

The Actor's Nightmare

By Christopher Durang

Cast:

George Spelvin, a young man (an accountant) mistaken for an actor

Meg, the Stage Manager

Sarah Siddons, a famous and glamorous actress

Dame Ellen Terry, A slightly less famous actress

Mary Anderson, even slightly less famous

Susan Barstow, the least famous of them all

Henry Irving, a dashing actor

Executioner....well, duh

The Announcer

Lights-Dim stage light mimicking a backstage setting

Sound-An instrumental version of "There's No Business Like Show Business"

Basically an empty stage with a few set pieces on it. George Spelvin wanders out of the TARDIS which is DCR in front of the traveler amongst other set pieces like boxes, a sofa, a fake tree, and a costume rack. He wanders downstage, looking very confused.

Enter Meg, SR, with clipboard and master script. She is looking at the clipboard and doesn't notice George at first.

GEORGE: Oh, I'm sorry. I don't know how I got in here.

MEG: *(Looking up at the sound of his voice and xing to him)* Oh, thank goodness you're here. I've been calling you.

GEORGE: Pardon?

MEG: An awful thing has happened. Eddie's been in a car accident, and you'll have to go on for him.

GEORGE: Good Heavens, how awful *(Xing a few step SL)*...who's Eddie *(Xing back)*?

MEG: Eddie. *(He looks blank.)* Edwin. You have to go on for him.

GEORGE: On for him.

MEG: Well, he can't go on. He's been in a car accident.

GEORGE: Yes, I understood that part. But what do you mean "go on for him"?

MEG: You play the part. Now I know you haven't had a chance to rehearse it exactly, but presumably you know your lines and you've certainly seen it enough.

GEORGE: I don't understand. Do I know you?

MEG: George, we really don't have time for this kind of kidding. Half-hour. *(Exits SR)*

GEORGE: My name isn't George, it's ...well, I don't know what it is, but it isn't George.

(Enter Sarah Siddons, very much like a diva, Xs past George dramatically and turns with a flourish back towards him.)

SARAH: My God, did you hear about Eddie?

GEORGE: Yes, I did.

SARAH: It's just too, too awful. Now good luck tonight, George darling, we're all counting on you. Of course, you're a little too young for the part. And don't forget when I cough three times, that's your cue to unzip the back of my dress and then I'll slap you. We changed it from last night. *(She starts to exit SL)*

GEORGE: Wait, please. What play are we doing exactly?

SARAH: *(Staring at him)* What?

GEORGE: What is the play, please?

SARAH: Coward. *(Looking at him like he's crazy)* It's the Coward. *(Slowly)* Noel Coward.

(There is a pause and then Sarah suddenly relaxes.) George, don't do that. For a moment, I thought that you were serious. Break a leg, darling. *(Exits SL)*

GEORGE: Coward. *(Xs a few steps DC)* I wonder if it's "Private Lives." At least I've seen that one. I don't remember rehearsing it exactly. And am I an actor? I thought I was an accountant. Any why does everyone keep calling me George?

(Enter Dame Ellen Terry from SR, a diva to be sure, but slightly less than Sarah. She Xs to George.)

ELLEN: Hello, Stanley. I heard about Edwin. Good luck tonight. We're counting on you. *(Starts off L)*

GEORGE: Wait. What play are we doing?

ELLEN: *(turning towards him)* Very funny, Stanley.

GEORGE: No, really. I've forgotten.

ELLEN: "Checkmate".

GEORGE: "Checkmate"?

ELLEN: By Samuel Beckett. You know, in the garbage cans. You always play these jokes, Stanley, just don't do it onstage. Well, good luck tonight. I mean, break a leg. Did you hear? Edwin broke both legs! *(Exits SL, laughing)*

GEORGE: I've never heard of "Checkmate".

(Enter Meg SR, looking at her watch.)

MEG: George, get into costume. We have 15 minutes.

(Meg exits SR, at the same time Henry Irving, who is somewhat of a dandy, enters and comes a few steps onstage.)

HENRY: Good Lord, I'm late. Hi, Eddie. Oh, you're not Eddie. Who are you?

GEORGE: *(Xing to him)* You've never seen me before?

HENRY: Who the devil are you?

