

IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE

Maggie Smith

with Some Help from the Demon She Summoned in Her Bedroom

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Draft Three

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CHARACTERS

FAUSTUS - 21, genius, so much knowledge, so little time

MEPHISTOPHELES - immortal, tempting, fallen from Heaven

WAGNER - [VAHG-ner] 21, if someone could give him a happy ending that'd be appreciated

LUCIFER - Mr. Satan Himself, there's really no boundaries for him

VIRGIL - 21, local Satanist, here for a good time, a lot happier than you'd think she'd be

URIEL - Angel of Creativity, Faustus's guardian angel, fucking PISSED, a semi-combination of the Good and Bad Angel

SETTING

Earth, Hell, Purgatory. Definitely not Heaven.

NOTES

I'd like to set the record straight that I'd never personally sell my soul to the Devil, but, after writing this play, I absolutely understand why someone would. It's important to recognize that Faustus is a smart girl, she's just impulsive. I think I'm the same way, but I don't want to unpack that right now. This is supposed to highlight this story in a light that I think is more relatable, at least for me, because it shows someone so young making a life-altering choice, and her use of gallows humor as a means of coping with it.

The set is meant to be small. Think of those miniature homes where every piece of furniture has multiple uses. Faustus' bed doubles as a sofa, the bookshelves are side tables, whatever you think of. I'm desperate for fairy lights or LED lighting, and incorporate the unexpected. I'm not saying you have to use glitter, but, personally, I'm a slut for it. This story takes twists and turns, the set should, too.

I've created a resource sheet on the final pages to give more information on some background and the reasoning behind specific choices I made, to help with dramaturgical work. Metaphysical poetry, Virgil's knowledge, everything you need to know.

As usual, make the casting diverse. It doesn't ever make you "historically accurate" or whatever the fuck to do an all-white cast of a show, it just makes you mean. I'd also be down for characters to have different gender identities than initially written. All I ask is that Faustus and

Mephistopheles aren't portrayed as men, one of the reasons I chose to write this story was to create an interpretation of these specific characters to be played by women or nonbinary individuals.

Finally, I want to make an important note of Act One, Scene Nine. Essentially, it's a brief warning because this scene in general deals with suicidal themes, however there's no actual death. There is some more background information on the scene in the dramaturgical resources at the end of the document, and why I felt it necessary to include it in the show. Be safe, take precautions, I love you.

A / indicates an overlap in dialogue

A — indicates dialogue being cut off

A [*Beat.*] lasts for however long it needs to. Just be aware of what you're doing.

“Although only breath, words which I command are immortal.”

-Sappho

OR

“When I.. Was BOrN.... Devil saiD... ‘Ohh... ShiT..!!.. CompeTiTioN..’”

-Some Post I Found on Pinterest

Whichever one you prefer.

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE
CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE THAT FAUSTUS IS A SAPIOSEXUAL

[Lights up. Bookshelves everywhere. It's a bedroom. Wooden floor, with a rug, bed not in the center of the room. Lots of blankets. It's cozy, with warm lights everywhere. FAUSTUS enters from the door, slams it, and throws her satchel across the room. She screams, frustrated. She has too many thoughts.]

FAUSTUS

Math isn't real.

[She pulls off a sweater she's wearing, and throws it somewhere else. She's not in the mood for any of this, and you're about to hear it.]

FAUSTUS

It isn't. We made up numbers, little signs to go between them, and called it a subject. We decided which number comes first, then second, all the way to— God, I don't even know what the last number is. Is there a last number? There has to be. There's always a beginning and end. We said that two plus two is four, five is a prime number because we can't use it in division— also something that's not real— and then— then we decided that regular numbers weren't enough, we decided to make multiple versions of them. One point one. One point two. One point three— Where the hell did those come from?

[FAUSTUS grabs a book from a shelf. Frankenstein.]

FAUSTUS

This is real, though. Right? Words? I mean, sure, we made up the sounds. And the meanings. And the way we can use them. Holy shit are words fake, too? *[Beat.]* Even if they are, they make you feel, right? And feelings aren't fake. *[Waving her book.]* Like in *Frankenstein*, right? When you've gone on a long journey, waited and waited for some form of redemption— or, or reconciliation— and all you get is a creature's death? That's agony. That's setting yourself up for something joyful and then you remember there's no happy endings in dark academia.

