

Fall Back

One act play

By

Bob Davidson

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Fall Back – Bob Davidson

Cast

ALISON – a sixty five year old widow. Settled and comfy. Husband died five years ago. She eats slightly too many scones. Bakes for the rural. Not long home after a bus trip to see The Eden Project and Cliff Richard.

DEIRDRE – A mysterious woman visitor with a job to do.

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The house lights dim. The theme tune from The Archers begins as the curtains open. There seated on her comfy chair, next the small table on which is the radio we are hearing is Alison a sixty five year old widow. She's had her tea and the dishes are done and she's about to catch up with what's been happening in Ambridge. HOWEVER – there is a knock at the door. She sighs and switches off the radio. She rises from her seat and answers the door.

DEIRDRE

(poking her head inside the room)

Oh!... Hello, didn't expect to see you up and about.

ALISON

I beg your pardon.

DEIRDRE

This is number seventeen?

ALISON

Yes... what do you mean up and about?

DEIRDRE

(checking her clipboard)

Station Road?

ALISON

Yes, that's right Seventeen Station Road.

DEIRDRE

Oh it'll be a slip up in Admin again. Got the times all muddled up I expect. S'pose I could wait.

ALISON

Wait for what?

DEIRDRE

The right time, only I hope it's soon. I've got rather a lot on. Been a heck of a busy lately. Lot of people down with flu.

ALISON

The right time for what?

DEIRDRE

Oh, I'm sorry... *(she checks her clipboard again)* Alison is it?

ALISON

Mmm... Alison Watt.

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DEIRDRE

... I can't understand this. (*reads from her clipboard*) Alison Watt, seventeen Station Road and here you are, quite the thing. I've heard of this happening but it's a first for me.

ALISON

Heard of what happening?

DEIRDRE

Oh, I'm sorry. I still haven't explained have I? I'm just not used to talking to clients. Well, not until later on in the process.

ALISON

What process? I think I'd like you to go now please.

DEIRDRE

No, no... give me a minute. I'll try and do it in a more traditional sort of way.

ALISON

Please, you're beginning to frighten me. I don't know who you are, but I'd like you to go. If you don't go I'll call the P...

DEIRDRE

(*In a booming very low down growly voice*)

...I HAVE COME FOR YOU!

ALISON

You've what?

DEIRDRE

I HAVE COME FOR YOU! Oh, that plays havoc with your vocal chords. I used to use a megaphone but it was a bit cumbersome to carry around.

ALISON

You've come for me?

DEIRDRE

Yes... I'm Deirdre and I will be taking you over.

ALISON

Taking me over where?

DEIRDRE

TO THE OTHER SIDE.

ALISON

I don't know what you mean. Classic FM?

DEIRDRE

Oh, I'm hopeless at this... Alison, would it help if I said that everybody I've dealt with... professionally, up till now... has usually been, how can I put it? What's a good word for it? Dead?

ALISON

Ah, I understand now...this is some sort of sick joke isn't it? It's not your fault Deirdre, but I think we're both the victims of a vicious prank. You're an undertaker aren't you and somebody has called you to come to this address. Well I can assure you I'm very much alive and reasonably well and not at all dead... I was listening to The Archers.

DEIRDRE

Well, I'm not quite sure what that proves, but it does sound like a very plausible explanation...

ALISON

...I thought as much...

DEIRDRE

... if... I was an undertaker.

ALISON

You're not an undertaker?

DEIRDRE

No, 'fraid not.

ALISON

Oh!

DEIRDRE
(agreeing)

Oh!

ALISON

Well what are you if you're not an undertaker?

DEIRDRE
(she thinks for a moment)

I'll give you a clue.

She holds up three fingers.

ALISON

Three words?

DEIRDRE nods, and holds up one finger.

First word?

DEIRDRE nods again.

Wait, wait you haven't said whether it's a book or film or on the telly!

DEIRDRE

What do you mean a book or a film...

ALISON

... you're not allowed to speak!

DEIRDRE

Well... it's not a book or a film is it? It's me... it's what I am, what I do...

She holds up one finger again.

ALISON

First word?

DEIRDRE nods and crosses one index finger over the other to form a "T" shape.

ALISON

THE!

DEIRDRE nods again.

ALISON

First word the...

DEIRDRE nods and holds up two fingers.

Second word?

DEIRDRE nods and puts on a grim face.

Sad? The Sad... unhappy? Grumpy? The Grumpy...

