

CHISELTOWN

An adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's text for
'The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny'

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CHARACTERS

Founders/Proprietors:

Madam Ladybird Begbick
Fatty
Trinity Moses

Customers:

Jim
Jake
Joe
Bill
Elderly Man
Woman
Tea Partiers

Staff:

Jenny
Girls
Maintenance man

Combatant:

Lloyd Blankfein

SCENE 1

A taxi in a traffic jam in New York City.

FATTY: We're not getting anywhere.

MOSES: It'd be faster walking.

FATTY: Is someone stalled? Or have they built condos in the street?

MADAM LADYBIRD BEGBICK (*in front seat*): I don't know, but I'm carsick sitting still with the windows down.

MOSES (*to Fatty*): Lean out, can you see up ahead?

FATTY: Drivers are standing by their cars. No one's talking though. The cabbies have gotten out of their narrow booths. (*Gesturing to their driver, in turban, almost immobilized by the 'safety' booth*) This poor fella, I want to interrogate him.

MOSES: Or feed him peanuts through the slot—it's awful. You want to turn around?

FATTY: It's frozen the other way too.

BEBBICK: And the SEC's back there.

MOSES (*getting out*): If we can get up to Times Square, anything goes.

FATTY (*getting out*): Not anymore. Now it's a mall for tourists in their public, not their secret, selves—the father, bad investor, the son with his sadistic avatar, the mother with her online lover, the daughter floating detached even in her screaming and sobbing.

BEGBICK: Now the Vice cops, of whom we have experience, gape at the ads and point the way to the flagship stores.

MOSES: Then that's not the place for us.

FATTY: And Wall Street itself...

BEGBICK: Still too reality-based, too loyal to the client.

MOSES: Then we're stuck.

FATTY: How about right here, where we are, Chinatown, on this block of video arcades? How about we start right here?

MOSES: Chinatown's getting built up. It attracts all kinds now.

FATTY: Yet is still labyrinthine, anonymous...

MOSES: People are going to be made homeless.

BEGBICK: There's a huge shelter on Grand. And if we grow, maybe we can run a shelter in the building. So the suckers can keep spending.

FATTY: Cabbie, on second thought we'll stop here. This is fine. This is better than fine.

MOSES: We'll pay with credit card.

BEGBICK (*getting out, exulting in Chinatown*): Las Vegas is already Sin City. And any decent casino comes with free booze, 2 buck lobster, on-site drugs and women. How, then, will we be different, what is our characteristic excellence? We'll offer all the vices,

but as sprinkling, cordial. Our Mahagonny, our Chiseltown, will be huge rooms, full of customers, silent, hidden from each other, staring ahead—in booths where they can buy impossibly low mortgages, booths to get in on abstract investments, booths to blog from and give their opinion on everything.

FATTY: There will be lounges with the softest couches, made, perhaps, of lung tissue. For man's greatest wish is to make the private public, to be the only real person except for eyes.

MOSES: And man's other great wish is, not to fight, but to flee-- to pretend in one's solitary warmth, for even the coming true of the dream is too much.

BEGBICK: As it says at the start of the Bhagavad Gita, there is no pain or slaughter, there are no grieving families—it's all an illusion.

SCENE 2

JENNY and two other girls enter carrying suitcases. They sit on them and sing the Jersey Song.

Goodbye Hell's Kitchen, goodbye
Apartment looking out on the sky,
The rents have risen, risen too high,
We have no choice, my girlfriends and I
Are leaving today, giving Jersey a try,
Someday soon I'm hoping to buy,
And all I could pay for here is a sty,
The assholes have snarfed up all of the pie!

Goodbye, Kensington, goodbye
Church Ave where everyone's on the fly,
The rents have risen, risen too high,
There's tapas in place of the tool-and-die,
I look at my grammar school and could cry,
But someday soon I'm hoping to buy,
And what we demand here they don't supply,
The assholes have snarfed up all of the pie!

FATTY *enters, sings*: Girls, I couldn't help hearing, I don't mean to pry...*(speaking)*
Wait a minute...Girls, I'll be frank, you're lovely. I am the owner of a legitimate
business, called Mahagonny. Hear me out. We're looking for girls. But not *that* way.
Our business is a little unreal, it spirals off into realms of...even at its most solid, it's
more like a hologram. We ask you to anchor us, simply with your presence, by being
yourselves. Yes, walk slowly through the rooms and among the booths once or twice an
hour. But otherwise, live your lives—eat, sleep, read, watch TV, pursue any of your
hobbies. Sip coffee, (add sugar), do a puzzle. Clients may notice, but you don't have to

be 'on'. Far from it. It's fine to be boring, as you would be, as anybody would be, on 24 hour webcam. And all this in a lovely environment, that won't offend your eyes or your sensibilities. We'll pay you well, and if you wish we'll provide lodging. Here is my associate, Lady Begbick.

BEGBICK (*entering and singing*): Goodbye, we hope, to your goodbye,
You girls have a presence that catches the eye,
Our business is soaring, soaring into the sky,
And our clients' brains are starting to fry,
Just be in the same room as their fingers fly
On the keyboard, not on your thigh,
And stay here, make money, keep your powder dry,
We sell homes in the city, you might qualify!

FATTY (*pointing and singing*): We're just a block away, past that Asian guy,
Would you like...(*speaking*) Wait a minute. Would you like to come for a tour?

JENNY: You're not talking about making me a...?

BEGBICK: It's cam with no camera, dear, nothing more.

They all depart, led by Begbick.

SCENE 3

Against the backcloth appears a projection showing a view of a metropolis and a photomontage of shopper's faces.

JIM, JAKE, and JOE *enter*.