[She searches through her bookshelf again, looking for another book. Dorian Gray.]

FAUSTUS

Just fear. Dorian Gray— Well, not so much fear. But curiosity— I felt curiosity. Or was it... Intrigue? It's not really something I can describe. But it was festering. And dark. And bleak and

FAUSTUS (cont.)

vengeful and harrowing and every single page wants to tear my heart from my body and destroy the being inside. And we ache. We look through these pages, word after word, and see ourselves deteriorating with the painting. Our flesh melts off and our eyes fall from their sockets and we keep on reading. Because we need something— Something more. Something that’s missing.

[She’s pulling out more books, now. Old books. Saying names and authors as she reads them, the names don’t matter, each one flying over her shoulder and landing wherever they do. She turns, looking at the mess.]

FAUSTUS

Marlowe, Donne, Shelley, Stoker. They’re all dead. Every single one of them. But I still know them by name, their words, the feelings. They’re immortal, then. They know something I don’t. How do I do that? Apollinaire wrote about multiple dimensions. Hugo Ball didn’t even use real words, he made it all up. How does it work? I’m okay with dying. I know I am. But how do you survive it? How do you live on afterwards?

[She goes through the shelf again.]

FAUSTUS

I need to know more. To be immortalized. I need some big discovery with my name attached to it, or originality pouring itself from my fingertips. When will my words be etched into the universe, like names carved onto a tree? When will people read my thoughts and feel a connection to their soul? I need... I need that “something more.”

[She pulls out the Bible. She holds it carefully, and flips through it.]

FAUSTUS

Faith. At one point or another it was there. It had to be. There’s no way I would have gotten here without it. It used to course through my veins with the blood cells and plasma. Into my heart. Love would go in with the oxidized blood, all the bad stuff would filter out. I can’t tell you when it changed. It just did. I just... I got over it. And I wouldn’t say no if it came back. I just don’t think it will. Is that bad? *[Beat.]* I’d be fine with dying— no legacy, no ghosts— if I had at least some faith. So clearly the book has nothing to offer me. No prayers, parables, no stories or figures that... Could... *[She stops flipping, reads a page.]* Huh. Okay. I can see where this is going. *[Beat.]* Yeah, I’m on board. *[She picks up her phone and speaks into it.]* Call Virgil.

[Transition to SCENE TWO.]

ACT ONE
SCENE TWO
PLEASE PICK UP THE PHONE WHEN YOUR MOM CALLS

[Phone ringing. Lights up on WAGNER, laying on a couch. It's a normal room, belonging to what can only be described as a run-down college student apartment. Go crazy. WAGNER picks up his phone, unenthused.]

WAGNER

Hello? *[Beat.]* Nothing. Just laying around. *[Beat.]* She's in her room. *[Beat.]* No, she's in her room. *[Beat.]* Because she's in her room. *[Beat.]* Jesus— FAUST! MOM'S ON THE PHONE! *[Beat.]* FAUST! *[Beat.]* FAU- She's not in her room. *[Beat.]* I don't know, I think she's meeting with Virgil today. Maybe she's doing that. *[Beat.]* Virgil, you met her. *[Beat.]* She's not an atheist, Mom, she's a Satanist, there's a difference. *[Beat.]* She's nice, Mom. *[Beat.]* No, don't put him on the phone, don't put him on the phone, don'tputhimonthephone— Hi, Dad. *[Beat.]* Yeah, I'm good. *[Beat.]* God, no, don't listen to her, we're not in a cult. *[Beat.]* Satanism isn't a cult, and even if it were, Faust and I aren't a part of it. *[Beat.]* Just because we don't go to Church doesn't mean— Dad, Dad, stop— Just because we— Dad, you need to listen— Just because we don't go to Church doesn't mean that we're in communication with the Devil. *[Beat.]* What? No! She's gay, that doesn't mean she loves the Devil! Gay people don't love the Devil— Well, I mean, they can but that doesn't mean that Faust does. Okay, but the fact that you haven't heard from her for a couple of weeks doesn't mean she's been talking with demons, they're not mutually exclusive, one doesn't replace the other. *[Beat.]* No, but I'm saying she could just as easily talk with you and a demon at the same time, so really what you're saying doesn't make any sense whatsoever. *[Beat.]* Okay, I don't really know how to state this in any way other than this: Faustus is not, nor will she ever, be in any form of communication with any sort of “dark spirit.” She's going to live a normal life and go to Heaven just like you—

[FAUSTUS and VIRGIL enter, the former holding a set of candles, matches, and red paint, the latter bones, hair, a plastic bag with small, round, white items in it, and a satchel. Do some research, it'll help a lot. The two try to sneak past, but WAGNER'S voice stops them.]

