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Get Flanagan: The Rise and Fall of the Federal Theatre Project

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GET FLANAGAN: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
The Department of Drama and Communications

by

Sean Michael Patterson

B.A. University of New Orleans, 1992

December 2004

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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to render theatrically the establishment and eventual dissolution of the Federal Theatre Project, from the point of view of its appointed director Hallie Flanagan. Drawn from a variety of historical sources, including subjective first-person accounts and objective transcripts of congressional investigation testimony, the play approximates the structure of the Living Newspaper, a style of presentation adopted by the Federal Theatre Project. This thesis also includes an appendix, which details my playwriting process for this particular play, from initial concept through to production.

**GET FLANAGAN:
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT**

**by
Sean Patterson**

**SIXTH DRAFT
15 November 2004**

SETTING AND STYLE OF THE PLAY

The events of the play take place between 1935 and 1939, but the action of the play takes place in a theatre. As much as possible should be done with light or the simplest scenic elements. With the exception of Flanagan herself, all roles could and should be doubled. Costumes should be simple but suggestive, and changes could take place on stage. An emphasis on theatricality is paramount. As much of the working machinery of the play as possible should be exposed. If available, projections should be used whenever possible. Scene titles may be incorporated at the director's discretion.

A NOTE ON THE SOURCES FOR THIS PLAY

Much of the material in this play is inspired by or drawn from Hallie Flanagan's first-person account of the Federal Theatre Project, *Arena: The Story of the Federal Theatre*, originally published in 1940, by Duell, Sloan and Pearce, of New York. Additional material is drawn from the transcripts of testimonies delivered before the Dies Committee of the House Un-American Activities Commission and from actual speeches made by individuals depicted in the play. Artistic liberty has been taken with this material.

**CHARACTERS
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT, 32nd President of the United States.

FRANK, a stage manager.

HERBIE, a technician.

ANNIE, assistant stage manager.

GEORGE, a director.

LEAR and LEAR'S WIFE, vaudevillians.

HALLIE FLANAGAN, director of the Vassar Experimental Theatre, and later, the Federal Theatre Project.

THREE STUDENTS at Vassar.

A SECRETARY at Vassar.

HARRY HOPKINS, director of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and later the Works Progress Administration.

JACOB BAKER, assistant to Harry Hopkins.

THREE PRODUCERS

ELMER RICE, independent producer and playwright.

MALVINA THOMPSON, personal assistant to Eleanor Roosevelt.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, First Lady of the United States.

NIKOLAI SOKOLOFF, director of the Federal Music Project.

HOLGER CAHILL, director of the Federal Art Project.

HENRY ALSBERG, director of the Federal Writers' Project.

A NEWSBOY

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST, publishing giant.

IOWANS, citizens of Iowa.

E. C. MABIE, professor at University of Iowa.

A DOORMAN at McLean Mansion, Federal Theatre Project headquarters.

SIDNEY HOWARD, **EVA LE GALIENNE**, & **LEE SHUBERT**, New York producers.

YOUNG PRODUCER

Various CITIZENS

CIVIL SERVANT, in the Works Progress Administration offices.

UNION LEADER

WORKERS' ALLIANCE LEADER

YOUNG ACTRESS

MUSSOLINI, an actor playing the character of Benito Mussolini.

SELASSIE, an actor playing the character of Haile Selassie.

ROSE MCCLENDON, an actress of color.

JOHN HOUSEMAN, theatrical producer.

ORSON WELLES, theatrical genius.

MACBETH, an actor of color playing Macbeth.

MAN, GROCERS, POWER BARON, characters in *Power*.

TELEGRAMS/REPORTERS/WHISPERS

OLIVE STANTON, a performer on relief.

MARC BLITZSTEIN, a composer.

A GUARD.

CONGRESSMAN MARTIN DIES, head of the committee investigating Communist activities.

EMMET LAVERY, an agent of the Federal Theatre Project.

CONGRESSMAN PARNELL THOMAS, reports to Martin Dies.

CONGRESSMAN JOE STARNES, report to Martin Dies.

HAZEL HUFFMAN, an employee of the Federal Theatre Project.

WALLACE STARK, an employee of the Federal Theatre Project.

ELLEN WOODWARD, an employee of the Federal Theatre Project.

ACT ONEPROLOGUE: A NEW DEAL

(Preset of a bare stage, with as much of the stage visible as possible. A single ghost light center, lit. The play begins with a BLACKOUT, including the ghost light. In the darkness, we hear a recorded VOICE.)

VOICE

Gentlemen and ladies of the 1932 Democratic National Convention, I present to you, your candidate and the next President of these United States, Mr. Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

(The voice of ROOSEVELT is heard.)

ROOSEVELT

My friends, I thank you for this honor. Let us resolve to resume this great country's uninterrupted march toward real progress. Out of every crisis, every tribulation, every disaster, mankind rises with some share of greater knowledge, of higher decency, of purer purpose. This is more than a political campaign; it is a call to arms. We will make this country solvent. We will win in this crusade to restore America to its own people. I pledge to you a New Deal for the American people.

(Applause, then silence. In the darkness the ghost light pops on.)

SCENE ONE: IT'S HAPPENING ALL OVER

(Slowly, lights fade up to reveal the stage space. FRANK, a stage manager, is heard giving actors calls offstage.)

FRANK

(Off)

One hour to places, please! One hour to places! Thank you!

(FRANK enters, holding a clipboard. HE comes downstage and speaks to a LIGHTING OPERATOR, HERBIE, whom we don't see because he's up in the lighting booth.)

FRANK (cont'd)

All right, Herbie. Can we run through these real quick? Gimme one.

(An isolated light appears, then dims.)

(MORE)

Good. Two? FRANK (cont' d)
(Another spot of light, appears and dims.)
 Three?
(Nothing.)
 Three, Herbie.
HERBIE
(Off, from overhead)
 I'm doin' it!
FRANK
 Well, great! Let me see it.
(The light doesn't come up.)
HERBIE
 I got nothin'.
FRANK
(Making a note on the clipboard, matter-of-fact)
 Then you need to change the lamp, Herb. Don't be a dunce.
HERBIE
(Off)
 I ain't a dunce, Frank! I know my job.
FRANK
 Good. Get it done.
HERBIE
 We got no bulbs.
FRANK
(Looking up)
 What?
HERBIE
 You heard me. And four's out, too.
FRANK
 Great.
(Suddenly, the ghost light flickers and then goes out.)
FRANK (cont' d)
 That can't be good.
(ANNIE, the A.S.M., female, young, plain - runs on, out of breath.)

Frank!

ANNIE

Whatsamatter, Annie? I got big problems.

FRANK

Well, here's another one. Lear just collapsed!

ANNIE

No.

FRANK

Doc's lookin' at him Cordelia says he ain't eaten in days.

ANNIE

What? Old fella like that! He's gotta eat! We all gotta eat.

FRANK

They say he can't afford it.

ANNIE

Not even crackers? Ketchup and water? Something?

FRANK

That's what they said.

ANNIE

Damn union. Supposed to make things better. How is it better if my actors can't eat?

(FRANK reaches into his pocket.
He pulls out a single quarter,
which he gives to ANNIE)

Here. All I got's two bits. Get him a sandwich. Something with meat.

(ANNIE runs off)

And be quick about it!

(To HERBIE)

All right, Herbie. Can we finish this?

FRANK

(Off)

You want the long story or the short?

FRANK

The short.

FRANK

(Off)

Everything's out.

FRANK
Ya kidding me, right?

HERBIE
They're dead, Frankie.

FRANK
Terrific.

(GEORGE the director enters, somber)

GEORGE
Frank.

FRANK
Herr Director! You picked a great night to show up. We got no lights and King Lear himself is sacked out with the faints.

GEORGE
(Persistent)
Frank.

FRANK
But you don't gotta worry about a thing. Annie's gettin' him a sandwich, and we'll have lights if I gotta stand out here with candles.

GEORGE
(Solemn)
Get the kids together, Frank. We're posting the close. Effective immediately.

(The slightest beat. FRANK knows this means he's now out of work, but he nevertheless tries to get back to it.)

FRANK
Nah, I can't do that. Union rules. Not before a show.

GEORGE
There is no show, Frank. That's it. We're done.

FRANK
But we go up in less than an hour.

GEORGE
Not tonight we don't. Tell 'em to take everything with 'em. We gotta padlock the doors. They ain't gettin' back in.

(GEORGE starts to exit)

George, wait.

FRANK

(GEORGE stops, but doesn't turn around.)

FRANK (cont'd)
(Slight smile. He knows the answer already.)
What about their final checks?

GEORGE
(Turning to STAGE MANAGER)
Hope they don't ask.

(FRANK nods, and he and GEORGE exit in opposite directions. ANNIE enters center and speaks to us.)

ANNIE
It didn't happen all at once, like a tornado whipping through a town, or a gigantic weight falling from the sky. This was different, like a virus. You'd hear about it first, maybe read it in the paper. Then it was a friend of a friend. Maybe a shop you'd been to a couple times. Then a neighbor. The places you passed everyday. Then your friend. Then your work. And that's where it got you. The Great Depression.

CHORUS
(In unison)
What's so great about it?

(A rimshot. ANNIE disappears. From out of the CHORUS comes an older actor who could be the fainting King LEAR.)

LEAR
You people nowadays, feh. What do you know from depression? You get depressed nowadays, you take a pill. Things might be tough, but there's ways around it. But then? Oy. Everywhere you went, everyone you knew. Your pants presser? Gone. Your shoe shine guy? Kaput. But it didn't make too much difference, because next thing you knew, you had to do it yourself.

(LEAR'S WIFE appears and joins him. She's older as well, his obvious match.)

LEAR'S WIFE
(Sarcastic)
Or you'd get your wife to do it. And maybe she worked, too. We used to tour forty, forty-five weeks a year.
(MORE)

LEAR'S WIFE (cont' d)

You think I had time for menial tasks?

(Beat, softer)

But now that I was home, what do you know? I had the time. And I was happy to do it. It was something to do.

LEAR

Nothing like it had ever happened before. It didn't happen in one day, but one day you woke up, and this Land of Plenty--

LEAR'S WIFE

--Was plenty of nothing.

(Lights out on LEAR and WIFE. Lights in a different area come up on HERBIE and FRANK.)

HERBIE

(To us)

I was pretty lucky. I mean, yeah, sure, I was working in the theatre. But I had a skill. I could work most anywhere. As long as they had 'lectricity, I could work. And even then, if there was no power, I could fix things.

FRANK

Management. Organizational skills. I even did some tech stuff when I was coming up. I wasn't helpless.

(Beat)

That's not fair. Nobody was helpless. But at least I had things I could do.

HERBIE

But what do you tell an actor? Talk about stuck. Most of 'em can't even find their light.

FRANK

(Reads from his clipboard)

The economy was in complete collapse. Fully one-third of the American workforce was out of work. Someone had to do something.

(Lights fade on FRANK and HERBIE.)

SCENE TWO: ACTION, AND ACTION NOW

(The VOICE speaks again in darkness.)

VOICE

Ladies and gentlemen, on this fourth day of March, 1933, I give you the 32nd President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

(Then the voice of ROOSEVELT again.)

ROOSEVELT

This nation asks for action, and action now. Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This great Nation will endure, revive and prosper. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

(During the speech, lights come up on THREE FEMALE STUDENTS who stand together, listening to the speech on a radio we don't see. At the end of the speech, there is thunderous applause. HALLIE FLANAGAN appears, a small, jaunty woman in her thirties, with a natural presence and power. She claps her hands for attention as she speaks to the STUDENTS.)

FLANAGAN

Radio off, ladies. You're supposed to be warming up!

(The STUDENTS take positions and begin stretching exercises as FLANAGAN looks them over.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

I'm sure Mr. Roosevelt won't mind if I tear you away from his speech. We can all read it tomorrow morning in the paper.

STUDENT #1

(To us)

The heroine of our piece, Miss Hallie Flanagan.

FLANAGAN

Remember to relax completely as you stretch toward the floor. Agility is crucial. It's not just about the words. Your body is your instrument.

STUDENT #2

(To us)

Director of Experimental Theatre at Vassar College.

FLANAGAN

No talking, ladies, please. Concentrate.

STUDENT #3

(To us)

She's tough, but we like her.

FLANAGAN

Shhhh!

(Beat)

All right, ladies. Circle up.

(The STUDENTS form a circle as a SECRETARY appears.)

SECRETARY

Excuse me, Miss Flanagan. There's a telephone call for you.

(She exits.)

FLANAGAN

If you'll pardon me, ladies. I suggest you use this opportunity to get the chatter out of your system, so we can get back to work.

(As FLANAGAN crosses the stage to take her call, the STUDENTS exit.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

This is Hallie Flanagan.

(Lights up on another area of the stage, and we see HARRY HOPKINS, dashing, prematurely graying, and roughly the same age as FLANAGAN.)

HARRY HOPKINS

Hallie, it's Harry Hopkins.

FLANAGAN

Harry Hopkins. It's been a hundred years.

(To us)

We were underclassmen together at Grinnell College in Iowa.

HARRY HOPKINS

Go, Pioneers!

FLANAGAN

I suppose congratulations are in order. It isn't everybody who's handpicked by the President to head up --

HARRY HOPKINS

(Interrupting)

We've got a lot of unemployed actors on our hands. Why don't you come up to New York and talk it over?

FLANAGAN

Bad timing. I leave next week for England. I'm directing at Dartington Hall. Ain't I posh?

HARRY HOPKINS

(Almost offhandedly)

I don't see what an American wants to do in European theatre.

(Beat)

Can you think of anyone else?

FLANAGAN

(To us)

At least he thought of me first. I rattled off some names.

HARRY HOPKINS

Great. Safe trip. Let me know when you're back Stateside.

(Lights fade on HOPKINS. FLANAGAN hands the telephone receiver back to the SECRETARY. The lights change.)

SCENE THREE: THE SQUEAKY WHEEL GETS TO GREECE.

(FLANAGAN steps forward to speak to us.)

FLANAGAN

Harry was blunt, but he had a point. I was useless in England. I finished my stay in Greece, where my husband was deciphering ancient inscriptions in the ruins of Delphi.

(As FLANAGAN speaks, projections appear. Initially we see vistas of Greece, but as FLANAGAN speaks, we see specific images of the theatres she describes. CHORUS MEMBERS appear and begin slow, subtle movement.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

You can see all the theatre in the world, but there's something holy about seeing where it all began. Philip dusted rocks by day, but our nights were spent with the villagers, drinking ouzo, and watching best-guess recreations of theatre no living eye had ever seen. We sat in this great stone arena carved into the hillside, looking down on a wide open playing space once filled with the flying feet of the Bacchae, with townspeople calling out to Oedipus. On the island of Delos, Philip reconstructed theatre accounts inscribed on stone over two thousand years ago. The theatre there had been a shrine to Apollo, and it could have fit five thousand people at a time, probably more.

(Beat)

Bear with me. There's a point to all this.

(As she speaks, FLANAGAN moves into the projection, so that she is lit by it, and her huge shadow is cast in the center of the image of an Ancient Greek stage. She continues her story. CHORUS MEMBERS continue their rhythmic pace.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)

Standing on that stage was a fearsome experience. The power they must have had. The energy. Not just to tell their stories, but to tell them to so many people, to keep them engaged. Their movement had to fill this enormous, open stage, their voices had to hit ten-thousand ears and roll out to the Aegean. And it all was so rhythmic, so sustained as to unite them, actors and audience, as one.

(CHORUS MEMBERS sink to the floor in unison. The projection changes to a closer shot of the stage, but FLANAGAN doesn't move, so she instantly seems larger in perspective.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)

Amazing, yes. But the miracle of it all was that whatever had gone on there had been paid for with government money. Think about that. All those theatres were erected, and those plays - the *thousands* of plays - were commissioned and produced on the government's nickel. Well, *drachma*. Of course, I thought of Harry, and his problem in New York. And then as if to underscore the whole thing, Philip showed me one particular inscription which began...

FLANAGAN AND CHORUS

"We let out these works on the vote of the people."

(The lights change and the projections disappear. CHORUS exits. FLANAGAN moves to a different area of the stage.)

SCENE FOUR: ANOTHER CALL FROM WASHINGTON.

FLANAGAN

When I returned to Vassar in May of 1935, I received another call, this time from Jacob Baker, special assistant to Harry Hopkins.

(JACOB BAKER, a youngish man in his thirties, appears in a spot of light some distance away from FLANAGAN)

BAKER

Mr. Hopkins wants you to come to Washington to talk about the unemployed actors.

FLANAGAN

Washington? I thought he was in New York.

BAKER

Mr. Hopkins is now with the Works Progress Administration. We're based in Washington. He specifically requested that I contact you.

FLANAGAN

That's kind. But you realize I'm a theatre teacher? Wouldn't you be better off with someone more *commercial*?

BAKER

We're crawling with commercial producers down here. Mr. Hopkins wants to see you. Can you come?

FLANAGAN

(To us)

You could say I was curious. Flattered. Helping out a friend. What I *did* say was...

(To BAKER)

I'll come.

BAKER

Thank God. I'd hate to be the one to tell him no. When can we expect you?

(Lights fade on BAKER. FLANAGAN steps forward.)

FLANAGAN

I had no idea what he wanted or what needed to be done. So actors were out of work. *Millions* of people were out of work. Besides, what actor *isn't* looking for his next job? I telegraphed a handful of New York producers, begging for suggestions.

(THREE PRODUCERS appear in a pool of light some distance away from FLANAGAN. They wear funny glasses with noses and mustaches to disguise their identities. They each hold a telegram.)

THREE PRODUCERS

(In unison, reading)

Washington addressing unemployed actors. Need professionals. Can you help?

FIRST PRODUCER

(Mocking)

Can we help? Right.

SECOND PRODUCER

I got two shows running, one on Broadway, one off. There must be a reason these actors can't work.

THIRD PRODUCER
Sure, there is. They got no talent.

(The PRODUCERS laugh.)

FIRST PRODUCER
They want to put people to work, and they call an academic.

SECOND PRODUCER
That'll teach 'em!

THIRD PRODUCER
Class, your first lesson is don't call professionals for free handouts.

FIRST PRODUCER
"Miss Flanagan, I respectfully decline. My professional commitments do not permit free consultations."

THIRD PRODUCER
She oughta be run out of town.

SECOND PRODUCER
"Miss Flanagan, best of luck, but I cannot attend as I will be out of town."

(FIRST and SECOND PRODUCERS laugh.)

THIRD PRODUCER
Say, that's good! What'm I gonna tell her?

FIRST PRODUCER
Just keep it simple, stupid.

THIRD PRODUCER
Fine. Two words. Ain't. Interested.

(They crumple their telegrams as the lights fade on. FLANAGAN, who has been watching them, turns back to us.)

FLANAGAN
I received one positive response, from Elmer Rice.

(ELMER RICE appears in another spot away from FLANAGAN. He is a pudgy, bespectacled man in his forties with unbridled enthusiasm.)

RICE
Thrilled, Flanagan. Stop. Will meet any time any place.
Stop. Regards, Elmer. Stop.

FLANAGAN

We met on a train on the way to Washington.

(Lights change. RICE and FLANAGAN meet center.)

SCENE FIVE: ON A TRAIN BOUND FOR NOWHERE.

(Suddenly we are in a train compartment, or the simplest suggestion thereof. RICE speaks animatedly to FLANAGAN, who takes notes.)

RICE

Government theatre, huh? So what do they want to *do*?

FLANAGAN

They want to put actors to work.

RICE

Oh? Simple as that? I mean, I applied for grant financing for Theatre Alliance about a month ago, and I haven't heard a thing.

FLANAGAN

How much were you asking?

RICE

A hundred thousand.

FLANAGAN

Well, that's why you haven't heard anything.

RICE

We pay taxes, right? That's *our* money.

FLANAGAN

Just because they're not spending it the way you'd like...

RICE

Whatever. Give us something.

FLANAGAN

They already are. There's relief.

RICE

You work at your craft, your career, and all your government has to offer is a few pennies for standing in line? How demeaning is that? It can't just be relief, and if it is, then to hell with them.

FLANAGAN

That's harsh.

RICE

No, Hallie. Harsh is innocent people robbed of their right to work. Judging the government isn't harsh. It's necessary.

FLANAGAN

But they want to do more than relief. They want to make a plan--

RICE

A plan! You haven't even met with them yet, and already you're parroting their rhetoric! It's a bureaucracy, Hallie. They're going to look for the path of least resistance, and they'll do whatever brings them the least opposition.

