

SCENE ONE: MOTHER NATURE'S REALM

GAUZE: A DENSE WOODLAND LUSH WITH GREENERY, BLOSSOMING TREES, FOREST FLOWERS AND TOADSTOOLS.

Bird song, a gentle breeze. A magical glissando. Enter FLORA GLORIANA. She is kind but stern with a big heart and a warm smile.

MUSICAL NUMBER: Performed by FLORA GLORIANA

FLORA: What a beautiful day! The chiffchaff is warbling happily, the breeze is gently whispering through the tree branches, a little bumblebee is humming its merry song . . . nothing could spoil this blissful tranquillity.

CONKER: (*Yelling, from offstage*) Mistress Flora!

FLORA: (*Startled*) Oh! Deary me.

CONKER: (*From offstage*) Where are you, Mistress Flora?

FLORA: I'm over here, dear, by the tree!

CONKER: (*From offstage*) Which one? There are loads of trees – you live in an enchanted woodland.

FLORA: Oh, yes, of course! How silly of me! I'm next to the ancient oak.

Enter CONKER, an excitable and rather annoying tree goblin.

CONKER: Ah! There you are! I've been looking for you everywhere. Where have you been?

FLORA: I was enjoying the peace and calm . . . before you spoilt it with all your racket. You really are a noisy thing, Conker.

CONKER: That's because I'm a tree goblin. All goblins have big gobs – the clue is in the name.

FLORA: Yes, yes, whatever! The point is I was trying to have a quiet moment before I begin the story.

CONKER: (*Eagerly*) Ooh! Are you going to tell a story? I love stories. What's it about?

FLORA: You'll have to wait and see, Conker.

CONKER: Well, what sort of story is it?

FLORA: It's a Christmas story.

CONKER: (*Uncontrollable with glee*) Ahhh! I love Christmas! Christmas is the best time of the year! I am beyond excited . . . (*Stopping short*) Errr. . . Why are you telling a Christmas story?

FLORA: Because I appear in it, dear – but not until later.

CONKER: There aren't many Christmas stories that feature Mother Nature.

FLORA: Not many, dear.

CONKER: Am I in it too?

FLORA: You might be . . . but only if you're on your best behaviour.

CONKER: Ooh! I will be! Promise, promise, promise, no fingers crossed. (*Beat*) So, where does the story begin?

FLORA: It begins where all good Christmas stories begin . . . at the North Pole . . . in Santa's workshop.

SCENE TWO: SANTA'S WORKSHOP IN THE NORTH POLE

BACKBOARDS: A BUSY, BUSTLING ENVIRONMENT FULL OF VIBRANT COLOUR AND SPARKLE. THERE ARE OLD-FASHIONED TOYS EVERYWHERE; ROCKING HORSES, TOY SOLDIERS, DOLLS, TEDDY BEARS AND TRAIN SETS.

The workshop is bustling with activity. MRS CLAUS and TRIXIE are organising everybody. TOPPER, FROSTY, BUTTON, CHERRY and PEPPER are making or packaging toys. HOLLY and IVY are knitting with BAAA-BARA.

MUSICAL NUMBER: Performed by MRS CLAUS and the ELVES

At the end of the number, the tea-whistle toots.

MRS CLAUS: Tools down everybody. It's time for a cuppa.

As some of the elves disperse into background to continue with their jobs, HOLLY and IVY begin to chat. They are two elderly elves responsible for producing knitwear using wool provided by BAAA-BARA, a magic sheep. All three like a natter but have a tendency to bicker.

HOLLY: Thank goodness for that, Mrs Claus. I'm parched – I've really worked up a thirst this morning.

IVY: Me too, dear. I'm as dry as a stale mince pie.

BAAA-BARA: I could tell you were flagging, Ivy. You dropped a stitch.

IVY: Ooh, it's a lie, Baaa-bara! I never did - I haven't dropped a stitch since eighteen sixty-four.

HOLLY: Yes, I remember that. You were in the middle of knitting that scarf for Charles Dickens.

