

Characters

John Partridge (M)	-	Chairman of Residents' Management Committee
Beth Linklater (F)	-	Secretary
Quentin Martin (M)	-	Retirement Village Resident
Serena Collins (F)	-	Retirement Village Resident
Nigel Taverner (M)	-	Treasurer
Muriel Taverner (F)	-	Nigel's wife
Bryony Gray (F)	-	Receptionist
Kate Morgan (F)	-	Investigator

Act 1Scene 1 - The Clubroom of Riverside Retirement Village.

(Set in the present. Tabs open. Lights up. Stage Left and Stage Right are two easy chairs, grouped around small coffee tables. Centre stage is a dining height table with three chairs. Newspapers and magazines are neatly displayed on one side of the table. Upstage is a flask of coffee with cups and saucers. Enter Beth. She places a single sheet of paper on each table. Enter John)

John: Oh there you are Beth. You're bright and early.

Beth: Yes, well I like to be prepared.

John: Expecting a good turnout?

Beth: You can never tell with these people. You know, family commitments, hospital appointments, etcetera. Meetings are not exactly high on their agenda.

John: We've given them the opportunity to bring their ideas to the table. It's now up to them to do just that.

Beth: And up to us to reject or accept their suggestions.

John: Beth, if you don't mind my saying, that is a negative approach. If we want the residents to help out, we must all work together, be open to new ideas.

Beth: Yes well, we'll see. But they need to be led, not work it out for themselves.

(Enter Quentin Stage left)

Beth: Ah. Good morning, Mr. ... er...

Quentin: Martin. Quentin Martin.

Beth: Ah yes. **(They shake hands)** May I introduce our Chairman, Mr. John Partridge?

(Quentin shakes hands with John Partridge)

John: You are most welcome. New, I believe?

Quentin: **(Selects and picks up a newspaper from the table. Moves to chair stage right. As he sits down, announces)** I came here to die.

Beth: Oh, we can't have that, Martin.

Quentin: Quentin.

Beth: Quentin. We must all pull our weight. Each should play a part in the spirit of Riverside.

(Enter Nigel and Muriel stage left)

Nigel: Oh dear. I hope we're not too late. Muriel had to pick up her prescription, the dog had to be seen to...

Muriel: ...then the phone rang, these cold calls are so annoying.

Nigel: Muriel worries, you see.

John: Yes, we do see, Nigel. Anyway, very pleased to see you both. Please, take a seat. There's some coffee if you would like to help yourselves.

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(Nigel and Muriel ignore the offer and take their places alongside John and Beth)

Nigel: Thank you, thank you. **(To Muriel)** All right, dear?

Muriel: Yes, dear. Thank you. Er... will this take long? Only, you see, Sammy frets if we leave him alone too long.

Beth: And Sammy would be...?

Nigel: Our Cocker Spaniel, of course.

Beth: Of course.

John: Then perhaps we can proceed. As notified last week, the meeting today is to discuss and plan an Open Day to be held here at Riverside. Date T.B.A. Run by residents. And this is where we need your help.

Muriel: In what way?

Beth: We were thinking of a showcase to promote some of our hidden talents. For instance, your gift of flower arranging, Muriel. Oh yes. I've seen those wonderful displays appear like magic in the front lobby. Such a shame to keep such a talent to yourself. You could give demonstrations during the day.

Muriel: Well, I don't know. I've never....

Beth: What about you, Martin?

Quentin: Quentin.

Beth: You must have a... skill, or a hobby you could... resurrect, to interest potential residents.

Quentin: I came here to die.

Beth: Well, have a coffee first, and think about it.

John: The first thing we must decide is the proposed date.

Beth: I agree. And I think it should be late Spring or Summer next year.

Nigel: What if it rains?

John: Then we have a contingency plan.

Nigel: Which is?

John: To hold the same sort of thing indoors.

Muriel: But we don't know what sort of thing it's going to be, yet.

