



SPIROCHETE
BY
ARNOLD SUNDGAARD



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"S P I R O C H E T E"

by

ARNOLD SUNDGAARD

A History

First produced at the Blackstone Theatre
Chicago, Illinois, on April 29th 1938

Produced by Harry Minturn
Direction of Addison Pitt Settings by Clive Rickabaugh

Music by David Sheinfeld

Lighting by Duncan Whiteside and Nat Crawford

Costumes by John Pratt

Musical Program Under the Direction of Edward
Wurtzbach

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CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE

Scene--The Marriage License Bureau, Chicago, Ill.
(The Year of Our Lord 1938)

LENNY THOMPSON (A Radio Announcer)
FRIEDA SCHMIDT
PETER MATZENAUR
THE CLERK

ACT ONE

Scene One--The Waterfront--Palos, Spain
(The Year of Our Lord, 1493)

THE PHYSICIAN
CAPTAIN CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

Scene Two--The Tap-Room of a Tavern Inn, Naples
(The Year of Our Lord, 1496)

GASTON
PIERRE
EMILE
FRITZ
MARGUERITE
ROSE
LOYAL
INNKEEPER
LUCIA
NINA
LOLA
FIRST OFFICER
SECOND OFFICER
LIEUTENANT
THE ITALIAN
THE FRENCHMAN
THE ENGLISHMAN
THE GERMAN
THE TURK
THE CHINAMAN
DANCING GIRL

Scene Three--The Patient's Room
(The Year of Our Lord, 1510)

The PATIENT
THE CHEMIST
THE SORCERER
FIRST PHYSICIAN
SECOND PHYSICIAN
THIRD PHYSICIAN
FOURTH PHYSICIAN
DR. GIROLAMO FRACASTORO

(The Year of Our Lord, 1600)

THE PATIENT
AN ELIZABETHAN MAN

(The Year of Our Lord, 1665)

THE PATIENT
A RESTORATION FOP

(The Year of Our Lord, 1760)

THE PATIENT
THE SPIRIT OF GIROLAMO FRACASTORO

(The Year of Our Lord, 1767)

THE PATIENT
DR. JOHN HUNTER
JOHNSON--his assistant

(The Year of Our Lord, 1837)

THE PATIENT
DR. PHILLIPE RICORDE

Scene Four--The Office of Dr. Fournier at the Hospital
St. Louis in Paris

(The Year of Our Lord, 1863)

JEAN LOUIS d'HOUBLER
DR. ALFRED FOURNIER

The Bride's Dressing Room
(Two weeks later)

COLLETTE--the bride
MARIE --the bridesmaid
Dr. Alfred Fournier

Jean Louis' Room
(Immediately following)

JEAN LOUIS d'HOUBLER
COLLETTE
DR. ALFRED FOURNIER

Scene Five--Doctor's Consultation Room--Berlin
(The Year of Our Lord, 1905)

DR. HOFFMAN
FIRST DOCTOR
SECOND DOCTOR
THIRD DOCTOR
FOURTH DOCTOR
DR. FRITZ SCHAUDINN
AN INTERNE
AN INTERNE

ACT TWO

Scene One--Laboratory of Dr. Metchnikoff and Dr. Roux
at the Pasteur Institute in Paris
(The Year of Our Lord, 1906)

DR. ELIE METCHNIKOFF
THE PATIENT
PAUL MAISONNEUVE
DR. ROUX
THE REFORMER
DR. JULES BORDET

(The Year of Our Lord, 1907)

THE PATIENT
DR. WASSERMANN
DR. JULES BORDET

Scene Two
(The Year of Our Lord, 1909)

FIRST TAUNTER
SECOND TAUNTER
THIRD TAUNTER
DR. PAUL EHRLICH
DR. S. HATA

Scene Three--A Street
(The Year of Our Lord, 1933)

FIRST WOMAN
SECOND WOMAN
THIRD WOMAN
FOURTH WOMAN
FIFTH WOMAN
SIXTH WOMAN

Lower House State Legislature of Illinois
(The Year of Our Lord, 1933)

FIRST LEGISLATOR
SECOND LEGISLATOR
THIRD LEGISLATOR
FOURTH LEGISLATOR
FIFTH LEGISLATOR
SPEAKER

Scene Four--Executive Office in a Large Industrial Plant
(The Year of Our Lord, 1936)

MR. THOMAS
MISS JOSLYN
JOHN ELSON

Scene Four-A----John Elson's Home
(Several hours later)

MRS. ELSON -- John's wife
TONY -- his son
JOHN ELSON

Scene Four-B----Executive Office in Industrial Plant
(A month later)

MR. THOMAS
A DOCTOR

Scene Five----Corridor to the Legislature
(The Year of Our Lord, 1937)

POLITICIAN
HIS CLERK

Lower House State Legislature of Illinois
(Immediately following)

Legislators--Officials--Guests--Spectators--Politicians

PROLOGUE

C H A R A C T E R S

LOUDSPEAKER

THE ANNOUNCER -- Lenny Thompson

THE GIRL -- Frieda Schmidt

THE BOY -- Peter Matzenaur

THE CLERK

"PROLOGUE"

LOUDSPEAKER

Through the years the battle has been much too furious between the eager forces of life and the quick forces of death. In his not unreasonable search for the peace and quiet which he blindly believes will be his without struggle, man has been constantly oppressed by the unseen tyrants within his own flesh. Unknown, even to himself, his body, from the morning of birth to the evening of death, is the scene of a vigorous battle between the something that wants him to live and the something else that wants him to die. In most cases and at most times the something that wants him to live is stronger than the army of microbes and bacteria who would prefer him out of the way. But there have been times when a violent plague of a subtle fever will surround him unawares and leave him begging for truce. Faced with the danger of fresh attacks, man has befriended strange medicines and new sciences to protect him. He has worked unceasingly to guard himself from death. And so in the face of this strong record of achievement it seems incredible, indeed, that he has never seriously challenged the right of syphilis to destroy his body. Because of a confused moral code he has abdicated in favor of this vandal disease. He has accepted its terms without question. But today we are asking: must this continue? Today we are wondering . . .

SETTING:

The curtain is rising and the lights on stage pick out the desk of a marriage license bureau. The orchestral sounds dim to a hum as we hear and then see one of those ubiquitous man-on-the-street radio pitchmen interviewing a young couple about to apply for permission to marry. They are not certain they'll like this quizzing, while they know the clerk waits impatiently at the desk.

THE ANNOUNCER

...and so don't forget to get them fresh at your neighborhood grocer and have them on the breakfast table tomorrow morning. Get your order in this very afternoon before his supply is exhausted. And now next on your Anchors Aweigh broadcast is a smiling young couple, who may very well be that boy and girl up the street you've seen holding hands these past few months. They're both very young and they're both very happy. Your name, please?

THE GIRL

Frieda Schmidt.

THE ANNOUNCER

And the boy friend here?

THE BOY

Peter Matzenaur.

THE ANNOUNCER

Well, Frieda, my-I-wish-you-could-see-her-folks, how does it feel to be applying for a marriage license?

THE GIRL

Great! Maybe more girls should do it.

THE ANNOUNCER

How about you, Peter?

THE BOY

I already made down payments on furniture. That ought to show how I feel.

THE ANNOUNCER

Yes, I guess it does. Step-a-little-closer-to-the-microphone-please, how long have you two known each other?

THE BOY

Since we were kids. We lived in the same block all our lives.

THE ANNOUNCER

That's quite a record these days. Tell me, was it love at first sight? I-wish-you-could-see-them-blush-folks!

(They hesitate about replying)

Don't you remember if it was love at first sight or not?

THE GIRL

It couldn't have been. He pulled my hair, tore my new dress, and said I couldn't ride his bike.

THE BOY

She said I had a funny nose the first time she saw me.

THE ANNOUNCER

Would you call it love at second sight, then?

THE BOY

Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't. We just sort of grew up together. We stopped fighting and fell in love the last year of high school.

THE ANNOUNCER

I don't know about this next question. It's--do you think your husband will have any faults?

THE GIRL

I should hope so. I'd hate to marry a perfect man.

THE ANNOUNCER

Really?

THE BOY

I'd hate to marry a perfect wife.

THE ANNOUNCER

In that case you two ought to get along all right.

THE BOY

We will. Come on, Frieda, let's get the license!

THE ANNOUNCER

Thank you, Frieda Schmidt and Peter Matzenaur, and the best of luck to you. There-they-go-folks-I-wish-you-could-see-them. Well, I see my time's about up and we'll return you to our studios where Don Kline has an announcement for you. This is Lenny Thompson saying good-bye from the marriage license bureau and we hope you'll be back with us tomorrow afternoon at this same time. So long, all.

(As he finishes his spiel the BOY and the GIRL have gone up to the desk and are now speaking to the CLERK)

THE CLERK

Where's your medical certificate, please?

THE BOY

Our what?

THE CLERK

Your medical certificate. We can't issue a license until you've both been examined.

THE BOY

We want to get married--not insured.

THE CLERK

You ought to read the marriage law then.

THE BOY

But what's the purpose of such a law?

THE CLERK

You don't know?

THE BOY

No.

THE CLERK

To put it bluntly, it's to check for venereal diseases.

THE BOY

Say, be careful the way you talk. Miss Schmidt and I have known each other all our lives. She's a decent girl and I'm not going to humiliate her by having anybody think otherwise.

THE CLERK

Why should I think otherwise? I'm only quoting a law. Sad as it seems, there are people who don't even suspect they are unfit for marriage. The State protects those who are. It's for your own good.

THE BOY

It ought to take into consideration that there are still a few decent people left in the world.

THE CLERK

This will help enlarge that select circle. You said something about life insurance. You'd be examined for that, wouldn't you?

THE BOY

Yes.

THE CLERK

Well, isn't marriage just as important?

THE BOY

Yes, but the idea of the thing is disgusting. It makes it seem as though we hadn't been decent.

THE CLERK

Decency has nothing to do with it.

THE BOY

Gosh, when two people know each other like Frieda and me--gee, she's just about perfect.

(LENNY, the announcer, has been listening to this argument and now comes to the desk)

THE CLERK

It's one small way of checking up on a disease that's been around for a long time. We can't examine everybody just hit or miss so we examine those we can. And sooner or later most everybody gets married. Isn't that right, Lenny?

THE ANNOUNCER

Say, a minute ago you two kids sounded pretty sensible to me. How come you're so prudish about this?

THE GIRL

We're not prudish. We'd rather not think about it.

THE ANNOUNCER

Aw, come on now, it isn't as bad as all that.

THE CLERK

Lenny can tell you. He studied the subject for broadcast.

THE ANNOUNCER

And some of it was kind of exciting. Nothing like I thought it'd be.

THE BOY

I felt the same way about measles.

THE ANNOUNCER

I mean it. The way it started and how it spread and what men have done about it. Do you mean to tell me you don't know that?

THE BOY

No, and I don't care to.

THE ANNOUNCER

Aw, don't be like that. Let me tell you about it.

THE BOY

What about Frieda? You don't suppose she wants to hear.

THE ANNOUNCER

Why not? How about it, Frieda?

THE GIRL

If Peter will, I will.

(PETER seems angry with her)

THE ANNOUNCER

Don't grit your teeth so. Will you, Peter?

THE BOY

To tell you the truth, there are a few things I'd really like to know.....

THE ANNOUNCER

How it all began, for instance? How it spread? Well, like everything else there's a difference of opinion about it, but there are a few things that seem pretty certain. It's not as old as you think. Not any older than our country. In fact it was way back in Palos, Spain. . . .

(The lights have already faded on THE ANNOUNCER as the other lights settle on the scene of the opening. There is music at the . . .)

END OF THE PROLOGUE

"SPIROCHETE"

ACT ONE

C H A R A C T E R S

A VOICE

THE PHYSICIAN

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

ACT ONEScene One

SETTING:

The waterfront at Palos, Spain, 1493. The sound of sea waves washing against the pilings of the wharf can be heard in the dark. A few mournful bells are ringing in the distance and there in the dark looms the darker hulk of the Pinta, made fast to the pier-head. Feeble, uncertain lights glimmer from the portholes.

A VOICE

The year of our Lord, fourteen ninety three!

(The sound of a man walking the plank wharf can be heard and a moment later the PHYSICIAN enters carrying a candle lantern. He holds the lantern aloft and calls:)

THE PHYSICIAN

Captain Columbus! Captain Christopher Columbus!

(A creaking hatch opens and the figure of COLUMBUS appears on deck. The opened hatch throws an eerie amber light across his face)

COLUMBUS

Who calls Christopher Columbus?

THE PHYSICIAN

I, the Physician!

COLUMBUS

At last.

THE PHYSICIAN

The people fled when they saw your sickly men and sent for me.

COLUMBUS

Yes, we are sick here. Sick as no man has ever been sick before.

THE PHYSICIAN

Scurvy most likely. That always comes from long voyages. It's God's way of saying stay home!

COLUMBUS

Scurvy is a mock affliction compared to this foul pox. Their skins are scaled and great sores like leprosy wound their bodies.

THE PHYSICIAN

Maybe it is leprosy.

COLUMBUS

No, it isn't leprosy. I've seen that disease, too, and it's unlike this. This is like all plagues in one.

THE PHYSICIAN

You've met devils in your travels.

COLUMBUS

I agree we met many things. This was the worst.

THE PHYSICIAN

How think you it came?

COLUMBUS

On warm nights there were moons and music my men had never seen nor heard before. In Espanola the dark has a magic to warm the flesh. Native women with full warm bodies and gracious in the extreme. They welcomed us.

THE PHYSICIAN

So that's how you spent the Queen's money?

COLUMBUS

But they left a mark beyond quick forgetting.

THE PHYSICIAN

A just penalty for sin.

COLUMBUS

A most cruel ungodly penalty.

THE PHYSICIAN

The Queen felt sorry for you and said I should see what I could do. How do you get aboard your pestilential tub?

COLUMBUS

You'll find a gangplank to the left there. Walk carefully or you'll drop into the harbor.

THE PHYSICIAN

I'll be right up.

(The PHYSICIAN goes off and can be heard tramping up the squeaky gangplank.)

COLUMBUS stands at the rail looking back across the sea.

The music grows with the heaving waves below)

COLUMBUS

We sought a passage to the east by sailing west! We fell on lands we'd never mapped before. India maybe and yet not like India. We fought strange new seas with frightened men and this is our reward---frightful sores such as man has never known before. We find there's more to discovery than a few new trees, a cheaper spice, a shorter route. For every tree there's a potential rot; for every fruit potential worm.

(The PHYSICIAN has come up opposite him)

THE PHYSICIAN

I saw one of the sick men on my way up. It's not a pretty disease. I'll say that for it.

COLUMBUS

Will it last long?

THE PHYSICIAN

The disease or the man?

COLUMBUS

Either one.