WAGNER

Shit. I'll call you later, someone's here. *[Beat.]* Love you, too, bye.

[WAGNER hangs up the phone, and puts it in his pocket. He stares at VIRGIL and FAUSTUS. It's a very specific kind of stare, one that asks “Why” without really needing to say it. They stare back.]

FAUSTUS

Mom called?

WAGNER

[Disbelief.] I— Yeah. Yeah.

FAUSTUS

Good talk?

WAGNER

Yeah.

FAUSTUS

Everyone still alive?

WAGNER

As of now.

FAUSTUS

Cool. *[Beat.]* You look like the blood vessel in your forehead is going to burst.

WAGNER

I'm just... I'm just trying to get it through my head how you decided that bringing some, what is this, demon shit into the house was a good idea?

FAUSTUS

First of all, the “demon shit” is named Virgil, and she is a lovely person. Second, if you're referring to the ritual items, I'll have you know that the only thing the landlord doesn't allow in this building is large pets.

VIRGIL

Besides, this isn't dangerous. I'm just teaching her.

WAGNER

What does she need to be taught?

FAUSTUS

I've had a reconnection with God.

WAGNER

And hair and bones and... [*WAGNER pulls the plastic bag from VIRGIL'S hand.*] White pebbles are the way to strengthen that reconnection?

FAUSTUS

Those are teeth.

[WAGNER drops the bag. FAUSTUS picks it up.]

VIRGIL

Priests can know how to exorcise demons. Faust can know how to contact them.

WAGNER

Contacting demons? This is a bad idea.

FAUSTUS

You were a bad idea, but Mom still had you.

WAGNER

Don't summon demons!

VIRGIL

We aren't summoning anything! [*Beat.*] Faust is.

WAGNER

You're fucking what?

FAUSTUS

You know. For fun.

WAGNER

That's not fun, you're going to die. It's dangerous!

VIRGIL

So suddenly everything you don't understand is dangerous? Nice, Wagner.

WAGNER

That's not what I'm saying—

VIRGIL

Ultimately, this won't matter. She'll say hi to a demon, he'll say hi back, then leave.

WAGNER

And that's your plan?

VIRGIL

Faust, is that the plan?

FAUSTUS

I feel like it's not my job to tell either of you the plan if you aren't going to be a part of it.

WAGNER

What if she dies?

VIRGIL

Faust, are you going to ask the demon to kill you?

FAUSTUS

No.

VIRGIL

Great. So she's not going to die. If that's all you have to say, we'll be in her room.

[VIRGIL and FAUSTUS begin to exit.]

WAGNER

Faust. Why?

FAUSTUS

Don't ask questions you don't want to know the answers to.

[They exit. WAGNER collapses onto the couch. END SCENE. Transition into SCENE THREE.]

ACT ONE
SCENE THREE
THE STEPS TO SUMMONING SATAN

[FAUSTUS and VIRGIL are sitting on the bedroom floor, on top of the rug. VIRGIL setting up the candles, very particular about where she places them around the room. Her bag is open on the floor; contents barely visible. Everything else they held in the prior scene is laid next to the bag. FAUSTUS is patiently waiting.]

FAUSTUS

So... How do we use the hair and bones and... The everything else?

VIRGIL

Oh, no, I just carry that with me wherever I go. We don't use that for this.

FAUSTUS

Then how am I going to summon the Devil? Do we use a ouija board or something?

VIRGIL

You don't use ouija boards to summon. Only if you want to talk. And even then, it makes it a lot harder to understand. Tone and everything. You need something to get him to stand in front of you. A face-to-face conversation. An actual summoning ritual.

[FAUSTUS leans in, watching VIRGIL with the candles.]

VIRGIL

I'm gonna want these back when you're finished with this. These are the candles for my Hand of Glory.

FAUSTUS

[Picking up one of the unlit candles.] Hand of Glory?

