

THE INTERMISSION

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. 42nd STREET-TIMES SQUARE SUBWAY STATION - DAY

N/Q/R/W UPTOWN-BOUND PLATFORM

It is a gloomy, rainy SUNDAY. We SEE the "WATCH THE GAP" stencil ahead of the yellow caution strip. THE "N" TRAIN APPROACHES.

NELLA ALLEN

is a FAIR-SKINNED, MIXED-RACE actor. She LIP-READS from a stage play-script. Lines from the character "MARIÉ" - the opening stanza of the poem, "Antigonish" by WILLIAM HUGHES MEARNS - are HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Don't do it!

FROM BEHIND - RAIN-SLICK, BLACK-GLOVED HANDS push Nella in front of the train.

Nella's BLOOD SPLATTERS off the TRAIN CREW'S CAB. The Plexiglas pane CRACKS.

The black-gloved hands CLENCH INTO SHAKING FISTS.

BYSTANDERS react to the scene. The man with the black-gloved hands DISAPPEARS into the crowd, past M.T.A. RADIO CHATTER: "Twelve-nine! Twelve-nine!" "Jumper!"

SECONDS EARLIER

Nella's upper-body CRASHES HARD against the TRAIN CREW'S CAB window. SHE DIES.

INT. TRAIN CREW'S CAB - DAY

Nella's face is PULVERIZED. BLOOD AND VISCERA SMEARS in front of the (Black) motorman, ISAAC, who SCREAMS.

INT. N/Q/R/W UPTOWN-BOUND PLATFORM – CONTINUOUS

Multiple yellow "POLICE SCENE DO NOT CROSS" tapes WHIP ACROSS the lead subway car.

INT. N/Q/R/W DOWNTOWN-BOUND PLATFORM – DAY

OPPOSITE PLATFORM – the "N" TRAIN PULLS IN. LOUIS, a Black playwright (actor and director), DISEMBARKS. A soaked UMBRELLA and a folded NEWSPAPER are in his hands.

Louis is oblivious to Nella's death in the station.

LOUIS

deliberately LEANS HIS SHOULDER, bumps into SUBWAY PASSENGERS, RUNNING DOWN THE STAIRS to catch the train.

SUBWAY TRAIN – CONTINUOUS

The doors close. Some of the COMMUTERS body-checked by Louis watch as he TRIPS OVER broken BODEGA UMBRELLAS discarded on the platform. They POINT, LAUGH as Louis nearly SLIPS into the path of the departing train.

LOUIS

Fuck! Fuck you!

(to the taunting passengers)

Y'all must be jelly 'cause jam

don't hate like that!

Louis WATCHES as the TRAIN PULLS OFF.

He unfolds his newspaper, DISCARDS EVERYTHING except the "ARTS" section.

LOUIS'S P.O.V. – SUNDAY NEWSPAPER

Louis READS OVER the "Obsequies" theater roundup, SEES the closing notice for his play, "The Plague Spring." Tonight's final performance, presented by the PLAYGROUND MONITORS ASSEMBLY at TEATRO DANTE ON BROADWAY, starts at 6 p.m.

Louis's BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH (manipulated for a LIGHTER SKIN TONE) is next to the article written by drama critic and theater columnist VAN PALLANDT.

EXT. 42nd STREET-TIMES SQUARE SUBWAY STATION — DAY

STAIRCASE TO SIDEWALK — MOVING

Louis exits the station. He holds the newspaper under his eyes, so that his picture is VISIBLE TO PASSERSBY. Nobody recognizes him.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE ON BROADWAY — DAY

Louis approaches the BOX OFFICE WINDOW. A taped-together POSTER (omitting a name next to "Directed By") for "The Plague Spring" is on display.

A COMMOTION RISES as Louis gets close to the LOBBY DOORS.

PROTESTOR/DEUCA (O.S.)

Do not support this play! Ask for
a refund! Tell them why!

Louis walks through PASSERSBY WITH BLACK UMBRELLAS, BUMPS into the lead white female protestor DEUCA.

LOUIS

Shit. Hi, Deuca.

DEUCA

Stop the normalization of sexual
violence in American theatre! Oh,
hi, Louis.

LOUIS

I'm not going to do that, Deuca.

DEUCA

Of course, you're not. What wildly
successful misogynist ever took
NO! for an answer?

LOUIS

Be respectful, Deuca. This is
America! Get a job!

Deuca indicates the STRIKING STAGEHANDS CIRCLING the
sidewalk in front of Teatro Dante.

She SHOVES TWO LEAFLETS – one protesting "The Plague
Spring," another detailing grievances by the stagehand's
union – into Louis's hand.

DEUCA

These guys have jobs. They've been
working without a contract since
the end of June.

LOUIS

It'll be resolved when the next
show loads in. Stop protesting in
front of my play. Teatro Dante
isn't covered by this contract.

DEUCA

Solidarity, Louis. Break a leg!
Break both your legs!

Louis walks past Deuca, TURNS THE CORNER to the STAGE
DOOR.

INT. TEATRO DANTE – ASA GRIGGS CANDLER STUDIO (MAINSTAGE) –
NIGHT

OPENING CREDITS

TITLES are PRINTED, PRODUCTION COMPANY LOGOS appear on the
covers and pages of "Playbill" theatre programs being read
by the AUDIENCE.

LOUIS (V.O.)

Fossey! What do you have for me?

INT. BACKSTAGE — CROSSOVER — DAY

Louis LOOKS AT HIS WATCH. The time reads: "16:19."

Louis approaches the stage manager and prop master, FOSSEY, a wiry white man in his 50's. Fossey is checking the mechanics of a WORKING CROSSBOW.

FOSSEY

I've almost got this baby
perfected.

Fossey loads a bolt, an ARROW with a BLUNTED FOAM TIP, into the crossbow. He aims it right at Louis's face.

LOUIS

Between the eyes? It doesn't work
at all, does it?

Fossey PULLS THE TRIGGER. The arrow SNAPS IN HALF.

FOSSEY

It doesn't work yet. Safety first!
I wouldn't have shot you.

LOUIS

I hate guns, Fossey. I've had to
use one in the denouement every
performance since the previews. I
even rewrote the script to reflect
that we use a gun onstage.

FOSSEY

I know, I know, Louis. I'm sorry.
I am getting close.

LOUIS

Bring back your archery lessons
from summer camp. Your motivation:
force me to throw out my shitty
typewriter. Or Saint Cristofer
suffers no fucks on the next show.

FOSSEY

I get the point, Louis.
(looks over Louis's shoulder)
And you've got bigger problems.

Louis LOOKS OVER his shoulder, SEES the play's set designer, white male, frustrated sculptor TURNBULL, STOMPING towards him. Fossey SLIPS AWAY.

TURNBULL

Louis! Saint Louis! You know who's a tough act to follow? Trying to follow the money by following you. You're a Goddamned dead end.

LOUIS

And yet, you're in my face.

TURNBULL

I created five magnificent sculptures for this production, your "Plague Spring."

LOUIS

That would be, "THE Plague Spring."

TURNBULL

Because the writer is king! But I am not young, numb and full of kingdom, Louis. You have sold my work - my art.

LOUIS

Per our agreement. Per your negotiations with Saint Cristofer.

TURNBULL

We never finalized the negotiations for the percentages, Louis. I had to read -
 (grabs at Louis's newspaper)
 - in the "Arts" section that all five sculptures have been sold. Where's my money? "What" is my money? It's closing night.

LOUIS

Your money issue is with Saint Cristofer, Turnbull. I'm just the rapper - he's the D-J!

TURNBULL

Bullshit. You two are peas in an IKEA pod. Are you cheating me on the sales? Are you pocketing more than you're letting on?

LOUIS

No. Are you donating your auction proceeds to arts programs, like you promised?

(Turnbull goes silent)

And stop calling them "sculptures." This is all set design. I'm actually concerned about inherent vice for the collectors and their galleries. Especially "The Dead Horse" – that was a preexisting work. It was never meant to spend weeks on an active stage.

TURNBULL

Don't you worry, Louis. My work is sturdy, brother! Um. Sir.

Louis BRUSHES PAST Turnbull.

INT. PROSCENIUM – SAFETY CURTAIN – NIGHT

LOUIS – MOVING

Louis observes the CAST ENSEMBLE (five Black actors, five white actors) doing their warm-up exercises – STRETCHES, VOCAL RUNS, COFFEE.

The Black cast members are three men – O'HARRIS (redbone), KIDWELL and BRADSHAW – and two women, SIBBLIES and ALESHA, the play's Tragic Mulatto.

The white cast members mirror the Blacks: three men – STAPLES, ARCHER and POMPOSELLO – and two women, HINDS and KNOTT.

Staples is a Method actor, in partial costume: his VINYL BALACLAVA has a zippered mouth-guard, representing his LIPS STAPLED TOGETHER.

The Black and white cliques (separated by design) run through a SINGLE LINE OF DIALOGUE done four ways: at NORMAL SPEED, at SUPER-SPEED, at EXTREMELY SLOW SPEED and in REVERSE.

O'HARRIS, SIBBLIES, KIDWELL,
BRADSHAW AND ALESHA
(in the King's English)
"We're going to keep killing you
until you can't die anymore."

HINDS, KNOTT, STAPLES, ARCHER
AND POMPOSELLO
(in Ebonic pentameter)
"We's gon' keeps on killin' yuh
'til yuh cain't dies no' mo'...."

Louis meets up with the play's co-lead, Black prima donna actress MARIÉ. They trade EUROPEAN KISSES.

LOUIS
Enchanté, Marié.

MARIÉ
Your latest light-skinned pork
chop: Nella, Louis? She's yet to
show her face.

LOUIS
Well, that is a problem now, isn't
it? She just left the theatre a
few hours ago, after -

MARIÉ
Nella - ugh, her name is "Nella."
She's my understudy and she's
supposed to step in for Sibblies,
Hinds, Knott and Alesha.

The play's producer, ST. CRISTOFER, approaches Louis and Marié. He has just arrived from being outside, unprotected, in the rain.

St. Cristofer is Black and wears dark glasses. FACIAL SCARS are VISIBLE beneath the lenses.

ST. CRISTOFER

I just met with her this morning.
She had to go home to prepare.
She's probably just running late.

St. Cristofer DISPOSES of ill-fitting, BLACK NITRATE GLOVES.

MARIÉ

Hello, Saint Cristofer, our patron
saint of per diem.

ST. CRISTOFER

Hello, Marié, Our Lady of
Perpetual M-F-A from Yale.

Marié and St. Cristofer exchange European kisses. St. Cristofer turns to Louis.

ST. CRISTOFER (CONT'D)

Were those some of our stagehands
on the picket line out front?

LOUIS

We're gonna need extra hands to
get through tonight.

ST. CRISTOFER

(indicates the white actors)
We've got ten extra hands.

LOUIS

(to Marié)

We're not going to need an
understudy unless somebody drops
dead onstage.

ST. CRISTOFER

Imagine how shocked I was when
Nella was waiting here to meet
with me. That my playwright
auditioned and hired her —
especially without me.

MARIÉ

A new understudy on closing night,
Louis?

LOUIS

You'll survive the night,
understudy or no.

(to St. Cristofer)

Guess who I saw at brunch today?

FLASHBACK - EXT. OSTERIA VIRTUOSISSIMA RESTAURANT - THEATER
DISTRICT - DAY

FACADE - VIEW THROUGH WINDOW

KRISTA THE (Black) MAÎTRE D'HÔTEL leads Louis, arriving
alone, to his table.

FLASHBACK - INT. OSTERIA VIRTUOSISSIMA - DINING ROOM - DAY

Louis hands his MENU back to the (Black) waiter NOBILE, who
goes to place the order.

Louis FLIPS THROUGH THE PAGES of "American Thespian"
magazine. A STOCK PHOTO of Louis (LIGHTENED, same as the
Sunday local "Arts" section) is captioned: "LOUIS HATES
YOUR CRACKER ASS." (byline: PEERLESS DOTHAN)

He LOOKS ACROSS THE ROOM, SPOTS another solo diner: older
white male drama critic/columnist VAN PALLANDT.

VAN PALLANDT'S TABLE

Van Pallandt is mid-meal. He ignores the food on his plate,
FURIOUSLY SCRIBBLES in a MOLESKINE reporter's notebook,
barely concealed in his lap.

Van Pallandt's EYES ARE FOCUSED on a PARTY OF FOUR WHITE
GUYS, two tables away.

This group, ISHERWOOD, COTE and ARMOND, includes Van
Pallandt's newspaper's anonymous food critic PETE BAKER
(dressed in hipster FEDORA, WARBY PARKER eyewear). His
table's ENTREES have just arrived.

Pete Baker LOOKS BACK at Van Pallandt, NODS. Van Pallandt LOOKS UP from his notebook, SEES LOUIS STANDING in front of him.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Usually we're spending our lazy Sunday afternoon at Orso, knocking back grappa and re-reading our old reviews.

VAN PALLANDT

Louis! A man of wit like caviar, who spreads it like marmalade. You're like a Black Noël Coward, hold the "Noël."

LOUIS

Hello, Van Pallandt. You look like you need a rendition of "Company."

VAN PALLANDT

You know, not every thespian can be a hyphenate. You wear a lot of hats, but only one really fits.

Louis LOOKS BACK at Pete Baker's table. He SITS DOWN at Van Pallandt's table.

LOUIS

Speaking of hats, isn't that your colleague Pete Baker from the "Dining" section? What visit is this, the second? The critical third?

VAN PALLANDT

You know what Pete Baker looks like?

LOUIS

Actors work in restaurants, Van Pallandt. We have milk cartons with his picture on it. If your disguise is obvious, then you're not anonymous.

Louis directs Van Pallandt's EYES AROUND THE DINING ROOM. The restaurant's ENTIRE STAFF is observing Pete Baker's table.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Critics. The livelihood of everyone in this room is in Pete Baker's hands. Food, music, theatre, film, literature. You guys are way too O-P'd. Not the paper's architecture critic, though. One bad review can't really close a Frank Gehry building.

VAN PALLANDT

You think we're "overpowered?" Have you seen the layoffs of critics around the country? I'm actually forced to review EVERY play now - two critics aren't in the budget.

LOUIS

Not "every" play, Countess Van Pallandt. So you're not so overpowered these days, just consolidated.

VAN PALLANDT

Today is my day off, Louis.

