

FOUR LEGS GOOD

A new play by

Michael David

Based on the book

GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday from Being Human

by Thomas Thwaites



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FOUR LEGS GOOD

TIME

Around 2015.

PLACE

The basement workshop of a three-story London flat.

There is an upstage wall of pegboard panels, punctured with hooks to hold a huge variety of hand tools; a large workbench; a dust vacuum; a six-foot ladder; a table saw and a drill press; a storage area for lumber, metal and other raw materials; stations for metalworking and electrics; bins for fasteners, wire connectors, plumbing parts and miscellaneous hardware; shelves stocked with power tools; a stool, a bench and a chair with a broken leg; and a vast assemblage of additional odds and ends collected over many years. The more cluttered the better.

Though higgledy-piggledy, the basement appears to be quite typical for a well-used DIY workshop. It is actually anything but. Hidden entrances allow characters to appear without warning; the back wall of pegboard suddenly becomes a screen for projections; sound and visual needs are nearly magical in their creation; and seemingly inconsequential objects transform into fantastical props and costume pieces.

The overall effect is that this is a place where anything can happen.

CHARACTERS

PLAYER #1

THOMAS THWAITES – early to mid-30s; an experimental designer

PLAYER #2

SIMON – mid 30s; a videographer and friend of Thomas

PLAYER #3

PHILIP – late 50s; Thomas' father

BOB HITCH – mid 50s; Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats

PROF. HUCHINSON – late 40s; Royal Veterinary College

CLIVE WEARING – 78; renowned musicologist and conductor

DR. HEATH – late 40s; University of Salford

SEPP – early 50s; goat farmer

PLAYER #4

SIOBAN – mid 30s; ex-girlfriend

JENNY PATON – 40s, Wellcome Trust Arts Adviser

ANNETTE – mid 60s; a shaman living in Copenhagen

DEBORAH WEARING – 59; wife of Clive Wearing

SOPHIE REGNAULT – mid 30s; Royal Veterinary College

DR. KENSINGTON-SMITH – mid 40s; Aberystwyth University

LINDSAY – mid 50s; a woman

RITA – late 40s; goat farmer

PLAYER #5

DR. MCELLIGOTT – late 50s; Irish; Queen Mary University of London

DR. DEVLIN – 40s; University College London

GEOFF – early 50s; University of Salford

TOMÁS – mid 50s; goat farmer

PUNCTUATION NOTE

Two slash marks -- // -- indicate overlapping text.

NOTES:

All actors serve variously as Londoners, animal spirits, herders, domesticated animals, university students, cave drawings, vivisectionists, prosthetic designers, goats and others.

Also, the narrative in the play is not meant to be treated as “presentational” narration. Rarely should it be addressed to the audience. Rather, most of the time, the narrative line is expressed as action and should be acted to the other characters in the scene as if it were dialogue.

And anywhere a * appears in the script, it identifies a reference image that will be easily found by a quick Google search.

Four legs good, two legs bad.

- George Orwell

FOUR LEGS GOOD

The basement workshop is lit as the audience enters and settles in.

At show time, the house and stage lights fade to black. A few seconds later the stage lights rise to reveal the entire company within the workshop.

SIMON: We find ourselves in this basement workshop--

PHILIP: of a London flat owned by a father--

THOMAS: where he lives with his son.

ENTIRE COMPANY (except PHILIP and THOMAS): And we are the others,

SIMON: the best mate,

SIOBAN: the ex-girlfriend and the shaman,

PLAYER #3: the goat keeper,

PLAYER #5: the doctors,

PLAYER #4: the arts advisor,

PLAYER #5: animal spirits,

PLAYER #3: Londoners,

PLAYER #2: cave drawings,

PLAYER #5: a woodchuck,

PLAYER #4: and many more.

THOMAS: Multitudes.

All except THOMAS claps once.

The lights change.

ENTIRE COMPANY: We are here to tell the true story,

SIOBAN: the very, very *true* story,

THOMAS: about a man named Thomas.

PHILIP: Thwaites. Son of Philip Thwaites.

THOMAS: Yes, Thomas Thwaites.

ENTIRE COMPANY (except THOMAS and PHILIP): You've likely heard of him.

PHILIP: Or not.

SIMON: You bloody well *have*. He did a TED Talk!

PHILIP: Who hasn't?

ENTIRE COMPANY (except THOMAS and PHILIP): We haven't.

THOMAS: He made a toaster.

SIMON: With the help of Simon.

SIOBAN: It took Thomas nine months.

PHILIP: Had to travel nineteen hundred miles.

PLAYER #5 [DR. MCELLIGOTT]: Mined ore for the steel,
(exits)

SIMON: made plastic from oil,
(exits)

PHILIP: and it cost him nearly twelve hundred quid.
(exits)

SIOBAN: Cost him more than that.
(exits)

THOMAS: But in the end ... I had a toaster.

On the pegboard screen is now displayed a photo of the melted toaster. * There are two slits on the top and a lever on the side, but otherwise it's unrecognizable as a household appliance.

