

SHARE

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>Dave Gardner:</u>	He's seen as a "lifestyle" beggar. He's the one people think of when they imagine beggars. However, he may hold a few surprises.
<u>Merri Bedford:</u>	Her mother became homeless and left Merri with a foster family. She is fourteen going on fifteen.
<u>Skylar Cohen:</u>	Thrown out of home by parents. Trained as an architect and hoping to create housing for the homeless.
<u>Ashti Grigoryan:</u>	The child of Armenian and Kurdish Iraqi refugees. Grew up largely in detention.
<u>Lauren Varos:</u>	Working on a Master Degree on the history of nonviolent protest. Came to Melbourne to be with her boyfriend. Now alone, unemployed and living in her car.
<u>Shawn Russo:</u>	She's a rev head and a taxi driver. Put out of work because of an accident. She now has a limp.
<u>Bill Nguyen:</u>	Angry young man who feels he should be doing better because he has a degrees in business and IT.
<u>Death:</u>	Something of a street person herself. She looks a bit punk, but shows great compassion.
<u>Omnes 1 & 2:</u>	The Omnes play passersby, homeless, police officers, Greek chorus, and homeless lovers Gloria Lee and Hank Reddy.

(MORE)

Cast of Characters (cont'd)

ACT I

All actors wear black tops and black trousers/skirts. They will then have various pieces of clothing that they put on and take off at various times during the show to represent their characters.

Death wears a white hoodie and grey leggings.

Sets and props are largely made of cardboard and newspaper.

Scene 1: Dave and Merri Meet

The play begins outside of the venue. On the pavement by the door DAVE is sleeping on a piece of cardboard with a tatty bag and a sign asking for change by his hat.

After the audience files into the venue and have seated themselves, Dave comes in wearing hat and dragging his cardboard after him. DEATH is sitting with the crew.

CREW MEMBER

(to Dave)

You can't come in here.

DAVE

The director said I could see the show.

CREW MEMBER

Please, the play is about to start.

DAVE

No, the director said!

DEATH

It's okay! She did say that. I've got a chair for him.

DAVE

See!

DEATH leads Dave to a chair and puts his bag and cardboard to one side.

The lights go partially down.

DAVE (cont'd)

(a little loudly)

Starting!?

DEATH

Yes, shush.

Death walks up to centre stage. "Wominjeka" is pronounced: woe-min-jekah.

Wominjeka! I acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional country of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation and pay respect to Elders past and present.

Dave stands up and puts his hand over his heart as a sign of respect.

I recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land, which continue to be important to the Wurundjeri people living today.

Dave drags his cardboard and things onto the stage. Death nods to him as she exits. He pulls a blanket out of his bag and lays down. Dave has a few moments to settle himself in.

Merri walks quickly onto the stage and stands next to Dave. She is out of breath and looks distressed. She glances at Dave then looks away trying to screw up her courage. She glances at him again. Finally, she gets on her hands and knees to give him a shove.

Dave waves her off mumbling.

MERRI

Come on! (shoves again)

DAVE

Give over.

MERRI

I gotta ask you something.

DAVE

What?

MERRI

Do you know Emma Bedford?

DAVE

Who?

MERRI

Emma Bedford. She's living in the streets. I need to find her.

DAVE

(sitting up)

Why dya need to talk to her so bad?

MERRI

She's my mum.

DAVE
Bloody hell! Really? Whaddya doin' out here so late?

MERRI
I ran away.

DAVE
From your mum?

MERRI
Of course not! Why would I be looking for her then?

DAVE
You got me.

Dave starts to turn and go back to sleep.

MERRI
No please, you've got to talk with me. I've run away from my foster parents and I've no place to go. I want to be with my mum.

DAVE
Buggered if I know where she is.

MERRI
What am I going to do?

Dave sighs, scoots over on his cardboard and offers Merri a corner. He taps it a few times before she understands she is to sit on the cardboard.

MERRI (cont'd)
I left the Trolls last night when they were asleep. That gave me time to get into Melbourne city before they start looking for me. I then hid in an alley most of the day.

DAVE
Don't want to be doin' that. Alleys are dangerous. Look! See that thingy over there. It's a camera. You wanna be where the cameras are. Much safer. People are afraid of bein' caught and leave you alone.

MERRI
Would Mum be near a camera?

DAVE
(shrugs)
What'll you do when you find her?

MERRI
I dunno. Sleep with her?

MERRI

Once-once-once...Once upon a time there was a warrior princess.

Ashti and Skylar come out wearing cardboard crowns. They formally place a particularly ornate cardboard crown on Merri's head.

MERRI (cont'd)

She wasn't always a warrior princess. In the beginning she was the dear princess, the darling princess, the princess of love and delight. Each dimple was counted one--two on her sweet little face every morning that she awoke.

Ashti and Skylar stand like religious icons to either side of Merri.

MERRI (cont'd)

Her parents, the king and queen, ruled a small domain within the land of Brunswick.

Dave roles over and "wakes up".

DAVE

Hang on, what is this? Where am I?

MERRI

You're in my dream.

DAVE

We better be on first name basis then. Don't want to be hanging about in just anyone's odd dream.

MERRI

And the princess's name was Merri Bedford.

Dave extends hand.

DAVE

Hello Merri! The name's Dave.

MERRI

Hi Dave! The kingdom of Bedford was poor but afforded its citizens a sufficiency of cheese crackers and smiles. The king, the queen, and the little princess lived happy lives.

DAVE

Ah, that's sweet. This is a good dream.

MERRI

Until...

DAVE

Oops! Hang on...Stop right there!

MERRI

An evil wizard...

DAVE

A what?

MERRI

A wizard, an evil one, mixed a potion full of vinegar and piss: a potion that addled the brain and made small men feel great. He gave this potion to a fearsome dragon, a dragon that now knew no boundaries and would twist left, then twist right.

Bill comes out with cardboard car that also looks a little like a dragon. Bill plays at being a drunk driver.

It would shout at red lights and smash-crashing speed down rivers of asphalt.

The king did not know such a spell had been cast, nor that the dragon was at large. After a long hard day dispensing with his royal duties, the princess's father walked home from the public chariot station.

Skylar acts out his role as the king walking home.

DAVE

Oh no.

MERRI

The dragon with a guttural roar that sounded of iron grinding into flame flung itself around a corner and...killed...the king.

Skylar and the dragon act out his being killed in a road accident. Followed by Ashti coming out to grieve over the body.

(very long pause)

Dad.

Death comes out carrying a dark lamp. This lights up when she bends over Skylar. She walks Skylar off stage.

(another long pause)

The heart bells rang out, shattering like icing glass. And oh, the Soul's portals were blinded with salted floods.

The queen tried to replenish the kingdom of Bedford and protect the princess of delight, but when even the lowliest of jobs had at least twenty people vying for the privilege of work, she came home empty handed.

DAVE

I know this nightmare.

At the right moment Ashti gives Merri a deep embrace and a kiss before sadly walking off stage.

MERRI

She lost the castle, she lost their home. And when it looked like she must sleep on the streets of a cold and barren land, she kissed her dear princess on each cheek and sent her to live with the trolls, because the trolls had a red tile roof beneath which to rest, and food on the table morning, noon, and night. In their care the princess learned how to be a warrior.

But what the trolls never gave her, what they could not give her, not in a million years, was that special place found in cheese crackers and smiles.

(long pause)

I would really like some cheese crackers.

DAVE

Ah sweetie.

Merri mashes her face into Dave's chest in a hug. He holds his hands up in surrender and accepts her embrace.

Come along.

Dave encourages Merri to return to her make shift bed, then once more settles himself in. Lights go down.

Scene 3: The Rally

The day is unseasonably warm. A rally is gathering in front of a municipal building. Death stands casually to one side next to Dave and Merri who are still sleeping. She listens to the proceedings with interest.

Lauren is snappily dressed, rolling a speaker onto the stage. On the side of the speaker is a poster: "Public property belongs to the public." She starts setting the speaker up.

Ashti and Skylar bustle onto the stage. They are carrying signs and banners.

ASHTI

Hey Sky! Hurry, hurry!

SKYLAR

It's not like we're going to be late. This is Australia.

ASHTI

People need our help. The earlier we're here, the more help we can offer.

LAUREN

(Sees signs) Oh! Thanks you two!

ASHTI

(to Skylar)

See.

LAUREN

(receives some signs) Bit hot today for this time of year.

SKYLAR

News says rain later.

Shawn saunters into the background and is standing next to sleeping Dave and Merri. Ashti waves and hands her a sign.

SHAWN

(reads out sign)

Beds, for all...Not. Biccies, for few. Sure. (smiles, nods, holds up sign)

Lauren turns on her speaker and picks up the microphone.

LAUREN

Testing, one-two-three! Can people hear that? Is it loud enough?

Dave and Merri startle awake and sit up. Merri looks around in amazement.

Bill shuffles in. Skylar is walking around with a banner. He recognises Shawn.

Shawn gives her sign to Bill and takes Skylar's banner. She encourages Merri to get up and take the other end. The banner says "Homelessness is not a crime!"

Bill looks at his sign, sniffs, then casually drops it by his side.

Lauren walks toward Bill. He likes her looks. He quickly checks his breath.

LAUREN (cont'd)

Hi! You helping us today.

BILL

Helping?

LAUREN

With the homeless rally. I'm Lauren.

