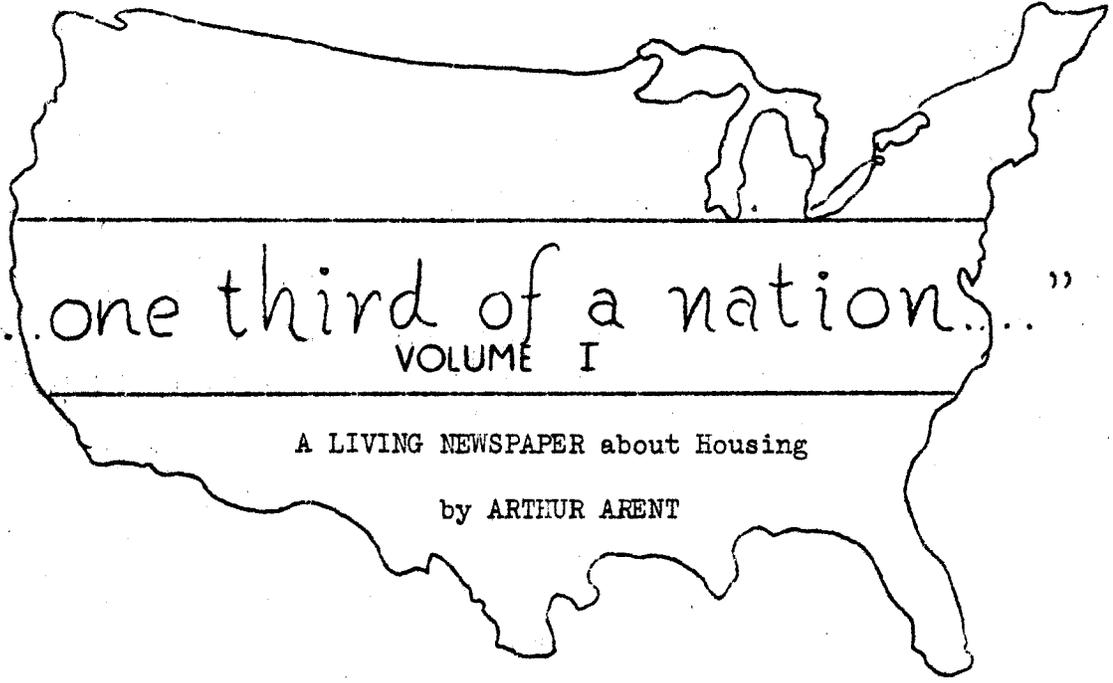


NATIONAL SERVICE BUREAU

FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
1697 Broadway - New York City
Irwin A. Rubinstein - Manager



"...one third of a nation..."
VOLUME I

A LIVING NEWSPAPER about Housing
by ARTHUR ARENT

NATIONAL
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THE LIVING NEWSPAPER
sponsored by
NEWSPAPER GUILD OF NEW YORK

"...one third of a nation..."

a Living Newspaper about Housing

by

Arthur Arent

- - - - -

Based on research compiled by the
Editorial Staff of the Living News-
paper.

- - - - -

Staged by Lem Ward
Setting by Howard Bay
Technical Director, Moe Hack
Music by Lee Wainer
Costumes designed by Rhoda Rammelkamp
Manager for the Living Newspaper, Irving Mendell

Produced by Philip W. Barber

Adelphi Theatre -- January, 1938

Final Edition

" . . . one third of a nation . . . "

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FOREWORD

With "...one third of a nation..." the Living Newspaper presents its fifth Broadway production.

TRIPLE A PLOWED UNDER, the first Living Newspaper edition, opened on March 14, 1936, and ran for eight weeks. It was seen by 38,000 New Yorkers. As its name implies, the play deals with the economic problem of the farmer. The interest in this initial Living Newspaper was so great that Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee and Cleveland reproduced it; Chicago, 93 performances, Los Angeles, 32 and Milwaukee, 22.

The second edition of the Living Newspaper, HIGHLIGHTS OF 1935, opened on May 12, 1936, and ran for three weeks. It dramatized important front page stories of the previous year. The Brooklyn Eagle characterized the play as, "a selection of headlines, editorials as well as news, in a nice combination providing pungency and humor."

With INJUNCTION GRANTED the Living Newspaper started to form its definite production pattern. This can be said to be the why, the when, and the wherefore -- cause and effect -- of living problems confronting us today. The subject at hand in that production was organized labor in the Courts, and the 63,000 people who saw it during its thirteen week run, were most enthusiastic in their response, both as regards the theme of the play, and the Living Newspaper form of dramatization. Gilbert Seldes in Scribner's Magazine said, "I do not know which to praise more, the shrewdness of the method, the significance of the subject, or the passion which, in the end, communicates a positive excitement to the audience."

As it's fourth production, POWER, a play tracing the history of the electric industry in the United States, was produced. It opened on February 23, 1937, and during its twenty week run played to a total audience of 76,529 people. While it was playing to capacity houses in New York, San Francisco and Seattle also produced it. At this moment, Portland, Oregon has a cast in rehearsal, and word comes from Seattle, that the play is touring the State of Washington with much success.

Early in February of this year, a second company was formed, had a four week run on Broadway, and now has numerous spot bookings throughout the city. The general feeling is that POWER will be on the books of the Federal Theatre for some time to come.

While POWER was still drawing large audiences, the germ of "...one third of a nation..." was taking root. Housing, a major problem of modern existence, was filling the columns of our metropolitan newspapers. Legislation was being drafted in Washington, and in our own City and State, groups were working for appropriations, not only for slum clearance, but also for housing projects. The production of "...one third of a nation..." on January 17th, at a time when there was so much

activity in the national housing field, indicates the vitality of the Federal Theatre.

At this writing, April 20th, the play has passed its eightieth performance, and has been seen by 111,000 people. It is booked solid with theatre parties until the 10th of June. There can be no doubt that the Living Newspaper has given to New York the, "hit of the season."

It is the hope of the Living Newspaper and the Federal Theatre Project that "...one third of a nation..." will be the basis for many presentations in local communities. We have set the scene in New York, but

LOUDSPEAKER

Ladies and gentlemen, this might be Boston, New York, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia ----

and with changes in names and locale, "...one third of a nation..." can be produced for all the nation.

New York
April 20, 1938.

"...one third of a nation..."

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 Helen Alfred, Secretary & Executive Director, National Public
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 Harold S. Bittenheim, Editor, American City Magazine
 Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President, Columbia University
 Cauldwell-Wingate, Inc., Contractors, New York City
 Stuart Chase, Editor of The Nation magazine.
 C. Davidson, Real Estate Board of New York
 Robert Dorman, Manager, Acme News Pictures
 Alex Down, New York City Housing Authority
 Edward Doyle, Real Estate Board of New York
 John J. McElligott, Fire Commissioner, City of New York
 Oscar Fischer, Architect
 Estate of Robert Goslet, New York City
 George Gove, Secretary, New York State Board of Housing
 Peter Grimm, Co-ordinator of Government Housing Activities
 Charles Y. Harrison, New York City Housing Authority
 Oscar Heimleish, Editor, Building America
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 Stanley Howe, Secretary to Mayor LaGuardia, New York City
 Walter F. Howes, N.Y.C. Slum Clearance Project, W.P.A.
 Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of Interior
 H. A. Lyon, Harold Strong Corporation, Publicity Organization
 Tenement House Committee of Charity Organization Society.
 Heinz Norden, City-Wide Tenants Council
 Charles Noyes, Secretary to Langdon Post, Tenement House Commissioner
 New York City
 Lawrence M. Orton, Secretary, Regional Planning Association
 Louis H. Pink, Superintendant, New York State Board of Insurance
 Langdon W. Post, Commissioner, Tenement House Department, N.Y.C.
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ACT I

VOICE OF LIVING NEWSPAPER.....CHARLES DILL

SCENE 1 -- FIRE

MAN IN CELLAR.....JAMES WILLIAMS

BOYS.....(ROY LeMAY
(NAT LOESBERG

FATHER.....CHARLES DEIGHAN

MOTHER.....MAY RITCHIE

DAUGHTER.....JENNIE WREN

POLICEMAN.....JOHN POTE

MAN ON FIRE ESCAPE.....PAT McCULLAGH

SCENE 2 -- INVESTIGATION

COMMISSIONER.....EDWIN WHITNER

MR. ROSEN.....MAX HIRSCH

FIRE DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR.....DICK FITZGERALD

BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR.....TOM HARRIS

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR.....WAYNE NUNN

MR. SCHULTZ.....RICHARD KELLER

CAR OWNER.....SNITZ MOORE

AUTOMOBILE SALESMAN.....ALEXANDER POLAK

SCENE 3 -- LAND

A- TRINITY CHURCH

(Staged by TAMARIS)

LORD CORNBURY.....PETER KING

MINISTER.....GEORGE A. RYAN
(LAWRENCE HAWLEY

LEASEHOLDERS.....(HUGH BANKS
(WILLIAM BURBRIDGE
(ROBERT WARD

ALDERMAN.....JAMES J. COYLE

WILLIAM RHINELANDER.....ZACK MACCUBBIN

AARON BURR.....THURLOW BERGEN

B- THE CITY GROWS

LANDOWNER.....ROBERT NOACK

VOICE OF TOWN CRIER.....ZACK MACCUBBIN

SECOND VOICE.....TOM HARRIS

MAN-in-SEARCH-of-HOME.....SIDNEY RIGGS

VERY FAT MAN.....PHIL BISHOP

ROBERT GOELET.....SAM BONNELL

JOHN WENDELL.....ROBERT MACK

JOHN JACOB ASTOR.....ED. BRANDON

JAMES GORDON BENNETT.....ROBERT LINWOOD

ACT ISCENE 6 -- RENTING

LANDLORD.....WILLIAM BURBRIDGE
 FIRST AGENT.....RICHARD KELLER
 (DAVID RESNIKOFF
 (DOROTHY GAMMON
 ITALIAN FAMILY.....(JANE HOWE
 (RICHARD HUETT
 (NANCY SKIDMORE

 MAN.....PAT McCULLAGH
 WOMAN.....BEATRICE OLSON
 (NAT LOESBERG
 (TOMMI BISSELL
 ANOTHER FAMILY.....(ANNE VOORHEES
 (MAY RITCHIE
 (GEORGE BATSON

 SECOND AGENT.....DICK FITZGERALD
 THIRD AGENT.....MAX HIRSCH

 (PAUL JACCHIA
 NEW YORKERS IN SEARCH OF A HOME.....(ALMA McKEE
 (WILLIAM La VAR
 (ANNE ASHLEY

 GRANDDAUGHTER.....JOAN DANTON
 GRANDFATHER.....GEORGE COLAN
 JEWISH MAN.....VLADIMIR PERLOFF
 JEWISH WOMAN.....MIRIAM GOLDINA
 MINISTER.....WAYNE NUNN

ACT IISCENE 1 -- THE LAW

VOICE OF THE HOUSE.....EDWIN WHITNER
 ANNOUNCERS OF THE LAW.....(ED BRANDON
 (ZACK MACCUBBIN
 COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE HOUSING (1894).....EMILE METRAS
 RICHARD WATSON GILDER, CHAIRMAN.....SAM BONNELL
 ENOCH VREELAND, DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT
 OF BUILDING DEPARTMENT.....ROBERT LINWOOD
 EDITOR OF NEW YORK HERALD.....GEORGE A. RYAN
 COLONEL S. VAN RENSSELAER CRUGER,
 COMPTROLLER OF TRINITY CHURCH.....PHIL BISHOP
 THE VERY REVEREND A. WOODRUFF HALSEY.....JAMES J. COYLE
 JUDGE PRYOR.....WILLIAM PARKE
 S.P. NASH, ATTORNEY FOR TRINITY.....TOM HARRIS
 ROGER FOSTER, ATTORNEY FOR CITY.....PETER KING
 JUDGE PECKHAM.....THURLOW BERGEN
 ANNOUNCER OF LAW.....WAYNE NUNN

SCENE 2 -- CROSSTOWN

THE LITTLE MAN.....CLARENCE R. CHASE
GUIDE.....JOSEPH DIXON

ACT IISCENE 2A- STREET KIDS

FRANK.....MICKIE JACOBI
SAMMY.....ROY LeMAY
SAMMY'S MOTHER.....MIRIAM GOLDINA
ANNOUNCERS.....(CATHERINE HUTH
(MAVIS WALSH)

B- EAST SIDE - WEST SIDE

MIN.....HELENE AMBROSE
JIM, HER HUSBAND.....JOHN POTE
MRS. BUTTONKOOPEER.....EDITH GROOME
TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSIONER.....PETER KING

C- HARLEM

A STEVEDORE.....ADD BATES
A BOOTBLACK.....KERMIT AUGUSTINE

D- RENT STRIKE

EAST SIDE STRIKERS.....(DOROTHY GAMMON
(JOAN DANTON
(BEATRICE OLSON
BRONX STRIKERS.....(MARION DAY
(JANET McGUINESS
(JEAN THOMAS
ORGANIZER.....SAM BONNELL
BROOKLYN STRIKERS.....(VLADIMIR PERLOFF
(KATHERINE BERGER

SCENE 3 - WHAT PRICE HOUSING?

LANDLORD.....ALEXANDER POLAK
LANDOWNER.....WAYNE NUNN
BROKERS.....(PHIL BISHOP
(SAM BONNELL
BUILDING SUPPLY MEN.....(SNITZ MOORE
(TOM HARRIS
CONTRACTOR.....ROBERT LINWOOD
BANKER.....JAMES J. COYLE
MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT.....WILLIAM PARKE
FEDERAL TAX COLLECTOR.....EMILE METRAS
STATE TAX COLLECTOR.....ROBERT MACK

"...one third of a nation..."

SCENE TITLES

ACT I

SCENE 1 - Fire!

SCENE 2 - Investigation

SCENE 3 - Land

A -- Trinity Church

B -- The City Grows

SCENE 4 - Looking Backward

A -- Why they came (an Irish family)

B -- What they saw (Steve and Joe)

C -- What they got (cholera)

SCENE 5 - Appoint a Committee

SCENE 6 - Renting

ACT II

SCENE 1 - The Law

SCENE 2 - Crosstown - 1933

A -- Street Kids

B -- East Side - West Side

C -- Harlem

D -- Rent Strike

SCENE 3 - What Price Housing?

SCENE 4 - Government Housing

SCENE 5 - Looking Forward

"...one-third of a nation..."

ACT I

SCENE I -- FIRE!

CHARACTERS

Loudspeaker

A little girl

Two small boys

Two girls

Another girl

Her mother

Her father

Man

Occupants of the tenement

Crowd of onlookers and passersby

Policeman

Fireman

Jewish man (Mr. Rosen)

Man (on fire escape)

ACT ISCENE I - FIRE!

OVERTURE

Curtain rises on a slum tenement which appears as a cross section of a number of tenements. On stage right, the ground floor of a tenement building represents the entrance to a cellar. Above this is cubicle stage right -- a room completely exposed, the upstage walls carrying up to flies; the walls, possibly from a house that has been demolished and is left standing, showing the plaster lines made by the former floors and stairways. Upstage and continuing from right to left is a cross section of a main tenement showing center - two exposed rooms, one over the other, and a narrow stairway to the left leading from the street up to the interior of the house. Continuing upward is the landing of the third floor and a connecting stairway to the fourth floor. The fourth floor shows a hallway with three closed doors - up. There is a balustrade down across the entire hallway. One center rung of the balustrade is out, leaving a wide gap. To the left of this structure stands another small section of a tenement with a fire escape about 24 feet above and one window as an egress to the fire escape. From the railing of the fire escape hangs a vertical ladder, each side of which is attached to the railing by a hook. On left of this is an alley leading up to the street with a view of the neighboring tenement houses, warehouse in need of repair, whole buildings in poor condition, and in the far distance a gas-tank. At entrance to alley is indicated passage to basement of small tenement. Opposite this, in alley stands a rubbish heap.

A ship ladder stairway leads from the street to cubicle stage right and a connecting stairway from this cubicle into the main tenement. Against wall of cubicle stage right is a stationary cot, on top of which is a mattress. Half way down stage in front of building and running across from right to left is a 3 step.

The apron has been built out and joins the stage by a step extending right to left. At each end of the apron a 2 step, down right and down left.

Steps lead from pit on to stage left. The action of the play alternates between the scenes in the tenement structure and those played in front of blacks. The blacks are flown upstage directly behind the 3 step. The scene develops as follows:

As the curtain rises -- a SMALL GIRL is seen getting water from the cellar faucet stage right. She then picks up her pail and starts to go up ship ladder stairway. As she reaches the middle of the stairway TWO SMALL BOYS, who have been shooting crap on the bottom step of the stairway to the second floor call her and wave. She waves back and continues on her way up to the top floor. Her walk is slow and indicates that the pail is heavy and that it is a long climb. At the same time in the lower center cubicle TWO GIRLS are lounging. A small victrola is playing a dance record of the period (1924). They are preparing to retire and are sitting at ease previous to going to bed. In the cubicle above is seen a YOUNG GIRL dozing on a chair, her MOTHER, in house dress, preparing a lunch pail for the girl's FATHER who is ready to go to work on his night shift. As the GIRL WITH THE PAIL reaches the third floor, the VOICE OF THE LIVING NEWSPAPER is heard over the microphone.

LOUDSPEAKER

February 1924 -- This might be 397 Madison Street, New York.* It might be 245 Halsey Street, Brooklyn,** or Jackson Avenue and 10th Street, Long Island City.***

Wisps of smoke appear coming from the third floor, the basement left, and the cellar right. The BOYS sniff, look about, and go back to shooting crap. A moment later dense puffs of smoke appear from cellar right and basement left. A MAN, coughing, comes up from the cellar right. He goes to get water at the faucet and the BOYS run over to question him. They all realize that the building is on fire and one of the boys excitedly starts to run up the stairs. The SMALL ONE, having remained downstairs, yells up to him, "Hey, where are you going?" The FIRST BOY, unheeding, continues on his way up the stairs to warn the occupants on the upper floors. The OTHER BOY starts to follow him up. As the FIRST BOY reaches the third floor, PEOPLE in various modes of attire and dishabille emerge from the various apartments and nearby tenements. The screech of fire sirens and the clang of bells are heard. From this point on the excitement mounts. PEOPLE on the third and fourth floors and in the various cubicles start running, taking with them any personal belongings that they are able to lay hands on, knocking on doors, waking up people in the other apartments.

* New York Times - Feb. 19, 1924.

** New York Times - Feb. 21, 1924.

*** New York Times - Feb. 24, 1924.

A CROWD OF ONLOOKERS and PASSERSBY start to gather on stage. In the crowd is a POLICEMAN who bangs his club on the ground and blows his whistle. A FIREMAN appears with a searchlight playing his light all over the structure. A Jewish man (MR. ROSEN)* enters right, agitatedly pointing to the building and begging the POLICEMAN to let him go up. The POLICEMAN refuses and holds him back with much difficulty. During the above a MAN comes out of window and appears on the fire escape in tenement left, 24 feet above stage. The CROWD sees him. He puts his foot over the railing of the fire escape. As his foot touches the ladder one hook gives way and it starts swinging crazily, shutting off his means of escape. He tries to clamber back in through the window but a cloud of smoke and flame blasts out, hitting him in the face. He is trapped on the fire escape. As the CROWD sees this, a cry of "look" is heard, over the screaming of sirens and clanging of bells. They rush to a spot directly underneath the fire escape. As they reach this spot they point to the MAN above who has been cowering on the fire escape. They freeze as

BLACKOUT.

(Blacks in)

*Fictional character

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT I

SCENE TWO - INVESTIGATION

Loudspeaker

Man (Mr. Rosen)

Commissioner

Three inspectors

(Fire Department

(Building Department

(Old Building Bureau, Tenement House Department

Mr. Schultz - landlord

Man - car owner

Automobile salesman

SCENE TWO - INVESTIGATION

LOUDSPEAKER

Thirteen persons lost their lives in that fire on Madison Street---four men, two women and seven children. Another man was killed in an unsuccessful attempt to make his way down a fire escape ladder into the yard. When the fire department arrived the building was in flames. Only a few of those inside could be reached...* What started this fire? Why did it spread so quickly? Why was the death toll so high?

(Lights up. Scene takes place in front of blacks. A man, MR. ROSEN seated down right. He is the one who tried to get back into the burning building. He is dazed and a little cowed, seemingly absorbed in something inside himself, puzzling it out.)

Upstage, center on 3 step, are seated in a row the INSPECTORS of the Fire Department, Building Department and the Old Building Bureau of the Tenement House Department.

Downstage, left center conspicuously empty, a chair...)

(All attention is focused on ROSEN, right, and the COMMISSIONER, who stands downstage center interrogating him)

COMMISSIONER

(sympathetically but a little worn, as though this has been going on for some time and he has almost despaired of getting an answer)

....and now, Mr. Rosen,** won't you tell us what happened when you came home?

(no answer. ROSEN just stares ahead, still absorbed, still trying to puzzle it out)

I realize how difficult this is, but we're trying to get at what caused this fire, and you've got to help us. That's how we can prevent more fires, by finding out about these things and correcting them.

(no answer)

(almost pleadingly)

Mr. Rosen....

ROSEN

(turns his head, regards COMMISSIONER; then slowly)

They no let me into the house.

(He stares out again)

COMMISSIONER

(gratefully)

Thank you. And then, what happened?

* N.Y. Times, February 19, 1924.

** Fictional character.

ROSEN

My wife burn up. In bed. My two children burn up, in bed.
(He faces COMMISSIONER)

Sons! Mine! Two!

COMMISSIONER

(eagerly)

And then?

ROSEN

And then...They no let me into the house.
(relapses into his brooding)

COMMISSIONER

(giving it up as a bad job)

That's all. Thank you.

(regards ROSEN for a moment - then turns
quickly and sharply to FIRE INSPECTOR)

Are you the Fire Inspector?

FIRE INSPECTOR

Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER

What do you know about this?

FIRE INSPECTOR

The flames started in the cellar.*

COMMISSIONER

How?

FIRE INSPECTOR

Probably in a pile of rubbish. We're not sure.

COMMISSIONER

What ignited the rubbish?

FIRE INSPECTOR

Cigarette, maybe. We don't know that, either.

COMMISSIONER

What happened then?

FIRE INSPECTOR

The halls went up and the stairways. That's why they couldn't get out. Then the walls caved in. You couldn't stop it because the wainscoting was made of wood. That carried the flames right up like somebody ran along it with a torch.**

COMMISSIONER

Is wooden wainscoting a violation?

