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# THE LIVING

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THE LIVING was presented as a workshop in the Mark Taper Forum's 1991 New Works Festival, directed by Oskar Eustis; in the Denver Center's U S West TheatreFest '92, directed by Nagle Jackson; in Carnegie Mellon's 1992 Showcase of New Plays, directed by Brian Kulik; and at Kenyon College, directed by Harlene Marley; and in readings at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Playwrights' Center, and Upstart Stage.

The world premiere of THE LIVING was presented on 3 May 1993 by the Denver Center Theater Company, Donovan Marley, Artistic Director, in U S West TheatreFest '93. The cast and creative contributors were:

MR JOHN GRAUNT	.....	Jamie Horton
MRS SARAH CHANDLER	.....	Katherine Heasley
DR EDWARD HARMAN	.....	Sean Hennigan
MRS ELIZABETH FINCH	.....	Kay Doubleday
SIR JOHN LAWRENCE	.....	William M Whitehead
LORD BROUNKER	.....	Michael Santo
REV DR THOMAS VINCENT	.....	Richard Risso
Ensemble	.....	Douglas Harmsen, James Baker, Michael Hartman
<i>Director</i>	.....	Nagle Jackson
<i>Set</i>	.....	Vicki Smith
<i>Lighting</i>	.....	Charles R MacLeod
<i>Costumes</i>	.....	Lyndall L Otto
<i>Sound</i>	.....	Joel Underwood
<i>Stage manager</i>	.....	Christopher C Ewing

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The events that took place in London in 1665 have survived thanks to the extraordinary testimony left by Captain John Graunt, Nathaniel Hodges, M D, Sir John Lawrence, the Reverend Dr Simon Patrick, Mr Samuel Pepys, and the Reverend Dr Thomas Vincent; and to a remarkable act of historical imagination, Daniel Defoe's novel A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR. This script owes a handful of sentences, and its existence, to them.

Dozens of directors, actors, designers, dramaturgs, crew, and staff worked with uncommon dedication to bring THE LIVING into being. My particular thanks to Nagle Jackson, Oskar Eustis, Brian Kulick, Harlene Marley, and Tom Szentgyorgyi.

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## CHARACTERS

MR JOHN GRAUNT, early thirties, a scientist  
MRS SARAH CHANDLER, late twenties, a shopkeeper's wife  
DR EDWARD HARMAN, mid-thirties, a physician  
MRS ELIZABETH FINCH, early forties, a searcher of the dead  
SIR JOHN LAWRENCE, late forties, Lord Mayor, a merchant  
LORD BROUNKER, early fifties, a cavalier  
REV DR THOMAS VINCENT, thirties, a nonconformist minister

Three men, twenties to forties, may play the following roles:

MAN 1: MR SAWYER, a cabinetmaker  
PAUL, SARAH's brother, a shopkeeper  
LAWRENCE'S CLERK  
FIRST CONSTABLE  
ROBERT, a smith from Walthamstow

MAN 2: MR MILLS, an Anglican minister  
SECOND CONSTABLE  
BROUNKER'S CLERK  
ANDREW, a shopkeeper from Walthamstow

MAN 3: DR GODDARD, a physician  
JAMEY, a watchman  
BILL, a farmer from Walthamstow

## SCENE

London, 1665

## SET

A lower level and a slightly raised upper level connected by steps. A few pieces of furniture come and go, but the stage is as bare as possible.

## A NOTE ON STAGING

Throughout the action, until the very end, no one approaches within arm's reach of anyone else. The exception is HARMAN, and only when he wears protective clothing. No object is handed directly from one person to another. Everyone on stage is isolated in space.

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow:  
but woe to him that is alone when he falleth;  
for he hath not another to help him up.

*Ecclesiastes 4:10*

## ACT ONE

### Scene One

*(On the steps: SARAH sits on one side, head on her arms. GRAUNT stands on the other side, holding a large sheet of paper, densely printed. He looks up.)*

GRAUNT: Ague and Fever, 5,257. Chrisomes and Infants, 1,258.  
Consumption and Tissick, 4,808.

