

# **BEGINNING OF THE END OF THE...**

written, directed & choreographed by David Gordon

Based on Luigi Pirandello's:  
**SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR  
& A CHARACTER'S TRAGEDY  
& THE MAN WITH THE FLOWER IN HIS MOUTH**

## **CHARACTERS:**

DIRECTOR/AUTHOR - dg  
LEADING LADY/AUTHOR'S WIFE - vs  
FATHER/COMMUTER - gs  
WOMAN W/VEIL/WOMAN W/JKT - nf  
SON/MAN W/FLOWER - ds  
STEPDAUGHTER/NURSE - cc  
DANCERS - kg & sc & am  
DUMMIES (2)

## **WHEN PLAY BEGINS:**

**DRCTR, LDNG LDY, FTHR, WMN W/VL, STPDGHTR, SN,  
3 DNCRS & 2 DMMS ASSEMBLED ON STG AS ON PG 42.**

LEADING LADY=

What if I play the mother, the madam, the stepdaughter and I play myself, the leading lady? Talk about illusion and reality.

ALL

"Illusion and reality", she says.

DIRECTOR

Everybody out. (ALL EXIT EXCEPT DIRECTOR/LEADING LADY)

LEADING LADY

"Talk about illusion and reality". Line?

DIRECTOR

"I have no illusions"...

LEADING LADY

"I have no illusions. My reality is"...sorry.

DIRECTOR

"I spent all day". Take it from "I have no illusions".

LEADING LADY

"I have no illusions. My reality is I spent all day" I think I say "with six characters in search of an author of a play he never finishes and that's okay but they don't eat or take a break and I don't think they pee and, anyway, they certainly aren't as much fun to work with as..." line?

DIRECTOR

"As real actors".

LEADING LADY

"As real actors. They've never actually been in another play".

DIRECTOR

"They don't talk about anything else but them".

LEADING LADY

But them, yes, I know, I was taking a pause. Don't give a line unless I ask. "If the director ever gets back to Pirandello I can break eggs and wear a cook's cap but he better call my agent."

DIRECTOR

I'm the director. I can hear you. I'm right here.

LEADING LADY

Does the leading lady say "I can hear you. I'm right here"?

DIRECTOR

No, I said that. You say "At least a cook's cap has no veil".

LEADING LADY

"No veil". Ok, I'll be right back. (EXIT,DNCRS ENTR/MUS/DOR)

DANCERS

The author has a habit when he's writing. He meets with would be characters of his future stories. He finds himself in company with these characters once a week for three hours, nine to one.

AUTHOR

Nine to noon. Try it in the first person.

DANCERS

Noon. I take down each character's name, question courteously and listen with all the patience I can muster to their stories. I make the greatest effort to be satisfied with them. I do.

AUTHOR

Yes, I do. (DNCRS EXIT/MUS/DOR)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

(ENTER) You want me to put the kettle on for coffee? Or tea?

AUTHOR

No. I mean no thanks. Is anybody here yet?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

He's impatient. Impatient with his would be characters and impatient with me. It's his nature to not be easily pleased.

AUTHOR

I don't like being hoodwinked.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

And to avoid hoodwink-ed-ness you determine to get to the bottom of everything with impossibly long, detailed argument.

AUTHOR

Reasonable discussion.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Cross examination too early in the morning or too late at night.

AUTHOR

I watch you watch the clock.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Maybe I have something else to do. Or it's boring.

AUTHOR

Which is it now?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

It's boring.

AUTHOR

And who are you now?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

I'm your wife. And you are the author except when you're the director but both of you tell us all what to do and if we do or say something back you tell us we should have done it or said it back better. You enjoy arguing and we don't - or maybe they all do - but I don't.

AUTHOR

I do. Not you. (DNCRS/MUS/DOR)  
Here's the man with a flower in his mouth again.

MAN W/FLOWER

(ENTER) Flower in my mouth has a name. Epithelioma.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

He says it again. "Epithelioma".

MAN W/FLOWER

Epithelioma. Death passes my way one day and plants this flower in my mouth. Epithelioma. Flower in my mouth. Death whispers, "Keep it, friend, I'll be back in eight or ten months." Where's the nurse?

NURSE

(ENTER) Doctor is running late. Take a seat.  
(DNCRS/MUS/DOR/NRS EXITS)

MAN W/FLOWER

Never like that nurse. (COMMUTER ENTERS)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Here's the commuter. He missed his train again.

COMMUTER

Missed my train again. I run in. Train pulls out.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

"Pulls out". (EXIT, DNCRS/MUS/DOR)

COMMUTER

Out. I run in. Train pulls out. Takes a time with all my bundles to get a taxi to the train and takes a time to get out of the taxi, loaded down with all my bundles and to get my fingers through all the strings. Two strings to a finger. Except for one finger - three strings and then - I miss the train again.

MAN W/FLOWER

You should have left the bundles in the cab and run for it.

COMMUTER

What would I tell my wife? And my daughters. You have no idea about women and shopping.

MAN W/FLOWER

I know all about women and shopping. My wife shops. I have no daughters but my wife has sisters. Girl friends. Women friends. Where did that nurse go? I have an appointment.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

(ENTER) Women shop, doctors run late and nurses disappear.

COMMUTER

Is that nurse new? And where is "Woman with Jacket"? She's new. And where are the characters who dance?

WOMAN W/JKT

(ENTER W/NRS) I used to be new. I'm not new now.

NURSE

And I'm not new.

WOMAN W/JKT

(ENTER DNCRS) And all the characters always dance.

ALL

All the characters always dance. (MUS/DNCE-DNCE ENDS)

MAN W/FLOWER

And the nurse always says "doctor is running late. Take a seat" and the commuter always tells his wife, "I'm going downtown".