JIM, JAKE, and JOE: We live amidst massive buildings
But I've never seen one being built,
Okay, I see the cranes
But never the men actually working,
I do see them doing things,
But I don't know how that fits with the whole,
Thus I live amidst massive buildings
That are not quite real.

FATTY and MOSES enter.

FATTY: It's all a blur, information overload. The quietest corner of life is getting to be like Times Square. But there *is* one place that's safe, that small still point—your own gut. There, in your home within your home, in your gut—what do *you* think? Everyone and everything blathers, but what do *you* think? Does anyone ever ask, apart from crappy surveys that would slow you down? You have opinions, lots of em. Come with us, we'll help them take wing...

MOSES: We'll make them stars.

FATTY: It'll feel good, after the assault on the senses, to project *yourself*. And you'll be doing good—donating your opinions to those who can use them.

JIM, JAKE, AND JOE: We are living through a crisis,
I watch TV and see workers filing out,
My friends have lost their jobs,
Or are afraid, and I'm afraid too,
I see the shuttered stores,
But no place where I shop,
Thus I'm living through a crisis
That is not quite real.

MOSES: I hear you, friend. I don't think anyone is immune to what you're feeling. But crisis also means opportunity. The time to invest is when there's blood in the streets. Come view our portfolio, and as you do, leave this sad and frightened place for Mahagonny, Wall Street's outpost on the savannah! Enough cringing...

FATTY: Haven't you been powerless long enough?

MOSES: Gather your courage, stalk the new beasts that you can't really see. In the end they will offer themselves to the true aggressor so he can eat, so *you* can eat. The risk is virtual; the profit is real.

SCENE 4

In the entryway to Mahagonny. Fatty and Moses usher in Jim, Jake and Joe who look up and around.

JIM: Very nice. Big. You could get lost in here.

JAKE: Some of this is frippery, but some of it is...*(he nods approvingly)*.

Lady Begbick enters carrying a large notebook.

BEGBICK: Welcome, gentlemen. You must be tired after your day. There are banquettes to rest, with dinner and drinks. I'll show you in a second. But first, *(consulting her notebook)* are you the famous Jimmy Gallagher? We hear tell of your way with router and server, Jimmy, that you're the backbone of the IT department, and play a mean guitar on the side.

JIMMY: Thank you. It's good to meet you.

BEGBICK: And we've dressed up especially for you, Jake. We know you have strong feelings about Obama. We look forward to you crafting that anger here and letting it shine. Maybe even doing battle with the ignoramuses out there!

JAKE: I'd be willing.

BEGBICK: Joe. A helper of others, now maybe a little tired yourself. We will all do our best to help you revitalize, so you can get back to throwing your body into the sinkhole of misery, if that's truly what you wish.

JOE: I'm grateful.

BEGBICK: And may I whisper a word--a name, rather? Lou's.

JAKE: That's right.

BEGBICK: The bar. You men work such cruel hours, sometimes it's not worth that long commute home. You sleep at your different offices, and on those nights you rendezvous at Lou's.

JOE: Lou's is good. Thank God for it. Cheap drinks. But we could use...a door beyond. A place that is to Lou's what Lou's is to work.

JIMMY: Yeah, more to do than bitch, or talk about houses and families we hardly see.

JAKE: Hey, we play cards too, and dope out the ponies.

BEGBICK: Gentlemen, let me show you around.

They all walk further in. JENNY takes up a position nearby and talks on a cellphone.

JENNY: That's right, I'm thinking about converting. Lately I'm feeling all kinds of fear and emptiness, I think it's a dark night of the soul. Maybe a real Mass would help me, where the bread and wine *are* the Body and Blood. *(Pause)*. No I don't judge you for having an abortion. Not at all. It's your decision.

She snaps her phone shut, curtsies and leaves. Another girl enters and talks on her cell.

GIRL: My sister helped my father a lot in the early stages of Alzheimer's, but then when she got power of attorney, she stole half his money and disappeared. We still don't know where she is.

She curtsies and leaves. A second girl enters and talks on her cell.

GIRL 2: I looked at home remedies for, you know, when it itches and gets a little grody down there. Sam said he wanted to help, so he put a little vitamin E on my lips... Yeah, broke open some capsules. Then he spooned in some yogurt. He did it really tenderly, like feeding a baby. He said it was amazing.

She snaps her phone shut, curtsies and leaves. The group walks further in.

SCENE 5

JIM gets up from his computer, staggers a bit, rubs his eyes. JENNY comes over and gives him eyedrops, which he uses.

JIM: Thank you.

JENNY: Would you like one of those pads to brace your forearms, so you don't get carpal tunnel?

JIM: That's very thoughtful. I'm okay.

JENNY: Well you just let me know. You're a real regular now. We gotta take care of you.

JIM: It's funny. I'm not sleepy, and it's what—3:30.

JENNY: You wanna know a secret? We pump oxygen into the rooms, just like the casinos. Keeps people zippy, unnaturally bright.

JIM: Hey, whatever works, I'll take it.

JENNY: It's good for the body too. Oxygenation. Like all the health drinks say.

JIM: Don't they say...Yeah. So, you work a lot of hours. You like it here?

JENNY: I sure do.

JIM: It seems like a nice staff.

JENNY: It is, but what I really like is—ok, it's 3:30 in the morning. I'm here, talking to you, which I'm enjoying. But I'm also home in bed.

JIM: You're home in bed.

JENNY: In a deep sleep. And when I'm, let's say, reading while a customer stock-surfs, I'm really reading at home.

JIM: Oh, you mean in spirit. Not really here, more there.

JENNY: No, physically.

JIM: You mean, since you're doing what you do at home...

JENNY: Whatever you may think you see, I'm home. It's hard to explain.

Pause.

JENNY: How's your night been?