* Digest of Report of N.Y. Board of Fire Underwriters on Feb.19,1924
Tenement Fire at 397 Madison St., N.Y. - Municipal Reference Library,
New York, N.Y.

** Digest of Report New York Times, February 19, 1924.

FIRE INSPECTOR

(looking at COMMISSIONER then nodding his head in direction of BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR)

Well, er.....maybe you'd better ask the Building Department about that.

COMMISSIONER

(crosses to BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR)

Are you the Inspector of the Building Department?

BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER

When was this house built?

BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

1884. It's an old law tenement.*

COMMISSIONER

What are the old law tenements?

BUILDING INSPECTOR

Well, most of the brownstones, wooden frame houses, tenements and every building that was put up before the law of 1901.**

BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

It said that any building erected after that date had to have certain improvements like a separate water closet for each apartment, adequate fire escapes.***

COMMISSIONER

And those already built and still in use?

BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

They had to conform to the new law in certain respects.

COMMISSIONER

What respects?

BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

They had to have fire escapes.****

COMMISSIONER

How about wooden wainscoting?***** Is that a violation?

-
- * Report of New York State Board of Housing, Legislative Document (1932) #84 - p.11
 - ** Report of N.Y. State Board of Housing, Legislative Document (1932)
 - *** Ibid. P.15
 - **** N.Y. Times, February 19, 1924.
 - ***** New York City Tenement House Commission - interview by Living News staff with Inspection Department - Ed.

In a new house, yes. BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

In an old law tenement? COMMISSIONER

No! BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

Have you recently inspected the premises at 397 Madison Street? COMMISSIONER

Well, er, that comes under the duties of the Tenement House Department. BUILDING DEPARTMENT INSPECTOR

Are you the Tenement House Inspector? COMMISSIONER
(crosses to TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR)

Yes, sir. TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Did you re-examine the premises at 397 Madison Street? COMMISSIONER

Yes, sir. About six months ago.* TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

What did you find? COMMISSIONER

An adequate number of fire escapes with vertical ladders as required by law.** TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Is the collection of rubbish in the cellar a violation? COMMISSIONER

It is. TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Did you find any there? COMMISSIONER

No. TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

But you haven't been there in six months. Why? COMMISSIONER

Because we haven't received any complaint. TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

* New York Times, February 19, 1924.

** Ibid.

COMMISSIONER

You mean a house is never inspected unless a complaint has been received? *

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Exactly.

COMMISSIONER

(sharply)

But you did receive one six months ago? **

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER

(eager to discover a violation)

What was it for?

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Roaches.

COMMISSIONER

Roaches?

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

Roaches.

COMMISSIONER

Why must you wait for complaints before an inspection is made? Why don't you have periodic inspections?

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

(distinctly enumerating statistics)

We have 224 inspectors to cover 105,000 tenements *** and apartment houses. It would take our entire staff three years to visit each one of these houses once. ****

COMMISSIONER

I see...Just one more thing, Mr. Inspector, in the light of your years of experience in the Department, would you consider this building a firetrap?

TENEMENT HOUSE INSPECTOR

If that building is a firetrap, then so is every old law tenement in New York City*****--and there are 67,000 of them!*****

COMMISSIONER

That's all gentlemen. Thank you. My report will state that a fire of undetermined origin broke out in the basement of the house at 397 Madison Street...According to your testimony there were no violations

* New York City Tenement House Department.

** New York Times, February 19, 1924.

*** Langdon Post, N.Y. City Tenement House Commissioner

**** Ibid.

***** N.Y. Times, February 19, 1924.

***** Report of the N.Y. State Board of Housing Legislative Document (1932) #84.

COMMISSIONER (Cont'd.)

and all the laws were scrupulously-----
 (They all rise and prepare to leave)

LOUDSPEAKER

(breaking in)

Just a moment, Mr. Commissioner. Has everybody testified?

COMMISSIONER

Why, yes....

LOUDSPEAKER

How about that empty chair? Don't you think there ought to be somebody in it?

(COMMISSIONER shakes head in bewilderment)

Well, you want to get at the bottom of this thing, don't you?

COMMISSIONER

Certainly.

LOUDSPEAKER

And you want to prevent more fires, by finding out about these things and correcting them, don't you?

COMMISSIONER

That's what I'm here for.

LOUDSPEAKER

(with finality)

Then let's call the landlord!

COMMISSIONER

Oh, no, I can't do that!

LOUDSPEAKER

Why not?

COMMISSIONER

The law doesn't allow me to. Only in a clear case of violations are we permitted to call in the landlord.* And you heard what they
 (nodding to INSPECTORS)
 said: There were no violations.

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, that settles it.. Of course we can't break the law.

(There is a pause, then, insidiously)

But wouldn't you like to know what he's got to say, anyhow....just, sort of, off the record?

COMMISSIONER

I certainly would!

* New York State Statute Tenement House Act 1909 Section 143.

LOUDSPEAKER

Fine. I'll call him!

(calling)

Mr. Schultz!* Mr. Schultz!

(as SCHULTZ appears left)

Would you mind testifying about your house on Madison Street?

SCHULTZ

(a bit suspicious)

No, I wouldn't mind. Where do I go?

LOUDSPEAKER

Right over there, center stage.

(as SCHULTZ comes to chair down left)

Mr. Commissioner, this is Carl Schultz...Mr. Schultz, this is the Commissioner.

(SCHULTZ and COMMISSIONER shake hands)

There you are. The witness is yours.

(SCHULTZ starts a bit as he spies ROSEN, then sits on chair. INSPECTORS sit again)

COMMISSIONER

Now, Mr. Schultz, were there any violations in your house?

(SCHULTZ hesitates and looks up at the LOUDSPEAKER for advice)

LOUDSPEAKER

Go on, Carl. It's all off the record!

SCHULTZ

Well, maybe a few. But they were all small and had nothing to do with the fire.

COMMISSIONER

Do you live in that house?

SCHULTZ

(looking up at him)

I do not!

COMMISSIONER

Why not?

SCHULTZ

(slowly)

Well, er, I got to live near my butcher store uptown.

COMMISSIONER

Is that the only reason?

SCHULTZ

(slyly)

That's the only one I tell you about!

COMMISSIONER

I see....Now tell me, why did you never renovate that house...so it would be a better place to live in, and not such a firetrap?

SCHULTZ

Well, first, I don't have any money. Second, it's not any worse than any other tenement on the block; and third, if I do have the money and do fix it up I have to raise the rent to get my money back. The tenants they have no money to pay and everybody moves out!

(spreading hands to express that)

COMMISSIONER

Did you make any money on your house, Mr. Schultz?

SCHULTZ

Some years yes, some years no.

(shakes head, sadly)

No, it is a bad investment.

LOUDSPEAKER

(suddenly sharp)

Do you want to sell, Mr. Schultz?

SCHULTZ

(A bargaining look comes into his eyes; he becomes cautious)

Sell? Well, maybe!

LOUDSPEAKER

I'll give you just what you paid for it, even though the house today in 1924...is practically worthless.

(SCHULTZ shakes his head, turning it down)

When you bought that house twenty-five years ago it was almost brand new. Today it's just a rubbish heap--a slum. Come on, Mr. Schultz, you can get rid of it without losing a cent!

(SCHULTZ shakes his head again)

Perhaps you don't understand. Let me show you what happens when people try to get rid of something they've used for a long time.

(Spot picks out MAN and automobile SALESMAN, down right)

MAN

I'd like to sell my car.

SALESMAN

What make?

MAN

Dodge.

SALESMAN

What model?

MAN

Sedan.

SALESMAN

What condition?

MAN

It's four years old. Cost me \$2300.*

SALESMAN

I'll give you five hundred.**

MAN

Five hundred! Why, it's only four years old.

SALESMAN

Mister, the minute you bought that car it became second hand. Every day you hold on to it it's worth less. Come around and see me next year, and I'll give you three hundred.***

MAN

\$500!

SALESMAN

\$500! And you'd better grab it before I change my mind!

(BLACKOUT on the TWO MEN)

LOUDSPEAKER

D'you see, Mr. Schultz, that's what happens.

SCHULTZ

(self-satisfied)

Not to me it won't.

LOUDSPEAKER

No matter what you have, furniture, clothing, a bicycle or a yacht-- the longer you hold on to it and use it---the lower the price drops.

SCHULTZ

(leans forward)

You know the trouble with that fellow? He didn't invest his money in real estate.

LOUDSPEAKER

In a house, you mean?

SCHULTZ

No. My house is just like you say--rubbish heap, a slum. Ah, but the land it's on. That's different!

* Branham's Automobile Reference Book, 1928, p. 56.

** New York American, June 22, 1924 - classified advertisements

*** Ibid, June 19, 1925.

LOUDSPEAKER

Oh, the land!

SCHULTZ

In a big city like this, land never goes down. If you hold on to it long enough it goes up, all the time! I cannot fix up the apartments, I cannot lower the rents, why? Because the land cost too much! I pay more than it's worth when I buy. I get still more when I sell. Each time rents go up, up, up!

LOUDSPEAKER

But, Mr. Schultz, you're speculating, and if you're successful, the standard of living of six million people* goes down. They still have to pay more in rent and do without other things that they need.

SCHULTZ

(rises, almost hysterically)

Speculating? Sure, I am! And so is every other landlord, who expects to make anything out of his investment! I tell you, it's land, land, LAND! That's where the money is! And I don't sell mine without a nice big profit!

(There is a pause. For the first time ROSEN looks up. Slowly he rises and crosses to SCHULTZ)

ROSEN

(softly)

And me? What about me?

SCHULTZ

(slowly, earnestly)

Mr. Rosen, believe me, I'm sorry for you. I'll do anything I can to help you...But if you can only afford to pay \$24 a month you'll have to live in my house or one just like it--and you cannot blame me.

(a pause - even more slowly)

You'll have to go back into history and blame whatever it was that made New York City real estate the soundest and most profitable speculation on the face of the earth.

(HOLD - as they regard each other, and

BLACKOUT

* 1935 World Almanac, p. 483, Population New York City - 1924

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT I

SCENE 3 - LAND

CHARACTERS

Loudspeaker

A - Trinity Church

Lord Cornbury

Minister

Anthony Lispenard, Vestryman

Abraham Mortier

Robert Harrison

William Rhineland

Alderman

Francis Ryerson

Aaron Burr

B - The City Grows

Landowner

Voice of Town Crier

Second Voice

First Tenant (man)

Second " ")

Third " ")

Fourth " ")

Fifth (woman))

Sixth (man))

Seventh ")

Eighth (woman))

Ninth: ")

Very fat man)

Six other men and women)

Tenants of the grass plot

Robert Goelet

John Wendell

John Jacob Astor

James Gordon Bennett

ACT I

SCENE 3 - LANDA- TRINITY CHURCH

LOUDSPEAKER

Back into history! The mad scramble for land begins! ... Who owned it first? How did they get it? Who bought it? And above all, who made the profit?

(Music swells and ends in fanfare.
Scene played in front of blacks)

(Light up on CORNBURY, on 2 step down right)

CORNBURY

(reads)

On this, the twentieth of November, in the year of our Lord, 1705, I, Edward Hyde Lord Cornbury, Third Earl of Clarendon and Governor of New York, do hereby grant the lands known as the King's Farm,* comprising sixty-three acres, bounded on the east by the Common and the Swamp, and on the west by the Hudson River, to Trinity Church, to own and to improve for the great glory of the Church, and for other pious uses.**

(Lights up. MINISTER enters left crosses to CORNBURY; receives deed)

MINISTER

Trinity Church acknowledges with profound gratitude this demonstration of Her Majesty's affection.

(CORNBURY exits. The MINISTER turns to a line of FOUR MEN who have just entered left and stand on apron step. He holds the imaginary deed in his hand. Then, crosses to FIRST MAN in line)

To Anthony Lispenard, Vestryman, the lease on 81 lots for eighty-three years at a rental of \$177 per year.***

* "Memorial History of New York," Wilson, Vol. 1, p. 82

** "A History of the Parish of Trinity Church in New York," Dix, p. 139.

*** "History of the Great American Fortunes," by Gustavus Myers, p. 129-130.

MINISTER (cont'd)

(He tears a small piece from the imaginary document and hands it to LISPENARD, crosses to SECOND MAN)

To Abraham Mortier, the lease on 465 lots for ninety-nine years at a rental of \$269 per year.*

(same business)

To Robert Harrison, the lease on the land known as the King's Farm....**

(same business. He now has none of the deeds remaining. He crosses to FOURTH MAN and spreads his arms to indicate that fact)

LOUDSPEAKER

1794....Trinity Church again petitions the City for more land. William Rhineland, of Tammany Hall,*** urges the presiding Alderman to grant the petition.

(During the above the ALDERMAN and RHINELANDER enter right to the accompaniment of fanfare. They stand down right at 2 step)

ALDERMAN

The Common Council of the City of New York will continue to assist religious institutions as in the past...

(He reads)

To Trinity Church, in the name of the city; Water Grant covering all the land under water between Chambers and Reade Streets from Washington Street to the North River.****

(MINISTER crosses and addresses ALDERMAN)

MINISTER

And the rental?...

ALDERMAN

....at an annual rental of one shilling per running foot....

MINISTER

....to begin?

ALDERMAN

....to begin forty-two years from this date, June 10, 1794.*****

* "History of the Great American Fortunes", Gustavus Myers - p.129.
 ** "Trinity Break Ye My Commandments", Willis T. Gridley, p.134-5
 *** "History of the Great American Fortunes", Gustavus Myers, p.183.
 **** Common Council Minutes, Volume 1, May 13, 1779. p. 354.
 ***** Ibid

ALDERMAN (cont'd)

(He hands over the deed and exits.
RHINELANDER takes his place beside
LISPENARD. MINISTER turns to
RHINELANDER)

MINISTER

To William Rhineland, a part of the water grant, between Chamber and
Reade Streets.....*

RHINELANDER

(interrupting him)

...and the rental?

MINISTER

.... free and clear for the first forty-two years....

RHINELANDER

.... and thereafter?

MINISTER

....and thereafter, one shilling per running foot.**
(RHINELANDER accepts and exits right.
MINISTER crosses back to FOURTH MAN)

To Francis Ryerson....***

(tears off part of lease and hands it
to him)

LOUDSPEAKER

Suspecting that the annual income of Trinity Church from its property
was more than the twelve thousand dollars permitted by law, the City
ordered an investigation. Aaron Burr was appointed Chairman.****

(Enter BURR left, and stands on 2 step down
left)

AARON BURR

It seems to me that the Corporation of Trinity Church is increasing
its income in a manner most incompatible with the dignity and piety
of the Church. As Chairman of the Committee of Investigation, *****
I ---

(The MINISTER stops him, urges him to
wait a moment. He then crosses back
to MORTIER, whispers to him. MORTIER
nods agreement, MINISTER tears off a
piece of his lease walks over and
proffers it to BURR)

* Report of the Comptroller to the Council, New York, Vol. 4,
p. 529, Aug. 17, 1807.

** Ibid

*** "Trinity Break Ye My Commandments", Willis T. Gridley, p.134-5

**** "History of the Great American Fortunes", Gustavus Myers, p.129.

***** Ibid.

MINISTER

To Aaron Burr, a part of the Mortier lease, with seventy-seven years to run...*

BURR

At the same rental?

MINISTER

At the same rental.

(BURR accepts the lease)

LOUDSPEAKER

The investigation was dropped....**

(Music - gesture)

BLACKOUT

* "History of the Great American Fortunes", Gustavus Myers, p. 129

** Ibid

B - THE CITY GROWS

(Enter down left the LANDOWNER. He carries a grass mat, rolled up, under one arm, and under the other, two stanchions. He is dressed in a costume that somehow suggests the period from 1775 to 1850. Spot follows him as he crosses to center. Music)

LOUDSPEAKER

Oh, hello. Who're you?

LANDOWNER

Well, I might be a lot of people. My name might be Rhinelander, Astor, Goelet, Wendell, or - er, Schultz.

LOUDSPEAKER

Schultz?

LANDOWNER

Schultz.

LOUDSPEAKER

That's very interesting. And what do you do for a living, if I may ask?

LANDOWNER

I put my money in the ground.

LOUDSPEAKER

You mean you bury it?

LANDOWNER

No. I invest it.

LOUDSPEAKER

Now we're getting some place! What's that thing under your arm?

LANDOWNER

That's it -- land!...

(Lights come up as he puts down the stanchions and begins to unroll the grass mat, laying it on the apron step)

.....and I own it!

LOUDSPEAKER

Looks like you've got quite a lot of it there.

LANDOWNER

(still unrolling it)

Five acres. Just bought it. Cost me \$200.

LOUDSPEAKER

Where abouts is your property, Mister?

LANDOWNER

Way uptown -- Broadway and Canal Street.

(He picks up one of the stanchions bearing the street markings; this he places beside his grass plot, stage right.)

That's Broadway -- and that's Canal...

(points--Broadway up--Canal, right angle to Broadway)

The City's down there a couple of miles.

(He places the other stanchion upstage center from grass plot. It reads: "THIS IS MINE. KEEP OFF!")

He stands at a distance, admiring the layout. With a wave of his hand)

There you are!

LOUDSPEAKER

Very pretty. And what are you going to do with it?

LANDOWNER

I'm going to sit here on my land, and make a lot of money.

LOUDSPEAKER

How can you make any money just sitting?

LANDOWNER

Watch me.

(He sits down, gets himself comfortable, then begins to whistle, nonchalantly. As he sits there, under his stanchion, the Voice of the Town Crier is heard a long way off. It is followed immediately by a Second Voice (not the Loudspeaker) This is sharp, metallic, unemotional)

VOICE OF TOWN CRIER

(off)

(bell ringing)

Cornwallis defeated at Yorktown! Cornwallis defeated at Yorktown! Eight thousand British surrender to Washington!* Cornwallis defeated at Yorktown!

SECOND VOICE

(off)

New York City, 1781 -- population, 18,000 **

LANDOWNER

18,000! Town's growing up.

(looks off, at the town. Stands up and starts walking around the grass plot)

In a little while it's going to get kind of crowded down there and then I'll --

* "Battles of the American Revolution", by Henry P. Carrington, p. 643

** "A Century of Population and Growth"--Gov't. Printing office, Washington, D. C., 1909.

LANDOWNER (cont'd)

(He breaks off, then starts whistling again. ...He stands stage right, pleased with himself and the announcement. A MAN enters, left. He is poorly dressed in clothes of the same period. He mops his brow, looking for a place to sit. He sees the green patch and sinks into a small corner, some distance away. He starts to stretch happily as)

LANDOWNER

(pointing to sign)

Hey! Can't you read! Get off!

MAN

Can't I just sit here for a minute?

LANDOWNER

(thinking it over doubtfully)

Well, maybe a minute...but that's all.

MAN

(sits, then, looking around)

Certainly is nice to get away from all them people. City's growin' too fast...

(pats the grass appreciatively)

...Certainly is nice out here, real country. Say, you know what! I'd like to build me a house right....

(waves his finger and places it in the center of the plot)

here!

LANDOWNER

You don't say!...Right here?

(pointing)

Got any money?

MAN

Well - er - no.

LANDOWNER

Then you can't live here.

MAN

But you know, a man's got to have a place to live.

LANDOWNER

Well, well, well.

MAN

You can do without a lot of things, but you've got to have a place to live.

LANDOWNER

That's very interesting. Come around and tell me about it some time...

(He shoos him away)

Your minute's up now. You'll have to get off my land.

MAN

(rising)

That's what everybody says--Get off my land! Get off my land!
YOU CAN'T LIVE HERE!

LANDOWNER

(crosses left a step)

And they're right, too. If you want to have a place of your own
you'll have to buy it, the way I did.

MAN

But I haven't got any money. Mister, I couldn't even buy - this much!
(marks off a tiny segment in one corner.
Starts off left)

LANDOWNER

Say...Do you work?

MAN

(stops and turns)

Certainly I work.

LANDOWNER

Do you get paid for working?

MAN

(getting angry)

Certainly I get paid for working.

LANDOWNER

(slowly)

How would you like to live on that patch over there in the corner?
(pointing to down left corner)

MAN

(eagerly - pointing to spot)

This one?

LANDOWNER

That's it. But not so much of it.
(gesture, cutting it down)

MAN

This much?

(marks off smaller piece)

LANDOWNER

No-o

MAN

(marks off still smaller piece)

This much?

LANDOWNER

Well, er ---

MAN

This much?

(marks off very tiny segment at extreme corner)

LANDOWNER

(heartily - as though looking it over)

That's right....Now that's a very fine lot. Plenty of air and sunshine, and a good view.

MAN

(stands off a bit and looks it over)

Pretty far away from the stagecoach line...and it seems a bit swampy. Must be plenty of mosquitoes around here...

(LANDOWNER turns away but keeps an eye on him over his shoulder. MAN pats spot affectionately)

But it's a place to live.

LANDOWNER

Fine. You can live there for twenty years at fifty dollars a year.

MAN

You mean you'll lease it to me?

(LANDOWNER nods)

MAN

But fifty dol -- Say, how much did this whole thing cost you?

LANDOWNER

Two hundred dollars.

MAN

In twenty years you'll be getting five times that much for just a little piece!

(as LANDOWNER nods)

Not only that - but I'll have to give the piece back.

LANDOWNER

When I bought this place ten years ago I couldn't lease the whole thing for fifty dollars. It was

(looking at LOUDSPEAKER)

too far outside the town....But I've been sitting on it.

MAN

Sitting on it! Why?

LANDOWNER

(slowly, to MAN)

Because I figured that some day you'd have to have a place to live.

MAN

Well, I guess you were right.

(starts to sit on land)

LANDOWNER

Hey! Fifty dollars, please.

LANDOWNER (cont'd)
 (holds out hand for money as MAN has about
 seated himself)

MAN

(rising)
 All right, all right...Here's your money!
 (takes pouch from pocket and pours out the
 silver dollars as LANDOWNER pockets them)

VOICE OF TOWN CRIER

(bell ringing)
 Thomas Jefferson elected President! Thomas Jefferson of Virginia,
 the third President of the United States! Jefferson elected! *

SECOND VOICE

New York City, 1800. Population reaches 79,216.**
 (LANDOWNER and MAN are seated contentedly)

LANDOWNER

Seventy-nine thousand! Not bad. Not bad at all.
 (whistles happily. Rises. Enter SECOND,
 THIRD, and FOURTH TENANTS right. They
 look around, see plot and are about to
 sit down)

Hey!

(points to sign significantly)

SECOND TENANT (MAN)

Can't I just--?