COMMUTER

I'm going downtown, I tell my wife. You need anything?

DANCERS

He says, "downtown". He says "need anything?"

AUTHOR'S WIFE

First she says, he says, she doesn't, doesn't she?

COMMUTER

Yes, she does. "No," she says. "I don't need anything but you better ask the girls (she means our daughters) and wait a minute, come to think of it", she says/

WOMAN W/JKT

She says, "you did say downtown didn't you?"

DANCERS

He did say "down town" didn't he?

COMMUTER

"I don't need anything" she says, "but come to think of it I could use a this" she says "and a little that if it's no trouble. And while you're there, could you stop by so and so?" So I did. So now I had a lot of bundles. So I left my bundles in the "station checkroom". So now I had too much time. So I had two or three coffees. Too many coffees. Hot as hell. Don't feel well. Now what? What now? Doctor's office is near. Maybe I'll wait there. Or here.

DANCERS

"Maybe here" he says.

MAN W/FLOWER

So you left your bundles in the "station checkroom"?

COMMUTER

Yes, why? Are they safe there? They were all well wrapped.

DANCERS

"Well" he says, and "wrapped".

MAN W/FLOWER

Some sales people have a special skill for wrapping don't they? (MVMNT) For using big sheets of paper don't they? They tear off great big double sheets of paper. You want to feel the paper with your cheek as the wrapper spreads it out on the counter, nonchalantly, gracefully, puts what you just bought - right in the middle - nicely folded.

DANCERS

"In the middle" he says. "Nicely folded" he says.

MAN W/FLOWER

With the back of one hand, a good wrapper lifts one side of the paper from underneath, folds over the other side from above, double folds the paper fast along the edges, folds end flaps into triangles, turns points under and reaches for the string. Pulls just enough string to tie the bundle, knots it so fast you don't have time to admire the skill and hands over the bundle - one two three. (MVMNT ENDS/NRS ENTERS)  
What a pleasure watching good wrappers wrap.

DANCERS

Good wrappers wrap.

MAN W/FLOWER

I have an appointment.

NURSE

Doctor's running late. (EXIT)

COMMUTER

How do you know so much about wrappers wrapping?

MAN W/FLOWER

I stop in shops and watch good wrappers wrap. They make a figure eight with cord or thin string between thumb and little finger of the left hand. I pretend I'm the cord or thin string they measure by the yard. I imagine things. I forget myself.



AUTHOR'S WIFE

(ENTER) He forgets himself and imagines things. He never lets his imagination rest, he says. He says he follows customers.

MAN W/FLOWER

I only follow with my eyes. Customers, who leave with bundles. No-one I know. No, I don't do that. I cling to lives of strangers.

DANCERS

"Lives" he says, "of strangers" he says. (NRS ENTERS)

MAN W/FLOWER

I'm next. (WMN W/JKT ENTERS) I have an appointment.

NURSE

The doctor had emergencies. The doctor's running late. (EXIT)

COMMUTER

This character, "Woman with Jacket", what does she want?

WOMAN W/JKT

I wanted to be a character in a story and the question is whether I can be the character I wanted to be so I'm back. I did not intend to be named "Woman with Jacket".

COMMUTER

I didn't mean to name you "Woman with Jacket". I'm sorry.

AUTHOR

This is when I laugh.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Don't be sorry. It's the first thing you said made the author laugh. It's not easy to see how much sympathy underlies his laughter. Many would-be characters think he doesn't like them.

COMMUTER

I know he doesn't like me but I'm determined to pay him no mind or to change his mind. (EXIT)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

He likes some characters more than others. (NRS ENTERS)  
He likes this nurse. Don't ask me.

NURSE

(TO WMN W/JKT) You still here? Why are you here?

WOMAN W/JKT

I was in the neighborhood so I came back. Why do you look at me like that? What's the matter?

NURSE

The matter? Nothing's the matter. How do I look at you? Next.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Is this nurse the real reason "Woman with Jacket" came back?

WOMAN W/JKT

Yes. She's everything to me. My whole life.

NURSE

I am nobody's whole life. I am not even my own whole life.

WOMAN W/JKT

I can't live unless I feel her close to me or feel me close to her.

NURSE

She lives fine. You live fine. I see you live. Next.

MAN W/FLOWER

I see someone live in a house so I live in it too - kind of. Not really live. I do in my mind. In my own house I breathe the atmosphere of my own life. But another someone's house has other atmosphere so I live in it kind of. Know what I mean?

WOMAN W/JKT

I mean, of course, a woman can't force another woman, or a man a woman, or a woman a man/

NURSE

Next - to return love he no longer, or she no longer, feels.

WOMAN W/JKT

But then he should, or she should, have the honesty to say "I don't love you anymore".

NURSE

I don't. I did say I honestly don't love you anymore but you don't hear me or believe me or you won't. Or is it you can't?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

What if it's inconvenient to be too honest or what if it's more convenient to keep quiet out of pity?

WOMAN W/JKT

Making anyone think you love him or her, out of pity, is a lie. If a woman keeps quiet out of pity she's already lying to the man or the woman she's lying to, or lying with, or to herself.

NURSE

Are you talking to or about me?

WOMAN W/JKT

About me. Pity is not love. Pity leads to contempt, contempt to betrayal. The sin of betrayal is committed by not admitting a lie. Mostly a practical woman lies to herself. I know I do.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Those should be my lines. They sound more like my character.

WOMAN W/JKT

Anyone who wants any of my lines can have them. You want them? Say them. We could say them together. (EXIT)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Where are you going? (EXIT)

NURSE

Where are they going? (EXIT)

MAN W/FLOWER

Where is that nurse going now? Will I ever see this doctor?  
(TO DNCRS) You ever sit in a good doctor's waiting room?