THE PHYSICIAN

Oh, those things come and go, you know. It may be like the locusts that come every seven years. They go and this may go, too.

COLUMBUS

Seven years is a long time.

THE PHYSICIAN

It may only be the dampness of the sea air. That's not good for the body, you know.

COLUMBUS

I've sailed all my life and never worried about damp before.

THE PHYSICIAN

There are those who say disease and plagues are caused by the position of the stars. Not that I hold much for that belief.

COLUMBUS

More than astrologers have faith in stars. We sailed by them and trusted them.

THE PHYSICIAN

Some say it's the sign of the devil!

COLUMBUS

All vague guessing for things the mind can't account for.

THE PHYSICIAN

For my own part I don't worry about those things. I take each plague as it comes, collect my fee, and treat them all alike. A plague is a plague and what's good for one is amply good for another.

COLUMBUS

I have nineteen men below. Can you save them or will you give them theories?

THE PHYSICIAN

I'll do my best. And that's all any man can do.
(The PHYSICIAN goes down the hatch)

COLUMBUS

Before we sailed they said the ocean dropped off sharply to hell and dragons waited to claw our ships. This good physician must have believed them.

(He looks down the hatch. There are
groans below)

What do you think of them?

THE PHYSICIAN

(below)

They're sick!

COLUMBUS

That's no discovery. I knew that.

THE PHYSICIAN

But such a sickness. There's little I can do for them beyond offering a few herbs, letting some blood, washing their sores. . .

COLUMBUS

I can do that much myself. . . .

THE PHYSICIAN

(coming on deck)

I can prescribe one other thing.

COLUMBUS

And that is? . . .

THE PHYSICIAN

Don't keep them cooped up on this ship any longer.

COLUMBUS

Yes, I suppose that's best because they're of very little use as sailors.

THE PHYSICIAN

Are most of them from Spain?

COLUMBUS

Some live here, some from Naples, some call Florence home.

THE PHYSICIAN

That's where they should be then, at home. Even if you must pay their passage send them there at once. Poor fellows, I'll wager most of them will feel better when they've seen their wives again!

(The music surges higher as the lights . . .)

BLACKOUT

Scene Two

CHARACTERS

LENNY

VOICE

GASTON

PIERRE

EMILE

FRITZ

MARGUERITE

ROSE

LOYAL

INNKEEPER

LUCIA

NINA

FIRST OFFICER

SECOND OFFICER

LIEUTENANT

ACT ONEScene Two

At once the music breaks through with sharp intensity and then as quickly drops to pianissimo as LENNY speaks.

LENNY

. . . and that's the way it worked. The sailors brought it home to a few cities in Spain and Italy where it quickly infected a large part of the population. As long as it was isolated in a few cities, however, there was nothing to fear until Charles VIII of France took it into his head to conquer the city of Naples. After a short siege the mercenary soldiers entered the city and there they found quite a surprise awaiting them . . .

A VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1496.

(The music continues for a moment and then is wiped away by the crash of wine-tempered laughter. A fragmentary song, a happy passage of string music, a banging of tables and other signals of discordant gayety are heard as the lights rise. These show the cellar of an inn at Naples. The frantic INNKEEPER and his retinue of SERVING WOMEN--catering to appetites of the flesh and palate--are being jostled and hugged and teased by the victory-drunken CELEBRANTS. A few exaggerated lights pick out the private MERCENARIES of the army who are now augmented by the gayer LADIES of the town)

GASTON

Victory!

PIERRE

A toast to Naples!

EMILE

What a siege it was.

FRITZ

But what a triumph, too. This is war and the spoils of war. Music! Women! Oh, God, this is what I dreamed of when we stormed the city.

GASTON

God keep Charles of France!

PIERRE

God keep the good women of Naples. Come here, my buxom duck!
 (He throws his arm around a GIRL and
 drags her into his lap)

MARGUERITE

How rough you are. Careful.

PIERRE

Careful, is it? Ah, the war has just begun, my sweet.
 (He kisses her and is so occupied for
 most of the scene)

GASTON

That's what I want. War! Give me more war.

EMILE

Quiet, you dog. They may take you up on it.

GASTON

But I do want more war! I conquered the damn city like anybody else.

ROSE

Why do you want more war, stupid turtle? Don't you like me?

GASTON

Did I say war? I mean wine. I want wine.

ROSE

Why didn't you say so? Here!
 (She takes a pitcher of wine to GASTON.
 He opens his mouth like a fish in the
 noonday sun while she pours it down
 his eager throat)

There you are, pig!

FRITZ

Ah, such are the fruits of victory. She is a good girl.

ROSE

Fool!
 (The wine spills down GASTON'S neck and
 he blows it out of his mouth like a
 spirited whale. ROSE laughs and falls
 into his lap)

LOYAL

Quiet, all of you!
 (He springs forward to address them)

EMILE

Look who's talking.

MARGUERITE

Isn't he beautiful?

GASTON

Ssshhh, I like speeches.

LOYAL

My friends . . .

ROSE

Look, he can talk.

LOYAL

Quiet, I say. My friends, the hour is late and love brings wings to our feet, does it not?

MARGUERITE

What a question.

LOYAL

The hour is late, I say, and we were promised women when we won the war.

EMILE

What of it?

LOYAL

Well, where is mine? She's left me.

INNKEEPER

(pushing a girl toward LOYAL)

Lucia, why are you loafing?

LOYAL

Ah, ma cherie, this is what I hoped for. Isn't she lovely? Isn't she dark and flashing? Such eyes!

(LOYAL sweeps LUCIA up into his arms and rushes outside with her)

Victory! What a sweet war.

GASTON

Vive la France!

FRITZ

Why isn't this ass singing for us?

(He forces the INNKEEPER to the front)

INNKEEPER

No, no, I am out of voice tonight. My throat, it is hoarse.

EMILE

Sing, you fool, we want a song for tired men.

FRITZ

Make it loud and make it good.

GASTON

Vive l'Italia.

(The accompaniment for the song starts)

INNKEEPER

Nina! See that everyone is served!

NINA

Si, signor!

INNKEEPER

Love rode out on the wind last night,
 But not in the saddle was I.
 Gone is the bliss that I knew last night
 And this is the reason why:
 Forgive me an anguished sigh

Ahhhh, my love sings only tra la, tra la,
 My love sings only tra lay.
 My love sings only tra la, tra la,
 No matter what song I play.
 Her voice is sweet as the mountain dew,
 Her smile is fresh as the ocean breeze,
 But when she sings as I ask her to,
 Her only words are such as these, tra la
 Tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la, tra la.

(As the INNKEEPER sings his song the lights
 begin to lower in this area. The REVELERS
 join in a chorus of the song as it forms
 an undertone for the following brief scene)

(LOYAL has gone to another room with LUCIA.
 The lights rise on this room, and LOYAL
 is seen backing away from the girl)

LUCIA

Yes, it is so. For your own sake, go!

LOYAL

No!

LUCIA

I tell you, you'll die! We'll all die!

LOYAL

No! I won't believe it.

LUCIA

That's why I didn't go near you. None of them should go near you.

LOYAL

You look so beautiful, ma cherie.

LUCIA

But I'm not. I'm ugly inside. I'm all ugly. Go now. Please go.

(LOYAL shrinks away from her and then rushes
 outside. LUCIA sits weeping as the lights
 fade. The song increases and the lights
 come up again on the tap room)

INNKEEPER

. . . my love sings only tra la!

GASTON

Bravo! What a fine song. I shall sing it to my children.
(He turns to kiss ROSE)

Come here, you!

(The others laugh and as GASTON is kissing
ROSE, LOYAL hurries in very frightened)

LOYAL

No, no. Gaston!

(He pulls GASTON off)

GASTON

Why, you fool, can't you see I'm busy?

LOYAL

No, you can't.

GASTON

What's wrong?

(LOYAL whispers into GASTON'S ear and then
GASTON draws fearfully away from ROSE)

It can't be. Monstrous! Come, my friends.

(They start to go but the others stop them)

PIERRE

What is it? What did he say?

FRITZ

Tell us.

GASTON

The pox! The disease is burning in the city. Look!

(With a horrified look he points to all the
women and then goes to ROSE and rips away
her bodice, revealing secondary lesions
on her breasts. All SOLDIERS begin exit
in wild confusion)

INNKEEPER

Gentlemen, good soldiers, what is wrong? Have I offended you?

(Two OFFICERS enter to see the men leave)

FIRST OFFICER

(to the INNKEEPER)

Where are they going in such a hurry?

INNKEEPER

Good soldiers, come back. There shall be music. . .

SECOND OFFICER

Don't stand there gaping like a sick cow. Give us some wine.

INNKEEPER

(recovering from his distress)

Yes, sir, of course, of course.

(Just as he is about to serve them, a
LIEUTENANT enters hurriedly)

LIEUTENANT

Sirs, I have bad news for you.

(The GIRLS start to drift out now)

FIRST OFFICER

Well, out with it.

LIEUTENANT

The men you saw leave are fleeing the city. From every inn, from every
brothel, from every hidden room they flee.

FIRST OFFICER

You're mad. Haven't they been promised furloughs, all of them?

LIEUTENANT

They cry the pox is here. They find the women sick.

SECOND OFFICER

(thinking of himself)

No!

LIEUTENANT

The Spanish disease, they say.

FIRST OFFICER

Command them to stay.

LIEUTENANT

You command them, sir, I'm fleeing myself.

(He salutes curtly and is gone)

SECOND OFFICER

They must be mad. They'll never get home till they're paid off. Why,
some are all the way from Poland!

(At this point two things happen. First
a large outline map of Europe drops in-
to place upstage. Then thrown as a shadow
on the map is a figure of a WOMAN dancing
a slow sensual dance. As the lights lower,
this silhouette fades and scarlet neon
tubes spread like a feverish artery through
the map of Europe)

FIRST OFFICER

Some from England.

SECOND OFFICER

A few from Hungary!

FIRST OFFICER

Others from Russia!

SECOND OFFICER

From the ends of Europe they have come.

FIRST OFFICER

And now they desert like ungrateful dogs.

SECOND OFFICER

Outrageous!

FIRST OFFICER

Here, more wine!

(He offers the SECOND OFFICER wine, but is transfixed by something he sees in the other man's face)

SECOND OFFICER

What's wrong?

FIRST OFFICER

You . . .

SECOND OFFICER

Why do you stare at me?

FIRST OFFICER

A sore on your lip. You've got it yourself!
(A clash of music and a shudder runs through the fading shadow of the woman. The FIRST OFFICER rushes out while the other slumps in a chair and stares stupidly ahead. The figures of the SOLDIERS as they march past are seen on the glowing screen. And then an ITALIAN enters and points to the OFFICER)

THE ITALIAN

That man has the Spanish disease.

(A FRENCHMAN enters and points to the ITALIAN)

THE FRENCHMAN

Oh, terrible, ze man has ze Italian disease!

(An ENGLISHMAN enters and points to the FRENCHMAN)

THE ENGLISHMAN

Keep your distance. I can see you have the French disease.

(A GERMAN enters and points to the ENGLISHMAN)

THE GERMAN

Gott im Himmel, but look who has dot English disease!

(A TURK enters and points to the GERMAN)

THE TURK

Eating pig is bad enough, but Mohammed should kill you for having the Christian disease!

(And finally, a little CHINESE enters but doesn't point at anybody)

THE CHINESE

I'm velly sick and I was never sick before.

(By now the entire map should be suffused in a red glow with these last figures outlined before it. LENNY'S voice is heard speaking as the long file of MEN and WOMEN pass before the feverish map)

LENNY

. . . and thus in twelve years the disease had circled the globe and wherever white men went this new pox was his most adhesive companion. The doctors were appalled at first and were at a loss as to how to study the problems it presented. But they were surprisingly good scholars and learned many new things about their bewildered patient. . . .

(The sound of the marching men fades away, is taken up by the music as the lights....)

FADE-OUT

Scene Three

CHARACTERS

A VOICE

THE PATIENT

THE CHEMIST

THE SORCERER

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

THE THIRD PHYSICIAN

GIROLAMO FRACASTORO

ELIZABETHAN MAN

THE FOP

JOHN HUNTER

JOHNSON

PHILLIPE RICORDE

THE FOURTH PHYSICIAN

ACT ONEScene Three

When the lights come up again the PATIENT is seen standing at stage center. On either side of him a CHEMIST and a SORCERER are waiting to be paid.

A VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1510.

THE PATIENT

I'm weary. Headaches. I've been to that man and taken this. I've been to this man and taken that. I've been steamed and scalded and bathed in mud.

THE CHEMIST

My fee, please.

THE PATIENT

(He pays him)

Here you are.

(CHEMIST exits)

THE SORCERER

My fee, please.

THE PATIENT

(He pays him)

There you are.

(The SORCERER exits)

A lot of good they've done. I pay and pay and still I'm aching. I've a fever and sores on my body.

(The FIRST PHYSICIAN enters)

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

You've been listening to quacks. No wonder you're ill.

THE PATIENT

Can you do any better for me?

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

I make no pretenses. I only observe. In you I observe the beginning of neuralgia. A very racking sort of pain.

THE PATIENT

I can feel it already. Shooting through my body.

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

I told you so.

THE PATIENT

Do something.

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

I told you I could only observe. I won't fool you. I'm helpless.
 (The FIRST PHYSICIAN stands off to one side looking very important. The SECOND PHYSICIAN enters)

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

(speaking to the first one)

Have you seen the patient?

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

I told him he'd get neuralgic pains.

THE PATIENT

And I did.

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

There'll be swellings of your throat and your hair will begin to fall out. A new observation.

THE PATIENT

What'll I do?

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

Lie down, that may help.

THE PATIENT

Oh, my throat!

(He sits on the edge of the bed while the SECOND PHYSICIAN stands next to his colleague. The THIRD PHYSICIAN enters)

THE THIRD PHYSICIAN

I've some good advice for you.

THE PATIENT

I need advice, lots of it.

THE THIRD PHYSICIAN

Don't let anybody else drink out of the same cup with you. Don't kiss anybody or let your children use the same bed.

THE PATIENT

I thought you said you'd help me.

THE THIRD PHYSICIAN

No, I'm just trying to protect your family and friends.

THE PATIENT

I wish somebody would protect me.

(The THIRD PHYSICIAN joins the others. The
FOURTH PHYSICIAN enters)

THE FOURTH PHYSICIAN

I've just observed a new fact about the disease.

THE OTHERS

What is it?

THE FOURTH PHYSICIAN

It can't infect a normal skin. There must be a break of some kind---
maybe so small you can't see it.

THE THIRD PHYSICIAN

We must put these facts together in a great body of knowledge.

THE PATIENT

Does that help me?

THE FOURTH PHYSICIAN

In time it may. I'd just go to sleep a while if I were you.

THE PATIENT

Oh, won't somebody do something for me? I'm tired of being observed.
I want to know where it comes from. I want relief.