LOUIS

Why don't you drop by Teatro Dante tonight? The Playground Monitors are sending off "The Plague Spring" with a bang.

(leans in, whispers)

I even make my own stage blood: red frosting, cocoa powder, water.

VAN PALLANDT

I don't have five hours to kill. I'm still not going to review it. I did you a favor, after that chaotic workshop.

LOUIS

Wait. You were there?

VAN PALLANDT

No review kills off a MacArthur "genius" show. But my review would've made your actors question their will to live in your play.

LOUIS

Maybe I'm just working the refs for next time.

VAN PALLANDT

Are you really closing? I heard a rumor that C-T-H offered to stage "The Plague Spring" in Marcus Garvey Park.

LOUIS

I'm closing on Broadway tonight. Going uptown would be kind of a letdown.

VAN PALLANDT

What am I supposed to say about your work, Louis? "If 'Dear White American Theater' were a play....?"

LOUIS

You once called me "Hell's Kitchen's Black Intelligencer." Well, to tell the family secret, my grandmama was Dutch.

VAN PALLANDT

I called you that. Once. You never called me back.

LOUIS

You haven't seen "The Plague Spring" since those disastrous previews.

VAN PALLANDT

Exhibit "A" on why playwrights not
named Sam Shepard or Tracy Letts
or Lin-Manuel shouldn't star in or
direct their own plays.

LOUIS

More new wrinkles than whatever
jukebox musical teat you're
sucking on these days.

Van Pallandt notices Nobile the waiter BRINGING FOOD to
Louis's unoccupied table.

VAN PALLANDT

Louis, your Uovo Purgatorio has
arrived.

LOUIS

How the Hell did you know what I
ordered?

VAN PALLANDT

You work the refs, I work the
room.

(O.S.) From nearby: the CLINK! of two CHAMPAGNE FLUTES and
WHITE WOMEN GIGGLING.

VAN PALLANDT (CONT'D)

The sound of white women laughing
at your pain means the fun is
over. Go away, Louis.

Louis leaves Van Pallandt alone, MAKES A STOP before
returning to his table.

PETE BAKER'S TABLE — CONTINUOUS

LOUIS

Pete Baker! Man, I love your work!
That one-star review of Yardbird
Sweet, that landmark, Black-owned
fried chicken shack in Red Hook?
Trés savage!

PETE BAKER

O-K, but I gave Yardbird Sweet, a landmark, Black-owned fried chicken shack in Red Hook, one star.

LOUIS

(sings ersatz Duke Ellington)

"If you should take the 'F' train...."

(to Pete Baker's friends)

Hey, you wanna make the Chef go berserk? Don't order dessert.

Louis LEAVES. Pete Baker LOOKS BACK at Van Pallandt.

PETE BAKER

You're not supposed to do that.

FLASHBACK — EXT. SPEAKING VOLUMES BOOK SHOP — DAY

STOREFRONT WINDOW

A Speaking Volumes staff member, white male stocker/cashier/clerk GRIGOR, removes copies of the DOUGLAS & DEMAR play, "Sirens Wail, Horns Blow, Negroes Sing!"

The BOOK COVER IMAGE is a May 7, 1963 clipping from the "Birmingham News" and a BLURB: "From the creators of Amos X Andy: Black-Eyed Peas in a Podcast."

Grigor replaces the SCRIPT BOOKS with a SANDWICH-BOARD BLOW-UP of the newspaper account of Louis being the recipient of a MacArthur "genius" Grant.

FLASHBACK — INT. SPEAKING VOLUMES — DAY

CHECKOUT COUNTER

Grigor DASHES BACK to the register as Louis brings TWO SCRIPT BOOKS to purchase.

GRIGOR

"Three Tall Women" and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

LOUIS

I don't like taking to women, so I read Edward Albee plays.

GRIGOR

Oh, my God. You're Louis — THE Louis! I was in a student production of your last play, "Incognegro."

LOUIS

Not "my" play, exactly. I adapted a Mat Johnson graphic novel. Slumming. So you're an actor.

GRIGOR

Yes. An actor, I am. One of those.

LOUIS

Oh yes. Which restaurant? No offense — old joke.

GRIGOR

Right now, I work in a bookstore.

Grigor SCANS Louis's books, bags them up.

GRIGOR (CONT'D)

I also act. Three nights a week on the BardBus. It's a Shakespeare-on-wheels, for tourists.

LOUIS

Let me guess. Tonight, it's "Julius Caesar?"

GRIGOR

Hey, yeah it is. How did you know? Have you seen my work?

LOUIS

'Tis a tale of low-hanging oranges, virtue-signifying. I will never forgive the Public Theater's politicized, pandering production.

(pulls out his wallet)

LOUIS (CONT'D)
I'm paying with a black card.

Louis SLAPS his black DRAMATISTS GUILD OF AMERICA MEMBERSHIP CARD on the countertop.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
I'd like my ten-percent discount honored, please.

GRIGOR
Sure, of course.

Louis pulls out a TICKET, STAMPED "COMP," SLIDES IT over the counter, along with his CREDIT CARD.

GRIGOR (CONT'D)
Wow. Really? I'm - I'm -

LOUIS
You're blown away by this gesture.
"The Plague Spring" is my best work yet.

GRIGOR
I'm working my BardBus shift tonight. I can pass it on.
(beat)
It's funny. I guess your show's not sold out tonight? The script books for "The Plague Spring" were bought this weekend. All seven copies in stock.

Grigor applies the D.G.A. discount on the cash register.

Louis SIGNS his credit card receipt.

LOUIS
Hey, that whole "talking to women" thing? Don't quote me on that.

Louis LEAVES. The next customer, RAPHAEL (white male, an actor like Grigor), recognizes LOUIS IN PROFILE as he exits the store.

RAPHAEL
 (to Grigor)
 Was that - ?

GRIGOR
 He was Him. Pretty much what you
 expect. Are you a fan?

RAPHAEL
 I know how aware Him is of his bad
 mother-fuckery.

Grigor SCANS Raphael's books on the register.

GRIGOR
 Him is generous. He just gave me a
 ticket to tonight's final
 performance of "The Plague
Spring." It starts at six. You can
 have it, if you want.

RAPHAEL
 (takes the ticket)
 Why not? This should be a riot of
 unintended laughs.

(V.O.) LAUGHTER of O'Harris, Sibblies, Kidwell, and
 Bradshaw ECHOES from behind Raphael.

INT. TEATRO DANTE - NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

CASTE LOUNGE (GREEN ROOM)

A large PAINTING LOOMS: a portrait of Louis as "The Emperor
Jones," as rendered by KEHINDE WILEY.

Pre-show: four members of the play's Black ensemble cast -
 O'Harris, Sibblies, Kidwell and Bradshaw - relax in the
 plush actors' parlor.

They are in FULL COSTUME, sitting around a BOARD GAME.

O'HARRIS
 We Black actors. We gotta stick
 together, y'all. Black actors.

Kidwell and Bradshaw SALUTE, fists to the heart.

O'HARRIS (CONT'D)

So, Sibblies. How does this work?

SIBBLIES

So this is Post-Mort 'Em! Four players. I'm Player One. I'm "Mort."

(holds up the zombie "Mort" game piece)
Player One dies, right? Before I died, I donated my organs, tissues and eyes -

O'HARRIS

Way to get your non-driver state I-D card at the D-M-V.

SIBBLIES

Right. Or when you registered to vote. I'm Player One - I die. I come back.

Sibblies ACTIVATES the "reanimation" mechanism: toy BATTERY-OPERATED DEFIBRILLATORS to jump-start "Mort."

SIBBLIES (CONT'D)

And I wants my shits. I want my ham! "Post-Mort 'Em!"

O'Harris, Kidwell and Bradshaw APPLAUD.

KIDWELL

So the three of us - we gots your shits. And your zombie ass is coming after us.

SIBBLIES

Through the fog!

BRADSHAW

Wait, how do you die to come back in the first place?

SIBBLIES

Player One picks her demise. The rest of y'all can go "eenie meenie miney motherfucker!" I went with, "questi neri stanno cercando di uccidermi."

KIDWELL

Talk that talk! What does that mean?

SIBBLIES

It's Italian for "These Blacks They Are Trying To Murder Me." You ain't lived till you've done a Tyler Perry gospel show overseas!

BRADSHAW

I'd kill to play Madea in Italy!

SIBBLIES

O'Harris got that ass to play Madea. Sings opera, too.

O'HARRIS

(sings bass-baritone)

Neeeeee-garo! Neeeeee-garo!
Hallelujer!

O'Harris PULLS BACK the duster of his costume, reveals his LARGE BLOOD-RED CODPIECE.

O'HARRIS (CONT'D)

Just so y'all know I'm not a castrato.

SIBBLIES

O'Harris has to sing opera to drown out Alesha's off-key octaves.

KIDWELL AND BRADSHAW

Oooooohhh!

O'HARRIS

We Black actors, Sibblies. We
gotta play together, girl. Black
actors.

"POST-MORT 'EM!" - GAME BOARD

Kidwell SHOOTs a pair of BLOOD-RED DICE across the game
board: the "POLICE SCENE DO NOT CROSS" chalk-outline of a
dead body with the VEIT SCHUELZ "NYC penis subway map"
representing BLOOD VESSELS and INTERNAL ORGANS.

O'HARRIS, SIBBLIES, KIDWELL
AND BRADSHAW

Pooooooooost-Mort 'Em!

BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Alesha PASSES BY the Caste Lounge, WANDERS OFF, drawn to a
HEATED CONVERSATION between Marié and St. Cristofer versus
the five white actors, Hinds, Knott, Staples, Archer and
Pomposello.

Staples stays Method, GROWLS through his zippered mask.

HINDS

.... It's not just about tonight,
Saint Cristofer. It's about the
entire run!

POMPOSELLO

It started when you fired Raphael.

KNOTT

It started when Louis fired Julie
to take over as director -

ARCHER

And it's never let up!

MARIÉ

(mimics playing the world's
smallest violin)

You all waited until closing night
to air these grievances.

HINDS

We are actors. You are not us,
Marié. This production has made us
feel disposable – like whores.

ST. CRISTOFER

I don't throw away quality whores.

KNOTT

Then you should've kept a few
understudies for stunts like this.
You insisted the gratuitous nudity
was "necessary," but now you've
really reduced it to demeaning.

HINDS

Marié touches and pulls on our
hair without permission. It's not
her character's business!

POMPOSELLO

And now Louis wants us to come out
for the curtain call naked?!

ST. CRISTOFER

You're naked for the entire first
act, Pomposello. It's called
"staying in character."

ARCHER

It's called "lack of character,"
Saint Cristofer. Our performances
have never been reviewed. Our
performances have never even been
cited in reviews.

ST. CRISTOFER

Don't tell me, tell Van Pallandt!

POMPOSELLO

We're telling you because you're
the producer. We never got the
exposure we were promised.

ST. CRISTOFER

Back off, Pomposello.

MARIÉ

You people -

ARCHER

What do you mean, "you people?"

MARIÉ

My people are Yale School of Drama people. You basic white folks - is that direct enough for you, Archer? You've been nuisances during this entire production. Like the raccoons at the Delacorte, when I was doing Shakespeare in the Park.

HINDS

(to Knott)

Marié's going full Calpurnia on us again.

MARIÉ

(to Archer)

This one goes "once more into the breach" during "Henry the Fifth," with no bladder discipline.

INT. TEATRO DANTE - CHANGING ROOMS - CONTINUOUS

THE WHITE ACTORS' BATHROOM

A MOLDY SHOWER and STAINED TOILET, possibly the shittiest on Broadway, is shared by the white actors.

MARIÉ (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This one: Knott. She peeks her tiny head up during death scenes.

INT. TEATRO DANTE - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

ST. CRISTOFER AND MARIÉ VS. THE WHITE ACTORS

Marié gets up into Staples and Pomposello's faces.

MARIÉ (CONT'D)

Pomposello, our high priest of T-V Actor Pomposity. This one eats food out of a Ziploc bag with my name on it.

(to Staples)

And this one's hooves claw the stage floor like a chalkboard.

Staples breaks character, UNZIPS HIS MASK.

STAPLES

Why would a mute slave have manicured toes?

MARIÉ

(to Hinds)

And this one — she leaves muddy footprints on my performance. Nightly. We should poison you coons. You forget: we let you share our stage. We let you!

HINDS

We play slaves, Marié. We are not your slaves.

KNOTT

And we're not coming out for the curtain call. We'll tell Louis ourselves.

MARIÉ

Why don't you just leave right after the chorale of Act Two? It's not like the audience stays to applaud the lot of you.

POMPOSELLO

Can we show some solidarity?

ST. CRISTOFER

We would prefer you do that and stay professional.

ARCHER

We support the stagehands striking out front.

ST. CRISTOFER

The stagehands are striking even though Teatro Dante is not covered by their contract. Fossey and Turnbull can't handle the tech by themselves.

MARIÉ

Turnbull? Work? You are precious!

ST. CRISTOFER

You're not helping, Marié.
 (to the white actors)
 It's closing night. I'm asking you to help.

Alesha STEPS OUT OF THE SHADOWS, approaches the group.

ALESHA

I'm also asking you to help.
 Please. Come on, guys.

MARIÉ

The Good Witch Alesha to the rescue? Or just a benchwarmer still upset about losing out on my lead role?

ALESHA

No one could possibly upstage you, Marié.

HINDS

We're not going to be your white knights on the dead horse. We exit right after the intermission.

Marié and the white actors BREAK OFF IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS.

ST. CRISTOFER

(to Alesha)

Had you been this diplomatic before, your name would be in lights in the next Louis-and-Saint-Cristofer show.

ALESHA

Your musical "Albee, Goddamned!" How did you get the rights from the Edward Albee estate to do a "radio bio?"

ST. CRISTOFER

I do what producers do, Alesha.

ALESHA

You said during auditions that singing wasn't my strong suit.

St. Cristofer TRACES A FINGER across Alesha's lips.

ST. CRISTOFER

Sometimes it's not what comes out of your mouth.

Alesha's TEETH DRAG ALONG St. Cristofer's finger, then she shoves it away.

ST. CRISTOFER (CONT'D)

I like your look, Alesha, but you're an eternal chorus girl, at best. Pity. It's not the Great Off-White Way.

St. Cristofer WIPES HIS FINGER on his pants, LEAVES.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE — LOUIS'S CHANGING ROOM — NIGHT

Louis sits, IN FULL COSTUME, in front of his vanity mirror. He checks his makeup; LOOKS UP, OVER at a dog-eared POSTER on the wall.

