



**Sample Pages from
Lose Not Thy Head**

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LOSE NOT THY HEAD

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Gary Rodgers



Lose Not Thy Head

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Casting

3W, 1M + 9 Either

VISCOUNTESS: Commanding executioner, armed with a dagger, suffering a bout of melancholy. If played by a male the title is Viscount.

WOLSEY: An executioner by day and a drunkard by night.

CROMWELL: An executioner who takes great pride in her work.

FRIAR: A holy person, offers prayers for the condemned and advice to the Viscountess.

DEATH: An apparition, unseen by the others at first, until he chooses to reveal himself.

LOVELL: A guard, rough and tumble.

GUILFORD: A guard, new to the job.

JOAN: (w) William Shakespeare's sister, dressed as Shakespeare typically did for she is impersonating her famous brother.

MARY: (w) Joan's mother, has a tendency to faint.

KING: (m) King Henry VIII, ruler of all and husband to Katherine of Aragon.

ANNE: (w) Mistress to King Henry VIII.

HEAD: Recently severed from body and okay with that.

DOCTOR: An authority on the analysis of dreams. Rather Freudian, speaks with a quasi-Austrian accent.

Notes on Accents

The Doctor's part is written to portray a mock Austrian type accent, /w/ and /th/ are generally pronounced as /v/ and /z/ so that "want" is "vont" and "there" is "zhere"; /s/ is pronounced as /z/ so that "see" is "zee" and words beginning with /r/ have a /v/ sound before them so that "really" is "vreally." The Doctor takes his work very seriously. However, he is a buffoonish character and his accent should reflect his limited competence.

If any actors can perform acceptable British accents, it can add greatly to the play, though it is certainly not necessary. If English accents are used, Wolsey, Cromwell, Lovell, Guildford, Head, and Mary should use variations of cockney accents whereas the Viscountess, Joan, Friar, Anne, and King should use sophisticated English accents with properly enunciated consonant sounds and blends.

Death should avoid having any defining accent but should speak in a slow, deep mysterious voice.

Costume Notes from Original Production

The cast is dressed in Elizabethan era costume with the exception of the Doctor, who wears a tweed suit, Head, who is only seen from the neck up, and Death, who wears a flowing black robe with his face concealed by a hood. Joan is dressed as William Shakespeare, complete with ruff collar, breeches and stockings. Wolsey and Cromwell wear balaclavas like stereotypical executioners and Guilford and Lovell dress as typical guards and carry swords. The Friar wears a brown Franciscan monk's robe. The Viscountess, Mary and Anne all wear dresses befitting the Elizabethan era. King, who is in fact, King Henry VIII, wears breeches and stockings, cape, feathered hat and has an animal fur over his shoulder.

Set Notes from Original Production

The set is a dungeon where executions (by beheading) are conducted. There is a large guillotine (constructed from 2x4 and a painted cardboard blade) UC. Its blade is down and covered in blood; it looms ominous above all set and properties.

A headless body lies on a wooden rack (similar to a stretcher) upon the guillotine bed. The stretcher has straps so that a body can be held in place and handles so that it may be carried.

The body has just recently had its head removed. In the original production, this body was created with stuffed clothing; however, it is important that the rack be strong enough to support a person, specifically, the actor playing Anne. There are two stone tables constructed from painted cardboard and plaster, one is set DR and the other, under which the actor playing the part of Head is concealed, is midstage left.

The stage is in blackness.

WOLSEY: All set, my lord.

CROMWELL: Awaiting your command, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: (*sighs glumly*) Very well, get on with it.

WOLSEY: You ummm... you have to speak the words, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: What?

WOLSEY: The words.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh... right... of course (*deep breath, then with authority*) Off with his head.

We hear a steel blade slicing and the thump of a head falling into a bucket. The lights come up. The bloodied guillotine blade is down. CROMWELL pulls a rope to raise the guillotine blade and ties it into place. WOLSEY turns away looking nauseous. FRIAR blesses the body and DEATH hovers over the bucket. The VISCOUNTESS carries a register, wears a dagger and is obviously in charge.

FRIAR: Good shot, Cromwell, right in the bucket.

CROMWELL: All in a day's work, Friar.

WOLSEY: Get this one will you, Cromwell?

CROMWELL: What? I got the last one. It's your turn.

WOLSEY: Sorry, but I'm a bit queasy today. Suppose I've got a touch of that stomach flu.

CROMWELL groans and takes up the bloodied bucket with the supposed head in it. (In the original production some fake hair was attached to an empty bucket.) CROMWELL walks to stone table (under which HEAD is hiding) and sets the bucket down upon it. DEATH follows to the table. CROMWELL grabs a bloodied mop and begins to clean the area around the guillotine. WOLSEY gestures for the guards (LOVELL and GUILFORD) to remove the headless body from the guillotine bed. They do as ordered, take up the rack and exit with it.

DEATH: (*talking to the head inside the bucket as CROMWELL walks with it*) Come to me thy wretched soul and eternal darkness be thy

reward. Come get thee hence into thy welcoming arms. Come on... ughhh... Fine. Stay in your bucket.

DEATH sits next to bucket, waiting. While carrying the headless body offstage, GUILFORD and LOVELL drop the rack sideways allowing the audience to get a good look at it and understand its purpose. GUILFORD and LOVELL exit with body. The body is quickly removed from the rack offstage.

