

## Characters

- Robyn (M/F)** - The patient, long-suffering but enthusiastic director
- Allen (M)** - Works at the bank, group treasurer, and lovable ladies' man. A big man.
- Julia (F)** - Allen's wife. A strong, big-hearted character. She has damaged her knee and limps slightly
- Sarah (F)** - Young but tired; to play the part of the ghost.
- Sheila (F)** - A prima donna and older lady; to play Lady Benwick.
- Millie (F)** - A small, neat lady who is the group secretary, a born organizer & ex-Sunday school teacher. She is very sensibly dressed.
- Lizzie (F)** - A younger lady; the new member and a smart cookie.
- Tracy (F)** - The vice president of the drama society and make up lady for this performance.
- Cast 1& 2** - Optional extra member(s) of the cast

Other optional, non-speaking parts to play the rest of the 'cast' during the rehearsal.

## Scene 1 – Community centre hall

**(The action happens in the hall of the community centre. Upstage centre is a large wardrobe with a row of 3 or 4 chairs stage right of it. Stage left we can see some other chairs. The company arrives in ones and twos from stage right, ready to start rehearsal, chatting together. Lizzie arrives last in a rush sitting far left when they get the chairs.)**

**Robyn:** **(Stage right)** Okay everyone... the time is getting on, I think that we should make a start...

**(All the characters ignore him)**

**Robyn:** ... If you could take your seats for a moment ...

**(Everyone begins to put the chairs together stage right, still talking)**

**Robyn:** Your attention, please ... Oh, stuff this.

**(Robyn blows a whistle. They all sit down shocked)**

**Robyn:** Thank you.

**Sheila:** Was that really necessary, Robyn?

**Robyn:** What is necessary, Sheila, is that we get started. We have a lot to get through and I don't want to spend fifteen minutes like last week trying to get everyone to listen. So then, a few notices before we crack on with Act 2 scene 1. First and foremost, I know you were all very worried about Helen dropping out of playing Mrs. Braithwaite, the housekeeper; it did look as though we wouldn't be able to continue with the production.

**(Worried murmurs from the cast)**

**Robyn:** However, Eileen Bishop from The Woodhouse Players has stepped in to save the day!

**(Everyone seems relieved and pleased)**

**Millie:** She did very well in that melodrama they did last year.

**Robyn:** Exactly - so we know she can handle a part like this one.

**Sarah:** **(Raises her hand)** But does the County Arts Festival committee have any rules about drama group members and such?

**Robyn:** **(shakes his head)** Only that everyone who takes part is an amateur

**Julia:** No worries there then

**Sheila:** She'll be glad of a shot at winning the Festival Cup, I should think. Woodhouse hasn't won anything for eight years, now.

**Robyn:** Well, we can hardly afford to rest on our laurels. Doing a gothic romance is certainly different, that's true.

**(Murmurs from the cast)**

**Robyn:** BUT I know we can make 'The Horrors of Hanover House' something to make the judges sit up and pay attention.

**Sheila:** **(Aside)** I still say we should have stuck with a comedy

**Robyn:** Right, despite all the dramas over the last few weeks, our final list of the main cast is: Eileen Bishop to play Mrs. Braithwaite the housekeeper, Steve Parsons to play the dashing tutor Anthony St John, Sarah is our ghost and love interest, Isabela de Winter, Allen is Lord Benwick ... hang on, where is Allen? He's never late. Do you have any ideas, Julia?

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**Julia:** I don't know. He said he'd meet me here because he would be coming straight from work. He had something to take care of after the bank had closed. I've got his tea with me in a Tupperware.

**Millie:** It could be traffic, dear. Those roadworks on the High Street are causing chaos.

**Robyn:** Let's hope he turns up in a minute. So Allen is Lord Benwick, Sheila is Lady Benwick, and Janey Parsons is their daughter Mariah, Isabela's rival for the heart of Anthony St John ...

**Sheila:** Excuse me, Robyn, am I to play the part of Lady Benwick?

**Robyn:** Yes, didn't you get the email while you were on holiday?

**Sheila:** No, I was on holiday, Robyn, I was not going to read emails while on holiday! Lady Benwick, are you sure?

**Robyn:** Yes...

**Sheila:** The mother?

**Robyn:** Yes...

**Sheila:** Lady Benwick, not Lady Ridley?

**Robyn:** Yes...

**Sheila:** Isn't she a little, well, how can I put it...somewhat advanced in years? As she is the mother, after all?

**Robyn:** Yes ...

**Sheila:** **(Quietly, leaning towards Robyn)** Don't you think that the part of Lady Benwick is a little old for me?

**Robyn:** Well, what can I say? You married young and your husband is a lucky man! So that's the list of the main cast, the complete list is in the email...

**Cast 1:** **(To their neighbour)** Did you get an email? I don't think I got an email, did you?

**Millie:** **(Overhears)** You are on the list so you should have got it. It was sent out Tuesday morning.

**Robyn:** ... And we'll start extra rehearsals on Thursday mornings as from next week...

**Sarah:** **(Tentatively raising her hand)** I'm sorry, I can't make Thursday mornings. I have my old folk that I shop and clean for.

