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SF PERUSALS

Shock!

A Thriller

Brian Clemens

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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SHOCK!

Presented at the Palace Theatre, Westcliff-on-Sea, on the 30th April 1974, with the following cast of characters:

Ann Marsh	Ann Kennedy
Jenny Rayner	Lesley Grayburn
Terry Dexter	Simon Brent
Andy Flewin	Michael Graves
Steve Turner	David Becket
Peter Rayner	Philip Brack
Maggie Miller	Jenny Tarren

The play directed by Leslie Lawton

Setting by Dorothy Draper

The action takes place in Maggie Miller's country home, a converted windmill

ACT I	Friday afternoon	
ACT II	Immediately afterwards	
ACT III		
	Scene 1	Saturday afternoon
	Scene 2	Two hours later
	Scene 3	Monday morning

Time—the present

ACT I*

The interior of a large windmill, now converted into a house

Early afternoon

The conversion has been a thoughtful one, retaining much of the original character: an area of architectural interest and surprise. To one side and to the front of the stage is what might be loosely termed the "relaxing" area; here are some comfortable chairs, an occasional table, and a battered chesterfield. Beyond them a door leads off to a box-room. On the opposite side is an openwork wooden staircase leading up a few feet or so to where a kind of balcony/gallery runs along the wall. Off this gallery are two doors leading to bedrooms. Situated half-way along the gallery is a large oak coffer—open—its lid up. Close by the bottom of the stairs is a very, very small dining table and chairs. On the table is a telephone. Also, nearby, is a small statuette, a figurine we will see more prominently later. At the top of the stairs hangs a small Chinese wind chime hung at such a level that one might or might not accidentally brush against it while passing and set it tinkling distinctively. Between these two areas we have a virtually unobstructed view to the back of the stage—where, just off centre, is the main door leading directly in from outside. Above the door is a fairly deep transom window. To one side of this door, opposite from the stairs, almost facing us, is a tall cupboard with two long doors. To the other side is a modern kitchen unit, adjoined by a complex of modern kitchen cupboards. Just above the sink unit is a large window to the outside—an original window, set higher than one would normally set a "kitchen" window—so that, although one gets the impression of trees and space beyond, one does not get an eye-level view out. If anyone were standing outside it, one would be looking just over the top of their head. Near the sink unit is a rack containing bric-à-brac and a long kitchen knife. On a table is hi-fi equipment—also a tape-recorder. This is set prominently

One feels that this is the "main" area of the conversion—the place where one cooks, drinks, entertains, relaxes—the place where everything happens

The conversion is the home of Maggie Miller, a young air-hostess and, through the furnishings and bric-à-brac we should come to know her very well. She travels—there are many objets d'art *from many countries—including a Samurai sword wedged against a beam. She has a sense of humour—some of the bric-à-brac is frankly bawdy—bought for their amusement value. She is a modern young woman—mingled with the antique bric-à-brac are modern "Op" art items, and a great deal of the kitchen stuff is brightly coloured. She has style; the whole area evokes this*

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*N.B. Paragraph 3 on page ii of this Acting Edition regarding photocopying and video-recording should be carefully read.

When the CURTAIN *rises, the sun is shining outside: as the Act proceeds the outside light fades slowly, almost imperceptibly, until by the end of the Act it has changed from day to dusk, and the whole area is very shadowy. The whole area seems utterly empty for some moments—then we hear movement from the shadowy gallery—and suddenly the lid of the open coffer is closed. A man, Peter Rayner, is revealed standing there. He is about thirty, handsome, with a face full of character, a face not to be forgotten easily. He wears well-cut country clothes we will remember, and when he moves, he moves lightly, like an athlete. He remains by the coffer for a moment, tapping his fingers on the lid as though to say, "That's that!" There is something altogether furtive and guilty about his manner, about his presence here. We feel he does not belong here. Now he reacts as he hears the sound of a taxi approaching some way off. He is galvanised into action—he hurries down the stairs to the main door. Here he stops, rather urgently feels in his pocket for something. Finally he produces a fairly large door-key. He tosses it in his palm—then quickly opens the main door and exits. The door closes behind him—we hear the door being locked and then we see his hand appear through the transom to replace the key. Then the hand disappears*

The sound of the taxi is very loud now. It stops and becomes the familiar tick-over sound of a taxi. We hear a taxi door open and shut

Taxi Driver (*off*) Can I give you a hand with that, miss?
Ann (*off*) No, thanks, I can manage.

We hear the taxi start up and pull away again—and, as the sound recedes—we hear a knock at the door—then another

Maggie? Maggie?

