

SLEEPING WALTER

By Matt Buchanan

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CHARACTERS

Principle Characters

Walter
Walter's Mom
Walter's Dad
Grace, Walter's Sister

Ensemble Roles (played by as few as three or four performers)

Announcer's Voice
Offstage Voice
The Voice of the Red Sox
Dr. Smart
Dr. Wise
Teacher's Voice
Two Students
Doctor
Offstage Camper
Campaign Volunteer
Television Reporter
Two Secret Service Agents (with Fingers in their Ears)
Two Courtiers
Two Alien Citizens of the Universe

Non-Speaking Ensemble Roles

Yankee Catcher
Umpire
Several Red Sox Players
Several Students
Campaign Volunteers
Television Reporters
Dancers
Archbishop
Aliens

PROPS

Bed with Pillow and Cover that becomes King's Robe
2 doors: one to the closet, one to the rest of the house
Posters, pennants, etc.
Towel
Dirty Laundry
Baseball Bat
Rocket Engine (use your imagination)
Crescent Wrench
Large Spanner
Teacher's Pointer
Doctor's Bag
Stethoscope
Teddy Bear
Prop Microphone
Handcuffs
Press pass
Pen
Merit Badge
Astrological Instruments
Oversized Merit Badge
Wiffle Bat and Ball

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

As a director I hate it when playwrights write a lot of elaborate instructions for the director. The theatre is a collaborative art form, and I'm not the director - you are. Still, having directed this piece myself, I can offer some helpful suggestions that you can either adopt or not as you see fit.

First, regarding the setting: it should be very simple. All you need is a bed (preferably one folks can hide under) and two doors. However, it is important that the closet door be differentiated from the other door, and this can be difficult, since characters need to be able to enter through the closet. We solved the problem with curtains that looked like solid walls in the closet, but you could also simply angle the door so that the audience can't see inside unless the door is all the way open.

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One glance at the cast list will tell you that costumes can be a big job on this show, but most of them can be merely suggested by a few items: a hat or mask, for example. The important thing about the costumes is that the characters be instantly identifiable - it doesn't really matter if they look "real." So matching jerseys for the baseball team are a good idea, but they could be worn over the same pants the actors are already wearing. The doctor could simply put on a lab coat. Of course, if you want to and have the resources, you can go much more elaborate with the costumes, and there's plenty of room to play. Have fun with the aliens, for instance.

The piece is designed to work with a large or small cast, depending on doubling. Especially with more experienced actors, you can do it with eight or so, but that involves nearly constant movement by all concerned, and lightning-quick costume changes. On the other hand, there are enough roles to keep several dozen performers busy if you've got them, and several of the "crowd scenes" will work better the more folks you can get onstage.

Regarding characters' genders: I've used male and female pronouns to designate characters only because our language lacks a neuter one. With a few obvious exceptions, most of the roles could be played male or female.

The biggest challenge in the piece is all of the voice-overs. If you have the resources you could, of course, prerecord these, but in the premiere we did them live, through backstage microphones. I think it's safer to do it than way - what do you do if the recording fouls up? - but it's also a lot more fun and challenging for the actors. We did most of the sound effects live as well - knocking two boards together for the baseball bat, etc. Again, it's more fun that way. (Although you'll probably want to use some recorded sounds - the rocket engine, etc. - and if you're using a small cast you may want to supplement the crowd noise in some of the scenes.) I've seen it work both ways.

Anyway, that's more than enough out of me. Good luck with your production!

Producers of *Sleeping Walter* are free to use any music they like for the song "Walter, Walter, Walter," but an original musical arrangement is available directly from the playwright. Email mlb@childdrama.com

SLEEPING WALTER

by
Matt Buchanan

At Rise: The setting is WALTER's bedroom. It is decorated like many children's bedrooms are with baseball posters, Cowboys and Indians, pirates and pennants. There are two doors; one, standing open, leads to a closet (and this must be clear), and the other, closed, leads to the rest of the house. The room is empty. WALTER enters, in pajamas, drying his hair with a towel.

