SPIROCHETE
BY
ARNOLD SUNDGAARD

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"SPIROCHETE"

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 Wurtzebach
WARNING

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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 MATZENAUER  
THE CLERK

ACT ONE

Scene One--The Waterfront--Paloa, 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)

CASTON  
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 POP

(The Year of Our Lord, 1750)

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 Hopital 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 SCHAUDTNN
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 MAISONEUVE
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

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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
CHARACTERS

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?

Frieda Schmidt.

And the boy friend here?

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.

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
May be 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.

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—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?

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?

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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.

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?

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.

Why not? How about it, Frieda?

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

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"SPIROCHETE"

ACT ONE
CHARACTERS

A VOICE

THE PHYSICIAN

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS
ACT ONE

Scene 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?

I, the Physician!

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.

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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.

A just penalty for sin.

THE PHYSICIAN

A most cruel ungodly penalty.

COLUMBUS

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

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.

Will it last long?

COLUMBUS

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.

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
They're sick!

(coming on deck)
I can prescribe one other thing.

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 ONE

Scene 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)

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?
Ssshhh, I like speeches.

My friends...

Look, he can talk.

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

What a question.

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

What of it?

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

Lucia, why are you loafing?

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.

Vive la France!

Why isn't this ass singing for us?

(He forces the INNKEEPER to the front)

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

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

Make it loud and make it good.

Vive l'Italia.

(The accompaniment for the song starts)

Vive la France!
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.

(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 LLOYAL is seen backing away from the girl)

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)
... my love sings only tra la!

INNKEEPER

Bravo! What a fine song. I shall sing it to my children.

GASTON

(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)

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 into 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!
Others from Russia

From the ends of Europe they have come.

And now they desert like ungrateful dogs.

Outrageous!

Here, more wine!

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

What's wrong?

You . . .

Why do you stare at me?

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)

That man has the Spanish disease.

(A FRENCHMAN enters and points to the ITALIAN)

Oh, terrible, ze man has ze Italian disease!

(An ENGLISHMAN enters and points to the FRENCHMAN)

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 POP

JOHN HUNTER

JOHNSON

PHILIPPE RICORDE

THE FOURTH PHYSICIAN
ACT ONE

Scene 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.

The year of our Lord, 1510.

A VOICE

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.

My fee, please.

THE CHEMIST

(He pays him)

Here you are.

(Chemist exits)

My fee, please.

THE SORCERER

(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)

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.
I told you so.

THE PATIENT

Do something.

THE PATIENT

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 PATIENT

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

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

What’ll I do?

THE PATIENT

Lie down, that may help.

THE SECOND PHYSICIAN

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.

I need advice, lots of it.

THE PATIENT

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.

I thought you said you’d help me.

THE PATIENT

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.

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.

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, Paré, 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.

Interesting, if true.

THE FIRST PHYSICIAN

We'd like to see you do it.

THE SECOND 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.
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.

(The year of our Lord, 1600.

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 year of our Lord, 1665.

And I feel foul.

(The Fop moves on as the clock strikes again)
The year of our Lord, 1760.

VOICE

And nothing happens. Oh, Girolamo Fracastoro!

THE PATIENT

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)

The year of our Lord, 1767.

VOICE

(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 gonorrhea 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 gonorrhea 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 gonorrhea 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
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 gonorrhea, 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 gonorrhea both!

THE PATIENT

Who are you?
I am Phillippe 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?

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

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.

You know, I was beginning to get discouraged.

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.

You mean you don't know yet?

I'm afraid not.

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

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

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 ONE

Scene 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.

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.

If you insist . . .

(He takes off dark glasses)

That's better. And now your name?

JEAN LOUIS

Jean Louis d'Houblon.

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.
I'm thinking of the one you love . . .

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.

It's fools like you who breed intolerance!

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.

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

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

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.

Come in. (MARIE, a bridesmaid, enters)

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

No, Collette, not yet.

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

Servants have been sent to look.

Oh, Marie, what will I do?

You mustn't worry. Jean Louis will come if he has to go through fire and water.
Yes, he would go through fire and water for me. He always said so.
But Marie . . .

Don't be so frightened, Collette.

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

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

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.

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

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

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)

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?

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

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)

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

I've come to see the bride.

No, please go. She doesn't want company now.
No, let him in, Marie. Maybe he knows...

Thank you, my child.

(FOURLIEE closes the door after him)

Shall I stay now?

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

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

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

Yes, Jean Louis! He...

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

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

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

You frighten me.

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

You say he's all right.

I'm sure he is.

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

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

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 ...
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 . . . .

Yes . . . .

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

He loved her?

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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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.

Who stopped him then?

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.

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

-51-
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.

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

Collette! So glad you came.

Why, Jean Louis, what are you doing?

Nothing important. Did you have something planned?

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

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.

You ... you were reading the papers?

And why shouldn't I read the papers?

No reason at all, but today . . .

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

Don't you remember Dr. Fournier?

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?

What makes you ask that?

COLLETTE

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)

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?
Answer me, what date is it?

FOURNIER

I don't know.

JEAN LOUIS

(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!

FOURNIER

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.
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

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ACT ONE

Scene Five

CHARACTERS

DR. ERICH HOFFMAN
FIRST DOCTOR
SECOND DOCTOR
DR. SCHAUDINN
LABORATORY ASSISTANTS
ACT ONE
Scene Five

The year of our Lord, 1905.

VOICE

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.

Would you deny there is a cause?

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

That would end if the real cause were found.