(And then FRACASTORO enters. GIROLAMO
FRACASTORO was a great physician of his
time, ranking, in his day, along with
other men of the period---Fernel, Pare,
Massa, Paracelsus)

FRACASTORO

I think I can help you, my boy.

THE PATIENT

I think God will bless you if you do. Who are you?

FRACASTORO

I'm Girolamo Fracastoro and I've studied the disease for the past fifteen
years. I've studied the things these other men have said about you. And
now in the year of our Lord, 1530, I think I've found something to assuage
your pain.

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

Interesting, if true.

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

We'd like to see you do it.

THE THIRD PHYSICIAN

What do you prescribe?

FRACASTORO

It's mercury, gentlemen. Its density is great and it will penetrate the flesh and drive out the disease. Here, my good man, rub this into your body.

(The PATIENT rubs it on his chest)

THE PATIENT

My, how soothing.

FRACASTORO

Does it help?

THE PATIENT

Yes, but will it cure me?

FRACASTORO

It will give you relief, I said.

THE PATIENT

I want more than relief. I'm ashamed of my body.

FRACASTORO

You need not be. After all it's an illness like any other.

THE PATIENT

With any other illness I'd either die or get well. This lingers on, torturing me from day to day. It doesn't even have a name.

FRACASTORO

Why, I've been calling it the disease of Syphilis.

THE FOURTH PHYSICIAN

Syphilis? Where'd you get that one?

FRACASTORO

Syphilis was a swineherd, you remember? In my poem, and I do write poetry occasionally, he offended Apollo. Apollo took vengeance and gave him this pox. Syphilis means lover of swine.

THE PATIENT

I don't care for the name. I want to get well.

FRACASTORO

Be patient then. No one doubts but at a given time this disease will return into the clouds of nothingness.

THE PATIENT

And in the meantime it strikes my heart, removes my hair, and leaves me dying a slow bitter death.

FRACASTORO

I say no. Listen to me. That which is most essential to a cure is to surprise the disease at its inception, to strangle it before it has had time to invade the viscera.

THE PATIENT

Isn't it a bit late for that?

FRACASTORO

But for you, you must flee from fogs and wet grounds. Choose for a stay a laughing country with uncovered horizon or a hillside bathed in sun. Guard yourself against laziness and nonchalance in your treatments and allow no truce for the disease.

THE PATIENT

Yes, I'd like that; but will I get well?

FRACASTORO

You must try. These physicians have observed you well. After all the disease is a young one--less than forty years old. New physicians will come to study you and will eventually banish it from the face of the earth. This is only the year of our Lord, 1530, and much will be done yet.

(Now FRACASTORO joins the other great PHYSICIANS. The lights fade. A clock strikes in the distance as darkness settles over the stage and the five PHYSICIANS move quietly on.)

A cock crows. The lights begin to rise.
PATIENT, alone at stage center)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1600.

THE PATIENT

I used too much mercury and it almost killed me.

(An ELIZABETHAN MAN passes. He stops in front of the PATIENT)

ELIZABETHAN MAN

God's blood, but you're a vile-looking mess. Why do you clutter up the lane with your cankerous itch? Oddsfish, you should be smoked in hell.

(The ELIZABETHAN MAN moves on as the clock strikes again)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1665.

THE PATIENT

And I feel foul.

(A RESTORATION FOP passes by, daintily waving his lace handkerchief at the PATIENT)

THE FOP

You look foul. My dear fellow, if you but realized how ridiculous you are. I know what you've been doing, you naughty boy. Fie on you. It's an amusing little ailment, isn't it? I must tell them at the coffee house about it. How they'll laugh at this.

(And laughing heartily the FOP moves on. The PATIENT yawns and changes his position. The clock strikes again)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1760.

THE PATIENT

And nothing happens. Oh, Girolamo Fracastoro!

FRACASTORO

(entering)

Yes, my boy.

THE PATIENT

I thought you said something would happen.

FRACASTORO

I didn't think it would take so long myself. But be of good cheer. I see John Hunter coming down the highways of time. He is a great physician, one of the greatest of all time and his name will be revered in all the world of medicine. Maybe he will have something to say.

(Lights dim and rise again)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1767.

(JOHN HUNTER enters. He is a violent fuming little man)

THE PATIENT

John Hunter at last!

HUNTER

And I've plenty to say about you.

THE PATIENT

I've been here for over two hundred years.

HUNTER

Yes, and you're not really sick. All those men have been telling you things. They're stupid old medieval quacks and have fooled you long enough. Let's see what's really wrong with you.

THE PATIENT

But this syphilis is no joke.

HUNTER

Syphilis, bah! It's just another form of gonorrhoea and everyone knows that's no great shakes as a disease.

THE PATIENT

It never made me very happy.

HUNTER

I know what I'm talking about. They've even named a chancre for me. But I say most of their talk is tommyrot. They said your children might get it, didn't they?

THE PATIENT

Yes, they advised me to be childless for the time being.

HUNTER

Bosh, that's what it is--sheer bosh. And they said you could get it from cups and kissing games?

THE PATIENT

They warned me about playing games, yes.

HUNTER

That's bosh, too. There's too much false knowledge about the ailment. It's all a part of gonorrhoea which we can cure.

THE PATIENT

Why have you been neglecting me then?

HUNTER

I'll show you how harmless it is. But first let's clear the atmosphere of wrong learning. You men get out of here. This is John Hunter speaking. Scat!

(He goes up and chases the five
PHYSICIANS off stage)

Out with your time-worn ideas. Out with you all, I say.

(HUNTER returns)

Now where was I?

THE PATIENT

You said you'd prove something.

HUNTER

Oh, yes. Well, I will. I'll infect myself with your disease and show you how it functions. Oh, Johnson!

(JOHNSON, an assistant, enters)

JOHNSON

Yes, Dr. Hunter.

HUNTER

Bring me the virus of a gonorrhoea infection.

JOHNSON

Yes, sir.

(JOHNSON exits)

HUNTER

Now you'll see that this virus is nothing to fear. I'm not afraid because I know I'm right.

(JOHNSON returns with a dish, needle,
several sponges and swabs, etc.)

JOHNSON

Here you are, sir.

HUNTER

This virus is from a man with the same complaint as yours but in an

HUNTER (Cont'd)

earlier and more vicious stage. Scarify my arm, Johnson, and rub it in.
(He holds out his arm)

JOHNSON

Are you sure, sir?

HUNTER

Go ahead, fool! Do as I bid.

JOHNSON

Yes, sir.

(He goes through the motions of scratching
HUNTER'S arm and rubbing in some of the
germs with the needle)

HUNTER

Very good, Johnson. Now we'll watch this disease develop and you'll
see it's nothing but gonorrhoea, nothing but that.

(The lights fade on JOHNSON and HUNTER
but remain very bright on the PATIENT)

THE PATIENT

Think of that! And I thought I was sick!

(He starts to get up but pains seize his body)

Ooooooh! I am sick. Are you sure you were right, John Hunter?

(At once there is an orchestral fanfare, the
bells ring wildly and the PATIENT looks
frightened. He speaks very slowly)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1837.

THE PATIENT

Seventy years later and I'm not any better, John Hunter or no John
Hunter. I wonder what's happened to him. Oh, John Hunter!

(He waits for an answer)

Where's John Hunter?

(From another section of the stage PHILLIPE
RICORDE enters. The light picks him out
as the PATIENT calls)

RICORDE

John Hunter has gone. He died from that little experiment of his. He
was too dogmatic for his own good. He didn't dream that two diseases
could be in the same sore. That other man had syphilis and gonorrhoea
both!

THE PATIENT

Who are you?

RICORDE

I am Phillipe Ricorde from the Hopital du Midi in Paris. I've been reading what old John Hunter said about you seventy years ago. He was quite a man, John Hunter was, and he did many noble things for medicine but when he talked about you he was woefully wrong. Being wrong is no sin but being believed for a wrong is sad, indeed. Has anybody looked at you lately?

THE PATIENT

Not a soul. And I'm sick, too.

RICORDE

Of course you're sick. You're very, very sick. But be of good cheer. Those first physicians who came to see you were right. The things they observed in you were correct. And isn't it strange that one man like Hunter, because he was a great man, could have twisted the whole thing upside down.

(During this speech RICORDE calls back
FRACASTORO and the other PHYSICIANS)

We must not forget these men.

THE PATIENT

You know, I was beginning to get discouraged.

RICORDE

Well, we're beginning anew today. Let's hope we don't make too many mistakes. The thing we'd like to find out is what causes the disease. Here in Paris we're working on that angle.

THE PATIENT

You mean you don't know yet?

RICORDE

I'm afraid not.

THE PATIENT

My, think of that. Oh, there must be a cause.

RICORDE

But we haven't found it yet. We do know that syphilis and gonorrhoea are not the same thing, though. That's something.

THE PATIENT

Yes, it's better than nothing, but Lord, what I wouldn't give to know what keeps me in this condition.

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

Scene Four

CHARACTERS

JEAN LOUIS

DR. FOURNIER

COLLETTE

MARIE

ACT ONEScene Four

The spotlight rests on LENNY for a moment.

LENNY

. . . and so one hundred and one years ago the search began all over again. Men like Phillipe Ricorde and his favorite pupil, Dr. Alfred Fournier. Dr. Fournier worked at the Hopital St. Louis in Paris and was the first to see the effect of syphilis on marriage. He saw how the disease brought on degeneration of the body, too. One day in Paris he tells about a young man who came to him

(The lights fade on LENNY and come up on the next scene)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1863.

(The office of DR. ALFRED FOURNIER at the Hopital St. Louis in Paris. The time is an afternoon in May, 1863, and the effect of the scene should be a suggestion of that period. Seated before DR. FOURNIER is JEAN LOUIS, a young man about town. JEAN LOUIS is wearing dark glasses in a pathetic attempt to conceal his identity)

JEAN LOUIS

. . . and so you see, Dr. Fournier, that brings me to the present situation. Not only have I been, shall I say indiscreet in my affections, but unfortunate as well.

FOURNIER

A very frequent misfortune, I'm afraid.

JEAN LOUIS

But I assure you I

FOURNIER

Yes, yes, I understand. A very frequent misfortune but, I might add, none the less tragic for all that.

JEAN LOUIS

I suppose I thought it could never happen to me.

FOURNIER

Isn't it strange how we instinctively feel immune to certain things. Death, for instance, we can always imagine for the other fellow but never for ourself. On the other hand, a kiss, a physical contact with a woman, we can imagine for ourself but can never quite picture for the other fellow.

JEAN LOUIS

My death was in a kiss.

FOURNIER

You make it sound much too tragic. You are young.

JEAN LOUIS

Not too young to be insensitive to my predicament and the present inability of medicine to cope with my affliction.

FOURNIER

Won't you please take those ridiculous glasses off. If you want me to treat you I'll have to know who you are.

JEAN LOUIS

Someone may enter the office and recognize me.

FOURNIER

We have many prominent citizens come here. Nothing is ever said about it. Besides, no one will enter the office.

JEAN LOUIS

If you insist

(He takes off dark glasses)

FOURNIER

That's better. And now your name?

JEAN LOUIS

Jean Louis d'Houblers.

FOURNIER

Ah, yes. I've seen the announcements of your wedding. It was to have been quite a social event.

JEAN LOUIS

Unfortunately, the biggest wedding of the season. The date has been set for two weeks from tomorrow.

FOURNIER

That wedding, I'm afraid, will have to be indefinitely postponed.

JEAN LOUIS

Too late for that, doctor. The banns have been read, the trousseau fitted, the invitations are out and, yes, even the reservations made for the bridal suite at Ostend.

FOURNIER

I wish you had been as thoroughgoing in the other phases of your social life.

JEAN LOUIS

That sounds faintly like a lecture on sin.

FOURNIER

Far from it. Laxity of any kind makes its own eloquent lectures. Yours is making a rather bitter one.

JEAN LOUIS

I risked and lost. I don't apologize for losing.

FOURNIER

But like most losers you'd like to squeeze out as easily as you can.

JEAN LOUIS

I'm willing to employ you to do that for me. I'm at your mercy.

FOURNIER

(thundering)

Then I must insist that the marriage be called off.

JEAN LOUIS

I told you it's too late for that.

FOURNIER

And yet you swear you love the girl.

JEAN LOUIS

Dr. Fournier, insane as it sounds and coming at this time I know you won't believe me, but I worship her with all my heart. To me she is all that is beautiful and desirable. She's everything that I'm not and want to be.

FOURNIER

I thought for a moment it was merely a wedding of two prominent families. We French are barbarous that way.

JEAN LOUIS

Yes, I know, but in this case it was love, too. Our families wanted us and we wanted each other. But rather than ask her to feed my physical hunger during that long engagement year I sought less pleasant outlets. I'd rather die, however, than lose her respect.

FOURNIER

I believe you, my boy. What I can't understand is--why do you want to burden her with your calamity?

JEAN LOUIS

What reason can I give for deserting her now? She trusts me implicitly and the shock would drive her mad.

FOURNIER

Which shock? The shock of being left at the altar or the shock of learning you're not a god?

JEAN LOUIS

You don't even try to help me.

FOURNIER

The girl will learn the truth in any event. Wouldn't you prefer that she learned it from you rather than from your body? Why add a further deceit to the one already established?

JEAN LOUIS

I don't have the courage to tell her. I couldn't face her.

FOURNIER

Why can't you go to her now, this very day, tell your story in all humility and if she loves you as intensely as you say she does, she will understand and forgive. Then return to me and rest at the hospital. Later, if all goes well, this marriage may be possible. And I'm sure she'll wait.

JEAN LOUIS

It's not only she. It's her family. They'd be insulted and refuse to allow a later date.

FOURNIER

Yes, I was afraid of that. Oh, God, why is there such finger-pointing at an illness that's been in every man's family at one time or another.

JEAN LOUIS

You and I can't change the world, doctor.

FOURNIER

We must make our appeal to the family then. Trust to their mercy.

JEAN LOUIS

Trust to theirs and run counter to mine. They'd disown me.

FOURNIER

You don't count on much understanding from anybody, do you?

JEAN LOUIS

In a case like this? No. If I hadn't been caught they might have laughed and said it was my youth. Now? No.

FOURNIER

How would they feel, I wonder, if they knew their narrow prejudices were forcing you to heap a greater wrong on the one already begun?

JEAN LOUIS

This is no time for speculation, doctor. The simple facts are, unless I marry her two weeks from tomorrow, there'll never be a wedding. And I'll be an outcast forever.

FOURNIER

It must not be. I forbid it.

JEAN LOUIS

It's not in your power to forbid. I've come to you for help and you wish to ruin my life even more than I've already done for myself. You can't do it, doctor.

FOURNIER

I'm thinking of the one you love

JEAN LOUIS

But you ask for tolerance in a world that knows only intolerance. I'm going out to that world now. And you'll not stop me.

