

THE ONE-ACT PLAY THAT GOES WRONG

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE ONE-ACT PLAY THAT GOES WRONG

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THE ONE-ACT PLAY THAT GOES WRONG was first presented by Mischief Theatre under the title *The Murder Before Christmas* on December 4, 2012, at the Old Red Lion Theatre, Islington, London. It was directed by Mark Bell, the designer was Henry Lewis, the lighting design was by Scott Pryce-Jones, the costume design was by Bryony Myers, the stage manager was Thomas Platt, and the general manager was Nicholas Thompson. The cast was as follows:

CHRIS Henry Shields
JONATHAN Stephen Leask
ROBERT Henry Lewis
DENNIS Jonathan Sayer
SANDRA Charlie Russell
MAX Dave Hearn
ANNIE Nancy Wallinger
TREVOR Rob Falconer

The production then extended under the title THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG on March 12, 2013, with the following cast changes:

JONATHAN Henry Lewis
ROBERT Greg Tannahill
SANDRA Lotti Maddox

The production then transferred to Trafalgar Studios on April 30, 2013, with the following cast changes:

JONATHAN Joshua Elliott
ROBERT Henry Lewis

The production extended at Trafalgar Studios with the following cast change:

JONATHAN Greg Tannahill

It subsequently opened in a two-act version under the title THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG at the Duchess Theatre, London, a Nimax Theatre, on September 14, 2014. Kenny Wax & Stage Presence presented the Mischief Theatre production. It was directed by Mark Bell, the set design was by Nigel Hook, the lighting design was by Ric Mountjoy, the costume design was by Roberto Surace, the original music was by Rob Falconer, and the sound design was by Andy Johnson. The opening night cast was as follows:

TREVOR	Rob Falconer
CHRIS	Henry Shields
JONATHAN	Greg Tannahill
ROBERT	Henry Lewis
DENNIS	Jonathan Sayer
SANDRA	Charlie Russell
MAX	Dave Hearn
ANNIE	Nancy Wallinger
JILL & FEMALE UNDERSTUDY	Alys Metcalf
PHIL & MALE UNDERSTUDY	Leonard Cook

THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG opened on Broadway at the Lyceum Theatre, a Shubert Theatre, in April 2017. It was produced by Kevin McCollum, J.J. Abrams, Kenny Wax, Stage Presence Ltd., Catherine Schreiber, Ken Davenport, Double Gemini Productions/deRoy-Brunish, Damian Arnold/TC Beech, Greenleaf Productions/Bard-Roth, Martian Entertainment/Jack Lane/John Yonover, Lucas McMahon, and Mischief Theatre. It was directed by Mark Bell, the scenic design was by Nigel Hook, the costume design was by Roberto Surace, the lighting design was by Ric Mountjoy, the sound design was by Andrew Johnson, the associate costume designer was Lisa Zinni, the associate lighting designer was Jeremy Cunningham, and the associate sound designer was Beth Lake. The opening night cast was as follows:

TREVOR Rob Falconer
MAX Dave Hearn
ROBERT Henry Lewis
SANDRA Charlie Russell
DENNIS Jonathan Sayer
CHRIS Henry Shields
JONATHAN Greg Tannahill
ANNIE Nancy Zamit
UNDERSTUDIES Matthew Cavendish (CHRIS, DENNIS,
JONATHAN, MAX, TREVOR)
Bryony Corrigan (ANNIE, SANDRA)
Adam Daveline (CHRIS, DENNIS, MAX, ROBERT, TREVOR)
Jonathan Fielding (CHRIS, DENNIS, JONATHAN, MAX, ROBERT)
Amelia McClain (ANNIE, SANDRA, TREVOR)
Greg Tannahill (ROBERT)
Michael Thatcher (JONATHAN, ROBERT, TREVOR)

CHARACTERS

As with any play within a play, you have the slight complication of the characters of the actors doing the play within the play and the characters within the play within the play. To try and make it a little simpler, the names are laid out below in two lists: firstly the actors, the members of The Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society who are putting on the play, and secondly the characters of the play The Murder at Haversham Manor. The text always specifies and refers to the actors rather than the characters.

MEMBERS OF THE CORNLEY POLYTECHNIC DRAMA SOCIETY *(in order of appearance)*

ANNIE is the company's stage manager. American accent.

TREVOR is the company's lighting and sound operator. American accent.

CHRIS is the head of the drama society, directed the play and plays Inspector Carter.

JONATHAN plays Charles Haversham.

ROBERT plays Thomas Colleymoore.

DENNIS plays Perkins.

MAX plays Cecil Haversham.

SANDRA plays Florence Colleymoore.

The action takes place on opening night of The Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society's production of the murder mystery play The Murder at Haversham Manor, written by Susie H. K. Brideswell.

CHARACTERS IN *THE MURDER AT HAVERSHAM MANOR*
(in order of appearance)

CHARLES HAVERSHAM, deceased.

THOMAS COLLEYMOORE, Charles' old school friend.

PERKINS, Charles' butler.