FLANAGAN

You're going to find fault with anything they try. Nothing they do could satisfy you.

RICE

Not necessarily.

FLANAGAN

What then?

RICE

Ideally?

FLANAGAN

Realistically.

(Pause. RICE stares at FLANAGAN as he collects his thoughts.)

RICE

Look, a government theatre can be good or it can be terrible. But the minute they forget about the artists - the people themselves - they might as well chuck the whole thing.

FLANAGAN

But it *could* work?

RICE

Ask me as a producer, and I'll tell you it's suicidal.

FLANAGAN

And what if I ask you as an artist?

RICE

I'd probably tell you the same thing.

FLANAGAN

But is that fair? This isn't about making money.

RICE

Don't kid yourself. Once that money starts rolling out, they're going to start wringing their hands about how to get some of it back. Now, the only theatre that makes money is New York, and this thing has to be as far from New York as possible.

FLANAGAN

Why does it? They've got more unemployed theatre people than anywhere else.

RICE

Because then it's as inaccessible and exclusive as Broadway. People can't have to travel to it. They can't travel! They're out of work! It has to spring up like weeds, right in their backyards.

FLANAGAN

That's a lovely cliché.

RICE

It has to be more than accessible. It has to be unavoidable. And that can't happen if it's *only* in New York.

FLANAGAN

But it *can* happen.

RICE

Realistically?

FLANAGAN

Realistically.

(RICE takes a deep breath, but doesn't answer. The lights fade on the train compartment.)

SCENE SIX: THE PITCH

(FLANAGAN steps forward and speaks to us.)

FLANAGAN

It was a partisan perception of what needed to be done, but when I arrived in Washington, I was as apprehensive he was. Jacob Baker met me at the train station.

(JACOB BAKER appears.)

BAKER

Our office isn't far. Why don't we walk? We can chat.

FLANAGAN

(To us)

Coincidentally, the walk took us right past the White House.

(Projection of the White House appears.
BAKER refers to it as he walks.)

BAKER

You know, people forget. When Roosevelt first went through that door, their banks were closing. All their savings were gone. Breadlines, soup kitchens, homelessness. They turned to the President to do something. Well, we're part of what he's trying to do.

FLANAGAN

(Suspicious laugh)

Is that the party line, or do you mean that?

(BAKER stops and looks at FLANAGAN
without speaking. A pause.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I've offended you.

BAKER

(True sincerity, not defensive)

No. That *is* the party line. But I say it because I believe it. I believe *in* it. I am a lucky, lucky man to have all the things I have. Just the simple fact that I have a job is a blessing. But because that job is prominent, because I'm a whisper in the President's ear, I have a responsibility to help the people who need it.

FLANAGAN

You *do* mean that.

BAKER

Desperately. Making work for artists - all artists, not just people in the theatre - it's different. You can't just hand them a hammer and tell them to build something. They need work in their fields. We have to do something, and even though we don't know exactly what that something may be, we're the only people who can do it.

(BAKER turns to look at the White House
projection. FLANAGAN turns to us.)

FLANAGAN

You heard him. A man of principles, devoted to the cause. Right? Remember that.

(BAKER turns back to FLANAGAN.)

BAKER
We'd better hurry. Hopkins is waiting.

(FLANAGAN watches BAKER as he walks off. The White House projection changes to a view of Washington, becoming the uncurtained windows of HOPKINS's office. HARRY HOPKINS enters as FLANAGAN steps into the office.)

HARRY HOPKINS
So we haven't scared you off. That's a good sign. This is a tough job we're asking you to do.

FLANAGAN
I don't even understand what the job *is*, Harry.

(If there are chairs, HOPKINS offers a seat. FLANAGAN sits, and HOPKINS follows suit. Brief pause.)

HARRY HOPKINS
Well, I'm stuck on this idea that unemployed actors get just as hungry as anyone else.

FLANAGAN
I'm sure they do.

HARRY HOPKINS
Unemployment doesn't necessarily mean anything other than that they're struggling right now. Unemployed plumbers aren't bad plumbers. There's just no work.

FLANAGAN
And you want to make work.

HARRY HOPKINS
Didn't you do a thing for the Guggenheim Foundation awhile back, about how other governments run national theatres?

FLANAGAN
Well, I was studying production styles. But, yes, most of the theatres were government funded.

HARRY HOPKINS
So you could give us some ideas on how to organize that here.

FLANAGAN
Well, maybe. But that's not what you want to do.

HARRY HOPKINS
Actually, that's exactly what we want to do.

FLANAGAN

No, it's not. The Europeans finance the best performers under the most advantageous conditions. It's based on merit. What you want is based on unemployment. Big difference.

HARRY HOPKINS

So you think actors on relief would be bad actors?

FLANAGAN

I don't think that at all.

HARRY HOPKINS

The distinction between merit and employment was yours, not mine.

FLANAGAN

No, you're twisting my words.

(Quick blackout on the office, and LEAR and HIS WIFE appear in a spot.)

LEAR

People think that just because you're vaudeville, you're not legit. But I got chops.

LEAR'S WIFE

We both got 'em. I once played Lady Macbeth.

LEAR

(Proudly)

Two seasons.

LEAR'S WIFE

(Dismissive)

It was years ago.

LEAR

She was va-va-va-voom!

LEAR'S WIFE

(To LEAR)

Stop it. You'll embarrass me.

(To us)

He's right, though. I was. His last job was King Lear.

LEAR

Nothing big. Tiny little theatre. But, "blow, wind! Come, wrack!"

LEAR'S WIFE

That's Macbeth, dear.

LEAR
What is it? Crack, wrack. I get it mixed up.

LEAR'S WIFE
"Crack your cheeks."

LEAR
That's it. "Rage! Blow!"
(To us)
It's not a funny play, but I got five solid laughs in the first act alone.

LEAR'S WIFE
I cried every night.

LEAR
Most of 'em miss the humor. But that's your sympathy. There's your pathos.

LEAR'S WIFE
People look at us, though, and all they see is vaudeville. A couple of Yiddish comics. They don't care how good we can be.

LEAR
And vaudeville's dead. I'm more than just some two-bit meshuggeneh funny-man. Both of us. But how can we work if they take it all away from us?

LEAR'S WIFE
They close the theatre, you take your kit and you go home. What else can you do? You go home and you wait.

LEAR
You wait for a job that don't come.

(Lights come back up on the office.
FLANAGAN and HOPKINS as before. LEAR
and HIS WIFE watch from their spot.)

FLANAGAN
Theatre's been hit two ways. If the economy hasn't taken their jobs away from them, then the movies have.

LEAR
Talking pictures! Who needs talent?

FLANAGAN
Even if the country weren't suffering, there would still be good actors who'd find themselves out of a job.

HARRY HOPKINS
But these are opportunities, aren't they?

FLANAGAN

It's not the same thing, Harry! The technology's as much a curse as it is a blessing.

(As LEAR and WIFE talk to us, HOPKINS and FLANAGAN continue in pantomime.)

LEAR'S WIFE

See, time was, you got yourself an act. All you needed was fifteen good minutes and you could play it anywhere all over the country.

LEAR

But with radio, you do your bit, everybody with a radio hears it in one night. Just like that, you got old material.

HARRY HOPKINS

All right, fine. Then suppose we take these unemployed actors --

LEAR'S WIFE

Can we give the "unemployed" thing a rest?

HARRY HOPKINS

(Correcting, for FLANAGAN)

-- good actors, who *happen* to be unemployed--

LEAR'S WIFE

A little better.

HARRY HOPKINS

--and band them together into troupes, with federal sponsorship. Could we do that much? I mean, they do it in Europe.

FLANAGAN

It's a little more complicated than "If they can do it, so can we."

HARRY HOPKINS

Why?

FLANAGAN

Because you're talking about a cultural legacy that we simply don't have here. The arts are just entertainment in America. There's an educational aspect that we lack.

LEAR

What is she talking about?

HARRY HOPKINS

We have educational theatre here.

LEAR

I learned things in the theatre that would make you blush, lady!

LEAR'S WIFE

(Nudging LEAR)

Would you let her talk?

FLANAGAN

I'm an educator, Harry. It's not the same thing.

HARRY HOPKINS

You do all right at Vassar.

FLANAGAN

What we have with the Vassar Experimental Theatre is not common. But if you're going to build a national theatre, then I agree the productions would have to be of some cultural value.

LEAR

Which means no comics. I heard enough.

LEAR'S WIFE

She didn't say that.

LEAR

You just wait.

(LEAR exits. LEAR'S WIFE stays.)

HARRY HOPKINS

So if we do good plays, people will come to see them?

FLANAGAN

Who knows? Producers take that gamble every time they mount a show.

HARRY HOPKINS

Look, people ride over roads and bridges built by relief workers and they never give it a second thought. But will they pay money to come to the theatre to see plays put on by relief workers?

LEAR'S WIFE

(To HOPKINS who can't hear her)

We lost our jobs because people weren't coming to the theatre! Now if they come to theatre, we'll have jobs again?

(Exiting)

Oy gevalt! How's this thing gonna help anybody?

(LEAR'S WIFE exits as their lights fade.)

FLANAGAN

But they won't be relief workers once they start, will they? They'll be theatre workers again.

HARRY HOPKINS

Tell a paying customer that.

FLANAGAN

If the plays are good, people will come. If they're bad, they won't. It's as simple as that.

(A tense pause.)

HARRY HOPKINS

All right. Draw up a plan.

FLANAGAN

(Surprised at the implied trust)

Wait. Just like that?

HARRY HOPKINS

(Rising, cheerful after battle)

Just like that. Hey, there's a party this afternoon at the White House. Want to go?

FLANAGAN

You just dropped a bucket of responsibility in my lap. I need to look at reports, see some of the relief shows...

HARRY HOPKINS

This minute?

FLANAGAN

But, Harry, I have so many questions. What about independent producers? Did you read Elmer Rice's Theatre Alliance proposal?

HARRY HOPKINS

(Guarded)

How do you know about that?

FLANAGAN

He's a colleague. Did you read it?

HARRY HOPKINS

Elmer Rice is fishing for a hundred grand without enough bait on his hook. We can't give that kind of money to an individual.

FLANAGAN

Well, I'd like to see it. I've heard his ideas. I'd like to know how he presents himself on paper.

HARRY HOPKINS

Ask Baker. Let him tell you.

(Beat, softer)

Look. Stay a few days, go over the whole thing, and then tell me what you think. But come talk to Mrs. Roosevelt. She's interested in all these art projects.

(HOPKINS starts to exit.)

FLANAGAN

You're so casual about it. "Talk to Mrs. Roosevelt. Ask her for a cup of sugar."

(HOPKINS exits as the lights change and HOPKINS's office disappears.)

SCENE SEVEN: MRS R LIVES FOR THIS.

(FLANAGAN steps forward and talk to us.)

FLANAGAN

And just like that, with no pomp and the flimsiest circumstance, I went to my first White House party.

(Faint music under. Projection of the White House. Lights up on a clump of GUESTS. In the center of them, obscured by them, is ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, shaking hands and laughing.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

And there, amidst a slew of Cabinet wives and society matrons, was the grand lady herself, Eleanor Roosevelt. And then, after most of the guests had gone...

(Some of the GUESTS filter out. MALVINA THOMPSON, Mrs. Roosevelt's personal secretary, street-smart but polished and carrying a notepad, leaves the clump and approaches FLANAGAN.)

THOMPSON

Mrs. Flanagan?

FLANAGAN

Yes, I am

THOMPSON

Malvina Thompson, Mrs. Roosevelt's assistant. Mrs. Roosevelt would like a word with you.

FLANAGAN
Are you sure? I mean, there might be some mistake.

THOMPSON
I'm sorry.
(Checks her pad)
Hallie Flanagan?

FLANAGAN
That's right.

THOMPSON
No mistake, then. Come on up.

FLANAGAN
But she must be exhausted after all those people.

THOMPSON
Are you kidding? She lives for this!

(The GUESTS disappear as THOMPSON leads the way into the room. We see clearly for the first time ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, a woman of nearly fifty, and exactly as one might imagine her - strong and commanding, but graceful and approachable.)

THOMPSON (cont'd)
Found her, Mrs. R!

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
Thank you, Tommy. Mrs. Flanagan, I'm so glad you could stay to meet with me.

FLANAGAN
You have no idea what an honor this is.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
I'm hardly royal ty.

FLANAGAN
I can only imagine how busy you must be. So many people vying for your ear.

THOMPSON
We always make time for the important stuff. Right, Mrs. R?

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
Tommy refuses to call me by my given name.

THOMPSON
I'm sorry. It just feels strange.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

So I refuse to address her by hers. Tommy she shall forever remain. Mrs. Flanagan, I hope you'll indulge me.

FLANAGAN

Only if you'll call me Hallie.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Our first agreement, then. Tommy, make a note.

THOMPSON

(Jotting in her pad)

I'm way ahead of you.

(THEY laugh.)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

It's a terrible time, isn't it? So many needy people, and so many of them look to me for assistance. You should see the letters I receive from children.

THOMPSON

Bags of 'em.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Some make the most outlandish requests. One wonderful child wants a trip to Hollywood to become a movie star.

THOMPSON

I sent her a very gentle no.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Tommy is brilliant with correspondence. But some of them want for the most basic things, like a winter coat or a job for a parent. It's heartbreaking, but who else can they ask? I'd love to grant the wishes of each and every one of them, but I'm not Santa Claus.

THOMPSON

I wish you'd let me tell that to some of the grown-ups.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Everyone wants something, but I am practically powerless to help individuals. Can you imagine the uproar if I gave even one person what he's asked for?

THOMPSON

They'd eat her alive.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

But I do have some influence in social projects.

(Beat)

Your cause seems to be a worthy one. I hear great things about you.

FLANAGAN

I hope they've been accurate.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

You've been at Vassar for ten years now?

FLANAGAN

(To THOMPSON)

You do good research.

THOMPSON

President and Mrs. R were on the board.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Franklin was a trustee some time back. You've built quite a reputation there.

(FRANK, the stage manager, is discovered in a pool of light in another part of the stage.)

FLANAGAN

I suppose you could say that.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Modesty. That's rare. Don't you want to hit me with some elaborate sales pitch? I'm not used to sincere humility.

FLANAGAN

I prefer to let our productions speak for themselves.

FRANK

(Calling off)

Places please, ladies.

(Flanagan's THREE STUDENTS scurry on and take places behind FRANK, who presents them to us. The STUDENTS punctuate their speech with movement.)

(To us)

The students of Vassar present Hallie Flanagan's work for Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Your girls do quite a bit of original material, don't they?

STUDENTS

Absolutely!

STUDENT #1

From writing...

STUDENT #2

...to design...

STUDENT #3

...all the way through to production.

FLANAGAN

We really try to train our students in every phase of the theatre.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

And how do they find your program?

STUDENT #2

(Very affected, trying to impress)

I think it's grand, grand, grand!

STUDENT #1

(To STUDENT #2)

Give it a rest.

STUDENT #3

(To ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, humbly)

It's really a great program, ma'am

FLANAGAN

They're terrific, aren't they? Vassar encourages a voice...

STUDENTS

...and we use it!

STUDENT #1

Campus issues!

STUDENT #2

Political opinion!

STUDENT #3

Social comment!

FLANAGAN

The administration couldn't be more supportive.

STUDENTS

(Secretively, sing-song)

We can get away with murder.

FLANAGAN

Our university president is particularly interested in theatre.

THOMPSON

That's McCracken, right?

STUDENTS

Hail, McCracken! Thanks for the backin'. If he didn't help us out, we'd surely send him packin'.

FLANAGAN

He gives us total freedom in choice of material.

STUDENT #1

You heard it, folks! Total freedom!

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Since Vassar's exclusively female, wherever do you find your men?

STUDENT #3

Lurking behind trees.

STUDENT #1

Crawling under rocks.

STUDENT #2

Hiding under our beds!

STUDENT #1

Total freedom!

FLANAGAN

From the community, other colleges. If we do ever come up lacking, well...

STUDENT #2

We wear the pants!

STUDENT #3

The grand theatrical tradition of trouser parts!

STUDENT #2

(Deep-voiced)
Thanks, little lady!

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

A golden opportunity, I'm sure, for an astute young actress.

STUDENT #2

You said it, sister!

STUDENT #1

Three productions a year.

STUDENT #3
Four, if we're lucky.

STUDENT #1
Original material!

STUDENT #2
Written by us.

STUDENT #3
Classics!

STUDENT #2
Written by dead people.

STUDENT #3
But we keep them fresh and current.

STUDENT #1
Chekhov, not once...

STUDENT #2
Not twice...

STUDENT #3
But three times in the same evening, each in a different style!

STUDENT #1
(Earnestly, very dramatic)
I want to go to Moscow.

STUDENT #2
(Very casual, southern)
Let's go to Moscow, y'all!

STUDENT #3
(Rabble-rousing)
Fight, women, fight like dogs! We'll get to Moscow or die trying!

STUDENT #1
(To us)
Note the conspicuous inclusion of Russian-themed material. It's very important later.

STUDENT #2
An ancient Greek tragedy...

STUDENT #3
(Intoned, in Greek)
Archai a Elleni ca Tragoedia!

...in the original Greek!

STUDENT #2

Miracle plays!

STUDENT #1

Lyric verse!

STUDENT #2

Restoration satire!

STUDENT #3

And Shakespeare?

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Well, of course, Shakespeare.

STUDENT #2

Pretty ambitious stuff.

THOMPSON

(Busily jotting it all down)

I like to think so.

FLANAGAN

Your production budget must be extravagant.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Hardly. It's minuscule. We're forced to be creative. Our scenery tends to be whatever we can do with light. And since we have a student workforce, it means...

FLANAGAN

Free labor.

STUDENTS

That's fortunate.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

For whom?

STUDENT #2

(STUDENT #1 elbows STUDENT #2.)

And it's not Broadway, so we have a certain critical liberty.

FLANAGAN

That's a blessing.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Sometimes.

FLANAGAN

STUDENT #2

A lot of times!

FLANAGAN

(Turning to the STUDENTS,
admonishing)

Thank you, ladies. That will do.

STUDENT #1

(To STUDENT #2)

Great. See what you did.

STUDENT #2

Vassar gives me a voice! I'm using it.

STUDENT #1

That voice is gonna get us in trouble.

STUDENT #2

(Pointedly)

You have no idea.

(STUDENT #1 shuffles STUDENT #2
offstage. STUDENT #3 steps forward as
addresses ELEANOR ROOSEVELT.)

STUDENT #3

Excuse me, Mrs. Roosevelt?

(Bravely and simply)

I just wanted to say. Mrs. Flanagan is the greatest thing
that's happened to me, not just at Vassar, but in my whole
entire educational life. I had no idea that theatre could
make a difference in people's lives. Make people feel
things, and think. Some people say she's trying to do too
much with us, but I think they're wrong. Nobody's ever made
that kind of an effort with me, and I'm very, very grateful.
Thank you.

(STUDENT #3 runs off.)

FLANAGAN

(Embarrassed)

And those are my girls.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

(Turning back to FLANAGAN)

Very impressive. You clearly matter to them very much.

(FRANK enters and speaks up to the
light booth.)

FRANK
 (To light booth)
 That's it, Herbie. Thank you.

(FRANK exits.)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
 Hallie, for this relief effort, could we do that kind of thing on a broader scale?

FLANAGAN
 How do you mean?

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
 Fine productions that cost only a little money?

FLANAGAN
 I don't see why not. I mean, there are stage technicians who'd need work, too, so that's a consideration.

HERBIE
 (From booth)
 Thank you!

(The STUDENT lights fade.)

FLANAGAN
 But there's no reason I can think of why it couldn't be done inexpensively.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
 And that same sophistication in the choice of material?

FLANAGAN
 I think there has to be.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
 America is long overdue to consider the theatre part of the educational process.

FLANAGAN
 I said the same thing to Harry Hopkins this afternoon.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
 Could this plan do that?

FLANAGAN
 I wouldn't put it to a vote in quite those terms. But, if Congress has the money, then I think we should at least try.

(Pause.)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
And would there be a place for everyone?

FLANAGAN
Everyone without a job?

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
Every kind of person.

FLANAGAN
I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
(Cutting her off)
I'm talking about the Negro population. I cannot support this project unless it can serve everyone who needs it.

FLANAGAN
I believe very definitely that this theatre would have to be free from prejudice. There should be a place for anyone who wants to work.

