

THE
MEDICINE SHOWDOWN

by
Adam Koplan & Topher Payne
(with additional songs and lyrics by John
Wright)

inspired by
Enemy of the People
by Henrik Ibsen

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The Characters

DOCTOR ARTHUR EGGERTON: Early forties. Charismatic proprietor and front man of a travelling medicine show.

DOCTOR CLAUDIA STOCKMAN HILL: Attractive. Late thirties or early forties. Widowed. Graduate of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, where she met her late husband Joseph. The only trained physician within three counties.

BEN COLQUITT: A newspaper man in his early thirties.

PETER STOCKMAN: Mayor of Norwich, in his early fifties, and brother to Doctor Claudia Hill.

ROY: Early thirties, African-American porter and delivery man for Dr. Hill.

TINY TWO BITS: A country comedian. Part hobo clown, part balladeer. His genre of hayseed humor is a precursor to “Hee Haw” and Jeff Foxworthy . Portrayed by the same actor as Ben Colquitt.

LEGS BENEDICT: A vaudeville-quality hooper who is far too good for touring medicine shows. Portrayed by the same actor as Roy.

CHIEF TUK TUK: A Medicine Man performing in an indiscriminate mash-up of “Yellow Face” tropes (Yellow Face being the equivalent to minstrelry but depicting East Asians instead.) Underneath the make-up and wig, Tuk Tuk is low paid white actor hired to be the vessel of magical exoticism AND the butt of jokes. Portrayed by the same actor as Peter Stockman.

SETTING: NORWICH, GEORGIA - October, 1918

PRESHOW

The medicine show ensemble - “Arthur Eggerton’s Re-rhythmifiers” - play a “bally” i.e. a sequence of country and bluegrass songs punctuated with comic bits designed to generate excitement. As this happens, DR. CLAUDIA HILL, distributes free facemasks to patrons as they enter. She ad-libs warnings about influenza and urges wearing the mask throughout the show. Claudia herself wears a cloth medical facemask and a hat. She has a black “country doctor” valise. When the bally winds to a close, the Re-Rhythmifiers ad-lib a goodbye and all exit the house.

SOUTHWARD MARCH...

Claudia enters her office and crosses to her desk. There she spots a pile of recently delivered correspondence. She hungrily rifles through the pile. She spots a larger and more narrow envelope in a different color than the rest. She discards the other letters, and opens this envelope to find transcribed wire cables. As she begins to read them she crosses to a corner of her office where she has a large map of Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The map already has clusters of tacks in North Carolina and South Carolina.

DR. HILL

(reading the first wire)

October Second. From: Dr. Wallace Lauderdale. Fort Jackson. Columbia, South Carolina. Pursuant to your inquiry. 21 new cases. All male. 14 White. 7 Colored.

Claudia takes tacks from a box, finds the locale of Fort Jackson, and puts several in. As she places tacks she mutters under her breath...

That’s *double* yesterday’s numbers...

She flips to the next wire.

October Second. From Dr. Eli Grandage. Charleston, South Carolina. Pursuant to your inquiry. 18 confirmed new cases. 16 White. 2 Colored.

Claudia puts several tacks into the Charleston area.

October second. Augusta, Georgia. Camp Hancock. From Lt. Colonel Avery Fentress. Pursuant to your inquiry. Two cases. Confirmed. Take all necessary measures do not delay.

She puts the tacks across the red line demarcating the GA, SC border. Stands back to take in what it means.

It is here.

She then crosses to back to her desk and opens a letter. Begins to read.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN...

Blackout. DR. ARTHUR EGGERTON enters. An immensely appealing showman, dressed in a coat with tails and top hat.

EGGERTON

Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls! Gather around if you can't hear, come up close if you can't see. It is indeed our great pleasure to return to your fair town. My name is Doctor Arthur Eggerton, and this is my Miracle Medicine Show. Tonight tonight tonight, my friends, what a program we have lined up! Two Ventriloquists! Six Dancers! A bona fide Oriental! Four Pekinese dogs! Some down-home music! And I already see you youngsters chomping at the bit for the annual pie-eating contest. That comes later, folks. This hullabaloo of hilarity, this jamboree of jovial jocularity, is presented for you free and for nothing. But tonight is more than just entertainment- though I guarantee you will be entertained. My associates and I have brought with us a magnificent discovery, the spread of which will transform mankind: a bold new approach to medicine. And tonight, right here in this hall, it will bring comfort and healthful living to untold multitudes. I know what y'all are thinking. Doctor Arthur Eggerton, you are a highly regarded scientist and scholar, more comfortable in the halls of science than here in the bright glare of the footlights. What are you doing here with a twenty-one person company of dancers, comedians, tumblers, and artistes of all sorts?

I'd like to share with you a little story. Four hundred years before the birth of our Lord, there lived a famous doctor named Hippocrates. I see that you, ma'am, have already heard of him. Hippocrates, through science and observation, discovered a cure for the great malady of his day: the pestilence that plagued the Peloponnese of Ancient Greece.

But did he stay confined to his academy and horde his discovery? ... No! Accompanied by musicians, actors, and even a full legion of soldiers, he traveled across his country to spread the word about his important cure. Just like ol' Hippocrates, we will present tonight a show which is first and foremost about information- information that I am confident you will find useful and supremely curative. And also, sublimely entertaining! Joining me this evening in our feast of fun and celebration of sagacity are the most proficient performers you'll find anywhere in the world. Tonight's program is a marvelous mix of thrilling new acts, and....of course we always bring back the Doc's regular crew: The Rerhythmifiers! Please welcome back some old friends now. You know him. You love him. Music and amusement from Mr. Tiny Two-Bits! And adding a touch of COLOR to the proceedings: Mr. Legs Benedict.

CHIEF TUK TUK, TINY TWO BITS and
LEGS BENEDICT enter, meeting onstage.

TINY

Howdy folks, and howdy Legs.

LEGS

(As though English is not his first
language)

Hello Mr. Tiny.

TINY

I sure do love bein' back here, don't you?

LEGS

It feels to me as though it is my home.

TINY

Almost like doing a show for family.

LEGS

Mr. Tiny. You speak of family. How is your dear brother? I know him to be in the war.

TINY

As a point of fact he is. Just got a letter from him this week, tellin' how he kilt a hundred men.

LEGS

One hundred men! He must be a machine gunner.

TINY

Well no... he's a cook.

(Responding to laughter-or groans)

Yes folks, we're going to have a good time. I'd like to start here by singing a little song.
This here is one of my personal favorites.

EGGERTON, LEGS, TINY

(singing)

When John Henry was a little baby
Sittin' on his daddy's knee
He grabbed a hammer and
a little piece of steel
And cried, "This hammer'll
be death of me,
This hammer'll be the death of me"

John Henry said to the captain
"A man ain't nothin' but a man
But before I let your steam drill
beat me down
I'm gonna die with a hammer
in my hand, Lord, Lord
I'll die with a hammer in my hand"

TINY

Go get 'em Legs!

LEGS executes a spirited dance.

EGGERTON

How about that Legs Benedict folks!

TINY

Well they battled it out up there on the mountain top, Ol' John Henry and that steam drill...

ALL

John Henry he drove fit-teen feet,
The steam drill made only nine-
But he hammered so hard
That he broke his poor heart,
And he laid down his hammer
and he died, Lord, Lord
He laid down his hammer and he died.

Music stops.

TINY

Speakin of dyin'. Doc, did I tell ya about my mother-in-law's funeral?

EGGERTON

No, Tiny, what about it?

TINY

Well, preacher got up and started sayin' some real nice things, 'bout how she was a kind woman, never had a hard word to say 'bout nobody...

EGGERTON

That's mighty fine.

TINY

Around that time I got up and snuck out.

EGGERTON

Why's that?

TINY

Figured I was at the wrong funeral.

Music resumes.

EGGERTON, LEGS, TINY

Oh, they took John Henry to the graveyard.
Buried him in the sand-
And every locomotive that roars on through says,
There lies a steel-drivin' man, Lord Lord,
There lies a steel-drivin' man.

TINY

And every locomotive that roars on through says,
There lies a steel-drivin' man, Lord Loooooord...

EGGERTON

Tiny's got the spirit!

TINY

There lies a steel-drivin' man!

ALL

There lies a steel-drivin' man!

Music ends.

EGGERTON

Oh, thank you! The Rerhythmifiers everyone!

All begin to exit save EGGERTON.

EGGERTON

Now I bet you're wondering who our newest Rerhythmifier is. Who is playing that washtub bass? Let me explain. For those of you who join us every year, you'll recall I often spend my summers traveling throughout the continent of Europe, meeting up with like-minded scientists to benefit from their studies and share knowledge. However, what with the mess over there, the Kaiser's boys made my usual trips difficult.

(Aside)

Instead, this year, I ventured into the mysterious, unexplored regions of the Far East. And it was on this journey that fate would have me encounter the most admired, honored, revered, and sapient man in that part of the world. Look at him folks! Isn't he marvelous! I just know he will soon join Legs and Tiny in your hearts. He's now part of our family. Chief Tuk Tuk.

CHIEF TUK TUK enters. An obviously Caucasian man dressed in a painfully misguided greatest hits of apparel from throughout East Asia. He's frequently called upon to add a little exotic appeal to the proceedings.

CHIEF TUK TUK

How!

EGGERTON

(speaks in Gibberish)

CHIEF TUK TUK

(Gibberish)

EGGERTON

(aside)

You go set up the stage now.

Everywhere I went in that part of the world, the natives spoke in hushed tones of this holy man who healed the sick and dang near performed miracles. One town had even made a little play which they used to honor the Chief, to tell his remarkable story. So rather than my going on about the Chief's credentials, let us do a stateside version of that mystical dance that helped introduce the Chief's power and respect. Tiny?

EGGERTON steps aside, as TINY addresses the audience.

LEGS (Maiden), EGGERTON (Death) and TUK TUK (Himself) perform the story as a pantomime.

TINY

In the jungles of Siam, a beautiful maiden-
Came down from the village to gather flowers to make a garland to welcome in the
Springtime. Now this folks, is the dance of Spring.
But even into this pristine environment danger lurks. About to come onto this stage is the
figure of Death. Yes. Death. And there he is.
Now folks, This maiden was so beautiful that even Death desired to have her for his own.
This folks, is the dance of Death.
Look out, little lady. That was close.
Now, Death's not to be foiled, He's got an idea. He's going to turn himself into a beautiful
flower. So beautiful, he's sure to catch the maiden's eye. But this flower was no regular
flower- it was so poisonous that if she were to touch it she would be struck with the most
powerful of convulsions. And shortness of breath.
Oh, folks, she touched it.
It sure looks like Death is going to have his way, but who should arrive on the scene- the
mighty mighty Chief Tuk Tuk!

CHIEF TUK TUK

(Gibberish)

TINY

Reciting some incantations, the Chief begins to gather roots, herbs, and barks! This folks is
the dance of gathering. He gives the remedy to the maiden. He drives Death right out of her
body. Now folks, a final showdown between Chief Tuk Tuk and the spirit of Death. Who's
gonna win?
It's the mighty Tuk Tuk!
Tuk Tuk has vanquished death! And now a final dance of celebration.

