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SF PERUSALS

GO BACK FOR MURDER

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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www.samuelfrench.co.uk
www.samuelfrench.com
www.agathachristielimited.com

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UNITED KINGDOM AND WORLD
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Go Back For Murder was presented by Peter Saunders at the Duchess Theatre, London, on March 23rd, 1960. The Director was Hubert Gregg, with sets by Michael Weight. The cast was as follows:

JUSTIN FOGG . . . . . Robert Urquhart
TURNBALL . . . . . Peter Hutton
CARLA / CAROLINE CRALE . . . . . Ann Firbank
JEFF ROGERS . . . . . Mark Eden
PHILIP BLAKE . . . . . Anthony Marlowe
MEREDITH BLAKE . . . . . Laurence Hardy
LADY MELKSHAM . . . . . Lisa Daniely
MISS WILLIAMS . . . . . Margot Boyd
ANGELA WARREN . . . . . Dorothy Bromiley
AMYAS CRALE . . . . . Nigel Green

CHARACTERS

JUSTIN FOGG
TURNBALL
CARLA
JEFF ROGERS
PHILIP BLAKE
MEREDITH BLAKE
LADY MELKSHAM
MISS WILLIAMS
ANGELA WARREN
CAROLINE CRALE
AMYAS CRALE

NOTES ON CASTING

TURNBALL can double as **MEREDITH BLAKE**.
JEFF ROGERS can double as **PHILIP BLAKE**.
AMYAS CRALE can also double with **TURNBALL** or **JEFF RODGERS**.
Minimum number of performers: 8.

SETTING

ACT I

London
Scene One: A lawyer's office.
Scene Two: A city office.
Scene Three: A room in a hotel suite.
Scene Four: A bed-sit.
Scene Five: A table in a restaurant.

ACT II

Alderbury, a house in the West of England.

TIME

1964. Autumn.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Carla and her mother, Caroline Crale, are played by the same actress.

As regards Act II, the characters are seen sixteen years in the past. Philip is not greatly changed, but his hair is not grey at the temples, and he is more slender, his manner is less pompous. Meredith is less vague, and more alert, his face is less red, and there is no grey in his hair. There is very little change in Miss Williams, except that she is also not so grey. Angela can have plaits, or long hair. Elsa must present the most profound change from Lady Melksham, younger in appearance and eager in attitude. Caroline is distinguishable from Carla by a different hair style, as well as by an older make-up. Her voice, too, must be different, deeper in tone, and her manner more impulsive and intense.

ACT I

Scene One

(Justin Fogg's room in the offices of Fogg, Fogg, Bamfylde & Fogg, Solicitors. An early autumn afternoon in London. The room is rather old-fashioned and cramped for space. The walls are lined with books. There is a door that leads to the rest of the building and a sash window with large desk and swivel chair in front of it. There is also a chair for visitors and a small table covered with files. **JUSTIN FOGG** *is seated at the desk on the telephone. The window is half-open.* **JUSTIN** *is a young man in his early thirties, sober, staid, but likeable.)*

JUSTIN. I quite see your point, Mrs. Ross, but the Law can't be hurried, you know –

*(***TURNBALL***, a clerk enters carrying a file.)*

– we have to wait for their solicitors to reply to our letter…

*(***TURNBALL** *coughs.* **JUSTIN** *turns.)*

Come in, Turnball.

(He returns to the call.)

No, it would be *most* inadvisable for you to take *any* steps yourself… Yes, we will keep you informed.

(He puts down the telephone.)

Women!

*(**TURNBALL** places the file on the desk in front of **JUSTIN**.)*

JUSTIN. Miss Le Marchant?

TURNBALL. She's here now, sir.

JUSTIN. Show her in, Turnball. I don't want any interruptions *at all.* Put anything urgent through to Mr. Grimes.

TURNBALL. Very good, sir.

*(**TURNBALL** exits. **JUSTIN** opens the file and looks through it. **TURNBALL** re-enters and stands to one side.)*

(Announcing.) Miss Le Marchant.

*(**CARLA** enters. She is aged twenty-one, pretty, and determined. She speaks with a Canadian accent. **TURNBALL** exits. **JUSTIN** offers his hand.)*

JUSTIN. How do you do?

CARLA. How do you do, Mr. Fogg?

(She looks at him in dismay, ignoring his outstretched hand.)

But you're *young!*

JUSTIN. *(Amused.)* Thank you. But I can assure you I'm a fully qualified solicitor.

CARLA. I'm sorry – it's just – that I expected you to be – rather old.

JUSTIN. Oh, you expected my father? He died two years ago.

CARLA. I see. I'm sorry. It was stupid of me.

(She offers him her hand. They shake.)

JUSTIN. Do sit down.

(They sit.)

Now, tell me what I can do for you.

(There is a pause. **CARLA** *is a little uncertain how to begin.)*

CARLA. Do you know who I am?

JUSTIN. Miss Carla Le Marchant of Montreal.

