

BLACKOUTS

A Play

By
Murray Mednick

The Scene: A hospital room below ground level. Upstage right is a large window opening onto a parking lot. Center stage is a hospital bed facing out, and down left is a chair. The usual stuff, including masks, other protective regalia. But no doors. People come and go through a (black) curtain. **Note: unless otherwise indicated, lights snap full up when it says Lights Up. Also: as we learned when the play was done online, in April,/2000, much of the Voice Over material, Car, Face, etc. can be done with Projection.**

Characters:

MAURICE: Elderly little Jewish man with a bad back and a replaced hip, plus C.O.P.D. bronchitis, glaucoma, and diabetes, etc.. Retains his irony and sense of humor. Mostly.

KEENO: Mysterious middle-aged doctor with a drinking problem and occasional vertigo, and who is in danger of losing his license to practice medicine.

RODRIGO: Younger mixed-race man who is a Registered Nurse in charge of the ward; knowing and sharp. Talkative. Bit of an accent. Bit of a con.

NANDI: A NURSE. In her mid-twenties; beautiful Philipina woman. Smart.

JIM, PASTOR, VISITING DOC: PLAYED BY SAME TALL, BESPECTALED OLDER MAN.

HANGING MAN, VOICE IN CEILING, FACE, VOICE with KEENO. ALL PLAYED BY THE SAME ACTOR, MAYBE A HANDSOME BLACK MAN.

1.

(Full flash up – RODRIGO and KEENO onstage, MAURICE on the hospital bed.)

KEENO: What time is it?

RODRIGO: 2:30 PM.

KEENO: What day is it?

RODRIGO: Wednesday, March 5th, 20/20. What's wrong with you?

KEENO: Nothing.

RODRIGO: Don't say nothing.

KEENO: Nothing. Don't talk.

RODRIGO: I'll talk.

KEENO: This patient will need a blood test, check his immune system. He thinks there's nothing wrong with him, but he has all the pre-conditions for the virus.

RODRIGO: What is this virus?

KEENO: Nobody knows.

RODRIGO: Where'd it come from?

KEENO: China.

RODRIGO: How?

KEENO: Someone ate a bat.

RODRIGO: A bat?

KEENO: Yes. We serve the human debris, Rodrigo, the accidents with animals in foreign lands, the shit and piss of human life.

RODRIGO: Now it's you who 's talking.

KEENO: The endless onslaught of germs. Viruses. Things that are not alive. So, you have constant blood tests. Blood pressure. Blood sugar. Strokes. Antibodies. Injections. Infections. Prescriptions. Immune systems. Cardio-vascular disease. Broken spirits.

RODRIGO: Life is hard and then you die.

KEENO: American slang, Rodrigo, but you talk too much.

RODRIGO: I like what you said -- onslaught. Onslaught.

KEENO: They call it shedding. **Shedding.**

RODRIGO: Shedding.

KEENO: Make sure your hands are clean. Wear gloves and a mask.

RODRIGO: How did all this happen?

KEEBO: What?

RODRIGO: This. How did it happen?

KEENO: Nobody knows.

RODRIGO: How would you say it?

KEENO: It's a pandemic. It's coming here soon. It's here already.

RODRIGO: Why?

KEENO: Be quiet for a minute. *(Pause)*

RODRIGO: You threw the old man into the hospital. The one with the cane. You threw him into a wheelchair and right down the concrete walk, through the tubular tunnel, into the underground.

KEENO: The old man's got health problems. He could use a couple days in the hospital. And some lab tests. There should also be a test for the virus.

RODRIGO: I don't see no tests.

KEENO: Don't talk.

'RODRIGO: There is a patient in there next to him with a neck operation who is moaning all the time. They took a bone out of his neck.

KEENO: Nandi.

RODRIGO: Nandi, what?

KEENO: She is supposed to be here.

RODRIGO: What are you doing?

KEENO: I'm saving the old fucker's life.

RODRIGO: You could lose your job.

KEENO: His immune system is totally compromised.

RODRIGO.: Are you drinking?

KEENO: No.

RODRIGO: You don't like being a doctor, one of the world's bestest professions.

KEENO: "Bestest" is not a word.

RODRIGO: Look at his fucking room. No doubt there's a wife, there's a wife who will be checking on him. A wife. A mother. A daughter. (*MAURICE is trying to hide on the bed.*) Is this him?

KEENO: That's him.

RODRIGO: He 's scared.

KEENO: Maurice...Sit up, please, so we can straighten you out.

MAURICE: No. I want my clothes. I want to go home.

KEENO: Put your mask on right.

MAURICE: What for?

KEENO: So you don't infect other people.

MAURICE: Where are my clothes?

RODRIGO: We don't have your clothes. Your maid took your clothes. You have to sign some papers now.

MAURICE: No.

KEENO: Sign the papers. And we'll need a blood test.

MAURICE: No.

RODRIGO: (*To KEENO*) What's wrong with him?

KEENO: It's the steroids and the drugs.

MAURICE: Nothing is wrong with me.

KEENO: You could have had a heart attack.

MAURICE: No way.

KEENO: You could have died. Keeled over and dropped dead.

MAURICE: I don't think so.

RODRIGO: You could have a sickness from China, where you can't breathe.

MAURICE: I can breathe fine. No problem.

KEENO: Stand up. Let's see if you can stand.

MAURICE: *(Standing)* See that?

RODRIGO: You're wobbling.

MAURICE: Can I say something.?

KEENO: Sit down first. *(MAURICE sits on the bed.)* Okay, talk.

MAURICE: I forget now. Sorry.

RODRIGO: You should talk. *(No answer)* Okay. I gotta go. Excuse me. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: The President of the United States is a kraut from Queens.

KEENO: I see.

MAURICE: Queens is a Borough of New York City.

KEENO: I can give you a sedative, if you want.

MAURICE: Like what?

KEENO: Ativan.

MAURICE: No ativan. Doesn't work. Give me morphine. It worked when I had my hip replaced. That was no fun. The morphine worked. Didn't last long, but it worked. For a minute.

KEENO: Okay, we can do that.

MAURICE: Thank you.

KEENO: We'll keep you stable and comfortable.

MAURICE: No, I'm not going to stay here that long.

KEENO: We'll also give you Norco for the pain.

MAURICE: What happened to the morphine?

KEENO: It's on its way.

MAURICE: I want to go home tonight.

KEENO: And then we'll see how you do. *(A moan, OFF)*

MAURICE: Is there a patient behind that curtain?

KEENO: Yes, he just had his neck operated on.

MAURICE: I hope he stops that moaning. I hope his head is still on his body.

KEENO: You were discombobulated. I listened to your chest. You were dangerously congested. You could have a heart attack with all that blockage, so I wheeled you into the hospital.

MAURICE: Then what?

KEENO: Mainly steroids. Fifty milligrams. And there's the danger of a viral infection. You're not breathing well.

MAURICE: Good grief.

KEENO: And insulin. We took a glucose test. High blood sugar. Too high.

MAURICE: I'm diabetic?

KEENO: Apparently.

MAURICE: Sugar is in everything, Doc. America was founded on sugar, slaves and sugar, sugar and slaves.

KEENO: Rest now, my friend. Save your energy.

MAURICE: I seem to see everything differently now. Electrical, mainly.

KEENO: Excuse me?

MAURICE: Energetical. Mechanical. Where a gang of ignorant white people drunkenly slaughtered the native inhabitants and righteously imposed the Christian

religion, and poisoned the air and the ground and the water, and now they say they like it, they like it the way it is now.

KEENO: I'm astounded.

MAURICE: Really?

KEENO: Don't talk. Rest. I have to get going on my rounds.

MAURICE: How many steroids?

KEENO: Fifty MG of prednisone.

MAURICE: What happens now?

KEENO: Looks like you might live. I'll give you an ativan. Slow you down.

MAURICE: No!

KEENO: Lie back on the bed.

MAURICE: No. They'll find me.

KEENO: Who will?

MAURICE: Doctors. Gentiles. Nurses.

KEENO: Did you say Gentiles? Why Gentiles?

MAURICE: I'm a Jew!

KEENO: We're saving your fucking life! You want to live or not?

MAURICE: Fuck, yes!

KEENO: So calm down!

MAURICE: Lemme tell you something.

KEENO: What?

MAURICE: Americans are all fucked up with Capitalist fantasies and criminal activities, that's all.

KEENO: Okay. Stay quiet for a minute. We need x-rays of your chest right now. *(Enter NANDI)* And we'll take some blood. Nandi will help you. *(Exits)*

NANDI: Hello, sir.

MAURICE: Hello.

NANDI: You must sign the admission papers, so we can take care of you.

MAURICE: No. I want to go home.

NANDI: You need care here and the medical attention that you can't get at home. Or you could die. Just your initials. *(He signs)* Good. Now I'll take some blood for the lab.

MAURICE: What is this with the virus, nurse?

NANDI: It's new. It started in Asia and it's moving fast. We have patients already. You're isolated here, but I'd be careful. Wear your mask and wash your hands and don't wander.

MAURICE: I feel fine. There's nothing wrong with me.

NANDI: Not what the doctor says. Follow me, please.

MAURICE: Where are we going?

NANDI: The x-ray room.

MAURICE: I can't walk.

NANDI: Use the walker. I'll help you.

MAURICE: You seem like a normal person.

NANDI: Button up your gown.

MAURICE: And pretty, too.

NANDI: Thank you. Button up. We don't want to see your ass.

MAURICE: Shit. They think they grabbed a crazy old Jew....*(They start off.)* Right off the street!

Blackout

2.

(KEENO and RODRIGO, at the entrance.)

KEENO: I'm not an alcoholic.

RODRIGO: How do you know?

KEENO: I don't miss it, I don't crave it. I don't think about it.

RODRIGO: Lemme ask you something. Five G's.

KEENO: Five G's what?

RODRIGO: I was talking to someone.

KEENO: And?

RODRIGO: It's an electro-magnetic blanket on the Earth. Or maybe radio waves? What do you think?

KEENO: Say more.

RODRIGO: Used to be four G's. Now it's five. It's all over the world. And what is it? It's a magnetic field? It's something, covering the earth, what makes the phones work. All the little gadgets and the phone. And the TV. And whatever. The radio. I'm only asking. What kind of problem is that?

KEENO: Sounds like a big problem.

RODRIGO: Does it cause the virus? I'm only asking. Because everything is electricity.

KEENO: Is everything electricity?

RODRIGO: As far as I'm concerned, it is.

KEENO: A virus is a parasite that is not a living thing but it survives and multiplies in a host.

RODRIGO: Which is us.

KEENO: Which is us.

RODRIGO: Fuck that shit, man.

KEENO: I agree with you. They're little machines that replicate. They get inside a human cell and there they make copies of themselves. Millions of them.

RODRIGO: I think that's weird.

KEENO: So do I.

RODRIGO: So where'd they fucking come from?

KEENO: A bat.

RODRIGO: A bat?

KEENO: So we have to tell Maurice to wear his mask right and to wash his hands frequently.

RODRIGO: He's hooked up now.

KEENO: Then the nurses will do it.

RODRIGO: Good luck with that.

KEENO: He'll wear gloves.

RODRIGO: You had alcohol on your breath.

KEENO: When?

RODRIGO: Before.

KEENO: I had one glass of wine.

RODRIGO: You're naïve. A bit of a mark. People take advantage.

KEENO: You think so?

RODRIGO: Yes. But what's with the bat? What's going on with the fucking bats?

KEENO: It's too complicated to explain right now. We have to deal with the old man now.

RODRIGO: What do we do with him?

KEENO: Fix him up and let him go. Fast. So he avoids disease. Antibiotics, insulin, anesthesia, anti-depressants, plus steroids for the COPD bronchitis, and that's it. But he's a super candidate for the virus. So wear your mask and gloves and keep your distance.

RODRIGO: I have to take his temperature. I have take his blood pressure. His vitals.