FOURNIER

It's fools like you who breed intolerance!

JEAN LOUIS

In this case, it will have to breed, that's all. If I had the measles or mumps you might stop me but I've got something you daren't name and you're helpless.

FOURNIER

Yes, I admit that. But please be reasonable for her sake.

JEAN LOUIS

It's too late for reason, doctor. It's much too late for anything as simple as all that!

BLACKOUT

In the dark a grotesque version of the "Wedding March" is played by the orchestra. This breaks off abruptly as the lights rise on the bedroom of the bride, COLLETTE. She is seated before a vanity dresser trying bravely not to show her anxiety. She jumps up eagerly when there is a knock on the door.

COLLETTE

Come in.

(MARIE, a bridesmaid, enters)

Oh, it's you, Marie. Has he not come yet?

MARIE

No, Collette, not yet.

COLLETTE

He must have been hurt. Have they looked in the hospitals?

MARIE

Servants have been sent to look.

COLLETTE

Oh, Marie, what will I do?

MARIE

You mustn't worry. Jean Louis will come if he has to go through fire and water.

COLLETTE

Yes, he would go through fire and water for me. He always said so.
But Marie . . .

MARIE

Don't be so frightened, Collette.

COLLETTE

Would he leave me at the altar like this? No, Marie, it's not possible
he'd do that.

MARIE

Sit down and rest, Collette. You don't want red eyes for all those
guests to see.

COLLETTE

No, no, I mustn't let myself cry. I must be calm. I must look my
best for him. He mustn't know I'm worried.

MARIE

You look so beautiful. Your mother's wedding gown and that lovely
veil. It should be a beautiful wedding.

COLLETTE

Why doesn't he come? What can be keeping him?

MARIE

I said you mustn't cry. Everything will be all right. Look, let me
put some powder on your cheek where you've rubbed it off. Sit still.
(She dabs some powder on COLLETTE'S cheek)

COLLETTE

If Jean Louis should desert me now I'd want to die, Marie. I couldn't
face Mama again. What would she tell the guests?

MARIE

Collette, you're going to cry again if you're not careful.

COLLETTE

I don't care. Go away, will you? Please let me alone. I don't want
to see anybody. Tell everybody to keep out.

(There is a knock at the door)

Oh, Marie, quick, see who it is!

(MARIE opens the door, admitting DR. FOURNIER.

Both are astounded to see him)

MARIE

Oh, you can't come in here. This is the bride's . . .

FOURNIER

I've come to see the bride.

MARIE

No, please go. She doesn't want company now.

COLLETTE

No, let him in, Marie. Maybe he knows . . .

FOURNIER

Thank you, my child.

(MARIE closes the door after him)

MARIE

Shall I stay now?

COLLETTE

Yes, of course. That is, maybe . . .

FOURNIER

If you'd be so kind as to watch outside the door. Let no one enter.

(MARIE looks frightened)

That's all right, child. There's nothing to fear; I've only come with news of Jean Louis.

COLLETTE

Yes, Jean Louis! He . . .

FOURNIER

. . . is all right, don't fear.

(FOURNIER waits until MARIE has gone)

COLLETTE

Tell me who you are. I saw Marie thought . . .

FOURNIER

. . . I was a guest? I am a guest, Collette, but an uninvited one.

COLLETTE

You frighten me.

FOURNIER

No need to be. I've come to talk of Jean Louis.

COLLETTE

You say he's all right.

FOURNIER

I'm sure he is.

COLLETTE

Then why isn't he here? Why has he done this to me? The time for the wedding . . .

FOURNIER

. . . is long past. Yes. I know. The guests are leaving.

COLLETTE

No

FOURNIER

The wedding will not take place today. I want to tell you that quickly.
(He waits for a moment before continuing)
My name is Dr. Fournier.

COLLETTE

Then he has been hurt. I knew it. I knew nothing else would keep him.

FOURNIER

Yes, he has been hurt. But nothing so serious that you can't hurt him more by not understanding.

COLLETTE

Where is he? I must go to him.

FOURNIER

Wait.

COLLETTE

He'll need me. Where was the accident?

FOURNIER

I'm afraid I don't know that. I know only why he isn't here.

COLLETTE

Why don't you tell me? I must know.

FOURNIER

Collette, you love him very deeply, don't you?

COLLETTE

What a foolish question when I stand here trembling for him.

FOURNIER

Anything you might learn about him now can't possibly make any difference to that love, can it?

COLLETTE

Of course not.

FOURNIER

Not even your friends or family or his family can really come between that love, can they?

COLLETTE

Why all these questions?

FOURNIER

Because something else has come between you that your families won't understand. But something that you, I hope, will accept quite sensibly.

COLLETTE

Meaning that . . .

FOURNIER

Two weeks ago Jean Louis came to my office. He told me he had gotten in trouble. It seems he'd met a certain woman

COLLETTE

Yes

FOURNIER

A certain woman who allowed him liberties that . . . well, young men are impulsive.

COLLETTE

He loved her?

FOURNIER

No, he loved you, of course. It was one of those things that have been happening since the beginning of time but hurt just as much when they happen to you.

COLLETTE

But if they did not love each other. Men do have mistresses, I know.

FOURNIER

This one left a rather ugly mark on him. A mark he might have carried to you.

(This blow leaves COLLETTE speechless.

She sinks into the chair as though struck)

He was afraid to tell you. He was afraid of your friends and your families. He couldn't come to you.

COLLETTE

He couldn't come to me . . . he couldn't . . . why couldn't he come to me?

FOURNIER

He didn't want to face you, being less than society expected him to be.

COLLETTE

I suppose sooner or later every woman must learn that her man is not invulnerable. I had not bargained on learning so soon.

FOURNIER

I forbade him to go through with this marriage. This he refused to do, giving wild and foolish reasons. Ethics forbade me from coming to you, although my heart cried out for you.

COLLETTE

Who stopped him then?

FOURNIER

He must have stopped himself. Brooding over the fact must have shown him what he was doing. Lacking the courage to tell you, he still possessed the courage not to come.

COLLETTE

Poor Jean Louis. Is he terribly ill?

FOURNIER

I don't know the full extent yet.

(and then wisely)

But he'll need plenty of understanding during the days to come. He'll be all alone, I suppose.

COLLETTE

Alone? Why should he be alone?

FOURNIER

His friends will all desert him. His family . . .

COLLETTE

His friends? What about me?

FOURNIER

You? I hadn't thought . . .

COLLETTE

I'm going to him.

FOURNIER

You?

COLLETTE

It's not as if he were dead.

FOURNIER

But your family?

COLLETTE

They were partly the cause. We wanted to be married a year ago but they made us wait. They wanted a big wedding. But if we had had each other this might never have happened.

FOURNIER

You do understand.

COLLETTE

Yes, doctor, we'll find him together. You with your science and I with my love will see him through.

FOURNIER

Brave girl!

COLLETTE

Marie!

(MARIE enters)

Marie, order a carriage at once. At the back door. I'm going to Jean Louis. But the honeymoon is off until. . .

(She looks at FOURNIER)

FOURNIER

It may be a long time yet, Collette.

BLACKOUT

The music continues for a moment in the darkness and then the lights come up on the room of JEAN LOUIS. He is in a smoking jacket idly reading a newspaper. He gets up, walks about nervously, sits down again. The door slowly opens and COLLETTE, in her wedding gown, and DR. FOURNIER enter. They stand at the door unobserved and watch JEAN LOUIS quietly reading the paper.

COLLETTE

Oh, Jean Louis!

(He turns and looks at her curiously,
neither surprised nor glad to see her)

JEAN LOUIS

Collette! So glad you came.

COLLETTE

Why, Jean Louis, what are you doing?

JEAN LOUIS

Nothing important. Did you have something planned?

COLLETTE

How can you say that? I thought you'd be grief-stricken.

JEAN LOUIS

On such a day as this? No, not at all. I've been hiding here away from the family, reading. I see they have freed the Negro slaves in America at last. That Lincoln must be a great man.

COLLETTE

You . . . you were reading the papers?

JEAN LOUIS

And why shouldn't I read the papers?

COLLETTE

No reason at all, but today . . .

JEAN LOUIS

(seeing DR. FOURNIER for the first time)

I see you've somebody with you. Why do you let him stand there?

COLLETTE

Don't you remember Dr. Fournier?

JEAN LOUIS

I don't believe I do. How do you do, doctor. Glad to meet any friends of Collette's. What do you think of the slave problem in America?

FOURNIER

Come here, my boy, we want to talk with you.

JEAN LOUIS

Of course we must talk. Please sit down. Or are you going some place?

COLLETTE

What makes you ask that?

JEAN LOUIS

That dress you're wearing? It looks as though you were going to a party. It looks lovely on you. Collette's a very pretty girl, don't you think, doctor?

COLLETTE

(shrinking back)

Jean Louis!

JEAN LOUIS

It's a perfect day for a garden party. I've noticed some birds in the poplars across the way. They seemed very gay about something.

FOURNIER

Collette, my dear, shall we sit down?

(She sits and FOURNIER turns to JEAN LOUIS)

JEAN LOUIS

Sure, let's all sit.

(They all sit down)

FOURNIER

Do you remember what day it is?

JEAN LOUIS

Are you asking me?

FOURNIER

Yes.

JEAN LOUIS

Don't you really know?

FOURNIER

I'm asking you.

JEAN LOUIS

I'd say Thursday.

FOURNIER

And what date of the month?

JEAN LOUIS

Why do you ask such funny questions? Doesn't she look lovely in that white gown, doctor?

FOURNIER

Answer me, what date is it?

JEAN LOUIS

I don't know.

(His eyes fall on the newspaper which he
grabs quickly. He looks at the date)

There you are. The eighth of June!

FOURNIER

And what were you going to do on the eighth of June?

JEAN LOUIS

Read the papers and . . .

(He stares intently at COLLETTE)

. . . AND . . . the eighth of June. Collette! This is our wedding day!

COLLETTE

Had you forgotten?

JEAN LOUIS

Forgotten? My God, yes. Where have I been? This loss of sleep!
Your gown. Now I know. Forgive me. What time is it? It's not too
late. We can hurry.

COLLETTE

But the doctor said you couldn't.

JEAN LOUIS

Couldn't? Said I couldn't marry my sweet Collette? The man's crazy.
Of course I'll marry you.

COLLETTE

He said not yet. Later maybe . . .

JEAN LOUIS

Nothing will stop us!

FOURNIER

Sit down, Jean Louis.

(The BOY sits down)

JEAN LOUIS

(He looks up at FOURNIER and seems to
recognize him. He sinks back into the
chair)

Oh, now I know who you are. Yes, you said I couldn't. You made me
forget. You hypnotized me. I was going to and then . . . you hypnotized
me.

FOURNIER

Jean Louis, listen to me.

JEAN LOUIS

Charlatan, that's what you are. Meddling in other people's business. I was going to live my own life my own way and then you came along. Get out of here, will you, get out. If you don't leave this room I'll kill you. You've done enough to ruin my life.

(He reaches into a drawer and takes out a small revolver which He points at the DOCTOR)

COLLETTE

He's only trying to help you, Jean Louis. He wants you to get well!

JEAN LOUIS

Then he has told you of my condition.

COLLETTE

Yes, he has told me. But I don't care. I'll wait. I'll wait for you.

FOURNIER

You're being very foolish, my boy. Let's put that gun away and talk it over.

(JEAN LOUIS stands trembling with the revolver and then breaks down and begins to cry)

JEAN LOUIS

Oh, my God, what's become of me.

(The DOCTOR is going to take the revolver when JEAN LOUIS jumps up again)

No, you don't! You'll take me away. How could I forget. Collette! I can't get it out of my mind. It seeps into your brain. I read that it does. I couldn't stand that, I couldn't.....

(And then before they realize he turns the gun on himself and shoots. They stand horrified as he slumps to the floor behind the table)

COLLETTE

Jean Louis!

(She rushes to him and kneels beside him)

My God, doctor, he's . . .

(She is sobbing)

BLACKOUT

ACT ONE

Scene Five

CHARACTERS

DR. ERICH HOFFMAN

FIRST DOCTOR

SECOND DOCTOR

DR. SCHAUDINN

LABORATORY ASSISTANTS

ACT ONEScene Five

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1905.

The lights rise on a row of chairs placed at different levels. Three DOCTORS in white laboratory gowns are seated there listening to a fourth doctor who is ERICH HOFFMAN.

HOFFMAN

Gentlemen, it should be increasingly apparent that the virus isolated by Dr. Siegel in 1898 is not the cause of syphilis. And now in the year of our Lord, 1905, we must seek elsewhere for the cause.

FIRST DOCTOR

Dr. Siegel's virus is as good as any other. There are as many causes found for syphilis as there are scientists to look for them. Every time a man peers into his microscope these days he comes up shouting, "Ah, at last I have found it!" It's ridiculous.

HOFFMAN

Would you deny there is a cause?

FIRST DOCTOR

I don't deny anything. I merely say medicine is making a spectacle of itself with all these wild guesses.

HOFFMAN

That would end if the real cause were found.

SECOND DOCTOR

They all say they've the real cause.

HOFFMAN

(turning to the THIRD DOCTOR)

Dr. Schaudinn . . .

SCHAUDINN

Yes, Dr. Hoffman.

HOFFMAN

For several years you've conducted protozoological researches which have been the very model of scholarliness.

SCHAUDINN

Thank you, Dr. Hoffman. I appreciate your tribute but if you are thinking of me in connection with your problem I must decline. I'm much too happy at my own work.

HOFFMAN

But for the sake of humanity . . .

SCHAUDINN

Humanity is an expression used much too loosely these past years. I am interested in humanity, yes, but not at the expense of my own researches which, please remember, I consider valuable in their own small way.

HOFFMAN

Syphilis is becoming an increasing menace. One out of seven . . .

SCHAUDINN

Statistics won't move me. Please.

HOFFMAN

I've already spoken to the German Academy of Science. They are of the same mind.

SCHAUDINN

No, no, you're jesting surely.

FIRST DOCTOR

It's a great honor, Dr. Schaudinn.

SCHAUDINN

A great honor to be ordered about like a janitor?

HOFFMAN

Unfortunately, Dr. Schaudinn, we both are employed by the government medical service. As in the army, transfers can be made. I have yours here for transfer to the division of venereal diseases.

(He presents SCHAUDINN with a paper)

SCHAUDINN

I don't believe it.

HOFFMAN

It's all there. You may as well resign yourself to the fact.

SCHAUDINN

Was this your idea, Dr. Hoffman?

HOFFMAN

I'll be honored to work with you.

SCHAUDINN

And I thought you were my friend.

HOFFMAN

I'm sure you won't regret it.

SCHAUDINN

Well, you certainly are a smart one, Hoffman. Bossing me around this way.

HOFFMAN

I've all your materials ready. A laboratory of your own and plenty of assistance.

