THE MADDENING FILTH

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INT. BUDAPEST ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE - DAY

TITLE CARD: 1865. BUDAPEST.

An ORDERLY wheels a young female MENTAL PATIENT, head shaved and body bruised, down the hallway on a gurney. The young patient is full-term pregnant. Screams with labor pains.

MENTAL PATIENT
No! Please! Not in there! Not in there!

She scratches her nails in resistance against the side of the wall as she passes.

MENTAL PATIENT (CONT’D)
No!

IGNAZ SEMMELWEIS, 47, a fellow mental patient with a shaved head and dressed in rags, winces at the sight of her passing by him.

He gets up from his rocking chair and follows the gurney into an “operating room” consisting of a blood-stained table.

An ASYLUM DOCTOR stands waiting impatiently, as the woman is wheeled in. His hands are stained as is his white coat with blood and pus.

The orderly and doctor throw the screaming, struggling patient on top of the filthy table.

She tries to fight them off. Tries to get up. The doctor holds her down and the orderly violently locks her in restraints.

She screams in agony and frustration. She struggles against the restraints.

Semmelweis shudders at the screams. He hovers, unseen, just over the shoulders of the doctor and orderly. Wipes his hands on his ragged hospital gown.

He eyes the greenish gold pus encrusted, rusted instruments on the side table next to the operating table. Wipes his hands again. Sweats.

DOCTOR
Okay, miss. Calm down. Just let me see how-

SEMMELWEIS
E-e-e-e-excuse me, Doctor.
ORDERLY
Be good now, miss. That baby will be coming whether you want it to or not.

SEMMELWEIS
D-d-d-doctor. You need to- chloride solution. Chlorina Liquida. Anything to kill the germs.

ORDERLY
(To Semmelweis)
You’re not supposed to be in here.

SEMMELWEIS
B-b-b-before you- They must be clean. They must be clean. Don’t- the germs-

The doctor reaches for the rusty, crusty instruments.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
NO!

Semmelweis pounces on the doctor.

DOCTOR
Someone get him out of here!

Semmelweis tries to wrestle the instruments out of his hands.

SEMMELWEIS
They must be clean! You’re killing-

The doctor rips the instruments from Semmelweis’ grip. Semmelweis staggers back, holding up his bleeding hand.

Two other orderlies come in. They drag him out.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
No! I’m a doctor! I am a doctor!
Let me-

They drag him, he tries to fight them.

Drags his hand across the wall in the struggle. The wall is smeared with blood.

INT. VIENNA LYING-IN WARD HALLWAY- DAY

TITLE CARD: 1845. VIENNA.
A TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN is being wheeled in by nurses in a wheelchair.

   TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN
   No! Please.

She screams in labor pain.

   TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN (CONT’D)
   Not the lying-in. Please not the lying-in.

Nurse pats her on the shoulder.

   NURSE
   You want to deliver in the hallway like a streetwalker?

   TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN
   No. Please! I don’t wanna die. Please...

   NURSE
   Oh stop. It’s perfectly safe.

Semmelweis, a younger version of the elderly mental patient, wearing a white coat, watches the patient being wheeled by him.

He trails the screaming patient.

The patient gets up from the wheelchair. Attempts to run in the other direction, and runs straight into Semmelweis. He grabs her. The nurse grabs her other arm.

   TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN
   Please. The midwives. Take me to the midwives. I’ll do anything.

Semmelweis and the nurse drag the teenage girl down the remainder of the hallway.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

Medical students file into the room.

The teenage pregnant woman lies on a bed. One of the nurses dabs her forehead with a cloth.

She screams out in labor pains.

The obstetrics attending, DR. KLEIN, enters the room. He is in his fifties, extremely short, with a large white mustache.
KLEIN
Well now. What have we here?

The teenage mother screams in agony.

TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN
Get me out of here. Get me out. Get me out. Get me out!

NURSE
Calm down now, Miss.

KLEIN
Rest assured, miss. All will be well in no time.

TEENAGE PREGNANT WOMAN
Please let me go to the midwives. I can’t stay here. I can’t-

She screams. She tries to get up to leave, but Dr. Klein and two of the medical students force her back into the bed.

KLEIN
Lie down. Now.

NURSE
There we go.

The nurse restrains her.

KLEIN
Now. Is she dilated?

NURSE
Yes, Doctor.

KLEIN
Come closer, gentlemen. You will notice that this is the exact same technique we practiced earlier this morning...

The gaggle of medical students crowd closer to the woman’s open legs.

INT. THE MORGUE - MORNING

48 hours later.

That same patient lies dead on the a slab in the morgue.
Dr. Klein and the same group of medical students are crowded around the corpse.

Some of the students hold handkerchiefs to their faces.

Klein holds a scalpel.

KLEIN
Now watch closely when we open up the abdomen...

Klein makes an incision vertically from the belly button downward.

The students groan. They hold their noses.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
You will get used to the smell. But do notice it’s specific smell. It is fairly unique, and consistent with the pathology.

One student vomits. Another medical student passes out.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
So the cause of death in this case is puerperal fever. It’s an epidemic that has ravaged the hospital for a while now. Quite commonplace among the medical institutions throughout Europe.

Semmelweis frowns.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Something the matter, Dr. Semmelweis?

Semmelweis shrugs.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Gentlemen, this is Dr. Semmelweis. He is my Chief resident. He’s a brilliant young man. You can go to him with any additional questions.

SEMMELWEIS
I have one, Dr. Klein.

KLEIN
Do you now?
SEMMELWEIS
I’m unclear as to how this “epidemic” as you put it-

KLEIN
It is an epidemic.

SEMMELWEIS
Fine. How does this epidemic get transmitted from patient to patient?

KLEIN
There are many theories-

SEMMELWEIS
Such as?

KLEIN
(To the students)
This will not be on your examination. But this shows you, or at least it should, the importance of post-mortem dissection. Think of a corpse as a treasure trove of enlightenment.

The medical students, most looking green, nod in agreement.

Klein goes back to the corpse.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Now-

SEMMELWEIS
Dr. Klein, you never answered my question.

KLEIN
Dr. Semmelweis, if you’re so fascinated with the subject, why don’t you do some work and try to find out for yourself? Instead of wasting my time looking for answers that don’t exist.

SEMMELWEIS
Perhaps I will.

KLEIN
Good.

Klein turns back to the corpse. He spreads her tissue further apart.
The students groan and choke on the stench.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

The morgue is empty, except for Semmelweis.

Another young mother lies on a slab in the empty morgue. She is naked. Her face drained of color. Her swollen abdomen is cut open.

Dr. Semmelweis stands over her. He takes the clamp in his hand and spreads the tissue open even further. He holds the candle closer to the dead woman’s abdomen.

The abdomen has a putrid, shaggy lining to it. There is a sac-like structure in the exposed cavity.

He punctures the sac with a scalpel. Thick, green/yellow pus seeps out of it. It’s tinged with blood.

He goes to his ledger. Writes “Abscesses formed.”

He returns to the body. He spreads her legs apart. Holds a handkerchief to his nose. Grimaces. Examines her genitalia. Shakes his head. Closes her legs.

He goes back to the ledger. Writes: “Infection throughout her” He stops. Crosses out the word “her.” Stares for a few moments. Looks back at the body. Stares. Writes “the patient.”

He pushes back from the ledger. Sighs. Wipes his brow. Exhales deeply.

He carries a lamp over to her face. He leans over her. Examines her lips.

HER EYES BOLT OPEN.

Dr. Semmelweis gasps as he picks his head off of his desk from his sleep. Panics in the completely dark room. He lights a match and lights the candle. There are beads of sweat on his brow.

He walks over to the young woman. Her eyes are closed. Leans in. Still closed.

He looks down the row of tables, all filled with corpses of young dead mothers.

SEMMELWEIS

Christ.
INT. MIDWIFE CLINIC - DAY

Semmelweis steps through the glass door entrance of the hospital’s midwife clinic.

There are nurses and female midwifery students everywhere. Some giggle at the sight of Semmelweis. A wrinkled HEAD MIDWIFE approaches him.

HEAD MIDWIFE
Are you lost, Doctor?

SEMMELWEIS
No. I-uh-um- I-

HEAD MIDWIFE
Yes?

SEMMELWEIS
Oh. (Beat) May I ask a question? How- how-

HEAD MIDWIFE
Spit it out if you please, doctor. We’re a busy lot. We’ve got every bed with mothers just about to burst.

SEMMELWEIS
What’s the mortality rate of mothers from puerperal fever in this clinic?

HEAD MIDWIFE
Low.

SEMMELWEIS
How low is low exactly?

She pauses for a moment.

HEAD MIDWIFE
Uh... Twelve.

SEMMELWEIS
Percent?

HEAD MIDWIFE
Patients.

Semmelweis’ jaw drops.
SEMMELWEIS
That’s the number of dead over the past year?!?

HEAD MIDWIFE
No.

SEMMELWEIS
(Relieved)
Oh... That wouldn’t have made sense-

HEAD MIDWIFE
Over the last two years.

SEMMELWEIS
WHAT? Wow. Wow!

HEAD MIDWIFE
Glad to help. Now if you don’t mind...

She begins to walk down the hall.

SEMMELWEIS
Can I follow you?

She turns.

HEAD MIDWIFE
Beg your pardon?

SEMMELWEIS
Just for rounds. To get a firm grasp of what your procedures are.

HEAD MIDWIFE
As long as that’s the only thing your grasping.

The midwifery students giggle. Semmelweis squints in confusion.

SEMMELWEIS
Huh?

HEAD MIDWIFE
Never you mind. Come along.

INT. MIDWIFE EXAMINATION ROOM—DAY

Semmelweis tiptoes behind a pack of midwives in training with a very large ledger.
The women giggle at his presence. His face reddens.

He observes the midwifery students delivering women on their sides.

He makes a note in his ledger. It’s titled: “Midwife Technique Checklist.”

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - NIGHT

Semmelweis opens the windows in the delivery rooms by a couple of inches.

He goes to his notepad. Crosses “Increased Ventilation” off of his checklist.

Smiles.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - DAY

Semmelweis wheels a mother back to the recovery room.

Two interns pass by him. They snicker to each other.

INTERN 1
There goes the Nurse.

The other doctor laughs.

Semmelweis ignores them and continues on his way.

He stops for a moment, checks off “Wheeling Patients Back” on his checklist.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

Semmelweis walks up and down the row of slabs. They are all filled with bodies.

He has his checklist from the previous scene. Examines it.

Looks at the row of bodies.

He tears up the checklist. Walks out.

INT. KLEIN’S OFFICE - NIGHT

Klein sits at his desk. He pours himself a glass of whiskey.

Semmelweis knocks softly. Pops his head in the doorway.
SEMMELWEIS
You wanted to see me?

KLEIN
Sit.

Semmelweis sits.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
We have a problem.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh?

KLEIN
I’ve heard some disturbing reports.

SEMMELWEIS
Yes, four more patients have died in the clinic. Within hours of each other.

KLEIN
I don’t care about that.

Semmelweis raises an eyebrow.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
I mean, I care about that, but that is not what we are discussing today. Well, it is in relation to that I suppose.

SEMMELWEIS
Yes?

KLEIN
These... unorthodox practices you have been implementing over the past couple of weeks...

SEMMELWEIS
You mean the ones used on the other side of this hospital by the midwife clinic?

KLEIN
Yes. Those are not department sanctioned.

SEMMELWEIS
But the midwives are allowed to use them.
KLEIN
Doctor Semmelweis, we make it a point to practice the most advanced techniques in medicine. We’re not frivolous women-

SEMMELWEIS
Who deliver roughly the same amount of children as we do in a given year.

KLEIN
However, we do not kow to ancient superstitions like putting a knife under a pillow to cut the patient’s pain.

SEMMELWEIS
I’ve never seen any of the midwives do anything of the sort.

KLEIN
Regardless, you cannot bring those techniques into this ward. After all, we are a teaching institution.

SEMMELWEIS
I know that.

KLEIN
Then you should know that this institution is filled with impressionable medical students, and we do not want to promote contradicting protocols to them. Do you understand what I’m saying?

SEMMELWEIS
Yes, Doctor.

KLEIN
How would that look?

SEMMELWEIS
You’re right, Dr. Klein. It would reflect poorly on you.

KLEIN
And of course, it could pose a risk on the safety of our patients.

SEMMELWEIS
Yes, Dr. Klein. I can tell that is very important to you.

(MORE)
SEMMELEWIS (CONT'D)
(Beat) Now if you'll excuse me, I have work to do.