DANCERS

Doctor's waiting room?

MAN W/FLOWER

You ever notice the used chairs and odd tables in the waiting room? Furniture just good enough for patients. Secondhand.

DANCERS

Secondhand, he says.

MAN W/FLOWER

When you're sick enough you notice. I notice. I bet Mrs. Doctor entertains friends on a luxurious upholstered three piece living room suite with matching end tables and lamps while Mr. Doctor's patients wait around on mismatched secondhand chairs with last weeks, last months, last years magazines until nurse calls "next".

NURSE

(ENTER) Next. Doctor will see you now. (EXIT)

MAN W/FLOWER

What about after? Here's the chair I sat in before the doctor said what's wrong with me. Who's in my chair now sick with what? Or is it empty? Is my chair waiting for "who knows who" to find out "who knows what". I didn't finish this magazine. I'm taking it. I take magazines from doctor's offices if I'm not done reading. Or I tear out magazine pages. (EXIT)

### AUTHOR'S WIFE

Author tears pages out of character's life. Man with a deadly flower in his mouth is a would-be character reading out of date magazines in second hand chairs in a doctor's waiting room imagining someone else's tragedies to make it matter less to him if his end comes sooner than later. Next!

### AUTHOR'S WIFE/DANCERS

We always have to prove things to ourselves because we feel a terrible thirst for life because life at the moment we experience it is always so full of itself that we can never actually taste it.

### AUTHOR/AUTHOR'S WIFE

All we can really savor is the past, which remains alive within us. Our thirst for life comes from memories that bind us. But bind us to what? To petty irritations. To everyday foolishness.

### AUTHOR'S WIFE/DANCERS

But, what now seems foolish to us or boring - how will it seem in five years? Or one? If we live that long?

### AUTHOR/AUTHOR'S WIFE

How will the thought of losing life taste when we know, if we know, if I were to know - it might simply be a matter of days?

### AUTHOR'S WIFE

I am made to say "if I were to know" but they aren't my words. These are not my words.

DANCERS

Headline: Author puts words in author's wife's mouth.

Headline: Director corrects, I mean directs, director's wife.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Wife is loyal to author and director. You think nobody knows?

AUTHOR

You know. I know. Loyalty is a debt. Mine to you. Yours to me.

WOMAN W/JKT

(ENTER) Loyalty is a debt we owe to ourselves.

NURSE

(ENTER) You speak in the abstract. Like any "loose" character without a fixed narrative.

WOMAN W/JKT

I never doubt your narrative could go almost anywhere.

NURSE

Or nowhere. You're talking about last summer at the beach?

WOMAN W/JKT

All I said was isn't it ironic we pretend to feel secure in the ocean when at any moment any wave could separate us.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

(TO AUTHOR) That's you talking again.

AUTHOR

I tried to make you feel safe in the ocean.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

I was perfectly happy. I swam, as I always swim, parallel to the shore. You insisted on teaching me to float.

NURSE

You said "I want you to feel the same fear I do that in five minutes you might not still love me. (ENTER/MN W/FLWR)  
If there was a moment I suddenly loved you there could be a moment I suddenly stop".

WOMAN W/JKT

At a turn in the road, a chance meeting or parting, a blinding conglomeration of circumstances, an unexpected irresistible intoxication of the senses, for any old reason at all love can die.

MAN W/FLOWER

Or love can live. My wife watches me day and night. Doesn't eat, doesn't sleep. I could strangle her.

WOMAN W/JKT

What does the poor woman want?

MAN W/FLOWER

Wants me to benefit from her loving care, she says, and from her carpets and furnishings and the perfect order of her silent rooms, she says, measured by clocks ticking. Wants me to stay home, she says, and wants me to want to stay home, she says.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Perhaps you could, once in a while, stay home. Could you?

MAN W/FLOWER

Could houses stay in line on streets about to be smashed by earthquakes? Could tenants placidly undress for bed, fold their clothes, snuggle under covers with clean white sheets, knowing in a few hours they'll be dead. Does that seem reasonable?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

I imagine if we can imagine it we can find a reason for it.

WOMAN W/JKT

What if a flame burns in her chest and consumes her heart and storm clouds of smoke from her burning heart blot out reason?

NURSE

If she allows herself to be swept - life will sweep her away.

MAN W/FLOWER

My wife says she wants to die with me. She scratched her lip with a pin to make it bleed and tried to kiss my flower.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

My husband, too, thinks he wants not to outlive me.

NURSE

Undying love. That's what some men and some women want. (

AUTHOR'S WIFE

My husband thinks I should want that too but I'm not so sure. I love him as much as I ever did. Maybe more. But not enough for him. But enough for me. But I can imagine loving to be without him if I outlive him. But I don't want him to die. Don't think I do. I don't.

MAN W/FLOWER

What if death were merely some strange, disgusting insect someone might unexpectedly find on you? You walk down the street and a passer-by stops you. "Excuse me", he says.

DANCERS

(ENTER) "Stop", he says. "Excuse me", he says.



MAN W/FLOWER

"You have death on you" he says. He extends two fingers of one hand. "May I?" he says. The passer-by plucks death off and flicks it away in no time.

DANCERS

"In no time" he says.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

My husband, when he used to go to funerals which he doesn't do any more, pointed at his family burial plot one day and said we'll lie here side by side. I said no.

DANCERS

She said no. (EXIT)

AUTHOR

She shocked me. Not the first time. Not the last. I was hurt. I was young. I got old enough to get grateful. To trust her.

WOMAN W/JKT

(TO NRS) Can I ever trust you?

NURSE

If I say yes you won't believe me so no. (EXIT)

MAN W/FLOWER

Will you go after her?