JIM: Derivatives. Win some, lose some.

JENNY: Word. What's next on the agenda?

JIM: Shopping for a mortgage, but the adjustable rates...in a year my monthly payment would jump by a third!

JENNY: Let me tell you something I learned, not just here, but in the school of hard knocks. And also in yoga class. There is no tomorrow. Jimmy, there is no tomorrow. Is it a good deal today? If it is, that's your answer. As Buddha says, if something is good

for you, do it. If something is not good for you, don't do it. Is this mortgage good for you?

JIM: *Now*, it's incredible. But--

JENNY: Divide an hour by two, what do you get?

JIM: A half hour.

JENNY: Divide that by two.

JIM: Fifteen minutes.

JENNY: Divide that by two.

JIM: 7 and a half minutes.

JENNY: Don't you see Jimmy? In this way tomorrow never comes. It can never *arrive*, never get all the way here. Today's interest rate is locked in.

JIM: Still, there *will* come a day when the rate resets. There will be a before and after. Something new, and bad, will commence.

JENNY: If you say so, Jimmy. I'm just the help. But I know life is an infinitely slow slog through shimmering water. Do you see the shimmer?

She and JIM look around. JIM sees his old co-worker BILL walking quickly toward the exit

JIM: Bill!

BILL: Hey Jim. (*He keeps walking.*)

JIMMY: Bill! What are you doing here?

BILL: Getting out.

JIM: Whoa. What's the story? (*Stops him.*)

BILL: Jim, you know I got laid off a few months ago. I don't fault them. Don't have survivor's guilt. I got a severance, a big lump. I decided to spend it here, cause you can look for a job here too; it's the same computer. Take my advice, go elsewhere. It's bullshit here. Waste a money. Too many rules. Just trying to be bad, like a poodle peeing on the rug, not really bad. Bunch a schoolmarms. Must do this, can't do that. Intrusive, big government mentality. Even this cutie here. Oh she looks sinful, but she's government, a government inspector. Wise up, Jimmy. The possibilities are too sweet, and our natures are too strokeable, for this. I know I'm in your phone. Call me.

SCENE 6

JAKE in a booth at a computer. A GIRL sits on a couch nearby reading a book on art history. JAKE clicks the mouse, addressing the screen.

JAKE: Yeah, I do think he was wrong on the missile shield. He's a coward, he rolls like Pillsbury, and he doesn't give a damn about foreign policy. (*Clicking.*) Yeah, I did think the final round was rigged. They went with the politically correct gay guy who couldn't sing for shit. (*Clicking.*) No. (*Clicking.*) No, I don't think there's a still undiscovered particle that's symmetrical to the meson. (*Clicking*) No, I don't think it's unseasonably hot. (*Clicking*) Does Barry hate private enterprise? *Oh* yeah; and what?--you want me to get an online degree? And buy a car? And try a diet? Sons of bitches! All right, enough yes/no. Let me marshal my thoughts, editorialize.

He types for awhile.

JAKE: I'm lonely. (*He erases that sentence.*) This is different than spreadsheets. No little boxes. It's fun to keep going, make connections, use all caps! Work like a slave, then be ruled by a slave! (*Types.*) Honey you catching this?

GIRL: Absolutely. I'm on your site, hit 33, that's me. I'm getting it as you write.

JAKE: There's probably some misspellings. I'll go back and edit.

GIRL: I like it. I can see your mind in action.

JAKE: Here we are, in our routine. Not like we're together of course.

GIRL: In a way. It's a little like making love. I'm receiving your thoughts, and I'm feeling, having all *kinds* of responses.

JAKE (*smiling*): What are the three pillars of his domestic policy? Health care, climate, financial regulation. All right, health care: (*types*) What part of healthcare can't be guaranteed as a right by the federal government do you not understand?

GIRL: Consider your brow stroked.

Several people walk quickly toward the exit, angry frowns on their faces. JAKE doesn't look up. The GIRL follows them with her eyes.

SCENE 7

JOE is lying on a couch, half awake, thinking in a dazed way, shifting his body from time to time. One hand trails idly on the carpet. BEGBICK, FATTY, and MOSES stand nearby, watching him.

BEGBICK: That's nice, a nice pattern you're making there, Joe, very flowing, free yet decisive. The man could do calligraphy. You have the touch or you don't. He does.

FATTY: He'd probably excel at origami too. Maybe swordfighting.

They wait. JOE is motionless.

BEGBICK: He has an above-average autonomic nervous system. Look how naturally he breathes.

MOSES: In out, in out. Good stuff!

FATTY: Blinking too. Not rapid, not slow, in the golden mean.

MOSES: How does he make it look so easy? Look, ma, no conscious thought!

Joe's lips move almost imperceptibly.

FATTY: But wait! That's right, baby, you translate those thoughts into words. Who better than you to do it? And what an interesting kiss that murmur plants on the air.

Joe wriggles a bit, changes the angle of his head. BEGBICK puts on a baseball cap with the initial G on it.

BEGBICK: This is God, Joe, seeing each thing you do, understanding of anything that shames you, well-pleased with everything else. In my eyes, your smallest gesture is a dance. Audience, get your mouses ready and tell us what you think of Joe's performance.

JENNY and two other girls take their places at the computers and begin clicking.

BEGBICK: The votes will be in soon, Joe. And all the feedback. But you can see from their faces they dig it. And the best thing--all the voices, all the love, it's not out here, it's actually inside you. This approval is your own deepest voice, Joe, and always will be; you cannot lose it now; you've found what you've been looking for. (Aside to FATTY and MOSES.) This is awful.

FATTY: It's a tomb. We're in trouble.

MOSES: They're all leaving, no one new's coming, the word of mouth is poisonous.

BEGBICK: I don't know why—I'm giving all I got to give.

