

# YOUR SOUL, MY SOUL

A One-act Drama

By Richard Packham

*"What would you give, in exchange for your soul?"*

- old revival hymn

Characters:

MARGE - about 50 or 60, frumpy

PHIL - about 55 or 65, looks ill, acts grumpy, in frequent pain

SCENE: A sitting room in a rather shabbily maintained house.

TIME: Present or recent past

(PHIL, dressed in pajamas and robe, which appear to have been worn for several days, is lying on a daybed or couch which has been made into a kind of bed. His eyes are closed, but he moves occasionally as though in pain. MARGE is kneeling nearby, praying silently.)

PHIL: (opening his eyes) Marge! (pause, louder) Marge!

MARGE: I'm here, Phil.

PHIL: (looks at her) What the hell are you doing?

MARGE: Praying, Phil.

PHIL: Why the hell are you doing that?

MARGE: You know. You know why I'm praying.

PHIL: (exasperated sigh) What a waste of time!

MARGE: It's not a waste of time, Phil. It gives me comfort, and I think it gives you comfort, too.

PHIL: No, Marge, it does not give me comfort! How the hell could it?

MARGE: Because I'm praying for YOU. I'm asking God to help you with your pain.

PHIL: Well, he's doing a damn poor job of helping me. (sits up, groans) So much for the power of prayer. You sure you're doing it right? Maybe you've got the wrong god?

MARGE: You have to help, too, Phil. You have to believe that he can help you, before he can.

PHIL: That's a lot of bullshit, Marge, and you know I don't believe it.

MARGE: All you have to do is open your heart and let him in.

PHIL: For all these years now I've been telling you that I don't buy all that Jesus mumbo-jumbo, and I'm certainly not going to start now!

MARGE: (gets up) It's never too late, Phil. Never too late. You can't wait too long, even though God is very patient.

PHIL: Unlike me. I am damned impatient. I'm tired of waiting for relief. I want it now!

MARGE: I'm so sorry for you, Phil, dear. I know you are uncomfortable.

PHIL: I'm not uncomfortable, Marge. I hurt like hell!

MARGE: You might feel better if you walked around a little.

PHIL: Yeah, maybe. (struggles to stand up)

MARGE: Here, let me help you. (she helps him to stand up) I'll steady you while you walk around a little.

(They take a few steps around the room together)

PHIL: Such an effort! Damn, I wish I knew what was wrong with me all of a sudden!

MARGE: I know, dear, I know. It's a mystery, for sure.

PHIL: It came on so quick.

MARGE: Well, I would suggest that maybe God is testing you, but I know you wouldn't like that.

PHIL: No! You're right, I wouldn't like that.

MARGE: Even though it's true...

PHIL: Marge, please stop with that kind of talk. It just makes me mad.

MARGE: We always get angry at hearing the truth, dear. (beat) Maybe God wants you to realize how fragile life is. How you need to set your life straight. (beat) Get good with God.

PHIL: I said to stop it! (pause) That's enough walking. I have to lie down now.

(Marge helps him back to his bed)

MARGE: Did that help?

PHIL: The walk, but not the talk. (pause) I'm really tempted to see a doctor, even if we can't very well afford it.

MARGE: No, we can't. But I have tremendous faith in God. And in my herbs. They have done wonders for me. We just have to be patient, because they work slowly.

PHIL: I wish we were closer to a VA hospital, then it wouldn't cost us.

MARGE: But we're not. And they would probably tell you not to use home remedies.

PHIL: Yeah, they probably would.

MARGE: What do those doctors know about herbal lore! Centuries of healing knowledge! They know nothing about it! They just want to give you shots of chemicals and cut you open.

PHIL: At this point I'd be willing to try anything.

MARGE: You don't need them. Just trust the herbs. (break) Which reminds me, it's time for your four o'clock tea. (exits to kitchen)

PHIL: (aside) Oh, whoopee! The highlight of my afternoon!

MARGE: (from offstage) The water will be boiling in just a minute!

PHIL: (aside) Oh, I can hardly wait!

MARGE: (enters) You know, I don't mind taking care of you, Phil dear.

PHIL: Yes, I know, Marge. But I know I've been a disappointment to you in many ways.

MARGE: Oh, it's water under the bridge now. Or over the dam. Which is it? (laughs)

PHIL: I'm too tired to care, Marge.