**Robyn:** Wednesday evenings?

**Sarah:** I work in the chip shop.

**Robyn:** Saturday mornings? **(Starting to look a little desperate and making notes on his script/note pad)**

**Sarah:** I clean in the chip shop before we open at lunchtime and then I work there until four.

**Sheila:** Why did you join the drama society, dear, if you cannot commit to rehearsals?

**Sarah:** My mum said it would be good to do something other than work. She said I needed to get more and broaden my horizons.

**Sheila:** And there's us thinking that some younger members would bring us a bit of life.

**Millie:** Don't worry, Sarah, we understand that you're a working woman. Isabella isn't such a big part, you'll manage.

**Sarah:** It seems like a big part to me, Mrs. Brown

**Millie:** **(Being friendly and reassuring)** It's Millie, dear. I'm not your Sunday school teacher anymore.

**Robyn:** We've only got eleven weeks until the County Arts Festival and we need to make up for lost time! During the break, Marvelous Millie will be measuring some of you for new costumes - after the disaster with the old ones. And Tracy will be here at 8:00 pm to do a makeup test for you, Sarah. We'll start then, shall we? Act 2 scene 1 everyone, and let's make it more 'The Mysteries of Udolpho' than 'Blyth Spirit'

**(They all look at him blankly)**

**Robyn:** Oh, never mind.

**Sarah:** **(She quickly goes up to Robyn)** You did explain to Tracy that I'm allergic to practically everything?

**Robyn:** Yes, yes. She owns a beauty salon so she knows what she's doing, she's very experienced.

**(Reassuringly, and putting his hands on Sarah's shoulders)**

**Robyn:** Stop worrying, Sarah, you'll be fine. I know you will. Right, let's move the chairs back... make a semi-circle please

**(The cast don't really move, just pick up their bags, look at their phones and scripts etc.)**

**Sheila:** **(Also going up to Robyn)** This part of Lady Benwick...

**Robyn:** Yes, Sheila?

**Sheila:** Are you sure it's really 'me'? I had been reading Lady Ridley, the cousin, you see. She's very vivacious, and I rather think she had her eye on Anthony too, you know.

**Robyn:** Sheila, we give great thought to all our castings. Lady Ridley is only a minor role, you see - two scenes tops. Whereas Lady Benwick is a pivotal character and integral to the piece. She has a regal bearing and a passionate soul... **(He gives her a moment to digest this)**

**Sheila:** A regal bearing... Hmm. **(She stands straighter, putting her chin at an angle)** Being a Lady means she's most certainly nobility, I suppose...

**Robyn:** Exactly **(seeing that she's coming around to it)** Who else could we cast for it really, Sheila?

**Sheila:** **(Pause, while she decides)** Hmm. I can hardly let you down now at this stage of things, can I? Rest assured, Robyn, I will do my best.

**Robyn:** Thank you, Sheila. **(He smiles to himself, then addresses everyone)** We'll start with a seated read-through to work on character expression and then after the break, we'll work on blocking out the scene, entrances, exits, and all that. Anyone not in the cast, like our production team, can I ask you to sit over there? **(indicates far stage right)** Thank you. Let's get to it.

**(The cast move the chairs into a rough semi-circle. Millie and Julia move their bags to the chairs stage right. The cast and director continue to act and talk using the minimum of movement so as not to distract from the conversation happening stage right.)**

**Julia:** Coo-ee! Lizzie! Over here with us, love.

**(Lizzie crosses to them)**

**Julia:** Oooh, I'm so glad you came.

**(Hugs Lizzie)**

**Lizzie:** I was nearly late! Things dragged on a bit at work.

**Julia:** How is the new job going? With all that added responsibility, you're quite an important person now.

**Lizzie:** Julia, I'm coming here to forget about work.

**Julia:** **(Julia mimes zipping her mouth closed)** Not another word.

**(Millie comes to sit down)**

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**Julia:** Millie, this is Lizzie, my neighbour's daughter. She moved back to town a few months ago.

**Millie:** Nice to meet you, dear, we weren't introduced properly last week, were we?

**(Julia, Millie, and Lizzie sit down)**

**Millie:** Have you settled in OK? Where were you living before?

**Lizzie:** I'd been working in the city for the last few years. When the opportunity came up to move back here, I was glad to take it.

**Millie:** Where are you working now?

**Lizzie:** Up the Stoneleigh Road...

**Millie:** **(Dismissively)** Oh, yes. There's that big new industrial park up there. **(Getting down to business)** So. Have you ever been part of a theatre group before?

**Lizzie:** Yes, various ones from leaving school up until now. I'm the assistant stage manager for this production; basically an important sounding title for Richard's go-for. I've been instructed to make detailed lists of props etc. tonight for Act 2. **(waves her notepad)** I'm honoured he trusts me with such an important job! **(laughs)** You're the costume lady, are you?

**Millie:** No, dear, Namita does our costumes mainly. She is so talented! There is nothing her and her daughter can't sew. I'm the drama society secretary and I help out wherever I'm needed – so it's costumes this production. It's all hands-on deck in that department.

**Lizzie:** What was the ‘disaster’ Robyn was talking about? What happened to the old costumes?

**Millie:** Well, we have a storeroom here at the community centre **(she points off stage left)** and Namita, Tracy, and I came here and sorted through the costumes to pull out those we could alter ready for the festival. We’ve done a few period pieces before so we had various costumes. We left them all on a rack by the window, and as luck would have it, some of the little hooligans that play football on the back field broke the window and then all the rain came in during that big storm. We can rescue some of them but others are completely ruined!