FATTY: Behind us is the SEC.

MOSES: And ahead of us, no more real Times Square.

FATTY: If we want to survive, we've got to take it up a notch.

BEGBICK (to JOE): A lot of chatter on the graceful trailing of the hand on the carpet, Joe. Oh, look, Genevieve from Des Moines thought the vacant stare had, quote, an almost religious intensity. (Aside) But how?

SCENE 8

Jim heading toward the exit. His friends are holding him back.

JAKE: Where you going? It's 3 in the morning.

JIM: Back to the office. Maybe even home! Anywhere but here!

JOE: Did something happen?

JIM: *Nothing* happened, that's the problem.

JAKE: Nothing? All these weeks?

JIM: Oh, I bought a house, in Queens. Crazy low-interest. We'll see how that pans out.

JOE: Congratulations!

JIM: Jenny said it was like the love of your life when she's determined to make it work: the great qualities in the mortgage, they're permanent. The bad ones are temporary, they'll soon be outgrown.

JAKE: Good, so what's the problem?

JIM: I bought that house. I bought condos and flipped them. I bought derivatives and bet that with Israel bulldozing houses, Caterpillar sales would rise, and I was right. I bet that three inches of rain would fall in Seattle last month—I was wrong. And now, and now...

JOE: And now?

JIM: And now, nothing! Who gives a shit? I'm uncomfortable. Their beer is too weak for me, their liquor's too strong. The women's faces are gaunt, their thighs are muscular. It's all too much, yet not enough.

JAKE: Come back. Let me show you what I'm working on. Try to see Mahagonny with fresh eyes, like when we first got here.

JOE: And Jim, everything you're feeling right now, it's interesting. You want them to gather an audience for you?

JIM: An audience? That's the last thing I need. In my inbox the orders keep rising. Come install this, I've forgotten how to do this, I can't access this, is there any way you could blah-blah-blah? It's like working a window in the post office. I get enough attention. People see me perform in their cubes. I'm good at my job, I know it. That's not the problem. The problem is, I can't relax. I can't relax here. The stimulation is too harsh, and the peace...doesn't soak into your bones.

Begbick and Jenny enter.

BEGBICK: What was that?

JIM: I said the stimulation is too harsh, and the peace doesn't soak into your bones.

BEGBICK: But Jimmy, here you have...

JIM takes out a small pair of wire cutters and starts waving them around.

JIMMY: Don't make me cut the wires! I'll cut the wires and plunge every screen into darkness! A few snips, and your nice network is a brain in late Alzheimers.

JOE: Calm down, put the cutters away.

JIMMY: No. The email requests, nicety nice. From people I know are sour. And typed attitude from people who seem nice. It hardly ever matches up! It's confusing!

JAKE: Easy, boy, easy.

JENNY: Jim, come back to your booth. Your back is stiff from sitting. You need Ben-Gay.

JIM: Nothing really happens here!

JAKE: Put down the cutters!

JIMMY: I need more stimulation, and less!

MOSES enters and whispers to BEGBICK.

MOSES: There's a hurricane coming. They just realized.

JAKE: Jim put down the cutters!

JIMMY: No!

All the lights go out. Everyone remains as he is in the dark.

SCENE 9

The night of the hurricane. Sitting on the ground leaning against the wall are Jenny, Begbick, Jim, Jake, and Joe. All are in despair, but Jim is smiling. From backstage can be heard the voices of customers in procession as they pass behind the wall.

THE CUSTOMERS OF MAHAGONNY *off*:

How bad will it get?

How bad *can* it get?

There are standards here,
Standards of living.

JOE: Aww shit. Brace yourself.

JAKE: I'll believe it when it rips the roof off and we can't live here any more.

BEGBICK: You don't really *live* here.

JAKE: Fear it if it drives us out into it. Otherwise it's more a hurricane of the mind.

JENNY *softly and sadly*: Divide an hour by two, what do you get

A half hour. Divide that by two, fifteen minutes.

In this way tomorrow never comes.

The interest rate is locked in.

JOE: Did anyone bring a first-aid kit?

CUSTOMERS *off*:

There are standards here,
Standards of living.

The foreclosed will not wander the landscape.
If they do, we won't be among them.

Jim laughs.

BEGBICK: Why the laugh?

JIM: Begbick, you're a hard worker, in your bent and ruthless way. Joe, you're all about giving. And Jenny, so young and healthy—yet you may die tonight. Joe, you may lack the necessities. And Begbick, admit that with your ruses you're still a piker compared to the banks—hear them now!—that bet against their own clients.

JAKE: Be quiet, Jim.

JOE: You talk too much.

JIM: They took it to the extreme. And now the storm wrecks the people and spares the houses. It crushes both the sound and the sick who would've died tomorrow. I know what I want to speculate in!

CUSTOMERS *off*:

There are standards here,
Standards of decency.
This shows the need to regulate,
Such systems must be bound by law.

Jake laughs.

JAKE: New laws
Will be like verse forms
Merely *guiding* their creativity.

There was a law I clung to—
To seek out a few opinions
And pick and choose what made sense
To me. Tonight I relinquish
That self-imposed law
And hear only one voice.
(Listening) The blowhard
Speaks for me!
My mission: to be a megaphone
For his megaphone!

JENNY *whispering*: Someday soon I was hoping to buy.

BEGBICK: Damage, even destruction, could be a chance to remodel. Joe, what's your vision?

JOE: Tonight, in the hurricane, my savings sank so fast. There's something wrong with me. Maybe I could look into subsidies, so I could still come here when I'm poor.

Begbick is silent.

