

# PLAGUE OF DAYS

A play by

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# PLAGUE OF DAYS

## CHARACTERS

JOHN:       A middle-aged man  
MARIA:      A young woman with an accent

## SETTING

Maria's office

## SCENES

SCENE 1  
Maria's office

SCENE 2  
A moment later

SCENE 3  
A moment later

## HISTORY

PLAGUE OF DAYS was written with support from a 2009-10 Jerome Fellowship from the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis.

## SCENE 1

MARIA's "office," which is a very bare room – the rougher better. The only personal effect is a glass bear figurine on the desk. Aside from the desk and the chair in which JOHN sits, there is only a single easel stand for holding signs to one side. It is empty. MARIA fills out paperwork. JOHN fills the silence.

JOHN

Do you ever feel like you're in the wrong room, even when you know you're in the right one?

MARIA

Mmhmm. Just one moment.

JOHN

Sometimes I feel the same way about things I *do*. That's the worst. I hate not knowing whether what I'm doing is what I ought to be doing. Then I think about what it is that even means: ought or should. Who says? What principle demands a certain behavior? It's so banal. The world isn't ordered. The world is chaotic. But then I doubt that too.

MARIA looks up and at JOHN for the first time, directly and eye to eye.

MARIA

Everyone has doubts.

JOHN

Yes.

SHE looks down again and continues her work.

The human eye is truly an amazing instrument.

MARIA

Mmm.

JOHN

It's an incredible machine.

MARIA

Yes. I use mine every day. Both of them. Boop. Boop.

JOHN

Think about the eye for a moment. It's not just one single mass. It's made of a number of parts. In that way it's like us. I mean us inside. People inside are complex. Sometimes I feel like there are many Johns. I mean, I know there's one me, but sometimes I am one way. Other times I'm another way.

MARIA

Mmm.

JOHN

And not just the human eye! All eyes.

I don't want to be humano-centric, necessarily.

Is that a real term? Oh you wouldn't know, would you?

What am I saying? Of course I'm humano-centric.

What I'm saying is, objectively all eyes, really are... are really incredible machines.

MARIA

They are.

Sign here.

JOHN takes the paperwork.

JOHN

And it's not simple. It's complex.

Pupil. Anterior chamber. Ciliary muscle.

What am I signing?

MARIA

Here, here. Initial here.

JOHN

Yes, darling. That's quite a little accent you have. But what am I signing?

MARIA

Oh. Just that we are meeting. That this meeting is taking place, and you agree to the rules and regulations of such a meeting as governed by law, et cetera et cetera. It is really mostly only a formality. You can rest assured I have your best interest in mind.

HE flips through a number of pages.

JOHN

All this just to confirm we're meeting?

MARIA

Yes.

JOHN

That's a lot of fine print.

MARIA

Yes. It is all very standard. Just initial each place I have highlighted. It is very obvious.

JOHN

Of course.

Gosh I'm kind of having a headache. It's hard for me to read all this.

MARIA

Oh it is really only a formality.

JOHN

That's a lot of formality.

MARIA

You know how government is! Everybody needs their pound of flesh.

JOHN

Isn't that the truth?

HE squints at the many pages of fine print. HE makes marks as HE recites the various parts of the eye.

Suspensory ligament.  
 Hyaloid canal.  
 Fovea.  
 Retinal blood vessels.  
 Optic nerve.  
 Optic disc.  
 Sclera.  
 Choroid.  
 Retina.  
 Vitreous humor.  
 Zonular fibres.

JOHN  
(cont.)

Posterior chamber.  
Iris.  
Lens.

HE returns the papers. SHE flips through them.

I know a lot about the eye. It's part of my profession to know it, really. All people can do is see my work.

A photographer doesn't work with the ears, is what I'm saying.

MARIA

And one more here. Your full signature.

HE signs.

Perfect.

That's quite the memory you have, Mr./

JOHN

Just John. I really insist. Ms.?

MARIA

Maria then.

JOHN

That's a lovely name.

MARIA

Oh, well thank you.

JOHN

My memory isn't perfect.

MARIA

Nobody's is. Do not hold that against yourself.

JOHN

Well, things get spotty. I think it's... well, you know. My history.

MARIA

Everyone has a history.

JOHN

Isn't that true? You're quite wise for such a young lady.

That or you keep a rolodex of clichés behind your desk there?

So which is it?

MARIA

No rolodex!

JOHN

I see that.

So.

MARIA

So.

JOHN

So.

MARIA

Yes.

JOHN

Well.

MARIA

Okay, John.

JOHN

Okay.

MARIA

I will start then. With a question.

JOHN

Of course.

MARIA

How may I help you?

JOHN

How?

May I... MARIA

May you/ JOHN

Help you. MARIA

Help me. JOHN

Yes. MARIA

How may you. Help me. JOHN

That's right. MARIA

JOHN  
Well there's really only one reason a person like me comes to... a person like you.

MARIA  
That's true. But there is quite a lot I can do for you.

JOHN  
Is there?

MARIA  
There is.

JOHN  
Such as?

MARIA  
Well, for instance this discussion we are having now. At this very moment! It could be the start of/

JOHN  
Are we having a discussion?

MARIA  
I believe we are.

JOHN  
You are awfully young, aren't you?

MARIA  
I don't see what/

JOHN  
This office doesn't look very worn in, if you'll forgive my saying. In fact it doesn't look much like an office. Aside from the desk.

MARIA  
I just got it.

JOHN  
I see.

MARIA  
I am new here.

JOHN  
Right.

MARIA  
Does that disappoint you?

JOHN  
I'll let you know after the consultation.

MARIA  
That is fair.

JOHN  
Am I your... umm...

MARIA  
My?

JOHN  
First, eh... first/

MARIA  
Client?

JOHN  
That's it. Can you answer that? That doesn't violate confidentiality?

No, it is fine. MARIA

So? JOHN

Yes and no. MARIA

What does that mean? JOHN

You are my first *unsupervised* client. MARIA

I see. JOHN

I probably ought not have told you that. MARIA

Well I appreciate your candor. JOHN

JOHN holds a hand to his forehead abruptly.

Are you all right? MARIA

Headache. JOHN

Oh dear. MARIA

Migraine headache. JOHN

Oh my. MARIA

It will pass. I just need to breathe. JOHN

Okay. Okay all better.

That was fast. MARIA

That's how they are. Fast and sharp. JOHN

Does it/ MARIA

Like a knife to the temple. JOHN

My. MARIA

Yes. Your. JOHN

So I was saying... MARIA

You were saying how you appreciate my candor. JOHN

Yes. And I do. MARIA

Thank you. JOHN

No, thank you. MARIA

You're just so young. And hot. JOHN

I am older than I look. MARIA

Do you mean literally or... on the inside? JOHN

Both. MARIA

I'm not going to ask your age. JOHN

Thank you. MARIA

So, this is big for you. JOHN

Yes. MARIA

Your first go round the block. Your first swing of the bat. Your first... your first time. JOHN

Yes. MARIA

Wow. JOHN

I know. MARIA

Are you... nervous? JOHN

No. MARIA

Are you? JOHN

I was. JOHN

But not anymore? MARIA

I don't know. JOHN

You don't know? MARIA

Listen: I have always had difficulty checking in with my feelings. I worked on this for years. They call it emotional intelligence, yes? JOHN