LANDOWNER

No.

THIRD TENANT (MAN)

Do you suppose you could--?

LANDOWNER

No.

FOURTH TENANT (MAN)

But the town's overcrowded!

LANDOWNER

Is it?

SECOND TENANT (MAN)

There's no place to live!

LANDOWNER

Well, well, well.

THIRD TENANT (MAN)

And a man's got to have a place to live.

* New York Commercial Advertiser, Feb. 17, 1801, et Supra.

** 1935 World Almanac, p. 483.

LANDOWNER

That's right. It'll cost you a hundred dollars a year.

SECOND TENANT

A hundred a year!

(MAN beckons to FOURTH TENANT and whispers
in his ear)

FOURTH TENANT

(excitedly, to LANDOWNER)

Say, he says he's only paying you fifty!

LANDOWNER

(grinning)

Wait until next year when his lease is up!

SECOND TENANT

A hundred a year!

LANDOWNER

That's right. That's what we're all getting for property in this
select residential neighborhood.

(as the MEN stand hesitating, TWO MEN enter,
right. They stop to look at the land. They
are interested in it. They are about to ap-
proach the LANDOWNER)

THIRD TENANT

(hurriedly)

Here you are. Here's my hundred.

SECOND TENANT

(same)

One hundred dollars, yes sir.

FOURTH TENANT

(counting his while handing it over)

One hundred, yes sir!

(They all hand the money over; the two MEN
change their minds and walk off, as)

VOICE OF TOWN CRIER

(bell ringing)

The Canal is finished! The Erie Canal! 363 miles from Buffalo to
Albany! *

SECOND VOICE

1845! The Great Immigration begins.** New York's population reaches
696,115. ***

* Encyclopedia Americana, p. 485.

** "The Tenement House Problem" edited by De Forest & Veiller,
Vol. 2., p. 7

*** World Almanac, 1935, p. 483.

(The FOUR TENANTS are now seated on the carpet. There is still plenty of room for more. The first sounds of building (off) is heard)

LANDOWNER

696,000! Did you hear that! It won't be long now...
(From this point action speeds up. TEN MEN and WOMEN enter right and left--five from each side. One is about to sit)

Hey!

(points to sign)

FIFTH TENANT (WOMAN)

But---!

LANDOWNER

I know. It's crowded.

SIXTH TENANT (MAN)

But---!

LANDOWNER

I know. You can do without a lot of things.

SEVENTH TENANT (WOMAN)

But---!

LANDOWNER

But you can't do without a place to live! ... Two hundred dollars, please.

EIGHTH TENANT

(without any hesitation whatsoever)

Two hundred. Here you are!

(EIGHTH TENANT starts to pay)

LANDOWNER

(looks at him in amazement, having expected an argument; then seeing how easy it is)

Two hundred and fifty dollars is my price.

FIFTH, SIXTH, SEVENTH, EIGHTH TENANTS

Two fifty!

(They rush up, pay him and tumble to the carpet)

LANDOWNER

Three hundred!

(shrugs shoulders as if to say, "Take it or leave it." THREE MORE PEOPLE pay -- LANDOWNER points out their spots, and they sit.

LANDOWNER crosses down and looks over his land for more space to sell. By this time the TENANTS are sitting in restricted, cramped positions. They can hardly move.

Their arms are pressed close to their sides. In these positions they are all engaged in going through some part of their daily routine. For instance, one is shaving; another is reading a newspaper; another is trying to eat; a fourth is washing himself. Still another is attempting to tie his shoe lace... Needless to say, all these activities must be cramped and hemmed in or the point of the scene is lost. They continue right through the scene until the blackout. The remaining THREE PROSPECTIVE TENANTS stand down stage)

LANDOWNER

(to the PROSPECTS)

Sorry, folks, that's all there is... all rented and busy as a beehive, that's what we are.

(The PROSPECTS start to exit)

LANDOWNER

(He calls the last man who is very fat.

FAT MAN stays behind as others exit)

Say -- wait a minute!...

(His roving eye has lighted on a few blades of green grass still visible at the far end of the carpet. He bends down to see it, then, with a slight push, he forces all in the first row to topple over)

....There you are, sir, the last parcel! Almost missed it, I did.

(as FAT MAN bends down to look at it)

It is a little small, but right in the heart of the business section. The lucky man who rents this won't have to walk far to work... It'll cost you ten dollars a square foot for this.

VERY FAT MAN

I'll take it.

(He hands over the money, kneels down, looks at it. He backs away to get a running start, then runs and jumps on to his spot. He bumps the TENANTS who are annoyed. Then, Music)

Home! Sweet Home!

LANDOWNER

Thank you folks. Thank you very much indeed.

(TENANTS on carpet continue their activities. LANDOWNER crosses down, center)

LANDOWNER

(to LOUDSPEAKER, jingling money in pocket)

Not bad, eh?

LOUDSPEAKER

How much is your property worth now, Mister?

LANDOWNER

Oh, about forty thousand dollars.

LOUDSPEAKER

That's a lot of money! To what do you attribute your success?

LANDOWNER

Well, I had faith in the development and growth of the city.

LOUDSPEAKER

I see. Tell me, Mister: who developed it? Who made it grow?

LANDOWNER

The people. Everybody. Me, too.

LOUDSPEAKER

No, not you. You just sat. Remember?...That city was developed through the industry of 696,000 people.

(suddenly)

Look at them! They built the city! What did you do?

LANDOWNER

(slowly)

I remembered that they had to have a place to live in while they were building it....And don't forget, I didn't break any laws! Everything was honest and above board! All the smartest people of my generation were doing it!

LOUDSPEAKER

For instance?

LANDOWNER

For instance, Robert Goelet!

(fanfare. Spot on GOELET, on 3 step left)

GOELET

Before 1850 I bought a farm running from 14th Street to 47th Street and Fifth Avenue.* I advised my descendants to keep on buying up-town lots ahead of the crowd....** They did, and when my grandsons died, their combined fortune was in the neighborhood of 140 million dollars!***

LANDOWNER

140 million! That makes me feel pretty small!

(fanfare. Spot on WENDELL

on 3 step right)

* "History of the Great American Fortunes"--Gustavus Myers, p.178.

** "The Golden Earth" -- Arthur Pound, p.295.

*** "Great American Fortunes" -- Gustavus Myers, p.180.

WENDELL

My family made fifty million dollars in New York real estate.

LANDOWNER

That's John Wendell.

WENDELL

To make it we followed four cardinal rules: never to mortgage, never to sell, never to repair, and never to forget that Broadway moved uptown at the rate of ten blocks in ten years! *

LANDOWNER

And here's the Granddaddy of us all -- John Jacob Astor!

(fanfare. Spot on ASTOR, on 3 step, center)

ASTOR

In my lifetime I invested two million dollars in Manhattan real estate. When I died in 1848, it was worth about twenty million!...I never failed to foreclose when I could and I didn't believe in coddling my tenants when they couldn't pay the rent! **

LANDOWNER

Thank you, gentlemen.

(bows to them. Lights out on the THREE MEN.
to LOUDSPEAKER)

You see, the best people, the founders of some of our greatest American families.

(crosses down)

Everybody did it! That is, everybody who was smart enough! And nobody thought it was wrong. Nobody, do you hear!

(Spot on BENNETT at 2 step down right)

BENNETT

Well, not exactly nobody.

LANDOWNER

(unenthusiastically)

Oh, hello!

(to LOUDSPEAKER)

This is James Gordon Bennett of the "Herald"....

(They bow)

He's got a lot of crazy ideas.

BENNETT

John Jacob Astor died today. He left a will disposing of property worth twenty million dollars among his various descendants....Now if I had been an associate of Mr. Astor the first idea I would have put into his head was this: at least one-half of his immense property-- belongs to the people of the City of New York. During the last fifty years of this man's life, his property has been augmented and increased in value by the aggregate intelligence, industry, enterprise and commerce of the citizens of New York. It is therefore as plain as two

* "The Golden Earth" -- Arthur Pound, p. 286-87.

** "The Life and Ventures of the Original John Jacob Astor" -- by Elizabeth L. Gebhard, p. 246.

BENNETT (cont'd)

and two make four, that at least half of his immense estate, has accrued to him by the industry of the community!*

(BENNETT exits)

LANDOWNER

Crazy as a bedbug! Everybody's out of step but Jim Bennett!
(starts off)

Well, so long!

LOUDSPEAKER

Hey, where are you going now?

LANDOWNER

Up the line a ways. Just bought a piece of property way uptown-- around Fourteenth Street.

LOUDSPEAKER

But what about those people? Look at them!

LANDOWNER

Oh, them! They're all right! They'll be here when I come back on rent day!

LOUDSPEAKER

They will? Why?

LANDOWNER

Because a man's got to have a place to live!
(pause)

So long!

(picks up signs and crosses off. TENANT.
remain and as music starts, they go into
their own individual occupations as---)

BLACKOUT

(End of Scene 3)

* "History of the Great American Fortunes" - Gustavus Myers, p. 148.

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT I

SCENE 4 - LOOKING BACKWARD

CHARACTERS

Loudspeaker

Little Man

Guide

Citizen, Man

Tenants of the HOUSE

A- Why they came (Irish Family)

Father
Mother
Daughter (Mary, 18)
Son (Mike, 25)

B- What they saw (Steve and Joe)

Steve (14)
Joe (17)

C- What they got (Cholera)

Mother)
Father) Jewish Family
Doctor)

Patient - Woman)
Her Daughter)
Doctor) Third Floor Landing
Nurse)

Doctor)
Mother) Stage Right Cubicle
Boy)

First Orderly
Second Orderly
Man
Emaciated Man
First Newspaper Reporter
Second Newspaper Reporter

Voice of Gerritt Forbes, City Inspector, New York

ACT ISCENE 4 - LOOKING BACKWARD

(The stage is dark. Music. There is a pause)

LITTLE MAN

Hey! Give me some light!

(LITTLE MAN comes down the aisle of the theatre, left. Spot follows him as he comes up stairway from pit to stage left. Scene is played in front of blacks.)

LOUDSPEAKER

What is it?

LITTLE MAN

I'd like some information.

LOUDSPEAKER

What about?

LITTLE MAN

Housing.

LOUDSPEAKER

What are you doing up there in those clothes?

LITTLE MAN

What's the matter with them?

LOUDSPEAKER

The matter with them? Why, they look like 1938. The scene we just finished was 1845.

LITTLE MAN

Oh that. Say, I'm no actor. I just came from down--
(pointing to seat in orchestra)

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, what do you want?

LITTLE MAN

Information. Every time something happens that I don't understand I'm going to stop the show and ask questions.

LOUDSPEAKER

And who's going to answer them?

LITTLE MAN

You are.

LOUDSPEAKER

I see.....Now tell me, Mister, what makes you so curious about housing?

LITTLE MAN

Well, it's like this: every time there's a new housing development in New York, in Brooklyn, Queens or New Jersey, I dash right out there, get myself interviewed and fill out an application for an apartment.

LOUDSPEAKER

And then what happens?

LITTLE MAN

I wait.

LOUDSPEAKER

I see. And then?

LITTLE MAN

And then, after two or three years, I get tired of waiting and I read about another new development.

LOUDSPEAKER

What happens then?

LITTLE MAN

I dash right out, get myself interviewed and fill out an application. Hillside, Boulevard Gardens, Knickerbocker Village, First Houses--* I've seen 'em all--and I'm still waiting.

LOUDSPEAKER

And that makes you curious?

LITTLE MAN

That started it. So I went down to see the Tenement House Commissioner. He told me the Living Newspaper was doing a show on Housing and I ought to see it....So here I am.

LOUDSPEAKER

So I see...Well, what's the first question?

LITTLE MAN

It's this: Why didn't I ever get rooms in any of those developments?

LOUDSPEAKER

Because, without exception, they were swamped with applications long before they opened their doors. There are 1,750,000 people living in old-law tenements in New York City today,** and if they all wanted to get into a model housing development like, say, "First Houses" their chances are about 3,600 to one.***

* Opened for tenancy, Hillside, 1935; Boulevard Gardens, 1935; Knickerbocker Village, 1934; First Houses, 1935.
New York City Housing Authority.

** "Housing or Else", p.8, Langdon W. Post, New York City Housing Authority, 1936.

*** On a basis of four persons to a family, with 120 apartments in "First Houses", the ratio is 3,600 to one.-Ed.

LITTLE MAN

3,600 to one!...

(whistles - a pause)

Now you say, my troubles started about a hundred years ago when land began to go up....

LOUDSPEAKER

That's what we've been showing.

LITTLE MAN

Tell me, at that time, didn't anybody say anything about it?

LOUDSPEAKER

Sure. Everybody said it was a shame.

LITTLE MAN

Well, didn't they do anything?

LOUDSPEAKER

Those were the good old days when nobody did anything about anything.

LITTLE MAN

They just let it ride.....?

LOUDSPEAKER

They just let it ride.

LITTLE MAN

(starts to cross right, then stops)

O.K. Now, let's see some of the houses these people

(turns toward LOUDSPEAKER at right)

lived in. And for the love of Mike, let's see some people---not landlords, people!

LOUDSPEAKER

All right, where do you want to go?

LITTLE MAN

Well, let's see. What year are we in now?

LOUDSPEAKER

Any one you like.

LITTLE MAN

(thinking)

Um-m---let's make it 1850. Now, I'd like to take a walk around the town and get acquainted. Got a map?

LOUDSPEAKER

Sure.

(to PROJECTIONIST)

Hey, Dave, let's have a look at New York about 1850.

(Screen comes down directly in front of blacks; projection of map* LITTLE MAN starts to cross up to screen - looks it over then starts to cross down center, nods approvingly to LOUDSPEAKER but seems a bit puzzled because he

* Map of New York in 1850, from files of Beseler Lantern Slide Co., 131 E. 23rd St., New York.

LOUDSPEAKER (cont'd)
does not recognize the neighborhood)

LITTLE MAN
Don't you think I need a guide? I might get lost.

LOUDSPEAKER
Anything you say.
(spot on a MAN sprawled out, asleep on 2 step
down left. He is dressed in period of 1850)
There you are.

LITTLE MAN
He's asleep.

LOUDSPEAKER
Wake him up.

LITTLE MAN
(doubtfully)
Sure?
(crosses gingerly, stops, then swings around)
Say, just in case we both get lost -- where am I now?

LOUDSPEAKER
You are standing beside a brook on what is now the Hotel Astor.*
(projection on screen)

LITTLE MAN
You don't say...
(to himself)
That means when I come back here, I walk down to Forty-second, take
the 7th Avenue Subway home and--

LOUDSPEAKER
---and add eighty-eight years on the way.
(as LITTLE MAN crosses back to wake GUIDE)
And you'd better watch out for Indians!

LITTLE MAN
Indians?

LOUDSPEAKER
You never can tell.

LITTLE MAN
Oh well---
(crosses to 2 step down left quickly,
shakes GUIDE)
Hey, wake up!

GUIDE
(stretching and rubbing his eyes)
Huh?

* Hall of Records, New York, N.Y.

LITTLE MAN

I'd like to have a look at the town. How about it?

(as GUIDE stares at him)

You live here, don't you?

GUIDE

(shaking his head).

Not me. Too noisy...It's all right for a visit, maybe, but I couldn't live here...

(He gets up)

I know the town pretty well, though. I'll take you. We'll just go down Broadway. Come on!

(They start striding in place in front of screen to indicate walking through the neighborhood projected. Music. Projection changes.)

That's the Leeds Farm.*

LITTLE MAN

Leeds Farm?

LOUDSPEAKER

Thirty-fourth Street and Broadway to you.

(THEY stride again and projection changes)

GUIDE

That's the Madison Farm,** best cows in the whole county.

LITTLE MAN

Madison, eh?

LOUDSPEAKER

(softly)

Twenty-third and Broadway - where the Flatiron Building is.

(They stride again; projection changes)

GUIDE

That's a quiet little spot called Union Place.***

LITTLE MAN

Union Place?

LOUDSPEAKER

Union Square!

(They stride again; projection changes)

*Hall of Records, New York, N.Y.

** Valentine's Manual, 1862.

***Stokes, Iconography A9 - Vol.3, p. 136.

GUIDE

Now we're really in the city. This is the New Bowery; number 40. It's a converted stable -- about thirty people live there now. *

LITTLE MAN

Did they make much of an alteration?

GUIDE

Sure - whitewashed the whole place.

(grabs LITTLE MAN)

Look out! That buggy almost ran you down. Traffic's certainly terrible here. They don't give a hoot about the pedestrians.

(They stride again; projection changes)

That's Bleeker Street. Pretty smart neighborhood....Only the swells live here. **

(LITTLE MAN backs up downstage to look at projection)

LITTLE MAN

You'd never think it to look at it now.

GUIDE

Huh?

LITTLE MAN

Skip it. I was just talking to myself.....let's have a look at a tenement.

GUIDE

All right. We'll turn east into Cherry Street.***

(They stride again...projection changes, they stop)

This is Gotham Court - at 36-38 Cherry Street.

(projection of Gotham Court - front view)

LOUDSPEAKER

Gotham Court: thirty-five feet front, 240 feet deep. Five stories high,**** twenty-four apartments to a floor. The windows open on an alley eight feet wide***** -- Want to hear some more?

(LITTLE MAN nods; projection changes to view of court (Gotham Court)*****

The Chairman of the Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizens' Association of New York will now read his report.

(spot picks out MAN on 2 step down right)

* "New York And Its Institutions - 1609-1872." J.S.Richmond, p.488.

** Home of Abraham Van Nest, Bleeker Street - between Charles and Perry, New York, N.Y.--Valentine's Manual - 1854, p. 528.

*** Picture from "Slums and Housing", James Ford, Vol.1, p.143.

**** "Tenement House Problem",--edited by De Forest & Veiller,p.78.

*****"Slums and Housing"--James Ford, Vol.1, p. 143.

***** Ibid

CITIZEN

(reading)

Gotham Court, housing 126 families, is entered at the sides from alleys eight feet wide and, by reason of the vicinity of another tenement of equal height, the rooms are so dark that on a cloudy day it is impossible to read or sew without artificial light. It has not one room which can in any way be thoroughly ventilated. The vaults and sewers which are to carry off the filth of the one hundred and twenty-six families have grated openings in the alleys through which the noisome and deadly odors poison the dank air of the house and the courts. The water closets for the whole vast establishment are a range of underground stalls without doors, accessible not only from the building, but even from the street.* We have found.....

(Projection off; screen away)

LITTLE MAN

(unable to stand anymore)

That's enough!

(BLACKOUT on CITIZEN. GUIDE exits)

LITTLE MAN

(turns toward LOUDSPEAKER)

What happened after he handed in that report?

LOUDSPEAKER

Everybody said it was a shame and something ought to be done about it.

LITTLE MAN

Did they do anything?

LOUDSPEAKER

No.**

LITTLE MAN

What about the people who live here?

LOUDSPEAKER

Why don't you go in and have a look?

LITTLE MAN

Me?

LOUDSPEAKER

Certainly.

LITTLE MAN

O. K. but if anything happens you can trace me through my social security number.

(pats his wallet. Crosses and sits on 2 step down left. Blacks away. Music)

BLACKOUT

* Report of Council of Hygiene and Public Health of the Citizens' Association....1864 - New York City Municipal Library.

** "Slums and Housing", James Ford, Vol.1, p. 138.

SCENE A - WHY THEY CAME (IRISH FAMILY)

(Upper center cubicle lights up--FATHER, MOTHER, MARY (18).

The FATHER is seated at the table, reading his paper. Some distance away, MARY is struggling with a skirt over her head. The MOTHER passes around the table silently, laying out the dishes for dinner)

(There is a pause.....)

MARY

(finally getting her skirt down and adjusting it)

All right, Pa. You can put your paper down now.

(He does)

What's in it, anyhow?

FATHER

I don't know. I wasn't reading it.

MOTHER

(without looking up)

Paper cost a cent.

FATHER

I know, Ma. I'll read it later.

(to DAUGHTER)

Where you going?

(MIKE enters - stands left of door)

MARY

Back to the store. Have to work tonight.

(sniffs)

What's that smell?

MOTHER

(as FATHER picks up paper again)

Toilet. Drain's all stopped up.

MARY

Well, why doesn't somebody go down and fix 'em?

MOTHER

Your father fixed it twice today.

MARY

What's the matter with the landlord? What do we pay rent for?

MOTHER

Ask your father.

FATHER

(as they all turn to him, puts down his paper)

Let's eat.

MARY

(putting on her coat)

I can't. I'll be late.

(starts toward door)

FATHER

Watch out for that broken step on the way down.....

MOTHER

And come straight home.....

FATHER

Of course she will. She always does.

(He begins to eat, reading his paper. MARY has just reached the door when MIKE bars the way)

MIKE

(easily, in a low voice)

What you goin' to do in the store tonight?

MARY

Work.

MIKE

Didn't know it was open - tonight.

MARY

Well it is.

MIKE

You wouldn't be foolin' your big brother, now, would you?
(as she just looks at him -- a bit louder)
I said, you wouldn't be fool ---

MARY

(fearfully)

Ssssh!

(She looks at FATHER to see if he has heard)

FATHER

(to MOTHER, without looking up from paper)

I see where Frank Conolly died yesterday.....

MIKE

(grabbing her by the wrist)

Would you?

MARY

Honest, Mike, I got to get back. I got to!

FATHER

That makes the third funeral in that house this week...

MOTHER

(covertly watching MARY and MIKE)

What did he die of?

FATHER

Paper doesn't say...

MARY

(in a whisper, struggling to free her arm)

I got to work, Mike, I swear. I ain't lyin' to you! You believe me, don't you, Mike?

MOTHER

(still watching them)

That's funny....

FATHER

It just says he died....

MARY

Don't you?

MIKE

Been seein' anything of that boy next door lately?

MARY

No, Mike. I haven't seen him. Honest I haven't.

MIKE

(giving her arm a twist)

Have you?

MARY

(afraid to cry out)

No. Mike! MIKE!

FATHER

(looking up from paper)

I thought you were in a hurry.

MARY

(crosses to FATHER)

I am. Good-bye, Pop...

(kisses him-- looks at MOTHER-- then exits)

MOTHER

(sits at table as MIKE crosses up and puts hat on)

Where are you going, son?

MIKE

I'll just make sure she gets there.

(Exits. Pause as MARY and MIKE go down the narrow stairway left and off)

FATHER

I know what's in your mind, Kate... but you're all wrong; Mary's a good girl. Wish they were all like her.