*(GRAUNT turns upstage to look at:)*

*(On the upper level: DOCTOR HARMAN, wearing a protective suit which completely hides his features. He hovers around a cot with a still figure in it. The suit includes a bulbous headpiece that covers him to the neck. A long breathing tube, shaped much like a bird's beak, protrudes from the front. He wears long, heavy gloves and a floor-length cloak. The whole suit is black and he looks, in sum, like a giant crow wearing a tricorn hat.)*

*(GRAUNT turns back.)*

GRAUNT: This is a publication that comes out every week. Has for sixty years now. Each parish reports: how many christened, how many died, what they died of. It's called the Bills of Mortality. People subscribe, glance through. At year's end, they publish a summary. Convulsion, 2,036. Dropsy and Timpany, 1,478.

*(HARMAN pulls a sheet over the body and crosses down the steps near, but not too near, SARAH. He pulls off his bird head. HARMAN speaks to SARAH, who nods.)*

GRAUNT: Frighted, 23. Grief, 46. Overlaid and Starved, 45. Plague, 110,596.

*(HARMAN exits.)*

GRAUNT: We did not know where it came from. We did not know what caused it. We had no way to stop it. For all we knew, it would never end. For all we knew, the world would end, in 1665. Bear that in mind. Judge what we did. For in this account it does not matter what becomes of me, or any of us. All that matters is what becomes of you. And what we did may be of use to you, if this ever should happen again. *(He exits.)*

FINCH: *(Off)* Sarah? Sarah?

(MRS FINCH enters. She carries a white wand, the badge of office of a searcher of the dead.)

FINCH: There you are. No, stay where you are, dear.

SARAH: I should get you something.

FINCH: No.

SARAH: Mrs Finch, come in and may I offer you something? I'll call the boy to go around, I don't know what there is in the house.

FINCH: Is everyone gone, then? No, don't you move. I'll just see him and be gone.

SARAH: He's all right. Everyone says he's all right.

FINCH: Where are the children?

SARAH: My sister has them.

FINCH: How are they?

SARAH: They're all right. Everyone's all right here. Truly.

FINCH: I should see him. Then we'd know.

SARAH: No, really, you don't have to.

FINCH: I do, though, you know. Won't take a moment.

SARAH: Can't you just leave him alone?

FINCH: Sarah, the parish needs to know what he had. What are the parish clerks going to do all day if they can't be writing down all the babies born and who their parents are and the dead and what their sickness was?

SARAH: The doctor said it was spotted fever.

FINCH: Did he?

SARAH: Yes. He did. So I don't see why you have to --

FINCH: Rumor.

SARAH: I don't underst —what rumor?

FINCH: You hear two houses have been shut up in Chancery Lane?

SARAH: I didn't know— I've been at his bedside here—

FINCH: Whole household locked in. A rumor got around they had the plague. *(Pause)* Believe me, you're lucky it's me that's here. When my husband died they sent an old drunk woman, some old drunkard I barely knew barged into my home to tell me what killed my man was the apoplexy. And it wasn't apoplexy, it was heart, as everyone said, as the doctor said, but she saw a red face and said apoplexy, and there he is in the

register, now to the Day of Judgment, dead of apoplexy. Till he rise again and straighten it out.

SARAH: Everyone said spotted fever, Mrs Finch, ask anyone.

FINCH: Not everyone, Sarah. What they say is one thing, but where have they gone?

SARAH: He's gone. There's nothing more to do here.

FINCH: Nothing? And no one to gather around you, grieving alone?

SARAH: They left because he's gone. That's all. He's gone.

FINCH: And they didn't want to go with him. But your children are all right?

SARAH: They've been with my sister.

FINCH: I should drop around there.

SARAH: I didn't let them touch him. I didn't let the children touch him, I didn't let his sister touch him or his mother touch him or anyone, no one touched him at all.

FINCH: Lonely death. No one there.

SARAH: I was there.

FINCH: Touching him.

SARAH: Sometimes.

FINCH: And now you'll want to see your children. And touch them, too. So you see? It's important what people know.

SARAH: Would we have to be quarantined?