FRIAR: Oh Wolsey, you wouldn't have the stomach flu every day if you stayed out of the King's Head Pub every night.

WOLSEY: (*lying*) Gee Friar, I wasn't at the King's Head last night.

FRIAR: (*placing a hand on WOLSEY's shoulder*) Really? So that wasn't you hanging off the bar, chatting up old Brown's stable boy. ("old Brown's scullery maid" if WOLSEY is male)

GUILDFORD and LOVELL enter with empty rack and place it on the guillotine bed.

WOLSEY: You were there too, then?

FRIAR: What, maybe... but just for a smidgen.

VISCOUNTESS: (*to FRIAR and WOLSEY, angrily as though she is quite upset*) Quit your prattling. Fools. (*to LOVELL and GUILFORD*) You two, fetch the next one.

LOVELL and GUILFORD exit R. VISCOUNTESS sighs deeply, moves away from others.

FRIAR: (*cautiously*) Is there something the matter, my lord?

VISCOUNTESS: What? Oh. No. Nothing. It's nothing... just... oh I don't know, Friar. Lately, I just feel so uninspired, as though something were amiss.

FRIAR: (*probing*) Hmm...

VISCOUNTESS: (*sighs*) There's an ambiguity inside me. My life's purpose seems uncertain. I hate to say it, but I wonder if I really belong in this line of work.

CROMWELL and WOLSEY gasp.

FRIAR: (*with disbelief*) No! But my lord, you love beheading. You were born to do this, and if it wasn't for your fine work, who would chop the heads off people? Hmmm? Who?

VISCOUNTESS: (*flattered*) Oh, I'm sure I could be replaced. Cromwell knows the practice well and she's usually sober.

WOLSEY: Can't be that bad, my lord.

CROMWELL: Could be worse. (*wrings out the bloodied mop into another bucket*)

VISCOUNTESS: But it's the same thing day in, day out - drag 'em in, off their heads, drag 'em out, over and over.

WOLSEY: You know what you need, my lord? You need a hobby.

CROMWELL: Cross stitch is fun.

WOLSEY: I'm learning the piano.

CROMWELL: Ohhh... that sounds nice. What can you play?

VISCOUNTESS sighs loudly. The others pause and look at each other.

WOLSEY: Gee, my lord, it sounds as though you're suffering a bout of melancholy.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh Wolsey, do you really think so?

CROMWELL: You need some cheering up, my lord. Why don't I bake a giant cookie for lunch? You know, a big one, like a pizza.

WOLSEY: Or perhaps lunch at the King's Head?

FRIAR shoots WOLSEY a glare. LOVELL and GUILFORD enter R, forcibly bringing JOAN, who is obviously captive. They push her to the floor DC. DEATH takes an interest in JOAN but does not interfere with the action. His presence is not acknowledged by anyone.

CROMWELL: The condemned, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh right... yes... er... hehemmm (*clears her throat and then with sudden authority*) Right, what have we got here? Thief? Adulterer? Doesn't matter. Get her set up.

JOAN: (*struggling as they begin to drag her toward guillotine*) No! Please, spare me my lord, for I've done nothing wrong.

WOLSEY: Well that's a new one, never heard anyone say that before. (*they all laugh*)

LOVELL: (*mockingly*) Not in the mood to have your head sliced off today?

VISCOUNTESS: Come on, let's get on with it.

JOAN: (*beginning to sob*) But I'm innocent. I beg of you show mercy, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: Woman there is no mercy in this world.

GUILFORD: Nor innocence.

FRIAR: We are all born into guilt.

JOAN: But I've committed no crime.

CROMWELL: Then you are guilty of apathy.

WOLSEY: Or at least boredom.

JOAN: But...

VISCOUNTESS: Can we just get this one done? Maybe we could lunch at the King's Head after all.

WOLSEY: (*perking up at this thought*) Alright.

JOAN: (*excessively*) No, please, mercy, my lord. Mercy, please.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh woman, why must you protest so?

JOAN: (*crying*) I do not deserve to die...

DEATH: (*hovering over JOAN*) Worry not thy wretched soul, for thou shalt soon rest in mine arms forever more.

VISCOUNTESS: (*sighing with exasperation, pauses to think before speaking*) Really? Then who are you, woman, and pray tell, why is it you do not deserve to die?

FRIAR: (*with surprise*) My lord?

VISCOUNTESS holds out her hand to hush the FRIAR.

WOLSEY: I know who she is.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh?

WOLSEY: She's that playwright's sister. She carries her brother out of the King's Head most nights.

VISCOUNTESS: Very well, playwright's sister, with what wrongdoings have you been convicted? Hmmm?

JOAN: Misrepresentation of thyself, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: (to JOAN) Misrepresentation. Dare I ask whom you have impersonated?

JOAN: My brother, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: I never would have guessed. Your reasons?

JOAN: (with shame) Monetary gain, my lord.

VISCOUNTESS: Thought so. Tell me, playwright's sister, have you a real name?

JOAN: I have, my lord. I am Joan.

VISCOUNTESS: (considering this) Joan, Joan... I suppose you had noble motives. Like the rest, needed the money, had to feed your brood or something stupid like that? (the others snicker)

JOAN: No, my lord. It was my mother who wanted the money.

VISCOUNTESS: Your mother?

JOAN: My mother.

