

and now for something rather different:

THE SAFETY OFFICER

A Short Comedy Stage Play in One Act, by Thomas Baines

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THE SAFETY OFFICER

A SHORT SYNOPSIS

I have described the play as a comedy, and hope that the reader finds it to be so. Its basis being a fire that has supposed to have occurred backstage of a theatre just before a play is about to be presented – actually, the fire has already been put out. The theatre management's unsuccessful efforts in trying to conceal the incident results in one of the company's actor's (Rex) being sent onstage in an effort to quell any possible unrest amongst the audience (he pretends he is the Theatre's Fire Officer). But instead he uses the opportunity to lambaste the play's producer (Gerald) and another actor (Rodney). ... In an effort to get him offstage, an actress (Carol) is sent on in order to try to persuade him to get off. Rex is in love with Carol, but she does not reciprocate his feelings – she in fact loves Rodney. Happenings onstage result in Rodney dashing on in an effort to assault Rex. ... Another actress (Monica) later gets involved, as does Gerald. ... The play ends with the cast about to dash offstage after hearing the sirens of fire engines pulling-up outside the front of the theatre.

THE CHARACTERS

In order of Appearance.

GERALD: He is the Stage Manager. A little overweight and in his late-thirties, wearing a polo neck sweater, jeans and sandals, possibly sporting a type of scruffy goatee beard and having his hair in the ponytail style.

TWO FIREMEN: Each is dressed in his obvious fire-fighter's outfit – helmet, black and yellow waterproofs and all. Both have black soot marks on their faces, and these together with the appropriate marks on their clothes, indicate that they have recently been fighting a fire.

REX: He, slim, average height and in his late-twenties, is wearing a two-piece suit (with collar and tie etc.), that whilst not appearing to be actually scruffy, has obviously seen better days.

CAROL: An attractive-looking woman in her mid-twenties, dressed in a smart-looking tennis outfit.

RODNEY: A large athletically-built and handsome man of about twenty-five, dressed in a tennis outfit.

MONICA: Is a sturdily built (but not really fat) woman in her late forties. She has a formidable countenance, being one who is obviously used to getting her own way. She being dressed soberly in a tweed jacket, suitable pleated skirt with blouse and wearing sensible flat-heeled shoes.

THE STAGE SET & PROPS

A BACKDROP: The bottom centre part of which is black over an appreciable area where it appears to have been scorched by a fire. This and surrounding areas of the stage floor are damp and there are small pools of water on the floor in the vicinity. A fire has obviously been recently dampened down.

THE STAGE CURTAINS are called for in the plot.

TWO FAIRLY LARGE FIRE HOSES – being rolled up (the flat fire services type – not garden hose).

SOUND EFFECTS

As described in the Plot

LOUD HAMMERING SOUND heard from behind the closed Stage Curtain.

TREMENDOUS THUD heard coming from behind the closed Stage Curtain.

Use of the STAGE and THEATRE'S LOUDSPEAKER SYTSTEMS:

Full-blooded rendering of the march 'Colonel Bogey on Parade', heard over the theatre's loudspeaker systems.

Sounds heard coming from and outside the theatre's foyer:

Sounds of a fire engine siren and the sound of the fire engine's squealing brakes as it comes to a stop.

THE PROLOGUE

(The Stage Curtains are in the CLOSED POSITION.)

(GERALD walks on-stage in front of the curtains – he appears to be anxious. He is carrying a theatre programme in one hand, from which he will quote.)

(Clearing his throat, he prepares to address the audience – as he then speaks he occasionally gives nervous glances towards his left):

GERALD: Good-Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. ... I-I'm the play's producer, and I have an important announcement to make. ... For the benefit of everybody, especially those who do not have a programme, I wish to quote from page two of it.

(He then reads from the programme):

GERALD: 'During the course of our play, statements will be made which, together with certain happenings, may indicate to some that not only are there deficiencies regarding the safety features in this theatre, but you yourselves are in some danger. ... The theatre management therefore wishes to emphasise that all these are part of the play's plot, and that nobody is or will be in any danger. Furthermore, the safety standards of this theatre are in accordance with the very highest safety requirements'.

(He lowers the programme and looks up at the audience):

GERALD: I hope that makes it very clear to everyone – we don't want anyone dashing out in a blind panic, do we? ... Em, in the very unlikely event that some real emergency crops up, I, accompanied by the theatre manager, will stop the play, and from the stage, personally make any announcement required.