FINCH: Only if it's the plague.

SARAH: It's not.

FINCH: That's what I'm here to decide. *(Pause)* Now, if you like, when I visit the children— for which the parish gives me not a thing, this is my concern as a neighbor now— if there's something you'd like me...to take for them?

SARAH: A message?

FINCH: A message, yes, but even if you had something you wanted me to take. For them. For their comfort? To make sure they *stay* comfortable? *(Pause)* Isn't that what we all want, Sarah, that the children be comfortable and safe?

SARAH: Mrs Finch. There is something? If you could?

FINCH: Is there?

SARAH: If you could...keep it for me?

FINCH: If that's what you'd like.

SARAH: We've been saving it. To keep the wolf from the door. But now— it's not a lot.

FINCH: That's fine. I know you, Sarah, you're a good girl. (*She crosses up the steps past SARAH.*) And now I'll have a quick look—

SARAH: Spotted fever, it's— he ran a fever, and— red spots, and— everyone said— *everyone* said. Before they went away.

(*FINCH peers at the figure in the cot and crosses quickly back down the steps.*)

FINCH: What do you know. Spotted fever.

SARAH: Is— is it?

FINCH: Now you know.

SARAH: Is it really? The children—

FINCH: Now if you'll tell me where you've got that little something—

SARAH: Let me get it for you—

FINCH: No! Stay where you are.

(*The lights fade on SARAH and FINCH as:*)

## Scene Two

(*Clamorous voices just offstage*)

VOICES: (*Off*) I'm the next one in!  
I don't care if he's in there!  
I'll wait!

(*On the lower level: Lights up as four men enter, at a cautious distance from each other. The first three have handkerchiefs over their faces and are wearing heavy cloaks. The last is GRAUNT who, as he crosses, comes too close to MAN 2.*)

MAN 2: Watch yourself!

GRAUNT: Sorry.

MAN 1: (*Furthest into the room*) Give a man some breathing room, could you?

MAN 2: (*In the middle of the room*) All you want.

(*MAN 2 moves further from MAN 1.*)

MAN 3: Watch it!

MAN 2: Look, I've got him on the other side as well.

MAN 3: There's other rooms you could wait in.

MAN 2: Not if you want a pass. I came here for a pass.

MAN 1: You can wait the same as anyone.

(LAWRENCE enters.)

ALL: Sir! Sir John!

LAWRENCE: All right. Who is next?

ALL: Here!

LAWRENCE: Does everyone have a certificate of health from the College of Physicians?

MEN 2 AND 3: Yes! Here!

MAN 2: Cost me enough.

MAN 1: Wait! They told me I had to go here first!

LAWRENCE: You're mistaken.

MAN 3: Got you good, son.

MAN 1: That's what they told me!

GRAUNT: Sir?

LAWRENCE: Anyone who wants a pass to leave London must go to the College for examination and return with a certificate of health.

MAN 1: Listen!

MAN 2: Clear out, would you?

LAWRENCE: I must have a certificate—

MAN 3: Here! Got mine here!

GRAUNT: Sir?

LAWRENCE: You, step forward.

MAN 2: Hey!

MAN 3: Thank you! Certificate, right here!

*(MAN 3 crosses toward LAWRENCE and places his certificate on the desk. He backs away and LAWRENCE looks at it without touching it, signs a piece of paper, places it next to the certificate, and backs away while MAN 3 crosses to the desk and takes the certificate and the pass, all during the following:)*

MAN 1: Friend? That certificate?

MAN 2: What of it?

MAN 1: How much for it?

MAN 2: Sorry, friend, I'm through dealing in them, I've saved this for myself.

LAWRENCE: Next!

MAN 1: Please.

MAN 2: Try outside. Certificate here!

LAWRENCE: You! How many are in the outer room?

MAN 3: Dozens.

GRAUNT: Fifty-three, actually.

LAWRENCE: Tell them to obey the constables and they'll all get a turn!

(MAN 2 and LAWRENCE go through the same routine.)

MAN 3: Hail and farewell, all!

MAN 1: Friend?

MAN 2: Thank you, Sir John!

