

Walden
The Ballad of
Thoreau
Act One



Master Edit - 2020 Edit

WRITERS GUID REGISTRATION #1329254

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BEFORE ACT ONE

MC On Stage and reads:

“The following play is an imaginary presentation of the final two days Henry David Thoreau spent in his cabin before leaving Walden Pond. He lived in Concord Massachusetts in the mid 1800’s. He lived while Mark Twain travelled the Mississippi in riverboats ... and he died before Vincent Van Gogh began painting in Europe.

Thoreau was, in fact, a pencil maker and surveyor by trade. He was a writer, an orator and a naturalist.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, his mentor and friend, was also a writer, an educator and a former minister. He employed Thoreau as a tutor for his children and a handyman for his estate. Emerson purchased the small plot of land along the shores of Walden Pond, where Thoreau built a tiny cabin and spent two years, two months and two days of his life.

There is no factual record of the events of this play, although much of the dialogue between Thoreau and Emerson are actual quotes or composite quotes culled from the body of their literary work.

An important historical fact referred to in the play happened in the early 1990’s as Walden Pond was being threatened by developers. Musician Don Henley of the rock group *The Eagles* helped establish the Walden Woods Project that purchased the property to protect Thoreau’s legacy.

We present this play as a celebration of the Earth, a celebration of nature ... and an acknowledgement America’s greatest literary giant.”

ACT ONE

STAGE TO BLACK

**BEGIN AUDIO TRACK: ONE
or OFF STAGE ANNOUNCER**

It is September, 1847.

A young man, 30 years old, has contemplated his life on this earth while living alone in a small cabin he built for \$28.

The cabin sits on a small plot of land along the shores of Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts, provided for his use by a trusted and wise friend named Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The young man, a sincere but struggling author, would write in his journals every day, and imagined that, someday, his experience alone in the woods would have meaning and importance.

His name was Henry David Thoreau, and this is a play about the final two days he spent in his cabin before leaving Walden Pond.

BEGIN AUDIO TRACK: TWO
LIGHTS UP:

ACT ONE

SETTING: INSIDE/MID MORNING IN SEPTEMBER

We are inside Henry David Thoreau's simple, sparse cabin at Walden Pond.

The cabin is plain and functional, rustic and wooden. Inside we see a bed with a feather mattress, blanket and pillow. There are three wooden chairs around a small, plain wooden table. Immediately inside the doorway there is a small pile of oak logs. There's a fireplace with a cook pot suspended over the fire. An axe leans against a wall, a hammer, a shovel and a saw.

On top of the bed we see five notebooks. On top of the table is the sixth open notebook next to the journal and several pencils alongside his flute and a candle.

HDT stands in front of the window. We sense the faintest autumn breeze, the song of birds far away and the sound of waves from a pond delicately lapping against the shore.

HDT
(sound of deep inhaling)
Ahhhhh. Such beauty. To be awake is to be alive.

He unlatches the shutters and lets them swing open, turns and sits back in his chair at the table. After a moment:

HDT
There. That's better.

pauses and soaks in the sunlight

All creation awakes in the morning. Music and art
are born at sunrise ...

... hmmm. I must write that down.

He reaches for his notebook across the bed and scribbles. Then,

Even better, I'll play my flute.

Henry picks up his flute and begins playing a soft, gentle melody. When done, he listens to the silent cabin. After several seconds of just sitting and staring at his journal, he leaves his bed and goes to his chair. He leans back, puts his hands behind his head and addresses no one in particular:

HDT

... I hunger for companionship.
I shall make some garden snap beans.

He picks up the notepad, journal and pencils on the table and tosses them to the bed. Then he goes to a box near his table and pulls out a fist full of green snap beans and begins to break and peel them.

HDT

Like my woodpile, peas and beans
keep me company. It is a communing and
conversation with nature.

He stops and looks up.

I must write that down

He gets up from the table and goes to the bed, fetching a notebook and pencil, repeating himself aloud while writing.

HDT

Like ... my woodpile
peas ... keep ... me ... company.

He stares at his pad and the words he wrote, looks up and,

HDT

Dear god ... You are having
a conversation with peas and
finding it intellectual.

He gets up, puts the few logs laying by his doorway into the fireplace after stoking the coals. There is a knocking at the door. Henry answers the door. It's his friend and mentor RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Ralph carries a small basket of corn and some bread loaves.

RWE

Henry, my good friend.

HDT

Mr. Emerson, my teacher and brother

Emerson looks at the beans on the table and the notebook. As he takes off his coat, he says matter-of-factly ... as though neither strange nor new:

RWE

Still talking to your vegetables, Henry?

HDT

I am finding a place in life with trees,
the woods, even snap beans. We are all
connected to the pulsing heartbeat of nature.

RWE

So ... you're talking to peas again.

Here, I brought you a basket of sweet corn from my
wife's garden. Perhaps you can have a group meeting.

As he places the corn atop the table

My boy, you a need lady friend.

HDT

Nonsense. I find the solitude of this
cabin stimulating.

Henry begins to quickly snap the beans with vigour and determination.
RWE sits at the table with him.

RWE

Why not venture into town and meet
a good woman. Let her *snap* your peas.

HDT

My log pile is like my woman.

