

SLEEPING WALTER

a Play for Young Audiences
by Matt Buchanan

Speaking Characters

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

Ensemble Roles (Can be 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

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, which is closed, leads to the rest of the house. At rise, 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. An 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. We hear the 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. The Voice of the Red Sox begins speaking.

VOICE OF THE RED SOX

. . .And it's the bottom of the ninth, and 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 an Umpire appears behind the 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. The 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.

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?

We hear a recorded version of Dad's voice (or a live imitation) from offstage.

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.

MOM

He's kicked off his covers.

She covers him tenderly.

He's really sleeping.

DAD

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.

Dr. Smart 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.

WALTER

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. SMART

You're world famous you know.

Walter smiles modestly.

DR. WISE

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. . .

The two 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.

He moves to the rocket engine and examines it carefully.

Mmm. . .Hmmm! Uh huh!

He continues to inspect the engine. He 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.

Dr. Wise *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. The NASA 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!

The Scientists jump up and down and hug each other. We hear Walter's sister Grace's voice.

GRACE

(Offstage.) Walter!

The two 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, the Scientists should take it with them, leaving Walter lying sideways on his bed, asleep. Grace enters through the bedroom door.

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

(Shouting.) 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.

Walter calls on another Student.

ANOTHER 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. The Students dive under the bed. Mom enters with Dad, Grace and a 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?