MARGE: I know, dear. I shouldn't try to make jokes. (pause) But, yes, I have had my disappointments, as we all have. But that's life, isn't it?

PHIL: I'm sorry, Marge.

MARGE: Oh, nobody's life is what they expected it to be, I suppose. How would we appreciate the good parts if we didn't have some bad parts to compare?

PHIL: I know that I sort of ... deceived you, to get you to marry me, 'way back then.

MARGE: I don't think it was deception, as much as it was love making you blind. It was love that was deceiving YOU, I think.

PHIL: Well, I shouldn't have led you on about religion.

MARGE: Oh, is THAT what you're talking about?

PHIL: Isn't it what YOU are talking about?

MARGE: Well... I'm not sure I know what I was talking about. What about religion?

PHIL: That I never did believe it. Never.

MARGE: Oh, I know that! I've known that for years. But there was a time when I thought... I'll never forget the day that you came to Christ!

PHIL: (sarcastic) Neither will I.

MARGE: I guess I should say "pretended" to come to Christ. (pause) It was the happiest day of my life!

(sound of kettle boiling offstage)

MARGE: Oh, the water's boiling. I'll get your tea. (exits)

PHIL: (shouting to offstage) Not so much this time, please, Marge!

MARGE: (offstage) I truly thought you believed it, Phil. I never felt the Spirit so strong.

PHIL: (not very loud) I was a damn fine actor.

MARGE: What did you say?

PHIL: Nothing. Nothing.

MARGE: (enters with a large mug of hot herbal tea) Here you are! You'd probably better let it cool a little.

PHIL: (takes the mug gingerly) Marge, I asked you not to give me so much!

MARGE: You need all the help you can get, Phil. (beat) Especially if you won't let the Lord help you.

PHIL: (sips tentatively) Yeah, it's way too hot. (sets mug down)

MARGE: I don't know... I've thought a lot about it, trying to figure out what happened...

PHIL: What happened about what?

MARGE: How you seemed to have faith, and then lose it.

PHIL: Marge, I never had it. Never had faith.

MARGE: You seemed such a spiritual person, though!

PHIL: I knew pretty quick that you'd never marry me if I was a heathen. So I decided to get religion.

MARGE: No, I won't believe that you didn't believe once. (shakes her head) You believed, but became a backslider. No, that's not true. That you never believed.

PHIL: But it IS true. You were gorgeous, the most wonderful girl I had ever met. And I wanted you more than anything in the world.

MARGE: Well, I knew that you loved me. I did know that, for sure (smiles).

PHIL: And you never would have married a heathen, would you, no matter how wonderful he was, or how much you loved him. (beat) Would you!

MARGE: (thinks) No, I probably wouldn't.

PHIL: So what was I to do?

MARGE: So you lied. You lied to me.

PHIL: I had to, or I would have lost you.

MARGE: I should have suspected that. At the time. It's really a terrible thing that you did....

PHIL: Honey, you should take it as a compliment!

MARGE: A compliment? That you lied to me? And to God?

PHIL: Yes, a compliment. I loved you so much that I committed that terrible sin of lying. I broke that commandment about false witness - which one is it, number eight or nine? I could never remember the numbering. But I knew it once - had to memorize all ten before the pastor would baptize me!

MARGE: It's the ninth commandment.

PHIL: Hell, I'd have broken all ten, if I'd had to, to get you!

MARGE: (a little bitter) I think in all the years we've been married, you HAVE broken pretty much all of them.

PHIL: Except the adultery one! I never broke that one!

MARGE: (sadly) You might as well have, I suppose. You're probably going to hell anyway, Phil. It's almost a shame that you haven't taken full advantage of your sin potential, since the price you are paying is the same, whether you break one commandment or all of them. It's eternal damnation, Phil. Eternal damnation.

PHIL: Well, adultery would have been a sin against you, Marge, not against God. I don't mind annoying the old Boy upstairs - if there really is somebody up there in the control room, but I wouldn't want to hurt you.

MARGE: Drink your tea, Phil.

PHIL: (sips, makes face) Oh, Marge, this tastes awful. You made it stronger this time. I can't gag this down.

MARGE: It's the same herbal combination that you've already been drinking. Please drink it, Phil. For me.

PHIL: (takes another swallow, reacts again) Aargh! You're sure this is medicine and not poison?

MARGE: Why would you say that!

PHIL: Oh, don't get upset. I'm just joking.