(Beat.)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
And you'll head it up?

FLANAGAN
(A little taken aback)
They've asked, but it's a tremendous responsibility.
(Beat)
To be perfectly honest, I don't think I can do it.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
Well then, you must do the thing you think you cannot do.
(To THOMPSON)
Write to Vassar, Tommy. Express our deepest hope that Hallie will help work it all out.

THOMPSON
I'll get it out today.

FLANAGAN
But --

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
Please. Don't disappoint me.
(Extending her hand)
Thank you, Hallie.

FLANAGAN
(Taking her hand)
Thank you, uh, Mrs. R.

(The lights fade on them.)

SCENE EIGHT: MORE THAN SHE BARGAINED FOR?

(As ROOSEVELT and THOMPSON exit, JACOB BAKER enters and joins FLANAGAN in her spot.)

BAKER

Charmed the queen, huh?

FLANAGAN

I didn't have to. She's very sympathetic.

BAKER

She's an easy sell. Real people are another story. This work has to merit government funding, or they're going to be all over it.

FLANAGAN

And well they should be.

BAKER

Wait, what?

FLANAGAN

No matter how affordable we make these shows, people are paying for them twice, indirectly with tax money and then directly in the price of admission.

BAKER

And that's an angle you are forbidden to discuss publicly.

FLANAGAN

Fair enough.

BAKER

It's all in how we present it. I mean, you should see some of these proposals. And they honestly expect us to take them seriously.

(FRANK enters with his clipboard.)

FRANK

Herbie!

(FRANK is suddenly bathed in a spot.)

HERBIE

Gotcha covered, babe!

FRANK

Thank you.

FLANAGAN

(To BAKER, re the proposals)

What's wrong with them?

BAKER

They're either self-serving or short-sighted. Commercial producers...

(FRANK reads from his clipboard.)

FRANK

Government money should finance our touring production of...

BAKER

(Continuing)

Little theatres...

(FRANK turns a page, reads.)

FRANK

Government endowment is the only way we can...

BAKER

(Continuing)

Colleges and universities...

(FRANK turns a page, reads.)

FRANK

Government support for more staff, more...

FLANAGAN

(To BAKER)

And none of that's going to help the unemployed.

BAKER

It gets better. Watch.

(LEAR appears and pushes FRANK out of the spot.)

LEAR

(Mad scientist)

Picture it! The Cosmic Ray Drama! Crazy, you say? Ha-ha-ha! Crazy *brilliant!* My play will single-handedly cure unemployment through electrical shocks from transmitters placed beneath the seats. Zap!

(LEAR'S WIFE appears and pushes LEAR out of the spot.)

LEAR' S WIFE

(Singing)

FORTY-EIGHT SONGS ABOUT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT!

(Speaking)

One for every state.

(Singing)

FORTY-EIGHT SONGS ABOUT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT!

(Speaking)

If you sing 'em at every theatre in every state at the same time...

(Singing)

FORTY-EIGHT SONGS ABOUT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT!

(Speaking)

We can end unemployment like that!

(Snaps her fingers)

And all I need for this genius solution is a small royalty fee.

(Sings)

FORTY-EIGHT SONGS!

(Speaks)

Forty-eight royalties. Forty-eight royalties a night!

(FRANK appears behind LEAR' S WIFE.)

LEAR' S WIFE (cont' d)

(Big finish)

FORTY-EIGHT SONGS!

(FRANK looks up to the booth and slashes his hand across his throat. Immediately, the spot goes black, cutting off LEAR' S WIFE mid-note.)

FLANAGAN

(To BAKER)

Your poor, poor man.

BAKER

A million dollars here and they can save the theatre. Over there they can do it for half that. Another one over there can do it better, but for twice as much. And then you have people like Elmer Rice who can't or won't understand that we can't just hand out cash grants like bank loans.

FLANAGAN

And there's no way any of these could be the least bit effective in the long run.

BAKER

(Laughs)

Well, ma'am, that's why we have you. That mantle's gonna rest squarely on your shoulders.

(HARRY HOPKINS enters.)

HARRY HOPKINS

Well, you two seem to be playing nicely.

FLANAGAN

Not really. I can't do this.

HARRY HOPKINS

What? Why not?

FLANAGAN

Look, nothing means more to me than getting these people off relief and back to work. But you don't need someone like me. You need a social worker, or a humanitarian with ridiculously deep pockets. Thank you, but I'm sorry.

(FLANAGAN starts to leave. HOPKINS stops her.)

HARRY HOPKINS

You're just overwhelmed.

BAKER

It'll pass.

FLANAGAN

How can it pass? It won't pass until things improve, and they won't improve until we do something, or until I do, and...excuse me.

(FLANAGAN tries to leave again. The men stop her.)

HARRY HOPKINS

Don't decide just yet.

FLANAGAN

It's a little late for that. Let me go.

HARRY HOPKINS

Hear me out. I want you to come with us tonight.

BAKER

We're meeting tonight with the heads of the other project areas. They're supposed to be pitching their ideas.

HARRY HOPKINS

You should hear what they've got to say.

(Lights fill the stage, and suddenly we're somewhere else.)

SCENE NINE: EVERYTHING SEEMED POSSIBLE.

(CAHILL, SOKOLOFF, and ALSBERG appear.
HOPKINS introduces them.)

HARRY HOPKINS

(To FLANAGAN)

Nikolai Sokoloff, head of the Music Project. Holger Cahill,
head of the Artists' Project. And Henry Alsberg, head of the
Writers' Project.

ALSBERG

Welcome!

HARRY HOPKINS

Gentlemen, this is Hallie Flanagan, head of the Theatre
Project.

FLANAGAN

(Correcting)

Harry...

HARRY HOPKINS

We hope. Hallie has doubts about whether these projects will
work.

SOKOLOFF

Work? How could they not work!

CAHILL

Our work is to find work.

ALSBERG

Work for the people. The people are the most important
thing.

CAHILL

Of course the people.

SOKOLOFF

Always the people.

ALSBERG

We're saviors bringing salvation.

FLANAGAN

At least you're humble. How do you propose to do that?

(Beat.)

CAHILL

We haven't figured that out yet.

BAKER
(To FLANAGAN)
See? They're as lost as you are.

FLANAGAN
Thanks for the vote of confidence.

SOKOLOFF
What lost? We have ideas.

BAKER
Ideas don't clear relief rolls.

CAHILL
Artists on relief are not bad artists. They're poor artists.

BAKER
That can mean the same thing.

ALSBERG
That's semantics.

BAKER
It's the truth. Explain semantics to the public.

FLANAGAN
Harry...

HARRY HOPKINS
I don't think finding skilled people is the concern, Baker.

CAHILL
Anything we put forth, we'll find people who can do it.

SOKOLOFF
It's finding what to put forth.

ALSBERG
Saviors and salvation!

BAKER
(Topping them all, almost
viciously)
Look! You're very passionate, all of you. And, believe me,
nobody cares more than I do. But you're just spouting
platitudes here. All we do is talk about how the people need
our help, and we've talked it to death. Talk won't keep
people from going hungry. What are you going to do?

HARRY HOPKINS
What Mr. Baker's saying under all that charm is that we need
something concrete.

(Tense pause. FLANAGAN turns to us and speaks while action continues behind her.)

FLANAGAN

(To us)

Suddenly everything seemed possible.

ALSBERG

How's this, then? Writers' Guides filled with history, folklore, poetry, written by relief writers from every state.

FLANAGAN

(To us)

They each saw the problem differently, and they each came up with something.

CAHILL

Photographers who document, preserve, and propagate the work of any artist they can find, from folk painters to furniture makers!

FLANAGAN

(To us)

But where was mine? Think, Hallie, think!

SOKOLOFF

A symphony orchestra in every major city! There are musicians all over this country, teachers of music, who have never heard a live symphony.

HARRY HOPKINS

Terrific!

(Pause)

Hallie?

(The MEN all look at FLANAGAN, waiting for her plan. Nothing. Then...)

FLANAGAN

(To us)

And suddenly, from the back of my mind, an idea. Said out loud for the very first time.

HARRY HOPKINS

Well?

FLANAGAN

(Timidly)

Living newspapers.

HARRY HOPKINS

Living what?

FLANAGAN

(Rapidly gaining confidence)

Newspapers. We could dramatize news events in living newspapers - current, topical shows specific to wherever they're being performed. Lots of actors doing bits instead of just a few stars. Quick, short scenes, almost cinematic - if people want cinema, we'll give it to them -- in a theatre!

(Pause. HOPKINS looks at FLANAGAN. No one says a word. FLANAGAN turns quickly to us, as the lights on the others fade, leaving FLANAGAN alone.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

I wanted to slap myself. I felt ineffectual, and stupid, and *idealistic*. What did I think? I was going to change the world? I'm a theatre teacher.

HARRY HOPKINS

(In darkness)

Hallie?

(FLANAGAN turns to him as he steps into her light.)

FLANAGAN

Harry. I am terribly, terribly sorry that I have wasted your time.

HARRY HOPKINS

What?

FLANAGAN

I'm not what you need.

HARRY HOPKINS

You're wrong, Hallie.

FLANAGAN

Exactly, I'm unfortunately, disappointingly, regrettably *wrong* for this job. Did you hear that drivel? Living newspapers!

HARRY HOPKINS

It's brilliant.

FLANAGAN

What?

HARRY HOPKINS

You should hear them back there. They can't stop talking about it. Even Baker.

FLANAGAN

It's not even an original idea. The Russians did it first.

HARRY HOPKINS

Don't destroy it, Hallie.

FLANAGAN

It's a Russian style, Harry. I just stole from a foreign country.

HARRY HOPKINS

It's *your* idea, and it's good. When can you start?

FLANAGAN

Doing what?

HARRY HOPKINS

Whatever you have to do to make these shows happen. Directing the theatre project.

FLANAGAN

Harry, *no*. I'll help you any way I can, I give you my word. But you're gambling with people's lives. I don't know the first thing about making money from theatre, because I don't have to. We survive on grants and funds and tuition. You have real producers who are clamoring to take a crack at this thing. They'll crucify you if you turn it over to me.

HARRY HOPKINS

Let 'em gripe. I need somebody who cares about profits other than money profits. I want someone who cares about the country other than just New York. I want you.

FLANAGAN

Harry...

HARRY HOPKINS

And I won't take no for an answer.

(HOPKINS goes. FLANAGAN is alone again. Lights tight on her.)

FLANAGAN

What else could I say?

(Pause.)

On August 27th, 1935, I took the oath of office as the Director of the Federal Theatre Project. And life as I knew it was over.

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE TEN: BLACK AND WHITE AND RED ALL OVER.

(Lights up on another part of the stage. A NEWSBOY in a spot.)

NEWSBOY

Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Flanagan heads Federal Theatre Project! Publisher William Randolph Hearst cries foul!

(HEARST crosses the stage, with one or two REPORTERS jotting notes.)

HEARST

I've had my eye on Hallie Flanagan for years. Look at her work at Vassar. Look at her trips to Russia. She's top of my list of disseminators of communist propaganda.

(HEARST continues out. The REPORTERS circle around to intercept FLANAGAN coming in the opposite direction.)

FLANAGAN

You and Mr. Hearst are mistaken. While I have indeed visited Russia, I am not, nor have I ever been, a Communist. I am an American. If you want Communist information, you'll have to look elsewhere.

(FLANAGAN goes out, followed by the REPORTERS. NEWSBOY runs on.)

NEWSBOY

Flanagan inauguration fires up Iowa! Hopkins speaks out!

(HARRY HOPKINS appears, speaking to an assembly.)

HARRY HOPKINS

Ladies and gentlemen, the Federal Theatre Project will set up regional theatres all over the country, even one right here in the great state of Iowa, so that your voices can be heard. These theatres will put thousands of able Americans back to work.

(An IOWAN speaks from out of the assembly.)

IOWAN

How many people are you talking about?

HARRY HOPKINS

Conservative estimate, about eight-thousand. In the best of all possible worlds, thirty.

IOWAN
 Thirty what?

HARRY HOPKINS
 Thirty thousand people back to work.

IOWAN
 Who's gonna pay for all that?

(Pause. HOPKINS turns on his
 captivating charm.)

HARRY HOPKINS
 You are.

(Murmurs in the crowd. HOPKINS
 continues.)

HARRY HOPKINS (cont'd)
 Who better? This is America, the richest country in the
 world. Yes, despite everything we've endured - and believe
 me, we *have* endured - we can afford to pay for anything we
 want. We want a decent life for every single man, woman, and
 child in this country, and we are going to pay for it!

(Another IOWAN speaks up.)

IOWAN #2
 But will it really be ours, or will it be what the government
 says it has to be?

HARRY HOPKINS
 This theatre, as long as we have the breath to fight for it,
 will be kept free from censorship. What we want is a free,
 adult, uncensored theatre.

(The people applaud and sweep out,
 HOPKINS with them. A NEWSBOY enters.)

NEWSBOY
 FTP Director announces staff!

(FLANAGAN appears with ELMER RICE, and
 E. C. MABIE, a gentle man in his mid-
 forties.)

FLANAGAN
 Elmer Rice, Mr. E. C. Mabie, University of Iowa.

RICE
 A pleasure.

MABIE

Likewise.

FLANAGAN

Elmer, I'd like you to head up the Eastern region, if you'll do it. And you can do it out of New York.

RICE

I don't know. I still believe that Theatre Alliance could work.

FLANAGAN

Does that mean no?

RICE

It means I'm thinking about it.

FLANAGAN

Well, when you're finished licking your wounds, you can get back to me.

(Turning to MABIE)

Mr. Mabie, you've done such spectacular work with the University of Iowa, I'd like you to cover the Midwest.

MABIE

Would this preclude my professorship?

FLANAGAN

Not at all, if you care to juggle the responsibilities.

MABIE

Then, I'll do it, if you can meet my salary demands.

(A pause.)

FLANAGAN

What kind of salary demands are we talking about?

MABIE

Well, I already make a respectable living from the university, and if my work there won't be too terribly disrupted, shall we say... a dollar a year?

FLANAGAN

Mr. Mabie, I don't think you realize the financial...

(It sinks in)

A dollar a year?

MABIE

If you could manage it?

FLANAGAN

We'll see what we can do for you.

(SHE shakes hands with MABIE
and turns to RICE)

If you're holding out, you're going to have to top that.

RICE

I won't do it for a dollar.

FLANAGAN

I'm not asking you to.

RICE

But I'll do it.

FLANAGAN

I had a feeling you would.

(THEY disappear and the NEWSBOY
enters.)

NEWSBOY

Federal Theatre sets up shop in Washington's McLean Mansion.

(Lights change, and the NEWSBOY becomes
the DOORMAN of the McLean Mansion.)

DOORMAN

I been working here since Harding was in office - before then, even - and I remember this place being built. A million dollars, it cost. And all the biggest of the big used to come right through this door. Government people, railroad people, just plain wealthy people, all of 'em right past me for a little tip of my hat and a "How d'ya do." On the nights Mrs. McLean wore the Hope Diamond, we had to put on extra guards - and then, the champagne! Ah. It was something.

(Beat)

But now. Now look what's coming through this door. Unemployed. And that's what the government calls progress. It's all part of the way they do business. It's all money, everybody talks about money nowadays. They take money from this one and give it to that one. Cut a chunk over here and stick it over there. Back then, nobody mentioned a word about money. But they didn't think nothing of giving me ten-dollar tips.

(HE pulls out a crisp bill)

But now money's all they talk about. The thousands and millions they push around like it's sugar. You ever see it? No. And why? 'Cause it's all in their minds. That money don't exist.

(Lights change, and the DOORMAN becomes the NEWSBOY again.)

NEWSBOY

Federal Theatre still in opposition! Legit producers up in arms!

(FLANAGAN and HOPKINS appear in their own spots, as will the other characters in the montage. Everyone talks to us, not to each other.)

FLANAGAN

If anything kills us, it'll be the money.

HARRY HOPKINS

Our productions will be free to the disadvantaged, free to the underprivileged. And if not free, then as close to free as we can get.

(SIDNEY HOWARD, New York Producer, 40s, appears.)

SIDNEY HOWARD

The *idea* of these theatres is magnificent, but who wants to give up the next five years organizing and developing them?

FLANAGAN

Sidney Howard, New York producer.

HARRY HOPKINS

I can think of only a few instances where we might ask for more than ten cents, and never will we take more than one dollar admission for our shows.

FLANAGAN

Unskilled labor gets between twenty-one and fifty-five dollars a month. Our skilled labor should get about twice that.

SIDNEY HOWARD

And what do the producers get? You'd need Superman to work on that kind of salary, especially with no profits. This thing's going to break your heart.

(Beat as HE turns to go.)

Have you talked to Elmer Rice?

(HOWARD exits. EVA LE GALLIENNE, a New York producer in her mid 30s, appears.)

FLANAGAN

Eva Le Gallienne, New York producer.

EVA LE GALLIENNE

But how can these works possibly be any good? Who's to say that actors who *can't* work aren't really actors who *won't* work? Or worse, actors who *shouldn't* work?

HARRY HOPKINS

We will work with Actors' Equity, so relief actors can earn professional union affiliation.

FLANAGAN

In response to our query, a letter, from Frank Gillmore, President of Actors' Equity in New York.

(FRANK GILLMORE appears, easily in his 60s)

GILLMORE

Equity thanks the Administration for its offer and its continued interest, but for reasons too numerous to mention, we cannot accept.

(GILLMORE exits.)

HARRY HOPKINS

So the union is out.

EVA LE GALLIENNE

It terrifies me to think of the money being given out by the government to promote theatre in this country. Especially when it's this *kind* of theatre. People are hungry. Why feed them downright bad food, when there are producers serving up filet mignon?

(LE GALLIENNE exits.)

FLANAGAN

Spoken like a true producer. An argument which makes no sense. But then, there were a few producers like Lee Shubert.

(LEE SHUBERT appears, also in his 60s, and much more of a common man.)

LEE SHUBERT

Look, people say I do anything that keeps the lights lit, but that don't bother me. I got theatres to rent. You call it whatever you want, I call it practical. If they need places to play, then I say rent 'em some dark theatres. It's that simple.

(A YOUNG PRODUCER appears.)

FLANAGAN

With age comes wisdom apparently, because talks with young producers went something like this.

(Beat)

We'd be grateful for your participation, but I'm sure you realize we can't pay you a Broadway salary.

YOUNG PRODUCER

How low are we talking?

FLANAGAN

Low. We're looking at ten million a year just for wages, and that's for everyone involved, actors, directors, designers...

YOUNG PRODUCER

How low?

FLANAGAN

(Slight pause)

Two hundred.

YOUNG PRODUCER

(Laughs)

I'd love to help you out, but there's no way I can survive on two hundred a week.

(Pause.)

FLANAGAN

That's two hundred a *month*.

(The YOUNG PRODUCER stares blankly.)

LEE SHUBERT

If we help them, it can only help us.

YOUNG PRODUCER

What are you, nuts?

LEE SHUBERT

If the people go to Federal Theatre because it's cheap, they develop a taste for it. They want more theatre, so maybe they come to us and pay a little more for our cheap seats. It might not happen that way, but I say give it a shot. It's win-win to me.

YOUNG PRODUCER

Two hundred a month?

FLANAGAN

But we have an audience as vast as America itself.

(SHUBERT and YOUNG PRODUCER exit.
NEWSBOY runs on.)

NEWSBOY

Flanagan and Hopkins answer questions from the heartland!

(FLANAGAN and HOPKINS meet in a spot,
and now they're on a whistle-stop tour.
Various CITIZENS shout questions to
them at stops.)

CITIZEN

What's it gonna cost us?

HARRY HOPKINS

It's your tax dollars at work, friends.

FLANAGAN

But the shows will be free. Or nearly free.

CITIZEN

Will they be any good, if the actors can't find work?

HARRY HOPKINS

Our actors are good, honest Americans lifted from the relief
rolls. No shame in that.

FLANAGAN

They are professionals, and our shows are professional.
You'll be proud to be part of it.

CITIZEN

If it's our money, there better not be filth!

HARRY HOPKINS

The only productions you will see are ones your government
can stand behind.

FLANAGAN

They won't be cheap, and they won't be vulgar.

CITIZEN

What *will* they be?

HARRY HOPKINS

Washington will not dictate the individual plays.

FLANAGAN

We'll do new plays! Classic plays! Plays for your children!
This theatre is for you!