LEGS and TUK TUK exit, victorious.

EGGERTON

Thank you Tiny! Yes folks, a little *authentic* taste of the Far East. Hope I didn't startle the
women and children in our audience with my depiction of the deleterious and dastardly
deportment of Death. It certainly had Legs Benedict quaking in his tap shoes! Did you see
that? Shakin' and shiverin'! Mister Rhythm himself began to shake and shiver- Spasms!
Hang on to that information, mull it over, because it's an important clue about the source of
many of our ailments. I want y'all to start thinking like doctors, with curious and logical
minds. What could cause convulsions of that sort? The answer is coming up later. But
now, speaking of convulsions, you'll explode with laughter at our next act. I first caught
up with this pair over in Nashville, and I knew I had to introduce them to you.

First you'll meet Joe Jones. And Joe, I'm excited to say, has brought with him a very amusing, but very stiff little friend who goes by the name of Mortimer Macgillicuddy! That madcap Mortimer can be a barrel of laughs, though at times he can be a touch wooden! That's right folks! Please welcome Joe Jones and his little birchwood bedlamite bosom buddy, Mortimer Macgillicuddy!

THE WEEKLY REPORT

The office of DR. CLAUDIA HILL. There is a desk and two chairs. A decanter of brandy with glasses. DR. HILL is seated. Her porter, Roy, sits across from her reading a letter aloud.

ROY

Dear Claudia, Thank you so much for your insights and questions. I am happy to recount what I am able. If my reading of recent news is accurate, you are right to think that this infection will move South and as ever I'm impressed by your care and forethought.

It is doubtful you will have any luck with
(struggles)

saw-LIE-sin

DR. HILL

Salicin. Sah-luh-sin. It's a drug.

ROY

... salicin as you suggested. When the epidemic began here at the Fort four weeks ago it developed so rapidly that all other work ceased. Soldiers here start with what appears to be an ordinary attack of LaGrippe [lag-RIP].

DR. HILL

Say it: LaGrippe [LuhGreep].

ROY

LaGrippe or influenza, and when brought to the hospital, they rapidly develop the most vis...viss... vis-coos type of puh-nuh, puh-nuh..

(stops reading the letter)

Dr. Hill. They's a lot of doctor-words comin' up. Maybe you best read it from here.

DR. HILL

All right but you are doing so wonderfully. Look here.

(She comes around the desk and reads
aloud over his shoulder as he follows
along)

...they rapidly develop the most viscous pneumonia that has ever been seen. Salicin, aspirin, epinepherin, it was all useless. Two hours after admission they developed mahogany spots over the cheekbones, and a few hours later we begun to see the cyanosis extending from their ears and spreading all over the face, until it was hard to distinguish the colored from white.

ROY

He using a turn of speech ma'am?

DR. HILL

No Roy. That's what happens with this one. That's what really happens. You finish it up. I think he's done with the big words.

ROY

"...It is only a matter of a few hours then until death came, and it was a struggle for air until they suffocated.

I regret that this correspondence is our first exchange in years because I have been so shamefully late in expressing my condolences. Please forgive me for not having written earlier. Rebecca and I only heard about Joseph last June from Conrad Harris and we were terribly saddened by his passing. I will warmly remember our...

Claudia takes the letter. As she scans the rest of
it...

DR. HILL

Roy you are doing so well with your reading. Listen. I'm going get JoAnna Bleckley to pay you a nickel a week to read to her. She can't hardly see anymore.

ROY

Yes'm. Thank you ma'am.

BEN COLQUITT enters.

COLQUITT

Claudia.

DR. HILL

Oh, Ben. I didn't hear you come in.

COLQUITT

No one was out front. Hello Roy.

DR. HILL

I was just about to send Roy out to mail some letters and make a delivery or two. In fact, Roy, you can start by taking this next door to Walter Jenkins.

Hands Roy a box.

ROY

Yes'm. Mr. Colquitt.

COLQUITT

Roy.

(keeping up appearances)

Just come by to get the announcements for this week's paper. Have a little time for me?

DR. HILL

(setting the letter aside as Roy exits)

A little. Yes.

COLQUITT

Oh. Anyone in the infirmary?

DR. HILL

Not at the moment.

COLQUITT

Well then.

(no longer keeping up appearances)

Have a little time for me?

DR. HILL

Got your little notebook?

COLQUITT

Allright. Business. I can do business.

DR. HILL

I expect Ida Barnes to deliver her baby any day now.

COLQUITT

Well it'd be nice if she'd have it before I go to press tomorrow night. Birth announcements help my sales. Folks send copies to relatives.

DR. HILL

I'll be sure and encourage her.

COLQUITT

How long you reckon Roy will be out on those deliveries?

DR. HILL

He'll be back in short order. Roy doesn't dawdle.

COLQUITT

Well that's a shame. You should teach that man to dawdle. Come on, Doctor Hill, let's dawdle.

DR. HILL

You are just ruining that word for me. We should get to the obituaries. I know you have things to get back to, what with the paper, and Florence Bingham.

COLQUITT

Claudia, any time I spend with Florence Bingham is a favor to my parents. Nothing more. She's a very sweet, and very dim, girl.

DR. HILL

She's a lovely girl, Ben. I'm sure she'd make a fine wife.

COLQUITT

Perhaps. But I'd make a lousy husband. Go on, let's hear those obits.

DR. HILL

Esther Phillips, yesterday morning. She lived way up Jackson's Mill. She was eighty-one. She keeled over at a quilting circle. I don't gather it was a surprise. None of the other women dropped a stitch, from what I could tell.

COLQUITT

Tragedy at the quilting circle, Bill Hartley got a new horse. Busy news week in Norwich. And Eggerton's Medicine Show bought the whole back page. He opens this weekend.

DR. HILL

I thought I smelled snake oil in the air. That man lies like a legless dog.

COLQUITT

Even still, it's a pleasin' diversion. How 'bout I take you over to see it?

DR. HILL

I've got a mountain to do Ben.

COLQUITT

Come out with me. Claudia. It's time.

DR. HILL

You'd best take Florence. Very sweet and very dim is Eggerton's favored audience.

ROY enters, carrying a wrapped parcel. He catches Dr. Hill and Ben Colquitt approaching an intimate moment near the map on the wall.

COLQUITT

So that's where Charleston is?

ROY

Excuse me, Dr. Hill. Mr. Colquitt.

COLQUITT

Roy.

ROY

I'm sorry. Mr. Jenkins sent me right back.

COLQUITT

I'm glad Walter's as ornery with you as he is with me.

ROY

Here's the creosote, told me you could keep it. He preferred the medicine he was on before.

DR. HILL

Of course he preferred it. Walter Jenkins was downing half a bottle of opium a day. That's not medication, it's a vacation. I'll take it over myself this evening.

ROY

I'd save yourself the trip, ma'am. Said he's taking snakeroot tonic for it now. His sister in Mississippi got it from Dr. Eggerton.

DR. HILL

(to Colquitt)

Eggerton's endorsing Snakeroot for tuberculosis?! I swear, that man -

COLQUITT

Hey Roy. You must have an opinion about the Eggerton show. You enjoy going?

DR. HILL

Mr. Colquitt. Come on. You know he's never been.

COLQUITT

That doesn't stop anyone from being a critic Doctor. Look at you. You never been. You got a strong opinion...

DR. HILL

Leave Roy out of this.

ROY

I been.

DR. HILL

To the Town Hall? To the Eggerton Medicine Show?

ROY

Every year. For near 6 or 7 years. Sometimes twice in a month. Our show is on Wednesday evenings.

COLQUITT

See! Twice in a month! And it's a fine diversion, right? You, as well-informed member of Eggerton's public can vouch for its finer qualities? Tell her about the bird act.

ROY

Mr. Colquitt?

COLQUITT

The fellow with the birds that talk.

ROY

They's a lady with dogs. But I ain't never seen no talking birds....Our show is only thirty minutes. Sarah tells me Eggerton stays with y'all an hour and a half. Maybe the show's a little different?

DR. HILL

Oh I'm sure he'll sell anyone some Snakeroot Tonic.

ROY

No'm. See I seen him already this year. When I went to visit my kin in Bent Hill.

COLQUITT

Marvelous! A legitimate connoisseur of Dr. Eggerton and his "Kick-a-poo" Indian Oil.

ROY

But it ain't an Indian medicine man no more. The new medicine man ain't from 'round here at all--I think he from CHINA. Can't hardly speak. And besides, Doc. Eggerton, he don't sell us the tonic anyways. Too expensive he say. But he gives us a real good price on the soap.

DR. HILL

Roy, you know I'll give you as much soap as you want. You surely don't need...

COLQUITT

But Dr. Hill--It's part of the fun! Right Roy? And thank you for helping me instruct the good doctor on the joys of leaving work every once in a while.

DR. HILL

Roy you can go. Just remember to post those letters and give my best to Sarah.

ROY departs. Colquitt goes to window and watches him leave.

COLQUITT

(reporting Roy's progress)

Passing Wilson's Hotel now... Oh. And round the corner...

He crosses room.

Now Roy had some excellent insights, but I am pleased to announce that we are finally and irrefutably alone.

He kisses her.

DR. HILL

Ben. Not now. I wish I could. I have obligations that need attending.

COLQUITT

You are just itchin' to get me out of here. You got another fella in the next room? I'll fight him. Bare-knuckle.

DR. HILL

I'm sure you would. Now run on. Please. I am immune to your charms.

COLQUITT

Claudia, what's gotten into you? It's not my dinner with Florence? You know that's just my pa being my pa. In the four months we've been meeting like this you've never once...What is it you're not telling me?

DR. HILL

Nothing of note.

COLQUITT

Hogwash. That's it. There's something you can't tell me. You're sitting on a secret.

DR. HILL

I'm wearing a corset, I can barely sit on anything.

COLQUITT

She deflects and parries! Confession is good for the soul, come on now.

DR. HILL

If my brother finds out he wasn't first to know, he'll lay an egg. I'll need your absolute discretion.

COLQUITT

Have I ever let you down before?

DR. HILL

Ben... Spanish Flu has come to Georgia.

COLQUITT

Christ, here in Norwich?

DR. HILL

(her excitement mounting)

No, thank heavens. A colleague in Augusta cabled this morning- there were two cases confirmed at Camp Hancock. But it's never just two for long.

COLQUITT

Well you should have said. You probably have a mountain to do. I expect you're going to have your hands full of sick of folks in no time.

DR. HILL

Maybe not Ben! I'm hoping to stop it before it even starts. A classmate of mine from medical college, she's based in Baltimore now, writes that they managed to avoid spread of the disease by shutting down all the schools, music halls, churches-

COLQUITT

Closing churches. I suppose they can get away with that sort of thing up North. But Healy's not gonna like it. He'll put up a fight. And Pastor Talbot too. When the roof on First Baptist's caved in, they moved out to the front lawn, never missed a hymn.

