

# HOW TO SURVIVE ACTING IN A BAD PLAY WITHOUT BEING TRAUMATIZED FOR LIFE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Bradley Walton

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**SYNOPSIS:** It's a BAD play. There's a fireman, a princess, a clown, and a pilgrim. And they're really, really happy. But there's also a bunny who's sad because his mom gave him cereal that was low in fiber, and now he's scared she doesn't love him. A cowboy is supposed to comfort the sad bunny, but the actor playing the cowboy is so embarrassed by the show that he can't bring himself to say his lines. So they skip ahead to the part where Prometheus takes fire from the heavens and gives it to the unicorns to make chocolate. Then there's a scene with a guidance counselor, but the actor is sick, so the pilgrim has to take over, only he doesn't know the lines and gives some highly questionable guidance. As the show gets worse and worse, the actor playing the bunny promises he'll share the secret to surviving the experience without being traumatized for life. But first, he's going to show the cowboy how awful things can REALLY get when everything goes wrong in a bad play in front of a live audience!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 MAN, 1 WOMAN, 9-10 EITHER)

FIREMAN/FIREFIGHTER (m/f).....	A teenager playing a firefighter in the play "Life is Happy." (37 lines)
PILGRIM (m/f).....	A teenager playing a Thanksgiving pilgrim in the play "Life is Happy." (52 lines)
PRINCESS (f).....	A teenager playing a princess in the play "Life is Happy." (34 lines)
CLOWN (m/f).....	A teenager playing a clown in the play "Life is Happy." (25 lines)
COWBOY/COWGIRL (m/f).....	A teenager playing a cowboy or cowgirl in the play "Life is Happy." (66 lines)

*HOW TO SURVIVE ACTING IN A BAD PLAY WITHOUT  
BEING TRAUMATIZED FOR LIFE*

- BUNNY (m/f) ..... A teenager playing a bunny in the play “Life is Happy.” (79 lines)
- PROMETHEUS (m) ..... A teenager playing “Prometheus” (who, in Greek mythology, stole fire from Zeus) in the play “Life is Happy.” (19 lines)
- FIRE (m/f)..... A teenager playing the fire stolen by Prometheus in the play “Life is Happy.” (9 lines)
- UNICORN 1 (m/f) ..... A teenager playing a unicorn in the play “Life is Happy.” (12 lines)
- UNICORN 2 (m/f) ..... A teenager playing another unicorn in the play “Life is Happy.” (9 lines)
- GUIDANCE COUNSELOR (m/f)..... A teenager playing a guidance counselor in the play “Life is Happy.” Can double as Crew Member. (2 lines)
- CREW MEMBER (m/f)..... A member of the stage crew for the play “Life is Happy.” Can double as Guidance Counselor. (4 lines)

**STAGING**

*How to Survive Acting in a Bad Play Without Being Traumatized for Life* takes place during the performance of a bad fictitious play called “Life is Happy.” The “Life is Happy” set consists simply of a background flat painted with rainbows, balloons, and butterflies. The flat needs to be able to fall over. The stage can otherwise be bare, but feel free to add platforms, ramps, levels, etc.

## PROPERTIES

- Cell phone – CREW MEMBER

## COSTUMES

Everyone dresses in a costume that matches his or her character...cowboy, princess, clown, unicorn, etc.

## AUTHOR NOTES

It was February when I came up with the basic idea for this play and wrote the first two pages. In April, I resumed work on the script and finished it off. Except it wasn't April of the same year. It was the *following* year...almost 14 months later. There was no particular reason for the time lapse. Two pages were all I had in me when I started and when I came back to them, it was over a year later. It really was that simple. But the time the script spent in hard drive storage turned out to be good thing. I won't go into details, but trust me...the play is better thanks to something I experienced in between.

