

Characters

- Sean Slater (M)** - Library security guard.
- Jane Rogers (F)** - Librarian married to Robert.
- Robert Rogers (M)** - Librarian married to Jane.
- Esme Birchall (F)** - Library Manager.
- Vladimir Stravinski (M)** - Russian fruit picker
- Sandra Elliot (F)** - Library user and homespun poet.
- Lana Brown (F)** - Russian Artist
- Rowena Glover (F)** - Poet preparing for a reading.
- Detective (M/F)** - A detective

Act 1

Scene 1 - Library

(Sean is loafing at back of set reading a crime novel. Lana enters as if from outside carrying a painting in a frame (not necessary for audience to see picture); looks around; waits at side of library desk. Sandra enters as if from outside carrying large shopping bag; looks around; waits behind Lana. Rowena enters as if from outside carrying briefcase; sees queue; stands behind Sandra.)

Rowena: (Addresses Sean) Is anyone serving?

Sean: (Lazily looks up) They won't be long.

Rowena: (To Sean, briskly) I've come to set up for the tonight's poetry reading - Rowena Glover.

Lana: (Following suit - to Sean, confidently) I'm Lana Brown. I've come to hang my paintings; I've got an exhibition.

Sandra: (To Rowena and Lana, gushing) I'm a poet too actually, and I paint. I illustrate all my own poems. I do them for family, friends and neighbours; silver weddings, all sorts; I did one for someone's dog's birthday last week; she raved about it.

Rowena: Not rabies I hope?

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Sandra: They all adore receiving them. I've got a webpage 'Poems for Every Occasion, including Death; because Death isn't the End'. They make people cry.

Rowena: I suppose they would.

Sandra: It's good to let it all out.

Rowena: It depends what it is.

Sandra: My bag's full of paper and pens, it weighs a ton, but you never know when inspiration will strike do you? I like poems that rhyme. Sometimes it's a challenge. There's some words, that there's only one other word that rhymes with it, and there's one word that nothing else rhymes with.

Rowena: (Ironically) Is it murder?

Sandra: Murder? I haven't tried that – writing a poem about it I mean. Um no, murder's an easy word to rhyme --- there's herder and --- girder --- and er - birder – you know like twitchers - and er spl, br, pl, ch, ch, chuckeler – someone who chuckles, um

Rowena: But why should murder make you chuckle? That's the trouble with forcing a poem to rhyme.

Sandra: The murderer might chuckle.

Lana: Maybe getting rid of someone who's in the way?

Rowena: Critics perhaps?

Sandra: (Still trying to make a rhyming word) Pr, t, fl - - (A thought occurs to her)
Rowena Glover! I know that name! You were the judge for the poetry competition in
The Reporter this year!

Rowena: I was indeed.

Sandra: Oh; right; well! My name's Sandra Elliot and I thought you made some very unkind
remarks! It's not clever to make unkind remarks you know!

Sean: I'll see if I can find someone

(Sean Exits.)

Rowena: I pride myself on giving constructive criticism. You have to accept criticism to
improve.

Sandra: I don't need to improve. You're just against poems that rhyme!

Rowena: I'm against poems that do nothing but rhyme!

Sandra: You're just jealous! You should read my testimonials.

Rowena: I'd rather not thank you.

(Robert enters looking a bit stressed. He is carrying books. He stands by desk.
Cast in queue, position yourselves so you don't have to turn your backs on
audience.)

Robert: Sorry to keep you all waiting. (Looks enquiringly at Lana.)

Lana: Lana Brown. I've got a painting exhibition – Rural Russia. I emailed the library
manager, Esme Birchall?

Robert: Ah yes, she'll be out in a minute; if you'd like to wait over there please, she'll come
and see you.

(Sean enters with a book and casually props himself up somewhere. Lana moves
away from desk and stands picture frame against a bookcase. It doesn't need to
face audience.)

Rowena: (Looks at Robert keenly, trying to recall where she's seen him) Your face is
familiar.

Robert: All middle aged men look like me.

Rowena: That's not it. I never forget a face. It'll come to me later. Rowena Glover. I've got a
poetry reading this evening. I'd like to get set up. I'll need a projector and –

Sandra: (Interrupts) Excuse me! I was next in the queue!

Rowena: (To Robert) I just need to know where to go.

Sandra: I could tell you where to go!

Robert: (To Rowena) If you could wait over there please, Esme will be with you shortly. She
needs to speak to you about tickets – I'm afraid we haven't sold many.

Rowena: What! Was it advertised?

Sandra: (Addressing Rowena) Perhaps that's why they haven't sold – because it was
advertised!

Robert: Er I'm not sure – if it was advertised.

Rowena: (**Addressing Sandra**) You should come and take some tips!

Robert: Esme will be able to answer your questions.

Rowena: She'd better. I can feel myself getting very annoyed.

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(Rowena and Sandra glare at each other as she passes. Goes to peruse a bookstand alone. She glance's briefly at Lana's painting on her way past.)

Sandra: (**Gets books out of her bag**) I was going to buy a ticket but I've changed my mind! I'll just return my books thank you Robert, and I'll renew 'Love Isn't Easy' and 'The Bride in the Bath'.