Nigel: That's all right, Muriel dear. **(To Chairman)** May I suggest...

(Enter Serena stage left. Swathed in colourful scarves and weighed down by a number of shopping bags, she flops down in the nearest armchair.)

Serena: Sorry I'm late. Oh, the crowds. It's Black Friday, some feast day or other. How was I supposed to know? Anyway I got a few bargains. And then, would you believe it, the lift has broken down, or I would have dumped this stuff back in the flat.

Beth: Oh yes, you're in our Apartment Block, aren't you? What number?

Serena: Thirty-six A. Third floor. Very nice it is, too, when the lift's working.

Beth: I've seen you about, but we haven't met officially. This is John Partridge, our Chairperson. He lives in Avon Close.

John: How do you do?

Serena: Pleased to meet you. Serena Collins, that's me. You don't mind if I don't get up. The shopping's knocked it out of me.

Beth: This is Nigel, our Treasurer, and I'm Beth, acting Secretary. Taw Cottage.

Serena: Ooh yes. I've seen those cottages. Very Olde Worlde, aren't they?

Beth: Small, but quite nicely converted. Our previous property was on a much grander scale.

Serena: Really? Well I'm quite happy with my new flat. Light and airy with a lovely view of the estuary. That's what sold it to me.

John: Ahem... Shall we begin the meeting? Are we expecting anyone else, Beth?

Beth: Not that I know of. Unfortunately.

John: Right. As you know, we have called this informal meeting to pool our ideas about the proposed Open Day to promote Adventurous Retirement Living at Riverside Village.

Serena: Brilliant. This is so exciting. I've been putting on my thinking cap, metaphorically speaking of course, and would like to suggest a table or stall, selling hand crafted goods, made by yours truly, plus old fashioned works of art, bric-a-brac – that sort of thing. In fact I have some fabrics here **(dragging out pieces of material from her shopping bags)** that I could knock into shape in no time...

Beth: Bric-a-brac! No, no, no, no! We have our reputation to consider. We can't invite people to a – a flea market!

Serena: Who said anything about a flea market? My craft works are high-end fashionable items.

Beth: Have you considered the average age of our residents?

Serena: Well, no. But what does that matter? I thought we were encouraging the adventure spirit in our midst. It's the outlook on life that counts... and I can see that yours is vastly different from mine. **(Serena gets to her feet, visibly upset, gathers up all her possessions and rushes off stage left)**

Muriel: **(After a pause)** I'll go.

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(Muriel exits stage left after Serena, followed by Nigel)

John: That was not well done – Emma.

Beth: Emma?

John: You should read Jane Austen.

Quentin: **(Lowering his newspaper)** Mister Knightly.

John: Quite so.

Beth: I only meant...

John: It would have been polite to hear her out, before rejecting her ideas out of hand. For all we know, Serena's talents are much to be admired.

Beth: Perhaps.

John: We should at least give her the benefit of the doubt.

Beth: Yes, but what if I'm right? What if she lowers the tone? What if...

John: Ah!...if, if, if, if... *"If ifs and ands were pots and pans there'd be no need of tinkers"*.

Beth: And who said that, Fanny Craddock?

John: Close. Another female warrior, long before her time – Joan of Arc.

Quentin: Correction. The words come from the pen of George Bernard Shaw, from his play, *Saint Joan*, written especially for Sybil Thorndike, I believe.

John: Really Quentin? That's fascinating. I know there have been different versions of the life of the Maid, depending on your political viewpoint. I wonder if you know the work by Jean Anouilh – *The Lark*?

Quentin: Flashbacks to her childhood, when she first hears her voices.

John: That's the one. And then there's Shakespeare's dark portrayal of her as the witch, *La Pucelle*.

Quentin: Henry The Sixth Part One.

Beth: When you two have quite finished your literary discourse...

John: Apologies. We must get on.

Beth: **(To Quentin)** I thought you were going to die.

Quentin: I refuse to die illiterate, at the hand of Philistines. **(Gets to his feet and replaces newspaper on the table.)** I'll be in the library if you need me.

