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To find a form that accommodates the mess,  
that is the task of the artist now.

—Samuel Beckett

## **Cast of Characters**

*The older actors:*

GORDON GOLDSMITH, 50s/60s

DENNIS DRYDEN, 50s/60s

*The younger actors:*

ROGER, late 30s

BOBBY BLIN, late 20s

THE BOY, teens

*The “stage manager”:*

MARGE, late 30s

## **Time**

The not-too-distant future.

## **Place**

The theatre.

## Acknowledgments

*Another Fine Mess* received its world premiere at Portland Center Stage on September 23, 2003. It was directed by Cliff Baker with the following cast and crew:

GORDON ..... David Cromwell  
DENNIS ..... Ted Roisum  
BOBBY ..... Zach Shaffer  
ROGER..... Mike O'Connell  
MARGE ..... Sharonlee Maclean  
  
Set Design..... Russell Parkman  
Lighting ..... Don Crossley  
Costumes ..... Jeff Cone  
Sound ..... Jen Raynak

*Another Fine Mess* was developed in part with the support of the Sundance Theatre Lab.

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*Another Fine Mess* was originally developed and produced by Portland Center Stage.

# ANOTHER FINE MESS

## by Steven Drukman

### Scene 1

#### Backstage

*(Lights come up on a dressing room with all the accoutrements: dying flowers, greeting cards, rolls of toilet paper, etc. There is a tiny portable TV in the stage right corner. Throughout, actors will apply make-up, facing audience as mirror, and get in costume. Against the back wall are four bowler hats on hooks [separate from the rack of clothing]: masking tape reads, in order stage right to stage left, "D.D." "G.G." "Roger" "Bobby.")*

*(THE BOY, dressed in typical Goth style [black eyeliner, black baggy clothes] is standing, listening to Faure's "Requiem" on a boom box. BOBBY, handsome leading man type, enters. Tousles boy's hair, though boy is transfixed by the music. BOBBY sits, dejected, in the stage left chair, starts getting made up for the show. Looks in mirror, stops and sighs. Starts making up again, stops and sighs. THE BOY looks at watch, picks up boom box, puts on shoulder, and exits. We hear music trail off. MARGE, a no-nonsense stage manager, enters. She has many keys attached to belt.)*

**MARGE.** *(Pokes her head in dressing room.)* Half hour.

**BOBBY.** I can't go on.

**MARGE.** You'll go on. *(Pause. Pointedly:)* Half hour.

**BOBBY.** Thank you, Marge.

**MARGE.** *(Looks at empty dressing room.)* I swear: the boy is the only one who cares about being on time around here. He's already on stage.

*(BOBBY sighs, loudly.)*

What's eatin' you?

**BOBBY.** Where do I begin?

**MARGE.** *(Shouts:)* Half hour! *(Pause:)* Where's Dennis?

**BOBBY.** Where do you think?

*(MARGE stomps the floor with her foot three times. Sound of three knocks in reply from below.)*

**DENNIS.** *(From offstage:)* Thank you, Marjorie!

**MARGE.** “Marjorie.” Now he’s calling me Marjorie.

**BOBBY.** You prefer just “Marge”?

**MARGE.** I prefer Clovis but that’s another story.

**BOBBY.** *(Laughs.)* Clovis? Why would you prefer to be called Clovis?

**MARGE.** Because it’s my name.

**BOBBY.** Oh. Well, where did...

**MARGE.** Gordon. First day we worked together—can’t remember the show—he named me Marge. It stuck.

**BOBBY.** Figures. The world’s his stage, we’re merely his players.

**MARGE.** It’s that voice of authority.

**BOBBY.** “Authority,” my ass. He’s a drunken mean old man. I was warned. My agent, everyone, they said “don’t take the job, that Goldsmith character is a total nightmare.”

**MARGE.** Yeah, you boys don’t play well together do you?

**BOBBY.** *Me?!* It’s not me. Ask Dennis, I am all about ensemble. It’s *him*. He thinks he’s God.

**MARGE.** Well, to some people—in the theatre—he is.

**BOBBY.** But Dennis isn’t like that. Dennis is a *dream*. I’d work with him again anytime. If I ever work again.

**MARGE.** What are you talking about?

*(BOBBY takes newspaper out of bag. Offers it to MARGE. She comes over.)*

Aw cripes. Bobby, if you start listening to the critics you’re dead.

*(MARGE picks up review and reads.)*

**BOBBY.** But you watch me every night, right? Would you use that word? “Wow, he’s ‘fussy’ tonight. Why’s Bobby being so ‘fussy?’”

**MARGE.** I don’t think like that, I’m a stage manager. *(Can’t help but laugh at review:)* HA! Oh that’s rich!

**BOBBY.** And you know Gordon! He pretends not to read the reviews, but he’ll totally make some lame joke about it. Watch... “oh dear boy, just takin’ the piss out of you.”

**MARGE.** *(Referring to letter in envelope:)* Where’d that come from? Don’t open that till I check it out.

**BOBBY.** House manager, don’t worry, it’s been there since previews. *(Re: review:)* “Fussy.”

**MARGE.** When Roger gets here tell him he has to bring his I.D. to the office. We gotta fill out papers again. Security found a discrepancy. And sign his birthday card.

**BOBBY.** Dennis has it. Says he does his best thinking in there.

*(Sound of toilet flushing.)*

**MARGE.** I’m opening the house in fifteen but we’re holding because...never mind.

**BOBBY.** Why?

*(MARGE quickly exits. BOBBY shouts after her:)*

*More critics?! How many can there be?! (Picks up cell phone, dials, a bit of histrionics, to/for himself:)* I’ve had it. I can’t do this. This is... this is...*not* why I went to graduate school. *(Speaks very sweetly:)* George, hi, how are you, it’s Bobby Blin. Could you, like, call me, I’m very unhappy. You were *so* right about this job, it’s...well we’ll talk, but it’s making me *very* unhappy, and...believe me, I *know* that all I did was *complain* about doing bad television, and I made that little speech about, like, bathing in my own vomit before I’d do it again...heh heh...but now...I’m, uh, wondering what else you could send me out on...just...call me, please. I’m unhappy. Thank you.

*(DENNIS appears with card, fastening his belt.)*

**DENNIS.** What a dump! *(Laughs.)*

**BOBBY.** (*Putting down phone quickly:*) Lovely.

**DENNIS.** (*Throws birthday card toward BOBBY, rubs BOBBY's shoulders.*) How ya doin' Chief? You seem tense. (*Pointing to TV:*) Hey who turned that off?

(*DENNIS quickly turns on TV, which emits the low sound of a ball game.*)

**BOBBY.** Oh, Dennis, I have no idea. Probably the boy, he was listening to his music when I got here.

**DENNIS.** But you know what's happening today, right?

(*BOBBY shakes his head.*)

It's Junior Antoine! He could break the record!

**BOBBY.** Which sport are we talking about again?

**DENNIS.** (*To TV:*) Run you fat bastard! (*Picks his nose, scratches his balls, etc. Sniffs his socks.*) Marge! (*To BOBBY:*) Where is everybody? Where's Psycho? Read what I wrote.

**BOBBY.** (*Looks at card, reads. DENNIS will chuckle.*) "Happy birthday, you psycho son of a bitch. This may be a play without a plot, but you're so freakin' bad we're out there dying. You must be trying to make a *burial* plot! Break a leg but not mine. You scare me, and I mean it. Dennis." That's...poetry.

**DENNIS.** (*To TV:*) Run! Ya got shit in yer shoes? (*Sits.*)

**BOBBY.** (*Signing card:*) Apparently, his papers aren't in order.

**DENNIS.** Whose papers, you mean Psycho?

(*BOBBY nods.*)

Yikes. He does drive a van—what does he need a van for?

**BOBBY.** Whatever.

**DENNIS.** And that accent. And he *has* set off that metal detector. You don't think he's...?

**BOBBY.** No, I don't.

**DENNIS.** You're right. It's probably just the plate in his head.

(BOBBY looks appalled.)

Oh, lighten up, college girl. I'm joking! Don't lose your sense of humor. Ya need it these days. *(To TV:)* Throw the ball, ya bitch!

(MARGE appears.)

**MARGE.** You bellowed?

**DENNIS.** These socks really stink. *(Sniffs.)* When are they gonna wash 'em?

**MARGE.** First of all, what stinks is the bathroom, like a box of eggs on fire, thanks to you, and second of all, those aren't your socks you're sniffing, those are Gordon's.

**DENNIS.** Oh. Well, that explains it. His feet are even worse than my breath.

**MARGE.** Can we vote on that? Any other questions, sweet cheeks?

**DENNIS.** That'll be all, Marge. I love it when you're angry.

**MARGE.** Then congratulations, you've found eternal love. Where the hell is everybody?

**DENNIS.** Is the boy making the curtain speech tonight?

**MARGE.** The boy *is* making the curtain speech tonight. The boy is here, on time, and on stage. The boy is professional. The rest of you... *(She walks out.)*

**DENNIS and BOBBY.** *(Unison:)* Thank you Marge!

**DENNIS.** Control freak. I love her. But don't screw up on her watch. Years ago, during a matinee—O'Neill, I think: I *corpsed*. She went ballistic.

**BOBBY.** "Corpsed"? What does that mean?

**DENNIS.** They didn't teach you that in theatre school? It means you crack up laughing on stage. Marge was furious. Can't do that to your fellow actors.

**BOBBY.** I can't do much of anything, it seems. *(Referring to review.)*

**DENNIS.** Aw, kid... Don't...don't... (*Sees that BOBBY is really upset.*) Listen to me: What the hell does that guy know? Gordon got drunk at a party once, made a pass at his wife. He's just bitter.