MOTHER

Don't take cream long to get sour in this neighborhood.
(a pause)
Tom, we've got to move.

FATHER

But I've told you so many times....

MOTHER

I don't care. We've got to move.
(rising)
How long can four grown-up people live in one room? How long, Tom?

FATHER

But we've no place to go. I've spent the last four Sundays walking up and down Cherry Street, Oliver, Catherine, Madison! * There isn't a flat to let in any of them. And even if there were, they'd be no better than this for what we can afford to pay!

MOTHER

(softly)
Tom, is this what we left Ireland for? Is this what we gave up a cottage and green grass and the good hot sun for?

FATHER

There's no famine here, Kate. Plenty of potatoes and bread and meat, if you can afford to pay for 'em. And I've been working steady a whole year....a whole year.

MOTHER

Sure, but where does it all go? To the landlord, to the butcher! Mary was right...What do we pay rent for, anyhow?

FATHER

Because we've got to have a place to live---

MOTHER

Does it have to be here?

(no answer)

Does it have to be here where your own daughter's got to take her clothes off in front of your eyes, in a place that smells so you can't even eat!

(suddenly pointing)

Look! Roaches!

(as FATHER rises and stamps on them)

I scrub and I clean and nothing happens. Just filth and vermin and garbage, and, and I tell you, I can't stand it!

(she falls back onto the chair, weeping)

BLACKOUT

* Historian, Immigrants' Industrial Savings Bank, New York, N.Y.

ACT ISCENE 4B - WHAT THEY SAW (STEVE and JOE)

(Light comes up on cubicle stage right.
STEVE (14) and JOE (17). JOE is at a
mirror fixing his tie. STEVE stares out
as though looking through a window)

JOE
Hey, kid, where's Pop?

STEVE
(staring out)
Out.

JOE
I know he's out! Where is he?

STEVE
Looking for a job.

JOE
Is he still sore at me?

STEVE
Yeah.

JOE
What'd he say?

STEVE
He said if he sees you around here, he'll throw you out.

JOE
What else?

STEVE
He said I should keep away from you.

JOE
Oh, he did?

STEVE
He said you're no damn good and if he thought I'd turn out like you
he'd crack my skull.

JOE
Well, he don't have to worry. I'm clearing outta' here.

STEVE
Where'll you go, Joe?

Never mind. JOE

But where will you go, Joe? STEVE

JOE
(putting on coat)
Nonna your business. You're too young.

Joe, can I go with you? STEVE

No! JOE

Aw, Joe. STEVE

No! JOE
(sniffs)
That toilet stinks. Go on down and fix it.

STEVE
(still staring out)
Guy across the hall fixed it.

Well, it's busted again. Go on! JOE

Wait a minute, will you, Joe. STEVE
(suddenly, leaning forward, in a hushed voice)
She's just come in again.

Who? JOE

You know. STEVE

JOE
(looks out window, then goes back to mirror)
What do you know about it?

I'm not so dumb. STEVE

Get away from that window! JOE

(Enter MARY, left. Stands at entrance to alley)

STEVE
(staring, fascinated)
There's a fellow with her I never seen before.

JOE
Get away from that window!

STEVE
(excited)
Look, Joe, she's ---

JOE
Get away from that window!

STEVE
(swings around, his voice shrill, defiant)
I won't! You're only my brother and you can't make me!

JOE
(starting for him)
I can't, eh?

STEVE
If you touch me, I'll tell Pop, that's what I'll do!

JOE
(coming closer)
What'll you tell him?
(no answer)
What'll you tell him?

STEVE
This ain't the first time I looked out of that window.

JOE
What's that?

STEVE
I said it's not the first time I looked out of that window.

JOE
What else will you tell him?
(STEVE looks away, not answering. JOE grabs him)

STEVE
You'll see---

JOE
What else will you tell him?

STEVE
I'll tell him who else I saw!

JOE
Who else did you see?

STEVE
You know who else I saw! You know---

JOE
Who?

STEVE

You!

(a pause. JOE stands rooted)

JOE

Why, you --

(He punches him in the face. STEVE sinks to the floor. JOE takes a final, fleeting look toward STEVE and exits.... We follow him as he comes down the steps, whistling happily. He crosses stage. MARY steps out of the shadow of alley and greets him)

MARY

(putting her hand on his arm)

Joe.

JOE

(without enthusiasm)

Hello, Mary.

MARY

Glad to see me, Joe?

JOE

(doubtfully)

Sure.

MARY

I had a hard time getting away tonight.

JOE

Yeah?

MARY

Mike knows about us, Joe, and I think Mom does.

JOE

(defiantly)

What if they do?

MARY

(interrupting)

I don't care about them. Kiss me, Joe.

(He does, then - putting her arm through his both cross downstage)

Where're we going tonight?

JOE

No place. I'm leavin' here - for good.

MARY

(shocked)

Leaving?

JOE

That's right. Leavin'. I'm sick of this place and the old man kickin' me around.

MARY

Oh!

(There is a pause, as the idea sinks in, then)

When do we go?

JOE

(backing away a step - looking right at her)

We? I can't have no woman hanging around! I got things to do!

MARY

(unbelievably)

You're going away and leave me? Here?

(He looks at her, but he doesn't answer)

Joe -- you've got to take me with you!

(He looks away. As he still doesn't answer, her mood changes; she grows a little dazed)

Where you goin', Joe?

JOE

I don't know.

MARY

How you goin' to live?

JOE

(looking at her again)

I ain't worried. There's ways.

(suddenly turning on MARY)

I can't take you with me, Mary. I just can't --- anyhow, you got a job.

MARY

Sure, I got a job. You know what else I got? I got a pain, Joe, right here.

(putting hand on chest)

It comes from not havin' any fun and workin' all day and livin' and eatin' and sleepin' in the same room with three other people, every one of 'em watchin' me every minute, afraid I'm goin' to go bad on 'em! It comes from a lot of things---I don't know what they are -- only I feel sick.....and tired.....and hopeless.... AND I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK IN THERE --- WITHOUT YOU!

(crosses to him and puts arm on his slowly)

Take me with you, Joe.

JOE

I can't. I haven't got the money.

(as she looks down - pause - He looks at her - then, pointedly)

Now, if I could lay my hands on some.....

MARY

(looks at him. Then quickly.....)

Mom's just got enough for supper, and Mike wouldn't give it to me even if he had any.

(She begins to get an idea. A pause - he starts off. Crosses in front of her left, and looking at her.....)

JOE

Good-bye, Mary.

MARY

Joel

(She puts her arm out and stops him. He swings around slowly)

I think I know maybe where I could find some.....

JOE

Where?

MARY

Will you take me with you?

(crossing a step to him)

JOE

Well.....

MARY

(insistent)

Will you?

JOE

Yeah --

(He nods. MARY, not able to come out with it)

MARY

No.....No.....

(backing away)

JOE

(twisting her arm)

Where is it?

MARY

(looking down)

The old man at the store where I work....he keeps a lot of money hidden under.....

JOE

Ssssh!

(looking up at house - a pause)

Come on.

(crosses left - looks around)

Come on.

MARY
(stands there --- looks at him)
Yeah,
(starts left - looks back at house over
shoulder)
come on.
(Then she runs out with him)

BLACKOUT

(Spot picks up LITTLE MAN on 2 step down left)

LOUDSPEAKER
Want to see some more?

LITTLE MAN
(doubtfully)
Well.....

LOUDSPEAKER
Why don't you try that room downstairs?

LITTLE MAN
Do you think I'd better?

LOUDSPEAKER
Go on!

(as LITTLE MAN nods his head)

BLACKOUT

ACT ISCENE 4-C -- WHAT THEY GOT -- CHOLERA

(Lights go on in lower center cubicle, on a Jewish family -- FATHER, MOTHER. A crib - music)

JEWISH MOTHER

He hasn't moved for a long time now.

JEWISH FATHER

It's good. Sleep is good.

JEWISH MOTHER

How white his face is.

(leans over crib)

Such a good baby. Never cries.

JEWISH FATHER

With a mother like you he should cry.

JEWISH MOTHER

Max-- I'm afraid....

(suddenly)

Where is the Doctor? You said he was coming right away.

FATHER

Soon. He'll be here soon.

MOTHER

Well, where is he? Why isn't he here now? How many times--

FATHER

Maybe we should send him to the hospital?

MOTHER

Hospital? Do you want to kill him?

FATHER

Maybe it's better there. In the hospital you can get a doctor right away.

MOTHER

(at crib, suddenly)

Look, Max-- he can't breathe!...Where is the doctor? Where is he?

FATHER

(sits down, wearily)

He's coming.

MOTHER

Coming! Coming! When is he coming? When it's too late?

FATHER

He's upstairs.

MOTHER
Upstairs! So go up and get him!

FATHER
Other people are sick.

MOTHER
Other people -- He's worrying about other people -- when your own baby is--

(as he leans forward wearily in his chair)
Max! What's the matter with you?

(He just shakes his head, tired. She, desperately, looking from the FATHER to the BABY)

Where is the doctor? Where is he? Max!
(He opens his eyes and looks at her)

FATHER
(in a dazed manner)
Sick....everybody sick....the baby....the whole house...
(He gasps and sinks down. MOTHER turns, sees him sink -- screams)

BLACKOUT

(Spot up on third floor landing. PATIENT, (woman) held up by her daughter is being examined by DOCTOR in hot spot, with NURSE standing by. DOCTOR is giving symptoms *)

DOCTOR
CHOLERA!
(tips face back)
Usual cyanotic color of skin...
(picks up hand)
Fingernails....
(looks into mouth)
and mucous membrane.
(as he releases her hand)
Eyes sunken....

NURSE
Pulse...

DOCTOR
(after holding wrist a few counts)
Rapid and weak.

NURSE
Respiration....

BLACKOUT

(Lights up in stage right cubicle.

BOY on bed, DOCTOR at head of bed, bent over, head against chest. MOTHER at foot of bed. DOCTOR looks up)

DOCTOR

Respiration rapid and irregular. Heart feeble.
(PATIENT groans and turns toward side of bed)

Bring the pan.

(The MOTHER brings a pan, and kneels by the side of bed. DOCTOR helps BOY to raise up slightly, and holds his head over the pan. The BOY retches into the pan. Lights dim out)

(The spot comes up in the lower center cubicle. JEWISH FATHER is still in a state of collapse. DOCTOR is examining him. JEWISH MOTHER is standing by)

MOTHER

Max. My husband.....

DOCTOR

(examining MAN - head, fingernails, mouth, pulse, heart)

Usual cyanotic color. Eyes sunken. Pulse rapid and weak. I'm afraid it's Cholera. When was he taken sick?

MOTHER

This morning he didn't feel so good.

DOCTOR

Cholera can run its course in a few hours. Put him to bed.
(DOCTOR crosses to BABY)
(abruptly)

This baby is dead.

MOTHER

(screams)

BLACKOUT

(Lights come up sharply on the right area of third floor landing, catching TWO ORDERLIES coming out of a doorway carrying a stretcher. NURSE stands center of landing, reading chart)

NURSE

Ground floor. Cholera. Baby dead. Male adult. Advanced stages.
(to ORDERLIES)

You're late! I've got twenty cases to go out immediately!
(SECOND ORDERLY dropping front end of stretcher to the floor)

Wait a minute.

SECOND ORDERLY

What's the matter?

FIRST ORDERLY

How many does this make for you?

SECOND ORDERLY

I ain't counted.

FIRST ORDERLY

Me neither. Bill, I'm scared.

SECOND ORDERLY

Scared of your luck?

FIRST ORDERLY

Sure I'm scared-- scared I'll catch it. Scared I'll---

SECOND ORDERLY

(An OLD EMACIATED MAN comes out of the door right next to the stairs, third landing and crosses with jerky, painful movements to the NURSE. He holds up the fingers of his hands, and slowly, with effort, moves them in jerky painful movements)

I can't move my hands. Look! Where's the Doctor?

MAN

He's busy. Go back to your room. You're sick.

NURSE

Doctor!

(turning to the SECOND ORDERLY, who is staring at him)

MAN

Get away!

SECOND ORDERLY

I can't move my hands.

MAN

For God's sake, let's get out of here!
(He rushes off)

SECOND ORDERLY

(Dim lights come up on entire stage. MAN comes out of alley left and collapses on top of 3 step. DOCTOR crosses to him. TWO NEWSPAPER REPORTERS enter stage left)

Say, Doc, what's this I hear about a Cholera epidemic?

FIRST NEWSPAPER REPORTER

DOCTOR

Say, who are you, anyway?

FIRST NEWSPAPER REPORTER

I'm from the "Post".

SECOND NEWSPAPER REPORTER

The "Herald".

DOCTOR

(turns away from the OLD MAN, calls to
FIRST ORDERLY, who comes down stairs)
(to ORDERLY)

Get back to the hospital* and tell them to send men, sedan chairs,
stretchers, baskets, anything! This whole house is infected!
(as the ORDERLY stands there, looking
at him)

Well, don't stand there! Go on! Hurry! It's Cholera! Cholera!

SECOND NEWSPAPER REPORTER

But, good Lord, everybody says there's no such thing as Cholera in New York!

DOCTOR

Everybody! Who's everybody? It's Cholera. I'm telling you! Over
two thousand** have died of it already. But the good people who make
a living out of these tenements are trying to hush it up.

FIRST NEWSPAPER REPORTER

Well, my paper won't. We'll spread it all over ----

DOCTOR

Oh, no, you won't, you're afraid! You're afraid of telling the truth!
Afraid to mention that no cases have been reported outside the slums!***
Go on, print it, I dare you! I DARE YOU!

HOLD and BLACKOUT

* "Slums and Housing", James Ford. Vol. 1. p. 117.

** Ibid. Vol. 1. p. 129

*** "Lost and Found, or Life Among the Poor", by Samuel B. Halliday,
p. 199 to 201.

LOUDSPEAKER

New York Post, June 12, 1854* - Cholera - Cholera epidemic spreads in Tenement District. Gerritt Forbes, Health Inspector** of New York City says:

(During the following speech which comes over the LOUDSPEAKER, the stage is darkened save for a spot on LITTLE MAN sitting on 2 step down left)

VOICE OF FORBES

Some cause should be assigned for the increase of deaths beyond the increase of population, and none appears as prominent as that of the crowded and filthy state in which a great portion of our population lives. We have serious cause to regret that there are in our city so many mercenary landlords who only contrive, in what manner they can, to stow the greatest number of human beings in the smallest possible space! ***

LOUDSPEAKER

Twenty-five hundred men, women and children lost their lives before that Cholera epidemic ended.**** Five thousand died in the previous one.***** This was the third time in twenty years that New York was visited by Cholera.*****

-
- * New York Post, June 12, 1854--first reference to Cholera for that year, under head, "The Cholera and Smallpox on Staten Island." Ed.
- ** Mr. Forbes' official city title was "City Inspector". At that time the City Inspection staff took care of all the inspection work necessary. It was in this capacity that Mr. Forbes reported for the Health Department. Librarian, Health Department, New York City.
- *** "The Tenement House Problem", edited by De Forest & Veiller, Vol. 1, p. 71.
- **** "Slums and Housing" - James Ford, Vol. 1, p. 129.
- ***** Ibid - Vol. 1. p. 117.
- ***** Ibid - Vol. 1. p. 93. Epidemics of Cholera in New York City, 1832, 1849, 1854. -Ed.

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT I

SCENE 5 - APPOINT A COMMITTEE

CHARACTERS

Little Man

Loudspeaker

Citizens' Committee

(N.P. Willis
(Dr. James L. Little
(Dr. Alexander Hadden

Man - Announcer of statistics on disease.

Mayor

Dr. John H. Griscom, City Inspector, New York.

Mayor's Committee of Four

SCENE 5 - APPOINT A COMMITTEE

LITTLE MAN

(looking toward LOUDSPEAKER)

What happened after that?

LOUDSPEAKER

Nothing.

LITTLE MAN

You mean to say they still went on just talking about it.

LOUDSPEAKER

A Citizens' Committee was formed to investigate conditions.

(Lights come up on house, bare and empty)

LITTLE MAN

Again?

LOUDSPEAKER

It consisted of Mr. N. P. Willis and Doctors James L. Little, and Alexander Hadden...*

(As their names are called lights come up on the THREE MEN in each of the three cubicles, inspecting the furniture and making notes)

LITTLE MAN

Well, what did they do?

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, give them a chance, will you?

(LITTLE MAN starts up impatiently)

Sit down for a minute. You're getting me nervous!

(LITTLE MAN sits down. He takes out a package of cigarettes)

That's right have a smoke.

(LITTLE MAN'S fingers tremble as he lights his cigarette)

You're not worried about anything, are you?

LITTLE MAN

(as though they had kept it a secret from him)

Nobody ever told me there was Cholera in New York!

LOUDSPEAKER

I guess a lot of other people didn't know about it, either.

LITTLE MAN

I thought it only happened in China.

* "Slums and Housing" - James Ford - Vol. 1, p. 142

LOUDSPEAKER

Our brand was just as good as any they ever had!

LITTLE MAN

Well, at least there isn't any more Cholera in New York today, not even in old-law tenements.

LOUDSPEAKER

That's right. No more Cholera. But look what we've got instead--in old-law tenements....Report by the New York City Housing Authority, Tuberculosis!

(spot on MAN on 2 step down right)

MAN

From 1919 to 1934 the death rate from Tuberculosis was 129 per cent higher in old-law tenements. *

LOUDSPEAKER

Diphtheria!

MAN

The death rate from Diphtheria was 97 per cent higher in old-law tenements. **

LOUDSPEAKER

Spinal Meningitis!

MAN

The death rate from Spinal Meningitis was one hundred and nineteen per cent higher in old-law tenements--and, the death rate from all causes was ninety-three per cent higher in old-law tenements.***

(blackout on MAN)

LITTLE MAN

But I live in an old-law tenement! What I want to know is---

LOUDSPEAKER

Let's go back to 1850 again. Sssh!

(The lights come up on entire stage.
MAYOR enters, stage right and crosses
to center, down from 3 step. THREE MEN
wait for him on top of 3 step)

LITTLE MAN

(pointing to MAYOR)

Who's that?

LOUDSPEAKER

That's the Mayor.

* Report to His Honor Fiorello H. LaGuardia, Mayor of the City of New York by the New York City Housing Authority, Jan. 25, 1937.

** Ibid

*** Ibid

DR. HADDEN

Mr. Mayor, it is a humiliating fact that no complete examples of sanitary renovation can be found in the City of New York. The "Five Points" is a district still full of perpetual fever nests and the breeding place of epidemic diseases! All told, in New York, not a district, not a street has been redeemed from its filthiness.*

DR. LITTLE

I saw, between Tenth Avenue and the Hudson River, three large manure yards, a number of fat-boiling establishments and slaughter houses. And to these may be added the dirty conditions of the streets, with gutters running with blood and filth. Scattered through the midst of these, surrounding them on all sides are the crowded and ill-ventilated tenements of the district! **

WILLIS

Mr. Mayor, I did not dream that human beings within the reach of human aid could be abandoned to the wretchedness which I saw with my own eyes. And all those horrors of want and abandonment lie almost within sound of your own voice as you pass Broadway. ***

LITTLE MAN

That's enough!

LOUDSPEAKER

Dr. John H. Griscom, Health Inspector of New York presents a city-wide report on Housing.

(Enter DR. GRISCOM stage left, crosses to center)

DR. GRISCOM

Mr. Mayor, in the attempt to raise from the depressed and the poor the necessity of living crowded in single rooms, much aid cannot be found in any legal enactment. The remedy lies with the humane and philanthropic capitalists by whom houses might be erected with all the comforts and conveniences of separate rooms, running water and so forth, which would yield a fair interest on their value and make thousands of people happy! These are my findings and suggestions. ****

(Hands imaginary document to MAYOR. A Committee of four enter down right on 2 step. MAYOR beckons to COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, who crosses to him)

LOUDSPEAKER

New York's first comprehensive document on Housing.*****

(MAYOR takes imaginary document to CHAIRMAN of Committee who catches it and goes back to his group. The COMMITTEE discusses the imaginary document in a sort of gibberish. Music)

* "Slums and Housing" - James Ford - Vol. 1. p. 146-148.

** Ibid. p. 145.

*** Ibid. p. 104.

**** Ibid. p. 108.

***** Ibid. p. 108.

COMMITTEE

Document - Survey - Housing - Cholera - Document - Survey - Housing - Cholera -

LOUDSPEAKER

(spacing the figures between the Committee's words)

One month..... two months.... three months.... four months.... five months....

CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE

(crosses to MAYOR)

Mr. Mayor, your committee do not profess to be judges of the subject. In other words, we do not think it proper at this time to go into such a measure. We recommend that the paper be returned to its author.*

(Committee exits right. As CHAIRMAN exits he tosses paper to MAYOR. MAYOR tosses it to GRISCOM as he is leaving)

LITTLE MAN

Well, I'll be damned.

BLACKOUT

* "Slums and Housing" - James Ford - Vol. 1, p. 108

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT I

SCENE 6 - RENTING

CHARACTERS

Three Charwomen

Little Man

Loudspeaker

Landlord

Apartment Seekers

First Agent
Italian Family (5)

Young Couple
(Man
(Woman

Second Agent
Irish Family of five

Young Boy
His parents
(Father
(Mother

Old Man
His Granddaughter

Third Agent
Jewish Couple
(Man
(Woman

Elderly Man

Group
(Three Women
(One Man

ACT ISCENE 6 - RENTING

(Spots pick up 3 CHARWOMEN, each in one of the cubicles. They are lethargically cleaning and dusting the furniture, sort of ballet style. Music)

LITTLE MAN

(still on 2 step down left; after music stops; lights up)

Say, who are they?

LOUDSPEAKER

Why they're sterilizing the place, so we don't have another epidemic. Got to be careful, you know.

(Music again as they continue the dusting)

(Enter LANDLORD right and crosses to 3 step left. Turns and looks up at CHARWOMEN)

LANDLORD

(clapping his hands)

All right, girls, that's enough. There's another place four doors down. Hurry up.

(The CHARWOMEN exit...He takes another look around and then, satisfied...he hangs a large cardboard sign on the stage left structure; it reads: "TO LET." He turns his back to his property, and waits, expectantly, on 3 step...Enter right, the FIRST AGENT with an ITALIAN FAMILY. He seats them on the 3 step and crosses to LANDLORD)

FIRST AGENT

I brought you some customers -- just off the boat.

LANDLORD

Greenhorns, eh? All one family?

FIRST AGENT

I didn't ask 'em. All I know is they want a place to live.

LANDLORD

Together?