DEIRDRE pulls her earlobe...

Sounds like?

DEIRDRE nods and breaks into a huge grin and points to her face.

Smile?... happy... The happy. The Smiley... Carol Smiley?

DEIRDRE

I am not Carol Smiley? Do I look like Carol Smiley?

ALISON

You're not supposed to speak...

DEIRDRE pulls on her earlobe again and grins...

ALISON

Sounds like grin?

DEIRDRE does the thumbs up.

ALISON

The grin?

DEIRDRE pulls her ear lobe yet again.

ALISON

The, sounds like grin?

DEIRDRE nods and holds up three fingers.

ALISON

The, sounds like grin, third word?

DEIRDRE nods and begins swinging an imaginary scythe.

ALISON

Mower? Scythe... harvester... The Grin... harvester... the reaper. THE GRIM REAPER!

DEIRDRE points cheerily to Alison with her right index finger while placing her left index finger on the tip of her nose.

DEIRDRE

Phew!

ALISON

(realising what she has just said)

The Grim Reaper?

DEIRDRE

(nodding)

Well... not the main man obviously. I'm one of his little helpers.

ALISON

The Grim Reaper has little helpers?

DEIRDRE

Yip, and I'm one of them.

ALISON

Like Santa's little helpers?

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DEIRDRE

Oh don't be ridiculous, Alison, we're talking about the real world.

ALISON

This is still some kind of joke isn't it?

DEIRDRE

Oh – I wish it was Alison, I wish it was, but I'm afraid... I HAVE COME FOR YOU.

ALISON

(In the same very low growly voice)

WELL, I'M NOT GOING!

DEIRDRE

Ah, a sense of humour, I like that, but I'm afraid you don't have a choice. Nobody does. Everybody goes in the end.

ALISON

Why should I believe you? I mean anybody can come into somebody's house and put on a silly voice and claim they are the Grim Reaper.

DEIRDRE

... one of his little helpers...

ALISON

... whatever. I'm not convinced.

DEIRDRE

Well, it's never really been an issue before. Usually my clients are lying on the floor when I arrive, or in bed, or behind the wheel of a car. They're not usually... well, up and about and listening to The Archers. Normally I don't have to do all this convincing. People who are dead ask a lot fewer questions. They're a lot easier to deal with...

ALISON

...sorry...

DEIRDRE

...all this conversation stuff isn't really in my remit. All I usually have to say is "Hello, I'm Deirdre I will be your life to afterlife transitional guide for today, would you kindly walk this way" and that's it.

ALISON

Do you have a scythe?

DEIRDRE

Not with me... I've got a pair of nail scissors.

ALISON

S'not the same is it Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

No... I've got a little ceremonial scythe I was given when I qualified. I keep it at home, on the mantelpiece.

ALISON

I see... and whereabouts is home? Narnia? Somewhere over the rainbow?

DEIRDRE

Broughty Ferry.

ALISON

Now, you see, Deirdre that doesn't help convince me that you are one of the Grim Reaper's little helpers. Ha, Broughty Ferry!

DEIRDRE

There's nothing wrong with the Ferry, I've lived there for years.

ALISON

No, no, I would agree with you, there are parts of Broughty Ferry which are very nice indeed. Just the place for someone from the afterworld to live. Do you have an office nearby?

DEIRDRE

I commute.

ALISON

A basement flat I suppose?

DEIRDRE

Semi-detached.

ALISON

Oh, semi-detached... very nice.

DEIRDRE

Alison, why are you being so snippy?

ALISON

Because I've just about had enough of this, oh... *(she clutches her chest a little)*

DEIRDRE

... what's the matter?

ALISON

...nothing, nothing... I'm okay. You're just getting me slightly worked up that's all.

DEIRDRE

Can I fetch you a glass of water?

ALISON

No, no... I'll be fine – I just need to take one of my angina pills.

DEIRDRE

Ah... *(she checks her clipboard again)* I see, angina, yes that figures.

ALISON

What do you mean? *(she pops a pill under her tongue)* What does it say... on your form?

DEIRDRE

Oh, nothing... just the usual admin stuff... paperwork eh... who needs it? Are you feeling a bit better?

ALISON

Yes thanks.

DEIRDRE

(disappointed)

Oh...

(she checks her watch and then the clipboard again and drums her fingers on the form)

Still okay?

