

Background

Slice of life · 12-character play · 6 women, 3 men, 3 either · 18 min · Beginner

Six in the morning, in the car park of a supermarket that has shut for good, a film shoot has pitched its tent. Eleven extras wait there for a four-second crowd scene, watched over by Clara, the second assistant director. When she announces that one of them will say a line, just one, the tent turns into a contest: alliances, spare jackets and rehearsals in every corner. And the sky is clouding over.

A white tent in the car park of a suburban supermarket, one Saturday in October, from six to nine in the morning.

Casting

CLARA (Female role, Young adult) 26, second assistant director, in charge of the extras list and the walkie-talkie.

GLORIA (Female role, Senior) 76, an extra for fifty years, has never said a word on screen.

LINA (Female role, Teen) 16, Gloria's granddaughter, here for the first time.

IRIS (Female role, Adult) 42, acts with an amateur company on Thursday nights.

SONIA (Female role, Adult) 34, a care assistant, just off a night shift.

PAULA (Female role, Adult) 55, came to do her shopping, as she does every Saturday at six.

FÉLIX (Male role, Senior) 71, worked thirty-two years in the fruit and veg aisle of this supermarket.

BRUNO (Male role, Adult) 47, once played a corpse in a TV series, two episodes.

OSCAR (Male role, Young adult) 21, a film student.

NOA (No gender marker, Teen) 15, has maths homework to hand in before eight.

ALEX (No gender marker, Adult) thirties, has brought a photo of the lead actor to get signed.

CHARLIE (No gender marker, Adult) forties, third day as an extra on this film.

SCENE 1: SIX O'CLOCK

(A white tent in a car park, folding chairs, a table with a thermos. It is still dark. Clara holds a sheet of paper and a walkie-talkie. Around her, ten extras.)

CLARA. Yes. They're here. I'm counting.

CLARA. Morning, everyone. I'm Clara, second assistant. I'll take the register. Gloria?

GLORIA. Present. Same as in 1976.

CLARA. Lina?

LINA. Yeah.

GLORIA. We say: present.

LINA. Present, yeah.

CLARA. Iris?

(Iris is doing voice exercises, mouth wide open.)

IRIS. Present! Sorry. I'm warming up.

CLARA. Sonia?

(Sonia raises a hand without opening her eyes.)

CLARA. Félix?

FÉLIX. Here. Well, here used to be fruit and veg. Thirty-two years. You've put the tent on top of my melons.

CLARA. I'm sorry.

FÉLIX. Never mind. The store's been shut since March.

CLARA. Bruno?

BRUNO. Present. I've brought three jackets. A beige one, a blue one, a plaid one. For continuity.

CLARA. Wardrobe provides the costumes.

BRUNO. I know. But I've played a corpse in a series. They kept me for two episodes. You can never be too ready.

CLARA. Oscar?

OSCAR. Yes. Question: what lens is the shot on? Because on a long lens, the background goes soft. And we're the background.

CLARA. No idea. Noa?

NOA. Yes. Is there any signal here? I've got maths homework to send before eight.

CLARA. Not much. Alex?

ALEX. Here. What time does he get in?

CLARA. Who?

ALEX. The actor. I've got a photo for him to sign. I had it framed.

CLARA. The cast don't come through the tent. Charlie?

CHARLIE. Here. Third day on this film. The first two, in the edit, they kept my shoulder.

OSCAR. Left or right?

CHARLIE. Right. My best side.

CLARA. Ten. I need eleven. I'm missing someone called Gérard.

(Paula comes in, pulling a shopping trolley behind her.)

PAULA. Excuse me. Isn't the shop opening?

FÉLIX. Not ever again, madam.

PAULA. Oh. I always come on Saturdays at six. There's nobody here at six. That's why I come.

CLARA. Are you free till noon?

PAULA. To do what?

CLARA. Wait for a bus that's never coming. Ninety euros.

PAULA. I've done that for free my whole life.

(Paula sits down, the trolley against her knees. Clara crosses out a name and writes in another.)

CLARA. Right. The scene. You're at a bus stop. The hero comes running, cuts

through the crowd and disappears round the corner. You turn your heads. Four seconds.

SONIA. Which way do we turn our heads?

CLARA. The way he's running.