BILL

Bill. I...oh, yes! (picks up sign he dropped) Go homeless! I mean don't go homeless. Um, homes for homeless!

LAUREN

Nice to have a few numbers. We have a hard time getting people to rock up. Those who have to beg to survive just don't have the luxury of time. Those allies with time have been scared off by news reporting.

BILL

Fuck, hard times.

LAUREN

Yeah, very hard times.

Lauren holds mic up in the air.

LAUREN

So, who want's to go first?

MERRI

(to Shawn)

What is this?

SHAWN

A rally in support of the homeless and those who are having homes taken from them.

ASHTI

Skylar, you go first. Tell people about your new job.

SKYLAR

Ashti, they don't want to know about my job. It'll make people feel badly.

ASHTI

No it won't. They will know you're helping them.

Ashti catches Lauren's eye and directs her to Skylar. Lauren hands the mic to Skylar.

LAUREN

Looks like you win.

SKYLAR

Um, hi! I'm Skylar Cohen. I've been homeless. I know what a pit that can be. I mean, if you're part of the queer community, you can be treated pretty badly. You add homelessness and poverty into the mix, and you've turned the heat way up.

(MORE)

SKYLAR (cont'd)

Ashti and I have known people who were killed by angry drunks, because they had the bad luck of sleeping rough while trans.

Most people don't choose homelessness.

ASHTI

Your job...

SKYLAR

Ashti wants me to tell you about my job. Well, one of two jobs. I'm now working part time as an Executive Officer for the volunteer nonprofit Sheltering Justice. Sheltering is an organization of architects who are working toward guaranteed housing for all. We are putting in a submission to the government about ways to develop a more humane city. That includes free housing to our poorest and most vulnerable.

People cheer.

SKYLAR (cont'd)

I really hope we can help.

More cheers. Skylar hands the microphone back to Lauren. Shawn gives her end of the banner to Ashti. Lauren passes the mic onto Shawn.

SHAWN

My name's Shawn. You can't tell anything by looking at a person. Shit, you can't tell anything about a person even when you're talking to them. And people look at you and think, fuck what did you do to deserve living in the street?

Maybe I did nothing to deserve it. Maybe I was rear-ended by a car that smashed my motorbike, lost me a job, and kept me out of work from injuries long enough that I couldn't pay my rent.

So the police come and kick me out of my flat. I'm on the street only a few days and the police come by again. Only this time they fine me several hundred dollars for camping in the city. I discovered that if you can't pay that fine, it's one day in jail for every hundred dollars owed. I had the bad luck of sleeping rough in an area they were about to do some municipal works.

ASHTI

Shame!

SHAWN

People say, why didn't you go to emergency accommodation?

(MORE)

SHAWN (cont'd)

Have you seen those hell holes? They are privately run slums without any oversight. You open the door and are assaulted by the smell of rotten food and piss in the hall. Even if you keep your room clean, it becomes infested with mice because it's opposite the common room where people have left food, junk, and even filthy laundry that has been there for weeks. On top of this, you can't lock your room door because it's been knocked in so many times by people interested in stealing your stuff. Believe it or not, the street is safer.

I'm doing everything I can to pull myself out of this mess, but it doesn't help when the government says, don't give her a blanket, don't give her showers or food. Those things will just encourage her to stay on the street and freeload. Not showing a little care is a guaranteed recipe for keeping people stuck on the streets you idiots! There should be a right, a right to have homes.

People cheer. Shawn gives the mic to Lauren. She goes and stands next to Ashti.

LAUREN

(to Shawn)

But you do have a right. (to crowd after rummaging through handbag for a copy of the UDHR) I'm Lauren. Let me read something from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yeah? Housing is not something that should be a right, it IS a right. We signed this treaty. Not only did we sign it, we helped to write it in the 1940s. This is what Article 25 says:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

This is your right! This is all of your right! This is everybody's right in the entire world! That's why we are here protesting the closure of our public housing.

We have to learn how to share! Sharing is what will bring us out of this and into a secure world of peace and equal rights! Sharing is about being a good human being. We want to be good human beings and this is how we do it!

Music for "Declaration" begins.

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)

Equal rights for all
Is the foundation of
Freedom, justice, and peace.

We seek a world in which
Everyone enjoys freedom...

Freedom of thought,
Freedom of expression,
Freedom from want,
Our aspirations.

After all
Everyone has a right to
Life, liberty, and security of person.

You have a right!
We have a right!
This is our declaration of rights
You have a right!
We have a right!
This is our declaration of rights!

SHAWN

One more time,
Tell us these rights!
I want to know
My heart ignites

LAUREN

You have a right!
We have a right!
This is our declaration of rights!

Born free and equal
In dignity and in rights,
We are given reason,
Endowed with empathy.

A spirit of friendship,
A generous spirit.
A spirit that guides us
All to share!

You have a right!
We have a right!
This is our declaration of rights!
(spoken)
Sharing gives us rights! X3

EVERYONE

Share...share...share, etc.

LAUREN

You have a right!

EVERYONE

We have a right!

LAUREN

This is our declaration of rights
You have a right!

EVERYONE

We have a right!

LAUREN

This is our declaration of rights!

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EVERYONE

You have a right!
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This is our declaration of rights
You have a right!
We have a right!
This is our declaration of rights

SHAWN

One more time
Tell us these rights!
I want to know
My heart ignites

LAUREN

You have a right!
We have a right!
This is our declaration of rights! (up)

*People are nodding or shaking their heads in response to the song. A quiet word or two is said to one another.
Dave takes over Merri's end of the banner and encourages her to take the mic.*

DAVE

Now's your chance.

MERRI

What do you mean?

DAVE

Go ask about your mother.

MERRI

But then everyone would be watching.

DAVE

Good. More people who might know.

MERRI

(to Lauren)

Can I have a turn?

LAUREN

Sure. Just say your name and tell us your story.

MERRI

Um, hi!

A few people say "hey!" back.

MERRI (cont'd)

My name is Merri. My mother gave me up to a foster home. She's living in the streets and I'm trying to find her. Her name is Emma Bedford. Has anyone met an Emma? No?

SHAWN

I'll ask around.

ASHTI

Sky and I will too!

SKYLAR

Who do we know?

ASHTI

Quite a few people.

LAUREN

It's not, "yes", but is that a start?

MERRI

(nods)

DAVE

That's better than nothing, Sweetie.

*Both OMNES walk across the stage individually.
Dave takes his hat off and holds it out.*

DAVE (cont'd)

Change?

The first OMNES walks past him, but when he holds his hat out again, the second OMNES stops long enough to give him some change. He nods his head toward Merri.

DAVE (cont'd)
And for her.

The person gives a little more money.

DAVE (cont'd)
(to Merri)
Let's get some breakfast.

MERRI
Sure thing.

Dave and Merri exit with Death following.

ASHTI
(to Shawn)
You still looking for a place, dear?

SHAWN
You know how it is.

ASHTI
Do you think you have enough for rent?

SHAWN
Maybe. But not enough for two months in advance and a bond.

Skylar wanders over next to Ashti.

ASHTI
(to Skylar)
Shawn says she may have enough for rent.

SKYLAR
Oh yeah! Did you tell her we have an available room in our house?

ASHTI
I was just getting to that.

SHAWN
What? You're offering me a room?

SKYLAR
The woman who was renting the place just disappeared. Technically she has missed her rent this fortnight. However, she hasn't used up her advance.

ASHTI
The room might as well be lived in.

SHAWN

Oh guys, are you sure you want me?

ASHTI

Don't be silly. You took the time to help rally. Of course we want you.

SKYLAR

Why don't you come over to our place and we can all decide if we're comfortable with the match.

LAUREN

(excited)

The homelessness committee are about to come out of their meeting. Come on everyone: POVERTY NOT A CRIME, HOMELESSNESS NOT A PASTTIME! POVERTY NOT A CRIME, HOMELESSNESS NOT A PASTTIME!...

EVERYONE

POVERTY NOT A CRIME, HOMELESSNESS NOT A PASTTIME!
POVERTY NOT A CRIME, HOMELESSNESS NOT A PASTTIME!

Lights go down.

Scene 4: JUST THE FACTS

Lights come up. Death walks out to centre stage. She takes her time and looks out at everyone.

DEATH

(loudly) Just the facts, sir!
(quieter) Just the facts, ma'am.

The main characters walk on stage and line up into two rows. They are holding candle-like torches. "Just the Facts" music begins.

DEATH (cont'd)

Ooh, aaah...(etc to music)

Actors heads are tilted slightly down and their eyes closed. They are gently swaying and swirling in one place. As each one in turn states a fact, they lift their head and open their eyes. Once they have completed their line they close their eyes, lower their head, and return to swaying.

DAVE

This week 247 homeless men and women were found sheltering on the streets around the CBD, an unprecedented 74 per cent increase in two years.

~The Age 2016

MERRI

14 March 2018 the ABC reported: new ABS Census data 2006 to 2016 shows that homelessness among 19-24 year olds has increased considerably: New South Wales is up 117%, Victoria is up 66%, Tasmania is up 71%, and the Australian total is up 46%. An incredible 17% of the homeless were under ten.

SKYLAR

Twelve percent of LGB people have ever been homeless compared to three percent of heterosexuals.

~Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017

SHAWN

Indigenous Australians make up 25 percent of the homeless population even though they comprise only 2.5 per cent of the population.