(Lights fade and ALL but FLANAGAN exit.
NEWSBOY appears.)

NEWSBOY

Hallie Flanagan addresses regional theatre leaders! Federal Theatre Project underway!

(NEWSBOY exits. A spot appears, and FLANAGAN steps into it.)

FLANAGAN

Thank you. We have an unenviable task before us, and not much more than good faith behind us. But we're all here because we believe. We believe we can help our fellow man, and we believe in the transformative power of the theatre. Theatre can effect great change, but to do so, theatre itself must change. We live in a changing world: man is whispering through space, soaring to the stars in ships, flinging miles of steel and glass into the air. Shall the theatre continue to huddle in the confines of a painted box set? The movies, in their kaleidoscopic speed and juxtaposition of external images and internal emotions are seeking to express the tempo and psychology of our time. The stage, too, must experiment - with ideas, with relationships, with speech and rhythm, with color and light - or it must and should become a museum product. The theatre must grow up. The theatre must become conscious of the changing social order, or the changing social order will rightly ignore the theatre. And so, we begin.

(BLACKOUT. HERBIE enters with the ghost light, which is now lit. HE sets it in the middle of the stage and exits. END OF ACT ONE.)

ACT TWO

SCENE ELEVEN: PRATFALLS AND PITFALLS.

(While the house lights are still up, HERBIE enters, turns off the ghost light and strikes it. House and stage go to black. In the darkness, we hear a reprise, live or recorded, of the final lines of FLANAGAN's Act I curtain speech.)

FLANAGAN'S VOICE

The theatre must become conscious of the implications of the changing social order, or the changing social order will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theatre. And so, we begin.

(Lights come up. FLANAGAN stands alone on the bare stage.)

FLANAGAN

Or so we thought.

(Beat, setting up a title)
The First Six Months of The Federal Theatre Project! A comedy. Of errors.

(She takes a position on a platform above the stage floor. Spot on her, specials as needed on the floor.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

Problem Number One. The trouble with identifying the actors on relief.

(A real battle-ax of a CIVIL SERVANT enters. Both actresses play out, but speak as if directly to each other)

CIVIL SERVANT

Whatcha need?

FLANAGAN

How does one determine whether an unemployed person is specifically an unemployed actor?

CIVIL SERVANT

See those cabinets? Full of cards. Each card's a name. Find the name. Look at the card. Says what they did.

FLANAGAN

Would you say it's easy?

CIVIL SERVANT

Find the name. Look at the card. If that ain't easy enough, you need a doctor.

FLANAGAN

Then it should be no problem to compile a listing of all the theatre people on relief. Do you think you could do that?

CIVIL SERVANT

(Horri fied)

That ain't my job! There's a hundred thousand cards in there. Twice that. And then what about the ones who already got relief jobs doing something else? You can't dump this on me! I'm just a sweet innocent office girl!

(CIVIL SERVANT exits.)

FLANAGAN

Problem Number Two. Trouble with the Unions.

(Spot on stage floor. UNION LEADER appears.)

UNION LEADER

They're gonna give these folks twenty-three dollars a week? Tell me something. What have we been fighting for all along that we're gonna give it all up for twenty-three dollars a week? This is the government holding the unions back. This is the government keeping us down!

(Spot out. UNION LEADER exits.)

FLANAGAN

Problem Number Three. More trouble with the Unions.

(Spot on floor. WORKERS ALLIANCE LEADER appears.)

WORKERS ALLIANCE LEADER

Relief workers, Workers Alliance is for you! The so-called real unions will not protect you. The government wants to pay you to work and the unions want to stand in your way! You cannot trust the union. But you also cannot trust your government. They want to give you twenty-three dollars a week as a consolation, as a bargain. With twenty-three dollars a week, our capitalist government denounces the relief workers. Well, we the relief workers, we the Workers Alliance, denounce the capitalist government.

(Spot out. WORKERS ALLIANCE LEADER exits.)

FLANAGAN
I bet you can see where that one's headed. Problem Number
Four. Trouble with the actors.

(Spot up. YOUNG ACTRESS walks into the
spot. Pause.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)
Name, please.

YOUNG ACTRESS
Uh, I'm here to audition.

FLANAGAN
Glad to have you. Name, please.

(The YOUNG ACTRESS says nothing.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)
Miss? I need your name.

YOUNG ACTRESS
Why?

FLANAGAN
So we know who you are.

YOUNG ACTRESS
Do I have to give my right name?

FLANAGAN
Well, yes. If you're on relief, and you want an opportunity
to work in our program, yes, you need to provide your name.

YOUNG ACTRESS
But I have a reputation.
(Stepping forward,
conspiratorially)
I don't want people knowing I'm associated with this. I
don't want my name on it.

(Spot out. YOUNG ACTRESS exits.)

FLANAGAN
But the biggest problem we faced? Six months into the
project...

(JACOB BAKER enters.)

BAKER
Where's the work, Hallie?

FLANAGAN

We had yet to produce a single show.

BAKER

We promised people theatre, we have to give it to them. So, where is it?

(Spot out. BAKER exits.)

SCENE TWELVE: NAILS IN THE COFFIN.

(FRANK and HERBIE set up a makeshift playing space as the lights change.)

HERBIE

(Announcing)

Presenting The Federal Theatre Project!

FRANK

(Becoming a ringmaster)

Plays That Speak!

FLANAGAN

Or, Nails in a Coffin.

(FLANAGAN steps aside, into another pool of light.)

FRANK

Act One. *Ethiopia!*

(FRANK and HERBIE set up a boxing ring on the makeshift stage.)

FLANAGAN

(To us)

1934. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini stages an invasion of Ethiopia with intent to overthrow Emperor Haile Selassie.

(The clang-clang of a bell. MUSSOLINI and SELASSIE appear on the stage as boxers in a boxing ring.)

MUSSOLINI

Italia invades!

(MUSSOLINI swings at SELASSIE.)

SELASSIE

Ethiopia resists!

(SELASSIE stands up to MUSSOLINI, but clearly is weaker.)

FLANAGAN

Could Roosevelt intervene for peace?

(The bell rings again. ELMER RICE and JACOB BAKER appear on the stage. BAKER tags MUSSOLINI who retreats to a corner. RICE tags SELASSIE, who retreats to his corner. BAKER and RICE now in stand-off. ROOSEVELT stands behind BAKER.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

Elmer Rice makes a formal request to the Roosevelt Administration.

RICE

Permission to use FDR's speeches on Ethiopia conflict!

FLANAGAN

Jacob Baker refuses.

BAKER

Permission denied!

(BAKER punches RICE in the gut. RICE reels. Sound of crowd ooh-ing.)

FLANAGAN

But wait! There's more!

(With each word, BAKER advances on RICE, beating him.)

BAKER

Depiction of any living world leader in any federal theatre production is forbidden. Production cancelled!

(RICE is on the ropes. He summons his last ounce of strength.)

RICE

Censorship! I demand free speech! If you shut this show down, I'll resign.

BAKER

If I block *Ethiopia*, you'll quit?

RICE

You heard me.

BAKER

(To us, smiling)
You heard him, folks!

(MORE)

BAKER (cont' d)
(To RICE)

I accept!

(BAKER deals a huge blow to RICE, who collapses. ROOSEVELT raises BAKER's arm high in victory.)

ROOSEVELT

We have a winner!

(The bell sounds. Blackout on the makeshift stage. ACTORS exit.)

FLANAGAN

Our first Living Newspaper, and it closed before it opened, taken down by censorship and lack of federal support.

(The sharp, unmistakable sound of a hammer pounding a nail into wood.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)

We ran into similar problems with our next two living newspapers, even though we got them open.

(The YOUNG ACTRESS enters.)

YOUNG ACTRESS

You call this garbage a script? This ain't acting! It's reporting.

(YOUNG ACTRESS storms off.)

FLANAGAN

Never mind how lucky they were to have work.

YOUNG ACTRESS

(Off)

I heard that.

(FRANK and HERBIE enter the makeshift stage.)

FRANK

Triple A Plowed Under.

HERBIE

And Injunction Granted!

(FRANK exits.)

FLANAGAN

Triple A Plowed Under was an indictment of government agricultural policy.

(MORE)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)
Injunction Granted attacked labor unions and the courts. I
 admit I tried to stop both of these productions.

HERBIE
 (To FLANAGAN)
 I'm playing you.

FLANAGAN
 Well, great.

HERBIE
 I never get to play anything.
 (As FLANAGAN)
 I will not have the Federal Theatre used politically.

FLANAGAN
 That's me?

HERBIE
 Be nice. I'm a techie.
 (As FLANAGAN again)
 I will not have the Federal Theatre used politically.

FLANAGAN
 O-kay. True, I said that. But these productions were more
 than examination of an issue. They took sides.

HERBIE
 (As FLANAGAN)
 The Federal Theatre will not further the aims of any party:
 Democratic, Republican, or Communist.

FLANAGAN
 I said that, too, and I meant it.

(BAKER enters on the makeshift stage,
 addresses HERBIE.)

BAKER
 Wait. Did you say Communist?

HERBIE
 (Indicating FLANAGAN below)
 I didn't say it. She said it.

FLANAGAN
 I did. But I had also said...

HERBIE
 (Involuntarily, as FLANAGAN)
 The theatre must be aware of the new social order, or the new
 social order will rightly ignore the theatre.

BAKER

Whatever. Since when is Communist an American party?

FLANAGAN

(To BAKER, correcting)

This is a new kind of theatre, with a new kind of message.

BAKER

A Communist message?

FLANAGAN

No. A political message. We may not agree with it, but how can we stand in the way of it?

HERBIE

(To us)

And audiences agreed.

(As AUDIENCE MEMBERS)

Freedom of speech is our First Amendment right! We won't be quiet. This is America!

(HERBIE exits, triumphant.)

BAKER

Attacks on government policies. How patriotic.

FLANAGAN

We're just presenting issues.

BAKER

And opinions. Successfully, too, I might add. I get amazing reports of audiences talking back to the actors on stage.

FLANAGAN

Well, theatre has an "amazing" power to move people.

BAKER

If I weren't a wiser man, I'd think you were inciting people to riot.

(The sound of a hammer pounding a nail into wood.)

FLANAGAN

You know that's not our goal, Baker.

BAKER

What is? The right of the worker to rise up and revolt?

FLANAGAN

We're simply trying to dramatize all angles of the situation.

BAKER

How the capitalist government is oppressing the lowly citizen. That's a little lopsided, don't you think?

FLANAGAN

That's just interpretation.

BAKER

It's my interpretation. Be very careful, Hallie. Not everyone's like me. Not everyone's smart enough to tell the difference.

(BAKER exits to the sound of another hammer pounding a nail into wood. FRANK enters.)

FRANK

Act Two. The Voodoo *Macbeth!*

FLANAGAN

As per Mrs. Roosevelt's recommendation, one of the departments of the Federal Theatre Project in New York was the Negro Unit, housed in Harlem

(ELEANOR ROOSEVELT enters on the makeshift stage.)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Actors are just as important to the fabric of America as any other civil worker, and Negro actors are no different. There's a wonderful actress you should meet who would be a perfect choice to direct the Negro Unit. She could teach some of your actors grace and distinction.

(ROSE MCCLENDON, the grand dame once called "The Sepia Barrymore" enters on the stage.)

ROSE MCCLENDON

(Proudly)

I could teach all of them grace and distinction.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Her name is Rose McClendon.

(ELEANOR ROOSEVELT exits.)

ROSE MCCLENDON

(To ELEANOR ROOSEVELT as she goes.)

Oh, thank you, sugar.

(Then, to FLANAGAN)

(MORE)

ROSE MCCLENDON (cont'd)
But why on earth do you want to put me in charge? All I know how to do is say my lines and look good in the costumes.

FLANAGAN
Miss McClendon, this is an incredible opportunity.

ROSE MCCLENDON
Of course, it is. You're paying me, aren't you?
(Laughs.)

But let me tell you something. You can't expect people who been kept in corners all their lives to come out onstage and suddenly dance ballets. We're a bunch of hungry actors, hungry for work and hungry to perform. But we need a real director. Get us somebody with some experience in here, and we'll give you theatre you can be proud of.

FLANAGAN
Enter John Houseman and Orson Welles.

(FLANAGAN exits. JOHN HOUSEMAN enters on the stage.)

HOUSEMAN
Miss McClendon, it is with great honor that I humbly accept the noble responsibility of heading up your theatre.

ROSE MCCLENDON
Mr. Houseman, before that missionary tone becomes habit, let me say that I do not care, nor do any of my actors care, that you are white. What we care about is talent. You got that, you got no problem.

(MCCLENDON exits. HOUSEMAN begins to address the Negro Unit, but he speaks to us.)

HOUSEMAN
(Caught a little off-guard)
Uh, thank you, Miss McClendon. I and my associate, Mr. Welles, have brilliant ideas about...

(Notices that WELLES is not there)
Uh...Welles. Welles!

(ORSON WELLES enters on the stage, like Igor in *Frankenstein*.)

WELLES
You rang, mash-tah?

HOUSEMAN
(To WELLES)
Stop it.

WELLES

(Like a little British child)

But don't you like my funny, father?

HOUSEMAN

(To us)

Excuse me a moment.

(To WELLES, as he pulls him
upstage for a private chat)

What are you doing? Don't you have any idea how important
this situation is?

WELLES

(Patronizing)

Oh, I'm sure it's very important, yes.

HOUSEMAN

You must show dignity and respect.

WELLES

Dignity and respect. Got it.

HOUSEMAN

Good.

(WELLES steps forward, and speaks in an
exaggerated Southern accent.)

WELLES

How y'all doin' up in heah this fine day?

HOUSEMAN

If you weren't such a genius bastard, I'd murder you in your
sleep.

WELLES

Take a number.

HOUSEMAN

Would you please present your concept to these good people?

WELLES

Gladly.

HOUSEMAN

Thank you.

(WELLES steps forward again.)

WELLES

(Very serious)

Hamlet.

(MORE)

WELLES (cont' d)
 (Beat, silly)
 Set in a traveling circus!

HOUSEMAN
 No!

WELLES
 Romeo and Juliet, told with barnyard animals!

HOUSEMAN
 No!

WELLES
 Oh, all right! You... critic!
 (Beat, serious)
 A Voodoo Macbeth!

HOUSEMAN
 No!

WELLES
 (To HOUSEMAN)
 Wait!
 (To sound booth)
 Drums!

(The sound of voodoo drums begins.)

WELLES (cont' d)
 I'm serious. The government of Haiti is notoriously unstable. I have this bizarre idea to take *Macbeth* and, preserving as much as possible, set it in that wild island culture, with all its violent power and voodoo mysticism. My idea is either destined for legendary success or doomed to tragic failure. And quite frankly, the risk is delicious.

(A pause. WELLES basks in his mad genius. HOUSEMAN comes up to him.)

HOUSEMAN
 Thank you. You have something on your tie.

(HOUSEMAN points. WELLES looks down. HOUSEMAN pops him in the nose. WELLES laughs hysterically. BOTH exit. ROSE MCCLENDON enters.)

ROSE MCCLENDON
 Those men are crazy. But they were exactly what we needed. They didn't treat us as people of color. They didn't treat us as *people*. They treated us as *actors*. That Orson Welles could charm the skin off a snake, he was so smooth. He could attack your acting and make you want to kiss him for it. I remember one time with the girl playing Lady Macbeth.

(MCCLENDON becomes the young actress playing Lady Macbeth, and an actor playing MACBETH joins her on the stage.)

MACBETH

Peace, woman. I dare do all that may become a man, he who dares do more is no man at all.

ROSE MCCLENDON

(As "Lady Macbeth," rather weakly)

When you dared to do it, you were a man; to do it can only make you more so.

MACBETH

But if we should fail?

ROSE MCCLENDON

We fail! Screw your courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail!

(WELLES enters.)

WELLES

All right, hold.

(The ACTORS relax.)

ROSE MCCLENDON

(As the actress)

I can't do this.

WELLES

Nonsense. It's just words. Sweetie, honey, what's happening here?

ROSE MCCLENDON

I think I'm mad at him.

WELLES

That's a start. Why are you mad?

ROSE MCCLENDON

Because he didn't do what he said he would.

WELLES

Shame on you, Macbeth. Disappointing a lady like that.

(MACBETH laughs.)

MACBETH

I'm sorry.

WELLES

Don't be sorry. If you didn't, there'd be no play.

(To "Lady Macbeth")

Sweetie, mad's a good place to start, but it needs to go deeper. Remember, you want him to kill the king. That's huge. More than that, you need it. You need that king killed, just like you need air in your lungs and blood in your veins, if not more so.

(Very gentle, comforting her)

I know you can do it. You have such a tremendous light inside you. Let it out. Dazzle me.

(Beat)

Let's try it again.

(WELLES exits.)

ROSE MCCLENDON

(As herself)

I swear, I would have kissed him right on the mouth. If it had been me, we never would have opened the play. I would have kept messing up just to get him to keep on talking to me like that.

(Beat, naughtily)

Good thing it wasn't me.

(ROSE MCCLENDON exits. MACBETH stays. The sound of voodoo drums. Lights change. Now we're in a performance of the *Voodoo Macbeth*.)

MACBETH

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time, and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, yet signifying nothing.

(Blackout on the stage and silence. MACBETH exits. FLANAGAN enters.)

FLANAGAN

The *Voodoo Macbeth* was an enormous critical and financial success. Finally, after a year in existence, we were on course.

(The sound of a hammer pounding a nail into wood.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)

But success is fickle, and always depends on interpretation. Hot on the heels of *Macbeth* came another Living Newspaper, this time about electricity and the development of monopolies. *Power*.

(Lights out on FLANAGAN, who moves to another part of the playing space. A MAN enters on the makeshift stage.)

MAN

Power. Some of us have it. Some of us don't. But we all need it.

(Two GROCERS enter, one from each side. MAN approaches GROCER #1.)

MAN (cont' d)

How much are your potatoes?

GROCER #1

Ten cents a pound.

MAN

Outrageous! I'll take my business elsewhere.

GROCER #1

Be my guest.

(GROCER #1 exits. MAN approaches GROCER #2.)

MAN

How much are your potatoes?

GROCER #2

Five cents a pound.

MAN

I'll take it.

(MAN mimes handing GROCER #2 a coin. GROCER #2 mimes handing MAN potatoes.)

MAN (cont' d)

How much for pork chops?

GROCER #2

Fifteen cents a pound.

MAN

Outrageous! I'll take my business elsewhere.

(POWER BARON and MAN exit. JACOB BAKER strolls onto the stage as FLANAGAN speaks.)

FLANAGAN

Power, like *Triple-A Plowed Under* and *Injunction Granted*, was a huge success everywhere it played. At the New York opening, Harry Hopkins spoke to the actors after the performance.

(HARRY HOPKINS appears in a spot near FLANAGAN. JACOB BAKER watches from the makeshift stage.)

HARRY HOPKINS

Power is a great show. It makes you laugh, makes you cry, and it makes you think. Now, some people will tell you it's propaganda. But I'm telling you this: We need more plays like *Power*.

(Lights out on HOPKINS. HOPKINS exits. BAKER speaks to FLANAGAN from the stage.)

BAKER

But it *is* propaganda.

FLANAGAN

Propaganda is only another word for education.

BAKER

A Russian word for it.

FLANAGAN

A Latin word for it.

BAKER

You want to take the utility companies out of the hands of independent businessmen and turn them over to the people.

FLANAGAN

No. We're denouncing monopolies.

BAKER

You're advocating socialism

(BAKER pulls out a hammer.)

And that can't be a good thing.

(BAKER exits. We hear the sound of a hammer pounding a nail into wood. FRANK enters, looking off the way he came, starting to show the pressure.)

FRANK
Act Three. *The Cradle Will Rock.*

FLANAGAN
In 1936, we launched our most ambitious project yet: *It Can't Happen Here*, about the rise of a fascist regime in the United States. Eighteen cities, twenty-two productions, all opening on the same night. Telegrams poured in from the field.

(Members of the ensemble pour onto the stage, reciting TELEGRAMS as they move on. This dialogue should flow very quickly, each line dovetailing the one before it.)

TELEGRAM #1
Where is revised act two? Rush immediately.

TELEGRAM #2
Received new act two. Act three now makes no sense. Please advise.

TELEGRAM #3
Spanish company can't learn lines unless full text translated ASAP.

FLANAGAN
Did I mention there were bilingual companies as well? French, German, Spanish... Yiddish.