Semmelweis exits.

Klein returns to his whiskey.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

JAKOB, a fellow gangly resident, walks briskly down the hallway. He passes an attractive nurse walking in the opposite direction.

They smile at each other. He turns around to see her behind.

He still looks behind him as he bumps straight into Semmelweis.

Semmelweis falls backwards. He steadies himself against the wall of the hallway, next to Klein’s office.

   JAKOB
   Ignaz!

   SEMMELEWIS
   Hello, Jakob.

   JAKOB
   What happened?

Semmelweis sighs.

   SEMMELEWIS
   It’s stupid.

   JAKOB
   Get another hiding from Klein?

Semmelweis shrugs his shoulders.

   SEMMELEWIS
   He’s being unreasonable. Protocols. What good are protocols if they’re killing people?

   JAKOB
   He runs the ward. They are as good as he sees fit. (Beat) Why not let him have it his way for now? Until retires. Or dies...

   SEMMELEWIS
   It’ll be too late.
JAKOB
You’re too dark, Ignaz.

SEMMELWEIS
Dark or not. I need figure out how to fix this. (Beat) I should go.

He starts to leave.

JAKOB
Where are you going?

SEMMELWEIS
The morgue.

JAKOB
Not tonight you’re not. Tonight, you’re coming with me. I’m not taking no as an answer.

Jakob playfully shoves Semmelweis. Semmelweis smiles.

JAKOB (CONT’D)
Come on.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

A seedy, smoke-filled tavern.

Jakob and Semmelweis enter. They peer down the rows of tables.

Jakob eyes two empty seats on the far left side of the tavern.

He darts through the inebriated crowd, and quickly claims the seats.

Semmelweis looks over the crowd for his friend. Nervous.

Jakob beckons Semmelweis over to the seat next to him.

Semmelweis breathes a sigh of relief and makes his way over, careful not to bump into any other patrons.

SEMMELWEIS
This is... earthy.

Semmelweis dusts off his seat with a handkerchief.
JAKOB
For someone who spends a majority of their time in the morgue, you are quite squeamish.

SEMMELWEIS
Actually, I don’t spend all my time there.

JAKOB
You know, if you don’t spend more time with the living, you’ll start to go mad.

SEMMELWEIS
Is that your professional diagnosis, Jakob?

A TAVERN WENCH walks by. All cleavage. She smiles at them.

Semmelweis follows her with his eyes. Jakob notices.

JAKOB
(Calls out to her)
Excuse me, miss! Two pints, please.

She smiles and nods.

Jakob smirks at Semmelweis. He gets up from the table.

SEMMELWEIS
Where are you-

Jakob follows the wench over to the bar.

He whispers into her ear. She looks back over at Semmelweis and nods.

Jakob puts a few coins in her hand. He takes the beers from her.

He walks back over. Hands a beer to Semmelweis.

JAKOB
Here we are.

SEMMELWEIS
Thank you. Damned nice of you.

JAKOB
Of course. When people get to know you better, they tend to find out that you’re a damned good doctor, maybe even a decent man.
SEMMELWEIS
Tell that to the rest of the hospital.

JAKOB
They’ll figure it out.

Jakob raises his pint. Semmelweis raises his.

JAKOB (CONT’D)
To living.

SEMMELWEIS
To living.

They clink glasses.

JAKOB
I got you a little present.

The tavern wench comes over. Smiles at him.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh? I- uh...

Jakob slaps him on the back.

JAKOB
Live a little.

Semmelweis gulps.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ OFFICE - NIGHT
The office is completely empty and dark.
A key turns in the lock.
Klein enters. He holds a candle. He looks around.
He lights the lamp on Semmelweis’ desk.
He examines the papers on Semmelweis’ desk.

KLEIN
(To himself)
What in God’s name is he up to?

He pulls out a sheet of paper from the pile on Semmelweis’ desk.
KLEIN (CONT’D)
(Reading)
The same number of deliveries took place in each of the hospitals 2 obstetrical divisions. The deliveries in the division lead by doctors resulted in 600-800 deaths in a given year. In the Midwife Clinic, there were far less.

Klein pulls up a letter.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
(Reading)
My darling husband Ignaz, I have not heard from you for several months. How have I- (Stops Reading) Oh for God’s sake!

Klein tears the letter up, and puts it in the bin. He pulls another sheet off of the desk.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
(Reading)
No such evidence of an epidemic of childbed fever occurred outside the walls of the hospital. Furthermore, decades of hospital statistics indicate that puerperal fever was not evidenced by the weather, as most epidemics often are.

Klein finds the ledger labeled HOSPITAL MORTALITY STATISTICS. He goes through a couple of pages.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
How did he get a hold of these, the fool?

He takes the ledger. Blows out the lamp.

INT. UPSTAIRS TAVERN ROOM – NIGHT
The tavern wench leads him into a sparse, mostly dark room.
She pushes Semmelweis into a chair.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh. Okay...

TAVERN WENCH
Your friend tells me you’re doctor...
She straddles him in the chair. He squirms. Nervous.

SEMMELWEIS
Uh. I am. Yes, you know- I’m- I’m not sure if he told you that I’m married-

She kisses him.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
And if that’s something you’re not-

She kisses him again. He starts to kiss her back.

TAVERN WENCH
So, Doctor, I need your expert medical opinion.

She begins to remove her clothes. She unbuckles his belt. Reaches into his pants. He gasps.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh?

She unbuttons her dress. She removes her corset, exposing her breasts.

TAVERN WENCH
Anything wrong with them?

She places his hands on her breasts. With her encouragement, he starts to massage them.

SEMMELWEIS
No... uh... They’re... they’re very nice.

He kisses her.

She starts grinding her hips against him. He closes his eyes tight. He moans softly. As her movements quicken, his moaning grows louder.

He opens his eyes to see her abdomen cut open- all of its contents covered in pus.

He screams and throws her off of him.

TAVERN WENCH
What? What?

He looks again. Her abdomen is intact.
SEMMELWEIS
I-I-I I’m so terribly sorry.

Sweat runs down his forehead.

TAVERN WENCH
What? What is it?

He buttons up his pants.

SEMMELWEIS
I-I-I- I have to go.

He runs out of the room.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Semmelweis sits at a long table in the library. Every inch of the table is stacked with books.

He opens one book. Skims it. Shakes his head. Closes it. Drops it on the floor. He does this several more times.

He opens another one. Skims it.

SEMMELWEIS
(To himself)
Greater degrees of trauma during delivery appear to increase the likelihood that the mother would develop puerperal fever.


He takes out his ledger and begins to write notes. They read: “Direct contact between individuals exposed to puerperal fever could be a cause?”

He rubs his eyes. Yawns.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Oh to hell with it.

He closes the ledger. Gets up from the table.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - DAY

He sits by the bedside of MARTA, a patient. She sweats and her teeth chatter. Her whole body shakes. Her skin is pale. Black colored blood seeps through the sheets covering the lower half of her body.
Semmelweis sits in a chair at her bedside. He holds her hand.

MARTA
Will I die?

He pats her hand.

SEMMELWEIS
I can’t answer that.

Tears form in her eyes.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
(Softly)
Don’t cry. Don’t cry, Marta. (Beat)
Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?

She shakes her head. Tears stream down her face.

Semmelweis wipes them away with his handkerchief.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Close your eyes. Try to rest.

She nods. Yawns. Closes her eyes.

He lets go of her hand. Semmelweis puts his head in his hands. Inhales sharply. Exhales.

He pulls out his ledger from under his chair. He makes notes.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

Semmelweis performs an autopsy on Marta. Her inner-thighs are swollen, and bruised—like they’ve been beaten with a club.

He looks up at her face. Shakes his head.

As he examines her genitalia, he grimaces at its swollen and reddish condition. He grabs a speculum. He is unable to insert it.

He slams his instruments down. He looks upward.

SEMMELWEIS
Why another one? Why?

He takes a deep breath and returns to his work.
INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - NIGHT

Notes on notes on notes accumulate on the floor of his room. He sits on the floor. He neatly organizes them into piles. He stops to read one of the papers.

Jakob knocks then quickly walks through the door.

JAKOB
Whew! Thank God! I thought I was disturbing you with a woman.

SEMMELWEIS
(Not listening)
Uh huh. Of course.

JAKOB
Feel like grabbing another pint with me? Or are you too busy?

SEMMELWEIS
(Distracted)
Uh huh.

Jakob waves his hand to get Semmelweis’s attention.

JAKOB
Well, I suppose this is progress. Your papers stink far less than your patients.

When there is no response, he knocks a pile of books off of Semmelweis’ dresser. Semmelweis looks up.

SEMMELWEIS
That’s not funny, Jakob.

JAKOB
Oh stop! You’re too serious, Ignaz.

SEMMELWEIS
They’re dying, Jakob. All those women.

JAKOB
I know.

SEMMELWEIS
So? Doesn’t that make you sick?

JAKOB
It upsets me, but I don’t let it get to me.
SEMMELWEIS
Well, perhaps you should. Maybe it would make you a better doctor.

JAKOB
Ignaz, there’s nothing to be done about it.

SEMMELWEIS
Why not?

JAKOB
Because that’s the way it is, my friend. That is the science. End of story. I wish there was a way-

SEMMELWEIS
I know there is. And I’m going to find it.

JAKOB
Be careful.

SEMMELWEIS
Careful. Of what?

JAKOB
If you do find something-

SEMMELWEIS
When.

JAKOB
Fine. When you share your findings, be careful. People—people have a hard time accepting new theories. Look at what happened to Galileo.

Semmelweis snorts laughter.

SEMMELWEIS
Are you trying to scare me off?

JAKOB
I’m trying to be your friend. There are consequences. If you do find something, don’t—just make sure you’re sure. Okay? I would want you to ruin your—

SEMMELWEIS
I should really get back to this.
JAKOB

Fine.

He leaves.

Semmelweis returns to organizing his papers.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - DAY

Klein walks through the clinic with a group of medical students behind him, each carrying notepads and pencils. SKODA, another young and rather good-looking resident, trails behind making notes as he walks.

KLEIN

So we have had 18 deaths over the last two months. The majority of them can be attributed to...

MEDICAL STUDENT #1

Puerperal Fever?

KLEIN

Good. And that is?

MEDICAL STUDENT #2

An epidemic.

KLEIN

Yes. This is the most likely theory. And certainly this is the cause of the death in some of our poor patients.

Klein and the medical students hover over a sweaty, sallow patient.

Semmelweis walks through. Spots Skoda standing along the back wall.

He walks over to Skoda. Puts his back up against the wall. Folds his arms.

SEMMELWEIS

(Quietly)
Do you get some sick pleasure from hearing our Fearless Ruler pontificate?

He gestures to Klein.
KLEIN
Now, one of the theories as to the causes of puerperal fever is? Anyone?

The students exchange glances in silence. None of the students respond.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
One is the suppression of free discharge of the lochia. Which is...

MEDICAL STUDENT #2
Fluid from the uterus that is released after delivery.

KLEIN
Good. Very good.

Medical Student #2 beams.

Semmelweis rolls his eyes.

SEMMELEWEIS
Seriously, what are you doing recording this drivel?

SKODA
It’s for Klein.

Semmelweis scoffs.

SKODA (CONT’D)
Well, I need to get on his good side somehow. This should help. And it wouldn’t hurt if you did the same.

SEMMELEWEIS
God. You’re such a lapdog...

SKODA
Thank you, my friend. You should try it some time. That would mean being more friendly than-

SEMMELEWEIS
I am friendly.

Skoda shoots him a look.
SEMMELWEIS (CONT'D)
Fine. (Beat) Just trying to stay objective that’s all. (Beat)
Okay... Maybe I’m just a little reclusive-

SKODA
And hell is just a bath house...

KLEIN
Another has to do with impurities in the blood accumulated over the 9 months of gestation. This causes the uterus to be enlarged and putting pressure on the intestines. This phenomenon causes stasis of fecal matter, and its poisons are absorbed into the veins-

SEMMELWEIS
Oh God...

SKODA
And just like God he holds our fates in his hand.

KLEIN
Now some other theories bandied about are more external factors. (Beat) Can anyone think of any?

MEDICAL STUDENT #2
Diet?

KLEIN
Sure. Any others? What about you?

MEDICAL STUDENT #3
Uh... Trauma induced by moving the patient too early after giving birth.

KLEIN
Okay. One more?

MEDICAL STUDENT #1
Catching a chill?

SEMMELWEIS
(Muttering)
Oh for the love of God.