GEORGE: I don't really know. George, I think. Maybe Stanley, but probably George. I think I'm an accountant.

HENRY: Look, no one's allowed backstage before a performance. So you'll have to leave or I'll be forced to report you to the stage manager.

GEORGE: Oh she knows I'm here already.

HENRY: Oh. Well, if Meg knows you're here it must be alright, I suppose. It's not my affair. I'm late enough already. *(Exits SL)*

MEG (Off-stage): 10 minutes, everybody. The call is 10 minutes.

GEORGE: I better just go home. *(Takes off his pants.)* I didn't mean to do that.

(Meg enters SR)

MEG: George, stop that. *(Indicating SL)* Go into the dressing room to change. Really, you keep this up and we'll bring you up on charges.

GEORGE: But where is the dressing room?

MEG: George, you're not amusing. *(Indicating again, more angrily and exasperated)* It's that way. And give me those. *(Takes his pants)* I'll go soak them for you.

GEORGE: Please don't soak them.

MEG: Don't tell me my job. Now go get changed. The call is 5 minutes. *(Pushes him off towards dressing room SL, Xs back SR)* 5 minutes, everyone. 5 minutes. Places.

Lights-BO

Sound-Voice over during scene change

Set-Strike Props

VOICE: Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please? At this evening's performance, the role of Elyot, normally played by Edwin Booth, will be played by George Spelvin. *(Sound of audience moaning)* The role of Amanda, normally played by Sarah Bernhardt, will be played by Sarah Siddons. The role of Kitty the bar maid will be played Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Dr. Crippin will play himself. The management wishes to remind the audience that the taking of photographs is strictly forbidden by law, and is dangerous as it may disorient the actor. Thank you.

Lights-Special Up On Coward Set

Set-Open Curtain

Sound-Recorded applause

(At curtain open, Sarah is discovered behind a small balcony railing. Beside her is a small cocktail table and chairs. She is wearing an evening gown, holding a cocktail glass staring out over the audience's head. After a moment, George is pushed onstage. He is dressed as Hamlet. As he enters, several flash photos are taken. He is disoriented and trips over chair. Once he is able to see, he is nervously staring at the audience.)

Sound-Music

SARAH: Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

GEORGE: What?

SARAH: Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

GEORGE: Yes, that's true. Am I supposed to be Hamlet?

SARAH: Whose yacht do you think that is?

GEORGE: Where?

SARAH: The Duke of Westminster, I expect. It always is.

GEORGE: Ah, well, perhaps. To be or not to be. I don't know any more of it.

(She looks irritated at him, and then she coughs three times. He remembers and unzips her dress. She slaps him.)

SARAH: Elyot, please. We are on our honeymoons.

GEORGE: We are?

SARAH: Yes. *(Irritated, being over-explicit.)* Me with Victor, and you with Sibyl.

GEORGE: Ah.

SARAH: Tell me about Sibyl.

GEORGE: I've never met her.

SARAH: Ah, Elyot, you're so amusing. You're married to Sibyl. Tell me about her.

GEORGE: Nothing much to tell really. She's sort of nondescript, I'd say.

SARAH: I bet you were going to say that she's just like lady Bundle, and that she has several chins, and one blue eye and one brown eye, and a third eye in the center of her forehead. Weren't you?

GEORGE: Yes, I think so.

SARAH: Victor's like that too. *(Long pause.)* I bet you were just about to tell me that you travelled around the world.

GEORGE: Yes, I was. I travelled around the world.

SARAH: How was it?

GEORGE: The world?

SARAH: Yes.

GEORGE: Oh, very nice.

SARAH: I always feared the Taj Mahal would look like a biscuit box. Did it?

GEORGE: Not really.

SARAH: I always feared the Taj Mahal would look like a biscuit box. Did it?

GEORGE: I guess it did.

SARAH: I always feared the Taj Mahal would look like a biscuit box. Did it?

GEORGE: Hard to say. What brand biscuit box?

SARAH: I always feared the Taj Mahal would look like a biscuit box. Did it? Did it? Did it?

GEORGE: I wonder whose yacht that is out there.

SARAH: Did it? Did it? Did it? Did it?

(Enter Meg SR. She has apron and maid's hat on over her stage manager garb. She is carrying a duster and the master script)

MEG: My, this balcony looks dusty. I think I'll just clean it up a little.