RWE

And how is that possible.

HDT

Like a woman ... it keeps me warm
at night. Cooks my meals. Even engages
in conversation as it crackles in the evening.

pauses as Emerson stares at him

Look, every man gazes upon his woodpile with
affection. I love to stack my woodpile before my
window. The fire place fills my home with company ...

... as if I have a cheerful house keeper.

My chimney tells the world that me and
my wood fire live here.

Henry graps his notebook and scribbles.

RWE

I have a younger cousin, you know.
You would like her.

HDT

I am NOT crazy.

RWE

Of course not. How long have you lived
alone out here ... a year and a half now?

HDT

Two years, two months. And one day.

RWE stands up from the table and goes to the window. He opens the shutter wider to let the midmorning light in.

RWE

Two years alone in these woods. Living in your little twenty eight dollar cabin. Enjoying nature, communing with the woods, talking to vegetables ... You need the embrace of a good woman.

RWE gazes out the window, and then leans forward. He sees something.

RWE

There's an attractive oak.
Maybe you can go hug that tree.

HDT

Make fun if you need to. Have a good laugh if it brings you fulfilment. There is a spiritual and intellectual reason for my time in these woods.

RWE

My apologies old friend. I am supportive of you. Truly. Although I find your life here odd and somewhat amusing.

HDT

There is nothing *odd* about it.

RWE

You hug trees and converse with vegetables. Seems completely sane and normal to me.

Henry picks up his journal from the bed

HDT

See? I've been writing. I have carefully recorded all my thoughts and musings. Every morsel of emotion and reason between my spirit and this small, brilliant patchwork of earth.

Emerson takes the journal and browses the pages, scanning the passages.

RWE

In a world covered with mountains, trees, ponds and peas ... this is SURELY what society needs. A book about mountains, trees, ponds and peas.

HDT

You sound like my father.

RWE

Does he still look for you at the pencil shoppe?

HDT

He does.

Emerson picks up several of the pencils on the bed.

RWE

Does he provide you with these pencils?
What a fine and practical writing instrument.

HDT

The finest.

RWE

You realize your family kills trees to make the pencils.

HDT

Mr. Emerson, is the purpose of your visit simply to mock me?

RWE

Don't be so sensitive. I am one of the few who still care enough to check on you from time to time.

HDT

Well, I do appreciate your concern. Hopefully as a friend who will take me for what I am.

RWE

Henry, you have such intelligence and skill. And passion. As much as you love it, I fear that you will pass from this earth unnoticed. All you do is write about dirt and ponds.

HDT

I have also written of society and man's attitudes and destruction of himself.

RWE

But it's not *poetry*. It's not a *story*. It's not a *novel*. It's barely an essay of social relevance.

Offended:

HDT

Every artist dips his brush into his soul and paints his own nature into the canvas. I write the Truth.

RWE

And will this Truth provide employment? Will it buy a home and sustain you? Will it bring honor?

HDT

Mr. Emerson, rather than honor, or money, or fame, give me Truth!

RWE

Here is your Truth, dear Henry: At this rate you will have achieved more recognition for helping your father *market* the lead pencil than for a single word you've *written* with it.

HDT

Then so be it. I can not be convinced I am irrelevant.
If that is to be my legacy from my work ... so be it.

RWE

You surrender to your fate too quickly.
I fear you have wallowed in your loneliness
amongst these bushes way too long.

HDT

To the contrary. I feel stronger in my loneliness.
I understand the meaning of quiet and solitude.
My isolation keeps me company.

RWE

My friend, hear me: You are talking to vegetables
and trees instead of women.

HDT

You make my efforts seem so ... without purpose.

RWE

I do not question your intentions or motives.
I'm only concerned about your eventuality.

HDT

And I'm concerned about the eventuality of society. I'm
concerned about the world's abandonment of God ...

RWE

whoever that is ...

HDT

... and of the nature that represents him. We head in
a direction far from the Creator's intent.

RWE

And when did you begin speaking on behalf
of this Creator? You would have us all living in
a cabin in the woods then?

HDT

In our hearts, Yes. In our spirits, Yes.

RWE

So we abandon progress. We abandon Art
and Science and Politics to hug trees instead?

HDT

Nonsense. I would remind men what the simple woods
mean to real life, what it means to live quietly and
away from the chaos of the cities.

RWE

I live in the city. So does your family.

HDT

And you have lost your sense of place in
nature. That is why they can not make sense
of this cabin or this pond ... or this journal.

Henry takes his beans and places them in a pot of water, placing the pot
over his fireplace to cook as he speaks

RWE

Compared to most people in this
world, you are indeed an oddity.

HDT

I beat my drum to those who ... drum to ...
different footsteps.

RWE

What?

HDT

My footsteps ... they are in rhythm to those
marching to their own drumbeat.

RWE

What on earth are you mumbling about.

HDT

What I am saying:
I walk to the beat of a different drummer.

RWE

Well, you certainly speak your own language.

HDT

Please hand me my journal. Quickly.

He writes in his notebook

I ... walk ... to ... the ... beat

RWE

Is this not the height of arrogance? To record your own words for the sole purpose of quoting yourself? I hate quotations.

HDT

Mr. Emerson. This is called *writing*. You have made a profession of this same arrogance.

