

**BOUFFALO TRAGIQUE (excerpt)**

by

Karinne Keithley

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*200 Clermont Ave #4*

*Brooklyn NY 11205*

*kk@fancystitchmachine.org*

The following text is the central section of BOUFFALO TRAGIQUE, a performance that takes place in an old school gymnasium, involving three guides, a science-fair type pavilion of information about salt, electricity, and cheese, and a life-size reconstruction of an American Court of Law, in which, later in the proceedings, a re-enactment of the trial of Leon Czolgosz is performed for the edification of the spectators. The text that follows is to be divvied up between three or four voices.

Italicized, indented sections are songs.

*On the island of goats,  
Where do you go,  
Where do you go in the morning?  
Where the waterfall flows,  
Where do you fly,  
Where do you fly in the flowing?  
Is a big man falling,  
Is a big water falling?  
Is anything flowing,  
Past the island of goats,  
Past the island of goats in the morning?*

The tragedy begins with a bleating and a flowing, on this, the very last morning. The Presidential party is ambling the trails of Goat Island admiring the idea of a harnessed world. Everything is light. Everything is electricity.

A buffalo enters! "He was not a high-ranking anarchist." Shall we be lit by stars or shall we be lit by Mister Edison?

They do the 1893 panic!

They do the high-ranking anarchist shrug!

Mr. James Parker, recently laid off, sure was looking forward to shaking the hand of the President.

\*bang\* \*bang\*

God damn it! (wrestle, wrestle, tackle)

"Be easy with him, boys."

"The Negro who saved the president."

Song: "I never did see a buffalo by starlight"

A pavilion, on a canal, on which, "He was condemned to travel the landscape." Outer space, electric light.

They do the dance of far-thinking and near-thinking. It is geometry made visible. It allows, agrees, turns a blind eye. Yes, it is only the dance of near-thinking, after all.

\*bang\* \*bang\*

And then [with a pause and a sigh] does the reverend lean forward on the podium and say to the nation,

"Ours is a common sorrow."

He done it.

45 handshakes in the space of a minute. "Remember" Lucky Major Mack "the Maine!"

Suffice to say there are a small rich few who are happy and a large poor many who are not, and there are allegiances that might be expected and grievances that might be expected. Suffice to say that someone has to get the short end of the stick. And they're going to find out that it's really awfully short, I mean it's a really short end and frankly it's hard to even hold on at all to such a very meager portion of stick. And no, happiness does not reign here among the short enders. No, why would it? Not in these times. Not in these great times.

"Big Jim" Parker, recently employed, sure was looking forward to shaking the hand of the president.

\*bang\* \*bang\*

God Damn It! (scuffle, wrestle, tackle.) "The negro who almost saved the president."

"Be easy with him, boys."

*It is Capital. Isn't it so very hopelessly Capital?*

"Be easy with him, boys."

Leon makes steel wire and Leon makes graves. Meticulous Leon. The anarchist who killed the President.

Has the heart lost all its senses? Has it gone out?  
Has it gone out to the extremities?

Has Kansas has become radicalized?  
And the family farm has bred the socialist?  
And the prairie has bred the anarchist?  
For lo, the land is infested with bargains, half-off wages--  
\*bang\* \*bang\*

"I done my duty"

says scoundrel Leon C., and is carried off, as on a moving  
walkway.

Fellers.

Where can a misfit go to improve himself? Can he go sledding,  
and sing songs? Sympathy for the misfit, lest he come to  
desperation. Fred C. Niemann! What will you sing now? Is the  
landscape filled with snow? It is a blizzard, Fred C. Niemann, it  
is white and full of unbearable, sorrowful— and is perfectly vast  
and totally incurable, given today's medicine, and no melodic  
line can set it otherwise.

But we? We are all sweltering, today. It is a very hot temple we  
find ourselves in.

Song. Where can a misfit go to improve himself?

*On the island of goats,  
Where do you go,  
Where do you conquer your leanings?  
Where the waterflow falls,  
What do you speak,  
How do you make clear your meanings?  
Has he done the deed?  
Has he done the deed?  
Has he done the deed?*

Her words had set him on fire. But he was connected to no one.  
So he states, and so it is.

"I didn't think it right that one man should have so much service  
when another man should have none."

Someone has been very unhappy.

Pan-American Exposition, September 6th,  
19 hundred. and 1.  
World's largest cheese.  
Palace of incubated babies!  
TelAutograph!

Like an encyclopedia laid out in space.

*Midway down the Midway,  
Studded in bulbs,  
I got a gun and I shot it.*

There are automatic envelope addressing machines for the girls.  
Wherever possible, ball bearings are being introduced. "And  
forestry has a separate, picturesque log building of its own."