SONIA. Fine. Wake me up when he's running.

GLORIA. You see? Four seconds. It's a lovely part.

LINA. Gran, it's not a part. It's a head turning.

GLORIA. I've turned my head in three hundred films. In front of kings, gangsters, a whale.

LINA. A real one?

GLORIA. Cardboard. But it knew its craft.

LINA. And can you see yourself, in the three hundred?

GLORIA. In all of them. You have to know where to look.

LINA. Where?

GLORIA. Top left. I always stand top left. People look bottom right, where something's happening.

LINA. So nobody's ever seen you.

GLORIA. I've seen me.

CHARLIE. The fee's ninety? The agency told me ninety-five.

CLARA. I'll check.

CHARLIE. That's three days you've been telling me that.

(The walkie-talkie crackles. Clara steps a few paces away to listen.)

SCENE 2: TEN PAST SEVEN

(The sky grows paler. Clara comes back under the tent.)

CLARA. I've got news. The director's changed the scene.

CHARLIE. Here we go. They're cutting it.

CLARA. No. He wants someone to speak. When the hero's gone, one of the

passers-by points him out to the police and says: "He went that way!"

(A pause. Sonia opens her eyes.)

IRIS. A line.

BRUNO. A real one?

CLARA. Three words.

OSCAR. Four. He, went, that, way. Four.

CHARLIE. A line is a different contract. You get upgraded to an under-five. Two hundred euros minimum.

SONIA. Two hundred?

(Sonia sits up straight in her chair.)

CLARA. The director will choose at nine. He'll come through the tent. Until then, nobody leaves.

NOA. Not even to look for signal?

CLARA. Not even for that.

ALEX. And the actor? Do we say the line to him?

CLARA. No, to the police. He's already gone. That's the whole point.

ALEX. So we don't see him.

CLARA. You see him go past. One second. From behind.

ALEX. One second from behind. I had the photo framed for one second from behind.

LINA. Can you say that again? It's for my followers.

ALEX. How many?

LINA. Four. Including Gran.

GLORIA. I never look.

IRIS. You've played a corpse.

BRUNO. Two episodes.

IRIS. And I've played Phaedra in the village hall. If it's you, you say I helped you. If it's me, I say you helped me.

BRUNO. And the others?

IRIS. The others haven't prepared.

BRUNO. Deal. I'll lend you the blue jacket. Blue reads well on camera.

(Bruno puts the blue jacket round Iris's shoulders.)

OSCAR. Not true. It depends on the grade.

BRUNO. Nobody asked you.

FÉLIX. I know where he went.

CLARA. Who?

FÉLIX. The hero. He turns the corner, over there. After the corner, that was frozen foods. There's a fire exit that opens onto the street. I opened it every morning for thirty-two years.

CLARA. He's not going to frozen foods. He's running down the street.

FÉLIX. They all say that. And then they go to frozen foods.

OSCAR. The light's beautiful this morning. Yellow.

FÉLIX. Yellow over the car park at seven, by nine we'd be bringing the trolleys in.

CLARA. The forecast says dry till noon.

FÉLIX. The forecast never brought a trolley in.

LINA. Gran. Do you want it, the line?

GLORIA. Me? No.

LINA. Three hundred films, and never one sentence. You could.

GLORIA. An extra who speaks isn't an extra any more. She's been seen. After that, they never put her back in the crowd.

LINA. So?

GLORIA. So I love the crowd. In the crowd, you can think whatever you like. I've gone over my shopping list in front of murders, weddings, the end of the world.

PAULA. That's what I do in the supermarket.

FÉLIX. I know. I used to see you.

PAULA. You used to see me?

FÉLIX. Saturdays, at six. You always took two lemons, and put one back.

(Paula looks at Félix.)

PAULA. I never knew why.

SONIA. Two hundred euros. That's a night shift, two hundred euros.

CHARLIE. Minus tax.

SONIA. Even minus tax.

(Sonia gets up, stretches, takes a few steps.)

SONIA. He went that way. He went that way. There. It's not complicated.

IRIS. You don't say it. You live it.

SONIA. I've been living since eight o'clock last night. Can I say it now?

SCENE 3: TWENTY PAST EIGHT

(Clara has gone off towards the trucks. Oscar has put a chair in the middle of the tent: it's the bus stop.)