**BOBBY.** Meaning what? Gordon got a *great* review!

**DENNIS.** Oh. Right. (*Pause.*) Still.

**BOBBY.** You *all* got great reviews! Dennis, be honest, I trust you: Am I "fussy"? What does that mean, anyway? It's *so* not useful. If I could, like, *translate* that into a technical adjustment or...

**DENNIS.** Look: I'm not the brains of the operation, my acting is all instinct... Ask Gordon for advice. He'd *love* that.

**BOBBY.** I did! After the first run. (*Imitates GORDON:*) "Just...do less." That was it.

**DENNIS.** (*Laughs.*) He's such a shit. "Do less."

**BOBBY.** I try to bond with him. You've seen me. So I did *one* season on that cop show, he rakes me over the coals...

**DENNIS.** It's generational. Gordon sees you approaching stage two, sees himself leaving stage four. That's all.

**BOBBY.** What does that mean?

**DENNIS.** This they'd *never* teach you in theatre school. The five stages of an actor's life: One. Who's Gordon Goldsmith? Two. Get me Gordon Goldsmith. Three. Get me a Gordon Goldsmith *type*. Four. Get me a *young* Gordon Goldsmith. Five. Who's Gordon Goldsmith?

**BOBBY.** Yeah, well...that critic will keep me from completing the life cycle.

**DENNIS.** Nah. One review, written by an idiot, signifyin' nothin'...

**BOBBY.** There'll be more tomorrow.

**DENNIS.** Yeah, and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

*(Stop. They both look surprised.)*

Oh fuck me, did I just quote...

**BOBBY.** *The Big M?! I think you did!*

*(They look at each other: "What do we do?!")*

**DENNIS.** Ah, shit happens.

*(They laugh.)*

Christ, thank God Gordon's not here. I'd be jumping through hoops right now, spitting, whatever you do...

**BOBBY.** The dreaded *Scottish* play!

**DENNIS.** Gordon won't even say "Scottish play." *The Tartans*, he calls it.

*(They laugh. He looks at TV, MARGE enters with noose.)*

Aw man! You're useless! Like tits on a bull!

**MARGE.** Is that my cue?

**DENNIS.** No offense there, Marjorie.

**MARGE.** None taken and don't call me Marjorie. *(Hands noose to BOBBY:)* Is that how you want it?

**BOBBY.** Perfect. I can tell you were a girl scout.

**DENNIS.** Yeah, but she was kicked out for eating brownies.

*(BOBBY and DENNIS laugh.)*

**MARGE.** *(Unfazed as always:)* You know, that knot could slip. I could tie a different one.

**BOBBY.** No, no tricks: it has to be the real thing.

**DENNIS.** Bobby, this is the theatre. Nothing's real! Smoke and mirrors!

**MARGE.** Sure, a Method actor kills himself, I get thrown out of the union. *(Looks offstage.)*

**GORDON.** *(From offstage, very grandly:)* Good evening. Good evening.

**MARGE.** Finally.

*(GORDON appears.)*

**GORDON.** Good evening.

**DENNIS.** Good evening.

**GORDON.** Must we begin all of this again?

**MARGE.** You're late.

**GORDON.** Yes, I suppose we must. Where's the other one?

**MARGE.** He's late. Sign his card.

**GORDON.** Late? I cannot work with amateurs! Speaking of... *(To BOBBY:)* Hello.

**BOBBY.** *(Clenched:)* Hello.

**DENNIS.** How did you get home last night?

**GORDON.** You're asking the wrong person. Woke up in the right place, thank you Saint...I forget which—patron saint of toxic thespians. *(Don't get excited, Marge, I said thespians.)*

**MARGE.** Get here on time, that gets me excited.

**GORDON.** *(Applying eye drops:)* But I fell asleep wearing my contact lenses. Woke up feeling like Oedipus. O! My eyes!

*(BOBBY imitates mockingly to MARGE, mouthing "Oh my eyes.")*

**DENNIS.** Out drinking again. I can't let you outta my sight.

**GORDON.** *(Not listening to DENNIS, shouts theatrically:)* Blind! Old, mad, blind, despised. But I'll do it. I'll soldier on. Sans eyes, sans teeth, certainly sans taste.

**DENNIS.** Hey we've never done it with taste.

**GORDON.** *(Putting on pants of costume, back twinge:)* O! So many cares, so many maladies. Now my rickets are acting up. Not rickets, the other one.

**DENNIS.** Lumbago.

**GORDON.** No, not that.

**MARGE.** Sciatica. My uncle has sciatica.

**GORDON.** Gout. It's gout. I'm too young for the gout, but there it is.

**BOBBY.** It's not from falling off of bar stools?

**GORDON.** Ooooh. Snappy. How long did you...fuss...over that comeback? *(Beat.)* Marge, you look radiant, the very pink of perfection: did you splurge on a new key chain?

**MARGE.** Stop trying to seduce me. Why are you late?

**GORDON.** Because I am the late Gordon Goldsmith. According to some critics. *(To BOBBY, who is trying to ignore him:)* Yes, more make up. That's the answer. *(Finally taking his seat, rubs palms.)* What is it tonight, fellows? Shall we do the tragedy or the comedy? Have the chorus girls arrived?

**DENNIS.** You wish.

**GORDON.** I do. I always wish for chorus girls. I miss dipping into the chorine pool.

**DENNIS.** Titiboom!

**GORDON.** What's the house like?

**MARGE.** Not bad. We may hold for five—suspicious activity at the bridge again.

**GORDON.** *(A little tantrum:)* No! No, no, no. I cannot abide holding. *(Pointed at BOBBY:)* Some of us add enough to the running time as it is.

**DENNIS.** Knock it off, Gordy-O.

**GORDON.** Might we at least tell the boy to cut the oath of allegiance tonight? Patriotism is so...predictable. There's no plot!

**MARGE.** No dice, buster. They're not shutting us down again. I'm gonna do a light check. When Roger gets here tell him his ass is mine. *(She exits.)*

**DENNIS, GORDON and BOBBY.** Thank you, Marge!

*(They start getting made up.)*

**GORDON.** Is the boy here?

**DENNIS.** He's already on stage. Or couldn't you see him there, Oedipus?

**GORDON.** Probably hiding from me. Like a raccoon in the dark. Listening to his requiems. Why would a child listen to *requiems*? It's so...morbid. Whatever happened to the Beach Babies, or whatever they were?

**BOBBY.** They disappeared with the beaches.

**GORDON.** And why does he sit onstage until curtain? They do the pledge, he makes the loyalty speech, then what?

**DENNIS.** He waits till we're onstage, and, you know, comes in here and hangs out till his entrance.

**GORDON.** Suspicious behavior, no?

**DENNIS.** No! There's no room in here and your feet stink.

**GORDON.** But does it ever speak? I mean, he's the voice of the next generation, I'd be curious to hear what it sounds like. And that cadaverous...get-up he wears. Wonder what sort of mother spawns something like that. Lucrezia Borgia, perhaps. *(Laughs.)*

**BOBBY.** *(Annoyed, has to say something:)* Hey, he's Goth. OK? It's back in style. And that's his thing. He's Goth.

**GORDON.** I beg your pardon. *Goth?* As in *Titus Andronicus*?

**BOBBY.** If that helps you.

**GORDON.** I didn't know people still did Goth. Who doth Goth? Aren't they the children who inflict mass casualties at their schools? Bomb mailboxes?

**DENNIS.** *(Points to letter.)* Speaking of mailboxes...

**GORDON.** Oh yes! Can we finally read our fan mail from some flounder?

**BOBBY.** Did anyone remember to bring latex?

**DENNIS.** Nope.

**GORDON.** All out.

**BOBBY.** Oh well—Marge should have it checked anyway.

**DENNIS.** Oh for Chrissakes, I'm so tired of this shit.

(He tears open letter. GORDON and BOBBY jump back in fright.)

**GORDON.** DON'T!

**BOBBY.** NO!

**GORDON.** How can you do that? Put yourself at risk, put us *all* at risk...

**BOBBY.** He's right, Dennis. This new strain is supposed to give nasty lesions.

**DENNIS.** (*Opening letter:*) Hey, if I'm out there and I develop a spot on my hand, and start rubbing it, well...we'll suddenly be doing another play.

**GORDON.** Don't you dare say which one!

(DENNIS *stares at GORDON, taunts him with "Macbe..."*  
BOBBY *laughs.*)

**DENNIS.** (*Reading, affecting comical woman's voice:*) "Dear Mr. Goldsmith: I believe one goes to the theatre to be amused and entertained..."

**GORDON.** Oh dear God, it *is* poison!

**DENNIS.** "...and I have seen you and your partner, Mr. Dryden..." we're partners now Gordon...

**GORDON.** Where's my ring?

**DENNIS.** "...Mr. Dryden, in some very funny material..."

**BOBBY.** Polyester.

**DENNIS.** "...but I cannot for the life of me understand why you would choose to do a play that not only deals with contemporary despair but tries to get some laughs in the process."

**GORDON.** We don't "try" for laughs, my dear, we *get* them!

**DENNIS.** "The whole situation is confusing: when are you *in* the play, when are you *out* of the play? In Act One, there is that long speech by that odd character, but what does it mean?"

**BOBBY.** Good question.

**DENNIS.** "Could it be possible to have the play end with some sign of hope?"

**GORDON.** Could it be possible that you left at intermission?

**DENNIS.** “Finally, *why bowler hats?* If you would be so kind, please be succinct in your reply. Sincerely, Lorraine Shepard, Liberty Falls.”

