

AS THE WORLD BURNS

Fictionalized Truth

live

from

LAFAYETTE PARK

(for my children)

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Written and proferred to humanity and God December 8, 1984, in memory of Norman Mayer.... requesting simply that whoever produces this play will do it reasonably, responsibly, respectfully, and with love in their hearts.

Ellen B. Thomas

12/8/1984

Scene 1

A dim spotlight focuses on Norman, a shrouded figure. In a voice which is conversational yet eerie, he shares with the audience his 'First Law of Reality.'

N: "There is only the incomprehensible reality and the individual distortion. Every mind struggles to concoct a semblance reality suitable to its comprehension, within the limits of its factual awareness and unprovable assumptions." (Lights down, then up on Thomas.)

THOMAS (T) is leaning against an iron fence in front of a backdrop (screen) of the North side of the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. On either side of him are three signs: two 48" x 96" (4x8) reading "Wanted, Wisdom and Honesty" and "Fraximus Pennsylvanicus Free Philosophical Forum," and one 8' x 8' sign reading "Revelation: This need not be our end. It's up to you!" over a lurid red and yellow painting of a nuclear explosion. Thomas is dressed in a long-sleeved shirt and rather baggy slacks. His glasses perch on the end of his nose beneath warm eyes, now closed. His chin digs through a thick beard into his chest, arms and feet are crossed comfortably.

At some distance down the fence, surrounded by brightly hand-lettered cardboard signs about a variety of subjects ranging from abortion to drug addiction, her largest sign reading "Stop FBI - CIA Human Hunter Maniacs! Justice and Freedom! -- tortured and poisoned by the FBI - CIA!", sits CONCEPCION (C), alertly watching passersby. On her head is a large black wig, which covers an aluminum foil helmet. Wisps of her real hair, soft black ringlets, cling to her hot cheeks. Very short, she wears wooden platform shoes, clean, faded bluejeans, and a long-sleeved soft checkered shirt. A scarf is wrapped around the wig and tied behind her neck. She speaks with a strong Spanish accent.

Enter OFFICER SPOOFNER (S) in summer uniform, nightstick and gun slung lower-than-regulation on his hips. Connie scurries over to Thomas and shakes him.

C: "Thomas, Thomas, wake up, Thomas!"

T: (Opening his eyes and looking over his glasses at Spoofner) "Thank you, Connie!"

S: "Hello, Mr. T!"

T: (unmoving) "Hello, Officer Spoofner. Gassed any squirrels today?"

S: (ironically) "Now, you know I don't gas squirrels, Mr. T. The National Park Service has that responsibility. I'm just here to keep the peace."

T: (putting hands behind his neck and stretching his feet further forward) "And what's your definition of peace, Officer Spoofner? A four-year-old told me yesterday he thought it was 'keeping quiet.' Would you agree with that definition?"

S: "That's part of it."

T: "And what happens if someone -- like me, for example -- decides not to keep quiet, and instead sits on the sidewalk speaking out? Is that a violation of peace?"

S: "Now, you know as long as you don't break any laws, you have a right to speak out, Mr. Thomas. This is America!" (He saunters offstage.)

Enter ALICE (A), exotically wrapped in plastic bags, rumpled white hair framing a hostile, muttering frown. A smudge of dirt adorns her nose. She's pulling a wire cart full of stuffed plastic bags behind her. Concepcion reaches behind her sign and pulls out a broom, busily begins sweeping the sidewalk closer and closer to Thomas. Alice shakes her fist at the White House.

A: "It's YOU, you bastard! They should put you out HERE, THEN you'd see! THEN you'd know! But NO, YOU don't want to lose your cushy bed and champagne brunch and all them toadies pointin' the way to the

bathroom!" (She runs into a sign, staggers back.) "Oof." (Glowers over at Thomas; Connie glowers over at her.) "WHO are YOU?"

T: "Thomas." (Gets up and walks over to her.) "Are you all right?"

A: (Shrugs his hand away) "Hell NO I'm not all right! I got no money, no food, no place to sleep 'cept that louse-riddled flophouse across town. Can't get a job without an address. Can't get an address without a job. And here you sit, another plug in the asshole of the Great White King, knockin' people over with shit.I didn't ask you your NAME, man. I asked you WHO are YOU?"

T: "A philosopher."

A: "Phil?"

T: "Lover of wisdom."

A: "Why you HERE, then, oh 'Lover of Wisdom'? Don't you know there ain't no wisdom in this neighborhood?"

T: "I'm here to communicate."

A: "Communicate what?"

T: "If we don't learn to live together, we're going to die together... very soon."

A: "Serve you all right."

T: "May be. May be."

A: (Reads signs.) "These signs don't make no sense."

T: "No?"

A: "Who's gonna listen? Nobody gives a damn what nobody says, too wrapped up in chasin' a buck or chasin' tail to care what a crazy hippie thinks. Look at me. I *keep tellin' them* mufu'ers to keep their gov'ment cooties off me -- that's why I wear this plastic, my skin was swarmin' with germs they sprayed on me to chew me up and spit me out so they won't have to listen no more. I call 'em every day, but do they listen?" (She spits.)

Concepcion has stopped sweeping and stands nearby.

C: "Who's this?"

A: "FBI, CIA, White House, IRS, the whole lot of them." (Concepcion nods in agreement, moves closer.) "THEY know, THEY know what's happening."

T: "Could be. Myself, I'm not as concerned about convincing the FBI or CIA as I am with people like you, and him," (nods at tourist), "and her, and him." (Nods at bureaucrats. They all ignore him.)

A: "Huh. You think those people give a shit? You're wastin' your time!"

Enter A.C. Airheart, 84 years old, arthritic, carrying a 16-lb. sledgehammer.

T: "Say, friend, you fixing to hammer out an agreement?" (Moves toward AC, unsure of his purpose.)

AC: "Wish it were that simple, young fella. Folks don't seem to want to agree on much of anything. Gonna hammer in a point I've been tryin' to make goin' on 70 years!"

T: "What's that?"

AC: "A man's freedom is worth more than a hunk of granite."

T: "Seems like a mighty obvious point to need such a big sledgehammer!"

AC: (Becomes agitated) "OBVIOUS POINT! ^{heavy emphasis} What do YOU know? Do you know me? Were you THERE, young whippersnapper, all those times I come out here seekin' justice? In and out, in and out, that's the story of my life, because they just don't seem to understand, them fascists, they just don't know the meaning of our Constitution, nosirree! I seen people like you come and go out here, come and go -- I was here, in this very spot, when the suffragettes told Wilson his war policies stink. I was here in '38 when that fella Norman Thomas -- he was

runnin' for President -- came out here to tell FDR to fight the second war all by hisself! Where were YOU? Do you know what's in my mind? Let me tell you, young smartalec, them blacks had a lot more respect for me back in '64 when they was picketin' 'gainst segregation."

T: "Didn't mean any disrespect, Mr...."

AC: "Airheart, A.C. Airheart, FRIENDS call me AC...."

T: "AC? Please, tell me, AC. I'm interested. What's in your mind?"

AC: "Humph."

A: "Yeah, AC. Tell us."

AC: "Well.....Seventy years ago I sat down out here in front of the White House with a sign, a big, beautiful sign, the work of the Lord in a 14-year-old boy's head. 'Hypocrisy stinks!' -- that's what it said! Them Park Police, a Lieutenant Marryhatt, I remember him like it was yesterday, he said I was breakin' the law, I couldn't have nothin' but hand-held signs in front of the White House -- moved me and my sign by force and non-sense over against that granite post over there -- it was city property then."

T: "Still is."

AC "Then a Captain Crabapple of the City police told me I had to move it out of the ENTIRE CITY or get arrested for VAGRANCY! So I lit it on fire, and that damn post crackled and popped me right into the pokey for ten years. First thing I did when I come out was get a hammer and chisel and pretty as you please chip "Hypocrisy Stinks" right in that post itself. Got arrested again. Kept doin' it, been spendin' the past seventy years of my life in and out, in and out, don't know any other way to live, you know? This time, my joints're so sore I can't make the words, so I figgered a sledgehammer'd do the job. I'm gettin' hungry." (He lifts the sledgehammer a few inches.) "Anybody want to help?"

A: "Wait, you old fool!" (He looks at her hopefully.) "Ain't nothin' worth goin' to jail for! 'Specially not this!"

AC: "Woman, I seen hundreds of folks goin' to jail right here on this sidewalk for any number of reasons, most of 'em good. Can't let them fascists keep us from speakin' our minds! Besides, how do you expect me to eat?"

A: "Come with me. I'll show you my favorite dumpsters."

AC: "Dumpsters. Humph." (He thinks a moment.) "You eat out of dumpsters?"

A: "When I have to. Or soup kitchens. Least I'm free."

AC: "But where do you sleep?"

A: "There's a hundred grates around here, all warm as soggy noodles when the weather's cold. Come on, I'll show you the ropes..." (counts change from her pocket) "...I'll even buy you a beer!"

AC: (Peers down at sledgehammer, spits in his hands, tries to swing it, only gets a soft thump out of the stone.) "Beer. Did you say BEER? Maybe you got somethin' there."

A: "Damn right!" (She puts his sledgehammer in her cart, and they walk off together, shaking their fists at the White House.)

C: "See, Thomas? I'm not the only one knowing the truth."

T: "What's that, Connie?"

C: "What I've been saying all along. The government uses mind control."

T: "Have you ever seen one of these machines you say they use?"

C: "No, of course not, you think they would let someone like me see their most powerful tool? What am I? I have nothing. I'm a nobody. But just the same like evil, you don't have to see it to know it's there."

T: "How do you know?"

C: "I just know. You saw me, how I was covered with sores from their poisons. This is my only protection." (She pats her wig.)

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T: "I can't agree with your conclusions, Connie. Logic compels me to question whether the government would spend its resources to chemically or electronically brainwash one homeless woman..."

C: (angrily) "It's because I speak truth! Sometimes I think you speak truth too, Thomas -- so why can't you see? Why can't you see?"

T: "Why can't you see, Concepción, that reality might be something other than what you perceive it to be, and that you're wasting your time and energy on imaginary causes when a very REAL cause must be dealt with?"

Connie stomps off to her signs, fuming. Thomas settles back down into his original position (prone, eyes closed). A few office workers walk purposefully past the signs as if they didn't exist. A couple of well-dressed tourists allow their eyes to scan the signs too quickly to have read them, their lips curled with mild disgust, much as they might use if they saw a man lying in his own feces. During the action a flow of passersby register varying degrees of interest and contempt. Concepcion repacks the broom away behind the sign, and doesn't see Officer Spoofer reenter and walk up to Thomas' feet. He stands looking down for a long moment as if willing Thomas to open his eyes voluntarily. Just as he resignedly begins reaching for Thomas' toe with his nightstick, Thomas speaks, eyes still closed.

T: "We never completed our discussion, Officer Spoofer." (His eyes open.)

S: (Jerks back.) "Oh? What's that?"

T: "What about sleeping, Officer Spoofner? Do you think sleeping is a peaceful activity? Or would you characterize sleeping as an act which threatens the fabric of society?"

Concepcion comes out from behind sign, comes to stand beside Thomas, who rises to one elbow.

S: "Sleeping on the sidewalk is a violation of the law, Mr. Thomas "

T: "But is it peaceful or violent?"

S: "It's illegal."

T: "Peaceful or violent?"

S: "I'm not paid to answer that question, Mr. T. I have no opinion."

T: "And that's why you will again feel ... compelled to arrest me for sleeping when you're told to do so by your 'superior' -- right?"

As Thomas speaks, two Secret Service agents (SS) roughly move in on the signs, pulling out some plastic, a box of literature, paint cans and tools, and a blanket, and move over to Connie's signs. Spoofner stands watching silently. Thomas rises, hands in pockets.

T: "What's up?"

SS#1: "Step back."

T: "Why?"

SS#2: "Just step back." (The two SS move toward Thomas threateningly, abandoning Connie's signs.)

T: "Why?"

SS#1: "Someone called in and told us there's a bomb planted behind these signs. We're checking it out. You're going to have to clear out of here."

T: "Why?"

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SS#1: "It's been determined your signs create a safety hazard. Terror-ists can hide bombs behind them, or use them to climb the fence."