DR. HILL

I'm preparing a report explaining all of this to my brother. Peter has the ear of every preacher in Norwich, white and colored. If I can get it over to him, he'll secure unanimous support for a mayoral proclamation to close down all public gatherings by suppertime.

COLQUITT

How long before it all blows over?

DR. HILL

Hard to say. Two weeks. Three?

COLQUITT

And you figured all this out from a wire or two.

Dr. HILL

Ben, I been sending wires, writing letters at the rate of a love-sick debutante ever since that article you reprinted about Boston. I wanted to gather some data.

COLQUITT

I'm glad I haven't typeset my front page yet. "Doctor Claudia Hill Saves the Town."

DR. HILL

"Mayor Stockman Saves the Town." That's your headline, if you know what's good for both of us.

COLQUITT

But folks'll know it all came from you, Claudia. It was your colleagues, your research. 'Cause of you, we'll be the town that dodged the bullet. Maybe they'll treat you like a real doctor for a change.

DR. HILL

My husband was Doc Hill for four years. It's no easy thing, bestowing that title on someone new.

COLQUITT

No longer glorified midwife and some-time veterinarian! People'll see you for who you are.

Dr. HILL

I'll be happy if they stop calling me "nurse."

COLQUITT

They will. And this'll be what teaches 'em. Even Mama and Daddy'll be forced to concede your respectability.

DR. HILL

Respectable, perhaps. But widowed for less than a year and unable to have your baby. Advantage, Florence Bingham.

COLQUITT

Fine. One challenge at a time. You have another copy of that report?

DR. HILL

I need to finish it up. Get it to Peter.

COLQUITT

But we need to get this out...If I can review it tonight, I could do typesetting tomorrow, while you're working your magic on your brother. Nobody'd see it until Thursday's edition. Let me help, Claudia. You don't have to do this all on your own.

DR. HILL

Alright. I'll make carbons of what I send to Peter for you to fetch tonight. And I can show you the letters I referenced, but they stay here. You can transcribe them if you like.

COLQUITT

I'll come by after supper.

DR. HILL

We could work during supper, I'll tell Ruthie to bring over an extra plate.

COLQUITT

Don't you ever eat at home?

DR. HILL

No, and neither do you. That's why we get on so well.

COLQUITT

You've got a mind like a steel trap, you're a damn fine doctor, and a very, very handsome woman.

(he kisses her)

That's why we get on so well.

DR. HILL

I stand corrected.

COLQUITT

And look at that, you admit when I'm right. The perfect woman. Good work, Doctor Hill.

He exits.

ROOTS, HERBS, & BARKS

EGGERTON faces his audience.

EGGERTON

Oh that rascal Mortimer Macgillicuddy, is there anything he won't say? And no, Mortimer, we don't have a tonic for termites, but I'll make sure Chief Tuk Tuk gets right on that! Ha ha! I tell ya, my friends, ever since the honorable Chief joined our humble troupe, we've benefitted greatly from his wealth of ORIENTAL knowledge.

(TUK TUK joins him)

But you know, he's learned a few things from us as well. It's true! They don't have anything in Siam that can hold a candle to fried green tomatoes, do they, Chief?

(clarifies to TUK TUK)

Fri-ed Gre-en Toe-may-toes.

CHIEF TUK TUK

(Gibberish)

EGGERTON

(interrupting the stream)

(Gibberish)

(Starts laughing dismissively at the Chief)

Thank you Chief. What is his trick? And at his age! My friends, I pray that the good lord blesses each and every one of *you* with a long healthy life. But Doc Eggerton, I'm sure you're thinkin', how do I lead a long healthy life? How do I make it to that age to reap the benefits of my labors? Children? Grandchildren? I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Travelers such as myself, who've been to the Far East, to India, Mesopotamia, to Siam, find men there who routinely leave to a hundred-fifty years old, even two hundred! Now, only recently did the great minds of science discern how such longevity was possible. The answer lies in an intricate tonic of roots, barks and herbs. It fortifies our bodies against all manner of maladies. The best line of defense against foreign toxins? Making sure your blood, your organs, heck, all of your internal animolecules, are in rhythm.

(LEGS enters, dancing.)

And now coming to the stage, here's a man, learned his fleet footwork from a Turk in the Turks and Caicos...he's a Swamiji of Sound, a man who knows a little something about rhythm! Mister Legs Benedict, ladies and gentlemen!

LEGS dances. The routine is astonishing. He freezes.

EGGERTON

Legs Benedict, everyone-

(LEGS begins again.)

Oh, he's got more!

After fully establishing a choreographic routine,
LEGS begins to cough, and freezes.

EGGERTON

(surprised)

A cough!?!

LEGS continues, but explodes into a coughing
fit.

EGGERTON

(professorial)

A veritable cacophony of coughs.

LEGS is weakened by coughing fit.

Spinal aches!

LEGS bends over

Gastrointestinal dysplasia!

LEGS dances into a collapse

Respiratory Distress!

LEGS begins to crawl with heavy breathing.
EGGERTON brings out chair so that LEGS
might have a place to rest.

What can be done for this man in extreme extremis? I think we may have just the thing!

A ding. A spotlight stage right. A hand pops
appears onstage holding a vial. Eggerton crosses
and snatches it.

Herbs, roots, and barks.

EGGERTON pours a few drops into LEGS'
mouth. LEGS' head pops back up. One by one,
his limbs come back to life. LEGS does a near
miraculous, athletic, and acrobatic routine.

EGGERTON

I bet there's more!

LEGS continues to dance, ending with grand flourish.

Healthier than ever before! Legs, I'll tell ya something, that rhythm was positively contagious!

LEGS

Is that so? In that case...A one, and a two, and you know what to do...

TINY enters with hats. EGGERTON, TINY, and LEGS dance a soft-shoe, each with a solo bit, cheering each other on. TUK TUK joins in, bringing the action to a stop.

EGGERTON

Not. Now. That silly celestial!

TUK TUK returns to his efforts as the trio completes their routine.

EGGERTON

Yes in-deed! I felt that rhythm, did you feel that rhythm? Re-rhythmification! You'll have the chance to get your hands on a bottle of that astonishing elixir later in the evening. But now, prepare to be bowled over by an act we've brought back by popular demand : The confounding capers of Contessa Christina and Her Coterie of Clever Canines!

SIBLING REVELRY

The following morning. DR. HILL at her desk, reading the wire report.

DR. HILL

Hancock: Current reported Cases: 716.

rifling though other papers to confirm her memory

And It was only two on Monday!

continues

Deaths -111. 72 White. 39 Colored. Camp Gordon reports 138 cases. 6 deaths. 5 White 1 Colored. Athens, 117 Cases reported:.

Chancellor Barrow made the sensible choice to suspend classes at the University of GA.
Abercromie says each municipality can make its own decisions...

To herself

but he's an imbecile.

Continues

Camp Gordon is but 12 miles from us and we, in Atlanta, are nearly 1.7 Million. I will prevail on Garver and the Council to get the ban for 4 weeks -which I think they will do. We must lock the stable before the horse is stolen.

PETER (OFFSTAGE)

Claudia?

DR. HILL

In here, Peter!

PETER

I stopped by the house first. Your girl, what's her name?

DR. HILL

Ruthie.

PETER

She said you didn't come home last night.

DR. HILL

I slept here. I'm beginning to wonder why I bother keeping the house. I'm always here, I can only imagine what Ruthie must think of me. No sense in lighting the lamps in the evening, I'm only awake for a few hours anyway.

PETER

She likely thinks you work too much. This town's not populated enough to require so much effort.

DR. HILL

This from the mayor.

PETER

Who would know better?

DR. HILL

Have a seat.

PETER

Oh I can't stay long.

DR. HILL

Have you spoken with all the preachers?

PETER

Preachers?

DR. HILL

My report, Peter. I sent it over yesterday.

PETER

Oh, of course. I looked it over, we'll get to it directly. Claudia, I'm quite serious about this. It looks odd, you camping out like a vagrant in Joseph's office.

DR. HILL

It isn't Joseph's office anymore. It's mine.

PETER

You know what I mean.

DR. HILL

Yes. That's why I corrected you.

PETER

Saw Mabel Colquitt on my walk in. She was out for a stroll. You and Mabel graduated school together, didn't you?

DR. HILL

No, Peter. We didn't. Mabel was older.

PETER

Ah.

DR. HILL

And she didn't finish secondary school, as I recall. She left to marry Zachary.

PETER

Of course, because they had little Ben right after. Hard to believe he's running the newspaper now. Why, we can remember when he was a baby.

DR. HILL

Perhaps you can.

PETER

Mabel says there'll be a wedding for Ben and Florence Bingham fairly soon.

DR. HILL

I'm not aware of any marriage plans.

PETER

Well they're courting, everyone knows that. Who else would it be? It's a small town. No one else appropriate for him, really. He hasn't mentioned a proposal?

DR. HILL

No. And Ben certainly has the resources at his disposal to make an announcement.

PETER

Really? In all those long conversations you have with him? I hear tell he's been whiling away entire afternoons with you, locked up in here. Wonder what y'all been discussing, baby sister.

DR. HILL

You keep right on wondering, big brother.

PETER

I doubt Joseph would've wanted his study be used for-

DR. HILL

Peter. Joe is dead. You know, for a man who can't stay long, seems you have all the time in the world to discuss matters that are none of your concern.

PETER

I worry about you. About your reputation.

DR. HILL

You worry after your own.

PETER

They're one in the same. Now, you know I'll defend you to the death, Sister. And there's plenty of fellas I've had to fight who take umbrage with a lady doctor. But you're eggin' it on with this odd behavior of yours. Sleeping in the office, carryin' on with Ben Colquitt, now you're kicking up this fuss, getting hysterical, tryin' to shut down the town.

DR. HILL

I am not a hysteric, Peter. Don't patronize me.

PETER

I would never. You're tough as nails and twice as sharp. Listen here- it was hard enough when you ran off to school up north-

DR. HILL

Did I have a choice?

PETER

Came back with a Yankee husband, but folks took to Joseph. And eventually to you... tending to 'em as you do. Now you're tryin' to undo all that goodwill. Your report said it was just two isolated cases all the way out in Augusta. I don't think I've ever even been to Augusta.

DR. HILL

It was two isolated cases on Monday. As of this morning, it's seven hundred sixteen. That's the equivalent of a quarter of our population in two days, Peter. Tell the good people of Norwich to stay home and read the Bible for a few Sundays. If God complains, refer Him to me.

PETER

Really, Claudia, you're gonna be blasphemous on top of everything else?

DR. HILL

Peter, there is a credible threat in Georgia. We must act.

PETER

A threat. Hell, the Germans are a threat. Drought. Bankruptcy is a threat. Damn it, Sister, you have to see the books to understand this? We need Eggerton's show, Claudia. We depend on it. Without it we go broke and I'll be tarred and feathered.

DR. HILL

Eggerton's show? But...Oh come come Peter. He can hold on to his snakeroot tonic and tap dance into town at a later time.