(Robert Puts returned books in pile; stamps those for renewal. Vladimir enters from within library with newspaper. He notices Lana's painting and stares at it for a few seconds, then moves to a nearby bookcase and pretends to peruse book. Now and then he looks across at painting puzzled. Robert hands renewed books to Sandra)

Sandra: (**Confidingly but not quietly**) Robert, it was kind of you to comfort me again the other night when I came in. I was so upset when I read those horrid comments about my poem in The Recorder. Your kindness meant something to me, and I know it meant something to you too.

Robert: (**Conscious of others around**) I was just trying to cheer you up.

Sandra: You needn't feel embarrassed. I'm very sensitive; I know when something means something to somebody.

Robert: (**Embarrassed**) There's nothing to feel embarrassed about Sandra, you were upset and er – excuse me I must find Esme.

(Robert exits.)

Sandra: (**Speaks as Robert is leaving**) I know you're in denial.

(Sandra exits.)

Vladimir: (**Looking at the painting he approaches Lana.**) You're having an exhibition?

Lana: Yes. It's called Rural Russia. I travelled around last year making sketches from village life.

Vladimir: Last year?

Lana: That's right. Then I had to make the paintings of course. Are you from Russia?

Vladimir: Yes, I'm in UK for fruit picking... You've painted a sawmill.

Lana: You like it? This is my main painting. It's like the planet that my other paintings, the forest, and the river, and the horse and cart, er revolve around. Timber used to be the staple industry in the villages.

Vladimir: Yes I know....**(Cranes neck and scrutinizes painting)** You say you made the sketch last year?

Lana: That's right.

Vladimir: It says 'Bronowski Timber' on it.

Lana: My brother's name. He has sawmills in many villages to supply his furniture business. He has big furniture business.

Vladimir: Which village is this .. Bronowski sawmill in?

Lana: The village isn't important. The sawmill is typical of that region of Russia.

Vladimir: It's in Sakha isn't it?

Lana: As I said the village really doesn't matter.

Vladimir: It really does matter! This is painting of my brother's sawmill. The sign should say Stravinski Timber. He was murdered last month to get rid of competition. You call yourself Brown in UK but your family name is Bronowski. I'm Vladimir Stravinsky. If you made sketch last year, you knew your family were planning murder!

Lana: That's nonsense! I painted my brother's name on sign as in-joke. Artists do that; little in-jokes. Anyone who knows anything about art knows that.

Vladimir: Murder isn't a joke!

Lana: You talk like you've drunk too much vodka.

Vladimir: Your brother's been trying to get his hands on that mill for long time.

Lana: - Why not? He buys sawmills.

Vladimir: And now my brother's dead, it's available.

Lana: Timber yards are dangerous places. Piles of logs sometimes fall down.

Vladimir: They do when they're pushed! And I didn't say how he died!

Lana: **(Abrupt)** And what do you know that you don't say! What are you doing here when you should be home with your family? Fruit picking pah! Where is the manager of this library! **(Exits.)**

Scene 2 - Library

Sean: (Moves over to **Vladimir**) Trouble at mill?

Vladimir: Prasteete!

Sean: What?

Vladimir: Excuse me?

Sean: Never mind --- have you got the stuff? Drinkies?

Vladimir: Ah yes. I've got you good bottle vodka; a little bit smaller bottle; a little bit more expensive than last one – but very strong. It will blow your whiskers off – is that how you say it?

Sean: I'm worth it though aren't I?

Vladimir: Prasteete?

Sean: Silence is golden.

Vladimir: Excuse me?

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Sean: Why? What have you done? There's something fishy about this sawmill business isn't there. I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. What did she mean by, 'you know more than you say'?

Vladimir: I don't know what she's talking about. You want to ask her.

Sean: Oh I intend to. You can get me ten more bottles for a start.

Vladimir: Prasteete?

Sean: What?

Vladimir: I don't have the money.

Sean: I'm sure you'll find it. Leave me that bottle on the floor in the stationery cupboard; second left along the corridor. I'll put a carrier bag in there – more secure. Security is thirsty work.

(Vladimir exits looking upset. Lana enters to retrieve a bag she left on the floor in Scene 1. Sean returns to propping himself up against a book shelf, reading a crime novel.)