(MAN 2 exits.)

MAN 1: That pass. You want to be careful who hears you have it.  
Thieves around.

MAN 3: Oh. Thanks. Well, I'm—

GRAUNT: Sir?

VOICES: (*Off*) Make way!

BROUNKER: (*Off*) Clear away there!

MAN 1: Why don't we go along together? Safety in numbers.

MAN 3: But you haven't got a pass yet.

MAN 1: Oh, I'll get one somehow. Coming?

VOICE: (*Off*) Clear a path for Lord Brunker!

(LORD BROUNKER enters. Everyone bows.)

BROUNKER: Hey ho, Jack.

LAWRENCE: Good morning, my Lord.

(MEN 1 and 3 exit.)

BROUNKER: No formalities, Jack, honestly, times like these.

LAWRENCE: It's good to see you, Harry. I'd started to think I was the only one left.

BROUNKER: I'm here on the King's business. Got your family out?

LAWRENCE: All out, settled in the country place.

BROUNKER: What about yourself? When do you go?

LAWRENCE: I'll be staying here.

BROUNKER: Jesus! Can't you leave it to the aldermen or something?

LAWRENCE: Harry. I'm an alderman.

BROUNKER: You're the Lord Mayor! Why can't you run things from a distance? Privy Council is.

LAWRENCE: Are they running things, or are they just running?

BROUNKER: Ho, Jack, gently now. All the best people are leaving.

LAWRENCE: What does that make you and me and the aldermen?

BROUNKER: The aldermen are excellent fellows, Jack, but surely you're a cut above them. We think of you as one of us. His Majesty himself, just before he left for Salisbury, said, "No one I'd rather have on the job than bully Jack Lawrence." He wants to know everything you do. I'm to be his eyes and ears.

LAWRENCE: Splendid, Harry! Who else is staying?

BROUNKER: Well, Albemarle is staying. But, Jack—

LAWRENCE: The Duke of Albemarle is upriver in Westminster.

BROUNKER: You don't want to work with him anyway. His physician told him the best preventive for the plague is a gallon of whiskey a day. He'll be drunk for the duration.

LAWRENCE: Aren't any of the Privy Council going to stay?

BROUNKER: Why do you need that pack of political lapdogs underfoot?

LAWRENCE: We'll need every figure of authority we can get. Together we may do this.

BROUNKER: Do what, exactly?

LAWRENCE: Harry. If all the best people are leaving, then all the worst people must be staying. They could riot in the streets any day. They might decide to loot your house.

BROUNKER: Ah. Can't the sheriffs keep them down?

LAWRENCE: They'll be no match for a mob.

BROUNKER: Call in the army.

LAWRENCE: It's a funny thing about armies. If you stand back and ask them to march into a plague they tend to resent you. They tend to become a mob. And so you have two mobs, and one of them has weapons.

BROUNKER: Ah.

LAWRENCE: The first thing we do is tell the Privy Council that we need enough money to keep the live people fed, the dying people indoors, and the dead people buried.

VOICES: *(Off)* Please! Sir! Can you give me a certificate, Sir!

GODDARD: *(Off)* I have business with the Lord Mayor!

VOICES: *(Off)* So do I!

GODDARD: *(Off)* I am with the College of Physicians!

LAWRENCE: Let him in!

*(GODDARD and SAWYER enter. GODDARD is wearing a protective suit like HARMAN's. SAWYER carries a roll of paper and measuring tools. GODDARD pulls off his headpiece.)*

GODDARD: Madness, madness.

LAWRENCE: Doctor Goddard. Good of you to come.

GODDARD: Good day, Sir John, the College has met and I have brought the proposed design.

BROUNKER: Goddard! Splendid, just the man—

GODDARD: Lord Brounker! What a surprise!

BROUNKER: Now I need your advice—

GODDARD: But, my Lord, I thought—

BROUNKER: This is about another matter.

*(LAWRENCE has noticed that SAWYER is sighting down his thumb at him.)*

LAWRENCE: Young man? May I help you?

GODDARD: Mr Sawyer will be taking your dimensions.