SCHAUDINN

It's all as cut and dried as that. Well, damn it, I never thought I'd see the day when Fritz Schaudinn would be kicked around like this.

HOFFMAN

You forget the purpose of this. We need you.

SCHAUDINN

Well, if I must I won't waste any time.

HOFFMAN

Science has sought this for four hundred years.

SCHAUDINN

I'll find it in four months.

HOFFMAN

You can begin next month.

SCHAUDINN

Next month? Bah, I'll begin now. Give me a microscope.

HOFFMAN

We have one waiting!

(Upstage on a raised platform there is now discovered an old table with a brass microscope on it)

SCHAUDINN

Hoffman, you old rascal. I should hate you for this. What a demon you are.

(SCHAUDINN now walks up to the microscope as the rest of the stage falls into darkness. All light is concentrated on SCHAUDINN and that gleaming brass microscope)

This is a good instrument.

HOFFMAN

The very best.

SCHAUDINN

You old rascal, Hoffman. Well, what are you waiting for?

HOFFMAN

What do you wish?

(The music begins here and increases in intensity as the search begins)

SCHAUDINN

Slides! From fresh chancres. New infections! Old infections! All infections! Bring me syphilis!

(A series of busy LAB ASSISTANTS enter now with slides. They go up to the microscope on one side and down the other)

HOFFMAN

You are foolish for being so impatient!

SCHAUDINN

I dislike this work. I want to get it over with.

HOFFMAN

Here they come. Call your needs!

SCHAUDINN

New infections, old infections!

HOFFMAN

What do you see?

SCHAUDINN

What do I see, what do I see?

HOFFMAN

Anything new?

SCHAUDINN

Anything old.

HOFFMAN

Anything old.

SCHAUDINN

Hoffman!

HOFFMAN

Yes?

SCHAUDINN

What's that spiral wriggling there?

HOFFMAN

What spiral?

SCHAUDINN

Like a corkscrew without a handle.

HOFFMAN

Spiral? Corkscrew?

SCHAUDINN

You heard me! Look!

(HOFFMAN comes and looks)

HOFFMAN

I can't see anything.

SCHAUDINN

Look!

HOFFMAN

Where?

SCHAUDINN

See the red corpuscle in the middle of the field?

HOFFMAN

Yes.

SCHAUDINN

Now toward the eight o'clock position.

HOFFMAN

Yes.

SCHAUDINN

A spiral! A corkscrew!

HOFFMAN

Yes. Fritz, you've found it!

SCHAUDINN

Not so soon. One little spiral is nothing. Bring me more.

(The LAB. ASSISTANTS practically dance
in with more samples)

HOFFMAN

This is from a young man. Recent infection.

SCHAUDINN

Ah, there is a spiral -- a pale spiral. It looks like nothing --
twisting.

HOFFMAN

From a woman. Recent infection.

SCHAUDINN

Again the spiral.

HOFFMAN

From an old man. Recent infection.

SCHAUDINN

And again the little pale spiral. Here on the dark field it is small and pale. The spirochete pallida!

(The lights begin to fade)

HOFFMAN

From an old lady. Recent infection.

SCHAUDINN

Still the spirochete pallida!

(The lights are down now and on the screen at the back a slide has been projected showing the spiral-like virus on a dark field)

You see it there, Hoffman? See the little spiral like a corkscrew without a handle?

HOFFMAN

From a young woman. Infection one day!

SCHAUDINN

We've found it! There it is, Hoffman. I hope you're satisfied.

(The lights rise exactly as in the beginning of the scene, only it is SCHAUDINN now who is addressing the men)

. . . and so, gentlemen, we have conclusive proof of the spirochete which is present in every infection of this disease and in no other. I might add that I'm glad it's been found at last because I can now get back to my own work while you, gentlemen, continue the search for the cure.

CURTAIN

"S P I R O C H E T E"

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

Scene One

CHARACTERS

METCHNIKOFF

THE PATIENT

PAUL MAISONNEUVE

DR. ROUX

THE REFORMER

DR. BORDET

A VOICE

DR. WASSERMANN

ACT TWOScene One

LOUDSPEAKER

With the discovery of the spirochete the search for cures goes forward in the twentieth century--the age of sudden, surprising progress. The extent of the syphilis reign of terror becomes fully apparent. But open fighting is hindered by great barriers of silence and social pressure. While quacks profiteer on a population's fright and ignorance, clear-minded scientists are gagged by prudery and scorn. In spite of this, new questions are asked. New answers are found. Almost imperceptibly the battle becomes more intensive, the field of fighting more widespread. METCHNIKOFF, BORDET, WASSERMANN, EHRLICH, LEVADITI, KAHN, HINTON, WENGER--the great names are legion. Each of these death-fighters brings into action a new weapon to fight the disease. And with each passing year the scientist begins to feel that he is wanted, that he is needed; and the cries of the people become louder . . . louder and clearer . . .

But first we must pause at the laboratory of METCHNIKOFF and ROUX at the Pasteur Institute in Paris.

SETTING:

At the rise of the curtain the wild-bearded METCHNIKOFF is working at a lab bench, his back to the audience. He is humming some mad tune when there is a knock on the door. He doesn't turn to look.

VOICE

(above the knocking)

The year of our Lord, 1906.

METCHNIKOFF

Come in.

(The knock is repeated)

Come in, I say! Must I keep yelling ten times, come in!

(The door opens and that ubiquitous fellow, the PATIENT, enters timidly. METCHNIKOFF is too busy to turn around)

METCHNIKOFF (cont'd)

Sit down, please. I'll be with you in a minute.
(The PATIENT waits nervously while
METCHNIKOFF finishes his song)

What did you say your name was?

THE PATIENT

(dolefully)

I'd rather not give my name. I've got something wrong with me I'd rather not talk about.

METCHNIKOFF

(still not looking)

What's your age, then?

THE PATIENT

About four hundred years in round numbers.

METCHNIKOFF

Answer my question. How old are you?

THE PATIENT

I told you four hundred years.

METCHNIKOFF

Four hundred what?

(Thinking the man crazy METCHNIKOFF
turns around for the first time)

Oh, so it's you, is it?

THE PATIENT

Yes, Dr. Metchnikoff.

METCHNIKOFF

Did you say there was something wrong with you?

THE PATIENT

All depends how you look at it.

METCHNIKOFF

You must be the one with syphilis.

THE PATIENT

Shhhhhh, please! We don't discuss those things so loudly nowadays.

METCHNIKOFF

Don't we? Why not?

THE PATIENT

People don't like to think about it, I guess. I can't get anybody to discuss it with me, at least.

METCHNIKOFF

How sad. I'm very sorry.

THE PATIENT

Even in death certificates they won't mention it. If a man dies of--you-know-what--they call it heart trouble or hardening of the arteries or brain softening. If they can think of another name for it they'll never call it--well, you-know-what.

METCHNIKOFF

You mean syphilis?

THE PATIENT

(quite pained by this indiscretion)

Please! After all . . .

METCHNIKOFF

Well, isn't it syphilis?

THE PATIENT

Yes, but . . .

METCHNIKOFF

Then let's call it by its real name. Now what did you want to know?

THE PATIENT

I want to know what you've done for me.

METCHNIKOFF

Me? Well, Dr. Roux and I have been working on apes.

THE PATIENT

Apes? Do apes have. . . er. . .

METCHNIKOFF

Syphilis is the word. No, man is the only one foolish enough to have it so far. But we--Dr. Roux and I--have found a way to give it to apes.

THE PATIENT

You mean you've actually given an ape this . . . this . . .

METCHNIKOFF

We gave them syphilis.

THE PATIENT

Oh, but if you really knew what it felt like you'd never do that.

METCHNIKOFF

But we couldn't study the course of the disease without them. Now we can watch the course of those germs from the time they start to the very finish. We know exactly what happens.

THE PATIENT

I could have saved you some trouble. I know that, too.

METCHNIKOFF

Could you have told me that it takes a while for syphilis to spread through the body? Could you have developed an ointment that will

METCHNIKOFF (cont'd)

prevent the infection of syphilis if you apply it soon enough?

THE PATIENT

Have you got an ointment like that?

METCHNIKOFF

We have for apes.

THE PATIENT

For apes? What makes you think it wouldn't work on me?

METCHNIKOFF

It won't work on you. You're too old with the disease. But it might work on somebody who's getting it for the first time.

THE PATIENT

If a person knew what was happening he wouldn't get it. Nobody gets it on purpose. Even I didn't four hundred years ago. It was accidental.

METCHNIKOFF

That's what they all say.

THE PATIENT

Well, it was. I was innocent. But it was spring. One day . . .
(A knock at the door)

METCHNIKOFF

Excuse me. Come in.

(The door opens and PAUL MAISONNEUVE enters. PAUL is young, eager, idealistic)

PAUL

If you're busy, Dr. Metchnikoff, I'll gladly . . .
(He turns to go)

METCHNIKOFF

No, please come in.

PAUL

Thank you.

METCHNIKOFF

What was your name, please?

PAUL

Paul Maisoneuve.

METCHNIKOFF

(introducing the PATIENT)

Well, I'd like to have you meet an old friend of mine.

PAUL

How do you do?

THE PATIENT

Not very well, sir, thank you.

METCHNIKOFF

Well, young man, what's on your mind?

PAUL

I realize that this is an intrusion, but I'm a medical student at the Faculty of Paris and I've just heard of your work here. This morning I decided to come here on a pilgrimage.

METCHNIKOFF

I'm touched by your tribute in coming but you picked a very poor shrine, I'm afraid.

PAUL

No, no, not at all, Dr. Metchnikoff. I couldn't have picked a more worthy one. When I read of your experimental success with apes I was thrilled beyond reason. I knew at once this was a great moment and I hurried to you.

METCHNIKOFF

For what purpose? You're not afflicted with this "you-know-what" as my friend calls it, are you?

PAUL

No, that's the point, I'm not. But I'm willing to be. I'm perfectly willing to be. I want you to try the disease on me.

METCHNIKOFF

On you?

PAUL

Yes, on me. You've done it on apes. You must do it on man!

METCHNIKOFF

It was just an experiment. We couldn't risk it on a human.

PAUL

Then who's going to benefit by your great work? Surely not the apes who won't have the disease outside the laboratory anyway.

METCHNIKOFF

But it's more than we dare ask a man to do.

PAUL

Oh, Dr. Metchnikoff, I had a greater faith in you. Surely this must be done for man. It's the next logical step, is it not?

METCHNIKOFF

Yes.

PAUL

Then do it on me, please.

METCHNIKOFF

I couldn't.

PAUL

You must, you must.

METCHNIKOFF

No, my boy, you don't know what it means to suffer this disease.

PAUL

I don't care.

METCHNIKOFF

My friend can tell you what it means.

THE PATIENT

Yes, it's a loathsome illness that seeps into your blood, then spoils your body with ugly sores. In time it will strike at your heart, then your brain, first here, then there, and soon you are gone, a wasted, raving man.

METCHNIKOFF

And that's not a very rosy future for a boy of your hopeful years.

PAUL

That's all the more reason why you must persist in your search for a cure. Others are equally hopeful.

METCHNIKOFF

We can't risk a life for them, though.

PAUL

But it's my life. And what is my life balanced against the millions who might benefit?

METCHNIKOFF

My boy, you have many years before you, years of happiness and good health. As an old man I advise you to treasure your youth while you may. Don't put yourself in the way of death until you have to.

PAUL

What of you? Each day you work with death all about you. It lurks in your test tubes, it hides in your smears, it's ready to seize you the moment you slip with your scalpel, or are careless with your pipettes.

METCHNIKOFF

With me it doesn't matter so much. I'm old anyway.

PAUL

But you've a knowledge that mustn't die with you. Your worth has been proved; mine is yet untested.

METCHNIKOFF

Oh, God, I wish you hadn't come to me.

PAUL

I had to. You needed me to make this more than just another experiment.

METCHNIKOFF

No, I can't do it. I can't. Please go and breathe some fresh air again. Once outside you'll be thankful for your life.

PAUL

You talk as though I'd die.

METCHNIKOFF

Death sometimes isn't so bad. But this disease is more ruthless.

PAUL

I tell you it doesn't matter. What happens to me here and now isn't important. But what other tragedies might be prevented because I've come to you is of great, of vital importance.

METCHNIKOFF

You're a splendid lad; I wish I could use you.

PAUL

If I knew your secret I'd do it myself.

METCHNIKOFF

You are determined, aren't you?

PAUL

With all my heart I am.

METCHNIKOFF

Well, if you must, I'll ask Dr. Roux.

PAUL

Oh, God, thank you.

METCHNIKOFF

Don't raise your hopes. Dr. Roux may think otherwise.
(METCHNIKOFF goes to the door and calls)

Dr. Roux!

PAUL

(to the PATIENT)
He's going to do it.

THE PATIENT

You're a fool for doing this.
(He exits)
(DR. ROUX enters. He is brisk, capable and scientific)

ROUX

Yes, Dr. Metchnikoff

METCHNIKOFF

I'm a little troubled, Dr. Roux. A young man . . . but first let me present him. Dr. Roux, this is Paul Maisoneuve.

ROUX

How do you do?

PAUL

(exuberantly)

I'm glad to meet you, doctor.

ROUX

Yes, you seem very delighted. What's the trouble?

METCHNIKOFF

Well, to make it brief, Paul has such a great admiration for our experiment he wants to try it on himself.

ROUX

I don't understand. Are you diseased?

PAUL

No, I'm not. That's where the experiment comes in.

ROUX

But how can we help you?

METCHNIKOFF

Paul wants us to give it to him as the next logical step.

ROUX

Is he mad?

PAUL

Not at all. Why do you hesitate? I thought you were men.

ROUX

We are. That's why we know the value of a human life.

PAUL

Your apes didn't suffer.

ROUX

You're not an ape.

PAUL

Oh, why must you be begged to do this to me?

METCHNIKOFF

He seems quite insistent, Dr. Roux.

ROUX

Yes, doctor, but what would the world say if we failed? They'd call us savage quacks who sacrificed a man's life.

METCHNIKOFF

I tried to tell him that.

ROUX

Don't you agree with me?

METCHNIKOFF

(weakening slightly)

Yes, I suppose I do. And yet . . .

ROUX

Yes.

METCHNIKOFF

And yet this step must be taken sometime.

PAUL

Thank heavens for that.

ROUX

The blame will fall on us in case of failure.

METCHNIKOFF

I'll risk it if you will.

ROUX

Just as you say, doctor.

METCHNIKOFF

I think we ought to.

PAUL

Then it shall be done. Make ready with your needles, Dr. Metchnikoff.

ROUX

We'll be right with you.
(ROUX exits)

METCHNIKOFF

I guess you win, my boy.

PAUL

I was examined this morning by two physicians, both members of the academy. Both proclaimed me in perfect health. Here are their sworn statements.

(He gives two certificates to
METCHNIKOFF)

They said I do not now have the disease, have never possessed it in the past.