T: "But the fence is less than nine feet high. Nobody needs a sign to get over it. Look." (Thomas leaps to the top of the fence and hops back down again onto the sidewalk.)

C: "No, Thomas, no! You crazy, Thomas? They'll arrest you!"

T: "No, C, I'm not crazy. They are. Or at least their claim is crazy. That's what I'm trying to show them."

SS#1: "You're under arrest."

Thomas drops to the ground and remains limp and noncooperative as the SS handcuff him and begin to drag him away while he talks to Connie and the gathering crowd.

C: "Why you keep going to jail, Thomas?"

T: "Because these flunkies keep making up excuses to put me there." (The SS jerk his arms up behind him roughly. Thomas looks around at the pedestrians.) "Let's nuke the world for America, folks. Let's nuke for cops and regulations and hypocrisy!

Long live mindless bureaucracy! Democracy is dead!"

(Looks at Spoofner pointedly, who turns away and begins dragging "Wanted: Wisdom and Honesty")

C: "No! I will be responsible!" (Grabs at the corner.) "Don't take the signs! I will move them! See?"

S: "Move your own signs, ma'am. These are being taken into protective custody."

When Concepcion struggles a moment over the sign, Spoofner threatens her wordlessly with his hand on his nightstick. She lets go and steps back. The SS who are dragging Thomas stop to observe, SS#1 putting his foot on

Thomas like a trophy. Thomas remains physically passive, still chanting "Democracy is Dead!" The SS, seeing Connie has backed down, drag Thomas offstage as he continued to shout. Spoofer drags the sign after them. Connie raises her arm in a Nazi salute, the remaining signs standing sentinel beside her.

FADEOUT

ACT I

Scene 2

Backdrop Lafayette Park by streetlamp. In the right corner (stage front) stands the trunk and a large branch of a sycamore tree. Additional and larger signs line the left of the stage in a V shape, easily read: "God is the Absolute," "As an Act of Sanity, Ban All Nuclear Weapons, or Have a Nice Doomsday." The handlettered signs are gone, replaced by a neatly painted sign (adjacent to a larger "Wanted: Wisdom and Honesty" sign) which reads, "Mr. President, come out and join the forced homeless! (Ask Mrs. Picciotto about it.)" The signs are poorly lit.

Enter Ellen (E), dressed in grey cossack, turquoise cape and black beret, large earrings, boots. Next to her is Meyer, a dark man with a friendly smile.

E: "Shucks. I hoped to show you the mealwagon. I came across it last November when I was walking from the office to the Washington Hotel to have a soda with a friend. I was struck by the irony of a mealwagon feeding obviously homeless people right across the street from the White House." (She turns to look at the message to the President, reads from it aloud.) "Ask Mrs. Picciotto about it. How can I ask Mrs. Picciotto if she doesn't leave a telephone number?"

As they begin walking again, Ellen sees lying on the sidewalk between two signs. Concepcion is bundled in ski suit, mittens, heavy boots, and wig.

E: "Are you Mrs. Picciotto?"

C: "Yes, I am."

M: "How long have you been here?" (waving at the signs)

C: "Three years...here and across the street, there in front of the White House...they moved us over here a year ago, said our signs were illegal."

M: "Three years! You mean you take turns with other people?"

C: "No, I live here...if you call it living. I SURVIVE here, trying to communicate."

E: (squats down) "I'm writing a play about the homeless, and I noticed your sign. Would you mind telling me your story?"

C: "No." (She gets up, reaches behind the sign, rummages and pulls out a folder, which she shows to Ellen and Meyer.)
"This is my baby. See? My husband and a woman friend of his, they planned how to get rid of me and take my baby. They tried to have me committed to a mental hospital. I went to the courts, but they didn't care. I came here to sit on the sidewalk ... here, I have a copy of a speech I made to the judge when he tried to put me in jail for camping, hah, they call this camping, they call these 'living accommodations,' they don't know...."

Ellen and Meyer sit in streetlight and read; light goes up on courtroom, Judge at the bench. Connie turns toward the bench and the light goes down on Ellen and Meyer.

C: "Your Honor, may I say something?"

J: "I don't think this is the time for that. I really don't."

C: "Your honor, if you are going to find me guilty of camping, which I am not doing,, I committed myself 24 hours a day in a vigil at the White House gates because a robe like you denied me my rights under the 14th Amendment. They forced me to be in the streets. I do not like to live this way. I hate to be on the sidewalk, but

I have no choice if I want to attract attention. I am not doing any camping. I do not have shelter. I have not any living accommodations, either. I am staying there 24-hour vigil, and getting wet with snow, cold, and freezing, eating from the garbage. I don't think that this is a pleasure to be there two years, your honor -- two years, a woman, on the sidewalk. It is not any pleasure. It is not any camping. It is not anything that you can enjoy. I sacrifice myself. It is a lot of sorrow. But they don't want to dig in my case; no. They just want to wipe it up under the carpet.

It is easy to get me; I'm nobody. They have the power. It is very easy. But there's God, mister -- there's God. He gives me the strength to survive all these elements on the sidewalk, the brutality of the police, which is unbelievable...unbelievable. I wouldn't believe it that the United States government was so cruel and tyrannical. It is just like a Hitler, the same system. I became a citizen of this country because of the ideals of the Constitution. Today I regret it. I thought I was protected by the country. I am a victim of the law, and the law is persecuting me when I challenge ^{leagley} injustice, your honor."

J: "I find them guilty."

Light rises on Ellen, who looks up from the folder. Meyer rises ^{has} and brushes himself off as if to go.

E: ^{"Them. Then} you're not alone here?"

C: "No. I have a friend. His name is Thomas. He's a philosopher. I used to think the most important issue was the homeless. But I listened to him for a long time. He showed me if we don't get

rid of nuclear weapons, there won't be any people left to need homes. First things first. So mostly I talk about nuclear weapons now."

Two blacksuited figures enter from behind the signs, unseen by Ellen and Meyer as they get ready to leave. Concepcion glances at them, stiffens her back, and turns back to Ellen.

E: "I'll be back. Is there anything I can bring you? Food? Clothing? Here, take this. This is my favorite perfume. I'll bet luxuries are scarce."

C: "Thank you. I need nothing. Except peace and freedom. That's all I need."

E: "I'll pray for you. Vaya con Dios."

C: (Nods, looks back at shadowy figures as Ellen and Meyer exit. Spoofer strolls forward into the light with a smile on his face. Connie calls after Ellen.) "Prayers we can use."

FADEOUT

ACT I

Scene 3

Dim light on Norman, shrouded. He intones (his "Second Law of Reality"):

N: "Change is the only immutable force endlessly continuous. All things and situations constantly alter and rearrange." (Light down, up again.)

Thomas is seated on the sidewalk before a backdrop of Lafayette Park, reading the Washington Post (same set as Scene 2, only daylight). Enter BOB carrying a briefcase which he plops down next to Thomas.

T: (opening briefcase) "Thanks."

Thomas takes out a notebook, starts scribbling in his lap. Bob walks over to the Revelations sign, pulls out a guitar and sits down on the sidewalk nearby to play. MONK, another young, bearded man ambles in and sits down next to Bob. The two of them softly play protest music where appropriate in the scene until their exit.

B: "Hello, Monk."

Ellen walks up quietly, photographs the signs and singers, and listens, dressed in conservative business suit, briefcase slung over her shoulder.

M: "You know this song?" (Pulls out a harmonica and blows a few chords, then sings.)

'It ain't that I'm unhappy with the way the world seems,

It's just I'm sick of watchin' its suicidal schemes.

I'm wishin' air was cleaner, and wishin' minds were keener,

and wishin' that my scrawny hide weren't always gettin' leaner

here on my side of the street.' "

B: "No, can't say I do."

M: "Not too surprising. Got any smokes?"

Ellen steps forward, rummaging in her bag.

E: "Here's a pack. Keep it. You fellows know Thomas?"

B: "Sure do."

E: "Could you point me in his direction?"

B: "Sure can. He's right over there." (Points to where Thomas is intent on his work.)

E: "Thanks. And thanks for the music. It's good to hear intelligent lyrics again." (Walks over to Thomas.) "I believe you're a philosopher named Thomas?" (He looks up and nods, smiles.) "I'm Ellen. Do you mind if I take your picture?"

T: "It's a free country."

Ellen photographs him, then kneels beside him. Lights dim to spotlight. Unidentifiable shadows move outside the light, miming tourists and bureaucrats.

E: "Your friend, Mrs. Picciotto, told me about you. The main character in my play is a philosopher, and I decided I'd better meet you. It seems to me in my research that most of the homeless are out here because somehow they're misfits. They usually don't seem to have much purpose. But you're what would be called 'homeless, WITH a purpose,' right?" (Thomas nods.)

T: "Right."

E: "She said you've been out here three years, 24 hours a day, maintaining an antinuclear vigil. How do you do it?"

T: "Couldn't have done it without Connie. She stands watch while I sleep or run errands."

E: "Why are you here?"

T: "I believe I understand why there are nuclear weapons, and I stay here so I can share this understanding with people."

E: "And why are there nuclear weapons?"

T: "Fear. Fear and economics. We have nuclear weapons because we want to keep the communist economic system out of our country."

The Soviets have nuclear weapons because they want to keep capitalism out of their country. We all are most comfortable with what we're most familiar with. We arm ourselves so we can hang onto what we know."

The sound of tires squeals nearby, someone shouts from offstage "FUCKIN' COMMIES!" The thunk of an object is thrown against a sign. Thomas walks over to pick up a rock, returns bouncing it thoughtfully in his hand.

T: "This country isn't perfect." (Ellen smiles agreement.) "Our system has real flaws. The Soviet Union is also not perfect. We have the technology to make a heaven on earth, and yet what we're doing is using that technology to prepare for the annihilation of the planet. I think it will be a terrible thing if we destroy the world over who has the least imperfect economic system."

E: "A filthy prospect. Seems inevitable, though."

T: "Sure does. Unless people change. Yet in an attempt to rationalize this evil, the government claims the good intent of protecting freedom. But the truth is that there IS no freedom."

E: "How can you say that? There must be SOME freedom -- or how could you be here sitting on the sidewalk?"

T: "This is the dilemma I've faced for a long time! My very presence here seems to strengthen the government's argument. This proves it, freedom of speech, right in front of the President's house! But if people were to look beyond the surface to our underlying struggle to keep these signs here...! They've been confiscated and destroyed. We've been beaten, arrested, harassed. Regulations have been written and rewritten to make harmless, constitutionally-protected activities criminal. I could go to prison for six months

each time I get arrested for simply falling asleep! The only reason I APPEAR to be free is because I refuse to give up."

E: "How many times have you been arrested since you've been out here?"

T: "Twenty-one. Not all for sleeping, but all directly related to First Amendment activities."

E: "That's incredible! Have you had any convictions?"

T: "The first year, no. The National Park Service Solicitor's office ^{government} (that's the/lawyers) had to drop the charges five times because of First Amendment protections. Then the same National Park Service Solicitor's office rewrote the 'camping' regulation to include the words 'regardless of the activity in which they might otherwise be engaged at the time,' and now I have several convictions on appeal. I could go to federal prison for as much as 14 years ... for doing essentially what I'm doing right now."

E: (awed) "Where do you come from?"

T: "The planet Earth."

E: (Claps her hands.) "Hah! All RIGHT! ... But what brought you to this place at this time?"

T: "Planetary insanity." (Rises, begins to pace.) "For years I was a nomad seeking others who think like I do. I saw the havoc being wreaked in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, in the name of 'freedom'... by BOTH superpowers. One day I realized I must in conscience refuse to be a citizen of a country which exploits people around the world and which threatens the existence of the planet for the sake of the perpetuation of an economic system."

Lights rise on a London bobby (Spoofer Anglicized) watching Thomas with interest. Thomas stops pacing, pulls a passport from his pocket, looks at it for a long moment, then throws it offstage. A splash is heard. The bobby steps forward.

LB: "Excuse me, Sir. What was that you threw in the river?"

T: "My passport."

LB: "And why would you do such a thing?"

T: "It has nothing to do with me."

LB: "Are you a citizen of the United States?"

T: "No. I'm a citizen of the world."

LB: (Bristles.) "I trust you have papers to prove this?"

T: "No. Only logic."