IVY: That's right, Holly, dear. It was at the top of his wish list.

HOLLY: It was a very intricate piece based on A Christmas Carol.

IVY: Yes, I sneezed and poor old Bob Cratchit nearly ended up with a missing ear.

TOPPER, an overly chirpy and cheerful elf, approaches the ladies with a notebook and pen.

TOPPER: Ladies, what would you like to drink?

HOLLY: Two teas please, Topper.

BAAA-BARA: And a lamb-onade, please. *(Beat)* Haha! Do you get it? A lamb-onade.

TOPPER: *(Confused)* Erm . . .

BAAA-BARA: It's a joke – I'm a sheep and I want a drink of . . . lamb-onade.

TOPPER: *(Comprehending)* Oh, yes! Brilliant. I love it! I shall write it down on my pad and use it when I'm on cracker joke duties later today.

IVY: Don't encourage her, Topper. It's not that funny.

TOPPER: Oh, it's fabulous! It's fabby-dabby-doosy-woosy! Miss Baaa-bara comes up with some of my best cracker jokes.

IVY: She should be concentrating on her job not thinking of silly jokes for you.

BAAA-BARA: I can manage both, Ivy, you know.

IVY: Can you? I requested a cerise pink earlier . . .

BAAA-BARA: And that's what you got.

IVY: It was more coral than cerise.

HOLLY: I've noticed the quality of your wool hasn't been up to scratch this morning.

BAAA-BARA: Ooh, that was a sheep shot! How dare you!

MRS CLAUS detects tension and approaches. She has a kind-heart and a generous nature but is firm and efficient.

MRS CLAUS: *(Detecting tension)* Now then, dears, whatever is going on over here?

BAAA-BARA: The Plumduff sisters are making unsubstantiated remarks about the quality of my raw material.

MRS CLAUS: Oh dear, ladies, not again.

HOLLY: Miss Baaa-bara is here to provide us with superior magical wool so we can knit scarves and mittens and Christmas jumpers of the highest quality.

MRS CLAUS: And I'm sure that is what Baaa-bara is doing.

IVY: It is when her mind is on the job.

BAAA-BARA: My mind is always on the job and my wool is never inferior.

MRS CLAUS: Now, now, ladies, I think we all need to calm down and I know the very thing to do that. (Beat) Topper, when you fetch the tea bring through the freshly baked gingerbread.

TOPPER: Yes, Mrs Claus.

HOLLY: Ooh, gingerbread! Delicious.

IVY: Yes, my favourite!

BAAA-BARA: And freshly baked, what a treat!

MRS CLAUS and TOPPER move away from the ladies.

MRS CLAUS: Well, that seemed to do the trick.

TOPPER: Yes – all's wool that end's wool.

MRS CLAUS: Yes, yes, very good, Topper. Time to carry on with your drinks order.

TOPPER: Of course, Mrs Claus – absolutely! Would you like one?

MRS CLAUS: My usual cinnamon and nutmeg infusion please.

TOPPER: Coming right up!

As MRS CLAUS moves off, TOPPER approaches TRIXIE, a smart, quick-witted elf with a positive outlook and energy.

TOPPER: Trixie, would you like a drink?

TRIXIE: Topper, I've told you before – it's Miss Merrymuffin when I'm the duty supervisor.

TOPPER: Whoops! Sorry, Trixie . . . ooh, I mean Miss Merrymuffin.

TRIXIE: I'll have a hot chocolate please . . . with squirty cream.

TOPPER: Good choice! That's what I'm having.

TRIXIE: I better go to check on Santa and see if he would like a drink. I'll be back in a jiffy.

TOPPER: What's that? Is it a new model of toy car?

TRIXIE shakes her head in despair and exits. TOPPER approaches FROSTY, the grumpiest elf in the North Pole.

TOPPER: Frosty, it's my turn to get the drinks. What would you like?

FROSTY: Thought you'd never ask.

TOPPER: Would you like something different for a change today?

FROSTY: No. Why would I?