DOG-EARED POSTER

Center: a black-and-white PHOTOGRAPH of actors Louis (as "CLAY") and Nella (as "LULA") in an "A" train subway car.

The BLURB reads: "The Playground Monitors present a totally illegal staging of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka's DUTCHMAN. 4th Car. Uptown-Bound A-Train. Beginning at Euclid Avenue Station, Approx. 7:30 PM Directed by ST. CRISTOFER."

COLOR PHOTO (SUPER)

of an APPLE with big bite taken out. A BLOOD-RED LIPSTICK KISS is imprinted on the exposed flesh.

LOUIS

closes his eyes, OPENS them. He SEES NELLA'S APPARITION, over his shoulder, REFLECTED in the mirror.

ST. CRISTOFER

(as "HECKLER") (V.O.)

Y'all really gotta do this on the
"A" train?

Louis SPINS AROUND, SEES NOTHING.

VANITY MIRROR — CONTINUOUS

Nella's BLACK-AND-WHITE HEADSHOT and C.V. are on Louis's countertop.

NELLA ALLEN'S C.V.

Among her listed roles: "CLEOPATRA, William Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, Broken Glass Theatre Company" and "FELICITY TROLLOP PARDON, Jean Genet's The Blacks: A Clown Show, Sensurround Stagings."

EXT. TEATRO DANTE — WILL-CALL WINDOW — NIGHT

SIDEWALK AND FACADE

ST. CRISTOFER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I guess any train colored folks
take is the "N" train, huh?

LOUIS (V.O.)
Well, shit, that's pretty good.
Where did you hear that?

TICKET BOOTH — CONTINUOUS

Arriving THEATER PATRONS ignore Deuca trying to shove
PROTEST LEAFLETS into their hands.

DEUCA
Do not support this play! Ask for
a refund! Tell them why!

One leaflet reads: "The Best Thing About This Show Is The
End Of It." Rain WASHES AWAY the ink.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — NIGHT

PROSCENIUM — MOVING

A FOLLOW SPOT illuminates Turnbull's SCULPTURES on stage:
"The Well" — a semicircular silo; "Double Helix" — a
combination umbrella stand and wine rack; "The Harrow" — an
agricultural tool; "The Skeleton" — a submerged Statue of
Liberty skeleton; and "The Dead Horse" — a breeding/rape
stand.

Each piece is inscribed with the legend, "PROPERTY OF
CHATEAU BOUCICAULT."

PROSCENIUM — CONTINUOUS

The final scenes of Act One of "The Plague Spring" are
unfolding. ARTIFICIAL RAIN shimmers, falls.

WINGS – DIMMER BEACH

Turnbull SHOUT-WHISPERS to Fossey over his cell phone while he operates the SMOKE MACHINE, which pipes fluctuating LIGHT MIST and HEAVY FOG across the stage.

WINGS – PROMPT CORNER

Fossey SYNCHRONIZES THE SOUND DESIGN to match the intensity of the rainfall.

He makes a "CIRCLE MOTION" to the cast onstage.

VIEW FROM PROSCENIUM – CONTINUOUS

The Black cast members are CLOTHED, under umbrellas. The white slaves are COMPLETELY NUDE, loosely CHAINED AND HANDCUFFED TOGETHER, stand exposed in the rain.

Louis and Marié are at CENTER. They welcome the bidders at STAGE LEFT: the two couples, O'Harris and Sibblies, and Kidwell and Bradshaw; and Alesha, the house servant who stands nearest to Louis and Marié.

Louis and Marié present their white slaves to the bidders. The bidders APPLAUD.

Marié SIGNALS: start the auction! She TAPS an ANTIQUE TEASPOON three times against the metal mount of a two-sided, black-and-white CAMEO PENDANT around her neck.

LOUIS

What of our stock do you prefer?
Our three bucks and two wenches,
our most cherished and fabled
quintet.

The five white slaves STEP FORWARD. Hinds and Knott KNEEL.

MARIÉ

(indicates "The Dead Horse")
These two bred well: the mixed
bounty of their master's loom!

Alesha MOVES BEHIND "The Skeleton," brings back a TRAY OF SEVEN STEM GLASSES, filled with red wine.

LOUIS

We will toast!

(to Alesha)

You poured a glass for yourself, Alesha. Bold. I suppose you'll be on the other side of this soon.

Marié takes her glass, GLARES at Alesha, wanders off. Alesha SERVES the bidders their glasses, takes one for herself. She FLINGS THE TRAY offstage, towards Fossey.

WINGS - PROMPT CORNER

Fossey is caught off-guard by Alesha's improvised move, but he CATCHES the tray.

FOSSEY

Well, somebody's in need of a screw. Fucking actors.

VIEW FROM PROSCENIUM - CONTINUOUS

Louis and the bidders go to the "Double Helix" to inspect the RACKED BOTTLES of Vino Hottentot.

Marié sips, DRIFTS TOO CLOSE to the white slaves. Hinds and Knott BOLT FORWARD, grab at Marié's ankle!

The RAIN INTENSIFIES. Louis, O'Harris, Sibblies, Bradshaw, Kidwell and Alesha DISAPPEAR INTO THE FOG.

MARIÉ

NO!

Marié DROPS HER WINE GLASS, clutches her cameo pendant.

The white slaves MOVE, use their long chains to corral Marié. Pomposello, Staples and Archer grab "The Harrow," a functioning agricultural tool.

HINDS AND KNOTT

Marrow or Harrow, Marié? Marrow or Harrow?

POMPOSELLO AND ARCHER

(as Staples GRUNTS)

Marrow or Harrow! Marrow or Harrow!

The white slaves CHASE Marié around the vineyard with "The Harrow." Hinds and Knott CLOSE IN. She SWIPES AT THEIR EYES with her teaspoon.

Marié ACCIDENTALLY FLICKS Knott's nostril, DRAWS BLOOD. She mouths, out of character: "I'm sorry."

The foam-rubber "SPOKES" of "The Harrow" RATTLE ACROSS THE STAGE FLOOR.

STAGE LIGHTING NARROWS on "The Well." Marié BREAKS, RUNS for the semicircular silo.

"Rainfall" POURS from the FLYSPACE into "The Well."

MARIÉ

It's flooding!

As the white slaves BEAR DOWN on Marié with "The Harrow," Marié JUMPS DOWN into "The Well."

WINGS - DIMMER BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Turnbull is no longer manning the dimmer racks.

INT. "THE WELL" - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

MARIÉ - DESCENDING

Marié CLIMBS DOWN the hidden ladder rungs, KICKS at the TRAP DOOR.

INT. PROSCENIUM – NIGHT

PROMPT CORNER – CONTINUOUS

Fossey LOOKS ACROSS the stage, SEES Turnbull is GONE.

SAFETY CURTAIN – MOVING

Fossey DASHES ACROSS backstage to hit the play's tech cues on time.

INT. TRAP ROOM – NIGHT – CONTINUOUS

Turnbull is WANDERING AROUND the basement space, trying to get reception on his cell phone.

TURNBULL

What kind of fucking gallery are
you running? Hello – fuck! You're
supposed to be – hello?!??

Turnbull stands DIRECTLY UNDER the mainstage's TRAP DOOR, hovers over Marié's SAFETY CUSHION.

From the other side: Marié UNLATCHES the trap door.

Marié DROPS FAST through the trap door. She does not immediately see Turnbull and LANDS on him, BREAKING HIS NECK AND KILLING HIM.

Marié barely hits her mark on the SAFETY CUSHION. The trap door above her SPRINGS SHUT, muting the AUDIENCE APPLAUSE from upstairs as Act One of "The Plague Spring" ends.

Marié's cameo pendant SNAPS OFF from her necklace, ROLLS to the side of the cushion. She does not notice.

VOICE ON PHONE (V.O.)

Turnbull? Hello?! You're breaking
up –

Marié CLICKS OFF Turnbull's phone. She panics, STIFLES HER SCREAM with both hands.

Marié stretches out TURNBULL'S CORPSE on the floor. She wraps his phone in the fabric of her costume, WIPES IT CLEAN of fingerprints.

Marié LEAVES.

SECONDS LATER — CONTINUOUS

Fossey scrambles from upstairs. He discovers Turnbull FACE DOWN on the safety cushion.

FOSSEY

What the fuck, Turnbull? You
couldn't wait two minutes before
your disco nap —

Fossey GETS CLOSER, POKES Turnbull. He SEES Turnbull's WIDE-OPEN EYES and broken neck, realizes he's dead.

Fossey PICKS UP the two-sided cameo, a piece of costume jewelry only Marié could've left behind.

Fossey LOOKS UP at the trap door, LOOKS DOWN at Turnbull's body. He DRAGS TURNBULL ACROSS THE FLOOR, STUFFS HIM INTO A CLOSET.

Fossey LOCKS the closet door. He checks his WATCH, sets his ALARM CLOCK to 90 MINUTES for the play's dinner break.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — UPSTAIRS — NIGHT

MEZZANINE

Raphael sits with his arms crossed. Everyone around him APPLAUDS. He SQUEEZES the handle of a DOUBLE CANOPY UMBRELLA like a stress ball.

ORCHESTRA LEVEL SEATS

Van Pallandt sits THIRD ROW, CENTER, writing notes in his Moleskine, taking in the wild AUDIENCE REACTION.

VIEW FROM PROSCENIUM – CONTINUOUS

The white slaves, still NUDE in CHAINS AND HANDCUFFS, SING as THEY EXIT. Staples GRUNTS, "Young Frankenstein"-style, through his zippered mask.

HINDS, KNOTT, ARCHER, STAPLES
AND POMPOSELLO
(barbershop-quintet harmony)
"Let's all go to the lobby, let's
all go to the lobby...."

A RECORDED VERSION of "Technicolor Refreshment Trailer No.1" PLAYS. The CURTAIN FALLS. The HOUSE LIGHTS RISE.

MEZZANINE

Raphael angrily WEDGES his umbrella upright between the seats. He SHUFFLES OUT with the rest of the AUDIENCE for the 90-minute dinner break.

INT. TEATRO DANTE – CHANGING ROOMS – NIGHT

MOLDY SHOWERS

The white actors WASH OFF their final performance of "The Plague Spring." They TURN UP THE HOT WATER until they COLLECTIVELY SCREAM from the heat.

INT. TEATRO DANTE – MAINSTAGE – NIGHT

MINUTES LATER – AROUND "THE WELL"

Fossey QUIETLY CONFERS with Hinds, Knott, Staples, Archer and Pomposello as they rush to get dressed.

Fossey LOOKS AT THE WINGS, then RAISES HIS VOICE, PROJECTS at the lowered curtain.

FOSSEY
Did you guys ever see "It?" I
can't – literally, I can't. I'm
vegan and it's got Derry in "It."

The white actors FORCE LAUGHS. Fossey prompts: "Sell it!"

FOSSEY (CONT'D)

Hey, here's one more. Why was the
Bride of Frankenstein worried
about breaking up with
Frankenstein's Monster? She knew
he carried a torch for her.

The white actors ACT, dial it up to "11," LAUGH at Fossey's
joke way too loudly, for too long.

The LAUGHTER STOPS ABRUPTLY.

Fossey HOLDS UP the COSTUME JEWELRY — the two-sided cameo —
Marié dropped near Turnbull's body.

Fossey reaches into "The Well," retrieves a Guns 'N' Roses'
Slash-style LEATHER TOP HAT. Each white actor pulls a
FOLDED SLIP OF PAPER, written with the name of a Black
ensemble cast member.

VIEW THROUGH SPIDERWEB ON CEILING

The group BREAKS OFF. Fossey positions the white actors,
FLIPS the cameo like a coin, POCKETS IT.

BACKSTAGE — MOVING (MONTAGE)

The white actors SEPARATE AND SCATTER throughout the
theatre. They THUMB THROUGH DIFFERENT PAGES of their copies
of Louis's "The Plague Spring" script book.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — THEATER LOBBY — NIGHT

LOBBY WINE BAR

The (Black) bartender, OLIVER, presents the STAGE PROP
BOTTLE of VINO HOTTENTOT red wine. A FLORENCE KATE UPTON
"GOLLIWOG" logo and an "A.A.V.E." seal are on the label.

Van Pallandt RAISES HIS STEM GLASS for Oliver to pour.

VAN PALLANDT

Nice touch. Louis makes up with marketing what he lacks in art. What's actually in the bottle?

OLIVER

It's a blend of two grapes, Pinot D'Onaggio and Petit Guignol. The percentage is a secret.

(shows him the seal)

Certified by the Afro-American Vinters Exchange.

VAN PALLANDT

It'll stay a secret. Nobody cares.

Raphael JOSTLES AROUND the lobby bar to stand next to Van Pallandt, who recognizes him.

RAPHAEL

(to Oliver)

I'll take a glass, please. Van Pallandt! I smelled your snark from across the room.

VAN PALLANDT

It's not me, it's the wine. I'm sure it'll open up by Act Two. Hello, Raphael.

RAPHAEL

I think this wine is meant to be quaffed, not savored. Kind of like journalistic integrity these days.

VAN PALLANDT

(flips though his "Playbill")

It's not listed, but it looks like we've reached the sad, "Rent"-to-rentboy arc of our show.

CAKE STAND

Under a glass cover: one last SLICE OF RED VELVET CAKE, priced at \$7. There are FOUR FLIES walking along the icing. A PLACARD reads: "Pastries courtesy of The Silken Place."

INT. TEATRO DANTE – BACKSTAGE – NIGHT

MOVING (MONTAGE) – CONTINUOUS

O'Harris, Sibblies, Kidwell, Bradshaw and Alesha WANDER AROUND the theatre, in FULL AND PARTIAL COSTUME, during the play's dinner break.

They are FOLLOWED by Hinds, Knott, Staples, Pomposello, and Archer, who are BURROWING through the theatre, READING SILENTLY WITH LIPS MOVING, from the script books of "The Plague Spring."

WHITE ACTORS' P.O.V. – OPEN BOOKS

The PAGES ARE HIGHLIGHTED according to the roles played by each Black ensemble actor.

CROSSOVER (MONTAGE) – CONTINUOUS

The white actors SIT IN THE SHADOWS, CROUCHED OUT OF SIGHT as they stalk their targeted Black cast members.