MARY: (Entering hurriedly L, goes directly to JOAN and takes her arm and kneels by her side. Melodramatic, sobbing.) Oh there you are, Joan. My dear daughter Joan. I'm so sorry, this is all my fault, all my fault. I should never have forced you to impersonate your broth...ther... (recognizing that she is about to incriminate herself in her daughter's crime) I mean... forced you to... let... me... be convinced by you that you should impersonate your brother (to VISCOUNTESS) about which I knew nothing... nothing at all. For shame, Joan! Doing these things behind my back — completely behind my back — for shame... tsk tsk tsk. You've really done it now. (attempts to pull her to the guillotine.) Come on, off with her head, let's get at it.

VISCOUNTESS: (dryly) Your mother?

JOAN: My mother.

VISCOUNTESS: (to MARY) So, my good lady, I'm to gather you knew nothing of your daughter's crimes?

MARY: Nothing at all, my lord, nothing. Her conspiracy was most unbeknownst to me, most unbeknownstable... my lord.

JOAN: Liar!

MARY: (to JOAN, with raised hand) Shut up wench! (to VISCOUNTESS)
 Heh heh ... you know children, my lord... always a handful. Do
 you have kids, my lord?

VISCOUNTESS: Tell me more of this conspiracy, Ms?

MARY: Arden, my lord. Ms. Mary Arden.

VISCOUNTESS: If you would be so kind, Mary. (offers her a chair)

MARY: (unnerved by the VISCOUNTESS's sudden and uncharacteristic
 kindness) Well... her brother... you see... his fame... it has been
 mounting and going to his head and with the success of his most
 recent production, *The Tempest*...

WOLSEY: Oh have you seen that one?

LOVELL: Not yet.

WOLSEY: You must, it's riveting.

VISCOUNTESS: Hehem. (glares at WOLSEY) Mary, if you will.

MARY: Well having profited handsomely from *The Tempest*, my son
 went on a drinking binge and has not been seen for over a month.
 (with some fake tears)

CROMWELL: Ha... a bard on a bender.

WOLSEY: Come to think of it, he hasn't been in the King's Head for
 ages.

MARY: He took all his earnings with him, he left us with nothing...
 (more phoney tears) nothing but a half-written script.

JOAN: A story of a King in love, my lord.

MARY: Some pathetic claptrap about Henry VIII. (pronounced "Henry
 the Eighth")

JOAN: It's a tale of true love.

MARY: It's poppycock. (accusingly) But she took it upon herself to finish
 it so that she could sell it as her own.

JOAN: Lies! You forced me to finish it so you could sell it. If you knew
 how to write you would have done it yourself.

MARY: I can write better than you, wench! (jumps up to strike JOAN but
 is prevented by LOVELL and GUILFORD)

JOAN: Ha! You couldn't write to save yourself.

MARY: And I suppose you call that smut you came up with literature.

JOAN: It's a love story.

MARY: Love story! It's lust and debauchery. (*shakes off LOVELL and GUILFORD and turns away*)

WOLSEY: Oooh... sounds juicy.

GUILFORD: Got me. What's the story?

LOVELL: Yeah, spill.

JOAN: It's a tale of a King, torn between lovers. Though terribly smitten with one, Anne Bullen, he is, most unfortunately, married to Katherine of Aragon.

KING enters R, boldly.

GUILFORD: Who is he?

LOVELL: That's King Henry VIII, dummy.

CROMWELL: Shhh... pipe down.

JOAN: Yearning for his mistress, the King calls... uh... yearningly.

KING and ANNE perform JOAN's play as she narrates. They do not acknowledge the others. The exchange between KING and ANNE is melodramatic and overplayed. It should clearly appear as a play within a play. The others act as though they are watching a play.

KING: Oh but how my heart doth long for thee, my most precious Anne. Godspeed thee hence to mine side and take thee mine hand as thou own.

ANNE enters L.

JOAN: Upon this plea, his mistress, Anne, makes haste to her suitor King's side.

ANNE: What is this? A King? Awaiting thine mistress? Dost thou awaitest me, thy highness?

KING: Awaitest with breath most bated, my love. Steal with me hence into the night wherest we may, as lovers, lie as lovers ought. (*with a suggestive grin or raised eyebrow*)

JOAN: Receptive of his forthright proposal, she declares her love for all to hear.

ANNE: With my heart unabashed I go with thee. (*raising her voice and directly to audience*) For let it be known by all that no force, earthen nor heavenly, bears strength to keep me from mine King's arms on this night.

KING: (*suddenly nervous*) Shhh... your words, my lady, speakest volumes, though perhaps they need not speak to all within my mistresses' earshot.

ANNE: (*to KING*) But, your highness, my love knowest no boundary. (*louder and again to audience*) I sing out mine affections to all and pray thee that every ear receive my message of love.

KING: Shhhh... Every ear but those of mine wife, my lady.

ANNE: What! (*suddenly upset*) Thine wife, thou sayest!

KING: Yes, well, uhmm... (*stammering*) you were aware.

ANNE: Aware? Is thou not aware of a recent discourse, whence thy mistress (*indicates herself*) did concoct a plan to rectify thy highness's present nuptial conundrum?

KING: My nuptial conundrum?

ANNE: Thy wife, my King. The matter of her beheading, rememberest thou, thy highness? Or hast thou forgotten the planned removal of thine wifely noggin?

KING: Right. Yes. Well... about that...