JIM: Joe, Joe, what do you know! You're a burnt-out case, staring into the clear lava lamp of space, unseeing yet wanting to be seen. Jenny, you're sweet, you have a good heart. But what if it's enlarged, or the panic reveals some hidden defect? I know what I want to speculate in! It's exciting yet reassuring. And Begbick, you're going to help me, because there's plenty in it for you. You're going to help me, or there will be hell to pay.

JAKE: I like sitting, sending my thoughts out and receiving responses. But look at the storm. The wind blows, chairs go flying off a porch. The wind blows, cars swerve. It *touches* what it affects. That is its essence. Fellows, I've been far away, growing, and now, with wildly rolling eye, I'm reaching land. There need to be changes, Begbick.

You're going to make them, because there's plenty in it for you. You're going to make them or there will be hell to pay.

SCENE 10

A year later. Mahagonny is booming. Customers sing.

CUSTOMERS:

One means to bet on life and death,
Two, to summon the mob,
Three means to fight to the bystander's last breath,
Four, to keep plugging or to quit your job.
And what's more, we go beyond the stolen pension,
Bring the Market to its logical extension.
Here, to the edge of murder,
This is the place to take it further.

An elderly man and a middle-aged woman appear before Jim who sits at a computer on a raised platform. The word GAMBLING is in huge letters on the wall behind him; on each side of him a musician is playing. Jenny watches.

JIM (*aside*): Both these people have life insurance policies. I am betting on who dies first. The younger will pay out more. From their names on the bond, they both seem nice. (*To Woman.*) You have the look of a champion. I believe in you. And I have to ask: what makes this world so great? The next one's supposed to be better, and just a step away.

WOMAN: I have a husband and three wonderful children. They're my life. They keep me going.

JIM (*contemplatively*): Really? Huh. (*Pause.*) Do you believe things like cancer have a psychosomatic component? Doctors say cancer erupts in those, particularly women, with pent-up anger or envy, the cells becoming hyper-expressive, eating emotionally, growing with lustful abandon. Ring a bell? Anything like that beneath that prim surface?

The woman shakes her head no.

JIM: And heart disease—amazing how butter, cream, eggs, cheese, grease, lard, can clog, I said clog, an artery. And why not? Shouldn't there be freedom of assembly in there? Can't like seek like? Just a thimbleful will do it, obstruct the narrow passage, first partly, the blood struggling. Then another gobbet, and another, from almost any food really, till the last micrometer of fat slips into place. Now full blockage, blood backing up, the heart, the poor heart, (how does it ever work in the first place?) freaking out!

The woman puts her hand to her heart and begins to sweat.

JIM (to elderly man): You, sir. Are you afraid you'll die soon? Perish the thought! People live incredibly long and productive lives these days. Why experience, until every alternative has been exhausted, eternal nightmare? Why cause your loved ones the kind of pain that often leads to a psychotic break? Better you outlive them. So, caballero, take care of yourself, play it safe, make good decisions, one of which should be breathing tubes and other forms of artificial prolongation, because you never know! Do you?

The man shakes his head weakly in agreement.

CHORUS:

Jim's doing pretty well.

He may burn in hell,

But he's got it doped--against the young

And for the codger in the iron lung,

He takes a flutter the flutter will get worse

And puts money in his purse.

Jim's new girl shows a lot of leg,

While the survivors get a big goose egg.

Go ahead, call him a heartless prick,

But his rooting never made one patient kick.

The old pay less, the young pay more,

Jim's gotten in on the ground floor.

SCENE 11

The Customers sing.

CUSTOMERS:

One means to bet on life and death,
Two, to summon the mob,
Three means to fight to the bystander's last breath,
Four, to keep plugging or to quit your job.
And what's more, though their headgear's eccentric,
We've birthed a movement that's more authentic,
To stop the spreading socialist state
And fight Nazism, terrorism, reverse-racism, with hate.

JAKE sits on a raised platform, typing furiously on his computer. A huge banner saying WRATH is behind him on the wall; a musician plays on each side of him.

JAKE (*aside*): Begbick paid a little extra. Now I'm near the top when you google 'Obambi'. (*Reading as he types*) Are we, collectively, stupid? Did an empire ever fall because of plain stupidity? Or insanity and general limp-wristedness? Because that's the deal if we let this regime re-regulate. Think about the free market—the steam engine, the cotton gin, the cure for polio, the microchip. Now think of it being bound, like Atlas, in red tape till it looks like a drag queen. Our Market, that hunk of driving beefcake, turned into a transvestite by some bureaucrat with fantasies of control, of sheer...*thwarting*. Some fusspot whose favorite word is 'Don't'. But of these 'elites', thousands of them, thinking they know better than you, tyranny--

As if responding to a voice off: The meltdown? Pal, you've been sadly misinformed. Or you choose to be. Study recent history. Activist government forced the banks to lend to--let's say it--poor minorities, forced the banks to be charities, repayment not important. And now we're here. Their answer--more regulation, more force. Isn't that the very

definition of insanity—to do the same thing and expect a different result? So sad. So enraging.

The Customers of Mahagonny enter with tea bags on their heads.

MAN: It's good to meet you, Jake. You, sir, are a patriot.

JAKE: Thank you. That means a lot to me.

WOMAN: We've traveled a long way to put a face to the words. You look like...one of us.

JAKE: I *am* one of you.

He comes forward and repositions the woman, guiding her by the shoulders and the small of her back. He does the same with the man.

WOMAN: Jake, my son is doing a school project, but I think the teacher is placing too much emphasis on so-called facts. I know how you love the individual states. Could you tell me, in your opinion—what are the chief products exported by Massachusetts?

JAKE: Happy to oblige. Timber. Borax, which is actually a mineral. Fire extinguishers. Wool.

WOMAN (*remembering*): Thank you, Jake. And thanks from my son.