Hinds watches Bradshaw. Pomposello watches Sibblies. Knott watches O'Harris. Archer is RELUCTANT as he watches Kidwell. Staples watches, COVETS Alesha, who does OFF-KEY VOCALISE: nine notes up, eight back down.

FLASHBACK – INT. TEATRO DANTE – DAY

VIEW FROM PROSCENIUM

Preview performance: Louis and Marié are on OPPOSITE SIDES of the stage. Sibblies, Bradshaw, O'Harris and Kidwell are UPSTAGE CENTER, observing the scene.

The white actors are NAKED, CHAINED AND HANDCUFFED in a WIDE SEMI-CIRCLE with their backs to the audience.

LOUIS (V.O.)

It's very "Theatre Brut" – have you ever read "Bildnerei der Geisteskranken" by German psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn?

DEUCA (V.O.)
"Artistry of the Mentally Ill."

Alesha brings a BASKETBALL, painted to look like a BILLIARDS "8" BALL, to Louis. Louis signals to Marié: "Get ready." The white slaves SCRAMBLE, STUMBLE around the stage, TRIPPING over their chains.

Louis HURLS THE BALL at Hinds, who maneuvers her head out of harm's way. Marié RUNS OUT to catch the ball, THROWS IT PAST Alesha, HITS Archer in the chest.

ALESHA
 QUELL!!!

VIEW FROM PROSCENIUM - HOURS LATER

Louis, Marié and St. Cristofer sit on the stage's edge, MICROPHONES IN HAND, addressing a few straggling AUDIENCE MEMBERS. Deuca is among them.

LOUIS
 That's right. There's a little of Eugene Ionesco's "Rhinoceros" in the mix as well.

DEUCA
 You are a playwright who takes pride in his asterisks and footnotes. About that degrading game near the end of Act One....

ST. CRISTOFER
 Thank you all, by the way, for staying for this talkback. Louis likes his David Mamet Rules.

MARIÉ
 (to Deuca)
 Why is that scene degrading?
 Because the women were naked? The men were naked. I'm also a woman starring in the play.

DEUCA

You're also an apologist for an accusation I haven't yet made.

LOUIS

The scene shows the depravity afoot at Chateau Boucicault. It is a condemnation of slavery. Louis and Marié are slave owners at the twilight. Disease has ravaged our human chattel.

MARIÉ

So we devised this game. It's elimination. But we are admittedly depraved. So this contest designed for appraisal of the fittest, it engages us and entertains us. It's supposed to upset you?

DEUCA

I lived in the women's dorms of the college Louis and Saint Cristofer attended.

(points at St. Cristofer's dark glasses)
Before.

LOUIS

Hinds took the first hit of the game and survived. She is the fittest. She is the Alpha bitch who sparks the rebellion.

St. Cristofer LOWERS his glasses. He RECOGNIZES Deuca. He LEANS FORWARD, LOOKS ACROSS Marié to get Louis's attention.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Hinds got my attention with her headshot. That blonde featherback-meets-Mohawk. Hashtag-throwback to when women had real bodies.

(to Marié)

No offense. I know yours is real.

ST. CRISTOFER

Louis, I don't think you're helping -

LOUIS

Still, while her reading was impressive, I didn't make up my mind to cast Hinds until I watched her leave the room. I cast her because of.... Hindsight.

DEUCA

Do you think your juvenile attitude towards women justifies Sunday ten A-M matinees of gaslighting trash like "The Plague Spring," Louis?

LOUIS

There's more truth about slavery – white or otherwise – in this play than there is in church. Deuca.

DEUCA

There's more truth soon spoken than there will be in your "New York Times" obituary. You and Saint Cristofer were roommates.

(pulls a press clipping from her purse)
Accused of an off-campus felony sexual assault.

MARIÉ

Those white girls will be the death of you.

LOUIS

She wasn't exactly "white."

DEUCA

Was she exactly raped, though?

LOUIS

Fuck you, Deuca –

MARIÉ

(to St. Cristofer)
Are there any press still here?

ST. CRISTOFER

Van Pallandt left right after the preview.

DEUCA

No, Louis. See? I said, "no." And you listened and avoided any problems.

LOUIS

You know I was acquitted!

DEUCA

Saint Cristofer was convicted —

ST. CRISTOFER

And that was overturned on appeal!

FLASHBACK — INT. TEATRO DANTE — PROSCENIUM — DAY

CENTER STAGE

Louis and Nella are in STREET CLOTHES. Louis is seated.

Nella stands in front of him, RECITES the poem "Antigonish" by William Hughes Mearns.

NELLA

"Yesterday, upon the stair, I met
a man who wasn't there. He wasn't
there again today, I wish, I wish,
He'd go away."

Louis GOLF-CLAPS, directs Nella through some of the play's blocking.

LOUIS (V.O.)

So, Nella, you'll be the understudy primarily for Knott and Hinds, and passing for Black for the octoroon Marié. Just to let you know.... Saint Cristofer is the producer here.

NELLA (V.O.)

That's fine with me, Louis. I'm here to act. Bygones.

DEUCA (V.O.)

Your victim filed a civil suit. Your parents settled out of court. Seventeen thousand, five hundred dollars – exactly a year's tuition.

MARIÉ (V.O.)

Seven-TEEN thousand? What kind of shitty college did you guys go to?

LOUIS (V.O.)

We can't all afford the Yale School of Drama, Marié.

DEUCA (V.O.)

What did you have on "Jane Doe" to bury all this?

NELLA – MOVING

She CIRCLES the stage, SHEDDING CLOTHES as she goes, until she is down to underwear.

When Nella turns around, Louis is GONE, REPLACED by St. Cristofer.

ST. CRISTOFER

Louis wrote this play called "The Plague Spring."

NELLA

Rewrote. I remember his early drafts in school. Snippets for class. I was "Marié" in the early versions and then I was "Knott."

ST. CRISTOFER

Mise-en-scene: a post-apocalyptic alternate universe in which whites are enslaved by Blacks. A just world. A perfect world.

NELLA

Is that Louis's meaning or your hot take, Saint Cristofer?

ST. CRISTOFER

You're not "Marié" here. You're one of the white Negroes who always wants a master.

NELLA

Until that magical day when the white Negroes rebel!

ST. CRISTOFER

A "novel virus" provoked the white Negro uprising. A literal novel.

(hands Nella a tattered scroll)

"You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in court...."

NELLA

"If you cannot afford a lawyer, one will be appointed for you before any questioning, if you wish." These are the Miranda rights.

ST. CRISTOFER

In "The Plague Spring," the Miranda rights carry a mythical, mystical weight. The white slaves think of Miranda as promised land.

(Nella laughs)

Remember: the play is a satire.

NELLA

And the white slaves realize they are oppressed human beings and are killed off as they "sass back" and revolt against their Black masters. Did Louis really write seven hours of this?

ST. CRISTOFER

It's now five hours, with a ninety-minute dinner break.

St. Cristofer steps back, SALUTES WITH HIS FOREARMS ANGLED DOWNWARD, forming an "M."

ST. CRISTOFER (CONT'D)

"Miranda Forever!"

(hands Nella a book)

Louis wants you to read this. The Black slave owners use this playbook to suppress the whites.

BOOK COVER

"White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism" by ROBIN DIANGELO.

NELLA (O.S.)

Does any of this bring back bad memories for you?

ST. CRISTOFER (O.S.)

Does it for you?

INT. TEATRO DANTE - DIMMER ROOM - NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

Hinds, just returned from being OUTSIDE IN THE RAIN, SPOTS Bradshaw meditating in the wings, next to the DIMMER RACKS. Hinds is an inch taller than Bradshaw.

Hinds SHAKES OUT her STICK UMBRELLA, FASTENS THE VELCRO STRAP tightly. She slinks up next to Bradshaw.

HINDS

Hi, Bradshaw. Do you want to bounce some lines off me?

BRADSHAW

Hi, Hinds. I know this play's been a wild ride, but I don't know what my life's going to be without it.

HINDS

Well.... let's find out.

Hinds pins Bradshaw AGAINST THE WALL, JAMS HER STICK UMBRELLA hard against his mouth. She KNOCKS OUT several of his front teeth.

Bradshaw tries to scream. Hinds jams the umbrella DEEPER. His mouth DRIPS BLOOD as he CHOKES.

Hinds APPLIES MORE PRESSURE on Bradshaw, who uses his entire body to PUSH BACK against her, FORCING HER OFF.

Hinds OPENS HER UMBRELLA, SPRITZES Bradshaw with water and his own blood.

She SPOTS LOOSE WIRES near the dimmer banks, KICKS Bradshaw with her RUBBER BOOTS, PUSHES him into the wires.

ELECTRIC CURRENT JOLTS Bradshaw. He clutches his heart, drops to the floor. Hinds stands on Bradshaw's throat and chest, JUMPS ONCE, kills him with a WET CRUNCH.

The LIGHTS FLICKER in the theatre. Hinds LOOKS UP at the lighting rigs, LOOKS DOWN at Bradshaw.

DIMMER BEACH

Fossey TURNS THE CORNER into the dimmer room, hits a breaker to FULLY RESTORE THE LIGHTS.

Hinds and Bradshaw's body are GONE.

FLASHBACK — EXT. THE DESIGNATED DINER — DAY

This is a THEATER-THEMED restaurant near the TERRI GRIFFIN CONCERT HALL, on a historically Black campus.

FLASHBACK — INT. THE DESIGNATED DINER — DINING ROOM — DAY

POSTERS for two chess-themed plays "Fish Men" and "The Woodpusher," in repertory at the MALAPARTE THEATER COMPANY, are on the walls.

Louis is COUPLED-UP, KISSING Nella in a booth, sitting on one side.

St. Cristofer, SEEN HERE IN FLASHBACK without his dark glasses and an UNSCARRED FACE, lingers over the diner's JUKEBOX, ruminating over the music selection.

St. Cristofer picks a song, inserts a QUARTER. HE MOVES to the CENTER of the diner's CHECKERBOARD-TILED FLOOR, invites Louis and Nella to come over.

ST. CRISTOFER

Stop sucking face, you two! Shall we dance?

The SONG STARTS. St. Cristofer and Louis HIT THEIR MARKS on either side of Nella, who has a BUTTER KNIFE in her hand.

St. Cristofer, Nella and Louis PERFORM a "pas de trois," interpret the love triangle of Joe and Violet Trace and Joe's lover Dorcas in TONI MORRISON'S "Jazz."

After the coda, the STUDENTS in the diner APPLAUD. St. Cristofer, Nella and Louis TAKE A BOW.

FLASHBACK — EXT. LOUIS AND ST. CRISTOFER'S OFF-CAMPUS APARTMENT (THE HJORTSBERG) — NIGHT

BEDROOM WINDOW

An INTIMATE SILHOUETTE OF A THREESOME between Louis, Nella and St. Cristofer is VISIBLE FROM THE STREET. The bedroom light is SWITCHED OFF.

FLASHBACK — INT. LOUIS AND ST. CRISTOFER'S APARTMENT — NIGHT

COMMON AREA — CONTINUOUS

SEXUAL SOUNDS give way to an ARGUMENT, MUTED behind the CLOSED bedroom door. St. Cristofer's desk is adorned with TWO FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS.

There is a COLOR PHOTOGRAPH of St. Cristofer as a TEENAGER, standing mournfully with his father GERARD. Both are in somber black suits. Gerard is wearing BLACK ISOTONER GLOVES. St. Cristofer has DRIED TEARS streaking his face.

Deuca UNLOCKS THE DOOR on the passenger's side. Nella looks distraught, confused. Deuca waves her in.

DEUCA
"Go with me somewhere."

NELLA
"Now?"

DEUCA
"Right now!"

Nella gets in. Deuca SPEEDS THE CAR away from the apartment building.

FLASHBACK — INT. LOUIS AND ST. CRISTOFER'S APARTMENT —
NIGHT

BEDROOM — CONTINUOUS

Louis and St. Cristofer FACE EACH OTHER from opposite sides of the bed. There is an INDENTATION, a sweat spot and BLOOD DROPS from where Nella was between them.

Louis SMOKES A JOINT, PASSES IT to St. Cristofer. St. Cristofer finishes the joint, exhales and SNUFFS IT OUT in an ashtray.

ST. CRISTOFER
(mimics Nella's voice)
"Give me my robe, put on my crown.
I have immortal longings in me!"

Louis and St. Cristofer SMILE, LAUGH. St. Cristofer ROLLS OVER, turns the bedroom lamp OFF.

(V.O.) Sibblies SCREAMS IN THE DARK.

BLACK SCREEN.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — BACKSTAGE — NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

WINGS — PROMPT CORNER

Mid-Sibblies SCREAM: the LIGHTS SWITCH BACK ON.

Pomposello RUNS FROM THE CROSSOVER in the direction of Sibblies's SHRIEK.

Pomposello is carrying an antique VIKING BLOOD-EAGLE (Norse torture insignia) UMBRELLA. He grabs Sibblies by her shoulders, SHAKES HER.

POMPOSELLO

Sibblies, it's O-K. It's me. Calm down.

SIBBLIES

I'm sorry. I'm scared of the dark. Terrified —

POMPOSELLO

I'll say. A few more seconds and you would've had a heart attack.

Sibblies PUSHES UP HER BOSOM in her costume.

SIBBLIES

Nothing gets through these lungs, Prospero.

POMPOSELLO

It's Pomposello.

SIBBLIES

What's with the tig ol' 'brella?

Pomposello SLOWLY SLIDES his other hand off Sibblies's bare shoulder.

SIBBLIES (CONT'D)

Are you still going to the party?

POMPOSELLO

After spending months in a cast, I'd like to be away from close-knit groups for a spell.

SIBBLIES

Come on, Pelligrino. You don't think of me as family?

POMPOSELLO

Only if you think of this as incest, Sibblies.

SIBBLIES

That's kind of yuck. But O-K.

Pomposello HOOKS THE EAGLE'S WING on the collar of her blouse, KISSES Sibblies.

Sibblies crushes herself against Pomposello. Pomposello UNHOOKS the umbrella, traces the Eagle's wing along her bare skin. He breaks the kiss, FORCES THE UMBRELLA HANDLE between Sibblies's lips.

Sibblies CARESSES THE LENGTH of Pomposello's umbrella. Pomposello removes the Eagle's wing from Sibblies's mouth, HOOKS THE TIPS in one of her nostrils.

Sibblies SQUIRMS. Pomposello grabs the back of her head.