ANNE: Hast thou taken leave of thine nerve, thy highness?

KING: Oh no no, my lady, no... no, it's just that, well, you know, it's... it's just that it's so barbaric.

ANNE: (*provocatively slips her dress off of her shoulder, turns away*) Perhaps thy King no longer fancies the fruits of thine heavenly mistress.

KING: Oh but I do, my lady, I do. But... chopping off heads seems so... excessive... and messy. Couldn't we just banish her from the kingdom?

VISCOUNTESS: Banishment? That's new.

ANNE: We had an agreement.

KING: Indeed, yes, but why must thou always turn to beheading to rectify thy problems?

VISCOUNTESS: I wonder, are we a smidge quick to slice off heads these days?

KING: Surely, there must be more humane ways to resolve thine conflicts.

VISCOUNTESS: Perhaps there are alternatives.

WOLSEY: You mean like hanging?

CROMWELL: Or drowning.

GUILFORD: Burning at the stake!

WOLSEY: Oh that's good... (*GUILFORD beams*)

FRIAR: Good one, Guilford.

KING: (*speaking to ALL*) But doth there not exist other possible courses of action?

VISCOUNTESS: No wait... I think he means alternatives to death.

WOLSEY: Well now, you can hardly execute someone without a little death.

KING: (*suddenly to WOLSEY*) ...alternatives to execution.

LOVELL: Is he talking to us?

VISCOUNTESS: Yes, I believe so.

KING: Can't you see, all this needless beheading is... well, needless.

CROMWELL: He *is* talking to us!

HEAD: (*from underneath stone table, or on a recording*) Oh it's not so bad. In fact, I rather like it.

VISCOUNTESS: (*looking around to see who had just spoken*) Well of course it's bad, it's death. There's no punishment worse, really.

HEAD: Well, I don't mind it at all. It's a nice change.

VISCOUNTESS: (*Again looks around to see where the voice is coming from. Be careful not to overdo this as it may give away that someone is hiding under the table.*) Now how could you possibly think it nice when you... (*demandingly*) ...just who is talking?

HEAD: I am.

VISCOUNTESS: (*still looking about*) And who might you be?

DEATH lifts the bucket in the air and places it upside down over the opening in the tabletop as if to dump the head out.

JOAN: The bucket! It's floating!

HEAD pushes his head up into the bucket. DEATH lifts the bucket again so that HEAD is revealed and appears as a severed head sitting on top of a table. MARY and JOAN find this disturbing but the others treat it as a common occurrence. DEATH puts the empty bucket on the table behind HEAD.

DEATH: (*as HEAD is being revealed*) Speak thy piece, rotund one.

HEAD: I'm the head you just lopped off the fellow that was ahead of her. Ahead of her, ha, that's a pun. (*to DEATH*) That's a pun isn't it? I made a pun, right?

MARY faints dramatically DL.

DEATH: Why yes, my jesting orb. (*pats HEAD on the head like a pet*)

JOAN: (*panicking*) This can't be happening, this-cannot-be happening.

KING: Oh and I suppose you're going to tell us that it's just a wonderful experience having your head chopped off.

HEAD: Well, it is a bit strange at first but once you get used to it, it's quite pleasant.

GUILFORD: Really? What's so great about it?

HEAD: (*thinking*) Uhhmm... I'm not hungry anymore.

JOAN: (*frantic*) What is happening? This cannot be real. Heads do not talk unless they are connected to bodies.

VISCOUNTESS: Now see here, Head. You have been punished because you... you umm... did that... that very bad thing that you did? (*to LOVELL*) What did he do?

LOVELL: Perjury.

VISCOUNTESS: Right. Perjury. Now because you perjured...

HEAD: It was forgery.

VISCOUNTESS: Alright then. Forgery.

LOVELL: No, my lord, it was perjury.

VISCOUNTESS: Very well, fine, you have been punished for perjury.

HEAD: It was forgery.

VISCOUNTESS: Alright! Forgery!

LOVELL: I am quite certain it was perjury, my lord.

GUILFORD: Me too.

VISCOUNTESS: (*increasingly irritated*) It doesn't matter what the charge. My point is you are being punished and you are not supposed to be feeling all cheery about it. Otherwise it's not much of a punishment, now is it?

HEAD: (*considering this for a moment*) It was forgery.

LOVELL: Perjury!

GUILFORD: Yep, perjury... no wait... (*remembering*) Perjury was the first one this morning.

LOVELL: What?

GUILFORD: He's right. (*pointing at HEAD*) He was forgery. Perjury was the one before larceny.

HEAD: (*smugly*) Thank-you.

LOVELL: Sorry 'bout that.

VISCOUNTESS: Enough!

JOAN: (*even more frantic, pacing*) This is not happening! Not happening! Can't be happening because it is not possible, therefore, cannot be happening.

DOCTOR enters L. He steps over MARY's fainted body and goes to JOAN's side.

DOCTOR: On zee contrary, Joan, anyzhing is possible.

JOAN: What! Who are you?

DOCTOR: I am zee Doctor. And I zhink I can give to you zee help.

VISCOUNTESS: (*indicating the HEAD*) Hey Doc, he's the one in need of help.

DOCTOR: Oh, I am not zhat kind of doctor.

CROMWELL: Then what kind of doctor are you?

DOCTOR: I specialize in zee analysis of dreams.

JOAN: What?