Scene 3 - Library

- Esme:** (**Enters and approaches Rowena**) Rowena? Hello, I'm Esme. Thank you for your emails. We've sold fifteen tickets; er I've put you in the small room; it will be more intimate in there.
- Rowena:** Fifteen? In the small room? Has it been advertised? I had fifty at Longborough Library and that's a much smaller library, and another seven came in on the door. They'd sent out press releases, and put posters up, flyers on the desk.
- Lana:** (**Enters as if passing through, addresses Esme**) I'm going to the car for more paintings.
- Esme:** (**To Lana**) Fine.
(**Lana exits.**)
- Esme:** (**To Rowena**) You didn't send us any fliers did you?
- Rowena:** I shouldn't have to, and if I didn't you should have asked! (**Looks around**) I can't see any posters up either.
- Esme:** There's one on one of the bookcase ends.
- Rowena:** One! On a bookcase end! This is disgraceful. You're supposed to be the manager of this library! You're supposed to encourage culture. The District Councillor for Culture, who happens to be a personal friend of mine is coming to my reading tonight, and I shall be informing him that this library doesn't appear to encourage culture!
- Esme:** I'm sorry, I've new here. The two librarians who have been here for some years were doing the publicity. I'll speak to them. (**Optimistically**) With a bit of luck people might come on the door.
- Rowena:** With organisation you don't need luck!
- Esme:** (**Stiffly**) Let me show you the room.
(**Esme leads off and Rowena follows. Sean wanders out of sight with a book. Jane enters with Robert.**)
- Jane:** (**looks around. She begins to nag him.**) I can't understand why you didn't apply for the post of manager! You're the senior librarian Robert, you should have applied. Now, because of your crisis of confidence, we're stuck with her. She's making our lives a misery, changing everything.
- Robert:** (**Soothing**) She'll be alright once she's settled in. She's got a difficult job with all the cuts. You're a bit prickly with her sometimes.
- Jane:** That's just typical of you; don't rock the boat; know your place; anything to avoid trouble. *We* know how to run this library. We've been doing it for years. I'm fed up with her and her customer surveys, and her bullet points, and her reading groups. Why do you have to be in a group to read? Why can't they just sit at home with a book? Reading is supposed to be a private matter between the reader and the author, not, not a rent a crowd! You may as well have - bathing groups.
- Robert:** They're called spas.

Jane: You're just a coward. You can't stand up to her

Robert: I don't need to stand up to her, she's alright with me.

Jane: That's why she's alright with you!

Jane: How can you think it alright having to bring in our own tea and coffee now? How petty is that? She'll be getting rid of the water dispenser next.

Robert: She's just trying to keep within the budget. That's why I didn't want the job.

Jane: You didn't want the job because you'd rather tread water than make a splash!

Robert: If you felt so strongly Jane, why didn't you apply to be Manager?

Jane: You know very well why I didn't apply! I didn't apply because you said I'm not senior enough, and that I'd make a fool of myself! And you know why I'm not senior enough; it's because I've spent years stuck at home looking after the children, and the house, and the dog and and --- the degus! (**pronounced de-goo**).

Robert: You're blaming the degus?

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Jane: Do you ever feed them; clean their hutch out?

Robert: They're the children's responsibility.

Jane: Always someone else's responsibility.

(Esme enters)

Esme: (**flustered**) Which one of you was responsible for the publicity for the Poetry Performance tonight?

Robert: Er -

Jane: We put a poster up.

Esme: Between you? What did you do - take one side each? I've just had a flea in my ear from Rowena Glover! The Councillor for Culture is coming to her thing tonight, and she's going to make a complaint. You do realise redundancies are on the cards don't you? You should have put posters all round the library, and got hold of flyers for the desk.

Jane: She didn't send any did she?

Robert: I didn't see any.

Esme: Then you should have chased them up!

Jane: Isn't that what you get paid for?

Esme: I've been here a month and I have my work cut out as it is. You should have had the gumption to take it in hand! --- Robert when I get back you'd better go and get your break. Jane, can you go and unblock the sink in the toilet; one of the kids has stuffed something from the art session down the plughole.

Jane: What shall I use?

Esme: Gumption!

(Jane exits looking angry. Esme exits with pile of books from desk.)

Scene 4 - Library

(Sean enters idly with book. Robert is shuffling paperwork.)

Sean: Confidentially Robert you're playing with fire.

Robert: What!

Sean: I heard you and what's her face, Sandra, in the dark, in the stationary cupboard the other night; a bit of late-night stock taking was it?

Robert: The stationary cupboard is no business of yours!

Sean: I had some business in there.

Robert: If it's any of your business Sean, which it definitely is not, Sandra was upset, and I was trying to console her.

Sean: What were you consoling her with? It was very quiet in there. Actually I tell a lie, there was whispering – and rustling.

Robert: She was showing me her poems.

Sean: That's where I have a problem. You see my business was to change the light bulb, because it's pitch black in there.

Robert: We were obviously using a torch. Haven't you ever heard of privacy when someone's upset?

Sean: You were private alright; you'd locked the door. Does Jane know about your private counselling services – in the dark --- er reading poems?

Robert: Jane would understand. What's it to you anyway?

Sean: A thousand quid.

Robert: What! Are you mad!

Sean: Fancy a divorce do you?; think about the degus.

Robert: What do you know about the degus?

Sean: I know one gets lonely on its own, they like being in a pair.

Robert: She won't believe you.

Sean: About the degus?

Robert: Don't be obtuse! Why should she believe you – your unpleasant insinuation is a lie.

Sean: No it's not. I'm an expert at these things. You learn a lot about human behaviour in the security business.

Robert: You've read too many crime novels. That's all you seem to do all day, sit around and read.

Sean: You can't read too many crime novels; I get my best ideas from them.

(Esme enters.)

Robert: **(To Sean)** I'll speak to you later – about that novel.

Sean: (To Esme) What you said to me earlier, about needing to make me redundant, I didn't quite understand.

Esme: It's very simple to understand Sean; as I explained we're having to pull in our financial belt; everything – and everyone not entirely necessary, has to go.

Sean: You're saying I'm not entirely necessary?

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Esme: I have to make the difficult choice of which members of staff to make redundant. Now I believe you were taken on in response to a spate of handbag thefts, but that's all stopped now. Customers are more aware of not leaving personal belongings lying around. This is a quiet peaceful library. We have absolutely no need of a security guard; and you must have read all the crime novels by now.

