

Twenty Minutes to Heaven?

by Natalia de Monet

WHY WE LIKE IT:

Edward Burns meets Rod Serling in this sophisticated take on a familiar theme. We've read examples of this storyline before, but never one presented as a screenplay. Though it's definitely fiction, it has the feel of 'New Theatre' and de Monet's strong, convincing repartee dialogue and the barest essentials of setting give this well-crafted drama a stark and intriguing immediacy.

Four friends at a bar.

JACK: So, what were we talking about?

ROGER: Shit beer.

RICHARD: Friday.

THOMAS: Happiness.

JACK: Happiness!

RICHARD: Cheers to happiness!!

(They cheer)

ROGER: So what is it you have to say, Tom?

THOMAS: Something great!

JACK: I thought you said something happy.

RICHARD: No, I'm sure he said something important.

ROGER: *(Annoyed)* Decide! Happy or important?

THOMAS: Well... I think it's happy *and* important.

JACK: I don't think I've ever said anything important.

ROGER: (*Ironically*) Well, Jack, I've never said something happy.

(*JACK smiles proudly*).

RICHARD: Oh, come on! You two have said many important and happy things.

THOMAS: You certainly have! What are you talking about?

JACK: Have I really said something important?

THOMAS: Of course! When you said you were marrying Belinda.

ROGER: That's not important. That's happy.

RICHARD: It's happy and important!

JACK: Important and happy!

THOMAS: Oh, here we go...

ROGER: It's definitely not important.

JACK: What isn't?

ROGER: That you married Belinda.

RICHARD: (*To ROGER*) How can you say that?

THOMAS: Don't worry, Jack. It was important for me.

JACK: (*To ROGER*) It wasn't for you?

ROGER: Well... I just think other things are more important.

RICHARD: How would you know what's important? You're alone.

THOMAS: Alone and depressed.

ROGER: (*Mad*) I'm not depressed!

JACK: (*Heartbroken*) I'm not important.

THOMAS: Of course you are.

JACK: As important as your story?

RICHARD: What story?

ROGER: Being alone doesn't mean being depressed.

THOMAS: I never said you're depressed because you're alone.

RICHARD: Then, what did you say?

JACK: His story!

THOMAS: (*Ignoring JACK. To ROGER*) You only find happiness in success.

ROGER: And am I successful?

THOMAS: Well... yes, but...

ROGER: (*Interrupting THOMAS*) Then, I'm not depressed. End of conversation.

RICHARD: That's not what we're here for anyways.

ROGER: (*To THOMAS*) Exactly, Richard. Not what we're here for at all.

THOMAS: What are we here for?

ROGER: Funny you'd ask.

THOMAS: Why?

ROGER: (*To THOMAS*) Can I ask you a question?

RICHARD: Only one?

ROGER: One question.

THOMAS: Ask away.

ROGER: What "H" will you choose?

THOMAS: (*Confused*) What?

RICHARD: Yeah... which one?

THOMAS: What "H"?

JACK: Yes!

THOMAS: "H"... The letter?

ROGER: Yes, the letter.

THOMAS: Well... (*Joking*) what options do I have?

ROGER: Do you really not get it?

JACK: Why does he get to choose?

ROGER: He doesn't, I'm just winding him up.

THOMAS: *(Confused)* Okay... So...

RICHARD: *(Interrupts)* You were telling a story!!!

JACK: The important and happy story!

RICHARD: Happy and important!

THOMAS: My story!

ROGER: What story?

JACK: His Friday story!

RICHARD: What Friday?

THOMAS: This Friday!

RICHARD: Today?

(Pause)

ALL: Today!! *(They cheer)*

THOMAS: *(To WAITRESS)* Four more please!! *(To his friends)* So, back to the point. *(Pause)* What's new with you, lads?

ROGER: Nothing new.

RICHARD: *(To ROGER)* As old as always.

ROGER: *(Joking)* Fuck off!

JACK: Belinda wants to buy a new house.

THOMAS: You're moving?

JACK: *(Laughing)* No!

RICHARD: So?

JACK: I can't leave my old house!

ROGER: A change could be good.

THOMAS: (*Ironic*) Look who's talking.

RICHARD: I agree, Jack. Maybe you and your wife need a change.

JACK: No, we don't. We're happy.

THOMAS: (*Thinks*) Happy?

ROGER: I believe he said happy, yes.

THOMAS: Wait a minute, my...

RICHARD: If you say so, Jack.

THOMAS: Guys...

ROGER: Have you considered that Belinda may need a change?

THOMAS: I swear I had to...

RICHARD: You have the money.

JACK: Belinda *is* happy!

THOMAS: (*Trying to remember*) Happy...