DOCTOR: I analyze zee dreams of zee people.

WOLSEY: Well, what's the point of that?

DOCTOR: I help zee people understand zee meaning of zheir dreams.
Zhat is useful, no?

FRIAR: Well it's hardly as useful as sewing someone's head back on.

DOCTOR: No doctor can do zhat.

LOVELL: A good surgeon could.

DOCTOR: Zhere is no surgeon who can put zee head back on zee
body.

GUILFORD: I bet Doctor Williams down the lane could do it.

ANNE: He's a Godsend.

FRIAR: Cleared my gout right up, he did.

KING: Took care of my ringworm, too.

ANNE: Ewee... You've got ringworm.

KING: Had. Had ringworm.

DOCTOR: But he cannot replace zee severed head.

CROMWELL: Well I bet he could.

HEAD: I don't think I'd want to be put back on.

LOVELL: Well, no, of course not, not you, Mr. Ain't-It-Grand-To-Be-A-
Severed-Head.

MARY: (*waking*) Uhhhhh... my head... what happened?

ANNE: The talking head doesn't want to be put back on his body.

MARY: Whaa uhhhhhh... (*looks at HEAD and faints again*)

DOCTOR: (*increasingly frustrated*) Look, no doctor can put zee head
back on zee body, vwhether zee head vonts to be on zee body
or not. Zhis is zilly. I psychoanalyze zee dreams. I tell vhot is
troubling you by zee careful study of your dreams.

JOAN: Kind of like a magician.

FRIAR: Ohhh... like one of those mind readers. They're fun.

DOCTOR: (*perturbed*) No, not like zee magician, I am zee doctor!

KING: Hmmmp... Doctors.

CROMWELL: If you want to know what's troubling someone why don't you just ask?

DOCTOR: Because zhey vill not tell you.

LOVELL: Well that's because they don't want you to know.

WOLSEY: Sounds like you're being a busybody to me.

ANNE: Maybe you ought to mind your own business.

DOCTOR: I help zee people understand zheir problems when zhey vont to understand zhem but zhey cannot.

WOLSEY: Well, why can't they?

DOCTOR: Because zheir subconscious mind suppress zheir past, hiding zheir true feelings from even zhemselfes.

CROMWELL: (*sarcastically*) Ooooh....

GUILFORD: Sounds like a pile of bunk to me.

DOCTOR: (*very agitated*) It is not zee pile of bunk! It is zee science!

JOAN: (*to DOCTOR*) Well Doc, I'm about to have my head detached from the rest of me so I'm not terribly concerned about the science of my dreams right now. What's troubling me is I'm about to end up like bucket head over there. (*to ALL*) So if someone could just send for Doctor Williams, I'd be most grateful.

WOLSEY: Speaking of that, shouldn't we be getting on with this? I'd like to get to the King's Head before the lunch rush.

VISCOUNTESS: Guards, if you will.

LOVELL and GUILFORD seize JOAN and drag her to the guillotine.

JOAN: Should have kept my mouth shut.

CROMWELL: Friar, a few words, please.

FRIAR: (*goes to JOAN's side*) Most certainly. (*FRIAR preaches as JOAN is dragged to the guillotine. LOVELL and GUILFORD attach the rack to JOAN in preparation for her beheading. The rack remains on*

JOAN so that she can walk around with it until it is later removed by LOVELL and GUILFORD. This line can be shortened to simply fill the time needed to do this.) Oh heavens above, we do send to you this wretched soul, this miserable worthless being, rejected by society, vile and unworthy to clean even the dirt beneath your divine toenails, a shameful creature, who should be thankful for the decapitation she is about to receive...

VISCOUNTESS: Wait... Hold on. (to DOCTOR) So you claim that you can tell what is troubling a person by analyzing their dreams.

DOCTOR: Yes, zhat is vhot I do.

VISCOUNTESS: All right then, tell me. Tell me what is bothering me.

DOCTOR: (*curiously*) Hmm... you are troubled?

VISCOUNTESS: (*looking around, peevishly*) I ummm... well... lately I have been feeling a little, you know, down in the dumps, depressed, sort to speak.

FRIAR: She's not her usual bubbly self.

CROMWELL: I offered to bake a big cookie but...

DOCTOR: Vell, first I vill need information about your dreams. Tell me about zhem.

VISCOUNTESS: About my dreams.

DOCTOR: Yez, zhat eez right.

VISCOUNTESS: But, I don't dream. I never dream.

DOCTOR: Everybody have dreams. You just not remember zhem.

VISCOUNTESS: Then you can't help me?

DOCTOR: Not until I know your dreams.

VISCOUNTESS: Then what can I do?

DOCTOR: Zhere is new process, I can try. I vill put you in trance with zee hypnosis. Vhile you in trance, I ask about your dreams and you vill tell me.

VISCOUNTESS: (*suddenly self-conscious*) Well, I don't think that's a great idea. Perhaps we should get back to the execution.

WOLSEY: Right! And then to the King's Head.

FRIAR: But perhaps, my lord, this may help you.

VISCOUNTESS: But we really shouldn't dawdle.

JOAN: Don't rush on my account.

CROMWELL: My lord, this could potentially resolve your (*looking around*) malady.

VISCOUNTESS: But hypnosis, it sounds so invasive.

WOLSEY: And the King's Head isn't, so let's all get chopping.