ALISON

Yes thank you, it's easing a bit now. My husband used to have to take these pills as well. The pair of us eh? Sweet tooth that was our problem. Too many cakes. Too many sweets. He was a devil you know. He'd fool about tickling me in the kitchen and I'd shout "Go easy... I've got acute angina" and he'd shout "yea, and you've got a fine pair of legs as well!" Ha...

DEIRDRE

...cheap schoolboy humour.

ALISON

Well that about sums them all up, doesn't it? Until one day when he was in his shed. He'd just gone out to get some string to tie up his sweet peas. I'd put the kettle on for our elevenses, we always had a milky coffee at eleven o'clock. And a bun. Fudge doughnuts was his favourite, but it was chocolate éclairs that day. Anyway I was reading my Peoples Friend and I'd finished my coffee and eaten my éclair and was eyeing up his when I suddenly thought, where the devil's he got to? It's a funny old thing but you usually think there's something wrong when there's nothing wrong at all. And this time when of course everything was as wrong as it could possibly be I dawdled round to the shed without a care in the world, and there he was, slumped over the Flymo. I just stood and looked at him lying there with his face squashed up

against a flowerpot. I didn't know what to do. There was nothing I could do, not a thing, and then I remembered in a flash. About three weeks before I'd taken him out some tea and scones... homemade jam and some New Zealand Anchor butter and two Tunnocks Caramel wafers for his two o'clock's . He was out in the shed cleaning the hedge shears, sitting on his wicker chair and he said "Ally," he said, "when the time comes" he said, "I think I'd like to die in this shed." I said – don't be daft love, you shouldn't be talking about daft things like that. But then when I saw him lying there, slumped over the Flymo with his face squashed up against that flowerpot, I thought – you bugger, you got your wish. Small comfort to me though Deirdre, I still miss him every minute of the day.

DEIRDRE

How are you feeling?

ALISON

I'm fine now.

DEIRDRE

No palpitations? Tightness in the chest?

ALISON

No, I'm fine.

DEIRDRE

Difficulty breathing?

ALISON

No, no I'm fine honestly.

DEIRDRE

Oh well, never mind. Well, Alison, I'm not sure what to do now. I don't know whether I should hang around or go away and come back again. I've got another home visit in about an hour in Lerwick...

ALISON

That's Shetland isn't it? I've been there. Doug and I went there on a mini-cruise from Aberdeen with P & O. That was nineteen eighty-nine. Of course if Doug was here he'd say no it wasn't Ally, it was eighty-eight. And I would say, no it wasn't Doug it was eighty-nine it was the same year Moira and John got married and he'd say yes it was the same year Moira and John got married, and they got married in nineteen eighty-eight because I'd just come back from Cambridge. And I would say not it wasn't, because you came up from Cambridge for the weekend specially for the wedding and then we'd forget what on earth we'd been talking about as if it bloody mattered which year it was we went to Shetland. The whole point was that we went there... sometime... together...

DEIRDRE

...well, I've got to be there in an hour... young chap on a motorbike although don't tell anyone I told you that... client confidentiality and all that.

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ALISON

Deirdre, is this all a joke?

DEIRDRE

No, Alison... I'm really sorry that it's turned out this way, I'm just useless at explaining as I said I've never had to do it before but no, it's not a joke.

ALISON

Have you really come for me?

DEIRDRE

Yes.

ALISON

So, am I going to die soon?

DEIRDRE

Well, yes I think so.

ALISON

You think so?

DEIRDRE

Well according to my form, you should be dead already, but given that you aren't then chances are that, yes you will be soon.

ALISON

Where will you take me? Heaven?

DEIRDRE

Well, we prefer to use the term "the other side," it's easier... bit more universal. I mean when we're here, then this is here and the other side is "the other side" And when we're on "the other side" then that becomes here and here becomes "the other side" It's quite simple really. But it's only folks like myself that can go back and forward from here to the other side. Generally speaking people from here would get what you might want to call a single ticket from here to the other side. We don't generally issue returns, in fact I don't think it's ever ever been done. In fact it hasn't.

ALISON

What's it like?

DEIRDRE

Mmm?

ALISON

The other side? What's it like?

DEIRDRE

Well, I'm not really supposed to say.

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ALISON

Well, I'm supposed to be dead, so I won't tell anybody if you don't. Are there angels and stuff and God?

DEIRDRE

Em... no, not really.

ALISON

Choirs? People sitting on clouds?

DEIRDRE

No.