KEENO: Be careful. Clean yourself up when you're done. *(Exits)*

RODRIGO: Great. *(Entering)* Hello, sir. I have to take your vitals.

MAURICE: Okay.

RODRIGO: Lemme ask you something.

MAURICE: Okay.

RODRIGO: You know what the five G is?

MAURICE: No.

RODRIGO: Well, you should figure it out.

MAURICE: Why?

RODRIGO: Because of the virus that's going around and killing people. Which reminds me, you have to stay clean – wash your hands and wear a mask and don't touch anything.

MAURICE: You must be kidding.

RODRIGO: Nope. I'm not.

Blackout

3.

(Lights up. MAURICE and KEENO, RODRIGO.)

KEENO: Okay, then.

MAURICE: Who took my clothes?

KEENO: The maid took your clothes.

MAURICE: Oh, for God's sake. So all I have is my gown? This stupid, shitty hospital gown?

KEENO: That's all you have.

MAURICE: Shit.

RODRIGO: I guess you could make a run for it in your gown. I would, if I were you. You're better off at home. This place is full of germs.

MAURICE: That's true, isn't it Keeno?

KEENO: Yes, but you need another day.

MAURICE: For what?

KEENO: To stabilize. We need to do the blood test. Then you can go.

RODRIGO: Run for it.

KEENO: Shut up, Rodrigo.

RODRIGO: You think about what I told you? The five G's and the virus?

MAURICE: No.

RODRIGO: I'd think about it if I were you.

MAURICE: I will.

RODRIGO: People think it came from a bat.

MAURICE: A bat?

KEENO: I didn't say that.

RODRIGO: But I don't think so. There's an electro-magnrtic field covering the whole Earth.

MAURICE: How do you know?

RODRIGO: I read about it on my phone.

KEENO: Oh, for God's sake.

RODRIGO: How do you think we all got here in the first place? What are we? We're electro-magnetic machines. Think about it.

KEENO: They say that someone ate a bat.

MAURICE: Someone ate a bat?

KEENO: In China.

MAURICE: In China?

RODRIGO: So make sure your gowns are clean, and so on.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

KEENO: Which unleashed a new virus, which is killing people in China and making it's way around the world and we all have to be careful. So, so far so good. Stay here another day and we'll let you go home with flying colors.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

RODRIGO: Everything is electricity. Am I wrong?

KEENO: What are you talking about?

RODRIGO: I'm talking about the origins of the Universe.

KEENO: Take a hike, Rodrigo.

RODRIGO: The movement of the stars, the rotation of the Earth. The light bulb, The machinery. I'm out of here. (*Exits*)

MAURICE: He has a point.

KEENO: No, he doesn't. He talks too much.

MAURICE: What's with the bat? Somebody ate a bat?

KEENO: In China.

MAURICE: In China. I should go home. Are there guards?

KEENO: They're harmless, and unarmed.

MAURICE: White guys working for an Indian hospital. Are you Indian?

KEENO: No.

RODRIGO (*Off*): Hey! Give him something, Doc! Ease the pain!

KEENO: Okay, Maurice? A little morphine?

MAURICE: About time. Will it work?

KEENO: Of course.

MAURICE: Let's go, then! *(KEENO does the injection.)*

KEENO: You'll feel better in a minute.

MAURICE: This is a gangster-driven capitalist nightmare situation.

KEENO: We're saving your life.

MAURICE; My life....

KEENO: How do you feel now?

MAURICE: Good. Thank you. I'm not sure what happened to me. I'm scared. But I feel good. What was that?

KEENO: A nice dose of morphine.

MAURICE: Good. Doesn't last, though. I'll need a pill on top of it soon.

RODRIGO: *(Off)* We got that! Think about what I said! Electricity!

KEENO: This happens to you every October when the weather changes.

MAURICE: Oh.

KEENO: C.O.P.D.

MAURICE: The weather on the planet. Which is no longer the planet, or the weather. It's something else. Something else is happening which we call the weather, but what it is is the cracking and peeling of the skin of the earth, which will be parched and barren and the creatures will be migrating into the netherworld. Including mankind. And now we have a pandemic. It must mean something.

RODRIGO: *(Off)* He 's right on, Doc! Five G's!

KEENO: Take a deep breath, Maurice. *(MAURICE breathes, in and out.)* Again. Again. Better. Good.

MAURICE: One more thing: Is there someone in the ceiling?

KEENO: In the ceiling?

MAURICE: There are other people around, too. Can you see them?

KEENO: No.

MAURICE: Some of 'em are hanging.

KEENO: Hanging?

MAURICE: They're here. Hanging, or twisted, or banged up. Why don't you come inside, Rodrigo?

RODRIGO: *(Off)* I'm off duty at the moment.

MAURICE: Gimme another shot. Morphine. Heroin. Anything.

RODRIGO: *(Entering)* We don't do heroin. I think he's hallucinating, Doc.

KEENO: So are you.

RODRIGO: We got 'em here, we got junkies here, but we're mainly keeping 'em out. Certain people. Like druggies. We gotta keep 'em out. They're overwhelming the hospital. That and the virus. Virus and opioids. What does it all mean? Like he said. They're overwhelming the country. You want this to be white America? You want this to be America the beautiful? It's not! Now it's JunkieLand! Now it's viral country? Killing off the Old people! Am I wtong?

KEENO: Stop talkng for a minute.

RODRIGO: Give him another shot.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

RODRIGO: Go ahead, Doc.

MAURICE: Wait a minute. I'm going.

KEENO: You can't walk, Maurice.

MAURICE: You threw me in here and loaded me up wth steroids?

KEENO: Yes. You could've died of a heart attack.

MAURICE: Everybody could die of a heart attack. Isn't that funny? You have all these worries, and then you die of a heart attack. Your heart stops ticking like a clock. Then the alarm goes off. I take it all for advantage – I meant, for **granted**. Also, I hear my pulse after about six oclock every night. Why is that? It's electrical, like he says. The nurse.

KEENO: Rodrigo.

MAURICE: He's right.

KEENO: You need to wear a mask.

MAURICE: I do wear a mask.

KEENO: Some people have strange faces with a mask on.

RODRIGO: We want to keep the other races out.

KEENO: I said **Faces**.

RODRIGO: No, Races. I'm talking about Races. We try to keep the other races out. Because this is America, the land of the White Man.

MAURICE: Can I say something?

KEENO: You should rest.

MAURICE: I was only a kid then, in the forties and fifties, when I had no idea where the East River was, which was right behind the tenement building in Brooklyn, and the war was going on, my mother saved silver chewing gum wrappings in a ball. Dekalb avenue. We used to take the trolley to Coney Island and mingle with the hordes of poor people, like us. I used to hide under the shade of the Boardwalk. No one heard about the Holocaust in those days.

RODRIGO: Are we talking about that?

MAURICE: There was a voice in the ceiling.

RODRIGO: Childhood?

MAURICE: That is a Jewish idea, as far as I'm concerned – the Evil Inclination -- and I'm interested in knowing what it means. What does it mean? The Evil in Man, born in there with his birth? Seeded in there by God? Sowed in there by nature? Screwed in there by DNA?

RODRIGO: Yeah. Sure. Time to go, Doc.

MAURICE: You disdained me about the Hanging Man.

RODRIGO: I think you mis-heard me.

KEENO: You're hallucinating.

MAURICE: You don't see the Hanging Man?

KEENO: No. Let's go. *(He and R. exit.)*

MAURICE: Childhood. New York City. DeKalb Avenue. Where people knew what's what and how to behave. Shuffle along. People looked like kupie dolls. People looked like aberrant monkeys, no, not monkeys -- like pink phony faces with brown teeth. Stupid grins. Beady eyes. Lying faces. Hitters. Murderers. Warmongers. An LSD impression. Manhattan was across the East River and I didn't know what was there. I was so interested in the alley and the apple carts on the street and the trolleys going by, that I had no idea that the tower city of Manhattan was just across the river. *(The ceiling speaks:)*

V.O.: This will be America again. Don't worry about that.

MAURICE: No, it won't. America is over.

V.O.: Don't worry about it.

MAURICE: I'm not worried. That was a lie. I'm very worried. I think something has sprung loose. Some kind of vibe or virus, or evil spirit, is upon the land.

V.O.: But we're going to take care of it, Friend.

MAURICE: How?

V.O.: Walls, fires, floods, pestilence. Cages. Bombs. Prisons. Diseases. Migration. Storms. Etc.

MAURICE: Frogs? Locusts?

V.O.: Yeah, there'll come a time when there'll be a collision, a conflict, a War, and an Armageddon between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. *(Pause)* The forces of Light will win.

MAURICE: Then what?

V.O.: And then we'll rapture, we'll rapture Up.

MAURICE: What'll you do? Hang on to someone's foot as you rise?

V.O.: Is that a joke?

MAURICE: That's a joke.

V.O: It's not funny.

MAURICE: You're a joke.

V.O: Watch out, Pal, because you, you will go to Hell.

MAURICE: I don't think so

V.O: Hell.

MAURICE: I don't think so. There is no Hell. This is Hell. And this talk of Armagedden has already put more of the horror in me. I don't know how much more horror I can take. You fucking idiots are believing a complete fantasy and you're running the country! Hey! What happened to Keeno? And the Hindu?

V.O: They slipped away. You missed it.

MAURICE: No! We don't see the same things. You're an example of a horror. You are a horror. Hey! You believe horrible things! *(Pause)*

Blackout

4.

(Lights up)

MAURICE: Hey, Voice Over. In the ceiling?

V.O: Yeah?

MAURICE: Who else is in the room here?

V.O.: You'll see 'em when you see 'em. *(Enter RODRIGO)*

MAURICE: Nurse?

RODRIGO. Yes. I'm a nurse, as you know, sir. I'm the Head Nurse on this ward. I'll try not to talk too much. Like some people I know. Do you need something?

MAURICE: There's one patient next to me whose neck is screwed up. He's right over there. What's his name?

RODRIGO: Francisco.

MAURICE: He never says anything. He just moans.

RODRIGO: He's on drugs, like you. He had a fusion. In his neck. Not a good idea.

MAURICE: Who else is in here?

RODRIGO: I don't see anyone else here.

MAURICE: Some Christian person in the ceiling is talking to me.

RODRIGO: I don't see no one, except him, next door, neither Christian or otherwise. And he doesn't speak English. I don't know what he is, actually. *(Moan)*

MAURICE: There's someone in the ceiling.

RODRIGO: All right.

MAURICE: You're condescending. You think I'm nuts.

RODRIGO: There's no one in the ceiling. Okay?

MAURICE: You think I'm scared?

RODRIGO: I do.

MAURICE: Okay. And you? What are you?

RODRIGO: I'm Indian. From India.

MAURICE: Aha! I thought so!

RODRIGO: What is that supposed to mean?

MAURICE: Is everybody here Indian?

RODRIGO: Of course not. No.

MAURICE: People have strange beliefs. Like the person who was talking to me. Is there a speaker in here? A pipe, a wire? What?

RODRIGO: Where?

MAURICE: In the ceiling.

RODRIGO: No.

MAURICE: An evangelical Christian?

RODRIGO: Not that I know of. *(Laughs)*

MAURICE: What's so funny?

RODRIGO: You. You're a funny old Jew.

MAURICE: Fuck you!

RODRIGO: I wouldn't know anything about no voices in the ceiling. I'll take your blood pressure again now. It was very high when you checked in. As was your heart rate.

MAURICE: I didn't check in. I was kidnapped.

RODRIGO: That's what all the old maniacs say.

MAURICE: I'm not a maniac. I'm a sane, intellectual person.

RODRIGO: Of course, you are. Let me have your arm, please.

MAURICE: Okay. *(RODRIGO wraps MAURICES'S arm, etc.)* What do you believe in, you?

RODRIGO: I'm a Hindu.

MAURICE: What's your name?

RODRIGO: Rodrigo.

MAURICE: What kind of name is that?

RODRIGO: Portugese.

MAURICE: Portugese?