VIRGIL

[Excited, suddenly distracted.] Oh, it's this hand that got cut off from this thief who was hanged in the past century, in the early nineteen hundreds or whatever, and someone mummified it and now it's sitting on my dresser in my room.

FAUSTUS

Okay, but why these candles? Can't you just buy more and I keep these here?

VIRGIL

[Turning back to the candles.] These ones are made from the fat of the hanged man.

[FAUSTUS sets the candle down immediately.]

VIRGIL

They're the only candles I could find, so be careful. I think I left the rest of them somewhere in my mom's house before I moved out— Can you go into my bag and grab the vial?

[Faustus pulls five or six vials from the bag. Some of them liquid, some of them dust. FAUSTUS puts the vials on the ground next to VIRGIL, who grabs a vial with a clear liquid inside.]

VIRGIL

Holy water. Take it, keep it with you. I don't know what you're trying to do but at least be safe about it.

[VIRGIL hands the vial to FAUSTUS. FAUSTUS picks up the one between them, filled with a red liquid.]

FAUSTUS

Wait, what do I do with the others?

VIRGIL

Oh, no, that's just my dove's blood.

[VIRGIL takes the vial from FAUSTUS.]

VIRGIL

Don't look at me like that. I didn't kill the dove. And I only use the blood as ink, anyways, it's not like I need it for something gross. What do you need all this for anyways? I mean— I know the ritual, yeah, but why?

FAUSTUS

Can you just go over this all again?

VIRGIL

The vials? Okay, this one is dried bat skin, which doesn't apply to / you, but if—

FAUSTUS

No, the ritual.

VIRGIL

Shit, right. So you start speaking, and while you're talking you use the paint and draw the sigil on the floor with your fingers. Everything should work fine.

FAUSTUS

Yeah, but what do I say?

VIRGIL

Whatever the fuck you want. Make it meaningful. Feel something.

[VIRGIL packs up the stuff FAUSTUS pulled out of her bag. She gets up and grabs one of the previously placed candles. She speaks while handing it to FAUSTUS.]

VIRGIL

You've got a lot of books.

FAUSTUS

I like to read.

VIRGIL

Don't let them burst into flames.

FAUSTUS

I won't. I'm smart.

VIRGIL

I know you are. But you're also a pyromaniac playing with fire. Be careful.

FAUSTUS

I will.

VIRGIL

Don't mess around with this shit, okay? Say what you need to say and get out.

FAUSTUS

Got it.

VIRGIL

Great. And I'm serious. Be careful. I don't know what you're doing, but... Just, things like this can be dangerous if you use them wrong.

[VIRGIL exits, and the lights dim. It's night. FAUSTUS sits on the rug, holding her candle, staring outward. She stands abruptly, sets the candle on the bookshelf, and pulls up the rug.]

FAUSTUS

I use this incantation to evoke the devil's spirits. I call upon all the names I know, not sacred, but profane; Lucifer and his consorts. I ask you to... fill this space with your presence, surround me with your... knowledge— Send me your help. *[Beat.]* God, I sound desperate.

[FAUSTUS looks around the room. Her eyes land on a book of poetry. She picks it up, quickly, and shuts her eyes. At some point, she sets down the book and begins to use the red paint to mark the floor, more and more intricate the further the poem goes. The poem itself is a spectacle.]

FAUSTUS

I have not felt fear yet inside my soul,
 Only my heart's balter of bravery.
 I stand atop the world crushed under me,
 Yet need inter'or empty turned to whole.
 Prove to me your orphic, leaden feat,
 Create a religion out of my doubts,
 Breathe your warmth within, the cold front out—
 Elysian Hellfire makes me complete.
 Now with my words I call you to this realm.
 The universe is under my control,
 To tear existence's limbs by a black hole,
 Is nothing more than steering ships at helm.
 I call upon a being dark, yet bright,
 Lifeblood of knowledge entwined with one of spite.

[The poem swells and fills the room. But everything stops when FAUSTUS'S words end.]

FAUSTUS

Nothing? God, fuck Virgil.

[And then: Everything is insane. Blasts of music. Maybe some lights? It's sudden. It's scary. MEPHISTOPHELES enters. The smile on her face is absolutely thrilling.]

**[END OF SAMPLE. FOR THE FULL WORK, PLEASE CONTACT:
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