RWE

This is all in the brazen assumption anyone anywhere would ever *dare* to quote Henry David Thoreau.

HDT

Again, you mock me.

RWE

I do nothing of the sort. But you are consumed with preserving your inanimate thought as though some kind of literary treasure. Your reams of pen to paper are a hard read at best. There is no structure. No poetry. No story. Just the gush of what you feel.

HDT

And isn't that exactly how we all Think?
You accuse my work of having no value

RWE

As regards the market place, yes I make such an accusation. How on earth will you live? Who will publish a book about walking in the woods when the woods surround us? Who, for that matter, will buy the damn thing?

Henry lays down his pencil and notebook.

RWE

Nothing.

You have written a book about ... *Nothing*.

HDT

Nothing, indeed. You offend me again, old friend. I am creating a pathway to our natural life for men trapped in the chaos of modern society. It's a map for our return to Nature. Do not maps have a purpose in the market place?

RWE

You build pathways where no roads are needed. Where is the logic? Why put yourself through this?

HDT

Again, you imply I am an oddity. I would be more odd to sit down to write when I have not stood up to live.

RWE

You are talking to your beans, Henry.

HDT

My beans!

He rushes to his cook pot to retrieve his cooking snap beans

Care for a bowl?

RWE

I'm famished. Please!

They bring the pot to the table and dish the beans into bowls.

RWE

Wooden bowls.

I assume you carved these yourself.

HDT
And the spoons.
From poplar and maple.

Emerson reaches into his basket of corn and pulls out a loaf of bread

RWE
Here. Fresh bread. From my wife.

HDT
Wonderful.

The two friends sit at the table, enjoying the meal of beans and bread.

RWE
Seriously, Henry. You need a girlfriend.
You are wound up tighter than my
grandfathers clock.

HDT
But ...

RWE
And I do NOT want to hear another
word about your woodpile!

Henry goes silent.

RWE
You and your woodpile ... You realize
I wasn't serious about hugging a tree ... I wouldn't
want to see you get overly attached.

HDT
Don't be absurd. Or insulting at my own table.

RWE

Are you devoid of a sense of humor? I read that a sign of success is to laugh often and much.

HDT

Now I am without success.

RWE

You are without a woman.

HDT

I enjoy my solitude.

RWE

Why not be alone with a soft attentive woman? You needn't marry the poor girl.

HDT

Solitude without morality is chaos. I aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something.

RWE

My dear, misguided friend. You DO realize it takes TWO people to be immoral.

As HDT grabs a notebook and again writes in it:

HDT

Now you accuse me of being immoral.

RWE

Of course not. But I would like to see you have ... you know ... the potential.

HDT

Alright. Alright. Do you want me to admit to my loneliness? I will. It is even agony at times. Is that what you wish to hear?

RWE

I just want what is best for my friend.

pauses

HDT

The nights are the longest, you know. So difficult. At night, I look beyond the stars hoping to find God behind them ... and I find no one. Each hour, every moment ... it is excruciatingly quiet. The silence thunders to the point of actual pain.

RWE

Then why? Why are you doing this to yourself? Why this cabin and this woods. This Pond for two years?

HDT

Two years and two months.

RWE

And one day. You have planted your feet here a long time. If travelling is a fools paradise you are indeed a wise man. Yet I am at such a loss. You speak with such conviction regarding choices that cause you so much pain.

I want to understand.

HDT

I don't know how to answer that. For a certainty I am pulled here. There is something calling me. Something in the soil. In the earth.

RWE

But, my brother, the world is full of soil and ponds and trees. You are consumed with a small raindrop in the midst of the floodwaters.

HDT

And every flood begins with that single raindrop. Just as every drought begins with a single ray of the morning sun. I see the coming drought. Because someday, so much of this abundance shall be gone ... and by our own doing.

RWE

How could that even be possible?

HDT

Can you not see? Can you not sense the loss?
With every rail, every road, every bucket of
mortar we lose more and more of what we are as
we search for what we will be. The horizon of
society is changing, old friend. What was once a
simple mountain and a sunrise is giving way to
factories and roof tops.

Can you not see it?

RWE

I see this: You cut a tree, another grows in its
place. You cut the field, the grass returns.

Is it not possible that you envision a battle
where there is no war?

HDT

I see a battle where there is no victory ... For
people. For nature. For commerce.

RWE

How utterly depressing and bleak. And on
such a lovely afternoon at Walden Pond.

A long pause

So, then. Man can build a coach but you fear
he has lost the will to use his feet. What do your beans
say about this impending industrial Armageddon?

HDT

Men are becoming tools of their tools.
You mock me yet again.

RWE

Then I apologise. I actually agree with you. That is
why I purchased these acres along Walden Pond. To
save them from the axemen.

I share your dream, young Henry.

HDT

Dreams. More like nightmares ... I do see a dream that invades my sleep almost every night.

RWE

Tell me it breathes and has cherry lips, whatever it is.

HDT

I see the woods.
I see this pond. But many years from now.

Emerson leans forward with interest

RWE

A dream of the future? Tell me.

HDT

People. A sea of people. They creep closer to the woods. Stripping the land. Destroying it. Ripping the solitude asunder. The noise is endless.