METCHNIKOFF

In perfect health. And you're doing this when you might be out swimming in the sea or climbing a high mountain!

PAUL

How can you deny me the right to this? You tell us younger men to be unceasing in our search for great truths. You tell us to be unselfish

PAUL (cont'd)

in our efforts, devoted in our work; and yet you hesitate the moment we try to demonstrate that devotion. If your words mean anything, if you expect our faith to have a meaning beyond your words, you wouldn't stand there and deny us the chance to share in your discoveries.

(DR. ROUX returns with a suspension of the disease, a Vidal scarifier, a few towels)

ROUX

Here you are, doctor. Fresh material from two of the worst infections in the hospital.

METCHNIKOFF

(to ROUX)

Do you still want to go through with it?

ROUX

From the looks of this young man I see no way out of it, doctor.

METCHNIKOFF

Then sit down, Paul. We must work fast. We've infected our apes on the eyebrow. It seems to be the most sensitive spot.

PAUL

I'm ready.

(PAUL sits down with back to audience. A white sheet is thrown over his shoulders)

METCHNIKOFF

We will make three scratches, much deeper, however, than the lesions in ordinary contact. We'll apply the germ directly to the wound. We will wait one hour. At the end of that time we'll apply the ointment. We hope, and I ask God to be merciful, that it works.

ROUX

There's still time to change your mind.

PAUL

No, go ahead.

METCHNIKOFF

Then keep your eyes closed, please.

(The PATIENT re-enters and watches operation)

Quiet. There. Another. There. And the last for good measure. There!

(During this METCHNIKOFF has partly covered PAUL as he uses the applicator. The lights begin to dim down except for a small spotlight on PAUL'S face.)

METCHNIKOFF

We're giving this same infection to three of our apes to make sure the infection is potent.

PAUL

This is a long hour A long, long hour!

BLACKOUT

VOICE

Eighty-six days later.

(The clock strikes in the distance and when the lights come up again the stage is empty except for METCHNIKOFF. He is seated as He was at the beginning of the scene. There is a knock at the door)

METCHNIKOFF

Come in!

(The knock is repeated)

Come in, please!

(The door opens and PAUL enters. He is looking very happy)

METCHNIKOFF

Paul!

PAUL

Hello, doctor.

METCHNIKOFF

Paul, let me look at you.

PAUL

Yes, take a good look at me, doctor.

METCHNIKOFF

How are you feeling, my boy?

PAUL

Splendid.

METCHNIKOFF

Not even a little--shall we say, tired?

PAUL

I never felt better in my life!

METCHNIKOFF

Think of that. And today is . . .

PAUL

The twenty-fourth. Eighty-six days! Eighty-six days have passed and still no sign of the disease.

METCHNIKOFF

Do you realize what that means, Paul?

PAUL

It means you're a great man, doctor--you and Dr. Roux. It means that calomel ointment will prevent the infection of syphilis at the time of inception.

METCHNIKOFF

A success!

PAUL

It's the first step in conquering the disease, a great preventive measure. And here is my clean bill of health. The same physicians who examined me before, examined me today.

(He reads)

"We, the undersigned, have this day examined Paul Maisoneuve who was, eighty-six days ago, inoculated with the germs of syphilis. We hereby declare he does not now possess nor does he indicate in the past having possessed this infection. It is incredible that he has escaped. We attribute this successful prophylaxis to the calomel ointment developed by Drs. Metchnikoff and Roux of the Pasteur Institute in Paris"

(As PAUL finishes reading, the door swings open and a crusading woman REFORMER enters)

THE REFORMER

Dr. Metchnikoff!

METCHNIKOFF

At your service, my dear lady.

THE REFORMER

As chairman of the Citizen's Moral Welfare League, I forbid you to make your discovery known to the world!

METCHNIKOFF

Do you really?

THE REFORMER

Syphilis is the penalty for sin! You are about to remove that penalty and plunge the world into an orgy of sinful living. Man will be free to pursue his lustful impulses with no thought of any physical wrath being inflicted on him. Think, Dr. Metchnikoff, what that will mean.

METCHNIKOFF

You are a citizen, you say?

THE REFORMER

Indeed I am.

METCHNIKOFF

And you say that syphilis is the penalty for sin?

THE REFORMER

Indeed it is.

METCHNIKOFF

And it's horrible ghastly penalty, you'll admit. A more horrible one could never be devised, could it?

THE REFORMER

I could think of none worse.

METCHNIKOFF

Then why in God's name hasn't it put an end to sin?

THE REFORMER

Why, I . . . I . . .

METCHNIKOFF

Besides all your moral prophylactics, chemical prophylactic is also essential and I thank God that I was able to find that.

THE REFORMER

That's not the way to look at it.

METCHNIKOFF

Telling people it's sinful hasn't stopped it from striking one out of every ten persons you meet on the street!

THE REFORMER

Yes, but if they wouldn't sin . . .

METCHNIKOFF

If they wouldn't sin! The real sin would be to keep this information from the world. The real sin would be withholding a new found drug when one was available!

THE REFORMER

You must think of people's morals.

METCHNIKOFF

Morals be damned! You think of their morals and I'll think of their illnesses. Now get out of here. Get out of here, I say, I'm giving this cure to the world. It's not an important one, really. It won't help the ones who don't know they have it. It won't prevent innocent children from being born with it. It won't cure a man once he's gotten it. But it may prevent a small amount of misery in the world and neither you nor your self-righteous committee will stop me from giving it to those who need it. Good day, dear lady!

(REFORMER exits. METCHNIKOFF turns to
PAUL)

METCHNIKOFF

Prudish old witch, that's what she is. Did you hear what she said, Paul? As though there weren't enough penalties for sin in the world.

(The door opens again and METCHNIKOFF wheels around yelling)

Get out, I told you. Don't ever come . . .

(And then he notices that it is not the REFORMER who stands in front of him but sad-eyed little JULES BORDET. METCHNIKOFF is overwhelmed with joy at seeing BORDET and rushes to hug him)

Jules! Jules! What on earth . . .? Ah, Jules, it's good to see you.

BORDET

(after releasing himself)

What's wrong with you, Elie? First you yell at me like a madman and then you hug me.

METCHNIKOFF

I thought you were somebody else.

BORDET

Do you send all your women away like that last one?

METCHNIKOFF

She was a fool, a stupid fool, Jules. But no matter, how are you?

BORDET

A little overwhelmed by this splendid welcome. Otherwise my health, good; my mind, hopeful; my spirits, bubbling.

METCHNIKOFF

That's excellent, Jules. I'm glad to hear it. Paul, come here and meet my good friend, Dr. Jules Bordet.

PAUL

How do you do, Dr. Bordet? I've heard a great deal about you.

BORDET

(looking questioningly at METCHNIKOFF)

Yes?

PAUL

You once worked here with Dr. Metchnikoff, didn't you?

BORDET

Worked? Slaved! I slaved under this big Russian bear here. I'm still frightened by him. He's mad, you know.

METCHNIKOFF

Oh, Jules, you don't mean that. Don't believe him, Paul. Jules likes me. He still writes to me, asks questions of his old master.

BORDET

Yes, like that question three years ago. That was a good answer you gave me, Elie.

METCHNIKOFF

I'll never forgive myself for that, Jules. Such stupidity! You know, Paul, if it hadn't been for me Jules would have been an immortal man today.

PAUL

How?

BORDET

Forget it, Elie. I guess your eyesight was bad.

PAUL

May I ask what you're talking about?

BORDET

Let's not mention it.

METCHNIKOFF

No, no, Paul must know what a great man you are. You see, Paul, back in 1903--Jules discovered the pale spirochete of syphilis.

PAUL

I thought Fritz Schaudinn did that last year.

METCHNIKOFF

So he did. But Jules saw it long before that. Only he's afraid to say anything about it. In those days everybody is finding a cause and Jules is afraid he'll be laughed at. So he sends a slide to me, his old master, and asks what I think. I say there is nothing to it and Jules is fool enough to believe me and let the matter drop. Think of that!

PAUL

Oh, how sad.

BORDET

What does it matter? Schaudinn found it anyway. I'm glad he did.

METCHNIKOFF

But to think I cheated you of fame, Jules.

BORDET

I say it doesn't matter now. I've found something else that looks just as important. That's what I came to see you about.

METCHNIKOFF

And what is that?

BORDET

They tell me that you and Dr. Roux have found an ointment that will prevent syphilis at the time of its infection. Is that right?

METCHNIKOFF

Yes, what do you think of it?

BORDET

I think it's wonderful. I'm glad for you.

METCHNIKOFF

Don't tell me you found that three years ago, too.

BORDET

No, far from it. Both you and Schaudinn have worked on the early stages of the disease. That's important, yes, but what about the man who already has it so badly you can no longer see the spirochete under the microscope? What about it after it burrows into every tissue and can no longer be found?

METCHNIKOFF

Ah, there we are helpless. Once it's got past the first stage it's gone. It melts into the system.

BORDET

Well, Elie, that's where I come in. I've got a hunch my test will detect it at those later stages.

METCHNIKOFF

No!

BORDET

Yes!

METCHNIKOFF

Think of that, Paul, think of that. I told you he was a genius. Ah, Jules, you'll be a great man yet.

BORDET

The thing is, I wonder if I could work here for a while. It will be easier than taking you all the way to my regular laboratory in Brussels.

METCHNIKOFF

Let's pretend this is Brussels!

BORDET

Ah, very good Elie. I feel at home already.

METCHNIKOFF

Anything else?

BORDET

Could you let me take a patient who has had the disease for a little while?

METCHNIKOFF

Let me see. Paul, do you think you could find one?

PAUL

I could try.

(PAUL goes out)

BORDET

Now I'll get my syringes ready and my test tubes and retorts and what the writers like to call "chemical paraphernalia."

(He busies himself with an assortment of impressive-looking paraphernalia)

METCHNIKOFF

Would you like to be left alone?

BORDET

That's up to you, Elie. You can stay or go as you like. This is just an experiment and I'm not saying one way or another that I'm on the right track. But it does look promising.

METCHNIKOFF

Well, if it's just an experiment you'd probably like to have me gone for a while. I ought to be getting back to Paris anyhow.

BORDET

I'll call you if anything good comes of this. Thanks for letting me use the laboratory.

(PAUL now enters with the PATIENT, who apparently must have been waiting outside)

PAUL

Look who I've found!

METCHNIKOFF

Ah, my innocent friend.

BORDET

Has he had it a long time?

THE PATIENT

Absolutely.

BORDET

Then you're just the man I need. Sit down.

METCHNIKOFF

Come along, Paul. We're going to let Jules have some peace for a while. Good luck, Jules.

BORDET

Thank you, Elie. See you again.

(METCHNIKOFF and PAUL go)

THE PATIENT

Nice fellow, that Metchnikoff.

BORDET

Yes, indeed, I owe a lot to him. Now let me have your arm.

THE PATIENT

Certainly.

BORDET

(getting the syringe ready)

This is a fussy sort of test but the main idea is that I'll take blood from your arm and mix it with four chemical reagents I've prepared which will make it cloudy. If it remains cloudy it'll mean you have the disease.

THE PATIENT

But I already told you I've got the disease.

BORDET

I know you have. But in this other tube I have some of my own blood and I don't have it. I'll test mine the same way. If the test is any good yours will remain cloudy and mine won't.

THE PATIENT

I'm afraid I don't understand it.

BORDET

Well, I don't blame you. It's very complicated and I don't understand some of it myself. Now we'll take our tubes and put them in the incubator here till we count ten. That would be equal to two hours of ordinary time.

THE PATIENT

I'll count. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

BORDET

That was a quick two hours. Now let's see what we have.
(He takes the tubes out of the incubator)

THE PATIENT

Look!

BORDET

I am.

THE PATIENT

Mine's still cloudy.

BORDET

Indeed it is.

THE PATIENT

And yours isn't. Yours is clear as wine. Man, think of what you've done.

BORDET

Wait a minute. Don't get excited. We've got to check this before it's valid. Here's a third specimen I've saved for that. This is blood from a young man with fresh sores. There are certain laws governing these things and everything has to fit. This will prove if it's right.

THE PATIENT

But you just proved it.....

BORDET

No, no, not for certain. We'll soon see.
(BORDET puts the tube in and
the PATIENT counts rapidly)

THE PATIENT

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten! Two
hours are up.

BORDET

We'll soon know for certain.
(takes it out of incubator)

THE PATIENT

What's the matter with it?
(BORDET looks sadly at the tube.
They wait impatiently but nothing
seems to happen)

BORDET

No, there must be a mistake. The law I've developed says it should
stay cloudy every time. And it doesn't. So the test isn't accurate
yet. I'll have to work on it longer.

THE PATIENT

A little inaccuracy won't hurt, will it? Who'll notice the difference?

BORDET

A fine mess if we went around telling people they had syphilis when they
didn't and vice versa.

THE PATIENT

Yes, I can see that would be confusing.

BORDET

I'm glad Metchnikoff didn't stay to see this fiasco. I was sure it
would work.

THE PATIENT

You're going to keep on trying, aren't you?

BORDET

No, not for a while. I'm tired. I'll publish what little I've done
and maybe someone else can puzzle out the answer.

THE PATIENT

Do you mind if I look at the notes?

BORDET

No, go ahead. Amuse yourself any way you want. But please excuse me.
I'm a little weary.

(BORDET goes. The PATIENT looks
at the notes. The lights dim
and rise again. The clock strikes)

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1907.

(DR. WASSERMANN enters)

WASSERMANN

Could you tell me where Dr. Bordet is?

THE PATIENT

He's out.

WASSERMANN

I'm Dr. Wassermann from Germany. I've been reading a lot about Dr. Bordet's blood tests. I have an idea I know where he made a mistake, I'd like to discuss it with him.

(WASSERMANN looks at the scientific journal he has been carrying)

THE PATIENT

I wish you would. He is rather discouraged. I looked at his notes before and they seemed like Greek to me--all these formulas.

WASSERMANN

No, I'm sure it all makes sense if you study it carefully. However, there's one little mistake here. I can't understand how he happened to miss that.

THE PATIENT

A mistake? Where?

WASSERMANN

Right here on the third experiment. I wonder if he'd mind my trying to fix it up.

THE PATIENT

I'm sure he wouldn't. He's too great a man for that.

WASSERMANN

Then sit down here, will you, please?

THE PATIENT

What're you going to do?

WASSERMANN

Prove that this test is essentially correct.

(He lets some more blood from the PATIENT'S arm)

We won't need much. And it won't hurt. There.

(He takes the tube, shakes it up, inserts some serum, etc. Then DR. BORDET walks in)

BORDET

Dr. Wassermann! I'm glad you've come.

WASSERMANN

Dr. Bordet, I think I know the answer to your experiment.

BORDET

I'd be mighty grateful if you did. The world will be grateful if you can fix it up.