SIBBLIES (CONT'D)

Stop! You're so fucking rough -

Pomposello TILTS Sibblies's head down, IMPALES the wing-tip into her skull, lodging it to the bone.

Sibblies FLAILS. BLOOD SPURTS through the wound. Pomposello STRUGGLES to dislodge the Eagle's wing.

POMPOSELLO

It doesn't want to come out... ?

He gets enough leverage, VIOLENTLY YANKS OUT the umbrella handle with a VISCOUS BURST OF BRAIN SPLATTER.

Sibblies DROPS FACE DOWN to the floor.

Pomposello uses his necktie to wipe BLOOD, BRAIN AND LIPSTICK off his face. He LOOKS AT his watch.

POMPOSELLO (CONT'D)

Let's pick up the pace.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Is this gizmo good to go yet,
Fossey?

FLASHBACK — INT. TEATRO DANTE — TRAP ROOM — DAY

Louis leads a production design meeting with Fossey and Turnbull. Fossey is wearing a GAP ANORAK with the logo "CAMP ANORAK" printed on it. The latest prototype of the crossbow umbrella is displayed on a tripod.

FOSSEY
It might be a little porous, but remember: it's not real rain onstage. It's a mix of silver glitter and finely-ground glass.

LOUIS
It's still a bitch to comb out of the actors' hair.

FOSSEY
Well, real water would be bad.
(indicates the tripod)
This prop is based on the nineteen seventy-eight Bulgarian umbrella.

Louis pulls out a SERVICE REVOLVER, waves it at Fossey and Turnbull. He fires the prop, CLICKS on empty.

LOUIS
I hate guns. And I've been stuck with this since those fucked-up previews.
(to Fossey)
Come on, "Q." Convince me.

FOSSEY
The umbrella has a pneumatic mechanism. Trigger in the handle. It's a linkage system with a spring, the valve-bone is connected to the trigger-bone.

TURNBULL

It seems really complicated.
That's why it keeps failing.

FOSSEY

Turnbull, you're more than welcome
to play "target."

TURNBULL

(indicates Fossey's anorak)
You're going to be a target,
wearing that hoodie.

FOSSEY

It's not a "hoodie," it's an
anorak. From the Gap.

LOUIS

Focus, "Q." The crossbow bolt is
loaded inside the umbrella. I
don't have to do it on stage.

FOSSEY

Normally, it would be a gunpowder
cartridge or a ricin pellet like
in seventy-eight. The bolt will be
in the umbrella. What you'll be
shooting is a smoke squib.

(aims at Turnbull)

The target will be fitted with a
brace, which I'll trigger from the
dimmer, and an arrowhead will pop
from the back of the actor's neck.

LOUIS

If it works, I'll be impressed,
Fossey. You sure learned a lot
from that one time on a movie set.

FOSSEY

Our French F-X guy was the best at
killing. All practical stuff.
"Summer Camp Psycho" was the time
of my life.

TURNBULL

Sounds like a real enema verité.

FOSSEY

Fuck you, Turnbull. Show us the mediocre mousetraps you built.

TURNBULL

"Built?" Fuck you, you union hack. I'm a sculptor.

LOUIS

Guys! Take it down. Stay professional.

Turnbull WALKS LOUIS OVER to "The Skeleton," a bare-bones version of the submerged Statue of Liberty, seen at the end of the original "Planet of the Apes."

LOUIS (CONT'D)

Well, damn you, bastard. Damn you all to Hell.

Turnbull MOVES OVER to display the working agricultural tool, "The Harrow."

TURNBULL

"Marrow or Harrow?" I took the world-building very seriously.

LOUIS

I'm tinkering with particulars. "The Black slave owners cultivate their white slaves for their bone marrow -"

Turnbull starts MOTORING "The Harrow" around the room, BARRELING DOWN on Fossey, who doesn't budge.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

" - if the white slaves have certain qualities, that bone marrow provides a cure for the virus ravaging the land."

FOSSEY

And the marrow is delicious! Louis's clapback on the Jeffrey Dahmer cookbook.

Louis MOTIONS for Turnbull and Fossey to "huddle up."

TURNBULL

(indicates "The Well")

This is mobile. We can put it right over the trap door.

LOUIS

There's a lot of moving parts in this play. I don't want the actors overshadowed.

FOSSEY

Let me show you these.

Fossey WALKS THEM OVER to a table of MANNEQUIN HEADS, displaying five dental acrylic FULL-FACE MASKS.

FOSSEY (CONT'D)

I call these "The Caste Masks," c-a-s-t-e.

CIRCLING - "THE CASTE MASKS"

The faces of the masks are diptychs: 1/2 INK-BLACK, 1/2 CHALK-WHITE. The interiors of the masks are all-black, fitted with CHARCOAL FILTERS.

FOSSEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

"Act Two: The masks symbolize how the Black bidders descend further into depravity during the auction." I call the white halves, "Caucasian Chalk," like Brecht.

Fossey uses a KRYLON SPRAY CAN, applies a fresh coat of BLACK PAINT.

LOUIS (O.S.)

Are the actors going to be able to breathe through that?

FOSSEY (O.S.)

Same mask I wore at the end of the "Summer Camp Psycho" shoot.

FOSSEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 They won't be wearing them long
 enough to cause any problems.

OTHER SIDE OF TRAP ROOM

Turnbull rudely FAKE-COUGHs, LEADS Louis and Fossey to the
 final sculpture, "The Dead Horse."

TURNBULL
 Here's the real showstopper,
 Louis. Say hello to "The Dead
 Horse."

"The Dead Horse" is constructed from STEEL POLES mounted to
 a WOODEN PLATFORM. There are curved METAL BRACES fitted for
 a horse, a dog or a human body with BUCKLED STRAPS
 positioned for the belly and head.

TURNBULL (CONT'D)
 The breeding post -

FOSSEY
 The rape stand.

TURNBULL
 - of "The Plague Spring." Strap it
 down and have at it, boys.

LOUIS
 This is all great. Maybe too
 great. Go nuts on the creativity,
 but don't forget: the play's the
 thing and the writer is king.

TURNBULL
 You are the H-N-I-C here, Louis.
 (as Fossey goes wide-eyed)
 What, he can say that and I can't
 throw it right back?

LOUIS
 You must really want to earn my
 hate for your cracker ass,
 Turnbull.
 (holds up a prop bottle of VINO HOTTENTOT)

LOUIS (CONT'D)
I'm the Head Vinter in Charge,
too.

FOSSEY
I don't drink anymore.

TURNBULL
One bit part in "Summer Camp
Slasher" -

FOSSEY
"Summer Camp Psycho!"

TURNBULL
- and the rest of us get stuck
with your therapy.

Fossey gets in Turnbull's face. Louis STEPS IN BETWEEN
them. He motions them to their work corners.

LOUIS
I'll leave you two to your own
devices.

Louis is about to go, SEES a translucent, silvery PROP FISH
mounted above the shop's door.

Sections of the prop fish are marked with Japanese
characters for mekajiki, toro, and amadai.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
This is new. What's this
"Frankenfish" thing?

Louis TIP-TOES to tap the prop. Fossey PULLS him back.

FOSSEY
Don't touch it! It's filled with
quicksilver. Liquid mercury. It's
my intake from eating swordfish,
tuna and tile for twenty years.

TURNBULL
You're saying we've been walking
under a piñata of slow sushi
death?

FOSSEY

It won't necessarily kill you. It might cost you a role in a David Mamet show.

Louis LEAVES.

Fossey EDGES OVER to Turnbull, who immediately WHIPS OUT his cell phone, speed-dials.

TURNBULL

Hi. It's Turnbull. Get me Rhodora Haze. Now.

FOSSEY

The stagehands contract expires soon. Before our run is over. Saint Cristofer's not going to shut down even a day earlier.

TURNBULL

I don't care.

FOSSEY

You're the one into bare-bones. The T-N-C light board is a Goddamn relic. We - Us! - we'll have to do the work of two carpenters, a fly man, three people on props, a sound person, an electrician and the assistant stage manager.

TURNBULL (ON PHONE)

Fuck. Rhodora - hold.

(to Fossey)

Let's get something straight. I am an artist. I am trying to innovate here. I am here to create and sell. You? You're just a glorified stage Mom-slash-handyman.

Fossey and Turnbull SPIN AWAY from each other. Fossey ROLLS HIS EYES, throws his head back, GROWLS.

Fossey SIDE-EYES Turnbull, then stares up at the TRAP DOOR HATCH below the mainstage.

The LIGHTS FLICKER ON AND OFF in the trap room.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — BACKSTAGE — NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

SHITTY CHANGING ROOMS (WHITE CAST)

Pomposello and Archer confer in the CRAMPED SPACE, LIT ONLY by the dull GOLDEN GLOW from discarded Yardbird Sweet "Lemon Pepper Wet" fried chicken TAKEOUT BOXES.

Pomposello shows Archer a BLACK-METAL COLLAPSIBLE UMBRELLA.

POMPOSELLO

Run with the baton. Igor your ass
and light 'em up.

ARCHER

Still getting residuals from that
one episode of "Law and Order?"

Pomposello SMACKS the umbrella into Archer's hands. Archer LEAVES.

CROSSOVER SPACE — CONTINUOUS

The walkway is DARK for a SPLIT-SECOND, before a STRING OF BULBS CLICK ON, backlighting Archer as a MOVING SILHOUETTE.

Archer WALKS FORWARD until he runs into Kidwell, STUMBLING AROUND in the shadows.

KIDWELL

Archer? Is that you?

ARCHER

Hi, Kidwell. How's it hanging?

Kidwell TUGS at his elaborate costume.

KIDWELL

It's too tight. Can you help me
out of some of this? I'd like to
breathe again before Act Two.

ARCHER

Sure, man. Sucks for you. Bet you're glad to be free of this Cenobite shit after tonight.

KIDWELL

Xeno-what? Hurry the fuck up.

ARCHER

I need to see what I'm doing.

Archer holds Pomposello's "baton" over Kidwell: an UMBRELLA WITH A 4100-LUMEN FLASH TORCH in the handle.

Archer SWITCHES THE BEAM ON.

KIDWELL

What is that? Is this thing safe?

ARCHER

I mean, it CAN be a flash torch. It's not gonna burn my hand.

KIDWELL

Fuck your hand, man! What about -

Archer WHIPS THE BEAM AROUND so it doesn't concentrate and burn Kidwell's costume. Archer SLIDES THE BUCKLE on Kidwell's choker.

KIDWELL (CONT'D)

Can you believe how claustrophobic I am, wearing all this shit?

ARCHER

I believe you.

Archer TIGHTENS THE CHOKER, strangling Kidwell, then shoves him against a wall, near a LIGHT SWITCH BOX.

Archer PRESSES the flash torch's HALOGEN BULB against Kidwell's EYE SOCKET.

A SECOND LIGHT SOURCE - from behind Archer and Kidwell - moves around to cast the two men into SILHOUETTE.

Archer's flash torch BURNS A HOLE completely through the BACK OF KIDWELL'S HEAD, killing him.

Kidwell's body SLUMPS DOWN to the floor. Archer turns off the flash torch, reaches for the light box.

ARCHER (CONT'D)

Found the switch.

Archer TURNS THE LIGHTS ON in the walkway. He throws the flash torch to Fossey, standing there to catch it. Fossey BLOWS OUT THE FLAME in a prop gaslight lantern.

Fossey guides Archer, who DRAGS KIDWELL'S CORPSE by the choker and shoulder straps.

FOSSEY

We'll stick him up here, for now.

Fossey and Archer HOOK A CABLE around Kidwell's corpse, use a PULLEY AND OLD RIG to lift the body into a crawl space.

FLASHBACK — EXT. SPEAKING VOLUMES — DAY

STOREFRONT WINDOW

Louis himself is on display for the bookshop's "Watch Writers Work" performative lecture series. Louis sits at a table, typing the manuscript for "The Plague Spring" on a MANUAL SMITH-CORONA TYPEWRITER.

FLASHBACK — INT. SPEAKING VOLUMES — DAY

SALES COUNTER

Deuca (at this time) is a clerk working at the store. Louis and his fawning CROWD are VISIBLE from here.

Louis's back is to his audience. He starts TYPING, STOPS, LEANS BACK to pose for pictures.

DEUCA

A lot of "watch me," but not a lot of "work."

Raphael is a customer. He WALKS UP to the counter with TWO BOOKS, Louis's adaptations of "Incognegro" and H.P. Lovecraft's "The Horror of Red Hook."

RAPHAEL

I can see how getting a MacArthur "genius" Grant might immediately go to your head.

DEUCA

(indicates "Incognegro")
Midtown Comics is right up the street. You should compare and contrast the original story to how Louis bastardized it.

RAPHAEL

He did this brilliant adaptation of H-P Lovecraft, too. I think?

DEUCA

You "think." Do you know how racist H-P Lovecraft was? Louis is kind of a race traitor.

RAPHAEL

(shows his D.G.A. membership card)
You know we're both white, right?

DEUCA

I know you're white. You're still paying full price.

STOREFRONT WINDOW — "WATCH WRITERS WORK" — CONTINUOUS

Louis types a QUARTER-PAGE, LEANS BACK, meditates OUT LOUD on dialogue. Raphael WALKS UP, joins the CROWD.

LOUIS

"We gon' keeps on killin' yuh 'til you cain't dies no mo'...." No.
"We're going to keep killing you until you can't die anymore."

RAPHAEL

You should go both ways!

LOUIS

The format is this: I will answer general questions from students -

RAPHAEL

I have a M-F-A.

LOUIS

You, sir, are a M-F-A-hole. Ask me about being a writer and the writing process. I will not be offering critiques on your work.

RAPHAEL

I'm just happy you're writing an original play, for a change.

LOUIS

"The Plague Spring." This is the story of "Louis," a free man of color, his octoroan bride Marié, and the last days of their plantation. Or vineyard. I'm still tinkering with that. Human phylloxera sweeps through the plantation -

RAPHAEL

Or vineyard?

LOUIS

- and Louis and Marié have to sell off what's left of their stock before they succumb and the plantation-slash-vineyard's assets are decimated.

SALES COUNTER - CONTINUOUS

Grigor is also a customer in Speaking Volumes this afternoon. He hands Deuca a copy of William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" to ring up.

GRIGOR

Quick question: are you guys hiring?

DEUCA

We hire people who can see. You can't, so I'll tell you: I'm not "guys."