RODRIGO: Portugese. They conquered us. We speak their language. That's another example. Language. Like a virus. 190 over 80. It's still high. Take it easy. *(Starts off)*

MAURICE: Will I ever see you again?

RODRIGO: Later on, sir.

MAURICE: What a minute.

RODRIGO: Yes.

MAURICE: What's Keeno's last name?

RODRIGO: I don't know nothing about him, sir.

MAURICE: Odd. You seemed like close friends.

RODRIGO: Why do you ask?

MAURICE: Because I heard he's on probation.

RODRIGO: I merely work here, sir. I'm a nurse. Bander 's his name. Hindus never tell about other people. Jews lie all the time.

MAURICE: Horseshit.

RODRIGO: Jews are well-organized and smart.

MAURICE: Correct.

RODRIGO: And they know how to make money.

MAURICE: I have connections, nurse.

RODRIGO: Connections?

MAURICE: I'll have you shot.

RODRIGO: I don't even know any Jews.

MAURICE: Not likely, Pal.

RODRIGO: What kind of connections?

MAURICE: The right kind. Tough Jews. Assassins.

RODRIGO: I'm not scared.

MAURICE: Tell me about the ceiling.

RODRIGO: No. I have to go now. Five G's. Remember, it's electro-magnetic, like a blanket, covering the Earth. You know, like the **Cloud**.

MAURICE: Of course. Thank you. *(RODRIGO starts to go.)* You can go now. *(He leaves.)* Come back soon, motherfucker! *(Silence)* Hey! Hey! Hey!

FRANCISCO (*Off, in Spanish*): Shut up over there! (*Moans*)

MAURICE: Sorry. (*Enter NANDI. She looks over the place, checks out MAURICE.*) Who are you?

NANDI: I'm your nurse. Nandi. Remember?

MAURICE: There was a female nurse here before. A pretty one. I think it was you.

NANDI: It was. Now I'm your night nurse. I'll be available all night. All you have to do is call. You press that button, and someone will answer.

MAURICE: Nobody comes when I call.

NANDI: Keep calling.

MAURICE: How did I get in here?

NANDI: Dr. Bander. You have lots of serious health problems. We need to monitor you for a few days. And do some tests. Now I have to take your vitals.

MAURICE: Not a few days. A day!

NANDI: Okay.

MAURICE: What about the pain? I'm in a lot of pain!

NANDI: I know. Everything has to be signed for. By the management. All narcotics. Triple signed. It's a process. Takes time.

MAURICE: That's not right. That's all bullshit.

NANDI: I'll bring you a norco, soon as I'm done.

MAURICE: Please.

NANDI: First, I'll take your blood sugar level and your oxygen, and your blood pressure.

MAURICE: Ok. That's all bullshit about the drugs. It's hysteria. About opioids and alcohol and viruses and hand sanitizers and toilet paper and God knows what else. You're a pretty girl.

NANDI: Thank you.

MAURICE: I was thinking. You want to hear?

NANDI: You can talk if you want. Quietly.

MAURICE: I'm a little hysterical myself.

NANDI: It's understandable. Go ahead. Talk.

MAURICE: Well, it's important to have something to look forward to. And I realize it's in my body. It's in my instinctive part, my bodily yearning – it's sex, that is what we look forward to, sex, even at my age. There 's nothing wrong with that. It's still there. That's what we are looking forward to, all our lives, the accomplishment, the ecstasy of sex. That's what we're given at birth, at birth, sexual achievement, and that's what I look forward to -- So Nandi the nurse pushes a button and I rise up like a light bulb or a snake.

NANDI: Fine. Don't excite yourself or move your arm, please.

MAURICE: It's the instinct of the body, the necessity to procreate. The Species imperative. And the pleasure that comes with it is the reward. We look forward to the reward. Nature knew what it was doing. You can't underestimate Nature. DNA.

NANDI: And the woman pays the price – first with monthly blood-letting and then in childbirth.

MAURICE: I think that's right. Tell me about yourself.

NANDI: I grew up in America. I thought everyone was smart here and above me. But I learned. You have the perfect Leader now, the Perfect American – vulgar, a little stupid, over the top, a phony person, a mad tyrant, who thinks he's God and the Emperor. Anyway, it's still better here than in the Phillipines, where I've never actually been. Your blood sugar is very high. Well over three hundred.

MAURICE: Are you a virgin?

NANDI: Did they give you insulin?

MAURICE: I think so.

NANDI: You need some right away.

MAURIC: You didn't answer me.

NANDI: None of your business.

MAURICE: I won't tell anybody.

NANDI: Yes.

MAURICE: Congratulations. How about my COPD?

NANDI: Doctor Bander will take care of that. Meanwhile you'll be on fifty milligrams of prednisone and be a little weird. And you need a shot of insulin. I'd say twenty units. *(Presses the bed phone.)*

MAURICE: They never answer.

NANDI: They better.

MAURICE: They won't. *(VOICE comes out of the phone.)*

VOICE: What's the trouble?

NANDI: Patient needs insulin here right away. #115. Twenty units. Send it over.

VOICE: Nandi?

NANDI: Come on, send it over quick.

VOICE: All right, I'll see what I can do. *(Disconnects)*

MAURICE: Jeez, apparently they listen to you.

NANDI: You need to learn to control the blood sugar. The congestion, the bronchitis, will be over in a day or two.

MAURICE: Get me off steroids. I'm not myself. I'm hearing things.

NANDI: Happens, sir.

MAURICE: What happens?

NANDI: People see and hear things. On steroids. At least you're not coughing.

MAURICE: No. Not at the moment. What do you think about the Cloud?

NANDI: What cloud?

MAURICE: You know, what makes the computer things go. You have one?

NANDI: Of course.

MAURICE: What do you think?

NANDI: I don't think about it.

MAURICE: Rodrigo –

NANDI: It's a Rodrigo obsession.

MAURICE: Can it talk through the ceiling?

NANDI: Excuse me?

MAURICE: Sorry. I don't know why I said that.

NANDI: No problem.

MAURICE: You have shiny black hair.

NANDI: Yes.

MAURICE: Beautiful.

NANDI: Don't get any ideas.

MAURICE: I won't.

NANDI: I work here. I'm a registered nurse.

MAURICE: No worries. Those days are long over.

NANDI: You'd be surprised. We get some rowdy dementia types in here.

MAURICE: I'll bet. What else do you do? Outside?

NANDI: I'm trying to stop the San Juaqin Valley from being paved over.

MAURICE: Really?

NANDI: Yes. By stupid white idiot bureaucrats. Sorry.

MAURICE: I'm not white. I'm Jewish.

NANDI: Is that so?

MAURICE: We're not black or white.

NANDI: Have it your way.

MAURICE: We're Semites. Tell me about Dr. Bander.

NANI: Like what?

MAURICE: What's his problem?

NANDI: You know, doctors work long hours.

MAURICE: Does he drink?

NANDI: I couldn't say, sir.

MAURICE: Sorry I asked.

NANDI: I'm supposed to tell you -- An occupational therapist will visit you soon.

MAURICE: What do they do?

NANDI: They tell you how to put your socks on, get dressed, things like that. Also a physical therapist.

MAURICE: I guess that's encouraging.

NANDI: We'll, I'm done.

MAURICE: Sounds like a scam to me. Occupational. Hustling Medicare.

NANDI: Not my department, sir.

MAURICE: Maurice.

NANDI: Maurice. I'll be back. Someone will be coming by with your insulin.

MAURICE: Put in a good word for me, will ya? *(She exits)*

Blackout

5.

(Lights up, MAURICE and KEENO)

MAURICE: She never came back.

KEENO: Who?

MAURICE: The nurse. The dark one. Nandi.

KEENO: She's a Philipina.

MAURICE: She didn't come back with my pain med.

KEENO: I'll take care of it. And the insulin?

MAURICE: Rodrigo did it.

KEENO: He's a talker.

MAURICE: He 's strange. He thinks leeches caused the epidemic.

KEENO: He has a different idea every twenty minutes. Depends on the last person he talked to. This is a for-profit hospital. So everybody does the best they can. And they're underpaid.

MAURICE: Figures. The nurses say yes, yes, and wipe your ass and take your temperature and then you don't see them again. For hours.

KEENO: They have to take care of other people. Not just you. Well, you are in pretty bad shape at the moment.

MAURICE: Business is what counts. Money is what counts.

KEENO: You might be right about that..

MAURICE; I'm terrified. The migrations are on their way now. They're banging on the doors, they're swarming on boats, they're flooding our borders. People will open fire. And the virus is wiping us out. *(Pause)* What's your problem, Keeno? You drink?

KEENO: Sometimes.

MAURICE: What else?

KEENO: I have vertigo.

MAURICE: I'm sorry.

KEENO: I get dizzy and lose my balance.

MAURICE: It has nothing to do with drinking?

KEENO: It exasperates it.

MAURICE: Can I ask you about the asshole in the ceiling?

KEENO: Ask. If you want. It means nothing. There's no one in the ceiling.

MAURICE: I disagree. Besides this asshole paranoid probably hypocritical born again evangelical lying American Christian asshole.

KEENO: Who are you talking about?

MAURICE: The President of the United States.

KEENO: I thought you were talking about the man in the ceiling.

MAURICE: I was. Do you vote?

KEENO: No.

MAURICE: The man in the ceiling? The nurses? Others? They're real?

KEENO: Those are our people, sir. They're doing their jobs.

MAURICE: The man in the ceiling?

KEENO: There's nobody in the ceiling. You're being paranoid. Your mind 's not right.

MAURICE: Okay, fuck you.

KEENO: Be nice, Maurice.

MAURICE: I know, you can't stand the nature of reality.

KEENO: I never said anything about reality.

MAURICE: Why? What is that? The pressure to survive? Human being? Vertigo? The Cloud?

KEENO: Take a break, Maurice.

MAURICE: I'm drugged. I never say things like that. I think those things, but I never say them. Because I'm an educated intellectual, of which we don't have enough in this country, because it is run by yahoos and hypocrites and hated by the ordinary jerks who don't read and react to false advertising in ways totally unpredictable by any functioning human being of past epochs.

KEENO: Hold up. Take a breath. Did you forget I was here? I have no idea who you're talking to. Do you?

MAURICE: Yeah, I do. I'm talking to you. Though I never talk that way. The Orange Ape de-regulated everything and de-lawed everything, so everything is lawless and cars sideswipe and people crack heads, and lying and cheating prevails and the Russians are our masters and our institutions are failing from the inside out and the economy is roaring like a toothless lion. One day he'll keel over in Griffith Park, this lion, and vomit out all the bad meat he's been eating from dawn to twilight.

KEENO: What's wrong with you? Do you need more sedation?

MAURICE: No. Too money -- I mean *many* -- fucking drugs. And you, Keeno? Is it alcohol or something worse? Family?

KEENO: I told you already. I get dizzy and fall down. I did it once in the ER and they thought I was drunk.

MAURICE: Thank you. You did tell me. I can't think straight. And I hate being immobilized like this, and scrambled like this, and totally uncomfortable in a medical dungeon. Who owns this place? Indiana? No, I mean: Do Indians own this place. Indians from India? They're supposed to be spiritual, am I right? Turns out they're beggars and thieves. My wife, my ex-wife, is going to get you, motherfucker.

KEENO: No, she won't.

MAURICE: I'll have you assassinated.

KEENO: Sure you will.

MAURICE: Are you Indian or not?

KEENO: Yes.

MAURICE: Which religion?

KEENO: None of the above.

MAURICE: You have blackouts?

KEENO: None of your business.

MAURICE: Thank you. You fall down?

KEENO: I'll see if I can get something to shoot you with.

MAURICE: Shoot me?

KEENO: I mean an injection. Quiet you down. *(Exits.)*

MAURICE: Bring it on, Doc. Not ativan! *(Exit KEENO)* Fuck!

Blackout

6.

(Lights up.)

RODRIGO: Where is he?

KEENO: In the bathroom.

RODRIGO: Do you know if he's a gangster?