LAWRENCE: Goddard, why does the College of Physicians think that standing inside a box is going to keep me healthy?

BROUNKER: Hey what?

LAWRENCE: They want to display me in a glass cabinet, like a waxwork.

GODDARD: The wood and glass will interpose themselves between you and the contagious air your petitioners breathe at you. It is the same principle as the headpieces we doctors are wearing.

BROUNKER: Doesn't that scare the hell out of your patients?

GODDARD: The beak filters the infected air.

BROUNKER: And makes you look rather like a vulture.

GODDARD: Sir John, would you care to see the rendering of the box?

LAWRENCE: Please.

(SAWYER *unrolls the drawing and holds it up.*)

LAWRENCE: Jesus. I look like a prisoner in the dock.

GODDARD: If you want any modifications...

LAWRENCE: Give me some room to maneuver in there. A place to sit.

GODDARD: Note all this, would you, Sawyer?

LAWRENCE: A slot to pass papers in and out. A chamber pot. It'll save a little time.

BROUNKER: Goddard? If no air comes in—

GODDARD: Exactly, my Lord. The contagion—

BROUNKER: And no air goes out...

(*Pause*)

GODDARD: Air holes.

SAWYER: Hm.

GODDARD: Thank you, my Lord. Sawyer, sketch out a new design.

BROUNKER: Now listen, Goddard. Tell me what to do. I ordered a new suit a few weeks ago, beautiful silk, apple-blossom shade— you'd appreciate it, Jack, wasn't haberdashery how you made your pile?— friend in the haberdashers guild put me onto the silk, Thomason—

LAWRENCE: Ah yes—

BROUNKER: —took me down to the docks, pulled it right out of the crates for me, silk the color of apple blossom, floating in the breeze off the Thames. All the fittings, I'd slip it on and swear I could feel that breeze. Marvelous stuff. I sent the silk to my tailor—

LAWRENCE: Who does your— ?

BROUNKER: Meredith, well, and there's the difficulty. I took delivery today, and I've just heard he's fallen ill.

GODDARD: Plague?

BROUNKER: Maybe, maybe not, "fallen ill," that's all you hear anymore.

LAWRENCE: That's a shame. He does beautiful work. When do we see you wear the suit?

BROUNKER: Wear it? I'm afraid to have the damn thing in the house. Am I being stupid here?

GODDARD: My Lord is right to be cautious.

BROUNKER: I've told my man not to hang it in the wardrobe for fear of infecting the rest of my clothes.

GODDARD: Have your man fumigate it overnight in a fire made of sea coal.

BROUNKER: I can't visit his majesty smelling like a campfire.

GODDARD: It would be best not to wear the suit till the plague is past. By then the contagion should have faded.

BROUNKER: By then the fashion will have changed. (*He looks at the clothes he's wearing.*) He did do good work, didn't he. What a fucking waste.

VOICES: (*Off*) Hey! Wait your turn!

MILLS: (*Off*) I am a Doctor of Divinity!

LAWRENCE: Let him in!

BROUNKER: Is it always like this?

(*MILLS enters.*)

LAWRENCE: On the slow days.

MILLS: Sweet Jesus.

LAWRENCE: Good morning, Reverend Mills.

MILLS: Sir John, I have been inspecting the parishes as you asked?

BROUNKER: Hm?

LAWRENCE: We warn them that public gatherings are unhealthy, and they insist on praying together.

BROUNKER: Commendable, really. Stupid, but commendable.

LAWRENCE: Is there any means to keep the people away?

MILLS: From church? But, Sir John—

BROUNKER: Make the sermons more boring.

GODDARD: Impossible.

BROUNKER: True.

MILLS: I found most of the churches have no ministers. They seem to be leaving the city.

LAWRENCE: I don't believe it.

MILLS: Almost none of us are left.

BROUNKER: I thought London was lousy with preachers. Didn't we appoint cartloads of you people when we gave the fucking Puritans the toss?

LAWRENCE: First the court goes, now the clergy. Jesus, this town feels empty now all the cowards are leaving.

*(Pause)*

BROUNKER: The King has left London. Sir.