GRIGOR

I'm sorry. Is this store hiring? For clerks or stock-boys? Stock-people?

DEUCA

(scans the book)

I reject this shitty job like a cow's heart. You can take my place. Fifteen ninety-nine.

GRIGOR

That's the year "Julius Caesar" was written!

BACKGROUND - Louis wraps up the "Watch Writers Work" session. The AUDIENCE APPLAUDS.

DEUCA

Not a quiz. It's the cost of the book. White people pay full price.

STOREFRONT WINDOW - "WATCH WRITERS WORK" - CONTINUOUS

Two of the future "Plague Spring" actors, Knott and Staples, WALK UP to Louis as the CROWD THINS OUT.

KNOTT

Wow, sir. That was just an hour.

STAPLES

That was a master class in playwriting.

LOUIS

Actors. I am the Master Class. You two - you're the slave class.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

You have to start from the cotton,
if you want to get here.

(indicates his chair)

Auditions in two months.

Grigor PASSES BY, SMILES at Louis on the way out of the store. Louis does not acknowledge Grigor.

A subway train's RUMBLE ECHOES throughout the bookshop.

WALL NEAR "STAFF PICKS" BOOKSHELF

We SEE a POSTER for a closed musical, Douglas & Demar's "Sirens Wail, Horns Blow, Negroes Sing!" featuring O'Harris as a trumpet player and Knott as a pin-up girl astride a ROCKET-SHAPED THERMOMETER with the mercury at 100 degrees.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — BACKSTAGE — NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

CROSSOVER — MOVING

Knott SLUMS AROUND IN THE SHADOWS, stalks O'Harris, who PEEKS OVER his shoulder, aware he is being followed.

Knott grips her GIANT GOLF UMBRELLA like a sword.

O'Harris STOPS, LINGERS in a spot, fumbles with his costume. Knott MOVES IN closer. She SLIPS, DROPS HER UMBRELLA, but catches it before it hits the floor.

O'Harris, unsurprised, TURNS to face Knott.

O'HARRIS

Oh. It is you. Hello.

KNOTT

Ah, O'Harris. Good evening, sir.

O'Harris MOVES TOWARDS Knott with his HIPS THRUST FORWARD, showing off his exaggerated RED CODPIECE.

KNOTT (CONT'D)

To you and yours, sirs.

O'HARRIS

We've still got some time before Act Two - well, I do. You won't be onstage anymore. Would you like to join me outside for a smoke?

KNOTT

It's raining like crazy, sir. You mustn't get your finery wet.

O'HARRIS

What gets wet, gets wet.

Knott offers O'Harris her golf umbrella. She can barely lift it. O'Harris GRIPS IT with both hands.

O'HARRIS (CONT'D)

This bad boy seems like it's too much work for you.

He places one hand on Knott's wrist, GLANCES DOWN at his codpiece.

O'HARRIS (CONT'D)

Grip it around the center.

KNOTT

I modestly bid you goodnight, sir.

Knott LOOKS AT O'Harris's codpiece, WALKS in the opposite direction.

O'HARRIS

Get out of character! Come play in the rain!

Knott turns a corner, OUT OF VIEW. O'Harris checks time on a POCKET WATCH, attached by a chain to his costume.

O'HARRIS - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

He WALKS THROUGH BACKSTAGE, resting the umbrella on his shoulder, EXITS THE THEATRE through the STAGE DOOR.

RAIN POURS IN from outside.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE — BACK ALLEY — NIGHT

O'Harris stands under the FIRE ESCAPE for cover. The rain TAPERS OFF. An ERRATIC RAT-A-TAT-TAT sound JUST OFF TO HIS LEFT attracts O'Harris's attention.

O'HARRIS'S P.O.V. — GARBAGE CAN

Rainfall POURS OFF the fire escape, onto Louis's discarded Smith-Corona typewriter. Water PUNCHES RANDOM KEYS.

O'HARRIS — CONTINUOUS

He lights a cigarette. The RAIN INTENSIFIES. O'Harris OPENS THE UMBRELLA given to him by Knott.

He holds the umbrella OVER HIS HEAD, POPS IT OPEN.

SPLASHES OF MERCURY POUR OUT from the collapsible metal ribs and stretches of the umbrella's fabric, pelleting O'Harris, SCARRING HIS FACE AND TONGUE. He SCREAMS. COLLAPSES against the wall.

ALLEYWAY — CONTINUOUS

Knott, waiting on the other side of the stage door exit, RUNS OUTSIDE.

She KNEELS DOWN in front of O'Harris, unfolds the "Aunt Jemima" BONNET of her costume. Knott MOVES IN to wipe O'Harris's face. He TREMBLES, WHIMPERS.

KNOTT

Shhh. Hush now, dusky sir. Let me dry your face. Off.

O'HARRIS

(breaks "Black American" character, Brixton patois)
"Dusky?!"

KNOTT

You're British?!

O'HARRIS

Cast off ... buh-buh "Black Mirror"-
rrr.

KNOTT

Well, you are dark with something
other than one drop, sir.

Knott's bonnet is full of USED HYPODERMIC NEEDLES and MERCURY-COATED RAZOR BLADES. Knott RUBS THE CLOTH VIGOROUSLY across O'Harris's face. She forces needles and blades into his mouth, then SLASHES HIS THROAT.

Knott stands up, watches O'Harris BLEED OUT AND DIE. She traces her hands around his costume, finds his pocket watch, CHECKS THE TIME.

Knott MATTES THE BLOOD on O'Harris's face with her bonnet.

JUMP CUT TO:

KNOTT AND O'HARRIS'S CORPSE

Knott has STRIPPED O'Harris of his entire costume. He is NAKED, FACE DOWN in the alley.

Knott GLOSSES HER LIPS, tosses away a VINTAGE BRASS LIPSTICK TUBE, shaped like a bullet, near the body.

She DOUBLE-TAPS O'Harris's exposed ass with her umbrella to make sure he's dead.

KNOTT'S P.O.V. - PAVEMENT

RATS SCURRY from between the garbage cans to feed on O'Harris's corpse.

KNOTT - CONTINUOUS

She TWIRLS her umbrella. All of the MERCURY IS SHAKEN OUT.

STAGE DOOR – CONTINUOUS

Knott GOES BACK INSIDE the theatre, with O'Harris's FULL COSTUME BUNCHED under her arm.

FLASHBACK – EXT. KITCHEN CINQUE STUDIOS – THEATER DISTRICT
– DAY

Raphael and some of the CURRENT ACTORS in "The Plague Spring" are among the THEATER PROFESSIONALS walking into this multi-purpose rehearsal space.

FLASHBACK – INT. KITCHEN CINQUE, STUDIO #1019 – DAY

The first full table reading of the play "The Plague Spring" is underway.

Louis is at the head of the "U"-SHAPED TABLE, flanked on either side by St. Cristofer and Marié.

LOUIS

This play will resonate. People will feel the pain. We've assembled an all-children-of-divorce cast.

Everyone LAUGHS. The Black ensemble actors – O'Harris, Sibblies, Kidwell, Bradshaw and Alesha – are seated on the LEFT SIDE OF THE TABLE. The white actors – Hinds, Knott, Archer, Pomposello and Raphael – are seated on the RIGHT.

The white actors are DRINKING COFFEE from "WE ARE HAPPY TO SERVE YOU" Greek diner cups.

RAPHAEL

(to St. Cristofer)
Was that on purpose?

LOUIS

(to the white actors)
Just try grasping the play's ideas. I expect the levels of charisma to be proportional to the melanin.

Staples is also present, as the current stage manager. He is seated OFF TO THE SIDE, near a window. He assists Louis and St. Cristofer for the reading.

Staples notices KNOTT WAVING TO O'HARRIS across the room. Marié notices, as well. She SNAPS at Staples to get his attention.

MARIÉ

Darling. You. Be kind?

Marié removes her ANTIQUE TEASPOON from its VELVET POUCH.

MARIÉ (CONT'D)

Baptize "Camille" for my chamomile? She prefers Perrier.

Staples GETS UP, WALKS TO MARIÉ, takes her spoon, goes over to Knott and SPLASHES WATER from her water bottle over the spoon. He SHAKES OFF the excess, holds the spoon UP TO SUNLIGHT, hands it back to Marié.

STAPLES

Sparkling.

Staples SITS DOWN.

LOUIS

So. That brings us to the theme of rebellion. A mysterious disease is sweeping through the plantation -

ST. CRISTOFER

The vineyard.

LOUIS

- and "Louis" and "Marié" have to liquidate what's left of their stock before it is afflicted and the estate is decimated. Going forward, I regret - no, no, I'm delighted - to inform you our original director, Julie, has departed. I am taking over, in addition to performing.

RAPHAEL
 (to Archer)
 That always works out well.

St. Cristofer GLARES at Raphael, specifically addresses the white actors.

ST. CRISTOFER
 This is an alternate universe, or maybe a near-future, where the slaves are all white and stand on stage completely nude.

POMPOSELLO
 Will this be on a thrust stage or a proscenium?

ST. CRISTOFER
 (to the white actors)
 You were told about it in audition. Boldface, in the script.

RAPHAEL
 I have no tactile objections....
 to the nudity.

Louis LOOKS BACK at Staples, NODS.

ST. CRISTOFER
 I have a tactile objection to your use of the word "tactile."

FLASHBACK — EXT. KITCHEN CINQUE STUDIOS — TIME-LAPSE

SEVEN HOURS pass. APPLAUSE from the "The Plague Spring" reading is heard, MUTED from the upper-floor window.

FLASHBACK — INT. KITCHEN CINQUE, STUDIO #1019 — NIGHT

The actors GATHER SCRIPTS, PERSONAL BELONGINGS, start to file out of the room. Louis confers with St. Cristofer. Knott meets with Staples. THEY KISS.

LOUIS
 (to Staples)
 Are you two.... together? Well.
 You're a lucky man.

KNOTT
 Why? Because he gets to fuck me?
 (to Staples)
 I'll meet you outside.

She GLOSSES HER LIPS from her vintage brass tube. Knott
 LEAVES. Louis WINKS at St. Cristofer.

LOUIS
 This is some real crackerjack
 casting you've done here.

Louis takes out his CELL PHONE, TYPES in a message.

FLASHBACK — EXT. KITCHEN CINQUE STUDIOS — NIGHT

FACADE — SIDEWALK

Raphael WALKS OUT, feels his PHONE VIBRATE the second he
 reaches the curb.

RAPHAEL'S P.O.V. — CELL PHONE SCREEN — CONTINUOUS

The TEXT FROM LOUIS READS: "Your tactile commentary on the
 play is not appreciated. Feel free to reschedule any plans
 you may have canceled to appear in the show."

RAPHAEL (O.S.)
 The fuck?

A PHOTOGRAPH POPS UP after the text.

It is a SCREEN CAPTURE of an e-mail from Raphael CC:'d to
 SEVERAL OF RAPHAEL'S FRIENDS, forwarded to Van Pallandt.
 The SUBJECT LINE READS: "FWD: RE: The 'Plagued' Spring."

The BODY OF THE MESSAGE begins: "Ladies and gentlemen, I
 would like to invite you to a plane crash."

ST. CRISTOFER (V.O.)
 Van Pallandt is publishing this in
 his column tomorrow?

FLASHBACK — INT. KITCHEN CINQUE STUDIOS — DAY

ELEVATOR — MOVING UP

Louis reads the e-mail obtained by Van Pallandt.

LOUIS
 He's giving us a heads-up out of
 professional courtesy. "Luis {sic}
 is a mechanic who has gears left
 over and fluid dripping from the
 fuel line. Hence, the plane crash.
 There are some incredible scenes
 in the play, fully-realized
 miniature plays"

FLASHBACK — INT. KITCHEN CINQUE, STUDIO #1019 — NIGHT

Louis and St. Cristofer SIT ON EITHER SIDE of Staples.
 Everyone else is GONE.

STAPLES
 So what happened to Raphael?

ST. CRISTOFER
 He's going to get sick from
 mercury poisoning and then get hit
 by a car.
 (to Louis)
 Hey, make sure we get Fossey's
 file. We've got everybody's tax
 info except the new stage
 manager's.

Louis hands Staples a REVISED COPY of "The Plague Spring"
 script.

LOUIS
 My first direction to you: Learn
 Your Lines, Keep Your Mouth Shut.

St. Cristofer shakes Staples's hand, SMILES.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — THEATER LOBBY — NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

LOBBY WINE BAR — CONTINUOUS

Raphael and Van Pallandt continue their discussion. Van Pallandt reads Raphael's e-mail from his phone.

VAN PALLANDT

".... The rest of the play is flimsy and shaky on the way to being a burning chassis sprawled over a coast line. Why can't the entire play be built out of the material the black box is made of?" Oof, Raphael. This is a beautiful kind of brutal.

RAPHAEL

You published a private e-mail to my friends. Mister Van Pallandt, you got me fired.

VAN PALLANDT

Mister Raphael, judging from my colleagues' reactions —

He directs Raphael's EYES to food critic Pete Baker and his friends, Isherwood, Cote and Armond, who seem to be RAVING ENTHUSIASTICALLY about Act One.

VAN PALLANDT (CONT'D)

I saved this play. You live in the City of "Six Degrees." Nothing is private. Everything is theater.

Van Pallandt KNOCKS BACK his last gulp of wine.

RAPHAEL

Can I at least buy you a drink?

VAN PALLANDT

Bury the hatchet, like the slaves do to their masters in the heavy-handed, pun intended, denouement?

RAPHAEL

I think Louis scrapped that original ending. No screaming Negroes in the finale.

VAN PALLANDT

Well, thanks to you, this play's two hours shorter and one working actor down. I doubt that you can afford that drink.

(looks at his watch)

I'll wave to you up in the cheap seats, Raphael.

Van Pallandt WALKS AWAY. Raphael CROUCHES to the floor to pick up his double canopy umbrella, which isn't there. Raphael ROLLS HIS EYES, recalls leaving it in the balcony. He LOOKS TOWARD the theater's entrance.

RAPHAEL'S P.O.V. — FRONT DOORS

As the intermission winds down, PATRONS return from the RAIN OUTSIDE. The lines of PROTESTORS and PICKETING STAGEHANDS march past Teatro Dante's facade.

Deuca SPOTS Raphael, FLIPS A MIDDLE FINGER at him.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — BACKSTAGE — NIGHT

SHITTY CHANGING ROOM (WHITE CAST)

Alesha LEANS AGAINST a wall, CRYING.