Skoda nudges him.
KLEIN
Sure. And the reason why all of these are acceptable is because each case of puerperal fever should be considered unique, just like every person is unique.

Semmelweis rolls his eyes.

MEDICAL STUDENT #3
And how can you prevent this, Dr. Klein?

KLEIN
You can’t. Sadly. Now, if you follow me...

Klein and the medical students move on.
Semmelweis takes Skoda’s notes and tears them up.

SKODA
Hey!

INT. HOSPITAL RECORDS OFFICE - NIGHT
An elderly CLERK checks the clock on the wall. It reads 6:30. He packs up his things.
He draws the shades.
Semmelweis enters, slamming the door.
The clerk jumps at the sound.

CLERK
We’re closed.

SEMMELWEIS
Your door is still open.

CLERK
I said we’re closed.

SEMMELWEIS
I have a few questions about the records you have over the last couple of years.

CLERK
You’ll have to come back tomorrow.
SEMMELWEIS
But you’re here now.

CLERK
I’m going home.

Clerk tries to move past him. Semmelweis steps in front of him.

SEMMELWEIS
But you’re here now.

Clerk tries to side step him. Semmelweis moves with him.

CLERK
Fine. What do you need? Make it quick.

SEMMELWEIS
It’s about the puerperal fever deaths.

Clerk hands him a pile of papers.

CLERK
Here.

Clerk turns to leave. Semmelweis grabs him.

SEMMELWEIS
Also I need to know if they spike in certain seasons or during certain weather conditions.

CLERK
No.

SEMMELWEIS
No? No you won’t tell me?

CLERK
No as in there’s no correlation. And saying please wouldn’t kill you...

Clerk slams a ledger down.

CLERK (CONT’D)
These are the weather conditions and these are the total dead by symptoms.

SEMMELWEIS
So...
CLERK
So no. There is relationship based on our records. You know, you should be better with people. You doctors think that you’re the smartest people in the-

SEMMELWEIS
Can I borrow these?

Clerk rolls his eyes.

CLERK
Yes. Just make sure to bring them-

Semmelweis runs out the door. The door slams shut.

CLERK (CONT’D)
(To himself)
You’re welcome.

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY
Semmelweis begins to mount the steps to the hospital. A guard stops him.

GUARD
No one is allowed to enter.

SEMMELWEIS
But I’m a doctor. I have patients-

GUARD
Did you not hear what I just said?

JAKOB (O.C.)
Relax. There was some sort of explosion. Half the ward’s gone.

Semmelweis turns around. Jakob is behind him without his white coat on.

SEMMELWEIS
Klein wasn’t inside was he?

JAKOB
You wish.

SEMMELWEIS
Well...

Jakob and Semmelweis laughs.
JAKOB
Well, the hospital’s closed down for a week. All our patients have been shoved off elsewhere. Some of us were thinking about heading to the tavern in Stephenplatz in a bit. Care to join?

SEMMELWEIS
Maybe. I have to take care of something first. Then I’ll be down.

JAKOB
Good. Good. You know, once the other lads get to know you better, you’ll have a less difficult time with everyone. But you have to try and act like a person.

SEMMELWEIS
Uhuh.

Semmelweis abruptly exits.

JAKOB
Well... See you later then.

INT. MARY’S BEDROOM - NIGHT
A shabby apartment bedroom in Vienna. MARY, a new mother, lies on a bed, holding a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Semmelweis appears in the doorway. He knocks.

Mary turns to see him. Smiles.

SEMMELWEIS
The midwife gave me a report, but I-uh- I just wanted to check. See how you are feeling.

MARY
That’s very kind, Doctor. (Beat)
You can move a bit closer. Or at least out of the doorway.

Semmelweis removes his hat and moves closer towards the bed. He puts his hand on her forehead.

SEMMELWEIS
Any fever? Chills?
MARY
I don’t think so.

He lifts up the sheets. Pauses awkwardly.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh. Um. Apologies. May I?

She nods.

He lifts up the sheets. Spreading her legs to examine her.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Fine. Fine. Everything looks fine.

MARY
Good.

SEMMELWEIS
And again, I apologize that our ward has been closed.

MARY
Well, thanks for even coming down here to check on me. That was well sweet of you.

He smiles. Takes out a list from his pocket. Crosses her name off with a pencil.

MARY (CONT’D)
What’s that?

Semmelweis smiles.

SEMMELWEIS
It’s nothing. Just... All my patients have delivered and survived outside the hospital.

MARY
Well, we’re all very lucky ladies then. To have a doctor such as you looking after us.

SEMMELWEIS (Sheepish)
Oh... well...

MARY
Sit. Sit you down. Have some tea.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh I musn’t.
MARY
Please. It's the least I can do.

Semmelweis sits. Stares at her for a few moments with a forced smile.

Silence.

Semmelweis bolts up.

SEMMELWEIS
That was lovely, but I really must be going.

He awkwardly leaves. He turns back.

MARY
Thank you.

SEMMELWEIS
I am glad you're doing well.

He closes the door behind him.

INT. DEMEL CAFE–DAY

Semmelweis stares down the linen table loaded with plates of Sachertorte, Annatorte, Katzenzungen, candied violets, Nusskaffee-torte, and marzipan Lippizzaner.

Jakob sits across from him–eyes on the Demelinerinnen waitresses in their black frocks and white collars.

JAKOB
When was the last time you ate something?

Semmelweis’ eyes dart from plate to plate.

SEMMELWEIS
Well... definitely yesterday.

Keeping his eyes fixed on a curvy waitress, Jakob attempts to lump cream onto his hot chocolate, but misses the cup.

JAKOB
Uh huh.

SEMMELWEIS
Ahem! Jakob? What’s the occasion?
JAKOB
Can’t two colleagues have a leisurely day out?

One of the waitresses floats over.

WAITRESS
Will the gentlemen require anything else today?

Jakob holds a hand to his chest.

JAKOB
Please put all of this on Dr. Klein’s account. Number 4313. Along with a box of tea biscuits please.

She smiles and nods.

SEMMELWEIS
Ah.

JAKOB
Eat up.

SEMMELWEIS
With pleasure.

Smirking, Semmelweis pulls the Sacher torte plate towards him. Using his fork, he shovels half of it into his mouth.

JAKOB
How is it?

Semmelweis swallows loudly and licks cake off of the corner of his mouth.

SEMMELWEIS
Now that I know Klein’s paying for it? Best I’ve ever had.

Semmelweis catches the attention of one of the waitresses. He gestures to the plate.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Two more please?

Semmelweis and Jakob chuckle as they dig in.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

Semmelweis and Skoda sit in front of a slab in the morgue. Skoda stares at him with incredulity.
SKODA
But you can’t!

SEMMELWEIS
Why not?

Skoda looks down at the dead newborn lying on the slab.

SKODA
It’s a sin.

SEMMELWEIS
Where?

SKODA
It hasn’t been baptized. You can’t–

SEMMELWEIS
I may not be much of a church going man, but from the looks of this I think the greater sin is that the child died in the first place.

SKODA
I’m starting to think there is something seriously wrong with you, my friend. I don’t understand your morbid fascination with–

SEMMELWEIS
I’m not fascinated with–

SKODA
And what does this look like to you then?

Skoda gestures to the dead infant.

SEMMELWEIS
I just– I have to figure this out. If it’s transferring from mother to infant post-delivery, then–

SKODA
Well, I want no part in this.

Skoda turns to leave. Semmelweis grabs his arm.

SEMMELWEIS
You’re the one who did the autopsy on the mother. Now, tell me–

SKODA
This is obsession!
SEMMELWEIS
This is science!

Silence.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
What if you were the father?
Wouldn’t you want to know why?

Skoda sighs. Stares at the dead infant.

SKODA
Pass me the damn scalpel.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM – NIGHT

He rolls over on his bed, there is a dead infant lying next to him.

It starts to wail. It crawls towards his side of the bed.

He wakes up from the nightmare covered in sweat. Screaming.

INT. MORGUE– NIGHT

Semmelweis runs to the morgue.

SEMMELWEIS
(Calls out)
Jakob? Jakob! Jacob!

There is a naked male body lying on the slab on the far side of the morgue. GEORG, a blond medical student, stands over the corpse.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Georg? Georg, is that you?

GEORG
Yes, sir. Over here, sir.

Semmelweis starts walking over.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m looking for Dr. Kolletschka-

He stops as he looks at the body. It is Jakob– all color drained from his face. His eyes are fixed and open.

Semmelweis stands with his mouth agape.
Georg has a scalpel in his left hand. He is about to cut into his chest. Semmelweis stops him.

GEORG
Sir?

SEMMELWEIS
When did this happen?

GEORG
It’s unclear. His maid found him this morning. We picked him up a few hours ago.

SEMMELWEIS
I saw him. I saw him only a few-

GEORG
My apologies, sir. How rude of me. Would you like to do the honors?

He extends the scalpel to Semmelweis. Semmelweis recoils.

SEMMELWEIS
No. I-I-I can’t. No.

GEORG
I’m only here because I wanted to get more practice in. (Beat) I would say he died in the last 48 hours or so. Am I close, Dr. Semmelweis?

SEMMELWEIS
I don’t understand. He was fine. He was perfectly fine. A few days ago, he was fine.

GEORG
I’m still trying to determine, cause of death, sir.

SEMMELWEIS
So, you have nothing yet? Nothing? Jesus-

Georg holds up Jakob’s left hand. It is swollen and putrefied. There is a long cut along his hand.

GEORG
Not to be disrespectful, but I feel that this has something to do with it.
SEMMELWEIS
Huh.

GEORG
It looks like a cut from a scalpel, sir. Do you agree? I’m only making that assumption because there are no jagged edges. And well...

SEMMELWEIS
Well? Well what?

Georg gestures to around the room.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Ah. Yes.

GEORG
It is the external injury I can find, sir.

Semmelweis picks up Jakob’s hand and pulls it close to his eyes.

GEORG (CONT’D)
From the looks of it, he suffered some sort of organ system failure. There’s evidence of severe dehydration, as if he had some kind of... I’m not sure.

SEMMELWEIS
Fever. Those are the symptoms of infection. Like... my last three patients.

GEORG
I’m not sure about that, Doctor. Perhaps you are seeing what you want to see.

Georg puts his hand on Semmelweis’ shoulder.

GEORG (CONT’D)
I know that you and Dr. Kolletschka were close.

Semmelweis stares at Georg’s hand. He shrugs it off.

SEMMELWEIS
Finish up. I expect a full autopsy report on my desk in the morning.
GEORG
Yes, Doctor. And again, I’m so sorry for your loss.

SEMMELWEIS
Uh. Yes. Well. Thank you...

Semmelweis turns and walks back to the door. There are tears in his eyes.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - NIGHT

Semmelweis paces in his room.

He goes to his desk. Rummages through the drawers. He pulls out a piece of white chalk.

He approaches one of his walls. He writes “Puerperal Fever” on the wall. Underlines it.

He goes back to his desk. Pulls up some notes. Reads them.

He goes over to another wall. He writes “Jakob” on it. Underlines it.

He returns to reading the papers.

He goes back to the first wall. Beneath “Puerperal Fever,” he writes “Sunken eyes, hyperventilation, altered mental status, edema, pus/discharge, organ failure starting with reproductive organs” in a column beneath it.

He examines the papers.

He goes to the other wall. Writes in a column “Edema, pus, jaundice, altered mental status, hyperventilation, possible organ failure.”

He stares at the wall. Looks back at the other. Looks back.

SEMMELWEIS
What’s the connection? How the hell did he get that?

He looks back at the papers. Rolls the chalk in between his hands. Stares at the wall.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Nothing. There’s nothing.

He tosses the papers. Begins to wipe down the walls with his hands in a fit.
He looks at his waistcoat, covered in chalk. He tries to
brush it off with his hands, but even more chalk builds up on
it.

He examines his hands- half chalky, half caked in blood,
especially around the fingers.

He sniffs his hands, grimacing at their smell.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
(Musing)
Hands. What if-

He washes his hands vigorously. Inspects them.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Huh.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - DAY

Klein is walking past patients lying in bed. He is trailed by
various medical students, interns, and residents. Semmelweis
lurks in the back.

KLEIN
Kranz! Grand rounds started 30
minutes ago.

KRANZ, a baby-faced medical student, runs to join the pack.

KRANZ
Sorry, Doctor Klein. Won’t happen
again, sir.

KLEIN
Well since you are refreshed from
your afternoon nap. Perhaps you can
tell all of us what this post-
delivery patient is suffering from?