Sean: You might think I've been reading, but I've been keeping my eyes open, and my ears; not like some people.

Esme: I beg your pardon!

Sean: You may think I'm not needed, but there's trouble brewing here, big trouble, and if you get rid of me you'll regret it.

Esme: Are you threatening me?

Sean: There's no need to threaten you, the threats are already here.

Esme: What threats?

Sean: I can't tell you here, meet me later in the Crime Section.

Esme: Which shelves?

Sean: M to R.

Scene 5 - Library

(Jane enters carrying bottle of liquid.)

Esme: Did you unblock the sink?

Jane: Yes.

Esme: What did you use?

Jane: You told me to use my gumption.

Esme: And? - What's in that bottle?

Jane: Muriatic acid.

Esme: What's that when it's at home?

Jane: Hydrochloric acid. It's alright as long as you don't drink it, bathe in it, or breathe it in, in a confined space.

Esme: **(Picks up bottle and reads label. Unscrews top, sniffs – blinks, gasps, holds bottle away, replaces top.)** Good grief!

(Sean exits)

Esme: Isn't a toilet a confined space?

Jane: I've rinsed it away.

Esme: It's a wonder you haven't rinsed the plughole away! It seems a foolish thing to use. You don't seem to have used your gumption at all.

Jane: You're bullying me Esme. You know there are rules against bullying. I don't know what you've got against me, but I'm not taking this. I shall talk to your boss.

Esme: I wouldn't bother talking to my boss.

Jane: Why?

Esme: Because.

Jane: What does that mean?

Esme: It means that we've already discussed you.

(Lana enters carrying pictures from outside. Esme and Jane suspend their conversation while Lana walks through and exits – awkward silence)

Jane: You know full well what I mean, you you bitch!

Esme: Well I certainly won't baulk at telling you now. We're rationalising, and anyone or anything superfluous to requirements will be made redundant. You'll be going I'm afraid. **(Puts bottle down on desk.)**

Jane: How can I be surplus to requirements? I was here before you! You're surplus to requirements! We don't need you to do the job, you're just a troublemaker. Everything was fine before you came! If I go, Robert goes.

Esme: Robert won't go.

Jane: Oh yes he will. He'll leave with me; we're walking out today, and we'll make it known why.

Esme: Robert won't rock the boat, he's not the type, he puts up with things, he -

Jane: He what?

Esme: It doesn't matter.

Jane: He what!

Esme: He puts up with you! Now I'm going for my break, or I might say something else I'll regret

(Esme exits.)

Jane: **(Picks up bottle of muriatic acid and looks at it for a second or two.)** I could kill you. I really could kill you.

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(Sandra enters. Jane jumps, puts bottle down on desk.)

Sandra: **(Picks up bottle)** That's how he disposed of The Bride in the Bath!

Jane: Who?

Sandra: Her husband.

Jane: **(Angry and upset)** Whose husband? What are you talking about? Have you been eavesdropping?

Sandra: It's a book, 'The Bride in the Bath'!

Jane: Well go and talk to somebody else about a book!

Sandra: That's not a very nice thing to say. You're a librarian; you're supposed to encourage reading.

Jane: Well go and read! Join a book group!

Sandra: Your husband doesn't say nasty things like that to me.

Jane: Well go and talk to him about it then!

Sandra: I will; it's no wonder he likes talking to me! It's no wonder**(still holding bottle)**

Lana: **(Rushes in, shouting)** My painting has been stolen. It was there when I went to the car, and now it's gone. **(To Jane)** You must lock the doors; stop anyone leaving!

Jane: I can't do that! Perhaps you've left it on the floor, or someone's just moved it.

Lana: I tell you it's gone. Don't stand there like a fool, call the police!

Jane: I've just about had enough of people calling me a fool!

Sean: **(Enters)** What's the shouting about?

Lana: My painting's been stolen from the wall!

(Vladimir enters)

Lana: Him **(Points to Vladimir)** He's taken it.

Vladimir: What?

Lana: Don't play the innocent! What have you done with it? **(To Sean)** You're security - arrest him!

Sean: It's a big item to hide. He doesn't seem to have it on him.

Lana: Then it must be in his car; search it!

Vladimir: I came on my bike.

Lana: Then search his bike; find it! Call the police!

Vladimir: Yes, do call the police! You can explain how you painted your brother's name on *my* brother's sawmill, before your family murdered him!

Lana: Don't call the police - he's crazy; he'll say anything.

Sean: Am I calling the police or what?

Sandra: I know where your painting is.

Lana: What!

Sandra: I know where your painting is.

Lana: Are all English people stupid?

Sandra: Don't you dare call me stupid. Find it yourself!

Lana: I'm sorry; please tell me.

Esme: What on earth's going on?

Rowena: **(Enters and brusquely addresses Esme)** What's going on is that your projector doesn't even work! Can you come and sort it out.

Lana: To hell with your stupid projector. My painting's been stolen!

Rowena: How dare you!

Lana: You wouldn't like it if someone stole one of your poems would you?

(Robert enters)

Robert: What's happened?

Lana: My beautiful painting's gone!

Rowena: **(Sotto but audible)** I didn't think it was beautiful.

Lana: **(To Robert)** What did she say!

Robert: It's not the one on the floor next to the coffee machine is it?

