

RECORD STORM SPREADS RUIN!

By

Aaron Henne

Devised By Son of Semele Ensemble

LA HISTORY PROJECT 2007/08

Aaron Henne  
1533 Silver Lake Blvd  
Los Angeles, CA 90026  
818-298-9227  
[wordstrut@hotmail.com](mailto:wordstrut@hotmail.com)

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### SURVIVORS:

The husband, OLIVER L. WHITMAN, 36 years of age was taking a bath when the avalanche overwhelmed his home.

Mexican Film Starlet DOLORES DEL RIO was forced to evacuate her swanky home.

NURSE MAE COLTRIN, 35, was swept into a deep ditch and her car was completely submerged.

OSCAR, the Academy Award. As a result of the flood, his ceremony was postponed for the first time.

### DECEASED:

The wife, RACHEL WHITMAN, 26 years of age and her son were buried under tons of boulder and earth.

W.E. STONE, 55, dropped dead of heart failure while attempting to push his stalled car out of a mud-hole near Colton.

When the bridge collapsed, an UNIDENTIFIED MAN was lifted into the air by a breaking timber and hurled into the water. His body has not been found.

### ABOVE IT ALL:

MAYOR FRANK SHAW was the first mayor of a major American City to be recalled. In the middle of disaster, he is on the radio, broadcasting to the city, live.

CLIFFORD CLINTON was the proprietor of Clifton's Cafeteria, whose motto is, "Pay only if delighted". Shaw's nemesis, he too broadcasts, repeatedly urging the city to turn to him, and against the mayor, for redemption. His hopeful message wins out.

### TIME

The months before.

THE LOS ANGELES FLOOD OF 1938.

The months after.

### PLACE

The City of Los Angeles.

Mayor Frank Shaw's office.

Clifton's Cafeteria.

The airwaves.

The streets, the homes, the sky.

Author's Notes:

While the script indicates that CLINTON appears floating without context other than a radio microphone, you could choose to have him appear in front of a fake redwood tree, serving soup and delectable treats to his "customers" - This activity could be different with each appearance.

The use of projections behind the action is also highly recommended. The actual photos from the storm are compelling, funny and heartbreaking. For example, when the survivors are floating in the tub towards salvation, you could choose to project a photo of the actual flood victims, umbrellas in hand, sailing in a makeshift boat down the Los Angeles River.

As for OSCAR, he should be the full life-size deal. Bald, golden, unable to move off his circular base.

THE CITIZENS are the characters (Survivors and Deceased alike) in the play. When a figure "enters", he or she is emerging from the citizenry.

The group actions are suggested. A production should feel free to use as much or as little as desired. Add in your own and/or substitute with actions you feel tell the story most effectively.

Portions of this text are comprised of quotes from newspaper records and archives of the time.

Much of Clifford Clinton's speech is taken from the recorded Voice-Over in the Little Chapel in Clifton's Cafeteria, Los Angeles, California.

This is a work of historical fiction.

The facts are true.

As to what happens behind closed doors when the rain is pouring down and the papers are flying and the city's needs are coming hard and fast...

RAIN

AT RISE:

A light drizzle.  
 SHAW, in a western vest, boots  
 with spurs and six shooters on his  
 hips, sits.  
 Desk sign: "Mayor Frank Shaw"  
 SHAW works.

Horns hang on the wall.  
 Lasso in the corner.  
 A cowhide rug.

Memorabilia and gifts. Thank You  
 Notes, staged handshaking photos  
 and Love Letters.  
 Commemorations and smiling  
 news clippings.  
 A life size OSCAR statue stands in  
 the corner - The inscription on  
 its base reads, "The Academy  
 thanks THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES"

In the shadows, trenchcoats and  
 fedoras hang on hooks, their  
 silhouettes dark harbingers of  
 that which is to come.

ALL CITIZENS appear.  
 Playing with their families.  
 Driving cars.  
 Having sex.  
 Walking in the beautiful city.  
 Filming a movie.  
 Laughing.  
 Living their Los Angeles lives.

A document crosses Shaw's desk.  
 Sign.  
 Another.  
 Sign.  
 And another.  
 An 1890's style telephone rings.  
 He answers.

