

THE PLAYWRIGHT'S NIGHTMARE

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By **Claudia Haas**

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SYNOPSIS:

Terry comes to the final dress rehearsal of her new play *Saving Salvation* and that's where the nightmare begins. It seems she never did get the changes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(FLEXIBLE CAST OF THREE)

ROBBIE (M OR F).....30's to early 40's; Producer of small theatre; fast-talker who has covered all her/his bases

TERRY (M OR F)Late 20's to early 30's; playwright who aims to please

ELLISANDRA (F).....(Ageless) an extraordinary "extra"

PLACE:

Backstage wing area of a theatre. Two chairs are in place for someone to view the play from the side.

TIME:

The final dress rehearsal of Terry's play, *Saving Salvation*.

Production History

- Lebanon Community Theatre, May 2007 (PA)
- Fine Arts Association, February 2008 (OH)
- Northfield Arts Guild, April 2008 (MN)
- MACT Fastfest, June 2008 (MN)
- Short Plays, June 2008 (MN)

AT RISE:

We see the stage left wing of a theatre. There may be pulleys about if there is a curtain. You could have a prop table there or a costume put aside for a quick change. Two chairs are also in place. Entering (and they can enter from anywhere in the theatre) we find ROBBIE, the theatre's producer, followed by TERRY, the playwright.

ROBBIE: No, I think it's great that you came. Most playwrights cash their check and don't care what happens to their play after that.

TERRY: I do care. Very much. *Saving Salvation* is my first serious drama and I took great pains with every word. I appreciate you letting me see the last rehearsal. I'm on my way to my parents for the holidays and this is the only time I could see it.

ROBBIE: You're okay with the changes, right? I never heard back from you so I figured they were okay.

TERRY: Changes?

ROBBIE: I e-mailed you some of the things we thought we had to fix. It's a new play - so I'm sure you knew it wasn't perfect when you sent it to us. We are heavy into the development process. I figure we do the playwright a favor by helping them develop the script.

TERRY: Development? The play was polished. I told you I take great pains with my work. My agent sent it to you.

ROBBIE: But you never really know how it plays, you know? And remember - it was in the contract that you signed - that we wouldn't do or say anything that could cause the theatre to be libelous to anyone or anything -

TERRY: I didn't receive an e-mail about any changes -

ROBBIE: - there was the language -

TERRY: It was G-rated! The play is about the scandal in the Catholic Church and I didn't see either of my characters cursing -

ROBBIE: There was a "heck" here and there -

TERRY: What's wrong with "heck"?

ROBBIE: Everyone knows it's a euphemism for, well, you know what for. Our audience is quite sophisticated. They get euphemisms. And you actually did say "Hell" one time.

TERRY: It's a word - "Hell" - a place that many Christians believe in. That word is spoken from the pulpit. It's important for the priest to feel that he is now damned -

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ROBBIE: That word went also. But you'll like what we replaced it with - doomed -

TERRY: Doomed? The priest is "doomed" to what? Eternal "doomnation"?

ROBBIE: That's very good. We didn't think of that. I wonder if we could replace that at the last minute or if it will throw off the actors.

TERRY: You can't say "eternal doomnation." The audience will laugh.

ROBBIE: It's good for them to laugh. Then you know they're with you.

TERRY: But the play's not a comedy.

ELLISANDRA enters with a bike horn. She beeps it as she goes by. She is dressed in workout clothes and carries some weights.

ELLISANDRA: Does this read? *(She beeps.)* Will they hear this at the back of the house? *(She beeps again.)* Wait here. Time for my costume change. It's a quick one. *(She exits.)*

TERRY: Costume change? There are no costume changes. And the play - has two men in it. I understand if you couldn't find a competent actor -

ROBBIE: No - don't worry. We have two very good actors.

TERRY: Oh. Then . . . who is she?

ROBBIE: She's - an addition. You're going to love this. In the first scene where the priest breaks down and the archbishop pleads with him to be strong - she starts pumping iron. Get it? Be strong? Lift weights? It's - sym-bol-ic!

TERRY: But it's in the lines - I shouldn't need a visual.

ROBBIE: Oh come on! You want the audience to get it, don't you? Sometimes they're a little dense. Sometimes you need to "pump it up a bit" if you get my meaning.

TERRY: I'm almost afraid to ask - what's with the bicycle horn?

ROBBIE: You're going to love this! Really! The actor dreamed it up. When the priest tries to pray at the archbishop's urging - he can't. I mean - it's in the script, right? We followed your script. So to "punctuate" that the priest can't pray, the weight lifter beeps the horn twice - sort of like Roadrunner - you know - and then the

priest changes his position and tries to pray again and the horn beeps and so on. Very effective.

ELLISANDRA rushes on dressed as a clown. It might be just a wig or a big nose and big feet - whatever you have "handy."

ELLISANDRA: How long?

ROBBIE: Under a minute.

ELLISANDRA: Great! Time me again!

TERRY: Was that a clown?

ROBBIE: Yes, the beautiful Ellisandra plays many roles in the play.

She is so versatile we just had to use her. She's the director's wife. He uses her in every play he directs -

TERRY: - whether she is needed or not?

ROBBIE: She is always needed! Our audience members call us up and ask if Ellisandra's in it. We lose ticket sales if she's not in it.