PETER

It's not quite so simple.

DR. HILL

You're more worried about that lowlife carnival barker than you are about the churches. And you accuse me of blasphemy. All it takes is one infected person, and we could lose the town. Thousands lost in Boston, thousands in Philadelphia.

PETER

Those are big cities! It's different there!

DR. HILL

It's not because of population, it's because of proximity. Their outbreaks started after Liberty Bond parades. And those were out of doors. You're talking about putting hundreds of people inside the municipal hall for weeks! It's reckless, and it's a death sentence for Norwich.

PETER

We have a contract with Eggerton. If we don't provide the municipal hall, we owe him eight hundred dollars in lost revenue.

DR. HILL

So, pay it.

PETER

Sister, we don't have it. Our pockets are empty.

DR. HILL

Could he reschedule?

PETER

Possibly. How long will the ban be necessary?

DR. HILL

As long as it takes, I suppose. Three weeks, a month.

PETER

A month? Jesus wept. Eggerton could be in Texas by then. But his advance man's already in town. I'll send word to the hotel, get him to come by my office.

DR. HILL

What if I spoke with him? Outlined the medical necessity? Surely you can't be penalized for that. We could meet with him here, in my consulting room this afternoon.

PETER

Fine. They don't strike me as the sort of people who let go of money willingly. I hope you're right about this, Sister.

He departs.

DR. HILL

I hope I'm not.

LIGHTS FADE.

Tooth & Consequences

TINY faces the audience.

TINY

Well now folks, I hope it's just me, but I am always getting sick, needin' to go see a doctor. Are y'all the same way? Well let's see, the last time I saw the doctor, I said, "Doc it's the strangest thing, whenever' time I drink coffee I get a sharp pain in my nose." He said, "Take the spoon outta the cup." Yessir, and then there was this other time I was back at the doctor and I said, "Doc, I think I'm fallin' apart. Everywhere I press it seems to hurt. It hurts when I press here, here, here, here, and here." And he said, "Well, that's because your finger's broken." Yessir, and there was this one other time, I said "Doctor, I'm just feelin' miserable, can you just help me out?" And he checked me over pretty good and he said, "Tiny, there are so many things wrong with you, I can't say what it is. But it's prob'ly 'cause of all that liquor." And I said, "That's alright Doc, I'll come back when you're sober."

Yessiree, there's something always ailin' me. In fact right now I've got a toothache in my tooth. I think I best go see a local doctor...

EGGERTON

That's me folks!

TINY

And see if he can help me out. Now you folks, come along!
(walks in to "Doctor's Office")
Hello, is there a doctor in this here office?

EGGERTON

Come right in sir, stand right there sir! What can I do for you today?

TINY

Well I got this tooth--

EGGERTON

Well let me guess, you're feelin' sick.
We'll patch you up in just a jif!
Let me take your pulse. Let me get the rate
Check, check the pulse- rate rate rate rate
Now keep that arm raised please! Next arm up!
For blood pressure, no keep that arm up for the blood pressure!
Next arm for the blood pressure.
Hold still please, you'll feel a squeeze!
Feel a squeeze squeeeeze squeeeeze, now put your head between your knees.
Very good, and up. Again, very good and up.

Oh my dear, oh me oh my, this temperature is much to high!
120 over 40 tells a mighty scary story!

TINY

That's my temperature? 120 over 40? That's weird.

EGGERTON

Say Ahhhhh....

TINY

Ahhhh...

They harmonize an "Aaaaah."

EGGERTON

I'll need to do some further guessing...

TINY

Guessing?

TESTING! scoping, stething, ah, yes, my stethoscope!
Now breeeeathe in!
And breeeeeathe out!
Just breathe normally, please!

(tickling)

Now breathe and breathe and breathe and breathe
I hope that's not your normal breath.

TINY

Well I'm afraid it is.

EGGERTON

Let's double-check your leg reflex, and flex. Flex. Flex!

TINY

Ow!

EGGERTON

Flex, flex! Keep those arms up, please!
Tell me if you're feeling this-

Kicks Tiny in groin

Close your eyes and make a fist.
You'll feel a little pinch but not to worry

Just tell me if the room gets blurry
This is called extracting plasma
Keeps you from contracting asthma
Stop fidgeting, good fellow!
Now step on the scale
My goodness, sir, you're five foot eight!
That's much too tall for what you've ate.
One little shot to inoculate.
I'm afraid we'll have to operate!
In short good sir you are presenting
Fearful symptoms unrelenting- Streptococcus, Viscous Mucous Rigor Mortis Typhus
Lupus!

TINY

That sounds bad.

EGGERTON

I have degrees! That should alleve
Your fears and worries, pains and peaves.
Now relax, hold that position. I'll need to make
A small incision
Tiny little surgery
Removing what has worried me!
I see it now! My diagnosis:
(pulls currency from TINY's pocket)
Greenbackus Superfluosis!

TINY

(as EGGERTON takes all his money)

Greenbackus Superfluosis! Holy cow! Get it out, Doc! Get it out!

EGGERTON

Success! Dear chap, you're good to go.
Just come back in a week or so.
And keep your eye out for the bill!
I've added on some pills that will
Fulfill your needs, I bet they wil
Just remember this simple schedule.
Two in the morning, three at noon,
Or four, depending on the moon.
Then half at dinner, twice at bed,
Now keep in mind what I just said!

EGGERTON exits.

TINY

Well now folks...Wasn't that just great? I got myself fixed up there real good-got my temperature took, got me some pills, even got my greenbackus extricated! I sure am glad I saw that doctor.

(stops. Winces.)

Ohhhhh, my tooth!

TINY exits.

GOLLY MOSES DR. EGGERTON

CLAUDIA'S OFFICE, later the same day. A desk and two chairs. PETER is looking out the window, concerned. DR. HILL is seated, looking at a stack of papers. Her medical bag is nearby.

PETER

Wonder what's keeping Eggerton's man. I said three o' clock.

DR. HILL

Rather rude to keep us waiting. I still have patients.

PETER

You're welcome to leave the folio here on your desk. If you need go out on your visits...your rounds... whathaveyou, I can send someone out for you if needed.

DR. HILL

No, this is the more pressing matter. Have you decided how to get word out to the town?

PETER

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Sister. I want to talk to this fella, see what we can work out first. It'll add a little honey to the castor oil if we can reschedule the show.

DR. HILL

You're hesitating.

PETER

I'm being careful.

DR. HILL

Well, it comes across as uncertainty.

PETER

It would really help if you could keep in mind the magnitude of what you're asking. We keep Norwich alive and presumably healthy. Wonderful. But how do we recover economically?

DR. HILL

We'll find a way, Peter. Have faith.

PETER

Oh God. Is it that bad? You only resort to faith when you don't have any decent answers.
(a knock)

Come in.

DR. EGGERTON enters, hat in hand.

EGGERTON

Mayor Stockman?

PETER

Golly Moses. Dr. Eggerton! I wasn't aware you were in town.

EGGERTON

The caravan's spending a few nights in Columbus, resting up before our engagement here. My man sent word of your situation, said you'd be at the Doctor's Office. I thought it best if I came to talk this over myself. Cut out the middleman, get right in the horse's mouth.

PETER

Well, I'm sorry we cut into your leisure time, I'm sure it's a rarity. Ah, Dr. Eggerton, this is my sister, Doctor Claudia Hill.

EGGERTON

Doctor Hill. A pleasure.

DR. HILL

Good afternoon.

PETER

Have a seat there, Dr. Eggerton.

DR. HILL

How much did your fellow clue you in on what we're facing in Solomon County?

EGGERTON

He told me there's a possibility of an Influenza outbreak in the area, that you're being forced to shut down all public gatherings.

PETER

That's the gist of it. But of course we became concerned about the clause in your contract-

DR. HILL

But surely, given the circumstances, you can understand why we have no choice.

EGGERTON

Now, hold on, folks. You got me all wrong. I didn't come here to quibble over money. That cancellation clause is just judicial jargon to keep the hall from being rented out from under us to one of our competitors. When a town is under siege by such a dreadful disease, discussions of dollars and cents would be obscene.

DR. HILL

Thank you for being so reasonable.

PETER

The town thanks you. This whole thing's just... well, it's a dark cloud.

EGGERTON

We've seen it all over the country. Dr. Hill, I am at your disposal as a physician. Free of charge.

DR. HILL

I'm sorry? Oh. No, that won't be necessary. I have everything under control.

PETER

Claudia.

EGGERTON

With all due respect, Doctor, that control won't last long. This is a dastardly disease. What we saw in Hartford made grown men in my company weep. But we've observed the proper precautions, and not one of us has taken ill. I'm happy to impart the lessons of our experience.

DR. HILL

Well, of course I'm interested to learn what you've done-

EGGERTON

When you saw the first patient with symptoms, did you check every member of the household?

DR. HILL

None of my patients have shown symptoms yet, but I'm monitoring closely.

EGGERTON

None of your patients are sick? Then who is treating the people infected locally?

DR. HILL

No one is infected, that we know of. That's what we're attempting to prevent.

EGGERTON

Ah. I see. But there are infected in Solomon County?

DR. HILL

That's what I'm attempting to prevent.

EGGERTON

I'm sorry, my man might have gotten his information a bit mixed up. You're saying there are no known cases of Influenza in this area?

DR. HILL

Not that we know of, yet-

EGGERTON

Mister Mayor, you must be so relieved.

DR. HILL

But nearly a thousand cases have been treated since the beginning of the week in Richmond County.

EGGERTON

You mean the Augusta cases?

DR. HILL

You've heard already.

EGGERTON

Yes, and I'm impressed you have. Augusta's a full day's travel from here.

DR. HILL

Well, we have the telegraph lines.

EGGERTON

Yes, but last I heard they weren't carrying infection. Dr. Hill, you'll be pleased to know I have some fine colleagues, old friends who are excellent physicians, at Camp Hancock. They have assured me the cases are entirely quarantined there, and it has not spread to the civilian population.

DR. HILL

I know that, but-

PETER

Wait, you knew that? You never mentioned it was all on the military base.

DR. HILL

That's where it starts, Peter. And then it spreads.

EGGERTON

After the incidents in Kansas and Virginia, they've become much more adept at identifying the symptoms in soldiers coming home from the front. While they have not been able to eradicate it entirely, they are learning how to stop the spread, praise God.

PETER

I see.

DR. HILL

All it takes is one person, Mister Eggerton. A single cough in a crowd could spread infection. That is the nature of contagious disease.

EGGERTON

But the Red Cross has set out specific guidelines- If we wash our hands, rinse our handkerchiefs regularly, get plenty of rest...

DR. HILL

I think you are dangerously in error, Mister Eggerton.

EGGERTON

I understand, you see the word "Georgia," it causes alarm. But there have already been cases in Alabama and Florida, which are geographically closer to Norwich. Why didn't you shut down the town for those cases, Doctor?

DR. HILL

There is a documented...documented Southward progression. Towards us.