**Julia:** May I remind you that my grandson Davey plays footy on the back field and they’re all nice lads! Oh, Lizzie, this production has had one problem after another. Some of them **(she indicates the cast)** are even saying that the Curse of Hanover House has left the pages of the script!

**Millie:** Poppycock. It’s all human error and mishap.

**Sheila:** **(Standing suddenly and grossly over-acting)** My daughter, enamoured of a lowly tutor! It cannot be so. He has bewitched her young and tender heart. She is greatly his superior both in fortune and in status! We must put a stop to so un-advantageous a match, for the sake of our daughter, for the sake our family, for the sake of our reputation... **(out of character)** Robyn, how can I practice this scene with Allen not being here?

**Robyn:** I’ll read for Allen. Meanwhile, what is Lady Benwick feeling? Is she worried about the reputation of her daughter ... or herself?

**(Sheila sits down again.)**

**Julia:** Oooh, she lays it on as thick as a carpet.

**Millie:** Oh, shush. Sheila always goes over the top at first, Robyn knows that.

**(Pause and Millie, Julia, LIZIE watch the cast)**

**Millie:** That little Sarah is quite good, though. Surprising really, as she’s had very little experience.

**Julia:** I’m not surprised. She’s lived a lot of life in her few years.

**(The other two look interested)**

**Julia:** She used to have a nice little office job up at the bakery on Godstone Road...

**Millie:** Oh, where they made all those job cuts?

**Julia:** Exactly. She lost her job and her dad got given ‘early retirement’. Bless her, all these cleaning jobs and working in the chip shop is keeping her little family going. Ooh, I could have slapped that Sheila Bamcock earlier for looking down her rich, retired nose at her.

**Cast 2:** Are you sure? It says stage left in the script.

**Sheila:** Didn't you mark down the changes? Really.

**Cast 2:** Anyone got a pencil?

**Robyn:** Here, use mine. Can everyone please remember to bring a pencil to every rehearsal and to mark down any changes or direction notes relevant to their scenes.

**Julia:** **(She looks off stage right)** I wonder where Allen could have got to? He always likes a bite to eat before rehearsal

**Millie:** Maybe the Curse has got him **(dryly)**

**Julia:** Oh, don't you start! **(Pause)** And what are you smiling at, missy?

**Lizzie:** I'm testing my 'drama group phenomenon' theory.

**Millie:** Your what, dear?

**Julia:** Get a load of this, Millie, she told me all about it when she came round for tea last Wednesday. I bet you can guess the people too. Go on, Lizzie, you tell her

**Lizzie:** Like I said before, I've been in quite a few drama groups and I noticed that certain stereotypes exist in each one: The New Recruit – that'll be me this time; the Prima Donna, who, incidentally, can be male or female ...

**Julia:** I wonder who that can be? **(Indicating Sheila)**

**Millie:** Julia!

**Lizzie:** And there are usually at least three people with the same name

**Millie:** That's true. We have Hannah, Anna, and Anne

**Lizzie:** There were three Johns in my last drama group. Then, there three stereotypes for each sex. With the men, we have The Ladies' Man...

**Julia:** That'll be my Allen

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**Lizzie:** But your Allen is a lovable rogue rather than the sleazy type. Then we have number two, the Gay Guy and number three the Expert – who's – not; you know the one who goes on and on about their experience but can never remember their lines or nearly blows up the sound system.

**Millie:** Oh ...that's Adrian! My, you are very observant.

**Lizzie:** Yes. It's an occupational hazard, I'm afraid. Then we have the three typical women: WWW. First W, The Witch – who plays villains but in reality is a very sweet person...

**Millie:** Oooh, that'll be Ellen! She did a smashing Wicked Witch of the West (**Getting into the game**)

**Lizzie:** Next on the list is The Wasp – who gossips and stings you when you're not looking. (**The other two exchange a significant knowing look**) And then there's the Weirdo – you know, the person who everyone says 'Oh, of course she's in the drama group' about. And they usually wear earrings big enough to be seen on Google maps.

**Millie:** (**Together**) Deidra!

**Julia:** (**Together**) Deidra!

(**Millie and Julia giggle together**)

**Robyn:** Could you ladies keep it down a bit, please? We just have a little more to do and then we'll take a break.

**Julia:** Sorry, Robyn. Look busy a minute, ladies. Let's compare notepads or something.

**Sarah:** My love killed me, and now I am doomed to stay within these walls until love releases me. But the Curse of Hanover kills all love! Anthony, you are the first person to see me in 100 years, and I beg you to leave this place before the curse consumes you too.

**Lizzie:** (**Thoughtfully**) Are they really that superstitious, Julia? One broken window and a few soggy costumes hardly constitute 'a curse' now does it? Has anything else happened?

**Julia:** A few things actually. At first, they just seemed random incidents but now it's even got me thinking something's up.

**Lizzie:** Like what?

**Millie:** We enter the County Arts Festival every year, but this year, as Julia said, it's been one thing after another going wrong or awry. Firstly, we weren't even booked in – can you believe it?

**Lizzie:** Who usually does the booking?

**Millie:** Well, I do, as the society secretary, but I received an email to say that it had already been done. I happened to have an enquiry about something and contacted the festival's admin office, and good job too, because that is when I found out that we weren't even registered to take part! I couldn't believe it.