*(Pause)*

LAWRENCE: The King is the body of England. He has a duty to preserve himself.

BROUNKER: The man has a stallion's courage—

GODDARD: Stayed in town for weeks after the first case broke out—

BROUNKER: And a fucking magnificent king he is, gentlemen—

MILLS: Amen—

BROUNKER: Like a horse, God's my witness. Lady Castlemayne is swelling by the day, the ladies-in-waiting are pleading exhaustion— just to keep him from catching the pox, his physician has invented the cleverest little device.

GODDARD: I've heard. Ingenious man, Doctor Condom.

MILLS: Actually, I had intended to stay.

BROUNKER: Had you.

LAWRENCE: I am very pleased to hear it.

BROUNKER: Yes. How soldierly of you.

MILLS: And I pray many times a day that God maintain my resolve. Look at this.

*(MILLS pulls out a flier and places it on LAWRENCE's desk.)*

LAWRENCE: "Vacant churches for rent. Best offer accepted."

MILLS: My Lord, there has been an outbreak of satire.

LAWRENCE: Who is responsible?

MILLS: Dissenters and nonconformists. They are starting to return.

BROUNKER: Strictly illegal. Put them down, Jack. We're still running the prison ships. We'll crate them all up and dump them in America.

LAWRENCE: We'll arrest the leaders to start with. I'll try and talk sense to them. Thank you, Reverend Mills. Good day.

MILLS: Good day, Sir John. Good day, my Lord.

LAWRENCE: Mills. I thank God you are staying.

MILLS: Yes. May he grant me the strength.

LAWRENCE: Yes.

MILLS: As long as I possibly can. (*He exits.*)

LAWRENCE: I give him a week.

BROUNKER: You might as well give him a pass out of town right now.

GODDARD: Rightly so. I am sending all my patients to Salisbury with his majesty.

LAWRENCE: But, Goddard—

GODDARD: The air in the country is wholesome and fresh. A sovereign shield against distemper. The necessities of life in such times as these are more plentiful there, and there are just— fewer troubles in general. If we disperse, the plague passes over an empty place and the people can return when the weather turns healthy again.

LAWRENCE: Goddard. We have great need of physicians now.

GODDARD: Oh, I will do anything in my power for my patients. Do anything and go anywhere.

LAWRENCE: Splendid.

GODDARD: I would follow them to the ends of the earth, if necessary. And as my patients are almost exclusively attached to the court, I find I really have to go to Salisbury.

LAWRENCE: What about the people who are staying behind?

GODDARD: Who would that be?

LAWRENCE: Servants minding their masters' property. Laborers whose employers have shut their doors. Anyone who works for a living, and whose only work is here. The poor. Harry and I have to keep them from panicking. What will they do when they hear that the doctors have run?

GODDARD: Every physician I know has signed his own certificate of health and is packing to leave. What do you want us to do?

LAWRENCE: I want you to think of something. While you wait for your pass to be signed.

(*Pause*)

BROUNKER: Jack, you old horse trader.

GODDARD: Very well, Sir. The College of Physicians shall provide, free of charge, a list of preventives for the plague. We shall engage our chief apothecary to remain here and dispense medicines.

LAWRENCE: At the College's expense.

GODDARD: Agreed.

LAWRENCE: I need doctors. Talk to the College. I'll pay them at the public charge if I have to.

BROUNKER: Just a moment. Are you proposing that the government pay for medical care?

LAWRENCE: Harry, if we could talk about the means of payment later—

GODDARD: If money is forthcoming, we should find a few volunteers.

LAWRENCE: We'll find your money.

GODDARD: That would have to include pensions for their survivors.

LAWRENCE: Done.

GODDARD: Done. Good day then. My Lord, may I call on you in Salisbury? Your man came by for your certificate of health, I trust you received it?

LAWRENCE: Harry?

BROUNKER: Thank you, yes, I believe I have.

GODDARD: Good day, my Lord.

*(As GODDARD exits, the hubbub outside rises.)*

LAWRENCE: Harry...oh, Christ Almighty! *(He crosses to the door.)* All of you! Out! Come back in an hour!