EGGERTON

Mayor Stockman, your sister is a fine, concerned physician, but she has not faced this disease personally, and I sincerely hope she never does. Frankly, I think this might be a big tempest in a teapot.

PETER

Claudia, I'm inclined to agree. Now that I've heard the parts you left out of your report.

DR. HILL

I didn't leave them out, Peter! They were irrelevant!

EGGERTON

You've prepared a report? Might I see it?

PETER

(going to his desk)

I don't see why not.

DR. HILL

That was for your review only, Peter.

EGGERTON

I merely wish to better understand your position, Doctor. I'm still more than willing to provide you with assistance. I've seen this disease. Treated it, first-hand.

DR. HILL

Treated it with what? Snake root tonic? Grain alcohol?

PETER

Claudia, that is quite enough.

DR. HILL

He's a swindler, Peter!

EGGERTON

My methods have been employed for centuries longer than yours.

DR. HILL

I agree, your methods are medieval. Do you endorse bloodletting as well? Leeches?

PETER

Claudia! Stop it!

EGGERTON

Since you mentioned it, leeches actually have their place.

DR. HILL

You would know a good bloodsucker, I'm sure.

PETER

I will carefully consider both of your points.

DR. HILL

Peter, don't fall for this hogwash!

PETER

Claudia! The decision is mine to make!

EGGERTON

Absolutely, Mr. Mayor. I know you'll do what's best. But given that there is no immediate threat to the public health, I'm sure you can see why I cannot personally endorse the closing of my show. My darned lawyers will compel you to honor that eight hundred dollar fee for cancelling.

DR. HILL

You see? All about money!

EGGERTON

We cannot allow one woman's hysteria to stand in the way of reason.

DR. HILL

Hysteria!

EGGERTON

Forgive me. Excessive caution. I'll be at the hotel, Mr. Mayor. Take your time. Dr. Hill, I look forward to reviewing your report. Good afternoon.

EGGERTON exits.

RE-RHYTHMIFICATION

EGGERTON

Thank you to Lester Pomfrey and his exotic birds! Those fine feathered creatures just might be the cleverest members of our company! Of course, there's no shortage of cleverness in this room. As I look out among the crowd, I can see y'all have remarkably intelligent faces. No, no, I mean it sincerely. I was in South Carolina last month and they didn't look half so smart as y'all. So I know you can follow the logic of how all this works.

You see, disease of every character, except that which may be induced by poison, or by accident of body and limb, originates in a de-rhythmification of the circulation of the body's corporeal electricity. As we saw earlier with Legs, ionic irregularities or disturbances will interrupt your natural bodily rhythm, which in turn can cause a whole host of problems. Our remedies re-ionize the animalecules in your blood. This effectively re-rhythmifies your animalecules. Now let me say that a little more plain: If you are sick, your blood is out of rhythm. That's the closest we can come to-

CHIEF TUK TUK

(entering)

Hamma noo fay. Mah-shteh oh-kee-ya-no.

EGGERTON

Excuse me, folks.

(to Tuk Tuk)

Whoo-oh-manhay. Pahsh Tay. Ee-yell-ah-oh?

Chief tuk tuk

Mah-shteh Ee-yell-ah-oh!

EGGERTON

Thank you. The chief was just reminding me that, among his people, the very word for “illness” or “pain” literally means “out-of-rhythm.”

And how, you might ask, can we re-rhyth-mify? There are several natural substances, substances that exist in Nature, which can align and charge animalcules. We put not just one, not just two, but seven of these substances together in patented formulas. Our soap does it for you topically, our tonic, systemically. Again in speakin’ plain: our soap’ll help your skin, our elixir’ll help your body.

Now from your faces I can see what you’re thinking. Yep. It’s clear as day what is running through your minds: “How would I know if my skin suffers from animalecular de-rhythmification?”

Well, it couldn’t be simpler. Ladies and children, avert your eyes! Chief Tuk Tuk, bring on the specimens!

EGGERTON exits.

The show must go on

The newspaper office, later that afternoon.

COLQUITT is at his desk. EGGERTON enters.

EGGERTON

Mr. Colquitt?

COLQUITT

Yes?

(He looks up.)

Oh! Doctor Eggerton.

COLQUITT jumps to his feet, offering his hand.

EGGERTON

My reputation precedes me.

COLQUITT

My parents and I've been to your show many times over the years. Always have a right fine time. My father particularly enjoys the dog act.

EGGERTON

Ah, yes. Everyone loves the Contessa.

COLQUITT

And I've spent hours laying out your advertisements for the paper. I'd know your face anywhere.

EGGERTON

You know, that likeness was crafted by the same engraver who put Jefferson Davis on the Confederate dollar.

COLQUITT

You don't say.

EGGERTON

I hear you're the man in charge now. Glad to hear you kept it a family operation.

COLQUITT

Editor, reporter, typesetter. I'm the fella to see.

EGGERTON

We'll need to craft a possible alternative advertisement for this week's issue. Had a meeting today with Mayor Stockman, and it appears some changes in the copy might be necessary.

COLQUITT

Yes. I heard a little something about that. The concern over Spanish Flu.

EGGERTON

The eyes and ears of the town. Your Daddy taught you well.

COLQUITT

So we'll be rescheduling your show?

EGGERTON

Well, "The show must go on," as we say in show business. If we don't play, we don't eat. But as luck would have it, I've made arrangements with the good people of Valdosta to relocate there.

COLQUITT

Valdosta's less than thirty miles down the road.

EGGERTON

It is. So it won't be hard for folks from 'round here to make it over. I hope you and your parents will join us again. Perhaps in a year or two we'll come back to Norwich.

COLQUITT

Wait--So, the mayor's decided to ban public gatherings?

EGGERTON

It's a distinct possibility. A concern for the public health, from your town doctor.

COLQUITT

Dr. Hill is a fine physician.

EGGERTON

She's an educated and articulate woman. Advocates the most extreme route- closing down Norwich altogether.

COLQUITT

I'm sure she would only request it as a matter of last resort.

EGGERTON

As it should be. I took a gander at the report Dr. Hill submitted for the mayor's review, with permission of course. Her interpretation of the situation is, if I may be frank, somewhat alarmist. The Augusta patients are entirely confined to the military base.

COLQUITT

Really?

EGGERTON

I've encountered this many times. I admire the local doctors for thinking of their patients first. But that's precisely the reason physicians do not set public policy- they fail to see the big picture.

COLQUITT

But don't you think the rate of spread in Georgia since Monday supports the doctor's position?

EGGERTON

Spread to some doesn't mean spread to all, Mr. Colquitt. Life does not stop. Those sick soldiers are literally confined in a fort. Military bases in Augusta are a far cry from your municipal building.

COLQUITT

In that case, why not just postpone a few days and see how this unfolds? You're probably right- this whole mess'll blow over soon.

EGGERTON

Mr. Colquitt, what happens if some adorable moppet gets the sniffles the day before we open? A spinster has a headache? Will we be shut down again? Reckless overcaution is the enemy of commerce. I cannot commit my company financially to a town with a history of unpredictable behavior. Would you?

COLQUITT

My understanding is that you cannot be too cautious with an illness like this.

EGGERTON

Nor can you pass up valuable opportunities. I'm sure you're aware not everyone in rural areas reads the newspaper, or has the ability to do so. We're a tremendous resource for getting the word out. About appropriate precautionary measures.

(Producing an envelope)

But, in the event the town chooses to err on the side of caution, I've prepared all the information you'll need to create an alternative advertisement. I suppose if there's good to be found in all of this, it's for the people of Valdosta. Their hotels, restaurants. An unexpected windfall for them.

COLQUITT

You're set on this?

EGGERTON

Mr. Colquitt, you needn't worry about yourself. My man'll come by weekly to set up advertisements for the Valdosta show. We have a loyal following here in Solomon County and I want to accommodate them.

COLQUITT

It's near 25 miles to Valdosta.

EGGERTON

Oh we have people travel much further. I'm sure you know that. Now, give my best to your Daddy, Mr. Colquitt.

EGGERTON exits.

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ

TINY and EGGERTON enter.

TINY

Lordy, lordy, lordy. Butter my biscuits! Would you look at that?!?

EGGERTON

Now Tiny don't you remember what I told you just the other night?

TINY

Doc, you've always been such a good friend to me. You said to me some words the other night that I will never forget... What were they again?

EGGERTON

Tiny, I let you in on a little motto that's served me well... I said-

(sings)

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
JUST CAUSE YOU SEEN IT IN BLACK AND WHITE PRINT
THAT DON'T MAKE IT BIBLE, OR HOLY WRIT.

TINY

That's right!

EGGERTON & TINY

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
JUST CAUSE YOU SEEN IT IN BLACK AND WHITE PRINT
THAT

TINY

Doc, I don't reckon I'll ever make it to Alabama.

EGGERTON

Tiny, I thought you went to Alabama just last week.

TINY

Well, I tell ya, I tried to, but right before I got there I saw a sign that made me turn around.

EGGERTON

What did the sign say Tiny?

TINY

It said "Alabama Left."

EGGERTON & TINY

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
JUST CAUSE YOU SEEN IT IN BLACK AND WHITE PRINT

TINY

Doc, did I tell ya my sister and her husband are havin' their fifth kid?

EGGERTON

Well, that is a blessing.

TINY

Yes sir, and this one's gonna be Chinese.

EGGERTON

How is that possible, Tiny? Neither one of them's Chinese.

TINY

But I read in the paper one outta every five babies is Chinese.

EGGERTON & TINY

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
JUST CAUSE YOU SEEN IT IN BLACK AND WHITE PRINT
THAT DON'T MAKE IT BIBLE, OR HOLY WRIT.

TINY

Doc, I reckon I'll never go back to the theater again.

EGGERTON

But Tiny, you love going to the theater.

TINY

But last time I went, I was bored stiff and I just about froze to death.

EGGERTON

What was the show called?

TINY

The marquee said it was called "Closed for Winter."

EGGERTON & TINY

YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ
YOU CAN'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ

JUST CAUSE YOU SEEN IT IN BLACK AND WHITE PRINT
THAT DON'T MAKE IT BIBLE, OR HOOOOOLY WRIIIIIIIT.

EGGERTON and TINY exit. TUK TUK enters.

EGGERTON

Yes indeed. Thank you, Tiny! Well, folks, we're gonna take a break for just a few minutes, while we get things set up for the ever-popular children's pie eating contest!

(TUK TUK is excited)

What's that Chief?

(an exchange)

Oh, no, Chief! They're not in the pie!

(TUK TUK is disappointed)

That rascally railhopper! He's still learnin', folks. So feel free to stretch your legs a bit, and we'll be back right soon with more amusements, wonders, and information. We'll see you real soon.

End of Act One.

THE MORNING AFTER

Legs enters. He begins a soft-shoe, light and pleasant at first, but building in intensity. It finishes as an aggressive flurry of motion- like a telegraph gone mad.

Newspaper office, the following morning.
COLQUITT is at his desk. DR. HILL enters, newspaper in hand, enraged.

DR. HILL

Damn you, Ben, what have you done?