Biograph, Cinematograph, Vitascope, Mutoscope, Penny-in-the-  
slot, New Facsimile Telegraph, Electric Typewriter.

"The operator plays upon it as on a piano. The keys dip one third  
as much and the pressure required is but one-tenth as much as  
the traditional machine. He need not worry about gaining  
uniform touch. Electricity does that for him."

The Topophone, with two acoustic bearing trumpets. Element  
Osmium meet Element Corundum. Meet 348 apple varieties.  
Anti-septic-ism.  
Wire futures.

World's largest cheese!

Electricity has done that for him.

*I never did see a buffalo by starlight.  
Only in the electric glare of my dreamings.  
In the gleaming glow of my teeming dreams  
full of buffalo lit up  
by electricity.  
Never stars, never starlight for me  
In my dreams*

*With the beast  
So it seems  
It never will be.*

See Bostock's trained wild animals, including Jumbo the Elephant. Tour the African village. Tour the Esquimo village. Tour the Village of American Law. We guarantee: foreigners kept are clean and supervised.

"It is a product of 11,000 pounds or 5,500 quarts of milk. When it is understood that the ordinary cow gives an average annual yield of 5,000 pounds of milk, it will be seen that it would take one cow 2 1/2 years to make a counterpart of the cheese now on exhibition."

They do the Buffalo Pose.

Superintendent Hall is passing the evening calculating quantities of cheese sandwiches.  
And down the midway, on a canal, on which "he was condemned to travel the landscape," ILLUMINATION.

Direct. Local. The Tower of Light. Direct. "There must be hundreds of thousands of bulbs. Why it must be visible in Manila, Havana."

Enter a buffalo.

Her words had set Leon on fire. He had made his mind up on Tuesday, and once he did, there was nothing to turn him from doing the deed, and nothing that could have, except maybe Emma Goldman, but that is not a guarantee and truly it was only later, after her trip to Russia, that she disavowed The Deed, and came to think that the eight hour workday was a worthwhile improvement, and that revolution was quick to become counter-revolutionary, and that ideas all must fear their inevitable inverse, and that the ends did not justify the means, and rarely were the ends the ends anyhow, when it came to that, the longed-for situation, at long last, as if, at all.

World's Largest Cheese!

"These lungs will grow monstrous."

\*bang\* \*bang\*

Never was there a crowd so quiet as that one, and we all waited, for the news of the President's condition, and the outlook seemed good for a while, but the second bullet couldn't be found. In the absence of electric light, looking glasses were held at angles to catch the waning daylight. And whereas the one bullet had not gone deep, the other had entered; it had cut a dark path into the gut of the man. The thing had penetrated. What a terrible handshake! And he had tumbled, from potted plant to potted plant. Where was it? Nobody knew. The operating doctor was a Gynecologist, unfamiliar with the new antiseptic ways. The abdominal surgeon was twenty miles away. There was a bullet lodged deep in the abdomen of "Our Dear President." And like before (James, Humberto, Edward, Elizabeth) the Movement progressed—

—as on a moving walkway.

And he sang, softly,

*"I  
am  
an  
anar  
chist"*

What we have here is the tragic consequence of philosophizing.

And then with a pause and a sigh did the Rev'rnd leaned forward on the pulpit and say to the nation,

"We are learning in our school of sorrow the inevitable result of permitting our country to become the home of Europe's moral outcasts."

What we have here is the tragic consequence of philosophizing.

Sympathy for the misfit, lest he come to desperation. (Electricity has done that for him.)

\*bang\* \*bang\*

*channeling the dying man, how spooky:*

oh fuck. oh fuck. oh my god. oh my god.  
oh my god I'm bleeding.  
oh my god I'm  
holy fuck. oh shit.  
oh my god I'm hit.  
oh shit!  
ohhhh shit!  
ohhhhh.  
ow.  
fuck. ouch.  
ohhhh...  
ow!

He claims he is an anarchist. I said, "Are you an anarchist? I  
said, "Are you an anarchist? And he said,

"Yes sir."

(and fat cat fat fat)

His is not a mental delusion, sirs, but a political one.

("and fat fat cat fat fat cat fat—")

And they danced the 1893 panic.  
And they danced the Gold Standard.  
And they danced the Alienist's Opinion.  
And they danced the Epileptic Shrug and covered their heads  
discreetly with napkins.