TOPPER: Well, they say a change is as good as a rest.

FROSTY: I've always thought that was a ridiculous saying. How can a change be as good as a rest? If you need to put your feet up, you don't want to be given a new job to do, do you? You want to sit down in a comfy chair and have a snooze.

TOPPER: So, it's a black coffee then?

FROSTY: You got it.

TOPPER: You don't want a hot chocolate?

FROSTY: Nope.

TOPPER: Are you sure? Because me and Trixie are having hot chocolate . . . with squirty cream. Well, actually, I'm going to have extra squirty cream on top on my squirty cream . . . with a cherry on top of that. And strawberry sauce. And chocolate sprinkles. And maple syrup. And honey drizzled over that. With a candy cane sticking in it.

FROSTY: No wonder you're so annoyingly enthusiastic and cheerful with that much sugar coursing through your veins.

TOPPER: It's good for elves to have lots of sugar. It gives you energy and makes you smile.

FROSTY: I'll stick to black coffee.

Enter TRIXIE, rushing in, clearly distressed. She is clutching a parchment.

TRIXIE: Oh, my goodness, oh my goodness!

MRS CLAUS, BAAA-BARA and the ELVES gather around TRIXIE

CHERRY: Trixie, what's happened?

BUTTON: You look like you've had a terrible shock.

IVY: You're as white as a sheet.

BAAA-BARA: Not all sheep are white, you know! Look at me – I'm all the colours of the rainbow.

IVY: (*Snapping*) I said sheet! Not sheep.

BAAA-BARA: Oh, pardon me for bleating.

MRS CLAUS: Will you two be quiet and let the poor elf speak! Trixie, whatever is the matter, my dear?

TRIXIE: It's Santa. He's gone. He's nowhere to be seen. (*Holding up the parchment*) I think he's been taken. Santa Claus has been kidnapped.

SCENE THREE: BUTTERBROOK ACADEMY SCHOOL LIBRARY

BACKCLOTH: A SMALL CLUTTERED SCHOOL LIBRARY WITH TOWERING BOOKSHELVES, PEELING POSTERS AND MAPS ON THE WALLS, AN OLD BLACKBOARD AND A SCHOOL SIGN WHICH READS BUTTERBROOK ACADEMY.

CASEY is sitting in a corner reading a book and ADDISON is tidying the shelves. FLORA and CONKER are ignored as they enter as if invisible.

CONKER: That was a bit of a shocking way to start a story! If I was sitting down, I'd be on the edge of my seat.

FLORA: I thought that would get you hooked.

CONKER: I hope this story is going to have a happy ending.

FLORA: Nothing is certain.

CONKER: (*Looking around*) Where are we now? This doesn't look like the North Pole.

FLORA: It's not. We're somewhere in England – a small town called Butterbrook. This is one of the schools.

CONKER: Why are we in a school?

FLORA: Wait and see.

FLORA and CONKER exit as MORGAN enters from the opposite direction. MORGAN is friendly and upbeat. MORGAN spots CASEY and bounds over. CASEY is bookish, clever and a little intense.

MORGAN: Casey, there you are! I've been looking everywhere for you.

CASEY: Why?

MORGAN: Because I want to speak to you.

CASEY: No, I mean, why have you been looking everywhere for me? You know if I'm not in a classroom, you'll always find me in the library.

MORGAN: Unless you're on the loo.

CASEY: I suppose, but even then, I try to avoid going at school if at all possible. The school toilets are a dangerous place to visit when you're a geek like you and me.

MORGAN: I'm not a geek.

CASEY: Oh, please! Morgan, you're one of the biggest geeks Butterbrook Academy has ever seen.

MORGAN: I am not!

CASEY: (*Calling over*) Addison, can you get me a dictionary please?

ADDISON: Get one yourself.

CASEY: You're a student librarian.

ADDISON: Yes, and I've got jobs to do.

CASEY: You're right next to them.

ADDISON begrudgingly gets a large dictionary

ADDISON: (*Handing the dictionary to CASEY*) What did your last slave die of?