**BOBBY.** Sounds like she wants an answer.

**GORDON.** Ah we all want answers. Dennis, take this down: “Dear Lorraine Shepard, Liberty Falls. *Phththth.* (He blows \*raspberry.\*)” Succinct. (Bobby’s cell phone rings. To BOBBY:) It’s the conservatory. They want their diploma back. (Laughs.)

**BOBBY.** (Answering:) Hi George, just a minute. Excuse me guys. (Exits.)

**DENNIS.** Go easy on him tonight.

**GORDON.** Just taking the piss. (Pause, they make themselves up.) So how do we keep ourselves amused out there tonight?

**DENNIS.** I like playing If You Will.

**GORDON.** Of course you do! So many of your lines call for it. “It’s a conundrum...if you will.”

**DENNIS.** You could sneak them in just as easily.

**GORDON.** I’ve never liked that game. Adds to the running time. (Thinks.) I have it: Taps. We’ll play Taps.

(DENNIS starts imitating bugle playing “Taps.”)

No, no no! *Taps!*

(He taps dressing room table three times.)

**DENNIS.** Oh, right! Yes! That’s good. Tap the floor three times, you get one point.

**MARGE.** (Enters.) Fifteen minutes. (Referring to BOBBY:) We lost one.

**DENNIS.** He’s on the phone.

**GORDON.** Actors’ Equity revoking his membership.

**MARGE.** It smells like a monkey cage in here. Sign Roger's card. If he gets here, he'll read it. *(Referring to TV:)* Turn on the evacuation report, see if that's the trouble.

**DENNIS.** There's nothing, Marge, he'll be here.

**MARGE.** Your lips to God's ear. *(To GORDON:)* And, no, I wasn't talking about you. Sign the card. *(Shouts:)* Fifteen minutes! *(She exits.)*

**GORDON and DENNIS.** *(Unison:)* Thank you, Marge!

**GORDON.** *(Looks outside door. Smirks.)* Did you read that review? Poor kid.

**DENNIS.** I seem to recall a review from our early days that called *you* what they called him. *(Sees TV, rapt again.)*

**GORDON.** *(Appalled:)* Fussy? You're deluded. I've never ever been called fussy.

*(GORDON puts down make up and picks up card. [The movements and attitudes associated with signing the card will be fussy in the extreme. DENNIS will watch TV until Gordon's manners become too distracting.] GORDON picks up pen. Touches tip of pen to tongue. Makes sour face. Reads card, trying out various distances of card from eyes, etc. putting down pen, declaims to air:)*

What a peculiar custom. Commemorating birth. *(Reads the card, mumbles the pre-printed sentiment.)* Oh that's lovely. Insignificant, but... spirited. *(Picks up pen. Touches tip to tongue. Makes sour face.)* Let's see now... *(Clears throat.)* "Roger, buddy" No, not buddy. Not buddy. I'm sure *you* wrote buddy. That's your...patois, hm? *(Reads.)* Oh. Ha! Well, you went full throttle, didn't you? Called him psychotic. *(Clears throat.)* "Roger, my friend," No, Gordon, please. "Roger, ol' ...chum." "Roger." "Dear Roger." Good grief. "Roger Dodger." "Roger, you old codger." See, the problem is the name: Roger. Too late to change it, I suppose. "Roger, babe." No I don't like 'babe.' Never liked 'babe.' *(Thinks. Touches pen to tongue. Sour face. Lifts pen as if just writing quickly will unleash inspiration. Stops.)* "Roger, over and out." Oh that's ridiculous.

**DENNIS.** Oh for Chrissakes! *(Grabs pen, dashes off Gordon's signature. Throws card down. Goes back to game.)*

**GORDON.** (*Picks up card, reads:*) Yeah, that'll do.

(*BOBBY enters. Continues getting made up. He looks glum.*)

**DENNIS.** Everything OK?

**BOBBY.** What? Oh... Just my agent. He's making some calls, but it's not pilot season, so...here I stay.

**GORDON.** (*Pause, to BOBBY:*) And you're...eager to get into the cockpit, are you?

**DENNIS.** No, Gordon: *TV* pilots. Don't pretend you didn't know. You schmo.

**GORDON.** (*Sings:*) Don't be a schmo, say addio.

(*They both start singing the rest of song...*)

**BOBBY.** Oh no, no, no—kill me now! I beg of you, do *not* do this again.

**DENNIS.** Oh come on Bobby, we'll let *you* do the punch-lines. It's a good warm-up. Do it with us.

**GORDON.** Now Dennis, this boy has an MFA! He must...“pre-  
pare,” drink from his...inner pools of energy.

**BOBBY.** At least mine aren't 80 proof.

**DENNIS.** Ha! He gotcha. See that's the spirit! Come on, both of you.

**BOBBY.** Ugh. Call Marge, she loves this.

**DENNIS and GORDON.** Marge!

(*We may hear her yell “What?”*)

**DENNIS.** (*Shouts out to MARGE:*) “Hey sweet Charlie, what's the forecast?”

**BOBBY.** (*Shouting to MARGE:*) They're doing the routine!

**DENNIS.** (*Sets it up again:*) “Hey sweet Charlie, what's the forecast?”

**BOBBY.** (*Rolls his eyes. Then:*) “Today will be muggy, followed by Toogy, Weggy and Thurgy.”

**DENNIS.** No you have to do it with the *voice*.

(MARGE will enter and watch, enjoying.)

**BOBBY.** Knock yourselves out.

(DENNIS and GORDON will pick up the routine, using different “old man” voices.)

**DENNIS.** I’m going.

**GORDON.** You can’t go. Where are you going?

**DENNIS.** Going to the doctor. Gotta get something removed.

**GORDON.** You’re always getting something removed.

**DENNIS.** Well, ya can’t take it with you!

(GORDON: “Titiboom.”)

**GORDON.** Still—ya gotta... (Forgets line.) what is it?

**MARGE and BOBBY.** Save something for a rainy day.

**GORDON.** Ya gotta save something for a rainy day.

**DENNIS.** I save plenty. Just can’t remember where I put it.

**GORDON.** What are they removing today?

**DENNIS.** Some sorta tag. A skin tag.

**GORDON.** *Removing* a tag is good. Bobby? (Waits.) *Removing* a tag is good...

**BOBBY.** I don’t know.

**MARGE.** (Jumping in:) It’s when they put one on your *big toe* that ya gotta worry.

(DENNIS: “Titiboom.”)

**DENNIS and GORDON.** (Sing:)  
They—tag—your—toe, It’s time to go/  
Don’t be a schmo, say addio/  
No more shad roe in the chateau/  
Or red Bordeaux in Idaho/  
So if you know, do not have woe/

Just be a pro, go with the flow/  
They will eat crow, 'cause then they'll know/  
Your bravado is not a show/  
Sooooooooo  
Shuffle off to Buffalo (Or ol' Sheboygan)  
Say g'bye to Romeo ('Cause he'll come later)  
Time to take your final...bow? (It suits your hairstyle)  
When they tag your toe.

*(MARGE applauds. A beat. Then:)*

**MARGE.** Ten minutes! *(She exits.)*

**GORDON, DENNIS and BOBBY.** Thank you, Marge!

**DENNIS.** Yikes, ten minutes: better go...clean out the temple.  
*(Rises. To GORDON:)* Keep an eye on the game, let me know what happens.

**GORDON.** "What happens"? They adjust their genitalia, they expectorate. Repeat ad nauseam.

**DENNIS.** Do your best. Bobby will help you.

*(GORDON gives him a look.)*

I'll be right back. I won't abandon you.

*(DENNIS pinches GORDON's cheek, tousles BOBBY's hair, as he exits.)*

**GORDON.** *(Theatrically, shouts out of room:)* Famous last words! First God to humanity, then dear old dad to me.

*(Silence [except for game]. GORDON will watch TV but he has no interest. It's awkward.)*

**BOBBY.** *(Finally:)* So...your father abandoned you?

**GORDON.** Where did you get that idea? *(Pause. An attempt:)* I suppose...you have parents?

**BOBBY.** Yeah. Two.

**GORDON.** Oh. *(Pause. Tries wit to relieve awkwardness:)* To have one parent may be regarded as a misfortune. To have two...

**BOBBY.** Hey, I'm into my parents.

**GORDON.** Oh. *(Pause. Rolls eyes theatrically.)* Did they come to see the play?

**BOBBY.** Yeah. Flew home today, in fact. My mom totally got it. You know? Wasn't thrown at all by the mix of humor and terror. "It's like watching the news," she said. Ha ha. But my dad...

**GORDON.** *(Not listening, watching TV:)* Ecch! Why must they spit like that, these athletes exhume things from their bodies that... Sorry. You were saying...?

**BOBBY.** Uh, well...my dad. I could hear him laughing in Scene One, but...he kinda got lost in all the abstract stuff in Scene Two, so ...he didn't like it much.

**GORDON.** Yes, *literally* everyone is a critic. Sorry. Dirty word for you.

**BOBBY.** Oh, whatever.

**GORDON.** Crrrrritic!

**BOBBY.** I don't pay attention to that.

**GORDON.** Yes. One mustn't...fuss with that sort of thing. *(Slight smirk.)*

**BOBBY.** *(Pause, then:)* Why do you want to do that? Why is it, like, so important to you to make me feel bad before I have to go out there again?

**GORDON.** I beg your pardon?

**BOBBY.** You get off on it.

**GORDON.** You're right. I'm sorry. You probably don't get many curmudgeons in TV-land. *(Beat.)* You get pep talks, I assume, before you're asked to roll over the hood of a car.

**BOBBY.** Not even.

**GORDON.** "Not even." I'm not sure what that means, is that like "whatever"?

**BOBBY.** You know, you love to trash things that are unfamiliar to you. I think it's all fear.

**GORDON.** Well there's plenty to fear these days.

**BOBBY.** Like, you trash *TV*, but this play wouldn't last a week on network, which I know is, like, to *you*, proof of its *importance*. But you can't fool an audience that holds a remote control.

