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A ONE-ACT PLAY IN SIX SCENES

NOTHING

OR

The Day When No One Killed Anyone. Almost.

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NOTHING, OR THE DAY WHEN NO ONE KILLED ANYONE. ALMOST. (A ONE-ACT PLAY IN SIX SCENES)

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Synopsis

In a quiet English village, an Inspector and his Constable investigate a crime scene — only to find that nothing has happened. As they question the locals, the absence of wrongdoing reveals a deeper horror: a world so sterile that only a murder can make sense of it all.

Cast of Characters

INSPECTOR	A steadfast, experienced detective, 65 years old.
CONSTABLE	A young rural policeman in a raincoat
WIDOW	An elderly aristocrat.
PUB OWNER	A burly, formidable sort of man, 40 years old.
DISTANT RELATIVE OF THE GARDENER	A man or woman of middle age. Wearing: faded shirt, wide-brimmed hat, jeans, rubber boots.
VICAR	Tall, slender. Clothes not new, but neat. White collar — the only sign of his clerical status.

Place

A typical, small English village.

Time

Unforgivably early.

Director Notes

Estimated running time is approximately 15 minutes.

The stage space is arranged with light, movable panels of different sizes, creating depth and an impression of multilayering. At the back of the stage — a screen. On them are projected decorations: almost colourless graphics in the recognizable style of Edward Gorey, possibly animated.

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: A drizzly morning. A clearing. The stage is lit by the flickering of police flashing lights. An area cordoned off with tape. Inside the cordoned area — nothing. Only mist and tall grass softly swaying.

At Rise: INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE are on stage.

CONSTABLE

Ahem…

INSPECTOR

Yes?

CONSTABLE

I'm sorry, sir. It's just that, well - it doesn't seem to look as if anything has actually happened here…

INSPECTOR

An astute observation, constable.

CONSTABLE

Would I be correct in saying that this is, in your opinion, a crime scene, Inspector?

INSPECTOR

Indeed. In fact, it's precisely as you just observed, constable. Nothing has happened here. Can you recall even one day when nothing happened here?

CONSTABLE

I don't suppose I can, sir.

INSPECTOR

You see, constable. Our reality is not static; it changes every second. That is, it's constancy. Reality is always changing; you can't even be certain what things will be like this afternoon.

CONSTABLE

No, absolutely. Anything can happen before noon.

INSPECTOR

Anything could happen. Don't you understand? Gravity could disappear or, worse — our ability to smell!

CONSTABLE

Or childhood, even.

INSPECTOR

And here — absolutely nothing, understand? — nothing has happened. We must investigate. We need a motive.

CONSTABLE

I'm sorry sir, a motive for what, exactly?

INSPECTOR

(a bit irritated)

For the uncommitted crime! For absence — in a figurative sense. Get on the phone to forensics, let them check everything here down to the last inch. We're missing something obvious.

CONSTABLE

I hope you don't mind my saying sir: But this really is quite an honour, us having you here. Just watching you untangle… this. The way you investigate, it's like an art.

INSPECTOR

Constable, please. Time in these matters is our most treacherous enemy. We cannot afford to waste it on sentimentality. We must hurry. Every second, witnesses' memories fade and become overgrown with false recollections. If we get lost in a labyrinth of false memories and those guilty of the deed do not receive due punishment — they will surely repeat it again. And I cannot allow that.

CONSTABLE

Allow what?

INSPECTOR

We are people of duty, constable. We are called upon to investigate crimes, to restore order where someone has disturbed it. Here we have an obvious violation of the order of the development of events. Hasn't it ever occurred to you… what will happen if nothing happens anymore? If all robberies, blackmail, thefts, murders, human trafficking, and illegal drugs disappear? What will become of us then? You understand, I wish no harm to come to anyone. But we are dramatic figures, created solely to fight crime. Without crime, we are redundant, meaningless. Our ultimate goal is to eliminate crime, but the paradox is that if it disappears — so do we.

CONSTABLE

(looking at the cordoned area, muttering to himself)

Well. I suppose when you put it that way, everything is much more complicated than it seems…

INSPECTOR

We need to review the surveillance camera footage again. And question the witnesses. We'll start with the Widow. She's always aware of everything that happens around here.

(Lights fade.)

Scene 2

Setting: Living room. On the walls — sabres, rapiers, rifles, hunting trophies, as well as portraits of moustached men and stately ladies with pearls.

At Rise: In the living room stand the WIDOW, MAID, INSPECTOR, and CONSTABLE.

INSPECTOR

Good afternoon, Madam. I do hope we're not disturbing you?

WIDOW

Inspector! Not at all. You're just in time, as always. Would you like a cup of tea?

INSPECTOR

A bit early for tea, isn't it?

WIDOW

Aha. Maybe something a little bit stronger then. Scotch? It's old, aged. Just like us, inspector.

(smiling)

INSPECTOR

You are very persuasive madam. You know just which side from which to manoeuvre.

(WIDOW nods to the MAID, who leaves.)

INSPECTOR

Thank you for having us, Madam. We've come here today to ask you if you've noticed anything unusual in this area lately? Any little detail could be of use to us.

WIDOW

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

(INSPECTOR glances at CONSTABLE — as if saying, see what I mean. CONSTABLE takes out a notebook, writes something down.)