(Quentin exits stage right)

Beth: Well! Where do we go from here?

John: No need to worry, not yet anyway.

Beth: Meaning?

John: I think we could make use of his literary talents.

Beth: I don't see how. You heard him. He thinks we're all a bunch of Philistines.

John: Leave it to me. I have a few ideas.

(Enter Nigel)

Beth: Oh, there you are Nigel. And how is our Prima Dona?

Nigel: If you mean Serena, I must say she's feeling not a little wounded by your sharp words, Beth. Muriel's with her now. At least the lift is working again.

John: Well that's something.

Nigel: I don't think any of us knew that Serena is something of a celebrity in the fashion world.

Beth: **(With gradual realisation)** Of course! Serena Collins! A label I know well. Not my idea of haut couture, I'm afraid. Never mind. I must make amends – without delay.

(Beth exits stage left)

John: Now, Nigel. Do you think you could persuade Muriel to do her flower thing?

Nigel: I'll do my best. She's a little backward in coming forward you know, but I might be able to persuade her.

John: Good man. I'm going to the library to seek out Quentin, see if I can get him back on board.

(Exeunt. Lights off. Tabs Close.)

Scene 2 – The Clubroom – 4 weeks later

(Tabs open. Lights up. Enter John, Beth and Nigel. They sit behind the high table, as before.)

John: Well, here we are again. The purpose of this small gathering is to progress with plans for the Open Day. Beth did you manage to take any Minutes?

Beth: I made a few notes, as circulated.

John: Fine. We'll take them as read. Matters arising?

Beth: Well, hardly. As you will recall, the meeting ended in disarray.

Nigel: Not entirely. I had some success in persuading Muriel to display her talents... flower arranging, you know?

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John: Oh, yes. Of course.

Beth: Splendid. I hope we can soon look forward to seeing her wonderful Christmas decorations, as usual? A practice run, as it were.

Nigel: I'll see what I can do.

John: What about Serena?

Beth: Oh, she and I are the best of friends, now. Serena appreciates my fashion sense. In fact, she has asked me to model for her, as I still have the figure for it. She's still turning out the most wonderful creations, you know.

John: And how do we stand with Quentin?

Beth: Still alive, I think. As if one could tell the difference.

John: Now, now, Beth. He is clearly a person of many inner resources. In fact, I may have persuaded him to contribute to our Open Day, after all.

Beth: How, pray?

John: It's early days, but if we can gently tap into his expertise, he might be willing to share his interest in the life and times of George Bernard Shaw.

Beth: Sounds deadly dull to me.

John: On the contrary. GBS was one of the icons of the twentieth century. Not only a playwright, but.....

(Enter Bryony stage left.)

Bryony: Excuse me. Sorry to interrupt. There's somebody to see Mr. Martin. I thought he might be here.

John: We haven't seen him. Have you tried his apartment?

Beth: Wait a minute. Who wants to see him?

Bryony: I think it's a reporter, or investigator of some kind.

(Enter Kate, rushing in front of Bryony)

Kate: Forgive me. I have to speak to Mr. Martin urgently. I understand he is a resident here at Riverside.

John: **(Getting to his feet)** Correct.

Beth: Why? What's he done?

Kate: We understand he failed to attend an appointment.

Beth: Not a major crime, surely?

Kate: No, but his appointment was in the Swiss Alps...

Beth: Really? He never seemed like the winter sports type.

Kate: ...at a clinic.

John: You don't mean...?

Kate: There's an organisation called "Flights of Angels". You may have heard of them. They arrange to...

John: All right. You don't have to spell it out.

Beth: We must find him. He can't be far away.

Nigel: The other day, I saw him walking along the riverside, with Serena.

Beth: Serena?

Nigel: Yes. They were in animated conversation. I don't know what about – didn't like to pry of course - but I couldn't help hearing the word *pig* a few times.

John: Pig?