**Lizzie:** Who was the email from?

**Millie:** That's the thing. It was from the ODDS Bods email address

**Lizzie:** (**Lizzie looks blank**) The what?

**Millie:** Sorry, The Ollynsmead and District Dramatic Society; we call ourselves the ODDS BODS, dear. Come to think of it, the email wasn't signed. It just said something like: 'Dear Millie, a quick note to let you know that the booking has been taken care of' then the ODDS Bods logo at the bottom of the page.

**Lizzie:** You didn't think it odd at the time? No pun intended, sorry.

**Millie:** No, not really. I'd had a dose of the 'flu for a few weeks and I just thought it was someone doing me a good turn. Robyn had typed up the previous meeting's minutes for me so I just assumed it was someone doing something similar. Initially, I was quite touched.

**Julia:** You had a nasty do of it, didn't you? She was at home for weeks. It takes a real something to keep Millie away from things – you've never been so busy since you've retired have you: badminton on Tuesdays, the choir on Fridays, and 'Knit and Natter' at the church on Thursday afternoons.

**Millie:** Well, I do like to keep active

**Julia:** My grand kiddies take care of that for me!

**Millie:** Isn't that how you twisted your knee? What was it this time: football or basketball? I half expect to see you on a skate board in the park one of these days.

**Julia:** No. It was Lego on the kitchen floor. You wouldn't believe how much that stuff hurts when you tread on it! My foot just slipped from under me and down I went. I had to get our little Ashley to fetch the phone for me so I could call for help.

**Millie:** Is that the blonde one or the little sticky one?

**Julia:** The blonde one.

**Lizzie:** Millie, who would have access to that email account?

**Millie:** Um...Any one of us on the committee, I suppose.

**Sheila:** Ghosts, sir? Do you claim to have seen a ghost? What a feverish imagination you have! Your pernicious influence over my daughter shall end forthwith!

**Cast 1:** Sorry, what page are we on? 21 or 22?

**Sarah:** Page 23

**Robyn:** Yes, try to keep up. I know you're not actually in this part of the scene but it really helps if we're all on the same page. Literally and figuratively.

**Sheila:** Good luck with that.

**Millie:** And then there was this business of Helen dropping out. I couldn't believe it when they told me; it was a shock for all of us! She's a founding member, you know, usually very good on stage and very reliable. I still don't understand what went on there. Do you think she's got some personal problem that she can't talk about? Because it's not like her to commit to something and then just change her mind. I've known her since we started and that reason that Robyn gave us in the email just didn't ring true.

**Julia:** Hmmf. **(crosses her arms)**

**Lizzie:** What's the 'Hmmf' for, Julia?

**Julia:** Let's just say it was no curse that made Helen drop out. She wanted that part and would have done it full justice. I know more than I'm telling **(She checks stage left, then leans into Lizzie)** ... but she was forced out! Somebody put the pressure on her until she backed out. It nearly cost us the production, you know, Lizzie. Mrs. Braithwaite is one of the principal characters in the play and without her part filled we would have had to cancel the whole thing!

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**Millie:** Well, I never! Forced out, you say!

**Julia:** I trust you, Millie, not to say anything. I saw her last week and she was dreadfully upset about the whole business.

**Millie:** No, no, of course not. Oh, dear. Poor Helen! **(Pause)** You don't think ... **(pause as she allows the thought to take root)** ... you don't think someone is trying to sabotage the play, do you? Because I, for one, do not believe in this curse nonsense. But there have just been too many of these little 'coincidences'

**Lizzie:** My experience has taught me not to believe in curses or coincidences, Millie.

**Julia:** But who'd want to sabotage us?

**Millie:** And what would they get out of it?

**Lizzie:** I remember Sheila's remark about winning the cup. Is there any prize money that comes with it?

**Julia:** Oh, no, just a little County Arts Festival cup. It's a pretty cheap looking one at that. Our Petey had a nicer one from school for his football tournament

**Lizzie:** Do all the drama groups in the town get on well?

**Julia:** Any big rivalries you mean? Mafia drama groups, ooh what a laugh. 'This is our town... This is our turf... It's not personal, Sonny, it's strictly business...'

**Lizzie:** Well, adults don't always play nicely together, especially if they have to share the same sandbox

**Millie:** With regards to the festival, we have come either first or second place for the last few years, it's true, but it's all very amicable between the different groups; we all support each other.

**Lizzie:** Are there many different groups?

**Millie:** **(Thinking)** Now then. There are the Woodhouse Players...

**Julia:** They do a smashing Christmas show, Allen and I always go with the grandkids. Lots of singing and dancing, I love musical theatre but my Allen can't carry a tune in a bucket, bless him. Then over at the Stoneleigh end of town there's the Roundabout Theatre group ...

**Millie:** 'Swings' and roundabouts, more like! You wouldn't believe what goes on down there **(looks very disapproving)**

**Julia:** **(Good naturedly)** Yes, yes. All very torrid, apparently, but they do a great murder mystery dinner every autumn. You have to book well in advance to get tickets, you know.  
**(SFX Lizzie's phone rings and she apologetically runs off stage right.)**

**Lizzie:** **(As she nears the exit she speaks)** Fawkner, here ... Good. Did you track down Johnson's papers in the end?... **(fades as she leaves)**

**Julia:** I wish my Allen would call.  
**(Julia and Millie watch the rehearsal a moment)**

**Robyn:** Can you see how the tension builds in the scene? Anthony is to be expelled from the house, Mariah is to be sent away to her aunt; each of the lovers is to be pulled apart in different directions...