KRANZ
Uh... Child... Bed... Fever?

KLEIN
Good God, Kranz. If you ever want
to be a proper doctor when you grow
up, you may want to start using the
proper terminology. Puerperal
Fever.

KRANZ
Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.
KLEIN
Grow up, Kranz. No need to be embarrassed. I’m merely trying to educate you. (Beat) Now, does anyone have any questions before we proceed?

Semmelweis raises his hand.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Well, let’s continue-

SEMMELWEIS
Excuse me, Dr. Klein. I had a question.

KLEIN
Oh this will be good...

SEMMELWEIS
Yes. I think it would be illuminating for everyone. Are you aware of any theories about the spread of puerperal fever through direct contact?

KLEIN
No.

SEMMELWEIS
No?

KLEIN
There is no such theory in an medical journal throughout Europe. (Beat) Anyone else care to contradict me?

Silence.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Are you insinuating I’m somehow to blame for this?

SEMMELWEIS
Forgive me, sir. I- I- I wasn’t contradicting you. But isn’t it at least plausible that direct contact could-

KLEIN
Direct contact. And what exactly do you mean by direct contact?
SEMMELWEIS
Passed it through the hands.

Klein laughs.

KLEIN
A gentleman’s hands are never dirty. Or at least an Austrian’s hands.

Everyone laughs.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT
Semmelweis walks in as a gaggle of medical students leave.


Two elderly women who are members of the cleaning staff enter with a trolley filled with rags and basins of water.

They grab the instruments. They grimace. Dump them in the basin.

SEMMELWEIS
What- what- what are you doing?

CLEANING STAFF 1
Washing ‘em.

SEMMELWEIS
With what?

CLEANING STAFF 1
Well, we can’t just use water. Doctors can still smell the stink on ‘em if we just use water. If they can’t abide using ‘em next day, we get sacked.

SEMMELWEIS
Well, what does it do?

CLEANING STAFF 1
Makes ‘em stink less. Obviously.

INT. ORDERLY SUPPLY DEPOT - NIGHT
Semmelweis runs in from the hall to the orderly supply depot, where an obese orderly sits on a stool.
SUPPLY ORDERLY
Can I help you?

SEMMELWEIS
(Panting)
Chloride solution.

SUPPLY ORDERLY
If you have an issue with cleaning, you have to take that up with the caretakers.

SEMMELWEIS
No. I need chloride solution. As much of it as you can give me.

SUPPLY ORDERLY
Well, you’ll need to fill out a requisition form—

Semmelweis runs to the back of the room and into the closet. He runs back out with a massive jug.

SEMMELWEIS
(Excited)
You can bill me later!

He runs out.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ CELL - DAY

TITLE CARD: 1865.

Semmelweis, once again a mental patient, paces the room. Sweats. Breaths rapidly. His hand is severely swollen, rotting, and dark in pigmentation.

SEMMELWEIS
Please. Let me wash. Please! Anybody! HELLO?

He bangs on the wall with his good hand.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Anybody!

Two orderlies enter with medication. Approach him.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
The orderlies stop in their tracks. They dump out his medication onto the floor.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
F-f-f-for the love of God-

They punch Semmelweis. Kick him when he falls. They throw him back down onto his bed.

They leave.

He lies on the bed. Breathing labored.

He stares up at his hand. Tries to wipe it. Screams in agony. Tries again. Screams even louder.

Beads of sweat drip down his forehead.

CLANG. The cell door shuts.

INT. LYING-IN WARD ENTRANCE - DAY

TITLE CARD: 1849. Vienna Hospital.

An immaculate white basin filled with soapy solution rests on a table in the middle of the door way.

A medical student attempts to walk by the basin. Dr. Semmelweis’ hand grabs his arm and forces him to the table.

SEMMELWEIS (O.C.)
Absolutely not. Wash.

MEDICAL STUDENT
But I’ll be late for rounds.

SEMMELWEIS
Wash.

MEDICAL STUDENT
But-

SEMMELWEIS
Wash.

The medical student scrubs his hands under the water.

MEDICAL STUDENT
Doesn’t smell like soap.

SEMMELWEIS
It’s actually Chloride solution.
Wash.
MEDICAL STUDENT
Phew! Strong.

SEMMELWEIS
How observant. You can go.

A nurse tries to side-step the basin. Semmelweis blocks her.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Hold it. (Beat) Wash.

Nurse sighs.

A line has started to form behind her.

INT. KLEIN’S OFFICE – DAY

Klein sits examining some papers.

A MEDICAL STUDENT bursts in.

KLEIN
My office hours aren’t until 4, and you aren’t doing yourself any favors by barging into my office without knocking.

MEDICAL STUDENT
Dr. Klein–

KLEIN
God, can’t you see I’m busy?

MEDICAL STUDENT
There’s something you need to see, sir.

KLEIN
Oh?

MEDICAL STUDENT
We can’t get into the ward.

KLEIN
Oh for God’s sake!

He slams down the papers in his hand.

Leaps out of his chair. Shoves the medical student out of his way, and bounds out the door.

The nervous medical student trails behind him.
INT. WARD ENTRANCE - DAY

Klein pushes past the long line of medical personnel. He stomps over to Semmelweis.

KLEIN
I demand an explanation!

SEMMELWEIS
Well, sir-

KLEIN
Holding up the majority of my staff? Clogging the halls? Tell me?

SEMMELWEIS
It’s to prevent further contamination. It may slow the death rate-

KLEIN
Contamination?

SEMMELWEIS
The mothers. The dead mothers.

KLEIN
Dr. Semmelweis, you fret like a woman. It’s an epidemic for God’s sake!

Klein sniffs the air. He puts his hand across the surface of the basin next to Semmelweis.

SEMMELWEIS
It’s chloride solution. They use it on the putrid instruments. And it’s not an epidemic-

KLEIN
So you plan to do what? Kill every other mother who doesn’t succumb to puerperal fever by the strength of the solution.

Klein flips the basin over.

INT. WARD ENTRANCE - DAY

The next day.
There is a far longer line into the ward filled with impatient doctors and nurses.

Klein rushes past them.

KLEIN
(Muttering)
Damned Hungarians. Worse than the damned Jews.

A Doctor with his back to Klein blocks Klein’s way. He shoves him.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Excuse me!

Klein rushes to the front of the line, where Semmelweis stands over a basin with his pocketwatch.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Is your German not so great or are all Hungarians slightly stupid?

The line laughs.

Semmelweis puts down his watch. Frowns.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m sorry?

KLEIN
I don’t know how it’s done in Budapest, but in this country, in this hospital, residents-

Points to Semmelweis.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Follow the directions that their attendings-

Points to himself.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Give them. (Beat) Or perhaps I should speak more slowly?

The line chuckles.

SEMMELWEIS
(Coolly)
Yes, Dr. Klein.

(MORE)
Even simple-minded Hungarians like myself can follow directions. And I have complied with your previous request.

Klein holds up the basin.

KLEIN
And what, pray tell, is this then? Because to my eyes and nose it looks like chloride solution.

Semmelweis folds his arms and smiles.

SEMMELEWWIS
Actually, it’s Chlorina Liquida.

KLEIN
I’m sorry. What?

SEMMELEWWIS
Chlorina Liquida. It’s a cheaper, and more diluted form. But of course, it is quite difficult to make that determination even with the eyes of my knowing attending. (Beat) Now is there anything else I can help you with?

The line speaks in shocked, hushed whispers.

Klein stiffens.

KLEIN
Well, I’m unclear as to how this will do anything beneficial.

SEMMELEWWIS
It can’t hurt, can it?

He walks off.

SEMMELEWWIS (CONT’D)
So, if we can just have the next person in line-

Some doctors follow Klein out.

SEMMELEWWIS (CONT’D)
Wait-

After ten people or so walk.
(Screams)
Everyone stop! Wash your damn hands. Or so help me God-

Semmelweis stops himself. He looks around.

The staff on the line stare at him. Some look at him like he is crazy.

INT. HOSPITAL RECORDS OFFICE - NIGHT

Semmelweis sits on the floor of the office, surrounded by papers.

Semmelweis pours over the hospital records book. Its spine reads “Ward Mortality Rate.”


He puts the paper down. Rubs his eyes. Checks again. Circles the number 38 on the page with a pencil.

Smiles. He nods.

INT. WARD ENTRANCE - DAY

There is a line of doctors waiting to enter the wards, backed up down the hallway.

Semmelweis stands behind a table with a basin on it. He holds a pocket watch.

A Doctor stands of the basin scrubbing his hands. He stops.

SEMMELWEIS
That was only 6 seconds. Go on.

Doctor groans. He continues washing.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
On your way.

The Doctor takes his hands out of the basin. Flicks the water off of them into Semmelweis’s face, and walks off.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Next!
The next doctor in line steps up to the basin. He starts to scrub his hands.

DOCTOR
You know, Dr. Semmelweis, I think this might be working.

Semmelweis looks up and smiles at him.

SEMMELWEIS
Thank you. Really.

The doctor nods and walks past him.

Klein stomps over.

KLEIN
Stop this! Stop this at once!

SEMMELWEIS

KLEIN
At what cost?

He grabs the basin from Semmelweis.

SEMMELWEIS
The cost of the lives of our patients?

Semmelweis tries to pull the basin back.

KLEIN
This little exercise, which is pointless by the way, is far too costly. And you’re mad if you think I will let this go on any longer.

Semmelweis notices everyone staring at him. His face reddens. Semmelweis lets go of his side of the basin—its contents spill over Klein.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - DAY

Semmelweis walks by a row of dying women. Their eyes are sunken. Their breathing labored.

Medical students pass by, doing their rounds. They are led by an attending physician.
ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
Now another epidemic of childbed fever as torn through the ward. So far-

SEMMELWEIS
Excuse me, doctor. Epidemic is actually a misnomer-

ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
I wasn’t speaking to you. Now, let’s continue.

SEMMELWEIS
(Loud)
Yes, but you are disseminating incorrect information to these students. To the peril of-

ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
Hungarians are always so neurotic. If they see their own shadow, they assume it’s Doomsday.

Everyone laughs.

SEMMELWEIS
(Shouting)
I’m not neurotic! You’re just wrong!

ATTENDING PHYSICIAN
See?

The students laugh.

INT. WARD ENTRANCE - DAY

Two days later.

The lines of doctors return once again.

At the basin, a nurse washes her hands. Semmelweis hands her a small scrub brush.

She looks at him in confusion.

SEMMELWEIS
Nails.

She holds up the brush. She scrubs along the tops of her nails.
SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
No underneath. Get rid of that
dirt, underneath the nails.

She sighs. Complies. He waved her on.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Thank you! Next!

A doctor rolls his eyes and steps forward toward the basin.
He dips his hands in the water. Starts to scrub.

Klein comes over. He sighs.

Semmelweis lets the doctor washing his hands pass.

KLEIN
When the Chief Administrator asks
me why my budget is grossly over
its allotment, I have to now tell
him it’s because one of my
residents wants my staff to have a
manicure!

Semmelweis hands him a few papers. Klein flips through. The
papers consist of a balance sheet, charts, and graphs.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
I don’t have time for this. What is
this?

SEMMELWEIS
For your next meeting with the
Chief Administrator. It’s for a new
solution.

Klein laughs.

KLEIN
Another one! Does it look like I’m
Father Christmas, Semmelweis?

SEMMELWEIS
If you closely, it’s a cost-benefit
analysis of a cheaper solution.

KLEIN
(Reading)
Chloride of lime. You want HOW
much?
SEMMELWEIS
Feel free to explain to the Administrator that if you buy it in a much larger quantity-

KLEIN
Now you’re telling me how to do both my job and his?

SEMMELWEIS
I’m not-

KLEIN
You may be doing it with charts and graphs, but you are.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m merely suggesting-

KLEIN
That you can do a better job than I can.

SEMMELWEIS
No-

KLEIN
Well, you couldn’t. And everyone here knows it.

SEMMELWEIS
Just listen. If you buy it in a large enough quantity both our staff and the cleaning staff can both use it and it saves the hospital a good deal of money.

KLEIN
Saves money. Wastes our time. But as long as you get what you want to soothe your vanity-

SEMMELWEIS
(Shouts)
I want to stop delivering babies that will be orphans! What’s vain about that?

The line murmurs.

KLEIN
Are you raising your voice to me, Dr. Semmelweis?
SEMMELWEIS  
(Subdued)  
No. Uh... I’m sorry, sir.

Semmelweis lowers his eyes. Klein walks past. He drops the papers into the basin.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - DAY

Semmelweis scrubs under his nails.