FRIAR: (*to WOLSEY*) Hehemmm... (*to ALL*) With the utmost respect, my lord, you do need help. Hmmm...

VISCOUNTESS: Well... alright, I'll do it... (*to DOCTOR*) but I warn you, if you make me do anything weird while I'm hypnotized, I'll have your head in a bucket.

HEAD: It's not so bad.

DOCTOR: Zit down and be comfortable. (*taking out a pocket watch on a chain*) Now I vont you to votch my votch.

The VISCOUNTESS sits while others gather around her. The DOCTOR sits to her side.

VISCOUNTESS: Votch your votch?

DOCTOR: Zhat eez vhot I mean, follow zee votch and listen to my voice. Vrelax. (*speaking slowly and in a low even monotone as a hypnotist would*) Now close zee eyes. Just listen to zee voice, zhere is nothing in zee vorld but zee voice... (*speaking increasingly slower and softer*) Follow zee votch, follow zee votch, follow, you feel zleepy, very zleepy, no?

VISCOUNTESS: (*bluntly*) No.

DOCTOR: Just keep votching.

VISCOUNTESS: With my eyes closed.

DOCTOR: Vrelax. It vill not take long, zoon you vill be in deep zleep. Vrelax. Vrelax. (*pause*) Now... are you azleep?

Everyone but VISCOUNTESS, DOCTOR and MARY (who is still unconscious) are in a trance and reply with a slow yes.

ALL: (*slowly*) Yes.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh great. Nice going, Doc.

DOCTOR: (to VISCOUNTESS) I am zorry. Zhis happen from time to time. (to ALL) Vhen I znap zee fingers, you vill all avake... Now! (Snaps his fingers. Everyone wakes up ad-libbing some wake up noises. VISCOUNTESS, however, falls suddenly fast asleep, snoring. MARY remains fainted.) Huh? It verked. It vreally verked. She is azleep. You are azleep, are you, my lord?

VISCOUNTESS: (speaking slow as if hypnotized) Yessss.

DOCTOR: Oh boy! OK OK. (calming himself) Tell me, my lord, do you have zee dream?

VISCOUNTESS: Yesss.

DOCTOR: (containing his excitement) And where are you in zhis dream?

VISCOUNTESS: (speaking slowly with eyes closed) Back on my daddy's farm.

DOCTOR: Hmmm... your fathzer. Interesting. And vhot are you doing on zhis farm?

VISCOUNTESS: I'm helping Daddy chop the heads off chickens.

DOCTOR: Oh... Hmhhh...

VISCOUNTESS: Come on, little chicken. Don't you want your head chopped off? Hmmm... They seem upset. Daddy, why don't the chickens want their heads chopped off? Are you sure we should be doing this? Will we chop the heads off the pigs next? How do we put them back on when we're done? Daddy, I'm confused? Huh? (suddenly waking up) What the! What happened?

ALL were listening intently but now turn away, acting casual, pretending not to have heard.

DOCTOR: I zhink vee have found zee source of your discontent.

VISCOUNTESS: Really. What is it?

DOCTOR: I zhink zhat you no longer vont to chop zee head off zhings.

FRIAR, LOVELL, GUILFORD, WOLSEY and CROMWELL ad-lib gasps of disbelief.

WOLSEY: What!

FRIAR: Now doctor, it can't possibly be that drastic.

CROMWELL: Ridiculous! Of course she wants to chop the heads off things, that's what we do. (*reassuring herself*) Right? My lord? Hmm?

VISCOUNTESS: (*unsure*) Yeah... uhhh... right, Cromwell.

WOLSEY: Severing heads is our life.

MARY: (*waking again*) Ohhh... my head is throbbing... what happened?

ANNE: Oh nothing much.

MARY: Did I miss it? Is her head chopped off yet?

JOAN: No Mum, it's right here. (*indicating that her head is still on her shoulders*) ...still attached. 'Fraid you'll have to wait a little longer.

MARY: (*feebly attempts to pull JOAN toward the guillotine*) Well come on everyone, what are you waiting for? Let's hack it off.

VISCOUNTESS: Oh I'm befuddled. Perhaps we should postpone till after lunch.

MARY: What!

LOVELL: Problem with that, Mary?

MARY: Well... it's just that she deserves to be punished.

FRIAR: Really? And why is that?

MARY: Well... you saw that rubbish she wrote. She was trying to pass that off as a script. Anyone who pens rot like that ought to be headless.

KING: Well, I, for one, thought it had merit. Sure the role of Anne is a tad contrived but...

ANNE: A tad contrived!

KING: Well, she is rather tawdry... if you know what I mean, huh... (*elbows DOCTOR*)

ANNE: (*under her breath with a roll of her eyes*) Hmmp. Pompous ass.

KING: Err... and this whole beheading business... just a pinch cliché, don't you think?

JOAN: Cliché? I don't know what you're talking about. This is fresh, cutting edge theatre.

MARY: Face it dear, it's drivel.

WOLSEY: Well I'd like to know how it turns out.

CROMWELL: Yeah, does he chop off his wife's head or not?

JOAN: Of course not. He's royalty. He obviously settles for civilized means.

FRIAR: No chopping?

GUILFORD: Apparently not.

WOLSEY: Not much of a play, then is it?

VISCOUNTESS: Do you really need head chopping to make a good play?

LOVELL: No, but it helps.