CECIL HAVERSHAM, Charles' brother.

FLORENCE COLLEYMOORE, Charles' fiancée and Thomas' sister.

INSPECTOR CARTER, an esteemed local inspector.

The action takes place in Charles' private room at Haversham Manor on the evening of Charles and Florence's engagement party. Winter 1922.

PRODUCTION NOTES

(a few notes from the writers about the piece)

The stage direction “*vamp*” denotes improvised dialogue to cover something. In our experience less is always more with this, but also finding believable improvised lines for your versions of the actors is important, and for that reason we haven’t included specifics from the original production.

An underlined letter in the text indicates a mispronunciation in that part of the word.

/ denotes the next line beginning over the current line.

In the very first run of the show, we finished it with a 5–8 minute improvised Q&A session, where the audience could ask the actors questions about the performance. For various reasons this may or may not be appropriate for different productions, but it was a nice way to allow the audience to meet the actors rather than see them only through the *Haversham Manor* characters. Of course in the Q&A none of the actors (except possibly Chris) realise that it’s gone that wrong.

There is a little specified in the text about preshow activity while the audience is coming in. More could be added to what is written in stage direction to suit the space and to give brief glimpses of some of the actors to help set up offstage relationships. Any action should remain subtle and in low light, allowing audience conversation to flow over it.

THE ONE-ACT PLAY THAT GOES WRONG

The stage is set with a low-budget (but not terrible) depiction of the private rooms of a young wealthy man of the time. The back wall consists of three set flats: one stage left with a door in it, one stage right with a fireplace half-painted onto it, and one in the centre with a window in it, with curtains drawn in front of it.

A clock and barometer hang either side of the door. A chaise longue stands in the centre of the stage, a drinks trolley (not quite of the period) stands stage left, and a small table with a telephone and a vase on it downstage right. A coal scuttle sits beside the fireplace and other various set dressings from different periods of history fill the space.

As the audience enter, Annie (the stage manager) kneels by the bottom of the flat, trying to affix the mantelpiece onto the fireplace with no success.

House music drops to a lower level as Trevor (the lighting and sound operator) moves to the front of the stage.

TREVOR. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. A couple of announcements; Number one; turn your phones off. Secondly, if anyone finds a Duran Duran CD box set in the auditorium, I need that back, please hand it to me at the end of the performance. Enjoy the show.

Trevor exits to the lighting box.

Clearance.

Trevor cues the lights to fade to black. Annie still hasn't finished the mantelpiece. Chris enters from around the back of the flats in the darkness.

* If music by a different band is used on pages 33 and 46, change "Duran Duran" appropriately.

CHRIS. Leave it. Just leave it.

ANNIE. We need...

CHRIS. We haven't got time.

Annie hurries off behind the flat, taking the mantelpiece and tools with her. Spotlight comes up, Chris hurries into it.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to The Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society's spring production of *The Murder at Haversham Manor*.

I would like to personally welcome you to what will be my directorial debut, and my first production as head of the drama society.

We are particularly excited to present this play because, for the first time in the society's history, we have managed to find a play that fits the company's numbers perfectly. If we're honest a lack of numbers has hampered past productions. Last year's Chekhov play, *Two Sisters*. Or last Christmas' *The Lion and the Wardrobe*, and of course our summer musical, *Cat*.

It may interest you to know that this will also be the first time the society has been able to stage a play of this scale. There's no question that usually we have to contend with a small budget, such as in last year's presentation of Roald Dahl's *James and the Peach*. Of course, during the run of that particular show the peach went off, and we were forced to present a hastily devised alternative entitled *James! Where's Your Peach?*

Finally we can afford to stage a play as it should be, and which, may I say, has been exceptionally well cast. I'm sure no one will forget the problems we've faced with casting before, such as our presentation of *Snow White and the Tall, Broad Gentlemen*, or indeed our previous year's pantomime, another Disney classic: *Ugly...and the Beast*.

But now, on with the main event, which I am confident will be our best show yet! So without further ado, please put your hands together for Susie H. K. Brideswell's thrilling whodunit—*The Murder at Haversham Manor*.

Chris exits around the flats and the stage lights fade to black. Jonathan (playing Charles Haversham) enters through the

darkness. He loudly collides with the drinks trolley.

JONATHAN. (*Under his breath.*) Shit.

The lights suddenly come up on Jonathan. He freezes. The lights go out again. Jonathan takes up his position, dead, on the chaise longue, arm outstretched onto the floor. The lights come up again, just before he's fully in position. Robert (playing Thomas Colley Moore) and Dennis (playing Perkins the butler) can be heard off, approaching the door.

ROBERT. (*Off.*) Charley! Are you ready? We're all waiting downstairs to raise a glass to your engagement! Charley?

Robert knocks on the door.

(*Off.*) Come along now Charley, you've been in there for hours now. If I didn't know better I'd say you were having second thoughts about the wedding! (*Chuckles.*) Hang it all Charley, if you won't come out, I'll come in! (*Tries handle.*) Damn it! He's locked the door! Hand me those keys, Perkins!