**Cast 1:** Page 23? Anthony isn't on page 23

**Sheila:** We are now on page 27. **(As if to an imbecile)**

**Cast 1:** Ah. Got it. Thanks.

**Sarah:** Will I actually have to cry on stage? Like properly cry? I don't know if I can do that

**Sheila:** Just sniff an onion in the wings before you go on, dear. It's an old theatre hack. It works a treat.

**Sarah:** Really? Euurr, I don't fancy doing that.

**Millie:** You don't think it's her, do you?

**Julia:** Who, Sheila?

**Millie:** No, Lizzie. She is new to the group after all and we hadn't had any trouble up until this production

**Julia:** Don't talk daft, Millie. It's more likely to be someone like that madam Sheila Bamcock. She didn't do us any favours, did she? Swanning off on holiday for three weeks just as we're about to go into rehearsals!

**Lizzie:** **(Lizzie slips back in from stage right and sits back down.)** It was a call from work, sorry.

**(Julia raises an eyebrow, but Lizzie shakes her head)**

**Millie:** Oh, it's all so horrid, but now I look at it there has to be something going on.

**Lizzie:** I agree with you, Millie. While I was on the phone, I ran around the back to check out that window. There is a great big tree right in front of it.

**Julia:** Yes, I know. What are you getting at, Lizzie?

**Lizzie:** Well, from what I could see, the tree would have protected the window. There's no way enough rain could have got in to ruin the costumes. The tree would also probably have stopped any accidents from a ball game. It's clear to me that window was intentionally broken. A football couldn't have broken that kind of glass

**Millie:** Oh, dear, oh, dear! My mind is all of a tizzy now. Well, I know it wasn't you, Julia...

**Julia:** Thanks for the vote of confidence

**Millie:** And it wasn't me. Damaging property and forcing people out ... who would do such a thing? Oh, it's horrible to think that it could be one of us. But what's the point of it, what would anyone gain?

**Lizzie:** That's what I keep coming back to.

**Julia:** Motive

**Millie:** Look at us; we've been watching too much Agatha Christie.

**Julia:** Not at all! It's always those right in the middle of things that know something they don't know they know, isn't that right, Lizzie?

**Lizzie:** Yes, I suppose it is, something observed or remembered that seemed odd at the time.

**Julia:** More odd than usual, you mean? I sometimes think the ODDS Bods is an apt name for this lot

**Lizzie:** Is there anything different about this year's arts festival in general? Anything different happen lately?

**Millie:** To be honest, there was a bit a rumpus at the committee meeting when Robyn put forward the choice of play. Some were dead against it.

**Julia:** **(Mimicking Sheila)** We should have stuck with a comedy

**Millie:** Sheila isn't even on the committee. Although not for want of trying

**Julia:** But it's what all those nay-sayers said, isn't it?

**Millie:** Yes, they thought we should stick with the tried and tested formula of a light comedy

**Julia:** But people want to see something different, and there are those in the group, believe it or not, that want to develop themselves and try new things. Oh, I know it's only am-dram but it's really important to some folk

**Lizzie:** Like Allen

**Julia:** Yes. Like Allen. He loves it!

**Lizzie:** He's good at it

**Julia:** Thanks, love

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**Millie:** But we're doing a gothic romance, not a comedy. So did Robyn propose such a thing to try to ruin our chances at the festival? Or is someone else trying to scupper the whole thing to prove a point? Oh, dear, my head is going round in circles! I don't know how Miss Marple does it.

**Julia:** I wish someone would solve the mystery of where my Allen has got to. It's not like him to be so late and the traffic isn't that bad. He never misses rehearsal and he never just not tells me if he has to change his plans. It's got me feeling worried.

**Robyn:** **(Standing up)** Right. Let's leave it there for now. We'll break now, everyone. Julia, are you doing the teas and coffees?

**Julia:** Yes, I have everyone's order from before we started. Lizzie, love, do you want anything, I didn't get around to asking you?

**Lizzie:** I got here late, that's why. Yes, sure. Look, I'll come and give you a hand if you like

**Julia:** Are you sure you don't want to question everyone? **(Quietly aside to Lizzie)**

**Lizzie:** Oh, stop it.

**Julia:** You can bring the bag with the biscuits in

**(Julia hands Lizzie one of her bags)**

**Robyn:** So fifteen minutes maximum and then back to work. Ok?

**(Murmurs all round. Checks watch)**

**Robyn:** Tracy will be here any minute to do your makeup, Sarah.

**Sheila:** Why is she doing it now? We have weeks before things like make-up checks need to be done.

**Robyn:** I don't know, Sheila, she's going away on holiday and wants it done before she goes, I suppose. Let's just take a break, shall we? **(He looks like he needs one)** Julia, could you call Allen and find out if he's coming? Millie, do you want to do costume measurements in the storeroom? Right. Fifteen minutes everyone. **(He slumps into a chair, absorbed with a script, stage left)**

**(Millie leaves with Sheila, carrying a tape measure and notebook, stage left. Lizzie and Julia leave stage right. Sarah stays. Any additional cast members relax on some chairs stage left or follow to the storeroom for measurements. SFX A mobile phone rings for some time, Sarah and Robyn look around but no one answers it and then it stops. Tracy enters stage right carrying a big bag. 'Hi, Tracy/Hello' is called out by anyone on stage.)**

**Tracy:** Hi, so you're Sarah

**Sarah:** Yes

**Tracy:** Hi, I'm Tracy. I'm doing makeup this time. Shall we go into the storeroom? I only like an audience when I'm on stage **(laughs)**.