**GORDON.** I have no interest in fooling an audience.

**BOBBY.** This whole play is *about* that! The need for illusion. If you agree with the review, that is. Which you obviously *do* agree with, because he's so insightful about my acting, so...

**GORDON.** Oh boo hoo, a bad review. So fine! Go make buckets of money on "network" while I remain begging for belly laughs from the blue-hairs. But remember that my generation called the television set an idiot box, and not without reason.

**BOBBY.** You're just a snob. There's some really good TV these days.

**GORDON.** Well *that* I'm sorry to hear: TV is at its best when it's bad.

**BOBBY.** See! You can't even admit that there's stuff on there that you like!

**GORDON.** TV is *meant* to be liked! Is that what you're looking for? Fine! But I don't want to be liked! I want to be contended with! TV ensures consensus, that's why everyone *has* a TV, and why it's always on! It blankets you at night and practically changes your diaper in the morning. It chews your food for you and spits it up in sound bites. The theatre, on the other hand, provides *no* answers—if we are doing our job *at all* we are making waters muddy with *questions*. Live! Not gobbled up in the endless maw of one self-perpetuating, advertisement for...*nothing!* And if you don't have the stomach for it, then get out now, bleach your teeth, and go get your "pilot." Take your place in the world-wide wallpaper of our troubled times. Of course you might, just might, have something in there that's worth sticking it out for. But don't look to others to tell you that. *Look to you*. Because *nobody* is going to look you in the eye and

implore you: “Whatever you do, Bobby Blin, promise me, you won’t leave the theatre!” OK? That never happens.

*(Fed up, wanting DENNIS back, he pounds his foot on the floor three times.)*

**DENNIS.** *(From offstage:)* Thank you, Marge!

*(GORDON puts his head in his hands.)*

**GORDON.** Seriously, now: you wanted to do this play. Something led you here. All other things aside, the money, all of it...isn’t there more to *(Indicates dressing room:)* this than to *(Indicates TV:)* ...that?

**BOBBY.** Honestly? I don’t know anymore. I know I thought so at one time. This was what I always wanted to do.

**GORDON.** Fine, but you do TV for the money—it will be ever thus.

**BOBBY.** *Fine.* But like it or not, TV reaches millions, and if we’re lucky, we reach a dozen. And most of them don’t want questions, don’t want to think. Sometimes I think all they want is a good nap. So yeah, live theatre, woo hoo. I’m just not always sure it’s worth it.

**GORDON.** Well none of us is ever sure. You have to *make yourself* sure. Every night. With *them.* *That’s* the work. *(Bobby’s Cell phone rings.)* Good grief, you’re worse than the audience.

**BOBBY.** *(Answers:)* Hi mom. You got home OK?

*(DENNIS enters.)*

**DENNIS.** Everything OK in here?

**GORDON.** “Not even.”

**BOBBY.** *(On phone:)* Yeah, yeah, fine, why?

**DENNIS.** *(Re: TV:)* And what happened here?

**GORDON.** The ball was tossed back and forth. The angels wept. Highlights at eleven.

**DENNIS.** The Angels aren’t playing, ya mook.

*(DENNIS watches game, GORDON gets made up.)*

**BOBBY.** We’ll be OK. I promise. I love you too. *(Hangs up.)*

**DENNIS.** Everything all right?

**BOBBY.** Very weird. Not like my mother *at all*, but she dozed off on the flight and—I don't know—had a bad dream and wanted to call.

**GORDON.** I envy people who can sleep on airplanes.

**BOBBY.** It was about *us*. The whole cast. She said it felt so real it was like...watching a movie.

*(They all look at each other. Pause.)*

**GORDON.** The angel of silence has flown over us.

**BOBBY.** Chekhov! *The Seagull*. Act One.

**GORDON.** Not bad.

**BOBBY.** Not even.

**DENNIS.** Did her dream tell her where Roger might be?

**BOBBY.** Boy he *is* late. When should we start to worry?

**GORDON.** You may start now, if you like. It's a free country. Or used to be.

**DENNIS.** Who gets to tell Marge that she may have to go on for him tonight?

**BOBBY.** Oh man, now *that* would be worth seeing.

**DENNIS.** She almost did have to go on once. Do you remember? *(To BOBBY who will be amused:)* We were doing some creaky Restoration crap and we listed Marge as understudy for one of the chicks...

**GORDON.** Big healthy actress, I recall. Very... Congreve in the bosom. Savage breast.

**DENNIS.** They gave us bad salmon after a matinee...

**GORDON.** Halibut. It was halibut.

**DENNIS.** We were all fine but this poor girl had the trotskys.

**GORDON.** Fine for a Russian play, but the English don't succumb to diarrhea.

**DENNIS.** And poor Marge, knowing she was gonna have to make her debut, locked herself in the office, wouldn't come out.

*(All three laugh.)*

**GORDON.** And of course she has all the keys!

*(Suddenly, ROGER rushes in, wearing earphones [music or iPhone]. The sound of the doorway metal detector goes off. Everyone groans.)*

**GORDON. MARGE!**

*(ROGER goes out again, throws his keys into the dressing room on the floor and re-enters. Alarm. DENNIS and BOBBY groan.)*

**GORDON.** *(As before:)* MARGE!

*(ROGER goes out again, throws his belt into the dressing room, some coins. ROGER enters, pants down to ankles. Alarm. GORDON is about to shout for MARGE again but she enters with hand-wand detector. Waves it all over ROGER while he rapidly gets in costume. Eventually, MARGE will stop when the detector fails to find anything, and she will stand and watch ROGER until he finishes speech.)*

**ROGER.** *(Speaks with Irish brogue:)* Sorry I'm late.

**DENNIS.** "Sorry I'm late"?

**ROGER.** I was queued up—you know, stuck in line. For ages. Wouldn't move. If the world is movin' *faster*—and it is, I'm told—then why is it that everythin' takes so much longer? Perhaps it's that...the faster the world moves, the *sloooooower* everythin' seems. Yes. That's it. Which only stands to reason, then, that if we keep goin' at this unnatural rate of acceleration, we will eventually come to experience ourselves movin' *backwards!* This, then, *necessarily* makes "whether we're comin' or goin'" *only* a matter of opinion. If you choose to *think* about it, of course. And I don't. I don't.

So, I'm standin' behind this geezer, some...birthmark, I don't know what. His elbow. Don't think it was the pox, or contamination, but ya never know these days and yer not likely to ask. Can't stop starin' at it. I look away. *(With disdain:)* Foreigners, everywhere! It's jammers! Nose to nape. Far as the eye can see!

These people are yammerin' on: Those agonizin' dialects...you know the ones. Authorities tell us to *learn* them to protect ourselves. Up the yard! Who has the time? World moves too fast.

Then I realize: I forgot what I was waitin' for! If it's a *checkpoint*, well, then...it's better that I stay. (Don't need any trouble.) If it's the line to report on *someone else*, well, then, *again*...it's better that I stay. (Good to *appeal* yourself to the right people.)

Almost asked the woman next to me, "What are we waitin' for?" but I don't want to look dodgy, and I hate makin' small talk. I know, I know, you're thinkin' "What's that about hatin' small talk, Roger? You never shut your gob!" But my talk is never small, fellas, never small: if I can't find words, I hold my tongue. Nothin' *idle* in my chatter. My mum believed in makin' idle chatter. Said if I were ever in a shop, to strike up a conversation with the clerk. Make an impression. That way, if I forgot my eyeglasses or somethin', I could go back to the store and prove they were mine. "Hey, remember me, fella? I was the specky four eyes who talked to ya about the weather?" (*Beat.*) Trouble is, I never wore eyeglasses. Just proves that ya can't even trust yer own mum. Not these days.

This woman ended up speakin' to *ME*. "Could ya watch my dog?" she asks. And YES, I said YES, I will, YES. And then the bleedin' slag...she slips away! At this point, I'm up to ninety! Don't know what I'm waitin' for, and now: *I have a dog!* Then—and I don't mind tellin' ya, lads—I get a wee bit fearful. No, I really do...because you have to report these things. It's a security breach, if not worse! Too much to be on guard for these days: Crop dusters. Crowds. Helicopters. Strange powders. Strange aromas. Barges. Bridges. Unwrapped candy. Undeleted files. Unattended parcels. Unopened attachments. Corrupted attachments. (*Pause.*) Attachments.

(BOBBY hands ROGER the rope after putting noose around neck.)

Then a thought occurs to me, as they do, at weak moments: stupid mongrel would never sit there waitin' like this. No explanation, only waitin'. Feck, no! "Deferred gratification?" Not this animal! He's hungry, he eats. He's got shite in him, he does his business, drops a brown trout when he's good and ready! No worries beyond the immediate.

(GORDON *pats* DENNIS's head.)

And we say *he's* the eejit, *he's* the stupid animal. No. (*Tugs rope to test the tightness of noose with BOBBY.*) No. I say he's lucky. So I stepped out of line. And that's why I'm late. Sorry to keep ya waitin'.

