

Thespian Killers Anonymous

by
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Cast

Anne.....any age from 20s on/ any race.

Reggie.....any age from 20s on/ any race.

3 Playwrights.....any age from 20s on/ any race and gender.

Detective Charlene.....from early 30s on/ any race.

Officer Serena.....from early 30s on/ any race.

(Community meeting room. Several people gathered as if at an AA meeting.)

ANNE

Good evening everyone.

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Good evening." "Evening." "Hey."

ANNE

Welcome to this safe space where playwrights recovering from their complicated feelings towards actors can speak freely. Let's just jump right in. Anyone?

(REGGIE holds up his hand.)

Reggie.

REGGIE

Hello, my name is Reggie, I'm a playwright. I'm here trying to get over my...it's almost a - phobia now...of actors.

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Hello Reggie."

REGGIE

I...

(Reggie gets emotional.)

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Take your time." "We're here for you." "We've all been there."

REGGIE

I'm sorry, it's still raw...

(Takes a breath.)

Last night my lead actor came to final dress still blanking on his lines. He screwed up his big speech in the first act. He had to have a prompter feed him half his lines in act two. And when his character was finally shot and he was supposed to play dead...his cell phone went off in his pocket. *Why?* Because he refused to hand it over to the stage manager. He wanted to be able to text whenever he wasn't on stage.

(Murmurs of sympathy.)

Not only did his cell phone go off...but it startled him so much - it made him jump. As a corpse....As a corpse, he jumped.

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Actors, man." "It used to make me cry." "I can't say it got any easier over Zoom."

REGGIE

There was an invited audience. Our first audience after a year of empty seats....That audience laughed - when he jumped. That moment wasn't supposed to be funny. It was supposed to be filled with pathos. A sublime catharsis of carefully built up emotions. What I got from the audience instead was...ridicule.

(Emotional.)

Ridicule.

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Rough, man. Rough." "Courage, my friend."

ANNE

You're doing great, Reggie.

REGGIE

But you know what?...Every time I had the impulse to plunge a knife into this - thespian...every time I imagined plunging his head into a vat of molten lava wearing specially protective gloves so I could keep dunking his head until his face melted off, so his poor face wouldn't have to bear the burden of his efforts to make it express emotions...every time I felt murder in my heart, I imagined attaching a flower to his jacket lapel instead.

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Wow." "Visualization works, man." "You see, you can abide by Equity rules." "Yay, actors are humans too."

ANNE

Good job, Reggie. We've all been through a very difficult year. And we have to appreciate that even actors are rusty as we get back into the swing of things. Anyone else with tales of dealing with actors in the flesh again?

(DETECTIVE CHARLENE and OFFICER SERENA enter the room.)

DETECTIVE
CHARLENE

Hello, I'm Detective Charlene.

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Hello Detective Charlene."

DETECTIVE
CHARLENE

No, I'm here on official business. To arrest Reggie Runnymede for suspicion of murdering actor Mike Sparkles.

PLAYWRIGHT 1

(To Anne.)

Is this - is this a bit? Are we doing role playing as part of the healing process now?

DETECTIVE

CHARLENE

No: listen up. I'm a detective. This is Officer Serena. We're here to arrest that man -

(Points at Reggie.)

- for the murder of Mike Sparkles who was scheduled to open in your play tonight. And just so you know, Mike's understudy was rushed to the emergency room after having a severe panic attack when he was told he would have to go on.

REGGIE

No!

DETECTIVE

CHARLENE

There will be no opening night for you. Only curtains.

(Officer Serena rolls her eyes.)

PLAYWRIGHT 2

Are you a theater director? You have a thing about you that suggests director.

PLAYWRIGHT 3

(Aside.)

Overbearing?

DETECTIVE

CHARLENE

For the last time, people, we have nothing to do with the theater!

OFFICER SERENA

(Somewhat embarrassed to admit.)

Well...I used to...I actually used to work in the theater.

(Detective Charlene looks surprised.)

I was a dramaturg.

DETECTIVE

CHARLENE

What's a dramaturg?

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Exactly. Nobody knows." "Sorry, this is a dramaturg-free environment." "Don't mean to be rude."

REGGIE

I'm not going to be arrested by a dramaturg.

OFFICER SERENA

Yeah, well too bad, and for the record - it was playwrights like you that drove me away from my first love. Always with your whining and fighting me on every change, and your precious text. Well guess what:

(She puts the handcuffs
on Reggie)

today I have the final say. And I say, you're under arrest.

DETECTIVE

CHARLENE

(To Officer Serena.)

Good one.

ANNE

Reggie? Is it true?

(When Reggie doesn't deny it.)

PLAYWRIGHTS

"Oh, Reggie." "What happened to the flower-in-his-lapel thing?" "We thought you were getting better."

ANNE

You should have called me, I'm your sponsor.

REGGIE

But now he can really commit to playing dead. And he'll never ruin anyone's script ever again. I did you all a favor.

(Slight beat.)

PLAYWRIGHT 1

You know what...I don't condone murder - but:

(He stands up and applauds.)

ANNE

(To Playwright 1.)

Stop that. Sit down. We don't endorse this.

PLAYWRIGHT 2

(Stands up and applauds.)

Neither do I.

PLAYWRIGHT 3

(Stands up and applauds.)

Murder is really bad.

ANNE

Everyone stop applauding!

OFFICER SERENA
 (As she leads Reggie
 out.)

Bunch of scribblers.

REGGIE
 Brothers and sisters! Stand up for your rights! To hell with
 feedback! Fuck rewrites! Death to actors who can't remember
 their lines and ad lib!

PLAYWRIGHT 3
 We'll get Dramatist Guild on your case!

PLAYWRIGHT 2
 We're with you!

(Detective Gaines, Officer Serena and
 Reggie have all exited.)

ANNE
 Alright, alright, everyone sit down. What's happened is
 horrific and runs counter to everything we encourage in our
 meetings. One of us committed a heinous act. We should all
 weep for the senseless murder of another struggling artist.
 So what if an actor forgets lines and misinterprets your
 characters. And renders the work you've poured your heart
 into a hot mess...making you question your calling and very
 reason for getting up in the morning. Folks...at the end of
 the day, it's only a play.

(Slight beat.)

PLAYWRIGHT 1
 Tell me you didn't feel just a little something when you
 heard what Reggie had done.

(Slight beat.)

ANNE
 I won't lie...yes, *but*.

PLAYWRIGHT 1
 Can we just sit with that for a moment.

PLAYWRIGHT 3
 We forgot to ask how he did it....It must have happened
 during this morning's rehearsal.

PLAYWRIGHT 2
 I bet he did that thing where you switch out the prop murder
 weapon used to kill the character in the play for a real
 knife.

PLAYWRIGHT 1

You know what? We should each write scenes about how he might have killed him and see if they match up with what actually happened.

ANNE

No! We're not going to indulge our fantasies of murdering our professional colleagues. No.

(The other playwrights
give her a cold stare.
Slight beat.)

Fine. Write the scenes. But then everyone here has to donate money to Actors' Equity.

PLAYWRIGHT 1

Fair enough.

PLAYWRIGHT 3

(Under his breath.)

They should be paying us for untold suffering.

ANNE

Repeat after me: we love actors.

PLAYWRIGHTS

(Weakly.)

We love actors.

ANNE

With feeling!

PLAYWRIGHT 2

We love them, okay! Now can we just write?

(End of play.)