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*HOW TO SURVIVE ACTING IN A BAD PLAY WITHOUT  
BEING TRAUMATIZED FOR LIFE*

**AT RISE:**

*FIREMAN, PILGRIM, CLOWN and PRINCESS on a dark stage about to begin a performance of the fictitious play "Life is Happy." There is a background flat painted with rainbows, balloons, and butterflies. The flat will be visible to the audience when the lights come up.*

**FIREMAN:** In the beginning, there was darkness.

**PILGRIM:** Darkness.

**CLOWN:** Darkness.

**PRINCESS:** Darkness.

*The lights slowly begin to come up.*

**FIREMAN:** It was a bleak time.

**PILGRIM:** A dreary time.

**CLOWN:** A weary time.

**PRINCESS:** But then there was light.

*Lights come up full.*

**FIREMAN:** And...

**PILGRIM:** Now...

**CLOWN:** There...

**PRINCESS:** Are...

**FIREMAN:** Rainbows!

**PILGRIM:** Sunshine!

**CLOWN:** Butterflies!

**PRINCESS:** Kittens!

**FIREMAN:** And they're all in...

**PILGRIM:** Me!

**CLOWN:** And me!

**PRINCESS:** And me!

**FIREMAN:** Whenever I feel sad...

**PILGRIM:** Or bad...

**CLOWN:** Or mad...

**PRINCESS:** I think happy thoughts!

**FIREMAN:** I think about flowers!

**PILGRIM:** And lollipops!

**CLOWN:** And pizza!

**PRINCESS:** And gum!

**FIREMAN:** Everybody's loved by somebody!

**PILGRIM:** Everybody has worth!

**CLOWN:** Everybody has value!

**PRINCESS:** Everybody has something worthwhile to share!

**FIREMAN:** Let's share!

**PILGRIM:** I love to share!

**CLOWN:** Who will share?

**PRINCESS:** I know! Let's give someone else the chance to share!

*FIREMAN, PILGRIM, CLOWN, and PRINCESS look offstage L expectantly. COWBOY and BUNNY skip onstage from L. Once onstage, COWBOY looks out at the audience and freezes up.*

**BUNNY:** Hi, everybody. I'm feeling kind of sad today.

*Pauses as if waiting for COWBOY to reply. When no reply comes, BUNNY plows on ahead.*

**BUNNY:** Do you want to know why I'm feeling sad today?

*Pauses as if waiting for a reply from COWBOY. Again, there is none.*

**BUNNY:** The cereal my mom gave me for breakfast this morning was low in fiber and now I'm scared she doesn't love me.

*Pauses as if waiting for a reply from COWBOY, and again, there is none.*

**BUNNY:** Do you know what it feels like to wonder if no one loves you? I'll bet you do. Remember the time that really mean boy taped the sign on your back that said "kick me" and everyone did, including me? That was mean. And I feel really sorry about it now. Because I bet it made you feel bad. Right?

*Pauses as if waiting for a reply from COWBOY that still isn't coming.*

*HOW TO SURVIVE ACTING IN A BAD PLAY WITHOUT  
BEING TRAUMATIZED FOR LIFE*

**BUNNY:** You felt like no one loved you. You felt like a mole rat in a room full of puppies. You felt like steamed cabbage on an ice cream buffet. You felt like a teacher who gave homework over Christmas break. You felt like scum. Worse than scum. Like this was scum up here (*Holds hand, palm down, up in the air.*) and this was you down here (*Holds hand, palm down, at knee level.*). And you probably thought that a science teacher was going to mistake you for a some kind of new bacteria specimen and stick you in a test tube for the rest of your life, but you were wrong, because if you put a bacteria specimen on this stage it would give more of a performance than what you're giving right now. Will you please snap out of it?

*EVERYONE on the stage glares at COWBOY with frustration.*

**COWBOY:** (*To BUNNY.*) That's not in the script! You can't say that! You're going to ruin the play!

**BUNNY:** No, you're the one who's ruining the play. Come on, get it together, will you? You're supposed to be a cowboy, not a mime.

**COWBOY:** I'm sorry. There's an audience out there. There are people watching me and I'm dressed like a cowboy and I'm supposed to talk about you being sad because your mom doesn't give you enough fiber and... and... this is such a bad play and it's so embarrassing.