TELEGRAM #1
Cuts to White House scene regrettable. Was best scene in play.

TELEGRAM #2
White House scene is quote ill-advised unquote. Need revisions.

TELEGRAM #3
No more revisions. If play must open on time, then no more revisions. Stop. Stop.

FLANAGAN
It didn't take long for the press to get curious.

(The TELEGRAM people become REPORTERS and surround FLANAGAN.)

REPORTER #1
This play imagines our government as a Fascist regime, does it not?

FLANAGAN

This play is a work of fiction. We very much believe in our federal government and the work it's trying to do.

REPORTER #2

Why align yourself with such a specific political agenda?

FLANAGAN

The goals of the Federal Theatre have not changed. We still strive for a non-partisan point of view.

REPORTER #3

But the government's the bad guys, right?

FLANAGAN

(To us)

In the context of the play, that was the truth.

(REPORTERS turn out and report their material.)

REPORTER #1

Clearly designed to re-elect Roosevelt.

REPORTER #2

Aims to get Roosevelt out of office.

REPORTER #3

Communist agenda.

REPORTER #1

New Deal all the way.

REPORTER #2

Paradoxically *advocates* Fascism

REPORTERS

Propaganda, naked and unconcealed.

FLANAGAN

78,000 lines of type all over the country before we'd even premiered. You'd think we'd kill for free press like that. But with free press like that, who needs it?

(REPORTERS exit. As FLANAGAN speaks continuous from the stage, the offstage REPORTERS overlap her speech with whispers.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

It Can't Happen Here...

WHISPERS
(On "Happen")

Propaganda. . .

FLANAGAN

. . . premiered on October 27, 1936. . .

WHISPERS
(On "October 27")

Clearly designed. . .

FLANAGAN

. . . one week before the Presidential election. . .

WHISPERS
(On "Presidential")

Roosevelt elected. . .

FLANAGAN

. . . and was a phenomenal success.

WHISPERS
(On "Phenomenal")

Fascist regime. . .

FLANAGAN

In its first three months. . .

WHISPERS
(On "Three")

Propaganda. . .

FLANAGAN

. . . it was seen by over 500,000 people. . .

WHISPERS
(On "Five Hundred Thousand")

Communist agenda. . .

FLANAGAN

. . . about the same attendance as a five-year Broadway run.

WHISPERS
(On "Five-year")

Federal Theatre. . .

FLANAGAN

And they said we couldn't make money.

WHISPERS
(Throughout the last speech,
blending as one)

Propaganda. . .

(MORE)

WHISPERS (cont' d)

Propaganda. . .
Propaganda. . .

(FLANAGAN strolls off proudly. As lights fade, the WHISPERS fade into silence. Then the sound of a hammer driving a nail into wood. Lights fade up on the makeshift stage. FRANK enters.)

FRANK
John Houseman and Orson Welles.

(FRANK starts to exit. HOUSEMAN and WELLES enter on the main stage.)

HOUSEMAN
(To FRANK)
That's an introduction?

WELLES
My God, man, where's your passion?

FRANK
Backstage.

(FRANK exits. HOUSEMAN and WELLES speak to us very conversationally, overlapping dialogue and finishing each other's sentences.)

HOUSEMAN
One night in early 1937, a man by the name of Marc Blitzstein came to my house and played the score to a new opera he had composed.

WELLES
He had written a little piece, just a scene, really, about a prostitute, and Bert Brecht suggested...

HOUSEMAN
(Mocking)
Oh, Bert Brecht. His old buddy Bert.

WELLES
...turning it into a whole piece about not just sexual prostitution, but all the different kinds of prostitution that we see in everyday life. And yes, my buddy Bert. Smart ass.

HOUSEMAN
He set his sights on the steel industry and the workers' fight for unionization. I thought it would be perfect for the Federal Theatre.

WELLES

And with Hallie's blessing, we went into rehearsal. But I didn't have my lead girl, my prostitute.

(Lights fade on WELLES and HOUSEMAN. A young actress, OLIVE STANTON, appears on the makeshift stage.)

OLIVE STANTON

I went to the WPA for a job. What do you do, they asked me. I wanted to act, so I told them, "I'm an actor." Then they asked me about experience. I didn't have any. So I did what any resourceful actor would do. I made it up. They saw right through me. They were going to just turn me away, and I said, "Wait. I want to work. I need to work. I'll take anything. Please." And they handed me a card. The lady said, "It ain't acting. But it's a theatre." I didn't set out to clean toilets.

(OLIVE kneels on the stage, and mimes scrubbing the floor. As she scrubs, she sings "Amazing Grace," beautifully and softly. WELLES comes onto the makeshift stage quietly, listening. After a moment, OLIVE senses his presence.)

OLIVE STANTON (cont'd)

(Rising, to WELLES)

I'm sorry, sir.

WELLES

Don't apologize. It was beautiful.

OLIVE STANTON

I didn't know anyone would be in here. Excuse me.

(OLIVE starts to leave. WELLES stops her.)

WELLES

Just a minute. What's your name?

OLIVE STANTON

Olive Stanton.

WELLES

Olive Stanton.

OLIVE STANTON

Please don't get me in trouble, sir. I'm on relief. I need this job.

WELLES
 With a voice like that, you shouldn't be on the floor. You should be on the stage. How do you feel about playing a prostitute?

OLIVE STANTON
 What does it pay?

WELLES
 Prostitution?

OLIVE STANTON
 Playing one.

WELLES
 Oh. Twenty-three dollars a week.

OLIVE STANTON
 I'll do it.

WELLES
 Great. Get cleaned up. We need you upstairs.

(WELLES exits. OLIVE talks to us.)

OLIVE STANTON
 This was a big deal. A big new show, a Broadway show, really, with a big fat part for me, and everyone was talking about it. They sold 14,000 tickets before the first performance! But you know what they say. Every silver lining has its cloud. The steel workers were on strike, and the unions didn't like the idea of another show about union problems. Bad news travels fast.

(OLIVE exits the makeshift stage.
 FLANAGAN and BAKER appear below.)

BAKER
 Tough break, Hallie.

FLANAGAN
 What a surprise. What now?

BAKER
 (Almost pleased)
 Money. There is none.

FLANAGAN
 Of course there is. Have you looked at the records lately?

BAKER
 (Smiling)
 I can only do what I'm told.
 (MORE)

BAKER (cont'd)
 (Hands FLANAGAN a notice)
 No new Federal Theatre productions before July 1st.

FLANAGAN
 (Taking the note)
 Well, we've got *Cradle Will Rock* opening in a week. But I'll give word to the other shows in rehearsal and tell them to put things on hold.

BAKER
 No. This includes the Blitzstein show.

(Beat. FLANAGAN gets the point.)

FLANAGAN
 Is this about the unions?

BAKER
 It's about money.

FLANAGAN
 It's censorship. You're censoring this show.

BAKER
 No. I'm not doing anything.

(BAKER exits. FLANAGAN looks after him.)

FLANAGAN
 No, you're not.

(WELLES and HOUSEMAN join FLANAGAN. HOUSEMAN takes the paper from FLANAGAN.)

WELLES
 This is outrageous!

FLANAGAN
 Yes, it is. But there's not much we can do about it.

WELLES
 We can go to the press! Raise a stink about it!

FLANAGAN
 You need more negative press?

HOUSEMAN
 Don't they realize the money's already spent? We have advance sales! They'll make it right back!

WELLES

(To FLANAGAN)

Eighteen thousand tickets, Hallie!

FLANAGAN

They won't hear it. The show's closed. I'm sorry.

(FLANAGAN exits.)

WELLES

(Screaming after her)

Like hell it is!

HOUSEMAN

(To us)

We posted a closing notice.

WELLES

(Turning on him, vicious)

Take that shit down!

HOUSEMAN

(To us)

In defiance, no closing notice was posted. On opening night, June 16, 1937, the audience flooded the sidewalks.

(AUDIENCE MEMBERS flood the stage, as GUARDS block the makeshift stage.)

GUARD

Under penalty of law, no one is allowed to enter this theatre.

HOUSEMAN

(To WELLES)

What are we going to do?

WELLES

We're going to do the show.

HOUSEMAN

We can't do the show! I mean, what are we going to do with all these people?

WELLES

(Adamantly)

We're going to do the show.

(WELLES speaks to the crowd, but we don't hear what he says. HOUSEMAN talks to us.)

HOUSEMAN

Orson Welles, the great magician, had a wonderful trick prepared. They wouldn't let us into the Maxine Elliott? Fine! He had secured another theatre, the Venice, twenty blocks uptown, on 59th Street. He sent Blitzstein off to locate a piano. And he told the audience that they would see *The Cradle Will Rock*. That is, if they'd be willing to walk twenty blocks to do it. And that audience, God bless them, every one of them followed us as we marched uptown to do our forbidden theatre.

(The AUDIENCE moves, led by WELLES and HOUSEMAN.)

HOUSEMAN (cont'd)

As we walked, a fire truck, lights blazing, came zooming by, and in the back of it, Marc Blitzstein pounding away on a borrowed piano. But at the Venice, more opposition.

(The AUDIENCE marches out with WELLES and HOUSEMAN. MARC BLITZSTEIN appears on the makeshift stage. A UNION LEADER stops him.)

UNION LEADER

Who are you?

BLITZSTEIN

Marc Blitzstein.

UNION LEADER

You the producer?

BLITZSTEIN

I'm the composer.

UNION LEADER

Well, tell 'em. No union actor, and no union musician, is allowed to perform this show on this stage. None of 'em. Got it?

BLITZSTEIN

Well, I'm playing it.

UNION LEADER

Did you hear what I said? No union actor...

BLITZSTEIN

And no union musician can perform on the stage. I got it.

(Smiles)

But I ain't union.

(UNION LEADER exits. BLITZSTEIN sits at an imaginary piano. WELLES appears on the main stage.)

WELLES

Could I have the house, please?

(The house lights come up.)

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, we promised you theatre, and by God, you're going to get it. We have dragged you through the dirty streets and damp night air to show you something your government doesn't want you to see. To play songs that your government doesn't want you to hear. However, as the performers' unions are indescribably restrictive of their workers' participation with the Federal Theatre, Mr. Blitzstein - that's him up there at the piano forte. Marc, wave to the people, would you? Mr. Blitzstein will perform the entire show for you himself. Enjoy.

(WELLES stands near the edge of the house, and HOUSEMAN joins him. BLITZSTEIN speaks to us from the stage.)

BLITZSTEIN

I sat down to play, and I didn't even have to look at my music. I played the hell out of the overture, and then came the first song. Moll's Song. The prostitute's song. I wasn't the best singer, but here went nothing. "A street corner. Steeltown, USA." I played the opening notes, and the most incredible thing happened.

(OLIVE STANTON stands up in the house.)

OLIVE STANTON

I stood up. I had to. It was my cue. And I sang. They could keep me off the stage, but they couldn't keep me from singing. And then as we went on, one by one, everyone, every actor in the show, stood up.

(The opening-night AUDIENCE has now become ACTORS in the house, and THEY stand up one by one.)

OLIVE STANTON (cont' d)

And we all sang. Everyone of us sang. We did the whole show right there in the audience. Everyone told me I was a genius. A hero. I wasn't. I was just a girl who needed a job. My mother and me, we were dead without that twenty-three dollars a week.

(House lights fade and ACTORS all exit, as the lights fade on the makeshift stage and BLITZSTEIN exits. WELLES and HOUSEMAN come forward.)

HOUSEMAN

We resigned from the Federal Theatre Project. Immediately. Why wait for them to fire us?

(HOUSEMAN storms off.)

WELLES

Oh, *I'm* the dramatic one. Our unit, Project 891, was officially closed. So we struck out on our own. From the ruins, we built our own theatre company, the Mercury Theatre! Our first big hit? *The Cradle Will Rock!* Hah! Bastards!

(WELLES exits triumphantly, as we hear the sound of a hammer pounding a nail into wood. FRANK enters on the makeshift stage.)

FRANK

Act Four. The Children's Unit.

(As FRANK starts to exit, LEAR enters, followed by LEAR'S WIFE.)

LEAR

Well, it's about time!

FRANK

I got it in, didn't I?

(FRANK exits.)

LEAR

(Calling after FRANK)

Barely!

LEAR'S WIFE

Through all of this *mishegas*, they never knew what to do with the vaudevillians. Until Yasha Frank said...

LEAR

(As Yasha Frank, very Yiddish)

Put them in kiddie plays.

LEAR'S WIFE

So they did. Okay, it wasn't Shakespeare. Hell, it's wasn't even vaudeville. But if you've never had fifteen hundred children laughing and clapping for you, then *bubbeleh*, you haven't lived.

LEAR

We did them all... *Alice in Wonderland, Hansel and Gretel...*

LEAR'S WIFE

The Revolt of the Beavers!

(Pause)

What? You never heard of it?

LEAR

We'll tell you the story. It's very important. Two little children...

LEAR'S WIFE

A boy and a girl...

LEAR

...find themselves magically transported to BeaverLand.

LEAR'S WIFE

Where the beavers live.

(Beat)

What else ya gonna call it?

(Back in the story)

There they meet a hard-working beaver named Oakleaf.

LEAR

Oakleaf tells them all the beavers are oppressed. Who's oppressing you, they ask him. The Chief, he says! Who's the Chief?

LEAR'S WIFE

The Chief is the biggest, fattest beaver of them all, and he yells at the other beavers to work on the busy wheel, turning wood into wonderful things like beaver food and beaver clothes!

LEAR

But while they all work, what does he do? Nothing.

LEAR'S WIFE

They're working their little flat tails off, he's rollerskating around, eating ice cream

LEAR

So what do you think happens? The beavers revolt!

LEAR'S WIFE

Oakleaf and the children organize the worker beavers and they overthrow The Chief.

BOTH

Mazel tov!

LEAR

And then they set up a society where they share everything,
and they all live happily ever after.

LEAR'S WIFE

But not quite.

(Lights up on the mainstage. BAKER and
FLANAGAN enter. BAKER carries a
newspaper.)

BAKER

You just can't seem to get any clean ink on this project,
Flanagan!

FLANAGAN

It's a children's play!

BAKER

Really?

(Reads)

"Mother Goose has been studying Marxism. Jack and Jill lead
the class revolution."

(To FLANAGAN)

You're teaching that to children! American children!

FLANAGAN

The play does not teach Marxism, Baker. It teaches
unselfishness.

BAKER

It teaches that rich people have all the power and that the
poor have to take that power away from them.

FLANAGAN

All it says is that it's better to be good than bad.

BAKER

They overthrow their government, Hallie!

FLANAGAN

They're beavers!

BAKER

Yeah? Well, they're also closed. As of immediately.

(BAKER exits. Sound of a hammer
pounding a nail into wood. Lights fade
on FLANAGAN, who then also exits.)

LEAR

That was 1937. The next year, we came back with a beautiful show that was one of the biggest hits the Federal Theatre ever had.

LEAR'S WIFE

Over fifty vaudeville actors all in one show! It was better than playing the circuit back in the old days.

LEAR

Vaudeville was dead, we were dying, and then ka-boom, all this gorgeous work!

LEAR'S WIFE

Walt Disney saw it, and it gave him the idea for his next big cartoon picture. That show was *Pi nocchio*.

LEAR

If you've seen it, or if your children have seen it, watch out.

LEAR'S WIFE

Subversive messages are everywhere.

(LEAR and LEAR'S WIFE exit, leaving the makeshift stage empty.)

SCENE THIRTEEN: IT CAN HAPPEN HERE.

(FRANK enters on the makeshift stage.)

FRANK

Act Five. It *Can* Happen Here.

(FRANK exits. A spot finds FLANAGAN in another part of the stage.)

FLANAGAN

In July of 1938, Republican Congressman Martin Dies, made formal allegations in the press that the Federal Theatre was Communist. I issued an immediate and unequivocal denial.

(JACOB BAKER enters, addressing FLANAGAN.)

BAKER

That's against procedure, Hallie.

FLANAGAN

You wanted clean ink. What else was I supposed to do?

BAKER

Washington handles press on this situation. No exceptions.

FLANAGAN

They name me personally.

BAKER

But you cannot publicly respond to the charges.

FLANAGAN

What?

BAKER

That's the policy. No exceptions.

(BAKER exits.)

FLANAGAN

By August, the committee had released testimony of a half-dozen supposed witnesses, all of whom supported the committee's charge of communism and all of whom were unqualified to speak about any Federal Theatre matter, direct or indirect. The administration still refused to allow me to speak to the press, so I wrote to Congressman Dies directly.

(Lights up on the makeshift stage, which now features a desk. Seated at the desk is CONGRESSMAN MARTIN DIES, late 30s, a loud, boisterous Texan, cloaked in black robes, smoking a black cigar, reading a letter.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

The witnesses you have subpoenaed are in no position to know the scope of the Project's activity. Their statements can easily be proven to be biased, prejudicial, or false. We are ready and willing to give our full cooperation to your committee.

DIES

(Chuckling over the letter)

That's cute.

FLANAGAN

To this letter, I received no reply.

(DIES crumples the letter and tosses it. Lights fade on HIM)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

Still the attacks continued and still the administration refused to get involved. Rumors swirled that the W.P.A. was prepared to cease the Theatre Project as a political liability. I wrote Dies again.

(Lights up on DIES at his desk again, reading another letter.)

FLANAGAN (cont' d)

Congressman Dies, thousands of people's jobs are in jeopardy, and livelihoods are at stake. I implore you to let me present to the committee positive proof of the work we've done.

DIES

(Apparently touched)

Aw, them poor souls!

(DIES breaks out in laughter and rips the letter in two as the lights fade on him.)

FLANAGAN

Still no reply. The charges were taking their toll. Public trust was damaged, and morale among Federal Theatre employees was at an all-time low. Emmet Lavery, one of our own, got up the nerve to write to Congressman Dies.

(EMMET LAVERY, a meek-looking but passionate man, enters. FLANAGAN gives him the stage. As he speaks, lights come up on DIES at his desk on the makeshift stage, reading the letter.)

LAVERY

Congressman Dies. I have been part of the Federal Theatre Project since near its inception, and for the length of my tenure, it has been my duty to sign the contract for each and every play we have produced.

(DIES appears to be folding the letter.)

LAVERY (cont' d)

Mr. Dies, I am a decent, upstanding citizen of this great country, and I am a Catholic. I can say with absolute certainty that I have never, nor will I ever, wittingly or unwittingly, authorize a communistic play for the project.

(DIES continues folding.)

LAVERY (cont' d)

I am a peaceful man, Mr. Dies, but I am outraged at the charges levied against this institution. I demand to be heard. I demand to be heard!

(DIES erupts in laughter, and sails the letter offstage as a paper airplane.)

As FLANAGAN continues, CONGRESSMAN PARNELL THOMAS of New Jersey enters and shares light with EMMET LAVERY.)

FLANAGAN

That letter went unanswered. By September, they got bolder still, when Congressman Thomas, a member of the Dies Committee announced...

THOMAS

(Ignoring LAVERY, to us)

Practically every play was clear unadulterated propaganda!

LAVERY

(To THOMAS, summoning strength he doesn't know he has)

How can you say that? Have you seen our production records? I'll argue the merits of each and every title with you. Name the time and the place. We can do it live on the radio, if you want. Are you prepared to do that, Mr. Thomas?

(Beat.)

THOMAS

(Smiling, to us)

I didn't hear anything, did you?

FLANAGAN

The challenge, like all others, went unanswered.

(Lights fade on all but FLANAGAN.)

FLANAGAN (cont'd)

Congressional hearings are not legal hearings. A citizen does not have the right to due process. They can hold a person in contempt if he refuses to testify, but they don't have to hear a person who demands to be heard. And they will listen to anyone who has even the shakiest connection to a cause if they speak in the name of American justice.

(FLANAGAN exits. Lights up on the makeshift stage. DIES is seated at a vaudeville-style judge's bench, with two smaller podiums on either side. From left and right, respectively, come CONGRESSMAN THOMAS and CONGRESSMAN JOE STARNES, who take their places flanking DIES. New Jersey Congressman THOMAS is clearly a lackey for DIES. STARNES is from Alabama and seems to follow a reasonable logic, but he's DIES' boy as well. There is also a chair on the floor of the main stage area, facing the audience.)

DIES

You ready to have a little fun, fellas?

THOMAS

If fun means catching commies, sir.

STARNES

Catch a commie by the toe, if he hollers...