FIRST AGENT

Sure.

LANDLORD

Room three. Third floor.

(FIRST AGENT returns to GROUP; he speaks to them in Italian; they nod happily to AGENT and then to LANDLORD. They cross and follow AGENT upstairs into upper center cubicle.

During the above a young COUPLE has entered left. They read sign and stop. They talk together excitedly)

MAN

(to LANDLORD)

Are you the landlord?

LANDLORD

I am.

MAN

I - er - we'd like to rent a room.

WOMAN

We've just got married.

LANDLORD

Well, you've come to the right place.

MAN

Something light and airy and....

WOMAN

(quickly)

And cheap. We can't afford--

LANDLORD

I've got just the thing for you: private entrance, ground floor, and handy to the toilets.

(points to basement)

MAN

Is it light and airy and --

LANDLORD

It's got a window and a stove and it's two dollars a week.

WOMAN

One window?

LANDLORD

One window

Oh!

WOMAN

MAN

(putting his arm around her)
That's all right, darling. We won't be here long.
(A pause as she looks at the building,
and then they follow LANDLORD into
the lower center cubicle...)

SECOND AGENT appears with an IRISH
FAMILY of five, right. The AGENT
leaves them standing, right center
below 3 step, and crosses to LAND-
LORD in cubicle)

IRISH GIRL

(to HUSBAND as SECOND AGENT crosses
to LANDLORD)

This is it, Tom -- America!

(looks up at structure)

Would you believe they made 'em this big if you didn't see it with
your own eyes?

SECOND AGENT

(to LANDLORD)

Got any rooms left?

LANDLORD

Still got a few.

SECOND AGENT

Party of five people down there.
(pointing)

LANDLORD

How many rooms?

SECOND AGENT

One.

LANDLORD

Rent?

SECOND AGENT

(giving him money)

Here you are.

LANDLORD

Fourth floor rear.

(During the above a YOUNG BOY passing
has stopped; he hurries off left and
returns with his PARENTS. They cross
below 3 step.)

(OLD MAN and GRANDDAUGHTER enter left, and cross to center. THIRD AGENT and JEWISH COUPLE enter right immediately after. FIRST AGENT comes down from upper center cubicle and pushes past them. He exits right)

THIRD AGENT

(calling to LANDLORD in lower center cubicle)

Hello, Landlord! I would like one of your best rooms for my friends over here.

GRANDDAUGHTER

We were here first, Mister.

YOUNG BOY

We were here first!

LANDLORD

(coming out of lower center cubicle with SECOND AGENT; stands on 3 step center)

Just a minute! What's going on here?

(SECOND AGENT crosses to IRISH FAMILY and they all start up ship stairway to cubicle stage right)

GRANDDAUGHTER

We were here first, and we want a room.

YOUNG BOY

They were not!

GRANDDAUGHTER

We were -- weren't we, Grandpa?

OLD MAN

(sitting on 3 step)

I'm tired.

LANDLORD

Never mind. There's room for the both of you. Got the rent?

(An elderly, distinguished looking MAN has entered down left, and heard the argument)

ELDERLY MAN

Are you renting rooms in this building.

LANDLORD

(sizing him up and observing his clothes)

You're on the wrong street, Mister.

ELDERLY MAN

I don't think so.

LANDLORD

Well, you'll have to wait your turn like everybody else--

ELDERLY MAN

Isn't this one of the tenements where the Cholera epidemic --

LANDLORD

(quickly)

No.

(He looks fearfully at the TENANTS)

You must be thinking of that place around the corner.

(to GRANDFATHER, helping him up)

Just because you were here first I'm going to give you the nicest room in the whole-----

ELDERLY MAN

I'm sure this is the place where Cholera---

LANDLORD

Shut up, will you!

MOTHER

(to YOUNG BOY)

You bring us to a Cholera house! You want us to die!

IRISH MAN

Cholera!

(crosses himself)

JEWISH MAN

(to THIRD AGENT)

We go some place else. Give me my money back.

THIRD AGENT

Now, wait--wait!

LANDLORD

(to ELDERLY MAN)

Who the hell are you anyway to be upsettin' honest people with your lies and ruinin' business?

(to TENANTS)

Don't you listen to him. He's probably got a house of his own he wants to rent! And it's probably a damned sight worse than mine!

ELDERLY MAN

This filthy pesthole should be burned to the ground!

(to TENANTS)

If you don't believe me, call a policeman and ask him. He'll tell you all about it!

(defiantly, to LANDLORD)

I say there was Cholera here!

(As the TENANTS start picking up their belongings, apprehensively)

LANDLORD

(desperately)

Wait a minute. Listen. We'd all like to live in a marble palace but we all can't -- so we take what God gives us and we're thankful.....
What if there was Cholera here?

• LANDLORD (Cont'd.)

Was this the only house in town that had it? Was it?

(as ELDERLY MAN doesn't answer)

Why don't you answer that, my good friend?

(same)

And let me tell you this: We've cleaned this house out! We've scrubbed it! We've washed it! We've whitewashed it! Why the whole place is just as fresh and clean as it ever was -- look at it!

(The TENANTS start to leave)

LANDLORD

(to TENANTS)

And you--before you go, remember this: If you don't live here, where are you going to live? In the park? In the street? In another place that's no better than mine and maybe a hell of a lot worse? Are you?

(A pause, as the TENANTS put down their belongings)

(A group of THREE WOMEN and a MAN enter left and join crowd)

Because, in case you're forgetting, there's one thing you've got to have -- all of you -- and you've got to make up your mind to it...

You've got to have a place to live!....

(pauses)

Yes, sir, you've got to have a place to live!

(There is a pause....Slowly they all pick up their belongings and start climbing the stairs into the structure, as)

S L O W C U R T A I N

END OF ACT I

HOUSE LIGHTS

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT II

SCENE 1 - THE LAW

CHARACTERS

Voice of the HOUSE

First Man) Announcers of the LAW
Second Man)

Committee of Three - Housing Investigation, 1894

(Richard Watson Gilder, Chairman
(Enoch Vreeland, Deputy Superintendent, Building Department
(Another member of committee

Editor, New York Herald

Colonel S. Van Rensselaer Cruger, Comptroller of the Rector, Trinity

Very Reverend A. Woodruff Halsey

Hon. Roger A. Pryor, Judge, "General Term")
S. P. Nash, Attorney for Trinity) Trinity
Roger Foster, Attorney for City of New York) "In Court"
Hon. Rufus W. Peckham, Judge, "Court of Appeals")

Third Man - Announcer of the LAW

ACT IISCENE I - THE LAW

(Music...Curtain up on bare House--
one light very dim covers entire
structure throughout scene. Music
stops...)

VOICE OF HOUSE

Well, I'm still here...There's been a lot of water under the bridge.
We've had a few new Presidents and a Civil War -- but I'm still here.
You're curious, aren't you? You don't know where I am. Well, I'm
here -- inside the house. I AM THE HOUSE!

(There is a pause. A spot picks up
odd corners of the interior)

Do you see that broken balustrade? That crumbling plaster? And that
sink down there under the steps? Do you see that rubbish piled up?
That's me. I haven't changed a bit in all these years! Not a bit. In
spite of their laws! LAWS!

(cackling laughter; sardonic)

When you hear the gong strike, the City Fathers will have given birth
to a brand new law.

(Gong strikes. Spots come up on TWO MEN
who enter right and left, and stand on
2 step, down right and down left. They
announce the Law)

1867! A law!

FIRST MAN

It shall be required that no horse, cow, calf, pig, swine, sheep or
goat be domiciled in any tenement or lodging house!*

SECOND MAN

It shall be required that there be a proper fire escape for each tene-
ment,** and there shall be one toilet for every twenty occupants.***

(Gong strikes)

VOICE OF HOUSE

1879! A law!

FIRST MAN

No windowless rooms!****

(Gong strikes)

VOICE OF HOUSE

1887! A law!

* Tenement House Law of 1867-N.Y.State Statutes,Chap.908,Sec.1,Pt.6.

** Ibid, Pt. 8

*** Ibid, Pt. 5

**** Tenement House Law of 1879-N.Y.State Statutes,Chap.504,Sec.1,Pt.14.

SECOND MAN

Water on every floor!*

(Lights out on ANNOUNCERS)

VOICE OF HOUSE

Did you hear that? Fire escapes, a toilet for every twenty occupants, no windowless rooms, and water on every floor! That's what the law says! But I'm still here. And I haven't changed a bit....Oh, well, I guess it's time for another investigation.

(Dim up THREE COMMITTEEMEN right on 3 step. They stare up at the house, notebooks and pencils poised)

What did I tell you? Come on, boys, look me over. But if you don't mind, I guess I'll go back to sleep for a while.

(His voice takes on the quality of a yawn)

....If anything exciting happens, just....wake....me....up.

(There is a pause; the COMMITTEE has been looking at the sink on the ground floor and up at the broken balustrade)

LOUDSPEAKER

May 4, 1894**.....As a result of the campaign waged in the New York "Press,"***Governor Flower today appointed a Committee to investigate housing conditions in the city. The Chairman is Richard Watson Gilder.

(Spot on one of the MEN who steps down)

GILDER

Of the 8441 houses we visited, we found 16, 756 windowless rooms****....

LOUDSPEAKER

That was fifteen years after the law was passed.

GILDER

Only 306 out of over 225,000 people had access to a bathroom. More than five sixths of the buildings had toilets in the yard. More than one fourth of all the apartments had no fire escapes of any kind.*****

LOUDSPEAKER

That was twenty-seven years after the law was passed.

(Another of the men, -- ENOCH VREELAND, comes away from the House; he stands beside GILDER)

VREELAND

I would like to supplement that report.

LOUDSPEAKER

This is Enoch Vreeland, Deputy Superintendent of the Building Department.

*Tenement House Law of 1887 - Chapter 84, Section 663. **New York Tribune, May 5, 1894. ***"The Tenement House Problem" edited by DeForest & Veiller, Vol. 1, P.105. ****Report of Tenement House Committee, authorized by Laws of 1894, Transmitted to Legislature, January 17, 1895, pp. 98-116 *****Ibid.

VREELAND

The tenements owned by Trinity Church are, without a doubt, among the worst in the city, with a death rate of 32 per thousand as against a general death rate in New York of 24 per thousand.*

LOUDSPEAKER

The New York Herald publishes the following reports concerning the Trinity properties made by the Department's Sanitary Inspectors....

EDITOR

(Spot on EDITOR stage right; reads)

Eight families are housed over a shop at 8 Sullivan Street. The apartments are without Croton water or plumbing of any description.At 264 Houston Street is perhaps one of the worst of the Trinity tenements. The waste pipes in the rear house are in such bad condition that sewage has escaped into the cellar, rendering the place a veritable pesthole. It was well-nigh impossible to remain in the cellar a moment owing to the overpowering stench!**

(EDITOR exits. Enter CRUGER, stage right)

LOUDSPEAKER

Colonel S. Van Rensselaer Cruger, Comptroller of the Rector, Churchwardens and Vestrymen.

(CRUGER crosses up to 3 step)

CRUGER

The situation has been greatly magnified. The defects found by the Inspectors are trivial.....A great deal of smoke has been made out of very little fire. This is all I have to say on the subject!***

(CRUGER moves down stage to apron step)

LOUDSPEAKER

The Very Reverend A. Woodruff Halsey.

(Enter HALSEY, stage right. He crosses up to 3 step)

HALSEY

We take no exception to these charges. A corporation owning between six and seven hundred pieces of property will, in the nature of things, overlook and even mismanage. No doubt some of the houses complained of were in a bad sanitary condition and needed overhauling....but that this is true of any considerable number of properties under the care of Trinity--or that Trinity, the Church, is governed by the law of righteousness, and Trinity, the Corporation, by the law of greed -- I cannot for a moment believe!****

(HALSEY moves down stage to apron step)

(Enter stage right, THREE PARTICIPANTS in lawsuit. JUDGE stands on 2 step down right -- the ATTORNEYS stand on apron step right, facing JUDGE)

* The New York Tribune, December 17, 1894.

** New York Herald, December 12, 1894.

*** New York Herald, December 19, 1894.

**** "The New York Observer," January 24, 1895.

LOUDSPEAKER

The Board of Health orders running water to be supplied to every floor. Trinity refuses. The case is taken to the courts, and Trinity is ordered to comply with the law.* But the verdict is set aside until "Exceptions" could be reviewed by the General Term...The General Term!** Stephen P. Nash, Attorney for Trinity, Roger Foster, Attorney for New York.

NASH

The acts of Legislature which impose the duty of supplying water on each floor of the houses described, cannot be sustained as a proper exercise of police power.***

FOSTER

The statute is a lawful exercise of the police power both for the protection of the health of the community and protection against fire.****

NASH

The legislation under review is a burden imposed upon landlords for the ease and comfort of tenants. It is clearly a violation of constitutional guarantees!*****

FOSTER

It is not a taking of property to compel an owner to improve or alter the condition of his property.*****

LOUDSPEAKER

Judge Roger A. Pryor renders the decision.

JUDGE PRYOR

The uncontroverted proof is that the lack of water on the various floors is not bad for the health of the tenants. There is no evidence, nor can the Court judicially know, that the presence of water will conduce to the health of the occupants. The required conduct of water up to the floors serves no other purpose than the convenience of the tenants....A conclusion contrary to the present decision would involve that species of socialism under the regime of which the individual disappears and is absorbed by a collective being called "the State" ... a principle utterly repugnant to the spirit of our political system, and necessarily fatal to our form of liberty....Exceptions sustained and a new trial ordered.**

(PECKHAM enters stage left and stands down
left on 2 step. NASH and FOSTER cross to
left; still on apron step and face PECKHAM)

LOUDSPEAKER

The Court of Appeals - Judge Rufus W. Peckham presiding...

* New York Supplement, Vol. 17, N.Y. Supreme & Lower Court of Record,
** Ibid. 1891 - 2.
*** N.Y. Court of Appeals - Vol. 8, 1895.
**** Ibid.
***** Ibid.
***** Ibid.
***** N.Y. Supplement, Vol. 17, New York Supreme and Lower Courts of
Record, 1891 - 92.

NASH

The particular requirement under consideration is that the landlord should carry water up to the upper floors of his tenement in order to save the tenants the necessity of carrying it up themselves. It would be quite as reasonable to require the landlord to furnish the houses with elevators to save the tenants the trouble of carrying up the coal.*

FOSTER

Stronger evidence of the need of such a water supply as the Statute requires has been furnished by the extraordinarily filthy, and unhealthy conditions of the defendant's tenement houses. The death rate in these tenements, according to official statistics on file in the office of the plaintiff, is far above the average and higher than in any other tenement houses.**

LOUDSPEAKER

The verdict of the Court of Appeals.

PECKHAM

There is scarcely a dissent from the general belief on the part of all who have studied the disease that Cholera is essentially a filth disease. The Legislature cannot in practice enforce a law to make a man wash himself, but when it provides facilities therefor, it has taken a long step toward the accomplishing of that object. That dirt and filth are great promoters of disease, that they breed pestilence and contagion, sickness and death, cannot be denied. We think the act is valid as an exercise of the police power with respect to the public health. The judgment is reversed.***

(Blackout on ACTORS)

(Pause)

VOICE OF THE HOUSE

Well, folks, I guess it's time to have a few new laws. As long as the Courts say you can enforce 'em, let's write 'em in the books and then you can tear down my poor old carcass and give me a nice decent burial.

(Spot on TWO MEN, Announcers of the Law, who enter right and left. They stand on 2 step down right and down left)

VOICE OF THE HOUSE

1901. The new laws for tenements!*****

FIRST MAN

A separate water closet in each apartment!*****

SECOND MAN

Hallways must be at least three feet wide!*****

* N.Y. Court of Appeals - Vol. 8, 1895.
 ** Ibid.
 *** Ibid.
 **** Tenement House Laws of 1901 - N.Y. State Statutes.
 ***** Ibid, Chapter 555, part 75.
 ****** Ibid, Chapter 334, part 14.

FIRST MAN

No room may be less than seventy square feet of floor area!*

SECOND MAN

No airshafts. Side courts must be at least twelve feet wide!***

FIRST MAN

Adequate fire escapes!****

SECOND MAN

Adequate light and air!*****

(Blackout on TWO MEN)

THIRD MAN

(hurrying on, right, stands center
in spot)

But--

VOICE OF THE HOUSE

Oh, Lord, I'm afraid of this "but!"

THIRD MAN

--But these laws shall in no way affect any tenements already in existence
prior to today's date, April 12, 1901.*****

(Blackout on THIRD MAN)

(There is a pause)

VOICE OF THE HOUSE

(slowly, very tired)

Well, folks, I'm still here....There's been a lot of water under the
bridge, we've had a few new Presidents and the Spanish-American War.....
But I'm still here....Yeah, I'm still here....still here...

(Voice fades away)

B L A C K O U T

(Blacks in)

* Tenement House Laws of 1901 - N.Y. State Statutes, Chap. 334, part 70.
 ** Tenement House Laws of 1901, N.Y. State Statutes, Chapter 334, part 61.
 *** Ibid, Chapter 334, Section 79.
 **** Ibid.
 ***** Ibid.

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT II

SCENE 2 -- CROSSTOWN, 1933

CHARACTERS

Little Man

Loudspeaker

Guide

A - Street Kids

Sammy (12)

Frank (13)

Woman -- Yiddish accent

First Woman)

Second Woman) Announcers - Statistics on Juvenile Delinquency

B - East Side - West Side

Man

Woman (Min)

Mrs. Buttonkooper

Tenement House Commissioner, New York

C - Harlem

First Negro (a stevedore)

Second Negro (a bootblack)

D - Rent Strike

First Woman)

Second Woman) Fourth Floor Hallway

Third Woman)

Fourth Woman)

Fifth Woman) Third Floor Landing

Sixth Woman)

Mrs. MacNamara)

Tenant League Organizer)

Group of Women Strikers) Upper center cubicle

ACT IISCENE 2 - CROSSTOWN - 1933

LITTLE MAN

(hurrying down the aisle of the theatre)

Hey!....Hey!

(He stumbles over somebody's foot...)

Pardon me!

(He hurries up stairway from pit to stage left. Follow spot picks him out. Crosses to center on apron step.

Scene played in front of blacks)

Here I am. Hey!

LOUDSPEAKER

Oh, hello. Where were you?

LITTLE MAN

Out for a beer. I just caught the end of that last scene. Tell me, why don't we tear down all those old-law tenements? Seems to me if we did that, all our troubles would be over.

LOUDSPEAKER

That's a very good question. Why don't you answer it?

LITTLE MAN

Me?

LOUDSPEAKER

That's right...Where do you live?

LITTLE MAN

Eighty-fifth and Amsterdam.

LOUDSPEAKER

In an old-law tenement?

LITTLE MAN

Well, it's a made-over brownstone.

LOUDSPEAKER

That's an old-law tenement, too. Now if we tore down your house, where would you move, Mr. - Mr. -- ?

LITTLE MAN

Buttonkooper. Angus K. Buttonkooper.

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, Mr. Buttonkooper, where would you move?

LITTLE MAN

Oh, in the neighborhood. Maybe around the corner.

LOUDSPEAKER
In another old-law tenement?

LITTLE MAN
Sure.

LOUDSPEAKER
Why?

LITTLE MAN
Because that's all I can afford!

LOUDSPEAKER
Exactly. Do you know what that means? It means we'd have the same number of people crowding into a smaller number of old-law tenements. And you wouldn't be any better off than you were before.

LITTLE MAN
(trying to interrupt)
But --

LOUDSPEAKER
Statistics show that only one per cent of the people who lived in the slums where Knickerbocker Village now stands could afford to live there after that development was put up! *

LITTLE MAN
(impatient)
But ---

LOUDSPEAKER
While the remaining ninety-nine per cent moved into other old-law tenements in the neighborhood, --- around the corner. **

LITTLE MAN
(insistently)
But --

LOUDSPEAKER
But what?

LITTLE MAN
(excited)
But suppose we tore 'em all down?

LOUDSPEAKER
Suppose we did. Where would you live?

LITTLE MAN
(smiling happily)
In a brand new house!

* "Building America", - Special Edition on Housing, June, 1935, p. 21.

** Ibid.

LOUDSPEAKER
That's great. Why don't you live in one now?

LITTLE MAN
I told you. I can't afford it.

LOUDSPEAKER
Well, what makes you think you would afford it then?

LITTLE MAN
(disappointedly, as he sees the point)
Oh! ...

LOUDSPEAKER
You see, slum clearance is one thing. Building new apartments you can afford to live in to replace them is another.

LITTLE MAN
(thoughtfully)
Oh! ...

LOUDSPEAKER
Any more questions?

LITTLE MAN
(angry -- crosses left and stops short at 2 step down left)
No. I was just wondering...How about the rest of the old-law tenements around New York? Are they all as bad as mine? Does the heat go off in all of 'em at ten o'clock and the water stop running just when you want to take a bath? Are the rooms all dark, do the walls crack, and how about the bathrooms? Are they hot as hell in summer and freezing in the winter? Are they all firetraps, is the landlord just as tough, does he refuse to paint, does he come around on the first for his rent,
(getting excited)
do they have roaches, do they have mice, do they have ----

LOUDSPEAKER
Hey, wait a minute! One thing at a time.

LITTLE MAN
(finally getting it out)
What I want to know is: am I any worse off than anybody else?

LOUDSPEAKER
Would you like to see for yourself?

LITTLE MAN
I sure would.

LOUDSPEAKER
Fine. How about a trip around New York in 1933?

LITTLE MAN
Wait a minute, wouldn't that sort of be repeating ourselves? We did that in the first act.

LOUDSPEAKER

Let's try it... You see, that's the whole point of this Housing business. It repeats itself. It just goes on and on.

LITTLE MAN

Well how are you going to stop it?

LOUDSPEAKER

(correcting him)

How are we going to stop it?

LITTLE MAN

(a bit sheepish)

Yeah, how are we going to stop it?

LOUDSPEAKER

That'll come later.....Now, are you ready?

LITTLE MAN

Where am I going?

LOUDSPEAKER

Oh, uptown, downtown, crosstown.

LITTLE MAN

O. K.

(He starts to walk, then stops)

Say, wait a minute. Do I have to go alone? I get kind of lonesome by myself in some of those dark streets.

LOUDSPEAKER

You're not afraid, are you?

LITTLE MAN

(putting on the bravado)

Oh, no, not at all! Just the same it would be kind of nice if....

LOUDSPEAKER

All right, all right... Who do you want to go with?

LITTLE MAN

Well, let's see now...