OSCAR. Right. Since we're waiting, we rehearse. I'll direct. I need a hero.

ALEX. Me.

OSCAR. You?

ALEX. I've got his photo. I know his walk by heart. He runs with his head tilted, like he's forgotten something.

OSCAR. Perfect. Everyone to the bus stop. Iris, you go first.

(The extras huddle round the chair. Alex runs across the tent, head tilted, and goes out.)

IRIS. He went... that way! That way! That way, where all who flee must go!

OSCAR. It's a bit long.

IRIS. I added an ending.

OSCAR. There is no ending. There are four words. Bruno.

(Bruno takes the blue jacket back off Iris's shoulders and puts it on.)

IRIS. My jacket.

BRUNO. Our jacket. For now, it's my turn.

(Alex runs past again. Bruno turns slowly towards the audience.)

BRUNO. He went that way.

OSCAR. Why are you looking at the camera?

BRUNO. So people recognise me.

GLORIA. You never look at the camera. Never. In 1981, a girl looked at the camera in a pirate film. We never saw her again.

LINA. Did she die?

GLORIA. She became an accountant.

OSCAR. Sonia?

(Sonia yawns.)

SONIA. He went that way.

OSCAR. Charlie?

CHARLIE. Before I say anything at all: is the rehearsal paid?

OSCAR. No.

CHARLIE. Then I'll point, but I won't speak.

(Charlie points the way with the right shoulder.)

OSCAR. Noa?

(Noa doesn't look up from the phone. Alex runs past again.)

NOA. He went that way.

(A pause.)

OSCAR. Again.

NOA. He went that way.

OSCAR. That's it. That's exactly it. You do nothing with it.

NOA. I'm not doing anything. I'm looking for signal. My homework's twenty minutes late.

OSCAR. There you go. Somebody in the street with other things to do, who helps anyway. Everyone, say it like Noa.

IRIS. Like Noa? I've been doing theatre for twenty years.

NOA. And me, for twenty seconds.

IRIS. If it's Noa, we're done for.

BRUNO. We can lend the plaid jacket. On camera, plaid scrambles everything.

OSCAR. That, on the other hand, is true.

BRUNO. Noa? It's cold. Do you want a jacket?

NOA. It's plaid.

BRUNO. It's warm.

NOA. No thanks. Plaid scrambles everything.

(Paula gets up, the handle of her trolley in her hand.)

PAULA. Excuse me. I have to say something. The bus here is the number 12. It doesn't stop on this side. It stops across the road, outside the pharmacy. If we wait here, we'll all miss it.

FÉLIX. That's true. The 12 never once stopped by the melons.

OSCAR. It's not a real bus.

PAULA. But we're pretending, aren't we?

(Alex runs past again. Paula turns to Oscar and points to the way out.)

PAULA. He went that way. And so did the 12, come to think of it.

(Nobody moves.)

LINA. She said it better than anyone.

PAULA. What did I say?

FÉLIX. You pointed to the right street. The frozen foods corner.

IRIS. Well. That's luck. Luck doesn't strike twice.

LINA. Your turn.

GLORIA. I told you no.

LINA. For me. Once. I'll film it, and I won't send it to anyone.

GLORIA. You'll send it to everyone.

LINA. To three people. Max.

(Gloria gets up slowly. Alex runs past again. Gloria raises her arm, opens her mouth. A clap of thunder. The first drops patter on the canvas.)

GLORIA. You see. Even the sky disagrees.

(Gloria sits back down. The rain falls harder. Iris looks at Gloria.)

IRIS. You were going to say it.

GLORIA. I was going to cough.

SONIA. "He went that way." Last night, at the hospital, I said it forty times. The doctor on call. He went that way. You can never find him.

CHARLIE. Forty times. At two hundred euros a sentence, that was a good night.

SONIA. They didn't pay me by the sentence.

(Clara's walkie-talkie crackles, somewhere outside.)

SCENE 4: NINE O'CLOCK

(It is pouring. Clara comes back, hair soaked, walkie-talkie in hand.)

CLARA. Right. The director won't be coming.

BRUNO. He chose without seeing us?

CLARA. He didn't choose. The day's cancelled. The equipment can't take the rain, and the forecast says the same until Thursday.