CARLA. My name isn't really Le Marchant.

JUSTIN. Oh, yes, it is. Legally.

CARLA. So you *do* know all about me?

JUSTIN. We have acted for Mr. Robert Le Marchant over a number of years.

CARLA. All right, then, let's get down to it. My name may be legally Le Marchant by adoption – or deed poll – or habeas corpus – or whatever the legal jargon is. But I was born –

(She pauses.)

– Caroline Crale. Caroline was my mother's name, too. My father was Amyas Crale. Sixteen years ago my mother stood trial for poisoning my father. They found her guilty.

(She takes a deep breath.)

That's right, isn't it?

JUSTIN. Yes, those are the facts.

CARLA. I only learned them six months ago.

JUSTIN. When you came of age?

CARLA. Yes. I don't think they wanted me to know. Uncle Robert and Aunt Bess, I mean. They brought me up believing my parents were killed in an accident when I was five years old. But my mother left a letter for me – to be given me when I was twenty-one, so they had to tell me all about it.

JUSTIN. Unfortunate.

CARLA. Do you mean you think they ought not to have told me?

JUSTIN. No, no, I don't mean that at all. I meant it was unfortunate for *you* – it must have been a bad shock.

CARLA. Finding out that my father was murdered and that my mother did it?

(There is a pause.)

JUSTIN. *(Kindly.)* There were – extenuating circumstances you know.

CARLA. *(Firmly.)* It's not extenuating circumstances I'm interested in. It's facts.

JUSTIN. Yes, facts. Well, you've got your facts. Now you can put the whole thing behind you. It's your future that matters now, you know, not the past.

CARLA. I think, before I can go forward – I've got to – go back.

JUSTIN. *(Puzzled.)* I beg your pardon?

CARLA. It's not as simple as you make it sound.

(She pauses.)

I'm engaged – or I was engaged – to be married.

*(***JUSTIN** *picks up a cigarette box from the table and offers one to* **CARLA**.*)*

JUSTIN. I see. And your fiancé found out about all this?

CARLA. Of course, I told him.

JUSTIN. And he – er – reacted unfavourably?

CARLA. Not at all. He was perfectly splendid. Said it didn't matter at all.

JUSTIN. *(Confused.)* Well, then?

CARLA. It isn't what a person *says*...

(She leaves it at that. There is a pause.)

JUSTIN. Yes, I see. At least, I think I do.

CARLA. Anyone can *say* things. It's what they *feel* that matters.

JUSTIN. Don't you think that perhaps you're super-sensitive?

CARLA. *(Firmly.)* No.

JUSTIN. But, my dear girl...

CARLA. Would *you* like to marry the daughter of a murderess?

(She looks at **JUSTIN**. *He looks down.)*

You see, you wouldn't.

JUSTIN. You didn't give me time to answer. I wouldn't particularly *want* to marry the daughter of a murderer, or of a drunkard or of a dope-fiend or of anything else unpleasant. But what the hell, if I loved a girl, she could be the daughter of Jack the Ripper for all I cared.

CARLA. I don't believe you would mind as much as Jeff does.

(She shivers.)

JUSTIN. Do you find it cold?

CARLA. I think your central heating's kind of low.

JUSTIN. It's kind of non-existent, I'm afraid. *(Smiling.)* I mean, we haven't any. Shall I get them to light the fire for you?

CARLA. No, please.

*(***JUSTIN** *sees the window is open and quickly closes it.)*

JUSTIN. This Mr. – er... This Jeff...?

CARLA. You'll see him. He's coming to call for me, if you don't mind.

(She looks at her wristwatch.)

Hell, I'm wasting time. I didn't come to consult you about my love life. *(Struck.)* At least, I suppose I did. I've got to find out the truth, you see.

JUSTIN. I told you just now that there were extenuating circumstances. Your mother was found guilty, but the jury made a strong recommendation to mercy. Her sentence was commuted to imprisonment.

CARLA. And she died in prison three years later.

JUSTIN. Yes.

CARLA. In her letter, my mother wrote that she wanted me to know definitely that she was innocent.

(She looks defiantly at **JUSTIN**.*)*

JUSTIN. *(Unimpressed.)* Yes.

CARLA. You don't believe it?

JUSTIN. *(Carefully.)* I think – a devoted mother – might want to do the best she could for her daughter's peace of mind.

CARLA. No, no, *no!* She wasn't like that. She never told lies.

JUSTIN. How can you know? You were a child of five when you saw her last.

CARLA. *(Passionately.)* I do know. My mother didn't tell lies. When she took a thorn out of my finger once, she said it would hurt. And going to the dentist. All those things. She was never one to sugar the pill. What she said was always *true.* And if she says she was innocent then she *was* innocent. You don't believe me – but it's *so.*

(She takes a handkerchief from her pocket and dabs her eyes.)

JUSTIN. *(Rising.)* It's better, always, to face the truth.

CARLA. That *is* the truth.

JUSTIN. *(Quietly.)* It isn't the truth.