RWE

And then?

HDT

I see houses. I see factories. And I see roads. Closer and closer the noise of it all comes into these woods. I see them plowing the hillsides away and ripping these very woods apart.

RWE

And what? What happens?

HDT

The pond. These woods.
Suddenly *saved*.

RWE

Saved? How?

HDT
By the song of a great Eagle.

Pause

RWE
Have you gone mad?

HDT
Well. you asked and I told you.

RWE
You see the impending destruction of Walden Pond
saved at the hand of a singing Eagle ...
foretold by a man who speaks to his vegetables.

HDT
I should have known better.

RWE
All of a sudden it's making perfect sense.

There is a knock at the door. It is JOSHUA BARNETT, a thin, slight man with a beard, thinning hair and about 60 years old. He wears a frayed hat and work boots, overalls and a coat. He is a man of humble passion, an English accent, and a simple education.

HDT
Joshua, my friend.

The two shake hands.

JB
Evenin' Mr. Henry. I didn't realize you
had company.

HDT
This is my friend, Mr. Emerson.
Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Joshua and RWE greet each other with a hand shake.

RWE
Greetings to you, sir.

JB
Ahhh, the writer ... just like Mr. Henry

RWE (to Henry)
Not quite. I write books that people will eventually read.

JB
Oh, Mr. Henry is a fine writer, he is.
The whole world will one day read his book.
If he writes one, that is.

Henry, frustrated, moves to the fireplace, then toward the door.

HDT (annoyed)
I must tend to my fireplace.

HDT leaves the cabin. There is an uncomfortable pause between Joshua and Ralph. After a moment:

JB
He talks to his broccoli.

RWE
I'm fully aware

JB
I've heard him.
It's quite a conversation.

RWE

Mr. Joshua, do you live nearby?

JB

Beyond the woods. I have a home outside Concord.

RWE

Family?

JB

A lovely wife, I do. And three children.

RWE

And how did you come to know Henry.

JB

I work for his father. In the pencil shoppe. I stack the lumber for the lathe. Sweep the floors. Look after Henry. Whatever needs to be done.

RWE

It seems Henry needs a lot of looking after.

JB

Not really. He's quite self-sufficient.

pauses, making a point:

Mr. Henry needs a lady friend.

(whispers)

other than his woodpile, of course.

RWE laughs, picks up the journal and begins browsing through the pages.

JB

He writes in it all the time. Day and night, he does.

RWE

I would never admit it to his face,
but really, it is fascinating. He writes so
fluidly and prolifically about his love
for the earth and nature.

JB

He doesn't tolerate people all that much.
Oh, but loves his vegetation.

RWE (*reading*)

*"October is the month for painted leaves. We become
more pensive in the twilight of the year..."*

(flips some pages)

*"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams!
Live the life you've imagined. As you simplify your
life, the laws of the universe will be simpler."*

and another page

*"I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder
while I was hoeing in a garden, and I felt
more distinguished by that than by any
crown I could have worn."*

JB

Isn't that just lovely.

RWE

It is romantic, on many levels.

looks through more pages and reads:

*"Every man looks at his woodpile with affection.
I love to have mine before my window"*

pauses and sighs:

He really needs a girlfriend

JB

Or a good hobby, at the least.

HDT returns to the cabin with an armload of wood for the fireplace. JB helps stack the wood inside near the fireplace and starts a fire.

HDT

This should help me survive the evening.
You two getting acquainted?

RWE

Splendidly.

JB

We've been browsing through your journal.

RWE

Hope you don't mind, Henry.
You truly are a gifted writer.

HDT picks up the journal and notebooks, stacking them back on the table.

HDT

I suppose not. It's all simple notes.
Nothing is edited of course.

RWE

It reads well. Much better than I assumed.

JB

There. What a lovely fire.

RWE gets his coats and prepares to leave.

RWE

Mr. Joshua, I have enjoyed our visit.
Henry, I must be home to my wife.

HDT

Good of you to come by. Really.

RWE

As a friend, I do wish you well and you know I completely support you.

Places his hand on Henry's shoulder:

Just don't be disappointed if others who someday read you are unavailable to your intent.

HDT

My old friend, I appreciate your council.
But not even I am completely sure of my intent.

Joshua picks up a water bucket and axe. RWE and HDT gather at the door.

RWE

Well, it is evening. I must be off. A wife and supper awaits. Perhaps, after a few years at this cabin, you will miss the sound of another heartbeat.

JB

Perhaps my sister? She *loves* broccoli and such.
I can arrange an introduction.

HDT

I don't believe there is a woman alive that can tolerate or even attempt to understand this.

RWE

And no doubt it would be unfair to even ask.
So there it is, then. You are a man destined to live your life alone in these woods.

HDT

Not my life.
Not even a week more.

JB

Mr. Henry?

HDT

All of this talk of the relevance of my work. I never intended on living out my days here, anyway.

RWE

I detect a change in the wind.

HDT

I have decided it is time. I shall prepare to gather my things and leave this cabin.


pauses, repeats as though making sure he hears himself speak:

Tomorrow, I am leaving Walden Pond.