LB: (Becoming officious.) "I'm afraid logic will not satisfy bureaucratic necessities. Your name, please." (Pulls out notebook.)

T: "Thomas."

LB: "Surname?"

T: "Thomas."

LB: (Looking up.) "Thomas Thomas?"

T: "No. Just Thomas."

LB: (Becoming angry.) "I advise you not to play games with Her Majesty's representatives."

T: "I'm not playing games."

LB: "Occupation?"

T: "I'm a pilgrim headed for Israel."

LB: "Without a passport."

T: "It shouldn't be necessary."

LB: "Well, it is. Where were you born?"

T: "What difference does it make?"

LB: (Puts his book away.) "I don't like your attitude. I'm taking you in for questioning, Mr. Thomas." (As he calls for assistance, light fades on him, Thomas paces back toward Ellen.)

T: "They kept me in jail seven months."

E: "In ENGLAND? Simply for not having a passport?"

T: "That's right. Finally they loaded me onto a jet, under protest, like a sack of Irish potatoes. The U.S. officials admitted they had no legal right to bring me back into the U.S. against my will, but they carried me in anyway. 'You'll love it here,' they said, 'we have DISNEYLAND!' I came to D.C. and sat down in front of the White House with a sign, "Let my body go," asking to be allowed to continue my pilgrimage to Israel."

E: "Why Israel?"

T: "There isn't a person living in Israel who hasn't been touched by war. It seems a logical place to work for peace."

E: "Did you ever find anyone who thought like you?"

T: "No. One came close, though. A man named Norman Mayer." (Sinks into memory.) "Norman saved my life. He came to the White House sidewalk the fifty-fifth day of my hunger strike."

Lights rise on Norman, a distinguished looking man in his 60's, dressed in casual clothes, ski jacket, spotlighted beside "Let My Body Go" sign, facing Thomas, who turns to meet his eyes. Light fades on Ellen.

N: "Thomas, your action shows great dedication and understanding. If everyone were as dedicated as you, we'd solve this nuclear problem in no time. But if you starve yourself to death you'll have failed in your mission to communicate. You're much more useful alive than dead."

Lights fade on Norman, focus only on Thomas.

T: "Norman, how could you say that when you yourself knew you were going to be a martyr?"

Norman's voice comes out of the shadows.

N: "What I was doing was different. I didn't kill myself. I forced them to kill me."

Lights rise on the side of a van, Washington Monument in the background. Thomas walks purposefully up to the driver's window. Norman looks out.

T: "Why didn't you let me join you, Norman?"

N: "This was my schtick, Thomas. I had to show them the inevitable result of threat -- empty or real." (pause) "You and I never agreed on this issue. You believe NO violence is conscionable. Live for your belief, Thomas. I had to die for mine."

T: "You succeeded, Norman. You showed them how self-destructive the threat of violence is."

N: "Exactly. But Thomas, beware of self-destructiveness. You cannot die by your own hand, or you're seen, as I was, as a self-glorifying kook. To be a martyr you must BE a martyr -- striving to abide by your conscience in the midst of unconscionability."

T: "Unconscionability. What does that mean to you, Norman?"

N: "Unacceptability. Unjustifiability. In other words, Thomas, you must let them kill you, if need be -- but, like Socrates, or Jesus,..or Gandhi,..or King,..you must be gentle while insisting on truth; justice, wisdom."

T: "Ah, Norman, I have missed you, my friend. It becomes lonely out here."

N: "I know. But that will soon change. Now, go. Do your part. As long as there's an antinuclear vigil in front of the White House, people won't be able to ignore the truth."

Lights down on Norman, rise on Ellen. Thomas turns. Long pause.

E: (thoughtfully) "Norman Mayer. I remember him. A most unusual experience. For some bizarre reason I turned on the TV on a snowy Wisconsin afternoon. December 8, right?" (Thomas nods.) "I seldom watch TV -- I detest most of it -- but I was looking for a movie to indulge in. I was immediately riveted by what was happening. I shouted at him when he was shot, 'You fool! You knew you were going to die!' That van was empty, even I could see that there couldn't have been a thousand pounds of dynamite in it.... I saw a man climbing the hill to the van..."

T: "That was me."

E: "You. Of course. How I respected you. That incident brought me hope."

Enter Concepcion, pushing a cart. She sees Thomas and Ellen leaning intently toward each other, and frowns. The lights come up over the entire stage again as Concepcion tucks her cart away.

C: "Thomas, I brought you coffee, and a sandwich." (Ellen smiles at Connie, who pretends she doesn't see.)

T: "Thanks, Connie." (Offers the sandwich to Ellen. She reaches out to accept, and Connie snatches the sandwich back.)

C: "That's for you, Thomas, I can't afford to give food to someone who can get her own."

E: "Oh, I'm sorry. You're right."

T: "No, she's not. She shouldn't attach strings to gifts. She gave it to me. What I choose to do with it is my business."

Thomas offers coffee to Ellen. She refuses.

Concepcion huffily disappears behind the sign. Enter JIMMY, loud and obnoxious, a bottle of mouthwash in his hand.

J: "Hey, Tom, spare a cigarette?"

T: (Pats his pockets) "Afraid I don't have any, Jimmy."

E: (Reaching into her bag) "Here. I thought you might be able to use these. I don't smoke, myself." (Hands the pack to Thomas.) "I've noticed in researching my play that there's a ritual of cigarettes. I try to come prepared now."

Thomas hands the pack to Jimmy, who fumbles for a long time trying to open the pack and extract a handful of cigarettes, takes a couple of swigs of mouthwash meanwhile.

T: (to Ellen) "Where do YOU come from? Who are you?"

E: "The corporate world. Via suburbia. Middle class 'success.' My father's an illustrator who sold his talent rather than paint what he loved. I'm a writer who's been selling myself for a long time -- I'm frustrated professionally, but personally I'm very glad to be alive."

T: "Oh? That's refreshing!"

E: "Yeah. It's a shame more people aren't. I think that's because we've all become digitized, feel futile, so many social security numbers."

T: "The mark of the Beast."

E: "What?"

T: "Revelations. Chapter 17."

E: "Oh."

T: "What are you doing here?"

E: "I came to Washington D.C. with the dream that here I could have some impact. There are things I hate -- nuclear weapons, war, poverty, pollution -- all ~~a~~ products of our spoiled and arrogant society. I saw Norman Mayer die -- saw the movie "Gandhi" -- and something

clicked. I realized perhaps I could DO something as an individual. I thought that nowhere else but at the seat of power could I hope to be heard."

T: "Sounds logical."

E: "I suppose it must -- look at you! ...I investigated organizations like SANE and Women Strike for Peace."

T: "What did you think of them?"

E: "It seemed to me they were ineffectual -- so busy surviving financially they had no time to do anything of substance. Their meetings reminded me of suburban housewife coffeekletsches -- people bitching back and forth for months and years, but never doing anything useful. Leftist soap operas. Lobbying Senators and Congressmen to no avail -- I didn't see how lobbying had done much to stop the Pershing or MX missiles. I became discouraged ... of course, I've never had much luck in 'joining', don't know why I expected anything different here. But in the meantime I was wandering the streets of the city, and became concerned about the hundreds of homeless I saw -- began writing about them -- and here I am! And here YOU are!"

J: (Handing pack back to Thomas, turns to peer down at Ellen.) "You fuck for money, or just write?" (Ellen's mouth drops open, then shuts firmly.)

T: "Ignore Jimmy..."

E: "It is unwise..."

T: "...he's always rude and crude..."

E: "...to make assumptions before you get to know a person..."

T: "...in fact, I make it a habit to ignore Jimmy..."

E: "...I will, however, give you an opportunity to learn."

T: "...because he never learns."

(Thomas and Ellen smile at each other.)

J: (Jimmy's mouth now drops open.) "Tom, Tom, how can you say such a thing? You know I've been out here with you all these years..."

T: "No doubt about it, Jimmy."

J: "...fighting side by side for freedom. What would you have done without me, Tom?"

T: "Probably found it a lot easier to communicate."

Concepcion comes out from behind the signs, thermos still in hand.

J: "Hey, Connie. How about giving me some of that coffee?"

C: "You drunken filth," (pulls the broom out after carefully putting the thermos down, sweeps furiously around Jimmy as he starts to bristle) "you and the rest of you crazy dope pushers are trying to destroy my vigil, Thomas' vigil. Get out of here and leave us alone."

J: "You got no right to drive me away. This is a free park. I have as much right to be here as you do!" (She raises the broom threateningly. They circle around behind the signs, their voices fading to outraged whispers.)

Enter UJC, two half-full plastic bags tied together and slung around his neck. He stops to carefully read the signs, while Thomas and Ellen speak. He also observes Jimmy and Concepcion with some interest. Then he turns and walks up to Thomas, waiting quietly until they finish speaking.

E: (to Thomas) "Does this happen often?"

T: "All the time."

E: "How do you stand it?"

T: (smiling slowly) "Patience."

E: "Not my strongest suit."

T: "Nor mine. But it comes."

UJC: "Excuse me."

T: "Sure."

UJC: "Is there room on the sidewalk for a person of dissenting mind?"

T: (moving over) "It's a free country."

Bob looks up from his guitar, stops playing.

B: "Looks like there's room for a thousand more. Too bad a thousand haven't figured that out. Maybe somebody'd start listening."

M: "They did in the 60's -- we actually stopped a war!"

B: "Well, we didn't carry it through to the logical conclusion -- we SHOULD have eliminated weapons, too."

M: "Yeah.... Hey, Bob. I'm hungry. Let's go make some people feel good."

B: "Good idea." (Bob stands up, packs up his guitar. Monk reaches into his backpack, pulls out a cardboard sign that reads "I'm Hungry.")

E: "How do you propose to do that?"

M: "It makes people's day when they give me money. And it makes my day. I figure I'm doing a community service. Sort of like the United Way."

T: "Well, Monk, you know how I feel about that."

M: "Yeah."

E: "How's that?"

M: "Oh, he tells me I should be patient and wait for God to provide me with what I want. But I don't have his confidence in anyone lookin' after me but myself -- and I figure it takes money to look after myself."

T: "Only if you lack patience, my friend. I reckon you're too young yet to have discovered its value."

M: "Or too smart to be suckered into it. Least I'm not a wage slave. I decided when I was in kindergarten I was either going to be a millionaire or a bum. Even then I hated taking orders. Since nobody seems inclined to hand me a million dollars, I figure it's best to be a bum."

T: "Since you're convinced that's your only choice, I guess you made the right one, Monk. Anything else is prostitution."

UJC: "Prostitution! Isn't that a little harsh?"

T: "The truth often seems harsh."

Monk laughs, makes a "peace" sign and exits after Bob.

E: (To Thomas) "Begging. Is that how you support yourself?"

T: "I try not to be concerned with supporting myself at all. I seldom find it necessary to ask people for anything, and money would be the last thing I would ask for."

E: "But what about the rest of society? What about people with families, for example? Everything you've said up to this point makes a lot of sense to me. But I have a hard time imagining a world without means of exchange."

T: "Of course -- you don't know anything else! I can tell you from experience, however, that there IS an alternative, and that it WORKS. I've proven to my own satisfaction that God does in fact provide."

E: "How?"

T: "I walked across 2,500 miles of Africa, from Casablanca to Cairo, without a penny...to prove to myself I could."

E: "How did you eat?"

T: "People would stop and offer me food, shelter -- all sorts of people -- but mostly the poor. They have a clearer perception of reality."

E: "Reality. That word is as subjective as 'love' or 'truth.' Trying to figure it out sometimes makes me schizoid -- in the morning I put my corporate uniform on, try to wipe my mind clean of the clutter of who I really am, so I can shuffle other people's garbage all day and pretend it has meaning. In the evening I limp home reeking of stress, impossible to live with. But what can I do?"

T: "Question the garbage. Think. WHY do you shuffle garbage?"

E: "So my kids can eat. And me."

T: "And what does it take for you to eat?"

E: "Money, of course."

T: "Not food?"

E: "Of course, food! But food takes money in our world!"

T: "Then the world needs changing! You can't buy or sell God's bounty."
(Leans forward intently.) "Look... money is an illusion. It exists only because people have agreed to pretend it has value -- but all it is, really, is a meaningless piece of paper."

E: "It's power."