(After a short pause):

GERALD: I-I have second announcement, it being in the form of an apology. I'm sorry to say we have had, em, had a little mishap with the stage props – this is at present being attended to and should only delay the play for a few minutes. ... I ask that you kindly bear with us, and sincerely hope that you enjoy our presentation. ... Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen!

(He then walks off the stage).

End of Prologue

(There is a wait of about two minutes – THEN):

THE ACTION

*(The Stage Curtains **SLOWLY OPEN** to reveal the following):*

(TWO FIREMEN are seen in front of the backdrop centre. ... The FIREMEN have their backs to the audience, being busily engaged in rolling up a couple of fairly large fire fighting hoses {the flat fire services type – not garden hose}).

(One of the FIREMEN ('A') happens to look up from his labours and glances round – he is at once obviously very surprised to see the audience. He gives a sheepish grin at them, after which he is seen to turn and whisper to the other FIREMAN ('B') – who after immediately going tense, slowly and deliberately turns his head and looks at the audience. He now looks shocked. Then without diverting his eyes, he murmurs something out of the corner of his mouth to FIREMAN 'A'. They BOTH stand up straight, then slowly turn round to face the audience. Each is looking very uncomfortable, obviously not sure what to do – FIREMAN 'A' constantly repeating his grins of embarrassment, whilst FIREMAN 'B' stares wide-eyed and open-mouthed in amazement. ... FIREMAN 'A' murmurs something out of the corner of his mouth to FIREMAN 'B', then slowly walks off the stage in an awkward and self-conscious manner – looking at the floor, except for occasional nervous glances in the direction of the audience. ... FIREMAN 'B' watches him depart, then looks at the audience, giving a series of nervous grins interposed with quick glances in the direction of his departed colleague).

(Suddenly, GERALD'S loud voice is heard to shout in an alarmed way from the Stage's Loudspeaker System):

GERALD (voice only): What?

(After a quick and startled glance round the open curtain at the audience {at the side of stage where Fireman 'A' went}, he is then heard to exclaim):

GERALD (voice): Bloody hell!

(He then is heard to shout to somebody):

GERALD *(voice only)*: Arthur! Arthur! Get those bloody curtains closed – right away!

(There is a brief pause, then):

GERALD *(voice only)*: Arthur! Arthur! Get the fu— ... Good God! Who switched the microphone on?

(FIREMAN 'B' is now staring in his offstage direction in a horrified way).

*(GERALD is heard no more – the Stage Curtains **SWIFTLY CLOSE**).*

(After a pause of about thirty seconds, a click then loud crackling noises are heard coming over the Theatre's Loudspeaker System. This is followed by the now much quieter sound of crackling as the GERALD speaks to the audience):

GERALD *(voice only)*: Hello – Hello, everybody! Th-This is the Producer. Please pay attention – I-I have an important announcement to ma...

(His voice is then obliterated by the sound of the crackling becoming loud once again. The noise continues for a few seconds, then it suddenly becomes much quieter – long enough for the audience to hear his thoughts being spoken aloud):

GERALD *(voice only)*: The bleedin' things playing up again – it's supposed to have been fixed! ... The staff of this theatre are nothing but a load of cu...

(His voice is once again obliterated by the crackling noise. There is a click, and then silence – obviously the system has been switched off).

(There is a pause of about thirty seconds, then from the wing walks REX {in front of the stage curtains} in an uneasy manner. It can be observed that he is a little nervous as, now stood facing the audience at about centre stage, he waits for them to settle down).

(After glancing uneasily around the audience, he clears his throat a couple of times, then):

REX: Em, L-Ladies and Gentlemen!

(Clears his throat again):

REX: ... L-Ladies and gentlemen ... Em, as you have heard, we are having trouble with the theatre's loudspeaker system. The producer has therefore asked me to come out and explain about the firemen being present on the stage a few minutes ago – em, n-nothing serious, I hasten to add! ... It's-It's em, well, em, I'm the Safety Officer for the company, and I-I can assure you that it is absolutely nothing to be worried ab—

(A loud hammering sound from the behind the stage curtain is heard, causing him to break-off. ... He turns towards the direction it came from, and after a quick glance at the audience, goes and parts the curtains and peeps inside at the stage set).