The sound of the taxi has gone

We see Ann's hand appear at the transom window—take down the key there—we hear the door being unlocked—then the hand replaces the key again—and then the door opens and Ann Marsh enters. She might be anything from thirty-five to forty-five—a trim, very attractive woman who wears the figure-flattering uniform of an airline. She looks exactly like a stewardess, but actually she is part of ground operations. Despite her obviously groomed assurance there is a sense of fun about her; we like her immediately. She carries a smart week-end case, and a wrapped parcel or an anonymous bag large enough to contain a dress

Ann Maggie. Maggie? (*She does not really expect an answer, and is not at all alarmed—she knows her way around this place; she is at home here. She pauses to touch a certain item*) Oh, you're new. (*She sees a large chunk of card prominently propped up against the tape-recorder, with some message printed on it. She picks it up and reads*) "Darling. Have just popped into the village to pick up the cake. Make yourself at home." All right, I will. (*She puts down her case—determines that the kettle is filled—plugs it in—then takes the teapot lid off and picks up a large tin marked "Tea". It is empty. She goes to the tall cupboard, opens the right-*

hand door and reveals shelves of foodstuffs. She starts to rummage for fresh tea)

We see Jenny's hand appear at the transom, feel for and find the key—then the door opens and Jenny Rayner enters. Jenny is an attractive woman of about thirty

The open cupboard door screens Ann from Jenny, and vice-versa. For a few moments neither is aware of the other—as Jenny closes the door, then heads straight for the record-player—seems about to operate it—and then is startled as Ann closes the cupboard door

Hello. (*She blithely moves back to charge the teapot with tea*) Sorry if I startled you. I was just making some tea—join me?

Jenny Thanks. (*Amused*) Do you usually offer tea to strangers?

Ann You're no stranger. You're Jenny Rayner, aren't you?

Jenny Why, yes.

Ann Maggie's told me all about you.

Jenny I didn't expect to find anyone home. When the key's there—it usually means Maggie's out.

Ann (*her tea-making preparations completed*) I put it back, force of habit. And she is. Maggie. She is out. Popped into the village. (*She picks up her case and heads for the stairs*) I'll just put my things away, watch the kettle, will you? (*She starts to ascend the stairs*)

Jenny You must be Ann Marsh.

Ann stops and reacts

Ann Oh, I'm sorry, I . . .

Jenny Don't worry, Maggie's told me all about you, too.

Ann ascends the stairs and exits into the first bedroom door off the gallery

Jenny remains gazing after her for a moment—then suddenly she turns about and starts quickly to search the place—finally finding an ashtray—and taking from it a longish cigarette-end. She holds it up, stares at it, then turns to move and regard the tape-recorder again—her hands touch it

Ann enters from the bedroom with a parcel

Jenny hastily, guiltily thrusts the cigarette-end down behind a chair cushion, or similar place of concealment, and turns to face Ann

You must wonder what I'm doing here. I came to borrow a book, that's all. I often do that, take a walk through the woods, let myself in and . . .

Ann is preoccupied, moving to open the parcel or bag and to take out a distinctive party dress, to shake out the creases and hold it on its hanger

Ann (*interjecting*) Maggie's always kept an open house. I sometimes think *too* open. (*She turns quickly to Jenny*) Oh, I don't mean you. But living in such a lonely place as this—the key so obvious—anyone could get in. You're her nearest neighbour, aren't you?

Jenny Yes, we live about a mile away—beyond the wood. Peter and me. Peter's my husband.

Ann Yes, she's told me about him, too.
Jenny Oh, really?

Jenny might pursue this line of conversation but at this moment Ann shakes the dress free and holds it up to examine it

Ann It's travelled better than I thought, won't need to iron it after all.
Jenny For the party?
Ann Yes.
Jenny It's beautiful.
Ann You think so?
Jenny Mmm, I just wish *I* could afford something like it . . .
Ann Afford? How much do you think it cost then?
Jenny I know how much it cost. I saw this self-same dress in Harringhams just the other . . .
Ann (*interjecting*) Harringhams? (*She flourishes the dress—and then hangs it somewhere in the area*) Fifteen quid from the little *boutique* on the corner!
Jenny No!
Ann Afraid so. (*She moves to finish making the tea*) I know I shouldn't admit it, but, well—Maggie's spoken of you so often, I feel I'm just confiding in an old friend.
Jenny Yes, I feel the same about you. (*She produces cigarettes*) Cigarette?
Ann No thanks, I don't smoke.
Jenny Like Maggie. She doesn't smoke either.

Ann hands Jenny tea

Thanks.