Nigel: That's right. Something to do with the male species, I assumed.

John: Could you have mistaken it for "Pygmalion"?

Kate: Pygmalion?

John: It's the title of a play by.... oh, never mind.

Nigel: Enough of this speculation. I'm going to have a look around for them. **(To Bryony).**
After you, Bryony. Let's go.

John: Thank you, Nigel. Good idea.

(Exit Nigel and Bryony stage left.)

Kate: I have to ask you – were you ever aware of Mr. Martin's suicidal tendencies?

Beth: Well, he did seem somewhat, er...distant. Said he'd come here to die. Of course, we took no notice.

Kate: Is there a possibility that Mr. Martin confused the Swiss Clinic with your establishment here at Riverside?

John: What are you implying?

Kate: Well, it's not unknown that some of these retirement homes, shall we say, *facilitate* the demise of their residents.

John: I take exception to that...

Beth: How dare you suggest...

John: You should know that Riverside is not a retirement home. It is a group of tasteful, individual residences. We aim to re-vitalise the whole concept of retirement living, try new things, share our talents.

Kate: Forgive me, but in order to protect you and potential residents, we must carry out an ethical review of all such premises, whether in sunny Devon or the Swiss Alps.

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(Enter Nigel stage left)

Nigel: We've had a look around. Can't see Quentin or Serena anywhere.

(Serena can be heard giggling off right. Enter Serena and Quentin stage right, linking arms)

Serena: I still can't believe it, Quentin. You mean he fell in love with his own sculpture?

Quentin: It's true, in mythological terms, that is. Pygmalion created a statue of a beautiful woman, and... **(breaks off when he notices the assembled company staring at him)**
Hello Kate. So you've tracked me down, have you?

Kate: Uncle Quentin.

(Long pause; eventually, Serena breaks in)

Serena: Look, why don't we allow these two some privacy. They clearly have some catching up to do.

John: Quite right.

Beth: (**Reluctantly**) Oh, very well. Help yourselves to tea, coffee, water...

(Exeunt Serena, Nigel, John & Beth stage left. Kate settles into an armchair stage right. Quentin pours two drinks from dispense area and places them on small table between them.)

Quentin: Well, to what do I owe the pleasure of my niece's company?

Kate: You didn't turn up at the clinic. That's what.

Quentin: You didn't seriously think I would fork out ten grand to an unspecified organisation, to exit myself from this painful world.

Kate: But you booked yourself in.

Quentin: Correction. *You* booked me in.

Kate: I thought we had an agreement. You trusted me to find a suitable place, make all the necessary arrangements. We would meet in Geneva, proceed to *Flights of Angels*, get you settled in, and then...and then, I was to leave you in their tender care.

Quentin: Yes, well, here's the thing my dear. I decided to research some alternative ways of spending my latter years – and my money.

Kate: And?

Quentin: I'm quite comfortable here. They leave me alone, by and large. Library's not that bad.

Kate: Do they know about you?

Quentin: What is there to know? Winning an international literary prize is no big deal these days.

Kate: Uncle, please stop being so obtuse. You are a sick man.

Quentin: Oh, that. Well... I've decided to recover.

Kate: But how?

Quentin: By resuming an interest in... in life, in the people here, in these not unpleasant environs, and by calling on the help of my dear friends from the past.

Kate: Meaning your obsession with Bernard Shaw?

Quentin: Call it what you will. At least I've begun to let go of my own ego. (**Calling after Kate as she gets up to walk off**) You should try it sometime, Kate.

(Exit Kate stage left. Quentin sits for a while in silence. Enter Serena stage right)

Serena: Has she gone?

Quentin: Yes, and good riddance.

Serena: I can see you're upset. What did she want?

Quentin: It's a long story. She just...she has a habit of turning up like that – out of the blue. It's quite unnerving. Just as I was beginning to, well... almost *like* it here.

Serena: I know how you feel. I, too, found it difficult to fit in at first. It wouldn't take much to upset the applecart again, and then I'd be back to square one.