(Robert exits to show Lana.)

Lana: What!

(Lana exits following Robert; she reappears a few moments later;

Lana: **(calls)** It's on the floor, but I didn't put it there for sure!

(Lana exits.)

Sandra: Stupid woman!

(Sandra wanders off with bottle still in her hand. Exits.)

Vladimir: Crafty and clever yes, but that family is not stupid.

Sean: **(To Esme)** And you call this a nice quiet library!

Esme: **(To Rowena)** I'll ask Robert to have a look at the projector. He's got a knack with these things. Is there anything else you'll need for this evening?

Rowena: **(Exasperated)** Just a glass of water for the table.

(Esme exits. Sean exits, following Esme).

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Scene 6 - Library

- Jane:** (Shuffling books distractedly. She looks upset. To Rowena) She doesn't ask me to look after the guests. She doesn't think to ask me to look at the projector. I might have a knack myself.
- Rowena:** Please say you have.
- Jane:** Um I haven't.
- Rowena:** (Sighs) But if you had she wouldn't ask you anyway.
- Jane:** Why not?
- Rowena:** Because she's a misogynist.
- Jane:** But she's a woman!
- Rowena:** That's why she favours the opposite sex. With Robert, she can use her wiles to win him over, but you, you're a threat. She has to fight you to keep her authority. Anyway, he's not much to win over from what I've seen.
- Jane:** What do you mean?
- Rowena:** I saw him at Flincon Railway Station last night. I was on my home from a poetry workshop. I recognised him as soon as I saw him this afternoon, but just couldn't place him. I've remembered now. He's wearing the same shoes as last night; soft tops, unusual design.
- Jane:** He'd been to the dentist – and he's got corns.
- Rowena:** How unfortunate; trouble at both ends. Well he was receiving comfort from two very heavily made up eastern European women in the shadows by the station doorway. I don't think they were dentists, or chiropodists, unless of course they were moonlighting. I particularly noticed him because he looked so ordinary and respectable. I thought, I bet he's got a wife unsuspecting somewhere, cooking dinner right now.
- Jane:** Chicken, cabbage and mashed potatoes.

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- Rowena:** - You know her? That sounds like the sort of diet he would have. Good and nourishing, whilst underneath --- what he really fancies is a bit of spice! Oh well I'd better go and see if his knack has come in handy with the projector.
- Jane:** Wait! I'd appreciate it if you didn't spread this rumour, about seeing him with er women. It probably wasn't even him; you can't have had a good view in the shadows - and it would be terrible for the er, um library. This is a very popular library, and if word got about -
- Rowena:** (Strongly) Men who take advantage of vulnerable women, should be named and shamed, whether they're a dustman, a prime minister – or a librarian. I don't shy away from speaking the truth. I may put him in a poem later on. Put anger into

poems. 'O while you live, tell the truth and shame the devil': William Shakespeare, Henry IV. Libraries are full of lonely women looking for a bit of romance and comfort; think of the havoc he could wreak here!

(Sandra enters. She looks as if she has overheard the conversation. She still has bottle in her hand. She stalks through haughtily, glaring at the two women and exits. They glare back. Rowena exits. Jane stands looking stunned.)

Scene 7 - Library

Robert: (Enters) Oh – has Rowena Glover gone through? I've got to look at her projector.

Jane: (Upset) Anything else of hers you've got to look at?

Robert: What?

Jane: I've just had a very interesting conversation with her. She said she saw you last night with some women of ill repute - at Flincom railway station! She said she's going to name and shame you!

Robert: (Shocked) She can't have seen me. My mouth was so numb after the filling I didn't even catch the train; I got a lift back.

Jane: You didn't tell me you got a lift. Who from?

Robert: Sean, he was coming back from town. Ask him if you don't believe me. Look there he is. I'll ask him.

(Sean enters.)

Robert: Sean – my wife seems to have got it into her head that I was up to no good at the railway station last night; confirm you gave me a lift back home will you.

Sean: (Looks surprised) - If your husband says he did, then you want to believe him.

Jane: I do want to believe him; that's why I'm asking you!

Sean: Of course I did. Saw him standing there with all his shopping.

Jane: He didn't go shopping.

Robert: I had a bag.

Sean: Was it only the one? Anyway I whisked him away from the metropolis before you could say Ant and Dec. One, no – two thousand nicker wouldn't make me change my answer.

Jane: What?

Sean: Of course I did, I'm joking.

Jane: You've got a strange sense of humour.

Sean: You need one to work here.

(Jane exits looking thoughtful.)

Robert: (Looks round to make sure no-one in earshot. To Sean) What did you mean when you said two thousand pounds just now? I'll give you the one thousand if you leave me alone, not a penny more, not a penny less!

Sean: Jeffrey Archer – read the book years ago, not bad, though I prefer 'Best Kept Secret' myself. If you want me to lie for you as well, the price is two thousand. I think you've been a very naughty boy. (Winks.)

(Sean exits.)

Scene 8 - Library

Sandra: (Enters. She no longer has the bottle of muriatic acid. She has a cup of water) I want to talk to you.

Robert: (Stressed) What can I help you with?

Sandra: Don't talk to me that way Robert; you know I'm more than just a customer.

Robert: Sandra, you're a customer; you're a library user.

Sandra: You told me I was special.