COLQUITT

I did my job, Claudia. I presented both sides of the story.

DR. HILL

You made me out to be some madwoman predicting the end of the world!

COLQUITT

I used quotes from your own report! The one we agreed to publish!

DR. HILL

But Eggerton is presented as an equally qualified authority! The man is not a physician-you've said as much yourself.

COLQUITT

It's not just Eggerton who disagrees, you know. The Public Health Service issued a report indicating quarantine is not necessary in all cases.

DR. HILL

The PHS puts out conflicting reports every day. Apparently they're trying to cure the flu by smothering it with paper.

COLQUITT

You think you know better than the Public Health Service?

DR. HILL

I don't! They don't know how to treat this, and neither do I. This disease will come, when it does, people are going to die. All I can do is try to stop the spread!

COLQUITT

And shutting Eggerton down won't stop it! He's gonna move the show to Valdosta. Everyone from Solomon County will follow him there and bring the disease home. The only thing your idea accomplishes is bankrupting Norwich! It's not worth sacrificing our welfare because of some sick soldiers two hundred miles away!

DR. HILL

It's not just soldiers anymore, Ben! As of this morning, it's in Evans, Stapleton, and Paramore Hill.

COLQUITT

I didn't have that information when I went to press.

DR. HILL

You didn't need it. You had my word.

COLQUITT

I did my job here, Claudia. I stand by that story.

DR. HILL

Don't you see, if you hadn't taken Eggerton's wagonload of manure and presented it as fact, if you'd honored your promise to present these people with what they need to know to stay alive, we wouldn't have to worry about them following him to Valdosta like the Pied Piper in a top hat. If this show goes on, you are complicit in their deaths.

COLQUITT

Listen to yourself. You wonder why people would call you a hysteric.

DR. HILL

I may well be! I'm trying to save a town that doesn't want to be saved!

COLQUITT

Maybe you need to stop acting like the "savior" of the town, start acting like you're a part of it! Did you know that Wilson's already in foreclosure and Sam Quigley's not far behind. And maybe you don't give a damn what men like pastor Talbot or Mayor Stockman or..or..my pa have to say-- but I do! Now, we've made your position perfectly clear; hell, I put it on my front page. But if you're not willing to budge an inch-- to even consider alternatives-- then folks are gonna dismiss you, Claudia. And...and...

DR. HILL

I understand, Ben. You have a future here to consider.

(a slow realization)

And I don't. Not anymore.

COLQUITT

That's not true. This is not a personal betrayal. It's for the good of the town.

DR. HILL

Perhaps you're right.

(She takes his face)

Go home to your parents, Ben. And if you're truly concerned for their welfare, stay there.

She exits, leaving him alone. He exits.

FRANKIE & JOHNNY & LETTERS

Eggerton enters with Tuk Tuk

EGGERTON

The Amazing Herman! Miraculous! Chief did you see that? Three barrels! Over his head! A near perfect corpus. Strongest strongman in the Americas. Maybe this hemisphere. Hell of Herman's muscles got muscles. You know, I may not look like Herman, but I betchya I'm that strong. Chief get a load of this:

Tries to lift chair. With great pomp and circumstance he tries and fails. Chief Tuk Tuk picks it up and moves it without incident. Places it center for Frankie and Johnny.

EGGERTON

How does the chief do it? And at his age? Must be those Roots, Barks, and Herbs...

TINY

Well now folks, we're almost at the part of the program you've been waiting for. But not quite yet, I'd like to sing you another song. This one's about sweet sweet love.

TINY sings.

Frankie and Johnny were lovers
Oh Lordy, how they could love
Swore to be true to each other
Just as true as the stars above
He was her man, he wouldn't do her wrong
Well, Frankie went down to the corner
Just for a bucket of beer
She said "Hey Mr. Bartender,
Has my Johnny man been here?
He is my man, He wouldn't do me wrong."
(Then the bartender say)
"Well, I don't want to cause trouble.
But I won't tell you no lies.
I seen your man about an hour ago
With a girl named Nellie Bly.
He was your man,
But he's doing you wrong."
Come on in Legs!

LEGS enters, dancing.

Frankie went lookin for Johnny
She wasn't out lookin for fun
In her ever lovin' hand she had Johnny's shooting gun
He was her man, but he doing her wrong.
Johnny saw Frankie a'comin'
Out the backdoor he did run

Legs make SFX

Frankie took aim with her pistol and the gun went...

LEGS makes the percussive sounds: bang bang
bang.

She shot her man
He was doing her wrong
The sheriff arrested poor Frankie
Took her to jail the same day
Put her in a dungeon cell and then he threw the keys away

She shot her man.
He was doing her wrong.

EGGERTON faces his audience.

EGGERTON

Legs and Tiny everybody! Well, I'll tell ya, folks, if you're carryin' on like ol' Johnny did, there's not much I can do to help ya out. But if it's your health that's troubling you, you have come to the right place. Facts and figures just can't compare to the testimonials of hardworking Christian folk like yourselves.

EGGERTON produces a letter.

EGGERTON

I've got a letter here from a Mrs. Millicent McCurlie of Musselfork, Missoura. She writes, "Dear Doctor Eggerton. My husband Rufus and I attended your show, and had a marvelous time. Rufus particularly enjoyed the Contessa. For years, I have suffered from stomach pains after every meal, and nothing seemed to remedy it. You explained stomach pains might be caused by derhythmified Bililary Integuments. (They often are, it's true.) I took your tonic as directed for two weeks, and have been free from pain ever since. God bless you, Doctor Eggerton."

Folks, there's a lot of you out there tonight just like Millicent, who've been going through life as best you can, suffering from maladies that you've been told you can do nothing about. Your body's out of rhythm, which can lead to a whole host of serious diseases. There is no need to suffer any longer! You remember when I asked you to think like doctors? As the Good Book tells us, "Physician, heal yourself." The first step on the road back to health is isolating your symptoms, identifying the causal ionic irregularities! Coming up real soon, you're gonna have the chance to get your hands our limited supply of remarkable remedies, developed using time-tested methods and up-to-the-minute technology! You can be fit as a fiddle once more, just like Millicent McCurlie of Musselfork, Missoura!

He exits.

Peter's compromise

DR. HILL is at her desk. ROY enters and hands her the mail. She looks through the stack and opens one.

DR. HILL

Here's what they did in Quitman Roy:

ROY

I ain't never been to Quitman Dr. Hill.

DR. HILL

“No public gatherings in churches or the court house or city houses for any purpose. No social gatherings of any kind within the city limits. All places of business shall be thoroughly ventilated People shall sneeze and cough in their handkerchiefs All residents will be issued a facemask.”

ROY

The mask, it's comfortable to wear Dr. Hill?

DR. HILL

Of course. It just goes over the mouth and nose.

ROY

Hmmm. Any more deliveries, Doctor?

DR. HILL

No. What would be the use anyway? You can lead a horse to water...

ROY

I'm sorry, ma'am?

DR. HILL

Roy, are you and Sarah planning to attend Dr. Eggerton's show again this year?

ROY

Wednesday afternoon next. Like I said, we always go.

DR. HILL

Of course. Roy. Would you do me a favor and just skip it this year. I'll pay you for the day on Wednesday. Take Sarah on a picnic.

ROY

That's right generous of you. Right generous. But I reckon I can't take your money if I ain't workin'. And Sarah, she do love the show.

(he registers Dr. Hill's expression)

You really think the flu's comin', Doctor?

DR. HILL

I do.

ROY

And if it don't come to here to Norwich?

DR. HILL

Then we should count ourselves among the blessed few.

ROY

Sorry, Doctor. What I mean is, what happens to all of us if we shut everything down? Sarah'd lose her job for sure. Hotels don't need maids when there's no guests.

DR. HILL

So Sarah'd lose her job? It's not the end of the world.

ROY

(continuing)

And maybe I still work some for you, but most of my keep comes from workin' the train depot. After harvest's done lots of us get our work in October on account the people comin' to the Hall. And Dr. Eggerton, he himself make a weekly pickup and pay folks pretty good to help load it down to Mr. Lamar's where they put up.

DR. HILL

(sighs)

I forgot you help them out on occasion. You must take my word Roy, the situation will be much worse if we don't take measures to protect ourselves.

ROY

Dr. Eggerton a doctor too, ain't he Dr. Hill? He don't seem worried bout the flu at all. He never seem to worry much at all. Nah, only one time I ever seen him get bent out of shape bout anything...

PETER enters.

PETER

Like a fool I went by your house first. Your girl was still in her bedclothes. Don't fret, I told her that was not likely to be your preference at nine in the morning. Gave her that stern look Daddy used to do. You remember the one.

DR. HILL

Is it the one I'm giving you now?

PETER

That would be the one.

DR. HILL

I'm sure by now you've seen the paper.

PETER

My decision was already made before the paper arrived.

(to ROY)

Would you excuse us...

DR. HILL

Roy. There's a crate of bottles in the infirmary. Would you mind-

ROY

Yes, Doctor. Mister Mayor.

ROY exits.

DR. HILL

Well. Let's have it. You think I'm a lunatic as well?

PETER

Sister, you're the wisest woman I know. I trust your mind better than my own.

DR. HILL

Good. Then trust me now.

PETER

I do. That's why I am putting out a directive regarding the public health, encouraging every citizen to exercise extreme caution- And there are measures which have proven successful in communities up North-

DR. HILL

From a list provided by Eggerton?

PETER

Damn it, Sister, give me a little credit. You're not the only one who went to college, I don't need to have every bit of information spoonfed!

DR. HILL

I apologize. Truly. What precautions are you encouraging in your directive?

PETER

According to the wire I got from a Doctor Earl Bishop in Raleigh- you heard of him?

DR. HILL

No.

PETER

You know what the biggest enemy he faced was? Fear. Pure and simple. People talking about symptoms, spreading rumors, overreacting to the slightest sneeze. So he set about calming folks down with a pamphlet he authored, detailing the realities of the situation. Doctor Bishop wired me his points, and I have prepared my own document.

DR. HILL

And what were the good doctor's points?

PETER

Well, they're mine now. Resolution for the Public Health, City of Norwich, County of Solomon, State of Georgia. Whereas, concerns have been raised in the city of Norwich regarding the potential grievous threat of Influenza, the Office of Mayor sees fit to put forth the following obligations for the sake of the public welfare. One. Do not allow fear and imagination to get a hold on you. They are more fatal than the real thing. Two. Be prudent in examining your own symptoms. Two sneezes do not a case of Influenza make. Three. Do not gossip about others reported to have contracted Influenza, or discuss your own perceived symptoms. Four. Do not give way to excesses of any kind; moderation in all things is essential to health. It continues in this vein.

DR. HILL

Peter. Have you sent this out?

PETER

Oh, yes. Door to door, as we speak.

DR. HILL

So. You won't be shutting down public gatherings?

PETER

This resolution is exhaustively researched, printed by Ben Colquitt at taxpayers' expense. It is a fine compromise.

DR. HILL

There's no compromise here!

