

Mr Producer

It was one of those days when the atmosphere of the participants matched the balmy conditions of a warm summer's evening. Thespians were strewn across the lawn in groups; the chortled sounds and chuckle of light banter permeated the still air.

The Producer (he prefers not to be called director) leaned back in his bespoke collapsible chair and surveyed the scene with feelings of benign equanimity. He could have sat in one of the plastic stackable chairs from the Green Room but this would have been out of character. He had his own chair and woe-betide anyone who accidentally deposited their behind on his throne.

Mr Producer, deferentially referred to by that 'title', was the recognised doyen of the drama society. It was rumoured that only madam chair and the secretary were allowed to know his real name. The sobriquet Mr Producer was part nickname, part term of endearment, and part acknowledgement of his position in the society's hierarchy, which explained why the junior members referred to him thus.

His reputation was based on his undoubted experience in amateur theatricals, his authority as a 'qualified' judge at competitions and on his longevity: he is one of the society's oldest members. In his younger days he had performed at *quite* a high level – although no one knows how high a level that actually was – but there was no denying that he was an actor *with* character. When not at the theatre he could be found throughout the year attending society and *Little Theatre Guild* meetings, he also served behind the bar on opening nights. His knowledge of the theatre's history, rules and regulations is second to none; to ensure that he maintains this revered position of authority he keeps a compact society rule book in the inside pocket of his jacket.

The serenity of the scene this day, unbeknown to others but not to Mr Producer, was shattered when he witnessed a younger member slamming his prop – an archer's bow – down into the back of his (the young man's) car, whilst at the same time uttering words of slight and profanity. True his curses could not be heard by others but they were upsetting to Mr Producer. He, the doyen, is of an age when young men were conscripted into the army where swearing was *de riguer*, but it was the manner of his outburst that really upset Mr Producer.

'Robin, have you got a minute?' called Mr Producer.

The youth turned around abruptly and looked displeasingly at the oracle. He knew that when summonsed you obeyed, not out of blind obedience but out of respect for his assumed wisdom. Mr Producer would, at times, offer useful and comforting words of advice to budding new actors.

'Come and sit by me' said Mr Producer patting the plastic chair he had drawn up next to his. He would usually try and put the younger member at ease with words of encouragement prior to admonishment or instruction before asking, 'When is your vacation over? You're an

art and music student, aren't you? And how is young Edwina, that lovely fellow student you brought to the social?

'She's fine. By the way she's thinking of taking up acting'.

'Excellent, I'm pleased to hear it. I couldn't help noticing that you deposited - almost threw - your prop into the back of your car with a degree of disgust, why was that?'

Mr Producer was aware that Robin was suffering from a decline in performance which he found most vexing; he was probably missing Edwina as she was away on a field study trip with other students. And no doubt she might, thought Mr Producer - remembering his own college days and the post-pradial studies in the bar - find an alternative admirer.

'I'm fed up, absolutely peed-off with these rehearsals. I stumble over my lines, nobody helps me out, and that pompous oaf playing the lead wallows in my mistakes'.

'That's no way to talk about your fellow Thesps' retorted Mr Producer.

During the ensuing conversation the old man attempts, using the archery bow, as a psychological prop, to calm the young Thesp down.

'You haven't had that prop, the bow, very long and so you haven't had time to build up a relationship, have you?'

'It's a bit of kit not a girlfriend!' retorted Robin.

'No it isn't, at times it is more important' emphasises the ancient Thespian. When you are on stage it becomes the most important object in your life. And with all the important props in your life it must be treated with care and respect, rather like your girlfriend - the lovely Edwina'.

'Well it's not broken, and it's not my girlfriend' replies Robin with a hint of annoyance.

'Robin, you do realise that the bow is feminine - don't you?'

'How can that bit of wood and string be feminine?'

'Answer me this question Robin, without wishing to be too personal, tell me, what is it about girls that interests you when you first see them?'

'Err ... well ... their looks ... their shape ...'

'Exactly ... their curves, their limbs and what sort of archery bow are you handling in the show? ... It's called a recurve - hence, Cupid's bow. Not to put too fine a point on it: your bow is curvaceous, rather like your gorgeous Edwina'.

'That's just your fertile imagination going a bit wild'.

'No it's not. There are other similarities. When holding your bow horizontally consider its shape, its form; look at the line of the limbs; what part of the facial anatomy does it resemble?'

'Err ... the lips!'

'Exactly and what is more, when at full draw what part of your facial anatomy touches the bow's string?'

Robin thought briefly and replied, 'The lips'.

'There you are. It is most definitely feminine. The prop, your bow, should be delicately handled. There is no other sporting equipment that necessitates such an intimate association with its user than that of the bow ... other more cynical people may say that it is even closer; that the bow is like your girlfriend, highly strung and has a will of its own'.

Robin huffed, puffed and blew heavily down his nose, and wondered how Mr Producer knew this much about Edwina.

'As well as being a musician are you not also an art student?'

'Yes, but what's that got to do with it?'

'Well art is the study of form and shape. Is it not?'

'Yes. Of course it is' snapped Robin.

'It seems to me you have all the attributes to make a good actor. What you need to do is apply your artistic talents to your acting, be aware of the shape and form of what you are using, and, incidentally, the way in which you are using it. Ignore the presumptive comments of the leading man and learn to trust your bow. But do not openly compare your love for your bow with your other beau – the lovely Edwina may misinterpret your intention.

Robin scooted off to his car and noticeably, when lifting his bow, ran his fingers over the smooth curves of its limb and taut string before replacing it gently on the back seat of his car. Then knowing Edwina's arrival was imminent, sped in haste off to the station.

Mr Producer smiled knowing that there are different ways of explaining and encouraging young men on the niceties of handling props ... and girlfriends. He then settled back in his Producer's chair and reminisced on the time when he was an Extra, and carried an archer's bow in two episodes of the 1960s Robin Hood series on TV.