CASEY: Being hit on the head by a large dictionary.

ADDISON: Very funny.

ADDISON moves away to continue tidying. CASEY flicks through the dictionary.

CASEY: (*Locating a word*) Ah! Here we go. (*Beat*) 'Geek, an unfashionable or socially inept person who is often a knowledgeable and obsessive enthusiast'.

MORGAN: Sounds nothing like me – I'm not socially inept . . .

CASEY: Inept . . .

MORGAN: Or obsessive.

CASEY: How old was Yoda when he died?

MORGAN: Nine hundred.

CASEY: What is Princess Leia's first line in Star Wars, Episode Four?

MORGAN: Lord Vader, I should have known.

CASEY: What odds does C3PO give Han Solo for successfully navigating the asteroid field?

MORGAN: Three Thousand, seven hundred and twenty to one.

CASEY: Case closed. (*Beat*) Don't worry, I'm more of a geek than you – at least you don't spend all your break times in the school library.

MORGAN: You should come out on the playground with me once in a while, get some fresh air - it's not good to be cooped up inside all the time.

CASEY: This is my retreat, Morgan, my refuge . . . my shelter from the storm.

Enter ELLIOTT and TAYLOR

CASEY: (*Noticing them*) Oh no! What are they doing in here?

MORGAN: Looks like your safe haven has been infiltrated by the enemy.

CASEY: Grab a book and keep your head down.

MORGAN gets a book and sits next to CASEY.

TAYLOR: (*To ELLIOTT, sarcastically*) So, this strange new world is called a library . . .

ELLIOTT: Get lost.

TAYLOR: (*Pointing*) And these things made of paper are what we call books.

ELLIOTT: (*After a fake laugh*) I wish I was as funny as you, Taylor.

TAYLOR: You'll never be as funny as me.

ELLIOTT: No, just better looking and better dressed.

TAYLOR: Whatever.

ELLIOTT's mobile phone beeps.

ADDISON: (*Calling over*) Mobile phones on silent please, Elliott.

ELLIOTT: What's it got to do with you, Addison?

ADDISON: I'm the duty librarian.

TAYLOR: Also, known as the fun police.

ADDISON: Part of my job is to keep the noise level to a minimum in here.

ELLIOTT: Well, I'm the duty trouble maker and part of my job is to make your job more difficult.

ADDISON ignores the comment and turns away to continue with her work.

TAYLOR: So, why the big interest in joining a committee all of a sudden?

ELLIOTT: I thought it was time for me to start contributing to school life.

TAYLOR: You've managed to get through your whole education avoiding committees and societies so far – why now?

ELLIOTT: Because, Taylor, there's never been a Christmas committee before! And, as you know, I am the world's biggest fan of Christmas so I felt it was my responsibility to give the school the benefit of my expertise.

TAYLOR: To be fair, you are pretty obsessed with Christmas.

ELLIOTT: Totally, right. We're always the first house in the street to put our decs up – this year we put them up the day after firework night.

TAYLOR: My Dad won't let us decorate the house 'til at least the first of December.

ELLIOTT: My family are just like me, they're all over it. We love Christmas. The flashing lights, the tinsel, glittery nail varnish . . . I've got a new shiny Christmas jumper this year that glows in the dark . . . and new sparkly snowman earrings.

TAYLOR: So, basically, you're going to suggest they cover everything in glitter.

ELLIOTT: Basically, yeah. (To ADDISON) Hey, Addison?

ADDISON: Keep your voice down! This is a library.

ELLIOTT: Where do we sign up for the Christmas Committee?

ADDISON: What's it to you?

ELLIOTT: I want to join.

TAYLOR: Elliott's got lots of ideas.

ELLIOTT: Taylor wants to join as well.

TAYLOR: Do I?

ELLIOTT: Yes.

ADDISON: It's on the wall over there. There's a pen on a bit of string next to it.

ELLIOTT: Come on!

ELLIOTT drags TAYLOR over to the list

SAMPLE