ROGER: (*Shouting to THOMAS*) Yes! Happy!

RICHARD: Have you asked her?

JACK: I know my wife.

THOMAS: Oh my God!

JACK: Shh... Don't say that here!

THOMAS: Don't say what?

ROGER: God.

THOMAS: God?

RICHARD: Yes, God.

ROGER: Great, now we've said it four times.

THOMAS: What's wrong with you all today?

JACK: I don't know.

RICHARD: I think we're sad.

ROGER: Very sad.

JACK: Oh yes, we're sad.

THOMAS: But, why?

ROGER: I don't know, you tell us.

THOMAS: But, I have nothing sad to say. In fact, I...

JACK: *(Interrupts)* Your story!

THOMAS: Yes!

RICHARD: Go on, tell us!

THOMAS: This is something big, guys.

JACK: Big? But...

ROGER: *(Annoyed)* So now its happy, important and also, big.

JACK: You're confusing.

RICHARD: Just let him talk.

THOMAS: So, the story.

JACK: Yes, the story.

THOMAS: I saw someone today.

(Pause. THOMAS drinks)

RICHARD: Tom?

THOMAS: Yes?

RICHARD: Is that your story?

THOMAS: Well, it's the beginning of my story.

ROGER: This'll be endless, won't it?

THOMAS: Endless? No! I just need time to say it.

ROGER: Time? We've been sitting here for a while now and you haven't even started.

THOMAS: *(Mad)* Because you keep interrupting me!

ROGER: *I* keep interrupting you?

THOMAS: No, all of you. The three of you.

JACK: I haven't opened my mouth!

RICHARD: How is this our fault?

THOMAS: And how is it mine?

ROGER: I never used the words "your fault".

THOMAS: Neither did I.

JACK: I'm sure you did.

RICHARD: You said...

THOMAS: *(Interrupting RICHARD)* I said nothing, absolutely nothing.

ROGER: You said plenty of things.

THOMAS: What things?

ROGER: Many things.

THOMAS: I didn't say anything. I never told my story.

RICHARD: But... *(Pause)* We know your story.

JACK: We do?

ROGER: We do.

JACK: We do.

THOMAS: *(Confused)* You... know my story?

ROGER: Yes, Tom.

THOMAS: But, how?

ROGER: Because you told us before!

THOMAS: I did?

RICHARD: Do you not remember?

THOMAS: No. Am I losing my mind?

ROGER: No, just your memory.

THOMAS: So... what story did I tell you?

ROGER: We know two stories.

THOMAS: There's two?

ROGER: Yes.

JACK: Two important, happy and big stories.

RICHARD: I'd say big and important.

THOMAS: And happy!

RICHARD: Not really...

THOMAS: My story isn't happy?

ROGER: Depends on which one of the two.

(Pause)

THOMAS: So, which are the stories I told you?

ROGER: One that leads to the other.

RICHARD: The good to the bad.

JACK: Have you really forgotten?

ROGER: Don't blame him. Everyone forgets.

RICHARD: I'll never understand how everyone forgets something so terrible.

THOMAS: Terrible?!

ROGER: Tragic.

THOMAS: *(Interrupting. Mad)*. Everyone forgets? Who is everyone?

RICHARD: Everyone that comes here. Everyone like you.

THOMAS: Like me?

JACK: Like you.

THOMAS: What do you mean everyone like me?

ROGER: The people that have stopped being people.

RICHARD: And have become something else.

THOMAS: Something else?

JACK: Like what?

ROGER: We don't know, a memory perhaps.

(THOMAS looks at them with his eyes wide open. He stays silent, unable to understand and reply to his friends)

(His friends look at each other).

ROGER: Forget about it! We're just messing with you.

THOMAS: What?

JACK: What?

RICHARD: I think we should let him tell us his initial story.

ROGER: That's a good idea. Tom, we're listening.

THOMAS: What just happened?

JACK: A lot happened.

RICHARD: But it wasn't getting us anywhere.

ROGER: *(To THOMAS)* You're better off telling your story.

THOMAS: *(Thinking)* My story...

(Pause. His friends patiently look at him.)

THOMAS: *(Confused)* But...

(Pause)

ROGER: What's wrong, Tom?

THOMAS: Nothing I... I just... *(Pause)* My story.

RICHARD: *(Calming THOMAS down)* What is it? Come on, we're listening.

THOMAS: You know? I... *(Stands up and walks around the stage)* This might sound ridiculous, but I just can't seem to... The... It's funny, you know? I came here today and I was... I was happy.

RICHARD: Are you sure you were happy?

THOMAS: I'm not that sure anymore.

ROGER: Why do you think you were happy?