KEENO: He's no gangster. He can barely walk and talk at the same time.

RODRIGO: He said he could have me killed.

KEENO: Me, too. It's a fantasy. He likes the idea of Jewish assassins. Because of the war.

RODRIGO: Which war?

KEENO: World War Two.

MAURICE: *(Off)*: What's wrong with you people? Don't you learn anything? Don't they teach you anything anymore?

KEENO: Ignore him.

RODRIGO: Not in India! Schools suck in India!. *(Sound of toilet flushing)*

MAURICE: *(Entering)* Can you read?

RODRIGO: Yeah, I learned here. In America.

MAURICE: Read a few books, Rodrigo.

RODRIGO: I can read the medical books. That's all I have time for right now.

KEENO: You're a joke, Rodrigo.

RODRIGO: Thank you, Doc. Are you sober?

KEENO: Yes, at the moment.

RODRIGO: You sound more intelligent lately.

KEENO: I'm not counting the days.

RODRIGO: I don't drink myself.

KEENO: Bully for you.

RODRIGO: It's a religious prohibition.

KEENO: Yeah, yeah.

RODRIGO: Dizzy?

KEENO: Not today, Rodrigo.

MAURICE: Bells are chiming in my brain. Why is that?

KEENO: It's a mingling of various chemicals.

MAURICE: I need a discharge.

KEENO: It's not time yet.

MAURICE: Now!

RODRIGO: What'll you do, have me shot?

MAURICE: Absolutely.

KEENO: We'll need to keep you here for another day or two.

MAURICE: Why?

KEENO: Until you're stabilized and balanced and we've run the tests.

MAURICE: I'll never be stabilized and I'll never be balanced. Run the fucking tests!

KEENO: You hallucinate, and rant and rave.

RODRIGO: Jewish killers with Jewish guns.

MAURICE: I'm connected.

KEENO: No, you're not.

MAURICE: I'm connected. I'm connected to Jews everywhere and for all time. They'll come after you.

KEENO: Stop it, Maurice.

MAURICE: I knew some of these men when I was a kid in the Catskills. Nickel and dime Jewish hoodlums. Those were the days. I'm stable and balanced now. I'd like to make a phone call, and get my clothes and go home.

KEENO: Hook 'im up, Rodrigo.

RODRIGO: Right. Sit down, sir. We need to plug you in to another drip.

MAURICE: I had a nephew once. Brian. He was a junkie and got aids. Eventually we had to pull the plug on him. Subsys?

KEENO: What the fuck is that? The answer is NO.

MAURICE: Fentanil?

KEENO: No.

MAURICE: Oxycontin?

KEENO: No.

MAURICE: You're a good man, Keeno.

RODRIGO: What's he getting at?

MAURICE: It's a list. America's drugs, Rodrigo. Some of 'em. American culture. It's really an avalanche of shit. JunkieLand. Am I right?

RODRIGO: Lemme ask you something – how could it be a bat? A bat, causing all these problems? It's absurd. Not a bat!

KEENO: Yes. Afraid so, Rodrigo. A bat.

MAURICE: The poverty in this country is a *shonda*. You know what that is? A shame! It's worse than any country in the world! Look it up! Check it out!

KEENO: He's a communist.

RODRIGO: I can see that.

MAURICE: What do you think about time?

KEENO: Stop talking for a minute.

MAURICE: Does Time pass or do we pass through time? To another dimension?
(Pause) This kind of thought is too much for you people. *(KEENO snorts and exits.)*

RODRIGO: I'll take your blood sugar count later.

MAURICE: Why? Nandi just did it.

RODRIGO: Right. We have to keep an eye on it. Determines how much insulin we give you.

MAURICE: Insulin? Who'd have thought it would come to that? Insolent!

RODRIGO: Yeah. Every morning and every night. Twenty-two units. Not a bat, my friend, not a bat. Leeches, maybe. That, I can see.

MAURICE: Insolent! Ha!

RODRIGO: By the way, I learned to read as a mere child of four. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: Good for you! So did I! My mother taught me!

Blackout

7.

(Lights up, enter NANDI)

NANDI: Just relax and lie down, mister. It's time for our shot. Lie down.

MAURICE: What's the shot?

NANDI: Morphine. Plus an intervenous antibiotic.

MAURICE: The morphine don't mean shit. I feel nothing. How 'bout some dillaudid?

NANDI: Forget it.

MAURICE: Why the antibiotic?

NANDI: It's a precaution. You have C.O.P.D. bronchitis. You could get pneumonia. We can't take chances. Especially in this place here, with the virus running around.

MAURICE: Nurses come and say it's time for your meds and then they don't come back for two hours.

NANDI: They have a lot of duties. And I'm here, aren't I?

MAURICE: Good. I'm glad you're here. But you need more nurses.

NANDI: We have all the nurses we want. *(Aside)* No, we don't.

MAURICE: Because you're capitalist, that's why! Profit making hospitals are a contradiction in terms.

NANDI: Doctor says fifty milligrams of prednisone a day will fix you right up, sir.

MAURICE: Maurice.

NANDI: Maurice. And then you have to cut down.

MAURICE: When do I get to go home?

NANDI: Two days, three days.

MAURICE: No, one day, one night. Does the doctor know what he's talking about?

NANDI: Of course.

MAURICE: I know the man. Slightly.

NANDI: I know you do.

MAURICE: He has vertigo.

NANDI: So what?

MAURICE: Are you Indian?

NANDI: No. I'm Phillipina. Why?

MAURICE: A lot of Indians around here. East Indians. Sometimes they might be lying.

NANDI: We have all kinds here, sir. Lie down, please.

MAURICE: I'm not a prisoner!

NANDI: No. But you could die. You see this patient, next door, Francisco, he had a neck operation. (*Francisco moans*) He can't talk right now.

MAURICE: What's that got to do with me?

NANDI: It's quiet here. Be quiet. You have a nurse. Me. And others. To keep you from dying.

MAURICE: God! Like Rodrigo, too?

NANDI: Yes.

MAURICE: Where's he from?

NANDI: The Bronx.

MAURICE: You're kidding.

NANDI: No.

MAURICE: You both don't have an accent. You talk like Americans.

NANDI: I was born here, sir. And he immigrated as a child. I'll come in again soon to give you a wash up. (*Enter KEENO*)

KEENO: Time for an ativan. (*Exit NANDI*) Thank you, nurse.

MAURICE: I don't want an ativan.

KEENO: It'll make you sleep.

MAURICE: It does the opposite. It wakes me up. I'm staring at the walls. I'm staring out the window. At the cars in the parking lot. I have no idea who I am. I've forgotten everything. What is a human being? How could all this happen to me? Flesh and bones. Breathing Oxygen. H₂O. Have I collapsed?

KEENO: Yes. I told you earlier.

MAURICE: I've collapsed?

KEENO: Yes.

MAURICE: I'm alright now. I can go home now.

KEENO: No. You have to wait for your blood test. They're checking for anti-bodies, among other things.

MAURICE: Why?

NANDI: Here. Take this and lie down. I'll adjust your bed.

MAURICE: Thank you.

KEENO: Try not to think too much.

MAURICE: You must be joking, Doc. *(Lies down.)*

Blackout

8.

(JIM is standing there, leaning against the wall, head down.)

MAURICE: Jim. Thanks for coming. What happened is, I'm in this New York hotel bedroom, 3 stars, a dump, staring out the window on a craggy, ominous New York skyline; I'm stiff as a board, pain going down my right leg from back to toe and my left hip down the thigh, and I cannot move, got to lie there and wait for the med to work and then figure out a way to get my socks on and get dressed and grab my cane and get a cab and get to where I'm going. Leaning on my cane. But I got it right. I got the fucking thing right. And then I'm done, I'm happily done, wheelchaired to the plane and wheelchaired out of the airport and by some miracle I'm home and the next thing you know Dr. Fuckhead is wheeling me into the hospital and pumping steroids into me. The thing is, the thing is, can you hear me, Jim? *(No answer)* It's determination, I wanted to see, to see if it worked, and it did, there's a whole side of me I didn't know, or I didn't recognize, a determination, a certain type of will, or even recklessness, recklessness, I think that's my point, which is a revelation. And then the pandemic. *(Pause)* Did you hear me, Jim? *(JIM makes no move, no response. To Aud:)* He 's hard of hearing.

Blackout

9.

(Lights up)

FRANCISCO; *(Off)* Can you put out that light? *(Silence)* Por favor. *(More silence)*

MAURICE: Then I can't read.

FRANCISCO: Fuck the read. *(Pause)*

MAURICE: No.

FRANCISCO: I'll call the nurse.

MAURICE: Call.

FRANCISCO: I'll call.

MAURICE: They won't come. *(Moan)* I'M SICK OF AMERICAN HISTORY! I'M SICK OF IT. AMERICAN HISTORY IS THE HISTORY OF CRIME! AMERICAN HISTORY IS THE HISTORY OF CRIME! AMERICAN HISTORY IS THE HISTORY OF CRIME! *(FRANCISCO moans.)*

Blackout

10.

(Lights up)

MAURICE: Later, after I'm home from the fucking hospital. This woman friend of mine comes over and says, "You have to take care of it. You can't let it slide. The pain gets too much, people check out." I think she means like a slow suicide. My heart flutters. The Chinese acupuncturist is standing there, silent and elegant. He's looking at my books. He's totally confident, but I know it ain't gonna work and the whole picture is ironic. She's kissing me on the forehead and I'm not sure why – is it Goodbye or Goodluck, or what? – and the Chinaman is looking at my books like there was no problem, just another old Jewish guy with money, in pain. "The man must have money," he thinks. The Chinaman wanted to come and puncture me again soon. I said **No** to the motherfucker.

Blackout

11.

(Lights up. The front of a car is up against the window. It speaks.)

MAURICE: Back in the hospital, one of the windows comes alive. It's a car with a human face. Good grief!

CAR: How did you find yourself tn this situation, Maurice?

MAURICE: I can't explain it to you right now. I've had a hard life. And I've never talked to a car before.

CAR: It's all about the human condition.

MAURICE: It's all about the human condition. Like why does there have to be violence and death? Viruses and death? Little hostile invisible buggers! Constantly. Permanently. Forever. I want to talk to my doctors. Why? I'm afraid I'll run out of meds. What 'll I do then? Die? My secret horror. But why am I talking to you? Usually, I don't talk to cars!

CAR: Say on, Maurice. I'm here to help.

MAURICE: Okay. I was pretty confused and helpless. Hard to face. Hobbling around New York City, my hometown, in and out of cabs and ubers, dogged, hoarse, scared, intelligent, with a vision and everything. So I had an idea that I knew who I was in that respect, who knew what he was doing and what he wanted, who took no prisoners, etc., but my back was killing me. And I'd go home to the hateful hotel room looking out the scrubby window. Like now. Alone, alone. One voice in my head. The work was good. Worked beautifully. I'm glad I did it. But the pain was bad. Reckless, maybe.

CAR: You get on the road with all the beasts. You don't know what they'll do, what they're thinking, who they are, where they're going, nothing. Anything could happen. We're going at speed and we pack a punch. **Wham bam.** A crushing, violent crash. And there you are, in shock, an accident, a shaking thing, no mind, no feeling, nothing. Gaw head. Continue.

MAURICE: So now I'm finding a new doctor who will guarantee my meds. Not kicking anything anymore at this age. Would kill me. I should get back to Keeno. *(Enter KEENO)* Ah, speak of the Devil.

CAR: I shall depart now. *(CAR backs up. KEENO approaches the audience;.)*

KEENO: *(Downstage)* Old Man comes in here confused and in pain. I know him because every October his COPD acts up and you have to boost his prednisone. Meanwhile, he has a bad back which is all messed up according to the MRI and a bad ceramic hip, which doesn't work right, and he has diabetes on top of that. So I threw him into the hospital and we go from there. Mainly to avoid the epidemic. *(He turns back upstage to MAURICE.)* And certain death.