TERRY: Couldn't she be a secretary or something - just bringing in mail and stuff? Why does she have to be a clown?

ROBBIE: You know better than anyone why we needed a clown in Scene Two.

TERRY: No. Really. I don't.

ROBBIE: You have to admit things get pretty tense up there -

TERRY: Yes, the dramatic action's supposed to build -

ROBBIE: And that breakdown! Fabulous! When the archbishop becomes unhinged - well, who saw that coming? Really, a powerful bit of writing there -

TERRY: Thanks. Uhh . . . the clown?

ROBBIE: We couldn't send the audience into intermission with the visual of an archbishop considering suicide, now can we -

TERRY: Well, yes. That was the point. And they'd wonder.

ROBBIE: NO! They'd worry, Terry. They'd worry and they wouldn't buy drinks and merchandise. This is our holiday show! Our cash cow! We have to sell, sell, sell!

TERRY: This is your holiday show? The exploration of a murder-suicide between an archbishop and his priest isn't exactly your typical holiday fare.

ROBBIE: That's why we wanted to do it! Cutting edge holiday! We loved it. And it has a priest, an archbishop - takes place in a church - why it even has the word "salvation" in it! The only thing missing is Santa. So we put him in.

TERRY: Wait a minute - don't tell me about Santa. I haven't figured out the clown yet

ROBBIE: Really? You don't get the clown?

TERRY: Really. I don't get the clown.

ROBBIE: You know the place where the archbishop looks at the knife and the clock is chiming -

TERRY: Yeah. I know the place. I wrote it. I think.

ROBBIE: Well, while the archbishop fingers the knife - most effective - really - you did a great job - I'm getting chills here thinking about it - well, the clown comes in and squirts him with a gun and winks at the audience -

TERRY: You're kidding, right!

ROBBIE: See! You get it! The clown does it as if to say - as if to say "just kidding, folks." I knew you'd get it. Then the audience relaxes and goes off into intermission and buys stuff.

ELLISANDRA rushes in - dressed as an elf. All that is necessary is an elf hat and a basket with - presumably - candy canes.

ELLISANDRA: How long?

ROBBIE: Just over a minute.

ELLISANDRA: Darn. I have to be on stage right after the blackout to invite the kids on stage. I'll have to wear this under the clown get-up. Be right back.

ELLISANDRA exits.

TERRY: Elf?

ROBBIE: We give out candy canes during intermission and the children come up on the set and play-act. It's a great family outing.

TERRY: But the bishop just cut himself with the knife and there's blood -

ROBBIE: No - remember - the clown stops all that.

TERRY: He stops the suicide attempt?

ROBBIE: I already told you! The clown winks at the bishop and then takes the knife away -

TERRY: But Act Two is about the priest saving the bishop - even at his own peril. The clown takes the knife away?????

ROBBIE: Yeah. So we changed the opening of Act Two -

ELLISANDRA enters dressed in black, possibly carrying a skull.

ROBBIE: Perfect timing! This is what we open Act Two with -

ELLISANDRA: "To be or not to be. That is the question."

TERRY: That's *Hamlet*.

ROBBIE: You're good. You know your stuff.

ELLISANDRA: I've always wanted to do *Hamlet*.

TERRY: Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*.

ROBBIE: - which is why we had to put some good writing in there -

ELLISANDRA: - and it fits - because your play considers the ramifications of suicide and Hamlet thinks about suicide and then I segue into "What a piece of work is man -"

ROBBIE: Which celebrates all of humanity, which is appropriate for the season.

TERRY: Is anything I wrote in Act Two still there?

ROBBIE: We kept to the "spirit" of the piece in the way that one follows what they feel to be the "spirit of the law." Are you following me?

TERRY: I have to ask this - *why* exactly did you do my play? Instead of, you know, acting out something like *The Night Before Christmas*?

ROBBIE: You *are* following me! I knew this would work.

ELLISANDRA: You are amazing Robbie - just amazing.

ELLISANDRA exits.

ROBBIE: How did you know we were ending with that? Darn! I thought it would be a surprise.

TERRY: Ending - with what?

ROBBIE: *The Night Before Christmas*.

*ELLISANDRA exits and returns with a Santa cap on, possibly a beard and possibly a copy of **The Night Before Christmas**.*

ROBBIE: As the lights dim, the archbishop and the priest celebrate the miracle of the season and in the background, we hear jingle bells and Ellisandra - dressed as Santa - begins to read -

ELLISANDRA: "Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring not even a mouse -

The lights fade to black as she continues to read.

ELLISANDRA: "The stockings were hung by the chimney with care in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there. And Ma in her kerchief and I in my cap had just settled own for a long winter's nap . . ."

The lights come on and we see TERRY alone on stage with a blanket over him/her. Covering the blanket is a script and a cell phone. TERRY awakens with a start and bolts upright.

TERRY: Am I here? (*Possibly pinching an arm.*) Ouch! It didn't happen! It didn't happen! (*TERRY dials the phone.*) Oh! Good - someone's still there. Can I leave a message for Jen Robinson? Yeah, the theatre agent. Do you know anything about novels? Tell me, once it's accepted for publication, can anyone change anything without the author's permission? No? Good. Please tell Jen to throw away my last script - *Saving Salvation*. I've decided to turn it into a novel.

THE END