**STAGE TO BLACK
END ACT I**

Intermission Option: 15 minutes

Play music provided on MP3
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Walden
The Ballad of
Thoreau
Act Two



Master Edit - 2009 Act Two

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ACT II

BEGIN AUDIO TRACK: TWO LIGHTS UP

It is morning. HDT sleeps on his bed. We hear the sounds of sunrise, birds, the pond in the distance, a touch of an autumn breeze. On the table all of his journals are stacked high. His pencils. His flute. The simple cabin looks sparse and bare. He moves about and slowly sits up on his bed.

He rises, finally, and moves to the window, pushing the shutter open. The sound of morning rises in volume. He lingers at the sight, and then looks toward his journal.

Moving toward his fireplace, Henry pours water from the pot into a tea cup and stokes the coals in his fireplace. He moves back to his table making his tea and sits in front of his pile of notebooks. He opens one at random and reads OUT LOUD:

"All poets and heroes emit their music at sunrise. To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun. The day is perpetual morning."

He picks up his flute and THINKS OF PLAYING, LOOKS AROUND THE CABIN AND LAYS IT BACK DOWN. HE STARTS FOLDING HIS BED SHEETS. There is a knock at the door. It is Joshua:

JB
Good morning, Mr. Henry.

HDT (*somewhat annoyed*)
Joshua, drinking the wine at nature's morning table, I see.

JB

Sorry, Mr. Henry. I don't drink. Not this early.
Perhaps later at the pub.

HDT (*facetiously*)

Never mind.
So ... why the visit so early in the day?

JB

I love the way you play the flute

HDT

Music ... it the true gauge which measures the
current of our thoughts, the very undertow of our
life's stream. You cannot hear music and noise
at the same time.

Speaking of noise ... why are you here?

JB

You said you would be leaving the woods.
I'm here to help shutter the cabin.

HDT

So, then. You came to fetch the splendor of my life at
Walden Pond and carry me back to the city.

JB

Your father sends his regards. Work has been
busy at the pencil shoppe. I think he misses you.

HDT

I'm sure he misses my work.

JB

A father's pride and all. Haven't you missed your
family? Living all the way out here and alone?

HDT

At times. My days here are lived by the same tick of
the clock as anywhere else. I rise in the morning and
rest under the same sunset as any man ... or any king.

JB

I suppose it's what you do with the in-between
time that sets a man apart.
Or who you spend it with ... or not.

HDT

And yet I am no different, I share the same spirit.
I have the same connection to natural earth as
anyone else.

JB

For someone who prides himself on being the
same you certainly go out of your way to be different.

HDT

My contradiction to human nature is
my balance with human nature.

JB

Well, you're the only one I know
who speaks to broccoli.

There is a knocking at the door, firm and loud. It's a lovely young woman
named RACHEL STUERS who carries a mop and a pail.

JB

Miss Rachel, you've come.

HDT looks uncomfortable. He turns aside, fidgets with his hair and brushes
off his shirt.

RACHEL

I've come as asked by Mr. Thoreau.

HDT

My father sent you?

JB

Actually, it was my doing. I thought we could
help prepare your return to the city.

Joshua gathers the notebooks, journal, pencils and axe. Rachel picks up
the pillow, blanket and flute. The cabin is now essentially bare. They look at
Henry who picks up his tea cup and pot.

JB
There you go.
That was easy.

HDT
This is nonsense. Put my things back down,
I'm not ready to up and leave just yet anyway.

JB
What shall I tell your father?

HDT picks takes a notebook from Joshua's arms and:

HDT
I have more studying and thought.
I must use my time to consider more of
this Earth and these woods.

He takes his flute from Rachel:

Stay if you wish. I must ... be off for a walk.
It is pleasant to walk over the beds of these
fresh, crisp, and rustling leaves.
How beautifully they go to their graves!

Henry leaves the cabin. Rachel and Joshua watch the door close and then stand there. They look at each other and Joshua shrugs.

RACHEL
What a completely peculiar man.

JB
He is rather odd at times.

RACHEL
I've never met a man so thoroughly ... rude.

JB
Oh, Mr. Henry isn't rude. He's just a drummer
who beats a drum he doesn't have differently
than anyone else.

RACHEL
And what of this place ... This is his home?

JB
It is.

RACHEL
It is rudimentary and plain.

JB
Simple may be a word.

Rachel picks up the journal and reads a passage:

*“All intelligence awakes with the morning.
Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable
actions of all men come from such an hour.”*

That is lovely.

She turns a page and again reads:

*“We are for the most part more lonely when
among men than when we stay in our chambers.
A man thinking or working is always alone”*

Hmphh.

She turns more pages:

*“I love to be alone. I never found the companion
that was so companionable as solitude.”*

RACHEL
Such rubbish. And what of life? Of Family?
Is this man devoid of love?

JB
Only for people.
He loves trees and birds and such.

RACHEL
A man can not have a family by loving only trees.

JB
Oh, I wouldn't underestimate Mr. Henry.

RACHEL
And what of this???

She reads another page from the journal:

"I derive no pleasure from talking with a young woman simply because she has regular features."

Has his living alone in these woods made him go daft, or was he in such a state to begin with?

JB
Miss Rachel, he is actually a very kind man.
He has a deep heart, a deep spirit he does.