T: "You THINK it's power. Because you're TAUGHT it's power. And as long as you buy that, then it WILL have power over you. As long as you accept its power over you, you'll never be free."

E: "So what's the alternative?"

T: "Sharing. I KNOW, from EXPERIENCE, that if we share equally the resources given us all equally by our Creator, money will have no more substance than a puff of bad-smelling smoke."

Enter JAKE, a tall, very dirty man dressed in once-stylish, too-short clothes. As he approaches Thomas he puts out a blackened hand.

Jake: "Spare change for the mentally deranged?"

T: (Pats his pockets.) "No change, Jake. Will a cigarette do? Here, take the pack."

E: "Here." (Digs in bag. Jake accepts money and cigarettes with

dignity, ambles offstage. Ellen watches, shakes her head, then turns back to Thomas.

E: "As long as there are people or nations controlling unequal shares of those resources, though, money will continue to control us all."

T: "No doubt about it."

E: "That's why nations exist. To control unequal shares of resources..."

T: "True."

E: "...and that's why weapons exist..."

T: "Also true."

E: "...and that's why you're here?"

T: "You got it!"

UJC: "Well, I agree that the economic system as it exists needs some serious revision. There's too much inequity -- people starving in the streets of the wealthiest country in the history of the world. My platform includes a technological remedy. I'm Cass, by the way -- UJC -- figure I'll set up my own demonstration here if it's all right with you. Since I'd like to move into that house across the street, this seems like a logical place to begin my campaign."

T: "You running for president?"

UJC: "I am."

T&E: (together) "What's your platform?"

UJC: "Resurrection of the principles of the U.S. Constitution."

T: "Makes sense to me."

E: "Why?"

T: "Stick around and find out."

E: (Laughs uncomfortably.) "Wish I could. Unfortunately, I'm penned up nine to five with a kid to support...although she did say she wanted to move out...she's eighteen...(pause)...I must say it's a lot more interesting out here than inside those claustrophobic walls."

T: "Why don't you leave those claustrophobic walls behind completely?"
(Grins.)

E: "Impossible. How would I pay the rent?"

T: "Move out."

E: "My daughter'd never forgive me."

T: "Take her with you."

E: (snorts) "Do you have any kids?"

T: "Stepchildren I haven't seen for a long time. None of my own."

E: "Do you know how tyrannical kids can be?" (Stands up, brushes herself off.) "It's a thought, though." (Laughs.) "Then they'd all be SURE I was nuts."

T: "Somebody is, or there wouldn't be bombs."

E: (Looks at him intently.) "I'll be back." (Starts to walk off, turns back around.) "I want you to know how much I admire you. You're the first person I ever met who tells the truth. You're doing what I should be doing, if I weren't afraid..."

T: "Afraid of what?"

E: "I haven't figured that out yet. I'll let you know. Right now I can hardly believe you exist." (Exits.)

UJC: "Well, I think I'll take you up on that offer to stick around."

T: (Smiles.) "Good."

FADEOUT

ACT I

Scene 4

Stage is empty of props. Ellen, dressed in business suit, sits at typewriter typing, stops, reads what she's written out loud. Thomas is seated crosslegged on the ground across stage, writing on a pad. As other characters appear and disappear they are spotlighted between Thomas and Ellen briefly.

E: (reading) "I sit inside this box, hot and caffeinated and screaming to get out into the fresh air. It's me and you, Thomas, me and you all the time now. I can't think, sleep, eat, work -- like a magnet you pull me back again and again and again..."

T: (writing) "You've begged me not to ask all I'd ever beg of you..."

E: "...the morality of your existence a finger pointing at the frivolity of my own...but I'm afraid..." (groans, head on typewriter) "Dear God, what do you expect of me????"

T: (holds up sheaf of papers and reads)

Dona Quixotess -- can she leave her cuddly nest to lay the troubled world to rest?

Imprisoned in her soft, frilly bed, ideals of virtue fill her still silly head. The idea of prison once made her quail -- now she says she's willing to wear her tweeds to jail! Lies .. suffering .. violence .. torture her tender heart. SHE would blow them away with a strong baby's fart.... If you want the answer, Quixotess, you must pay the price -- sa~~v~~vation, my Lifeblood, demands sacrifice.

E: (reads from identical sheaf of papers) "...When you are prepared for some heavy-handed criticism, remove the strip." (She peels up a strip as Thomas tapes one down on his paper.) "You...are... a...butterfly." (Looks up, frowns, then smiles.) "BUTTERFLY!" (Turns to Thomas who turns to her, they speak across the gulf of darkness.) "You say I'm a butterfly -- quixotic -- why? Because

I want to help you MY way ... because I haven't left my 'nest'?
Because the responsibility of motherhood is paramount to me? Because
I want to ease my daughter's way into the path of responsibility?
Because I fear my son won't want to know me?"

T: "What's more important -- your children's comfort^{and approval,} or their souls?
How can you teach them if you don't set an example? Why is mother-
hood more important than sisterhood? If YOU don't fight for their
lives ... who will?"

E: "Maybe my values are still at larvae stage -- maybe my commitments
have been of butterfly nature -- but God created butterflies for a
purpose ... and sunsets ... and laughter...."

T: "God made you a butterfly for you to remake you. Are you satisfied
with who you are?"

E: "No."

T: "Do you believe that you've become the best that you can be?"

E: "God, no."

T: "I believe the best you can be is just a breath away. I believe you
may well be that half of the Spirit I've always sought. I believe
that you ^{MAY} be / the first honest woman I've met ... my Ideal Woman ..."
(He looks down, pained.) "But if you ARE my Ideal Woman ... then WHY
do you LIVE the WAY you LIVE? I feel threatened by you, for you may
deceive me into losing sight of my cause...."

Light rises on Concepcion, who holds Ellen's letter in her hand.

C: "She is very good with words. But this is a fantasy. It's not real.
You are a good man, but you are caught in a trap."

T: "But what about this part, here...."

E: (quoting herself) "What is between us as individuals is unimportant.
What IS important is the cause. Everything else is irrelevant....
DELIGHTFUL, but irrelevant...."

C: "Of course she would have to write that. They are very clever. They know your weaknesses, and what you want to hear."

Light down on Connie, up on Monk.

M: "You've got to get Ellen out of your heart and into your head, Thomas

T: "Thanks, Monk. That's good advice."

M: "Just what you told me ... I got it figured out."

T: "What?"

M: "Ellen. I know why she's here."

T: "Why?"

M: "Somebody sent her to motivate us."

T: "How do you know?"

M: "It's obvious. Yesterday she was out here organizing a newspaper. 'You do this' - 'You do that.'"

T: "Scared she'll turn you into a capitalist, Monk? Or a slave?"

M: "Na-a-aw. You know," (scratches his chin thoughtfully) "It might be okay if she moves out here. We might have a family."

T: "Just what I'm hoping for, Monk. One big happy family."

Light down on Monk. Ellen walks back over to the typewriter and sits down, begins to type a moment, slumps forward, forehead on typewriter, looks up, face drawn.

E: "I'm exhausted. I can't talk, can't think any more about what's happening. It's out of my hands. I know all the arguments, I've lived their lives, I've tried their 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts' on for thirty-seven years. And they're wrong...."

Lights up on mother and father.

Mother: "Why are you DOING this to me?"

E: "What, Mamma?"

Mother: "You'll get killed! How do you expect me to deal with that?"

E: "You'd be surprised how safe the streets can be."

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Father: "You're a pair of gnats taking on Goliath -- they'll squash you in an instant! And what about winter? And what if I should die? How will you come to my funeral?"

E: "Time will tell about winter, Snake. And protesting nuclear weapons won't affect your lifespan except, perhaps, to prolong it. If it affects mine, that's okay. If there's the slightest chance of making a difference, I must try ... don't you see?"

Father: "But you had such a good JOB! You might be Senator or Congressman someday, if you play your cards right!"

E: "Hardly, sitting behind a typewriter, shuffling other people's papers, writing other people's thoughts, answering other people's mail, and serving as a hollow symbol to another's ambitions. I'm tired of wiping the noses of executives."

Mother: "So you choose to sleep on a grate instead?"

E: (patiently) "No, Mother, on a sidewalk beside a sign."

Father: "What's the difference?"

E: "Semantics. And ideals.... Lafayette Park is probably the only free place I've ever encountered. People come and go, everyone with a private life nobody asks about. No one CARES about your pedigree, your credentials, where you work, live, went to school. It's the only place where you can be who you are. And so people keep coming back, unafraid to speak their minds, to share their knowledge and learn from each other. It's inspiring, exhilarating, alive! When I'm inside the corporate world, I feel the walls closing in. 'Who are you?' is a question I never heard. Only 'What do you do?' 'Where are you from?' 'How important are you?' If your answers aren't satisfactory they ignore you -- or try to mold you into their own perceptions of reality and twist your conscience and your consciousness into parodies of truth. Except in Lafayette park." (Looks over at

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Thomas.) "Do you know how GOOD that feels, how LIBERATING? How can I resist?"

Father: "Well, I don't want to hear about it. I don't understand, don't want to understand, won't ever understand." (Voice turns to pleading.) "Do you remember what good buddies we were?..you were my little 'Fussin'..."

Mother: "She's outgrown us..... it's time to let her go."

E: "Thomas." (Lights go down on parents.)

T: "Ellen."

E: (Walking over to him.) "I said those words so bravely. But behind the words lies the unknown -- thoughts of hunger, insanity, jealousy, cold..."

T: "Of course. And you'll experience them all. But they won't conquer you. You've just begun to tap your potential."

E: (Sits down, takes Thomas' hands) "Thomas. Dear Thomas. I feel as though I've been led by a benevolent hand, blind and uncomprehending, to this place, at this time, to a joy I hardly deserve. I've found purpose...and I've found you. I would be your disciple, and you lift me to your side. Even the words my family speak no longer wound, no longer twist my brain. You're the rock, my guide, my friend, the soulmate I'd given up on finding. You're familiar to me as a long-forgotten dream."

T: (Looks at her searchingly) "God is good."

E: (Touches his beard, his face, in wonder, and they embrace.) "God is very good."

FADEOUT

ACT II

Scene 1

Ellen, dressed in a long grey dashiki with gold and white embroidery, is seated on the frameless bed of a very disheveled room -- packing boxes everywhere. KATY huddles under the covers, coughing and blowing her nose.

K: "I'm sorry, Mom. I really am. I wanted to go to your wedding, but I'm so sick. I feel awful. How was it?"

E: "Wet. Simple. Beautiful." (Feels Katy's forehead.) "Your head is still warm. Here, maybe this will help." (Hands her a box of candy.)

K: "Candy! Wow!"

E: "Now. What do you need to help you get moved?" (Looks around.) "Besides a shovel?"

K: "I think it's taken care of. Several friends are going to load the U-Haul, and some others are lined up on the other side. Janie's going with me. You go ahead and do what you have to do, since you're obviously determined to do it."

E: "Ouch. Do I detect a note of disapproval?"

K: "No, Mom, we've had all that out. I just want to know that the bills are going to get paid so Janie and I don't have to pay them -- you know we don't have any money."

E: "They're paid. Barely." (Drily) "It's nice to know where your priorities lie. Are you SURE you want to take that mountain of crap I've been accumulating all these years? I feel like for me to trap you with those things as I was trapped is the worst handicap I could possibly give you."

K: (equally drily) "Well, we agree we don't have the same priorities --
Believe me, I'm GRATEFUL for an apartment
full of furniture and a closet full of clothes."

E: "I sure wish you had decided to stay in D.C. I'm going to miss you."
(Katy's eyes start filling. She brushes at the tears angrily,
forces a smile.) "Aw, honey, it'll be all right. You're strong.
You don't know how strong. You're going to be just fine. And so
am I. How could I not be? I finally found someone whose priorities
match my own!" (They hug.) "I guess I just wish you could learn
from my experiences, so you don't have to suffer through your own.
But that's illogical. We all must bump our own noses."

K: "God, Mom, I love you, but why couldn't you have been just a little
more normal? You've turned my life upside down so many times I
hardly know which way to go. I'm scared. And I hate to say it,
but Mom? I don't believe you'll be here for me any more if I need
you."