WOMAN W/JKT

No. She'll forget me. I'll forget her. Your wife will forget you. One day she'll forget which side of the bed you slept on. Did she ever know? No, she'll say, I don't think so.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

These days I hear myself say "whatever happened to".

WOMAN W/JKT

I hear myself say "whatever happened to" too. I can't remember who or what I was thinking I was asking about. He or she has joined the growing void inside me. (EXIT)

MAN W/FLOWER

If I faced the void inside me I could kill a total stranger.

COMMUTER

(ENTER) What time is it? Mustn't miss my train.

MAN W/FLOWER

"Mustn't miss my train". I could kill a total stranger. (EXIT)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

He doesn't mean what he says and he won't remember he said it and if killing someone is his solution he could kill himself or the author could kill him off.

AUTHOR

Not before the apricot speech.

MAN W/FLOWER

(ENTER) Apricots are in season. Eat them with the skin on. Break them in half and squeeze them like a pair of juicy lips.

AUTHOR

"Like a pair of juicy lips". I love when he says that.

MAN W/FLOWER

(TO COMMUTER) Better not miss the last train. I suppose the village is a little distance from the station, is it?

COMMUTER

Yes.

MAN W/FLOWER

You might walk home?

COMMUTER

Yes.

MAN W/FLOWER

Do me a favor, the first fat tuft of grass you see, at the edge of the road, count the blades for me.

COMMUTER

Yes.

MAN W/FLOWER

That's the number of days I might still have to live so be sure you pick a nice fat one. (EXIT/DNCRS ENTER/MUS)

COMMUTER

Where is the man with the flower in his mouth going and who was he before he got sick and began dying and sick and dying got to be his only identity, his only life and is the woman who watches him really his wife? And did he ever stay home?

DANCERS

He says "stay" and "home".

AUTHOR'S WIFE

(TO AUTHOR) And how much longer will you work?

DANCERS

She says "how much" and "work" to the author.

AUTHOR

Depends.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Depends on what?

DANCERS

"On" and "what" she says to the author.

AUTHOR

On what happens next.

DANCERS

"What" and "next" he says to his wife.

COMMUTER

And will Woman with Jacket and the nurse meet again and will they manage to be in love and to stay in love enough to make Woman with Jacket happy?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Who can love Woman with Jacket enough to make her happy?  
Can anyone love anyone enough and how much is enough?

DANCERS

She says "enough, enough and enough".

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Shall I begin dinner?

AUTHOR

I'd love that. If you're getting hungry I could get hungry.

COMMUTER

Will I get to the station checkroom in time? Are my bundles okay? Did I remember what my wife and daughters asked for? Will they meet my train? Will this author ever learn to love my character's story? Will I keep trying? Will I die trying? (EXIT)

AUTHOR

What are we having?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Leftovers. (EXIT)

DANCERS

The author's wife says "leftovers" to the author and leaves.

AUTHOR

Did we have leftovers last night? Not that I mind. Leftovers are like characters. Depends on what you do with them. Place old character in new context. Ask "What if"?

DANCERS

"What" he says and "if" he says

AUTHOR

What if a character who always wears black buys a blue coat?

DANCERS

"Blue coat" he says.

AUTHOR

Right. Old character in new blue coat sits down to leftovers.

DANCERS

Yesterday's store bought roast chicken de-boned and thrown in a pot with a jar or can of store bought red sauce or home made red sauce with Italian peeled plum tomatoes and tomato paste and diced yellow onion and chopped garlic and cracked pepper - fried up in olive oil. Throw in mushrooms, celery and zucchini and yesterday's leftover salad - if you have some. Eat it for dinner with pasta or rice and, uh oh, get a red stain.

AUTHOR

On the new blue jacket.

DANCERS

On the blue jacket. Next day throw what's left in a frying pan with grated cheese. Eat it warmed up for lunch with a glass of red wine and, uh oh, spill red wine on day old blue jacket and, uh oh, new red stain but a different color red. Pinker. (EXIT)

AUTHOR

Does she mean original leftovers? Or leftovers of the leftovers? That's the question. (MUSIC ENDS/BLACKOUT)

LEADING LADY

(OFFSTG) Where is everybody? Hello? (ENTER) Can't see a bloody thing. Lights? Hello? (LIGHT) Oh, thanks. Am I late? Backstage smells like backstage. (EXIT, ENTER W/CHAIR) American backstage smells like British backstage. Tried to return my British passport when I became American but Brits don't take 'em back. "You don't stop being British, Madam".

DIRECTOR

No, you don't and you didn't.

LEADING LADY

No, I didn't. I played in British pantomime when I was 14 or 15. Panto at the Margate Hippodrome, two shows a day, six day week. When we closed I was bereft. Auntie Vera guessed. Took me to a tea dance to cheer me up . Bought me silvery green eye shadow - Lancome. Thought I still had it but no. I use Leichner stage make-up now if I use stage make-up if I'm on a real stage. Thought I was late. (EXIT/ENTER W/CHAIR) No clock. Didn't there use to be a clock stage right? Or left?

DIRECTOR

Yes, there did. Forget used to be. Nothing is like it used to be.

LEADING LADY

Not you. Not me. Not nothing, not no how. What are we doing?

DIRECTOR

Pirandello. "A curious room serves as dining-room and study."

LEADING LADY

Let me write that down. "Curious room."

DIRECTOR

"Exit rear to bedroom. Left to kitchen. Principal exit to right."

LEADING LADY

"Right". I'm writing.

DIRECTOR

When the curtain goes up you're discovered in the kitchen.

LEADING LADY

"In the kitchen". Okay. Is there really a kitchen?

DIRECTOR

No.

LEADING LADY

Is there really a curtain?

DIRECTOR

No. "You wear a chef's hat. Beat an egg in a cup."

LEADING LADY

(WRITE) "Egg in a cup". Chef's hat? Really a chef's hat?