(BORDET goes to another lab bench and starts putting around)

WASSERMANN

Together we must work on this vital experiment.

BORDET

Yes, we've got much work to do.

THE PATIENT

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten! Two hours are up, Dr. Wassermann.

(WASSERMANN takes the tube from the incubator)

WASSERMANN

(holding up several tubes)

Well, I've got it!

BORDET

The Wassermann test for syphilis! It sounds good. I hope a lot of people will take it.

WASSERMANN

Come, we must tell the world we now have a way of finding the hidden spirochete.

BORDET

You do that. I've some other important experiments here. Now where was I? Let me see.....

(BORDET returns to his work and is happily engaged in that as WASSERMANN, holding the tube aloft, goes out)

THE PATIENT

Bravo, Dr. Wassermann . . .

(then he looks back at BORDET)

And God bless you, Dr. Bordet

2-1-22

(The PATIENT goes)

(BORDET continues working in the
laboratory. The lights

DIM OUT

ACT TWO

Scene Two

CHARACTERS

A VOICE

PAUL EHRLICH

THREE TAUNTERS

S. HATA

ACT TWO

Scene Two

The laboratory of DR. PAUL EHRLICH
at Frankfort, Germany.

LENNY

(in darkness)

. . . and thus twice did Dr. Jules Bordet stand on the brink of
immortality . . . once as the discoverer of spirochete before Schaudinn
and once as the discoverer of the blood test before Wassermann. He failed
because he wanted to make doubly sure he was right. However, thanks to
Bordet and Wassermann there was now a way of testing the disease in its
later stages. The next step was to find a cure. Paul Ehrlich was a
zealous worker and we find him now at Frankfort, Germany

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1909.

The lights rise again. PAUL EHRLICH
and the little Japanese S. HATA are
busy at the lab bench with brightly
colored dyes in test tubes. Beside
EHRLICH stand the THREE TAUNTERS.
They sound like old haggling witches.

FIRST TAUNTER

(pointing at EHRLICH)

That's Paul Ehrlich and he's mad!

SECOND TAUNTER

That's Paul Ehrlich and he's a failure!

THIRD TAUNTER

For twenty years he's been mad and failing.

(They all laugh uproariously at this
but EHRLICH and HATA work on oblivious
to the THREE TAUNTERS)

FIRST TAUNTER

Look at them wildly searching for a magic bullet.

SECOND TAUNTER

They've done that two hundred . . .

THIRD TAUNTER

Year in . . .

FIRST TAUNTER

Three hundred . . .

THIRD TAUNTER

Year out . . .

SECOND TAUNTER

Four hundred . . .

THIRD TAUNTER

Always failing . . .

FIRST TAUNTER

Five hundred . . .

THIRD TAUNTER

Never successful

SECOND TAUNTER

Six hundred times they have done it. Paul Ehrlich is a mad fool!

THIRD TAUNTER

A failure.

FIRST TAUNTER

Why don't you give up, Paul Ehrlich, you and that little Japanese, S. Hata?

(The lights dim from the THREE
TAUNTERS and grow more intense
on EHRlich and HATA)

EHRlich

. . . the principle of this is right. We know that. We twist and turn these arsenic compounds first one way and then another. We must find a magic bullet to kill the disease.

HATA

Are these formulas to be tried next?

EHRlich

Try them. Try them. Always keep trying.

HATA

Yes, sir.

EHRlich

Arsenic will kill a human being. But if we find the right combination of arsenic we will kill the spirochete in the patient and not the patient himself.

HATA

This tube? How much?

EHRlich

Add three cc.'s of chloride! That may be the one we're looking for.

(The light emphasizes the THREE
TAUNTERS again)

FIRST TAUNTER

He tries again!

SECOND TAUNTER

He will fail again.

THIRD TAUNTER

This is the 606th time. I've counted.

FIRST TAUNTER

Six hundred and six times a fool.

SECOND TAUNTER

A mad fool!

(Light emphasis shifts back to
EHRlich and HATA)

HATA

Meister! Look!

EHRlich

What is it?

HATA

This is the 606th compound we have the report on. It was used on five rabbits last week. All had ugly sores.

EHRlich

Yes

HATA

All are alive and the sores are gone!

EHRlich

I knew it. The magic bullet. It is the salvation of man. It will cure! It will save. I give the world my salvarsan!

FIRST TAUNTER

What!

SECOND TAUNTER

He has found the cure.

THIRD TAUNTER

Bravo for Paul Ehrlich.

FIRST TAUNTER

Such courage!

SECOND TAUNTER

He never gave up!

THIRD TAUNTER

A genius!

FIRST TAUNTER

We knew Paul Ehrlich could do it!

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

Scene Three

CHARACTERS

A VOICE

FIRST GIRL

SECOND GIRL

FIRST WOMAN

SECOND WOMAN

THIRD WOMAN

FOURTH WOMAN

FIRST LEGISLATOR

SECOND LEGISLATOR

SPEAKER

THIRD LEGISLATOR

FOURTH LEGISLATOR

FIFTH LEGISLATOR

ACT TWOScene Three

A VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1933!

Three spotted areas are picked up successively in front of the curtain

FIRST WOMAN

Ja, it wouldn't be so bad, but some of them are respectable educated people. First it was 606, then it was fever treatments and now it's bismuth. Why in the world don't they put their intelligence to something worth while, I say. Why, I understand they even print those silly articles in the medical journals. Ja, that's the place for them, all right.

BLACKOUT

Light up in second area.

FIRST GIRL

Did you hear that up in Wisconsin a man can't get married unless he takes a medical examination first?

SECOND GIRL

Ain't that awful. They're not asking the girls to do that, too, are they?

FIRST GIRL

Oh, heavens, no. They'd never dare ask a girl to do that. What do they think we are?

BLACKOUT

Light up in third area.

FOURTH WOMAN

What made me mad was, he asked for blood for a Kahn blood test. And I was gonna do it, too, till I learned it was a new test for syphilis.

THIRD WOMAN

I would have walked right out of his office.

FOURTH WOMAN

That's exactly what I did. I was never so insulted in my life.

BLACKOUT

Light up in first area.

SECOND WOMAN

. . . and that's what we're payin' taxes for . . . to keep guys like that in office. Why, just the other day someone was tellin' me that a guy named Saltiel was going to discuss syphilis right on the floor of the state legislature. Imagine that! My God, what's the world comin' to?

BLACKOUT

The lights rise on the Lower House of a State Legislature. The FIRST LEGISLATOR is speaking.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

. . . the proposition is to add an amendment to the law in relation to marriage. This modern amendment to an old law would require persons of both sexes to present a medical certificate stating they are free from venereal diseases. In submitting this amendment I wish to call attention to the great damage done by syphilis and gonorrhoea each year. Statistics show that syphilis and gonorrhoea . . .

SECOND LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, I object to the terms being employed in this discussion.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

To what terms do you refer?

SECOND LEGISLATOR

It should be quite obvious to what terms I refer.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

Unless you can be more specific I shall continue the speech begun. I see nothing objectionable in it.

SECOND LEGISLATOR

Well, I do. I may be old-fashioned and come from a small town but I still believe that the dignity of the legislature should not be besmirched by anything so patently revolting. The diseases to which references have been made are incompatible with anything above the level of bar-room talk. Furthermore, most of us are fathers of children who would sooner or later be subject to this infamous law. How many of us would wish them to be humiliated by an examination before the most sacred, the most holy moment of their lives? This amendment presupposes suspicion of a most intolerable nature. In the name of decency I demand that this discussion be dropped at once!

FIRST LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my sensitive colleague, I insist that the greatest menace confronting public health today is syphilis. Each year its deadly effect on the social structure becomes more apparent. . . .

SPEAKER

Pardon me, but are you really serious in what you're saying or is this some sort of joke?

FIRST LEGISLATOR

I've never been more serious in my life!

THIRD LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, I refuse to remain on the floor while this disgraceful discussion continues!

FIRST LEGISLATOR

If the gentleman was only aware of the significance of this measure.

FOURTH LEGISLATOR

Possibly the answer is that you'd like a civil service job examining prospective brides!

(The others laugh at this)

FIRST LEGISLATOR

I refuse to be swayed by my colleague's vulgar stupidity.

FIFTH LEGISLATOR

May I seriously ask what your interest in this amendment is?

FIRST LEGISLATOR

To that I gladly reply. Up until a year ago I had no interest in it whatever. It was one of those vague subjects one hears but never discusses. Then I was made a member of an investigating committee for the insanity board. I visited a few of our insane hospitals. There I saw the wrecked, ravaged flesh of madmen perishing from this disease. Huddled in corners I saw their wasted bodies, many of them crying to be dead. And I thought it would be a kind God that would give them death in place of their miserable sufferings. But I know society is not as merciful as that. But if we can't release these people through death we can at least save their offspring. And that gentlemen, is the purpose of this amendment!

(There is an embarrassed pause)

SECOND LEGISLATOR

I'm sure that my colleague, being a young man, is being a bit too melodramatic in this matter. We would be alarmed, too, if we did not know that this disease confines itself to those of loose morals and criminal instincts--the riff-raff of society. I insist it has no place in a bill dealing with anything as honorable and sacred as marriage.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, I ask that this be put to a vote.

THIRD LEGISLATOR

Sit down, Ed, we're all blushing for you.

FOURTH LEGISLATOR

My constituents would kick me out of office if they knew I came to discuss bills like this.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, there's an amendment before the floor. I demand that it be voted upon.

MR. SPEAKER

In order to save Sir Galahad from further embarrassing the House we shall proceed to the next bill.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

I demand a vote.

SPEAKER

You're out of order! The gentleman from Drool County has the floor.

FIFTH LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, I present the bill for enlarging our program for eradicating noxious weeds. Each year the farmers of this state are losing money because of pigweed, burdock, thistle, ragweed. . . . The effect on hay fever is devastating. These weeds must be stamped out!

(There is thunderous applause at this
as the lights . . .)

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

Scene Four

CHARACTERS

A VOICE

MR. THOMAS

MISS JOSLYN

JOHN ELSON

THE WIFE

TONY

THE DOCTOR

Scene Four

A VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1936!

The executive offices of a large industrial plant. At the rise of the lights MR. THOMAS is seated at his desk. MISS JOSLYN, his secretary, is finishing the work of the day. It's about five in the afternoon and the slanting rays of the sun fall across the desk, fading toward the end of the scene.

THOMAS

That'll be all for this afternoon, Miss Joslyn. See you in the morning.

MISS JOSLYN

Aren't you going to see him?

THOMAS

See who?

MISS JOSLYN

That man from the shop who's been waiting outside your door all afternoon.

THOMAS

Good heavens, is he still here?

MISS JOSLYN

Yes, he is, sir, and he looks rather pathetic. He must be one of the men you laid off.

THOMAS

If he's been laid off there must be a reason. I don't want to see him.

MISS JOSLYN

I've already told him you would.

THOMAS

Oh, well, show him in. Might as well get it over with.

MISS JOSLYN

Yes, sir.

(She goes to the door and admits JOHN to the office. JOHN is a man of thirty-six who looks older than his years. He is a very frightened man right now)

Mr. Thomas will see you now.

JOHN

Thank you.

MISS JOSLYN

Will that be all, Mr. Thomas?

THOMAS

Yes, I guess so. Good night, Miss Joslyn.

MISS JOSLYN

Good night.

(MISS JOSLYN goes. JOHN stands timidly near the door)

THOMAS

I didn't get your name....

JOHN

John Elson, sir.

THOMAS

John Elson? Oh, yes, yes, I remember. Well, what's on your mind, John?

JOHN

This, sir. I don't quite understand.
(He places a blue slip before THOMAS)

THOMAS

Your discharge, eh? Didn't Mr. Morrison speak to you?

JOHN

Yes, he did, but I still don't understand. I don't know what I've done to get this, sir. I've been employed here a long time. Ten years. I've never been late. I never cause trouble.

THOMAS

It isn't a question of being late or causing trouble, John. We appreciate faithfulness. Wish we had more men like you. But the insurance company through Mr. Morrison seems to think you're a risk they can't very well carry.

JOHN

I've always done my best. I try hard.

THOMAS

It isn't a question of trying, John. We know you like the work and we hate to lose a willing workman. But from the code on this slip it seems you're not as careful as you once were, that you get into little accidents which they believe avoidable. The insurance company will overlook one accident -- like cutting your finger there -- but when it happens three times they begin to wonder.

JOHN

But I've worked here a long time. Nothing serious has ever happened.

THOMAS

No, they step in before anything serious does happen. It all comes under the head of general inefficiency.

JOHN

But I've worked here a long time. This is only the second job I've had in my life. I don't know where I'd go.

THOMAS

How old are you?

JOHN

Thirty-six, sir.

THOMAS

Thirty-six? I thought you were older than that.

JOHN

No, that's my right age. I wouldn't lie.

THOMAS

There's no reason why you should be fired for a thing like this at thirty-six. You should be at the peak of your ability at that age.

JOHN

It's the only kind of work I know.

THOMAS

I can't understand it. Occasionally we have to lay off men when they reach fifty, cruel as it seems, because the system is too complicated for them. They become a danger to others as well as themselves. But you're not old, John, and yet we're firing you because you seem old.

JOHN

Of course I'm not old.

THOMAS

Maybe you worry too much. Mr. Morrison said your mind strayed from your work. What's been bothering you, John?

JOHN

Nothing, unless...

THOMAS

Unless what, John?

JOHN

Unless it's because my wife's going to have a baby.

THOMAS

Why should that worry you? Do you have any other children?

JOHN

Only one living. We lost two when they were babies. Oh, we've had our share of hard luck. But we never complained. Only this -- losing my job -- that's something we never counted on.

THOMAS

You make me feel very badly, John. I wish I could help you.

JOHN

You could give me back my job.

THOMAS

No, much as I'd like to, I can't do that. We've got a schedule to maintain and can't break it up for one man. Furthermore the insurance company won't carry you on their accident compensation list.

JOHN

You mean I'm definitely fired?

THOMAS

Yes, John, I'm afraid you're definitely fired!

BLACKOUT

ACT TWOScene Four-A

In the darkness the voice of JOHN'S wife is heard. She is reading from a book.

THE WIFE

"....with that he swept the scythe through the grass, full of ox-eye daisies, and sighing with a dry sound. And because the grass was so thin, you could watch the scythe, like a flash of steely light, through the standing crop before the swath fell. And it seems to me now it was like the deathly will of God, which is ever waiting behind us till the hour comes to mow us down; yet not in unkindness, but because it is best for us that we leave growing in the meadow, and be brought into His safe rickyard, and thatched over warm with His everlasting loving-kindness."

(The lights, which have risen during this, reveal the wife reading to a blind boy of twelve. He listens attentively until she is done)

TONY

Are there any pictures with it, Ma?

THE WIFE

Not in this book, dear.

TONY

I wish there were.