~Mission Report 2016

BILL

Going by the government's own statistics there are 19 job seekers competing for every job vacancy in Australia--a 50 per cent increase since 2011.

ASHTI

In February underemployment was 18% of the youth labour force and unemployment was 13.5%

~Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017

LAUREN

A 2012 survey by Universities Australia uncovered evidence two out of three Australian university students were living below the poverty line.

*Choreography of everyone except Dave and Lauren.
They continue reciting facts.*

DAVE

October 2016, Australian Council of Social Services revealed that poverty is growing in Australia, with an estimated 2.9 million people or 13.3% of all people living below the internationally accepted poverty line.

LAUREN

According to ACOSS poverty reports, the declining rate of income support payments seen over the last

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)

three decades is one of the leading causes for Australia's rapidly increasing poverty rate.

ASHTI

A 2015 report, commissioned by the United Kingdom Commonwealth and Foreign Office, is stark in its assessment of the wide-ranging dangers posed by unchecked global warming, including:

- * very large risks to global food security, including a tripling of food prices
- * unprecedented migration overwhelming international assistance
- * increased risk of terrorism as states fail

Music ends.

Everyone walks sombrely off stage. Bill walks to back of theatre

The penny drops for Merri and she goes to grab death beseechingly.

MERRI

Wait! This is my future!

DEATH

(nods)

Merri follows the others in despair. Death casually walks off looking none too happy herself.

Lights go down.

Scene 5: Sleeping Arrangements

A box is placed in the middle of the stage in order to split the space. Death will be sitting in front of the box.

Stage right Lauren is seated, reading a book. Next to her are a begging bowl and a sign asking for money.

Stage left Ashti and Skylar are cuddling on the sofa watching TV.

Dave and Merri walk up to Lauren from down stage.

Stage right lights brighten.

MERRI

Hey! Lauren!

Lauren looks up from book.

LAUREN

Hey Merri!

MERRI

(nods)

What're you doing?

LAUREN

Studying.

*Dave takes a look into Lauren's begging bowl.
She notices.*

LAUREN (cont'd)

And begging.

DAVE

I hate saying it, but you aren't going to be attracting a lot of change this way.

LAUREN

I put some change in the bowl. It's supposed to look like others have been giving me money.

DAVE

That works for buskers. You don't look like you're suffering enough. People figure you're skyving if you look respectable.

OMNES 1

(walking past)

Geesus! Get yourself a job!

DAVE

Like that guy.

LAUREN

But if I don't look respectable, how do I get a job?

DAVE

It's a trap, isn't it? And if a program is set up to give you jobs, then you're stealing paid positions from buggers who feel more entitled to them.

Of course if you're put into one of those work for the dole schemes, that's all right. So they force you to work in bottom of the barrel jobs whether you are suited for them or not, the working conditions are shit, and you get paid not only less than minimum wage but less than poverty wage.

In my book that's the very definition of slavery.

LAUREN

Shit!

Police officers (both OMNES) casually walk across the stage.

MERRI

Blue alert!

Merri crouches behind Lauren so as to not be seen by the police.

DAVE

(to Lauren)

She's been doing that all day. I keep telling her she's going to be picked up by acting all skittish like that.

LAUREN

(to Merri)

Any luck finding your mum?

MERRI

No.

LAUREN

So where are you sleeping?

Merri picks up one of Lauren's books and is looking through the pages.

MERRI

With Dave.

LAUREN

In the street?

MERRI

Under a blanket. Shhh! Here they come!

Everyone looks awkwardly casual as the police pass in front of them.

LAUREN

You could sleep with me. I've got a car.

MERRI

Could Dave join us?

LAUREN

I'm sorry. It's not a very big car.

MERRI

(changing subject)

What are you studying?

DAVE

Yeah, looks interesting.

Dave seats himself next to Merri and Lauren. He holds his cap out and looks sad as a person (OMNES) passes by. He is given a coin to Lauren's annoyance.

LAUREN

I'm working on a Masters degree in history. My thesis is on the history of nonviolent political movements. And now I'm living one. Well, nothing like learning from the inside.

DAVE

Not much money in history.

LAUREN

You're telling me!

Stage right lights dim. Centre stage lights brighten.

Bill staggers on stage with a bottle of whiskey in his hand. He awkwardly seats himself next to Death on the side opposite from Lauren. He is at the lachrymose stage of intoxication.

BILL

Oh, oh fuck! I think I've just sat in some gum. Damn!

He leans forward and sees Lauren.

BILL (cont'd)

(to himself)

Lauren! Laaauren.

DEATH

What have we here.

Death smells the alcohol and shakes her head in disgust.

Bill tries to neaten his hair.

BILL

She wouldn't want me. She'd think she's too good for me.

DEATH

You don't know that.

BILL

They all think they're too fucking good for me.

DEATH

Which "all"?

BILL

I spent my whole life putting up with "banana". Oh Bill, stop being such a banana. How'd you get so white on the inside? Lauren thinks she so smart.

DEATH

Did you ask her?

BILL

Well I'm smart too! I worked damn hard to get good grades and...and the right degrees in business and IT. I should be rolling in money.

DEATH

Should?

BILL

God damn, God damn! I deserve better. I--I should have a fucking jaguar...in red...with chrome bumpers.

You hold onto your dreams, think positive thoughts, play the game right, and a God damn reward is supposed to drop into your lap. Doesn't anyone read the books?

I fucking hate the world! Why do this to me! Go pick on the losers. They deserve it. Not me!

DEATH

The losers?

BILL

(starts to sob)

An OMNES now dressed as a drug dealer comes out and wanders over to Bill. The dealer holds a packet out to Bill.

A recording is played of the OMNES's lines. The OMNES moves to the lines.

OMNES 2

Feeling down? (echo) Feeling down?

DEATH

Oh no-no! This guy is bad news.

OMNES 2

Wanna feel better? Wanna feel better than you ever felt before? (echo) Felt before?

Bill stands up and looks at what the dealer has to offer. Death joins the group.

OMNES 2 (cont'd)

You could be a spaceman. (echo) Spaceman. Fly to the moon!

*Bill holds his hand out to take the packet.
Death steps between them and stops Bill.*

DEATH

Are you flirting with me? You flirting with Death?

BILL

I want to feel better.

Death grabs Bill and starts fondling him as he keeps looking beyond her.

DEATH

Oh yeah, you'll feel better. Right until I go crazy smelling this stuff in you.

Death puts her hands around Bill's neck.

DEATH (cont'd)

Do you really want me to go crazy? Or do you just want to relieve the pain? Because this ain't the way.

OMNES 2

Try it. (echo) Try it. Try it. (echo) Try it. First go is free.

*Bill looks like he is about take the stuff.
Death pushes him back.*

DEATH

GO TO SLEEP BILL!

Bill drunkenly staggers, then falls down. Death spins on her heel and stares at the drug dealer. Bill rolls over, groans, and starts to snore. OMNES 2 rolls eyes.

OMNES 2

(not recorded)

Loser.

OMNES 2 walks off in disgust. Centre stage lights dim.

Stage left lights brighten.

SKYLAR

Want to watch some Grand Designs?

ASHTI

How about a wildlife documentary?

SKYLAR

Don't you get depressed by all the animals that are going extinct?

ASHTI

I want to watch them while they are still with us.

Door knocks.

ASHTI (cont'd)

Shawn!

SKYLAR

I'll get it.

Shawn is standing at a pretend door. Skylar comes to answer it.

SKYLAR (cont'd)

Come on in. Good to see you Shawn.

SHAWN

Hey, Ashti!

ASHTI

Hey! (gets up to give Shawn a hug)

SHAWN

Does this mean I'm in?

SKYLAR

Well, Ashti would have the whole world living here if she could. The only reason we don't have a million cats is my allergies.

ASHTI

But some cats are hypo-allergenic!

SKYLAR

And after we catch up on a few bills, we'll consider one.

SHAWN

I kind of like cats too...and dogs. I keep thinking a big Saint Bernard. Oh! But I don't have any pets!

ASHTI

(laughing)

We didn't think you did.

SKYLAR

I'm the lease holder for this place. We have a good relationship with the owner.

Ashti and I understand how hard it can be. We also have to make sure anyone who shares a room will be a good tenant, and can afford the rent. It's not always

(MORE)

SKYLAR (cont'd)

easy to find places that will accept a "queer couple".

SHAWN

So what happened to your previous tenant? Did she lose her job?

SKYLAR

We don't know exactly.

ASHTI

Her ex found her address here. She did have a restraining order.

SKYLAR

We think she ran. We think she may be hiding.

ASHTI

And after all that work to get Centrelink support. I hope she's all right.

SHAWN

Maybe I should come back another time. When you know for sure.

SKYLAR

She's been gone a few weeks. She took everything. So, we've resigned ourselves that she's probably not coming back.

ASHTI

No sense in leaving the room empty when so many people need a roof over head, even for a few days.

SKYLAR

See how she is?

ASHTI

And that's why you love me.

SKYLAR

Yes, that's why I love you. So, if you are interested, the place comes with a few pluses and minuses. Minus: the previous tenant might come back. Plus...

SHAWN

I don't have to pay the bond straight away.

SKYLAR

With the upfront out of the way, do you think you could make the rent, plus our shared bills? This is the itemised list.

Skylar hands document to Shawn.

SHAWN

I may be able to manage this. Can you give me a day?

ASHTI

Of course! You do what you need to do.