Staples APPROACHES Alesha. He stays in character, MUTE behind his mask. He is carrying Raphael's DOUBLE CANOPY UMBRELLA, stolen from his mezzanine seat.

ALESHA

I thought I would be alone. Who would want to come back here?

Staples touches Alesha's shoulder, lays the umbrella on the floor.

ALESHA (CONT'D)

It's you. You know? You know. How hard this role has been for me. Marié isn't doing Method, Marié is doing Marié. She's been a bitch to me for years.

(imitates Marié)

"Ooh, from southwest Atlanta to Stella Adler? That's so... Raven." This play is intense. And complicated. Louis hasn't checked in on me once during the run. No one asks me about my mental state.

(looks for herself in Staples's eyes)

I am so fragile.

Staples remains silent. He TRACES HIS FINGER-GLOVED HANDS across Alesha's lips.

Staples ROUGHLY SHOVES his thumb in between Alesha's teeth. She is surprised - GAGS - quickly gets into it.

Staples CROUCHES SLIGHTLY, PICKS UP Raphael's umbrella. He pulls out his thumb, replaces it with the tip of the umbrella. Alesha WRETCHES.

ALESHA (CONT'D)

Um, no. Did you just pick that up off the floor? Nasty ain't kinky -

Alesha GRABS THE UMBRELLA with one hand, PUNCHES Staples in his zippered mouth.

Staples PUNCHES Alesha back. Staples and Alesha GRAPPLE, TUMBLE to the floor.

Alesha breaks his grip. She grabs the umbrella, SWINGS WILDLY, STRIKES Staples on the nose with the handle.

BLOOD FROM HIS NOSE AND MOUTH CLOTS UP under Staples's mask. Alesha HITS Staples again. Staples UNZIPS his mouth-guard, SPITS BLOOD into Alesha's face.

Staples YANKS the umbrella out of Alesha's reach. Alesha WIPES HIS BLOOD out of her left eye.

ALESHA'S BLOODY P.O.V. — SUPPORT COLUMN

Alesha is distracted by the SHARPIE'D SIGNATURES of "The Plague Spring's" white actors on the DRYWALL.

STAPLES

moves INTO VIEW, SHOVES part of the umbrella DEEP INTO ALESHA'S EYE.

STAPLES AND ALESHA — CONTINUOUS

She is still ALIVE, MOANING. Staples shoves the umbrella FURTHER IN. He works the umbrella EVEN DEEPER, TAPS ALESHA'S SKULL. Staples pops the umbrella OPEN.

The SPRING-LOADED MECHANISM SPLATTERS Alesha's BRAINS AND BLOOD all over the changing room floor.

Alesha's CORPSE COLLAPSES, DROPS just above Staples's knees. Her head FALLS FORWARD, into his crotch.

Staples ZIPS his mouth-guard CLOSED as a punctuation to Alesha's murder. He THRUSTS the umbrella handle UP, SHATTERS an overhead light.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — CASTE LOUNGE — NIGHT

Marié SITS ALONE in the parlor, STIRRING AND DRINKING chamomile tea.

She HEARS THE POP of the overhead light from the white actors' changing room. It is the ONLY AUDIBLE NOISE in the entire backstage area. Marié wanders out, runs right into Fossey, WALKING IN.

FOSSEY AND MARIÉ — CONTINUOUS

FOSSEY

Didja hear? Turnbull's boycotting the party tonight.

MARIÉ

You just spoke with Turnbull?

FOSSEY

Right when he left for dinner
break.

MARIÉ

That's too bad. He'll be missed.

Fossey's EYES WANDER DOWN to Marié's cameo-less neckline.
She catches his eyes on her bosom.

MARIÉ (CONT'D)

Yes, I graduated from the Yale
School of Décolletage, as well.

Fossey SLINKS OFF.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — CROSSOVER — NIGHT

WALKWAY — CONTINUOUS

Marié WALKS PAST the white actors' changing room.

She SEES Staples and Alesha FROM A DISTANCE and from an
OBSCURED ANGLE.

Marié can only make out their SILHOUETTES, in what appears
to be a compromising position.

Marié stays silent, FALLS BACK INTO SHADOWS, WALKS AWAY in
the opposite direction.

Staples PULLS THE BLOODIED UMBRELLA out of Alesha's skull.
He DRAGS Alesha's body out of the room, across the floor.

The house lights FLICKER ON AND OFF.

An AUDIENCE APPLAUDS. MUSIC PIPES IN.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — MAINSTAGE — NIGHT

THIRD ROW, CENTER

Van Pallandt checks his cell phone, SHUTS IT OFF. He takes his seat.

MEZZANINE

Raphael returns to his seat, SEES that his expensive umbrella is GONE.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — BACKSTAGE — NIGHT

DIMMER BEACH

Fossey SCRAMBLES to get the artificial rainfall going onstage, just before he has to open the curtains.

EXT. SPEAKING VOLUMES — FACADE — NIGHT

CURBSIDE

Grigor is in FULL SHAKESPEAREAN COSTUME. He holds an anachronistic parasol — a Teatro Dante-branded umbrella with the theater's "nine circles" grid logo.

The BardBus ride LOADS UP in front of the bookshop.

GRIGOR

Good even and twenty! Welcome to
New York City's Theater District.
"Julius Caesar" soon commences!

FLASHBACK — INT. TEATRO DANTE — BACKSTAGE — NIGHT

MARIÉ'S CHANGING ROOM

St. Cristofer KNOCKS on the door, lets himself in.

MARIÉ

I'm not decent, Saint Cristofer.

ST. CRISTOFER
As confirmed by "Vanity Fair."

MARIÉ
'Tis a pity I'm also not this
troupe's whore. So. Staples and
Alesha – how long has that been
going on?

ST. CRISTOFER
That was going on? Hm.

St. Cristofer LOOKS AT Marié's neck, notices the cameo
pendant is gone.

ST. CRISTOFER (CONT'D)
I'll let you finish getting your
costume on. See you at the party.

ST. CRISTOFER – MOVING – CONTINUOUS

St. Cristofer LEAVES Marié, goes to Louis's changing room.

LOUIS'S CHANGING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

Louis BROODS at his vanity mirror.

St. Cristofer SLIPS IN behind him, notices Nella's HEADSHOT
AND RESUME on the nightstand.

ST. CRISTOFER (CONT'D)
If you say "Helen" five times in
front of a mirror, she appears.

LOUIS
Her name is "Nella."

ST. CRISTOFER
It was. The party. You'll be
there.

St. Cristofer slips on BLACK ISOTONER GLOVES. He brushes
the back of Louis's neck, LEAVES.

FLASHBACK — INT. TEATRO DANTE — DOWNSTAIRS — NIGHT

TRAP ROOM — PROP SHOP

SEEN IN REVERSE — the FROSTED WINDOWPANE of the door is stenciled with vinyl letters: "1 DEMENTIA."

Fossey multitasks: he tinkers with the crossbow umbrella, mounted on a tripod, pointed at the LOCKED DOOR.

He sprays ANOTHER COAT OF BLACK PAINT across the charcoal interiors of the FIVE TWO-TONED "CASTE MASKS," mounted on a row of foam mannequin heads.

BEHIND FOSSEY — The sounds of Staples GRUNTING and the SCRATCHES of Alesha's body and costume SCRAPING ALONG THE FLOOR are AUDIBLE from outside the shop.

Staples's SILHOUETTE APPEARS in the windowpane. He KNOCKS on the locked door.

INT. TEATRO DANTE — MAINSTAGE — NIGHT (THE PRESENT)

VIEW FROM CENTER STAGE

Act Two of "The Plague Spring" begins. The curtain GOES UP. The ARTIFICIAL RAIN (a mix of glitter and finely-ground glass) COMES DOWN.

All of the bloody MURDER-UMBRELLAS are sheathed in the "Double Helix" parasol-stand and wine rack.

Four of the white cast members — Hinds, Knott, Staples and Pomposello — are onstage with the two-toned, full-face "Caste Masks" and BLACK NITRATE GLOVES.

They are costumed in WHITE BAPTIST CHURCH GOWNS with RED-WINE SATIN TRIM.

They shield themselves from the DOWNPOUR with GOSSAMER UMBRELLAS, double-sided with prints of artist KARA WALKER's silhouettes from her masterwork, "Gone, An Historical Romance Of A Civil War As It Occurred Between The Dusky Thighs Of One Young Negress And Her Heart."

The fifth white cast member, Archer, wears the same mask and gloves, but has on O'HARRIS'S COSTUME, which does not fit him properly.

Archer stands SLIGHTLY APART from the others.

All five white cast members SING an erratic, very Europeanized version of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing (The Negro National Anthem)."

Hinds, Knott, Staples, Pomposello and Archer hold "The Plague Spring" script books to their chests, like Bibles, but UPSIDE-DOWN.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE — STAGE DOOR — NIGHT

ALLEYWAY

St. Cristofer WALKS OUT of the theater through the BACK ALLEY ENTRANCE. He is wearing a BACKPACK branded with the logo of his alma mater, SANDEMAN COLLEGE.

He STOPS, SEES O'Harris in the alley. FEEDING RATS cover the naked actor's unrecognizable corpse.

St. Cristofer SHAKES HIS HEAD, nearly decides to ignore the grim scene when....

ST. CRISTOFER'S P.O.V. — O'HARRIS'S BODY — CONTINUOUS

St. Cristofer SEES Knott's VINTAGE BRASS LIPSTICK TUBE, discarded near the corpse.

His black-gloved hand REACHES for the lipstick tube, but he is discouraged by TWO VERY AGGRESSIVE RATS.

ALLEYWAY — CONTINUOUS

St. Cristofer wards the rats out of his path by SWINGING, STABBING his umbrella. He KICKS the vintage brass lipstick tube away.

St. Cristofer WALKS AWAY in the opposite direction.

DEUCA (V.O.)
 Don't go back in for Act Two! Do
 not support this play! Ask for a
 refund! Tell them why!

INT. TEATRO DANTE — MAINSTAGE — NIGHT

MEZZANINE

Raphael REACTS to how many changes, unknown to the rest of tonight's AUDIENCE, Louis has made to "The Plague Spring" since his forced departure.

THE WINGS

Marié ARRIVES AT STAGE RIGHT. She LOOKS ACROSS THE STAGE to get the prompt from Fossey.

Marié LOOKS AROUND for the white ensemble cast members to be on their marks as a backstage chorus. She is confused by the fact that she can HEAR THEM SINGING.

CENTER STAGE AND WINGS — MOVING

Marié WALKS OUT, SEES Hinds, Knott, Staples and Pomposello in their race cosplay, and Archer dressed in O'Harris's ill-fitting costume.

Fossey STOPS THE RAIN. Marié HESITATES to hit her mark onstage.

Fossey gets Marié's attention, URGES HER to step forward. He mouths the words: "Play your part."

Louis ARRIVES in the wings, on STAGE LEFT, next to Fossey. Fossey hands Louis a perfected CROSSBOW UMBRELLA.

FOSSEY
 (whispering)
 It works now.

LOUIS
 (whispering)
 Where do I shoot him?

FOSSEY

You shoot him onstage.

LOUIS

No, I mean, which part of his
body?

Fossey points BETWEEN HIS EYES.

Louis WALKS OUT, Marié moves towards him. They hit their
marks.

Louis and Marié LOOK AROUND the stage, SEE THE BODIES of
Sibblies, Kidwell, Bradshaw and Alesha STUFFED under,
behind and inside Turnbull's sculptures.

The bodies are NOT VISIBLE to the theater audience, but
Louis and Marié can clearly see the corpses.

Fossey SIGNALS FROM THE PROMPT CORNER, catches Marié's
eyes, directs her to LOOK UP.

MARIÉ'S P.O.V. — FLYSPACE

Marié SEES Turnbull's body, SUSPENDED IN A RIG, hanging
high in the flyspace, SWINGING from his broken neck.

A few BONES CRACK from the strain. The corpse SLIPS
SLIGHTLY in the noose.

CENTER STAGE AND WINGS — CONTINUOUS

Marié LOOKS OVER at Fossey, who silently urges Marié and
Louis: "Stay professional."

Louis and Marié collect themselves. They both take DEEP
BREATHS, go into their lines.

LOUIS

Thank you for the fellowship. Pick
up your prizes at the gate.

MARIÉ

(to Archer)

NOT YOU!!!

AUDIENCE — THIRD ROW, CENTER

Van Pallandt LEANS FORWARD, recognizes substantial changes in this second act of "The Plague Spring."

Van Pallandt takes out a pen and his MOLESKINE NOTEBOOK, jots down review notes. He tries to be subtle as he WRITES, but in the SIDE EYES of nearby AUDIENCE MEMBERS, it looks like Van Pallandt is masturbating.

CENTER STAGE AND WINGS (TIME-LAPSE)

All of the actors SLIGHTLY REPOSITION as "The Plague Spring" approaches its final scene. Pomposello FORCIBLY EXCHANGES MARKS onstage with Archer.

LOUIS
(to Archer)
You, sir — you treach! You lie!
You are an abolitionist with a
whip! You paint the fence while
the house burns down.

Pomposello, Hinds, Knott and Staples PUT MORE DISTANCE between themselves and Archer, who is confused.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
You raisinated the grapes of our
vineyard. I am a case study
preserved in vinegar, rather than
amber. Stand in the sun so I may
watch you explode.

Louis CLOSES IN on Archer, raises his umbrella, SQUEEZES the handle.

The CROSSBOW BOLT FIRES. It is a very real ARROW that SPEARS, DEAD CENTER, into Archer's head!

The AUDIENCE GASPS. Archer's mask BREAKS EVENLY into black and white halves. His body drops to the floor.

Louis and Marié LOOK OVER at Fossey in the prompt corner. He SIGNALS, "thumbs up," once again SILENTLY MOUTHS the words: "It works now."

The AUDIENCE APPLAUDS the "realism" of Louis killing Archer onstage.

THIRD ROW, CENTER

Van Pallandt, having already seen the play in previews, is just as SHOCKED as Louis and Marié, blown away by the "stagecraft" of Archer's death. It then occurs to him that this may not be "F/X."

Van Pallandt breaks with decorum, takes out his cell phone, PRESSES "9" and "1."

The BEEPS of the cell phone gets Van Pallandt SHUSHED BY THE THEATERGOERS on either side of him. He TURNS OFF his phone, joins in with the APPLAUSE.