MARGE: Why would you joke about a thing like that?

PHIL: Because this tastes so awful, that's why. (beat) Oh, forget it! (beat) I didn't mean it!

MARGE: It's not funny.

PHIL: I'm sorry! I guess it's just because I always seem to feel a lot worse after a mug of this damn stuff.

MARGE: I think I know what it is that makes you feel worse.

PHIL: Oh, you do?

MARGE: You just won't admit it.

PHIL: What won't I admit?

MARGE: You're afraid of dying. (beat) You don't want to die.

PHIL: Of course I don't want to die! But that doesn't mean I'm afraid.

MARGE: Yes, you're afraid of dying. Admit it!

PHIL: Marge, I was a hell of a lot more in danger of dying in the jungles of Nam than I am now. I wasn't afraid then, and I'm not afraid now. (beat) I just feel shitty and wish this pain would stop.

MARGE: Yes, you're afraid. (beat) You're afraid you're going to die and have to face God.

PHIL: Oh, stop talking nonsense!

MARGE: Everybody is afraid when facing death.

PHIL: And how the hell would you know that?

MARGE: There are no atheists in foxholes.

PHIL: That's bullshit, Marge. My buddy Carlo and I went through a hell of a lot of danger and dodged a million Cong bullets, and never once did we get down and pray to some god to keep us from getting blasted away! Carlo and me were atheists. Devout atheists! (smiles)

MARGE: I'll bet you thought about it, though.

PHIL: Marge, you weren't there. You don't know what it was like. (pause; seems to be recalling the past) No, the only thing we were thinking was how to do the damn job of killing without getting killed ourselves. God had nothing to do with it. (beat) At least I didn't see any sign of him being around anywhere. (beat) The devil was there, maybe, but for sure not God.

MARGE: Maybe God WAS there, Phil, and you just didn't realize it.

PHIL: Okay, Marge. That's enough.

MARGE: Maybe it really was God that was keeping you from getting killed.

PHIL: And why would God do that for an unbeliever?

MARGE: God knows your heart, Phil. He knew that someday you would realize that he was there, all the time, looking out for you. And then you would acknowledge his goodness to you.

PHIL: Marge, please stop. It's just fairy tales and superstition. I've got enough to worry about without having to argue with you.

MARGE: We're not arguing, Phil. I'm just telling you what I know.

PHIL: No, Marge, you're telling me what you think, what you believe, what you imagine.

MARGE: Well, you can't tell me what I know and what I don't know.

PHIL: (hands Marge the mug) Go dump this out, Marge. I can't drink it.

MARGE: You're just like a little kid. Just drink it and be done with it!

PHIL: If you'll stop talking God to me.

MARGE: Drink it!

PHIL: (drinks it all, makes face) Okay. There! (hands her the mug) Now, no more God talk at least for today.

MARGE: (cooly) I didn't actually promise anything, did I?

PHIL: (groans, lies back down) No, I guess you got me. Add to my torment!

MARGE: (pause) Would you like to listen to some music?

PHIL: Are you going to sing to me?

MARGE: No, of course not. I mean, on the radio.

PHIL: Oh, I suppose. Depends on what's on.

MARGE: Well, we can turn it on and see. (She goes to a small radio)

PHIL: Wait! You're going to turn it to that station that has all those hymns, aren't you!

MARGE: It wouldn't hurt you to listen to some gospel music.

PHIL: Yes, it would! I don't even like it when you go around the house humming "The Old Ragged Cross," or whatever.

MARGE: Don't make fun, Phil. You know it's "rugged," not "ragged." (pause) So do you want some music, or not?

PHIL: Just let me have some silence for a bit. No music. No talking. No sermons. Please, Marge! (closes his eyes)

MARGE: You used to like some of the old gospel songs.

PHIL: Marge, please!

MARGE: You did.

PHIL: And I also liked "Ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall" and "The Cowpuncher's Whore." So?

MARGE: All right, all right. (pause) I'll take your mug to the kitchen. (gets up, takes mug, exits to kitchen)

PHIL: (closes eyes, shifts to get more comfortable, shifts again)

(some kitchen sounds; pause)

MARGE: (enters, holding a dish towel) Phil?

PHIL: (without opening his eyes) What?

MARGE: Can I ask you something?

PHIL: Does it have to do with my soul?

MARGE: (thinks a moment) No, I don't think so.

PHIL: Okay.

