

Backstage Imbroglio

A radio play by

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BACKSTAGE IMBROGLIO

BACKSTAGE IMBROGLIO, BEFORE THE SHOW.

CHRIS

Ladies and.. Ladies and Gentl.. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Chris, your compare for the evening. For this evening. Welcome to the Ernie Villa Acting Troupe's first professional production! Soon you'll meet Ernie Villa, our magnificent writer, director, producer, treasurer and lead actor. Now, he's a real top notch guy is our Ernest, always so encouraging and optimistic. He was inspired by the great Shake-sphere into writing his own tragic, doomed romance and, even though he failed at his GCSE English, his wit, determination, and a lucky granny death, have allowed his writing dreams to come true! As the company understudy, it can sometimes be quite easy to doubt myself and get a bit down about my role, but Ernie is always the one who is there to support me and show me how valuable I am to the company, or as I like to say, my second fam-

ERNIE

-Chris, you useless, talentless toad!

CHRIS

-ily.

ERNIE

Where have you been? I've been looking all over for that stupid, idiotic face of yours, we have some massive problems! The state of this show is a complete catastrophe! Oh, Chris!! It's all your fault.

CHRIS

I don't understand, I haven't done anything! I was rehearsing introducing the show.

SOUND: SLAP

ERNIE

Be quiet you bumbling cretinous troglodyte. Do you have any idea what's going on? The whole show is ruined!

CHRIS

What do you mean?

SOUND: SLAP

ERNIE

I mean it is you, me and little Rodger and that is it!

CHRIS

Ernie I don't understand. Where is everyone? Where's the set and costumes and props? Who's little Rodger?

ERNIE

They're gone! It's all gone! Josh, Andy and Josh were in the company van having their lunchables in the back when they were stolen! The thief was hard of hearing and didn't realise until he opened the back doors, but by then they'd already been smuggled to Vietnam!

CHRIS

Oh my goodness, Ernie that's terrible.

ERNIE

I know, that van was my Nan's and she's not a forgiving lady.

CHRIS

I meant about the cast!

ERNIE

Oh yes, I know. But it's worse! Not only are we a Thisbe, Doris and Eugene down. Josh who plays the Lion has unfortunately found his courage!

CHRIS

Well, that can't be bad. Surely?

ERNIE

No! Liquid courage. In the form of an extra value bottle of Putinoff from the off license! He's running around on the loose with a big smelly toilet brush in his hands! And big Rodger? You know, the Techie? He was working under the van when it was stolen, he's in A&E getting his toes re-attached. He sent his son over to run the show, but he's only eight, and he couldn't even reach the control board!

CHRIS

Oh, for goodness sake. What use is he then?

ERNIE

Well, I gave him a soundboard and a stick for the lights. His dad is a professional, he can improvise!

SOUND: COW NOISE

CHRIS

This is ridiculous! Why are you telling me all this now? You should've cancelled the show hours ago! What have you been doing whilst I've been rehearsing my opening speech?

ERNIE

Well, I'm a true actor and I have a vigorous warm-up routine before a show to get me in the right state of mind.

CHRIS

Watching Toy Story 3 in the bath until you get all emotional is not a warm-up routine! Well, I'll go and break the news to the audience.

ERNIE

What? No! You can't do that, this is my.. I mean our, first professional production!

CHRIS

You can't do the show with two actors, one of which is half cut on extra value Putinoff!

ERNIE

You also can't break the news to a room full of snivelling theatre ponses, that the show they've travelled to come and see, is cancelled because the company van was stolen, along with the half the set, props, costumes and the cast inside!

CHRIS

I'm sure they'll understand.

ERNIE

No they won't you baby-faced idiot! If you go out there and break that news it will taint our names in the theatre world forever. No producer will ever work with us again. We'll be finished. I'll never live my dream.

CHRIS

Ernie, you are a talent. Kinkyboots would be lucky to have someone of your class.

ERNIE

Well, I can kiss that dream goodbye. It's never going to happen now my show is completely ruined. I'll never get to flaunt those sensational sequined thigh highs!

CHRIS

What if we made the show happen?

ERNIE

Oh, you said it yourself Chris, you can't do the show with two actors, one of which is now scrubbing himself with the toilet brush.

SOUND: LIGHT SCRUBBING NOISE

CHRIS

What if we sober him up?

ERNIE

And then what?

CHRIS

Well, you and I can do the show. And we'll sober up drunk Josh too! We'll just multi-role. You know, like they do in Bertolt Brecht's plays.

ERNIE

Who?

CHRIS

Bertolt Brecht?

ERNIE

They also do that in GCSE drama! And what will people think of me then? They'll wish we did cancel the show. Lousy secondary education productions!