(*Pause.*)

**GORDON.** Could you repeat that, Roger? I wasn't listening.

(ROGER *inhales to speak...*)

**MARGE.** Later! Come with me. We have some paperwork.

**DENNIS.** Marge, does he have to do it now? We have a play to do.

**MARGE.** (*A speech:*) Yes, now! We have to comply! If we get shut down, people will imagine the worst. It's hard enough to get them into the theatre! (*To ROGER, who exits with her, wearing headphones.*) So put some fire under it! (*Shouts:*) Five minutes! (*They exit.*)

**GORDON, BOBBY and DENNIS.** (*Pause.*) Thank you, Marge!

(GORDON *puts on jacket of costume. He looks at BOBBY and DENNIS who are busy after the five-minute call, so he surreptitiously looks in inside pocket. Pulls out a flask. Shakes it, sniffs it. Replaces it in jacket.*)

**GORDON.** (*To DENNIS:*) OK. Ya ready? Tonight! Which one of us is damned, which one is saved?

**DENNIS.** Rock, paper, scissors?

**GORDON.** If you please.

**BOBBY.** Wait. Can I say something?

**GORDON.** If you must.

**BOBBY.** You *always* do "rock, paper, scissors." Always. And—OK, am I giving anything away here? Dennis is *always* "rock" and Gordon you are *always* "paper." And so, Dennis, uh, newsflash: Paper beats rock. So...you always lose, so...like... (*He breaks off.*)

**GORDON.** (*Not seeing the point:*) Expound.

**BOBBY.** So what's the point?

**DENNIS.** It's a game of psychological brinkmanship, Bobby. Yeah, I'm *usually* "rock" because I'm the rock in this relationship...

**GORDON.** Oh, I had no idea.

**DENNIS.** And Gordon, fancying himself an intellectual, is *usually* "paper," so it just...makes sense that those choices would, you know...float our boats.

**GORDON.** A dull cliché.

**BOBBY.** Fine, but, like, why *pretend* you are playing a game? If you always do the same thing?

**DENNIS.** But out there we "pretend" every night. And we always do the same thing. Right?

**BOBBY.** Right, but with this...isn't the point to try to win?

**GORDON.** (*To DENNIS, without irony:*) Is it? I never considered that.

**DENNIS.** (*Thinks, shrugs.*) I guess. "One of us is saved, one is damned."

**BOBBY.** But it should be totally unpredictable!

**DENNIS.** Well, let's see: Maybe tonight it will change.

**GORDON.** Let's see. Who is saved, who is damned?

*(They play. Once, twice, thrice: DENNIS is rock, GORDON is paper.)*

**DENNIS.** Damn!

**BOBBY.** Big surprise.

*(ROGER enters, still listening to iPod [or similar]. Sits. BOBBY hands him his card. He reads as he hurriedly gets made up, smiles broadly, gives thumbs up to everyone.)*

**GORDON.** Happy birthday.

**BOBBY.** (*Simultaneous with above:*) Yeah, you're welcome.

**DENNIS.** (*Simultaneous with above:*) Crazy bastard.

(ROGER hears none of it. All actors put finishing touches on their make up.)

**GORDON.** (To BOBBY:) Remember to turn off your little telephone. I don't want to hear that chirping from the dressing room.

**BOBBY.** You know, it happened *once*. I'll totally never live it down.

**GORDON.** Not likely, no. But we're almost at "beginners" so I thought I'd remind you.

**DENNIS.** "Places." We're almost at *places*, Gordon.

**GORDON.** (Pointed at BOBBY:) I prefer "beginners." The British were on to something with that one.

**BOBBY.** You're so, like, affected.

**GORDON.** And you're so, like, disaffected.

**DENNIS.** Let's call the whole thing off. OK, you two? It's show time.

(MARGE pokes her head in.)

**MARGE.** Places!

**DENNIS, GORDON and BOBBY.** Thank you, Marge!

(They all go into their routines:)

**BOBBY.** Badagada, badagada, maaaa, maaaa...

**GORDON.** I can't possibly go on! Why must we do this? They bleed me dry!

(DENNIS is humming a song. ROGER is listening to iPod and trying to dress hurriedly. DENNIS, watching TV, suddenly stops singing. Transfixed by what he sees, he slowly stands up. ROGER, too, stands up slowly, jaw dropped, pointing to his ear.)

**GORDON.** (To DENNIS:) Help me with this button.

(DENNIS stares at TV.)

Come on, knock it off.

(GORDON looks at TV, wide-eyed.)

*(MARGE runs in, is agitated for the first time. She shakes BOBBY's shoulder as she enters, unable to speak, and signals for him to watch TV. ROGER watches TV with headphones on. Then: they all gasp simultaneously.)*

**DENNIS.** Holy crap!

**GORDON.** *(Simultaneous with DENNIS, clutching him:)* Good lord. That's...that's no accident!

**BOBBY.** *(Clutching MARGE:)* No! No, I can't take it, not again. I can't take this again. I can't go through this again.

*(ROGER grabs BOBBY, pulls him toward him. BOBBY buries his head in Roger's coat. Suddenly, there is a loud, terrible noise—an explosion off in the near distance. They all look at one another, in shock.)*

**GORDON.** This is really happening!

*(Sound of screams from "audience." Lights flicker.)*

**MARGE.** The boy's on the stage!

*(MARGE runs out with her hand over her nose and mouth. The actors look at each other. Finally, they pull the bowler hats off the wall. Underneath each bowler hat is a dust mask [resembling a "paint mask," covering nose and mouth]. Each actor applies it. They are all wearing bowler hats and masks, they look at one another, not knowing what to do next. Suddenly, there is another explosion, this one louder, more present, in the theatre and we:)*

*(Blackout.)*

***End of Scene 1***

## Scene 2

### Onstage

*(Lights up on an enormous mound of rubble on stage. The peak of the mound is at the stage right edge, sloping down toward stage left. There are some bits of twisted metal and piping, but mostly pulverized wood and concrete. Many stray papers stick out of mound, some pieces litter the stage. GORDON and DENNIS enter, masked and wearing hats as before, and tentatively approach mound. GORDON reaches his arm towards it.)*

**DENNIS.** Don't touch it!

**GORDON.** But the boy...

**DENNIS.** DON'T! We just wait.

**GORDON.** *Wait?*

**DENNIS.** For the authorities! *(Holds mask over mouth to put face closer to mound, extends hand to test its heat.)* We don't know what any of this is yet.

**GORDON.** True.

*(He puts mask back on. Moves away from mound, far downstage. DENNIS stays up at mound.)*

**DENNIS.** *(Shouting into mound:)* HELLO! Can you hear me? *(Waits for response. Again:)* HELLO?!

**GORDON.** God. This is a fiasco.

**DENNIS.** *(A bit hysterical:)* It's a disaster, Gordon! Don't you know the difference? This is a tragedy!

**GORDON.** All right, all right. Calm down.

*(DENNIS steps away from mound, afraid of its toxicity, and both inhale deeply and exhale.)*

First of all, where did everybody go?

**DENNIS.** I imagine Roger's gone for help.

**GORDON.** Help?

**DENNIS.** *(Pointing to mound:)* For the boy! The boy!

**GORDON.** Be calm. Calm. (*Goes to the mound, shouts:*) Can you hear me? (*Waits, repeats:*) Can you...

**DENNIS.** Shhhh!

**GORDON.** What'll we do?

**DENNIS.** He's so small, he's probably choking with it.

**GORDON.** Where's Bobby?

**DENNIS.** Saw this mess, imagined the worst. Poor kid was terrified.

**GORDON.** So he just...took off? Will he be back?

**DENNIS.** (*Hysterical:*) I don't know, Gordon!

**GORDON.** Shows what those schools are worth. Haven't they started to...teach about these things?

**DENNIS.** In *theatre* school? Be serious! What "things"?

**GORDON.** Things, I don't know. "The show must go on." "Never desert a sinking ship."

**DENNIS.** Are those the same?

**GORDON.** Nearly. (*Pause, they regard the mound.*) And Marge? (*Shouts:*) Marge!

**DENNIS.** I'm sure she's filling out the paperwork already.

**GORDON.** *Paperwork?* There's a *form* we fill out for these occurrences now?

**DENNIS.** Yes, of course, it's a new world, Gordon.

**GORDON.** But what can one possibly say? In a *form*. In *any* form?

**DENNIS.** That's the question! (*Pause.*) Well, they'll want to know the cause of death, for one.

**GORDON.** Ha! "Cause of death." Being born! Is that not enough for them?

**DENNIS.** True. (*Sighs.*) What a world. To do *this*.

**GORDON.** (*Looking at mound:*) It's impenetrable, is what it is.

**DENNIS.** Inexplicable.

**GORDON.** Impenetrable. And now how can we go on, doing... what we do?

**DENNIS.** It's a conundrum...if you will.

*(GORDON clears his throat and shakes his head.)*

It's a conundrum. But we have to do something!

**GORDON.** Yes, but what? Clearly it's not proper that we...entertain. Not now.

**DENNIS.** He entertains the worms now. Hope he has his radio.

**GORDON.** His radio! If that's in there, we could be completely cut off!

**DENNIS.** The TV!

*(He runs off.)*

**GORDON.** Hurry up! *(Pause.)* Poor boy. *(Takes slug from flask.)* Poor me.

**DENNIS.** *(Re-enters, places TV on stage:)* There! *(Sound and light from TV, as they watch.)*

**GORDON.** It's hard for me to see, my eyes are *already* failing, this dust is...

**DENNIS.** OH NO!

**GORDON.** *(Startled:)* WHAT?!

**DENNIS.** He dropped the ball!

**GORDON.** Dennis, change the bloody channel, what is wrong with you?

**DENNIS.** No, you're right. Sorry.

*(GORDON sighs, rolls eyes. DENNIS changes channel, considers:)*

Funny that they decided to continue to play. In the midst of all this.

**GORDON.** Maybe they're on to something.

**DENNIS.** (*Trying to tune in to other station:*) I can't get another channel in here. That's strange.

**GORDON.** Well, turn it off then. (*He does.*) OK, think.

(DENNIS "*thinks*" a la Rodin.)