MARGE: (hesitates) It has to do with our children.

PHIL: (opens eyes, puzzled) What children? We don't have any children.

MARGE: Oh, of course I know that, but I was just wondering...

PHIL: What?



MARGE: Well, you know, now that you're older, and it's too late...

PHIL: Too late for what?

MARGE: I mean, you maybe are approaching the end of your life...

PHIL: I hope to hell I'm not so close to dying that I couldn't father a child! Is that what you're talking about?

MARGE: Well, I was just wondering if you were ever sorry that we never had children.

PHIL: We had dogs instead. That was fine with me. They're more loyal than kids.

MARGE: Yes, I suppose. But it's not really the same.

PHIL: You loved every dog we had. Spoiled every one of them rotten. Just like you would've a kid.

MARGE: And I mourned every one of them as if I had lost a child.

PHIL: So?

MARGE: Why do the things we love have to die too soon?

PHIL: (sarcastic) You'll have to ask God.

MARGE: We all have to die. Even you and me.

PHIL: Yes, I know that.

MARGE: What if we had had kids? Would you be more sorry about dying?

PHIL: Do you think I am dying?

MARGE: Well, Phil, you are pretty sick.

PHIL: Whether I die tomorrow or live for another thirty years, I don't regret anything.

MARGE: Not even the children?

PHIL: How can I regret not having something I never had? Same reason why I don't miss believing in God.

MARGE: But you do wish that you believed in God?

PHIL: Marge, this is one of the reasons that I am almost glad we never had children. You would have taught them to believe in angels and fairies and Jesus and demons and all that crap.

MARGE: What harm is there in that?

PHIL: Oh, just drop it, Marge!

MARGE: But it's important, especially if you feel like you're about to die!

PHIL: Please drop it.

MARGE: What harm would it do you to believe in God?

PHIL: I see no reason to believe any such thing.

MARGE: But just think, Phil. If you're right, and there is no God, it won't have cost you anything to believe.

PHIL: Except my self-esteem!

MARGE: But if you're wrong, and God really does exist, you have sentenced yourself to eternal torment!

PHIL: I'll take my chances, Marge!

MARGE: But think of the odds! I know you're not a gambler, but think about it! It's like a small insurance premium to believe in God, and it doesn't really cost anything!

PHIL: But what if you choose the wrong god to believe in?

MARGE: There's only one God, Phil.

PHIL: The Muslim holy book says that if you don't believe in their god Allah, and believe that Jesus is God, you'll go to hell.

MARGE: (huffily) Oh, I don't believe that for a minute!

PHIL: (teasing) But what if they're right?

MARGE: Well, they're not! They're wrong!

PHIL: Don't you think it would be good insurance, as you say, to believe in Allah and not believe in Jesus?

MARGE: I'm sure you don't want me to become a Muslim!

PHIL: But what if you're wrong?

MARGE: I'm talking about YOUR soul, Phil!

PHIL: My soul is just fine, thank you!

MARGE: I would do anything to save your soul!

PHIL: Doesn't Saint Paul say that we have to work out our own salvation?

MARGE: Yes, and all you have to do is say that you accept Christ as your savior.

PHIL: Even if I don't believe it?

MARGE: Well, BELIEVE it!

PHIL: Marge, don't you think that God can read my mind? Won't he know that I was just pretending?

MARGE: Oh, you are so stubborn! After all I've gone through! The price I am paying for you! Don't you have any fear of facing God, being close to death?

PHIL: The more you talk about me dying, the more I feel like you're right! I really feel awful. (has a spasm of pain)

MARGE: Oh, Phil, what can I do?

PHIL: I'm at the point that I don't give a damn about the cost. I've got to get some help. Call a doctor or something. Call 911.

MARGE: (frantic) Oh dear, oh dear. It wasn't supposed to be like this!

PHIL: Call somebody, quick!

MARGE: Phil, we don't want to call anybody!

PHIL: I'm hurting something awful!

MARGE: But they're not going to help you!

PHIL: I'm getting pretty desperate! Do something!

MARGE: I'm trying to help you, Phil. But doctors only...

PHIL: Marge, I can't stand this any longer! (obviously in great pain) Do something!

MARGE: Doctors only deal with the body. They don't know anything about the soul.

PHIL: (angry) It's my goddamn body that hurts, not my soul!

MARGE: Your soul is sick, too, Phil!