CHRIS

No Ern, people will think you're smart. Clevar! A thinker outside the box.

ERNIE

They would?

CHRIS

Yes! That's what all the ponsey amdram directors are doing.

ERNIE

Well in that case, I'll do it. But how are we to sober up drunk Josh?

CHRIS

Well first, we better get that toilet brush.

(PAUSE)

SOUND: CHRIS, ERNIE AND DRUNK JOSH FIGHTING

CHRIS (cont'd)
Give it here!

ERNIE
Hand it over!

DRUNK JOSH
Nevverrrrr!

ERNIE
It's for your own good!

DRUNK JOSH
Bugger off!

SOUND: GLASS SMASHES
You schwinesh! Not the putinoff! Look what youth done.

ERNIE
Uh-oh!

(DRUNK JOSH BEGINS TO CHASE ERNIE AND CHRIS WITH
THE TOILET BRUSH)

DRUNK JOSH
That's it, come here!

SOUND: SCRUBBING NOISE

(SCRUBBING NOISE INTERMITTENTLY THROUGHOUT)

CHRIS
No. No. No!!

SOUND: SCRUBBING NOISE
Ernie, he's got me pinned down!

DRUNK JOSH
Free the animals!

ERNIE
What's he talking about?

CHRIS
Get him off me!

DRUNK JOSH
No one steals my tranquillisers!

CHRIS
I haven't got your tranquillisers!

ERNIE

Try to hold him still.

SOUND: THUMPING NOISE

CHRIS

Ahhhh! Try to hit him, not me!

DRUNK JOSH

You'll never take me alive, Sauvage!

SOUND: THUMPING NOISE

SOUND: SILENCE

(THERE IS A LONG PAUSE)

ERNIE

What have you done? You've killed him!

CHRIS

I didn't! You hit him.

POLICE OFFICER

(*From afar*) Hello? Is anyone back there?

ERNIE

Uh, oh!

CHRIS

Ernie. Who's that?

ERNIE

When I discovered the cast had been stolen and smuggled to Vietnam, I called the coppers.

CHRIS

Who?

ERNIE

You know, the fedz? The filth. The pigs. The rozza's! The Fuzz. The bill. The Home Office henchmen! The-

CHRIS

-I think I get the picture!

ERNIE

Yes, well we'll have to hide drunk Josh quickly. Move him into the props cupboard and lock the door.

CHRIS

Come on, Josh!

ERNIE

He's not a cat, he's an incapacitated drunk.

CHRIS

Aw, he looks rather sweet when he's-

ERNIE

-Just move him for gods sake!

SOUND: CHRIS LETS OUT A PATHETIC WHIMPER

SOUND: DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES

(CHRIS AND DRUNK JOSH EXIT)

(A POLICE OFFICER ENTERS)

POLICE OFFICER

'Ello 'ello 'ello, what's goin' on 'ere then?

ERNIE

Hello officer. Pleased to meet you. I'm Ernie Villa,
lead actor, direc-

POLICE OFFICER

-You the one that called?

ERNIE

Erm, yes. But I'm also the lead actor, director, writer
and treasurer for this magnificent show. Which reminds
me, it's about to start, so you'll have to make this
speedy.

POLICE OFFICER

My report says your company van was err, stolen. That
right?

ERNIE

Yes, officer.

POLICE OFFICER

With your cast inside, is that right?

ERNIE

Yes, that is correct.

SOUND: DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING

(CHRIS ENTERS)

CHRIS

The err.. Situation J has been taken care of.

ERNIE

What?

CHRIS

Situation J.

ERNIE

You've lost me.

CHRIS

You know.. Situation J. Josh. Drunk Josh. The cup-

ERNIE

-Yes! Yes, wonderful. Good. Yes.

POLICE OFFICER

And who might this be?

CHRIS

I'm Chris Mackl-

ERNIE

-That's Chris Mackleroy, the company understudy.

CHRIS

And head of catering!

ERNIE

Yes, and head of catering.

POLICE OFFICER

Right. So, how many cast members were there inside the van, Mr Viola?

ERNIE

Villa. Yes, there were three cast members.

CHRIS

(*Coughs*) Four.

ERNIE

Four cast members.

POLICE OFFICER

Well was it three or four?

ERNIE AND CHRIS

Four cast members.

POLICE OFFICER

Right. Okay, and what was the-

SOUND: DRUNK JOSH MOANS FROM INSIDE THE CUPBOARD

(MORE)

POLICE OFFICER (cont'd)
What was that?

ERNIE
What?

CHRIS
I didn't hear anything.