Robert: I said your writing had special qualities Sandra.

Sandra: Not in the dark, in the stationary cupboard you didn't! You said I had something special! You told me I just need nurturing.

Robert: Your writing, your writing needs nurturing. Sandra this is neither the time nor the place. I was being kind to you. I'm beginning to wish I hadn't been now.

Sandra: You caressed me.

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Robert: I was comforting you in the way that you comfort children.

Sandra: Robert, you could get a divorce and we could be together; then you wouldn't --- need other women.

Robert: What other women!

Sandra: I heard what Rowena was saying about the women at the railway station. She's got a loud mouth. She said she's going to tell everyone about you.

Robert: Keep your voice down for pity's sake! I've already explained to Jane that I wasn't at the railway station. Lots of men my age look like me. You see them all over the place. Sean saw me in town, and gave me a lift back.

Sandra: Oh Robert, you don't need all these women in your life, just one! We could run away together, then you would be free. You wouldn't need to pretend anymore! We could open up a little library all of our own; think of it; we could go to the south of France. I've got lots of poetry books. I could be Poet in Residence.

Robert: Don't they speak French in the south of France?

Sandra: Oh everyone speaks English these days. --- Robert, I don't need to ask Sean if he gave you a lift back.

Robert: I'm relieved to hear it.

Sandra: I believe in you Robert. You're lonely and misunderstood. You need someone in your life like me, with poetic licence, to make you happy. I've written you a poem, shall I read it to you?

Robert: Not right now please Sandra.

Sandra: Later then; and Robert, about that lift back

Robert: What about it?

Sandra: I don't need to ask Sean if he gave you a lift back, because he gave me a lift back; I'd been shopping; and you weren't in the car.

Robert: Ah; there's a logical explanation for all this. We need to have a serious talk.

Sandra: About the south of France?

Robert: And other matters. Perhaps you'll read me your poem?

Sandra: Where?

Robert: In the stationary cupboard; fifteen minutes.

(Robert watches Sandra as she finishes her cup of water and puts it down on desk. Lana enters; she is carrying a mug in her hand, as if about to drink. Walks through with it ignoring other two and exits. Sandra wrinkles nose, and sniffs, in obvious distaste. Exits. Robert enters wearing a pair of rubber washing up gloves and with a tea towel over his shoulder. He picks up Sandra's cup in one gloved hand, and looks around, as if for more cups to wash up. Exits.)

Scene 9 - Library

(Esme enters, tidies bookcase. Sean enters holding crime novel)

Sean: So you still don't think the library needs a security guard?

Esme: I think you're exaggerating Sean. You've been reading too many crime novels. Nothing out of the ordinary is going on here. As I said before, we're basically a nice quiet library and -

Sean: Isn't murder out of the ordinary?

Esme: Murder? What are you talking about!

Sean: You just don't see the threats do you? Me, I'm like a trained sniffer dog; I can sniff out things you're not even aware of. I hear things that your ears don't pick up. I see things you don't notice. You've got all the ingredients for murder here!

Esme: Murder! Don't be ridiculous! --- What ingredients?

Sean: Think of it as a four course meal. For your starters, you've got the two Russians, Vladimir and Lana. He says her family killed his brother to take over the sawmill, but she says he's got a secret. Something's going to happen there, you mark my words. Then, for your main course, you've got the love triangle.

Esme: Love triangle? What love triangle?

Sean: Robert, Jane and Sandra.

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Esme: You've got to be joking!

Sean: I'm honour bound not to divulge details, but believe me when I say there's going to be trouble there. And then for pudding, there's you and Jane; you've ruffled her feathers.

Esme: Well she's ruffled mine! She might drive me insane, but I'm not about to murder her!

Sean: I was thinking of the other way round! She hates you. I've overheard her saying she could kill you. Now if I leave, who's going to protect you?

Esme: Don't be absurd! I've never heard of anything so absurd! She might be cross but she's a librarian. Librarians don't go around murdering people. Anyway, she's irrelevant; she'll be leaving.

Sean: She's not leaving yet, not today, not tomorrow. I should be very careful when you next have a cup of tea. You never know where that muriatic acid gets to! And then for the cheese course, you've got Rowena and Sandra, at each other's throats over poetry.

Esme: Oh for goodness sakes! This is just pathetic. Whoever murdered anyone over poetry! You're trying to find excuses to make yourself indispensable. **(Looks on desk as if for bottle - pause.)** Where is that bottle of muriatic acid by the way? It was on the desk?

Sean: There you go! It's started already: careless not to know where poison is on your watch. If anything happens, your photograph will be on the front page of The Reporter; 'new manager's negligence causes death of' etc; they're desperate for bad news. All they ever get are charity tea parties and potholes.

Esme: **(Worried)** Stop winding me up Sean! It's probably been put back in the cleaning cupboard.

Sean: It's not.

Esme: How do you know?

Sean: Someone spilt some liquid by one of the shelves; I needed a cloth.

Esme: Well where can it be?

Sean: I could make enquiries; if it makes me what shall we say, indispensable.

Esme: Are you blackmailing me?

Sean: Am I asking you for a pay rise? I'm just pointing out that the last person you should consider making redundant is your security guard.

Esme: Well go and be one then!

Sean: I'll take that as a yes.