MAN: Jake, what you said just now about re-regulation—somehow I feel like I've heard it before, even the exact words. Is this possible?

JAKE: Possible? It's downright likely! All I do is repeat the ideas of someone I trust. I've never claimed otherwise. In fact, on my blog, I just retype transcripts of his rants. Is that a problem?

MAN: I guess not. I mean, your, his, thoughts suit me.

JAKE: Good. Now, we have work to do. Candidates to find, purity tests to administer. And time is short. We need to hurry. The juicy moon is White, but slowly setting.

SCENE 12

The Customers are gathering around an octagonal cage with the word VIOLENCE on it. Fatty and Begbick are watching. Musicians play. Moses gets up on a chair:

MOSES: We have the honor to bring to you today the grudge match of the century
To be won by Submission or straight K.O.
The famous extreme cage fighter Trinity Moses, me,
Versus Some pretty huge dude without a moniker Lloyd Blankfein!

Lloyd Blankfein enters in suit, with Bill behind him carrying papers.

FATTY (to Bill): What, boy, you're challenging Trinity Moses?! Sell an organ, sell two organs, but don't do *this*.

BILL: I'm just holding the fine print. He wants to pay me for that, in stock, that'll work.
(Calling) Hey Moses, what's up? How's business? (To Fatty) Who's the stick figure with him?

FATTY: One of our maintenance guys.

BILL: Let me say a quick hello to my friends.

He goes over to Jim and Jake.

JIM: Hi, Bill! You back? So you heard about the improvements...

BILL: Nah. Lloyd saw my resume, offered me this gig. You gotta do what you gotta do.

JIM: Yeah, but Moses...

BILL: Buddy, *I* don't get hit. Lloyd's the bruiser. Look at him, he's got a steel safe for a head. You wanna bet on my combatant?

Silence.

BILL: This is loyalty--to Moses? Any of you close with him?

JAKE: Moses has no conscience, man.

MOSES (*taunting Lloyd*): Hey, you! The private's about to become public! Upchucked blood, bones sticking through your skin, maybe even brain matter coming out your ears!

LLOYD: Yeah? Well the private's about to become public for you too! The scared face, alone in your office, when market share plunges, for all to see!

BILL (to JAKE): I, I hung with you at Lou's once or twice...

JAKE: I'm sorry. My money's on Moses.

BILL: So that's how it is.

JIM: I'll take a flyer, Bill. For the days saying hi in the hall.

BILL: Thanks, bro. I won't let you down.

JIM: When I think of the days saying hi in the hall...

BILL: Or just nodding. You'll win your money, Jim. I'll do all a man can do.

The cage is ready. Moses enters it, trailed by the maintenance man. Lloyd enters, Bill behind him holding papers.

CUSTOMERS: Give three cheers for Trinity Moses!
Moses, show your true character!

FATTY: Our Trinity Moses: 230 pounds.

Lloyd Blankfein: 170.

And folks we're a little sorry this is real, not HD,
But on the other hand, it's off the grid, in-house,
So you are the select few.

JIM: How's he feeling?

BILL: Focused. He blocks out other people's fears.

JIM: I'm trusting him.

FATTY: All right, men. No gouging, no fish hooking, no small joint manipulation.

The fight begins. Moses and Lloyd strike the other's surrogates with punches, kicks, knees, and elbows. The broom and the papers go flying.

CUSTOMERS *alternately*:

Oh, ouch! What a wimp! Come on, fight back!

Borderline foul—genius! The angle of maximum stress!

Shit, he hit him so hard his whole family felt it!

Bill and the maintenance man are down.

CUSTOMERS *as one*: Ground and pound, baby!

Now sprawl and brawl!
Show your true character!
Take it to the extreme!

Bill and the maintenance man are dead. Fatty raises the arms of Moses and Lloyd.

MOSES and LLOYD (*as one*): I regret it.

MEN (*dispersing*): That was ugly. They were just too damn little. Unsophisticated.

Jim and Jake are alone near the cage.

JAKE: Congratulations.

JIM: Congratulations to you too. I didn't think it'd take such a bloodbath.

JAKE: Something had to give. It was a market correction.

JIM: Bill...

JAKE: The maintenance guy too. Those houses have been seriously abandoned.

JIM (*with a nod to Bill's body*): So long, bro.

SCENE 13

JIM, JAKE, and JENNY are gathered around a pool table. JOE is lying on a couch. BEGBICK, FATTY, and MOSES are going over accounts at a nearby table.

JIM: C'mon, come play, Joe. We need a fourth.

JOE: No, I'm going to be watched soon.

JIM: Let them watch you do *this*.

JOE: I don't want to perform. It's unconditional love I need.

JAKE: You bummed about Bill?

JOE: Eh. I hardly knew him. But I'm familiar with the outcome.

JIM: What do you have, man, PTSD? From what? You're *morose*? I say enough! Get up and live. Take a drink, place a bet, watch Jenny as she leans forward to put another bag in the bag of bags under her counter.

JOE: Jenny, you're delightful. But I see something in your eyes, I know what brought you here.

JENNY: It's true I was taken from my mother and put in foster care. In more than one home, I was sexually abused. It's true I dropped out of high school. But I got my GED, I'm working on my Associates. Everyone's got their cross to bear.

JOE: You see, Jim (*he crosses and climbs up on the billiard table*)

Why stand up, the stream of misery is endless.

And what's the best way to help?

One-on-one, by carrying a caseload?
But for each one helped
A thousand more wait
With their horror stories.
Structurally, reaching many at once?
But within the structure,
The socialist, the true democrat, is castrated.
From outside? Yes, the sad cranks
And their visions, like ships in bottles.

JAKE: Joe, please, have a drink, have *something*.

JENNY: Do you want to lie back down?