E: (emphatically) "You're WRONG. I'll ALWAYS be available to you --
God willing. Just try to understand that you may not always need
me as much as you fear you do. You're going to be fine. It may
seem I threw too much responsibility on you too young," (Katy nods
vigorously) "...maybe I did. But you've turned out strong, compe-
tent, and willing and able to make up your own mind, no matter how
unpopular the decision. I think you're great. You're just over-
whelmed right now by the myriad of options available to you. If
you're smart you'll listen and learn. Listening can be much less pain-
ful than experiencing."

Enter Thomas in long burgundy dashiki with silver embroidery, looking
like a patriarch with thick brown beard and long fine hair flowing.

K: "Hello, Thomas. You look great."

T: "Yeah? I guess so. Actually your mother made me wear this. I feel a little silly."

K: "She does that. My brother and I have been suffering with her flamboyance for years."

E: "And I suppose you both want to feel unsilly again? Let me go get your boring clothes."

T: "You read my mind." (Exit Ellen.) "I can't believe my good fortune in meeting your mother, Katy. It was the last thing in the world I ever expected. She understands my thinking and I understand hers. I spent my entire life seeking this level of understanding. I'd given up on finding it. When I read what she wrote about our meeting, I began to suspect we saw the world through the same eyes. But she was living in a world I could no longer enter, and I really didn't expect her to make the quantum leap of rejecting that world since no one else had. But she did. She's willing to live as she writes. She values honesty and personal responsibility above pleasure, comfort, security, convenience. Her existence -- her ACTIONS -- strengthen my belief in God and my hope that this battle I'm fighting will be won."

K: "That's basically what she says about you ... Will she be all right out on the street? I'm so afraid for her!"

T: "This may sound strange. Physically arduous as it may be, I'm living in Heaven." (Ellen enters unseen, listens quietly.)

K: "How could that be? It's dirty, dangerous! You have no money, no home. You're surrounded by crazy people, you're arrested all the time, she may end up spending years in jail...or dead!"

T: "I guess it's all a matter of perspective. I don't see it quite that way. I'm surrounded by a family -- people who are homeless, sure, society's misfits, but who for that reason are less encumbered by society's things. We have more time to think. Eccentric, sometimes even weird. But free."

K: "Free to starve, to freeze."

T: "We operate on a different set of values than people wasting their lives chasing security -- we who have little share it all -- as a matter of survival, for what goes around comes around, so it pays to share. As for jail, there are worse fates. A good time to study and to write. They may lock our bodies up, but as long as we choose to think, speak, and act as free individuals, they can't lock up our souls."

E: "As for death," (Katy looks around, startled) "...as long as I'm living what I believe to be Truth; death doesn't frighten me. I believe I have a responsibility to do what I can to leave you and your brother a sane, threat-free world. That's much more important than a rock concert, or dinner at a French restaurant, or a new pair of boots. That's all I'd be good for from now on, anyhow, since you're grown. You have your own life to live." (Hands Thomas his clothes.) "Here you go, Thomas." (He exits. From offstage, JANIE's voice is heard.)

Ja: "Katy?"

K: "Down here!"

Steps are heard thumping down stairs. Enter Janie.

Ja: "Katy? Oh. Ellen. I came to ask if Katy had heard from you today. I wanted to make sure the rent had been paid through the first."

E: (Patiently) "Yes, Janie. It's paid. You did know Thomas and I were married in the Park today, right?"

Ja: "Yes. I know. However, I couldn't be there. I don't recognize this as anything but a farce. It just doesn't make any sense. You know this ... long-haired ... guru ... bum..."

E: "Since when were you offended by long-haired gurus? Is this the woman I thought I knew?"

Ja: "You're not the woman I thought I knew! You quit your successful job, abandon your child, and go out and live on a goddamn SIDEWALK with a bunch of DERELICTS. I'm horrified by your behavior. I've talked to your mother, your father, your son. NOBODY understands it. Katy feels like she hasn't anyone in the world. I do what I can..."

E: "Thank you."

Ja: "...but she needs her MOTHER!"

K: "Now, Janie, I AM eighteen..."

Ja: "That's not what you sobbed in my arms the other night. Ellen, I love you, and I want you to know if you ever decide to do what's right, get a job, begin living like a sane person again, I'll do anything I can to help you. But until then, I've got nothing to say to you, and you've got nothing to say that I want to hear." (Exit Janie, stomping up the stairs.)

E: (Looks at Katy.) "I always thought love was allowing someone to become the best that they can be...."

K: "She thinks you're hurting yourself, Mom. And me."

E: "And you? What do you think?"

K: "I love you, Mom. I don't understand you, but I love you, whatever you do."

E: "Yeah, kiddo, you're going to be okay." (They look at each other for a long moment, then hug. Thomas steps into the room in street clothes, his hair bound in a club at the base of his neck.)

T: "Let's go back to the park, Ellen Melon. We've played hookie long enough ."

E: (Putting her arm affectionately across his shoulder and tickling his beard) "Wherever you go, I obediently follow, my love -- unless it don't make no sense. Then I'll argue with you all the way."

Lights down. Ellen's voice only can be heard, all is otherwise dark.

E: "The consummation

though delayed

was an unqualified success.

We drove each others' pasts

into oblivion."

END SCENE 1

ACT II

Scene 2

In the low lighting of a streetlamp, Ellen and Thomas lie sprawled on the sidewalk in front of a new 8' x 8' sign: "I was born to save the world, you were born to save the world, together we can save the world -- strike for peace!" Dressed in rain gear, feet wrapped in plastic bags, heads protected by a poncho from the drizzle, Thomas has his arms around Ellen. Across the stage, sitting upright in a lawn chair under an umbrella, alone amid the other signs, Concepcion looks at Thomas and Ellen with terrible sadness in her face. In a throaty Spanish mezzo-soprano she sings to herself of sorrow. Her voice dies out, her head tips forward and she falls silent. Suddenly two police dressed in black rainsuits sweep in, stand over the two prone figures silently, and snap several strobelit photos. Connie's head jerks up.

C: "Thomas!"

The police slip away into the shadows. Ellen sits up just as a car door slams and the sound of an engine purrs away.

C: "PUNTA! Whore! You're trying to get him arrested.!"

Connie runs over and pokes at Ellen with her umbrella. Ellen rises, backs up under the onslaught, then stretches out her arms and walks toward Connie saying in a level voice, over and over, her voice rising in an attempt to be heard until she realizes the futility:

E: "I love you, Connie, I love you, Connie, I love you, Connie...etc."

C: (Jabs harder, backs up as she screams over Ellen's voice) "You DRUGGING him, I saw you, you cut into his scalp and inserted something, I saw. You want him arrested. Poor, crazy Connie, you think, poor, crazy jealous Connie. But I see, I know, you won't get away with it much longer, I've got PROOF! Why would you want to leave your job, your home, your CHILD, to come out onto the street? It doesn't make sense! Everybody agrees with me, EVERYBODY. You're one of them, you control his mind with chemicals and sex, you're evil, evil, you Jezebel! Concubine! You're not his wife, don't you think it, you filth. Thomas, Thomas, wake up, Thomas, she's got you poisoned against me, Thomas." (Thomas sits up.) "Stay the course, Thomas, ha ha, stay the course and you'll see, you'll see."
(Thomas shakes his head wearily.)

E: (Drops her arms.) "Why are you doing this again, Connie? I know it hurt you that Thomas married me, and I'm sorry it hurt you, truly I am. Thomas loves you, Connie..."

C: "You BET he does!..."

E: "I love you, Connie, I want to be your friend."

C: "Love? You don't know the meaning of love. Drugs and sex is all you know, drugs and sex and murder." (Ellen steps toward her again.) "KEEP AWAY FROM ME!!! Go back to your friends FBI - CIA -- go away, leave us alone!!!"

E: "PLEASE, Concepcion, if you don't have something good to say to me, leave me in peace. Enough hate, please. You're not going to get rid of me, but you sure are making all our lives difficult. Why can't you recognize I want to be your friend? Why must we be enemies? Please, let's be friends."

C: "Friends? With you? Never!" (Spits, jabs again with the umbrella. Ellen winces at a particularly painful jab, twists the umbrella out of Connie's hand in a reflex action, throws it over toward Connie's sign.) "HYPOCRITE! SEE! You talk peace and nonviolence but you LIE! You HURT me!"

E: "Oh, God, did I? I'm SORRY! You were hurting me! Here, let me see...."

C: "HELP! POLICE! I've been ASSAULTED! POLICE!" (Runs offstage.)
Ellen stands, chest heaving, next to Thomas, who has risen to his feet.

E: "I hope I didn't hurt her.... Do you think the police will do anything, Thomas?"

T: "Unlikely. They usually only harass us, not help."

E: "Do you think she'll ever forgive me?"

T: (Putting his arms around her) "Time will tell. She doesn't trust anyone."

E: "Especially me."

T: "Especially you. But I trust you."

E: "I appreciate your confidence. But I get so frustrated. Nothing I do seems to get through. And it's so hard not to scream back at her irrationality ... it's so hard not to lash back."

T: "I know. But unless we can achieve peaceful coexistence among ourselves, how can we hope to illustrate how to achieve peace to the rest of the world?"

E: (Smiles wanly.) "We certainly do set an absurd example now, don't we? ... This is the greatest test of patience and creativity I've ever encountered. What do you think it will take?"

T: "A miracle. But your conversion to morality was a miracle. So
anything is possible."

Lights go down, red light slowly rises on a much younger Concepcion looking very innocent in her natural hair and a white robe. She hums softly and sweetly to herself. In the background two black robed figures pass in quiet meditation, faces looking devout beneath cowls. One figure approaches the child serenely, hand outstretched invitingly; its face suddenly twists into a fierce scowl, the hand turns to slap Concepcion, and her humming turns to sobs.

FADEOUT

ACT II

Scene 3

Daylight. UJC is lying wrapped in a blanket on the sidewalk between Connie's old signs and Thomas and Ellen's new signs: "Warning: U.S. Supreme Court is Hazardous to Your Constitution" - "Brutality and Lies Will Not Silence Us!" - and "If Genocidal Weapons are Peacemakers, Then Adolf Hitler Was a Saint!" All other signs are gone. Alice stands at UJC's feet, Thomas *sits beside him.* Ellen is busy painting a new sign under the sycamore tree. Connie dozes beside her signs.

T: "It seems to me we're in a pretty good position. They've lost or destroyed the camera, destroyed our signs, and violated our constitutional rights. Payne blatantly perjured himself in court, the Grand Jury threw the assault charge right out. Of course, they're feeling pretty smug right now over the Supreme Court ruling that upheld the camping regulations..."

UJC: "Clearly unconstitutional, written by a couple of low-level wage slaves to justify their existence..."

T: "...and just following orders."

UJC: "Two of the Justices agree with us."

T: "Yeah. But they're just two justices against seven injustices -- and a gaggle of 'kooks' agreeing with them on the sidewalk is probably doing them more harm than good in their eyes."

UJC: "It's all a matter of perspective." (They both smile.) "I wonder what they're cooking up now." (*Grins.*) "I can hardly wait to find out!"

A: "Four days you been lyin' here, and nobody's arrested you. Don't push your luck, Casimer Urban Junior, or mark my words, something terrible will happen!"

UJC: "I appreciate your concern, Alice. It may be a little hard to understand, but I'm just doing my job."

A: "Yeah? Whadda you get paid for it? A trip to jail?"

UJC: "Maybe. But my biggest payment is self-respect."

Ellen and Thomas carry over the new sign, "Welcome to Reaganville 1984, Where Sleep is Considered a Crime" and positions it behind UJC.

E: "There you go, now your physical demonstration is backed up by some explanatory words. Don't want anyone to mistake what you're doing as camping!"

Enter Officer Spoofner. Concepcion jerks awake, watches silently.

UJC: (To Thomas, aside) "Ah, our favorite flunky. Looks like maybe my ship's finally come in. About time." (pretends to be asleep)

T: "Hello, Officer Spoofner. What's a nice guy like you doing in a place like this?"

S: (Ignores Thomas) "Wake up." (Pokes UJC with his night stick.)
"You're going to have to move. I have my orders. They're not going to allow you to continue your defiance of the regulations. You are CLEARLY lying on BEDDING, ~~Mr. Urban.~~ I have no choice, if you won't move. One last time, will you cooperate?"