(He thinks)

Say, do you remember that fellow in the first act who showed me around New York in the old days? I'd like to take him.

LOUDSPEAKER

You can't. He's dead.

LITTLE MAN

Dead?

LOUDSPEAKER

The last time you saw him was in 1850. He can't go on living forever.

LITTLE MAN

(persuasively)

Aw, come on, dig him up. I can't just talk to myself up here!

LOUDSPEAKER

But why do you want to see him?

LITTLE MAN

Well, I felt pretty uncomfortable walking around in his century. Let's see how he feels walking around in mine.

LOUDSPEAKER

All right. Call him.

LITTLE MAN

(first to right, then to left)

Hey!...Hey!....

(nothing happens)

LOUDSPEAKER

Why don't you try a little magic?

LITTLE MAN

Magic?...All right!

(He goes through the movements of a magician, saying)

Allakazam, allakazam, allakazam, BOOM!

(Spot picks up GUIDE, asleep on 2 step down left)

LITTLE MAN

(shaking his head in wonder at the miracle)

I wish I could get an apartment that way!

(crosses to GUIDE; shakes him)

Hey, you still asleep? ... Wake up!

(GUIDE wakes)

Remember me? You showed me New York about eighty-five years ago!

(Screen comes down in front of blacks)

GUIDE

Sure.

(They shake hands)

LITTLE MAN

Well, this time I'm going to show it to you! Come on!

(grabs his arm...then, to LOUDSPEAKER)

Where are we now?

LOUDSPEAKER

You're standing right in the middle of Times Square and you'd better watch out!

(Projection on screen of movie trip around New York, 1938, including crowded sections of the city - Times Square, Herald Square.* The honk of an automobile is heard, also noise of crowd...GUIDE jumps out of the way. They start striding)

GUIDE

What's this?

LITTLE MAN

Thirty-fourth and Broadway.

GUIDE

Thirty-fourth and Broadway?

LOUDSPEAKER

Remember? The Leeds Farm? **

(They stride again. Projection changes to Twenty-third and Broadway)

Twenty-third and Broadway.

GUIDE

Twenty-third and Broad--

LOUDSPEAKER

Madison Farm.*** Best cows in the whole county!
(They stride again. Projection changes to Fourteenth Street. Soapboxes, etc.)

Union Square!**** Quiet little spot.
(They stride again. Projection changes to Bleecker Street. - slum tenement)

Bleecker Street.

GUIDE

Bleecker!

LOUDSPEAKER

You know, where the swells live. *****

* Movies of New York City - shots of street scenes in crowded business also slum neighborhoods. Taken by technical staff, Living Newspaper in co-operation with East Side Tenants' Union, New York. -Ed.

** Valentine's Manual, 1862 - also Hall of Records, New York.

*** Ibid

**** Stokes Iconography, Vol. 3, p. 136.

***** Valentine's Manual, 1854 - p. 528.

LITTLE MAN

I thought it would surprise you.
(grabs him)
Look out! That car almost bumped you off!

GUIDE

"Bumped me off?"

LITTLE MAN

Skip it.

GUIDE

Wait a minute. What is that thing?

LITTLE MAN

Automobile.

GUIDE

What's that?

LITTLE MAN

Horseless carriage.

GUIDE

Go on, there ain't no such thing.
(They stride again, the GUIDE still
looking back at the auto)
Where're we going now?

LITTLE MAN

Downtown, the East Side. Have a look at a slum.

(They stride again. Scene changes to
Orchard Street)

GUIDE

Say, what's all this?

LITTLE MAN

Orchard Street. We're going to cross east into Madison and then--
hey!

(looking backward at the GUIDE as he talks)
(Movies off;
Screen is flown, with Blacks out)

SCENE A - STREET KIDS

(Lights come up. House is empty. A young boy, SAMMY, (12) sits on bottom of 3 step, right. He is repairing the skate on a home-made skooter. The skooter is lying on its side, the BOY bent over it.. some distance away down center from 3 step stands another boy, FRANK, (13) watching him)

LITTLE MAN

(stumbling over skooter)
(rubbing his shin)

Why don't you be more careful with that thing!

SAMMY

Excuse me--

LITTLE MAN

(to GUIDE)

Let's go.

(They start to walk)

LOUDSPEAKER

Just a moment, Mr. Buttonkooper.

(They stop)

I thought you wanted to see how the other guy lives and what his kids are like!

LITTLE MAN

I do, but--

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, here they are.

LITTLE MAN

But we want to look at a slum!

LOUDSPEAKER

Mr. Buttonkooper, you're looking at the results of one right now... Listen!

(They watch BOYS)

FRANK

(watching SAMMY repair skate)

Whatsa matter?

(no answer)

I said, whatsa matter?

SAMMY

(without looking at him)

Skooter's busted.

FRANK

Who busted it?

SAMMY

(calmly)

You did.

FRANK
 (a little taken aback)
 I did... Who told you?

SAMMY
 Nobody.

FRANK
 (grabs him and swings him around)
 Who told you?...

SAMMY
 (still very calm)
 I saw you drop that cobblestone on it.

FRANK
 (releases him; SAMMY bends over the
 skooter as though nothing has hap-
 pened)
 Well, ain't you goin' t' do nothin' about it?

SAMMY
 I'm goin' - to fix it.
 (There is a pause; SAMMY tinkers with
 skate)
 (LITTLE MAN and GUIDE remain standing,
 stage right, watching)

FRANK
 Anybody busted my skooter I'd beat him up. I'd beat him up plenty.
 (bends over him)
 First I'd give him the knuckles--like this...
 (rubs his knuckles hard on SAMMY'S head)
 ...then I'd give him the rabbit -- like this...
 (slaps him sharply on the back of the neck)
 ...then I'd stretch his nose... like this...
 (pulls his nose)
 ...and then I'd smack him down-- LIKE THIS!
 (He smacks him across the face, knocking
 him on his back. Throughout this SAMMY
 has not uttered a word, nor has he cried
 out... Slowly now he rises, blows his
 nose to hide the tears and then goes back
 to his tinkering)

FRANK
 (slowly after a pause)
 Anybody I did it to would bust me one back - if he wasn't yeller.
 He'd get up on his two feet and smack me right in the nose - if he
 wasn't yeller...
 (SAMMY goes on tinkering)
 But ye can't expect nothin' out of a guy that's yeller, kin ya!
 Kin ya!

SAMMY
 (regarding him fearfully)
 No.

FRANK

And ya can't expect nothin' out of a guy that has to sleep in the same bed as his big sister, kin ya?

(as SAMMY says nothing)

Ya do, don't ya? Don't ya?

(as he doesn't answer FRANK grabs him by the collar)

SAMMY

(almost crying out)

I got to. We ain't got no more room.

FRANK

(jovially)

Say, what's she like, your sister? Why don't ya introduce me sometime?

(as he doesn't answer)

...I'll bet you get a nice little feel in sometime when she don't know it, eh?...

(as SAMMY tries to wriggle loose)

...Say, I wouldn't mind changin' places with ya some night - some night when it's nice and cold. You go home and sleep with my old man and I'll go to your house and - and -

(as SAMMY wriggles desperately)

Say, what ya bawlin' for? I was only bein' nice to ya. I was only sayin' that some cold night I was goin' over to your house and maybe do a little sleepin' with your--

(with a tremendous heave SAMMY tears himself loose; then with a cry he throws himself upon FRANK. They roll over on the ground. They are fighting desperately. FRANK on top, SAMMY underneath gone completely berserk.... BOTH BOYS freeze... There is a pause)

WOMAN

(Yiddish accent. She has come out of door on fourth floor hallway and leans over balustrade, looking down)

Sammy!... What's the matter, Sammy?

SAMMY

(underneath)

Nothin' mom.

WOMAN

Come upstairs for supper.

(as they remain frozen)

Supper!

SAMMY

I'm comin' ...

(They both rise; SAMMY dusts himself off; he picks up his skooter)

WOMAN

You're all right, Sammy?

SAMMY

(slowly)

Yeah, I'm all right...

(without a look at FRANK he picks up his scooter and starts up the ship ladder stairway slowly. FRANK watches him for a moment, spits, then, hands in his pockets, he crosses off left. There is a pause)

(Spot on LITTLE MAN and GUIDE still watching stage right)

GUIDE

Pretty mean little cuss. Are they all like that?

LITTLE MAN

That's what I'd like to know. Is that kid unusual or is it the result of where he lives and what he sees?

(to LOUDSPEAKER)

Come on. Let's have the facts.

LOUDSPEAKER

Seattle, Washington.

(Lights up on TWO WOMEN down right and left. They stand at 2 step down right and down left)

FIRST WOMAN

25% of all juvenile delinquency found in six and one half per cent of the city area-- the slums! *

LOUDSPEAKER

Richmond, Virginia.

SECOND WOMAN

50% of all juvenile delinquency found in eighteen per cent of the city area-- the slums! **

LOUDSPEAKER

Cleveland, Ohio.

FIRST WOMAN

47% of all juvenile delinquency found in seventeen per cent of the city area-- the slums! ***

* "Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States", Edith Elmer Wood, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works Housing Bulletin #1, p. 13.

** Ibid

*** Ibid

LOUDSPEAKER

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

SECOND WOMAN

46% of all juvenile delinquency found in nine per cent of the city area-- the slums! *

(Lights out on WOMEN)

* "Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States", Edith Elmer Wood, Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works Housing Bulletin #1, p. 13.

2B - EAST SIDE - WEST SIDE

(Standing before the house, right, LITTLE MAN is jostled by a MAN holding a chair with both his hands. On the chair is piled a breadbox and various other articles. Under his arm he carries a broom. The MAN crosses up to narrow stairway left leading to upper center cubicle)

LITTLE MAN

That's enough.

(to LOUDSPEAKER)

Where's he going?

LOUDSPEAKER

Why don't you follow him and find out?

LITTLE MAN

O. K. I will.

(grabs GUIDE as latter starts off right)

Uh! Uh! You come with me.

(Spot out on LITTLE MAN and GUIDE as they cross center)

(Lights up on upper center cubicle which is cluttered with furniture, chairs, etc. MIN is at stove, trying futilely to polish it. MAN enters and stands holding the chair)

MAN

Where do you want this, Min?

WOMAN (MIN)

(tired)

Oh, drop it any place. The room's so jammed up you can't move anyhow. Drop it and sit on it. Then you'll both be takin' up the same space. That'll save somethin'.

(MAN drops the chair, then bends down and holds up breadbox)

MAN

Where do you want the breadbox?

WOMAN

I'll take it.

(takes box and puts it on stove)

MAN

(leaning on broom)

Where do you want the broom?

WOMAN

(excitedly)

How do I know! You got eyes in your head. Find a place for it!.... This is the last time I move if I have to rot here!

MAN

(good-humoredly)

How'd you like a place on Fifth Avenue with nine bathrooms and a swimmin' pool?

WOMAN

(crosses, stops center)

(sharply)

How'd you like to go----

(pause, then a bit kinder)

---back and get the rest of the stuff!

MAN

Lemme rest a little, will ya? Them three blocks seem plenty far away when you're carrin' a load on your back.

(MAN sits on chair. WOMAN continues cleaning around)

WOMAN

They'll seem further away than that in a year or so when you look up at them tall buildings and say to yourself, "I used to live there."

MAN

What're they goin' to call it, Min?

WOMAN

Knickerbocker Village.

MAN

Knickerbocker Village! Sounds swell. What's the idea of it?

WOMAN

The idea is they want to tear down the slums so poor folks can have a decent place to live.

MAN

Well, why don't we move in?

WOMAN

(looking up from her polishing)

I guess we're too poor. *

MAN

That don't make sense.

WOMAN

You said it!

(There is a pause)

* Knickerbocker Village rental - \$12.50 per room per month.
Fred F. French Management Company, New York, N.Y.

MAN

(in a different tone)

Hey, Min!

(She turns and regards him for a moment)

Sit down a minute, willya -- I want to talk to you. Sit down.

(She shrugs her shoulders, moves chair over, and sits center. He rises and crosses left a step, then turns....slowly)

Looks like I won't be any better off in the next few years than I am right now. Right?

(She just looks at him)

Looks like we'll be livin' in this dump or one just like it for a long time to come. Right?

(She continues to look at him)

(slowly)

How about us havin' a kid?

(There is a pause)

WOMAN

(looks away)

No.

MAN

What's the use of us holdin' out and hopin'? Nothin's goin' to change.

WOMAN

(decisively)

No.

MAN

I ain't gettin' any younger, Min. I'd like to see a piece of me and you crawlin' around the house - sort of representin' us after we're gone...

(pleadingly, holding her chin)

Min...

WOMAN

(softly, but definitely and turning away)

We had two, didn't we?

MAN

(patting her shoulder and turning away)

I know. It ain't your fault. It ain't nobody's fault they died.

WOMAN

Listen to me, Jim. There's nothing wrong with me. And there's nothin' wrong with you -- you couldn't heave that coal around the way you do if there was...

(suddenly, leaning forward)

What made them kids die, Jim?

MAN

(resignedly)

I guess it was just bound to be, Min.

WOMAN

(rises)

Bound to be - hell! It's the house we lived in! It's the houses we always lived in! It's these walls and these lice and no sun and no air and no decent food and these stinking toilets! That's what it is!

(hysterically)

And you want me to have another kid and have him die before he's a year old! Or maybe if he's lucky, grow up to be a gangster like Peg Leg Lonergan or Two Gun Crowley and die with a cop's slug in his belly! No, I say, NO!....NO! God damn it, no.

(She stands there. Hold and BLACKOUT on MAN and WOMAN. Spot on LITTLE MAN and GUIDE sitting on 3 step, left. LITTLE MAN heaves a deep sigh and shakes his head despairingly)

GUIDE

You want to know something? What goes on in these houses is pretty much like what I showed you - back in 1850.... It's the same story all over again.

LITTLE MAN

Yeah, that's what he said.

(points to LOUDSPEAKER)

It repeats itself. It just goes on and on.

GUIDE

Well, isn't anybody going to do anything about it?

LITTLE MAN

Funny, you asking that question. That's just what I keep on asking.

GUIDE

Well, aren't they?

LITTLE MAN

I dunno.

(points to LOUDSPEAKER)

I think he's got something up his sleeve. But he won't spring it yet.How about taking a trip up to Harlem?

GUIDE

Harlem?

LITTLE MAN

Up about a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. We'll take a subway.

GUIDE

Subway?

LITTLE MAN

Skip it. I always forget about you being---

(from the audience--)

A WOMAN'S VOICE (Mrs. Buttonkooper)

Angus! Angus!

(They stop as spot on WOMAN coming up
stairway from pit to stage left)

LITTLE MAN

Oh, hello, dear.

(to GUIDE)

That's Mrs. Buttonkooper.

GUIDE

(takes off hat and makes old-fashioned bow)

How do you do?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Angus, what are you doing up here, and who is that man in the funny
suit?

(GUIDE looks at his clothes bewildered)

LITTLE MAN

Oh, him! He died about fifty years ago. We just dug him up.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Will you stop being a fool and get your hat and come with me?
Hurry!

LITTLE MAN

But, dearest.....

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Did you hear what I said!

LITTLE MAN

But, darling....

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Angus K. Buttonkooper! Will you come with me this instant!

LITTLE MAN

(folding his arms, bravely and stamping
his foot)

No. Not unless you tell me what it's all about.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(looking around apprehensively)

Do you want everybody to hear?

LITTLE MAN

Certainly. I have no secrets.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(a very loud whisper)

There's a new Housing Development. Williamsburg. They're taking
applications! *

* "Toward the End to be Achieved", the New York City Housing
Authority - Its History in Outline, 1937 - p. 10.

LITTLE MAN

(in a dither of excitement)

Why didn't you say so!

(starts pacing)

What did you stand there talking for! Why didn't you say something!
 Why didn't you send me a---

(They start toward steps. SPOT on
 TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSIONER, right)

TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSIONER

Just a moment, Mr. Buttonkooper.

(They stop)

Remember me? I'm the Tenement House Commissioner.

LITTLE MAN

Can't talk to you now, Mr. Commissioner. I'm too busy.
 (They start toward steps again)

TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSIONER

That's what I want to talk to you about....There's no need for you to
 rush like that. You see, we've got 1622 apartments in that Williams-
 burg Development.*

LITTLE MAN

(rapturously)

1622 apartments!

TENEMENT HOUSE COMMISSIONER

.....but we already have 19,000 applications for them. **

LITTLE MAN

Nineteen thou-- Oh!

(Both stop and gasp)

COMMISSIONER

So you see there's no need to rush!

BLACKOUT ON COMMISSIONER

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(sarcastically)

You see! That's what you get when you go galavantin' all over the
 place and nobody can find you!.....What are you doing here anyhow?

LITTLE MAN

I'm seeing a show. It's about Housing.

* "Toward the End to be Achieved", the New York City Housing
 Authority - Its History in Outline, 1937 - p. 11.

** By July 12, 1937, 19,000 completed applications for apartments in
 the Williamsburg Development had been received - N.Y.C. Housing
 Authority.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Housing! Will they show us how we can get our hands on a lease for one of those model developments?

LOUDSPEAKER

We're coming to that, Mrs. Buttonkooper. You'll just have to be patient.

LITTLE MAN

(taking her arm - pushing her toward steps)

That's right, dear. You'll just have to be patient. Now go on home and wash the dishes or put the baby to sleep or something. I'll stay here and find out all about everything.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(stops on top step)

I'll do no such thing. The dishes are washed and the baby's asleep. And if you're going to stay here and learn something, then so am I.
(faces front)

LITTLE MAN

All right, if that's the way you feel about it.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

That's the way I feel.

LITTLE MAN

But don't look at me up here. You'll make me nervous....

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Oh, don't be silly-----

LITTLE MAN

(spotting empty seat-- pointing to it)
There's a seat. Sit in it.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(looks at him-- is about to refuse, then changes her mind)

Wait 'til I get you home!

(goes down steps and sits in seat.
LITTLE MAN remains stage center)

On, go on----

LITTLE MAN

Well, where were we?

GUIDE

You said something about a place called Harlem.

LITTLE MAN

Oh, yeah!

(They start walking)

You know, I'm not so familiar with this neighborhood. I don't know just what to show you.

LOUDSPEAKER
How about showing him the "Hot Bed"?

LITTLE MAN
(puzzled)
The "Hot Bed"?

LOUDSPEAKER
That's right. The "Hot Bed".

LITTLE MAN
Where'll I find it?

LOUDSPEAKER
Just walk up Lenox Avenue and turn in any street-- 135th, 140th,
145th-- almost any one will do.
(They walk across stage to right)

ACT IISCENE 2-C - HARLEM

(Dim up on stage right cubicle, on TWO NEGROES. SECOND NEGRO asleep on cot. FIRST NEGRO stands in center of cubicle, taking off coat)

FIRST NEGRO

(crosses to bed)

Hey, wake up!

(no response)

Come on there, man, UP!

(He shakes him)

SECOND NEGRO

(rubbing his eyes)

Huh? Whas' a matter?

FIRST NEGRO

Four o'clock. You had all the sleepin' you're goin' to.....

SECOND NEGRO

Ain't hardly closed my eyes.

FIRST NEGRO

(sitting on steps leading to main tenement.
He takes off his shoes and socks)

Well, you better open 'em pretty quick. I got some fast sleepin' to do. "Aquitania" comes in at twelve o'clock midnight. I gotta be down there and rassel that cargo.

(as SECOND NEGRO doesn't move)

All right, Jack, let your feet hit the floor. I said I got some sleepin' to do!

SECOND NEGRO

I ain't goin' to git up...

FIRST NEGRO

You ain't eh?

SECOND NEGRO

I'm sick and I'm goin' to sleep. What you think I pay three dollars a week for this bed for?

FIRST NEGRO

Same reason I do, I expect. You gets your eight hours and I gets mine and Bob, he gets his. And there ain't but twenty-four hours in a day!

(crosses to bed)

Why don't you stop jibin' and get outa that bed.

SECOND NEGRO

Landlady tell me I can sleep as long as I like.

FIRST NEGRO

She did, eh?

(rolls him out of the bed and drops him
on the floor)

You can sleep there as long as you like!

SECOND NEGRO

(angry)

What you do that for?

FIRST NEGRO

(getting into bed and lying down)

Don't get sassy, sonny. All I want is what's comin' to me.

SECOND NEGRO

(on floor)

By God, I gotta sleep, I tell you! I gotta pain right here in the middle and I gotta sleep.

(FIRST NEGRO rolls over, turning his
back to him)

What kind of thing I gotta put up with anyhow? In the bed, outa the bed! First me, then you, then that other fellow. What kind of thing is this anyhow!

(crawls on floor)

Twelve hours a day, ten bucks a week! Shine, Mister? Shine 'em up black, shine 'em up brown! In the summertime it's white..... Shine, Mister? No, boss, he don't want no shine....

(as he crawls farther and sits on top step
of ship ladder stairway leading from street)

But I wanna sleep, I gotta sleep, d'you hear?

(He stops, then, as if talking to himself)

Try and get myself a decent room where a man kin lay his head when he's got a sick belly. Landlady tell me white folks live here pay thirty dollars for this flat. Black ones move in -- forty-five! * Same rooms, same busted bannister, same lousy sink!

(claps his hand to his stomach in a spasm
of pain)

By God, what kind of thing is this!

(pause...then slowly, intensely, reminiscently)

.....member what my grandpop used to tell me - 'bout the old country where he come from....

* "Report on Negro Community Housing", Will Thomas Williams, Special Consultant.

SECOND NEGRO (Cont'd)

(reciting the words verbatim, as though
his grandpop were speaking through his
lips)

.....When a man's got more misery'n he kin stand, and his bones ache
and his eyeballs burnin' with fire and there's hot pain runnin' up
and down his arms and legs - you know what he do? You know what?....
He grab his machete, and run out into the clearing where all the
planters are stanin' with their whips in their hands and he yell as
loud as he can, AMOK, AMOK!

(quietly, as FIRST NEGRO sits up in bed
to listen)

You know what that mean? It mean I can't work no more! I'm crazy
from work and I don't wanta live! I'm going to bust right into you
and cut you wide open and keep on cuttin' until I'm dead! Until I'm
dead!

(suddenly struck with the idea)

Until I'm dead!

(pause, then suddenly as the idea takes
hold and possesses him)

Did you hear, did you hear me?

(FIRST NEGRO gets out of bed)

AMOK! AMOK! AMOK!

(stands swaying, hysterically....)