Louis breaks "character," FLEES THE SCENE. Van Pallandt STANDS UP, WAVES to get Louis's attention.

VAN PALLANDT
(to Louis, racing by)
HOW DID YOU DO THAT!?!?

The CAST and AUDIENCE WATCHES as Louis LEAVES through the auditorium's FIRE EXIT.

CENTER STAGE AND WINGS — CIRCLING

Marié watches Louis's departure. Van Pallandt sits. The APPLAUSE SUBSIDES.

Marié collects herself, unsheathes her long teaspoon, TAPS IT against her necklace as a call to order.

Marié JUST NOW REALIZES she is no longer wearing the two-sided cameo pendant.

MARIÉ'S P.O.V. — PROMPT CORNER

Fossey LEANS BACK in the wings, FLIPS THE CAMEO in the air, like a coin. He FLASHES THE BLACK SIDE to Marié.

MARIÉ – CONTINUOUS

Marié SPEAKS TO THE SPACE Louis abandoned. She improvises a monologue that was meant to be their dialogue.

MARIÉ

Who jumps brooms to play
solitaire? The Man Who Ain't No'
Mo', be's where? Rebels! Devils,
beating their wives. Ofays slowly
slay me, riled-up hives.

(to Hinds and Knott)

Bucks and wenches, who weave
Georgia fire ants in my gown.

(to Pomposello and Staples)

Laced 'cane in my ruby shoes, stir
up the mound!

Hinds, Knott, Pomposello and Staples DISCARD their umbrellas and script books.

HINDS, KNOTT, POMPOSELLO AND STAPLES – MOVING

They each CROSS THE STAGE to one of the sculptures (except "The Well"), REACH IN and RETRIEVE BOWS AND TINY BLACK VIOLINS, prying them from the DEAD HANDS of Sibblies, Kidwell, Bradshaw and Alesha.

VIEW OF PROSCENIUM

The white actors quickly TUNE UP, play the first verse of a RACIST DITTY from the Old South.

Staples GRUNTS THE VOCAL over Hinds, Knott and Pomposello's instrumental rendition of the chorus.

MARIÉ (CONT'D)

(as intended, to the audience)

Strange fruit blooms from rain, at
most fear bares. Man Who's No'
Mo', ain't gon' nowhere. Caste for
us, by us, eat my dust. Spade
rakes red clay, laid to watch
y'all rust!

CENTER STAGE AND WINGS – CIRCLING

Marié TOSSES her long teaspoon at Hinds. Knott CATCHES IT, like a wedding bouquet, in mid-air.

Fossey turns on the rain again, DRAWS THE CURTAINS – and the show – to a close. The AUDIENCE APPLAUDS.

Van Pallandt LEADS the audience in an OVATION. There is no curtain call. The audience starts to FILE OUT.

MEZZANINE – CONTINUOUS

Raphael stares at the stage as PEOPLE SQUEEZE THROUGH to walk past him to the exits.

STAGE FLOOR – CURTAIN

Marié's HAND SHOOTS OUT from beneath the fabric but it is quickly, quietly DRAGGED BACK.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN – CONTINUOUS

Marié DASHES for the trap door. Hinds and Knott block her escape.

HINDS

No, that won't do.

KNOTT

No, that won't do at all.

Fossey DRAGS ARCHER'S BODY to "The Well," opens up the trap door's hatch.

FOSSEY

Somebody's got to be the fall guy.

Fossey BREAKS OFF the crossbow bolt through Archer's head, THROWS HIS CORPSE down the open trap door.

Pomposello and Staples SEIZE Marié. They MANHANDLE her, SLAP HER across the stage.

Pomposello and Staples STRAP AND BUCKLE Marié across "The Dead Horse" breeding stand. Turnbull's sculpture proves to be amateurish in construction, not built for practical action. It BREAKS under Marié's weight.

Marié, hurt and winded, LIES FACE DOWN on the stage floor. Pomposello, Hinds and Knott PIN HER DOWN, jamming their violins and bows into the backs of her thighs and the curve of her spine.

Staples LIFTS HIS MASK, UNZIPS his mouth-guard. He shares a BLOODY KISS with Knott, HANDS OFF his violin to her like a baton.

Staples SCRAPES his violin bowstring across the back of Marié's head. He doesn't slash her. He WEAVES THE BOW through Marié's hair, PULLS BACK TO REVEAL her wig.

Knott HANDS OFF Marié's favored teaspoon to Staples.

Staples GETS DOWN ON ONE KNEE, next to Marié. His NASTY BARE FEET are in her face. He BRUSHES HER NATURAL HAIR to the side. Staples FORCES the long teaspoon into Marié's ear, DIGS AROUND UNTIL HER EYES BLEED.

Marié DIES. BLOODY TEARDROPS stain the stage floor.

Hinds, Knott, and Pomposello CIRCLE OVER Staples.

HINDS

What do we do now?

POMPOSELLO

Well, they're casting an all-Black production of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" in Chicago.

KNOTT

We do what actors do.

STAPLES

We're gonna take this show on the road!

Staples ZIPS HIS MOUTH-GUARD back up, LOWERS HIS MASK. Hinds, Pomposello, Knott and Staples TAKE A BOW around Marié's body, EXIT THE STAGE.

VIEW FROM PROMPT CORNER

Fossey LURKS, WATCHING the others from the shadows.

FOSSEY

And scene. Fucking amateurs.

Fossey dons the "lottery" LEATHER TOP HAT. He WALKS PAST a prop: an HOURGLASS-SHAPED VERTICAL MIRROR.

FOSSEY'S P.O.V. - REFLECTION

Fossey SEES HIMSELF in BLACKFACE MAKEUP, as the spirit of Harlem's Apollo Theater legend HOWARD "SANDMAN" SIMS, complete with a SHEPHERD'S CROOK.

Blackface Fossey HOOKS HIMSELF around his neck, TAP-DANCES as he LEAVES.

EXT. RESTAURANT OSTERIA VIRTUOSISSIMA - NIGHT

FACADE - MOVING

St. Cristofer CHECKS IN at the host stand. Krista the maître d'hôtel WALKS HIM through the dining room.

INT. RESTAURANT OSTERIA VIRTUOSISSIMA - PRIVATE DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is decorated with POST-SHOW CONGRATULATIONS.

St. Cristofer sits and DRINKS ALONE, waiting for anyone from the production to show up.

ST. CRISTOFER

He relaxes enough to REMOVE HIS DARK GLASSES, REVEALS THE TEAR-GAS CANISTER SCARS on his face.

He plays a solitaire version of the Post-Mort 'Em! organ donation board game.

ST. CRISTOFER
(rolls the dice)
"Nigger-mortis!"

Something catches his attention. He LOOKS TOWARD the front of the restaurant.

ST. CRISTOFER'S P.O.V. - HOST STAND

TWO WHITE N.Y.P.D. DETECTIVES, SEARCY and BURVANT, arrive at the restaurant. They FLASH THEIR BADGES, check in with Krista the maître d'hôtel. She POINTS in the direction of the Private Dining Room.

Detective Burvant immediately puts his hand on his HOLSTERED GUN.

ST. CRISTOFER - CONTINUOUS

St. Cristofer puts his dark glasses back on, LOOKS at the black Isotoner gloves near his hips. He DROPS THEM to the floor, KICKS THEM underneath the banquette.

Detectives Searcy and Burvant are SEEN ENTERING the space, REFLECTED in St. Cristofer's dark glasses.

INT. TEATRO DANTE - NIGHT

Louis RUNS, still in full costume, through the theater lobby, out the front door. He DROPS the crossbow umbrella just before exiting.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE - NIGHT

LOUIS - MOVING

Louis EXITS the theatre, BUMPS right into the protesting Deuca, before inadvertently BREAKING THE PICKET LINE of striking STAGEHANDS.

Louis SCRAMBLES around the sidewalk in front of Teatro Dante.

He SEES TWO IDLE BLACK N.Y.P.D. OFFICERS, WATERS and WILKIE, who have noticed him. Louis HESITATES before MOVING FORWARD to alert the cops.

A TOURIST from BEHIND Louis, HELEN FROM CHICAGO, waves her cell phone in the air, DASHES PAST him.

DEUCA (O.S.)
Helen! Helen! Helen! Hellllll -
ennn!

STOREFRONT WINDOWS - CONTINUOUS

Helen From Chicago is a REFLECTED BLUR, RUNNING PAST THE GLASS as Deuca YELLS OUT for her.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE - STAGE DOOR - NIGHT

ALLEYWAY

Hinds, Pomposello, Knott and Staples EXIT THE THEATRE to the REPEATED THREE ECHOES of Deuca calling out for Helen From Chicago.

They SPLASH across the rain-slicked pavement, over O'Harris's GNAWED ON BODY.

Staples STOPS COLD. He notices his full-face "Caste Mask" is SMOKING AROUND THE EDGES.

Rainwater hits their masks, ACTIVATES A CORROSIVE POISON. Hinds, Pomposello and Knott COUGH, WRETCH as their masks also become RINGED WITH FUMES.

Hinds and Pomposello FALL to the pavement. They GRAB at their masks. Staples CATCHES Knott as SHE FALLS.

He is able to remove his two-tone overmask altogether, CASTS IT ASIDE just as it DEGRADES COMPLETELY.

STAPLES AND KNOTT - CONTINUOUS

In the BACKGROUND: Hinds and Pomposello CONVULSE AND DIE. Staples RIPS THE MASK OFF Knott's face.

Her face is GONE. The SKIN, EYELASHES, EYEBROWS, and RED LIPS are partially BURNED OFF and fused in her mask's interior filter.

Part of KNOTT'S BRAIN IS VISIBLE THROUGH BURNT SKULL. It CRATERS IN, like a soufflé.

Knott DIES. Staples tries to remove his mouth-guard. The ZIPPER IS WELDED SHUT by the corrosive. Staples SCREAMS into the SINGED FABRIC and MELTED METAL.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE — SIDEWALK — NIGHT

LOUIS — MOVING

through a SEA OF WET, BLACK UMBRELLAS, until he BUMPS INTO "Helen From Chicago" — a dead ringer for the murdered actor Nella Allen.

Helen/Nella BRUSHES PAST Louis, RUNS UP to meet her friend Deuca FURTHER ALONG the sidewalk.

LOUIS'S P.O.V. — TEATRO DANTE'S MARQUEE

UNDERNEATH — Deuca EMBRACES her friend, Helen/Nella.

DEUCA

"Helen."

Louis SEES "Helen From Chicago" as Nella's APPARITION — Nella as a PALE WHITE GHOST.

Nella takes a SHARD OF MIRRORED GLASS out of her purse. She SLICES IT ACROSS her white lips, COATING THEM in a RING OF BLOOD.

CURBSIDE — CONTINUOUS

FROM BEHIND Louis — Grigor's VOICE RISES IN DIMINUENDO. He RECITES from William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" (Act V, Scene 5).

GRIGOR

(as "Octavius," on a wireless mic)

"According to his virtue let us
use him, with all respect and
rites of burial. Within my text
his bones: to-night shall lie,
Most like a shoulder, order'd
honorably."

BARDBUS — MOVING — CONTINUOUS

Louis is still DISTRACTED as the tourist DOUBLE-DECKER
BardBus ROLLS UP behind him.

Grigor RECITES, GESTICULATES under an umbrella angled on
his shoulder as he WALKS ALONG the sidewalk.

REAR-VIEW MIRROR — CONTINUOUS

Louis TURNS AWAY from watching Deuca and Helen/Nella.

He SLAMS HIS FACE into the BardBus's REAR-VIEW MIRROR.

STREET — CONTINUOUS

Grigor and the BardBus TOURISTS LOOK ON, horrified, as
Louis JERKS BACK from the impact, SMASHES HIS HEAD on the
pavement, and DIES.

Grigor manages to STAY IN CHARACTER. He LOOMS OVER Louis's
body, getting soaked in FALLING RAIN and a GROWING PUDDLE
OF BLOOD.

GRIGOR (CONT'D)

"So call the field to rest; and
let's away. To past the glories of
this happy day."

AERIAL VIEW OF LOUIS

The position of his head in this SPREADING OVAL OF BLOOD
mirrors Marié's profile as she died onstage — and MATCHES
the two sides of the heirloom cameo.

FURTHER UP THE SIDEWALK

Deuca FOLLOWS Helen/Nella's EYES, OBSERVING Louis's hard fall.

Helen/Nella WATCHES Louis CRUMBLE to the pavement, LOOKS UP at Teatro Dante's MARQUEE LIGHTS above her.

EXT. TEATRO DANTE - NIGHT/DAY (TIME-LAPSE)

BOX OFFICE WINDOW

A (Black) theatre worker, DANA LESLIE, removes the POSTER of "The Plague Spring," REPLACES IT with a notice of Teatro Dante's next production, the INNOCENT THEATER COMPANY'S revival of DOUGLAS TURNER WARD'S "Day of Absence."

EXT. TEATRO DANTE - ALLEYWAY - DAY

SIDEWAYS VIEW

The TITLE CARD and END CREDITS ARE typed on a SINGLE SHEET OF PAPER in Louis's trashed, rusted Smith-Corona manual typewriter.

Detectives Searcy and Burvant and officers Waters and Wilkie are among the COPS CANVASSING the scene.

PAVEMENT - CONTINUOUS

TAPE AND CHALK demarcate O'Harris's SOLITARY CORPSE and the group of Hinds, Pomposello and Knott's BODIES.

GARBAGE CANS - CONTINUOUS

The P.O.V. of the area is FOSSEY'S. He is in BLACKFACE MAKEUP and "SANDMAN" SIMS COSTUME, wearing his "CAMP ANORAK" ANORAK over the rags.

He slept overnight on the SAFETY CUSHION from the theater's trap room.

FOSSEY'S FACE (FULL-SCREEN)

WHITE EYES BULGE OUT from his black greasepaint. He GRINS at his handiwork with YELLOWED TEETH. He uses Knott's vintage brass tube to SMEAR RED LIPSTICK around his mouth.

(V.O.) - The DISEMBODIED HARMONY of O'Harris, Bradshaw, Kidwell, Sibblies and Alesha UNDERSCORES an a cappella chorus from SWAHILI FOLKLORE.

NIGHT FALLS

Fossey becomes an eerie, "Golliwog"-like caricature, framed by a ...

BLACK SCREEN.

THE END.