JOAN: Ugggh... Watch... *(narrating)* Confirming his devotion, the King announces to Anne that he has had his twenty years of marriage to Katherine of Aragon annulled. *(KING and ANNE appear to have forgotten that they are characters in JOAN's play. She nods to them.)* Well, go on.

KING: *(to JOAN)* Right, yes... *(to ANNE)* My dearest mistress, let it be known that mine nuptial status has undergone... modification. My dreadful twenty year marriage to Katherine of Aragon has been... *(clearing throat for emphasis)* hehem... annulled. I am now without restriction to marry thee and you, my darling mistress, may profess thine love with volumes reaching all ears but um... perhaps, first, we may, as lovers, lie as lovers ought. *(grins)*

JOAN: Anne, perplexed, provides forthwith a bewildering reply.

ANNE: Annulled! But my king, what, pray thee tell, became of thine plan? Remember... the old slice and dice. *(makes a chopping motion with her hand)* Hmm...?

KING: But... my loving, Anne, I am free to marry thee, as thou hast long wished.

ANNE: Yes fine fine, but what about the head chopping?

KING: Well I thought it unnecessary, given the circumstance.

ANNE: Unnecessary! Well! I guess it is for thee, being King and all. 'Tis not like thou leads a ghastly mind-numbing existence! But rather I was looking forward to a sliver of excitement. Not much to do in the old kingdom these days, you know, same old same old. Is it really wrong of me to wish for just a pinch of dismemberment to shake off the doldrums? *(turns away pouting)*

KING: Well, why don't I set up a tournament in thy honour... I'll organize a parade, that'll be fun... anything... but perhaps... you know, first we could... as lovers, lie as lovers ought, hmmm?

ANNE: Oh dear but how mine head doth ache on this evening, perhaps another time.

KING: Another time?

ANNE: Another time.

KING: Oh. But.. heh heh... of course, another time.

MARY: Well now who didn't see that coming?

FRIAR: I thought it was quite unforeseen.

DOCTOR: But why is there such fixation on chopping of zee heads?

LOVELL: Well, why not?

GUILFORD: Yeah?

DOCTOR: Why not does not explain zee need for all zhis head chopping.

CROMWELL: Now see here, people are always disrespecting the head chopping business, but no one ever stops to think about just how important it is.

WOLSEY: Yeah, if folks like us weren't slaving away in castle dungeons, who would be chopping the heads off people?

GUILFORD: It's not like the government's going to do it.

KING: Hey, lay off the government, we're doing the best we can with what we've got.

VISCOUNTESS: It's true. If it wasn't for the head removal industry, criminals, witches and misfits everywhere would be going around with heads on their shoulders and I don't think society is quite prepared to deal with that.

DOCTOR: But why zee head chopping? Does not society vont to vrehabitate troubled people so zhat vee may all live in zee peace?

LOVELL: Now Doc, do you really want to live next door to a rehabilitated witch? Huh? Do You?

DOCTOR: (*cautiously, without confidence*) Vell, if zhey are vrehabilitated, zhen I guess okay. I vould live next door to zee vitch... (*qualifying himself*) zee vrehabilitated vitch... who is not zee vitch anymore.

VISCOUNTESS: You don't sound very confident, Doc. A little spooked by the thought of living next door to (*mockingly*) zee vitch?

JOAN: (*matter-of-factly*) There is no such thing as witches.

FRIAR: Oh really, and what makes you so sure?

JOAN: Witchcraft is nothing more than stories made up to scare children.

MARY: Only a witch would say that.

JOAN: I am not a witch.

MARY: She is a witch. I say we burn her.

GUILFORD: Or chop her head off

WOLSEY: Good thinking.

DOCTOR: Vait! Everyone! (*cautiously to JOAN with hesitation and fear*) Joan... have you been zee vrehabilitated?

JOAN: (*angrily*) Ugggh... there are no such thing as vitches... uggghh... Witches!

MARY: Hmmp. What a witch.

JOAN: I am not a witch and I do not deserve to die, I've done nothing wrong. (*shouting, getting teary, breaking down*) I've done nothing wrong.

FRIAR: Doesn't sound too rehabilitated to me.

JOAN: (*pleadingly*) Doctor, you said you can help me. How? How can you help me?

DOCTOR: I can tell you vhot your dreams mean.

JOAN: What can that do for me, please doctor? I need help.

DOCTOR: Vell, if you understood your dreams maybe you will realize vhy you vont to have your head chopped off.

JOAN: But I don't want to have my head chopped off.

DOCTOR: Zhen vhy do you vurry about it so much?

JOAN: It's becoming increasingly imminent.

FRIAR: Really, Joan?

JOAN: Well, yes really! Of course!

HEAD: It is all you ever talk about.

LOVELL: Kind of boring.

KING: Perhaps you should concentrate on something else.

JOAN: It's a little hard to think about anything else at the moment.

ANNE: Maybe you could focus on mending your play.

JOAN: *(with a confrontational chuckle)* Mending my play! Mending my play! What do you mean mending my play? There is nothing wrong with my play.

ANNE: There's too much beheading in it.

VISCOUNTESS: Maybe you could work in more love story.

JOAN: There's plenty of love in it.

VISCOUNTESS: *(threateningly)* It needs more love.

JOAN: Would more love save me from the guillotine?

VISCOUNTESS: Temporarily.

