

CLOWN KILLER

**By
Cerise de Gelder**

EMAIL: cerisedegelder@live.com.au

CHARACTERS:

STUPENDOUS: *A man, forty to fifty age range.*

ALICE: *A woman, any age.*

SETTING: *A street corner.*

(Alice stands centre stage staring straight up. Stupendous enters wheeling a trolley filled with umbrellas, initially obscured from view by a colourful silk cloth. He spies Alice, sidles up beside her and follows her gaze skyward.)

STU: Rain?

ALICE: *(Noticing him for the first time)* Clouds.

STU: Rain clouds.

ALICE: Possibly.

STU: Probably.

(He regards her for a moment. She becomes self-conscious.)

ALICE: I like to look at clouds...while I'm waiting.

STU: Waiting?

ALICE: For my husband.

STU: Ah.

(Stupendous looks from left to right.)

Is he late?

ALICE: Usually.

STU: Hard to imagine.

ALICE: What?

STU: Being late for you.

ALICE: *(Glancing at her watch)* He'll be here any minute.

STU: Of course. But...until then perhaps you would care to observe the cloud above us and slightly to the left.

(He points, she looks.)

Cumulus, if I'm not mistaken. Commonly known as a rain cloud. And wind direction currently being from left to right, or west to east for the navigationally aware, then logically one could predict that soon...it will rain. On us.

ALICE: Then perhaps you should take cover.

STU: I would only...I don't need to.

ALICE: And why is that?

STU: Ah well, I have a secret weapon. Or several, to be exact.

(He removes the silk cloth with a flourish to reveal his umbrella collection.)

Wa-la!

ALICE: Umbrellas?

STU: Not just any umbrellas. Umbrellas with a history that would enthrall and bewilder, if only they had the power of speech.

ALICE: You're a salesman, aren't you.

STU: Madam, you offend me.

ALICE: A man carrying five umbrellas, accosting strange women and predicting rain? Don't think I can't see what you're up to. I'm no fool.

STU: And I am no salesman, Madam. A salesman would try to convince you that the umbrella is worthy of you, whereas I must convince myself that you are worthy of the umbrella.

ALICE: Okay, what's so special about them?

STU: Nothing.

ALICE: But you just said/...

STU: It is their previous owners that were special.

ALICE: They're secondhand?

STU: Of course.

ALICE: All right...I'll bite. Who owned them?

STU: To tell you that I must reveal my true identity. Or more precisely who I used to be...in a previous life.

ALICE: You're reincarnated?

STU: Madam, I'm mysterious and colourful, not a raving lunatic. I mean, I must tell you of my life many years ago, before time gripped my joints with anger and sprinkled my hair with grey. When my skin was firm and my body taut and I was known to all those who passed the threshold of Mandrake's Magical Circus tent as The Great Stupendous!

ALICE: Stupendous?

STU: The Grrreat Stupendous! The greatest trapeze artist that ever lived...at that time in that part of the world.

ALICE: You were a trapeze artist?

STU: Not *a* trapeze artist, Madam, the *best*...at that time in that part of the world. But alas...my life was cursed.

ALICE: Cursed?

STU: Cursed by my heritage. My mother and father were trapeze artists. And their parents before them and theirs before them. I was born to swing...it was my destiny. And yet...my heart belonged elsewhere.

ALICE: You wanted to run away and leave the circus?

STU: Never! I loved the circus! It was all I knew. It was in my blood, my whole being. There was no other life for me.

ALICE: Well, where was your heart?

STU: Every night I would stand high above the crowd in my silver leotard and my royal blue cape...majestic, magnificent and melancholy. Watching them far below, knowing that that was where I was meant to be.

ALICE: In the audience?

STU: The clowns, Madam, the clowns. Running, tripping, flying, tumbling, in outrageous costumes and ridiculous shoes. They made everybody laugh. Forget their miserable lives for just a few minutes. Made them believe there were others less fortunate than themselves, who fell and flustered, fought and failed, but just kept smiling and laughing through it all because life was just one big magnificent joke.