Start with the basics: *We're here.* There *may* be a boy...*in there*—though perhaps he escaped...

**DENNIS.** Perhaps.

**GORDON.** ...or perhaps he was spared.

**DENNIS.** Not likely.

**GORDON.** No, but: *We're here.* And they will expect *us*... I mean, you and me...as witnesses...

**DENNIS.** Witnesses?

**GORDON.** ...to say something. To convey...something.

**DENNIS.** Right. After all: (*Echoing GORDON above:*) "*We're here.*"

**GORDON.** But how to...? (*He thinks.*) Shakespeare. Now he'd know what to say.

**DENNIS.** (*Laughs.*) You're not going to compare yourself to Shakespeare, are you?

**GORDON.** It's a start.

**DENNIS.** Start with the boy's *name*.

**GORDON.** Oh, of course!

(*Beat as they look at each other, realize they never knew the boy's name. They look out, puzzled.*)

**DENNIS.** (*Finally, tries out a name:*) "Serge."

**GORDON.** "Serge"? Don't be absurd!

**DENNIS.** Well, *you* try a name then.

**GORDON.** (*Thinks:*) You know, "Serge" is not bad, really.

**DENNIS.** (*Glows:*) You mean it?

**GORDON.** No, it's good. Lends him a certain...panache. A sort of piquancy.

**DENNIS.** Like that boy we shared in the Keys that morning.

*(GORDON looks confused.)*

Did I say "boy?" I meant "omelette."

**GORDON.** I had an omelette I'll never forget. We were on the road, in the absurd Southern portion of this country, remember?

**DENNIS.** I remember the waitress. Tall. Pretty hair. *(Poetically:)* Like...amber.

**GORDON.** It was dyed.

**DENNIS.** So much the better. Amber waves of gray. *(They laugh.)* That's a song, isn't it?

**GORDON.** "Waves of *grain*." But the song's forbidden by the authorities.

**DENNIS.** Pity.

**GORDON.** Too nostalgic. *(Distraught, shouts:)* Roger! *(No reply.)* Damn him!

**DENNIS.** Marge! *(No reply.)* How can people do that? Just...leave us here! To...to...

**GORDON.** To rot in a theatre?

**DENNIS.** To perish on the boards.

**GORDON.** To wither within these walls, this hollow furnace.

**DENNIS.** I played Holofernes once. Got good reviews.

**GORDON.** You know, it wouldn't look right if we just left him in there.

**DENNIS.** I know what! Let's at least...mark the occasion!

**GORDON.** "Mark the occasion"?

**DENNIS.** The authorities will approve, trust me.

*(He runs off, stage right.)*

**GORDON.** (*Shouts:*) Can't we *forget* this occasion? We had almost put it behind us! (*Sings softly:*) "For amber waves of grain." (*Pause. Wistfully:*) I remember those: *beautiful*.

**DENNIS.** (*Reenters, carrying a makeshift white flag—a white sheet on two hooks, attached to pole.*) Marge always keeps a flag around. It makes it easier for the theatre to choose plays.

**GORDON.** How do you figure?

**DENNIS.** You fly the flag, they leave you alone. (*Pause.*) Until they don't. (*Puts flag in mound.*) Oh I like that. (*Tapping his foot each time he says:*) I do, I do, I do!

**GORDON.** How *can* you? It's *absurd*. A *white flag*? Somehow, it seems, we could...do more.

**DENNIS.** We could *burn* the flag.

**GORDON.** Well *that* would be filled with meaning.

**DENNIS.** Meaning what?

**GORDON.** "Meaning what?" Good point. I don't know. But something...political.

**DENNIS.** I've always tried to avoid politics.

**GORDON.** Too late for that. Man is inherently a political animal.

**DENNIS.** (*Laughs heartily, knee slapping:*) Where did you hear that?

**GORDON.** You hear people say it and I'm beginning to think it's true. All my life, I've tried to avoid it. But in some way, I believe that *we* are (*Tap with foot:*) politically... (*Tap.*) irrevocably... (*Tap.*) responsible.

**DENNIS.** You and I? What did *we* do?

**GORDON.** Precisely. What *did* we do?

**DENNIS.** I've never done anything in my life and I'm proud of it.

**GORDON.** Well, it's time to act. But act how? Can't provoke them. Can't appease them. Can't anger them. Can't please them. (*Beat, playfully:*) Can't taunt them. Can't tease them.

**DENNIS.** I have it! (*Assumes defiant pose.*) I'm going to kill the bastards who did this! You'll never get away with this! Not while there's still breath in me. Fuck you. Fuck the lot of you. Fuck you all! I've worked hard my whole life!

**GORDON.** (*Pause.*) Well, that was a departure.

**DENNIS.** (*Squirms like an aesthete.*) Didn't quite...

**GORDON.** No, it didn't. But the "working hard" part, that was good. "We must work." After all, even in a situation like this (*Motions to mound:*) when we don't have the words, yet, to respond... and when we don't know what might be next, well...we *should* be able to offer something constructive, we're theatre people, we...we ...traffic in profundity, we...we...address big themes, we... we...

**DENNIS.** (*Giggles like a little boy:*) You keep saying "we we."

**GORDON.** Oh Dennis, please.

**DENNIS.** Speaking of—I have to go.

**GORDON.** You just went! Not an hour ago! Don't you ever "go" before you leave home?

**DENNIS.** It's the call of nature. What's *left* of nature.

**GORDON.** I think it's interesting that the moment I mention *work*, you have to go.

**DENNIS.** Hey, I like work as much as the next guy.

**GORDON.** Next guy?

(*DENNIS exits stage right. GORDON shouts after him:*)

Who's the "next guy"?

(*BOBBY enters stage left, wearing his noose and bowler hat. He is covered in ash. GORDON turns. BOBBY runs right to GORDON and embraces him. GORDON stiffens awkwardly. BOBBY eventually releases him.*)

**BOBBY.** I've come back.

**GORDON.** So you have.

**BOBBY.** (*Points to mound:*) Is the boy...?

**GORDON.** We don't know. Let's...try to imagine the best. Shall we?

*(BOBBY puts handkerchief over mouth. Crosses to mound.)*

Don't go near that. This day and age, you should always have a mask with you. What happened to your mask?

**BOBBY.** I don't know.

**GORDON.** Well where did you *go* exactly?

**BOBBY.** What difference does it make? I left! I went *out!* Out *there!*

**GORDON.** A curious sight, I bet. *(Meaning noose:)* With that around your neck.

**BOBBY.** *(Tearing off noose, throwing it on ground:)* Well, you can take my word for it: nobody was looking at me.

**GORDON.** They weren't?

**BOBBY.** NO! They weren't! Somehow what I did didn't seem to matter too much out there!

**GORDON.** I...I'm sorry, I...

**BOBBY.** Are you just a total jackass? Do you have any idea what is going on out there? People are walking up the avenues like zombies! Others are just in shock, lying down, sobbing on the sidewalk! Some people are covered in this...*ash*, I don't know what. A little boy was pointing: "Look, mommy, the birds are on fire." I heard people howling...wailing into cell phones...*pleading* into a recording: "Are you there? Are you there? I need to hear your voice!" The authorities are panicked. Megaphones, growling everywhere: "Keep moving!" *Keep moving?* How can you move forward when you're afraid to take your eyes from the sky? *(Beat.)* Do you get it now?

**GORDON.** I get it now.

**BOBBY.** *(Screams:)* Nobody cares about an actor walking around in costume!

**GORDON.** Fine. Calm down. My word, such...emotion. I'm sorry. I didn't know.

**BOBBY.** Well, you *should* know. Out there, this place seems less important than anything in the world. *It's only right that you know that!*

(BOBBY buries his face in his hands.)

**GORDON.** Fair enough. I'm sorry. I've been here for so long, Bobby. It felt right to stay. This is what I do. It's my work. You understand? I don't think about it, really.

**BOBBY.** (*Sorting it out:*) You're an actor, so...you don't "think"?

**GORDON.** (*Slight laugh:*) Oh good heavens, I'm an actor, yes—and of course I "think." But for so long I've had to "think" about my mortgage, "think" about the electric bill. So don't you...*how dare you?* I "think" about doing this, every night, every week, month, year after year—I *exist only in here*, you little... (*Angry but containing himself:*) What's more, I "think" I've paid my dues, I "think" I've learned who I am, and I don't "think" I need a lecture on propriety from someone who *hasn't!* (*Softening:*) Yet. Hasn't yet.

**BOBBY.** Fair enough. (*Beat. BOBBY looks out at house.*) You know, I never noticed: it's amazing how quiet it can be in here. (*Sighs.*) I like it.

**GORDON.** Well, you wouldn't like it during a *comedy*.

**BOBBY.** (*Smiles.*) You were probably right to hide out in here.

**GORDON.** All my life.

**BOBBY.** I don't blame you. If you could just see it...out there.

**GORDON.** I can imagine.

(BOBBY nods. Then has a thought.)

**BOBBY.** Well, that's it! Right? Because you *can* imagine. *That's* why you're here.

(GORDON looks confused.)

That's the work, I mean. In here. (*Points to audience:*) With them. We do it *with them*.

**GORDON.** (*Understanding:*) Yes, Bobby. That's it. We exercise imagination. We *suspend disbelief*. It's heavy lifting. Hard work. And

now...we may have to work harder, that's all. (*Looking to house:*)  
And so will they.

**BOBBY.** *If they come back.*

**GORDON.** We'll cross that bridge. First step: *we're here.* You came back. We'll take it from there.

**BOBBY.** I "came back" to call my parents. I haven't figured out my next move. Or anything else. (*Beat.*) Yet. Haven't yet.