THOMAS AND STARNES

Squeeze harder!

DIES

Whoa, pace yourselves, boys. Y'all gonna get plum tuckered out.

(WALLACE STARK, an intense middle-aged man, enters and goes up to the committee bench.)

WALLACE STARK

Excuse me, Mr. Dies? I'm Wallace Stark, and I'd like to...

DIES

Come back later, son. Hearings haven't started yet.

WALLACE STARK

I'd like to speak to you anyway, if I may. Off the record.

DIES

Well, that's just fine. We can always make time for that.

STARNES

What did you say your name was?

WALLACE STARK

Wallace Stark. I'm an independent instructor in dramatics and public speaking.

THOMAS

You realize we're investigating the Federal Theatre Project and allegations of Communist activity within it?

WALLACE STARK

I worked for the Federal Theatre, briefly, around the time it started. Do you realize that Hallie Flanagan has employed known Communists in the Project?

DIES

You have names?

WALLACE STARK

Yes, I do. Irving Mendell. Flanagan put him in charge of placing people in different units of the project.

THOMAS

Was he a Communist?

WALLACE STARK

Yes, an avowed Communist.

THOMAS

An admitted Communist?

WALLACE STARK

That's what "avowed" means, sir. And you know what's really insulting? I'm a professional, right? A professional in Manhattan. Mendell was a candymaker. From Brooklyn.

STARNES

And he worked for the Communists?

WALLACE STARK

He recruited students from the dance and drama unit where I taught. Then he was transferred to the "overthrow the Government" theatre they do, the Living Newspapers. That's Flanagan's doing as well.

DIES

So, you're saying that Mrs. Flanagan herself is a Communist?

WALLACE STARK

I wouldn't say that exactly.

DIES

Not even off the record?

WALLACE STARK

Read the reports about the plays she did up at that girl college in Poughkeepsie, before she was even part of the project. That's enough for me.

THOMAS

You ever talk to her about it?

WALLACE STARK

No. She avoided every opportunity to speak with me about anything constructive. I had ideas about organizing a veterans' unit...

THOMAS

So you don't know her personal political theories?

WALLACE STARK

Look at the work, gentlemen! They put on propaganda plays. They advocate Communism. All these social-problem plays that won't quit until they start a revolution. All they do is find fault with the government and make it out to be an enemy of the people. Apologies to Ibsen.

DIES

Who's that? 'S that another Communist?

WALLACE STARK

Who, Ibsen? He's a playwright.

DIES

Funny name. He a Russian?

WALLACE STARK

He's Norwegian. He wrote *An Enemy of the People*.

DIES

Never heard of it.

WALLACE STARK

It's about a man who's shunned by the very community he's trying to help. The same way that our American government is being shunned by the Federal Theatre.

DIES

Thank you, Mr. Stark. You're a good American.

WALLACE STARK

I hope you're going to suspend Hallie Flanagan.

DIES

Uh, that's not within the province of this committee.

THOMAS AND STARNES

But we're gonna try!

DIES

Thank you for your time.

WALLACE STARK

My pleasure, sir.

(WALLACE STARK exits.)

DIES

Hoo-hoo, fellas! This is gonna be more fun than I thought.

(Solemn)

I hereby call this session of the House Un-American Activities Committee to order. The Committee calls its next witness. Miz Hazel Huffman.

SCENE FOURTEEN: THE WORDS OF A MAIL CLERK.

(HAZEL HUFFMAN enters, 30s, with the look of someone coarse who's been reined in. Throughout her testimony, she flirts openly with the panel, using her femininity as a weapon. As she crosses to the chair, FLANAGAN enters.)

FLANAGAN

Hazel Huffman was a mail clerk in our offices in McLean Mansion.

(HUFFMAN stands beside the chair and facing the committee, her right hand raised.)

DIES

Miz Huffman, do you solemnly swear, blah, blah, blah, and all the rest of it, so help you God?

HUFFMAN

Can I keep my fingers crossed?

DIES

As long as we don't see it, l'il darlin', you sure can! Cover up, boys.

(DIES covers his eyes. THOMAS covers his ears. STARNES covers his mouth. HUFFMAN, facing them, puts her left hand behind her back and crosses her fingers.)

HUFFMAN

I do!

DIES

Then please be seated.

(HUFFMAN sits in the chair, now facing us. She speaks as if addressing the committee face to face.)

DIES (cont' d)

Miz Huffman, I'm Congressman Dies, and these are my boys - I mean, these are my *colleagues* - Congressman Thomas and Congressman Starnes.

HUFFMAN

Hi, boys.

(THOMAS and STARNES whistle at HUFFMAN.
DIES sits back with his cigar.
FLANAGAN speaks to us.)

FLANAGAN

Ain't she something?

DIES

Miz Huffman, will you state your employment for the record?

HUFFMAN

Certainly. I'm a representative of the Professional
Theatrical Employees of New York City, Committee on Relief
Status.

FLANAGAN

(To us)

She's a mail clerk!

THOMAS

You understand, don't you, Miss Huffman, that the purpose of
your testimony is to show the communistic activities in the
Federal Theatre Project in New York City?

HUFFMAN

Yes I do. And I've got a doozy.

DIES

Well, let's hear it.

FLANAGAN

(To us)

Are you ready for this?

HUFFMAN

Hallie Flanagan.

THOMAS

(Jumping in, excited)

Flanagan's a commie? You got proof?

HUFFMAN

You're so cute. No, I have never seen a card bearing her
name, so I cannot prove her Communist membership.

FLANAGAN

(To us)

Because I'm not.

HUFFMAN

But I can prove she was an active participant in Communist
activity...

FLANAGAN

(To us)

Which I wasn't.

HUFFMAN

Her Communistic behavior is at work in the Federal Theatre Project right now to the detriment of the American people.

FLANAGAN

(To us)

Total crap.

DIES

Miss Huffman, there's certain evidence which has preceded yours that shows that some of the officials of the Federal Theatre are well-known Communists.

HUFFMAN

That wouldn't surprise me. There's an organization closely tied to the Communist Party called the Workers' Alliance that now dominates the Federal Theatre Project.

FLANAGAN

The Workers' Alliance was a union of unemployed relief workers. It was a union for those who had no union.

DIES

Do you belong to the Workers Alliance, Miss Huffman?

HUFFMAN

No, Mr. Dies, I do not. However, there was tremendous pressure from the management of the Federal Theatre project to join. If you refused, your options were dismissal or demotion.

FLANAGAN

Many of our employees belonged to some kind of union for their own protection. None of them were forced to join.

DIES

And what happened to your job?

HUFFMAN

What's an honest American to do, sir? I resigned willingly.

FLANAGAN

Her husband embezzled federal funds and was prosecuted. She left when he got caught, to save face.

STARNES

I'd like to ask the pretty lady a question, if I may.

DIES

Go right ahead.

STARNES

Miss Huffman, in your written testimony, you named certain plays produced by the Federal Theatre as Communist plays. And you make a distinction between a propaganda play and a communist play, correct?

HUFFMAN

You want me to explain the difference, sweetie?

STARNES

I want to know specifically what there is in the play *Power*, for example, that is communistic.

(Pause.)

HUFFMAN

Frankly, at this moment, I can't even remember the play *Power*.

STARNES

You're pretty bitter about it in your written testimony.

HUFFMAN

I based my opinion on material I discovered in Workers Alliance literature.

STARNES

And based on that material, you felt it was communistic?

HUFFMAN

I'm sure it was propaganda for communist activity; yes, sir.
(Adjusting her blouse)
Is it hot in here, or is it just me?

DIES

Careful, Mr. Starnes, or she's gonna charm the pants right off you.

STARNES

Let me play devil's advocate.

HUFFMAN

Ooh, spooky. Go right ahead, Mr. Devil. Advocate.

STARNES

I'm simply saying that if the *Power* were put on by any Broadway producer, he would not be summoned here as un-American; because many productions go much further than that.
(MORE)

STARNES (cont' d)

I can point to productions that ridicule – well, I would not say "ridicule," but they "say things about the President for amusement's purposes."

HUFFMAN

And I'm simply saying, Mr. Starnes, sir, that the messages in these plays are the very same ones presented by Communists. They incite people against their government. They incite people against their own fellow citizens.

STARNES

Are you talking about class hatred? Because plain old propaganda is one thing. But if these lowlife Commie bastards are spouting hatred against decent Americans, well, that's another thing entirely.

HUFFMAN

Mr. Starnes, have you really looked at they way they use these plays? Even when they produce the classics, there's some sort of political or social message tacked on to provoke a revolution in this country, in America. Everything they do is designed to attack our federal government, or turn poor against rich, or arouse people to fight the bourgeois. As a matter of fact, the slogan in the Workers' Alliance magazines, and it is not a misprint because it's printed this way 20 times, is "The bourgeois is a danger to society."

DIES

What's the bouge-way?

HUFFMAN

Bourgeois. It's a fancy French word for capitalists.

DIES

Miss Huffman, do you consider yourself part of the bourgeois?

HUFFMAN

No, sir. I'm as common as they come.

FLANAGAN

You can say that again.

DIES

Have you ever been moved by any of these plays to strike out against capitalist society?

HUFFMAN

There's nothing un-American about making a little money, Mr. Dies.

(SHE smiles)

I hope I answered your little question, Mr. Starnes.

DIES

I think you did real good, Miz Huffman. You may step down.

HUFFMAN

Thank you, Mr. Dies. And if you gentlemen need anything further, you just give good ol' Hazel a call.

DIES

We certainly will.

(HUFFMAN starts to exit, then stops as she notices FLANAGAN.)

HUFFMAN

Well, if it ain't Red Rover.

FLANAGAN

You're a piece of work.

HUFFMAN

(Hard)

Thanks. By the way, my husband's innocent.

FLANAGAN

Your husband's a liar and a thief.

HUFFMAN

Yeah, but at least he's a decent American. See you at the theatre, toots.

(HUFFMAN exits. THOMAS and STARNES whistle as she goes.)

HUFFMAN (cont'd)

(Over her shoulder)

See you around, boys!

STARNES

I hope all our witnesses are that easy.

THOMAS

You can say that again.

STARNES

I hope all our witnesses are that easy.

DIES

Now, boys. We can have a good time, but if we're gonna get anywhere we gonna have to crack down on the next witness.

(FLANAGAN steps forward on the main stage.)

FLANAGAN

Of course, the next witness was one of us.

SCENE FIFTEEN: THE SECRETARY FOR THE DEFENSE.

(BAKER enters with ELLEN WOODWARD, a secretary of the Project. He addresses FLANAGAN.)

BAKER

We've decided to let Mrs. Woodward speak for us.

FLANAGAN

You've got to be kidding me.

BAKER

Hallie...

FLANAGAN

What are you going to tell me, Baker? That she has a better idea of what's going on here than I do?

BAKER

She's a common citizen.

FLANAGAN

Aren't we all?

BAKER

We feel that using Mrs. Woodward would be advantageous for us.

FLANAGAN

How so?

BAKER

Well, she's not a politician, for one. She's simply a working woman, and as a secretary, she has access to a wide range of our printed matter, so she can speak to the broad nature of the work we do.

FLANAGAN

Just like Hazel Huffman.

BAKER

The decision is made, Hallie.

(BAKER exits.)

FLANAGAN

(To ELLEN WOODWARD)

Are you prepared to answer technical questions about the Federal Theatre?

ELLEN WOODWARD

How technical?

(Beat.)

FLANAGAN

This is a disaster waiting to happen, you realize that?

(ELLEN WOODWARD steps to the witness chair. Lights up on the bench.)

DIES

(To THOMAS and STARNES)

Let me lead on this one, boys. Show y' all how it's done.

(To ELLEN WOODWARD)

Don't be shy, Mrs. Woodward. Have a seat, make yourself comfortable.

(WOODWARD sits.)

ELLEN WOODWARD

Thank you.

DIES

Mrs. Woodward, you have worked for the Federal Theatre for some time, haven't you?

ELLEN WOODWARD

Yes, sir, I have.

DIES

As a secretary, correct?

ELLEN WOODWARD

Yes, sir.

DIES

And how do you feel about the Project?

ELLEN WOODWARD

I believe that what the Project stands for, and what it's trying to do, what it is doing, is important and necessary.

DIES

Does that include the advancement of the Communist cause?

ELLEN WOODWARD

I don't know anything about that cause or its advancement.

STARNES

(On the attack)

Are you a Communist, Mrs. Woodward?

ELLEN WOODWARD

No, I am not.

THOMAS

Have you seen any of the Federal Theatre productions?

ELLEN WOODWARD

As many as I can.

STARNES

And do you like them?

ELLEN WOODWARD

They're very entertaining.

DIES

I think Mr. Starnes is asking whether you agree with their messages.

ELLEN WOODWARD

I don't go to the theatre for messages.

DIES

So you can't say, then, whether these plays have influenced your own politics?

ELLEN WOODWARD

I don't believe they have, no.

DIES

And how many other Americans do you think could say that same thing?

ELLEN WOODWARD

I couldn't begin to guess.

DIES

Well, how about a percentage? How many Americans have attended the productions in question?

ELLEN WOODWARD

I don't know that I have that information.

THOMAS

But those are just basic attendance figures, Mrs. Woodward.

ELLEN WOODWARD

I'm sorry.

STARNES

Mrs. Woodward, you must be very uncomfortable in this situation. Your superiors are putting you in the awkward position of having to speak for them, when it's quite clear that they haven't provided you with all the information you might need.

ELLEN WOODWARD

May I say something?

DIES

Of course, little darlin'.

ELLEN WOODWARD

You look at what they do, what we do, and all the people we've helped - and don't ask me for a number of how many, because I don't know - but you look at all that work - that decent, honest work - and you call it Un-American. Well, sirs, with all due respect, I think what you're doing is Un-American. This ruthless nosing around like dogs in garbage, all in the vain hope of finding the one little bone to prove that there was once meat there. Have any of you ever seen one of our productions? Have any of you ever read any of the plays we've produced?

STARNES

You are not here to ask the Committee questions, Mrs. Woodward! You are here to answer them. You, and every other witness brought before this panel, were brought here to answer, not to question! This committee was created to investigate, not to be investigated!

ELLEN WOODWARD

All I'm saying, gentlemen, is that if you could see these plays, if you could see all these good people working, you'd feel differently.

THOMAS

Yeah, we'd feel like Communists. Witness dismissed.

DIES

Thank you, Mrs. Woodward. You may step down.

ELLEN WOODWARD

Thank you.

(SHE exits, passing FLANAGAN)

Disaster?

FLANAGAN

I'm sorry I said that. You handled yourself admirably.

ELLEN WOODWARD

We have to fight for things we believe in.

DIES

We summon to the committee, Mrs. Hallie Flanagan.

ELLEN WOODWARD

Good luck out there.

(ELLEN WOODWARD exits.)

SCENE SIXTEEN: DAVID AND GOLIATH.

(FLANAGAN steps forward.)

FLANAGAN

It was six months after the initial hearings began, much later than any of us had thought. Could a few hours in our favor undo the months of unanswered charges and the bloodthirsty press?

(Beat.)

The room was lined with photographic exhibits of our work for the past three years, and all I could see were the faces of our theatre people - actors in grubby rehearsal clothes, dancers in stretches, clowns from the circus, costume women making cheap stuff look expensive, playwrights, carpenters, musicians, ushers. These were the people on trial that morning.

(FLANAGAN goes to the witness chair.)

DIES

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

FLANAGAN

I do.

DIES

State your name and title, please.

FLANAGAN

Hallie Flanagan. Director of the Federal Theatre Project.

THOMAS AND STARNES

Are you a Communist?

FLANAGAN

No, I'm not. I'm a registered Democrat.

(THEY laugh.)

DIES

Mrs. Flanagan, who appointed you to your office?

FLANAGAN

Harry Hopkins.

DIES

Was that his own idea or did somebody put him up to it?

FLANAGAN

Mrs. Roosevelt made a recommendation on my behalf, but Mr. Hopkins had been familiar with my work for some time.

DIES

Good for him. I've only learned about it recently. What are the duties of your position?

FLANAGAN

Well, Mr. Dies, while your committee has been concerned with Un-American activity, I have been concerned with Un-American *in*activity.

DIES

Is that some kind of fancy wordplay?

FLANAGAN

Not at all. Our goal has always been to put unemployed Americans back to work, and we've done just that.

DIES

Well, that's just wonderful. Let's talk some more about that early work of yours. You got some kind of grant, didn't you, to study theatre around the world?

FLANAGAN

That's correct.

DIES

Oh, that must have been exciting. I've never been to Europe. I always travel right here in this great country of ours.

FLANAGAN

The countries and cultures of Europe are as fascinating as ours, Mr. Dies. There's a lot to learn over there.

DIES

And how long were you there? In Europe, I mean?

FLANAGAN

A little over a year. Fourteen months.

DIES

How much of that time did you spend in Russia?

FLANAGAN

Less than three months out of fourteen.

THOMAS

Why did you spend more time in Russia than anywhere else?

FLANAGAN

Because there's more theatre in Russia than anywhere else.

DIES

And didn't you state that the Russian theatre was more important and vital than any other you'd found?

FLANAGAN

I did. But I think any critic of drama you called to testify would tell you the same thing.

DIES

Why is it more important and more vital than anything we have here in America?

FLANAGAN

Mr. Dies, the Federal Theatre was founded specifically as an American theatre, on American principles. It has nothing to do with Russia.

STARNES

You're not answering the question.

FLANAGAN

Russia has a theatrical tradition that America does not. They are temperamentally equipped for the stage. It's richer than mere entertainment. A lot of their productions come from a long history of folklore and fairy tales.

DIES

All those Russian fairy tales have a moral, don't they?

FLANAGAN

I don't think that's always true.

THOMAS

Yeah, you can't call it "moral" if it's Russian.

FLANAGAN

Well, many of them do have a point.

DIES

Mrs. Flanagan, do you believe the theatre is a weapon?

FLANAGAN

I think theatre can be an educational force. It's entertainment. It's excitement. I think it can be all things to all men. I don't think I'd use the word "weapon."

DIES

But you did use the word "force." Does your kind of theatre "force" people to think a certain way? Do you think of the theatre as propaganda?

FLANAGAN

Let me clarify something for you. Propaganda means education. But in these hearings, it has only been used to mean Communist propaganda. And while we have never performed propaganda for Communism, we have performed propaganda for democracy, better housing...

DIES

So you have performed propaganda?

FLANAGAN

I've just explained that we have, yes.

DIES

You've been quoted as saying that there are two kinds of Russian theatre, the commercial theatre and the workers' theatre. Could you explain that distinction for us?

FLANAGAN

The commercial theatre wants to make money. The workers' theatre wants to make a new social order.

STARNES

And what do you want to make?

FLANAGAN

Our concern has never been commercial.

DIES

You said that those Russian workers' theatres, and I'm quoting you here...

THOMAS

"...Shape the life of the country socially, politically, and industrially."

STARNES

"They intend to remake a social structure without the help of money."

THOMAS

"This ambition alone has a certain Marlowesque madness."

DIES

Those your words?

FLANAGAN

That seems accurate.

DIES

Who is this Marlowe? Is he is a Communist?

FLANAGAN

Ha! I have no idea.

THOMAS

Is she laughing at us?

STARNES

What does she think this is, a vaudeville act?

DIES

Does something amuse you, Mrs. Flanagan?

FLANAGAN

I beg your pardon. I was quoting Christopher Marlowe.

DIES

Well, tell us, please, who this Marlowe is, so we can all enjoy the reference.

FLANAGAN

Marlowe was the greatest dramatist immediately preceding Shakespeare.

DIES

And you don't know if this Marlowe was Communist?

FLANAGAN

He's been dead over three hundred years. I don't know his politics.

DIES

But he could have been? I mean, we had what people call Communists back in the days of Greek theatre.

FLANAGAN

I suppose that's true.

DIES

So even Euripides and Sophocles were teaching social consciousness, weren't they?

FLANAGAN

Absolutely.

DIES

You've spent time in Greece as well, did you not?

FLANAGAN

I did.

DIES

Your husband's a professor of Greek?

FLANAGAN

Classical languages.

DIES

You produced Greek plays at Vassar, in Greek?

FLANAGAN

We occasionally did foreign plays in their original languages.

THOMAS

Did you ever do any Russian plays?

FLANAGAN

Yes, Chekhov.

STARNES

In Russian?

FLANAGAN

I had enough trouble trying to order dinner in Russian.

DIES

What about Isben?