A Nurse enters.

NURSE  
Dr. Semmelweis, your patient is waiting.

SEMMELWEIS  
In a moment.

He finishes scrubbing his nails. Examines them closely.

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - NIGHT

It is late at night. The hospital is quiet. Semmelweis walks by a long row of sleeping patients in recovery.

He examines each of them, careful not to wake them. Takes their pulses. Feels their foreheads. He watches over them as they sleep. Makes notes.

One of the patients opens her eyes for a moment. Smiles at him. He smiles back.

SEMMELWEIS  
You’re doing well. Go back to sleep.

She nods. Smiles again.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - NIGHT

Semmelweis rolls over in his bed. There are large bags under his eyes. He rolls over again. Growls a little.

He gets up from the bed. Goes to the window and draws the curtain. It is still dark out.

He lights another candle. Goes to the basin of water on the dresser. He picks up the soap and nail brush to the side of the basin. He begins to wash his hands.
INT. LYING-IN CLINIC- DAY

A pregnant woman lies on an operating table. She is in labor. Dr. Klein and some medical students stand around her.

    DR. KLEIN
    Now if you look, the cervix is dilated-

Semmelweis bursts in.

    SEMMELWEIS
    1.3%! Dr. Klein! 1.3%

Klein ignores him.

    DR. KLEIN
    The cervix is a muscle that-

Semmelweis shoves a paper in his face.

    SEMMELWEIS
    Dr. Klein, the mortality rate fell to 1.3% We’ve matched the 2nd ward! My experiment worked!

Klein waves him off.

    DR. KLEIN
    It could also be the recently installed enhanced ventilation system as the true cause of improvement.

    SEMMELWEIS
    I have to disagree, Dr. Klein.

    DR. KLEIN
    That’s fine, Dr. Semmelweis. That doesn’t mean you’re right.

    SEMMELWEIS
    Can I at least make my policy mandatory throughout the hospital?

Klein laughs him off.

Everyone stares at Semmelweis.

Semmelweis makes a quick exit.
DR. KLEIN
Now that the fantasy section of our session is over, let’s deliver this baby.

The medical students laugh.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT
A patient gets wheeled in by two nurses, Nurse Frida and Nurse Magda. She is in labor and has a massively swollen left knee four times the size of her other one.

NURSE FRIDA
What the hell is that?

NURSE MAGDA
Dunno. It’s an odd one.

NURSE FRIDA
Get Doctor Oddball then.

Nurse Magda breaks away from the other nurse and the patient, and walks...

DOWN THE HALLWAY.
Nurse grabs Semmelweis by the arm.

NURSE MAGDA
Doctor. Come with me. We have... an unusual patient. She’s in labor—

SEMMELWEIS
That is hardly unusual.

NURSE MAGDA
Come on.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - NIGHT
Nurse shows him in. The patient again is writhing in pain. Nurse Frida is unable to get the patient into the birthing position due to the swollen knee.

Semmelweis comes in. Places his hand on the knee. It is red and swollen.

SEMMELWEIS
(To himself)
Hot... Huh. (To Nurse Magda)
Scalpel.
She hands him a scalpel.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
This might hurt a bit, Miss.

He makes a small incision on the knee. She screams in pain. Yellow pus oozes out.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Bizarre...

He’s fixated on her knee.

NURSE MAGDA
Doctor. Doctor? Doctor!

Semmelweis snaps to attention.

SEMMELWEIS
What?

NURSE MAGDA
The baby’s coming.

SEMMELWEIS
Ah. Yes. Of- of course. You, drain the knee, and then you may assist in the delivery.

He goes to a basin and washes his hands.

INT. MORGUE - DAY

Three days later.

The patient with the swollen knee and ten other women lay on tables in the morgue.

Semmelweis stands over them with his assistant HEBRA, a slight man in his early twenties.

Semmelweis throws his hands up in the air.

SEMMELWEIS
I don’t understand it, Hebra!
Really, I don’t.

HEBRA
It makes no sense, Doctor.

SEMMELWEIS
(To himself)
Was this all in my head?
Hebra flips through notes in a ledger.

HEBRA
I’ve been keeping a record of the hand washings. Every single person who entered the ward from the morgue washed their hands–

SEMMELWEIS
Starting when? From when that patient came in?

HEBRA
Ada. Her name was Ada.

SEMMELWEIS
Who?

HEBRA
The one with the knee.

Klein walks in. Semmelweis rolls his eyes.

Klein inspects the corpses. Sighs.

KLEIN
You musn’t feel too bad, Semmelweis. This was bound to happen. As it often does with epidemics. All you’ve done is wasted everyone’s time with your ineffective protocols.

SEMMELWEIS
At- at least I am trying to save lives.

KLEIN
Trying and failing, Semmelweis. Trying and failing. (Beat) All these useless protocols stop tomorrow.

SEMMELWEIS
But–

KLEIN
But nothing.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Late at night.
Semmelweis goes through a set of double doors. He wears a vacant expression.

Semmelweis wanders the hallways alone. There are huge bags under his eyes. He walks like he is sleepwalking.

He sees the night nurses move about the ward. They move between patient to patient. Focuses on their hands. Even from far away they are filthy.

SEMMELWEIS
Damn it.

He runs over to one of them.

He grabs one of them, JANA, by the hand. She yelps. He looks closely at her hands. Sniffs them. Grimaces.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
(Sighs)
I’m free of it.

INT. KLEIN’S OFFICE- DAY

Klein sits reading a newspaper. He takes a sip from his cup of coffee.

He drags Jana into Klein’s office.

Klein groans and puts down his cup.

KLEIN
You know at this point, Semmelweis. I should start to anticipate these outbursts.

Semmelweis shoves Jana in front of Klein.

SEMMELWEIS
Tell him. Go on. If you won’t tell me, you damn will tell him.

JANA
Dr. Klein, I’m-

SEMMELWEIS
Tell him. When was the last time you washed your hands during your rounds?

JANA
I-I-I-
He jerks her arm.

JANA (CONT’D)
Ow!

KLEIN
Semmelweis! Enough!

She starts to cry.

SEMMELWEIS
The night rotation hasn’t been following my protocols. At all. The night nurses transmitted the infected particles of the patient with the knee infection to the other patients!

KLEIN
And you’re grasping this theory because?

SEMMELWEIS
All the other patients died in order of when the nurses treated them.

KLEIN
Pssh. So?

SEMMELWEIS
After they treated her.

KLEIN
Is that what you call proof?

SEMMELWEIS
What else would you call it?

KLEIN
Obsession. (To Jana) You may go.

She exits.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m not obsessed. I’m just-

KLEIN
Not allowed to set foot in this hospital until you have actual proof to show me about the transmission of puerperal fever. Not one foot-
SEMMLWEIS
I’m right. You know I’m right.
You’re just- you’re just...

KLEIN
Prove it. (Beat) You may go.

Semmelweis turns. Leaves. Slams the door.

Klein goes back to his newspaper.

INT. SPANISH RIDING SCHOOL - NIGHT


He focuses in on the hooves of the Lippizzaner in their School Quadrille, mouth agape: the hoofbeats match the ringing of Semmelweis’ own heartbeat in his ears.

Skoda nudges him. Semmelweis jolts to attention.

HEBRA
(Whispers)
She reminds me of Dr. Klein’s wife.

Their gaze tracks to a particularly toothy mare on the side.

SEMMLWEIS
(Normal volume)
No. The nag is far more handsome.

The trio chortle. An elegantly dressed couple seated in front shush them, causing the three men to laugh louder.

INT. SPANISH RIDING SCHOOL HALLWAY - NIGHT

The men stumble down the baroque, chandelier-clad hallway.

SEMMLWEIS
I actually had a lovely evening.

SKODA
Good to hear. Thought you could use it.

Hebra drags his feet.
HEBRA
No matter how much I scrape these boots after I leave here, they still stink of horse. Why is that?

SEMMELWEIS
Hard to say. I’ve never noticed before. Usually you smell worse.

Hebra gives Semmelweis a playful shove. Skoda groans as he peers to the exit.

SKODA
God above, it’s pissing rain again, isn’t it?

They look down the warm glow of the hallway into the dark. Ladies’ gowns are immediately drenched once they cross the threshold.

HEBRA
There’s a decent tavern near here. Might be a good place to wait out the rain.

SEMMELWEIS
I—I should get back to work.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - NIGHT

A soaked Semmelweis trudges through the front door.

He sinks down on his bed. He picks up a few papers arranged on the surface of his bed. He puts them on his night table and examines his fingers, black with smudged ink.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - DAWN

An unsettling amount of dead, dissected rabbits lie on Semmelweis’ dinner table in his apartment. They lie in several neat piles.

The piles are labeled which ones died of puerperal fever after contamination. It works out to be one in three.

He stares at them. Groans.

He throws the rabbit carcasses to the floor.

He takes his notes and tosses them into the air. They fall like snowflakes.
Hebra knocks and enters.

HEBRA
Doctor Semmelweis? Sorry it was open.

Semmelweis stares into space.

HEBRA (CONT’D)
How are you? I haven’t seen you since we all went out...

Semmelweis folds his arms and shakes his head.

HEBRA (CONT’D)
It’s been a few weeks.

Semmelweis keeps shaking his head.

HEBRA (CONT’D)
I didn’t if you were ill or not. So... I thought I’d... check.

Semmelweis doesn’t make eye contact with Hebra.

SEMMELWEIS
(Muttering)
Maybe it’s for nothing. Maybe everyone’s right. Maybe Klein is right. I don’t know. I don’t know anymore. It’s not real. My theory. My theory is...

HEBRA
Dr. Semmelweis.

Hebra puts a comforting hand on Semmelweis’ shoulder.

SEMMELWEIS
Uh...

HEBRA
I’m not just saying this because you’re my boss, but I think you have something. I know you haven’t shared everything with me, but from what I know...

Semmelweis removes his hand with his index and thumb.

SEMMELWEIS
I should... I should toss out the rabbits.
Hebra, left alone, packs up the scattered pages.
He kneels down. He reads them to himself. He raises his eyebrows.

HEBRA
Wow...

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY

INT. HALLWAY - DAY
Two nurses read the same pamphlet.
Klein storms down the hallway.

KLEIN
God damn it.
He snatches the pamphlets from them.
They gasp.

INT. KLEIN’S OFFICE - DAY
Klein enters the office. He slams the door.
He takes the armful of pamphlets. Throws them in the wastepaper basket.
He takes out a match. Lights the contents of the bin on fire.

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS - DAY
A group of doctors stare at Semmelweis as he climbs up the stairs to the entrance. They start to whisper.
Hebra runs up behind him.

HEBRA
Dr. Semmelweis! Dr. Semmelweis!

SEMMELWEIS
Hebra!
HEBRA
We did it!

He embraces Semmelweis.

SEMMELWEIS
Hebra, what have you done?

HEBRA
Everyone in Vienna is reading it! I published it, and then several other medical periodicals have-

SEMMELWEIS
I never asked you to do this.

HEBRA
Everyone is talking about it. You’re going to be a sensation.

SEMMELWEIS
How could you?

HEBRA
I was only doing what you wanted. I thought.

Semmelweis holds up the pamphlet.

SEMMELWEIS
This is not what I wanted. This is never what I wanted.

HEBRA
But-

SEMMELWEIS
People are going to misunderstand. This is what everyone is going to think of me.

HEBRA
But they’ll finally listen to you-

SEMMELWEIS
To the wrong things, Hebra! You damned idiot.

HEBRA
I copied all of your notes, Doctor-
SEMMELWEIS
(Groans)
Not all of it was written down, you imbecile! Why would you do this to me?

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT
Semmelweis' head is on the table surrounded by four mugs of ale.

Skoda grabs him by the hair and lifts his face off the table.

Semmelweis groans.

SKODA
Didn't expect you in this state this early.

SEMMELWEIS
(Slurring)
What time is it?

SKODA
It's about 5:30 in the afternoon.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh...

SKODA
Come on...

Semmelweis doesn't move.

SKODA (CONT'D)
Ignaz, come on.

Nothing.

Skoda shakes him.

Nothing.

Skoda grabs a pitcher of water. Dumps it on Semmelweis' head.

Semmelweis groans and wipes the water from his eyes.

SKODA (CONT'D)
Come on.

Skoda picks him up by the shoulders.
EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Skoda carries Semmelweis through the street.

Semmelweis can barely walk. He staggers around.

SEMMELEweis
(Mumbling)
They think I’m bonkers, Skoda.

SKODA
Almost there. Stay awake, my friend.