DENNIS. (*Off.*) Here they are, Mr. Colley Moore!

ROBERT. (*Off.*) Thank you Perkins. Let's get this door open. We're coming in, Charley! We're coming in!

Robert goes to open the door, but it won't budge.

(*Off.*) There we are. We're in.

Robert and Dennis dart around the side of the set to enter.

But, what's this? Charles, unconscious?

DENNIS. Asleep surely, Mr. Colley Moore?

ROBERT. Damn it, Perkins, I hope so.

DENNIS. I'll take his pulse!

ROBERT. Blast! I knew something was wrong, it's so unlike Charles to disappear like this!

DENNIS. Sir! He's dead!

Lights snap to red. Dramatic musical spike. Lights snap back to general state.

ROBERT. *Dead?! Damn it Perkins, he can't be! He's my closest friend!*

DENNIS. He's not breathing sir and there's no hint of a heartbeat!

ROBERT. I'm dumbfounded! He was right as rain an hour ago.

Robert crosses in front of the chaise longue, treading on Jonathan's outstretched hand.

DENNIS. I don't understand. He was as fit as a fiddle. He can't be dead. It doesn't make sense.

ROBERT. Of course it makes sense. He's been murdered!

Lights change to red again. The same dramatic musical spike. Lights change back to general state.

Good God; where's Florence?

DENNIS. In the dining room sir, shall I fetch her?

ROBERT. Not yet! The last thing we need is for her to have one of her hysterical episodes.

DENNIS. Yes, sir. Do you think it was murder Mr. Colley Moore? Or do you think perhaps it was suicide?

ROBERT. Suicide! Charley? Not possible! There never was a man with more zest for life than Charley! He was young, rich and soon to be married, why on earth would he commit suicide?

DENNIS. But why on earth would anyone murder him, sir? Charles was such a good man. Generous, kind, a true... (*Reads the word from his hand and mispronounces it.*) philanthropist. He never had an enemy in his life.

ROBERT. Until today it seems. Damn it, Perkins! Charles Haversham was murdered in cold blood in this very room on this very day, in this very room! (*Realises his mistake.*)

DENNIS. Shall I telephone the police, Mr. Colley Moore?

ROBERT. The police? They wouldn't make it out here for days in this snowstorm.

Robert opens the curtains to reveal falling paper snowflakes. He closes the curtains again.

I'll telephone Inspector Carter, he lives just the other side of the village. (*Picks up receiver.*) He'll be here in next to no time. Hand me the receiver, Perkins.

Robert realises he already has the receiver.

Thank you, Perkins.

Dennis sits on Jonathan's leg.

Good Evening. Give me Inspector Carter! ...I know it's late!... Damn it, I don't care about the weather. There's been a murder! Someone's murdered Charles Haversham!

Lights change to blue. A much longer dramatic musical spike. Lights change back to general state.

That's right! Thank you. *(Hangs up.)* He's on his way.

DENNIS. Inspector Carter?

ROBERT. They say he's the best damn inspector in the district, he'll crack this case and quick.

DENNIS. Very good sir and what shall I do?

ROBERT. Lock every door man!

Robert crosses the stage again. Jonathan sharply moves his hand out of the way of Robert's foot. Jonathan replaces his hand. Dennis treads on it.

Not a soul gets out of Haversham Manor until the killer is found!

DENNIS. At once, sir.

ROBERT. ...and assemble everyone in here.

DENNIS. Right away sir!

Dennis goes to leave through the door, but it still won't budge. He exits around the side.

ROBERT. Good God! Just an hour into the engagement party and already there's been a murder! *(Turns sharply to the door.)* Florence!

Sandra tries to get through the door.

SANDRA. *(Off.)* Charley!

ROBERT. Get out Florence! You can't be in here.

SANDRA. *(Off.)* No! I can't believe what I'm seeing.

Sandra cannot get through the door so pokes her head around through the tabs at the side of the scenery.

My god he looks so frail lying there.

ROBERT. I'm sorry Florence, it's a shock to all of us.

SANDRA. His skin is cold to the touch.

ROBERT. No, don't touch him Florence!

THE ONE-ACT PLAY THAT GOES WRONG

by Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer &
Henry Shields

6 men, 2 women

You all know the classic murder mystery story: There has been an untimely death at a country manor, everyone is a suspect, and an inspector is set on the case to find who the culprit is. However, when this play is performed by the accident-prone thespians of The Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society, everything that can go wrong...does! The actors and crew battle against all odds to make it through to their final curtain call, with hilarious consequences! From Mischief, the creators of the West End smash *Peter Pan Goes Wrong*, critically acclaimed TV series *The Goes Wrong Show*, and the Tony-winning Broadway hit *The Play That Goes Wrong*, this is the original one-act play which started everything going wrong. Over the course of an hour, expect a plethora of disasters from missed lines to falling props. Do you ever find out who murdered Charles Haversham? You'll have to see for yourself!

Also by Henry Lewis, Jonathan Sayer
& Henry Shields
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