DIRECTOR

Really. (HANDS HAT) Pirandello plays the fool with us all and nobody understands anything.

LEADING LADY

(READ) It says I "represent the shell of the egg I'm beating and I become a puppet of myself." (PUT ON HAT/EXIT)

DIRECTOR

Looks great.

LEADING LADY

(ENTER) Didn't there used to be a mirror? Was it stage right?

DIRECTOR

Used to be a stage right stage right. Script says you represent empty form of reason without fullness of instinct which is blind.

LEADING LADY

(WRITE) Reason without instinct - whatever that means.

FATHER

(ENTER) Excuse me. We're looking for a playwright.

DIRECTOR

I'm the director. No playwright here.

LEADING LADY

I'm the leading lady. We're not rehearsing a new play.

STEPDAUGHTER

(ENTER W/GIRL DUMMY) We can be your new play.

DIRECTOR

We're not holding auditions.

FATHER

No, not be in it, we can be your new play.

SON

(ENTER) A play full of madness and absurdities.

LEADING LADY

Do I have time to use the ladies? Don't say anything good.  
(EXIT/WOMAN W/VEIL ENTERS W/BOY DUMMY)

WOMAN W/VEIL

Madness and absurdity is a basis of your profession isn't it?

FATHER

Reverse an ordinary process to create an incredible situation.

SON

To make seem true that which isn't true is a kind of joke.

STEPDAUGHTER

We have drama too. You might guess from this veiled woman.  
She is a widow. We are her children.



WOMAN W/VEIL

The author who created us no longer wished or was able to put us into his work of art.

FATHER

A crime. He who has the luck to be born a character in a proper play can't die. An author dies but his creation does not die.

SON

Unless the author kills him off and some of us don't care to live in a proper play.

DIRECTOR

Drama or comedy - we always start with a proper play.

FATHER

Directors take liberties.

DIRECTOR

We adapt.

FATHER

You re-write.

LEADING LADY

(ENTER) Toilet is where I remember but I think it's bust again. Or still. Used it anyway but I didn't flush.

STEPDAUGHTER

At the end baby sister drowns. Baby brother shoots himself.

FATHER

Nobody wants to know the end at the beginning.

LEADING LADY

Unless it's a flashback. Sunset Boulevard? Body in the pool? Bang bang. Gloria Swanson shoots William Holden.

WOMAN W/VEIL

I can't bear it. I couldn't and I can't. I'm going to faint.

STEPDAUGHTER

I run away but not till what happens with my baby sister and my stepbrother and my baby brother.

WOMAN W/VEIL

Faint. I'm going to faint.

DANCERS

(ENTER) "Faint and faint again".

SON

(ENTER) A chair! A chair for this poor fainting widow.

DANCERS

"Chair" and chair again."

LEADING LADY

Is she really his wife and is she really fainting or is she acting?

DANCERS

"Fainting or acting" she says.

LEADING LADY

And how can she be a widow if this father is alive? He is alive?

FATHER

I am as alive as a character can be without a play. My wife had a lover who ought to be here but he can't. He died. He's dead.

STEPDAUGHTER

Died and dead. Can't you see we're all in mourning?

LEADING LADY

I see you're all in black but I wear black for dramatic effect.

WOMAN W/VEIL

He died but that's not my drama. I'm not just a widow, I'm a mother. My powerful drama lies all in my four children.

SON

By two men. Four by two. That's the drama. And the comedy.

DANCERS

"Drama" he says and "comedy."

LEADING LADY

So, the father of some of these children is not here but the father of some of these children is here and the woman with the veil is the widow of - who?

WOMAN W/VEIL

Of the man this man sent me to. Gave me to. Forced me to go.

STEPDAUGHTER

No, mama, the "force" part isn't exactly true.

DANCERS

"Not exactly true" and also "true".

WOMAN W/VEIL

She knows everything. What is she a mind reader or what?

STEPDAUGHTER

She says he forced her to go but we don't get to that scene until page 13.

LEADING LADY

Page 13 of what?

STEPDAUGHTER

There was a play and a page 13 before the author stopped writing. My mother lived in peace and happiness with the other so called father who was kind to her while he lived.

LEADING LADY

Is that true?

WOMAN W/VEIL

Yes. I don't deny it. I only said I didn't abandon a two year old son through any fault or passion of my own.

FATHER

It's true. It was my fault.

DANCERS

His fault.

FATHER

A poor man, a secretary of mine, becomes friends with her.

STEPDAUGHTER

He introduces them. He wants them to be friends. (EXIT)

SON

(ENTER) Now you'll hear about the "Demon of Experiment."

FATHER

They are kindred souls. I mean to do good for them and, I confess, for myself. It was the Demon of Experiment.

LEADING LADY

The "Demon of Experiment". What page is that on?

FATHER

But soon I can't say a word to either of them. They appeal mutely to each other with their eyes - roll their eyes silently in commiseration so I send him away but I watch my wife drift forlornly around the house like an animal without a master.

WOMAN W/VEIL

You are still the master. You make me weak and you force me to abandon my son when he's only two years old. (EXIT)



LEADING LADY

Or she doesn't close them - so she sees his closed eyes. (EXIT)

SON

He opens them to shed crocodile tears of remorse. It's a fact.

FATHER

A fact is like a bag which won't stand up when it's empty.

SON

Demon of experiment/dazed fly/empty bag metaphor.

FATHER

You are a cynical imbecile. You make fun of me on account of the words I use to express myself. They came back without letting me know. How was I to know?

WOMAN W/VEIL

(ENTER) How was I to know he would want to know? Did he really love me? Why did he marry me? I was a nobody. (EXIT)

FATHER

My family see my love and pity as a ferocious form of cruelty.