**GORDON.** Fair enough. We'll figure it out. In here. Not out there. OK? Now go call.

*(BOBBY makes to leave.)*

But first: Promise me, Bobby Blin, whatever you do, you won't leave the theatre.

*(BOBBY smiles and GORDON forces smile back. BOBBY exits stage right.)*

*(GORDON buries his face in his hands. After a moment, DENNIS enters from stage right. He looks at GORDON, notices his despair. Puts on a happy face and summons up:)*

**DENNIS.** Good news!

**GORDON.** (*Removing his head from hands:*) God I hope so.

**DENNIS.** Spoke to Marge: We go on tomorrow!

**GORDON.** (*Perplexed:*) We go on? How can...do you have any idea what's going on out there?

**DENNIS.** I'm blissfully ignorant.

**GORDON.** It's no use, Dennis. We can't go on. Not yet. You're not thinking clearly.

**DENNIS.** Are you attacking my character?

**GORDON.** (*Smiles:*) No, Dennis. But think. (*DENNIS thinks.*) How can we "go on"? To what end?

**DENNIS.** Ah. Curtain call, I imagine.

**GORDON.** No, I mean... (*Motions to mound:*) After this: what would it all be about?

**DENNIS.** Ah. About two hours, I would think.

**GORDON.** No, I mean...to what *purpose*? What could we possibly...? Does it not seem...suddenly...meaningless...?

**DENNIS.** “Suddenly”?

**GORDON.** ...like playing chamber music at the burial ground?

**DENNIS.** (*Suddenly affronted:*) Oh I see. So... (*Mocking Gordon's grandness:*) *everything's* changed then.

**GORDON.** I'm afraid so.

**DENNIS.** If only we could get back to...where we were before all this happened. When somehow we meant something.

**GORDON.** Well, when you put it in those terms...

**DENNIS.** But that's what you mean, isn't it? And if we can't, then how *dare* we...play, you and I? Do this...play, you and I. In a world with (*Indicating mound:*) this. Is that what you're asking?

**GORDON.** I think so, Dennis, yes. Help me with this: When we look back, at what we've done, even in the beginning, were we ever really...?

**DENNIS.** (*Gleefully:*) That's my cue!

(*DENNIS clears throat. There is a dramatic light change, catching Gordon's interest.*)

(*Grandly:*) “In the beginning.” (*Clears throat again:*) In the beginning ...well...lights up, dressing room, boy listens to music, young man enters, attractive fellow—depending on one's taste—and uh...let's see, four bowler hats, I'm downstairs, stage manager enters, “half hour!” ...

**GORDON.** No, no, no, wait!

(*Lights shift to previous cue.*)

We know all that. Take the larger view.

**DENNIS.** Larger view? Hm.

*(Snaps fingers at "booth." A new lighting effect. Again, GORDON is surprised.)*

In the beginning... *(He is clearly vamping through all of this, but will try to cover up for his lack of knowledge with dramatic emphasis.)* In the beginning, from the darkness, a light is shone, and there is an air of... *(Checks with GORDON:)* unease?

*(GORDON considers, nods.)*

Unease. And from that unease will come *(Motions to mound:)* tragedy.

**GORDON.** Yes, but...

**DENNIS.** *(On a roll:)* And tragedy comes to be realized in a spectacle of masks and dithyrambs...in the mountains of antiquity—praising vice and damning virtue, or, no, the other way around, damning vice and...

**GORDON.** Stop! *(Lights back to normal:)* Can you somehow...home in on something in between?

**DENNIS.** You didn't buy it?

**GORDON.** No, it was...good. *Very good.*

**DENNIS.** Really? Because honestly... *(Giggles:)* I've never understood what I'm saying there.

**GORDON.** Well, it sounded downright...presidential. I was just hoping...

*(BOBBY enters, holding cell phone. He is distressed, not able to get a signal.)*

**DENNIS.** Hey kiddo.

**BOBBY.** I can't get through. *(Dials again, puts up to ear.)*

**GORDON.** *(Stage whispers to DENNIS:)* I think you're supposed to give him a hug.

*(DENNIS looks uneasy.)*

Just...

*(He pushes him physically toward BOBBY.)*

(DENNIS approaches BOBBY. Embraces him. Beat. DENNIS crosses back to GORDON.)

**DENNIS.** That felt right.

**GORDON.** It looked right.

**DENNIS.** (To BOBBY:) So whaddya say there, chief: maybe we scared the critics away for good!

**GORDON.** (Trying to help buoy Bobby's spirits:) Yes, the cowards! Who needs them?

**DENNIS.** (To BOBBY:) Oh sure, just watch: tomorrow, he'll play all the laughs in their direction.

**GORDON.** I never pander! (Peering into house:) They usually sit around there, don't they?

**BOBBY.** Hang on. Tomorrow? We go on?

**GORDON and DENNIS.** Of course!

**BOBBY.** You mean, there'll...still be an audience?

**GORDON.** It would be pointless without them, wouldn't it?

**DENNIS.** "If an actor falls in the forest...and there's no one there to see him..."

**GORDON.** "Does he gotta get a gimmick?"

(They laugh.)

**BOBBY.** You really think they'll come back?

**GORDON.** Yes, Bobby. A broom, a dustpan, Marge cracking the whip: we go on!

**DENNIS.** We've been through as bad as this before, haven't we?

**GORDON.** Let's not speak of Ibsen.

**BOBBY.** They'll really be here?

**GORDON.** Indubitably! (Set up:) Today they left in a huff, but tomorrow...Bobby? (Pause.) Please, Bobby. We need you. (Repeats:) "Today they left in a huff, but tomorrow..."

**BOBBY.** Tomorrow? (*Slight beat, punch line:*) Tomorrow, they'll be back in a *minute* and a huff!

(*Sound effect of rim shot. DENNIS gives "thumbs up" to the booth.*)

**GORDON.** (*Keeping it going:*) They'll *all* be back! (*"Pointing them out" in the house:*) That guy in the third row, breathing through his nostril, like it's a dog whistle!

**DENNIS.** He'll be here!

**BOBBY.** That woman on the aisle, unwrapping candy till she sticks to the armrest!

**DENNIS.** She never leaves!

**GORDON.** (*Pointing to back of house:*) In fact, you're one of our biggest fans and you were late!

**DENNIS.** Now, Gordon, don't be a shit.

**BOBBY.** (*"Vaudeville" delivery:*) He's right! 'cause you know what they say.

**GORDON.** No, what do they say?

**BOBBY.** If you're not careful: the *fan* might hit the *shit*!

(*They groan.*)

**DENNIS.** (*To BOBBY:*) You're incorrigible.

**BOBBY.** Irrepressible.

**DENNIS.** Incorrigible.

**GORDON.** And why not? Why *not* be incorrigible?

**DENNIS.** Why *not* find the (*\*Raspberry.\**) in this?

**GORDON.** Yes!

**BOBBY.** Which "this" do you mean exactly?

**DENNIS.** This! *This* this!

**BOBBY.** (*Looks around.*) Oh *this*! Find the (*\*Raspberry.\**) in this!

**DENNIS.** Yes!

**BOBBY.** You're trying to distract me, aren't you?

**GORDON.** *(Slight pause.)* Yes.

**BOBBY.** I appreciate it, guys, but is that...are you... *(Sighs.)* I mean, guys, ya gotta deal with reality here.

**GORDON.** "Reality"? In *here*?

**DENNIS.** Bobby, I told you: this is the theatre. Smoke and mirrors.

**GORDON.** We work to keep what's real out there.

**DENNIS.** Until we're rudely interrupted.

*(Suddenly, Bobby's cell phone rings. GORDON glares at the audience not knowing it's Bobby's. BOBBY finally realizes it's his phone that's ringing.)*

**BOBBY.** *(Answering:)* MOM?! Oh, George! HI! *(Whispers to GORDON and DENNIS:)* My agent.

**GORDON.** Give him our best.

**BOBBY.** *(Back to phone:)* Are you OK? How did you get through? *(To phone:)* We don't know, but we're...we're trying to be hopeful. And your office? *(Beat.) REALLY?* *(BOBBY nods his head, says to GORDON and DENNIS:)* "Business as usual."

**GORDON.** *(To DENNIS:)* TV land.

**BOBBY.** *(To phone:)* Listen: I've tried to call my parents, like, a million times, but I can't seem to... *(Beat.)* Would you, George? Thank you. Just tell 'em I'm OK. And thanks for checking on us, we... Oh? Why are you calling?... *(Beat. Looks nervously at GORDON and DENNIS, steps away from them.)* Really? A series? Hunh.

*(GORDON and DENNIS step towards BOBBY. He inches away. Beat.)*

Really? Leading role? Hunh.

*(Again, they step towards him; he steps away.)*

And how much would I... *(Beat.) REALLY?*

*(BOBBY looks at GORDON and DENNIS. They look away in unison.)*

Beginning...?

*(BOBBY deflates.)*

Oh. Listen, George, I think that...for *now*...I should be here. Yes I'm sure. Just...be sure to call my parents, OK? Thank you.

*(He puts cell phone in his pocket.)*

*(GORDON and DENNIS look at each other. Then, they applaud BOBBY. BOBBY tips his hat.)*

**GORDON.** Well well.

**DENNIS.** Well well well.

**BOBBY.** I know! Recurring role.

*(They all laugh about what BOBBY gave up.)*

Not like this.

**GORDON.** This? No. You're "second banana."

**DENNIS.** *(Affronted:)* Well, *third* really.

**BOBBY.** Right. *(Laughs again, halfheartedly. thinks a bit. With regret?)* And opposite...you know...what's her name.

**GORDON.** Not what's her name!

**DENNIS.** The blonde?

**BOBBY.** Yeah, actually, she was in... *(Stops himself:)* You know what? Doesn't matter.

**GORDON.** No?

**BOBBY.** No. *NO.* Of course not. This does. Right?

*(GORDON and DENNIS look at each other. Both shrug. Pause. They look at BOBBY.)*

Well, I guess... I should be going.