WALTER: Oh, hello. I'm Walter. I'm pleased to meet you. You should be pleased to meet me, too, because I'm a good boy. I know I am, because everyone tells me so. My Mom says I'm a good boy. My Dad says I'm a good kid. My teachers all say I'm a good hard worker. My gym coach says I'm a good sport. So I think it's fair to say that I, Walter, am good. The only problem is that I don't seem to be good at anything. I may be a good hard worker, but you'll never catch my teachers calling me a good student. The coach says I'm a good sport, but he never says I'm a good player. My sister Grace is good at everything, but not me. There is one thing I'm good at, though. I'm a really good sleeper. Maybe the best you ever saw. And when I sleep, I dream. And when I dream, I'm good at lots of things. When I dream, I'm good at everything. So I sleep a lot. In fact, I'm going to sleep right now.

(WALTER gets in bed, lies down and goes to sleep. After a moment we hear the sounds of a cheering crowd. ANNOUNCER is heard.)

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: Ladies and gentlemen, Walter... the King of the Universe!

MOM: ***(offstage)*** Walter! Time to wake up! ***(The sound effects stop abruptly with the sound of a needle being ripped from a record. WALTER lies asleep in bed. MOM enters through the door.)***

Walter, dear, it's Saturday. Don't you want to go out and play? ***(there is no response)*** You always like to play baseball on Saturdays, Walter. If you don't get up pretty soon your friends will have started without you. ***(WALTER tosses in bed, but does not wake up.***

Offstage sounds of children shouting insulting baseball chatter: "No batter! No batter! He can't hit!" etc. MOM sits on the edge of the bed.) Walter, are you going to sleep all day?

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Come on, swing, stupid!

(WALTER squirms.)

MOM: Don't you want to go out and play with your friends? You like your friends

OFFSTAGE VOICE: Strike three! You're out!

(WALTER wraps his pillow around his head without waking up.)

MOM: Suit yourself, Walter. I'll wake you for lunch.

(MOM exits, picking up a few scattered pieces of laundry and closing the closet door as SHE goes out. There is a pause. We hear the sound of a large stadium crowd cheering. WALTER throws off his covers and leaps to his feet on top of the bed. HE is still in his pajamas, but holds a baseball bat which has been under the covers with him. HE smacks the bat against the plate a couple of times and stands at the ready. We hear the sound of a stadium organ revving up the crowd. VOICE OF THE RED SOX begins speaking.)

VOICE OF THE RED SOX: And it's the bottom of the ninth. The Sox are trailing by three runs. There's two men out, but the bases are loaded. A home run now would win it for the Red Sox. And stepping to the plate... Walter! **(The crowd reacts with riotous approval. WALTER takes several deep bows, and then waves with mock modesty to his fans. The crowd chants, "Walter! Walter!")** And the fans are going crazy! Walter has already hit two homers in this game, and he looks ready to make it three! **(Suddenly a uniformed New York Yankee CATCHER leaps up from behind WALTER's bed to crouch behind WALTER. Then UMPIRE appears behind CATCHER.)** And here's the windup, and... the pitch! **(WALTER swings at an invisible ball. There is a loud crack as the bat connects. The "crowd" gasps. Silence. CATCHER throws down his mask and stares open-mouthed at the ball. All three characters watch as the ball clears the wall. It takes a moment. Then the crowd erupts.)** Home run! Home run! Walter wins it for the Red Sox! What a great moment! This kid makes it look so easy!

(WALTER runs triumphantly around the bases. Several uniformed RED SOX rush onto the field and lift him onto their shoulders. They parade him around, ending up with WALTER suspended directly over his bed. The chants of "Walter! Walter!" start up again. The voice of MOM intrudes on the scene.)

MOM: **(offstage)** Walter?

(WALTER is dropped unceremoniously onto his bed, the sounds of the crowd stop abruptly, and everyone else disappears as quickly as possible. MOM and DAD come into the room. WALTER is asleep. They regard him with curiosity but not with great concern.)

MOM: Walter?

DAD: Wake up, son! It's suppertime!

MOM: He's been sleeping since last night. I tried to wake him for lunch, but he just kept on sleeping.

DAD: Silly thing to do. That's not like my boy. Walter! Wake up!

MOM: Don't you want any dinner, dear?