THOMAS: And the damn thing worked! One time. Sort of. But that was three years ago.

The basement workshop is now a sidewalk café.
THOMAS sits.

Noggin [PLAYER #5], a wire fox terrier, is present with THOMAS, sitting at his feet, watching the world hustle by.

A WAITRESS enters and places a menu in front of THOMAS.

PLAYER #4 [WAITRESS]: The Ted Talk about the toaster racked up more than a million views.

Noggin is petted by a CUSTOMER.

PLAYER #3 [CUSTOMER]: Thomas did an international book tour,

PLAYER #4 [PASSERBY]: And made dozens of television appearances.

PLAYER #3 [CUSTOMER]: The Toaster Project was acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum for its permanent collection.

PLAYER #4 [PASSERBY] (reading *The Toaster Project Book*): And *Wired* magazine said: "The Toaster Project is so cool, it's beyond words."

THOMAS: Three years ago.

PLAYER #3 [PANHANDLER]: But that ain't nuthin', is it? Thomas Thwaites was the dog's bollocks.

(Noggin reacts)

For awhile.

SIMON enters.

THOMAS: Precisely.

ENTIRE COMPANY: And that brings us to today.

SIMON sits opposite THOMAS. He appears to have left his bed just minutes ago.

Noggin growls.

SIMON: Why the mutt?

THOMAS: His name's Noggin. I'm watching him for my niece.

SIMON: The blondie with the bouncy bits?

THOMAS: No. Yes.

SIMON: You think she'd let me watch her pussy?

THOMAS: Bloody hell, Simon! She's my *niece*.

PLAYER #4 [WAITRESS] appears for SIMON'S order.

PLAYER #4 [WAITRESS]: Didn't know you ventured into the daylight, Simon. What can I get you?

SIMON: A pint. And some crisps.

WAITRESS goes.

THOMAS: It's nine-thirty in the *morning*.

SIMON: So it's too early for lunch. I get it.

THOMAS emits a deep sigh. SIMON, a belch.

SIMON: What's got *you* whinging again?

(no response)

You can tell *me*, mate. I'll forget it by tomorrow.

THOMAS (after some hesitation): Can you guess my major responsibility today? Making sure Noggin doesn't eat anything too manky off the pavement.

SIMON: Cool gig. Lucky you.

THOMAS: I'm thirty-three years old, Simon. I don't have a real job, I live with my dad, and yesterday I got turned down from opening a bank account.

SIMON: Not the same old moan, mate.

THOMAS: The bank account rejection is new.

SIMON: Oh, woe is bloody you, Thomas. You're well off // and have--

THOMAS: Hardly.

SIMON: Compared to me. Don't pay rent, wrote a book that actually sells (don't ask me how), been on the telly and all over the Net, got a tasty bit of crumpet in your bed, and can do with your days as you please. Not the worries of the common man.

THOMAS: It's been just three months since // my mother--

SIMON: No, I get it. No one can blame you for being slightly off your game.

THOMAS: Sioban can. We broke up.

SIOBAN appears.

SIOBAN: How long do you plan to room with Philip?

THOMAS: What's *wrong* with him?

SIOBAN: Nothing. He's a very sweet bloke. But he's your *father*. And you're nearly thirty-*five*.

THOMAS: I just turned thirty-*three*!

SIOBAN: You *live* like you're *eighteen*! I quite fancy you, Thomas, I really do. You're funny, you're brilliant, but you have no ambition. And I understand. If I were in your situation, I might also be hunky-dory just being a slugabed.

SIMON: Ouch, *that* hurts.

THOMAS: My father needs me here.

SIOBAN: Has *he* said that?

THOMAS: He doesn't *have* to.

SIOBAN: But you've been living at home for five years.

THOMAS: Four.

SIOBAN: Get your own flat, Thomas. A real job, a fuckin' *ATM* card. Stop living like a house pet.

She's gone.

THOMAS: That was Tuesday.

SIMON: Crikey. She took the piss outta *you*.

THOMAS: And she's not altogether wrong.

(pause)

I'm stuck in a big, dark hole.

(pause)

Y'know, I watch these adults -- *other* adults -- striding past, moving forward with purpose, on their way to their jobs, their careers, and I sit here with Noggin. Who is oblivious. Who doesn't care. His thoughts are simple: he has likes ("is that something to eat?"), *dislikes* ("that *wasn't* something to eat") and maybe even *desires* about the immediate future ("when do I *get* something to eat?"). But no worries. And not just because he's thick as two planks.

They watch as Noggin tries, unsuccessfully, to spit out something he thought looked scrummy.

SIMON: Cute little wanker pooch.

WAITRESS appears with a pint and crisps.

PLAYER #4 [WAITRESS]: It was just a month later,

PLAYER #5 [NOGGIN] (standing): One afternoon, in the basement workshop,

PHILIP: of Philip's once-quiet London home,

PLAYER #4 [WAITRESS]: Thomas and Simon are wagging off and,

PHILIP: nothing much has happened in their lives,

PLAYER #5 [NOGGIN]: Since that afternoon with Noggin.