(Sean exits)

Esme: **(To self)** And what about the coffee and mints course Sean? Doesn't anyone want to murder you?

(Esme exits. Vladimir enters. Lana enters. Discomforted to see Vladimir.. She no longer has mug.)

Lana: You; why are you still hanging around?

Vladimir: Why shouldn't I? It's public library. You can't frighten me off, we're in UK now.

Lana: Yes we're in UK - and I've been thinking -

Vladimir: So have I; I've been thinking I shall visit the police as soon as I reach home. I have taken photographs of your painting; evidence! **(Gets out mobile phone, indicating camera).**

Lana: **(Tries to grab phone)** It's not evidence – it's painting!
(Vladimir grapples with her for the phone. Lana lets go)

Lana: Ow – you've hurt my hand! Look what you've done! **(Shows redness on fingers)**

Vladimir: I haven't done that!

Lana: Yes you have! You were in the sawmill business with your brother weren't you! My brother said you two were always arguing! You had him killed, so you could come back and make your sister in law an offer for business. Well it's too late she's accepted my brother's offer!

Vladimir: **(Raises voice)** Kill my own brother, are you crazy? Ah - I see what you're trying to do, but it won't work. Last person you expected to see, me in UK, wasn't it? How inconvenient for you. Anyway, deal hasn't gone through. Your brother may be big

man, powerful man in Russia, but he can't run business from prison! (**taps mobile phone**) Evidence!

Lana: (**Raised voice**) You saw my painting, and thought to use it to drive suspicion from yourself! How pleased you must have been to see it!

(**Sean enters**)

Sean: What's with all the shouting?

Lana: (**Nursing her hand**) Look what he's done to me!

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(**Sean takes her hand and looks at it**)

Vladimir: (**Looks at Sean's hand**) - Your hand is red too.

Sean: (**Stares at his hand for a moment in puzzlement**) Never mind that; this is a library. We don't shout in British libraries unless there's a fire, and then you just shout 'Fire', and everyone leaves in an orderly manner. (**Looks around**) I'm going to have to fine you both.

Lana: I don't belong to the library!

Vladimir: My books aren't due back!

Sean: I'm not talking about your books. It's a security fine for keeping things under my hat, about you keeping things under your hats. I can see you look puzzled; it's for keeping schtum. You don't understand that either? How about for keeping quiet and not asking the police to pay you both a call about a case of murder? One of you knows more than you're saying. I'm sure they have fines like this in Russia?

Lana: (**Ironically**) Oh all the time; it's called extortion. How much?

Sean: Just move over here. You don't want to let everyone see you both being fined do you?

(**Sean exits followed by Vladimir and Lana**)

INTERVAL HERE IF REQUIRED

ACT 2

Scene 1 - Library

(Rowena enters, rubbing head as if she has headache. Sandra enters)

Sandra: **(Confronts)** I've been published in 'Your Poems' in The Minster Herald you know.

Rowena: That page is a vanity page for bad poets. It relies on the fact that every one of them and their dog will buy a copy. Talking about dogs; they run a best pet page too.

Sandra: How dare you! I have the support of the senior librarian here. He's mentoring me.

Rowena: Ah, that wouldn't happen to be Romeo Robert would it? I'd imagine quite a few ladies have enjoyed the benefits of his full support.

Sandra: You say another word against Robert –

Rowena: Actually I intend saying quite a few words about Robert.

Sandra: I'm warning you! You say another word about Robert and I'll kill you! You're too stupid to understand something good when you see it.

Rowena: What did you say?

Sandra: I said you're too stupid to understand!

Rowena: Before that.

Sandra: Something good when you see it?

Rowena: Before that

Sandra: Er that I'm warning you?

Rowena: No before that.

Sandra: That I could kill you?

Rowena: That's the one. Well, you've already murdered a great deal of poetry, so you've had a bit of practice. That's the trouble with judging an open poetry competition; some people just can't take criticism! My advice to you is to use your anger constructively, and put it into a poem --- but don't rhyme for pity's sake. 'I planned a murder, with a girder, but luckily for me, I fell in love with a goat herder.'

(Sandra burst into tears and rushes out.. Rowena sighs, puts her hand to her head.)

Scene 2 - Library

(Esme enters)

Rowena: **(Hand to head)** Your library's given me a migraine. Is there somewhere dark where I can rest before my reading tonight?

Esme: Not really; there's the stationery cupboard if you don't mind that. It's quite large; there's a chair, and it's dark, unless you put the light on. Actually I think the bulb's gone in there. Anyway it's the room adjacent to where you are tonight.

Rowena: Have you sold any more tickets this afternoon?

Esme: I don't think so.

Rowena: This is the worst library for publicity I've ever come across.

Esme: I've reprimanded those responsible.

Rowena: I'm not interested in excuses and scapegoats. To my mind, the buck stops with you. **(Holds hand to head. Sighs.)**

Esme: **(Tersely)** Are you alright?

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Rowena: I always get this peculiar metallic taste in my mouth when I've got a migraine.

Esme: **(Tersely)** Do you want a cup of tea making?

Rowena: No, there's a cup of water by the projector, I'll take that in with me.

(Rowena exits. Lana enters.)

Lana: Where are the toilets?

Esme: Straight ahead, through the middle door

(Vladimir enters and walks through and exits. Jane enters with books)

Esme: What are you doing?