DAD: Come on, Walter. After dinner I need you to help me work on the car. You always like to help me in the garage, don't you, son? Lotsa fun with your old dad?

(A recorded version of DAD's voice - or a live imitation - from offstage is heard.)

OFFSTAGE DAD: I said a spanner! That's a crescent wrench! Pay attention, boy!

(WALTER squirms in bed.)

MOM: You two are quite a team, Walter. Don't you want to get up? We're having fried chicken.

OFFSTAGE DAD: Can't you do anything right?

(WALTER squirms.)

DAD: Come on, boy, I need your help tonight. You can't sleep forever.

(WALTER's kicked off his covers. MOM covers him gently.)

DAD: He's really sleeping. All right, Walter. Be that way. Means more delicious chicken for the rest of us, I guess.

(They exit. DAD gives one last look before closing the door. WALTER sleeps on. After a moment there is an insistent knocking on the closet door. WALTER gets up calmly and answers it. Two NASA Scientists in uniform come out of the closet. They are DR. SMART and DR. WISE.)

DR. SMART: Walter. (**shakes hands with WALTER**) Sorry to disturb you, sir. Dr. Smart - NASA. I wonder if my associate and I might have a word with you.

WALTER: Sure... come in. Come in.

DR. SMART: This is my associate, Dr. Wise.

WALTER: (**shakes hands with DR. WISE**) Nice to meet you. Now what can I do for NASA?

DR. SMART: Well, sir, it's rather embarrassing. We need your help.

DR. WISE: We were told that you were the best rocket mechanic in the world.

WALTER: I am? I mean... yes, I am.

DR. WISE: You're world famous you know. (**WALTER smiles modestly.**) So you see, we thought you were the one person who could help us out.

WALTER: What exactly is the problem?

DR. SMART: Why don't we show you? Dr. Wise... (**SCIENTISTS go into the closet and come back carrying a large, extremely complex looking piece of rocket machinery, which they place on WALTER's bed.**) This is our newest rocket engine.

WALTER: Well?

DR. WISE: It doesn't work.

WALTER: Ah.

DR. SMART: None of our top scientists can do a thing with it. Will you take a look at it for us?

WALTER: Glad to. (**moves to the rocket engine and examines it carefully**) Mmm... hmmm! Uh huh! (**continues to inspect the engine, lies on his back on the bed and squirms underneath the engine, like a mechanic under a car**) Ah ha! I think I see your problem. Hand me a spanner, will you? (**DR. WISE produces a crescent wrench from a coat pocket and hands it to WALTER.**) No, no, no. That's a crescent wrench. I said a spanner!

DR. WISE: Sorry, Walter. Where is my head? Here you go. (**hands WALTER a spanner**)

WALTER: Thanks. Try and pay attention, doctor. Okay. That ought to do it. I think you'll find I've solved your problem. She should work fine now.

(Still under the engine, WALTER smacks the side of the machine with the flat of his hand, and it roars to life. Lights flash, gears turn, and the whole apparatus shakes slightly. Smoke pours from an exhaust port. SCIENTISTS are elated.)

DR. SMART: It works! Thanks so much! I knew you would be able to fix it, Walter.

DR. WISE: Everything is so easy for you!

(SCIENTISTS jump up and down and hug each other. We hear GRACE's voice.)

GRACE: ***(offstage)*** Walter!

(SCIENTISTS look fearfully around and disappear into the closet. If possible, the rocket engine should lift off on its own and disappear straight up. Otherwise, SCIENTISTS should take it with them, leaving WALTER lying sideways on his bed, asleep. GRACE enters through the bedroom door.)

GRACE: Walter, it's time to get up. You're going to be late for school! You slept all day Sunday. You can't still be tired. ***(WALTER doesn't respond.)*** Come on, Walter. Mom sent me to get you up, so get up! Don't you want to go to school?

(We hear the voice of a TEACHER from offstage.)

TEACHER'S VOICE: Walter, would you go to the board and solve the next problem, please?

(WALTER squirms.)

GRACE: ***(shouts)*** Mom! Walter won't wake up! ***(to WALTER)*** Come on, Walter! You're going to make me late! Besides, I need you to hang posters for me today, remember? For class president?