SEMMELEweis
(Slurring)
God, you’re so bossy. You’re like my wife...

SKODA
You’re married?

SEMMELEweis
It’s complicated...

SKODA
I’d says so. She’s invisible!

SEMMELEweis
She’s in Budapest.

SKODA
What? Did you forget to bring her?

SEMMELEweis
It’s not funny, Skoda.

SKODA
Yes it is. Ask anyone.

SEMMELEweis
(Slurring)
I can’t. They think I’m crazy. And unoriginal? How am I sooooo lucky to be both, Skoda?

SKODA
You’re a very lucky man. Come on now, Semmelweis. Use those feet. There we go...
SEMMELWEIS
(Slurring)
Maybe I should just jump in the river. And just... end it all...

Skoda pushes Semmelweis up against a wall. Skoda grabs his face. Semmelweis cannot meet his eye.

SKODA
Oh stop it. You want to fix this?

SEMMELWEIS
Yes...

SKODA
So fix it. Publish the correct version. Set the record straight.

SEMMELWEIS
No. It’s not worth it. No one believes me.

SKODA
I do. I’ll help you.

SEMMELWEIS
I don’t know...

SKODA
What do you have to lose, Ignaz?

SEMMELWEIS
Aside from everything?

SKODA
That’s the spirit. Now let’s get you home, so you can at least clean the vomit off your shoes.

INT. HOSPITAL RECORDS OFFICE - NIGHT

The next night.

Skoda goes to the records office.

SKODA
Why did Klein have the office locked?

SEMMELWEIS
For this exact reason?

Skoda playfully shoves Semmelweis.
SKODA
Good thing I nicked that key.

SEMMELWEIS
You would have made a great criminal in another life, my friend.

They look through some files.

SKODA
Why thank you. Either that or a butcher. You know, I’m glad you decided to at least decided to come up with a more cohesive draft for Klein.

SEMMELWEIS
I just want him to understand.

SKODA
Good for you.

SEMMELWEIS
I still don’t it getting around.

SKODA
I completely respect that. At least you deserve Klein to hear your version. Maybe he will leave you alone. Finally.

Semmelweis picks up one file.

SEMMELWEIS
Here it is. Let’s go.

They turn out the lights.

INT. PRINTER’S SHOP – DAY
Skoda walks in.

The printer stands smoking.

Skoda carries a manuscript. He tosses it on the printers desk.

The title reads: “Germ Theory by Ignaz Semmelweis.”

The printer grabs it. Reads the title page. Raises his eyebrows.
Skoda places some coins on top of the manuscript.
The printer nods.
Skoda nods.
He turns and exits.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - NIGHT

Thirty corpses of former patients lie still on top of Semmelweis’ bed in a pile. Their eyes are fixed and open, but tears drip down their cheeks.

After a few seconds, a hand makes its way up through the pile and into the air. Then another hand.

Semmelweis climbs out from beneath the pile of bodies. He gasps for air.

Semmelweis’ EYES BOLT OPEN.

He feels around his bed. There is nothing there but sheets.

INT. KLEIN’S OFFICE - DAY

Semmelweis waits in the doorway. He picks the dirt under his nails.

He wipes his hands on the sides of his jacket.

KLEIN (O.C.)
Semmelweis. Get in here.

Semmelweis enters. Klein

Klein smiles. He holds a pamphlet in his hand.

KLEIN (CONT’D)
Are you a fan of literature, Dr. Semmelweis?

SEMMELWEIS
Uh. Well...

KLEIN
Because I just read a piece of rather interesting fiction.

SEMMELWEIS
Sir, I did not intend for that to be published-
KLEIN
In medical journals throughout Europe?!?

SEMMELWEIS
No. Ahem. No, sir.

KLEIN
Do you understand that your fanciful theories of these “germs,” as you put it, have jeopardized the reputation of this ward and the entire hospital?

SEMMELWEIS
Sir, I realize that this makes you look bad, but if you read the third page-- this is cobbled together from my original findings, but it shows that there is a possibility of even more that we can do-

KLEIN
We? We will do nothing. Because you? You will no longer be working here.

SEMMELWEIS
What?

KLEIN
Your residency is at an end. And as the attending physician of this ward, I refuse to renew it.

SEMMELWEIS
Sir, I am one of the best obstetricians in this hospital. No. The best.

KLEIN
Yes. And good luck finding a place at any other hospital here in Vienna. Now, get out before I have you thrown out.

Semmelweis leaves, shoulders drooped.

Klein tears up the paper in his hand and tosses the pieces into his wastebasket.
INT. SEMMELWEIS’ OFFICE - NIGHT

Semmelweis stands in the middle of his office. He puts papers and a miniature portrait of a woman into a box.

He hangs his head.

He looks at his windows. Pasted on to them are papers of his publication that read “Germ Theory by Ignaz Semmelweis.” Some of them have “NURSE” and “HUNGARIAN DOG” handwritten on them.

His face reddens. He tears them all down.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ ROOM - NIGHT

Skoda enters Semmelweis’ apartment. There are neat piles of papers everywhere.

SKODA
Dear God.

Semmelweis sits at his desk. He rearranges his papers. Head down.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m busy.

SKODA
You’re not that busy.

Semmelweis looks up from his work.

SEMMELWEIS
I could kill you.

SKODA
So kill me.

Semmelweis looks up from his papers and shoots him a look.

SEMMELWEIS
That’s not the point.

SKODA
So what’s the point?

SEMMELWEIS
I knew. I knew this would happen. I told you-

SKODA
That’s because-
SEMMELWEIS
This is your fault. I got sacked because of you. And your...
encouragement.

SKODA
Because I know you’re right. I wanted everyone to know you were right. And just so you know, if anyone found out I was involved in this, I would have been sacked too.

SEMMELWEIS

SKODA
What I really came here to say is: good luck on your appeal. If you stay calm, you’ll be fine. The Dean of Medicine is a fairly understanding man.

Semmelweis grunts. Goes back to his paperwork.

Skoda shakes his head and exits.

SKODA (CONT’D)
Fine.

INT. HALLWAY – DAY

Semmelweis stares at the door of the Dean’s office. He wipes the sweat from his brow with a perfectly folded handkerchief. Checks under his fingernails. Straightens his tie.

He hears laughter of two men coming from behind the door.

He cocks his head in confusion. Frowns. Clears his throat and opens the door.

INT. HOSPITAL DEAN’S OFFICE – DAY

Semmelweis opens the door. He finds the DEAN, a bespectacled octogenarian, sitting with Dr. Klein, laughing and smoking cigars. They stop once they see Semmelweis.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh. Ahem. Pardon me. I thought I had an appointment with you.

Semmelweis eyes Klein. Klein smugly smiles and stubs out his cigar, without breaking eye contact with Semmelweis.
DEAN
No. You do, my boy. I was going 
over your file and appeal, when Dr. 
Klein decided to pop in.

SEMMELWEIS
How thoughtful of him...

Dr. Klein smirks.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Sir, if I may, can I just say that 
my measures in my department.

DR. KLEIN
“My department?” See, Fritz-

SEMMELWEIS
If you let me finish, Dr. Klein. I-

DR. KLEIN
(Mocking)
I-I-I-me-me-

SEMMELWEIS
I-I-I WASN’T FINISHED!

The Dean raises his eyebrows.

DR. KLEIN
This is the sort of autocratic 
behavior I was mentioning...

DEAN
I see.

SEMMELWEIS
No-

DEAN
Be calm, Dr. Semmelweis.

SEMMELWEIS
I’ve saved more lives in the past 
year than he has-

DEAN
Please! No one will deny that you 
are a good doctor.

Dr. Klein scoffs.
DEAN (CONT'D)
However, I've decided to deny your appeal.

SEMMELWEIS
What? So because he hates me-

DR. KLEIN
Me-me-me...

DEAN
This is not a popularity contest. I have to make decisions based on what will benefit the hospital and this... friction between you and Dr. Klein will only harm all the progress the two of you have made.

Dr. Klein stands up. Turns to Semmelweis. Pats him on shoulder.

DR. KLEIN
I hope you don't have too much trouble packing. (To the Dean) Thanks for cigar, Fritz.

Klein exits.

Semmelweis stands. Mouth agape. Silent.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY
A train whistles.

Semmelweis stares out the window at the passing landscape.

VOICE #1 (V.O.)
Nurse!

KLEIN (V.O.)
Obsession.

ATTENDING PHYSICIAN (V.O.)
Neurotic Hungarian.

He clutches his head in his hands. Rocks back and forth a bit. Plugs his ears with his fingers for a few moments.

SEMMELWEIS
Stop! Stop it! Stop it!

The sounds of those negative voices fade.
Semmelweis unplugs his ear and straightens up. Looks around. Everyone else in the train car stares at Semmelweis.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ CELL - DAY

TITLE CARD: 1865.

Semmelweis lies on a cot. His skin is yellow. His breathing is labored. Beads of sweat roll down his face. He shakes uncontrollably. He is visibly near death.

          SEMMELWEIS
          Someone! Someone help me.

Nothing.

INT. SEMMELWEIS FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: 1861.

Semmelweis opens the door. He looks around. Frowns.

IN THE SITTING ROOM

Semmelweis’ house in Budapest is run down. The room is mostly bare– no tables, two ratty-looking chairs. The curtains are in tatters. The carpets are dusty, and the tassels look like they have been chewed off by mice.

Semmelweis hears creaking on the stairs. It’s MARIE, his homely wife. Her dress is worn.

          MARIE
          Ignaz? What are you doing here?

          SEMMELWEIS
          They let me go.

Marie looks around.

          MARIE
          You could have written. I would have tried... to make this more... presentable.

          SEMMELWEIS
          What happened? Where are Jozsef and Zoltan?

          MARIE
          We ran into a little... difficulty.
SEMMELWEIS
A little difficulty? Where in God’s name did the damn furniture go?

MARIE
Your brothers— they were arrested. Accused of sedition or something.

SEMMELWEIS
Sedition?

MARIE
They were carted off so quickly I couldn’t understand. With them gone, I couldn’t afford— and I started selling the furniture, and it still wasn’t enough... (Breaks down) Ignaz, I’m so sorry.

SEMMELWEIS
You should have told me. I would have sent you more money.

She stiffens.

MARIE
Ignaz, you haven’t written anything in over two years, let alone send me any money.

SEMMELWEIS
I did. I could swear I did.

MARIE
I haven’t had a single word from you. And my letters started getting returned. Did you move?

SEMMELWEIS
Oh.

Marie cries so hard she shakes. Semmelweis does not move to comfort her.

MARIE
(Sniffling)
That is all you can say to me?

SEMMELWEIS
There’s a lot we have to be sorry for, Marie.
MARIE
Now that you’re here. Can we- can we just... try and have a fresh start?

Silence.

SEMMELWEIS
Yes. If you want...

They awkwardly embrace.

MARIE
I am glad you’re here. It’s been so long since we...

SEMMELWEIS
Yes. Yes it has.

EXT. ST. ROCHUS HOSPITAL OF BUDAPEST - DAY

Semmelweis turns the street corner. He looks up.

St. Rochus Hospital stands before him in fading granite. This hospital looks far more run down than the Vienna hospital. A statue of St. Rochus stands on a weathered pillar ominously between him and the front door.

He stares for a moment. Looks down. Wipes his hands with a handkerchief. Examines his nails. Takes a deep breath.

He walks through the front doors.

INT. ST. ROCHUS HOSPITAL OF BUDAPEST - CONTINUOUS

Semmelweis looks around.

He sees a swarthy tall man in his late 40’s bounding toward him. This is the hospital’s Chief of Surgery, DR. CSONKA.

DR. CSONKA
You look lost. You must be Semmelweis then.

SEMMELWEIS
Yes... You are?

Dr. Csonka extends his hand. Shakes Semmelweis’ hand vigorously.
DR. CSONKA
Emile Csonka. Chief of Surgery.
This way.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh. Uh... okay...

Dr. Csonka leads Semmelweis down a hallway.

DR. CSONKA
We know all about you, Dr. Semmelweis.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh?

DR. CSONKA
Read your work. Interesting...

SEMMELWEIS
Thank you, Dr. Csonka.

They walk into the...

SURGICAL UNIT
Doctors are performing amputations.

Semmelweis looks confused.

DR. CSONKA
So... everyone starts their mornings in surgery, which is here. Mainly it’s the run of the mill-amputations, abscesses, and the like. Occasionally we do get some interesting cases.

SEMMELWEIS
Excuse me, Dr. Csonka? I was actually here to meet the head of Obstetrics?