**BUNNY:** You're absolutely right. The name of this show may be "Life is Happy" but it might as well be called "Life is Sappy." Compared to some of us, though, you don't have a lot of room to complain. You're dressed like a cowboy. I'm dressed like a *bunny*. I promise you, (*Gestures to his costume.*) this is not what I had in mind when I decided to audition for the school (*Or other type of performing group.*) play. Do you think it made me feel good to go home and tell my dad—who wanted me to try out for a sport—that I was going to be dressing up as bunny rabbit? Furthermore, my character is the one who's sad because he didn't get high fiber cereal. He's practically admitting to the world that he's irregular, plus he's a neurotic half-wit who thinks maternal love is somehow related to his cereal's fiber content. I have way more reason to be

embarrassed than you. But you know what? I'm not embarrassed at all.

**COWBOY:** How are you not embarrassed?

**BUNNY:** I'm not thrilled with the situation, but I still have my pride. When the show is over, I'll be able to walk out of this theater with my head held high no matter how bad the show is or what goes wrong. And so far, I'd say we've got a really bad show with plenty going wrong.

**COWBOY:** You're seriously not embarrassed?

**BUNNY:** Not in the least.

**COWBOY:** You're not embarrassed by being in a bad play that's gone from bad to worse?

**BUNNY:** Nope.

**COWBOY:** Could you maybe enlighten me as to how you achieve that frame of mind? Because I'm on the brink of being traumatized for life.

**BUNNY:** You think this is bad now?

**COWBOY:** Yeah.

**BUNNY:** You ain't seen nothing yet.

**COWBOY:** I know. I know what happens in the rest of the play. We've been rehearsing it together for weeks, remember?

**BUNNY:** No. You only think you know. The thing about plays is, stuff feels completely different when you perform it in front of an actual audience. So even if you've rehearsed it twenty times in an empty theater, you're going to be experiencing a whole new set of feelings when you get bodies in those seats out there.

**COWBOY:** Yeah... I'm kind of experiencing those feelings already, so if you could just—

**BUNNY:** I think we need to press on with the show some more so you can fully appreciate the acute psychological agony that being in a bad play can potentially inflict on the mind of a young actor.

**COWBOY:** No, that's okay.

**BUNNY:** Let me see, where were we? Right... my mother's love and low-fiber cereal. If we go back to that, do you think there's any chance of you being able to say your lines?

**COWBOY:** No.

**BUNNY:** All right. Forget that part.

**COWBOY:** Thank you.



*HOW TO SURVIVE ACTING IN A BAD PLAY WITHOUT  
BEING TRAUMATIZED FOR LIFE*

**BUNNY:** We'll skip ahead to where Prometheus takes fire from the heavens and gives it to the unicorns so they can start a chocolate factory.

**COWBOY:** Could we skip that part, too?

**BUNNY:** No.

**COWBOY:** Bummer.

**BUNNY:** Fireman! Your line!

**FIREMAN:** Right. In the beginning, there was darkness.

**PILGRIM:** Darkness

**CLOWN:** Darkness.

**PRINCESS:** Darkness.

**FIREMAN:** But then there was light.

**PILGRIM:** And the light was fire.

**CLOWN:** But fire only belonged to the heavens.

**PRINCESS:** Mankind existed in a state of darkness.

**FIREMAN:** So Prometheus took fire from the heavens.

**CLOWN:** And gave it to the unicorns.

**PILGRIM:** So they could make chocolate!

*PROMETHEUS and FIRE enter from R. UNICORNS 1 and 2 enter from L.*

**UNICORN 1:** Mankind exists in a state of darkness.

**UNICORN 2:** Poor mankind. They are so unfortunate.

**PROMETHEUS:** I can help with that. I have fire. I took it from the heavens.

**FIRE:** Hi.

**UNICORN 1:** Cool. Give fire to us and we'll see to it that mankind benefits.

**PROMETHEUS:** But you're not representatives of the human race. You're unicorns.

**UNICORN 2:** That's a very astute observation.

**PROMETHEUS:** I need to give fire to actual humans so they can use it as a tool to grow as a species and find their way out of the darkness, both literal and metaphorical.