TEACHER'S VOICE: Are you sure about that answer, Walter?

(We hear the offstage sounds of children laughing in a classroom. WALTER tosses and turns. MOM enters.)

MOM: Walter, get up right now! It's time for school. You're going to make your sister late. ***(No response.)*** Walter, you have to go to school. Maybe if you were as smart as Grace you could afford to sleep through school, but you need all the learning you can get, Walter. Maybe then it might be you running for class president!

TEACHER'S VOICE: Try it again, Walter. Carry the seven!

(We hear children's voices giggling cruelly.)

MOM: Why can't you be more like Grace? All right, Walter, I give up. It's your brain. Keep on sleeping if you must. Come on and get ready for school, Grace.

GRACE: But, Mom!

(They exit. We hear the indistinct murmuring of a large group. WALTER stands up on his bed. HE now has a long teacher's pointer. HE speaks.)

WALTER: So we can see that from this very complicated formula we can accurately predict the time it will take for any chemical reaction to take place. As you might imagine, the implications of my discovery are fantastic. I have revolutionized chemical science forever. Now, are there any questions?

(Suddenly several STUDENTS are in the room, their hands raised eagerly. WALTER points his pointer at one of them.)

STUDENT: Professor Walter, can you talk a little bit about how you made this amazing breakthrough?

WALTER: Certainly. You see, all it really took was a superior intellect. It's all right there in the formulas—you just have to know how to see it. As you know, I hold several advanced degrees, and have the highest IQ in North America. So for me it was easy. ***(calls on another STUDENT)***

STUDENT: Professor Walter, everything comes so easy for you. You are truly an inspiration to students everywhere. I only wish I could be half as smart as you.

WALTER: Keep trying and someday you might be.

MOM: ***(offstage)*** Walter, dear!

(WALTER drops back onto his bed. STUDENTS dive under the bed. MOM enters with DAD, GRACE and DOCTOR, carrying a little black doctor's bag.)

DAD: Walter, wake up. The Doctor is here.

DOCTOR: Well, now, Walter... what seems to be the problem?

DAD: He won't wake up, Doctor. He's been sleeping for a week. That can't be normal.

DOCTOR: Perhaps not. You say this has never happened before?

MOM: No, Doctor.

GRACE: But Mom...

DAD: Well, there was that one time. . .last Summer.

(We hear the offstage sounds of cheering children. "Run! Run! Faster!" etc. WALTER squirms but does not wake up.)

GRACE: It was the day of the camp relay race. Walter was supposed to be on my team.

(The sounds of cheering become more urgent. CAMPER's voice is heard over the din.)

CAMPER: Walter, you idiot! You run like a girl!

MOM: He slept for almost two days then, Doctor, but not for a whole week!

GRACE: We won anyway, naturally. I was the MVP.

DAD: Personally, I think he'll wake up when he's good and ready, but you're the doctor, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Yes, I am. Well, let's take a look at you, Walter.

(DOCTOR examines WALTER carefully, using a stethoscope, a little penlight, and whatever other medical paraphernalia seems appropriate. DOCTOR's examination is punctuated with little "Mmm - Hmm"s and "Ah Ha!"s. When the examination has finished DOCTOR packs up the black bag.)

GRACE: So what's wrong with him, Doctor?

DOCTOR: Nothing whatever. He's simply asleep.

DAD: ***(to MOM)*** What did I tell you?

MOM: Nothing? Why won't he get up?

DOCTOR: He's sleeping.

MOM: For five days?

DOCTOR: So it would seem.

GRACE: When will he wake up?

DOCTOR: ***(shrugs his shoulders unconcernedly)*** Maybe never. But I assure you, he's perfectly healthy.

GRACE: Never?

MOM: But why won't he wake up? He's always waked up before.

DOCTOR: Well, I really couldn't say. Maybe he's tired. ***(winks at GRACE)*** Maybe an evil fairy put a spell on him.

GRACE: That's ridiculous. Like Sleeping Beauty? Do you think so?

MOM: Why would any boy want to stay in bed for a whole week?