JOE: I'm always lying down, so small under the blanket.
Here's a secret: my cells,
And I don't just mean skin,
But neurons, gut,
Fly about the room, hither and yon,
No common purpose
Binds them together,
They just sometimes drift back,
As me, when they're bored.
I am a rec center, not unlike Mahagonny.
And so I ask, how could I help anyway?
I never have. All those years,
My desk was vacant.

JAKE: No, Joe. I was with you when you met someone who you'd helped, long ago.
He remembered you and thanked you.

JOE: I don't recall.

JIM: Can't you use it, Joe--if you're right and you're nothing? Can't you be a cloud in the shape of a hand? If you're nothing, all the better to, to...

JOE: To...

JIM: Work.

JOE: Jim, the fact is, I have no choice. Tonight's the last of my paid vacation days. So tomorrow, it's back to the salt mines, me sitting in my empty chair like two clear streams converging.

BEGBICK: You're leaving us?

JOE: If you consider me to have been here.

MOSES: Don't go!

JOE: Moses, I'm out of days

BEGBICK: Be creative. Isn't there a CD you can tap? A pension of some kind?

JOE: I'm afraid not.

FATTY: Could you borrow from a friend?

JOE (*looking at the others*): I don't think so.

BEGBICK: I see.

FATTY: Loss of membership. Back to pay as you go. How humiliating.

BEGBICK: In light of your changed status, this session's not happening. Fatty, Moses, go through his pockets.

Fatty and Moses lift him down from the pool table, take his wallet, remove the money.

JOE: The customer service here has certainly de--

BEGBICK: Now hit the bricks.

JOE: What?

BEGBICK: I don't know you, you don't know me, and you don't have any money.

JOE: You don't know...? Help me, friends!

JENNY: Joe, you're leaving, but I have to work here.

JOE: Jake!

JAKE: Joe, I think you know I oppose any attempt at regulation, such as the Golden Rule. But the Rule of Law is a different matter. The Rule of Law is written in stone, and the Rule of Law is telling you: hit the bricks!

JOE: I can fight it. I fought an eviction once.

JAKE: How did that work out for you?

JOE: Legally I didn't have a leg to stand on, but morally...

JAKE: How did that work out for you?

JOE: Jim!

JIM: Joe, when I think of the nights in Lou's, the image rises up before me...of Bill being crushed. They already have your money. It's over.

BEGBICK: Joe, the feedback we're getting says that you looked stupid up there on the pool table and your speech was a bunch of gibberish. Also, that your wallet was cheap and kind of sad. But I guess that's the non-profit salary for you: can't even afford a decent wallet.

FATTY: Looks like you been voted off, lad. Emphatically.

MOSES: Yeah, I mean can the majority be wrong?

JOE: Absolutely. But there are reasons...

JAKE: Joe there are blog templates. Talk there.

JOE: Can you send me one?

JAKE: Look them up!

FATTY and MOSES escort JOE out.

SCENE 14

Jim in his booth, Jenny nearby with a mug of tea in her hands.

JENNY: Here's an update, Jim. I'm in my apartment downstairs talking to you, which is strange since you're not there.

JIM: Okay.

JENNY: And I'm drinking this cup of tea. Chamomile. Do you smell it?

JIM: Yes.

JENNY: Feel the steam, a little?

JIM: I think so.

JENNY: Hang on. *(She talks on her cellphone.)* I saw something on the train today. A little girl playing with silly putty. She was so creative. Her hands moved constantly. She talked to it, made faces—smiled at stringy, growled at lumpy. With all the gadgets--silly putty. There was something special about that girl. I felt she would grow up into an amazing person...*(Getting off cellphone.)* That's it.

JIM: Nice.

JENNY: You don't seem that thrilled.

JIM: I just...

JENNY: What? Say it.

JIM: The truth is I get jealous when anyone talks on their cell. I resent all the people on the other end.

JENNY: But there *was* no one on the other end.

JIM: Still. (*Pause.*) Anyway. Give me an update.

JENNY: Now I'm in my apartment downstairs, walking toward you, and it's strange because...you're there.

JIM: I am?

JENNY: Yes. I'm looking into your eyes, seeing they're tired. Poor pupils, poor focusing muscles. No eyedrops downstairs, though. Hey, I know. Why don't I read and you just type.

JIM: No, that's okay.

JENNY (*snatching a sheet of paper*): Part of the job description! (*Reading*) Brandon Reynolds, 41. Grace Moffit, 38. Jerry Casagrande, 30. Jennifer McGuire, 24. That's me. Jim!

JIM: No, Jenny.

JENNY: You put me on a list of likely to die.

JIM: No.

JENNY: It says right here: 'Likely to die young'.

JIM: Jenny. Look, babies born to addicts tend to be sickly. Heart, lungs, immune system. I've listened to your breathing. Sometimes it's not right. These things tend to manifest in the mid-twenties. It's not personal, Jenny, it's science. And math. Trends, probabilities. If it was up to me, I'd want you to be healthy. Of course!

JENNY (*screaming*): Begbick! Begbick! Throw him out!

BEGBICK (*running in with Fatty and Moses*): What? What is it, Jenny?

JENNY: Jim bet I'm going to die! There, in his Wall Street bundling, or whatever it is. I'm part of a bundle of policies, those likely to die young!

BEGBICK: How do you know that?

JENNY: I've seen the list. Ask him.

BEGBICK: Is this true?

JIM nods.

BEGBICK: Well it's none of our business. We have no spyware here. He's entitled to confidentiality. You shouldn't have seen it, so forget it.

MOSES: Disregard it.

BEGBICK: Besides, no one forced you to sell your life insurance. That wasn't very smart.

JENNY: I have to live. And I have to save. Begbick, what if he was betting against you? Selling short. Betting Mahagonny would go under?

