Characters:

BOY
MAN
CHORUS WITH A LEADER

Scene I

(Scene. The stage is completely dark except for a single spot on a chair at center stage in which the BOY is seated. Behind him is an elevated platform on which the CHORUS will perform. The platform is back-lighted so that the CHORUS is seen in silhouette.

The lights come up on the BOY and CHORUS. The BOY is sitting staring at the audience moving slightly in a lulling rhythm. The CHORUS is walking slowly from left to right, spaced evenly and singularly, creating the impression of movement.

BOY (as CHORUS behind him files past). I see fence pickets. One, two, three, four, five. . . Fence pickets are boring. One after another, frozen stiff, painted white. I see them all. Do they realize they exist and that they all exist? All connected by the same rusty wire. They go one after another, one before the last. Alone with only a wash and wire for warmth. Alone with grass at their feet. Ahh, a symbol. What does it show us? What do I see?

LEADER (stopping directly behind the BOY while the CHORUS continues the procession). Can you see death? Is death boring? Watch the fence pickets growing out of the ground. Growing slowly at first, then faster as this train nears them. They spring up from the grass and then are cut down in the distance. You are like the fences growing all the time, coming nearer still. Do you see us yet? See us this way? We are very near, very large.)
(The light goes down on the BOY and upon the CHORUS platform. At the same time a strobe light begins, creating an old silent movie effect. The CHORUS reenacts the standard scene of the villain and the heroine at the railroad tracks in a very stylized manner. The audience sees FEAR, VILLAINY, ETC. Some of the CHORUS members play the part of the train as well as the Villain and the Heroine. There is no hero and no rescue. As the TRAIN is about to run over the Heroine the lights black out. In the darkness the CHORUS speaks.)

CHORUS (in the darkness). We are men as scenery, scenery as men. We watch; we are watching as we are being watched.

BOY (as the lights go up quickly. Both the BOY and the CHORUS are as before). Watching, I am watching out the window at nothing passing by. Listen to me, talking about fence pickets. About, about nothing passing by. Why am I afraid? The silence, the sound of the fences, makes me afraid. The whitewashed fences saying nothing as they go sinking into the distance. Fences, are they men or what? Sinking into the past as if nothing had—nothing will—nothing will happen. They are fences, pickets, between something. Rods of wood (pause) with wire in between.

LEADER. Nothing but rods of wood watching washed windows go by, growing near and fading in the distance. Glinting for an instant. Washed faces in washed windows go by. Connected by cast iron and air hoses so fragile. As they go by in bundles of blankets peering on cushions of vinyl, peering through the metal skin of the train, they stare, as we stare, as you stare, as we all stare. We count and say good-by.

CHORUS (as they file by severally). Good-by... Boy (slowly). One, two, three... CHORUS (joining in). Six, seven, eight...

(Scene II)

(Scene. Lights up as before. The MAN is now seated next to the BOY. The CHORUS moves again from left to right. The MAN has a newspaper. In his lap and on the floor are other books and newspapers. He wears a “WIN” button in his
lapel. He is blind and wears dark glasses. A white cane leans up against the seat. Beneath the chair is a white blanket.

BOY. How long have I been asleep?
MAN (reading paper). Not long.
BOY. How long have you been here?
MAN. All the time.
BOY. Pardon me, I’ve never seen you before.
MAN. Or again, I might add. No, I was passing through and saw the empty seat. You don’t mind? Crowded on this train, isn’t it?
BOY. Yes, no. You said you saw.
MAN. Yes, a lot of people. That’s too bad. Good angle for a story though, transportation history and all that.
BOY. What did you say?
MAN (reading). Nothing, nothing at all.
BOY. Who did you say you were?
MAN. I didn’t, isn’t in the script. If you must know (as if telling a secret) I’m the foreshadow.
BOY. The what?
MAN (changing the subject). The trains, you know, aren’t as travelled as they once were. But today, today this train is another story (turns page). Did you see this? (indicating article).