IRIS. Do we come back Thursday?

CLARA. No. The scene's been cut. The hero will take a taxi. They'll shoot it in the studio, no crowd.

(A pause. The rain on the canvas.)

CHARLIE. And the fee?

CLARA. Half a day. Forty-five euros.

CHARLIE. I'll check.

ALEX. And him? Did he at least turn up?

CLARA. He never left his hotel. I'm sorry.

ALEX. I'll leave you the photo. You can give it to him.

(Alex puts the framed photo on the table, next to the thermos.)

CLARA. I never see him. I see the first assistant, who sees the director, who sees the actor, in the evening, at the restaurant.

NOA. Four seconds in a film an hour and a half long, that's nought point nought seven per cent. I did the maths. And now it's nought.

OSCAR. Have you finished your homework?

NOA. No. But I found signal. Right there, under the bus stop chair.

(The extras gather their things. Bruno folds his jackets one by one.)

FÉLIX. Thirty-two years here. And they bring me back to close it a second time.

SONIA. I'm off to sleep. At least I saw the sun come up. Usually I see it from the other side.

FÉLIX. Next Saturday there's a market in the car park. Six o'clock. There'll be lemons.

PAULA. I'll take two.

FÉLIX. And put one back.

PAULA. Maybe not.

(Bruno stops, the blue jacket in his hand.)

BRUNO. We could do it anyway.

IRIS. Do what?

BRUNO. The scene. We've got the bus stop, we've got a hero, we've got the crowd. All that's missing is the camera.

LINA. I've got my phone.

OSCAR. And with the rain, the light's perfect. Soft, no shadows. They don't know what they're missing.

CHARLIE. For free?

BRUNO. For free.

CHARLIE. I've never done anything for free on a shoot.

SONIA. Me neither. And I'm staying.

CLARA. I'm not allowed to keep you.

SONIA. You're not keeping us. We're staying.

(Clara looks at the chair in the middle of the tent.)

CLARA. I started out like you. Right here, four years ago. A heist film. I was the customer at checkout three. In the edit, they cut checkout three.

GLORIA. I remember. You had a red basket, and you held it like a suitcase.

CLARA. You were there?

GLORIA. Checkout four. They kept it.

(A pause. Iris looks at Gloria, then at Lina's phone.)

IRIS. The line goes to Gloria.

BRUNO. Iris. We had a deal.

IRIS. You took the jacket back. The deal went with it. And I've said it twenty times in my head since seven. That's enough for me. What Lina films, nobody's going to cut that.

(Iris takes the blue jacket from Bruno's hands and puts it round Gloria's shoulders.)

IRIS. Blue reads well on camera.

GLORIA. No.

LINA. Gran.

PAULA. I said it without meaning to. You say it, and mean it. Just once.

(A pause. Gloria stands up.)

GLORIA. Once. And nobody looks at the camera.

ALEX. I'll be the hero. I know his walk better than he does. He's never seen himself run from behind.

OSCAR. Everyone to the bus stop. Alex, at the back. Lina, you frame it. Noa, you hold the chair.

NOA. Why?

OSCAR. It's the bus stop. It mustn't move.

CHARLIE. I'm going in front. For once, they'll keep my face too.

SONIA. And me, which way do I turn my head?

IRIS. The way he's running.

(Clara switches off her walkie-talkie and puts it on the table. She takes her place at the bus stop, next to Paula. All twelve are there.)

CLARA. Quiet, everyone. Are we rolling?

LINA. Rolling.

OSCAR. Action.

(They wait for a bus. Alex comes running, head tilted, cuts through the crowd, disappears. Every head turns together.)

GLORIA. He went that way.

(A pause. The rain. Nobody moves.)

CLARA. Cut.

(Still nobody moves.)

FÉLIX. Through frozen foods. I knew it.

PAULA. Shall we go again?

GLORIA. No. That one, we keep.

(Blackout.)



Rehearse this text with Acto

A voice gives you your cues, you learn it at your own pace, you test yourself.

acto.re/biblio

What you can do with it

Original text written for Acto. Read it, print it, work on it in class, perform it at an audition or on a self-tape: that is what it is for, and you need no permission. For a public performance or any commercial use, write to us at contact@acto.re.