SHAW

No.  
 No.  
 Yes.

SHAW  
(cont'd)

No.  
No.  
No No No No  
NOOOOOOOOOO!

Slams phone down.

The drizzle has become rain.  
ALL CITIZENS continue their  
activities, in spite of the water.  
Perhaps they use umbrellas.

A knock at the door.  
He walks to it with a pronounced  
limp.  
He opens.  
A flood of documents sends him to  
the floor.

The telephone rings.  
Shaw removes gun from  
holster.  
Ring.  
Shoots telephone.  
Door knock.  
Shoots door.  
THUD.  
Finger slips.  
Gun shoots into air.  
Hundreds of newspapers fall,  
burying him.

An old-fashioned radio microphone  
appears.

SHAW grabs it.  
Click. Amplified.

SHAW

Ahem.  
The sun is shining in Southern California...

Lightning.  
Thunder.

The rain grows.  
The rain roars.  
Power outage.  
Blackout.

Cracking.  
Destruction.  
Chaos.

Lights up.  
ALL CITIZENS appear, dripping wet.  
They are torn asunder.

SHAW

(amplified)  
And all is well.

CLIFFORD CLINTON, in a crisp suit  
and apron, appears floating,  
holding a serving utensil.  
He too speaks into a radio  
microphone, voice amplified.

CLINTON

Stand very still.

ALL CITIZENS look to him.

Blackout.

FLOOD

AT RISE:

The rain roars.  
 The sound of rushing water.  
 SHAW sits at desk.  
 The documents/papers are stacked  
 neatly.  
 The telephone has been repaired.  
 Old fashioned radio microphone.

ALL CITIZENS, each in their own  
 individual flood bound states,  
 surround the space. They are  
 silhouettes, their plights  
 glimpsed in shadow.

SHAW speaks, voice amplified.

SHAW

Good evening, fine citizens of the city of Los Angeles.  
 If you are hearing me, as most are,  
 You are not starving.  
 You are not begging.  
 You are not dying.  
 You are safe.  
 You are prosperous.  
 You are fat.  
 You are happy.  
 You are beautiful.  
 You are standing in the light.  
 My light.  
 So, you see,  
 no matter what happens  
 The sun  
     (hands out, speaking of himself)  
 is shining in Southern California  
 And all is well.

SHAW clicks off microphone.  
 Rolls a cigarette.  
 Lights it.  
 Smokes.  
 Picks up newspaper on pile.  
 HEADLINE:  
 "RECORD STORM SPREADS RUIN!"  
 Rain.  
 Lightning.  
 Thunder.  
 Screams.  
 SHAW stubs cigarette on his arm.

This moment lasts forever.  
 Winces.  
 ALL CITIZENS react to the pain.  
 Clicks on microphone. Amplified.

SHAW

Los Angeles, with respect to domestic trade and the commerce of the Orient, Mexico and South America, stands where New York City stood fifty years ago. We are destined to become one of the leading ports in the United States, shucks, in the entire democratically led glorious freedom seeking world. I do not expect to live to see this development, but I can, have and will continue to lay the groundwork insuring that all of your children can live without having to live without.

Clicks off microphone.  
 Sticks gun in mouth.  
 This moment lasts forever.  
 Pulls out wet gun.  
 Polishes it.

ALL CITIZENS breathe a sigh of relief.

SHAW returns gun to holster.

Rain.  
 Lightning.  
 Thunder.  
 A house collapsing.  
 A mother screaming.  
 A baby crying.

SHAW

(clicks on microphone)

Under my first administration, our CITY acquired Fifty-one million Four Hundred Seven Thousand, Forty Two Dollars and Seventy Three Cents worth of permanent

PER-MAN-NENT

public improvements without bonds or special assessments or any sacrifice from you, my fellow citizens, of any kind.

No sacrifice.

None.

Zilch.

Cerro.

Clicks off microphone.  
 He breathes out.  
 ALL CITIZENS breathe in.

Breathes in.  
 ALL CITIZENS breathe out.  
 Breathes out.  
 ALL CITIZENS breathe in.  
 The storm screams on.  
 Sirens.  
 A man bellows.

