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Background Artiste

A Play

Stephen Smith

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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BACKGROUND ARTISTE

First performed by Waterbeach Community Players at the Sawston Drama Festival on March 26th 1999 with the following cast:

Alf	Chris Shinn
Jessica	Sally Burgen
Mary	Jane Butcher
Enid	Bernardine Orrock
Walter	John Orrock

Produced and directed by Stephen Smith
Designed by Mark Easterfield
Stage Managed by Julie Petrucci
With the assistance of Martin Andrus, Simon Molloy, Valmai Furness and Roy Furness

CHARACTERS

Alf, middle-aged
Jessica, early 20s
Mary, thirties
Enid, elderly
Walter, elderly

The action takes place in the offices of a background artiste agency

Time—the present

Other plays by Stephen Smith published by
Samuel French Ltd

Departure
One-sided Triangle
Parentcraft

BACKGROUND ARTISTE

The offices of Alfredo Leache Artistes in London on a December morning

Alfred's desk, UR, *is littered with various papers and files. On the desk is a telephone and under the telephone is a* Yellow Pages *directory. In front of the desk is a chair for Alfred's clients.* UC *is Jessica's desk, equally untidy. On the desk, amongst the clutter, there is a telephone; a note pad and pen; a* Cosmopolitan *magazine and various directories, files and desk diaries.* DL *is a small coffee table with three chairs around it. On the table there are back copies of* The Stage *newspaper. Against the back wall* C, *there is a filing cabinet and some boxes. On the back wall* R, *there is a large display of photos of all the actors the agency represents and* L, *there is a noticeboard with theatrical posters and newspaper cuttings on it. All entrances and exits are made through the door* L

When the CURTAIN *rises, Walter and Enid are sitting at the coffee table. They are an elderly couple. Enid is wearing a pink hat, pink shawl and pink trousers. She is eating, with chopsticks, a Chinese take-away meal. Beside her chair is a large bag. Walter is wearing a raincoat and scarf. His left foot is heavily bandaged. He is reading a copy of* The Stage

Alfred Leach is sitting at his desk, and is on a telephone call to one of his clients. He is a middle-aged man and is dressed in black trousers with red braces, a shirt and a colourful tie

Alfred *(into the phone)* Yes love. ... Yes love. ... Yeah I quite understand, sweetheart, but isn't that what acting's all about:

become the character, live its life through you, use every fault and imperfection as a tool to assault the injustice of life. ... I know, I know, believe me, sugarplum, I've been there, but deep down, you know as well as I do, not all ducks are pretty. ...

Mary enters and walks up to Alfred's desk. She is casually dressed in a coat and carries a handbag. She is in her thirties

Let's face it, giving birth is embarrassing but we all have to do it!

Jessica, Alfred's secretary, enters and races up to Mary. Jessica is in her early twenties, smartly dressed and is wearing heavy make-up. She dreams of being an air stewardess and loves showing people to their seats. However, she looks like the kind of girl who works behind a perfume counter. She is a perfect vision until she opens her mouth

Jessica (*pulling Mary* C, *away from Alfred*) You're early. Alfredo's in a business meeting at present.

Mary Found you quicker than I thought.

Alfred (*looking at Mary; into the phone*) Would a bigger bottom help?

Jessica Excuse me for not smiling but I'm on a smile diet.

Mary Pardon?

Jessica (*picking up the notepad and pen from her desk*) Only close friends and family plus one new acquaintance a week, as it's only Monday I'd have nothing left to look forward to if I went for it now.

Alfred (*smiling at Mary; into the phone*) Perhaps smaller eggs then?

Jessica I hope you understand.

Mary (*unsure*) I think so.

Jessica Good. Every four thousand produce a wrinkle according to my flat mate so we've invested in a facial pension. Above our beds we have a sign, "Abstinence makes the face grow tauter". If you'd like to take a seat next to Enid and Walter ... (*She ushers Mary to her seat*)

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