SKYLAR

Get back to us in a couple. We can then sign contracts and make it official--if this is what you want.

SHAWN

You guys are so kind. Why are you doing this for me?

ASHTI

Because we like you, silly.

*Lights go up on entire stage. Group song:
"Livin' On The Moon"*

SHAWN

Just want a roof.

LAUREN & MERRI

Just want a home.

DAVE

Those cold rains
Are makin' me feel so alone.

BILL

So alone...

SHAWN

We take our lives for granted.

LAUREN

Question what fate has us handed.

DAVE

We don't deserve sorrow,
Any more than a fire's gentle glow.

EVERYONE

Skies are grey.
The streets are grey.
Must be livin' on the moon.
No place where I can stay.

LAUREN

Night comes so soon,
My life's in eclipse!

SHAWN

All I do just turns to dust:
I'm livin' on the moon.

MERRI

Blankets and soft pillows.
Breakfast with hot cocoa.
Heaven can be so small,
When you have nothing at all.

EVERYONE

Skies are grey.
The streets are grey.
Must be livin' on the moon.
No place where I can stay.

Night comes so soon,
My life's in eclipse!
All I do just turns to dust.

LAUREN

I'm livin' on the moon.

*End of song Dave and Merri wander off. Dave sees
Bill, shakes his head.*

DAVE

(to Merri)
Help me pick him up.

BILL

Lauren, just wait! I'll have a Jaguar.

MERRI

What?

DAVE

Yeah, and I'll have a gold wrist watch. Let's get you
to a soup kitchen and a large cup of coffee.

Dave, Bill, and Merri exit with Death following.

Skylar and Ashti see Shawn to the door.

SKYLAR

(to Shawn)
Have a good evening!

SHAWN

Thanks.

*Skylar and Ashti exit. Shawn wanders to centre
stage.*

SHAWN (cont'd)

A roof over head. Where am I going to get the money?

Shawn flinches as something drops on her head)

SHAWN (cont'd)
What was that?

Lauren also flinches, then puts her hand out.

LAUREN
Rain?

Both Lauren and Shawn alternately flinch.

LAUREN (cont'd)
Hail!

Lauren gets up from her seat, picks up her things and runs to centre stage. Shawn is wrapping her coat around herself more tightly and looking worried. Lauren runs into Shawn.

LAUREN (cont'd)
Shawn, hail!

SHAWN
I know.

LAUREN
My car is nearby. Quick!

OMNESS bring out cardboard car. Lauren and Shawn hop in. The sound of hail gets louder and louder. The two are looking concerned. The sound of the windshield cracking startles them.

LAUREN (cont'd)
Oh no!

The hail slows up, then ends.

LAUREN (cont'd)
Look at that...a crack! I can't afford to replace the windshield!

SHAWN
You don't have to replace it. Not right away. There's some silicone stuff you can use to hold it together for awhile.

LAUREN
Would you know how to put it in?

SHAWN
Sure thing! I'm a rev head. I could fix your whole car, if you needed it. I would own a car, if I could afford one.

LAUREN
To be honest, I'm not really affording this one. It's just all I have in the way of a home.

SHAWN

Really? I thought you might be an employee with one of those non-profits.

LAUREN

Me? No. I'm a student. The only jobs I've been offered are the sort where you work as an intern for a year for free. Only students with rich parents can afford that. Sounds like you could go for one of those trade jobs.

SHAWN

Not likely. Auto repair is too fucking sexist to give me half a chance.

LAUREN

I see...

Pause.

SHAWN

You know, we might be able to help each other out.

LAUREN

I like the sound of that!

SHAWN

We both need a regular place to stay and we both need an income.

LAUREN

Yes.

SHAWN

I've been offered a room, if I can make the rent. I don't need a room twenty-four hours a day. What if we share it.

LAUREN

How does that work?

SHAWN

Well, I'll fix your car for you.

LAUREN

Oh, I'm liking this!

SHAWN

I check the engine, the breaks, the electrics. I clean up the inside and make it pretty. Then if you're okay with this, I borrow the car at night. I'll pay for the petrol, of course. I get onto All Less, one of those platform taxi services. You can snooze on my bed when everyone is asleep--and I'll be off making money as a driver. Does that sound fair?

LAUREN

So, I would be sleeping in your room on the sly?

SHAWN

I'm sure I'm allowed guests. People share beds with boyfriends or girlfriends all the time. It's not like we're taking up extra space.

LAUREN

It feels risky, but I can't see a downside.

SHAWN

Let's do it, Lauren.

LAUREN

All right, you're on!

Snap to black.

Scene 6: Merri's Journey

Both Omnes are on stage dressed as street people. Amongst them is Death. Except for boxes to sit on, the stage is bare.

Merri enters from behind the audience. Music begins and she starts asking audience members if they have seen her mother.

MERRI

Have you seen a woman? My mum. She would look a little like me. Just like Harry Potter--I have my mother's eyes. I've been told she's sleeping in the streets. (worried about judgement) But she's real nice! Have you seen her? I promise she doesn't drink or do drugs. We're just, you know, poor.

Eventually Merri makes it to the stage. She approaches the Omnes.

MERRI (cont'd)

(to one Omnes)

Have you seen my mum?

(to the other Omnes)

Her name is Emma, Emma Bedford.

The Omnes shake their heads in turn. Merri walks up to Death.

MERRI (cont'd)

Have you seen Emma Bedford?

DEATH

(sadly looks at Merri for a beat)

No, not just yet.

Merri walks to centre stage. She's in grief. She crouches down then starts to cry.

Ashti is struggling with grocery bags as she enters upstage. She drops an item, and in retrieving it notices Merri. She walks over.

ASHTI

Are you all right, dear?

Merri looks up.

ASHTI (cont'd)

Merri! It's you! Where's Dave?

MERRI

Begging.

ASHTI

And you're alone looking for your mother.

MERRI

(nods)

ASHTI

Where have you been sleeping?

MERRI

With Dave.

ASHTI

It's been cold the last few nights.

MERRI

He lets me use his blanket.

ASHTI

Oh dear one, we have to find you better than that.

MERRI

I want to find my mum.

ASHTI

Of course you do.

MERRI

(still crying)

Do you...do you know what that's like?

Ashti sits down next to Merri.

ASHTI

Yes...I do. I haven't seen my mother in years.

MERRI

But you seem so nice.

ASHTI

(a little angry)

You think bad things only happen to bad people? This culture has a lot to answer for. You're not bad.

MERRI

Sometimes I think I must be.

ASHTI

Don't even go down that path. It nearly killed my mother and it nearly killed me. You are not to blame for whatever has happened to your mother. Do you understand?

MERRI

But if it were my fault, maybe I could do something about it.

ASHTI

I know, I know...

Let me tell you about my mother. My father is a Christian Armenian, my mother is Kurdish.

"Searching for Home"

Once long ago my father did wander
Far from the town that he did call home.
His parents fled to Havresk to escape persecution.
Then Anfal campaign forced him to roam.
His feet burned!
Oh how his heart yearned
For some place like home.

Once long ago mother's heart it did wander
Far from the people of her family's home.
Her people embraced Dad, it wasn't enough.
From these fair lands were they disowned.

Born on rough seas, brought to these shores.
Put in detention, facing new wars.
Dad and I were released and so we did go.
Mum was a Muslim, walls held her low.
Our hearts yearned!
I longed for her warmth,
She was my home.

Our visits were daily:
Just two hours a time.
We watched as she crumbled,
Her heart it did pine.
Forced to Baqubah!
My world turned,
Still searching for home.

MERRI

Oh, that's sad.

ASHTI

When my father felt I was old enough to care for myself, he left me here in Australia so he could join mother in Iraq. Their lives are again in danger,

(MORE)

ASHTI (cont'd)

because beautiful Baqubah is now under Daesh control. A Christian-Muslim marriage is not allowed. They have forbidden me to join them because I would be executed for being transgender.

MERRI

No!

ASHTI

People in the West do not understand how progressive peoples of the Middle East can be. Not only were many of the Kurds of Baqubah accepting of my parents's marriage, not all but many are accepting of gay marriage as well. Australia broke my mother and broke up my family, simply because mother is Muslim.

MERRI

Now I feel badly for being upset.

ASHTI

My dear, you have every reason to cry. This isn't a competition. I'm just saying I understand. And you understand too. So, maybe we can help each other. You want to keep looking for your mother, yes?

MERRI

Uh huh.

ASHTI

At five-thirty come up to Parliament building. We're having an evening rally. We can talk about some place for you to stay the night.

MERRI

Maybe mum will be there!

ASHTI

Yes, maybe mum will be there.

Scene 7: Evening Rally

Image of Parliament projected onto a screen. Shawn, Skylar, Ashti, and Lauren are preparing for another rally and chatting among themselves. Dave stands to one side and Bill stands on the other. Death walks to centre stage. As she walks past Bill, she calls out the first word of the song "Look Down".

DEATH

Hey!

BILL

Wake up to illusions, delusions, social confusions.
Yeah, what you rockin' on?
What you walkin' on?

(MORE)

BILL (cont'd)
 Ropes of nylon held up by pylons.
 Walkin' straight and narrow,
 Hawk's gonna eat you little sparrow.

You're fal-ling down.
 Cause you won't, look, down.

DEATH
 Hey!

BILL
 Hey!

DEATH
 Hey!

DAVE
 Hey!