(Xs to George, dusting, and whispers in George's ear. Exits SR)

GEORGE: Not only did the Taj Mahal look like a biscuit, but women should be struck regularly like gongs.

Sound-Recorded laughter and applause.

SARAH: Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

GEORGE: Yes. Quite extraordinary.

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE: China?

SARAH: You travelled around the world. How was China?

GEORGE: I liked it, but I felt homesick.

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE: Lots of rice. The women bind their feet.

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE: I hated it. I missed you.

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE: I hated it. I missed...Sibyl.

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE: I hated it. I...miss the maid. Oh, maid!

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE: Just a moment please. Oh, maid! *(Enter Meg SR)* Ah, there you are. I think you missed a spot here. *(She Xs, dusts, whispers in his ear, and exits SR)*

SARAH: How was China?

GEORGE *(with authority)*: Very large, China.

SARAH: And Japan?

GEORGE *(Doesn't know, but makes a guess)*: Very...small, Japan.

SARAH: And Ireland...?

GEORGE: Very green.

SARAH: And Iceland?

GEORGE: Very white.

SARAH: And Italy?

GEORGE: Very...Neapolitan.

SARAH: And Copenhagen?

GEORGE: Very...cosmopolitan.

SARAH: And Florida?

GEORGE: Very...condominium.

SARAH: And New Jersey?

GEORGE: Very...mobile home, I don't know.

SARAH: And Sibyl?

GEORGE: What?

SARAH: Do you love Sibyl?

GEORGE: Who's Sibyl?

SARAH: You new wife, who you married after you and I got our divorce.

GEORGE: Oh, were we married? Oh yes, I forgot that part.

SARAH: Elyot, you're so amusing. You make me laugh all the time. *(Laughs)* So, do you love Sibyl?

GEORGE: Probably, I married her.

(Pause. She coughs three times, he unzips her dress, she slaps him.)

SARAH: Oh, Elyot, darling, I'm sorry. We were mad to have left each other. Kiss me.

(They kiss. Enter Mary SL as Sibyl, in an evening gown. She Xs to them.)

MARY: Oh, how ghastly.

SARAH: Oh dear. And this must be Sibyl.

MARY: Oh, How ghastly. What shall we do?

SARAH: We must all speak in very low voices and attempt to be civilized.

MARY: Is this Amanda? Oh, Elyot, I think she's simply obnoxious.

SARAH: How very rude.

MARY: Oh, Elyot, how can you treat me like this?

GEORGE: Hello, Sibyl.

MARY: Well, since you ask, I'm very upset. I was inside writing a letter to your mother and wanted to know how to spell apothecary.

SARAH: A-P-O-T-H-E-C-A-R-Y.

MARY: *(Icily)* Thank you. *(She writes it down, Sarah looks over her shoulder.)*

SARAH: Don't scribble, Sibyl.

MARY: Did my eyes deceive me or were you kissing my husband a moment ago?

SARAH: We must all speak in very low voices and attempt to be civilized.

MARY: I was speaking in a low voice.

SARAH: Yes, but I could still hear you.

MARY: Oh, sorry. *(Speaks to low to be heard.)*

SARAH: *(Speaks to low to be heard.)*

MARY: *(Speaks to low to be heard.)*

SARAH: *(Speaks to low to be heard.)*

MARY: *(Speaks to low to be heard.)*

SARAH: I can't hear a bloody word she's saying. The woman's a nincompoop. Say something, Elyot.

GEORGE: I couldn't hear her either.

MARY: Elyot, you have to choose between us immediately—do you love this creature or do you love me?

GEORGE: I wonder where the maid is. *(Looking around)*

MARY & SARAH: Forget about the maid, Elyot. *(They both look embarrassed.)*

MARY: *(Trying to cover)* You could never have a lasting relationship with a maid. Choose between the two of us.

GEORGE: I choose...oh God, I don't know my lines. I don't know how I got here. I wish I weren't here. I wish I had joined the monastery like I almost did right after high school. I almost joined, but then I didn't.

SARAH: *(Trying to cover)* Oh, Elyot, your malaria is acting up again and you're ranting. Come, come, who do you choose, me or that baggage over there?

MARY: You're the baggage, not I. Yes, Elyot, who do you choose?