SON

Demon of experiment/dazed fly/empty bag metaphor and this is when he turns to blank verse. (EXIT/DANCERS ENTER)

FATHER

I only explain, in my own words, things as I see them.

FATHER/DANCERS

We imagine we understand each other but do we?  
No, we don't dear, we never really do, dear.  
His wife imagines his pity for her is cruelty, says he.  
ferocious cruelty, isn't that really true, dear?  
(DANCERS EXIT)

WOMAN W/VEIL

(ENTER) He knows how to talk and I don't. He's a somebody if it comes to talking and I, if it comes to talking, am a nobody.

FATHER

How could I know they were in misery and my wife would take sewing work in the shop of my old friend the madam?

STEPDAUGHTER

The madam who hires attractive daughters of impoverished sewing ladies into her fancy shop to sell dresses and hats, and themselves, to wealthy horny old gentlemen customers.

LEADING LADY

Maybe I could play the madam?

WOMAN W/VEIL

You must believe it never entered my mind the madam offered me work because she had her eye on selling my daughter.

STEPDAUGHTER

To my so called stepfather who was an old and frequent client.

WOMAN W/VEIL

I should have known. Shame on me. (EXIT)

LEADING LADY

I could play the woman with the veil. Perhaps without the veil?

DIRECTOR

There's a lot of drama in that veil.

DANCERS

(ENTER) "Drama", he says. "Veil", he says.

LEADING LADY

Will we do the egg scene today or can I lose the cook's cap?

DIRECTOR

Lose it but remember where to find it.

STEPDAUGHTER

How could I be expected - after our meeting in the madam's shop - to be or act like a modest miss? He knows I'm a shop girl who can be had for the price of a hat.

DANCERS

"Had" and "hat" she says.

FATHER

I had to take them all to my house but imagine my position.

DANCERS

"Imagine" he says, and "position."

DIRECTOR

That's a scene we need to play. Where's the leading lady?

LEADING LADY

Here. She surprised him in a place she oughtn't to have known him. Now she attaches, to his character, a dreadful reality.

FATHER

Based on one shameful fleeting moment. An injustice to judge a man as if he can be summed up in one deed in one play.

DANCERS

"One deed", he says. "One play", he says.

DIRECTOR

But there is no play. And no author.

STEPDAUGHTER

You could be the author. We could play it scene by scene.



WOMAN W/VEIL

(ENTER) You could take it all down. Why not?

SON

(ENTER) "Why" she says and "not". I could tell you why not.

DIRECTOR

Could you all take a walk while I think? (MVMNT W/MUS)

DANCERS

"Take a walk" he says "while I think"

LEADING LADY

(ALL STOP) I could play the dress shop madam - with an Italian accent too - I was in an Italian revue - for 8 months when I was 22. (SINGS) English girls sing and dance - Italian actors improvise for laughs - one of us, a girl named Burda - wants to see her family in England - when we have a few days off for Christmas - but management says "no signorina". (MVMNT/MUS START)

LEADING LADY

(ALL STOP) So another one of us named Carol - with a rich beau in London - calls him collect to send a cable - to say Burda's father is very ill - and she has to go home right away. (MVMNT/MUS START)

LEADING LADY

(ALL STOP) So we get to the dressing room that night and Burda is in floods of tears - so I think she's acting crying really well but no, she got a real telegram from her mother - and she did really go home for Christmas but her father really died.

STEPDAUGHTER

Darling baby. (TO GIRL DUMMY) You don't know where we are, do you? It's a stage, baby, where actors play at being serious. Dead serious in comedies.

DIRECTOR

Now the characters need to rehearse so I can write down parts.

SON

I don't need to rehearse. I know the character I am. (EXIT)

DIRECTOR

You all know the characters you are but characters don't act. Actors do the acting. Actors become the characters.

FATHER

Excuse me, the actors do not become the characters. You want to and you pretend to but you can't become me.

DIRECTOR

But let's not pretend because you are a father you can act the part of a father. We need a professional actor to act the part.

FATHER

So I'm going to be acted by I don't know who (who isn't me) and who acts me according to, I suppose, how he supposes I am and not as I, inside myself, feel myself to be.

STEPDAUGHTER

I, inside, feel myself to be what madam tells me to be which is nice to old male customers like him. Madam speaks half Italian and half English but there's no mistaking her meaning.

LEADING LADY

Beezynessa izza beezynessa, no? I thinka da madama musta talka like-a thissa. She sezza de "olda signore" wantsa talka nice-a ta you so you gotta talka nice-a ta heema. Eefa ya no like- a heema he getsa summudda girlsa. De "olda signore" widda da moolah alwayza getsa whatta he wantsa. This is not as much fun as I thought. How long is this scene?

DIRECTOR

Madam exits. (LDNG LDY EXITS) Customer enters.

FATHER

Salesgirl says "good afternoon". I say "No need to be so formal. Your dear little head ought to have a nicer newer better hat."

STEPDAUGHTER

"Better redder" he says. "Madam will be pleased with the sale."

FATHER

She says "I couldn't wear a red hat on account of my black dress." I say "Oh. Are you in mourning? I'm so sorry."

STEPDAUGHTER

"Don't be so sorry", I say, "I've been with other men dressed like this."

WOMAN W/VEIL

Did she say that? Did you say that? Oh my God, oh my God.

DIRECTOR

I'm gonna cut that last bit but the red hat is good. I'd like the leading lady to read the role of the stepdaughter.

WOMAN W/VEIL

What? He thinks the stepdaughter is the leading role?

STEPDAUGHTER

She can't play me. She isn't in the least like me.

LEADING LADY

(ENTER) I don't have to be like you. I just have to act like you.

STEPDAUGHTER

I better watch you act, then, so I can learn how to play myself.