DRUNK JOSH
(*From the cupboard*) Let me out.

POLICE OFFICER
I'm sure I heard something.

CHRIS
Perhaps it was Ernie's rumbley tummy. Feeling peckish before the show, are we Ern?

ERNIE
Yes, and who's fault is that?

CHRIS
Yes, silly me, lousy Chris the head of catering! Haha!

SOUND: ERNIE AND CHRIS FAKE LAUGH.

ERNIE
You were saying officer?

POLICE OFFICER
Yes. Right. What did you describe the van as-

DRUNK JOSH
(*From the cupboard*) Red Vauxhall transit, 03 reg.

POLICE OFFICER
What did you say?

ERNIE
Red Vauxhall, transit. 03 plate. It's my nans.

POLICE OFFICER
Right. And where were you when the van was stolen?

DRUNK JOSH
(*Singing from the cupboard*) Santa baby, I've been an awful good gurrrrll!

POLICE OFFICER
Alright, I definitely heard something from that cupboard. Explain yourselves otherwise I'm calling this show off and taking you two down the station.

ERNIE

It's my.. Rowdy Grandmother. Yes! She's furious her van was stolen.

POLICE OFFICER

Your rowdy Grandmother? Well as it was her van, I'll need to question her too.

ERNIE

That won't be necessary officer.. Bald.

PAUSE

CHRIS

You have a lovely name, officer.

ERNIE

Chris, go sort out my disorderly Grandmother, would you?

CHRIS

I don't know where she lives.

ERNIE

You don't need to, she's in the cupboard, remember?

CHRIS

Oh yes! The cupboard. Let me just go and see to her. Excuse me.

(CHRIS GOES TO THE CUPBOARD AND EXITS)

ERNIE

I'm sure he'll calm her down. He's really rather good with her.

SOUND: CHRIS RUNNING AROUND CHASING DRUNK JOSH.

CHRIS

Get back here you drunken old fart! Oh, put your sugar lumps away, no-one needs to see that! No, don't do that! No! No!!!

SOUND: THUMPING NOISE, THEN A BODY HITTING THE FLOOR.

ERNIE

So, you were saying officer?

POLICE OFFICER

No more questions, related to this matter anyway..

ERNIE

Oh, excellent! Well if you wouldn't mind, we have a show to do in approximately three minutes, so you can see yourself out.

SOUND: DOOR OPENING

POLICE OFFICER

Yes, of course. I'll try to have some news for you regarding the investigation as soon as I can. Oh, how's the Grandmother? Under control now, is she?

CHRIS

I didn't kill him.

ERNIE

Her. Yes! Just a little joke of his, he's just joshing around. Damn!

POLICE OFFICER

Right. Well, I'll be in touch. Oh and good luck with the show, I'm sure it'll all go to plan.

(POLICE OFFICER EXITS)

(PAUSE)

ERNIE

Phew!! That was a close one! I think he bought it.

CHRIS

Did he?

ERNIE

Of course! Must've done, he left, didn't he?

CHRIS

Ernie, I think I killed drunk Josh..

ERNIE

What? No! No, I'm sure he'll get back up. Probably.

CHRIS

Probably!? Oh, gosh. What will my mum say? She'll never forgive me! I have to go, I can't go on now!

ERNIE

What? Pull yourself together man! Your mother can wait, I'll never forgive you if you don't get on and introduce that show!

CHRIS

What? I can't go out there, I'm a nervous wreck! I'm going home!

SOUND: SLAP

ERNIE

Listen here, you jumped-up little twerp. You're going out there, you're introducing the show, then you're going to help me save it before the people are up in arms and my reputation is ruined. And if you don't, I'll grass you up to the coppers myself!

CHRIS

What!?

ERNIE

The fedz! The pigs, the flith-

CHRIS

-I know what you meant!

ERNIE

So get out there!

CHRIS

No!

ERNIE

Get/ out there! Get out there and introduce me!
Introduce the show! Come on. Go! Go! Get!

CHRIS

/No I can't! I can't! Please don't make me do this Ern,
please! No! No! Ah!

(ERNIE PUSHES CHRIS ONSTAGE)

CHRIS (cont'd)

(Nervously and from afar) Good evening Ladies and.. and Gentle, gentlement. Men! And err, welcome to the show/ I'm Chris Mackleroy and I'll be your compare for the evening. For this evening. Welcome to the Ernie Villa Acting Troupe's first professional production! Soon you'll meet Ernie Villa, our magnificent writer, director, producer, treasurer and lead actor.

ERNIE

Yes, yes. Chris will save the show. What could possibly go wrong. Hang on a minute, where's my car keys? My.. Watch!