DAVE (cont'd)
 Think you're above ache, hate, the judgement of fate?
 Under your balancing wire
 You gotta raging fire.
 The safety net's burned,
 Nowhere to turn.

You're fal-ling down.
 Cause you won't, look, down.

BILL
 You won't fall down.

DEATH
 If no one falls down.

DAVE
 You won't fall down.

DEATH
 If no one falls down.

DEATH (cont'd)
 No more falling!
 No more falling!
 No more falling!
 No more falling!
 (sing "no more falling" X6 more)

DAVE
 Think you're above ache, hate, the judgement of fate?
 Under your balancing wire
 You gotta raging fire.

BILL
 Wake up to illusions, delusions, social confusions.
 Walkin' straight and narrow,
 Hawk's gonna eat you little sparrow.

DAVE

Look down!

BILL

Look down little sparrow!

DAVE

You could be a dero.

BILL & DAVE

You won't fall down.

DEATH

If no one falls down.

BILL & DAVE

You won't fall down.

DEATH

If no one falls down.

DEATH (cont'd)

Hey!

Death wanders off to one side. Shawn taps Bill on the shoulder.

SHAWN

Hey, Bill! You're good with computers?

BILL

(nods)

SHAWN

I'm having problems with my phone.

BILL

Let me see.

Bill holds out his hand and Shawn puts her phone into it. He starts checking her device.

BILL (cont'd)

You haven't updated the software in like...forever. Here, just give it a few minutes.

SHAWN

Thanks!

BILL

(to Lauren)

Windstorm tonight.

LAUREN

Outdoor rallies! I should have been organising letter writing campaigns.

BILL

Who pays attention to those?

LAUREN

Exactly! Mind you, we haven't gotten a lot of attention for this either. You think people would notice all the bodies on the street.

BILL

They do, they just don't care.

LAUREN

I can't let myself believe that. They're just being good boys and girls to protect themselves from our fate. Only playing it safe doesn't work.

BILL

Shouldn't we be more direct to make that point then? What's with the non-violence thing?

LAUREN

Violence doesn't work.

BILL

And peace does? I mean look around. We need to get people outraged and ready to tear down the establishment.

LAUREN

Hannah Arendt says, "The distinction between violent and non-violent action is that the former is exclusively bent upon the destruction of the old, and the latter is chiefly concerned with the establishment of something new." I don't want to live amongst rubble, I want to live in a better world.

(gives Bill an encouraging smile)

Everything ready with the speaker?

ASHTI

(to Lauren)

Have you seen Merri?

LAUREN

Not yet. But I can see Dave over there. (speaks into Mic) Hey, everyone! So here's the news tonight. The government has released a bunch of houses they originally purchased to build a road.

People cheer.

LAUREN (cont'd)

Sadly, not yay. They have given them to a religious non-profit who have no plans to offer them to the homeless. In a similar vein they are selling off more public housing in the northern suburbs to developers without replacing and certainly not increasing available housing to those who rely on those rooms.

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)

Creating more low income housing is not the same as social housing for those who are incapable of paying at all. People are not disposable.

SHAWN

That's right: "People are not disposable!" Everyone!

EVERYONE

People are not disposable!

Merri runs up to Dave and grabs him around the waist.

MERRI

Hey, Dave!

LAUREN

Who's first today at the mic?

MERRI

Dave is!

DAVE

I'm not really sure...

LAUREN

Surely someone wants to come up without being nominated.

DAVE

All right, all right then! Gimme that.

I'm Dave Gardner.

People assume I chose homelessness. Given my age, they assume my situation is hopeless and don't give a rat's ass. I used to work as a seasonal farm hand. The farms would put me up and I'd make a little money traveling around the country picking basil, zucchini, you name it. Problem is, they found they could exploit the backpackers. So, the jobs dried up.

Wasn't able to support my family. Got depressed. Started drinking. You have no idea how much it hurts when you can't stop the suffering your wife and kids are forced to live with. She left me and took the kids with her...As she should! They had a better chance with her.

I've cleaned myself up, so I can see them sometimes. I just wish...I just wish, I could get the rest of the way out of this hole.

Oh God! I want to change the world too. Change is hard. Try bending a fifty cent piece! I remember when Australia was a kinder place, and its just swirling down the gurgler now without half a thought.

LAUREN (cont'd)

Time is now--we must gather:
Whole new world is what we are after.
Time is now--there is no other.
Come together now my sisters and brothers.

*People are encouraged to wave their signs on the
back of their programmes.*

MERRI

Joy!
A planet rich in life!
Let's do away with strife.

LAUREN

Let's love nature more.

ASHTI

Goodwill!
All needs are met.
Let's do away with threat.

LAUREN

Let's do away with war.

EVERYONE

Time is now--we must gather:
Whole new world is what we are after.
Time is now--there is no other.
Come together now my sisters and brothers.

EVERYONE STAGE RIGHT

POVERTY NOT A CRIME!

EVERYONE STAGE LEFT

HOMELESSNESS NOT A PASTTIME!

Repeat EVERYONE stage right and left 3X total.

BILL

Participate!
We're gonna rally! We're gonna vote!
Start rocking that boat!

SHAWN

Cooperate!
Stand strong together.
Show we care, demand what is fair!

EVERYONE

(quieter)
Time is now--we must gather:
Whole new world is what we are after.
(loudly)
Time is now--there is no other.
(spoken) Come together now my sisters and brothers!

Ashti draws Merri to one side where Skylar is standing

ASHTI

We would like to offer you a roof until something better can be found. Skylar and I only have a couch available, but you can have it.

MERRI

Can Dave come?

SKYLAR

We don't really have the room. (trying to be humorous) Besides, he's a bit old and smelly.

ASHTI

Skylar!

Merri shakes her head and walks toward Dave.

EVERYONE

(a cappella)

Time is now (clap clap) we must gather:
Whole new world is what we are after.
Time is now (clap clap) there is no other.
Come together now my sisters and brothers.

The Omnes walk onto the scene dressed as police officers and carrying batons.

ASHTI

What were you thinking?

SKYLAR

What do you mean?

Ashti starts to follow Merri, walking away from Skylar. Dave notices the police officers.

DAVE

Merri! Blue alert!

Merri looks around, sees the officers, and bolts.

SKYLAR

Blue...alert? Ashti!

Skylar has now also seen the officers. He grabs Ashti and swiftly trots her away from the scene. She looks furious, but lets Skylar remove her.

The police start to head after the runners when Dave puts himself in the way.

DAVE

Hello, officers!

They look about to arrest Dave when Lauren comes forward to intervene.

LAUREN

Yes hello, this is my rally. This gentleman is only here because I organised the event.

The officers try to arrest him anyway. Lauren pushes them back.

LAUREN

I'm sorry, but this is my responsibility!

The police grab Lauren and start cuffing her. Bill is stunned. He drops his sign and is trying to figure out what to do. Shawn pushes her way forward.

SHAWN

What do you guys think you are doing? This is peaceful!

LAUREN

Shawn, stop! Let them take me.

SHAWN

How can you do this. We weren't doing anything!

LAUREN

Stop, stop!

SHAWN

I'll find a...a...lawyer!

LAUREN

Yes! Go, go go!

The police start to walk Lauren off stage.

Bill walks up to Dave and pushes him to the ground. He shakes his fist.

BILL

Look what you've done!

Lauren, Shawn, Bill, Dave, and the two Omnes freeze to form a tableau vivant. Death walks forward.

DEATH

I've seen something like this before.

Lauren, Shawn, and Bill walk off stage. Dave curls up into the fetal position. Both Omnes shed their police caps and gear and walk forward.

OMNES 1

Police battle with protesters as the rally turns violent. The Australian second of February, two thousand seventeen.

DEATH

How many homeless were at that event.

OMNES 1

Twenty.

DEATH

How many police officers?

OMNES 1

Seventy-five.

DEATH

Did The Australian say who exactly was violent?

OMNES 1

No.

OMNES 2

Homeless people are mocking Melbourne. Christopher Bantick, eighteenth January, two thousand seventeen, Herald Sun.

OMNES 1

People sleeping rough in Melbourne CBD are pretending to be homeless so they can (*finger quotes*) "shake down" tourists for money, according to Victoria's police chief, Graham Ashton, nineteenth January, two thousand seventeen, The Age.

DEATH

Pretty scary. I just don't recall being near anyone at the time. No close swipes with Death. Well, other than stressed and hungry homeless people.

Both Omnes walk off stage. Death seats herself next to Dave. He starts to breathe raggedly and we hear a sob. Death puts her hand on Dave.

DEATH (cont'd)

It's going to be a hard night. Hold strong, it's not your time.

A recording of the voices of drunken youths starts.

YOUTH 1

Hey, pass me a stubby!

YOUTH 2

Look what we have here.

YOUTH 1

Look at the rubbish the police left behind!

We hear a kick and a groan.

YOUTH 2

Couldn't be bothered getting a job, eh gramps?

More kicks.

DAVE

Please!

YOUTH 1

Who's going to stop us? The pigs?

The youths laugh. Couple more kicks.

The stage lights fade to black.

End of Act 1

ACT 2Scene 1: Skylar and Ashti

Skylar is standing to one side of an empty stage. Next to him is a short black stool.

SKYLAR

I was seventeen when someone's dad told my dad I was homosexual. I wasn't certain and was too scared to think about it. I was just hanging out with the kids who identified.