BOY (after reading). What does the death of Blanche Payne have to do with me or anything?
MAN. Nothing. Yet, that’s the absolute beauty of it. Our common humanity. What did you call it, our “rusty wire”? (He writes this down in a notebook) That’s good. Probably the first time the old girl’s been in the papers (pause) and the last, I might add.
BOY. You confuse me.
MAN. You confuse yourself with simple matters. You witness death, and you are confused. Simplicity is the key, is paramount. It’s all here in black and white. See?
BOY (after a pause). That wasn’t the first time.
MAN. What? That I foreshadow, oh no, I—
BOY. I mean Blanche Payne was probably in the paper before, when she was born.
MAN (writing in notebook). Very good, yes! We all were. You’re learning, growing up well. Growing all the time.
BOY. You are strange.
MAN. Well, the best are only shadows, but I am real, a professional real person with 20-20 hindsight. I only know what I read in the papers and all that. I hope the things I've been quoting are in public domain. I'd hate to get in trouble. You know, I'm blind.
BOY. But if you can't see, how . . . ?
MAN. Now there you go confusing things again. Take my word, I can see. It just depends in what direction. You see, I'm blind to the present. (A pause). I have another "WIN" button here some place. No, here, take mine. There "Whip Inflation Now". I can't take that stuff. It's too present.
BOY. Listen, Mister, you're going to get in trouble . . .
MAN. No, no, I am sure I can quote that "Whip Inflation Now" perfectly legally.
BOY. Leave me alone.
MAN (looking at watch). It's about time. (He reads from a book.) Some say the world will end in fire. Others ice. How about you, my confused friend?
BOY. I'm not your friend.
MAN. You are. Here is a blanket for warmth, and there is the window for wind. Which do you prefer? It really doesn't matter. (Looks at watch.)
BOY. If it doesn't matter—?
MAN (growing impatient). Must I quote you Macbeth. Here now, give me back my "WIN" button.
BOY. Take your button.
MAN. You are quite regular, really. The best that was thought—n'er so well expressed. Try not to be angry. Look it square in the eye. You owe God a death and all that. (To himself.) Who said that? Was that Shakespeare again?
CHORUS. Look up Hemingway.
MAN. I don't want to use Shakespeare again.
BOY. What is going on?
MAN. Wait a minute, will you? Where's the Bible? (To the audience) Has anybody got a Bible?
BOY. What about fire and ice?
MAN. Oh, yes. Little matter. (Growing calmer). That's right. Little use in the way it will end. The glass will still break and shatter, the blanket split and tear. Little protection from
metal and human shouts.

BOY. Listen, Mister, if you don’t stop this, I’m going to call the conductor.

MAN (changing the subject). What is more important than that fence?

BOY. One more time, mister, and I’ll make a scene.

MAN. Indeed, you will. It won’t be a pretty sight, and I don’t envy the men who’ll have to clean you up. They’ll wear masks to keep from fainting from the stench. No, I don’t envy them.

BOY. Conductor, conductor!

MAN. That’s right. Call, be saved. Don’t you see you’re being saved this way, too? We’ll read about you once in the papers; I so love the papers. Saved from being asked those questions about your future life. (At this point the “William Tell Overture” is heard fading in). You’re saved. You’ll be used.

BOY. Stop it.

MAN. Used as show. You are a spectacle, a revelation. The boy has died, yet you are the boy. A symbol. What lesson can we draw?

BOY. Stop it.

MAN. Deliverance coming nearer all the time.

BOY. Stop it. Stop it.

MAN. Nearer all the time.

LEADER (with conductor’s hat steps out of the shadow). Yes, may I help you?

BOY. This man is—

LEADER. Is an employee of the railroad. (Sound of “Overture” cuts).

MAN (after humming a few bars of “Toot Toot Toosie Good-by”). This train is doomed. Always has been, (To conductor) eh, Sam?

LEADER. Right on schedule too, sir.

MAN. Good. Excellent. You see we knew all along, so did they (the audience), but they came anyway. And back in that cute little head of yours (mussing BOY’s hair), so did you. Are we right?

BOY (after a long pause). I’m very cold.

MAN. The blanket, Sam, by all means.

BOY (wrapped in blanket. I’m very warm.

MAN. I’ll get the window.
CHORUS (as the window is slid back). Ten, nine, eight, seven—
MAN. Getting near, eh, Sam?
LEADER. Right you are, sir. It’ll be a good one, I can feel it in
my bones.
CHORUS. —Five, four, three, two . . . (Black and sound out.)

Scene III

(Lights fade in on the MAN sitting in the chair reading the paper.
The boy’s chair is gone; the platform and CHORUS are gone
also.)
MAN (reading). “The body of the boy was the 208th corpse taken
from the twisted wood and metal of a 22-car train that
careened from the tracks Thursday night to the screams of
terror from its passengers.” He went quietly though. (Lights
up full on boy in blanket held coffinlike by the CHORUS on
the platform. The CHORUS is wearing surgical masks,
except for the LEADER). He knew about what was hap-
pening there at the end.
LEADER. We told him at the beginning. Don’t feel bad. You did
your best. Some refuse to listen until—
MAN. Some refuse to admit it even though they know.
LEADER. All and all he was about average.
MAN. Aren’t we all?
LEADER. Never grew up—
MAN. Like many—
LEADER. Never looked back—
MAN. Like few—
LEADER. Torn in half—
MAN. While we watched.
LEADER. Nothing new. In that—
MAN. Death is so near all the time.
LEADER. Now moves away, an image fading, a perspective
view. (Lights fade out on platform).
MAN. It’s just the way you look at things and the relative
distance between a point of a moment and the thought of the
next. (Reading) I’ll turn the page. And try not to think.
(Black out).