MAURICE: *(To Himself)* All I see is silence and indifference from the authorities to anything meaningful or useful. It's all about who gets the most money and who gets to keep it when they get old and sick. Or mental illness on their part, a kind of hubris, so they can't think straight. But don't blame the doctors or nurses, they work hard and are courageous in the face of a hidden terror, a terror that seems to come from the sky, from the air itself, and they are under-equipped, and under-prepared. *(To KEENO)* People die on the ventilators.

KEENO: I know.

MAURICE: I think the whole system is corrupt.

KEENO: You would. But I figure that's none of my business. I am an immigrant. I'm mixed race, too. I got on probation because I screwed up with the booze, but I'm a damn good doctor, even if I fall down sometimes, it's just hard to work for these people. They work for profit and they don't even live in America. They live in India. They own forty hospitals in America. For profit. How did that happen? You can't keep the hippocratic oath and work for profit? Can you? I get as confused as my patients. So. *(Faints)*

MAURICE: Good grief! *(He awkwardly rushes to KEENO, fumbling with his gown and the hospital paraphernalia, and slaps KEENO around and pours water on him and KEENO wakes up.)* You all right Doc?

KEENO: Yeah. Don't tell anybody. People are snitches around here.

MAURICE: I understand. Sit down, Doc. *(KEENO finds the one chair and dries himself, etc.)* Okay?

KEENO: Yeah. Got carried away there.

MAURICE: Recklessness, Keeno. I got into it with the car. Probably inborn. A tendency to imagine things.

KEENO: I go to my car. I drive my car. I go down the road. I go to the store. I buy shit. I go to the bar. I drink rum.

MAURICE I was almost murdered, maybe four times.

KEENO: Murder and mayhem and the chopping off of limbs.

MAURICE: It's in our stars, Keeno.

KEENO: Who says that?

MAURICE: Shakespeare.

KEENO: Oh.

MAURICE: You've heard of him?

KEENO: Of course. I'm Armenian. Gotta go. Nice talking to you. Thanks for the help. Keep your mouth shut. Stay cool, Maurice. Do the best you can. And so on. I'll see ya. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: Wait! Keeno! Armenian? Discharge me!

Blackout

12.

(Lights up)

(A MAN, fully visible, is hanging by the neck somewhere in the room, upstage. He is dressed in a red outfit.)

HANGING MAN: Is he making all this up? Is it all in his head? *(Enter KEENO)*

KEENO: Maurice? *(Enter MAURICE, using a walker, in his gown.)*

MAURICE: Who else is in the room?

KEENO: I don't see anyone.

MAURICE: Someone is in the room.

KEENO: *(Looking out)* Where?

MAURICE: Hanging.

HANGING MAN: America is on drugs. America is paying the price. America is on drugs and the Christians are persecuting the young; the young women of America are being persecuted by hypocritical Christians all over the country. They are traveling around in vans all over America in order to persecute young women.
(Silence)

MAURICE: Did you hear that? Keeno?

KEENO: Did you?

MAURICE: He 's in the bathroom?

KEENO: No. No one is in the bathroom. You were just in there.

MAURICE: There is someone here, in this room, speaking.

KEENO: I feel something, but it gives me the crawlies.

MAURICE: Don't faint.

KEENO: I'm out of here, Maurice.

MAURICE: Remember what we talked about!

KEENO: I remember nothing.

MAURICE: The human condition! The dangerous virus!

KEENO: You're hallucinating again. Try to rest. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: How could he not hear? How could he not see?

HANGING MAN: *(Portentously)* He may have seen a shadow. He might have heard a whisper. Perhaps he sensed a presence.

MAURICE: He 's pretending.

HANGING MAN: No, he 's afraid of falling.

MAURICE: You said hypocritical women - no, hypocritical Christians are persecuting women. Yes?

HANGING MAN: Poor women. Uneducated women. Why? Because they have babies. Lots of touching goes on and the next thing you know, you are pregnant. Then a Christian van comes along and pulls you in and says you have to have the baby or Jesus will deny you. Jesus will deny you and you will go to Hell. And not only that, you are Unamerican. You are Unamerican trash and you have no morals.

MAURICE: How terrible!

HANGING MAN: You are Unamerican and you probably are **homeless** or parasiting somewhere, and we're only trying to help you, by showing you what's inside you, because of your weaknesses and stupidity amid the greatest country on God's Earth.

MAURICE: What bullshit! We Jews would never do such a thing!

HANGING MAN: And that's not all. The Orange Gorilla has decreed that all the old people who are poor and not Christians should die as soon as possible, so we don't have to make -- no, lose money on them. That's the real Christian way. And not only that -- we will deny our friends, we will not give away any more money to our friends, whether they are Christians. Or not. I take that back. We'll make an exception for certain Christian friends. Which brings up the question: What is a Christian? And what is a friend? Let's take a look at these assumptions and figure something out.

MAURICE: Did anyone hear this person? He is here, making a case, and hanging from the ceiling! Listen!

HANGING MAN: Right here! *(He opens his eyes; We see his big eyes.)* And that's not all. No more free food. If you are starving, it's too bad, but the Government cannot help you. It's not the business of Government to feed starving citizens. So, he's sorry about that, The Orange Gorilla, but those of you who are starving, you should go ahead and die and spare the rest of us the extra expense.

MAURICE: I think it's wrong to call this person a Gorilla. Gorillas are nice. He 's an ape. Let's call him an Ape.

HANGING MAN: Okay. The Orange Ape. So, I'll continue. So, now we are the America of the Apes. But we'll stick to America and the Christians in America who are basically running the country right now. It's not easy to talk about them because, one, they're a lot of them, and two, they get mad. They get mad and resentful and they string people up on wires.

MAURICE: Jesus!

HANGING MAN: Don't say that word or you'll get in trouble. I'll continue with my analysis. *(Pause)*

MAURICE: Come on!

HANGING MAN: Right. What is a Christian and what is a friend?

MAURICE: Right!

HANGING MAN: These people are righteous. These people are righteous and they are right! They know what's what, automatically, because they have their beliefs. Where do these beliefs come from? Good question. They come from a guy in a pulpit. A pulpit is a place where a person can stand and preach to the congregation from a place that is above them. So these beliefs come from above them, from someone ordained to preach, and so he has to be right. And not only that, the words he uses come from the Bible. Which has to be Right. And the Believers pay a lot of money for that. And you got churches now bigger than football stadiums. Which is saying something right there.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

HANGING MAN: Has to be right, because it's in the Bible.

MAURICE: Wait a minute. Who wrote the Bible?

HANGING MAN: Nobody knows who wrote the Bible.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

HANGING MAN: What do you expect from people? People are stupid. People are gullible. They'll believe anything you tell them, if you say it often enough.

MAURICE: That's what I'm thinking. That's human nature. Wait a minute. So you have Evil, you also have Evil. No conscience. They want to survive. And now they have the sickness, sweeping through the country!

HANGING MAN: From God!

MAURICE: My goodness! I don't want to be here anymore!

HANGING MAN: On the planet? Or in the hospital?

MAURICE: Where are you?

HANGING MAN: Right here. *(He pulls a hood off his head. We see his head.)* You're an American, too. You, too!

MAURICE: Good grief! *(We see more.)* The Man is hanging by a rope! Keeno! *(Enter KEENO)* You see the man?

KEENO: No. It was you I heard, talking to yourself.

MAURICE: Look up! Look the fuck up!

KEENO: I don't have time for this right now, Maurice.

MAURICE: Yes, you do! Moral outrage!

KEENO: I'll be right back. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: Wait! Listen! Keeno! *(No response)*

HANGING MAN: This is what I was meaning to say, the problem is too complicated.

MAURICE: The problem is too complicated?

HANGING MAN: He's scared. The problem is too complicated. Because we're talking about Man. We're talking about the species. Mankind on the Earth, destroying the Earth. These little no-minded microbes throwing their shit around. These ignoramuses, young and old, throwing garbage into the rivers and the sea. Desecrating the Holy Earth. Mankind. As William S. Burroughs said, of language, the Virus. We are the Virus. Nobody wants to admit that. We think we are the highest

of the highest. We rule the Planet. But we are nothing but effluence crawling around, sickening Mother Earth, who is starting to cough, and to bleed.

Blackout

13.

(Lights up. Moments later.)

KEENO: We got planes and algorithms. We got robots and TVs. And look at all this hospital machinery. Isn't that something? And jobs! What about jobs?

MAURICE: Clean up the Earth. Repair the damage. Plenty of jobs. Endless. What am I hooked up to, Keeno?

KEENO: A morphine drip.

MAURICE: What else am I hooked up to?

KEENO: Antibiotics.

MAURICE: What else?

KEENO: Sedatives and nutrients.

MAURICE: What else?

KEENO: H2O.

MAURICE: I'm having vivid memories and I'm having heart palpitations. And I have seen a Hanging Man.

KEENO: Calm down, Maurice.

MAURICE: My heart is vibrating.

KEENO: Take the ativan.

MAURICE: No

KEENO: I'll get you something else.

MAURICE: Great.

KEENO: I'll be back. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: Again. *Otra vez*. They come and go like rabbits. Rabbits? My God, life is suffering and death. And people leaving you and not coming back. And a Monster in the sky hunting us down!

HANGING MAN: Hang on, fella, I'm going to introduce you to a friend of mine.

MAURICE: A friend?

HANGING MAN: Yes. He's a tube.

V.O.: I am a tube. I am a long tube. Tubular. Things flow through me, like, mainly liquids, but sometimes not. Dirty water, needles, etc. I am horrified. I can't believe it, or understand it, how the Ego comes up and says things and then forgets itself.

MAURICE: Ego?

V.O.: Ego.

MAURICE: Who is talking now?

(Voice of the Ceiling)

V.O.: You can't see me. No one ever sees me. I'm a tube, or a wire or a flimsy substance in the mind. Sneaks in there, like a little green snake.

MAURICE: You have a face ? You have a body?

V.O.: Yes and no.

MAURICE: I can't see you. *(Re-enter KEENO)*

KEENO: Here, take this.

MAURICE: What is it?

KEENO: Lorezepan. It'll relax you. Take it with water.

MAURICE: *(Swallowing)* Thank you.

V.O.: Yes, you got your algorithms and your phones and your data, but you don't have your moral compass.

MAURICE: Moral compass?

KEENO: Did you say something?

MAURICE: Yes. Listen up!

V.O.: Right. The North Star. Because you don't look up. You never look up. You're always looking down and rushing away!

MAURICE: I can't see you!

KEENO: I'm standing right here, Maurice.

HANGING MAN: And the lack of Conscience on Earth. Simple honesty, decency and truth. And liars and lies. Assassination. Brutality and murder.

KEENO: Oh fuck, I can't stand this shit anymore. I need a drink. Voices from the deep. Francisco, no doubt. His English is amazingly good. I'm out of here.
(FRANCISCO moans)

MAURICE: Keeno! It's not him! It's not Francisco! It's a hanging Man! Don't drink!

KEENO: Fuck you. (Exits)

MAURICE: Don't go away, I have more to say! Don't faint! (Pause) This hospital room is full of demons. One sure thing is this: how memory is connected to thought. No, to talk. If you don't start speaking, you don't remember. Now, I'm remembering what they call "childhood." Which is running and playing and delighting in life, in the air and the energy and the wind and the ball, and first base, and woods, and the sky and jumping and running and sliding and hitting. I did all that. (Pause) There was no virtue then. I was walking around in a marijuana fog or a mental malaise. I couldn't forgive myself for growing up under a greasy rock, crawling around with worms and bugs. I was shocked to be an honor student at the time. Brooklyn College. I hung out with the guys, Jewish left-wingers, except for Jerry Mazza, who was Italian. We did pilgrimages to the Brooklyn Bridge and Coney Island and Sheepshead Bay. Hart Crane and Walt Whitman. Before that I was in a deep hole. Terrified of the future. I had no ideas except for working as a waiter in the hotel dining-room business. No idea that I had a good mind. William Blake saved my ass. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

V.O.: And?