When he came bursting into my room demanding I explain, I refused to betray my friends. So I said, "Yes!" I said, "Yes, I am gay...what are you...YOU...going to do about it?"

What he did was make me pack my suitcase. He drove me to an outer suburb of Melbourne. He said, "How can you shame your family like this? And you pretend to be the good kid in the family." He gave me five dollars and told me never to come back. People don't want to believe that's how it can be, but it's true.

My mum didn't want to do anything to cross my dad. Two days later she and my sister found me at the park near where I had been left. I was hungry, scared. Your clothes get dirty pretty fast sleeping on the ground. They brought me some food and a few more things.

Mum gave me extra money. She also gave me her sister's address: Aunt Janelle. They hadn't spoken since my mother married, but Janelle was willing to take me in. I managed to pass my VCE with high ATAR course entry scores. I soon began university studies in architecture.

I avoided exploring my sexuality further, then one Saturday I decided to go to a literary event at Rainbow Readers bookstore. They were holding a panel discussion about *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Leguin. And there she was...excuse me, not Ursula...Ashti!

Ashti comes out with a stool, sets it down and sits. Skylar picks up his stool and walks over to Ashti.

SKYLAR (cont'd)

May I?

ASHTI

Yes, you may!

Skylar sets his stool next to Ashti's.

SKYLAR

I've never been to one of these events before--you?

ASHTI

Only once.

SKYLAR

So, it was good enough to come back.

ASHTI

Well...yeh-s!

SKYLAR

Great book. And for such an old book, it's still so relevant.

ASHTI

I thought so too. I loved the character of Estraven!

SKYLAR

I should probably leave you alone. Things are about to start.

ASHTI

That's completely all right. Maybe after the panel we could go for a cup of coffee.

SKYLAR

I would like that!

Skylar stands up and looks out to the audience. Ashti stays where she is seated and is listening to the book discussion.

SKYLAR (cont'd)

Ashti was so gentle, so kind. When I was a child I used to love collecting pebbles at the beach. I would put them into jars of water to keep them shiny. One Christmas my family gave me a rock tumbler. In it you put a handful of rocks and some sand. You then turn on the tumbler and it rolls the rocks around until they polish one another, so they are as shiny as if they had just come from the ocean.

I sometimes feel Ashti's time in a detention centre with other refugees was like that. She wasn't allowed to shine from the natural action of wind and waves, but by being knocked about with others equally in need and in danger, they polished each others rough edges away. They became as luminous as gems!

I fell in love with Ashti. I'm still in love with Ashti. She's now my family.

Skylar offers his hand to Ashti and she stands.

SKYLAR (cont'd)

Would you be my beloved mate?

ASHTI

Skylar, I don't know. I'm not certain if I'm really homosexual. I feel like the universe has been playing tricks on me. I feel, deep inside, who I really am is a woman.

SKYLAR

Honestly, I don't know if I'm gay! But I do know that I love you. And I will love you whatever your gender.

Song "Your Heart Has Touched Me" begins.

SKYLAR

Touch me.
Your heart has touched me
Free me, I get so lonely
I humbly ask to follow your road
Heal me, can we share this load.
Touch me, touch me now.

SKYLAR & ASHTI

Touch me.
Your heart has touched me
Free me, I get so lonely
Humbly, I ask to follow your road
Heal me, can we share this load.

ASHTI

Hold me
Love's warmth enfolds me.
Tenderly, fiercely, closely,
Your touch my one true destiny.

Touch me.
Your heart has touched me.
Touch me, touch me now.

SKYLAR

What is this love
Burning so bright?

ASHTI

Flames are raging,
Eagles set flight.

SKYLAR

Life's so hard.
I don't understand.

ASHTI

We are one,
A promised land.

SKYLAR

Touch me!

ASHTI

Touch me!

SKYLAR & ASHTI

Touch me.

Your heart has touched me.

Touch me, touch me now!

Scene 2: Rally Fallout

The stage darkens. Ashti and Skylar walk around in a circle so that they are now facing opposite directions from before. Now instead of a tender embrace Ashti is struggling as Skylar is holding her in place.

SKYLAR

Ashti...Ashti, you're safe now.

ASHTI

Skylar, stop it! Let me go. What do you think you are doing?

SKYLAR

The police...

ASHTI

I know about the police.

SKYLAR

They could have taken you.

ASHTI

Yes, they could have. They didn't. And in the meantime people like Dave are sleeping in the street through no fault of their own.

SKYLAR

Dave's been homeless for a long time. He knows how to handle himself.

ASHTI

Did you ask him about that?

SKYLAR

What?

ASHTI

You know nothing about what another person is going through until you ask. Even then, you can't know until you've spent some time in their tired old boots.

SKYLAR

Why are you so worried about Dave?

ASHTI

Because he's a human being. But for the meanderings of fate he could be my own father.

SKYLAR

We've been through this, we can't house the whole world in our tiny home.

ASHTI

I didn't suggest he should live here.

Door knocks, then Shawn comes in.

SHAWN

Hi guys. I'm not interrupting anything?

SKYLAR

Come on in.

SHAWN

Are you guys all right?

ASHTI

I don't know.

SKYLAR

Yes, we're fine.

SHAWN

I need to talk to you.

SKYLAR

Oh yeah?

ASHTI

What's up?

SHAWN

I think I'm going to have to pick up my things and go.

ASHTI

Why?

SHAWN

Lauren has been locked up.

SKYLAR

Yes.

SHAWN

I found a lawyer, but not before the police impounded her car. She can't very well move her car around when she's behind locked doors.

ASHTI

That's unfortunate.

SHAWN

It means I won't have enough money to pay the rent and things--I've been borrowing her car to work as a taxi driver.

ASHTI

Oh no!

SHAWN

Lauren can't afford to pay the fine for disturbing the peace, but if she stays in prison for three days, they won't take the car, provided she pays a lesser fine. I will pay for that, but it's back to the streets for me and Lauren.

SKYLAR

And Lauren?

SHAWN

I have a confession to make. Lauren has been sleeping in my bed at night.

SKYLAR

She's been here?

SHAWN

She hasn't been using your stuff or anything. Well, maybe the toilet.

SKYLAR

She's been here without us knowing about it?

SHAWN

I figured it wasn't much different from having a date stay the night. That way she didn't have to sleep in her car.

SKYLAR

We can't afford to have so many people here! God, why are we paying taxes when we are the ones who are made to care for the desperate?

ASHTI

Oh Shawn, this is all so complex. Stay the night.

SKYLAR

Ashti!

ASHTI

It doesn't affect us one way or the other having you here one more night. Maybe we'll think of something. (looks meaningfully at Skylar)

SKYLAR

Okay, okay! Stay the night.

SHAWN

Thank you so much, you guys. Maybe the lawyer will be able to do something!

SKYLAR

Fucking..hell...Will this night ever end?

ASHTI

Why don't I fix something for everyone to eat. There's some leftover lamb in the fridge.

Another door knock.

SKYLAR

Who?

SHAWN

I'll get it!

BILL

You're Lauren's friend?

SHAWN

Yes.

BILL

I think it's my fault.

SKYLAR

(sighs)

What's your fault? What's going on?

BILL

I pushed the old guy.

SKYLAR

You mean, Dave?

BILL

Yeah. I left my jacket when the police came. When I came back, Dave was being loaded onto a paramedic truck.

SHAWN

What happened?

BILL

I don't know, but his face was bloody.

SHAWN

Should we do anything?

SKYLAR

He has already been taken to hospital. Maybe after a night's sleep.

ASHTI

Aren't we forgetting someone?

SKYLAR

Forgotten?

ASHTI

Merri!

SKYLAR

Damn, I'll go get my coat.

Lights dim. When they come up Merri is sleeping under Dave's blanket with his cardboard sign nearby. Death stands nearby and sings "Humankind".

DEATH

(spoken)

Why do we cause such pain
Tears fall like winter rains
Open hearts and open minds
Be human kind.

(singing)

Why do we cause such pain
Tears fall like winter rains
Open hearts and open minds
Be human kind.

Can you hear the call to be
Part of a bright and bold story
No future without your care and sympathy

See that city on the hill
The one where clouds are dark and winds are chill
The one where million souls are sad and unwell
Surely they can find how to be kind.

Why do we lose ourselves
Down isolating wells
To forgive's more than divine
Be human kind.

Why do we always hesitate
Choosing friendship...over hate, you know
It'll never be too late
Be human kind.

See that child there
The one huddled and beyond desperate despair
The one in this city and not just elsewhere
Surely you can find how to be kind.

(spoken)
 Love is patient, love is kind. X8
 (singing)
 Oo-oo. Oo-oo, etc.
 (spoken)
 Love black, love red, love yellow,
 Love Muslim, love Humanist, love Jew,
 Love disabled, love gay, love trans,
 Love young, love old,
 Love indigenous, love nomad, love poor...
 Love humankind!
 (singing)
 See that planet rare
 The one rich in earth, in water, and in air
 The one that we must tend and come to share
 Surely we can find how to be kind.

Learn mercy and learn grace
 All humanity embrace
 And find our lasting peace
 For humankind

Learn mercy and learn grace
 All life to embrace
 And find a bright new space
 Where kindness shines.

Where kindness shines
 Where kindness shines

Skylar starts entering the stage, then stops. He sees Merri and his face and body reflect memories of having been in her position. The audience can read sadness and shame passing through his thoughts. He exits and brings back Ashti.