THE WIFE

What difference does it make, Tony?

TONY

I like to think of pictures. I'd like to make some of my own. Big ones with all the colors you could think of, green, orange, pink, and what are the other colors?

THE WIFE

Blue, red, yellow, brown, lavender -- ah, there are many colors, Tony.

TONY

Read on.

THE WIFE

That was the end of the chapter.

TONY

Start a new chapter.

THE WIFE

It's too late for that.

TONY

Pa isn't home from work yet. It can't be late.

THE WIFE

Yes, it is, Tony. He's late. I can't understand what's keeping him.
(She has put the book down and begins to
pace the room nervously)

TONY

Why are you worried?

THE WIFE

I'm not worried. I'd like to know where he is, that's all. He's not
been well lately. He won't admit it but I can tell.

TONY

You always tell me not to worry. You say I shouldn't worry about not
seeing again.

THE WIFE

I know, Tony, it's foolish of me. Tony, I think you better go to bed.
You're tired.

TONY

You always say, "Tony, you're tired," and you don't really know if
I'm tired at all. Do you?

THE WIFE

Tony, please go to bed.

TONY

Just as you say.

(He gets up and starts to go)

Well, all I can say is, there's one good thing about not being able
to see.

THE WIFE

What's that?

TONY

You're not afraid of the dark.

(He stops half way across the room)

Wait a minute. There's Pa now.

THE WIFE

How do you know?

TONY

Why doesn't he come in? He's out there.

THE WIFE

Are you fooling me, Tony?

TONY

Open the door and see.

(She opens the door and there is JOHN.
He looks more frightened than ever;
his face is pale)

THE WIFE

John! Why are you standing there?

JOHN

Why, I was . . .

TONY

See, I told you. I knew he was there.

(JOHN comes in looking very bedraggled.
The WIFE starts to say something but JOHN
puts up a finger and warns her not to show
her fear before TONY)

JOHN

How are you tonight, Tony?

TONY

I'm fine, Pa. Ma just read me a good story but it didn't have pictures.
Why are you late?

JOHN

I was kept at work.

TONY

Did they pay you extra, Pa?

JOHN

No, this was something else. I thought you'd be in bed by now.

TONY

I was on my way when you came. And I think I'm going to miss some-
thing now but I'll go anyhow.

THE WIFE

Good night, Tony. Don't kick the covers off you. It's cold in your
room.

TONY

You better tie my feet down then.

(And TONY, familiar with the room, makes
his way out without help. As soon as
he is gone the WIFE rushes to JOHN who
has slumped in a chair)

THE WIFE

John, what happened?

JOHN

Everything, Martha, everything.

THE WIFE
But tell me.

JOHN
I will tell you. But I've got to get my wits first.

THE WIFE
You frighten me.

JOHN
I'm frightened myself. I don't know where to begin.

THE WIFE
Yes . . .

JOHN
Well, I might as well get it all out at once. Martha, you can't have the baby!

THE WIFE
I can't have the baby! But it's three months . . . A little late to change my mind . . . it's . . .

JOHN
It doesn't matter, you can't have it.

THE WIFE
John, you're trembling. Don't tremble. Why can't I, what do you mean?

JOHN
I was fired today.

THE WIFE
No!

JOHN
Yes! They've let me go. Said I was too old for the work. Said I was like an old man.

THE WIFE
They couldn't have meant it. You've been so faithful there.

JOHN
I've been faithful all right. Oh, God, Martha, it was crazy the way they talked. But they let me go just the same, and you mustn't have the baby.

THE WIFE
You're taking it too hard. You'll find another job.

JOHN
You don't know why I was fired, the real reason.

THE WIFE
Why were you fired?

JOHN

I didn't know at first. They didn't know either. They just said I couldn't keep up with the schedule. And that's true, Martha. Lately the work's been too hard. The same work I used to do without any effort at all began getting too hard for me. So when they let me go I was afraid to come home and tell you.

THE WIFE

John, you should never be afraid of me.

JOHN

Well, I was. I was afraid of myself. I walked the streets for a long time. Then I went to our doctor and asked if there was any medicine he could give me. I thought he could give me something so I wouldn't be so tired.

THE WIFE

Did he?

JOHN

He examined me. He examined me all over, my nerves, my blood, everything.

THE WIFE

What did he say?

JOHN

Martha, I found out why Tony's blind!

THE WIFE

You--you found out why Tony's blind? Why?

JOHN

Because of us.

THE WIFE

Why because of us? Aren't we all right?

JOHN

The doctor said no. He said I've been sick for a long time, and most likely you've been sick, too.

THE WIFE

What kind of sickness?

JOHN

The doctor said it's--it's syphilis.

(She stifles a scream while JOHN continues)

I didn't know I had it. I still don't know how I got it. I used to see those stories in the papers but I never dreamed it was me--me who might have it. He said it doesn't pain you at all It just comes quietly.

THE WIFE

It must have happened long ago.

JOHN

It must have. Long before I met you.

THE WIFE

Oh, God, John, what'll we do?

JOHN

He said we shouldn't be frightened. He said we shouldn't worry.

THE WIFE

At least now we know. Now there's no question. We know why you lost the job.

JOHN

And we know about Tony.

THE WIFE

Yes.

JOHN

Martha, the doctor said you should come to him, too.

THE WIFE

So we won't have the baby.

JOHN

I don't know.

THE WIFE

Yes, I understand. We couldn't have another. Like Tony, he'd never have a chance.

JOHN

None of us had a chance, Martha, none of us had a chance!
(He falls weeping on her lap)

BLACKOUT

ACT TWOScene Four-B

The scene is MR. THOMAS'S office again. At the rise of the lights, the DOCTOR is talking to MR. THOMAS.

THE DOCTOR

. . . and so a few months ago this John Elson came to my office asking for medical examination. He said he'd been fired from your company for inefficiency and he wondered if there was anything I could do for him.

THOMAS

Yes, I remember the case. We hated to let him go. He had always been a willing worker.

THE DOCTOR

I wonder if you realize the real reason for his inefficiency?

THOMAS

We try to look into those things when we can but of course it's impossible to investigate all personal details.

THE DOCTOR

How often do you have to dismiss a man for inefficiency--for getting into accidents, for making mistakes, for star-gazing, for day-dreaming, for wasting time?

THOMAS

It happens quite frequently. We're a large organization.

THE DOCTOR

And breaking in a new man is a rather expensive item, isn't it?

THOMAS

Yes, terribly. But we have to accept it as part of our industrial system--this hiring and firing of men.

THE DOCTOR

Would you like to know why one man--this John Elson, for instance, who worked here for more than ten years--was lost to you?

THOMAS

It wasn't our fault, I can tell you that. His pay was good, his working conditions ideal.

THE DOCTOR

Well, I'll tell you why. The reason he was inefficient was because he had syphilis.

THOMAS

I don't believe it. He's not the type.

THE DOCTOR

The disease doesn't confine itself to types, Mr. Thomas. It's liable to strike anybody. John, in a rather unusual case, had gotten it innocently years ago. Because of ignorance of the symptoms he never even knew he had it.

THOMAS

He must have.

THE DOCTOR

No, he didn't.

THOMAS

Well, I'm glad he's gone. We don't want any such man around this plant.

THE DOCTOR

He wouldn't have had the disease if you had helped him.

THOMAS

How could I have helped him?

THE DOCTOR

You could have given all your men blood tests and treated those who were found infected at regular intervals. You do all other things to avoid inefficiency.

THOMAS

That's too personal a problem.

THE DOCTOR

It will save you money, you know.

THOMAS

What's that?

THE DOCTOR

I said it would save you money.

THOMAS

How do you explain that?

THE DOCTOR

Oh, don't think I'd expect you to do all this out of sheer good-heartedness. Far from it.

THOMAS

But saving money. How will I go about that?

THE DOCTOR

Take blood tests of all your men. Find out how much potential inefficiency you've got in your plant.

THOMAS

That's an excellent idea. Then we could lay off all the men who look like bad risks.

THE DOCTOR

Oh, no, not so fast here. You can't do that. You won't get any man tested until you can assure him that the test will in no way interfere with his job -- provided he takes treatment. If they're under treatment they'll be as efficient as anybody.

THOMAS

You're sure of that?

THE DOCTOR

I wouldn't be here if I didn't think so.

THOMAS

All right. I'll take it up with the board of directors at once. And I can promise you this -- if, as you say, it will increase the efficiency of our men, which means more money for us, I know the board will adopt it.

THE DOCTOR

All right, now that we have that settled, what about John?

THOMAS

John? Well, he's already fired and the disease has got the best of him. We couldn't take him back, could we?

THE DOCTOR

He'll end up on the relief rolls if you don't. And you'll pay for that in the long run anyway.

THOMAS

But he'll be a danger to the other men.

THE DOCTOR

Do you think so? I wish you'd look at him.

(The DOCTOR goes to the door)

John, will you come in here a minute.

(JOHN enters looking very strong and healthy. The DOCTOR turns to MR. THOMAS)

He'll be no more of a menace than you or I.

THOMAS

Why, John, you don't look like the same man. How do you feel?

JOHN

Never better. I feel ten years younger and I'm ready to start work-- that is, if you'll take me.

THE DOCTOR

I think you'd be making a mistake if you didn't, Mr. Thomas.

THOMAS

Well, doctor, if you're sure the cure is permanent, I don't see any reason why he can't have his job back.

JOHN

Thank you, Mr. Thomas, I'm sure you won't regret it.

THOMAS

But there's one thing I'm a bit curious about. Maybe I seem a bit sentimental, but what about the baby you said your wife was going to have. Won't that be rather dangerous?

THE DOCTOR

Even the unborn are not beyond our reach. The baby will be all right. We can begin treatment as late as the fifth month and in ten cases out of eleven the child will be normal. The main thing is to test by the Kahn or the Wassermann and find out where this disease is lurking. If John had been tested at the time of first employment he would have known this. If he had been tested at the time of marriage it could have been prevented. Industry must do its part. The people and the State must do theirs

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO

Scene Five

CHARACTERS

A VOICE

POLITICIAN

SECOND CLERK

FIFTH LEGISLATOR

THIRD LEGISLATOR

FOURTH LEGISLATOR

FIRST LEGISLATOR

SPEAKER

SECOND LEGISLATOR

ACT TWOScene Five

The music rises for a moment and the lights rise before the curtain outside the floor of a Legislature.

VOICE

The year of our Lord, 1937!

The POLITICIAN and the SECOND CLERK are discovered before the curtain.

POLITICIAN

Okay, maybe a law like that's all right. But the question is: what's it gonna do to us? Every lousy couple will leave the state to get married. They won't wait for no examination. And where's that gonna put our little Gretna Green here, huh?

SECOND CLERK

Right behind the eight ball.

POLITICIAN

Oh, no, it don't. Not if I can help it. It's up to you and me to see it don't get passed.

(The FIFTH LEGISLATOR enters. The POLITICIAN looks up pleasantly surprised)

Oh, oh, look who's comin'!

(He goes up and buttonholes the FIFTH LEGISLATOR)

Well, well, well, if it ain't the gentleman from Drool County. Imagine that. Have a cigar, fella. Boy, you can't imagine how glad I am to see you. Say, that's a good-lookin' suit ya got on. Where'd you get it? It sure looks good on you. It's all right.

(They go off stage together and the THIRD and FOURTH LEGISLATORS enter. The SECOND CLERK goes up to them)

SECOND CLERK

Good morning, gentlemen. Lovely morning, isn't it? Wish we'd have more mornings like this, don't you? It makes a person feel peppy, doesn't it? Here, have a cigar.

(They accept and look at each other questioningly)

Nothing so good for a person as feeling peppy, is there? It sort of makes you feel like voting the right way, doesn't it?

(The POLITICIAN returns)

POLITICIAN

Gentlemen! Imagine meeting you here.

(He goes up to embrace them)

Here, have a cigar. My gosh, it's sure a small world after all.

B L A C K O U T

The curtain rises on the floor of the Legislature. The FIRST LEGISLATOR is speaking.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

Mr. Speaker, four years ago I presented a bill which, over my protests, was not recognized by the chair.

SPEAKER

If the gentleman from Cook County is again referring to an amendment to the marriage code, I might advise him that the feeling of this House has not changed.

SECOND LEGISLATOR

But the feeling of the people has changed. Look!
 (He points to the side and rear where
 many people have gathered)
 They demand that this amendment be heard!

SPEAKER

If my memory serves me correctly it was your opposition to the bill four years ago that led to its suppression.

SECOND LEGISLATOR

I admit it. I admit my own former blindness to facts which ought to have been obvious to all of us. But since that time I have learned that a country like Sweden wiped out this disease because years ago it faced the facts and didn't try to hide them. Based on past records we know that out of one hundred thousand Americans this year, 796 will be struck down by syphilis. Out of exactly the same number of Swedes, only seven will get it. Seven hundred and ninety-six to seven is the difference between blindness to facts and intelligence applied to those same facts.

THIRD LEGISLATOR

But this isn't Sweden. What works there might not work here.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

(jumping up to join the debate)
 All right. Let me tell you the story of Denmark then. Last year in America sixty thousand babies were born with syphilis. Sixty thousand helpless children had this disease wished on them through no fault of their own. But while we were breeding sixty thousand sickly babies--not counting the other thousand who died before birth--while this was going on, Denmark gave birth to five.

SECOND LEGISLATOR

And I say that even if this isn't Sweden, even if this isn't Denmark, the things they can do, we too can do!

(There is a commotion at the side as the
 POLITICIAN tries to push his way through)

POLITICIAN

Gangway here. Let me through here.

SPEAKER

Order! Order!

(He bangs his gavel to quiet the crowd)

SECOND LEGISLATOR

During the past four years I have learned many things. My eyes have been opened to the flagrant weakness of any system that allows its people to suffer year after year. Let's be truthful with ourselves.

POLITICIAN

(shouting)

The bill can't be passed.

(The people shout at him to be quiet. The
SPEAKER cries for attention)

SECOND LEGISLATOR

I say, let's be truthful with ourselves. Nice people do get syphilis. And I say the difference between those who do and those who don't is misfortune and nothing else. The syphilis carrier is a potential murderer and must be stopped whether he likes it or not!

POLITICIAN

No!

THE PEOPLE

Yes!

FIRST LEGISLATOR

Let this be put to a vote.

SPEAKER

All those in favor signify by saying aye!

(Everyone shouts aye in a great chorus which
is taken up by the people. The SPEAKER bangs
for attention and his request for "nay" votes
is drowned out)

The amendment stands adopted!

(There is applause for this)

Victory for this amendment is a battle just begun. Votes for a measure mean nothing unless translated into action by the people. This fight must go on until syphilis has been banished from the face of the earth. It can be done and will be done if you and you and you wish it so. The time has come to stop whispering about it and begin talking about it . . . and talking out loud!

THE CURTAIN FALLS