Quentin: The Applecart! Now that's an interesting work by Shaw. Known as the Political Extravaganza of its time.

Serena: There you are then. That's better.

Quentin: What?

Serena: You're back on track. In the world of literature where you belong. Let's go and get some fresh air and you can tell me more.

(Lights off. Tabs Close.)

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Scene 3 – The Clubroom. The morning of the Open Day.

(Tabs open. Lights up. Enter John. He wears a smart three piece suit with collar and tie. Adjusting his waistcoat, he tries out a few poses that he thinks suggest the character of Professor Higgins. When satisfied he starts to check off items on a clip board. Enter Beth, carrying a quality paper bag containing a hat. She is in modern dress.)

Beth: Oh yes, John. Very smart. Professor Higgins, I presume?

John: I thought I'd show willing by getting into character early on. Hopefully, I will feel more comfortable by the time the show opens. What about you?

Beth: I've too much running around to do.

John: But it was your idea that we all dress up as characters from *Pygmalion*.

Beth: *My Fair Lady*, you mean.

John: If you insist.

Beth: I'll probably wear a hat later, in keeping with the period. Serena is in charge of Costume. Now, is the banner up? And signs to the attractions in place?

John: Yes, I've ticked those off.

Beth: Good.

(Enter Muriel, followed by Nigel.)

Beth: Come in, Muriel – and Nigel. Well, you certainly look the part.

(Muriel is wearing a greyish coloured long dress and apron, shawl, and a shabby hat. She looks distinctly uncomfortable as she takes a seat down left. Nigel carries a large basket of flowers, places them at Muriel's feet and stands beside her.)

Muriel: Well I don't feel it. I'm only dressing up because you and Serena said, but how that's going to help with my flower arranging, I don't know.

Beth: But you're supposed to be the flower girl, Muriel, selling flowers? Eliza Doolittle? From *My Fair Lady*?

Muriel: I thought that was *Mary Poppins*.

Beth: No, dear. She was feeding the pigeons.

John: For "twopence a bag" I seem to recollect.

Nigel: Well, there's inflation for you.

Beth: What part are you playing, Nigel?

Nigel: Well, I... I'm just helping Muriel.

Beth: No, no, that won't do. You can be Doolittle, Eliza's Dad. What was his name?

- John:** Albert.
- Beth:** That's it, Albert Doolittle. And you won't have to change the way you look... well, (**reconsidering**) a tad more unkempt, perhaps. You two can work together. That basketful of ready-made posies will set the scene. Now, Muriel, have you got all the containers, with those polystyrene thingies soaked and ready?
- Muriel:** Yes, of course. But what worries me is – did they have plastic or polystyrene in those days?
- Beth:** (**exasperated**) It's called artistic licence.
- Nigel:** Are we supposed to have a licence?
- John:** Not that kind of licence, Nigel.

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(Enter Serena stage right. She is dressed in late Edwardian fashion of the time, with hat and parasol)

- Serena:** Da-da! (**Gives a twirl**) How do I look?
- Beth:** Splendid, Serena!
- John:** I say! Marvellous! But whose character are you assuming, dressed like that?
- Serena:** I thought that was settled. I'm to be Mrs. Higgins, the Professor's Ma.
- John:** So you'll be in the tea tent, then? Or marquee, I should say.
- Serena:** Well, no. Bryony is seeing to all that. She's got an endless supply of cakes made by residents and the local supermarket is delivering the sandwiches. So I thought I would be of more use meeting and greeting people – create a bit of atmosphere.
- Beth:** But the tea party is the most important element of the story. Mrs. Higgins should be there to act as hostess.
- Muriel:** In the film, they were at Ascot, watching the races.
- John:** Quite right, Muriel. But to please our friend Quentin, we decided to revert to Shaw's original setting: an elegant tea party during which Higgins attempts to pass the common Eliza off as a Duchess.
- Serena:** Pygmalion's statue coming to life. (**The others look at her, bemused**) Quentin has been enlightening me. He sees me as his muse.
- Beth:** Really.
- John:** Where is Quentin, by the way?