SKYLAR
 I don't think she would talk to me.

ASHTI
 Maybe if you apologised.

SKYLAR
 Yes, but we don't want her running.

ASHTI
 Okay.

Ashti walks over and sits next to Merri. She rummages around in her bag and pulls out a sandwich.

ASHTI (cont'd)
 Hello, dear one. Here, I have something for you to eat.

Merri is sleepy and slowly wakes up.

MERRI

I stayed where the cameras see you, just like Dave said. Where's Dave?

ASHTI

We can take you to him, but you need to come with us first.

Merri ravenously bites into the sandwich. She picks up Dave's hat nearby and puts it on.

MERRI

I want Dave.

Skylar steps forward and joins Ashti and Merri. He is on the verge of tears.

SKYLAR

I'm so sorry. He can stay with us.

MERRI

Really?

SKYLAR

(nods)

Really, I promise.

MERRI

Okay.

Shawn enters as Skylar and Ashti are helping Merri up. Shawn picks up the street gear.

ASHTI

Let's get you some place comfortable to sleep.

Skylar is clearly still emotional. He wraps his arm around both Ashti and Merri as they walk off stage.

Scene 3: Spring Storm

Lauren is seated to the front of the stage in a gentle spotlight. Her hair is tied back and she's wearing a white t-shirt and a blue jacket. In her hands are a pen and journal. In her world she is in prison.

Behind Lauren, Bill enters with one of the Omnes following him. They are carrying torch-like sticks. In their world they are in front of the house of the State Premier.

Death is watching to one side.

DEATH

(singing)

The spring storms are coming!

LAUREN

Our Common Dissent.

BILL

LAUREN! Lauren should NOT be locked up in a cold grey tower when her heart is a rainbow promising better days!

LAUREN

We uphold universal human welfare.

Bill swishes his torch with the sound of accelerated flames. The Omnes does the same.

BILL

You Mr Lord Mayor, Mr State Premier, Mr so called "Prime" minister should NOT be comfy cosy in your golden mansion when your heart is cold and grey.

LAUREN

We uphold the welfare of our living world. Poverty is an environmental crisis.

BILL

One thing I learned in business school: just eight men hold the same wealth as half of the world. Oh yeah! And they all slyly wink at one another wondering who will be the first trillionaire as the world burns.

Only eight men! In a world populated with over seven billion people. We could knock these guys over with a feather...if we weren't so caught up in the game.

LAUREN

We are dedicated to peaceful means to achieve peaceful ends.

BILL

With one hand you spread marmalade sweet words to lull people into thinking all is well in the world. With the other hand you take and take and take. GO TO SLEEP! You tell the world. Go to sleep and do nothing--we will give to you sugar-coated candy dreams as the world falls down.

LAUREN

Action expresses priorities--we dedicate ourselves to take firm and committed action whenever anyone abridges the welfare of any part of humanity or our living world.

BILL

I am a guardian of the future. This generation, we are guardians of the future. Do you hear me Mr Leader?

And all the suited men will scatter and tumble before us like dead leaves before a storm.

We will blow them from their glass towers.
We will blow them from their gated castles.
We will drown their islands and give them no place to run.

Lauren stands and joins in chanting the blessed curse. Others dressed as Omnes come in forming two groups upstage.

LAUREN

And the voices of the young will SHOUT with one voice--the voice of angels.

BILL

Calling you to account for your sins against this planet and your sins against the future. You will be stripped naked.

LAUREN

And because your lives and your hearts are empty...

Omnes group one joins Lauren with the above words.

BILL

You will crumble into nothingness.

Omnes group two joins Bill in the above words.

LAUREN

Rains will scrub you away from the Earth and all memory.

Omnes group one adds their voices.

BILL

For all living things on this planet will turn away.

Omnes group two adds their voices.

The Omnes dressed as a police officer comes and arrests Bill and takes him away. He goes both defiantly and willingly.

All the Omnes go silent.

LAUREN

Never to look upon you more.

(MORE)

LAUREN (cont'd)

The spring storm is coming.

Exuent Omnes. Lauren reseats herself with her pen and journal. The lights go down.

Scene 4: Shawn's Rally

Shawn wanders onto the stage with the speaker. She puts a cardboard protest sign next to it. She then takes out the microphone and turns it on. She taps the mic and blows on it to check for sound.

Ashti, Skylar, and Merri begin to casually walk on. Skylar is holding a sign.

SHAWN

Hi guys! It's me, Shawn. I've never run one of these things before. So, We'll see how we go.

ASHTI

Yay, Shawn!

SHAWN

Last night Lauren said she was responsible for this rally. It was done with love. It was done to protect people...but she was wrong. This is our rally--all our rally, and the people of Melbourne and the whole world are responsible for what happens to their poor.

ASHTI

Amen!

SHAWN

I guess I start with the news. Lauren has been locked up in a correctional centre--fancy words for jail. She will be there for a few days. Bill Nguyen--the one with the obvious crush on Lauren--he's in jail too for disturbing the peace in front of the state premier's house. Part of me says, "Yay!" Part of me says, "Shit, that's not really how you do it." Finally, Dave is in the hospital after being beaten up by some drunk jerks. He'll be all right but he has some broken bones, stitches, and a mighty headache. He won't be able to join us for awhile either. I know what that's like. Rock on Dave.

The newsmedia reported violence last night, as if we were at fault. I'm not certain what planet they live on. I found this quote on Google: "Poverty is the worst form of violence." That was Mohandas Gandhi.

Omnes 2 as a street person runs up to Shawn with a newspaper. It points out a section to her.

(cont'd)

That might be Merri's.

SHAWN

Oh, that does sound like...(looks around) Merri? I have a news article. It's about a woman and her boyfriend squatting in an old boat factory on the Maribyrnong river. She evidently gave up a teenage daughter to foster care.

Merri trots forward in hope.

MERRI

Can I see that?

SHAWN

(nods)

I hope it's good news. I can't imagine how things could get worse.

The Omnes leaves the stage. Merri steps back and to one side in order to read the news. Anxious desire is written all over her face and body.

SHAWN (cont'd)

Okay, now it's someone else's turn. Who's up for it!

Holds up mic. Skylar steps forward.

SKYLAR

The media portrays us in the worst possible light. They do this to many minorities, so people don't feel the need to care. They are made to feel as if we deserve poor treatment. It then becomes easy for the government to abridge our freedom of speech and our freedom of assembly in the name of protecting the public. Hear me, Melbourne! This is how rights are eroded. Nelson Mandela said, "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

I've been talking to people at Sheltering Justice, and they decided to do two things: first, they are running an awareness campaign about our homelessness problem; second, they are in communication with the United Nations about our abridged rights. Let's see how we go.

Skylar returns mic to Shawn.

SHAWN

Fuck Skylar, that's awesome!

ASHTI

Patience is bitter, but it can certainly bear sweet fruit!

Music for "What If There's Enough" begins

SHAWN

Big cars, big hair
Are taking you no where.
Can't go cuddling a Cadillac,
That's no aphrodisiac.
A gold watch won't remember you,
When you're nothin' but horse glue.
And a thousand bedrooms,
Won't save you from a lonely doom.

What if there's enough.
Oh!
What if there's enough.
What if there's enough
For all.
What if there's eno-ough!
If you share...

You scare the little guys
Feed them golden lies
We've gotten wise
Time you downsize
We won't take your alibis
We'll just rehumanize

What if there's enough.
Yeah!
What if there's enough.
What if there's enough
For all.
What if there's eno-ough!
If you share...

What if there's enough
What if there's enough
What if there's eno-ough!
If we share...

Shawn will get the audience clapping on the last chorus. While audience applauds at the end of the song, Death walks over to Skylar and points out the police coming toward them. Omnes as police enter at a measured pace. Skylar calls to Merri.

SKYLAR

Blue alert!

Merri scuttles off to hide without the police noticing.

SKYLAR (cont'd)

Ashti!

ASHTI

Ashti will stay here.

DEATH

This is not a good idea. Heart's in the right place, but...

OMNES 1

(comes up to Ashti)

Would you be Ashti Grigoryan?

OMNES 2

(joins first)

We have video evidence of you assisting a youth last night. We have reason to believe that she's a runaway.

OMNES 1

Would you know where we might find her?

ASHTI

Right now I would have no idea.

DEATH

(to Skylar)

This will not end well.

OMNES 2

Could you come with us to the station. We would like more information that might lead us to the girl's whereabouts.

DEATH

Don't let them do this.

SKYLAR

Ashti is participating in an event. Could she perhaps drop by your station later?

ASHTI

Skylar, don't be silly. I can handle things.

DEATH

No, this time she can't. This time it's the end.

SKYLAR

(to police)

How long will this take?

OMNES 1

Not long.

ASHTI

There we go! I'll be back in a few minutes.

DEATH

(to Skylar)
Tell her you love her. Tell her you love her now!

Skylar grabs Ashti in an embrace.

SKYLAR

I love you, you know.

ASHTI

I love you too, dearest.

The police take Ashti away.

DEATH

I am so sorry. I am so...so sorry. Ashti will be dying in Baqubah.

Skylar sings a refrain from the Ashti/Skylar love song. He then briskly walks Ashti's direction.

The Omnes enter stage.

DEATH (cont'd)

(to audience)

When a migrant is deemed to have failed the character test under Section 501 of the Migration Act, their visa is cancelled. This determination is made by the minister.