*(LAWRENCE turns to BROUNKER as the hubbub subsides.)*

BROUNKER: The King wants me with him.

LAWRENCE: I thought you were here on his business.

BROUNKER: Not to stay.

LAWRENCE: Why can't you stay here? Travel down there.

BROUNKER: If I stayed here, they'd never receive me down there, would they.

LAWRENCE: I thought you were his majesty's eyes and ears.

BROUNKER: I am. And he doesn't want his eyes and ears to become diseased. When I come for your reports we're to meet on the outskirts of town. You'll be the hero, you know. Do your duty, and it's glory and everything. My duty, it seems, is to anticipate the King's desires and keep him amused.

LAWRENCE: Much in the manner of Lady Castlemayne.

*(Pause)*

BROUNKER: In the manner of a cavalier. And a friend of the King.

LAWRENCE: Why would he risk such a friend on a job like this?

BROUNKER: Well, because I insisted, didn't I. Had to do something.

LAWRENCE: Damn it, Harry, you're a good man, I need you here.

BROUNKER: To do what? What do you think you'll be doing? Giving the scum of the city titles like searchers of the dead and watchers of houses? Sharing the latest gossip, "So-and-so is dying, Such-and-such is dead?" Watching the bodies be buried? My God, man, you can't trust the clothes on your back!

(LAWRENCE *signs a pass.*)

BROUNKER: I'll tell them the city needs money.

LAWRENCE: I'll ask the aldermen to estimate their needs.

(BROUNKER *crosses to the desk and picks up the pass.*)

BROUNKER: How many of the aldermen did you persuade to stay?

LAWRENCE: We had a meeting together over that.

BROUNKER: Are any of them staying?

LAWRENCE: All of them are staying.

(*Pause*)

BROUNKER: Each of us to his duty, then. (*He turns to go.*)

LAWRENCE: Would you— please tell his majesty I shall do everything I can to preserve his city. Tell him we are praying for him.

BROUNKER: He will pray for you as well. You in particular, Jack. (*He exits.*)

LAWRENCE: Did you hear that, Mr Sawyer? My name in the King's prayers. Imagine that.

SAWYER: Aye, it's all who you know.... Do you want to see this sketch, Sir John?

LAWRENCE: Yes, all right.

SAWYER: I'm afraid the additional wood will be very dear.

LAWRENCE: Here we go. Disaster is a sellers' market.

SAWYER: I'm stocking all the planks I can get my hands on now, Sir.

LAWRENCE: Why on earth?

SAWYER: Well, for the coffins.

LAWRENCE: Damn it, this isn't a coffin you're building me!

SAWYER: No, Sir. Quite the opposite. (*He holds up a new sketch.*) I put the air holes in the back, away from the people you'll be meeting.

LAWRENCE: Mr Sawyer, am I going to be able to hear people through this thing?

SAWYER: Well, Sir, if I build it to specifications...no.

LAWRENCE: So people will talk and talk and they'll watch me smiling and nodding and I won't hear a word they say.

SAWYER: Very likely, Sir.

LAWRENCE: I'll be just like a politician. Thank you all the same.

SAWYER: Sir John...I have spent some time on this.

LAWRENCE: Here. Here's for your time.

*(LAWRENCE reaches into his wallet and holds out a coin. SAWYER hesitates.*

*LAWRENCE puts the coin down on his desk. SAWYER covers his hand with a rag and picks up the coin.)*

SAWYER: Sir John? Good luck, Sir. *(He exits.)*

*(Pause)*

LAWRENCE: And what the hell do you want?

*(This to GRAUNT, who has been in the room all this time.)*

GRAUNT: Oh. Graunt. My name is John Graunt. Sir.

LAWRENCE: I suppose you want a pass out of town.

GRAUNT: Oh. No, actually. Too much to do here.

LAWRENCE: You mean you're not essential to the King?

GRAUNT: Well. Not essential, not yet. Known to him though. He made me a Fellow of the Royal Society.

LAWRENCE: Congratulations.