DR. CSONKA
That’s me.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m sorry?

DR. CSONKA
Obstetrics is under my purview. I’m afraid we’re a smaller ship than you’re used to in Vienna.

(MORE)
Believe you me, it’s a lot, but we have to do our best with what we are given.

Oh. That’s... surprising...

Dr. Csonka pushes through a set of double doors to...

Pregnant women lie in beds. They are attended by nurses and doctors.

Eventually, surgeons end up here at the end of their daily rotation.

So you’re telling me that your doctors go from draining abscesses to delivering babies in the same day?

Yes. And here our maternity ward-

What is the rate of puerperal fever in this hospital? Do you have any of the proper protocols in place?

And what are the proper protocols? Yours?

Forgive me, Dr. Csonka. I only meant-

You know, Dr. Semmelweis. I only agreed to show you around because your wife is a friend of my wife. There isn’t even a position available- come to think of it.

(Blurts out) You don’t have to pay me!

I’m sorry?
SEMMELWEIS
If you make me a Obstetrics
Director of the maternity clinic, I
won’t take a salary. Just allow me
a little freedom to do what’s best
for the clinic.

Dr. Csonka pauses.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
You have more free time, and you
won’t be spending any money on new
staff. I guarantee I can drop the
mortality rate in Obstetrics. What
do you have to lose?

Dr. Csonka nods.

DR. CSONKA
Just get me some results.

Semmelweis smiles and shakes Dr. Csonka’s hand. He then
covertly wipes that same hand off with his handkerchief.

INT. CLINIC MAIN ROOM - DAY

The entire staff of the clinic crowds into the main room.
They wait. There is a low hum of whispering.

Semmelweis stands along the back wall of the main room of the
clinic, which is lined with long windows.

Semmelweis looks out the Ward window, which opens up onto a
cemetery. Outside it rains.

He scans the names of the first row of names on the grave
headstones: “MARTA- ANNA- CLARA- LIESEL...” All women.

He stares for another moment. He clears his throat. Turns
around.

SEMMELWEIS
Hello. I am the new Obstetrics
Director, Dr. Semmelweis. I’m here
to start a new chapter here at the
hospital. There will be no more
deaths in this clinic.

A hum of incredulity passes through the crowd.
SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Of puerperal fever. I mean. Ahem. I
can guarantee that if you follow
the guidelines I plan on
implementing here, you won’t see
another woman perish at the hand of
childbed fever. And that starts
today.

He walks through crowd, posts a list labeled “Guidelines” on
the door before he walks out.

INT. SEMMELWEIS FAMILY HOME – DAY

Semmelweis sits at a dining room table with a full breakfast
laid out before him. He reads the Austrian Medical Journal.

SEMMELWEIS
(Without looking up)
Pass me the marmalade, dear.

He extends his hand, gets the jar. He smiles. He finally
looks out from behind his paper.

The corpse of a dead pregnant woman sits across from him. He
lets out a little shriek.

He rubs his eyes and looks again. The woman is gone.

Marie’s hand pats his shoulder. He jumps.

MARIE
Everything alright, dear?

SEMMELWEIS
Fine. Fine. Fine. (Beat) I have to
wash.

MARIE
But-

Semmelweis gets in her face.

SEMMELWEIS
Damn it, Marie. I HAVE TO WASH.

He gets up from the table and runs out.

MARIE
But what about your tea?

Sounds of footsteps going up stairs.
Marie frowns.

INT. CLINIC MAIN ROOM - DAY

Semmelweis washes the blood off of his hands and forearms as MRS. STAHL, a new mother, is wheeled past him.

    SEMMELWEIS
    Congratulations, Mrs. Stahl. You have a perfectly healthy set of twins.

    MRS. STAHL
    (Exhausted)
    Thank you, doctor. Bless you.

    SEMMELWEIS
    They're being brought to the nursery right now.

He smiles. She smiles back at him as she’s wheeled through a set of double doors.

Semmelweis returns to scrubbing at the basin with a smile on his face.

Dr. Csonka approaches him. Semmelweis sees him out of the corner of his eye. Semmelweis sighs deeply. As Dr. Csonka gets closer, Csonka starts to applaud.

    DR. CSONKA
    Bravo!

    SEMMELWEIS
    (Confused)
    Sorry, sir?

    DR. CSONKA
    I just received a report, and there hasn’t been a single death in Obstetrics from puerperal fever. (Louder) Ladies and gentleman, let’s hear it for our Director!

A smattering of applause. The rest of the staff just stares.

    SEMMELWEIS
    (Embarrassed)
    Thank you, Dr. Csonka. Really.

    DR. CSONKA
    I am recommending you for a salary to the Chief Administrator.
Wow. Thank you, sir.

Dr. Csonka pats him on the shoulder.

Keep it up, Semmelweis.

Dr. Csonka walks off.

Semmelweis breaks out into a huge smile.

A few months later.

Semmelweis sits across the desk of the Hospital CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR. The Chief is a lanky man with a well-groomed salt and pepper mustache.

Semmelweis looks like he hasn’t slept in a month—large, dark bags under his eyes. His clothes, with the exception of his white coat, are unkempt.

Dr. Semmelweis, this is not Vienna. We just don’t have the resources.

I understand that, sir.

And your instruments work perfectly fine.

We just need more of them. Ones that are not rusted. Enough so that doctors don’t have to share them when examining patients at the same time.

While I do appreciate all the good work you’ve done at the hospital—

Sir, there were 514 births during the my tenure as director. Out of those, there were only 2 deaths related to puerperal fever.
CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
I am perfectly aware of—

SEMMELWEIS
So whatever you think I am doing
that is excessive, or expensive—

The Chief Administrator throws an periodical on the desk. The
Chief Administrator points to a paragraph.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
It’s from a medical journal based
in your old stomping grounds.
(Reads) The experience and the
statistical evidence of most of the
obstetrics institutions protest the
opinion of Semmelweis: it would be
well that the readers should not
allow themselves to be misled by
this theory.

SEMMELWEIS
Please... This is punitive nonsense
from my former employer.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Well, Doctor... it’s fairly
widespread nonsense.

SEMMELWEIS
The people who read that trash are
lemmings and sheep. Lemmings and
sheep.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
You know who also reads these?
Trustees.

SEMMELWEIS
I- I- I don’t understand the
relevance. This is a hospital.
Trustees are... are...

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
The ones who come up with the money
for the new instruments and massive
amounts of cleaning solutions and
God knows what else you will want
later on. And they do not
appreciate being associated with
the negative reaction brought about
when you brandishing about your
theories.
Silence.

SEMMELWEIS
So you’re informing me what? What?
You’re going to let me go? You’re
going to let me go too? Because of-
because of- because of this?!?
These lies. This conspiracy against
my truth.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Calm down.

SEMMELWEIS
I will not calm down.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Dr. Semmelweis. Calm down.

Semmelweis shakes.

SEMMELWEIS
I will not calm down for the likes
of you or any of the rest of them.
You are going to toss me out, and
nothing about that fact will ever
make me calm.

Chief Administrator grabs Semmelweis’ shaking hand.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
You are not going to be fired. Not
will Dr. Csonka still breathes on
this earth.

SEMMELWEIS
What? What?

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
You may stay. In order for you to
do so, you must keep a low profile.
Do you think you will be able to do
that?

SEMMELWEIS
Yes, sir.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Aside from that, continue doing
what you’re doing.

SEMMELWEIS
Thank you, sir. I will.
Semmelweis smiles.

INT. MORGUE - NIGHT

16 bodies lie in the morgue.

Semmelweis paces up and down clutching his ledger in his hands. He goes down the row of bodies.

SEMMELWEIS
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.
Puerperal fever. Puerperal fever.

He throws his ledger against the wall. Papers fly everywhere.

He slumps down against the wall. Puts his head in his hands. Closes his eyes.

One of the bodies closest to him sits straight up. She turns her head towards him.

BODY #1
The experience and the statistical evidence-

Another body sits up and turns her head to him.

BODY #2
Of most of the obstetrics institutions-

Semmelweis looks up in horror.

A third body sits up and turns her head to him.

BODY #3
Protest the opinion of Semmelweis.

Another follows.

He presses himself up against the wall hard. Beads of sweat form on his brow.

BODY #4
It would be well that the readers-
SEMMELEWIS

No!

Another rises and turns.

BODY #5
Should not allow themselves to be misled by this theory.

Semmelweis gets up and runs down the row of bodies. Each of the corpses sits up and echoes the criticisms against Semmelweis until all sixteen are speaking.

Semmelweis runs out and slams the door.

INT. MORGUE - MOMENTS LATER

A medical students opens the door to the morgue.

All 16 bodies lie perfectly still.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Semmelweis roves the hospital going down his checklist.

SEMMELEWIS
Hand washing. Check. Instrument cleaning. Check. What in God’s name is it?

INT. LYING-IN CLINIC - NIGHT

He sits with a patient. She looks perfectly healthy. She sleeps.

Semmelweis checks her vitals. Pulse. Temperature. He leans in to retake her pulse.

He sniffs. Wrinkles his nose. He picks up the corner of her blanket. Sniffs again. Makes a gags a little.

He inspects them closely. They are stained with various reddish yellowish stains.

SEMMELEWIS
No...

He moves over to another unoccupied, bed- pulls the covers down.
There is dried blood on the sheets that flakes off when Semmelweis runs his hand over it.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Damn it.

Semmelweis gathers up the sheets and carries them off.

INT. CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR’S OFFICE — DAY

He throws the ball of sheets on the Chief’s desk.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Can I help you?

SEMMELWEIS
I know what’s killing the mothers.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Shouldn’t you be taking this up with Dr. Csonka?

SEMMELWEIS
Not when it’s your fault.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
I beg your pardon?

SEMMELWEIS
Smell them.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
I’m not going to-

SEMMELWEIS
Do it.

The Chief leans in a bit and inhales sharply. He groans and covers his nose.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Ugh!

Semmelweis holds the sheets closer to the Chief’s face, right up to his line of vision.

SEMMELWEIS
That? That’s blood. See that?
That’s dried pus? That? That’s lochia... See all of this? That’s your fault.
CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
I’m not following. And get that thing out of my face.

SEMMELWEIS
The head nurse was accepting linens so dirty that they reeked of decomposing discharge of former patients.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
I’m sorry?

SEMMELWEIS
Your head nurse was accepting linens from the cleaning staff that were barely laundered, or perhaps not even laundered at all.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
That is a fairly serious accusation, Dr. Semmelweis.

Simmelweis holds up the linens.

SEMMELWEIS
Is this not proof enough?!! Fine. Sir, would you be so kind as to come with me? Perhaps this will make a difference.

INT. MAIN CLINIC AREA - DAY
Simmelweis storms in followed by the Chief.
Simmelweis scans the room.
His eyes lock on the Head Nurse who stands in the corner. She chats with an orderly.
Simmelweis walks over and grabs her arm.

HEAD NURSE
Hey!
Simmelweis drags her over to the Chief. Gives her a little shove.

SEMMELWEIS
Explain!

HEAD NURSE
What?
SEMMELWEIS
(Shouting)
Tell him. Tell him what you did.

The entire rest of the room goes silent. Everyone stares.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Dr. Semmelweis, there’s no need for such a public display.

HEAD NURSE
Sir, I have no idea what he’s talking about.

SEMMELWEIS
(Growling)
Let me refresh your memory.

Semmelweis shoves the filthy sheets in her face.

Muffled screams. The Chief pulls Semmelweis off of her.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Dr. Semmelweis, control yourself!

She groans. Throws up.

SEMMELWEIS
Imagine delivering a child on that!
Tell him. Tell him you allowed these “clean” sheets to be on the beds in the ward the other day.

She starts to cry.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Dr. Semmelweis-

SEMMELWEIS
Tell him. Tell him how you are responsible for the murder of 16 innocent women. TELL HIM.

HEAD NURSE
I’m so sorry, sir. I was trying to come under budget, like you-

SEMMELWEIS
What?!!

Chief looks around the room. Notices everyone is staring.
CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
(Cautious)
Dr. Semmelweis, it may be a good idea for you to get out of the hospital for a bit.

SEMMELWEIS
I’m sorry?

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Since Dr. Kuzni left, we are in need of a new leader of our lecture series.

SEMMELWEIS
But—but—but what about the patients? If I’m not here, they’ll die.

The Chief frowns. He pauses to think for a moment.

Semmelweis sweats.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
(Careful)
Doctor, are you telling me that the protocols you put in place are only effective if you monitor them?