The lighting shifts.

All but THOMAS and SIMON disappear,
including the WAITRESS with the pint and
crisps.

We are back in the basement.

SIMON (to departing WAITRESS): Wait a second ...

THOMAS (to SIMON): I do have *one* opportunity on the immediate horizon. I've been asked to teach an experimental design master class in Denmark.

SIMON (retrieving a hidden beer): Huh? What? Denmark? When? Take me with you.

THOMAS: Don't you ever work?

SIMON: I shoot wedding videos, mate. Nobody gets married in June.

THOMAS: *Everybody* gets married in June!

SIMON: Danish girls are blinding beautiful! I could get jammy there.

THOMAS: They *are* beautiful. And smart and confident and funny. And generally have good eyesight. So you're out of luck. Anyway, I'm not there long; I'm in and out.

SIMON: That's exactly what I want! The old in and out!

PHILIP (offstage): Thomas! You down there?

THOMAS (a shout): With Simon, Professor!

PHILIP (offstage): I'll come down anyway.

We hear footsteps descending stairs and then
PHILIP enters, carrying letters and
advertisements.

PHILIP: The post arrived. A letter for you.

THOMAS looks at the envelope, sets it
aside.

PHILIP: You're not going to open it?

THOMAS: I will.

PHILIP: The Wellcome Trust. Did you apply for a grant?

THOMAS: I'm *always* applying for grants. Cheers for the letter.
Anything else?

PHILIP: You coming up for supper?

THOMAS: Shortly.

PHILIP (with a look to SIMON): I only got enough for two. Sorry.

PHILIP turns and we hear him ascend the stairs.
A door closes.

SIMON: What'd I ever do to him?

THOMAS is studying the
envelope.

THOMAS: Nothing.
(pause)

You remember a couple o' fortnights ago?

PLAYER #5, as Noggin, enters and lies
down at the feet of THOMAS.

THOMAS: When I was dog sitting Noggin?

SIMON: Your niece's mutt? Yeah. Wearing the see-through blouse.
(off THOMAS and NOGGIN'S look)

Your niece.

THOMAS: So you remember that morning ...

PLAYER #3 [PANHANDLER] and
PLAYER #4 [CUSTOMER] begin to take
their places as they did outside the café.

THOMAS: ... sitting outside the café?

SIMON: No.

PANHANDLER and CUSTOMER freeze.

THOMAS: It was four *weeks* ago.

SIMON: A'ight.

PANHANDLER and CUSTOMER resume their entrance.

THOMAS: So you *do* remember.

SIMON: Nah.

PANHANDLER and CUSTOMER exit, visibly annoyed.

THOMAS (a sigh): I was saying how Noggin had the luxury of living totally in the moment. And life for him is so basic, so simple. Just eat, sleep and shit.

SIMON: And boff a poodle or two. I'm with ya.

THOMAS: Anyway, I've been thinking, wouldn't it be nice to live so freely? To not care if you're a loser. To not mourn the ... the death of a parent.

(pause)

To step away from the complexities of the world and have a lovely holiday, not just to somewhere warm, away from your job, but away from your very self. To have a holiday from *being human*?

SIMON: Have I ever *thought* about it? No.

THOMAS: Live without the trappings. Treading lightly on the earth ... causing no bloody suffering, contentedly noshing on the green plants just popping up from the ground. Galloping across the landscape. Free!

(pause)

Wouldn't it be nice to be an animal, just for a bit?

THOMAS holds up the envelope.

SIMON: You having some kinda surgery done?

THOMAS: No. I submitted a grant request to this foundation. After the morning at the café.

SIMON: When was *that*?

PLAYER #5, as Noggin, stands and exits,
bewildered by SIMON'S bewilderment.

THOMAS is opening the envelope.

THOMAS: If it's like most application responses, I'll wager it begins "After careful consideration, we regret ..."

THOMAS removes the letter from the envelope.

As he does, JENNY PATON appears. She
speaks as THOMAS reads.

JENNY PATON: Dear Mr. Thwaites: Thank you for your application to the Arts Awards programme. After careful consideration, I am delighted to confirm successful application for the funding of your project, "I Want to Be an Elephant."

SIMON: Bloody hell!

THOMAS: I know!

JENNY PATON: The Committee thinks this is a wonderfully engaging idea from an experimental designer with a good track record. They did note, however, that the project milestones look very tight and advise you to rethink the timetable. Best wishes, Jenny Paton, Arts Awards Advisor, blah-blah, blah-blah-blah. Blah-blah.

THOMAS refolds the letter as JENNY
disappears.

THOMAS (slipping the letter back in the envelope): Well, *that* takes the biscuit.

SIMON: An *elephant*?!

THOMAS (reconsidering): I know.

SIMON: Why an *elephant*?!

THOMAS: At the time, an elephant seemed most practical.