**Sarah:** **(Doesn't laugh but looks rather serious in fact)** Millie is doing measurements for costumes in there.

**Tracy:** Oh, is she? Ok, no matter. Grab a chair and we'll go over here

**(They move downstage centre)**

**Sarah:** Robyn did explain to you about my allergies, didn't he?

**Tracy:** Yes, in great detail. But don't you worry, I bought something just for you. **(Sarah sits in the chair)** You've got nice skin. So, all I want to do this evening is to try out one possible look. I'll take a couple of photos and think about any changes I want to make, then run it by Robyn, that sort of thing.

**Sarah:** OK

**Tracy:** Do you wear much makeup?

**Sarah:** Not really. A bit of mascara, and maybe a bit of lippy if I go out. But I'm allergic to so much that I don't bother.

**Tracy:** Poor you! You must have to be so careful. It's a good job I know what I'm doing, eh?

**Sarah:** Yeah, I suppose so

**Tracy:** **(She starts to apply something to Sarah's face with a sponge)** This is a primer ... it helps the makeup stay put ...**(More dabbing with the sponge)** Relax! You look so worried you've gone and wrinkled up your forehead; you'll have lines in your make up.

**Sarah:** Sorry, I can't help it.

**Tracy:** You're playing the part of the tragic ghost then?

**Sarah:** Yes...

**Tracy:** Was it the part you wanted?

**Sarah:** Um, well, not really. I thought I'd play the maid but they said that I had great potential and there wasn't really anyone else, and that ...

**Tracy:** Oh, I see. Pressganged into it were you? **(Sarah nods)** Same thing happened to me last year in the Pantomime.

**Sarah:** Did you have a big part too? This is my first proper part and I'm bricking myself, to be honest

**Tracy:** I know just how you feel. Not easy is it, trying to remember everything? **(Pause while she switches products)** This is the makeup now. We'll see how it works with your skin tone. **(Pause while she applies the makeup)** Just between you and me, Sarah, that part last year was nearly too much for me.

**Sarah:** Was it? How?

**Tracy:** Oh yeah, what with working in the salon and trying to learn all those lines and having to get to rehearsals, it nearly killed me! **(More makeup)** Do you work, Sarah?

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**Sarah:** Yeah. Like a lot.

**Tracy:** Well, you'll soon see what I mean.

**Sarah:** This make up has a really strong smell, Tracy. Everything is supposed to be perfume free. Robyn said he explained everything...

**Tracy:** Trust me, it's fine. I brought it specially, and I mixed up the primer myself. Well, when it came to the week before the performance, let me tell you, I stopped sleeping! My nerves were electric. Like static running all over me. And the diarrhea I had before the dress rehearsal was awful ... Are you all right, love? Your forehead has gone all crinkly again.

**Sarah:** This was exactly what I was worried about – I just can't cope with any more stress in my life right now! Robyn keeps telling me that I'll be fine, but that just makes me feel even worse. **(Whispers)** What if I let everybody down?

**Tracy:** Oh. Yes. Imagine forgetting all your lines or freezing on stage in front of everyone? What a nightmare! I don't think I could ever live that kind of thing down, do you?

**Sarah:** Um, Tracy ... Tracy, my cheeks are stinging a bit. Are you sure that make-up is okay?

**Tracy:** Absolutely, it's perfect for you. How are you getting on with the others in the group? They can be a funny lot.

**Sarah:** Tracy, my neck and face is starting to itch ... and burn a bit **(She starts to panic a bit and scratch)** I really think... I really think I ought to wash it off... **(She rushes off stage right)**

**Tracy:** Suit yourself. **(Louder)** Let me help you. This makeup remover should do the trick **(She grabs a bottle out of her bag and follows Sarah to exit)**

**(Enter Millie. She moves Sarah's chair back to the semi-circle, but leaves Tracy's bag. Then, she shows Robyn something on her notepad and we hear the SFX mobile ring again. They look round for it.)**

**Robyn:** It must be in someone's bag **(Robyn looks back at the notepad)**

**Millie:** I recognise the ring tone, though I can't think whose it is

**(Sarah enters but stays stage right centre, obviously very upset and with red blotches all over her face and neck, she's clutching a cloth with which she continues to dab at her face)**

**Sarah:** Robyn, I'm sorry. I'm sorry but I can't do it ... I just can't do it... I can't! Look at my face!

**Millie:** **(Leaves her notepad with Robyn and crosses to Sarah)** Oh my goodness, Sarah. What on earth has happened?

**(Millie steers Sarah to sit on the chairs stage right of the wardrobe)**

**Sarah:** I can't do the part, Mrs. Brown, I just can't. I thought I could but I can't. Tracy just told me how hard it is taking a main part...