MAURICE: Now I got a bad hip and a bad back and bronchitis and high blood pressure and glaucoma and diabetes. Go figure. And you guys better let me out of here soon. I feel drugged up and talkative, but there's nobody here but borderline doctors in a mean room with technology that speaks. **PLUS A SERIOUS VIRAL THREAT.**

V.O.: Sit up. The kidney guy will be in to see you in a mintue.

*A tall man (Same man who is also hiding in the machinery, etc.) walks in wearing a white coat, puts a hand on M's side briefly and says: **His kidneys are fine**, and walks out of the room.*

MAURICE: Before that, a dull impression of walking around a depressed village, brick houses and dirty storefronts – no longer Brooklyn, from where I moved when I was six -- but something was burning in me, something was alive in me, and it had something to do with nature and it had something to do with the passage of time, and it had something to do with drugs, and it had something to do with literature, and it had something to do with a spirit in me which I'm only now dimly coming to understand, maybe a love of Life, a love of Being – (RODRIGO, the surly male nurse, comes in and offers M. a pill.)

RODRIGO: Hi.

MAURICE: Hi.

RODRIGO: Lemme ask you something.

MAURICE: What, Rodrigo?

RODRIGO: The ringing, you hear the ringing?

MAURICE: What ringing?

RODRIGO: In your ears. Listen. You hear it? It's an electrical wave, and it's always there. We get used to it, so we don't hear it. We be quiet and we start to hear it. It's a ringing. An electrical sound. Where does it come from? Somebody knows. But it's not us. Be quiet, and listen. (Pause) You hear it?

MAURICE: I do, actually.

RODRIGO: Because it's there. It's always there. Electricity in the air. A ringing. Where is it coming from? I'm only asking. And what does it have to do with our health and well-being?

MAURICE: I don't know.

RODRIGO: I don't know, either. I'm only asking. Okay? Time for your pain-killer, sir.

MAURICE: What is it?

RODRIGO: Norco. Hydrocodone.

MAURICE: I just had one. You were supposed to bring it an hour ago.

RODRIGO: There are a lot of people to take care of in this hospital, sir, not just you.

MAURICE: Go fuck yourself. But I'll take it. Thank you very much.

RODRIGO: That'll hold you for four hours.

MAURICE: I don't think so! It never does! It's more like two hours!

RODRIGO: I'll be back. Check it out. What I showed you. A ringing. A ringing we never hear. *(Exits)*

(Another pair of eyes appears among the hospitalia.)

V.O.: You must be having interesting impressions of yourself, it says.

MAURICE: I am. But I'm sad. I didn't know that that was it. That the experiences I had would never happen again. That what was happening was what was happening and that was it for that. And now it's true again. What's happening now will disappear and never happen again, and I'll forget, or I'll die and nobody will ever remember. *(The face of the **voice-over** appears.)*

FACE: I didn't follow quite.

MAURICE: No. Are you real?

FACE: Yes. Real as you.

MAURICE: What's your name?

FACE: Face.

MAURICE: Oh. Yes. I've done something like this before. Mystical, weird.

FACE: You're not doing it.

MAURICE: No?

FACE: No, I am.

MAURICE: Whoa!

FACE: You'll want to remember this moment. Breathing. Looking. Thinking. Hearing. What does it mean? Where is it going? What's the story here? I'll tell you: Childhood. America, America. Little Jewish boy. I'll tell you why, okay?

MAURICE: Why what?

FACE: Why people kill each other. Why people persecute each other: It's electronic – the Sun flares, or Venus cools, and the idiots on Earth start killing and tortuing each other. So, listen up, and I'll tell you what's happening. What we got here is Evangelical America.

MAURICE: Now I'm frightened.

FACE: You know what that is?

MAURICE: The words fiighten me. And I hear a ringing in my ears.

FACE: The Orange Ape is the Chosen One. The Chosen One is going to bring on the Second Coming. Did you know that?

MAURICE: No.

FACE: The Chosen One is going to bring on Armageddon, which will summon the Messiah's second trip to earth, and all the Christians will rapture up to heaven, hanging on to the Chosen One. And that 'll be that. Did you know?

MAURICE: No.

FACE: Yes, so you see there's a plan and the Orange Ape is the One. That's why he thinks he 's God.

MAURICE: People have to be told! Right away!

FACE: Not me, Pal. I found me a hiding place in this here hospital. Why? I don't know why. Maybe because it's Hindu Indian. They're not Christians. They have different beliefs.

MAURICE: This is the most terrifying thing I have ever heard. Do all these Christian people believe all that?

FACE: In the South and the Midwest of America.

MAURICE: I just want to die! No, I take that back!

FACE: One time I was lying where you are now and this Pastor walked in. He was like an hallucination. *(Enter PASTOR)*

PASTOR: The Chosen One will bring about a war between Israel and its Muslim enemies. In the bible, it's called Armageddon. The word must be a Hebrew word. The world will be destroyed, or there'll be a remnant. The Jews, for example, will be

fucked, unless they convert. And then the Messaia will come with the power of the Sun and lift up the righteous to Heaven and Immortality. We call it the Rapture.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

PASTOR: We don't know much about the Remnant. But it will insure the survival of Life on Earth.

MAURICE: Who are they?

PASTOR: The ones who couldn't rise, I suppose. Like the Jews.

MAURICE: Why couldn't they rise?

PASTOR: Too Jewish, or too heavy, I suppose, too fat. Too intelligent. Organized. Just kidding. I speculate, I speculate that there's too much on their resumes, too much iniquity, so the Lord keeps them in the gravity, in the pull downward, toward the mass.

MAURICE: The mass?

PASTOR: Yes, because the Rapture is for the light, light in all the meanings of light, righteous and wise, fine and glittery.

MAURICE: So the Remnant are Evil?

PASTOR: I didn't say Evil. I said "Heavy." So the righteous rise up and they, the heavy ones, are left behind. They have to straighten out their behaviour. They have to renounce their sins and beg forgiveness. Or convert.

MAURICE: And then they get to go?

PASTOR: Yes.

MAURICE: Thank you.

PASTOR: Not a problem.

MAURICE: And me?

PASTOR: Not you.

MAURICE: Why not?

PASTOR: You're a Jew. *(Pause)* Remember? One more thing: we got a pandemic going on right now, going on around the world, the entire world – what do you think about that?

MAURICE: It scares the shit out of me, because I have all the pre-conditions and I'm old.

PASTOR: Well, it's not about you, is it?

MAURICE: I think it is.

PASTOR: It's an Action of the Lord. You get that? It's the Lord God and his punishment of the wicked.

MAURICE: The wicked? At random?

PASTOR: Before the End Time. The Lord acts in mysterious ways.

MAURICE: That's just fucking ridiculous. Get the fuck out of here!

PASTOR: I'd be careful if I were you, Jew-head, I'd watch what I say, and watch what I do, and watch where I step, and watch what I breathe.

MAURICE: Go fuck yourself!

PASTOR: No, you go fuck YOUR self. *(Pause)*

Blackout

13.

(Lights up. KEENO and MAURICE)

MAURICE: When do I get out, Doc?

KEENO: Soon.

MAURICE: My friends come around here and they can't believe their eyes.

KEENO: How so?

MAURICE: I don't look good and the hospital sucks. And it's starting to feel dangerous around here.

KEENO: You mean the outbreak?

MAURICE: Yeah, the outbreak.

KEENO: I'll get you out of here. But I want to be sure. Meanwhile, you're safe. We got you down here in the dungeon away from the rest of the hospital.

MAURICE: What about him? Francisco?

KEENO: This place is totally sanitized.

MAURICE: Is it?

KEENO: It is. He's covered up and doped up. Soon as we get the lab results, soon as you're stabilized, you can go.

MAURICE: That's what you keep saying. What does it mean?

KEENO: Normal breathing, normal sugar levels, normal teperature, normal blood pressure, moderate congestion, lower T cells, and so on. And no more hallucinations, like people in the ceiling.

MAURICE: Okay. You look worried.

KEENO: I'm not worried.

MAURICE: You look sick.

KEENO: I feel fine,.

MAURICE: Vertigo?

KEENO: I got pills. So far, so good.

MAURICE: I'm amazed you stopped in. You should go home. You have a pre-existing condition. Probably your liver.

KEENO: I'm on my way to my office.

MAURICE: Good. Take a rest.

KEENO: Behave yourself. Wash your hands.

MAURICE: How can I do that?

KEENO: Just walk the I.V. over to the sink.

MAURICE: Not so easy. I need wipes. Hand wipes.

KEENO: Okay. Rodrigo been here yet?

MAURICE: Definitely. The man is out of his mind.

KEENO: Don't encourage him. He likes to talk..

MAURICE: But he has a point. Listen. *(Pause)* You hear it? A ringing. In the air. Electricity. *(Pause)*

KEENO: No.

MAURICE: Fuck it. I can't sleep.

KEENO: I'll get you an ativan.

MAURICE: I don't want ativan. I can't sleep with ativan. I need something stronger. I want out of here. I'm seeing things and hearing things. And there's evil bugs in the air.

KEENO: One night. We'll know what's what. Clear your head. All this will pass.

MAURICE: No.

KEENO: One more night.

MAURICE: Where are my clothes?

KEENO: They are right behind you, in the closet. The maid washed them and brought them back.

MAURICE: Thank God. Good for her. So I'll need to be discharged in the morning. How do I do the discharge?

KEENO: Rodrigo.

MAURICE: Why him?

KEENO: He's the head nurse on the ward. That's how it works. Just do what he says. Sign the papers and go. *(Starts off.)*

MAURICE: Wait! I been meaning to tell you: One time I quit vodka martinis for eleven months. I didn't feel a thing. No craving, no shakes, no nothing. Didn't miss it at all.

KEENO: Congatulations.

MAURICE: I wouldn't want to be a doctor. All those distressed bodies coming through. Human distress. Viral loads. Death and dying. Doesn't it get to you?

KEENO: Yes. Makes life difficult. Especially now, with this epidemic. Some don't seem to mind. They get used to it. They don't get affected by the misery. The money 's good. In most other countries they don't make a tenth as much. That's life, they say to themselves, and I'm doing my job. And most of them have kids, so they pass on their line, so they're cool with the whole thing. And they're dedicated. Some are sick. Some are dying.

MAURICE: You want kids, Keeno?

KEENO: Maybe I don't want to pass on my line.

MAURICE: Too bad. It's a big thing. Me, too. Not passing on the blood line. It's the Jewish version of immortality. That, and memory. Remembrance. I was determined to get the job done. What is that? Limping around New York City with a cane. My hometown, where I have a lot of memories. Where I was a kid. Never thought any of this would happen to me. Locked up in a hospital. In the Valley. Old. And I want to live a few more years.

KEENO: You might.

MAURICE: Are you really from Armenia?

KEENO: No.

MAURICE: Where from?

KEENO: My mother lived in Lebanon. People don't realize. They start out as a cell. Billions of years of little cells, and then they end up having parties and cocktails and socialize and everything and they don't realize where their body is coming from, how it got made, what they're for.

MAURICE: Go on.

KEENO: The organism gets all worked up and then the little sperm cracks the egg and the cell starts to divide and - **wham bam** - it's you. Your Self. *(Pause)* I have to go, get ready for the storm. Rodrigo should show up soon.

MAURICE: Thanks, Keeno. *(Exit KEENO)* Good luck!

Blackout

14.

(Lights up – the ceiling speaks.)

V.O.: Hey!

MAURICE: Yeah?

V.O.: What do you think of life after death?

MAURICE: I don't think anything about it.

V.O.: You should. You should be prepared. It could happen soon. It's happening every few minutes around here.

MAURICE: In Judaism it's more the bloodline, not the afterlife. Memory.

V.O.: It could happen now. I'd be prepared, if I were you..

MAURICE: This is the life. This is it. I do wonder --- what people think, what they'll say about me when I'm gone.