FATHER

I say "is this your first time?" She says "no sir".

STEPDAUGHTER

He says "no need to be so formal. May I buy a new red hat?"

LEADING LADY

"Oh no, I couldn't wear it on account of my black dress." Do I say "on account of" or "because of"? "On account of" sounds so teen age. I prefer "because of".

STEPDAUGHTER

I am "teen age". Or I was. I said "on account of".

FATHER

She said "on account of".

DANCERS

She said, "on account of!"

FATHER

"Are you in mourning? I'm so sorry. Perhaps a new black hat?"

STEPDAUGHTER

He said "Take off your black dress honey." That's the truth.

LEADING LADY

We only need truth up to a certain point. Truth is relative.

STEPDAUGHTER

My relative doesn't know I'm his relative and mama cries out when she hears about it. I can still hear her cry. Cry out mama

WOMAN W/VEIL

Ahhhhhhhhhhh! Then she runs away.

STEPDAUGHTER

Not yet. But I do. I did. I ran away.

SON

(ENTER) Are there dressing rooms? I could lay down.

STEPDAUGHTER

Make him stay. I owe my life on the streets to him.

SON

She wants to blame so she blames me. I don't want anything to do with this. It's easy for me always to seem in the wrong but imagine my position.

DANCERS

"Imagine", he says.

SON

An impudent young woman arrives unannounced. She acts like mistress of the house and leaves and returns with two children and her mother who she claims is my mother too and asks my father to give her money in a way that implies he must .

DANCERS

"Give me money", he says she says.

SON

"These children" she says "are your step brother and step sister and I am your step sister too and this woman is your mother".

DANCERS

"Your mother", he says she says.

DIRECTOR

Would you do that speech slower? I'm trying to write it down.

SON

I can do it slightly differently with the same information. One day - I think it was a Tuesday before lunch - I was hungry - this impudent bossy young woman arrives - with a veiled woman she calls mama - and two children - unannounced.

DIRECTOR

Slower.

SON

Unannounced, before lunch, with a veiled woman and two kids. She tells me this woman, she calls mama, is also my mother.

DANCERS

Slower.

SON

I'd rather not say what I felt or I thought about the whole new mother thing - but I wasn't at ease. Dramatically speaking I'm a less realized character so please leave me out - please.

FATHER

What you're "like" makes it necessary to leave you in.

SON

When did you bother, father, to learn what I'm like?

FATHER

I might know more, but your aloofness is cruel to me and your mother. Look, she's crying.

SON

She's acting. You say "look, she's crying" and she always cries.

WOMAN W/VEIL

One way to cry when you're acting crying is to try to not cry.

FATHER

The drama finally is this: death of the girl, tragedy of the boy.

DANCERS

"Drama, death" and "tragedy".

LEADING LADY

(ENTER) So you're really four characters in search of an author.

SON

Stepdaughter flees. We three remain. Mother, father and me.

LEADING LADY

So, that's actually three characters in search of - an author.

DANCERS

"Searching, searching, searching".

STEPDAUGHTER

The author wrote us this way. He abandoned us in a fit of depression about the public's love for conventional theater. De-constructing conventional theater was his obsession

SON

My character doesn't ever agree with her character but yes. De-constructing conventional theater was his obsession.

DANCERS

"Yes" he says. "De-construction" he says. "Obsession" he says.

SON

You're the acting author. Get me offstage. Write an exit for me so I won't see the baby girl drown and the young boy shoot himself again. Or cut the scene.

LEADING LADY

Or write a visit. Make the baby and the boy visit their dead father's relatives? If he's really dead. And if he had relatives.

WOMAN W/VEIL

The author never wrote any relatives and you can't cut the drowning shooting scene. He wrote it for me.

(MUS BEGINS)

Climax of my dramatic journey.

And the deaths of the baby girl and the boy must be in the garden.

(ALL CREATE GARDEN)

CUE ALL:

Son must see drowned baby girl in fountain in garden.

CUE ALL:

Son doesn't know baby girl is drowned when he pulls her out.

CUE ALL:

Father must see son see brother.

CUE ALL:

Mother looks where son looks and sees other son.

CUE ALL:

How did son get father's gun?

CUE ALL:

Young son must shoot himself.

CUE ALL:

Older son must hear shot.

CUE SON:

Must son hear shot again?

CUE ALL:

Baby girl drowns.

CUE ALL:

Older daughter must run away.

STEPDAUGHTER:

This is when I run away but I don't know where I go. The author doesn't say and he didn't finish or produce the play.

CUE ALL:

Curtain (STRIKE GARDEN)

CUE LEADING LADY

Curtain to what? Act one? Act two?

Are there any scenes in the father's house before or after the veiled woman, who he says is his wife, is introduced by him to the man we never meet and with whom she has the children?

Is there a scene in the house with the man who took her away?

Is she divorced from the father or is she a bigamist?

Does she ever marry the second man before he dies?

Does he really die?



DANCERS

"Really", she says, "does he die"? (MUS ENDS)

LEADING LADY

Or did he stop getting written and if he stops getting written why isn't he here with the rest of them?

DIRECTOR

Think of it as an illusion.

DANCERS

"An illusion" he says.

WOMAN W/VEIL

Don't say "illusion". It's our painful reality.

FATHER

For you actors the play is only an illusion - a game.

LEADING LADY

We might stop saying illusion if you stop saying "game". I am an actor. I was a dancer. I was a girl. I am a woman. I am a wife. Mother. A mother in law. I am, in reality, a grandmother.

FATHER

Isn't it true while you are, in reality, a grandmother, you can pretend to be another lady? Even a younger lady?

WOMAN W/VEIL

And isn't it also true while you're pretending to be me I can, in reality, still be myself.

LEADING LADY

Isn't it true one is being and one is acting?