**DENNIS.** See you tomorrow.

**BOBBY.** Tomorrow. *(Beat.)* I'll just...get out of costume.

**GORDON.** Adieu!

**DENNIS.** A-dooby-doo!

**BOBBY.** Tomorrow, then. (*BOBBY hesitates, doesn't want to leave. Suddenly afraid:*) What if I don't feel like it? Tomorrow, I mean.

**DENNIS.** Oh these Method actors! If Gordon made an entrance only when he *felt* something, I'd be doing a lot of one man shows.

**GORDON.** (*Slowly, to BOBBY:*) We find our places, in the dark. We take a breath. We go on.

*(Beat.)*

**BOBBY.** Tomorrow then.

*(They watch BOBBY exit. DENNIS and GORDON are suddenly happy.)*

**DENNIS.** You see?! We're *not* irrelevant.

**GORDON.** Of course we're not! Who needs 500 channels, when we have... (*Looks at mound, can't help it:*) blech.

**DENNIS.** Sometimes less is more!

**GORDON.** Perhaps. (*Thinks.*) Though I think we could use some (*As if cue to booth:*) special effects. (*Nothing. Tries again, snaps fingers:*) "Special effects."

*(GORDON looks up at booth. Waits expectantly. DENNIS looks at GORDON, then booth. They wait. Nothing happens.)*

**DENNIS.** (*Thinks.*) Be special. Affect me.

**GORDON.** Yes! That's the idea. Uh... (*Thinks.*) Boo!

**DENNIS.** (*Shrieks.*) AH! (*Beat.*) Very convincing! Again!

**GORDON.** Uh... (*Thinks. Imitates a monkey:*) Oooh oooh oooh oooh...

**DENNIS.** (*Laughs.*) Political satire! Again!

**GORDON.** (*Thinks.*) I'm all out.

**DENNIS.** Well that wasn't a bad little run.

**GORDON.** But is it enough, Dennis? We can recite doggerel, sing and dance...

**DENNIS.** ...I *do* like a good musical...

**GORDON.** ...we can preach, amuse, but ultimately...why should they come back? (*Gestures to mound:*) When things fall apart, why look for...ceremony?

**DENNIS.** (*Looks out at house:*) Well, they come...for the occasional antidote.

**GORDON.** Anecdote?

**DENNIS.** That too.

**GORDON.** Ah. So they come for...hope, is that it?

**DENNIS.** Amid the destruction.

**GORDON.** Distraction?

**DENNIS.** That too.

**GORDON.** Ah. Hope. And Distraction. (*Asks audience:*) Are we on to something?

(*MARGE enters with urgency.*)

**MARGE.** Gentlemen!

**GORDON.** Marge, we were just...

**MARGE.** (*GORDON turns it off.*) Listen!

(*They listen.*)

**GORDON.** The authorities?

**MARGE.** Shhh! No!

(*They listen again.*)

**DENNIS.** (*An excited child:*) An ice cream truck?

**MARGE.**  
Shhh!

**GORDON.**  
Dennis! No!

(*They listen.*)

**MARGE.** I coulda sworn I heard music!

**GORDON.** Music?

**MARGE.** Yes.

**DENNIS.** A radio?

**MARGE.** Yes!

**DENNIS and GORDON.** *(To each other:)* The boy!

**MARGE.** I'm gonna dig back here!

**GORDON.** Without a mask?

**MARGE.** I don't care!

**DENNIS.** But it's dangerous!

**MARGE.** I don't care! *(As she runs behind mound:)* I'm gonna dig, and you'll just have to...fish me out!

*(She exits.)*

**GORDON.** *(Beat.)* Yeah, that makes sense.

*(Immediately, we see paper flying from behind the mound. Presumably, MARGE is digging.)*

**DENNIS.** *(Running to base of mound:)* The flagpole!

*(DENNIS grabs flagpole and tears off sheet.)*

**GORDON.** Dennis, that's forbidden!

**DENNIS.** *(Thinks, points to noose:)* The noose! He can grab the noose!

**GORDON.** I *knew* there was a reason for it!

*(GORDON gets noose, hands it to DENNIS, recedes upstage left to watch MARGE. Papers are still flying over mound. DENNIS attaches noose to pole and dangles over mound.)*

**DENNIS.** *(To GORDON:)* Can you hear anything?

**GORDON.** I hear nothing. *(Shouting to MARGE:)* Dig, you little terrier! Dig! *(To DENNIS:)* Oh she's good.

**DENNIS.** Wish *I* could see.

**GORDON.** It's really quite... *(Suddenly, with alarm:)* Shhh! Wait! Do you hear something?

**DENNIS.** *(Listens:)* Music! I do, I do, I do!

**GORDON.** *(Elated:)* Me too! *(To MARGE:)* Keep going, Marge!

*(BOBBY ambles on in street clothes. He is listening to an iPod.)*

**DENNIS.** Keep digging, Marge! We hear it too!

**GORDON.** Don't give up!

*(More papers continue flying over the mound. BOBBY stops and surveys the scene. DENNIS and GORDON don't notice him. BOBBY takes headphones off his ears and puts them around his neck.)*

**DENNIS.** It's getting louder!

**GORDON.** He's making it through! There's still hope!

*(DENNIS eventually looks behind him, sees BOBBY. GORDON, too, will see BOBBY. BOBBY turns off his iPod. DENNIS, realizing the source of the music, drops pole, dejected, descends mound, crosses with GORDON downstage left. They sit, sigh. [GORDON, perhaps, pats BOBBY's shoulder on way downstage.] MARGE appears. Her face is smudged and her clothes covered with dust. BOBBY crosses to her and helps her dust off.)*

**DENNIS.** The trick is to remain in denial.

**GORDON.** I'm beginning to come around to that opinion.

**MARGE.** *(Clears throat:)* Gentlemen...

**GORDON.** There goes that idea.

**MARGE.** If we *do* go on tomorrow...and I think we're all agreed it's the thing we should do...

*(They all halfheartedly grunt agreement.)*

...we have to face the fact that...the possible...loss of one of our cast-members means we need a volunteer to do the curtain speech tomorrow.

**GORDON.** He *may* be back.

**MARGE.** It's possible.

**DENNIS.** You mean...the loyalty oath?

**MARGE.** I do.

**BOBBY.** You mean, after *this*? We still have to start with *that*?

**GORDON.** Such a pointless ritual, Marge.

**MARGE.** Aren't they all, Gordon? So: Dennis?

**DENNIS.** Aw darlin' you know I'd do anything for you. Give me a character to hide behind and I'm fine. But...as *myself*?

**MARGE.** Gordon?

**GORDON.** Oh dear. All that rot? All that "love of nation" and "eternal allegiance" and...you mean, all *that*?

**MARGE.** I do.

**GORDON.** (*Sighs.*) I suppose so. If we have to.

**BOBBY.** Why do we *have* to?

**DENNIS.** They *could* close us down, kiddo.

**GORDON.** These are the times we live in, I'm afraid.

**MARGE.** This oath is just a little...think of it as a little...rite of passage...*before*.

**BOBBY.** But they're *our* rites.

**MARGE.** Well, this one's *theirs*.

**BOBBY.** Even if we lost someone today? One of ours?

**GORDON.** (*Sadly:*) The boy.

**BOBBY.** I thought...in *here*: we lead the rituals. That we've been doing that since...since...

**GORDON.** (*Dawning on him:*) We...lead *THEM!*

**BOBBY.** Yes! Don't we?

**DENNIS.** Yes! We do! (*Beat, to GORDON:*) Come on, Shakespeare. This is your chance! *You* should know what to say.

**GORDON.** (*Laughs, quoting “play”:*) Shakespeare? You’re not going to compare me to Shakespeare, are you?

**DENNIS.** (*Quoting “play”:*) Well, it’s a start.

**GORDON.** (*Thinks. Starts to like idea. We see former hammy GORDON:*) Well, come to think of it, I don’t see why I couldn’t... conceivably...rise to the occasion.

**DENNIS.** Who else?

**GORDON.** Nothing *too* ornate, quick in-and-out, I’m sure I could... have a go.

**DENNIS.** Never doubted you for an instant!

**GORDON.** (*Fondly:*) Really, Dennis? You believe in me?

**DENNIS.** I do, I do, I do! We all do. We’re here. Behind you. (*Beat.*) And if you fail, well...then tomorrow, you’ll just have to...fail better!

**GORDON.** Fail better. Fair enough. (*Lights change. All actors stand behind GORDON. To audience:*) Of course, the words can’t be...lofty. Must be humble...*we* must be humble. After all, we’re mere ghosts, we’re fictions, we can’t...bring people back, can’t...change what’s happened. But we can entertain. *Must* entertain...can’t escape that. And we must *imagine*. Together. Imagine us all together. We *all* must remember that to not imagine, tomorrow, would be... unimaginable. We just have to do it. Show up, prepare, take our places. (*To audience:*) You there. We here. (*To actors:*) And go on. (*Then with finality:*) I’ll do it. I’ll lead them. In *our* oath: to the boy.

*(Lights begin to fade.)*

*(Actors put their hands on hearts.)*

A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.

*(We hear the strains of Faure’s “Requiem” off stage left. All actors look in that direction, where BOBBY entered earlier. Pause. Is there a problem? Someone forget to enter? The actors look at one another. The music stops. GORDON looks up over the house toward the “booth.” Shrugs his shoulders. The actors get back in position. The music starts again.)*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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