**UNICORN 1:** If you give fire to us, we'll use it to make chocolate.

**UNICORN 2:** And we'll share the chocolate with the humans.

**UNICORN 1:** And it will make them happy.

**PROMETHEUS:** That sounds a lot nicer than what I had in mind.  
Here. You take fire.

**UNICORN 2:** Thanks so much.

**PROMETHEUS:** Goodbye, fire.

**FIRE:** Goodbye, Prometheus. I'll miss you.

**UNICORN 1:** Come on, fire. Let's go to your new home.

**FIRE:** Oh boy, I get to live with unicorns!

**FIREMAN:** I've got my eye on you, fire. Just telling you.

**FIRE:** I'll be good, I promise.

**CLOWN:** So the unicorns took fire and made chocolate in their new factory, then gave the chocolate to mankind, and mankind was happy.

**PRINCESS:** This is the true story of the creation of chocolate.  
Mostly.

*PROMETHEUS, FIRE, and the UNICORNS strike a triumphant pose.  
Pause. EVERYONE stares expectantly at COWBOY.*

**BUNNY:** That's your cue.

**COWBOY:** I...

**BUNNY:** You have a line here. It's a really easy one. Just three words.

**COWBOY:** I... I...

**BUNNY:** Do you need help?

**COWBOY:** I...

**BUNNY:** "I" is the first word. Very good. Do you need the second word?

**COWBOY:** I...

**BUNNY:** Why am I not surprised? The second word is "love."

**COWBOY:** L-love.

**BUNNY:** Good. Do you know the third word?

*COWBOY looks out at the audience and then tries to run off the stage, but the UNICORNS grab and restrain him.*

**BUNNY:** "Chocolate."

**COWBOY:** Choc-chocolate.

*HOW TO SURVIVE ACTING IN A BAD PLAY WITHOUT  
BEING TRAUMATIZED FOR LIFE*

**BUNNY:** Right. Now, can you put it all together for everyone in the audience to hear?

**COWBOY:** This is really, really embarrassing!

**BUNNY:** And it's going to get worse, because you need to put those three words together and say your line.

**COWBOY:** No.

**BUNNY:** Yes.

**COWBOY:** No!

**BUNNY:** Say it!

**COWBOY:** (*Flatly and quickly.*) I love chocolate.

**BUNNY:** Say it right.

**COWBOY:** (*Slightly more intelligible.*) I love chocolate.

**BUNNY:** Now say it like you mean it. (*Demonstrates.*) "I love chocolate!" Like it makes you happy! Like it's the most important thing in the world that could have come from the harnessing of fire! Say it! SAY IT!

**COWBOY:** (*With exaggerated, forced, and over-the-top enthusiasm.*) I love chocolate!

**BUNNY:** Good!

**COWBOY:** Oh, I feel so... so...

**BUNNY:** Dirty? Defiled? Debased?

**COWBOY:** Yes. And dumb.

**BUNNY:** There's that, too. Welcome to the club.

**COWBOY:** It's so smarmy and cheesy.

**UNICORN 1:** Trust us, we know.

*UNICORNS 1 and 2 release COWBOY.*

**COWBOY:** Whoever wrote this needs to be slapped.

**UNICORN 2:** Yup.

**COWBOY:** Why did the director choose this play?

**PROMETHEUS:** Because it's positive and uplifting.

**COWBOY:** But it sucks. It's such a bad play.

**FIRE:** But it's a positive and uplifting bad play.

**COWBOY:** Part of what makes it bad is that it tries too hard to be positive and uplifting.

**BUNNY:** There are adults who feel that young people have fragile egos and need their self-esteem boosted at every possible opportunity. And that if we understood how horrible the world really is, we'd wither and die. Generally these adults have fragile egos and no self-esteem of their own, they can't read a newspaper without coming close to a nervous breakdown, and they don't want us to grow up to be like them.

**COWBOY:** And our director is one of those people?

**BUNNY:** Our director is watching this performance and even though the show has completely jumped the rails already, I'm still not going to touch that one with a ten-foot pole.

**COWBOY:** But being in a bad play that tries to boost my self-esteem and give me a sugar-coated view of the world is psychologically traumatizing because I know how lousy and contrived it is. If the play wasn't trying to boost my self-esteem and was, y'know, more realistic, the overall experience would be so much healthier.

**BUNNY:** Maybe. It depends.

**COWBOY:** On what?

**BUNNY:** Oh, a lot of things. Tell you what... this show has a semi-realistic scene, although since the play is called "Life is Happy," of course it turns out to just be a dream the fireman is having. But why don't we perform that part completely out of context?

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