Serena: Getting ready for his book signing in the library. He's refusing to wear a long Shavian beard, so we've settled for a large portrait of the great man instead. We've been putting up posters of various GBS plays. Quentin has been persuaded to display his collection of old theatre programmes.

Nigel: What happened to that niece of his?

Serena: Kate? Don't mention her. Turns out it was a set up. She thought she'd grabbed him with the title, *Flights of Angels* – from *Hamlet* I think. Turns out the place was a bit dodgy, if it ever existed. Quentin could find no records or testimonials, anyway.

Muriel: After his money, was she?

Serena: It would seem so. But Quentin was too clever for her. Oh, he's so smart. Nevertheless, I'd better go and see if he needs my assistance.

(Exit Serena stage right. Enter Briony stage left. She is formally dressed as the Housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce.)

Briony: Sorry I'm late. I was just checking the finishing touches with the groundsmen when I was approached by a couple from the CQC.

John: The CQC?

Briony: The Care Quality Commission. They....

Beth: Yes, we know. It's a regulatory body that inspects care homes, etcetera. Go on, Bryony.

John: But we are an independent retirement village and not subject to outside regulations or inspections. How many more times?

Bryony: They didn't come for that.

Beth: What did they want, then?

Bryony: They were asking questions about some fraudulent activity concerned with places that help people - die with dignity, that sort of thing. Apparently someone has been posing as an inspector, visiting care homes persuading them to sign up....

Beth: **(together)** Kate!

John: **(together)** Kate!

Bryony: Yes. She did fit their description.

Beth: So Quentin is not the only one.

Bryony: Apparently not. Anyway, they could see we were busy with our Open Day and had no wish to trouble us further. The matter is with the police now.

John: That's a relief. Thank you, Bryony, for dealing with all that – this day of all days. Now, is everything else under control?

- Briony:** Yes, I think so. We could do with a few more china cups and saucers for the tea tent. Sorry, *marquee*. We have plenty of mugs, but I imagine they're not what you had in mind for your elegant tea party.
- Beth:** Not really. There's nothing like the chink of delicate china to the strains of music and laughter.
- John:** Beth, I think you are getting carried away.
- Bryony:** It's all right. I'll just go and see what the other residents can come up with.
- (Exit Bryony stage left. Enter Quentin and Serena, stage right arm in arm. He uses Serena's parasol as a walking aid in his free hand.)**
- John:** Quentin. Come in. Take a seat. How are you feeling?
- Quentin:** **(easing himself into a chair)** Not bad, not bad. I'll be glad when this circus is all over, mind. Don't get me wrong, book signings I can do, but I could do without the... window dressing.
- John:** Understood. But I'm afraid that we can't go back on our decision to use *My Fair Lady* as our main theme.
- Quentin:** That, that *travesty*, or if you prefer its proper title, *Pygmalion*, is merely a fraction of Shaw's diverse talents.
- John:** As your book explains. And that is why we see the book signing, together with your in-depth knowledge of the man, as an added attraction to visitors.

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- Beth:** We might not show it, but we are proud to have you as one of our residents.
- Nigel:** **(together)** Hear, hear!
- Muriel:** **(together)** Hear, hear!
- Quentin:** Very touching, I'm sure.
- John:** We mean it, Quentin. We are genuinely pleased you came here to live.
- Quentin:** And so am I. **(Struggles to his feet)** So am I.
- (After a pause)**
- John:** Come on, then. We all have work to do. You know your stations, if you get my meaning.
- Beth:** In the adventure spirit of Riverside, **(with a flourish, draws a large brimmed hat from her bag and plonks it on her head.)** Let the play begin!
- (All walk off to strains of "I could have danced all night" from Overture to My Fair Lady. Tabs Closed. Lights off.)**

The End