BEGBICK: Is he?

JIM: No. That's not my area.

BEGBICK: So the question's moot.

JAKE enters.

JENNY: Please. I can't look at him.

Begbick is silent.

JENNY: It's him or me.

BEGBICK: You don't make threats. Jenny, what's gotten into you? We teach you to shrug things off—comments, pinches, bad tips. You've always been fine, till now.

JENNY: He's wishing my death!

JIM: No, I'm not. I'm just...conflicted.

BEGBICK: Jim's a businessman and this is *his* business. He's not delinquent in his membership fees, and he is a valued customer.

JENNY: He's a monster. He talks to me gently, we have our routines, and all the time...Throw him out!

BEGBICK: That's not going to happen.

JENNY: At least Joe, broke as he was, helped people. What does Jim contribute? Does he make anything? Does he lend to others so they can make things? He's a parasite. And you call him a valued customer!

BEGBICK: Jenny, you're the problem here. I see that clearly. You're the destabilizing element. Selfish! Your ego, the fear of your small death and the miniscule drama of your so-called betrayal, while Jim deals in thousands of deaths, and his membership fee is not delinquent. Put her in irons! She needs some re-education.

Fatty and Moses clamp irons around her hands and feet and drag her off.

JAKE: It's okay, Jim. You took it to the extreme. And you have a family to think of. Well, it's good practice for when you do.

SCENE 15

Jenny in jail. Footsteps approaching.

JENNY: Jake. Jake, and another sermon on making others eat the consequences. I've got to go to another place. Like when I was raped. Go to another place. My house. My new house. I have my Associates, my BA. I have a good job, health insurance, enough to eat. And now I have a house. No one can take it away from me. It's affordable. The math works. It's even cheaper than my rent. I'm not sure how that happened, but...I'm all moved in. Spent nights rearranging the furniture, laying out my knick-knacks, getting it just how I want. And now, finally, I can nest. Sit in this chair, my favorite chair, and look around and let the peace and safety sink into me. The nice cream color of the walls, the pictures I've had for years. Everything a mix of the familiar and the new that's becoming familiar. My laptop. The perspective of doorways. A neighborhood that's safe. So let Jake lecture, and get sentimental, stare at me, puff his long cigar--I'm nesting in the new house I've earned, the proof of my new life. *Silence.*

Soon. I can feel it. The same words, copies of words, words of words—all referring to? It's almost midnight. But tomorrow never comes. (*Sound of key in lock.*) Here you are, sitting in your favorite chair, with the drapes pulled back so the neighbors can see. What's wrong with a little vanity? Go to the house. (*Whispering*) Goodbye, Jenny, goodbye.

SCENE 16

Days later, Jenny in jail.

JENNY (*muttering*): No, no, I can't afford that. The math doesn't work!

The building begins to shake. Jenny is tossed around. Cracks appear in the walls.

JENNY (*screaming*): Broker, didn't you know? How could you not know?

The ceiling starts to crumble. The cell door falls partly from the wall. Joe appears.

JENNY: Who are you?

JOE: It's Joe.

JENNY: Joe with no money?

JOE: Just Joe.

JENNY: What's happening?

JOE: The banks have been broken apart. Glass-Steagall is the law again. A bank can be commercial, or it can be investment, but it can't be both. Hedge funds will be regulated. Consumers are to be protected even in the shadow banking system.

JENNY: How did all this happen?

JOE: I'm not sure it did. But it did here. The fissure has spread throughout the building. Mahagonny is no longer legal. And it's being enforced.

JENNY: And you? Why are *you* here?

JOE: I knew it'd be bad. Come on. It's chaos upstairs.

JENNY: It's hard for me to walk. They seemed to forget about feeding me.

JOE: Just hold on, we'll get you some food soon. I promise.

JENNY: All right. By the way, how's your job?

JOE: Same old-same old. (*Helping her.*) Here, easy.

They stagger out of the cell.

JENNY (*suddenly gripping his arm*): It's being enforced?

JOE: Apparently so.

SCENE 17

Joe and Jenny enter. Jim and Jake are fighting in the rubble of Mahagonny. Begbick crawls halfway out.

BEGBICK: Jenny, you want to buy a rambling old Chinatown manse? The time has come. We reviewed your records and you have sufficient collateral. You've made it!

Jenny and Joe move away. Fatty and Moses emerge from the wreckage and pull Begbick out.

BEGBICK: Thank you, boys. We'll be okay. We'll escape through a loophole.

FATTY: This is not the America I grew up in.

BEGBICK: I saw this coming and I know a safe place, not far away. And I vow to you, one way or another, we're going to keep sending the pollution downstream. Because it's not, it's really not, our responsibility.

They exit, limping but already looking around for an angle. The two Girls come over to Jenny and hug her.

GIRL 1: Thank God you're okay!

JENNY: You too, oh, you too! Do you think anyone's still in there?

GIRL 2 (*looking around*): I didn't see Ellsby. He trades near the innermost room.

JENNY: I didn't see him either. Or Diane.

GIRL 1: Diane?

GIRL 2: With her laptop, who just seems to want to be around people while she does her work.

GIRL 1: Oh yeah.

JENNY: We're going to have to go back in. Be careful.

GIRL 1: Jenny, when this is all over we should talk. We're thinking of starting a restaurant, a cooperative. We'd love to have you.

JENNY: Ok, tell me later, I'm curious. Here we go. (*Calling.*) Hello! Hello!

Holding hands, the Girls, Jenny, and Joe disappear into the rubble.

GIRL 2 (*from inside*): Can we sleep in the ruins if we have nowhere else?

JENNY (*from inside*): We better not. It may not be done falling; it may never be stable.

END