RACHEL
I'm not one to gossip. Nor do I listen to such nonsense, but I have heard your Mr. Thoreau refuses the company of suitors. *Women* suitors.

JB
Mr. Henry doesn't tolerate people of all persuasions.

Rachel walks to Emerson's box of corn and pulls out a handful of broccoli, which she gestures with to Joshua as she says:

RACHEL

What does this man of solitude do for
companionship, then? Who does this man
with such deep feelings express himself to?

Joshua reaches for the broccoli and takes the bunch from Rachel:

JB

Here now, Mr. Henry is very particular in
how his vegetables are handled.

There is a knock at the cabin door. It is RWE:

RWE

I've come to speak with Henry.

JB

He left, Mr. Emerson. He's off in the woods
with his flute and his notebook.

RWE

And who is this?

JB

Rachel Stuers. *Miss Rachel Stuers.*
From Mr. Thoreau's shoppe.

RWE

Do I dare ask if you are a friend of Henry's?

JB

Not yet.

RACHEL

We just met this morning and then he left.

RWE

You speak as though that disturbs you.

RACHEL

I came all the way into these woods to assist
and the man barely greeted me.

JB

He was just normal. Just being Henry.

RWE

Are you not under Mr. Thoreau's employ?
You have no valid complaint.

RWE takes a coin from his pocket and hands it to Rachel:

Here. For your mood.

RACHEL (*returns the coin*)

Excuse me, sir.
I do not sell my offense so easily.

Rachel storms out of the cabin, taking her bucket with her.

RWE

My goodness. Such spirit.

JB

She has a high priced mood. Obviously.

RWE

And what was Henry's reaction to
the young woman?

JB

He left.

RWE

Splendid. He *likes* her.

JB

That would make Miss Rachel the first breathing thing he has liked in years.

RWE

Perhaps so. I must speak to Henry.
Which direction did he go?

They walk to the cabin doorway:

JB

To the pond, I think. Follow the sound of the flute and the non-banging drum.

Joshua reenters the silent cabin. Looks around. Picks up the journal and reads aloud:

*“Do not think that you have companions:
know instead that you are alone in the world.”*

Poor Mr. Henry

Rachel returns with her pail full of water

JB

I thought you left for town.

RACHEL

I have a job to do. So I'll do exactly as instructed by my employer. I certainly don't need any man's coin to fulfill my obligation.

JB

Oh, he didn't mean anything by it. Really

Rachel dips her mop and begins to scrub angrily

RACHEL

Why do men assume their thoughts
transcend other people's feelings?

JB

A man works differently, my dear.
He executes his thoughts unencumbered by emotions.

RACHEL

And a woman will express her feelings freely.

JB

Often without thinking.

RACHEL

So I'm wrong for being angry?

JB

No. Being angry was your honest reaction.
You were only wrong for thinking you had reason too.

A loud commotion rises from outside the cabin.
HDT and RWE are arguing.

HDT (VO)

I completely disagree.

RWE (VO)

What do you honestly find disagreement with?

They enter the cabin:

HDT

And why do you put me to the test?
There is no way you can convince me
that the spread of cities does not matter.

RWE

Why object to progress as though it is a bad thing?

HDT

Progress without balance *IS* a bad thing.

RWE

But progress by its very nature causes imbalance.
To deny imbalance denies progress.

HDT

And only man struggles with this imbalance.
It is against nature. When a beaver bulds a damn, it
does not harm the stream. When a bird builds a nest,
it causes no injury to the forest.

RWE

Because birds and beavers “exist,” within the boundries
created for them ... they do not cause progress ... only
man has the intellect by nature to cause progress.

HDT

How can you possibly deny man’s destructive
role in nature ... his lack of love for this earth.
To leave it unchecked will eventually lead to the
destruction of man.

RWE

And how can you deny that destruction
is an essential part of creation?

HDT (*slams table top*)

Nonsense!

RACHEL (*to JB*)

Is this emotion or expressive male thought?

RWE (*calming*)

Look at your own life, Henry.

HDT

Me? I destroy *nothing*. And do not even
begin to imply the natural gleaning of
the earth as destruction.

Emerson picks up a notebook

RWE

Did you, or did you not, come to these woods and this pond to study the value of nature and your place in it.

HDT

I did.

RWE

And did you not destroy a small plot of these very woods to build this cabin so you could have a place to reside while in nature?

HDT

It is not the same.

RWE

It is exactly the same.

HDT

My cabin is not comparable to the spread of a city.

RWE

It is merely the first building.
There is no difference.

HDT

Read my work.
I document the difference clearly.

RWE

Your father cuts down the trees to make the pencils that you use to write about how much you love the trees.

HDT

Again, my redundant friend, it's part of the natural gleaning of the earth.

RWE

That is called *progress*. A few short years ago we wrote with charcoal and a quill pen ... and not a single oak would fall. Now we cut down trees to make pencils and employ your family ... *Progress*.

HDT
So I shall use the tools of progress to
expose the sin of progress.

RACHEL
Then you, sir, are a *hypocrite*.

The room falls abruptly silent

HDT (*insulted*)
I beg your pardon?

JB
Mr. Henry. She is expressing her emotions.
There are no thoughts involved.