OLIVER

Nooooooooooooo!

SHAW

(click, amplified)

I fought and won.  
 For you.

As we crawled our way from the Depression's depths, buried under tons of debt and bills, I carried our case to the District, opened it, pulled out an old set of boxing gloves, slid them over these strong man hands and landed some good body blows, maybe even a knock on the chin or two. Well, old Uncle Sam didn't know what hit him. Next thing you see, this down in the dumps town has turned into a jumpin' juke joint jive City and you ain't even had to pay an extra cent out of your no longer lint filled pockets to make it happen.

(clicks off microphone)

Ain't you the lucky bastards.

Pours a shot of whiskey.

Beat.

Lifts bottle and pours it over his head.

ALL CITIZENS make drinking sounds.

Glug Glug Glug.

Click. Amplified.

SHAW

Lucky.  
 With your homes on hills and your automobiles on wheels.  
 That ain't luck. That's good planning.  
 That's me.

OLIVER

Nooooooooooooo!

SHAW

Me!

OLIVER

Nooooooooooooo!

SHAW

Me!

OLIVER

Nooooooooooooo!

SHAW

Meeeeeeee!

The screaming fills the stage.  
 ALL CITIZENS recoil.  
 OLIVER comes crashing into SHAW's  
 office.  
 He is in a bathtub.  
 His voice echoes, amplified.  
 ALL CITIZENS lean in, listening  
 intently.

OLIVER

The husband, Oliver L. Whitman, 36, was taking a bath when the flood  
 overwhelmed his home.

He stands up, naked and dripping.  
 Reaches out.  
 Screams silently.  
 SHAW stares at him and abruptly  
 clicks off microphone.

SHAW

Fella, I think you made a wrong turn.

OLIVER

No, I did everything right.

SHAW

I know how you feel.

OLIVER

Lye.

Reaches into water.  
 Grabs soap. Holds it high.

OLIVER

Burns my skin.  
 Never have to feel again.  
 I scrub.

OLIVER shuts his eyes and scrubs.

SHAW

You gots ta' git, stranger.

OLIVER

(sings)  
Don't know why  
There's no sun up in the sky  
Stormy Weather...

SHAW pulls gun from holster.

SHAW

You gots ta' git.

OLIVER

(sings)  
Since my gal and I ain't together  
Keeps raining all the time

SHAW cocks the gun.

OLIVER

(sings)  
Life is bare  
Gloom and misery everywhere  
Stormy weather

SHAW shoots the floor next to the  
tub. Water slowly streams in.

OLIVER

(sings)  
Stormy Weather...

SHAW shoots again.  
From this point on, the stage  
very slowly fills with water.

OLIVER

Get out of my house!

SHAW

You're in my house, palsey.

OLIVER

I'm not gonna say it twice.

You already did.

SHAW

OLIVER jumps out of the tub.  
Attacks SHAW.  
They fight,  
flipping over furniture,  
breaking lamps, etc...  
By the end, both are bloody and  
out of breath.

Nothin' like a good fight.

SHAW

OLIVER

(breathing heavy)  
Yeah.

OLIVER walks back toward the  
tub.

You givin' up?

SHAW

OLIVER keeps walking.

Wimp.  
(no response)  
Pansy ass.  
(no response)  
Oliver.

SHAW

OLIVER stops.

How do you know my name?

OLIVER

SHAW

That's my job.  
To know every corner of this city, like it's my own,  
'cause it is.  
To know every happy pappy getting' off on getting' off  
and every poor sop who don't know where to find his.

SHAW  
(cont'd)

I see you all  
(into microphone, amplified)  
I SEE YOU ALL.  
(clicks off)  
and do what I can.

OLIVER

I don't need nothin', mister.  
Nothin'.  
(beat)  
Dog tired.  
Weary.  
Pooped.  
Caput.  
The end of the Road.  
(beat)  
I dragged into my home  
Our home  
My home, I goddamn paid for it  
And went straight to the back  
Rachel looks over  
Pleading eyes.  
My son looks  
up.  
Pleading eyes.  
I'm too tired.  
Tired from paying for this goddamn house.  
The Bath was drawn  
She must have heard me pulling into the drive.  
That was sweet.  
I'll thank her later.  
(beat)  
Besides, it's her job.  
We have an agreement.  
A contract.  
I pull off  
my shoes  
sole is worn out  
I pull down my socks.  
Shit, there's a hole  
Maybe she'll mend it.  
Maybe my wife can mend my sock.  
My pants.  
Dirty on the seat.  
Maybe my wife will clean.