(With the hammering sound continuing, he shouts there):

REX: Would you mind stopping that – please! Otherwise I'll have to —

(The hammering sound immediately stops).

(Coming away from the curtains, he turns towards the audience, gives a nervous smile, then):

REX: I'm-I'm sorry about that – em, now where was I? ... Em, oh yes – em, there's nothing to worry about, everything is under control. But however, tonight's performance will be delayed for just a few min—

(He stops abruptly – giving a jump due to shock and fear. The cause is a tremendous thud behind him on the stage set from the other side of the curtains, as though something heavy as fallen down. ... He is visibly shaken – but this quickly changes to obvious feelings of angry frustration).

(After giving an angry glance behind him, he at once shouts in a belligerent way in the direction of the audience):

REX: That does it! That does it! ... I've had this bloody company up to here!

(He shows how much, by indicating with a bent flat hand high above his head.)

(Then after a quick and angry look in the Gerald's off-stage direction):

REX: What-What's happened here tonight is typical of the place and its management – it-it's a bloody disgrace! ... Personally, I blame Gerald, our actoor manager and producer – you know, the one wearing the sandals, who made the opening announcement. ... Producer? Producer? That's a laugh! He's only a bit player who got control by fu—

(He suddenly breaks off as he again glances off-stage – then continues in a slightly restrained way):

REX: N-No, I'd better not say that – even though it's true. But nevertheless, he's —

(He again breaks off, this time turning and glaring in a belligerent way off-stage, demanding):

REX: What was that? What did you say?

(A short pause as he obviously listens to a voice the audience cannot hear).

(Then in a forceful way):

REX: No - I won't come off! You can do what you like, but I'm not leaving until I've told this lot about everything that's been going-on!

(He is obviously listening to a reply for about ten seconds, then):

REX: Well, you can do what you like! Threatening to report me to Equity won't get me off!

(He listens again, and then exclaims):

REX: Oh, go to hell! ... Leave me with my public. ... Pardon? ... Up yours, too!

(Turning towards the audience):

REX: I'm-I'm sorry about that – it's Gerald – he's making all sorts of threats. But no matter what he does, I'm not leaving here until I've had my say. ... Now, what else can I tell you – oh, yes! This Safety Officer lark. I'm not the Safety Officer – they haven't got one, but they should have! ... I'm an actor, who like some others in this company, is treated like a general dogsbody. ... After he made a bloody fool of himself over that microphone business, dear Gerald couldn't face you – so he shouts to me in that affected way of his: 'Rexy Boy!' – he always calls me Rexy Boy. 'Rexy Boy,' he says, 'Go out there and tell the customers there has just been a minor accident, tell them you're the Safety Officer, but for god's sake don't mention the fire!' ... Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you, how the hell can I be expected to explain the firemen and the

scorch marks, without being able to mention it. Surely, you couldn't help but have seen the bloody mess. ... God! We were lucky there wasn't a real catastrophe. It's only by good fortune that the fire sprinklers were actually working – but even so, the fire brigade were needed to get it finally under control.

(He gives a couple sneering glances in Gerald's off-stage direction, then continues):

REX: ... Mind you, our Gerald isn't the only one who's a real pain in the neck. Rodney Clooney, our so-called lead star runs him a close second. Did you know that dear 'old Rodders actually wears a ... – well, you won't believe this, but he wears a —

(He has to stop abruptly, for his voice is drowned by music that suddenly blares out loud and clear from the Stage's Loudspeaker System – it is a military band giving a full-blooded rendering of the popular part from the well-known march 'Colonel Bogey on Parade.' ... He is obviously extremely annoyed, and this shows as he turns to the side of the stage and angrily mouths what appears to be obscenities at somebody there. But suddenly stops and appears to be a little taken aback, staring there in a tense and uneasy way).

(Then, as the music gradually fades away, CAROL walks slowly and uneasily on to the stage. She gives quick nervous glances at the audience as she approaches Rex. ... She stops a few paces from him – they BOTH look tensely at each other, waiting for the other to say something. ... {Note: When Rex speaks during the scene with him, Carol, though paying attention, nevertheless occasionally gives quick nervous glances at the audience – initially, more frequently}).