PETER

There never is with you! That's why people don't want to listen! But they do listen to me. Had you heard to my directive in its entirety, I presented options. Doctor Bishop found great success with the use of cloth masks, I've asked Betsy to round up the women from the church to make a few. I also point out, as you specified, that close proximity to known infected should be avoided. If they want to stay home, they can. They can take the information and decide for themselves.

DR. HILL

Peter, being a leader means making the hard decisions. Sometimes they shouldn't decide for themselves. People are terrified of change and despise inconvenience.

PETER

I have a little more faith in them than that.

DR. HILL

Then you're a damn fool. The majority of these people will want the show to go on because they like it! Sometimes you simply have to tell them what is right!

PETER

Jesus, Claudia, it doesn't matter! The city treasury can't pay him off!

DR. HILL

I could. The house is paid for. It's worth four thousand, I have no use for it anyway. If you could loan me the money against the house, we can pay him off today.

PETER

Paying Eggerton off won't solve anything! You run him out of town, then are you gonna pay the Wilsons for the lost hotel guests, or Sam Quigley for the meals he doesn't sell at the restaurant? You can't fix everything, Claudia. You do not always know better than the entire town, and neither did Joseph!

DR. HILL

Joseph and I gave our entire careers to Norwich! I didn't have to move back here-

PETER

No, Sister, you didn't! And you can leave right now if you want!

DR. HILL

You'd be much happier if I did!

PETER

Why stay? Joseph's gone. You think Norwich is full of imbeciles. The only people you take any personal interest in are your colored errand boy and a young man who's about to be married! You barely deign to visit the home your husband built for you, living here like a vagabond-

DR. HILL

What would you have me do at the house? Live like some lonely childless widow, come over to Sunday dinner with you and Betsy? I am the doctor for the entire county. I have a purpose here. Goddamn you, Peter, you've stripped me of my credibility and taken away the only thing I have!

PETER

That is quite enough of that, baby sister! You can sit here in your doldrums if you like, or you can act like a physician and deal with the facts. If Eggerton goes to Valdosta, all is lost. The show stays. You did not get what you wanted. You might as well start figuring out what you're going to do next.

DR. HILL

Very well. You win, Peter.

PETER

It was never a contest, Claudia.

(heading for the door)

I gotta get over to Eggerton's hotel, get him caught up.

DR. HILL

He doesn't know?

PETER

No, Sister. I told you first.

DR. HILL

Let me go. I'll tell him.

PETER

There's already enough bad blood between you two-

DR. HILL

I know. But if this is where things stand, I have to find a way to make it work. Eggerton's my best chance for getting the right information out to the community. You raise some excellent points in your directive, I just want to make sure the message he's giving is consistent.

PETER

Of course. Thank you, Sister. If there's anything else you need from me, you only have to ask.

PETER exits. DR. HILL is left alone.

DR. HILL

Roy?

(ROY enters)

How much of that did you hear?

ROY
(Crosses to daily deliveries)

No more than usual.

DR. HILL

Meaning all of it?

ROY

Yes, Doctor. I reckon so.

DR. HILL

Your discretion is appreciated.

ROY

Yes ma'am.

(begins to stack boxes)

You'd really pay your own money just to keep Dr. Eggerton out of town?

DR. HILL

Happily.

ROY

But...but you know they won't take him in Valdosta right? They got run out of town there.

DR. HILL

Hmmm?

ROY

Yes ma'am. Dr. Eggerton, he's like you, gets hisself a few wires every day. And yesterday, just outside the wire office and next to Mr. Quigley's, Eggerton was cussing to one of his gang. See he read a wire says they ain't welcome anywhere in Solomo County. Not just him too. All medicine shows. Guess some a'them doctors puttin' hooch in they tonics.

DR. HILL

(to herself)

So his Valdosta threat...

ROY

And you know my cousins live in Valdosta. They say they'll miss the work...and more'n that they'll miss the entertainment.

DR. HILL

I'll bet they will.

ROY exits.

A WORD OF WARNING

EGGERTON faces his audience.

EGGERTON

My friends, I know most of you think to yourselves, “I get by, I can putter through a day without much trouble.” And because of that, you came in here tonight thinking you were reasonably healthy.

However...

After putting some thought into cataloguing and isolating your symptoms, have you found yourself out of rhythm? Are you experiencing any of the urgent internal indicators?

Anyone present suffering from dry, itchy skin? That could lead to Osteomalacia Pemphigus. Commonly treated with amputation.

Ladies? Ever experience inexplicable changes in your emotions, irrational thought, accompanied by abdominal pains? Husbands, have you observed this? Perhaps with alarming regularity? It could be a slow, irretrievable descent into madness resulting from Gynomarasmus Atrophy!

Ever have trouble waking up in the morning? It’s very likely Varioloid Foramen Ovalae. It’ll get harder and harder to rise from bed, until one day... you just don’t wake up.

Headaches! Ever have ‘em? Might be Hydracephalus! That means your brain could literally burst in your head. And the most dangerous headaches are the mild ones, because you’re losing the ability to feel pain.

I don’t mean to scare you.

But, thank the good Lord, there is something you can do! We are gonna get you back in rhythm! I’ve got testimonials from around this great land! We’ve provided relief from Malacia in Memphis! Beriberi in Birmingham! Shigellosis in Shreveport! Nephria in Knoxville! Jaundice in Jackson! Cured!

The next testimonial can be from you! You needn’t suffer anymore, my friends! Help has arrived!

He exits, triumphant.

Showdown

The town hall. EGGERTON rehearses You Can’t Believe Everything You Read with the Cast Members. Tuk Tuk is not in costume, rather he looks like “Gus McFadden.”

EGGERTON

Take this.

He hands off jacket to Tiny. Then speaks to Gus giving staging directions.

Right there, Gus. That's where you come in.

GUS

With that duck walk or the swingin arms?

EGGERTON

Your choice.

A knock at the door.

EGGERTON

Door's open.

DR. HILL enters.

DR. HILL

Eggerton.

EGGERTON

Oh! Doctor Hill. Would you excuse me fellas? An unexpected pleasure. Forgive my attire, I wasn't expecting company.

DR. HILL

It's quite alright. I haven't much time.

EGGERTON

Come to take me up on my offer of professional assistance?

DR. HILL

Why, yes. I have.

EGGERTON

I'm honored. Boiled peanut?

DR. HILL

No thank you. I'm told you're a man who values pure logic.

EGGERTON

Invariably. Don't you?

DR. HILL

Absolutely. In light of that, Doctor Eggerton, these are the facts. There have been at least a hundred deaths from influenza in Georgia since Monday. Infected patients are now in the thousands. There's word it's reached Atlanta. As a dedicated physician, I'm sure you can respect the position we are in. The persistent spread of the disease has forced the mayor to shut down all public gatherings.

EGGERTON

These are delicious. Shutting it all down, is he?

DR. HILL

I acknowledge your darned lawyers might not respond favorably to the facts at hand-
(handing him a check)

So I've brought you a check for eight hundred dollars, as stipulated in your contract. That should satisfy them. We wish you all the best.

EGGERTON

Doctor Hill. This is a personal check.

DR. HILL

The city treasury lacked the funds. I was in a position to provide assistance.

EGGERTON

I believe I should speak with the mayor about this.

DR. HILL

Whatever for? You've got your money. If you pack up now, you and your company can be ready in Valdosta by nightfall.

EGGERTON

Now, Doc, me and my crew have been in this community for more than a decade. Most medicine shows, those fellers are so crooked they can hide behind a corkscrew. But we genuinely care about these fine people- we're a part of their lives. And if they are in peril, by God, we want to help however we can.

DR. HILL

Good. Leave.

EGGERTON

An what will you do when they follow me to Valdosta? Or attend the performance of one of my less-principled competitors?

DR. HILL

I don't believe they will. When they comprehend the gravity of the situation, they will stay home.

EGGERTON

Isolation makes new information very difficult to disseminate. I would encourage you to utilize the opportunity my show presents.

DR. HILL

In what way?

EGGERTON

Influenza is the devil, and these days effective therapies are scarce as hen's teeth. The most powerful weapon in our arsenal?

(he reaches in his bag, producing a face mask)

It's our ionized face mask. Created for us by the Farnum company, we make them available for a nickel apiece.

DR. HILL

The Red Cross has been giving these away for free.

EGGERTON

Well, theirs are of variable quality, crafted by volunteers. These are top-drawer muslin, machine-stitched and treated with eucalyptus and menthol to clear the respiratory passageways.

DR. HILL

Like Vapo Rub.

EGGERTON

Well, the Chinese had been using the same techniques for centuries before Dr. Vick put a trademark on it. As I've said, there's much to be gained from the diligent study of ancient remedies.

DR. HILL

I'll give you credit. This is actually clever. Once you trim the fat, get to the meat of it.

EGGERTON

But Doctor Hill, the flash and dazzle is the meat of it.

DR. HILL

A perfumed cow pie is still shit.

EGGERTON

You are a pistol, Doctor. Let me put it to you this way. If you tell your patients washing their hands reduces the possibility of infection, how many of them actually do it?

But if I throw a wig on ol' Gus McFadden, stuff a few feathers in his outfit and call him an "injun" or a "celestial" or a "chinaman"... Get him to chant some mumbo jumbo--then I translate that they've got wash vigorously in order to "rhythmify their epidermis," they follow my instructions to the letter. I serve a distinct purpose, Doctor, and can be of great use to an open-minded medical professional.

DR. HILL

If I endorse your show continuing, I will require a few assurances.

EGGERTON

I am all ears.

DR. HILL

Every member of your audience is issued a face mask. Free of charge.

EGGERTON

A penny apiece, not free. The Farnum company must be paid, as well as my crew.

DR. HILL

If the audience has to pay, too many will turn the masks down.

EGGERTON

Then you pay for them. Shouldn't be any trouble. You just saved yourself eight hundred dollars. The masks would be a fraction of that amount.

DR. HILL

...Done. I'll also need address the audience from this stage.

EGGERTON

I will be delighted to impart your communicate personally.

DR. HILL

On this point there can be no compromise. You might be the authority on ancient remedies, but I am their physician. Before the show begins, let me speak to them directly.

EGGERTON

After, not before. For your sake. Anything you say will be forgotten as soon as the Contessa takes the stage with those damnable dogs. You can be the last word, and send them home with the information they need.

DR. HILL

I will defer to your wealth of experience in these matters.

(produces a sheet of paper)

If you'll just sign this amendment to your contract, guaranteeing my inclusion in the program... Wouldn't want you to have a change of heart at the last minute.

EGGERTON

With pleasure. You're a wise woman, Doctor Hill. I admire your willingness to adapt.

DR. HILL

If that's what it takes to serve this community.

An uncomfortable pause.

EGGERTON

Anything else, Doctor?

DR. HILL

The check.

EGGERTON

(handing it over)

Oh, ha ha, of course.

(as she heads for the door)

Doctor Hill?

DR. HILL

Yes?

EGGERTON

That check? Was it worth more than the paper it's printed on?