OLIVER  
(cont'd)

My shirt.  
The bottom button is broken.  
Maybe my wife will fix it.  
I slide in.  
The water is warm.  
I'll thank her later.  
Later.  
    (beat)  
Later.

Suddenly, without any ability to  
stop it, A HEADLINE bursts from  
his mouth.

OLIVER  
He was found still in the tub, several hundred yards down the canyon.

Stands, hands outstretched  
reaching for them.  
The silent scream.

SHAW  
    (claps him hard on the back)  
Buck up!

OLIVER grabs microphone from SHAW.  
Clicks it on.  
He is amplified.

OLIVER  
I am not in a steam filled familiar room.

SHAW  
That's mine!

SHAW tries to grab microphone.  
OLIVER has a tight grip.

OLIVER  
I am not sitting with the radio turned low and the candles high.

SHAW  
Not yours.

Grab.  
No dice.

OLIVER  
I am not bathing.

Not ours.

SHAW

Grab.  
No dice.

I am not.

OLIVER

Miiiiiiinnnee!

SHAW

SHAW shakes OLIVER.

OLIVER

I am going where the rubber meets the road to meet my doom.

SHAW shakes him harder.  
ALL CITIZENS shake.

OLIVER

To meet my end.

SHAW hits OLIVER in the arm.  
ALL CITIZENS grab their arms.

OLIVER

To meet my family's end.

SHAW punches OLIVER in the face.  
ALL CITIZENS' necks snap.

OLIVER

My family has ended.

SHAW kicks OLIVER in the stomach.  
ALL CITIZENS double over.

OLIVER

He was taken to Valley Hospital Van Nuys for treatment.  
While there, he identified the bodies of his wife and child.

SHAW

Aw Geez, I hate to see a mister get all misty.  
--Who the heck paid for your house?

Pause.

OLIVER

I did?

SHAW

Who the hell didn't get a moment's rest?

OLIVER

I didn't.

SHAW

Who the good goddamn just wanted a little peace after havin' to hear yap yap yap all day?

OLIVER

Me.

SHAW

Who deserves a moment, fucking cunt fuck, how about an hour, in warm water when the cold hard stares and the fake smiles from that big streetcar world got you down?

OLIVER

Me!

SHAW

Who gives and gives and gives and puts his soul in danger of damnation, his heart in danger of bursting, and his whole body in guarantee of becoming one big cancerous tumor eating him from the outside in and vicey versey?

Long pause.

OLIVER

(back into microphone - amplified)

Thank you for drawing my bath.

Thank you for making it warm.

Thank you for adding the salt.

SHAW tries to pull the cord from the wall. Struggling.

ALL CITIZENS lean, as though being pulled.

OLIVER

(cont'd)

Thank you for giving up.

Thank you for giving in.

Thank you for giving me a son.

Thank you for giving me.

Thank you for forgiving.

Pull.  
 No dice.  
 ALL CITIZENS lean.

OLIVER

I was too busy.

SHAW reaches, not letting go of  
 cord, to his desk.

OLIVER

Too tired.

Grabs letter opener.

OLIVER

Too scared.

Cutting cord.

OLIVER

Scared of losing.

Nope.

OLIVER

I was two.

Chewing through cord.

OLIVER

And now I am none.

SHAW shoots OLIVER.  
 ALL CITIZENS crash.  
 Microphone crashes to the ground.  
 He walks to tub and holds OLIVER  
 under water, legs flailing and  
 kicking.  
 ALL CITIZENS flail and kick.  
 OLIVER goes limp.  
 ALL CITIZENS go limp.  
 SHAW dunks his own head in tub.  
 Minutes pass.  
 He emerges, gasping for air.

SHAW

(into microphone, amplified)  
 All is well.