(Then, said in a mildly bitter way):

REX: So that's it – Gerald's really hitting me below the belt. Sending you on, is one thing I never counted on. ... How could you let yourself be used in this way, Carol?

(In a concerned but timid way):

CAROL: Oh, Rex, what's happened? It-It's so unlike you to behave in this manner. ... G-Gerald didn't send me – I came on because I wanted to Em, well, I'm-I'm so terribly upset that it has all come to this!

REX: Oh, Carol! You know I wouldn't do anything that would hurt you in any way. But I felt I must have a final fling – not only at the management, but at the theatre as a whole. So when Gerald told me to come on and pretend to be the Safety Officer, it was as though fate and circumstances had given me the chance to let this lot know how I feel.

(When he says "this lot", he glances at the audience – Carol also glances in their direction).

CAROL: But, Rex, how could yo—

REX: You see, being given a week's notice earlier today, means I could be finished as an actor – I had told myself that I was going to make it with this company, or go back to Mecca.

(Puzzled):

CAROL: Mecca?

REX: Yes – I was a bingo caller there.

(In a slightly incredulous way):

CAROL: I-I didn't know.

(In a kind of proud way):

REX: Yes – I was very good at it, and ever so popular with the ladies – the older type! ... Do you know what the old dears used to call me? ... Em, no, I'd better not – em, where was I ... oh, yes!

(Looking serious):

REX: ... It-It came as a terrible shock to be told I was to leave the company at the end of the week. But the thing that really shook me, was the thought that I, em, I would never see you ag...

(His voice tails-off, he being distracted by the distant sounds of a fire engine siren coming from the front of the theatre (as though outside). ... BOTH exchange obvious worried looks as the vehicle seemingly approaches the theatre. But it is heard to go past – their relief being clearly seen as the sound goes into the distance before disappearing).

(At an appropriate moment, CAROL clears her throat and says):

CAROL: But-But how could you do this? I know you feel aggrieved at being told to leave – but surely, this is really going too far! And it-it's so unlike you.

REX: It-It was when that loud bang went off just behind me.

CAROL: It was a curtain counterweight that fell.

REX: Oh, em – it shook me! It was then as though something went click in my head. ... 'To hell with it!' I thought – 'I'll show them – I'll let this lot know a few home truths – tell them what really goes on behind the glitter of it all!'

(Again, when he says "this lot", he glances at the audience).

(CAROL also glances at the audience, and then is firm with him):

CAROL: Really, Rex! I'm cross with you. ... Our public shouldn't be treated like that – and they're not interested what goes on back there.

REX: On the contrary, they wouldn't be human if they didn't like to hear the truth for a change, especially if there's a bit of spice to go with it.

CAROL: You're wrong – I'm sure they don't want to hear about backstage goings-on – that's not what they've paid to listen to.

REX: But I'm giving it to them for free. ... Hang on, I'll ask them.

(After clearing his throat, he addresses the audience, shouting):

REX: You don't mind hearing all about the facts of theatrical life, do you?

(With his hand cupping his ear in the direction of the audience, he shouts at them):

REX: Come-on! Let's hear you!

(In reply to a positive response):

REX: I knew it!

(Alternatively, if there is a negative or mediocre response):

REX: Oh, suit yourselves then!

(After a pause of a few seconds, Carol looks at him and says):

CAROL: Rex – I think it would be an idea if you come off the stage with me now.

(He looks at her in a serious way and says):

REX: What have I got to go back there for? This is where I really belong, away from behind the scenes. ... Especially since y-you ...

(He falters, obviously suddenly in an emotional state):

REX: ... S-Since you turned me down flat!

(Obviously embarrassed and a little distressed):

CAROL: Please, Rex – don't!

(Now calm, but a little severe with her):

REX: Em, would it have made any difference if Rodney hadn't arrived on the scene?

(She is clearly embarrassed, and after giving anxious glances at him and the audience, says):

CAROL: I'm-I'm not sure. I don't think so. ... Please, you're embarrassing me in front of all these people!

(He suddenly turns a little hostile):

REX: I! Embarrass, you? ... I bet you're not embarrassed when 'dear' Rodney holds you in his arms – on and off stage!

(She is clearly upset):

CAROL: Please, Rex. ... Please don't!

(But he carries on in a sarcastic way):

REX: Rodney Clooney! The renowned leading star and womaniser! ... He's nothing but a —