V.O.: Some say you follow the light. You go through a tunnel and see a light and go toward the light. Some say everything depends on where you are at the moment. Are you in the bathroom? In bed? Do you stand up? A warrior's death? Do you sing your death song?

MAURICE: I'd like to. I wish for that.

V.O.: Look at the second hand of your watch for one minute and see what your mind is. Try that. I'm the clock. See the clock?

MAURICE: Yes.

V.O.: Watch the second hand. Okay? Stay on it. For one minute.

MAURICE: Yes. I'll try.

V.O.: Ten seconds passes as he stares at the clock.

MAURICE: I'm walking down Dekalb Avenue with my father. I'm holding his hand. It's a sunny afternoon. People on the street. We're heading downtown toward the Paramount Theatre. Wait. Watch the second hand.

V.O.: Ten seconds more passes as he watches the second hand.

MAURICE: Movietone news. Stacks of bodies. Skinny Jews looking through the wire. Dazed soldiers walking around. It's 1945.

V.O.: Twenty more seconds pass.

MAURICE: My mother is sitting in Sol's luncheonette eating a chicken salad sandwich. My brain-damaged brother is sweeping the floor.

V.O.: The minute has passed.

Blackout

15.

(Lights up)

MAURICE: America is over. People don't realize it, or they don't give a damn. They just want to eat their muck and buy their shit. Survival beats all. History moves on, if there is a history, which I doubt, because the rivers will be running red and the Earth will open like a maw and turn itself inside out. Fire, flood, pestilence and hurricaines. Like the Old Testament in Noah's time, and the Flood, and the Hopi Prophecy. This is the Fourth World. The Fifth World is on its way. It'll be icy and hot. Too cold to move and too hot to breathe. The oxygen will be gone. New organisms will form. Poisonous ones. Sulfur dioxide and carbon dioxide and who knows what else. Poisons. Awareness itself will not exist. Nothing human will survive. I had a glimpse of a football game on the television – men running around. They looked like strange bacteria in costume. Helter-skelter. Deluded. Willy-nilly stupid. And I sit here watching, on a hospital bed, helplessly in pain. As the ball on the TV bounces around.

Blackout

17.

(Lights up. Enter NANDI)

MAURICE: Look who 's here.

NANDI: Hello, sir.

MAURICE: Where you been?

NANDI: Here. We're becoming overwhelmed. Covid 19.

MAURICE: What's your name again?

NANDI: Nandi. I only have a minute. Time for your meds and your blood sugar.

MAURICE: Which meds?

NANDI: Norco. Almopine. Lipitor. Etcetera. Put your hand out.

MAURICE: Say, please.

NANDI: Don't give me a hard time, sir.

MAURICE: Sorry. Nurses come and go like Michaelangelo.

NANDI: What does that supposed to mean?

MAURICE: Nothing. A rhyme. Get me out of here.

NANDI: You have to be discharged.

MAURICE: Discharge me.

NANDI: I can't do that.

MAURICE: What do you think of India? Do they shit on the ground there?

NANDI: I've never been, sir.

MAURICE: Are the young men still attacking and raping girls?

NANDI: I'm Philipina, sir.

MAURICE: Right. And you got a guy running around shooting dope addicts. Am I right? The President of the country.

NANDI: Looks like it, sir. The man 's a psycho. I'll take some blood now.

MAURICE: Why is that, do you think? Human beings acting like shitheads, all over the world, no end in sight? And this mindless pandemic? Why?

NANDI: I don't know why. To be honest. People seem to be that way. It's another coronavirus, sir. No one knows what it is. Tiny machine that makes copies of itself.

MAURICE: Copies. Replicates. Very strange. Do you read?

NANDI: I have a masters in English Literature.

MAURICE: Oh.

NANDI: You were trying to quote T.S. Eliot.

MAURICE: Right.

NANDI: Prufrock, I believe.

MAURICE: Right. I'm impressed.

NANDI: So you're wondering what I'm doing here?

MAURICE: Yes.

NANDI: Part time. I'm an adjunct at UCLA. I'm needed here more now, because of the virus. They're putting people on ventilators, where most of them die. In their sleep. It's hard to take.

MAURICE: Get me out of here!

NANDI: They'll let you go soon as you're negative.

MAURICE: I'm negative! No way I'm going on a ventilator!

NANDI: Okay. Calm down. You'll be alright. Your blood pressure is normal, but your heart rate is still fast.

MAURICE: I'm an anxiety neurotic. Years ago, 1963, I was drafted into the Army.

NANDI: And?

MAURICE: No way I was going into the Army.

NANDI: So?

MAURICE: I refused to speak. I didn't say a word to anyone. Finally they sent me all the way up to the head of the Draft, an old Austrian gentleman with white hair whose name I forget. Whitehall Street, downtown. Big office, tall building. I didn't talk to him, either. He looked at me for a while. Then he let me go. I got a **1Y**, which means Anxiety Neurotic.

NANDI: *(As she continues her work)* Coughing?

MAURICE: No, not at all. On steroids, as you know. *(Pause)* I was a first class waiter once. In New York City, a restaurant below the ice rink at Rockefeller Center. I wore a red jacket and a black cummerbund and a black tie. I made it into Local 11, which was a feat. No one could get into local 11.

NANDI: I'm so impressed.

MAURICE: I can see that. Can I ask you something? Was there something wrong with me when they wheeled me in here?

NANDI: There's a lot wrong with you.

MAURICE: Right. I know that. Obviously. In terms of the virus.

NANDI: It says here you have COPD bronchitis, congested, high blood pressure, severe back-pain, and diabetes, and glaucoma, and your hip replacement didn't come out so well. And so on. So, you're a prime candidate.

MAURICE: How did it come to this? *(Starts to cry.)*

NANDI: Don't cry, sir. Happens to everybody.

MAURICE: Somehow that's no consolation. *(Wipes his eyes)*

NANDI: We do the best we can, sir. Must have been hard for you.

MAURICE: What's that?

NANDI: Not to talk. Complain.

MAURICE: Thanks. But I do complain. You like it here? This hospital?

NANDI: It's a job. Part time. Getting to be more full time, all the time. *(Laughs, Exits)*

MAURICE: Thank you, nurse! Nandi! Come back soon!

Blackout

16.

(KEENO is downstage of MAURICE:)

KEENO: As I was saying, people want to survive. That's the main thing. And some of them don't know how to do that. Some Americans don't know what to do to survive. And some of them are going to die if they depend on the President to do anything. He's just gonna take it away from you --- your oranges and apples and pommelos and your little burgers. **Wham bam**, gone. Including your ventilators and resperators. You'll have to go somewhere and crawl under a porch or under a hedge, and die there. That's the story of the citizens, that they want to survive, and they'll believe anything you tell them, if you tell them often enough, again and again,

lies about their survival, because mainly they don't get it the first time, and they don't read. Maybe they vote. Some of them vote. They vote for the Orange Ape, even though he thinks they're shit and takes away their stuff, their food and their shelter and their confidence that they'll survive. Survive today and tomorrow. And next year and the year after that -- but they won't. (*Returns to Maurice.*)

MAURICE: Did you work on that speech?

KEENO: Yes.

MAURICE: When?

KEENO: Just now.

MAURICE: I have a feeling of horror.

KEENO: So do I.

MAURICE: There are millions of Americans who can't afford a MacDonaldis, or any of that crap they eat, and they live in shacks. And they don't know what a Jew is and they think the Holocaust was a movie. It takes away your faith. What little I had.

KEENO: I don't know what to think. About America. I'm an immigrant. About the human condition. I was in a store. I won't tell you the name of the store. It was a poor people's store. People had shabby clothes and sad, desperate faces, and they weren't good-looking like you see in commercials where everybody is well-clothed and good-looking. No. These people were ugly and unhappy and confused, but they wanted to survive, they felt like they deserved to survive, because they were Americans, and they wanted to buy stuff at a discount, and there were products to buy all around them, and they looked at the stuff in despair, it seemed to me, all that stuff in this huge store, a warehouse of a store, and they had to be very careful with their money, if they were going to survive. You follow me?

MAURICE: Yes.

KEENO; One can lose the will to live. Do you feel that?

MAURICE: Not that, exactly.

KEENO: What, then?

MAURICE: Oblivion.

KEENO: Isn't that the same thing?

MAURICE: No.

KEENO: Because I want to enjoy the sensation of not giving a shit anymore about what happens to me, or what might happen to me, or see the suffering going on all around me, all the time, and feel high and happy for a minute.

MAURICE: Me, too, but I have all these health problems now, including diabetes, so I can't drink.

KEENO: You can have a glass of wine once in a while.

MAURICE: Yeah. That's good.

KEENO: No big deal. Live a little..

MAURICE: And you, you shouldn't drink or you'll lose your licence.

KEENO: I know.

MAURICE: How did that happen?

KEENO: I blacked out one time. Another time I fell asleep.

MAURICE: It's not good, Keeno. Things are not looking good. Like this hospital, this hospital is for profit, Indian people are making money on the misery of American illness, and it's not right, but nothing's right anymore.

KEENO: We've got all kinds of people come in here or who are working here, people from all over, your friend next door is from El Salvador.

MAURICE: He's not my friend. I hardly know him. He lies there and moans. *(A Moan)* So I'm glad you came by. When can I get out of here?

KEENO: Rodrigo will have to sign you out, discharge you.

MAURICE: Come on!

KEENO Not yet.

MAURICE: I can't stand this! It's a plague!

KEENO: Somebody has to check your kidney function, your blood sugar, your lung congestion, see if you're infected, and so on. And then you can go.

MAURICE: FUCK YOU!

KEENO: Have it your way, Maurice. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: It's fucking incredible, what happens!

Blackout

17.

(Lights up)

PASTOR: The Chosen One defies all edicts.

MAURICE: It's the ceiling again. It's the room. Is it me?

PASTOR: Did you call Alabama?

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

PASTOR: I don't know why I said that.

MAURICE: Wait just one minute. You could say it's the worst state in the country. Ignorant and violent.

PASTOR: Another part of the brain. Somewhere deep. Why is it that talking evokes memory? Where are the memories lodged?

MAURICE: One more minute. *(Pause)* I have a memory.

PASTOR: Shoot.

MAURICE: Thank you. I was a waiter at Mayhew's Country Kitchen when Kennedy was assassinated. Little red jacket, black bow tie, excellent hamburgers. Actually, it was the relish, pickle relish, thick burgers. East Broadway. Office workers came from blocks around. In those days, I never thought I'd be an old man in a shitty hospital in L. A. with back problems and bronchitis and diabetes and all the rest of it, maybe brain damage due to stress, a virus in the building, and a talking ceiling. All I want is to get out of this place. Nurse! Nurse! Nurse! *(No one responds. Next door to him FRANCISCO moans.)*

PASTOR: Thoughts of death and dying.

MAURICE: Thoughts of dying. Alone. Subconscious. Drugged up. Images appear. From the past. Scenes of Revenge for the Jews. And I'm looking through my eyes instead of with my eyes. Like a telescope. No, like binoculars. William Blake. My mentor at Brooklyn College, whose name I can't remember. Wordsworth was her guy. She thought highly of me and took me to my first shrink. Huelsenbeck. A Swiss phenomenologist who had a portrait of himself on the wall behind him and who

thought his very presence would cure me. He would hold his hand out like this, for his fee. Like a Nazi. (*Enter the male nurse, RODRIGO.*) Twenty-five bucks.

RODRIGO: You need something?

MAURICE: Where'd you come from?

RODRIGO: We heard you yelling.

MAURICE: I wasn't yelling.

RODRIGO: You're not supposed to yell. We have a lot of problems. You want something, you press that red button and talk into the phone. That's a phone.

MAURICE: I know that's a phone. What's going on?

RODRIGO: A plague. You know what a plague is? Microbes flying around. Invisible. Nobody knows where they come from, or why, or when it will go away, nothing. Nature's way of cleaning up the mess. That's what I think. Something from the bowels of the earth.