FLANAGAN

Do you mean Ibsen?

DIES

Yeah, him. He wrote something called *An Enemy of the People*. You ever heard of that?

FLANAGAN

I am very familiar with Ibsen's work.

DIES

Well, that particular play is about a man who viciously attacks his government even though it's trying to help him, just as your Federal Theatre Project keeps on attacking the American government. You know that play?

FLANAGAN

Mr. Dies. That play is about a man who fights to expose truth even though it means that society rejects him. It's about the refusal to compromise one's principles. If your understanding of it is limited to an attack on the government, then you not only have misunderstood it, but you are espousing the very mentality it protests.

DIES

Let me try another tack. Have you ever produced any anti-Fascist plays?

FLANAGAN

It Can't Happen Here was a play against an imaginary Fascist government.

THOMAS

A Fascist government?

STARNES

In America?

FLANAGAN

An imaginary Fascist government, yes. If I may clarify, we never do a play because it has a political bias. We do a play because it is a good, strong play.

DIES

But some of your selections clearly have a Communist agenda.

FLANAGAN

I don't agree, but I support your right to misunderstand them.

DIES

Are you in sympathy with Communist doctrine?

FLANAGAN

I am an American, and I believe in American democracy. That's the form of government with which I sympathize.

STARNES

She didn't say no.

THOMAS

I noticed that.

DIES

What's the foremost objective of your plays?

FLANAGAN

Aside from creating opportunities for people to work, I'm not clear what you're asking me.

DIES

What are the American people paying for?

FLANAGAN

And I've just told you that the American people are paying for work opportunities.

DIES

But there are work opportunities building roads and bridges, and the people aren't expected to *learn* anything from them.

(MORE)

DIES (cont' d)

Now is this theatre just amusement, or do you want to teach ideas?

FLANAGAN

On the whole, we only produce plays that the government could stand behind.

DIES

Answer the question, Mrs. Flanagan. Do you think the Federal Theatre should be used to convey ideas along social, economic, and political lines?

FLANAGAN

I personally would hesitate on political.

THOMAS

But social and economic, yes?

FLANAGAN

I think we must.

STARNES

And educational?

FLANAGAN

Certainly.

DIES

So, the Federal Theatre's aim is to educate people on social and economic lines, is that correct?

FLANAGAN

We've successfully presented a variety of ideas.

DIES

But you have educated people on their social and economic differences?

FLANAGAN

Among other things, yes.

DIES

Pointing out the differences in class.

FLANAGAN

Occasionally.

DIES

How one class suffers at the hands of another...

FLANAGAN

Our plays are not intended to stir up class hatred.

DIES

Your plays reach twenty-five million people, Mrs. Flanagan. That's an undeniable power. Would you agree that that power could be easily abused?

FLANAGAN

All power can be abused, Mr. Dies.

DIES

Sure it can, but I think the greatest abuse of your theatre's power would be to imply superiority of one class over another

FLANAGAN

We do not perpetuate class hatred, Mr. Dies.

DIES

One of your productions encouraged average citizens to revolt against the government---

THOMAS AND STARNES

The Fascist government!

FLANAGAN

That play was fiction.

DIES

We're talking about its moral, Mrs. Flanagan! You continually incite impoverished Americans to rebel against the very society that's trying to help them, isn't that right?

FLANAGAN

No, Mr. Dies, it is not.

DIES

Furthermore, we have considerable testimony that many of the people on these projects are Communist. Some of them have even admitted it right where you're sitting.

FLANAGAN

Mr. Dies, you are mistaken. I have heard these testimonies, I have read the transcripts, and no one has come before us and admitted to being a Communist.

DIES

Before "us"? Who's this "us," Mrs. Flanagan?

FLANAGAN

I beg your pardon. Before you.

DIES

You employed a candymaker named Irving Mendell, did you not?

FLANAGAN

A relief worker who made candy for about five cents a day.

DIES

Did you know he was a Communist?

FLANAGAN

I know that he was an American who needed stable employment.

DIES

So you gave it to him. You gave work to a Communist over a decent American.

FLANAGAN

I don't know Mendell's political involvement, and I didn't know it then.

DIES

But we do know it now, Miz Flanagan. We now know that he's a - what's that word he used, Thomas?

THOMAS

Avowed.

DIES

He's an avowed Communist, Miz Flanagan. That means he admitted it.

FLANAGAN

I know what avowed means, Mr. Dies.

DIES

So you know what it means. Very good. Well, we know what it means, too.

(Beat)

Thank you, Mrs. Flanagan. It's time for us to adjourn for lunch. We won't need you any further today.

FLANAGAN

Wait, am I to understand that this concludes my testimony?

DIES

That's to be determined, but I think we've heard what we need to hear.

THOMAS

You know, it's funny. She doesn't look Communist.

STARNES

Yeah, she looks Republican.

FLANAGAN

Mr. Dies, if your committee is not convinced that the Federal Theatre Project is not Communistic, then I would like to continue my testimony this afternoon.

DIES

Oh, we don't want you back. You're a tough witness. We're all worn out. Thank you, Mrs. Flanagan.

(Lights fade on the makeshift stage. The CONGRESSMEN exit. FLANAGAN is left alone.)

FLANAGAN

Two weeks later, I invited Dies and his committee to our New York holiday production of *Pinocchio*. I told them that it was a brilliant summation of everything we were trying to do. They never saw the production.

(ELEANOR ROOSEVELT appears. FLANAGAN watches her as she speaks.)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

I am concerned about the end of the Federal Theatre Project, and there seems to be very little I can do to prevent it. The end of the Federal Theatre means that education is limited, ideas are suppressed, voices are silenced. But we are told that it is done out of concern for our welfare. Well then, I can only assume that Congress is unconcerned with the welfare of our artists. Only five percent of the Federal Theatre workers are not on relief. Apparently the other ninety-five percent who depend on it are expected to dig ditches, if they can find ditches to dig, or starve if they cannot. This project is considered dangerous because it may harbor Communists, but I am not terribly worried about gainfully employed Communists producing plays. I worry about jobless Communists starving to death. A citizen who is busy earning money to keep body, soul and family together won't very well have time to plot to overthrow our government. How can these men go home and face their own families, when they have legislated poverty for the families of their fellow man?

(ELEANOR ROOSEVELT exits. FLANAGAN remains. DIES appears, holding a hammer.)

DIES

We are convinced that large numbers of the Federal Theatre Project personnel and employees are Communist, or have Communist sympathies. For the protection of this country and its citizens, it is our recommendation that Congress cease funding of the Federal Theatre Project at its earliest opportunity.

(DIES exits, and we hear the sound of a hammer pounding a nail into wood.
FLANAGAN is alone.)

FLANAGAN

It was an attack from which we never recovered. On June 30, 1939, Congress withdrew its funding and officially abolished the Federal Theatre Project. My life for four years had been dedicated to serving the American people. The Federal Theatre was my life. And now life as I knew it was over.

(FLANAGAN exits. LEAR and LEAR'S WIFE enter on the makeshift stage.)

LEAR

We were about to go on for a performance of *Pinocchio* when we heard the news.

LEAR'S WIFE

I'll never forget that night as long as I live. It was a Friday. We were getting ready, and our stage manager came backstage.

(FRANK enters.)

FRANK

Bad news, folks. The government just killed the Federal Theatre Project.

LEAR'S WIFE

What? No!

FRANK

Be sure you clear everything out. They're locking the theatre.

LEAR

So, wait, there's no show?

FRANK

No, there's a show. The tickets are sold. They're hanging on to every penny they can get. But after tonight, that's it. I'm sorry, folks. Thirty minutes to places.

(FRANK exits.)

LEAR'S WIFE

We were stunned. Everything we worked so hard for, gone. And then Yasha Frank had an idea, God bless him.

LEAR

(As Yasha Frank)

They want to take the theatre away from us. What would happen if we took the theatre away from them?

LEAR'S WIFE

And he plotted out a not-so-subtle change for the second act.

LEAR

(As himself)

He wrote it, he could do that.

LEAR'S WIFE

So we do the show. Everything goes along fine until just about the end of the play.

LEAR

Right at the part where Pinocchio turns into a real-live boy...

(HERBIE and ANNIE bring on a small coffin.)

LEAR'S WIFE

(In character, to HERBIE and ANNIE)

What happened?

LEAR

(As "Geppetto")

Where's my Pinocchio? Where is my real-live boy?

HERBIE

He's gone, Geppetto. Pinocchio's dead.

LEAR'S WIFE

(To us)

And there on the coffin, Yasha had the stagehands paint birth and death dates. Born, December 23, 1938, the day we opened the show. And for the death date, he put...

ALL FOUR

Killed by Congress. June 30, 1939.

ANNIE

We tore the sets down right there in front of the audience.

(HERBIE and ANNIE begin dismantling the makeshift stage, as LEAR and LEAR'S WIFE take up the coffin.)

LEAR' S WIFE
 Everyone was shouting, "Who killed Pinocchio? Who killed Pinocchio?"

LEAR
 And then we carried the coffin *through* the audience, out into the street.

(THEY carry the coffin from the makeshift stage down to the main stage floor. CHORUS MEMBERS pick up the chant as LEAR and LEAR' S WIFE continue.)

LEAR' S WIFE
 And the audience followed us! All the way down to Times Square...

LEAR
 Where we read out loud the names of every Congress member who voted against the project.

LEAR' S WIFE
 Only twenty-one congressmen voted to keep the project going. Three-hundred seventy-three voted against. We read every one of them

LEAR
 And that was the end of the Federal Theatre.

(Blackout. Silence.)

EPILOGUE: EULOGY FOR A NATIONAL THEATRE.

(FLANAGAN alone in a spot. As she speaks, VOICES come out of the darkness and the lights fade up, until the ENTIRE COMPANY is revealed onstage with her.)

FLANAGAN
 The official cause of death?

DIES
 (In dark)
 What are the American people paying for?

FLANAGAN
 After they shut us down, the Theatre Project money, less than one percent of the WPA funding, was redistributed among the other projects.

BAKER

(In dark)
It's money, Hallie.

FLANAGAN

But it was never about money.

DOORMAN

(In dark)
That money don't exist.

FLANAGAN

It was about fear.

RICE

(In dark)
Judging the government isn't harsh. It's necessary.

FLANAGAN

When I think back over all that we've been through...

HARRY HOPKINS

(In dark)
We've got a lot of unemployed actors on our hands.

FLANAGAN

The struggle to do the impossible...

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

FLANAGAN

I wonder if it all was worth it?

OLIVE STANTON

I was just a girl who needed a job.

FLANAGAN

Would I do it all again?

LEAR

Vaudeville was dead, we were dying, and then ka-boom, all this gorgeous work!

FLANAGAN

You bet I would.

LEAR'S WIFE

If you've never had fifteen hundred children laughing and clapping for you, bubbeleh, you haven't lived!

(As she speaks, projections appear of FTP productions, all of them pictures of people employed.)

FLANAGAN

We didn't know it at the time, but the Federal Theatre Project would be America's first, last, and only attempt to create a national theatre, a luxury enjoyed by almost every other civilized nation in the world.

WELLES

Ladies and Gentlemen, we promised you theatre, and by God, you're going to get it!

FLANAGAN

I remember a speech I made, when the project was ripe and full of promise.

(As FLANAGAN speaks this next speech, the ENTIRE COMPANY joins in with her, one by one.)

FLANAGAN & COMPANY

We're all here because we believe. We believe in the transformative power of the theatre. Theatre can effect great change, but theatre itself must change. The stage, too, must experiment. The theatre must grow up. And so, we begin.

(Beat)

Again.

(BLACKOUT. END OF PLAY.)

Appendix

Taking Liberties: The Writing of *Get Flanagan*

Pre-show

The idea for this play came from an assignment in Dr. Carol Gelderman's Special Topics course entitled "Nonfiction of Youth," which I took at the University of New Orleans in the spring of 2003. The course was based on early-years biographies and memoirs of selected political and literary figures, and each MFA Writing candidate in the class was required to submit a final project in his respective genre that dealt with some aspect of the lives we'd studied. At the same time, Susan Chenet – now a graduate of this program, but then merely my peer – was working on rewrites of her play *Mademoiselle Blackwell*, which also had begun as an assignment in a previous Gelderman course. Susan often referred to her play as *docudrama*; and somewhere along the way, Dr. Gelderman suggested that I approach my assignment in the same manner. Although I was largely unfamiliar with the style of docudrama – essentially defined as a dramatization of historical events – I was game for the challenge.

Two of the figures we studied in that course – President Franklin D. Roosevelt and author Mary McCarthy – had in common a woman named Hallie Flanagan. Once McCarthy's professor at Vassar, Flanagan was appointed by the Roosevelt administration to direct the Federal Theatre Project, a relief project legislated in conjunction with the New Deal. Although we did not study Flanagan directly in the course, she was nonetheless an appropriate subject for the assignment. Dr. Gelderman suggested a docudrama on the life of Flanagan, an idea I quickly embraced but secretly resisted. I knew very little about the period, even less about the Federal Theatre Project, and next to nothing about the woman herself. Besides, where does one decide to *begin* with docudrama?

Act I: First Draft

I chose to begin with Flanagan's first-person account of the Federal Theatre Project, *Arena: The Story of the Federal Theatre Project*. While the early part of the memoir is immensely readable, the lion's share is devoted to an extremely technical rendering of the Project's progress, a preponderance of names, dates, financial data, and attendance figures. The immediate question was in choosing which part of this story to tell. I complicated matters by also investigating *Hallie Flanagan: A Life in the Theatre*, written by Flanagan's stepdaughter Joanne Bentley, which provides far greater scope than *Arena* does. Flanagan did lead an interesting life from beginning to end, but I felt that the meatiest sequence of events involved to the Federal Theatre Project.

The Federal Theatre Project was one of four projects grouped under the heading Federal One, the others being the Federal Music Project, the Federal Art Project, and the Federal Writers' Project. Federal One itself was under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration, one of the relief efforts of Roosevelt's New Deal. Lasting only four years, from 1935 through 1939, the Federal Theatre Project, under Flanagan's leadership, was at once enormously successful and alarmingly controversial. Subject matter of certain plays and productions – as well as the very public political activities of some of its participants – brought overly critical attention; and detractors levied vociferous charges of Communistic activity. A congressional committee investigated the allegations, and its subsequent recommendations influenced Congress to vote overwhelmingly against continuing to fund the Project.

Seeking a more concise overview of Flanagan's Federal Theatre Project years, I went to the internet, as so many of us do in this age of quick information. I did indeed find more narrowly focused biographical information than Bentley offers, but I also discovered a large

amount of material about the Dies Committee hearings on Un-American Activities, formed to examine charges of Communism and its infiltration of the United States government. Headed by Congressman Martin Dies, it was a vicious precursor to the McCarthy committee of the 1950s. I decided to use pieces of actual testimony in the play, a device also used in Tim Robbins's 1999 film *The Cradle Will Rock* (which, in part, traces the events surrounding the production of Marc Blitzstein's opera *The Cradle Will Rock*, originally produced under the Federal Theatre Project aegis). Curiously, Flanagan gives those testimonies somewhat short shrift in her memoir, especially compared to the reams of type she devotes to the Project's genesis and successes. This relative omission intrigued me, and I began to formulate a concept based on this apparent duality: how much can we learn about the woman by comparing her behavior at the beginning of the Project (which inspires delightfully lengthy prose) to her behavior at the time of its demise (which hardly rates mention)?

At this point in the play's development, I considered fashioning the play as a piece intended for one performer. Having performed a one-person show myself, I am familiar with the rigors of the format. I had never written such an extended monologue, though; and I was concerned that it wouldn't be a far cry from a live reading of the memoir. Also, using only a single performer wouldn't allow for the dramatization of the congressional hearings, at least not without extensive use of offstage voices, a device I thought would grow quickly tiresome; and I felt very strongly that the testimonies of Flanagan and her detractors and associates should be a part of the play. So, the one-person idea became moot, and I looked toward other structural techniques.

In the memoir, Flanagan recounts practically every personal conversation that took place during the development of the Federal Theatre Project; and I felt that these conversations were a

clue to the structure of the first act. Essentially, this part of the Project's development process represented a personal journey for Flanagan, as she moved from ignorance to wisdom, from self-doubt to confidence. They also functioned as a journey for the Federal Theatre Project, as it grew from idea to existence; and I began to see the Project itself as a sort of unseen character in the piece. I thought it would be interesting to characterize each of these conversations as a separate turn of the screw, collectively bringing the Project ever closer to fruition, and at the same time embroiling Flanagan in this situation so deeply that she has no choice but to acquiesce. I envisioned the conflict as two-fold: the struggle of the government to overcome the poverty of the Great Depression through the Federal Theatre, and more importantly, Hallie Flanagan's internal struggle to accept the overwhelming responsibility of saving the livelihoods of America's unemployed theatre professionals.

It never occurred to me initially that what I was writing was essentially a lot of talking about government policy. In trying to fulfill Dr. Gelderman's assignment, I felt a real responsibility to be true to the letter of this history. I understood the conflict, even if I had decided to phrase it in distinctly un-theatrical terms. So taking my cue from Flanagan's own recollection of formative meetings in the early stages of the Project, I drafted a first act in fulfillment of Dr. Gelderman's assignment, a reverent detailing of the meetings and discussions that led to the formation of the Federal Theatre Project.

Key figures included Hallie Flanagan herself; Harry Hopkins, Flanagan's college classmate and eventual head of the Works Progress Administration; Eleanor Roosevelt, whose support was crucial both in securing approval for the effort and in convincing Flanagan to take on the responsibility of managing it; and Philip Davis, Flanagan's husband whose blessing was the final push Flanagan needed to agree to Hopkins's offer. I sketched out an initial scene with

Flanagan and Harry Hopkins that laid out the problem of the unemployed artists; a second scene, in which Flanagan must persuade Mrs. Roosevelt to lend her support; and another scene with Hopkins in which Flanagan admits her doubts. A fourth scene expanded the palette of characters to include the heads of the other project areas: Henry Alsberg of the Writers' Project, Holger Cahill of the Art Project, and Nikolai Sokoloff of the Music Project. Finally, a scene with Flanagan and her husband in which Flanagan at her most vulnerable makes a very personal decision to accept the duty of managing the Project.

The result was an unmitigated disaster. Previous assignments returned to me by Dr. Gelderman were highly praised; this piece came back with a litany of criticisms, the most memorable being "This is not a play!" and "Very, very bad!" Undeterred, I set about repairing the damage. I thought all of the criticism was deserved, but I didn't know how to fix the problems while still maintaining the level of accuracy. Dr. Gelderman was absolutely correct: it wasn't a play. What I had drafted was essentially transcriptions of conversations, held together by the flimsiest of stage conventions.

Act II: Rewrites

The first definitive decision I made was to cut the character of Philip Davis. While an understanding of an individual's personal life may be crucial to developing a complete understanding of that individual, Flanagan's home life simply did not have a great impact on the events of the Federal Theatre Project. Also cut were personal references in the scene between Flanagan and Eleanor Roosevelt. Here, I had shown more of Flanagan's history (her widowed first marriage, where Hallie Ferguson became Hallie Flanagan; the loss of one of her sons by the late Murray Flanagan; and the adoption of three stepchildren in her marriage to Davis), and attempted to correlate those details with similarities in Mrs. Roosevelt's life (the loss of a child, the maintenance of an established identity as a woman despite marrying a powerful man). While it is true that Flanagan and Mrs. Roosevelt did share certain things in common, it was not this commonality that encouraged Mrs. Roosevelt's support. Rather, it was Flanagan's experience in the theatre, her ideas for employing artists on relief, and her passion for combining those two that made Mrs. Roosevelt take notice.

The next great deadline – and point of transformation for the play – was the submission deadline for production consideration by the Department of Drama and Communications. A great weakness in this playwriting program is that there are severely limited opportunities for playwrights to have their work staged, or at the very least, rehearsed. As an actor, I have had the privilege to work on many original scripts, and the changes that those scripts went through in the rehearsal process were amazing. So much happens when the words are put into the hands of actors and directors; often, even more happens when those words are presented to an audience. While the department's abbreviated production schedule clearly cannot support a series of

audience previews during which critical fine-tuning can be accomplished, there would seem to be room for student playwrights to workshop their material outside of the seminar environment.