*Ida, oh Ida  
Oh Ida and me  
Nearer my God to thee  
She's my first lady and she'll always be.  
Ida it's Ida for me  
I don't care if she makes it  
a habit to seize,  
Ida oh Ida  
It's Ida for me.*

Everyone discreetly holds hands

Police Chief Propane is on the scene. Weren't they all there, all the security, secret police, all of them? This handshaking engagement had been the subject of a premonition. Not a definite foreseeing but a case of nerves. A bad kind of roiling in the gut. An instance of spooky gut vision, miles of blind intestines holding their intestinal fingers to the intestinal wind with an acidic rumbling groan. Signal the head, signal the head! Signal the head of state. Yes this handshaking meet and greet was twice cancelled by the President's secretary Mr. Cortelyou, the man possessing the gut of foreboding, the gut of distinguishing what is a wise idea and what is a not-wise idea. Twice cancelled by Mr. Cortelyou it was, but then twice reinstated by the President. He wants to shake the hands of the people! He really wanted to shake the...

(sigh)

Chief Propane performs the lament:

*It is  
So hard to stop  
people, or fish  
or anarchists:  
it is impossible.  
To be rigid,  
a barrier  
and yet remain mobile,  
capable of striking.*

You plug the top it seeps around the sides  
You barricade the sides it seeps through the cracks  
You seal the cracks it flows under and bursts forth.  
There are ruptures everywhere, there are seams that you can't see.

*And anarchists doing the deed.*

They do the dance of the deed that has been done. It is a  
funerary measure. Electricity set him on fire. Sulfuric Acid  
made him disappear.

aria

*I know the rules for the restoration of lost  
and obliterated corners.  
I know to look for monuments,  
accessories and tree lines and  
I know about meridional lines and latitudinal lines  
I know the rules for the restoration of  
lost and obliterated corners.*

Shh.  
The buffalo are coming.

Have you done the deed?

Said the undertaker to the overtaker.

Did you dutifully deed?  
Didn't deeding do? Did I deed you?  
Do you deed? Indeed?  
Are you indeed the deeder, to whom the deed was done. Or, no:  
whom did the deeding.  
But who did the deeding?  
The deed or the deeder, or the deedee.  
Did the deed do the damage of which the deed felt need.  
Did the deeder need the deed, did the need produce the deed?  
I deed you dead. If dead, then yes, the deed was done.  
And the undertaker and the overtaker.  
And the deed was done.  
The deed was done to everyone.

For ours is a common sorrow

And grievously, the deed was done.  
The deed was done to everyone.

For ours is a common sorrow.  
And the power and the

Gory.

A dark and gory path wound the bullet through the abdomen. Deeper through darkest reddest viscera, cutting the muscle sheath piercing the organ sacs. We see William McKinley sensing his fluid system; we see William McKinley sensing his lymphatic system; William senses that something is gone terribly wrong in the gut. Does it jiggle; does it dribble when you bounce? Is bouncing really advisable?

They do the Dance of Mournful Bouncing and hold their abdomens duringwhile.

**Mr. Titus for the defense**

Did you hear the president make any remark or say anything?

**Mr. Branch**

Well not only just when he jumped

**Mr. Titus**

When who jumped

**Mr. Branch**

When the President jumped himself, after the shot.

**Mr. Titus**

What do you mean?

**Mr. Branch**

The second fire, he jumped, you know, from one of them—what do you call those things there?

**Mr. Titus**

You mean he started back?

**Mr. Branch**

No, sir. He jumped back from one of those big tubs the trees were in.

**Mr. Titus**

Flower pots?

**Mr. Branch**

Yes sir, he jumped from one and staggered over to the second one, and then stood up.

**Mr. Titus**

That is, he staggered over to the right?

**Mr. Branch**

He staggered over to the right.

**Mr. Titus**

And then braced up again?

**Mr. Branch**

Yes sir, and then braced up again on the second one.

**Mr. Titus**

What did you hear him say?

**Mr. Branch**

He didn't say anything only just "Be easy with him, boys." That is all I heard him say.

**Mr. Titus**

What is that?

**Mr. Branch**

"Be easy with him, boys."

**Mr. Titus**

"Be easy with him, boys?"

**Mr. Branch**

Yes, sir. "Be easy with him, boys." That is all I heard him say.

They do the dance of far-thinking and near-thinking.

It is geometry made visible. Everything is light, everything is electricity. The temple of music is terribly hot. We are all sweltering, and everyone has a handkerchief. But how many of us conceal in ours a revolver? How many of us have that in hand? Has the trouble left the hand of the loser? Has it been left in the hand of the loser? Then it is only the dance of near-thinking after all.

The fact of being president includes the possible configuration of being president in a room where a bullet is speeding towards you. It is inherent in the thing-of-becoming-president-at-all.

It could always have been the case.

*Electric Light*  
*Is like a humming bee*  
*it buzzes, and it buzzes, and it buzzes*  
*it makes gold things,*  
*it makes gold things,*  
*and it buzzes.*  
*electric light*  
*is like a humming bee.*