T: "Officer Spoofner -- I trust and hope you have your radio on and this is being recorded in the station? -- it's perfectly obvious that

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Cass is not camping, but is protesting, and that the regulation he is protesting and you're threatening him with is in blatant defiance of his constitutional rights as guaranteed by the First Amendment."

UJC: (Opens his eyes.) "That's right. Congress is the only body empowered to pass laws. As the Declaration of Independence orders, I MUST as a CITIZEN question the U.S. government's police state powers of regulation and must, therefore, do MY job. You DO have a choice, though. You can allow me to continue doing my job unmolested. Or you can follow orders which are unconstitutional. In which case you are in about the same boat morally as the Neuremberg defendants."

T: "Which will it be, Spoofer? Suit yourself."

Spoofer pulls the handcuffs and walkie-talkie off his belt, calls for a patrol car, and cuffs UJC.

S: "You're under arrest for violation of 36 CFR 50.27, 'camping.'"

E: "What you're doing is wrong, Officer Spoofer. Are you prepared to face the consequences? Do you know the Golden Rule?"

S: "That's enough. Get back or you're under arrest." (Threatens them both.)

T&E: "What for?"

S: "Obstruction of justice."

T: "Are you implying that you are justice?"

S: "No. The Supreme Court is justice."

E: "Well, Cass, congratulations. Have a nice rest in jail. No doubt we'll see you tomorrow."

UJC: (Holds his fingers in "universal V" peace symbol) "No doubt. Will you watch my signs?"

E: "Sure."

Cass walks quietly offstage with Spoofner, hands cuffed behind his back. A car door slams. Spoofner comes back and picks up the blanket, stuffs it into a plastic bag marked "EVIDENCE."

T: "How do you sleep at night, Spoofner?" (Spoofner ignores him, and exits quickly.)

A: (Ominously) "You guys just never learn. Listen to Mother. Go hide away someplace. You're all of you doomed."

T: "If we're doomed, then so is the world."

END ACT II

ACT III

Scene 1

Dim light up on Norman in his shroud, who intones Norman's "Ninth Law of Reality":

N: "Nobody's stupidities are superior to our own. The smartest person in this world would possess less than 1% of the world's knowledge. We are all at least 99% stupid."

(Throughout this scene, there's a guitar playing improvisationally, tuned to the action on the stage. Parts of the scene can be choreographed.)
Same set as Scene 2, daylight. UJC sits under a two-sided teepee sign which outlines his platform, quietly observing with amusement. Thomas is painting a sign. Monk stands nearby. Ellen enters with a box of fast food on her shoulder, plops it down as if it were heavy.

T: "Well, the lioness returns from the hunt!"

E: "A good haul today! Look -- the biscuits are still warm! I must have gotten to the dumpster right after they threw the food out..."

M: "Ah, Hardee's. The best garbage in town."

T: "Now, I wouldn't go that far. There's some pretty good garbage over on 21st Street!"

E: "Help yourself." (Monk examines the loot.)

T: "A reporter came by, I talked to him for quite awhile. Sorry you weren't here."

E: "Oh, well, what the hell. You're the one with the story anyhow."

T: "I think he might actually be fair. He asked some unusually intelligent questions, seemed to retain an open mind."

E: "Let's hope so. It'd be nice if they started writing about our ideas instead of our appearance."

M: "Face it. As long as they can laugh at you, nobody will listen to what you have to say."

E: "Well, we've got to change that. Somehow. We'll find a way."

Concepcion enters and ostentatiously hangs a large sign, "Drug Pusher Lesbian CIA -- I shall not be intimidate!" Ellen reads the sign, shakes her head wearily, and turns back to pull some literature from behind a sign.

M: "Not as long as you and Connie are carrying on this feud."

E: "I wish you folks would stop laying HER vendetta at MY feet! For God's sake, what do you think I came OUT here for? To communicate about PEACE! Why would I want to be at WAR?"

M: "Looks like you've got no choice!"

Ellen turns away in disgust, accosts passing pedestrians.

E: "Would you like a piece of literature?" (pedestrian accepts)
"Thank you; God bless you! ... We're here 24 hours a day -- my husband and that lady over there have been here three years -- would you like to know why? No? You don't want to think, huh? Or did your parents fail to teach you manners?" (she calls after a pedestrian who has ignored her) "Ooooooh! Why are people so RUDE?"

M: "Could be because YOU'RE rude. Nobody likes to be hollered at."

E: (Stops, thinks a moment.) "You're right.... Good afternoon!"
(pedestrian ignores, she repeats more emphatically) "Good afterNOON!"
(pedestrian glances back, then walks on) "You don't have to be afraid, you know!" (pedestrian scuttles on) "Oh, well." (to Monk)
"Was that better?"

M: "Yeah. But still not good enough."

E: "Communication. What a trick. No wonder the world's in the state it's in --- no one listens, no one responds! Sometimes I see what happens here in Lafayette Park as a microcosm of the 'real' world... at least we're not shooting at each other, ^{though,} or threatening each other with missiles."

During this exchange, a couple of college students have stopped, are listening. Across the stage, Jimmy and Concepcion whisper conspiratorially, Jimmy looks at Ellen speculatively.)

Student 1: "So what you're saying is we should lay down our arms, unilaterally?"

T: "A leader leads by example. Someone has to take the first step. The whole world is watching us very carefully -- the Europeans are incensed by the way we're threatening their existence, they're marching, vigiling, striking ^{against} our so-called allies. Our policies are isolating us from the world. It seems to me if we set a moral example, we can't lose."

Student 2: "Isn't that what we're doing? The papers are full of stories about how we're helping exploited third world countries with food, technology..."

T: "...weapons, armies, dictatorships, industrial rape..."

E: "All in the name of democracy..."

T: "...all for the dollar bill. Don't believe everything you read."

St. 1: "So how do we stop it?"

E: "Go on strike. Refuse to support a system which threatens to blow up the planet. Don't pay their bills. *Don't build their bombs.*"

T: "That's why we're out here. To demonstrate how far it is necessary for us all to go to stop the insanity that ^{threatens} our lives..."

St 2: "You mean you're saying we should all sit down out here?"

T: "Well, if enough of us did, we'd sure make the people at the top stop and think a minute. As it stands now, what incentive do they have to set a different course?"

E: *"Sure wish it would happen soon, so we could get about the business of living free!"*
(Jimmy weaves over to Ellen, gestures to her he wants to talk.)

She walks some distance away with him, toward stage front; Thomas walks with students to back of stage, sits down with them, and they continue to converse animatedly, but just beyond earshot.)

M: "Naw, we're too civilized. We just cuss each other out."

Thomas finishes his sign, holds it up for review: "America loves Soviet dissidents and persecutes her own!" A well-dressed pedestrian stops to look at it.

P: "What's that mean?"

T: "Our fearful leader *refuses* discuss arms reductions *because* the Soviet Union's sending its dissidents to mental institutions and jail -- and yet ignores the jailing of dissidents right across the street from his house!"

P: "Why don't you go to Russia, if you don't like it here?" (Looks around at the signs) "And get this treasonous crap out of the park while you're at it!" (Spits.) "Figs." (stalks off)

T: "Have a nice doomsday!" (pedestrian whirls around and comes back)

P: "So what are you saying? Get rid of our bombs?"

T: "Do you like the prospect of extermination?"

P: "And don't you think if we get rid of our bombs the Russians will use theirs against us?"

T: "Actually, no, I don't. I think they will be very glad to be out from under the burden of fear. Remember, they built their bombs in response to US -- WE started it. And WE'RE the only country that has used nuclear weapons against fellow human beings. The Russians already know how horrible a nuclear bomb can be -- and how easily they can be detonated by accident. They accidentally blew up a bomb in the Ural Mountains in 1957 -- 500 miles have been closed off, for all practical purposes / *for generations* -- *the* best kept CIA secret for 15 years."

E: "A reporter from Pravda told us the Soviet people want peace more than anything in the world -- after all, they've suffered horribly from war."

P: "Well, what do you expect him to say? He's just a Commie."

E: "Actually, he seemed to be an extremely kind man. I've never met a Russian I didn't like." (Pedestrian grunts and exits, disgusted.)

E: "Yes, Jimmy? What can I do for you?"

J: "I heard something about you...."

E: "Yes?" (Looks toward Concepcion, who's watching intently.)

J: "I hear you're VERY friendly..... can we be friends?"

E: (warming up) "Certainly, Jimmy."

J: "Here, let's shake on it." (He reaches for her hand as if to shake it, seems to change his mind, bends over as if to kiss it, and then, grinning wickedly, guides her hand toward his crotch.) "Come to Big Daddy, big momma -- he's very friendly too!"

E: (Slaps his hand away and straightens into a tower of disdain.)

"Come back when your body's sober, Jimmy, and your mind is free of lust. Right now your behavior disgusts me." (Jimmy salutes and waaves away. Concepcion smiles.) "And yours Concepcion. You should

be ashamed of yourself!" (Ellen pointedly turns her back on Concepcion and sits down with ^{ellen! (Revelations, Chapter 17?) or} Bob's guitar, which she's pulled from behind the sign, begins to pick out a tune, then sings. As she sings,)

Thomas finishes his conversation with students, who leave; he lies down. Monk and Bob settle comfortably near her to listen, doze off.

Connie busies herself around her signs, then stands watching the road away from Ellen. Daylight drops into dusk, then dark; the streetlights come on. When she's finished ~~singing~~, Ellen too lies down. ~~Songs can either~~ "Sound of Silence" "Eleanor Rigby,"

or "Free Way Blue" -- (attached to end of play.) After a moment of quiet, Officer Spoofer and Officer Payne sweep in. Cass and Norman are standing ~~quietly~~ in the shadows of the sycamore tree, unobserved.)

P: "You're under arrest!"

(Thomas, Ellen, Monk and Bob all sit up.) "We're not sleeping!"

P: "We don't care!"

B: (Stands up) "If I'm under arrest, I'd better put on my shoes."

P: "Halt! Stay where you are!"

B: "I didn't join your army." (Ambles over toward the sign.)

Payne leaps on Bob from behind, puts him under choke hold, bears him down and punches him several times in the back of the neck. Ellen hands her camera to Thomas, who takes photos. Payne turns on him as two Secret Service cops come in to take Bob. Payne beats and kicks Thomas, who's ~~tossed~~ ^{tossed} camera to Ellen; she photographs. Concepcion runs screaming offstage. SS#2 holds and cuffs Thomas. Payne grabs for the camera, which Ellen throws toward Monk; she's choked and thrown down by Payne, who takes the sweater off her back and hands it to Spoofner, who has been watching, stunned.

P: "Evidence."

Spoofner, seeing Thomas watching him, turns away, thinks for a long moment, then pulls out a plastic bag, ^{marked "EVIDENCE"} and stuffs the ~~sweater~~ ^{sweater} inside, turns ^{to} ~~to~~ Cass's sign, and drags it and the ~~sweater~~ ^{sweater} offstage while Cass and Norman watch. Lights Out.

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ACT III -- JUDGMENT

Scene 1 -- Song of the Magistrates

Norman's shrouded figure materializes, intones Norman's "Fourth and Fifth Laws of Reality":

N: "Truth is ever changing reality, unknowable. In a world of competing notions of reality, wise individuals must determine survival necessities on a priority schedule."

Lights down

Thomas, Ellen, Bob, Monk, Concepcion face Male Magistrate (MM). UJC faces Female Magistrate (FM). Court Clerk bustles between them. Two paid thugs stand with arms crossed between UJC and others, staring stoically at the audience except to look from time to time and in unison threateningly at one side or another as the dialogue warrants.

MM: "You say you want to represent yourself, Mr. Thomas?" (Looks over his glasses disdainfully at a very long computer printout, then at Thomas.) "It seems you have had ample opportunity to learn the policies of The Court ... what is this, one, two, three, four ... seventeen arrests?"

T: "Twenty-two, Judge."

FM: "You say you want to represent yourself, Mr. Urban?"

UJC: "As is my Constitutional right, your Honor."

MM/FM: "A man who represents himself, as it has been said, has a fool for a client. Therefore your motion is denied. The Court will

assign an attorney to give you advice, as is your right under the Constitution. Can you afford your own attorney?"

All defendants in unison: "No."

MM/FM: "Then the Court shall provide you with one."

Chisholm (Ch) and other attorney(s) (OA) walk out of the shadows. Chisholm stands near UJC, other attorney(s) next to other defendants.