DR. HILL

Doctor Eggerton. That check was as authentic as your offer from Valdosta.

EGGERTON

You are a pistol. I'll need you to pay for those masks in cash.

She exits, leaving a bemused EGGERTON behind.

LOZENGES, TONIC, & SOAP, OH MY!

EGGERTON on stage, joined by TUK TUK, TINY, and LEGS.

EGGERTON

My friends, we thank you for the warm welcome! It certainly has been an extraordinary evening in Norwich. It's gone by so fast. Just the blink of an eye. But think about it;

you've seen so much, learned so much, EXPERIENCED so much in between now and when we honored that indefatigable steel driver, John Henry at the top of our show. I'm sure by this moment you are already feeling the benefits of your ionic-dipped face masks, elixir-dipped for your respiratory relief, provided exclusively for you this evening, entirely gratis (that's how the Ancient Romans said "free"). You've seen a whole barrel load of entertainment. I hope you relaxed and enjoyed yourselves. But there have been parts of the show where I asked you to sit up, pay attention, and think like scientists. By now, you have discerned the evils, the proven evils of corporeal de-rhythmification. And so at this moment, I am going to give to you the opportunity to purchase some of our miraculous re-rhythmifying products.

Tonight, tonight tonight we are making available some of Dr. Eggerton's patented Ionic lozenges. They're easy to digest, tasty to taste, and will thoroughly re-rhythmify de-ionized pulmonary, glottal, and mouthal regions in your body. Dr. Eggerton's patented lozenges!

(LEGS, TUK TUK, and TINY begin to dance.)

This astounding lozenge renews life force as it slides down your throat. It gives relief to rheumatism, backache, kidney, liver and bladder troubles, early decay, night losses, lack of nerve vigor, nervous debility, constipation, dyspnoea, underdevelopment, and lost vitality.

(LEGS, and TINY freeze. TUK TUK opens case)

That's right. Dr. Eggerton's patented ionic lozenges. A nickel apiece, or one dollar for a box of twenty! Get them here at immense discount. Oh Tiny Tiny hold on. He's so eager, ladies and gentleman, but we have more deals for these folks tonight!

Available this evening to the good people of Norwich: Dr. Eggerton's patented re-rhythmifying soap! As I mentioned earlier, the electro-power and hydraulic force of this soap could power a city block for a month, if properly broken down in a laboratory. Think what that kind of awesome energy will do for your epidermal skin rhythms! Dr. Eggerton's re-rhythmifying soap!

(LEGS, TUK TUK, and TINY begin to dance.)

This product cleans, of course it does! But it is far from an ordinary soap. The tingle you'll feel upon its application is the commencement of the ionization of your epidermal organ. Restoring this system to balance will yield benefits immediately, and is liable to have you feeling rejuvenated, rough-and-ready in seventy-two hours.

(LEGS, TUK, TUK, and TINY freeze.)

Dr. Eggerton's patented re-rhythmifying soap. Ten cents a bar or a box of ten for one dollar!

TUK TUK displays a bar of soap.

TiNY

Alright Doc, let's go! There's-

EGGERTON

Not just yet, Tiny. Now, my friends. Once every generation there comes a long a product so revolutionary, and yet so ancient, that humanity must stop and take stock. Utilizing the wisdom of our own Chief Tuk Tuk, we have created and patented a fabulous, fantastic formula. Dr. Eggerton's Miracle Elixir!

(TUK TUK displays the elixir)

One bottle fifty cents and two bottles for a dollar!

Neighbors-we only have a limited supply of this product due to the duration of our run and high demand in the Carolinas. You won't all be able to get a bottle. We simply haven't got them. Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. When I ring this bell, the sale will start.

When I ring it again, the sale will stop. Not another product sold. Have your dollars ready.

EGGERTON rings bell. The sales begin.

TINY

Don't rush. Don't rush. There's enough for everybody.

CHIEF TUK TUK

Maka chow clay nah waka loa!

They all go into audience.

TINY

Sold, Doc!

LeGS

Another one sold!

Tiny

Another one sold! They're selling like hotcakes over here!

EGGERTON

Remember, this product will cure:

Chills

Night Losses

Warts

Pimples

And

Tumors

Deafness

Cuts

Wounds

Sprains

Bruises,

Burns
Scalds

TINY

I got a double sale, Doc!

EGGERTON

No, Tiny! Only one bottle of this precious elixir to a person.

TINY

Can they also get soap then?

EGGERTON

Yes. Yes. They can buy a box of soap along with the elixir if they like!

As I was saying...

This elixir will cure

Bites of Dogs and other Animals

Stings of Insects and Reptiles

Sore and Bleeding Gums

Neuralgia

Diphtheria

Dyspepsia

Gastralgia

Catarrh

And Rheumatism

Biliousness

Nervousness

Wakefulness

And

Drowsiness

Dyspepsia

And Dropsy

Hay fever

Hemorrhoids

Headaches

Heartaches

Earaches

And

Toothache

And

Indigestion

Cardiac Palpitation

And

Digestional Constipation

Bowel Complaints
Liver complaints
Men's complaints
Women's complaints
And even
Kidney Complaints
Sour stomach
Stiff Joints
Contracted Cords and Muscles
Sore Throat
Quinsy
Croup,
Cramps
Claw
Fungus
Clots
Colic
Cholera Morbus
Laryngitis
Lame Back

And all manner of lumbago including advanced crepular lumbago.

Throughout the above, TINY, LEGS, and TUK
TUK are talking over Eggerton's list of
symptoms. They shout 'S-o-o-o-l-d!' or 'Another
bottle gone!' , 'More elixir, Doctor!' , etc.

And we're done, that is it!

TINY

Right over here we have another one.

EGGERTON

I'm sorry the bell has stopped ringing. Now folks, Fair is fair.

TINY

But just this one?

EGGERTON

No I cannot make an exception for that lovely lady, not even her. Because I'd have to sell one to everyone if I sold her a bottle.

TINY

Well I think other people back there wanted one.

EGGERTON

Please. Please. Folks you are making it tough on me. The only bottles I have left are the ones I have set aside for tomorrow night's show.

CHIEF TUK TUK

Mashtay poolanka lay lay. Kamonka loa hooshi mon lowbee.

EGGERTON

Noalby? Lowby? Cooktalay kay laylay benayg Ma'atlunooshkak. What's that Chief?

CHIEF TUK TUK

Mashtay poolanka. Gooby nookal Texas arank it no Nor. Itch.

EGGERTON

Well, this is unprecedented! The Chief has said, for the good people of Norwich, he's willing to stay up all night and make more for tomorrow. So I will resume the sales when the bell rings!

It will cure:

Chills

Night Losses

Warts

Pimples

And

Tumors

Deafness

Cuts

Wounds

Sprains

Bruises,

Burns

Scalds

Bites of Dogs and other Animals

Stings of Insects and Reptiles

Sore and Bleeding Gums

Neuralgia

Diphtheria

Dyspepsia

Gastralgia

Catarrh

And Rheumatism

Biliousness
Nervousness
Wakefulness
And
Drowsiness
Dyspepsia
And Dropsy
Hay fever
Hemorrhoids
Headaches
Heartaches
Earaches

TINY

All sold out, Doc!

TUK-TUK and LEGS indicate the same.

EGGERTON

We're sold out ladies and gentlemen, sold out entirely. Thank you so much, folks. It's always a pleasure being here in Norwich- tell your neighbors, friends, and relations to come by and see us, we'll be here through the end of the month! On behalf of myself, The Rerhymifiers, and the rest of the twenty-one person company of Dr. Eggerton's Miracle Medicine Show, good night, good health, and God bless.

(TUK TUK, TINY, and LEGS recede.)

Oh, wait. Wait. Sit back down. Please. Just a few more moments of your time. The show is not quite over yet. We have a local official who needs no introduction. She would like to make a few remarks about the public welfare. Please welcome Dr. Claudia Hill!

DR. HILL enters from the audience, and steps onto the stage.

DR. HILL

Thank you, Doctor Eggerton, for inviting me to join you this evening. Ladies and gentlemen. If you received the mayor's issuance regarding the public health, or saw today's paper, you are aware that Spanish Flu has come to Georgia, and the threat of this disease arriving in Solomon County is very real. It is proving fatal to young, otherwise healthy individuals. There is nothing....nothing anyone can do to cure the infected.

There are things we can do, however, to prepare ourselves. As you read in the mayor's issuance, moderation in all things is essential to health.

First and foremost: The flu masks you were issued this evening should be worn at all times outside of your home. They must be washed every day with boiling water and soap- Dr. Eggerton's soap will do just fine. Drink lots of water, and avoid touching your eyes, mouth, or nose.

And if you or any member of your household experiences a headache, sore muscles, a cough, a fever, please, please, stay home.

Taking these steps will... help. For the time being. As a... compromise. Moderation in all things essential to health.

(EGGERTON signals her time is up.)

But some of you will find compromise...inadequate...when it comes to the health of your families. So know this: Spanish Flu is unlike any other flu you've ever seen before. You'll start feeling tired, aches in your legs, neck, or back. Perhaps a mild headache or earache. And then you will cough. This cough will become increasingly persistent, because your lungs are filling with fluid, swelling. Within a few hours you will be gasping for air as your face turns blue, unable to cry out as you bleed profusely from your nose, ears, and mouth. After several days of excruciating pain, you will find the release of death. If by chance your life is spared, you will live to witness the deaths of your parents, your spouse, your children. Don't you see. It's happening just up the road, in towns like ours, and it will happen here. There is no drug, no elixir, no inoculation that can save you. Anyone who tells you otherwise is a liar, profiteering from pain and misery.

(with venom)

So, remember. Moderation in all things is essential to good health.

(EGGERTON clears his throat)

We must be bold. Even coming here, all together tonight is dangerous. We must band together, by breaking apart.

EGGERTON

We're out of time.

EGGERTON signals to TUK TUK, who guides her away.

DR. HILL

And please, please tell your kin and your friends who aren't here. They need to know. In this one moment trust me. This is my home. Help me save this town! I will continue to stand, alone if I must, and I will keep shouting that WE MUST NOT GATHER. I beg you. I BEG you. Please. Go HOME. STAY home. Stay. Home.

By now, EGGERTON has returned to center stage. TINY, LEGS, and TUK TUK are nearby and have escorted DR. HILL off to the side of the stage.

EGGERTON

Well, folks, there you are. One woman's valuable opinion. Our thanks to Mrs. Hill. I suppose for those of y'all who do decide to burrow in like possums, you'll require extra supplies of our lozenges, tonic, and that ionizing soap perfect for-

(he coughs)

'Scuse me. Perfect for cleaning those face masks. So fellas, what say we take a-

(Another cough. Several.)

A special exception for these fine people, and make our quality products availa-

EGGERTON launches into a fit of coughs.

TINY, TUK TUK, and LEGS subtly move away, watching him. DR. HILL instinctively steps forward, then stops. EGGERTON quickly recovers and looks at her. She looks at him, then the audience, wondering what will happen next.

BLACKOUT. End of Play.