GRAUNT: Thank you, yes. They're all gentlemen dilettantes, really, but I'm only a tradesman, so who am I to talk. Not all dilettantes, in fairness, a few men of knowledge in there. Newton might come up with something. Do you know him, Isaac Newton, no, of course you wouldn't, promising boy, teaches maths at Cambridge, anyway, Royal Society, great honor, a year, no, two years ago, my book came out three years ago, 1662, so two years now.

LAWRENCE: And what moved his majesty to honor you?

GRAUNT: I think because I proved that if there were a plague it wouldn't be his fault.

LAWRENCE: Yes, I expect that was it.

GRAUNT: It was just a matter of looking at the Bills of Mortality.

LAWRENCE: I look at the Bills, everyone looks at the Bills.

GRAUNT: No, actually, you don't. No one does. Or did. Till me. Look. Take the plague. What does everyone think about the plague?

LAWRENCE: I find that for the most part they oppose it.

GRAUNT: You do?

LAWRENCE: Don't you?

GRAUNT: I don't see anyone preventing it, so no. Now. What does everyone think? Either that you can't predict when the plague will happen, or that it happens every twenty years like clockwork. Except for his majesty's enemies, who say that it's broken out whenever one of his dynastic line has been crowned. Judgment of God, you see.

LAWRENCE: And you proved his enemies wrong.

GRAUNT: I proved everybody wrong. If you really look at the Bills, you see there've been plague years after some coronations but not others, you see there is no twenty-year cycle—

LAWRENCE: You see there's no predicting it.

GRAUNT: You see there is. I predicted this one.

LAWRENCE: You did?

GRAUNT: Three years ago. The plague doesn't come from nowhere, you can see it coming months away. Before the plague years, there is always a sickly year: increase of fevers, increase of stillbirths, increase of infant deaths. Same this time.

LAWRENCE: Do you know why that happens?

GRAUNT: Because everyone lies. The plague is there, but they call it different things. Enough searchers lie, and enough parish clerks lie— everything fine in our parish, thank you!— and the government believes them because it wants to, and when the rumors start, they publish items in the *News* and the *Intelligencer* saying it's nothing, and people believe it because they want to. The surest symptom of the approach of the plague is a dramatic increase in lying. Didn't you look at the Bills last year?

LAWRENCE: Well, yes, but...

GRAUNT: You should have looked harder. (*Pause*) Look at the Bills from the previous plagues. Where do they start? In the parishes built on swamp land, bad water, bad drainage, laystalls and slaughterhouses. This plague? The same thing. They put me in the Royal Society, so I thought they believed me, but they only believed me about how it wouldn't be a judgment from God on the King. I've come to ask you a favor. Could I examine the reports from the parish clerks, the numbers that go into the Bills of Mortality?

LAWRENCE: What are you looking for?

GRAUNT: Which direction the plague is spreading, how fast, when it's going to arrive in any given district.

LAWRENCE: So you're a soothsayer.

GRAUNT: No. If you really look at numbers, they'll tell you a story. But no one looks. The King doesn't even know what he's king of.

LAWRENCE: England.

GRAUNT: But nobody knows who that is.

LAWRENCE: Can you really learn those things?

GRAUNT: If I do, will you act on it? Or would you use it to prove that whatever happens isn't your fault?

LAWRENCE: Who's left for me to prove it to? The Lord Mayorship was a ceremonial post, until today. Now I'm running the place. Me, two sheriffs, a handful of clerks and constables, every one of my aldermen, and the goddamn Duke of Albemarle, to run the city of London, and oh, by the bye, there's a plague.

GRAUNT: Sir John, this won't be the end of the world. If someone stays here looking, really looking. We might help, the next time.

LAWRENCE: And you plan to stay in London? Aren't you afraid?

GRAUNT: What, of catching the plague? No, no, I'm just here observing. May I look at the numbers?

LAWRENCE: Come with me. You said you were a tradesman?

GRAUNT: Yes.

LAWRENCE: What do you call your trade?

GRAUNT: I call it statistics. Do you think it might catch on?

*(LAWRENCE and GRAUNT exit as the lights crossfade to)*