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The Man in the Aisle

A timed exercise

by Sho Botham

Gilbert made his entrance and strode confidently to centre stage. He opened his mouth to say his first line when he saw that something was happening in the stalls. A group of people were standing in aisle with their backs to the stage. Gilbert paused and glanced to the wings for guidance. A wave of, 'get on with it', from the stage manager, caused Gilbert to take a deep breath before launching into his monologue. He only got as far as, when the light beats a hasty retreat, when it became clear he would have to stop.

The crowd in the aisle of the stalls was increasing as he looked on. There appeared to be someone in the middle of the aisle, standing still as everyone fussed around. Gilbert walked downstage to peer over the footlights for a better view. He lifted his hand and placed it, like a visor, on his forehead so he could shade his eyes from the spotlight. Once his eyes adjusted to less light, he could see the centre of all the attention. A large hard-breathing middle-aged slow man, with a mouth like a fish, dull staring eyes, and sandy hair standing straight upright on his head, so that he looked as if he had just choked, and had that moment come to.

By now the stage manager and the rest of the cast had joined Gilbert on stage. From a distance it must have looked like they were all doing a visor dance looking out to the auditorium.

In the distance, sirens could be heard, getting closer to the theatre.

People were asking questions about the large, slow man. "Where had he come from". He hadn't been sitting in the stalls.

He didn't speak. He didn't move. He didn't do anything. His dull staring eyes, didn't even blink.

The sirens were no longer moving. They sounded as if they were inside the theatre. Two paramedics appeared at the back of the stalls and ran down towards the crowd in the aisle. Mr slow man didn't move a muscle as the crowd was gently parted to let the paramedics reach him. Still he didn't respond.

The paramedics began to check him for vital signs but there were none. He had no pulse and no breath. His skin felt weird, unlike any skin they had touched before. They had no explanation. Mr slow man stood in the aisle with his fish-like mouth and his hair standing upright on his head. But he wasn't alive. The two paramedics were wondering what to do. How could they explain to the audience and cast that this man wasn't real. They couldn't explain how he had got there. Just as they were thinking, Mr slow man, coughed, turned to face away from the stage and slowly started to walk up the slope to the back stalls.