HDT
That sounded very thoughtful to me.
Explain yourself.

RACHEL
You sir, are a *blind* hypocrite.

RWE
What a delightful woman.

RACHEL
You write so eloquently about the emotion
of your place in nature ... but you refuse to
express the emotions you need to understand
what nature is for.

Henry sits in his chair at the table.

You write of the value of nature when all the while
you disobey your natural needs, rendering your
place on earth as no value at all. It is as though
you were never here.

HDT
What?

RWE

Mr. Thoreau, I would like to introduce you to a living, breathing woman with a point of view.

JB

Don't be frightened, Mr. Henry.

HDT

You read my essay on *Civil Disobedience*.

RACHEL

I did. At your father's pencil shoppe.

HDT

And you read through my notebooks?

RACHEL

I have.

RWE

Good god. A customer.

(to Rachel)

And yet you conclude he is a hypocrite? When skating over thin ice, my dear, your safety is in your speed. I would quickly clarify your self.

RACHEL

You are a hypocrite. But not a fool.

HDT

Not a *fool*?

Am I to suddenly feel complimented?

RACHEL

I didn't find your hypocrisy without wisdom. Although you're blind to your role in destruction, you are not wrong about man's imbalance.

HDT *(to RWE)*

Well, there you have it. My life's work has been validated by my father's cleaning woman.

RWE

Maybe the idea of balance is not altogether inappropriate. Perhaps the idea of balance could bring perspective to this argument.

HDT

In what way?

JB

Maybe it means that man destroys a little as part of his nature ... he just shouldn't destroy too much.

RWE

Exactly. Well said.

HDT

And cities, therefore, are the "*too much*" that causes the imbalance.

Heated again:

RWE

Cities are part the natural progress of man, like an ocean wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. Again, natural. The greater the destruction, the greater the progress.

HDT

There is nothing natural about it.
Why do you equate destruction with progress?

RWE

(looking at broccoli in a dish)

Here

(hands the vegetable to Henry)

You garden these?

HDT

Yes.

RWE

You harvest them

HDT

Yes

RWE

You *destroy* them by pulling them.
You *destroy* them by cooking them.
Is not a farm nothing more than a small city?

HDT

A farm, in itself, does not decimate the land

RWE

No more so than a city.

HDT

Factories ...

RWE

Plows ...

HDT

Smoke stacks ...

RWE

(pointing to the cabin wall)
Fireplaces and chimneys ...

HDT

Garbage ...

RWE

Manure and left overs ...

HDT

Noise!

RWE

Children!

HDT

Confusion!

RWE

Marriage!

RACHEL *(offended)*

I *beg* your pardon?!!!

JB

Oh dear, I sense imbalance ...

RWE

That wasn't meant ...

RACHEL

That was meant exactly as spoken.
All this talk of imbalance as though it was
balanced men speaking.

HDT

Now we are not balanced?

RACHEL

Love for the earth without loving the life
this earth provides is unbalanced.

Silence in the room

... and it renders *you* irrelevant.

a long pause. Joshua, almost embarrassed

JB

Not bad for a cleaning woman

RACHEL

My employ does not alter my thoughts, sir.

HDT

And your thoughts do not alter my experience.

RACHEL

Your experience has been to isolate yourself in
a cabin so far from real life that you can only write
the reflection of what true life has to offer.

HDT

True life is no more reflected by society than your image on the waters of Walden Pond.

RACHEL

Are not the stars reflecting on the pond at night actually the stars?

HDT

You are so lost in the *image* of the stars you do not see society creeping up to take the pond away. Where are your stars, then? Where is your reflection of *real life* once the pond is gone? Your life is no more real than a dying fish left behind on the dry water bed.

RACHEL

At least the fish didn't die alone in a cabin talking to his vegetables.

pause

HDT (*to Rachel*)

Many go fishing all their lives without knowing it's not fish they're after. What exactly, madam, irritates you so about me?

RACHEL

Because. I can not for the life of me understand why you bothered to come to this cabin and write about a life you are not living.

HDT

To the contrary. I have found the essence of life in the simplicity of it.

RACHEL

You confuse isolation with simplicity.

HDT

And you, my dear woman, confuse isolation with simply not wanting to be with *you*.

Ouch ...

The room is uncomfortably silent.

JB

Well, the temperature in this cabin has certainly dropped on this autumn evening

Evening is coming. Let me light a candle ...

Joshua lights the candle on the table:

RACHEL

I apologise if my honesty left an inappropriate or dishonorable impression

Each one becomes more visibly calm and tender.

Henry turns to the fireplace and, after a moment of reflection, back to his friends:

HDT

I did not come to these woods just to squaller in my solitude as if it is some lonely crown. And I didn't want to waste two years and two months of a fleeting life in some empty fog with no purpose.

He picks up his journal:

... and I didn't come here just to write.

HDT

I came to these woods because I wished to live deliberately, to strip life down to the barest of essentials, and see if I couldn't learn what Life had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived at all.

He looks at all in the room

I came to Walden Pond to discover my life,
not abandon it.

after a pause

and only then to write about what I truly, passionately
believed. To write about what I truly lived. To write so
that people ... my friends ... would also live simply and
honestly.