DOCTOR: You'll have to ask Walter. Now, if you'll excuse me, I do have other patients. I'll send you a bill.

(DOCTOR exits. DAD shouts after him.)

DAD: For what?

(MOM and DAD look at each other and shrug their shoulders. They exit, leaving GRACE alone with WALTER. SHE stands by his bed watching him.)

GRACE: Walter, are you really all right? ***(No response.)*** Are you really never going to wake up? Ever? ***(No response; pause.)*** Walter, I really don't care if you want to sleep for a year, but you promised to help me with my posters, Walter. ***(starts to leave, but, in the doorway, SHE turns back)*** Walter, you're not really under a spell, are you? ***(moves closer and looks at him for a moment more, then shrugs her shoulders and makes up her mind)*** All right, Walter. I'll do it, but you can't ever tell anyone. Because I need you to wake up. ***(sits by WALTER's head)*** And not on the lips. ***(bends to kiss him, then stops)*** Look, Walter. I'm only doing this because I need your help if I'm going to win the class elections. Otherwise you could sleep until Christmas for all I care. Well, here goes. ***(kisses WALTER on the forehead and nothing happens)*** Okay, Walter, that's the best I can do, so you can wake up now. ***(No response.)*** Come on, Walter! The school elections are on Monday! Don't you want to vote for me?

(We hear the sounds of a loud party. A campaign VOLUNTEER is heard.)

VOLUNTEER: Quiet down, please, everybody, quiet down! We have the latest poll results. With sixty percent of the precincts reporting, Walter is ahead of his opponent by almost two-to-one. We're going to do it!

(Cheers, horns, etc. WALTER smiles broadly in his sleep.)

GRACE: Walter? Walter! Why are you smiling like that, Walter? ***(More cheers.)*** Walter! You're dreaming, aren't you, Walter?

VOLUNTEER: Walter is now ahead by three-to-one! We've done it! We've done it!

GRACE: Stop it, Walter. You're scaring me. Are you going to dream your whole life away? ***(Cheers, horns, etc.)*** I miss you, Walter. Come back to the real world. Please! ***(WALTER does not respond. GRACE looks on for a moment, then makes up her mind. SHE runs out of the room. In a moment, SHE is back with a pillow and her teddy bear. SHE shoves WALTER over a bit in the bed.)*** Move over, Walter. ***(GRACE lies down next to WALTER and shuts her eyes. The sounds of the campaign party grow louder.)***

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: Ladies and Gentlemen, the new President of the United States... Walter!

(WALTER stands up and begins to make his acceptance speech. GRACE continues to sleep.)

WALTER: Ladies and gentlemen, volunteers, and friends. It is my very great honor to answer my country's call and become the next president of the United States. I hope that I can remain worthy of my outstanding popularity. **(GRACE gets up and approaches WALTER.)** In my term in office I plan to...

GRACE: Walter.

WALTER: Yes? Who are you?

GRACE: Walter, it's me, Grace. Your sister.

WALTER: I have no sister. I'm the President of the United States.

GRACE: Walter, you're dreaming. You're not the president of anything. **(shakes him)** It's me, Grace!

WALTER: **(takes GRACE outside and whispers urgently)** Grace, you can't be here! Get out of my dream. In my dreams I am the smart kid, not you. I win things. I get elected to things. I have no sister for Mom and Dad to compare me to. I'm not useless here. These people need me. You have to go away. You'll ruin everything. Get your own dream.

(A few VOLUNTEERS and REPORTERS enter, some from the closet and some from under the bed. If others are available, the stage can become quite crowded.)

VOLUNTEER: Congratulations, Walter! Don't you want to talk to the reporters?

REPORTER: Walter, you won the election so easily. Do you have anything to say to your public?

WALTER: **(shoves GRACE behind him)** Sure. Let me first say that I am honored...

GRACE: **(not to be ignored)** Walter, you're not useless. We all need you too. And we're real.

REPORTER: Walter, who is the young woman? Do we smell a scandal?

WALTER: No, no! This is my sister!

VOLUNTEER: Your sister! But I thought you were an only child!

WALTER: **(a smile like a used-car salesman)** I am! I mean, er... **(to GRACE)** You see! You're spoiling everything!