(Pause)

But no one laughed at the trapeze artist. No one felt better because some jerk in a silver leotard flew through the air and was caught by another jerk in a silver leotard. We received their respect, bowed to their polite applause. But the clowns...they had their love.

(Pause)

ALICE: So...why didn't you become a clown?

STU: It just wasn't done. There were clowns and there were trapeze artists, and that was the way of the world. But that didn't stop me from being with them at every opportunity. Every night I was in their caravans listening eagerly to their stories and learning their tricks. I loved them all...Muppo, Zeppo, Poppy, Boppo, Ziggy, Zippy and Frank. They were like family to me, more than my own family. And then...

(Pause)

ALICE: Then?

STU: Without warning...he struck.

ALICE: He? He who?

STU: The Clown Killer.

ALICE: Clown killer!

- STU: A madman. A crazed animal with a psychotic hatred of clowns. One night, Zeppo was performing his tightrope trick...on a bike high above the crowd, holding an umbrella. When suddenly the tightrope snapped.
- ALICE: Oh my God!
- STU: Tampered with, they said. Weakened just enough to give way in the middle of his act. And down they plummeted, Zeppo, bicycle, and umbrella, in a horrible twisted tangle of metal, makeup and ridiculous shoes. I ran to him...heard his dying whispered words, felt his last feeble breath upon my cheek.
- (Pause)*
- And this...*(holding up an umbrella)* is the very umbrella that he clutched to his death, no doubt hoping desperately that it would break his fall, that it would catch a puff of wind and save him from that fatal, final impact far below. But sadly...
- ALICE: Doesn't look like a clown's umbrella.
- STU: Oh? And what would you expect to see? A tattered frill? Some tawdry tinsel? Perhaps a splash of blood spattered amongst the glitter?
- ALICE: Well no, I...just thought....Did they catch the clown killer?
- STU: If only they had. Alas he lived to strike again and again...another town, another clown. Muppo was found with a rubber nose thrust deep into his oesophagus. Poppy was strangled with one of his balloons. Boppo was bashed to death with his own rubber baseball bat. Zippy, Ziggy...each one killed in increasingly horrific ways. And each with their painted smiles erased and turned upside-down into a satanic frown.
- ALICE: And Frank?
- STU: Frank married the bearded woman and moved to the suburbs. He never really fitted in.
- ALICE: And these are their...
- STU: Umbrellas. Collected, protected and offered only to those few who are worthy.
- ALICE: You think I'm worthy?

STU: The moment I saw you I knew.

ALICE: How?

STU: A woman who studies clouds in such a busy and distracting world...this is a woman who cares about what matters.

(He holds out an umbrella to her.)

Zeppo.

ALICE: I'll treasure it.

STU: I knew you would.

ALICE: *(Fetching a note from her wallet.)* But I want to pay you something.

STU: *(Feigning reluctance he puts out his hand to accept it.)* If it makes you feel better.

ALICE: They never found him? The clown killer?

STU: Never.

ALICE: And you left the circus?

STU: It closed down, I retired. All good things...so on and so forth.

ALICE: *(Looking up the street.)* I see my husband's car.

STU: Then you must go, but...always remember what matters.

(Pause)

And make sure he does too...

ALICE: I'll try. Thanks.

(She exits.)

STU: Because everyone must remember what is important. We must all find what is in our hearts, be it trapeze artist or clown, and fight to be who we truly are, no matter what it takes, no matter what...or who...we must sacrifice.

And when the time is right...when there are no clowns left to perform...then the show must go on. Another clown must be found! Enter Stupendo The Great!

(He puts an umbrella up with a flourish and pretends to walk the tightrope. There is the sound of an audience laughing and cheering.)

And finally...he will be loved!

(Lights down.)

END