

At rise: Two actors, ALEX and SARAH, sit at opposite ends of a table perusing their scripts. A chair placed between them sits empty. Presently, the DIRECTOR, with much affectation, strides onto the stage, clutching his copy of the script.

DIRECTOR

Oh, what a glorious sight to behold! My two frighteningly talented actors on time, scripts at the ready, breathlessly anticipating my arrival. Marvelous, marvelous!

(The DIRECTOR sits in the chair between them.)

DIRECTOR

(Turning stage R. to face ALEX.)

Now then, you must be...Greg.

ALEX

Alex.

DIRECTOR

(Turning stage L. to face SARAH.)

And you must be...Jenny.

SARAH

Sarah.

DIRECTOR

Splendid, splendid. And you can call me...well, let's see...exceptionally talented...extraordinarily accomplished...astonishingly gifted – take your pick.

(Beat.)

Just kidding, kids. Incidentally, did either of you happen to catch my production of *Electra* at the Lyceum last season?

(ALEX and SARAH shake their heads.)

DIRECTOR

No? Oh, that's criminal – because it was sublime...groundbreaking...a coup de théâtre! The press hated it, of course, as expected. The shock of the new, you see? Way over their heads.

(With increasing agitation.)

DIRECTOR (Cont'd.)

Way, way over their heads – their tiny, malicious, spiteful, venomous, odious little pinheads.

(Takes a deep breath.)

But you can't take that stuff personal, kids – you'll end up bitter. Now, let's see, the name of this play is...

(Flipping through his script.)

Ah, yes...*The Butcher*.

(Beat.)

Hmm...I may want to change that later.

ALEX

Change it?

DIRECTOR

Yes, but not now – don't rush me. Now, this is the tale of a slowly blossoming romance between a well-to-do young lady and her local village baker.

SARAH

Butcher.

DIRECTOR

Butcher. It says it's set in Massachusetts in 1748. However...I think it might need a little updating – give it a more modern twist.

ALEX

What?

DIRECTOR

Now, you, Greg–

ALEX

Alex.

DIRECTOR

...will be playing the part of the male character. And you, Jenny–

SARAH

Sarah.

DIRECTOR

...will be playing the part of the young woman.

SARAH

Yes, well, I...think we got the gist of that already.

DIRECTOR

Oh, you did? Oh, well then you're light years ahead of me. Oh, this makes my job so much easier. There's simply no substitute for talent. You either get it or you don't get it, and you kids obviously *get it*.

(ALEX and SARAH look at each other askance.)

DIRECTOR

Now Greg, your character's name is Amos—

ALEX

It's Alex.

DIRECTOR

No, it's Amos – it's written right here. And Jenny, your character's name is Verity.

SARAH

I'm Sarah.

DIRECTOR

No dear, you're Verity – please refer to your script. Right, now then, I'll start you off with the introductory stage directions, and then the two of you can dive right in.

(Reading from the script.)

“At rise, Verity enters the butcher's shop, where Amos is immediately struck by her poise and delicate beauty. Likewise, Verity cannot help but notice the ruggedly handsome features of the purveyor of fine meats that stands before her. She looks away, coyly.”

(The DIRECTOR gestures for ALEX to begin.)

ALEX

“Good morning, ma'am. How may I be of assistance?”

(The DIRECTOR cues SARAH to begin.)

SARAH

“I want a pound of your finest sausages.”

DIRECTOR

(Raising his hand.)
Wait! Stop! I don't like that.

SARAH

What? My delivery?

DIRECTOR

No, the line. I think we should change it.

SARAH

Change it? But are you allowed to? Aren't there laws about copyright and things like that?

DIRECTOR

(With a smile.)
No, dear – not at my level. Now, instead of, “I want a pound of your finest sausages,” let's have you say – and you may want to write this down, Jenny – let's have you say, “I want to have your baby.”

SARAH

(Taken aback.)
I want to have your baby?

DIRECTOR

Yes, only you're saying it as if it were a question. I want you to make it sound more like a statement of intent.

SARAH

(Reluctantly.)
Well...all right.

DIRECTOR

Okay, from the top. Greg, you may begin.

ALEX

“Good morning, ma'am. How may I be of assistance?”

SARAH

“I want to have your baby.”

ALEX

“Ah, then you're in luck, ma'am – I just made a fresh batch of pork ones earlier.”