PHIL: I'll worry about my soul later! Now call for help!

MARGE: It might be too late.

PHIL: Then don't waste any time!

MARGE: (hesitates, upset)

PHIL: NOW!

MARGE: (looks frantic, does not move)

PHIL: Goddammit, Marge! Hand me the phone!

MARGE: (goes to phone, dials) Hello? Hello? Oh dear, my husband is terribly sick and in a lot of pain. Can you send somebody? (pause) It's pain all over, but cramps, belly cramps, that come and go. (pause) Well, he's not felt well for some time, but it's getting worse. (pause) Just herbal treatment. I know herbs. (pause, hesitant) Various herbs. I know my herbs. (pause) Homeopathic treatment, you know. (pause, huffily) Well, too much of anything could be poisonous, too! (pause) I suppose you could call it a case of poisoning, but homeopathy uses very small doses. (pause) Oh, thank you! It's 6242 Carson Road. We're about a mile past the Dry Willow Grange, on the left. (pause) That's right. (pause) Barker, Marge Barker. (pause) Phillip Barker. (pause) Sixty-two. (pause) All right. Thank you. Please hurry! (hangs up phone, but does not move, staring off)

PHIL: Are they coming?

MARGE: (pause) Yes. Yes, someone is coming. (still doesn't move)

PHIL: What was that about poisoning?

MARGE: What? (turns to him)

PHIL: Poisoning. You said something about poisoning.

MARGE: They asked if you had been poisoned. (she starts to cry)

PHIL: Poisoned? What would make them think that?

MARGE: I don't know. (angrily) I don't know!

PHIL: All I've been eating and drinking is what you've been giving me, and with my appetite lately, that hasn't been much.

MARGE: No. No, it hasn't.

PHIL: Do you think it's something in those herbs?

MARGE: (doesn't answer; turns away)

PHIL: Well, was it?

MARGE: (starts to cry; pause) I was only trying to save you, not really hurt you.

PHIL: What do you mean?!

MARGE: Some herbs can make someone sick.

PHIL: Herbs that you've been putting in my tea?

MARGE: (hesitates) I only wanted to make you a little sick, just enough to make you think about dying.

PHIL: What on earth for?

MARGE: To make you think about your soul, to save your soul.

PHIL: (angry) You mean you have been deliberately poisoning me?

MARGE: (turns away)

PHIL: Marge, answer me!

MARGE: I love you so much! I can't bear the idea that you would go to hell.

PHIL: So you'd kill me?

MARGE: I didn't intend to kill you. Just make you scared of dying.

PHIL: (another pain spasm) Well, I think maybe you HAVE killed me!

MARGE: (frantic) Oh, no! I didn't mean to kill you! I don't want you to die!

PHIL: (struggling with pain) I can't believe you would do this to me!

MARGE: It's your soul, Phil, your eternal soul!

PHIL: To hell with that!

MARGE: Phil! Phil! Before it's too late! Just say, "I accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my savior"!

PHIL: To hell with Jesus!

MARGE: (sobbing, leans over Phil, puts her arms around him) Phil, don't die! Don't die! I don't want you to die!

PHIL: Oh, this pain is... Oh! Oh!

MARGE: Phil, just say it! Say it!

PHIL: (losing strength) Hell...

MARGE: You won't go to hell, if you just say it!

PHIL: (faintly) Go.... hell...

MARGE: Say "I accept Christ"! "I... accept... Christ..."

PHIL: (more faintly) Go... hell...

MARGE: Oh, I know you're afraid! But don't be afraid! It's easy!

PHIL: Go... to... hell...

MARGE: Phil, do you accept Christ? Just say "yes"!

PHIL: (almost inaudible) Fox...

MARGE: Is that "yes"? (pause) Is it? (pause) Just nod if it's "yes"!

PHIL: Fox... hole... fox... hole...

MARGE: (shakes him gently) What does that mean? Phil?

PHIL: (convulses, then lies motionless)

MARGE: Oh my God! (pause; stands, looks at the lifeless Phil; begins to sob; walks around, looks back at Phil) Oh my God! (pause; slumps to the floor beside the bed) He's damned! Oh, Phil, why didn't you... Oh my God! (slowly, the realization dawning on her) What have I done? (pause) "Thou shalt not kill! Thou shalt not kill!" We are both damned! I have damned us both! Damned! Damned to hell! (violent sobs)

CURTAIN