Granted, there is little preventing resourceful students from organizing their own opportunities, that is, apart from the prohibitive production schedule and relative lack of departmental support. Still, many students seeking the MFA in Playwriting do matriculate and graduate without ever having their works put through a production process. Without that benefit, these works are essentially created in a vacuum, and the playwrights are robbed of an important lesson, that of collaboration. Since the theatre is necessarily a collaborative environment, this missing link means that playwrights so fated are unprepared for the situations they face in the “real world.” The opportunity for students to submit their original works for production consideration, then, is a precious one, as it could very well be the only chance to get as thorough an education as possible through the program. And so, with that golden goal in mind, I set about the arduous task of rewriting this play.

My first decision was to open up the first act to include more than just the six remaining characters (Flanagan, Hopkins, Mrs. Roosevelt, and the other project heads). There was the obvious necessity to make the piece more theatrical, and the only way to tell this sprawling story theatrically was to add more characters. Even in the abstract, this choice solved two problems. First, it made the action (or lack thereof) less claustrophobic. Each scene in the original draft – really, just a first act – was lengthy, and involved only two characters talking to each other; there was a lot of information, and the scenes were theatrically inert. Paradoxically, the addition of other historically significant figures allowed for more concise scenes, and opened up greater possibilities for something resembling action. The other huge problem in the first draft was that poor Flanagan was saddled with the weighty responsibility of narrating much of the action;

anything not explored in those treacherous conversation scenes was encapsulated in boring direct-address monologues. In the new draft, Flanagan's connective speeches were considerably reduced, both in number and in length; and her true monologues became opportunities to reveal her internal conflict.

This expansion of characters allowed for the inclusion of important voices unheard in the first script. Jacob Baker, Harry Hopkins's assistant who was the *de facto* head of Federal One, became a great device to show the conflicted sympathies of the government. Though Baker felt very passionately about what these projects could do, he also became an opposing force, a man caught between idealism and practicality. Also added was Elmer Rice, the Pulitzer-winning playwright who offered Flanagan distinctly partisan advice on how best to set up the Project. Rice's influence became important because of his dubious political activities, which brought suspicions of Communistic involvement at an early stage.

The other key decision in this revision was to explore the theatrical form of the Living Newspaper. Based on a Russian theatrical form of the early 20th century, the Living Newspaper was adapted by Flanagan into a defining aspect of the Federal Theatre Project. Using short scenes and a broad palette of characters, the Living Newspaper dramatized events of the day in a presentational manner. In the Federal Theatre Project, this form became a tool to examine the effects of government legislation on the average citizen, and by extension, the injustices suffered by those citizens at the hands of their government. Despite Flanagan's protestations that the Federal Theatre not be used politically, the Living Newspaper productions seemed to engage in unilaterally partisan politics.

I decided to use the Living Newspaper style to illustrate the events that followed Flanagan's inauguration as head of the Project. This choice parallels a similar change in

Flanagan's memoir, as she moves from easy, conversational prose in the early stages of her involvement to a more detailed, statistical reporting style once the Project gets underway. I found this section somewhat liberating to write, as I didn't feel as confined by accuracy. It was easier to take sides; and what the earlier draft certainly lacked was an opinion. I feel that the failure of the Federal Theatre Project is the single, most important explanation why this supposed greatest country in the world is one of the few civilized countries without a national theatre. That the failure was due to healthy exercise of First-Amendment rights and the subsequent fear it aroused in those in power is all the more crushing.

I also got around to drafting the second act, which involved the hearings before the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities and actual testimony taken from those hearings. I chose two of the more damning anti-Project testimonies, from Hazel Huffman and Wallace Stark, former employees of the Project; and two pro-Project testimonies, from Ellen Woodward, Jacob Baker's secretary, and from Flanagan herself, whose abortive stint on the stand was the death knell for the Project.

The biggest addition in this phase was the character of Congressman Martin Dies, chairman of the Un-American Activities committee. In keeping with the device of the Living Newspaper, I chose to characterize Dies as something of a vaudeville showman. When we first see him, he's viewing a series of letters sent by Flanagan and her associates; he chuckles over the letters, crumpling them, burning them with his cigar, folding them into paper airplanes. During the first round of hearings, Dies has his associates, Congressmen Thomas and Starnes, attached to huge dog leashes; and as they ask questions that provoke anti-Project testimony, he offers them dog treats. Later, during the second round of hearings, Dies has them attached to puppet strings that he controls, and their comments are surrealistically comic.

I felt this draft was much stronger, overall, than the earlier one. If nothing else, I had something resembling a complete play; and it was this version I submitted to the Department for production consideration. There were still problems, though, mainly in the first act, prior to the Living Newspaper section. These early scenes were still too reliant on exposition, and I grappled with the question of how much to include. The Federal Theatre Project unfortunately has become little more than a footnote in American history, and I thought it important to provide as much information as possible so that a contemporary audience could understand the ramifications of what was being attempted. The most accurate criticism of this version came from one of my mentors, Dalt Wonk, who called it “a very thinly disguised recitation of the facts through the mouths of actors who very thinly suggest the people in the story.” He went on to say that, if he were to ask whose play it was, the answer would have to be “a government policy.”

I found out in the early months of 2004 that Department selected the script, but for a staged reading rather than a full production. I was disappointed but stoic. A staged reading is a valid form of production, and any production is better than none. My meetings with my major professor Phillip Karnell were encouraging, though. He acknowledged the problems with the script, and offered the valuable advice to structure the entire play along the lines of the Living Newspaper, rather than confining the device to a particular section of the play. I hadn't really considered that possibility, but I agreed that any subsequent rewrites would probably move in that direction. The Living Newspaper section of that draft was without a doubt the most fun to write, and I wanted to bring some of that feeling to the less exciting sections of the script.

Phil also asserted that the play was most egregiously lacking in presenting the plight of the people, the unemployed artists who needed the Project. Again, I agreed, and also felt that I had given almost no attention to the actual work done by the Project, work that directly led to its

being targeted by the Dies Committee. These three points, then – showing the plight of the people, using the Living Newspaper format throughout, and illustrating the production work of the Project – became my goals for the next round of rewrites.

Intermission

In early 2004, I was approached by Southern Repertory Theatre in New Orleans about the possibility of submitting material for their Southern New Plays Festival, an annual festival of readings of new works, one of which is ultimately selected for full production in the following season. I submitted the same draft of *Get Flanagan*, and received the reply from Ryan Rilette, Artistic Director, that the play had been selected as part of the Festival. He also included the effusive statement that “you’re one hell of a writer.” While that is widely open to interpretation (I’m not even sure that *I* agree), I appreciated the vote of confidence. Rilette paired my script with director Rusty Tennant, an MFA Directing candidate in the UNO program who had directed me twice before and with whom I shared an office at the university. Rusty also had strong positive words for the script, calling it “my kind of theatre.” I also had faculty support from another mentor, David Hoover, who felt that, with some tweaking, it could be a strong entry for the American College Theatre Festival’s writing competitions.

The Southern Rep reading was eye-opening. Whether due to the weak reception by the UNO Production Resource Committee or trepidation at the mammoth rewriting that lay ahead, I did not feel very optimistic about the script. I felt compelled to apologize for it, rather than celebrate it. At any rate, the reading was a modest success. Rusty assembled a company of seven actors – Amy Alvarez, Martin Covert, Maggie Eldred, Scott Jefferson, Brian Peterson, and UNO graduate students Michael Santos and Heather Surdukan – whose collective and individual talents made my wordy, wordy play sound as smooth and brisk as possible. Audience reaction, while far short of rapturous, was overwhelmingly positive. They felt that it was an important story that needed to be told; many had never even heard of the Federal Theatre Project. Several people thought that it had a valuable message to convey in the current political climate,

correlating the fearfulness of perceived Communist activity with the contemporary concerns about perceived terrorist sympathies. (While I appreciate that connection, such allusions are not implied in the script. If any political finger pointing exists, it is intended to criticize the nugatory support of the arts in this country.)

The most compelling response came from an elderly audience member who had begun his career in the latter days of the Federal Theatre Project. Currently the artistic director of a small independent theatre in Washington state, he and his wife happened to be in New Orleans that night on a layover and wound up at Southern Rep almost by accident. Acknowledging the coincidence of his attendance at a play that referenced his own personal history, he felt that the story absolutely needed to be told, and that that version of the play did a reasonably good job of telling it, if not definitively so. He made a direct connection between the ultimate failure of the Federal Theatre Project and the difficulties contemporary artists face in trying to create their art without corporate support. This gentleman was emotional in his opinion, perhaps unsurprisingly so; and his voice inspired me like no other.

Act III: Rewriting for Production

After the Southern Rep reading, Rusty Tennant and I began to discuss possibilities for the UNO presentation, scheduled for December 2004. We both agreed with Phil Karnell's assertion that the play could benefit from more of the Living Newspaper stylization, but we doubted that the staged reading format could adequately illustrate that device. We wondered if there were a way to structure the play so that it did not "suffer" from the staged reading format (after all, the Southern Rep reading *was* effective), but rather was enhanced by it. My greatest concern was the extensive doubling of characters. In the Southern Rep reading, we had technical support from Cecile Casey Covert, an incredible costumer and a personal friend, who lent us a variety of costume pieces that helped to clarify the multiple characterizations. For the UNO reading, however, we would have no technical support whatsoever; and I felt that the ever-growing palette of characters would confuse the audience.

Also, without technical support, delineations of place would be a problem. Fortunately, I had written the working draft to take place in a theatre space, with any scenic elements being both suggestive and comprised of available materials. For Rusty, one of the most resonant lines of the script was Flanagan's description of her Vassar productions: "Our scenery tends to be whatever we can do with light." As Rusty has both technical and creative expertise in lighting, he felt that quote could serve as something of a mantra for the production. Working from the supposition that departmental technical support would surely extend to basic lighting for the space, we began to formulate ways in which the lighting could be used to give a sense of space.

Perhaps we were too open in our discussions of production ideas, because we were both called to task for trying to make more of the reading than the department intended. While I do not know the tenor of Rusty's discussions with his supervisors, I do know that my discussions

with Phil Karnell were supportive and positive. Phil recapitulated the department's stance that this production was a staged reading, with little or no use of departmental resources. I countered that our intent was completely in line with those restrictions, but that we wanted to preserve as much theatricality as possible. I also argued, however, that the assigned production space, the Lab Theatre, was inadequate for the production's needs. A small, poorly climate-controlled and acoustically compromised space, it does not lend itself readily to the presentation of a sprawling two-act play with more than thirty characters.

While I firmly believe that good theatre can happen anywhere and that limitations are merely opportunities for creativity, I argued that in this case the limitations were confining rather than liberating. I suggested that moving the production to either of the other available performance spaces, the Arena Theatre or the Thrust Theatre, would invite access to a broader canvas of creative choices. I felt that since the play was about making theatre out of nothing, we would still be able to adhere to the draconian restriction on the use of resources, and at the same time challenge our own creativity to put on a hell of a show. Phil – God bless him – was receptive to my arguments, and assured me he would defend my position to the Production Resource Committee, who ultimately agreed.

The next phase of rewrites were daunting, and I admit, brought out the worst of my approach-avoidant nature. Throughout the process, I felt an almost debilitating responsibility to tell this story well; and frankly, I had no idea how best to accomplish that. I threw caution – and theatrical good sense – to the wind, and embraced the reality that the number of characters in the play would be more than twice what I had originally thought. I also realized that to illustrate the production work of the Federal Theatre, I would have to include a section of the play that not only presented those works but also allowed some opportunity to comment on their effect.

Rusty also pointed out certain structural similarities to *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman and Members of the Tectonic Theatre Project, in which Rusty had directed me at UNO. That play uses a huge cast of characters and personal recollection to dramatize the events surrounding the murder of Matthew Shepard; and Rusty felt that further adopting those techniques – by using the character of Flanagan in the same way that Kaufman and company use themselves to facilitate the inclusion of the other characters – would help clarify some of the transitional areas and make it easier for an audience to keep everyone straight.

So, I dove in. The play now begins with an amplified voice (Living Newspaper device) to introduce Franklin Roosevelt, whose speech sets up the economic problem of the Depression. A wholly fictitious scene dramatizing the effects of the Depression on the people themselves follows this sequence, setting up some recurring characters: Frank, Herbie, and Annie, stage technicians, and Lear and his Wife, two aging vaudevillians, all of whom find themselves out of work. These characters serve as a protean chorus, taking on other roles as needed and providing a populist comment on the action. Lear and Lear's Wife particularly were a joy to write, and I used them to provide a contrapuntal voice in the scenes where Flanagan and Hopkins rough-sketch the project. More than any other characters, they came to represent the disenfranchised performers who were to benefit from the Federal Theatre Project.

Flanagan now appears much later than she did in previous drafts, and her exploits at Vassar are dramatized rather than merely described. Using the characters of three unnamed students, we see Flanagan in a teaching environment, and we also see her effect on them as an inspirational force. Earlier drafts tended too heavily toward hagiography with respect to Flanagan, and I wanted the opportunity to show a less beatific side of her; so her opening lines are sharp and critical, deriding the students for their failure to stay focused on their work. These

students would reappear in Flanagan's interview with Mrs. Roosevelt, in a surrealistic dramatization of her work at Vassar.

Eleanor Roosevelt was also expanded, her secretary Malvina Thompson was added, and her interview with Flanagan took on a slightly tenser tone. Thompson is a comic character who both lightens the scene and acts as a minor obstacle for Flanagan to get Mrs. Roosevelt's full support. Flanagan has to work a little harder to sell herself this time around, and Mrs. Roosevelt finally has an opportunity to voice her concerns for the African-American actors (or less anachronistically, the Negro actors). Mrs. Roosevelt's attention to the Negro community was conspicuously absent from the earlier drafts, and its inclusion nicely sets up the notorious Federal Theatre production of the *Voodoo Macbeth* depicted in Act II.

Flanagan always had lacked a significant adversary, and this draft finds him in Jacob Baker. This choice is a broad exaggeration of reality, and I think it represents one of the greatest strides forward in this draft. I had always resisted taking real liberties with the truth; and while I had made attempts to offer a fictitious version of the truth, here was the first place I deliberately distorted it. Baker was a fundamentally good man – in *Arena*, Flanagan states that Baker surpasses all others in the depth and sincerity of his concern for the unemployed – but he was something of a Cassandra figure. He was always conscious of public opinion and of the ramifications of the Federal Theatre productions on government perception of the Project's value. As such, he often had to stand in the way of certain productions. He was the strict parent who imposed boundaries, whereas Flanagan became more the permissive parent who allows reckless abandon. But since the story's told from Flanagan's point of view, Baker becomes the antagonist.

The simple fact is that had Baker's advice been followed, the Federal Theatre might be in existence today; so this manipulation of Baker also led to a similar manipulation of Flanagan. As I said earlier, previous drafts cast Flanagan in an almost holy light, and here was the opportunity to tarnish her halo a bit. She's more uncertain of herself initially, and then, after a taste of success, she's cocky and headstrong. Her ambition becomes her undoing, and that fatal flaw was desperately needed to make her more than the reliable narrator she was in previous drafts. She comes much closer to being a real character, and again, it was due to my taking some liberty with the truth.

Act II, which previously jumped right into the Dies Committee proceedings, is greatly expanded and now begins with a crash course in the production history of the Federal Theatre Project. The technicians erect a makeshift stage on which these abbreviated Federal Theatre productions are presented, punctuated by scenes involving Flanagan, Baker, and the press that chart each production's aftermath. Building on the idea that these key productions were directly or indirectly responsible for the Project's demise, I added the recurring sound effect of a hammer pounding nails into wood, illustrating the idea that these shows were nails in the Federal Theatre's coffin. At one point, Baker produces a hammer onstage, and the sound effect occurs on his exit, implying some culpability on his part as well.

I exercised a great deal of creative license in depicting these productions. I did not want merely to recreate these shows, so I avoided as much as possible any accuracy in quoting their scripts. Rather, what I hoped to do was to use these productions to show what was happening to the Federal Theatre at the time they were produced. This sequence is probably the most ambitious in the play, and I think it carries the greatest risk of failure, which is a tantalizing prospect.

The most notable character additions in this sequence are John Houseman and Orson Welles. Houseman appeared as an aborted device in an earlier draft; I say *aborted* because he was never used to proper or intended effect. Here, both become living and breathing characters, and they are exciting additions. Their over-the-top theatricality was desperately needed, and they were instrumental in two of the Federal Theatre's key productions, the Voodoo *Macbeth* and *The Cradle Will Rock*, both of which are now depicted in the play. Both of these productions allow for the inclusion of other real-life characters who were affected by the Project: Rose McClendon, who was tapped to head the Negro production unit; Olive Stanton, a cleaning woman whom Welles cast in a leading role; and Marc Blitzstein, controversial composer of *Cradle*; just to name a few. These characters provided an even greater opportunity to give voice to what the people were going through, and I think their inclusion makes *Get Flanagan* a better and more complex play.

Once the Dies Committee springs into action, the makeshift stage becomes the judge's bench, so the judgment comes from the same place the plays were presented. In the Dies Committee hearings, I deviated from the transcripts in an effort to create richer characters. For example, Hazel Huffman is now coquettish and flirtatious, using her sexuality to charm the Committee. I felt some tweaking of Huffman's character was necessary; her testimony at times strains credibility, yet she appears to have been given enormous significance by the Committee. The reason for that disparity is not apparent in the actual testimony, so the addition of her sexual nature is an attempt to illustrate it. I also added an exchange between Huffman and Flanagan that exposes just how much of an act it was, clearly designed to take down Flanagan out of spite.

I particularly like the device of the makeshift stage, which is used first to show the Federal Theatre productions and then the Committee hearings. After the hearings adjourn, the

makeshift stage is used one last time, to show the final performance of the last Federal Theatre production. In the real-life final performance of *Pinocchio*, the cast and crew reacted to Congress's dissolution of the Federal Theatre Project by dismantling the set in full view of the audience. This sequence is dramatized using the populist characters of the technicians and the vaudevillians. When *Pinocchio*'s set is destroyed, the makeshift stage is dismantled as well, so that it only exists for the duration of the Federal Theatre.

Curtain Call

It remains to be seen whether this most recent draft (the sixth) will be more successful than its predecessors, or even whether it will be successful at all. I certainly have greater confidence in it. I think it's a bit long, particularly in the second act; and as of this writing, Rusty and I are discussing the feasibility of making it three acts instead of two. I'm disinclined to go that far, because a second intermission is often a cue for half the audience to leave early; but it feels like the right decision. Rusty has assembled a huge cast of seventeen actors, but since there are about sixty characters in this draft, he's going to need every one of them. This thing has taken on a life of its own, I'm afraid; and I think that's a good thing. As Welles says in Act II, "My idea is either destined for legendary success or doomed to tragic failure. And quite frankly, the risk is delicious." (I'm rather proud of that one, I must say.)

The greatest lesson through the arduous process has been in learning to take liberty with the truth. I had tried so hard to be faithful and accurate that I lost sight of my task: to make this story theatrically compelling. I think I've finally begun to move in that direction, but only after giving myself permission to exercise creative license, and to do so liberally. In drafting this analysis, I've had to review the earlier drafts, and I am truly amazed at how far the play has come. I don't know that I've solved every problem, and I know that I've created some messy new ones in the process. But I do know that it's a better play now than it ever was, and I'm excited to see how it will change and grow through the rehearsal process.

I am exceedingly grateful to the Department of Drama and Communications, and particularly the members of my thesis committee – Professor Phillip Karnell, Professor David Hoover, and Dalt Wonk – for the chance to take this extended journey. It has not only made a better play, but it has made *me* a better *playwright*. I cannot adequately express here how much I

have learned on this process. Practically everything else I have written during my tenure in this program pales in comparison to this play, and I'm eager to begin something new. My previous works are arch and shallow, and this project has awakened the strangest motivation in me: to say something. I had thought my biggest goal in this program would be to develop discipline as writer, but I think I have achieved something far greater: I have begun to find my voice.

Vita

Sean Patterson was born in New Orleans on February 11, 1972. A graduate of Jesuit High School, he earned his Bachelor of Arts in Drama from the University of New Orleans in December 1992. He has worked professionally in the New Orleans theatre community for over ten years. His performance in All Kinds of Theatre's production of the one-man show *Fully Committed* earned him the 2002 Big Easy Award for Best Actor in a Play. As of this publication, his thesis play *Get Flanagan* has been chosen as one of fifteen national finalists for the KCACTF David Mark Cohen Playwriting Award. Sean continues to act, direct and write for the theatre.