MM/FM: "Do you attorneys take these defendants to be your lawfully wedded clients?"

Ch/OA: "We do, your Honor."

MM/FM: "The Court pronounces you attorney/client, till sentencing do you part."

MM/FM: "And do you have anything you wish to say on behalf of your client?"

OA: "No, except that the records clearly support release on personal recognizance, your Honor."

Ch: (In an oily voice) "Your Honor, I would move that this case be dismissed because there were no camping regulations posted in the park at the time of Mr. Urban's arrest."

Other defendants suck in their breath and turn to observe Cass while their attorney(s) attend MM.

MM: "Motion granted."

FM: "Totally inappropriate, Mr. Chisholm. Motion denied."

Thomas' group exhales in a moaning sigh. UJC stands with legs splayed.

Ch: "Then, your Honor, I recommend Mr. Urban undergo psychiatric evaluation at St. Elizabeth's Hospital."

FM: "Not outpatient?"

Ch: "He has no home, your Honor, no family, he therefore can't be relied on to attend outpatient evaluations. He appears to be suffering from some sort of delusion that he can take his case before the Supreme Court. He claims he's running for President on the sidewalk of Lafayette Park. He lives in abject poverty, you can see he doesn't even have a shirt or a pair of shoes..."

UJC: "They were stolen from me by the police."

FM: "Quiet, Mr. Urban. Let your counsel speak on your behalf."

UJC: "He's not MY counsel." (Thugs threaten.)

Ch: "And I'm simply not sure, your Honor, that Mr. Urban is competent to stand trial."

Lights go down on all but Chisholm and Thomas, who face each other.

T: "Precisely what was it that made you suspect that Mr. Urban might require psychiatric evaluation, Mr. Chisholm?"

Ch: "Mr. Urban disagrees with the rules, the regulations, the values and the structure of The System. In fact, he disagrees with just about everything about The System."

T: "Okay. But specifically what was it that made you question his sanity?"

Ch: "When someone disagrees with everything about The System, it makes his life very difficult."

Chisholm turns to plead his case to the audience; Thomas watches him.

Ch: "It's not that I believe Mr. Urban is a bad person, mind you. On the contrary. I have no negative opinion of him at all. I merely think he's the victim of his own delusions. I have three other clients who are getting excellent treatment at St. Elizabeth's Hospital -- and they're MUCH better off than they would be starving and freezing in the streets. And I've observed how their

personalities change under the therapy, particularly when they begin psychotropic medications. They become much calmer, more cooperative, less apt to argue, much more acceptable in the eyes of a civilized society."

Thomas looks directly at Chisholm as he speaks.

T: "It's not that I believe you are intentionally a bad person, Mr. Chisholm. On the contrary. I believe you're a brainwashed advocate of society's delusions. And your own. For your actions would indicate that you suffer from the delusion that you are God, and that it is preferable to be locked up and deprived of all your rights as a free civilized citizen simply to have a warm bed, three hot meals, all the TV you can stomach, and a perpetual state of drug-induced semi-catatonia. Even if you are correct that Cass's ideas are delusions -- and unless the Constitution and Bill of Rights have been superceded I don't see how that can be -- is anyone besides the government complaining that they are suffering as a result of his beliefs? Could the government be complaining because he's right? On the other hand, if your beliefs are delusionary that you can play God with the rights and freedoms of a man simply because he's poor and sitting on the sidewalk speaking his mind, who are you hurting?"

Lights come up on Magistrate and UJC.

FM: "Mr. Urban. Do you have anything to add?"

UJC: "I would like to represent myself, your Honor. I do not recognize Mr. Chisholm as my attorney. I would like to have my case heard at the next level of federal court ... I believe it might merit Supreme Court review. I would like a jury trial."

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FM: "We have already ruled that you must have an attorney to protect your rights, Mr. Urban. We also agree with Mr. Chisholm's motion that you undergo inpatient evaluation to determine your competency to stand trial on these charges. We are sure you will not be able to have a jury trial since you are charged with a petty offense which can only take six months of your life and \$500. We shall see you in 30 days, Mr. Urban. Thank you Mr. Chisholm. Next case."

Friends register shock. Thugs move in on Cass, who's led away to harsh, discordant guitar chords.

FADEOUT

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ACT III

Scene 3

Set is similar to Scene 2. Instead of the two magistrates, there are two judges, both female. Judge Green presides over the five defendants, Judge Johnson over UJC. The Defendants and their attorneys stand at attention; UJC has been brought in by the paid thugs, who stand near him.

JUDGE GREEN

"We wish that we had the time to be more artistic in our summation of facts, but the constraint of time prohibits aesthetics."

JUDGE JOHNSON

"The fact is, the defense has shown beyond reasonable doubt, without any help from the government, I might add, that Mr. Urban is incompetent to stand trial on the charges of 36 CFR 50.27, 'camping'..."

"The fact is, after seven days of testimony which was, to say the least, contradictory and inconsistent, the government has failed in its obligation to establish beyond a reasonable doubt defendants' guilt on charges of 36 CFR 50.27, 'camping'..."

JUDGE GREEN

"...and has, in fact, raised some issues as to First Amendment rights which I regret will not be our fortune to decide in this particular case...."

"....I feel sure that these First Amendment issues will be addressed at a later date by this Court, or others, with these defendants, or others...."

JUDGE JOHNSON

"...Due to the testimony of the clinical psychologist of St. Elizabeth's Hospital who testifies that Mr. Urban refuses to cooperate, and may never be competent to stand trial..."

"...by virtue of the fact that he is paranoid schizophrenic, chronic type, and he is unclear as to the judicial proceedings involved...."

"....We therefore order Mr. Urban to continue his evaluation and treatment at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, which shall include the administering of any medications the doctors may deem of assistance in bringing Mr. Urban to a state of competency. Case is hereby continued indefinitely."

JUDGE GREEN

"....However, to continue further with these proceedings would be to turn prosecution into persecution. Case is therefore dismissed."

Five defendants turn to watch Cass being led away.

FADEOUT

ACT III

Scene 4

Lights rise on UJC in front of a barred window, talking on a desk phone. Thomas and Ellen stand at a public phone kiosk in Lafayette Park.

E: "Well, Cass, we're still trying to find you an attorney who cares more about justice than money. Everyone we've contacted just 'doesn't have the time.' Listen, love, I have to go climb a tree -- Thomas'll tell you about it! 'Bye!" (Hands phone to Thomas, exits.)

T: "Hi, Cass. How are you?"

UJC: "Have been better and could be worse."

T: "I'll bet. It's the strangest thing, Cass. These attorneys all swear you've been wronged, but no one wants to take on your case! One guy told me 'This sort of thing happens all the time. If we defended every indigent who was stuck away in St. E's, that's all we'd ever do -- and we'd starve.' And of course Chisholm won't relinquish your fee voluntarily. So there you sit, rotting for three months, pickled by drugs...how are you bearing up?"

UJC: "I could certainly do without their chemicals. I can't see, stand, or think straight. Can't do much but sit around like a zombie."

T: "What kind of 'therapy' do they use, other than drugs, that is?"

UJC: "What therapy? Mostly we sit around and play cards, watch TV, once in awhile we have so-called 'group sessions' consisting of training on court procedure to make us 'competent.'"

T: "How do they do that?"

UJC: "They give us a list of questions and the answers to memorize so we can play our parts in court.... What's this about Ellen climbing a tree?"

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T: "She's disgusted by the lack of interest shown by the press, thinks maybe she can get some attention paid to your plight by doing something radical ... short of violence. So she's 'up a tree 'til UJC is free!'"

C: (Laughs.) "I'm afraid she may get pretty cold before she comes down."

T: "Yeah. If they let her stay. Which is unlikely."

C: (Turns as if responding to someone speaking to him nearby.) "Time's up? Gotta go, Thomas. I'll try to call tomorrow. Same time."

T: "Sure, give it a try. Maybe I'll still be around to answer."

C: "Why? You planning on going someplace?"

T: "Who knows? I may be in there with you!"

Light fades on Thomas and Cass as it rises on Ellen, sitting on the branch of the sycamore tree. A hammock hangs from a higher branch. At the base of the tree lean additional hand-lettered signs which tell Cass's story. Spoofer stands under the tree, just beneath reach of a banner which reads "Help Us Free UJC -- UJC Is Not Crazy!" Connie's signs stand at extreme opposite stage. Norman stands in shadows. Pedestrians gather around and listen to the conversation.

S: "Mrs. Thomas, I've been instructed to inform you that you are under arrest for camping as well as general injury and attachment to a tree."

E: (Laughs.) "Yes, indeed, after seven days I'm growing mighty attached to this tree! It's like an old horse.... Tell your 'superiors,' Officer Spoofer, that I'm fully cognizant of their opinion of my behavior, since you're the fourth official to tell me."

S: "Fine. No hard feelings. Just doing my job."

E: "I'm just doing my job, too."

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S: (Looks at her solemnly and nods.) "How long are you going to stay up there?"

E: "Till UJC is standing at the base of the tree, telling me to come down. Or until you folks come up after me. But in that case either I or the tree may be injured -- not by me, of course -- and I'm sure you don't want to hurt either one of us, do you Officer Spoofner?"

Pedestrian: "You've been up there seven days? How do you go to the bathroom?" (Other pedestrians laugh; she blushes.)

E: "Discreetly." (More laughter.) "Honestly. Did you know one McDonald's cup of coffee makes two McDonald's cups of urine?"

Pedestrian: "You mean you haven't come down ONCE in seven days?"

E: "No. I'm under arrest when I do. There's a guard posted watching for my descent 24 hours a day. A remarkable waste of taxpayers' money, I must say, for I have no intention of coming down until my friend is free!"

Pedestrian: "Isn't it cold?"

E: "It gets brisk. But I don't mind. It's been a spiritual awakening..." (Sounds of ambulance and trucks drown out her voice; jet flies overhead; she wrinkles her nose, covers her ears, and shouts over the noise) "...if a little hard on the vocal chords!"

Enter Concepcion, carrying a stuffed monkey on a tree limb, beneath which dangles a sign, "Monkey See, Monkey Do, Monkeys Have Rights Too!" She laughs gleefully, points at the monkey, at Ellen, and rotates her finger near her ear. Monk enters behind her and watches quietly.

C: "Ha, ha, ha, she's crazy! SHE wants to be a MOVIE star!" (Sings.)
"There's no business like show business like no business I know!"
(Pedestrians turn around to look at her, confused.)

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E: "Connie, I don't interrupt your conversations. Please don't interrupt mine." (Speaks to the crowd, which tries to ignore Concepcion's continued counter-demonstration.) "You see, I'm here because if I were in Cass's shoes, I'd hope he or someone else would do everything possible to set me free."

Concepcion sees Thomas enter, stops gesticulating for attention, and returns to her signs. Alice follows, and talks in the background with Thomas for a moment.

E: "There's my husband. He has some literature he can share with you, answer your questions -- Thomas, would you take over for me, please? I'm getting hoarse." (Starts to climb up to the hammock.)

Pedestrian: "Wait. Before you disappear. Are you going to stay up there in winter too? Have you been out here in the park all winter?"

E: "If necessary, and God willing, I'll stay here as long as is necessary. I haven't spent a winter in the park yet. You'll ^{need to} ask Thomas or Concepcion about that -- they've been here three winters. I've just been here six months."

Pedestrian: "That's not insignificant in itself. Isn't it difficult?"

E: "Sometimes. But I ^{thrive on} challenge. And I feel it's necessary. Besides, the rewards far outweigh the difficulties. I love it."

Concepcion has been inching over to listen, and at this point explodes.

C: "LOVE it! What do YOU know? YOU think you can make me seem less important, what I did, three years I struggle out here, all alone except for Thomas. You want to pretend it never happened. But you won't take my story away! I'll see to that!"

E: "I don't want to take your story away, Concepcion. I want to tell it. But I don't agree with you yet that this life is miserable. Or that you're all alone. We have friends, Connie --"

and I for one am grateful! How do you think I manage to stay up here in this tree?" (Connie marches back toward her signs.)

"Connie's an amazing woman. She's like one of the pioneer women, stubborn and strong. I've learned a lot from her."

C: (Shouts.) "Don't you talk about me, dope pusher!"