GRACE: **(an announcement)** Okay, everybody, that's all for tonight. You can all go home. The president needs his rest. Go on...shoo!

(VOLUNTEERS and REPORTERS begin to file out of the room.)

WALTER: Wait! Security! I've never seen this little girl before in my life!
Take her out of here. And don't let her back in!

(AGENTS enter, fingers to their ears. They grab GRACE, handcuff her and hustle her out of the room. Everyone relaxes. GRACE hollers over her shoulder as SHE is dragged out.)

GRACE: Walter, come on! It's me! Grace! Wake up, Walter! You're not yourself! You'd never treat anyone this way in real life, Walter!

WALTER: ***(again addresses the crowd)*** Poor, sad, deluded young lady. Probably voted for my opponent. ***(The crowd laughs appreciatively.)*** But seriously, folks, I'd like to stay and celebrate with my adoring supporters, but I've got to catch a plane to Stockholm. I'm accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in the morning.

VOLUNTEER: ***(a shout from the crowd)*** Don't go, Walter! We love you!

ENTIRE CROWD: Yeah! Don't go! We love you, Walter!

(Music cue. Suddenly WALTER is surrounded by tuxedo-clad dancers. Las Vegas-style lighting comes up. Everyone sings. A showstopper.)

ENTIRE CROWD: WALTER, WALTER, WALTER! YOU MAKE THE BLUE SKY BLUE! WALTER, WALTER, WALTER! HOW COULD WE LIVE WITHOUT YOU? WALTER, WALTER, WALTER! THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN'T DO! YOU ARE THE VERY BEST! AND WE FEEL TRULY BLESSED TO EVEN GET TO LOOK AT YOU!

(During this, GRACE has re-entered, now dressed in a too big trench coat and slouch hat, with a hastily drawn press pass in the brim. SHE stands to one side. WALTER doesn't notice her, even when SHE speaks.)

GRACE: Oh, Walter! This is just sick!

ENTIRE CROWD: WALTER, WALTER, WALTER! YOU'RE GREAT AT EVERYTHING! WALTER, WALTER, WALTER! YOUR PRAISES WE WILL SING! WALTER, WALTER, WALTER! THANKS FOR THE JOY YOU BRING! WE'LL ALWAYS LOVE YOUR HAIR! FOLLOW YOU ANYWHERE! PLEASE WALTER, BE OUR KING!

(The number ends with WALTER on DANCERS' shoulders. They help him down to thunderous applause, as HE beams brightly at his fans, who congregate around him. GRACE starts shoving her way to the front.)

WALTER: Thank you, thank you! You're too kind. Not that I don't deserve it, of course. . .

GRACE: Walter! Walter!

WALTER: Ah, my press! No doubt you want an exclusive. Sorry, I can't just now. But don't feel bad. I'll give you my autograph.

(WALTER feels in his pocket for a pen. Instantly several people offer him one. HE plucks the press pass from GRACE's hat and starts to write. SHE snatches it back.)

GRACE: Walter, wake up!

WALTER: Look, Miss, I know it's a thrill to meet me and all, but you have to control yourself...

GRACE: Walter! *(takes off her hat)* It's me! Grace!

WALTER: *(rushes Grace aside)* What are you doing back here? What happened to the Secret Service?

GRACE: Never mind that, Walter! Look at you! This is terrible!

WALTER: No it's not! It's great! They all love me here!

GRACE: I don't know why. "I know it's a thrill to meet me!" "Yes, I'll be your King!" "Everybody worship me!" Walter, who are you?

(During the following, the crowd gradually disperses, leaving WALTER and GRACE alone.)

WALTER: You just want me to help you win the school elections.

GRACE: Walter, forget the stupid elections!

WALTER: Grace, you don't understand. In real life I'm nobody.

GRACE: In real life you're Walter. You're you.

WALTER: Big whoop!

GRACE: It is a big whoop Walter! Nobody else is you.

WALTER: Nobody else is the president either.

GRACE: But Walter, it's not real!

WALTER: *(storms)* It is for me! *(WALTER starts to leave, GRACE stops him.)*

GRACE: Walter! How did you get elected president?

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