GEORGE: I choose...*(to Sarah)* I'm sorry, what is your name?

SARAH: Amanda.

GEORGE: I choose Amanda. I think that's what he does in the play.

MARY: Very well. I can accept defeat gracefully. I don't think I'll send this letter to your mother. She has a loud voice and an overbearing manner and I don't like her taste in tea china. I hope, Elyot, that when you find me hanging from the hotel lobby chandelier with my eyes all bulged out and my tongue hanging out, that you'll be very, very sorry. Goodbye.
(Exits SL)

SARAH: What a dreadful sport she is.

GEORGE: Poor Sibyl. She's going to hang herself.

SARAH: Some women should be hung regularly like tapestries. Oh who cares? Whose yacht do you think that is?

GEORGE: *(remembering)* The Duke of Westminster, I exp...

SARAH: *(furious)* How dare you mention that time in Mozambique? *(Slaps him.)* Oh darling, I'm sorry. *(Moving in to embrace him)* I love you madly!

GEORGE: *(gasps)* I've inhaled your hair. *(He coughs three times. Sarah looks confused and tries to pull off his Hamlet doublet. He looks confused, and then slaps her. She slaps him back. They both look confused.)*

SARAH: There, we're not angry anymore, are we? Oh, Elyot, wait for me here and I'll pack my things and we'll run away together before Victor gets back. Oh, darling, isn't it extraordinary how potent cheap music can be? *(She exits SR. George sort of follows a bit, then turns back to face the audience. Flash photos are taken again, George blinks and is disoriented. Lights change, the sound of trumpets is heard, and Henry Irving, dressed in Shakespearean garb, enter SL and bows grandly to George.)*

HENRY: Hail to your lordship!

GEORGE: Oh hello. Are you Victor?

HENRY: The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

GEORGE: This doesn't sound like Noel Coward.

HENRY: A truant disposition, good my Lord.

GEORGE: You aren't Victor, are you?

HENRY: My Lord, I came to see your father's funeral.

GEORGE: Oh yes? How was it?

HENRY: Indeed, my Lord, it followed hard upon.

GEORGE: Hard upon? Yes, I see. *(Enter Meg SR)* Oh good, the maid. *(She whispers to him.)* Thrift, thrift Horatio. The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables...what does that mean? *(Meg exits as he speaks)* Ah, she's gone already.

HENRY: My Lord, I think I saw him yesternight.

GEORGE: Did you? Who?

HENRY: My Lord, the king your father.

GEORGE: The king my father?

HENRY: Season your admiration for a while with an attent ear til I may deliver upon the witness of these gentlemen this marvel to you.

GEORGE: I see. I'm Hamlet now, right?

HENRY: Two nights together had these gentlemen, Marcellus and Bernardo, on their watch in the dead waste and middle of the night been thus encountered. A figure like your father, armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe, appears before them and with solemn march goes slow and stately by them. Thrice he walked by their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distilled almost to jelly with the act of fear, stand dumb and speak not to him. This to me in dreadful secrecy impart they did, and with them the third night kept the watch, where, as they had delivered, both in time, form of the thing, each word made true and good, the apparition comes. I knew your father. These hands are not more like.

GEORGE: *(not paying attention)* Oh, my turn? Most strange and wondrous tale you tell, Horatio. It doth turn my ear into a very... *(At a loss)* merry...bare bodkin...

HENRY: As I do live, my honored Lord, tis true, and we did think it writ down in our duty to let you know of it.

GEORGE: Well, thank you very much. *(Pause)*

HENRY: Oh yes, my Lord. He wore his beaver up.

GEORGE: His beaver up. He wore his beaver up. And does he usually wear it down?

HENRY: A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.

GEORGE: Well, I am sorry to hear that. My father was a king of much renown. A favorite amongst all in London town...and in Denmark.

HENRY: I war'nt it will.

GEORGE: I war'nt it will also.

HENRY: Our duty to your honor. *(Exits SL)*

GEORGE: Where are you going? Don't go! *(Smiles out at audience. Enter Sarah SR dressed as Queen Gertrude.)* Oh Amanda, good to see you. Whose yacht do you think that is?

SARAH: O Hamlet, speak no more. Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul, and there I see such black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct.