Monk, who has been listening quietly throughout, turns to Concepcion.

M: "Sometimes I think what you're telling people is to get rid of bombs and choke each other to death, Connie!"

T: "Exactly. Which is why I've always contended that we don't think alike."

C: "No, you're wrong! We shared the same dream, you and I, Thomas. You've changed. But I forgive you. You're just a victim of mind control."

T: (Voice becomes firm.) "NO. YOU'RE wrong. We NEVER shared the same dream. We both TALK of peace -- but you make WAR. Because you're AFRAID."

C: "I'm not afraid of ANYTHING! YOU see how I stay out here in all the cold and misery."

T: "Yes, Concepcion, you're remarkable. God built you with lots of stamina. But here again we don't agree. I don't think it's miserable, speaking out on the sidewalk. And I DO think you're afraid to trust. You don't even trust ME, or you wouldn't be so contemptuous of Ellen."

C: "She's no good for you, Thomas. Look at her, making a fool of herself, stealing you away from talking about nuclear weapons, wasting your time."

E: "To fight for the freedom of a friend is NOT a waste of time. I would do the same for you, Concepcion."

C: "Shut up. I'm not talking to you. You need a nanny, Thomas? Be a MAN."

T: "Why won't you talk to Ellen?"

C: "Because I don't like the way she behaves."

E: "What is it about my behavior you don't like?"

C: "You have no dignity. You're an agitator. It's obvious. You're one of them."

E: "What proof do you have that I'm one of them?"

C: "You spray chemicals on me when you pass me."

E: "How do I do that? What do I use?"

C: "I don't know. I don't see it. But I FEEL it, like needles on my skin!"

E: "You have no proof of any of the accusations you make against me, Connie. If you had proof, I'm SURE you would be the first to hand it out to every passerby. After all, you HAVE written up your own perception of my life and handed it to the press as truth. I think I had better write the truth as I see it and give people another perspective. You are definitely a part of my life. May I have permission to write about you?"

C: "I'm not afraid. Go ahead. I have nothing to hide." (Stomps away; pedestrians disperse in amusement as Ellen calls after her.)

E: "Neither have I!" (Looks down at Spoofner, who has been listening closely.) "How about you, Spoofner, do you have anything you'd like to say? I'll do my best to represent you fairly. Would you like to develop your character and become a moral human being? Why don't you climb this tree and join me in my protest? You ARE the one who put my friend in a mental institution, after all."

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S: "I WHAT? What are you talking about?"

E: "UJC, of course."

S: "What do you mean?"

E: "Who do you think UJC is? Haven't you been listening? You arrested him in mid-July -- he's been locked up with killers and rapists in the criminal ward of St. E's -- near the president's own attempted assassin -- for simply lying on a blanket in front of a sign. Here it is mid-October, and he's still there, pumped full of Prolixin against his will, declared 'indefinitely incompetent' to stand trial by a judge who's covering her ass. THAT'S why I'm up this tree, Spoofner. 'Cause what happens to Cass COULD happen to me -- and, ultimately, you...unless we stop them."

S: "Especially if I climb that tree."

E: "If enough of us climbed trees maybe they'd stop locking us up! That's what I'd like to see -- every tree in Lafayette Park and Washington, D.C. full of the homeless, protesting. Can't you see it? They'd NEVER have enough cherry pickers to get us all down! We could hop and run from one tree to the next! Let's all climb for UJC!"

M: "Yeah. What could they do? Shoot us?"

Alice: "I ain't climbin' no tree -- 'specially for UJC -- he's nuts!
And I got better things to do!"

T: "Why do you say he's nuts?"

A: "Well, the shrinks SAID so. Why else would he be in so long?"

T: "Ah. I see. You believe them. Have you ever talked to a shrink?"

A: "Yeah. Had a nervous breakdown, six months they kept me."

T: "What makes you think you had a nervous breakdown?"

A: "Well, that's what they CALLED it -- what the hell, what're you grillin' ME for?"

T: "I'm not grilling you. I'm just suggesting you look at your definitions. Do YOU think you had a nervous breakdown?"

A: "What else would you call it? I couldn't stop cryin'!"

T: "Why?"

A: "Nobody would listen to me! At least THEY listened, them shrinks -- when I got to see 'em. Tried to make me think like somebody I'm not, though.... Didn't have much luck at THAT, I'll say!"

M: "No? How do you know?"

Suddenly a SET team sweeps onstage, wearing camouflage, carrying teargas cartridges in their hands. Ellen leaps up, climbs as high as she can go.)

E: "Whoops! Here we go!! HELP US FREE UJC! UJC IS NOT CRAZY!"

All characters on stage freeze and observe Ellen being dragged out of the tree. Her coat is ripped as the cop pulls her down. As soon as she has been roughly carried, limp but vocal, offstage, Thomas jumps into the tree.)

S: "MISTER Thomas!"

C: "THOMAS!"

S: "YOU can't do that!"

T: "No? I already have! HELP US FREE UJC! UJC IS NOT CRAZY!"

(Connie stops, silent.)

S: "But it's against regulations!"

T: "Not God's regulations. He says do for others as you would have others do for you. I've told you that, Mister Spoofer. HELP US FREE UJC!"

SET team returns, climbs up tree after Thomas, who nearly falls, but twists and jumps agilely to the ground. Remaining SET team cuff him and drag him offstage. Spoofner, Monk, Concepcion and Alice stand looking at each other.

S: "Well? Is there anyone else?"

M: "Not me. I don't like D.C. jail. Too many cockroaches." (exits)

C: (Sniffs.) "Humph. You think I let you take my signs? Who would keep the vigil then?" (Retreats to her signs, but observes.)

A: "No way I'm goin' through that..." (waves at the tree) "...particularly at MY age. Me and squirrels don't get along, anyway." (exits.)

Lights fade to spotlight on Spoofner, lesser spotlights on Concepcion and Norman. Spoofner looks thoughtfully at the tree, the park, out at the audience toward the White House.

S: "I wonder.... No. They'd think the pressure cracked me. I'd be right in there with UJC and the rest...." (Looks up at tree.)
"...No. I'd lose my job. A job's a job, no matter what you think of it -- gotta pay them bills...." (Starts to pace.) "I WAS naive enough to think by joining the force I could save the world -- once. I would be a 'peace officer'... defender of the weak." (Snorts.)
"But what do they have me doing? Putting people in mental institutions for sleeping, off to jail you go for lying on a park bench?
.... Justice. It's a game. I saw THAT the first time I testified in Court -- couldn't for the life of me remember what had happened, my first arrest, I was so nervous... so they sat me down and told me what to say on the stand.... He went to jail...." (long pause as he paces) "Oh, he was GUILTY, all right...." (pause) "They'll probably try the same thing with me this time too if UJC ever gets

to trial.... I had no idea.... I HAD NO IDEA!!" (he shouts at the sky) "...I'm just a newt in a gigantic pond, THEY don't tell me WHY, just WHAT! I'm JUST doing my JOB!!"

Norman, dressed in ski coat, steps out of the shadows. Concepcion, observing from behind her signs, starts when she sees him.

N: "Hello, Spoofner."

S: (Turns to Norman, blanches.) "N-NORMAN MAYER? You're DEAD! I SAW you die! We shot you in the HEAD!" (Looks around frantically.)

N: "I forgive you. You needn't run. The time has come to help you see there's more to life than death."

S: "Huh? Is that a joke?"

N: "How's your spirit, friend?"

S: "You want the truth?" (paces) "In agony."

N: "See any way out?"

S: "NO!" (pleadingly) "Do you?"

N: "Could be.... A leader leads by example, right?"

S: "So it's said."

N: "Seen any good examples lately?"

S: (Looks up at the tree.) "Yeah." (Light fades on Norman.) "I haven't climbed a tree in years. Wonder if I lost the knack." (Unloads his gun and drops it, takes off his badge and drops it, begins to climb.) "I USED to climb higher than anyone on the block...."

Concepcion walks over, agitated.

C: "Officer! Officer! What are you doing?"

S: "I guess since I'm responsible for putting UJC in St. E's, I better do what I can to get him out.... HELP US FREE UJC! UJC IS NOT CRAZY!"

Concepcion whirls, starts to run away, but crashes into Norman, screams and begins to sob. Light fades on Spoofer as she speaks.

C: "NORMAN! Norman! Am I going CRAZY? Policemen climbing trees? What for? Why would he do such a thing? It doesn't make any sense! And now YOU, am I dead or something, have I gone to hell?"

N: (gently) "No, Connie. You've already been in hell for a long time.... What's happening? A wedge is being driven into the cracks of hell... by a man who is willing to change."

C: "People don't change -- unless they're tricked."

N: "Oh, yes they do. When they want to. You've seen at least two."

C: "Who? SPOOFNER? He's losing his mind!"

N: "No, dear Connie. He's finding it."

C: "And who's the other? Thomas?"

N: "No. Ellen."

C: "YOU TOO? I thought you were my friend, Norman! See, I put up this sign about you, I did what you said, I kept the vigil going.... all alone now, Thomas deserted me.... See, look, 'Norman Mayer, Be Like Him, Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!'"

N: "I know, Connie. Thank you. But you're mistaken. You're not alone. There are those who will help if you'll let them, and stop trying to control. You can't own people, Concepcion. Just love them. And help them love you. Thomas didn't desert you ... he still loves you."

C: "Sure. I know that. We were one...."

N: "No, that you never were. You were partners in separate causes. You were friends. But you were opposite ends of a magnet -- he attracts, you drive away -- and so you were ridiculed and ignored by people

who were confused by your conflicting messages. Until Ellen."
(Concepcion spits.) "She's not so bad. Think about it. She's
suffered your lies..."

C: "They're not lies!"

N: "...delusions, then...and keeps offering friendship.... Who else
has done what she's done? Can't you respect her for doing it?"

C: "What has she done? Abandoned her child? Stolen Thomas from me?"

N: "YOU answer that, Concepcion. I'm not here to argue with you. Just
to help you understand. Soon I'll be on my way.... Make peace with
your neighbors, Connie. Show the world how. We MUST make peace
with our neighbors. Or THIS will be our end."

He whirls, waving at the screen. A brilliant flash of light engulfs the
stage, then darkness, thick and sullen. A mushroom cloud grows on the
screen to the music, "Sound of Silence." Lights go down, then rise on
Lafayette Park in early morning. All Ellen's signs are gone. The
murmbling and chattering of pigeons and grackles grows around Concepcion,
who stands beside her signs, arguing with herself.

C: "True. It is terrible to be alone.

Do I drive Thomas away?

But if I don't protect myself, who will do it for me?

There's God -- or so Thomas says."

Enter Ellen, carrying a hand-lettered cloth banner which she ties to the
limb of the sycamore tree: "Hey, King Ronnie, the police stole our
signs! 'There They Go Again!'"

C: "How can I trust her? She doesn't think like me!

But she is not afraid.

It's getting cold -- she'll soon disappear.

But what if she stays? She could help....

maybe I could get some sleep ... or warm my frozen toes...."

Enter Officer Payne and two SS, who start to untie the sign.

E: "What are you doing? You have no right. That's my sign."

P: "You can't hang it from the tree. I'm removing it. Regulations."

E: "That sign is protected by the First Amendment."

P: "Sue me."

E: (Shouts to pedestrians) "THUG! THIEF! He's stealing my sign! Long live the fascist state!!" (Holds onto the edge of the banner; the SS hold her, try to pry her fingers loose; Payne cuts the banner from her hands with a dull knife. Concepcion watches for a moment, then makes up her mind, and hurries over to stand by Ellen.)

C: "We want freedom!" (Ellen stops struggling briefly, looks at Concepcion in astonishment, and smiles. Concepcion nods grimly and shouts again.) "WE WANT FREEDOM! WE WANT FREEDOM!"

E: "Thank you, God! WE WANT FREEDOM -- NOW!!"

-End-

After-note:

I can't imagine why I shouted "Long live the fascist state!" What a dumb thing to say. I clearly had much to learn. I was very grateful when Concepcion stepped up and provided a much better slogan to shout.

It's a fact that Concepcion had told me I could write about her, but when I brought her the play, she threw it to the ground and told me I was forbidden to write about her "as long as I'm alive!" So I tucked it away, and in 1988 wrote its sequel, "[Peace Park](#)," with changed names and no Concepcion, as demanded.