(FIRST NEGRO stands watching him, SECOND
NEGRO shrieks and starts for FIRST NEGRO.
The latter crosses to him, shakes him
hard, then....)

FIRST NEGRO

What happens when one of these guys you talkin' about goes out of his
head that way?

SECOND NEGRO

He fight until they kill him.

FIRST NEGRO

And then he's dead. And what good is it for him? And what good is
he for anybody else?

(slowly)

That ain't the way to do it, all by yourself. This kinda business
won't get you nowhere. When you don't like the way things are, and
you want to change 'em, don't try to do it all by yourself. You
can't....You got to get 'em all together -- and then you gotta do
somethin' -- TOGETHER!

(There is a pause)

SECOND NEGRO

(slowly)

Do something? Like what?

FIRST NEGRO

Like this.....

(Slowly he turns, facing out; then,
addressing an imaginary landlord....)

You go to the landlord and say: If you don't stop gougin' us --
if you don't fix them rusty pipes and clean up this here house, you
know what we're goin' to do? YOU KNOW WHAT?

(pause)

We ain't gonna pay no rent!

SECOND NEGRO

No rent?..... But they won't let me stay here. They'll kick me out.

FIRST NEGRO

Sure they will - if you do it by yourself. But suppose everybody in
this whole house didn't pay the rent until every man had a bed of his
own and that sink downstairs was fixed -- WOULD YOU GET IT FIXED OR
WOULDN'T YOU?

(There is a pause, the SECOND NEGRO regards
him for a moment, then, joyously)

SECOND NEGRO

(shouting)

No rent! We ain't gonna pay no rent!

FIRST NEGRO

That's it -- no rent!

TWO NEGROES

No rent! No rent!

BLACKOUT

SCENE D - RENT STRIKE

(The music comes up)

LOUDSPEAKER

Harlem Rent Strike: New York, October 11, 1936.....four thousand march in fight on Harlem rent rise!* East Side Rent Strike - New York, January 28, 1933 - 300 Tenants picket landlord.**

(Light up fourth floor -- THREE WOMEN come out of the three doorways and stand in hallway)

FIRST WOMAN

(pointing to gap in balustrade)

Three dollars a month more rent! Look at that bannister!

SECOND WOMAN

It's been just like this ever since I moved in!

FIRST WOMAN

Some day somebody's going to get hurt.

THIRD WOMAN

Nobody did yet!

FIRST WOMAN

That's right -- nobody did yet! So let's not do anything until some kid falls and breaks his skull on the landing down there!

SECOND WOMAN

But what are we going to do?

FIRST WOMAN

Let's just sit back and pray.

THIRD WOMAN

But what can we do about it?

FIRST WOMAN

I'm not sure but I've got an idea.....

BLACKOUT

(Music comes up again)

LOUDSPEAKER

Bronx Rent Strike - New York, January 6, 1933 - 20 families in Charlotte Street tenement picket landlord.***

-
- * New York Times, October 11, 1936- tenants in Harlem parade, sponsored by Consolidated Tenants' League, Harlem, N.Y.C.
 - ** Ibid - January 28, 1933, tenants of "Paradise Alley", Avenue A and 11th Street, N.Y.C.
 - *** Ibid - January 6, 1933 - tenants at 1433 Charlotte St., Bronx, N.Y.

(THREE WOMEN rush down steps and into
third floor landing as light comes up.
THREE OTHER WOMEN meet them)

FOURTH WOMAN

I'm not going to pay it -- that's what!

FIFTH WOMAN

Three dollars a month more beginning October first!

FOURTH WOMAN

What about Mrs. MacNamara-- where is she?

(calling)

Mrs. MacNamara!

MRS. MacNAMARA

(stepping out of shadows of landing, right)

Here I am! And I just saw him!

FOURTH WOMAN

Are you going to pay it?

MRS. MacNAMARA

NO!

FIFTH WOMAN

Are you going to move?

MRS. MacNAMARA

NO!

FIFTH WOMAN

What are you going to do?

MRS. MacNAMARA

I'll tell you what I'm going to do -- I'm going to picket -- and
so are you -- and you --

(to SIXTH WOMAN)

and you, too!

SIXTH WOMAN

Picket? We can't picket!

MRS. MacNAMARA

Why not? All you have to do is walk up and down!

SIXTH WOMAN

With signs?

MRS. MacNAMARA

With signs and banners and everything! Sure -- if the men can do it --
so can we!

BLACKOUT

(Music comes up and continues throughout
LOUDSPEAKER'S announcement)

LOUDSPEAKER

Brooklyn rent strike. - January 17, 1933. Two hundred members of the Brooklyn Tenants' League picket the landlord.*

(Lights come up on FIVE or SIX WOMEN
and TENANTS LEAGUE ORGANIZER in upper
center cubicle)

ORGANIZER

Do you know how much it'll cost him to evict each tenant? \$25.00! --
For forty apartments it'll cost him a thousand dollars!

FOURTH WOMAN

A thousand dollars! He'll never spend it!
(There is a pause)

FIRST WOMAN

But is it right for us to stay here without paying rent?

ORGANIZER

Is it right for him to raise rents when there's a housing shortage?
For us to be thrown out on the street? Is it?

CHORUS OF VOICES

NO!

(pause)

ORGANIZER

And so, I'm proposing right now that we, members of the Tenants' League, declare a rent strike of all the tenants in this house. That nobody move and nobody pay rent until the landlord --

FOURTH WOMAN

Until the landlord is willing to let us stay for the old rent!

CHORUS OF VOICES

Right!

BLACKOUT

(Blacks in)

* New York Times - January 17, 1933, Tenants at 226 Barrett Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT II

SCENE 3 -- WHAT PRICE HOUSING?

CHARACTERS

Guide

Little Man

Loudspeaker

Landlord

Real Estate Operators

(Landowner)
(First Broker -- Mr. Salt) Land Buying
(Second " -- Mr. Spinach)

(First Building Supply Man)
(Second " " ") Construction
(Contractor)

(Banker) Finance
(Mortgage Company President)

(First Man -- Government Taxes)
(Second " -- State ") Collectors
(Third " -- City ")

(Fourth " -- Insurance Agent)
(Fifth " -- Coal Dealer) Operating
(Woman -- Renting Agent) Expense
(Sixth Man -- Janitor)

Announcers -- Government Housing Projects

(First Man
(Second "
(Third "
(Fourth "

Nathan Straus, Administrator, United States Housing Authority

ACT IISCENE 3 -- WHAT PRICE HOUSING?

(Spot up on LITTLE MAN and GUIDE
sitting on 2 step down right.
Scene played in front of blacks)

GUIDE

Say, that's a new one on me!.....

LITTLE MAN

Is it?

GUIDE

Never had anything like a rent strike in my day!...Any good come out of it? Did they get the rent cut? Did they get rid of the roaches? Did they?

LITTLE MAN

Well, er...

(looks at LOUDSPEAKER, helplessly)

LOUDSPEAKER

They did. In one case the rent was cut two dollars a month. In another, the landlord was forced to comply with the Multiple Dwelling Laws. In other cases rent increases have been prevented, painting done, drains repaired and roaches exterminated. The City-Wide Tenants' Council has on its record thousands of instances where repairs were made and rent adjusted only after action was taken!*

GUIDE

Well, well, well.

LITTLE MAN

(smiling happily)

Well, well, well.

(takes out paper and pencil)

I'll have to make a note of that. City-Wide Tenant's -----

(He does)

GUIDE

Then all you've got to do is join the union and all your troubles are over...

* "How Tenant Organization keeps down Rents and Improves Housing Conditions." A table for the month of November, 1937, issued by the City-Wide Tenants' Council, New York, N.Y. December 11, 1937.

LITTLE MAN

Well, not exactly....You see -- or -- Well, you see, all they can do for you is help keep the landlord from raising the rent, and see that he obeys the laws. But they can't give you light and sunshine and a decent place to live! You need new houses for that!

(He looks up at the LOUDSPEAKER for approbation)

LOUDSPEAKER

That's telling him, Angus!

(LITTLE MAN smiles)

GUIDE

Well, why haven't you got these new houses; why aren't they building new ones every day to replace the old ones?

(Spot on LANDLORD who enters) left, crosses to center)

LANDLORD

I'll tell you why.

LITTLE MAN

Oh, hello. Who're you?

LANDLORD

I'm the fellow who can answer that question. I'm a landlord.

LITTLE MAN

A landlord. Well, well.

(He introduces him to GUIDE)

Mister Guide, I want you to meet a landlord.

(GUIDE bows)

LANDLORD

Now the reason there's no incentive to the commercial builder to build for the low income group is this: there's no money in it.* That's simple, isn't it?

LITTLE MAN

(crosses center to LANDLORD)

But why is there no money in it? I don't want a marble palace. All I want is a little light and air, fair-sized rooms, and a few modern plumbing gadgets!

LANDLORD

You got any ideas what goes into the building and operation of a house?

LITTLE MAN

Sure. First, the land has to be bought....

* "A Housing Program for the United States," Nathan Straus, p.5 & 6

LANDLORD

Uh-huh.

LITTLE MAN

....and the contractor and laborers paid....

LANDLORD

That's right.

LITTLE MAN

....there's taxes and the janitor, and -- and --

LANDLORD

Go on.

LITTLE MAN

....and - and - well, I guess that's all.

LANDLORD

You guess that's all! Well, let me show you something!
(beckons off)

Hey, come here!

(Light up on FOURTEEN MEN and a WOMAN
who enter left and right. Music)

LITTLE MAN

(puzzled)

Say, who are all these people?

LANDLORD

Don't rush me. That's what I'm going to show you.

(to MEN and WOMAN who stand upstage)

Line up over here, where everybody can see you....That's right.

(THREE MEN come to apron step and
line up, left -- LANDOWNER, center --
FIRST BROKER, right, SECOND BROKER,
left)

(to LITTLE MAN and GUIDE)

Now, you two get out of the way...

(pause)

(LITTLE MAN and GUIDE stand at
2 step down right)

Now, I'm a philanthropic sort of guy, see, and I love my fellow
men. So I decide to build a house where they can have light -- and
air -- and -- and -- what else do you want?

LOUDSPEAKER

A few modern plumbing gadgets!

LANDLORD

A few modern plumbing gadgets....Now I don't want to make anything out
of it -- much! Just a couple of dollars a year so I don't have to depend
on the Old Age Security Act....

(crosses in front of line below apron step)

LANDLORD (Cont'd.)

....Now I want to rent my apartments for about seven or eight dollars a room*--Remember that, seven or eight dollars a room! -- that's for the low-income brackets....So I draw my money out of the bank and I go to work....

(crosses to MAN at end of line, left, who has just begun to whistle. This happens each time -- The MAN about to be approached whistles)

(to first in line)

I want to buy a piece of your land on the East Side.**

LANDOWNER

You'll have to consult my brokers -- Pepper, Salt, Mustard and Cider, 220 Broadway!

(indicates MAN next to him, center.
LANDLORD crosses)

LANDLORD

You Mister Pepper?

FIRST BROKER

No, I'm Salt. What can I do for you?

LANDLORD

I'd like to buy a piece of his property.

FIRST BROKER

Where's your broker?

LANDLORD

Do I have to have one, too?

FIRST BROKER

Certainly. I can highly recommend the firm of Beans, Beans, Beans and Spinach.

(indicates MAN next to him, right.
LANDLORD crosses)

LANDLORD

You Mister Beans?

SECOND BROKER

No, I'm Spinach. What can I do for you?

LANDLORD

I want to buy a piece of his property. Ask him how much he wants.

* Average rental for "First Houses" - \$6.05. "First Houses" can be considered as a yardstick for low-income rentals in New York City. Booklet - "First Houses," -- New York City Housing Authority, p.26

** Land buying transaction based on figures estimated by Real Estate Board of New York, 12 East 41st Street, N.Y.C., in a survey made October 1, 1936 - data furnished by National Association of Builders, Owners and Managers.

SECOND BROKER

(to FIRST BROKER)

How much?

FIRST BROKER

(to LANDOWNER)

How much?

LANDOWNER

(to FIRST BROKER)

Ten dollars a square foot!

FIRST BROKER

(to SECOND BROKER)

Ten fifty a square foot!

SECOND BROKER

(to LANDLORD)

Eleven dollars a square foot!

LANDLORD

(to SECOND BROKER)

But he said ten fifty!

SECOND BROKER

That's my commission!

LANDLORD

(to FIRST BROKER)

And he said ten dollars!

FIRST BROKER

That's my commission!

LANDLORD

(doubtfully)

Eleven dollars!

LANDOWNER

(poking FIRST BROKER in the ribs)

Tell him I just sold a small piece for twelve dollars.

FIRST BROKER

(poking SECOND BROKER)

He says he just sold a fairly large piece for sixteen dollars.

SECOND BROKER

(poking LANDLORD)

He says he just sold a square block for nineteen dollars!

LANDLORD

But eleven dollars! That's an awful lot of money!....Can't we shave it down just a little?

(He looks at SECOND BROKER who turns to FIRST BROKER, who turns to LANDOWNER)

LANDOWNER

Ten dollars, that's my price.

FIRST BROKER

Ten fifty, that's his price.

SECOND BROKER

Eleven dollars, that's his price.

(THREE MEN step back. After group has spoken they remain frozen in their last positions)

LANDLORD

(a deep sigh)

O.K. I'll take it.

(hands over money to SECOND BROKER)

Well, now I'm a man of property.

LITTLE MAN

What'd it cost you?

(TWO MEN step to apron step; they stand right -- FIRST BUILDING SUPPLY MAN, and left -- SECOND BUILDING SUPPLY MAN)

LANDLORD

Plenty.

(crosses to MAN right -- FIRST BUILDING SUPPLY MAN)

I want to build a house. Four stories high, walkup, plenty of light and air, and -- and --

LITTLE MAN

Plumbing gadgets!

LANDLORD

Yeah. How much for the materials?*

FIRST BUILDING SUPPLY MAN

Fifteen thousand dollars.

LANDLORD

Fifteen thousand! Too much.

FIRST BUILDING SUPPLY MAN

Why don't you try him?

(indicates left)

There may be a lot of sand in his cement but he's cheap.

LANDLORD

Thanks. I will.

(crosses to MAN, left a little tired)

Want to build a house. Four stories. Light. Air. Gadgets. How much?

* Average costs of material in 1936-37, furnished by Caldwell Wingate, Builders, 101 Park Ave., New York.

SECOND BUILDING SUPPLY MAN
 (looks at FIRST BUILDING SUPPLY MAN,
 inquiringly. FIRST BUILDING SUPPLY
 MAN holds up fifteen fingers. SECOND
 BUILDING SUPPLY MAN nods, LANDLORD
 suspecting something, swings around at
 FIRST MAN but he's too late)

Fifteen thousand.

LANDLORD

That's what he said.

SECOND BUILDING SUPPLY MAN

Did he? What a coincidence!

LANDLORD

He also said your cement was full of sand.

SECOND BUILDING SUPPLY MAN

That's O.K. So is his.

LANDLORD

(hesitant)

Well, I may as well go back to him. He saw me coming first.

(crosses back)

Here you are. Fifteen thousand.

(hands over money to FIRST BUILDING
 SUPPLY MAN and crosses to MAN who
 has come down and stands center, up
 from apron step)

You a contractor?

CONTRACTOR

Yeah.

LANDLORD

Do I have to repeat it all or did you hear me talking to them?

CONTRACTOR

I heard you.

LANDLORD

How much?

CONTRACTOR

Twenty-four thousand.

LANDLORD

(indignant)

Twenty-four -----

CONTRACTOR

That's right. My carpenters get twelve dollars a day.*

* Carpenters and Joiners District Council, 130 Madison Ave., New York.

LANDLORD

Twelve dollars a ----

LOUDSPEAKER

Don't let him get away with that one. Sure they get twelve dollars a day. And they probably worked three days last month!

LANDLORD

Oh, well

(starts counting out money and stops in consternation)

Say, I haven't got enough money!

(CONTRACTOR languidly turns away and starts whistling)

What'll I do?

CONTRACTOR

(stops whistling)

Try the bank.

(Steps up as TWO MEN come down and stand on apron step right and left)

LANDLORD

Thanks.

(crosses to MAN, left -- BANKER)

I want a mortgage.

BANKER

Sorry. Got too many!

LANDLORD

What'll I do?

BANKER

Try the Mortgage Company.

LANDLORD

Thanks.

(crosses to MAN, right -- MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT)

I want a mortgage.

MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT

Sure. We'll float bonds. Six percent.*

LANDLORD

Six percent!

MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT

Plus my commission!

LANDLORD

Your commission!.....O.K. Give me the money.

(MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT hands over money. LANDLORD crosses back to CONTRACTOR)

* New York State Mortgage Commission.

LANDLORD (Cont'd.)

Here you are. Twenty-four thou-----
 (stops, hears whistling of MAN,
 standing directly back of
 CONTRACTOR on 3 step. His
 hand is outstretched. The COL-
 LECTORS follow FIRST MAN, circling
 past the LANDLORD, all with their
 hands outstretched, while he, in
 bewildered fashion hands them money
 as they ask for it.)

Who're you?

FIRST MAN

Government, taxes.
 (LANDLORD pays him)

LANDLORD

Who're you?

SECOND MAN

State, taxes.
 (same business)

LANDLORD

Who're you?

THIRD MAN

City, taxes.
 (same business)

LANDLORD

Who're you?

FOURTH MAN

Insurance.
 (same business)

LANDLORD

Who're you?

FIFTH MAN

Coal.
 (same business)

LANDLORD

Who're you?

WOMAN

Renting Agent.
 (same business)

LANDLORD

Who're you?

SIXTH MAN

I'm the Janitor!
 (The circle freezes)

LANDLORD

Thank God!

(He goes down and sinks exhausted on
apron step center. There is a pause.....)

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, now what?

LANDLORD

Wait a minute, will you?

LANDLORD

(He takes out a sign: "APARTMENTS FOR
RENT," and hangs it around his neck.
LITTLE MAN seeing the sign, rushes to
center)

LITTLE MAN

Have you got an apartment to rent?

(LANDLORD still exhausted, nods)

Pretty fair-sized rooms?

LANDLORD

Uh-huh.

LITTLE MAN

-----and - er - modern plumbing gadgets?

LANDLORD

Uh-huh.

LITTLE MAN

(suddenly)

Got a three-room apartment left?

LANDLORD

Uh-huh.

LITTLE MAN

(incredulous)

Did you say, uh-huh?

LANDLORD

Uh-huh.

LITTLE MAN

(beside himself with excitement)

Now lemme get this straight -- fair-sized rooms, light, and airy, modern
gadgets - And you've got an apartment for me?

LANDLORD

Uh-huh.

LITTLE MAN

(same)

For the love of Mike, how much is the rent?

LANDLORD

Twenty-five dollars a room!

(Music)

BLACK OUT AND HOLD

LOUDSPEAKER

Wait a minute! Hold it! Don't blackout on that yet! Bring those lights up - full!

(they come up)

That's better. This scene isn't over yet!

(pause)

Now, Mister Landlord, we know that the conditions you showed us exist. They were a little exaggerated perhaps, but they exist...But we can't just let it go at that. We can't let people walk out of this theatre knowing the disease is there, but believing there's no cure. There is a cure!

LANDLORD

What is it?

LOUDSPEAKER

(pause)

You see, every one of those people who had his hand in your pocket while you were building that house, was inspired by the profit motive -- the Landowner, the Broker, the Building Supply Man, the Contractor, and you, too, you were all out to get yours -- and you did! ...But there's one thing you've got to stop taking profits on -- and that's human misery! If you can't build cheap houses -- and you've just proved that you can't -- then let somebody do it who can--and I mean the United States Government -- for instance,

(Enter left, MAN holding in front of him on a large board, a relief model of a housing project. Stands at 2 step, down left)

Chicago, Illinois.....

FIRST MAN

Government Housing Project -- Jane Addams Houses - \$7.38 per room per month!*......

(Exits)

(Enter SECOND MAN, down right, same business)

LOUDSPEAKER

Memphis, Tennessee.....

SECOND MAN

Government Housing Project -- Dixie Homes -- \$6.51 per room per month!**

(Exits)

(Enter THIRD MAN, down left -- same business)

* Congressional Record, August 13, 1937.

** Ibid.

LOUDSPEAKER

Detroit.....

THIRD MAN

Government Housing Project --- Brewster Houses - \$5.78 per room per month!*

(Exits)

(Enter FOURTH MAN, down right -- same business)

LOUDSPEAKER

Cleveland.....

FOURTH MAN

Government Housing Project -- Lakeview Terrace -- \$5.53 per room per month!**

(Exits)

LANDLORD

Did they say, "government?"

LANDOWNER

Government?

FIRST BROKER

(to CONTRACTOR)

Did he say, "government?"

LOUDSPEAKER

Yes, I said "government!"

LANDOWNER

But that's socialism!

SECOND BROKER

It's an invasion of private rights!

BANKER

It's contrary to economic laws!

MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT

By God, it's unconstitutional!

LOUDSPEAKER

It is, is it?....Let's hear what Nathan Straus, Administrator, United States Housing Authority has to say about that!

(Enter STRAUS left, crosses to center
and stands up from apron step)

*Congressional Record, August 13, 1937

**Ibid

STRAUS

There is no reform within my memory that has not been attacked as an invasion of private rights and as contrary to economic laws. There is usually the added comment that it's unconstitutional.....

(He bows to MORTGAGE COMPANY PRESIDENT)

....We have only to recall the history of the enactment of Workmen's Compensation Laws, of the Income Tax Laws, of the laws creating a Public Service Commission to curb improper practices of the Public Utility Corporations. In every one of these cases we were told that the new legislation was contrary to economic laws, in that it interfered with private initiative. In practically every case we were told that it was unconstitutional. Yet each of these reforms has been written into the laws of our land.*

(HOLD AND

BLACKOUT

*"A Housing Program for the United States" - Nathan Straus, P.12.

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT II

SCENE 4 -- GOVERNMENT HOUSING

CHARACTERS

Little Man

Guide

Loudspeaker

United States Senate

Group of three Senators)
" " two ") Stage right

Hon. William E. Borah-- Idaho)
" Robert F. Wagner-- New York) Center

Hon. C. O. Andrews-- Florida)
" Harry F. Byrd-- Virginia) Stage left
" Millard E. Tydings--Maryland)
Group of two Senators

Vice-President, John N. Garner

Clerk of Senate

ACT IISCENE 4 -- GOVERNMENT HOUSING

(Spot on LITTLE MAN and GUIDE at 2 step down right. Scene played in front of blacks)

LITTLE MAN

(pacing, excitedly)

Five dollars a room, six dollars a room....Lakeview Terrace*.....
First Houses**... That's the kind of place I want to live in!