GEORGE: I haven't seen Victor. Someone was here that I thought might have been him, but it wasn't.

SARAH *(turning dramatically away)* Oh speak no more. These words like daggers enter in mine ears. No more, sweet Hamlet.

GEORGE: Very well. What do you want to talk about?

SARAH: *(melodramatically)* No more! *(Exits SR)*

GEORGE: Oh don't go! *(Pauses, smiles uncomfortably at the audience)* Maybe someone else will come out in a minute. *(Pause)* Of course, sometimes people have soliloquies in Shakespeare. Let's just wait a moment more and maybe someone will come. *(The lights change suddenly to a dim spot center stage. George is not standing in the spot.)* Oh dear. *(He moves awkwardly to the spot, decides to do his best.)* To be or not to be, that is the question. *(Doesn't know anymore.)* Oh maid! Line. Line! Ohhhh.....Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I. Whether tis nobler in the mind's eye to kill oneself, or not killing oneself, to sleep a great deal. We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our lives are rounded by a little sleep. *(The lights change. The spot goes out and another one comes up SR. George moves into it.)* Uh, thrift, thrift, Horatio. Neither a borrower or a lender be. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. Extraordinary how potent cheap music can be. Out, out damn spot! I come to wive it wealthily in Padua- if wealthily then happily in Padua. *(sings)* Brush up your Shakespeare- start quoting him now! Da da da... *(Lights change again. That spot goes off and another DCS comes up. George moves into it.)* I wonder whose yacht that is! How was China? Very large, China. How was Japan? Very small, Japan. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Line. Line! Oh my God. Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee and I detest the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. But most of all because they offend thee, my God, who art loving and deserving of all my love. I swear to confess my sins, do penance and amend my life, Amen. *(friendly)* That's the act of contrition Catholic schoolchildren say in confession to be forgiven their sins. Catholic adults say it as well, I imagine... I don't know any Catholic adults. Line! *(Explaining)* When you call for a line, the stage manager normally gives you your next line to refresh your memory. Line! The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth like a gentle rain upon the place below when we have shuffled off this mortal coil. Alas, Poor Yorick- I knew him well. Get thee to a nunnery- Line!- Nunnery. As a child I was taught by nuns and then in high school by Benedictine priests. I really rather liked the nuns. They were sort of warm but they were also fairly crazy too. Line. I liked the priests also...the school was on the grounds of the monastery and my junior and senior years I spent a few weekends joining in the daily routine of the monastery: prayers then breakfast then prayers then lunch then prayers then supper then prayers then sleep. I found the predictability quite attractive. And the food was good. I was going to join the monastery after high school but they said I was too young and should wait. And then I just stopped believing in all those things, so I never did join the monastery. I became an accountant. I studied logarithms and cosine and tangent... *(Irritated)* Line!*(Apologetic)* I'm sorry. This is supposed to be Hamlet or Private Lives or something and I keep rattling on like a maniac- I really do apologize. I just don't recall attending a single rehearsal. I don't know what I was doing. And also you came here to see Edwin Booth and you get me. I really am very embarrassed. Sorry. Line! *(Singing)* A, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t...It's a far far better thing I do than I have ever done before... Its a far far better place I go to than I have ever been before. *(Ellen enters SL, dragging 2 large trash cans. She puts them side by*

side, gets in one.) Oh good- Are you Ophelia? Get thee to a nunnery! *(She points to the other garbage can, indicating he should get in.)* Get in? Okay. *(He does.)* This must be one of those modern Hamlets. *(Lights change.)*

ELLEN: Nothing to be done. Pause. Pause. Wrinkle nose. *(Wrinkles nose.)* Nothing to be done.

GEORGE: I guess you're not Ophelia.

ELLEN: We'll just wait. Pause. Either he'll come, pause pause pause, or he won't.

GEORGE: That's a reasonable attitude. Are we, on a guess, waiting for Godot?

ELLEN: No, Willie. He came before and was an awful bore. Yesterday he came. Garlic on his breath, telling a lot of unpleasant jokes. He was just dreadful, pause, rolls her eyes upward *(she rolls her eyes).*

GEORGE: Well, I'm sorry to hear that. Pause. So who are we waiting for?

ELLEN: We're waiting for Lefty.