THOMAS: See? Now that's the problem. That was supposed to be my story.

JACK: Supposed to be?

THOMAS: I just can't seem to... *(Pause)* To remember it.

JACK: You don't remember your story?

RICHARD: You've forgotten.

THOMAS: I have.

JACK: He's forgotten his story.

ROGER: Have you forgotten by accident?

THOMAS: By accident?

ROGER: Or have you made yourself forget?

THOMAS: How can I make myself forget?

(Pause)

(THOMAS rests his head on his hands trying to understand what ROGER has told him).

ROGER: *(To RICHARD and JACK)* I think he's starting to understand.

THOMAS: Understand what?

RICHARD: *(To ROGER)* Are you sure?

THOMAS: *(Sitting down, annoyed)* Understand what?

ROGER: *(To RICHARD)* No, not sure at all.

THOMAS: Please! What's going on with me?

ROGER: Think.

JACK: Okay.

RICHARD: *(To JACK)* Not you.

JACK: What?

ROGER: Tom, think.

THOMAS: What am I supposed to think about?

RICHARD: So, you wanted to tell a possibly happy story that you forgot about.

(Pause)

(THOMAS looks at him, waiting for more information)

THOMAS: And...?

RICHARD: And, what?

THOMAS: *(Mad)* Is that all you're telling me?

RICHARD: What else do you want?

THOMAS: I want you to help me understand.

ROGER: *(Raising his voice)* Oh! He doesn't get it. He won't get it. Just leave him.

JACK: Leave him?

RICHARD: We can't leave him here.

ROGER: Sure we can!

THOMAS: Then go! Leave me alone!

RICHARD: But we can't leave you.

THOMAS: Then I'll go! You can pay for the pints.

(THOMAS stands up and approaches the door)

JACK: Where are you going?

THOMAS: *(Shouting)* I told you, I'm leaving!!

RICHARD: You can't leave!

THOMAS: You're mad! You're all mad, and you're making me mad!

(THOMAS opens the door and stays standing still in front of it, unable to take another step forward. He tries to do this various times unsuccessfully. His friends look at him trying to leave, then look at each other feeling pity)

THOMAS: *(Breathes, stands looking at the door)* Why can't I move?

(Pause)

THOMAS: (*Shouting*) Why can't I move?!

RICHARD: (*Standing up and walks towards THOMAS. Talking to JACK and ROGER*) This is ridiculous! We're torturing him!

ROGER: He's torturing himself!

RICHARD: (*To THOMAS*) Come, friend. Come and sit.

THOMAS: No! I won't come! Why can't I move?

ROGER: You know why.

THOMAS: No, I don't.

ROGER: Yes, you do.

THOMAS: How could I know?

ROGER: You're just trying to avoid it.

THOMAS: Roger, why can't I move?

(*ROGER ignores THOMAS*).

THOMAS: Just tell me why!!

ROGER: (*Calmly speaking*) Because you're dead.

THOMAS: This is not a joke anymore, Roger.

ROGER: I'm not joking...

THOMAS: (*Frustrated*) Roger! Please, tell me!

ROGER: I told you!

THOMAS: (*Furiously runs towards ROGER. Shouting*) Why can't I fucking leave this place??

ROGER: (*Stands up. Shouting back*) Because you're dead, Tom! You're dead, dead!

(*Pause*)

THOMAS: What?

JACK: I'm sorry, Tom.

RICHARD: Are you okay?

THOMAS: What are you talking about?

ROGER: You're dead.

THOMAS: Stop saying that!

RICHARD: *(To JACK and ROGER)* He's not taking it that badly...

THOMAS: What?

JACK: *(To RICHARD)* What an interesting reaction.

(They all look at THOMAS. He looks back at them completely confused)

(Long silence)

RICHARD: So...

JACK: So, Tom, I...

ROGER: Tom?

(Pause)

THOMAS: I'm dead?

RICHARD: Yes!

JACK: No!

THOMAS: What?

RICHARD: *(Laughing and cheering)* And I'm not real!

JACK: *(To RICHARD)* You're not?

RICHARD: *(To JACK)* You're not either.

JACK: I'm not?

ROGER: No. None of us are.

(THOMAS sits down in silence and drinks his beer. He's looking down trying to think of something, completely ignoring his friends)

ROGER: *(To JACK and RICHARD)* We haven't got much time, you know?

JACK: At least it seems like he understands.

RICHARD: *(Looking at THOMAS, who is still ignoring them)* I'm not sure if he does.

JACK: Tom?

(THOMAS ignores him. He is thinking)

ROGER: Let him think.

(Pause)

RICHARD: If only he hadn't got into that car.

JACK: But then he would be stuck in the same place he's been for the past 20 years.