ALISON

I didn't think there would be. I can't remember when I stopped thinking there would be, but I didn't think there would be. Well, what is it like? Tell me.

DEIRDRE

It's... it's a bit like... It's a bit like Switzerland.

ALISON

Switzerland?

DEIRDRE

Yea, or Canada maybe.

ALISON

Switzerland or Canada?

DEIRDRE

Yes...

ALISON

We went to Switzerland once, Doug and I on a bus trip to Interlaken... ninety-one I think it was. Or no... was it ninety-two? Georgina and Mike had just moved house...

DEIRDRE

...Alison! It doesn't really matter when it was, does it? The important thing is you went there... sometime... together...

ALISON

Mmm... So is it a bit like Interlaken?

DEIRDRE

Em... a bit... I suppose...

ALISON

So, is it a bit like going on a Thomson's Lakes and Mountains package deal?

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DEIRDRE

No...no,no,no...no...no. Not really but there are lots of mountains and lakes and waterfalls and clear pools brimming with fish...

ALISON

...Deirdre, are the fish dead?

DEIRDRE

No, no, the fish are fine... and there's bunny rabbits and bears...

ALISON

...bears?

DEIRDRE

Mmm... bears.

ALISON

Are the bears dead?

DEIRDRE

No, no, no, the bears are fine too. The bears are fine, the fish are fine and the bunny rabbits are fine. Nothings dead Alison everything's fine.

ALISON

Everything... except me? I'll be dead.

DEIRDRE

What? No, no... you'll be fine too. Trust me. It's just like here but without the bad bits. No package deals... or buses. Oh blimey... beam me up Scotty

ALISON

It's like Star Trek?

DEIRDRE

What? No Alison it's not like Star Trek... oh it's so much easier when they're lying on the floor or in bed or behind the wheel of a car.

ALISON

I'm sorry... I'm just interested that's all. Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

Yes, Alison?

ALISON

I'm frightened of bears.

DEIRDRE

Oh please don't worry about the bears Alison, honestly they're big coothy lumps.

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ALISON

Will Doug be there?

DEIRDRE

Oh boy, the big one. I was wondering when you'd get round to asking that. Do not tell anyone I told you this...

ALISON nods nervously.
Promise?

ALISON

Yes, okay I promise.

DEIRDRE

I mean really promise. If anyone finds out I told you this, then I'll be out on my ear. My career as a life/afterlife transitional guide will be finito.

ALISON

I understand.

DEIRDRE

Sorry... what was the question again?

ALISON

Doug... will Doug be there?

DEIRDRE

Yes... Doug will be there. Everybody's there.

ALISON

Everybody?

DEIRDRE

Yep, everybody who's ever lived and died.

ALISON

Blimey, it's bound to be a bit crowded.

DEIRDRE

Well, not really, remember... it's a big place, you know... a bit like Canada...

ALISON

Oh yea... What about the bad people?

DEIRDRE

Everybody who's ever lived and died. But we have ways of keeping things going smoothly and as far as you're concerned Alison, you'll only see or bump into people you want to see or bump into.

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ALISON

So, I'll see Doug.

DEIRDRE

If you want to, yes.

ALISON

What will he look like?

DEIRDRE

He'll look just how you want him to look... just as you remember him the last time you saw him alive...

ALISON

...in the kitchen. Peering out the window saying...

SFX OF DOUG'S VOICE

Those sweet peas need tied up – I'll just go and sort out some string before elevenses. Put the kettle on Ally I'll be back in a minute.

ALISON

... I want to go now. Take me with you Deirdre I want to go now. Please I'm ready to go.

DEIRDRE

You're not.

ALISON

I am, honestly. Let's go... to the other side, let's go now.

DEIRDRE

Alison, you are not ready...

ALISON

I am!

DEIRDRE

You're not.

ALISON

Why not?

DEIRDRE

Well... because, to use a horrible modern phrase, which somebody like me should actually be above using... Your case doesn't exactly tick all the boxes.

ALISON

What?

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DEIRDRE

There is one box left un-ticked.

ALISON

Oh!

DEIRDRE

Oh! Exactly, and we both know which box it is.

ALISON

Mmm... it's the "Is Alison dead box?"

DEIRDRE

It is... and until it's ticked... you stay put I'm afraid.

ALISON

You could kill me...

If you like what you've read so far and would like to buy a copy of the complete script or would like to perform the play, please get in touch.

Thanks for reading,

Bob Davidson