

# Murder Back Stage

## ACT ONE

**SIX CHARACTERS WALK TO THEIR POSITIONS ON THE STAGE. EACH STANDS READY TO BE DIRECTED BY ALEX. ALEX: IS BOTH THE DIRECTOR AND AUTHOR OF THE PLAY BEING REHEARSED, 'DIARY OF AN URBAN TREE DWELLER - A MODERN-DAY ROBIN HOOD'. ALEX: IS CLEARLY NOT PLEASED WITH THE CAST.**

**ALEX:** Metaphor, darlings, metaphor. You must remember that your interpretation should reflect an understanding that modern society is raping the world, and therefore the creatures who live upon it.

**HEATHER:** Oh, for God's sake Alex, don't be so pompous. You know that no one in the audience at the West Griddlington Amateur Dramatic Society gives a stuff for your pseudo interpretations of your second-rate scripts. You can't even manage to script the minutiae of your own life, so how you propose to save the planet is beyond the comprehension of any sane person.

**SARAH:** Come on you two. Give us a break. Do we have to have this performance every time you get together in public. Alex, stop being so pretentious; Mummy, leave him alone.

**JO:** If we had adopted my script in the first place, we never would have had this problem. It was only the old boys network which gave you the deciding vote on the committee, and if you ask me...

**BRIAN:** Children, children, please can we get back to the matter in hand. If I remember correctly my character, the alternative tree surgeon, Alistair Green, is about to defend the protesters, played by you Rodrigo as 'Swampy' Nolan, you Heather as 'Maid Marion' and Sarah as 'Forest Elf' from the road construction company fronted by you Alex as the Big Boss, Sir Douglas Nimby, and Jo as the construction site-manager, Emily Stour. Alex, weren't you about to insist that an injunction would be taken out if the protesters insisted on continuing?

**ALEX:** Thank you Brian. What a pity you can't be so assertive in the rest of your life. **(DECLAIMING)** 'You must know that to go against our authority would lead to possible imprisonment.'

**SARAH:** You rapist. Do you not realise what you are doing to our planet? Gaia will surely die.

**RODRIGO:** And then where will the birds live? Have compassion for our feathered friends. **(WITH PASSION).** You are a bastardo!!

**ALEX:** For goodness sake, Rodrigo, how many years have you been living in this country? It's 'bastard', B A S T A R D not a bastardo.

**SARAH: (HALF TO HERSELF)** Whatever the language, the sentiment is still the same. You are a bastard Alex. We all know that. You're raping the forest now, and you did exactly the same when you almost tried to rape me 13 days after my sixteenth birthday.

**HEATHER:** Darling be quiet! Just let him get on with it. You know what he's like.

**BRIAN:** Yes, let my people go free, to return to nature. To live among the trees of the forest!

**JO:** But the law is the law. I must insist on supporting Sir Douglas over here **(POINTS DRAMATICALLY TO NIMBY I.E. ALEX)** in our attempt to relieve the congestion in the surrounding villages.

**HEATHER:** So what's new, Jo? You support Dear Alex every time we have a minor tiff. Why don't you concentrate on putting your relationship in order? Or are you so bored with Brian that you have to seek your thrills vicariously, in other people's disputes?

**ALEX:** Right, that's it! Any more of this and I'm going home! I knew that choosing a cast like this would lead to problems.

**RODRIGO: (STILL CONCERNED WITH THE PLAY, OBLIVIOUS TO WHAT HAS JUST GONE BEFORE)** I must honour these bushes **(LOOKS AT MARION I.E. HEATHER AND ELF I.E. SARAH)**. It is part of God's sacred creation. I will worship at the temple of Gaia. **(CLOSES EYES AS IF IN A TRANCE)** Om.

**BRIAN:** And I will give the bush an injection of virility. Let me free with the syringe! I anoint you a child of the planet **(GREEN I.E. BRIAN SYMBOLICALLY HOLDS THE SYRINGE ABOVE ELF i.e. SARAH)**

**SARAH:** Forest Elf says 'Save Our Bushes!'

**HEATHER:** Maid Marion says 'Save Our Bushes!' **(SARAH AND MARION HOLD HANDS)**

**SARAH AND HEATHER:** Save Our Bushes!!

**ALEX:** That's good. Now we're really getting into the sense of the piece. Rather good, if I say so myself. It's about time the denizens of West Griddlington understood that the saving of the planet is an issue for them as well as the rest of us.

**JO:** Alex, I'm not sure about the delivery of my next line, 'Forget about saving the planet. You'll make even greater savings if you let us build our road, thereby cutting five miles off the journey between Raston and Lower Cockham.' Is it meant to be some kind of weak joke?

**ALEX:** Look Jo, why don't you take a leaf out of your boyfriend's book? How many times do I have to say this? This is a serious work, meant to raise the consciousness of the local community. Your line merely confirms the lack of sensitivity of the road construction company.

**JO: (WITH GREAT INTENSITY)** 'You'll make even greater savings if you let us build our road...'

Jo is interrupted by the telephone ringing

**BRIAN:** Do you want me to get it?

**SARAH: (WITH SARCASM)** Go on Daddy, it's probably someone from the first night audience wanting to know how to know if re-cycling is hyphenated or one word.

Brian picks up the receiver

**BRIAN:** Hello? I beg your pardon. Just a minute please. Rodrigo, it's for you.

Rodrigo comes to the telephone to take the call

**RODRIGO:** Hello.....yes.....oh, good.....Very good. So that is the result of the final examination. It is as we had hoped. Thank you for your trouble. Good night.

**HEATHER:** So you passed then Rodrigo. Congratulations! I knew that you couldn't fail your English exams again. May I be the first.....

Rodrigo looks slightly abashed and unsure how to respond

**ALEX: (BECOMING EVEN MORE IMPATIENT)** Let's try to push on towards the end. Brian, why haven't you got your syringe?

**BRIAN:** Not wishing to be difficult Alex, but aren't you the keeper of the props?

**ALEX:** What? Yes, of course. I'll go and have a look in the props room. Is there anyone else who needs anything? No, all right. Take a break everyone, I'll be back in two minutes.

**SARAH:** Can I make a suggestion?

**ALEX:** If you must.

**SARAH:** I'm sure the script is wonderful, and will have a great effect on raising awareness among the audience. However, don't you think we should make some attempt to appeal to a wider audience?

**ALEX:** Go on.

**SARAH:** Well, don't you think the play would be more attractive to younger people if it contained more action?

**ALEX:** Such as?

**SARAH:** Well I think there should be a greater element of violence. **(SARCASTICALLY)** You know, guns and threats. Real confrontation. I think someone should die. So that the name 'eco-warrior' means what it says.

**HEATHER:** Good idea darling. Could I be the one to shoot you Alex? You know, the triumph of good over evil.

**JO:** Don't be selfish now Sarah. Don't you think we'd all like the chance?

**SARAH:** Let's draw lots, then.

**BRIAN:** No, let's be more original than that. Rodrigo. Think of a date.

**RODRIGO:** A dathe. Let me see.....1492.

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