CARLA. How can you be so sure? Does a jury never make a mistake?

JUSTIN. There are probably several guilty people walking around free, yes, because they've been given the benefit of the doubt. But in your mother's case – there wasn't any doubt.

CARLA. You weren't there. It was your father who attended the case –

JUSTIN. *(Interrupting.)* My father was the solicitor in charge of the defence, yes.

CARLA. Well – *he* thought her innocent, didn't he?

JUSTIN. Yes. *(Embarrassed.)* Yes, of course. You don't quite understand these things…

CARLA. *(Cynically.)* You mean that it was *technical* only?

*(***JUSTIN** *is slightly at a loss how to explain.)*

But he himself, personally – what did *he* think?

JUSTIN. *(Stiffly.)* Really, I've no idea.

CARLA. Yes, you have. He thought she was guilty. And you think so, too.

(She pauses.)

But how is it that you remember it all so well?

JUSTIN. I was eighteen – just going up to Oxford – not in the firm yet but – interested. I was in court every day.

CARLA. What did you think? Tell me. *(Eagerly.)* I have to know.

JUSTIN. Your mother loved your father desperately – but he gave her a raw deal. He brought his mistress into the house – subjected your mother to humiliation and insult. Mrs. Crale endured more than any woman could be expected to endure. He drove her too far. The means were to hand – try and understand. Understand and forgive.

CARLA. I don't need to forgive. She didn't do it.

JUSTIN. Then who the devil did?

*(***CARLA** *is taken aback. There is a pause.)*

Well, that's the point, isn't it? Nobody else had the slightest motive. If you were to read up the reports of the case…

CARLA. I have. I've gone to the files. I've read up every single detail of the trial.

*(***JUSTIN** *goes through the file on his desk.)*

JUSTIN. Well, then, take the facts. Aside from your mother and father, there were five people in the house that day. There were the Blakes – Philip and Meredith, two brothers, two of your father's closest friends. There

was a girl of fourteen, your mother's half-sister Angela Warren, and her governess – Miss – something or other, and there was Elsa Greer, your father's mistress – and there wasn't the least suspicion against any of them, and besides, if you'd seen...

(He breaks off.)

CARLA. *(Eagerly.)* Yes – go on...

JUSTIN. *(Sensitively.)* If you'd seen her standing there in the witness box. So brave, so polite – bearing it all so patiently, but never for one moment fighting. You're like her, you know, to look at. It might *be* her sitting there. There's only one difference. You're a fighter.

CARLA. *(Puzzled.)* She didn't fight – why?

(He looks in the file again.)

JUSTIN. Montague Depleach led for the defence. I think now that may have been a mistake. He had an enormous reputation, but he was – theatrical. His client had to play up. But your mother didn't play up.

CARLA. Why?

JUSTIN. She answered his questions with all the right answers but it was like a docile child repeating a lesson – it didn't give old Monty his chance. He built up to the last question – "I ask you, Mrs. Crale, *did* you kill your husband?" And she said: "No – er – no, really I d-didn't." She stammered. It was a complete anti-climax, utterly unconvincing.

CARLA. And then what happened?

JUSTIN. Then it was Asprey's turn. He was Attorney General, later. Quiet, but quite deadly. Logic – after old Monty's fireworks. He made mincemeat of her. Brought out every damning detail. I – I could hardly bear it...

*(***CARLA** *studies him.)*

CARLA. You remember it all very well.

JUSTIN. Yes.

CARLA. Why?

JUSTIN. *(Surprised.)* I suppose…

CARLA. Yes?

JUSTIN. I was young, impressionable.

CARLA. You fell in love with my mother.

*(***JUSTIN** *forces a laugh.)*

JUSTIN. Something of the kind – she was so lovely, so helpless. She'd been through so much – I – I'd have died for her. *(Smiling.)* Romantic age – eighteen.

CARLA. *(Frowning.)* You'd have died for her – but you thought her guilty.

JUSTIN. *(Firmly.)* Yes, I did.

*(***CARLA** *is really shaken. She fights back her tears.* **TURNBALL** *enters.)*

TURNBALL. A Mr. Rogers is here, sir, asking for Miss Le Marchant.

CARLA. Jeff. Please ask him to wait.

TURNBALL. Certainly, Miss Le Marchant.

*(***TURNBALL** *looks closely at* **CARLA** *for a moment, then exits.)*

CARLA. He looked at me…

JUSTIN. Turnball was at your mother's trial. He's been with us for nearly forty years.

CARLA. Please, ask him back.

*(***JUSTIN** *moves to the door.)*

JUSTIN. *(Calling.)* Turnball.

*(***TURNBALL** *enters.)*

TURNBALL. Yes, sir?

*(***JUSTIN** *motions to* **CARLA**.*)*

CARLA. Mr. Turnball – I'm Carla Crale. I believe you were at my mother's trial.

TURNBALL. Yes, Miss Crale, I was. Er – I knew at once who you were.

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