A pause, they sip their tea

Ann Perhaps it's not so bad for Maggie, I mean she's away so often—hardly ever here—but you—don't you find it lonely living here?
Jenny I find it—restful. And anyway, the country is such a marvellous place to bring up the children.
Ann Oh, Maggie didn't tell me you had children.
Jenny Well, we don't. Not yet. But sooner or later . . . Children are the final expression of love, aren't they?
Ann So they say.
Jenny What did Maggie tell you about Peter?
Ann Eh?
Jenny You said she told you about Peter, what did she say?
Ann Well, that he's your husband, a promising architect, good neighbour —attractive . . .
Jenny She told you that?
Ann Why? Isn't it true?
Jenny (*smiling*) Yes, of course. At least, I think so.
Ann And so does Maggie.
Jenny Yes. (*She turns her attention to the hanging dress*) I was planning to wear just jeans or something, but if you're going to be wearing *this* . . .
Ann Maggie said "casual" and these days that can mean anything from a

T-shirt to a tiara. I just felt like dressing up because—well—I just felt like it, that's all . . . (*After a slight hesitation*) Your husband is about the same age as you, isn't he?

Jenny Two years older. Why?

Ann Just curious. (*Slight pause*) No. Can you keep a secret?

Jenny Probably.

Ann Tonight could be a double celebration—Maggie's birthday—and my engagement!

Jenny That's wonderful!

Ann That's why I bought the dress—but you mustn't breathe a word, not until it's official. All these years with the airline—chasing a career . . . Oh, there have been men, of course, but never *one* man. *The* man . . .

Jenny Until now.

Ann Yes. I love him, Jenny. I love him so much.

Jenny And he loves you.

Ann I think so.

Jenny Well then . . .

Ann But he's younger than me. Nearly five years younger.

Jenny Well, that's hardly a generation gap. More of a generation crack!

Ann You really think it doesn't make any difference?

Jenny Why should it? If you love each other . . .!

Ann Yes. (*Smiling*) I had to tell *someone.*

Jenny I'm glad you did. And I'm happy for you. But, Ann, don't be taken in. Make sure. Quite sure!

Ann What?

Jenny abruptly moves away to the bookshelves

Jenny (*examining and discarding books*) Pay no attention to me. This is my day for cynicism.

Ann, a bit uncertain, moves closer

Ann That's not bad—if you like frothy romance.

Jenny Mmm. I expect she keeps the best books locked away somewhere.

Ann Best books?

Jenny How long have you known Maggie?

Ann Since I helped to train her—how to soothe the savage passenger and not spill soup into his ear—that kind of thing.

Jenny But you don't know about the books.

Ann Books? What books?

Jenny The spicy, kinky books. The porny ones.

Ann (*laughing*) What?

Jenny Maggie brings them back from abroad. Smuggles them in.

Ann (*still amused*) She told you that?

Jenny No. She showed me. I was telling her about—about a friend of mine whose husband isn't being as attentive as he was—and Maggie produced *her* method, as she called it.

Ann A pornographic book?

Jenny Yes.

Ann One book doesn't make a collection.
Jenny It isn't just books.
Ann What do you mean?
Jenny I'm sorry. Maggie's a friend of yours and I shouldn't be . . . Look, let's forget the whole thing, shall we?
Ann Oh, no, I want to know what you meant by that last remark. "Not just books." What did you mean?

Jenny regards her and hesitates

Jenny All right. It's this. (*She moves to touch the tape-recorder*)
Ann The tape-recorder?
Jenny I don't think she meant to tell me—but she'd been drinking and it just slipped out.
Ann What did?
Jenny If men were butterflies, Maggie would pin them to a card, but they're not—so she does the next best thing. The next worst thing. She puts them on tape.
Ann (*laughing*) One, two, three, testing . . .!
Jenny (*interjecting*) No! No, Ann. Not talking. Not *just* talking. Every gasp, every murmur—every . . . You know.
Ann I don't believe it. Whenever Maggie has an affair—whenever she makes love . . .?
Jenny She commits it to tape.
Ann I do not believe it. This recorder . . .? (*As she speaks, she presses the button*)
Jenny No!

Jenny is too late—the tape turns—and, from the recorder comes the sound of pleasant music. It plays for a few moments—and then Ann snaps off the recorder again and turns to look sympathetically at Jenny

Ann You don't like Maggie much, do you?
Jenny Yes, yes, I do like her. I *do*. But . . .
Ann (*quietly*) But?
Jenny I always feel so *plain* when she's around.
Ann But, Jenny, you're not a bit plain.
Jenny Dull then. When she starts talking about all the wonderful places she flies to—places I'm only ever likely to *read* about—it sounds so—so glamorous. So exciting.
Ann Excitement—glamour? Yes, it's sometimes like that I suppose. But not always . . .

Jenny regards her with some compassion

Jenny I'd forgotten. You were in a bad air crash, weren't you? Maggie told me. A bad air crash and you were the only survivor?
Ann (*with bitter-sweet irony*) Yes, I was the lucky one.
Jenny It must have been awful—a terrifying experience.
Ann Mercifully I don't remember. I was in a coma for weeks—and the rest—I've taught myself to forget.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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