Jane: Sorting out the returns.

Esme: Can you check on Rowena Glover in a bit - she's resting in the stationery cupboard.

Jane: Like you would.

Esme: She's got a migraine!

Jane: **(Mumbles)** Sure you can trust me to do that?

Esme: What did you say?

Jane: Nothing.

(Jane exits. Esme sighs. Robert enters.)

Esme: (**Urgent**) Robert; we've lost a bottle of muriatic acid. Unfortunately Jane used it to unblock the plughole in the toilet. It was on the desk at one point. It's not been put back in the cleaning cupboard. I've had a look round, and Sean's hunting for it now.

Robert: I think I saw Sandra Elliot with it.

Esme: What are earth is she doing with it?

Robert: I hate to think; she's really got it in for Rowena over the poetry competition. Sandra's a bit unbalanced you know.

Esme: (**Crossly**) It's really irresponsible of Jane to leave it laying around for anyone to waltz off with. I don't know what she was thinking of!

Robert: She probably wasn't thinking; she's a bit distracted at the moment, what with one thing and er another.

Esme: That's no excuse! Can you have a word with her; ask her if she's seen it or moved it. I'm afraid she's not being very co-operative with me - I told her she's being made redundant.

Robert: Redundant? She's been here a long time.

Esme: I'm sorry but cost cutting is necessary.

Robert: What about Sean? He's relatively new. Is he er necessary?

Esme: I'm afraid so. He's outlined some potential security problems.

Robert: What sort of problems?

Esme: Well – the muriatic acid for a start.

Robert: I'll see if I can find Jane.

(Robert exits the same way as the others. Esme sighs. Sandra enters)

Esme: (**Urgent**) Sandra - Robert says you picked up the bottle of muriatic acid from the desk; what have you done with it?

Sandra: Oh yes, I kind of picked it up automatically when that Russian woman started rabbiting on about her painting. I think I left it on one of the book shelves.

Esme: Oh dear – which one

Sandra: M. M for murder. Oh--- wait a minute, I think I saw Jane with it later. Yes - I can see her holding it with a wild murderous look in her eye. I was talking to her earlier and told her that was how the husband got rid of 'The Bride in the Bath' and she was quite rude to me.

(Sandra exits. Sean enters with light bulb in one hand, and a torch in the other.)

Esme: (**Urgent**) Sean, this is serious; Robert says Sandra had the muriatic acid and that she's unhinged. Now Sandra says Jane had it, and that she was looking crazy.

Sean: Just your average library then. Don't say I didn't warn you. It's the main course love triangle.

Esme: I thought you said that was starters?

Sean: No, the Russians are the starters. Robert, Sandra and Jane are the main course.

Esme: I thought you said Jane wanted to murder me?

Sean: That's just a few olives on the side.

Esme: I'm really worried about that bottle. Do you think I should call the police?

Sean: I'll do it; I'm security, it's my job. Don't get involved, or they'll start questioning you about where you left it. Leave it all to me. It might turn up. I'll just fit this light bulb in the stationery cupboard. Shed a bit of light on –

(Lana enters holding bottle of muriatic acid)

Lana: **(Interrupting)** What is this? Should this be on bookshelf? It has skull and crossbones on side.

Esme: **(Takes it off her quickly)** We've been hunting high and low for that! Where did you find it?

Lana: A bookshelf.

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Esme: Which one?

Lana: **(Shrugs)** Crime and True Crime; pushed behind a book. You should be more careful.

Esme: **(Sigh of relief)** Thank you very much. I'm going to take charge of this now.

Lana: You should be more careful in library.

(Lana exits)

Sean: **(Seems a bit 'put out')** Well I'd better get on with this light bulb.

(Sean exits. Esme frowns absently, looks at bottle, shakes bottle gently as if to see how full it is. Robert enters)

Robert: **(addresses Esme)** I haven't found Jane yet.

Esme: It doesn't matter now. **(Holds bottle out)** That Russian artist found it. Sandra Elliot must have pushed it in between some books in the Crime Section. That woman's a menace. I don't think she reads anything else.

Robert: Romance.

Esme: That's an explosive mixture. Oh well, all's well that ends well. Darn!

Robert: What's wrong?

Esme: I didn't tell Sean that Rowena's resting in the stationery cupboard. Don't ask – she's got a migraine now. He's changing the light bulb. I'll probably get a flea in my ear for disturbing her.

(Rowena screams loudly offstage)

Esme: **(Jumps):** Who's that?

(Rowena enters looking shocked.)

Esme: (Crossly) What on earth's wrong now!

(All cast apart from Sean emerge from various corners of the library.)

Rowena: (Stares at Esme perplexed) --- It may be entirely normal for your library, but what's wrong, is that there's a body on the floor of the stationery cupboard! It's probably my nose at the moment, but there's a weird smell.

Esme: What!

Robert: Who - is it?

Rowena: I was *attempting* to rest when someone came in. I could hear them in the dark, rustling about – and then there was a thud – and he's on the floor. It looks like your security chap. *He's dead!*

(Cast all freeze in shocked pose for around ten seconds, until the detective, who has either been watching from the audience or from the wings enters and introduces himself. They will say that they were only hoping to renew their library books, and not solve a murder – and can the audience help?)