ROGER: Yes, but he wouldn't be here.

RICHARD: What if he doesn't remember anything at all?

(THOMAS looks at his friends as if he was starting to understand. He listens to their conversation, paying close attention)

ROGER: Then he might get stuck here.

RICHARD: Here?

JACK: Forever?

ROGER: There are no forevers here, Jack.

(THOMAS stands up looking at his friends with his mouth open. He starts anxiously laughing. They all look at him confused)

THOMAS: *(Laughing)*. Death?

JACK: What?

THOMAS: *(Laughing even harder)* I'm dead and I can't leave this place?

ROGER: Oh, dear...

JACK: I don't understand.

ROGER: No, *he* doesn't understand.

RICHARD: We have another death in 20 minutes, he needs to hurry up!

THOMAS: *(Relieved)* Okay! That was intense. *(Sits)*

JACK: Intense?

THOMAS: Very intense.

RICHARD: Intense... what?

THOMAS: In fact, I think this is the most intense dream I've had in my life!

ROGER: *(Rolling his eyes)* And here we go.

RICHARD: Another one in denial...

THOMAS: *(Excited)* I can't wait to wake up and tell you guys!

JACK: We're here, you don't have to tell us.

THOMAS: But you're not real!

JACK: *(Annoyed)* I know, that was hard enough to hear earlier. You don't have to say it again.

(THOMAS laughs)

THOMAS: The real you will die of laughter when I tell you.

RICHARD: Die? Well, considering they're on their way to your funeral right now... *(Joking)* That would be quite ironic!

ROGER: Tom...

THOMAS: No, no! I get it now. It's a dream!

JACK: A dream?

THOMAS: You've made me think I was crazy, I can't believe I was only dreaming!

ROGER: Tom, you're not...

THOMAS: Roger! Don't! You don't have to confuse me anymore, I figured it out.

RICHARD: But you didn't...

THOMAS: *(To WAITRESS)* Another round please!! *(To his friends)* I might as well drink till I wake, right?

ROGER: Tom...

THOMAS: Now that I know, this is actually quite nice.

ROGER: Listen...

THOMAS: I can do whatever I want!

(THOMAS stands up)

ROGER: Please, Tom...

THOMAS: *(Knocking over the table at the back)* I can throw away anything!

ROGER: Don't do that!

THOMAS: *(Running around. Throwing everything that is on the tables to the floor)* I can go crazy and it's okay!

RICHARD: Sit down, Tom!

THOMAS: *(Going behind the bar)* I can break what I want! *(Grabs a plate and smashes it)*, destroy what I want! *(Keeps throwing things on the floor)* I can take my own beer... *(Grabs a pint of beer)*.

JACK: This is madness...

(THOMAS holds WAITRESS from her waist and brings her out of the bar)

THOMAS: *(Offensively to WAITRESS)* I can even use you to have an affair!

ROGER: What did you just say?

THOMAS: Affair!

RICHARD: *(Slowly approaching THOMAS)* Affair?

(THOMAS looks at ROGER confused. He thinks to himself as if memories were starting to come back)

THOMAS: A-ffair...

(THOMAS gasps and drops his pint on the floor. The bar goes silent. WAITRESS, RICHARD, JACK and ROGER stand completely still, looking at THOMAS, who is in a sudden shock)

(Pause)

(THOMAS starts to walk back very slowly and turns around to look at his friends. His face expression hasn't changed, his eyes and mouth are still wide open. His friends remain silent. Nobody moves)

(Pause)

THOMAS: I... I'm dead.

(Pause)

RICHARD: *(Comfortingly)* Tom...

ROGER: You remember.

THOMAS: *(Without moving)* Yes.

JACK: Tom..

THOMAS: I'm dead.

RICHARD: Are you okay?

THOMAS: I'm *dead*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Ever since I was a little girl, I've dedicated my free time to writing. From silly poems about golden clouds for my mother, and song lyrics for a high school crush to unfinished romantic novels and short dramas in prose. It wasn't until my second year of studying Playwriting that I drowned in Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot', and I suddenly found myself writing a conversation between four old men that I had absolutely nothing in common with. I then realized how much I needed characters that were strangers to me in order to challenge my deepest and most absurd thoughts, as opposes to the relatable little girl I had always written about. And somehow I ended up with 'Twenty Minutes to Heaven?'

BIO:

My name is Natalia de Monet. I was born in Atlanta, Georgia but raised in Madrid, Spain. Three and a half years ago I left Spain to live in London and here I am! I'm a recent Drama and Theatre graduate at Royal Holloway University of London where I work in the marketing and communications department as a communications coordinator. So I spend my days writing articles for our website and posts to social media.