SEMMELWEIS
Well... no.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Fantastic. I will have my secretary give you a list of dates. We can meet next week to discuss content. Thank you.

Semmelweis stands stunned.

SEMMELWEIS
Uh. I-uh-I-well-uh...

The Chief pats him on the back.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR
Wonderful. I will see you next week. Thank you, Doctor. Why don’t you take the rest of the day off? Yes, thank you...

Semmelweis looks around. He walks out.
INT. SEMMELWEIS FAMILY HOME - MORNING

Semmelweis sits at a table in his robe. He looks as if he hasn’t slept.

Marie comes down the stairs. She stops at the sight of him.

MARIÉ
Ignaz?

SEMMELWEIS
Yes?

MARIÉ
You know... we never talked about having a family.

SEMMELWEIS
I know.

MARIÉ
Now, that you’re back. For good. What if we-

SEMMELWEIS
Absolutely not.

MARIÉ
Why?

SEMMELWEIS
No.

MARIÉ
I think a baby would-

SEMMELWEIS
(Stern)
No. Marie.

MARIÉ
Please, can I just say-

SEMMELWEIS
(Shouts)
NO. NO. NO. NO. NO.

MARIÉ
Why are you yelling?

SEMMELWEIS
You’re not having a baby. We’re not having a baby. End of story.
MARIE
So I have no say in this?

SEMMELWEIS
It’s filthy. You’ll be filthy and then if I couldn’t make sure-

MARIE
I know you would never let anything happen to me.

SEMMELWEIS
No.

MARIE
Ignaz, please.

SEMMELWEIS
No! Get out. I’m not going to tolerate this inane babble.

MARIE
What?

SEMMELWEIS
Out. Get out.

MARIE
Why are you doing this, Ignaz?

SEMMELWEIS
Out.

Marie leaves the room in tears.

INT. SEMMELWEIS BEDROOM - NIGHT
1864.

Marie already lies in bed asleep.

Semmelweis takes his clothes off. He gets into bed.

He closes his eyes.

He sees a dead patient hovering over him. Her infected entrails pour onto Semmelweis’ face.

He jolts up from the bed.

He gets up. He starts muttering to himself.
Marie opens her eyes. Watches him for a few moments. She shakes her head and rolls over.

He starts putting on his clothes. Still mumbling.

He goes over to the basin on the dresser. He takes out soap and a nailbrush. He scrubs his hands until the skin under his fingernails starts to bleed.

**INT. LECTURE HALL - DAY**

A crowd of men in suits and white coats sit in rows facing a podium. The are all talking to each other.

Dr. Csonka and Semmelweis enter and walk up the aisle to the podium.

Simmelweis sweats. He adjusts his tie.

Dr. Csonka walks up to the podium.

Simmelweis checks under his nails for dirt.

**DR. CSONKA**

Thank you all for coming to this conference. It is truly exciting to see Europe’s finest medical minds assembled here at St. Rochus. Our next lecturer is the Director of our Obstetrics department. He will be speaking on his recent publications and will be taking questions. Dr. Semmelweis?

A smattering of applause.

Dr. Csonka steps down.

Simmelweis adjust his tie. Walks up to the podium.

He shuffles his notes. Wipes sweat from his brow.

He looks up and sees a room full of stern men looking back at him.

**SEMMELWEIS**

Ahem. Thank you, Dr. Csonka. Some of you may have read about my work. Or read the various interpretations of my work.

(MORE)
I started off years ago in Vienna with a question: why was it that patients who experienced street births or births at the hands of midwives less likely to die of puerperal fever than in the lying in clinic? What protected those who delivered outside the clinic from these destructive unknown endemic influences?

He straightens his notes. Coughs.

It was my friend and colleague, Dr. Jakob Kolletschka, that lead me to exclude factors such as overcrowding, climate, and environment. Jakob died. (Pause) And his death led me to a breakthrough in my post-mortem examination of him.

He looks up. He sees most of the men looking at him incredulously. In the corner of his eye, he thinks he sees the corpse of a patient sitting in one of the seats. He jerks his head in that direction. Blinks. Nothing.

He coughs again and looks back down at his notes.

His autopsy revealed a pathology similar to my patients who were dying of puerperal fever. It was then that I discovered there must be a connection between cadaveric contamination and puerperal fever.

There is murmuring through the audience.

Semmelweis looks up. The corpse has returned to the seat.

Semmelweis looks down. Rubs his eyes. Looks back up. The corpse is still there, staring back at him.

Semmelweis swallows hard. He shuffles his notes.

Ahem. I-I-I-I came to the conclusion that my hospital colleagues and myself carries cadaverous particles on our hands.
More murmuring.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Now, I know that this is an unpopular theory. But-

He looks up there are three more corpses in the front row.

He rubs his eyes harder. He wipes his brow.

He looks up again. They stand.

Semmelweis gasps a little. Goes back to his notes.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
Now it’s controversial, but I have data. Hard data. Hard data. The midwifery ward, which doesn’t have autopsy rotations, has always had a dramatically lower mortality rate.

He looks up. There are more corpses in the audience.

They all get up and walk toward him.

SEMMELWEIS (CONT’D)
I-I-I-I had introduced hand washing policies that reduced-

They head up the stairs to the podium.

He screams.

They grab at his arms.

Semmelweis continues to scream as he tries to get their hands off of him.

The audience rumbles in confusion.

Dr. Csonka runs up the steps.

DR. CSONKA
Dr. Semmelweis! Dr. Semmelweis!

He grabs Semmelweis’ arm. Semmelweis lets out a bloodcurdling scream and runs out of the lecture hall.

INT. SEMMELWEIS FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

There is a knock on the door.
Marie goes down the stairs and opens the door to find Skoda and Dr. Csonka standing there.

    MARIE
    May I help you?

    SKODA
    Is Ignaz here?

    MARIE
    He’s resting. Who are you?

    DR. CSONKA
    Forgive me. I’m Dr. Csonka. You’re friends with my wife, Mathilde.

    MARIE
    Ah yes. Nice to finally meet you.

    SKODA
    I’m Dr. Skoda. A friend of your husband’s.

Marie frowns.

    MARIE
    My husband doesn’t have many friends.

    SKODA
    Believe me. I worked with him in Vienna. I helped him publish–

    MARIE
    He’s never mentioned you.

    SKODA
    No. He wouldn’t. Would he?

She nods.

    MARIE
    Would you come in?

    DR. CSONKA
    Thank you, Mrs. Semmelweis.

They follow her in. They look distressed at the condition of the house as they walk through it.

She shows them into the living room. There are only two chairs in the entire room.

Skoda and Dr. Csonka look at her.
MARIE
Please, sit.

Skoda awkwardly sits. Dr. Csonka remains standing.

DR. CSONKA
I am fine with standing, Mrs. Semmelweis. Please, do sit.

She sits.

MARIE
Thank you. If I knew I had people coming I would have... my husband and I aren't used to having guests. I'm sorry.

DR. CSONKA
Mrs. Semmelweis we’re here because we’re concerned about your husband. (Beat) Has he been acting a little... strange lately?

SKODA
More than usual?

Marie glares at Skoda.

DR. CSONKA
Mrs. Semmelweis?

MARIE
Well, his behavior has been... different since he returned from Vienna, but...

SKODA
We’re concerned.

DR. CSONKA
Did he tell you about the other day?

MARIE
No. He’s been asleep for two days.

Skoda and Dr. Csonka exchange glances.

DR. CSONKA
He was giving a lecture at our annual conference, and half-way through he... he-
SKODA
He apparently started hallucinating.

Marie shifts in her seat.

MARIE
I see. (Pause) That makes sense.

SKODA
Mrs. Semmelweis, you know— you must know that his dismissal was, well...

MARIE
I assumed it was political. The Austrians don’t exactly make us feel welcome.

DR. CSONKA
True as that may be, Mrs. Semmelweis...

MARIE
It is all stress. With good reason. When they booted him out, I always assumed he was having a difficult time adjusting.

SKODA
Well, it’s not the case. Or, rather, that’s not entirely the case.

Marie shoots him another look.

DR. CSONKA
He’s unwell, Mrs. Semmelweis. And we’re afraid, if this continues... he’ll become a danger to himself and others.

Tears form in Marie’s eyes.

MARIE
He’s a good man.

Skoda nods.

DR. CSONKA
Nevertheless, we want to talk to you about your options.
MARIE
My options?

SKODA
About his care.

DR. CSONKA
We want to talk to you about... well, putting him in an institution.

MARIE
What?

DR. CSONKA
Temporarily. It sounds worse than it is.

SKODA
I feel like he will only decline further without the proper care. Do you think you could manage him on your own?

MARIE
He’s my husband.

DR. CSONKA
This would only be a temporary stay. It’s really more of a health spa, a sanitarium if you will.

SKODA
Don’t you want to do what’s best for him?

MARIE
He’s my husband.

Skoda gets up from the chair.

DR. CSONKA
Of course. All we ask of you is to think about it.

Marie gets up. She leads them to the door.

SKODA
May I just say: your husband would go to any lengths to save the lives of his patients. (Pause) I just wanted to do the same for him. I owe him that. At least.
Marie opens the door.

MARIE
Thank you for stopping by. I will let my husband know that you came to see him.

SKODA
Don’t.

She raises her eyebrows.

DR. CSONKA
It may upset him more.

She nods.

MARIE
Of course. Thank you.

They walk out. She closes the door.

INT. SEMMELWEIS FAMILY BEDROOM - NIGHT

She opens the bedroom door.

She finds her husband staring out the window. Blank expression. He rocks softly. He mumbles to himself—barely audible.

SEMMELWEIS
They live on your hands. They’re so small. They live on your hands. Everything you touch. They live on your hands.

Rests her head on the door frame. She wipes the tears from her cheeks.

EXT. BUDAPEST ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE - DAY

Semmelweis is dragged in restraints past MARIE, his wife, by two muscular orderlies.

Marie cries.

MARIE
(To the orderlies)
Don’t hurt him!

SEMMELWEIS
Marie!
MARIE
I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.

SEMMELWEIS
Oh, Marie! How could you?

MARIE
I had to!

SEMMELWEIS
They got to you. Didn’t they?
Did’t they?!?

MARIE
No one got to me. Do you remember what happened at the Lecture Hall?

SEMMELWEIS
How dare you betray me like this.
How dare you! All my work– my work–

Marie grabs his hands. They are red and raw.

MARIE
Look! You’ve scrubbed yourself raw.
You need help, my dear. (Tears up)
And I... can’t... keep...

SEMMELWEIS
I will not be silenced! Not by you.
Not by anyone.

He tries to fight the restraints. The orderlies drag him away, so his feet drag along the floor. One of his shoes comes off and is left behind.

INT. SEMMELWEIS’ CELL – NIGHT

Semmelweis lies dead on his cot in the mental institution. His physical state is exactly like the mothers that died of puerperal fever.

A hand closes his eyes.

A sheet covers him.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM – DAWN

A window opens. Blood tinged water pours out of a wooden bucket and onto the pinkish-gray cobblestones below.
The cries of a woman in agonizing labor pains reverberate off of the clean white walls.

SUPER: “IGNAZ SEMMELWEIS SAVED THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF WOMEN BEFORE HIS DEATH AT 47.”

A pristine, white NURSE’S HAND thrusts a dry metal pail underneath a water pump. Clear water sparkles pink-orange in the dawn light as it flows into the pail.

INT. DELIVERY ROOM- MORNING

A baby WAILS.

Drab gray shutters fling open. Cheery church bells peal in time with the baby’s cries. Sunlight spills onto the black and white tiled floor.

SUPER: “HIS FINDINGS EARNED WIDESPREAD ACCEPTANCE YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH, WHEN LOUIS PASTEUR CONFIRMED THE GERM THEORY AND JOSEPH LISTER OPERATED USING THE HYGENIC METHODS OF SEMMELWEIS WITH GREAT SUCCESS.”

A middle aged orderly, down on her knees, dips a scrub brush into a metal pail filled with soapy water.

She scrubs the floor until it gleams gold in the sunlight.

I/E. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - DAY

A young, rosy cheeked MOTHER carries her infant down the darkened hallways of the hospital.

SUPER: “THANKS TO IGNAZ SEMMELWEIS’ SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY, GENERATIONS OF MOTHERS HAVE LIVED TO SEE THEIR CHILDREN GROW UP.”

AT THE DOORWAY, she stops and kisses her child.

The mother and child walk through into the SUNLIGHT.

FADE TO WHITE:

END OF FILM