GEORGE: Ah. And he is a political organizer or something, I seem to recall?

ELLEN: Yes, dear, he is a political organizer. He's always coming around saying to get involved, get off your behinds and organize, fight the system, do this, do that, uh, he's exhausting, he's worse than Jane Fonda. And he has garlic breath, just like Godot, I don't know which of them is worse, and I hope neither of them ever comes here again. Blinks left eye, blinks right eye, closes eyes, opens them *(does this).*

GEORGE: So we're not really waiting for anyone, are we?

ELLEN: No, dear, we're not. It's just another happy day, pause, smile, pause, picks bug from head *(does this).*

GEORGE: Do you smell something?

ELLEN: *(under her breath)* That's not your line. Willie doesn't have that many lines. *(Louder)* Oh, Willie, how talkative you are this morning!

GEORGE: There seems to be some sort of muck in the bottom of this garbage can.

Ellen: Mustn't complain, Willie. There's muck at the bottom of everyone's garbage can. Count your blessings, Willie. I do. *(Counts to herself, eyes closed.)* One. Two. Three. Are you counting, Willie?

GEORGE: I guess so.

ELLEN: I'm up to three. Three is my eyesight. *(Opens her eyes.)* Oh my God, I've gone blind. I can't see< Willie. Oh what a terrible day. Oh dear. Oh my. *(Suddenly very cheerful again.)* Oh well. Not so bad really. I only used my eyes occasionally. When I wanted to see something. But no more!

GEORGE: I really don't know this play at all.

ELLEN: Count your blessings, Willie. Let me hear you count them.

GEORGE: Alright. One. Two. Three. That's my eyesight. Four. That's my hearing. Five, that's my...MasterCard. Six, that's...

ELLEN: Did you say God, Willie?

GEORGE: No.

ELLEN: Why did you leave the monastery, Willie? Was it the same reason I left the opera?

GEORGE: I have no idea.

ELLEN: I left the opera because I couldn't sing. They were mad to have hired me. Certifiable. And they were certified shortly afterward, the entire staff. They reside now at the Rigoletto Home for the mentally Incapacitated. In Turin.

Pause. Tries to touch her nose with her tongue *(does this.)*

VOICE: Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention please?

ELLEN: Oh, Willie, listen. Perhaps there is a God.

VOICE: At this evening performance, the role of Sir Thomas More, the man for all seasons, normally played by Edwin Booth, will be played by Georg Spelvin. The role of Lady Alice, normally played by Sarah Bernhardt, will be played by Susan Barstow. The role of Lady Margaret, normally played by Eleanora Duse, will be read by the stage manager. And at this evening's performance the executioner will play himself.

GEORGE: What did he say?

ELLEN: The executioner will play himself.

GEORGE: What does he mean, the executioner will play himself?

(Lights change. Enter SR Susan as Lady Alice and Meg with a few costume touches but otherwise in her stage manager garb. She is carrying a script. They X to the cans)

MEG: Oh father, why have they locked you up in this dreadful dungeon, it's more than I can bear.

SUSAN: I've brought you a custard, Thomas.

MEG: Mother's brought you a custard, father.

GEORGE: Yes, thank you.

MEG: Oh father, if you don't give in to King Henry, they're going to cut off your head.

SUSAN: Aren't you going to eat the custard I brought you, Thomas?

GEORGE: I am not hungry, thank you.

(Sudden alarming crash of cymbals. The executioner enters USL and Xs CS and stops.)

GEORGE: I've got to get out of here.

MEG: He's over here. And he'll never give in to the king.

GEORGE: No, no, I might. Quick, is this all about Anne Boleyn and everything?

MEG: Yes and you won't give in because you believe in the Catholic Church and the infallibility of the Pope and the everlasting life of the soul.

GEORGE: *(to Meg)* I don't necessarily believe in any of that. *(To executioner)* Oh sir, there's been an error. I think it's fine if the King marries Anne Boleyn. I just want to wake up.

MEG: Oh don't deny God, father, just to spare our feelings. Mother and I are willing to have you dead if it's a question of principle.

SUSAN: The first batch of custard didn't come out all that well, Thomas. This is the second batch. But it has a piece of hair of in it, I think.