**Millie:** Oh, she did, did she?

**Sarah:** I can't cope with all that, not on top of everything else I've got going on right now. And now look at me! I knew I'd have an allergic reaction to the makeup (**trying not to cry or scratch her face**)

**Millie:** Just take a breath now, that's it. We'll fix you up in a jiffy. We've got all sorts of pills and potions in the first aid box. I'm sure we've got some allergy cream or some chamomile lotion at least. It's just here in the store cupboard...

**(Millie pats Sarah's hands, stands and crosses to the wardrobe while still talking. Millie unlocks and opens the door and we see Allen in the wardrobe with his eyes closed standing but leaning propped up against the back. There is a moment of shock and then she touches him. He slowly falls out of the wardrobe on top of little Millie. She screams like a banshee)**

**Millie:** **(Screaming)** He's dead .... He's dead ... He's dead all over me! Get him off ... Get him off!!

**(Millie is pinned under the body on the floor, Sarah is staring in shock)**

**Robyn:** **(Still looking at the script at first)** The screaming part isn't until scene two ... Millie! Good heavens!

**Julia:** **(Enters stage right waving the phone)** I've tried calling him but there's no reply ... Oh, dear God! Lizzie!!! **(She drops the phone in shock and stays stage right in shock)**

**(Lizzie enters quickly stage right and together with Robyn, rolls the body off poor Millie. Lizzie kneels and checks the body for signs of life)**

**Julia:** It's Allen! It's my Allen ... Oh, Lizzie is he alright?

**(Crosses to Allen, Millie, Lizzie and Robyn)**

**Lizzie:** His vitals are all fine. He seems to be asleep but he's not waking up ... It's not normal... I think he may have been drugged, Julia!

**Millie:** **(helped by Sarah she sits up)** I'm fine, don't worry. **(She dusts herself off and straightens her hair)**... Oh! Poor Allen! What happened to him? Oh! It was his mobile we heard, Robyn!

**(Julia sits on the floor stage right behind/upstage of Allen and puts her cardigan under his head.)**

**Lizzie:** **(Dialing on her mobile)** It's best we don't move him any more just now. I'll call an ambulance **(she moves away from the others to talk)**

**Julia:** To think he was here all along! Drugged and stuffed in a cupboard ... oh! **(near to tears)** There can be no doubt now that there's something sinister going on!

**Robyn:** What are you talking about, Julia? Surely not this nonsense about The Curse?

**Sarah:** Well, look at my face! I look like something out of horror movie.

**Millie:** These ‘Coincidences’ are starting to add up, Robyn. **(She stands up)** Point One: The booking wasn’t made and I received a suspicious email. Point two: The broken window in the storeroom ...

**Sarah:** I thought that was just some kids?

**Julia:** As I’ve said before, the lads are all good boys. And there’s no way the rain could have damaged the costumes like that – think how much water must have been put on them! I don’t know why we didn’t see it before.

**Millie:** And three: There’s more to Helen pulling out than getting cold feet.

**Robyn:** Look, I know we’re the dramatic society, but aren’t you ladies being a little too dramatic?

**Julia:** **(Blurts)** Helen was blackmailed! **(There is shock and reaction to her announcements)** She came round to see me last week with this nasty letter that said she’d had a thing going on with Allen during the last show. Hot stuff on and off of stage, it said!

**Robyn:** We all know she had a soft spot for Allen, being on her own now she probably just innocently enjoyed the attention. There’s no way any of us would have taken a rumour like that seriously!

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**Julia:** We all know that – and I know my Allen – but if the news had gotten out, she was worried that she’d lose her place on the church board and you know how folk like a scandal. I promised I’d keep it to myself but I can’t, not after this! Oh, Allen....Allen, love **(she clutches his hand)**

**Lizzie:** Wait! It looks like he’s coming round **(She kneels on his other side, stage left)** Allen ... can you hear me, Allen?

**(Allen loudly mumbles something incoherent)**

**Julia:** Allen, love, I’m right here

**Lizzie:** It looks like he’s trying to tell us something. Can you hear me, Allen?

**Allen:** **(He sounds drugged up or drunk)** It was Peter Pan... Peter Pan is a pirate!

**Sarah:** He’s off his rocker.

**Lizzie:** He’s hardly 100% coherent but let me talk with him a moment, he may be able to tell us what happened. Allen.... Allen .... Peter Pan, Allen, why is Peter Pan a pirate?

**Allen:** Peter Pan's a pirate ... All the fairy dust has gone, it's all gone ...

**Lizzie:** The fairy dust? Why do you need fairy dust?

**Allen:** All the fairy dust has gone, it's all gone ... we can't fly now ... Peter Pan took it all

**Sarah:** What's he going on about fairy dust for?

**Millie:** He's well away with the fairies - fairy dust or no.

**Robyn:** But what if it's not fairy dust, per se, but it just represents something to him while he's all dopey like this?