(to Omnes)

Tell them (nods to audience) how things are.

OMNES 1

Solicitor Sophie Ellis at a Melbourne public hearing April 2017 said:

When the minister carries out a decision to cancel somebody's visa it is a form of extrajudicial punishment that is taken outside of the proper rubric of the court system and the proper examination by the courts.

OMNES 2

According to the Edmond Rice Centre: Reports of death, disappearance, imprisonment and torture, of fear-filled lives spent in hiding, privation and despair have filtered back to Australia about some people Australia has removed after disallowing their claims for protection on refugee or humanitarian grounds.

Death and Omnes exit.

Shawn looks around at her abandoned rally. She checks her watch.

SHAWN

Looks like we are down to a one person rally.

Shawn puts her hand in her pocket and pulls out some change which she quickly counts.

SHAWN (cont'd)

Coffee money.

She starts to pack up the speaker and mic.

Scene 5: Merri and Shawn Make

Plans

Merri carefully creeps up on Shawn while scanning around for the police. When Merri taps Shawn on the shoulder, Shawn jumps. Merri holds out a five dollar bill.

SHAWN

What is this?

MERRI

Taxi fare.

(pause)

SHAWN

You want me to take you somewhere?

MERRI

(nods)

I want you to drive me to my mum.

SHAWN

You don't have to pay.

MERRI

No, you keep it. I need you to help me.

SHAWN

Okay, what do you want?

MERRI

(points to newspaper)

I don't know where this place is.

SHAWN

That's not a prob. I'm good at finding places.

MERRI

I don't know if she will want to see me.

SHAWN

Really? Why wouldn't she?

MERRI

She gave me up to a foster family. Maybe it was all so hard, she wants to forget about me.

SHAWN

Fuck, I hadn't thought of that.

MERRI

I know. She told me she loved me and that she was giving me up, so I could have a better life. I sometimes wonder if that was true.

SHAWN

She had to love you.

MERRI

Really?

SHAWN

No, I suppose not. There's no accounting. But if I were your mum, I would love you. You're a pretty cool kid.

MERRI

When we find my mum, can you see her first? Let her know I'm okay, then ask if I can see her?

SHAWN

Sure...sure, I promise. I'm blown away you haven't given up. Loads of people do.

Merri's song "I Do Believe" starts.

During song cardboard car comes out. Shawn has Merri follow her to the car and they "get in".

They pretend to drive while Merri continues the song.

MERRI

I do believe life can be good.
I do believe that people can be good.
I'm told that I'm naïve,
Been tricked and deceived.

I don't think so.

Much to learn and unlearn.
Sometimes change is just a season's turn.
I've lived more experience,
Than some have lived in years.
I've never forgotten smiles,
Even through all the tears.

And yes, I do believe in grace.
...I do believe that goodwill has its place.
And when they say life is dire,
People consuming fires,

SHAWN
I think this is it.

MERRI
I don't think I can do this.

SHAWN
It's okay. I'm here. I'll check then come get you.
Right? This is **your** plan.

Lights go down.

Scene 6: Mother Daughter Reunion?

*Lights come up stage left, but are kept dim.
Shawn is supporting Merri as she creeps forward
toward centre stage.*

SHAWN
You all right?

MERRI
I don't know.

SHAWN
Trust me, you're all right.

MERRI
Maybe.

*Shawn and Merri stop a couple feet from centre
stage.*

*Another couple walk in darkness from stage right
toward centre stage. A man HANK and a woman
GLORIA. They soon stop a couple feet from centre
stage.*

Merri takes one step forward.

GLORIA
Princess?

*Gloria takes one step forward. Stage left lights
dim and a light comes up on centre stage. Merri
and Gloria stare at each other for a few moments
as music surrounds them.*

*The audience can see something shifts in both of
them as they realise they are not looking at
their daughter/mother.*

*Merri takes a deep breath, walks forward and
gives Gloria a hug. Gloria is a little
surprised, but then returns the embrace.*

MERRI

My name is Merri Bedford.

GLORIA

I'm Gloria. This is Hank.

HANK

Pleased to meet you.

SHAWN

You...don't know each other?

GLORIA

This isn't my daughter. But you could be.

Gloria gives Merri another hug.

MERRI

I wish I were.

Merri pulls an orange out of her pocket and offers it to Gloria as a gift.

Gloria motions for Hank to join them. They all sit down and Gloria starts to peel the orange and hand out slices.

HANK

Thanks for that, Merri. Thoughtful.

MERRI

No probs. (to Gloria) You gave up your daughter to a foster?

GLORIA

Yes, I did.

MERRI

How did that feel?

GLORIA

It tore me to pieces. I love my little doll. I wanted to change my mind a thousand times. The government wouldn't let me. No one would help. I was afraid I would do something drastic. So I moved from rural Queensland.

It was really too much to expect my daughter would trail after me to Melbourne. She has no idea I'm here.

MERRI

I would do it.

GLORIA

You're a good girl.

(MORE)

GLORIA (cont'd)
Don't.

MERRI
Don't?

GLORIA
You are your mum's only hope for the future. She wants you well. Don't run off to find her just yet.

MERRI
Am I doing the wrong thing?

GLORIA
I don't know. I only know what I want for my own daughter. Surely your mother would want the same.

MERRI
I miss her and I miss Dad.

Death walks up and sits with Gloria and Hank.

GLORIA
I know.

Finding Hank has helped. We live as much on scraps of love as we do on scraps of food.

HANK
It's true.

MERRI
For at least a little while could you be my mum?

GLORIA
Yes, Merri. Yes.

End with more music.

Scene 7: The Final Rally

Dave, Bill, and Ashti are dressed as Omnes with masks on. Omnes are also present as street people.

Merri and Shawn come out with the speaker.

SHAWN
Wow! Great turn out, guys! Could someone hand out our petition clipboards?

Skylar slowly walks on. He's alone and seems distracted. In his hand he's holding a newspaper. Merri goes to greet him.

MERRI

Was it my fault?

SKYLAR

What?

MERRI

Was it my fault Ashti was deported?

SKYLAR

Oh, no. If it was about you, they would have called me in as well. It was about bigotry and fear. Nothing else.

MERRI

If I told them I'm almost fifteen!

SKYLAR

No Merri, sh!

MERRI

Why would anyone want to deport Ashti?

SKYLAR

I don't know.

SHAWN

(checks watch)

Damn, not everyone's here. I guess I'll make a start anyway. How about the news people! First up, Dave has been moved from the hospital. His ex has agreed to take him in until he's better. He may like visitors. Bill will probably like supporters as well. He will be in court later today. I'll be heading his direction if you want to join me. Keep your fingers-crossed he will get off lightly for disturbing the peace.

The really bad news is that our refugee friend Ashti is being deported to Iraq by the government. We've started a GetUp! campaign to bring her back. We also have people with petitions you can sign.

Lauren walks onto the stage. The Omnes get excited. She's carrying a stack of newspapers.

SHAWN (cont'd)

Lauren! You made it! In other news, Lauren is out of jail!

MERRI

Lauren!

Lauren sets down the papers and waves at everyone.

SHAWN

(to Lauren)
You want to share the really big news?

LAUREN

Sure.

OMNES 1

We love you Lauren!

LAUREN

Thank you. The federal government has called an election. This is an amazing time to have our voices heard.

OMNES-ALL

Homelessness is not a crime (repeat several times)

LAUREN

(holds up a newspaper)
And! Guys, and...because of the hard work of people like Skylar from Sheltering Justice and yourselves: poverty and homelessness are election issues! As Martin Luther King Jr said: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."

Lauren starts to hand out newspapers and everyone wants to take a look.

SKYLAR

(to Merri)
The election is not the only thing in the paper.

MERRI

Yeah? What else?

SKYLAR

Your friend at the boat factory.

MERRI

Gloria?

SKYLAR

The owner of the boat factory was given permission to redevelop the land.

MERRI

So she's being forced out of her squat?

SKYLAR

(shakes head "no")
He set the factory on fire. The police have arrested him for arson, but also potentially for murder. Gloria and her friend died of smoke inhalation. They were trapped in the building.

MERRI

No!

SKYLAR

I can't afford to stay in the flat with Ashti and Shawn gone. I've agreed to do more work for my non-profit in Canberra. Would you like to come with me as my family?

Music for "Love is the Sun" begins. Lauren steps forward with the mic.

LAUREN

Simple words. Simple acts.
Fly like birds, our living pacts.
A light inside says I must care,
And a power within will take me there.

Flowers can break stones.
Raindrops melt mountains.
I will go where Love is the Sun. I may be small, my heart will be mighty.
Love is the Sun. Love is the Sun.

All your fears, all your tears.
Gently now, hold strong my dears.
You be you and I will be me.

Can we be the people we were meant to be?
Find the light that is our shared humanity.

I will be there for you.
I will be there for you.

Flowers can break stones.
Raindrops melt mountains.
You will go where Love is the Sun.
You may be small, your heart will be mighty.
Love is the Sun. Love is the Sun.

Love's time is now!

Flowers can break stones.
Raindrops melt mountains.
We will go where Love is the Sun.
We may be small, our hearts will be mighty
Love is the Sun. Love is the Sun .

LAUREN (cont'd)

Love is the Sun!

MERRI

Okay Skylar, you are now my family.

Merri and Skylar embrace.

~the end~