GEORGE: Oh shut up about your custard, would you? I don't think the Pope is infallible at all. I think he's a normal man with normal capabilities who wears gold slippers. I thought about joining the monastery when I was younger, but I didn't do it.

ELLEN: *(waking up from a brief doze)* Oh, I was having such a pleasant dream, Willie. Go ahead, let him cut your head off, it'll be a nice change of pace.

(Executioner wheels out chopping block.)

GEORGE: That blade looks very real to me. I wasn't to wake up now. Or change plays. I wonder whose yacht that is out there. *(Susan offers him the custard again.)* No, thank you. A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!

EXECUTIONER: Sir Thomas More, you have been found guilty of the charge of High Treason. The sentence of the court is that you be taken to the Tower of London, thence to the place of execution, and there your head shall be stricken from your body and may God have mercy on your soul.

(Meg helps George out of the garbage can.)

GEORGE: Alright, I'm sorry I didn't go to the monastery, maybe I should have, and I'm sorry I giggled during church in the 3rd grade, but I see no reason to be killed for it.

ELLEN: Nothing to be done. That's what I find so wonderful.

(Meg puts George's head on the block.)

GEORGE: No!

EXECUTIONER: Do I understand you right? You wish to reverse your previous stand on King Henry's marriage to Anne and to deny the Bishop of Rome?

GEORGE: Yes, yes, YES! *(He rises)* I could care less. Let him marry eight wives.

EXECUTIONER: That's a terrible legacy of cowardice for Sir Thomas More to leave behind.

GEORGE: I don't care!

EXECUTIONER: I'm going to ignore what you've said and cut your head off anyway, and then we'll all pretend you went to your death nobly. The Church needs its saints and school children have got to have heroes to look up to, don't you all agree?

ELLEN: I agree. I know I need someone to look up to. Pause smile picks her nose *(Does this.)*

GEORGE: Yes, yes, I can feel myself waking up now. The covers have fallen off the bed and I'm cold, and I'm going to wake up so that I can reach down and pull them up again.

EXECUTIONER: Sir Thomas, prepare to meet your death.

GEORGE: Be quiet, I'm about to wake up.

EXECUTIONER: Sir Thomas, prepare to meet your death.

GEORGE: I'm awake! *(Looks around him. Susan offers him the custard again.)* No, I'm not.

SUSAN: He doesn't know his lines.

EXECUTIONER: Sir Thomas, prepare to meet your death.

GEORGE: Line! Line!

MEG: You turn to the executioner and say, "Friend, be not afraid of your office. You send me to God."

GEORGE: I don't like that line. Give me another.

MEG: That's the line in the script, George. Say it.

GEORGE: I don't want to.

MEG: Say it.

ELLEN: Say it, Willie. It'll mean a lot to me and to generations of school children to come.

SARAH *(entering from SL, Mary follows)* O Hamlet, speak the speech, I pray you, trippingly on the tongue.

EXECUTIONER: Say it.

GEORGE: Friend, be not afraid of your office. You send me...Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.

MEG: That's not the line.

GEORGE: Women should be struck regularly like gongs.

MEG: George, say the line right.

GEORGE: They say you can never dream your own death, so I expect that I'll wake up just as soon as he starts to bring down the blade. So perhaps I should get it over with.

MEG: Say the proper line, George.

(George kneels down.)

GEORGE: Friend, be not afraid of your office.

(Executioner raises axe.)

ELLEN: Goodbye, Willie.

SUSAN: Goodbye, Thomas.

MARY: Goodbye, Elyot.

SARAH: Goodbye, Hamlet.

MEG: Goodbye, George.

GEORGE: You send me to God.

(Executioner raises axe higher to bring it down. Blackout. Sound of axe coming down.)

EXECUTIONER *(In darkness)* Behold the head of Sir Thomas More.

ELLEN: *(In darkness)* Oh I wish I weren't blind and could see that, Willie. Oh well, no matter. It's still been another happy day. Pause, smile, wrinkles nose, pause, picks bug from hair, pause, pause, wiggles ears, all in darkness, utterly useless, no one can see her. She stares ahead. Count two. End of play.

(Music plays. Everyone bows except George who is dead on the floor. Everyone else does curtain call and leaves. After the stage is clear, George gets up dazed and looks around. Looks out at the audience and leaves.)