GUIDE

Well, why don't you?

LITTLE MAN

Didn't you hear what he said?

(points to LOUDSPEAKER)

My chances of getting a flat in one of 'em are about three thousand six hundred to one. THREE THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED TO ONE!***

GUIDE

Well, why don't they build more of 'em?

LITTLE MAN

Why don't they build--

(stops short in amazement, then)

Say, that's right! Why don't they?

GUIDE

I don't know. I'm asking you... You - er still have a Congress, don't you?

LITTLE MAN

Certainly we've got a Congress!

GUIDE

Do they - er - still pass laws?

LITTLE MAN

Certainly they still pass laws!

GUIDE

Well, what're they doing about it?

LITTLE MAN

What are they -- say ---- Seems to me I remember reading something about...

(to LOUDSPEAKER)

Hey! What's this about a Housing Bill they passed some time last summer?

* Congressional Record - August 13, 1937.

** Average rental for "First Houses" \$6.05 per room, per month-- booklet, "First Houses", p. 26, New York City Housing Authority.

*** Based on figures from New York City Housing Authority.

(Lights come up on five groups of SENATORS and VICE-PRESIDENT GARNER. The groups stand stage right, center, and stage left-- a group of three at 2 step down right, a group of two upstage right; two Senators center, a group of three down left, and a group of two up left. VICE-PRESIDENT GARNER stands on 2 step down left)

LOUDSPEAKER

February 27, 1937....The Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill is introduced in the Senate!* The Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill;

(Enter CLERK of SENATE. He stands down left at 2 step)

CLERK

To create a United States Housing Authority, to provide financial assistance to the States and the political subdivisions thereof for the elimination of unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions; for the development of decent, safe and sanitary dwellings for families of low income; and for the reduction of unemployment and the stimulation of business activity....For these purposes there shall be made available, the sum of one billion dollars**

(Exits)

LOUDSPEAKER

Senator William E. Borah of Idaho.

BORAH

(stands left center)

Mr. President....

GARNER

Does the Senator from New York yield to the Senator from Idaho?***

WAGNER

(stands right center, facing BORAH)

Certainly.

BORAH

Is the Senator going to discuss the question of causes of slums? Why do we have these awful degraded conditions?****

LOUDSPEAKER

Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York.

WAGNER

I think it is a very simple matter. It is because of the low incomes received by the individuals who live in the slums. That is the fundamental difficulty. If overnight we could increase their incomes by a more fair distribution of the wealth of the country, we would not have any slums!*****

* New York Times, February 25, 1937.

** Ibid

*** Congressional Record - Senate, August 2, 1937, p. 10358.

**** Ibid

***** Ibid

LOUDSPEAKER

Senator C. O. Andrews of Florida.

ANDREWS

(stands down left)

Mr. President, I should like to ask the Senator from New York where the people who live in the slums come from.*

WAGNER

(turning toward ANDREWS)

A great many of them have been here a long time. What does the Senator mean by, "Where do they come from?" Whether they have come from some other country?***

ANDREWS

I think we ought not to offer any inducement to people to come in from our country or foreign countries or anywhere else and take advantage of our government in supplying them with homes. For instance, if we examine the birth records in New York, we will find that most of the people there in the slums were not born in New York, but the bright lights have attracted them from everywhere, and that is one reason why there are so many millions in New York without homes!***

LOUDSPEAKER

Despite his position during the debate, Senator Andrews voted for and supported the Bill in its final form.****

BORAH

Mr. President....

(Enter CLERK left. He hands GARNER a slip of paper. Three raps of a gavel are heard. CLERK exits)

GARNER

(reads)

The appropriation for the Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill has been reduced from one billion to seven hundred million dollars!*****

LOUDSPEAKER

Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia.

BYRD

(stands down left in group with ANDREWS)

Mr. President, I offer an amendment, the purpose of which is to prevent the extravagance which has occurred in other homestead projects built throughout the country....This amendment is presented for the purpose of preventing the expenditure of more than four thousand dollars per family unit.*****

WAGNER

Those who are not in sympathy with our efforts to do something for the one third of the people of the United States who are ill-housed--something to give these unfortunate people who have not sufficient income to enable them to live in decent quarters a chance for life-- will feel that the amendment of the Senator from Virginia ought to be adopted and the bill defeated. I say very candidly to the Senate that if the amendment of the Senator from Virginia is adopted it will kill the bill.***

* Congressional Record - Senate, Aug. 2, 1937, p. 10368-9

** Ibid *** Ibid **** Ibid, August 6, 1937, p. 8373.

***** New York Times, July 23, 1937. ***** Congressional Record-Senate Aug. 4, 1937, p. 10548-55. ***** Ibid

(Enter CLERK down left. He hands GARNER another slip of paper. Three raps of the gavel are heard)

GARNER

(reads)

The appropriation for the Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill has been reduced from seven hundred million to five hundred twenty-six million dollars!*

(His voice fades and lights dim down as a large screen rises up. Blacks out. The voices of the SENATORS fade but are heard debating in a vague sort of mumbo jumbo pattern under the LOUDSPEAKER. Music)

BYRD

Does the Senator think this low income group about which he is talking-- and I am thoroughly in accord with that----

WAGNER

If the Senator is in accord with that, he should not suggest this amendment because he may be able to do in Virginia what he suggests, but there will be few areas in the United States where a room can be built for a thousand dollars, and under the Senator's amendment this benefit would be limited to a few localities!**

LOUDSPEAKER

Senator Millard E. Tydings of Maryland.

TYDINGS

(stands down left in group with ANDREWS and BYRD)

Mr. President, I think the amendment of the Senator from Virginia is liberal. If these people cannot be rehabilitated at four thousand dollars per family, then we had better give up slum clearance!***

(while debate is going on second series of movies of City appears**** with running commentary by)

LOUDSPEAKER

(AREAS OF NEW YORK including Brooklyn Bridge)

This is New York City in 1938, considered by many to be the wealthiest city in the world. Skyscrapers, Wall Street, the Empire State. In some part of this area seven million people***** have a place they call "home".

(PARK AVENUE - and sign "NO DOGS ALLOWED")

Park Avenue where some of America's millionaires have their homes.

(PUSHCARTS)

The same Park Avenue - further along. The rent is much cheaper here. Dogs run all over the place and nobody minds.

(TENEMENTS)

Slums. The lower East Side.

(AIRSHAFT)

Air and sunshine, primary requirements for growing children. --

* N. Y. Times- Aug. 17,1937.

** Congressional Record - Senate, Aug. 4,1937 - p.10548-55.

*** Ibid.

****Movies consist of shots taken by N.Y. City Housing Authority and those taken "on location" by Director and Technical Staff "...one third of a nation..." Winter-1937. Continuity by Living Newspaper technical staff.Ed.***** N.Y. City Health Dep't. Quarterly Bulletin - 1937.

LOUDSPEAKER (Cont'd.)

(DIRTY YARD)

To avoid being hit by automobiles children are advised to play in their backyards.

(MAN EMERGES FROM CELLAR DOOR)

Yes, he lives down there.

(REAR HOUSE)

See those vertical ladders on the fire escapes? How would you like to climb down one of those in the middle of the night when a fire breaks out?

(BARRED WINDOWS)

Or try to get through these barred windows.

(FIRE SCENE)

And there are fires. How many lives were lost in this one? How many people were trapped in the halls? How many old men and women missed their footing on those vertical ladders? How many firemen were killed when the wall caved in?

(DIRTY YARD)

A home with a view.

(TWO WOMEN ENTERING TOILET ROOM)

Out of a sick-bed two flights down.

(OLD-FASHIONED WATER CLOSETS)

Modern plumbing -- more modern plumbing.

(GARBAGE CANS AND A DEAD RAT)

Out of the slums of New York City ... typhus ... meningitis ... tuberculosis.

(FAUCET IN YARD)

One faucet for the whole house and that's in the yard.

(GARBAGE CANS)

A million and three quarter* people look at these every day of their lives. Garbage...filth...disease...crime...slums!

(Voices of SENATORS are raised higher and higher in dispute as one group right shouts: "PASS THE BILL! PASS THE BILL!" The other group left shouts: "POINT OF ORDER." Movies end with projection of hand with gavel in it, descending, then crash of gavel, then)

GARNER

The Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill, with an appropriation of five hundred twenty-six million dollars, is passed!**

(Blacks come in; Music)

BLACKOUT

* "Housing or Else", p. 8 Langdon W. Post, New York City Housing Authority - 1936

** New York Times, August 22, 1937.

"...one third of a nation..."

ACT II

SCENE 5 - LOOKING FORWARD

CHARACTERS

Loudspeaker

Little Man

Langdon W. Post - Former Tenement House Commissioner, New York City -
Voice

Helen Alfred, Secretary and Executive Director, National Public
Housing Conference

Hon. Fiorello H. La Guardia, Mayor, New York City

Landowner, 1800 -- Same as Act I, Scene 3

Landlord, 1938 -- Same as Act II, Scene 3

Mrs. Buttonkooper

Tenants of the HOUSE -- Same as Act I, Scene 1.

ACT IISCENE 5 - LOOKING FORWARD

(After short musical interlude follow spot picks out the LITTLE MAN, down right. He paces agitated, then crosses stage, to center)

LOUDSPEAKER

Hey!

(no answer; he continues pacing)

Hey! What are you doing?

LITTLE MAN

(without stopping)

Arithmetic.

LOUDSPEAKER

Arithmetic?

LITTLE MAN

That's right.

(He stops; leans forward, intently)

I suppose you noticed how they cut that Bill down to half of what Senator Wagner originally asked for.*

LOUDSPEAKER

I noticed it.

LITTLE MAN

Of course, 526 million is a lot of money.

LOUDSPEAKER

Of course.

LITTLE MAN

I could do a lot of things with 526 million.

LOUDSPEAKER

Sure you could. But where does the arithmetic come in?

(Blacks in)

LITTLE MAN

Well, I'm taking ten per cent of 526 million --

LOUDSPEAKER

You mean five hundred million -- twenty-six million goes for maintenance---**

* Original appropriation Wagner-Steagall Bill, \$1,000,000,000. -Ed.

** Wagner-Steagall Act as passed, -Ed.

LITTLE MAN

All right, five hundred million. Ten per cent of that is fifty million -- which is all that any one State can get under the terms of the Bill.* Right?

LOUDSPEAKER

Right.

LITTLE MAN

Well, I'm taking that fifty million and trying to fit it into the New York City Housing problem.

LOUDSPEAKER

But you can't do that.

LITTLE MAN

You're telling me!

LOUDSPEAKER

That fifty million is for the whole State.** According to Mayor La Guardia the most New York City can hope to get is thirty million.***

LITTLE MAN

As I was saying. I'm taking that thirty million and trying to fit it into the New York City Housing problem.

LOUDSPEAKER

That's fine. Before you begin, let me show you what the New York City Housing problem really is -- in dollars and cents. This is Langdon Post, former Tenement House Commissioner.

VOICE OF POST

A conservative estimate of the cost of removing the slums in New York City alone is about two billion dollars!****

LOUDSPEAKER

Two billion dollars! There's your problem in arithmetic, Mr. Button-kooper. How to make thirty million equal to two billion.

LITTLE MAN

(with paper and pencil)

That's what I'm working on.

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, what's the answer?

* Wagner-Steagall Act as passed. -Ed.

** Ibid

*** New York Post, January 27, 1938.

**** Letter to Living Newspaper from Langdon W. Post - Dec.10,1937

LITTLE MAN

A headache.

(He starts pacing again; he stops)

Do you realize that the Wagner Bill at the end of four years will have solved less than two per cent of the Housing problem in New York City? Do you realize that, at that rate it will take us more than two hundred years before every slum in New York has been demolished?*** -- And by that time the ones they're building now will be slums and we'll be back just where we started.

(He crosses down; then, intently)

Remember, I want to live in one of those new developments! I don't give a damn about my great-great grandchildren!

(pause, then, more composed)

You know, when I heard all those Senators arguing, I got a funny feeling. I thought maybe I was crazy..... Tell me, isn't there anybody else who's taken the trouble to figure this thing out? Doesn't anybody know what the score is?

LOUDSPEAKER

Most of the local Housing authorities have studied the matter.

LITTLE MAN

Well, let's have it! What do they say? Let's hear somebody say something.

LOUDSPEAKER

Helen Alfred, Secretary and Executive Director of the National Public Housing Conference.

(Spot on MISS ALFRED, at 2 step, down right)

MISS ALFRED

The Wagner-Steagall Housing Act lays a permanent foundation for the too long delayed attack on dangerous and unsanitary housing conditions prevalent throughout the country. But in view of the great need for new accommodations, the sum stipulated is pitifully inadequate.***

(Light out on MISS ALFRED. Spot on LA GUARDIA, down left)

LOUDSPEAKER

The Honorable Fiorello H. La Guardia, Mayor of New York City.

LA GUARDIA

The Wagner-Steagall Housing Bill with its provisions for 500 million dollars for rehousing the nation is a step in the right direction, but only a step -- a drop in the bucket!**** It is therefore my intention to start a building program aside and apart from, and in addition to the Federal program.....I have therefore requested the Board of Estimate to be prepared to act upon a resolution appropriating funds to

* Thirty million dollars is one and one-half per cent of two billion dollars. -Ed.

** At rate of thirty million dollars in four years, it will take 356 years for the total appropriation to equal two billion dollars.-Ed.

*** Interview with Miss Alfred - Dec. 7, 1937.

**** Speech made at conference of Mayors, Washington, D. C., Nov. 17, 1937.

LA GUARDIA (Cont'd.)

take care of interest charges and amortization of capital investments for the construction of low rent houses....Remember, slums cannot be wished away, nor even legislated away. THE ANSWER IS BUILDING! *
(Lights out on LA GUARDIA)

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, there you are. Feel any better?

LITTLE MAN

No--- but at least I know that if I'm crazy, I'm in pretty good company! According to all those fellows we're not much better off than we were before....

LOUDSPEAKER

Less than two per cent better, according to your arithmetic.

LITTLE MAN

Well, what are we going to do about it?
(excitedly)

Are we going to take it lying down like mice? Or, are we men?
(starts taking off his coat)

LOUDSPEAKER

What are you going to do now?

LITTLE MAN

I'm going to find the guy who's responsible for these slum conditions! I'll tell him something all right, all right!

LOUDSPEAKER

Do you know who it is?

LITTLE MAN

Certainly I know who it is! What do you think I came to see this show for!

(Goes to wings right, and leads out to center, LANDOWNER 1800 - Act I. Scene 3)

There you are!

(pointing to tenement)

Do you see that? Look at it! You started all this when you began to speculate in land!

LANDOWNER

All I did was sit. Remember?

LITTLE MAN

Yeah, I remember. And while you sat the town grew up around you. Land values went up, and because people had to have a place to live in, this is the result!

LANDOWNER

Well, what are you going to do about it?

* New York Post, January 27, 1938.

LITTLE MAN

(taken aback)

Huh?

LANDOWNER

(belligerently)

I said, what are you going to do about it? Do you think you can take the land away from my descendants and make it public property? Do you?

LITTLE MAN

(doubtfully)

No - o.

LANDOWNER

That's all I wanted to know! Good-bye.

(He crosses off, right leaving a bewildered
LITTLE MAN, down center)

LOUDSPEAKER

You certainly told him something, all right, all right.

LITTLE MAN

(sheepishly)

He was too quick for me....But there's another guy I'm going to get my hooks into and he won't get away so fast!

(crosses to wings, left, shouting)

Hey, come on out here!

(He emerges, bringing on the LANDLORD
of Act 2, Scene 3)

You're to blame for that! You and the high rents you collect every month! Do you know the percentage of income used for rent is higher here than in any other country on the face of the earth? *

LANDLORD

Well, what are you going to do about it?

LITTLE MAN

I'll tell you what we're going to do! We're going to march right up to Albany and get some emergency rent laws passed! That'll take care of you all right!

LANDLORD

(calmly)

Is that all?

LITTLE MAN

(a bit shaken by his calm)

Well - er - isn't it enough?

* "Yearbook of Labor Statistics" - 1935-1936 - International Labor Office, League of Nations, Geneva.

"American Public Housing through British Eyes", Richard Reiss in, "Housing Officials Yearbook", 1936

LANDLORD

I don't think so.... As I recall, you fellows marched up to Albany in 1920, 1924 and 1926.* In each case Emergency Rent Laws were passed.
(suddenly)

Are you paying any less for your apartment today than you did then?

LITTLE MAN

No.

LANDOWNER

That's all I wanted to know! Good-bye.
(He crosses off)

LOUDSPEAKER

You certainly got your hooks into him all right.

LITTLE MAN

Let's not talk about it.

LOUDSPEAKER

Of course those emergency rent laws did prevent rents from going still higher.

LITTLE MAN

(explosively)

Sure they did!

LOUDSPEAKER

Well, why didn't you tell him that!

LITTLE MAN

He - er - he was too quick for me.

LOUDSPEAKER

I see... Well, what next?

LITTLE MAN

Let's see now...there was the Landowner - and the Landlord - and - er - I guess that's all.

LOUDSPEAKER

Isn't there something you've forgotten, Mr. Buttonkooper?

LITTLE MAN

What is it?

LOUDSPEAKER

How about the thing that's made these slum conditions possible for the last hundred and fifty years? The thing that makes people like you and everybody else sit back and say, "Well, this is the way it always has been and this is the way it's always going to be!"

LITTLE MAN

What thing is that?

* New York State Statutes - Municipal Reference Library.

LOUDSPEAKER

...it's called "inertia."

LITTLE MAN

Inertia?

(He looks puzzled)

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(rising from seat in audience)

Don't look so surprised, Angus. That's just what it is - inertial
(Spot picks her up as she comes down aisle
and up on stage, left. Stands facing LITTLE
MAN)

You know about these conditions and so do I and so does everybody
else that lives in 'em - but we don't do anything about it!

LITTLE MAN

By golly, that's right. According to what we've seen here tonight
people have been going around for a hundred years or more - taking
notes, making surveys - but nobody's ever done anything!

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

That's it...What good are all those surveys and speeches to us when
we've got to live in a place almost as bad as that twenty-four hours
a day! ... What good are all those new laws that nobody obeys when
maybe those kids are going to turn out to be crooks or murderers!--

LITTLE MAN

Sure! And what good are all those Housing Bills that take care of
less than two per cent of the trouble. What good are they when we
still have this?

(points to tenement)

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Look at it - and don't forget - that isn't only New York. It's
Philadelphia and Chicago and Boston and St. Louis! ...According to
a man named Roosevelt, it's one third of a nation!* One third of a
nation is just like that in 1938!

LITTLE MAN

(pause)

Well, what are we going to do about it?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

I don't know yet, -- but it seems to me ---

(suddenly)

Angus, how much did you say that Wagner Bill was for?

LITTLE MAN

526 million.

* Second Inaugural Address. Hon. Franklin D. Roosevelt, President
of the United States, Washington, D.C., Jan. 20, 1937.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

526 million - for four years! Why was that bill cut down from a billion dollars, Angus?

LOUDSPEAKER

Because they're trying to balance the budget.

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Balance the budget? What with? Human lives? Misery? Disease?

(A whistle is heard as)

LOUDSPEAKER

FLASH.* New York, February 24, the cracking walls in three buildings at Avenue C and 12th Street caused all the tenants to flee for their lives. A few minutes after they had abandoned their homes and possessions, two of the buildings collapsed.**

LOUDSPEAKER

FLASH, New York, March 9th, thirty men, women and children were forced to flee for their lives when the walls in another old-law tenement at 82 St. Marks Place began to crack. This is the SECOND case of the kind in the last two weeks.***

LOUDSPEAKER

FLASH, New York, March 12th, this afternoon at 843 St. Nicholas Avenue, Manhattan, a fire broke out in a FIRE ESCAPELESS three story tenement. Leaping from a second floor window, a woman was impaled on a spiked fence and a three year old child was asphyxiated. Mayor La Guardia visited the scene and promised a thorough investigation.****

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Say, Mister, how much was the appropriation for the Army and Navy?

LOUDSPEAKER

The appropriation for the Army and Navy for the last four years was three billion, 125 million dollars.*****

* News flashes of events that have occurred are used--calamities that are traceable to bad housing. The three above flashes have been used to date.-Ed.

** Reported by Research Worker on Living Newspaper Staff, 2-24-38.

*** Daily Mirror, March 9, 1938.

**** New York Sun, March 12, 1938.

***** Foreign Policy report - February 15, 1937., Vol.12, No.23, Foreign Policy Association.

LITTLE MAN

Three billion, 125 million dollars. Why - why - that's more than enough money to clean out every slum in New York!
(pacing excitedly)

Well, what are we going to do?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

(interrupting)

You know what we're going to do-- you and me? We're going to holler. And we're going to keep on hollering until they admit in Washington it's just as important to keep a man alive as it is to kill him!

LITTLE MAN

Will that do any good?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Sure it will. If we do it loud enough!

LITTLE MAN

You think they'll hear us?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

They'll hear us all right if we all do it together-- you and me and La Guardia and Senator Wagner and the Housing Authorities and the Tenant Leagues and everybody who lives in a place like that!

(pointing to tenement. TENANTS start to fill the tenement as lights come up on it)

LITTLE MAN

(excitedly)

All right, all right, when do we begin?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

Right now.

LITTLE MAN

Now?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

NOW!

(She crosses down center)

(shouting)

We want a decent place to live in! I want a place that's clean and fit for a man and woman and kids! CAN YOU HEAR ME - YOU IN WASHINGTON OR ALBANY OR WHEREVER YOU ARE! GIVE ME A DECENT PLACE TO LIVE IN! GIVE ME A HOME! A HOME!

LITTLE MAN

Do you think they'll hear us?

MRS. BUTTONKOOPER

And if we don't make them hear us you're going to have just what you've always had --- slums-- disease-- crime-- juvenile delinquency...and... and...

2-5-10

(TENANTS start activities as in Act I -
Scene 1. Smoke starts to appear and
begins to rise. Suddenly the fire sirens
are heard. Pandemonium as fire scene is
re-enacted. The entire scene builds to
a crescendo topped by flames, smoke, and
the MAN cowering on the fire escape.
Music)

LOUDSPEAKER

Ladies and gentlemen, this might be Boston, New York, St. Louis,
Chicago, Philadelphia -- but just let's call it, "...one third of
a nation..."

BLACKOUT

CURTAIN

HOUSE LIGHTS