INSPECTOR

Perhaps a suspicious visit from a stranger? Complications in any relationships? Blackmail, at least?

WIDOW

I wish!

(MAID appears with a small crystal glass on a metal tray. INSPECTOR sips. Smacks lips with satisfaction.)

CONSTABLE

Typical…

WIDOW

Well if you ask me, inspector, I'd say our Labour government is to blame. In the old days, we used to have poisonings in which all manner of people had at least one reason to see the victim go. Nowadays, you can't even get a decent barfight, let alone a murder. It's outrageous.

INSPECTOR

(nodding, thoughtfully twirling the glass in his hand)

We live in an age of cynicism, madam. Such things become systemic.

WIDOW

I trust you have reported this madness to the right people?

INSPECTOR

Oh, most certainly.

(finishes drink)

Nevertheless, I do apologise Madam, but I'm afraid I must be leaving you. We've many witnesses to examine.

WIDOW

I understand, inspector. You must do your duty.

INSPECTOR

Do inform me at once, if you notice anything askew.

WIDOW

You shall be the first to know.

INSPECTOR

Goodbye.

CONSTABLE

All the best to you, madam.

(They smile reservedly.)

WIDOW

Take care of yourselves.

(INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE leave.)

WIDOW

Old fool… he must have gone completely mad.

(Lights fade.)

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Scene 5

Setting: A Church. Beams of light cut through the space. Stained-glass reflects dull coloured spots on stone slabs.

At Rise: INSPECTOR, CONSTABLE, and VICAR stand in the central aisle between the pews. Behind the VICAR — the altar.

INSPECTOR

So you understand, Reverend. But who, in your view, could have an interest in nothing happening?

VICAR

Modern evil, Inspector. It's not bandits with muskets in the forest, you know. It is order brought to such sterility that nothing human remains in it. Evil now sits on committees of public morality, draws garbage collection schedules, and drafts evacuation plans…

CONSTABLE *(writing)*

Evacuation plans…

VICAR

God, creating the world, left room for choice. For error! But as you have observed here, inspector, today's "ideal," is a world in which nothing happens, is sinless, and therefore inhuman. Where there are no crimes, there is no need for law. And where there is no law, there is no fear, and no forgiveness. A world without fear is devoid of all hope. This is the true hell.

INSPECTOR

Excuse me, reverend, do you mean to say that we are now living in hell?

VICAR

It is not built yet, but it has already been designed.

(INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE exchange glances.)

VICAR

The former evil was childish, naive, theatrical. It was easy to recognize. It inflamed the passions, seduced, tantalised the wrongdoer with power. Rather like modern advertising, no? Meanwhile, the new evil is faceless. It does not promote sin — it simply removes it from the equation. It became the architect of the labyrinths that now control each human destiny, always working around the clock, never taking a day off. It builds walls of rules and regulations, narrowing human will to absurdity. Lying is called 'marketing', callousness 'professionalism', envy 'inspiration', fornication, 'self-discovery', murder - no longer always a crime but a duty, for the sake of peace and order. But we're living in the modern age. Let us rely on this senselessness, let us gladly and knowingly make mistakes for the sake of peace, ignoring the blatant absurdity of it all. Let us infringe upon the universal, transcendental Law, for the sake of 'order'.

INSPECTOR

I was hoping you could tell us something more concrete, reverend. Have you seen anything out of the ordinary around here lately, anything suspicious, perhaps?

VICAR

Suspicious you say?

(thinks)

No, I can't say I've seen a thing.

CONSTABLE

You haven't seen anything?

VICAR

I haven’t seen anything.

INSPECTOR

Thank you, reverend.

(Lights fade.)

Scene 6

Setting: Inspector's office. Semi-darkness. Through tobacco smoke, outlines of furniture barely visible. Desk with papers, lamp, and old-fashioned phone. On the wall — district map and photos with marks. In the corner — coat rack and filing cabinet.

At Rise: INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE are in the office.

CONSTABLE

Sir, if things really are this serious, if the very fact of our existence is at stake, I'm ready to do anything. I'm even ready to "afrinjup on the law" for the sake of order, as the vicar said. For the sake of our jobs, our existence, inspector!

INSPECTOR

Absolutely not, Constable. Unthinkable!

CONSTABLE

Just a pretend crime, then? You said it yourself, inspector, our very existence is at stake.

INSPECTOR

Constable, if we do something, we do it properly. You as a fellow police officer ought to know that. Now think, constable, let's summarise what we know so far.

CONSTABLE

(opens notebook, reads)

Widow — noticed nothing suspicious.

(pause)

Pub owner — essentially the same. Gardener's distant relative — nothing. Vicar — mere scholastic suspicions, not worth attention. Pharmacist — nothing.

INSPECTOR

Nothing?

CONSTABLE

Nothing.

(continues)

Neighbours of the schoolteacher say they also saw nothing. Brother of the doctor's acquaintance-

(The phone rings.)

CONSTABLE

(picks up)

Speaking. Yes, yes… Don't touch anything, we're on our way.

(to INSPECTOR, lively)

The Vicar was found murdered. Just discovered by the widow's cousin who arrived from London… Someone stabbed the priest with garden scissors.

INSPECTOR

Thank God! The order of events is restored! Let's go, let's go, why are you standing…

(The End)



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