JOAN: Do you think you could... *(requesting that the rack be removed from her)*

VISCOUNTESS: Guards. *(LOVELL and GUILFORD remove rack)*

JOAN: Thanks.

VISCOUNTESS: More love.

JOAN: So, the King's lovestruck mistress, having learned of her royal lover's annulment, dashes, with lustful wild abandon into his yearning arms, declaring her love, for all to hear.

JOAN eyes ANNE, who responds by running to KING.

ANNE: Oh my devoted King, the news of thou's divorce...

KING: *(correcting her)* Annulment.

ANNE: Annulment, though suspect it may be, doth sing heartfelt music to mine ears. I proclaim to all my love for thee and now, we may *(suggestively)* as lovers, lie as lovers ought.

JOAN: Relishing her affections, the King bestows upon Anne's lips a passionate kiss. *(ANNE puckers up but KING avoids her)*

KING: Oh but mine most naïve Anne, our plans, they have been altered slightly so.

ANNE: Oh?

KING: Slightly so.

ANNE: (*nervously*) Do tell, my lover, King.

KING: Oh but my droll mistress, I have grown weary of thy... wearisome ways. Hence, I think it best for thee to have thine head removed. I trust you concur?

ANNE: What!

JOAN: (*sternly*) No! Relishing her affections, the King bestows upon Anne's lips a passionate kiss.

KING: (*to JOAN*) Sorry, but it's beheading for this mistress.

ANNE: I beg thy pardon, my liege?

VISCOUNTESS: (*to JOAN with hand on dagger*) I thought there was going to be more love.

JOAN: I'm trying, my lord. It seems that there is something wrong.

KING: More love, you say? Not a problem. For I, King Henry VIII, have found a new love... a playwright... (*takes JOAN's hand and kisses it fondly*) a mistress to mine mistress she shall be. (*to ANNE*) So it's beheading for you. Guards seize her.

GUILFORD and LOVELL restrain ANNE and, over the next few lines, move her toward the guillotine. WOLSEY and CROMWELL follow. They strap ANNE onto the rack and place her on the guillotine bed with her head sticking out the front ready for the blade.

ANNE: But... but you can't.

KING: Oh but I can, I am the King, remember?

GUILFORD: He's got you trumped.

LOVELL: (*to ANNE*) Ooo... you're in for it now.

CROMWELL: Yeah, it's curtains for you.

ANNE: (*to JOAN, alarmed*) Do something, Joan, please. Only you can stop this.

JOAN: He's not listening to me.

KING: I am the King. I listen to no one.

ANNE: Please Joan. Stop them.

KING: Come on, we haven't all day. Off with her head.

ANNE: (*panicking*) Help me! Joan. Please.

JOAN: I... I... can't.

DOCTOR: Zhat is where you are wrong, Joan. You are zee only vone who can help.

JOAN: But... but how? What can I do?

DOCTOR: Vhotever you please.

JOAN: Uhhh... You speak in riddles. You can't help me, you're just a dream doctor.

ANNE: (*as she is put into place upon the guillotine bed, under the blade*)
Do something!

DOCTOR: But zhat eez just zee help you need.

JOAN: With my dreams?

DOCTOR: Eureka!

JOAN: Wait a minute! I get it. This is all a dream. This is not real is it?
That explains the talking head – he's not real. None of this is real.

HEAD: Now that's using your head. I did it again, didn't I?

DEATH: Yes, my cranial one.

DOCTOR: You zee, dream analysis, it verks. No?

JOAN: (*with relief and laughter*) Ha! None of this is real. I'm dreaming.
It's all a dream.

ANNE: (*her panic becomes sobbing*) Save me, Joan. Please...

ANNE is now loaded into the guillotine. DEATH hovers over her and the FRIAR says prayers by her side.

JOAN: (*relieved*) Don't worry Anne, it's a dream. This isn't real.

ANNE: It looks very real.

WOLSEY: Awaiting your command, your highness.

JOAN: But it's all a dream. I'm just dreaming. Your head will not be chopped off.

ANNE: It won't?

JOAN: No. Not at all.

ANNE: Oh. (*calmer but still skeptical*) Okay, that's a relief.

WOLSEY: (*to JOAN*) What do you mean?

JOAN: You're all just part of my dream. None of you really exist. It doesn't matter what you do because when I wake, it will be like none of you ever were.

ALL pause for a moment to consider this turn of events.

FRIAR: Well, that kind of takes the wind out of our sails.

CROMWELL: Yeah, the fun is all gone out of it now.

JOAN: Sorry.

VISCONTRESS: Now hold on. Are you claiming that we are all imaginary, that none of this is real?

JOAN: That's right. You're all just figments of my subconscious.

VISCONTRESS: (*pulling her dagger out and putting it to JOAN's throat*) Then tell me Joan, does this feel real? Does my dagger feel real? Huh Joan? Does it?

JOAN: (*panicked*) I have a very vivid imagination.

VISCONTRESS: They say that when people die in their dreams, they die in real life. Ever hear of that one, Joan?

JOAN: Maybe.

DOCTOR: (*coaching JOAN*) Remember Joan, zhis is your dream. Your subconscious. You control everyzhing. You need only choose to do it.

JOAN: What? What do you mean?

VISCONTRESS: Perhaps I'll take your head off myself.

DOCTOR: Take charge of your dream. Make it zee vay you vont it to be. Try it.

JOAN: (*shakily*) Okay... Put... put away your dagger.



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