MAURICE: Very poetic.

RODRIGO: Not a fucking bat!

MAURICE: You lose the five G's idea?

RODRIGO: Nobody knows what that is either. Am I wrong? A wave, a particle, a buzz in the atmosphere? A sound? A note? I don't know. But it's turned this place into a shithole, and I'm very busy right now. And if I were you, I'd put that mask back on. .

MAURICE: (*Doing so*) You have a family?

RODRIGO: Of course, I have a family. A mother, an aunt, cousins and nephews and uncles and who the fuck knows who else. So I'm just gonna live here until this thing is over.

MAURICE: Where you from?

RODRIGO: India.

MAURICE: A dirty, crowded place. I would never go there.

RODRIGO: Who cares? What do you want?

MAURICE: Another narco. Or Norco. Something strong.

RODRIGO: I just gave you one, two hours ago. You're not scheduled for another one now.

MAURICE: I'm in a lot of pain.

RODRIGO: Nothing I can do. I can't give you anything that isn't signed for, in triplicate. By a higher authority.

MAURICE: This is a prison posing as a hospital and owned by Indians. Everybody lies and everybody dies. That's a rhyme.

RODRIGO: I know what a rhyme is.

MAURICE: How do I check out of here?

RODRIGO: I'll check you out.

MAURICE: Let's go!

RODRIGO: First the Doctor has to sign off on you.

MAURICE: He said you would do it.

RODRIGO: I will.

MAURICE: So where is he?

RODRIGO: Nobody knows right now.

MAURICE: What the fuck! All Keeno did was put a hand on my chest and wheel me in here.

RODRIGO: They'll be looking for me.

MAURICE: Do you have immortality where you come from?

RODRIGO: I don't know.

MAURICE: You don't know?

RODRIGO: No. *(A bell rings.)* They're calling me.

MAURICE: Wait a minute.

RODRIGO: I'll be back. Keep your mask on.

MAURICE: Yeah, yeah. *(Exit Rodrigo)* For us, it's the bloodline. The name. The genes. The remembrance. No resurrection of the body. Bury it in 24 hours. To be honest, I could never understand the Gentiles. My Grandmother used to say, if you see a church, cross the street. That's why I love New York. I'm not sure about that. It's tough and crowded. But the Jews give it flavor. The Jews and the Blacks and the Puerto Ricans. I used to take the IRT to Atlantic Avenue and cross to the Flatbush line. Brooklyn College. I was an honors student, believe it or not. Now they think I'm a crazy old man.

Blackout

18.

(Lights up)

MAURICE: Why would I call Alabama? Home of the evangelical delusion.

KEENO: I haven't a clue.

MAURICE: And who would I call?

KEENO: Beats me.

MAURICE: People are looking for you.

KEENO: I quit. That is to say, I'm quitting. Too much death and dying.

MAURICE: Sign me out first.

KEENO: I will.

MAURICE: Can you get a job?

KEENO: I can get a job.

MAURICE: Doing what?

KEENO: I was a waiter once.

MAURICE: Never go in or out of the kitchen empty handed.

KEENO: Right.

MAURICE: I was in Local Eleven, in New York. Hard union to get into. Restaurant was under the rink at Rockefeller Center. The waiters were mainly Cuban exiles. Lawyers. Doctors. Good shoes. Cummerbunds.

KEENO: What happened was this: *(Pause)* A feeling that came over me, sitting at lunch. In the cafeteria, that I was not what I think I am. Nothing to do with alcohol, per se, sober for three or four months now, I'm not counting the days, although it could be, I don't know, connected, the sobriety affecting my conscience. It's an epidemic, and I can't handle it. They're going to fire me anyway.

MAURICE: I've been talking to the ceiling, myself. Along with faces and objects and a hanging man.

KEENO: Basically, it could be that I'm realizing that I'm not a boy anymore, not young anymore, the dye is cast, the time is up, the clock is wound, and it's time to go.

MAURICE: You're still young, Keeno.

KEENO: So then I read an article about gin...Next thing you know, I go to a bar in Hollywood, to try the taste...Just the taste...Gin...You know the rest.

MAURICE: I think I do.

KEENO: I can tell by the scars on your arms. It's hard to take your blood.

MAURICE: That was fifty years ago. In Santa Fe, a man walked into my apartment while I was watching a baseball game and drinking Irish whiskey and he tried to kill me for the fun of it. He was on PCP, turns out. I'm having a similar feeling now.

KEENO: They ever catch him?

MAURICE: No. Not that I know of. *(Pause)* Here's another thing. Nandi. I feel a thin emergence of desire, I'm not sure that's the right word, and probably it's not quite desire. It's a thought, an inkling, a vibe. All of a sudden, I get a picture. I feel an interest. I imagine a touch. Skin like silk.

KEENO: She's very good. The best. She'll go far.

MAURICE: She evoked a feeling in me of normalcy, of youth. I had felt like it was all over for me. Manliness, lust. All gone. I want to thank you, or her, for that sliver of lust I felt.

KEENO: You're welcome.

MAURICE: What are you going to do?

KEENO: We'll see. I don't know what's going to happen. I feel the unknown is approaching like a huge, flaming gin and tonic. A drink on fire.

Blackout

19.

(Lights up. NANDI is standing near the "door.")

NANDI: What else will you do?

MAURICE: What I always do. Write and read and watch TV. Worry about dinner. Go to doctors. Meetings. Therapies. Too many doctors. And you?

NANDI: It's getting too dangerous around here.

MAURICE: This could be the end you know, of liberal democracy in America.

NANDI: I know. In India, as well.

MAURICE: Yes. The ones with grievances and envy and pride. And the religious fanatics. I wish you luck. Hide out in a University, if I were you. Somewhere safe.

NANDI: I tried to find out if you were kidnapped or extorted into this place.

MAURICE: And?

NANDI: Hard to tell. You were congested. Your heart rate was high. Your blood sugar was high. You couldn't walk. You couldn't talk straight. You were a mess, in general.

MAURICE: Thanks for trying.

NANDI: You're welcome.

MAURICE: Can I get out?

NANDI: Hopefully in the morning.

MAURICE: Thank you. You hear anything from Keeno?

NANDI: No. Nothing.

MAURICE: Where would he go?

NANDI: I'm guessing Las Vegas. He had enough. Ventilators and dead bodies.

MAURICE: That makes sense.

NANDI: Not his cup of tea.

MAURICE: No. Is he really Armenian?

NANDI: Half. He likes to gamble and drink. He always raved about Vegas.

MAURICE: I want to thank you, Nandi.

NANDI: What for? You thanked me already.

MAURICE: Just in general. Thanks.

NANDI: No problem.

MAURICE: Okay.

NANDI: Don't thank me anymore.

MAURICE: I won't see you ...?

NANDI: Well, you never know, old man. Bye! *(Exits)*

MAURICE: Bye!

Blackout

20.

(Lights up.)

MAURICE: So I got home, eventually. Steroids for the C.O.P.D. pain meds for the back, insulin for the diabetes. Care-givers coming and going. *(Pause)* Never realized it would come to this. Dependence and constant pain. Limping about with the help of a cane. Out there, in the dirty alleys and the shiny condos, the United States, run by the Orange Ape, declines into the amoral muck. Besieged by a virus. Masked people crawling around and running sideways and throwing garbage into the sea and gasping in respirators. 360 million. 63 million voted for the Orange Ape. The dim, the witless, the Christian believers in apocalypse, the fat, the Unemployed. But it doesn't end there. It's worldwide. Endless killing, endless wars. Torture and mayhem. Imagine the Earth as a sick organism and we are the disease. *(There is a virus, and it mutates.)* And me? What am I? Will I transform into an invisible life, a spirit, when I die? Reincarnate into a stone? Visit my biblical ancestors on another planet? Become a particle of warmth on the moon? A little memory -- what will

they think of me? -- and I'm gone. A little more time and the planet will be barren and cold. We had best put away our desperate need to survive and contemplate our actual planetary situation.

Blackout

21.

(KEENO is alone on stage.)

KEENO: Goodbye and good riddance. We have smart people come in here once in while. Like Maurice. Mostly they're fucked up and poor. It's a for-profit hospital, run by foriegners. Medicare runs the show. I'm out of here. I don't have an alcohol problem. I have a Keeno problem. Every other thought is about my failures and misses. Weaknesses and mistakes. You can't live that way. I don't know how to deal with it. And I have a vertigo problem. I got dizzy and fell down while I was working with a patient. Just talking. The only thing that helps is a glass of rum in a dimly lighted bar. I figure if the family doesn't love me, then what's the point? I know that sounds like an excuse. I see these people and I see dreadful mechanical devices. Like ventilators. People with bloody parts. Wired. Bruised. Confused. I haven't seen it myself, but I'm hearing things. People dying on the vintilators, gasping for breath. I can't handle it... I did call the number Maurice gave me. The idea was to get help by giving help. No one picked up.

Blackout

22.

(The same.)

KEENO: I wish Maurice the best. But he's an old man now, and advice ain't gonna do much for him. If the family isn't with you - and they're not -- they just show up on holidays and send me texts - then you have no chance. I think it's mainly me, my fault, because I don't have a clue what they think of me, or who they think I am, and I'm probably all wrong about it. Probably they don't think of me at all.

Blackout

23.

(MAURICE is standing downstage. Behind him, a curtain has closed the set. He is using a nice cane.)

MAURICE: I was staring at my watch. Twenty seconds later I was dreaming about something. Ten seconds after that, I was dreaming about something else. Ten seconds later, dreaming again. And so on. For one minute, I wanted badly to sense

this battered body, which had been imprisoned and tortured, like a captured insurgent. And then I had a flashback of Nandi walking into my hospital room like she owned the place, and me with it.

24.

(NANDI onstage with MAURICE.)

NANDI: Maurice!

MAURICE: What?

NANDI: You do your physical therapy?

MAURICE: What physical therapy?

NANDI: Walk. Use your cane.

MAURICE: No.

NANDI: Get up and walk.

MAURICE: No.

NANDI: Think about it while I do your vitals,

MAURICE: It's all a scam, Nandi.

NANDI: I know it is.

MAURICE: You read William Burroughs?

NANDI: Yes.

MAURICE: He says language is a virus.

NANDI: Something like that. Do your walking.

MAURICE: They walk you around like a mule and ask stupid questions.

NANDI: We'll skip the walk.

MAURICE: I don't want to see all the dying going on in the halls.

NANDI: Your vitals are good.

MAURICE: It's torture. Every four hours.

NANDI: Patience is a virtue.

MAURICE: I don't have it.

NANDI: No. But you should be out of here in no time. *(Exits)*

MAURICE: Read! Read, Nandi! Real books!

Blackout

25.

MAURICE: I wanted you to get another look at sweet Nandi before we close. I thought of Keeno, who had disappeared. I asked him if he'd called the number I gave him, if he sought help. "Yes," he said, "but nobody answered the phone." He was from Palmdale, California, turns out. I think of him in Las Vegas, now, waiting on tables, drinking and playing craps. Drinking and falling down. Who knows and who cares? I'm grateful to be out of that joint. I'm grateful to be alive. As I told you, I use a cane, limping about. The Orange Ape has been impeached, and I hope he goes to jail. That pretty much dates me, but it doesn't matter anymore, because the so-called evolution of Man has hit a snag – there'll be no history, because there'll be no culture, there'll be no books or plays." Of course, there'll be a final blackout, something Americans don't like to talk about, like the Orange Ape bombing Australia, that lying sonofabitch. Maybe the sun flares, and a pandemic occurs, and a war starts on earth. There is a Hopi saying: **The last breath, the dying breath, goes up into the sky and comes back down as rain.** And I'm not feeling so good at the moment. But...As I've tried to say before, this is near the end of The Fourth World. Pay attention, close attention, to the Hopi Prophecy. This world will be destroyed. The Fifth World, the world to come, is: ***Fire and ice.***

THE END

Murray Mednick

3/23/20

4/15/20