DANCERS

"Acting" she says and "being".

FATHER

Isn't today's "being" fated to seem mere illusion by tomorrow?

WOMAN W/JKT

Isn't your script a temporary reality?

FATHER

Or no reality at all. Isn't a script only a script?

LEADING LADY

A good script is a good script. When I get a script - I read the last page first. Reality check: am I on stage at the end with a good last scene? Reality check: on stage from good scene one?

FATHER

Or two, whenever it is we enter.

STEPDAUGHTER

(ENTER) When the "characters" enter. When I enter.

WOMAN W/VEIL

Maybe you're in the prologue to our play.

LEADING LADY

Reality check: If I agree to play "woman with veil" can I lose the bloody hat?

SON

(ENTER) Play my part why don't you? You don't need a hat.

DIRECTOR

Don't forget the drama in the hat.

LEADING LADY

Or keep the hat but lose the veil.

DANCERS

"Lose the veil", the leading lady says.

LEADING LADY

What if I play the mother, the madam, the stepdaughter and I play myself, the leading lady? Talk about illusion and reality.

ALL

"Illusion and reality", she says.

DIRECTOR

Everybody out. (ALL EXIT EXCEPT DIRECTOR/LEADING LADY)

LEADING LADY

"Talk about illusion and reality". Line?

DIRECTOR

"I have no illusions"...

LEADING LADY

"I have no illusions. My reality is"...sorry.

DIRECTOR

"I spent all day". Take it from "I have no illusions".

LEADING LADY

"I have no illusions. My reality is I spent all day" I think I say "with six characters in search of an author of a play he never finishes and that's okay but they don't eat or take a break and I don't think they pee and, anyway, they certainly aren't as much fun to work with as..." line?

DIRECTOR

"As real actors".

LEADING LADY

"As real actors. They've never actually been in another play".

DIRECTOR

"They don't talk about anything else but them".

LEADING LADY

But them, yes, I know, I was taking a pause. Don't give a line unless I ask. "If the director ever gets back to Pirandello I can break eggs and wear a cook's cap but he better call my agent."

DIRECTOR

I'm the director. I can hear you. I'm right here.

LEADING LADY

Does the leading lady say "I can hear you. I'm right here"?

DIRECTOR

No, I said that. You say "At least a cook's cap has no veil".

LEADING LADY

"No veil". Ok, I'll be right back. (EXIT,DNCRS ENTR/MUS/DOR)

DANCERS

The author has a habit when he's writing. He meets with would be characters of his future stories. He finds himself in company with these characters once a week for three hours, nine to one.

AUTHOR

Nine to noon. Try it in the first person.

DANCERS

Noon. I take down each character's name, question courteously and listen with all the patience I can muster to their stories. I make the greatest effort to be satisfied with them. I do.

AUTHOR

Yes, I do. (DNCRS EXIT/MUS/DOR)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

(ENTER) You want me to put the kettle on for coffee? Or tea?

AUTHOR

No. I mean no thanks. Is anybody here yet?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

He's impatient. Impatient with his would be characters and impatient with me. It's his nature to not be easily pleased.

AUTHOR

I don't like being hoodwinked.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

And to avoid hoodwink-ed-ness you determine to get to the bottom of everything with impossibly long, detailed argument.

AUTHOR

Reasonable discussion.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Cross examination too early in the morning or too late at night.

AUTHOR

I watch you watch the clock.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Maybe I have something else to do. Or it's boring.

AUTHOR

Which is it now?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

It's boring.

AUTHOR

And who are you now?

AUTHOR'S WIFE

I'm your wife. And you are the author except when you're the director but both of you tell us all what to do and if we do or say something back you tell us we should have done it or said it back better. You enjoy arguing and we don't - or maybe they all do - but I don't.

AUTHOR

I do. Not you. (DNCRS/MUS/DOR)  
Here's the man with a flower in his mouth again.

MAN W/FLOWER

(ENTER) Flower in my mouth has a name. Epithelioma.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

He says it again. "Epithelioma".

MAN W/FLOWER

Epithelioma. Death passes my way one day and plants this flower in my mouth. Epithelioma. Flower in my mouth. Death whispers, "Keep it, friend, I'll be back in eight or ten months." Where's the nurse? (DNCRS/MUS/DOR)

NURSE

(ENTER) Doctor is running late. Take a seat. (EXIT)

MAN W/FLOWER

Never like that nurse. (COMMUTER ENTERS)

AUTHOR'S WIFE

Here's the commuter. He missed his train again.

COMMUTER

Missed my train again. I run in. Train pulls out.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

"Pulls out". (EXIT, DNCRS/MUS/DOR)

COMMUTER

Out. I run in. Train pulls out. Takes a time with all my bundles to get a taxi to the train and takes a time to get out of the taxi, loaded down with all my bundles and to get my fingers through all the strings. Two strings to a finger. Except for one finger - three strings and then - I miss the train again.

MAN W/FLOWER

You should have left the bundles in the cab and run for it.

COMMUTER

What would I tell my wife? And my daughters. You have no idea about women and shopping.

MAN W/FLOWER

I know all about women and shopping. My wife shops. I have no daughters but my wife has sisters. Girl friends. Women friends. Where did that nurse go? I have an appointment.

AUTHOR'S WIFE

(ENTER) Women shop, doctors run late and nurses disappear.

COMMUTER

Is that nurse new? And where is "Woman with Jacket"? She's new. And where are the characters who dance?

WOMAN W/JKT

(ENTER W/NRS) I used to be new. I'm not new now.

NURSE

And I'm not new.

WOMAN W/JKT

(ENTER DNCRS) And all the characters always dance.

ALL

All the characters always dance. (MUS/DNCE-DNCE ENDS)

THE END