**Lizzie:** My thought's exactly

**Millie:** Represents something? Like what?

**Julia:** Ask him some more questions, Lizzie. Maybe he'll come round properly. I've never seen him like this.

**Lizzie:** Um, er, where is Peter Pan now, Allen?

**Allen:** Gone... it's all gone ... we can't fly now ... Peter Pan took all the fairy dust

**Robyn:** This isn't getting us anywhere.

**Lizzie:** **(Thinks a moment)** Allen, where was the fairy dust?

**Allen:** In the bank ... and it's all gone... Robert told me

**Lizzie:** **(To Julia)** Who is Robert?

**Julia:** His colleague at the bank, his deputy manager I think.

**Millie:** Oh! The bank account for the drama group is with the bank where Allen works, isn't it?

**Sarah:** But what has Peter Pan got to do with anything?

**Robyn:** **(Pause)** Peter Pan was our pantomime this year. Most of our money for the year comes in from the pantomime sales

**(Allen mumbles incoherently)**

**Julia:** It's alright, Allen love. You'll be okay. He will won't he, Lizzie?

**Lizzie:** Once he gets whatever it is out of his system, I'm sure he'll be fine. Just asking, but who played Peter Pan?

**Tracy:** **(Enters stage right and goes directly to her bag and puts the bottle back in it)** Right, I'll be off then. I've got packing to do and a plane to catch. **(She notices what's happening upstage)**

**Julia:** Tracy. Tracy was Peter Pan

**Millie:** And Tracy is the vice-president of the drama society

**Sarah:** And Tracy did my makeup

**Millie:** And it was Tracy who suggested putting the costumes near the window

**Robyn:** Tracy?

**(Pause while everyone stares at her)**

**Tracy:** What? What's up with ol' Allen? Had a tippie has he ... **(she laughs, but they stonewall her)** You think I had something to do with this? ... Why would I? I'm just off to Benidorm for my holiday

**Julia:** Help me up, Lizzie so I can knock her down!

**Allen:** **(Sits up a little more and sees Tracy)** Peter Pan ... what have you done with the fairy dust? It's all gone! Why did you become a pirate?

**Robyn:** Tracy!

**Tracy:** What's he on about? Mad ol' duffer

**Robyn:** Some things have been adding up around here – the costumes...

**Millie:** The booking...

**Sarah:** My face!

**Robyn:** And you, Tracy seem to be the connecting factor. Care to explain?

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**(Lizzie rises and casually moves stage right centre, between Tracy and the exit stage right)**

**Tracy:** **(She moves stage left, as if looking for escape, and then turns back centre)** You're all barmy! It's just random stuff happening. You can't blame me for any of it. **(She sees that they all mean business)** All right! I'm sorry! I only borrowed the money to pay off some debts.

**Sarah:** What money?

**Robyn:** From the panto. I'm guessing that's the fairy dust Allen is talking about.

**Millie:** What about poor Helen? Did you blackmail her too?

**Tracy:** I thought if the production was cancelled no one would find out what I'd done. Then Allen found out somehow at the bank and he met me here earlier and confronted me – the old fool ... so I ... so I stuck my pills in his tea.

**Millie:** Tracy! How could you?

**Julia:** Will someone help me up!!!

**Tracy:** I was going to pay back all the money, honest. This casino I'm going to in Benidorm, I did really well there last time I went ...

**Allen:** Julia? Is that you?

**Julia:** Oh, he's coming round properly. Hello, darling man. You gave us quite a scare.

**(Allen stays sitting up and is obviously more awake)**

**Tracy:** Well, I'll be long gone before you can tell the police! And you don't have any evidence anyway **(She grabs her bag off the floor)**

**Julia:** Ha! Tell them your day job, Lizzie!

**Lizzie:** **(She has moved to intercept Tracy. She speaks firmly and quietly, with absolute authority)** Detective Sergeant Elizabeth Fawkner, county CID. The rest of the boys will be here any second. I called it in when I phoned for an ambulance. Now Tracy, shall we go and sit in my car quietly or do I need my handcuffs?

**Millie:** She works up the Stonleigh Road, of course! **(Clicks her fingers)** There's the big new police headquarters up there. And there's me thinking she was a little secretary in an office on the trading estate. A detective sergeant, well I never, she doesn't look old enough!

**Lizzie:** **(She has Tracy by the arm who is slumped in defeat)** Talking of secretaries, give me a call tomorrow, Sarah. I may know of a job in my building.

**Sarah:** Really? Oh, that would be wonderful. All the cleaning products play havoc with my skin. I've got all my diplomas and everything!

**Lizzie:** We'll go and wait in the car park

**(Lizzie leads Tracy off stage right.)**

**Julia:** Are you feeling better, Allen love?

**Sarah:** Do you think the paramedics would have a look at my face? I'm starting to feel a bit puffy. Are you OK, Mrs Brown?

**Millie:** I'm sure they will, dear. Oh, my, I nearly had a heart attack when I saw Allen in the cupboard

**Sarah:** You really did scream

**(Sarah and Millie giggle a bit together)**

**Millie:** I'll give you lift home after, you can't go walking the streets looking like that **(More giggles)**

**Robyn:** Good grief, that's enough drama for one night. Time to head home I think - or to the pub! That looks like the ambulance arriving... Up we get, Allen.

**(Robyn helps up Allen)**

**Allen:** Ooh, my head... Look at all the pretty, bright lights ... I love you, Julia

**Julia:** I know you do, you daft herbert. But that's Robyn you're looking at.

**(Sarah helps Julia up and they all leave stage right together. As they do, Sheila can be heard from off-stage left).**

**Sheila:** Well, I suppose some of those costumes will be adequate, the brocade is nice on the damson coloured one. **(Enters)** As Lady Benwick I should have something quite regal I think ... All gone? No one said anything...well, really! Some people can be so selfish. **(She grabs her bag and stalks off stage right.)**

*The End*