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.
I'm sure you won't regret it.

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

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

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.

You forget the purpose of this. We need you.

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

Science has sought this for four hundred years.

I'll find it in four months.

You can begin next month.

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

We have one waiting!

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

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.

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

What do you wish?

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

Slides! From fresh chancre, 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)

You are foolish for being so impatient!

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

Here they come. Call your needs!

New infections, old infections!

What do you see?

What do I see, what do I see?

Anything new?

Anything old.

Anything old.

Hoffman!

Yes?

What's that spiral wriggling there?

What spiral?
SCHAUDINN
Like a corkscrew without a handle.

HOFFMAN
Spiral? Corkscrew?

SCHAUDINN
You heard me! Look!

(HOFFMAN comes and looks)

I can't see anything.

SCHAUDINN
Look!

HOFFMAN
Where?

SCHAUDINN
See the red corpuscle in the middle of the field?

Yes.

SCHAUDINN
Now toward the eight o'clock position.

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
"SPIROCHETE"

ACT TWO
ACT TWO

Scene One

CHARACTERS

METCHNIKOFF
THE PATIENT
PAUL MAISONEUVE
DR. ROUX
THE REFORMER
DR. BORDET
A VOICE
DR. WASSERMANN
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, EHHLCI, 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?

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

Shhhhhhh, 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.

-66-
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.

You mean syphilis?

METCHNIKOFF

THE PATIENT
(quite pained by this indiscretion)
Please! After all . . .

Well, isn't it syphilis?

METCHNIKOFF

THE PATIENT
Yes, but . . .

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

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

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

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.

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.

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

Have you got an ointment like that?

We have for apes.

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

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.

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.

That's what they all say.

Well, it was. I was innocent. But it was spring. One day...

(A knock at the door)

Excuse me. Come in.

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

If you're busy, Dr. Metchnikoff, I'll gladly...

(He turns to go)

No, please come in.

Thank you.

What was your name, please?

Paul Maisoneuve.

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

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.

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?

Yes.

METCHNIKOFF

Then do it on me, please.
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.

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.

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

How do you do?

I'm glad to meet you, doctor.

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

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

I don't understand. Are you diseased?

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

But how can we help you?

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

I see he mad?

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

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

Your apes didn't suffer.

You're not an ape.

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

He seems quite insistent, Dr. Roux.

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

I tried to tell him that.
Don't you agree with me?

ROUX

(weakening slightly)

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

METCHNIKOFF

Yes.

ROUX

And yet this step must be taken sometime.

METCHNIKOFF

Thank heavens for that.

PAUL

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

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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 ayes 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.)
METEHNKOFF
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 METEHNKOFF. He is seated as he was at the beginning of the scene. There is a knock at the door)

Come in!
Come in, please!
(The knock is repeated)
(The door opens and PAUL enters. He is looking very happy)

Paul!

Hello, doctor.

Paul, let me look at you.

Yes, take a good look at me, doctor.

How are you feeling, my boy?

Splendid.

Not even a little—shall we say, tired?

I never felt better in my life!

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.
And you say that syphilis is the penalty for sin?

Indeed it is.

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

I could think of none worse.

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

Why, I... I...

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

That's not the way to look at it.

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

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

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!

You must think of people's morals.

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.

And what is that?

METCHNIKOFF

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?

BORDET

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.

Anything else?

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

BORDET
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!

Ah, my innocent friend.

METchnIKOFF

Has he had it a long time?

BORDET

Absolutely.

THE PATIENT

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.
Certainly.

BORDET
(getting the syringes 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)

Look!

THE PATIENT
I am.

BORDET
Mine's still cloudy.

THE PATIENT
Indeed it is.

BORDET
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.
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)
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 puttering 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 . . . .
(The PATIENT goes)

(BORDET continues working in the laboratory. The lights . . .

DID 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 ....

The year of our Lord, 1909.

VOICE

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 ...

-38-
Four hundred ...  
SECOND TAUNTER

Always failing ...  
THIRD TAUNTER

Five hundred ...  
FIRST TAUNTER

Never successful ...  
THIRD TAUNTER

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

A failure.  
THIRD TAUNTER

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

(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!
He will fail again.

SECOND TAUNTER

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

THIRD TAUNTER

Six hundred and six times a fool.

FIRST TAUNTER

A mad fool!

SECOND TAUNTER

(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 TWO

Scene Three

The year of our Lord, 1933!

A VOICE

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 gonorrhea each year. Statistics show that syphilis and gonorrhea ...

SECOND LEGISLATOR

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

To what terms do you refer?

FIRST LEGISLATOR

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, raved 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 gentemen, 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.

I demand a vote.

FIRST LEGISLATOR

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 after-
noon.

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.

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)

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 TWO

Scene 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.
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?
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)

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.
But tell me.

THE WIFE

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

JOHN

You frighten me.

THE WIFE

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

JOHN

Yes...

THE WIFE

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

JOHN

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

THE WIFE

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

JOHN

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

THE WIFE

I was fired today.

JOHN

No!

THE WIFE

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

JOHN

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

THE WIFE

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.

And we know about Tony.

JOHN
Yes.

THE WIFE
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 TWO

Scene 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 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.

He must have.

No, he didn't.

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

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

How could I have helped him?

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.

That's too personal a problem.

It will save you money, you know.

What's that?

I said it would save you money.

How do you explain that?

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

But saving money. How will I go about that?

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

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.

You're sure of that?

THOMAS
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 TWO

Scene 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.

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?

(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.

BLACKOUT
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