RWE

My friend, the world is yet simple. Your cries of
simplicity fall on deaf ears.

HDT

Even so, the rumbling of the coming industrial storm
grows louder. The thunder of the coming change will not
be felt along the shores of Walden Pond alone. It will be
global. England, France, Germany and beyond. The
forests will be replaced by factories. The woods will be
plowed under and covered over by warehouses.

RWE

Perhaps the clouds beyond the distant lightning are
not clouds at all ... but oceans of smoke from the
cities.

JB

It's just hard to see when, you know, everything
around us looks just fine. The woods along Walden
Pond in September are so lovely, after all.

Looks out the window

I don't hear no thunder, I don't see no lightening
... and the only rumblin sounds are from my
tummy with no supper.

pause

RACHEL

I didn't mean to be rude or accuse.
But to speak honestly, as you say.

HDT

It takes two to speak truth - One to speak,
and another to listen. I have listened.

RACHEL

Then so shall I.

JB

And we are all friends here.

pause

JB (*with outstretched arms*)

Let's hug.

HDT

I don't need a hug,
I need relief from this incessant arguing.

RWE

It is not arguing, Henry. But a test of your
convictions. A test of your passions.

HDT

A test. And why?

RWE

Because to be *great* is to be *misunderstood*. And I
believe you have done a great thing. Of course I agree
with you. That is why I bought these acres of land
along Walden Pond. That is why I gladly offered this
spot in the woods to you. But do you believe this
yourself? Do you believe in your heart the value of
what you have done?

Hear me, my friend ... Once you leave this place,
everything you believe in will be ripped apart and
judged by men of smaller minds.

RACHEL

Or held in their highest esteem.

HDT

I don't need their approval.

RWE

Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone of lesser will to tell you that you are wrong.

RACHEL

Or fools that tempt you to believe your critics are right.

JB

And no one ever erected a statue in honor of a critic.

RWE

And I would argue your degree of greatness will be measured to the extent you are rejected

He places his hand on Henry's shoulder:

Remember: Socrates, Luther, Galileo ...
every pure and wise spirit that ever walked this earth
confused everyone around them.

HDT

So my hypocrisy has turned into confusion.
In turn my future and my work will be
understood by no one. And of my time in this cabin,
at this pond? Have I in fact wasted two years, two
months and two days of my life?

RWE

To be great is to be misunderstood. Hitch your
wagon to a star, my boy. What you write, what
you believe, the road your passions have travelled
will be understood ... someday.

HDT

Then you can see it? You can feel it, too?

RWE

I can. *Some* can. *Most* will not. The majority will ignore it in favour of their material comforts.

But if we pause for a moment. If we bend down on a humble knee and truly gaze upon the brilliance of the tiniest life in our hands, we can use what you have written as a magnifying glass to peer deep into the simplest of life's beauty.

I believe, in all my heart Henry, the world will one day recognize this of you.

HDT

But not now?

RWE

Not now, my friend. That's why I say "someday" ... your writing will have impact and purpose. Someday.

HDT

And if that "someday" arrives at a moment well beyond my lifetime, what of my words? What of my writing and journals?

Ralph picks up Henry's notebooks

RWE

Rest your words regarding your love and respect for this Earth in the care of those who love and respect you. Let your work rest in the protection of your friends who believe in you.

The two friends shake hands

RWE

The most striking part of any day is to encounter a mind that has startled us. What you have done, what you are writing, will startle many for generations to come.

HDT

Much is published but so little printed. An honest book is the noblest work of Man.

(to Rachel)

Unfortunately I am imprisoned by the narrowness of my experience.

So be it. It is done, then.

Joshua, Rachel and RWE pick up the few belongings in the house. All look around at the now empty cabin.

RWE

To my house, all.
For supper and celebration!

HDT

Here, leave me my flute and notebook. One last moment for reflection and I will follow.

RWE

My dear Henry.
In the end, always the last and always alone.

The three friends leave the cabin. Henry is alone inside the silence. He takes his flute and THINKS OF PLAYING ... LOOKS OUT THE WINDOW INSTEAD.

Ahhh, the beauty of the last hour of the day ...
I do believe this earth is the mother of all creatures.

He takes his notebook and turns a page and then reads aloud:

HDT

*“As surely as the sunset ...
shall translate me to the ethereal world,*

*As surely as the last strain of music which falls
on my ear shall make age be forgotten,*

*So surely my Friend shall forever be my Friend,
and reflect a ray of God to me”*

Henry walks to the door, looks around one last time, goes to blow out the candle and then decides to leave it burning, and finally, closing the door behind him, leaves the cabin forever.

LIGHTS COME DOWN

**BEGIN AUDIO TRACK: FIVE
or OFF STAGE ANNOUNCER:**

Henry David Thoreau left the beauty of the woods after spending two years, two months and two days of his life alone in his cabin at Walden Pond.

Eventually, his notes were published, but his book, “Walden” sold only a few copies.

Thoreau was buried 14 years later on a quiet, wooded hillside near Walden Pond. His friend and mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson took it upon himself to collect Henry’s writings and preserve the reputation of Thoreau and his mostly unread and unpublished works.

Today, Henry David Thoreau is the forefather of the global green movement and most quoted writer in American history.

Stage goes to black
THE END