

FOULWEATHER FRIEND

sample script

By James Kent

A dark comedy in two acts

<http://offthewallplays.com>

Settings and Characters in FOULWEATHER FRIEND

It is June, 1957, in Covered Bridge, Vermont. Though picturesque, it is a village no one wants anymore. In Act One we are introduced to a pond, then a community stage brimming with props and set pieces. In Act Two the characters are only in the graveyard. Drop dead silence is punctured by sounds of crickets, cicadas, birdsong and by lightning and thunder.

Characters in "Foulweather Friend" abound. Though eight are clearly known to us, there are several more offstage clinging to the lifeless village and, while going unseen still manage to complicate the plot. Invisible principals include Hamilton and Nenor.

DARBY *Dartmoor* is a village aristocrat from a once prominent Vermont family. He is unofficially Lord of Dartmoor Manor. Since his father died sliding from solipsism in the stock market, Darby has been the best educated man in the village. Early seventies.

LOLA *Drabble*, an actress of her time, considers herself madly talented rather than talentedly mad. Direct and coy, she is a director's nightmare. Her perspective is skewed and her growing self-awareness of it makes her increasingly difficult to know. Sixties.

CLARICE *Clark* is a born play director, fatuous and gastritic, an actor's nightmare. Fifties.

CRATTY *Stirling*, a firecracker, is the world's oldest Brownie Scout. Some of her deafness is denial. She's at least in her nineties; however, since she's a packrat and can find nothing in her house, including her birth certificate, who knows? She certainly doesn't.

MORTIMER *McFife* is irascible, rude with a mind no more complicated to explain than a double helix. He obsessively pushes -- brooms, people, arguments -- with all his might which at times can be considerable for his age. Seventies or eighties.

PEGREEN *Dalyrimple* is intelligent and cagey, young and beautiful, clear and baffling --and insoluble even if she is who she says she is. She's twenty-eight, a complete "stranger."

JOHN *Smith* only wishes he could solve anything from ancient mysteries to finally finding a bed with a woman in it. Curious as an unceasing science student, he remains vibrant as a boy with his first chemistry set. He is also just as bottled up. Late thirties.

JANE *Paxton* has seen many weddings in her historic home, always as a bridesmaid. Her life until recently has been devoted to her long-lived, ever-dying parents. At last living alone she might be close to forty-seven as she's claimed these past three years. A passionate gardener, she enjoys digging up her estate, mystified by most of her finds.

EXCERPT FROM ACT ONE SCENE THREE TO ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

DARBY: Proving what?

MORTIMER: She's a Democrat!

DARBY: Democrats are not communists in short skirts. Not even in Scotland.

MORTIMER: Watch it. You know my background's Scottish.

DARBY: There are nudist camps. Though probably not in Scotland. How would you tell a Democrat from a Republican?

MORTIMER: The hell you say. That Democrat female copper-playwright's a secret agent.

DARBY: Morty! What possible interest could a secret agent have in Covered Bridge?

MORTIMER: It's J. Edgar Hoover. He wants all our secrets.

DARBY: Covered Bridge is *constructed* of secrets. Take them away and the town will collapse like a house of cards. Come to that, I realize now that's what J. Edgar has in mind for the country. Anyway, there's nothing here except dirt swept under the carpet.

MORTIMER: Hah!

DARBY: Morty, listen to me. There's no center to your argument. There never is.

MORTIMER: And now all these archaeologists. More 'n' a month, now, I've had a hunch this hamlet of ours is sittin' square on a diamond mine.

DARBY: Diamonds. I want to get this straight. Diamonds! In Vermont?

MORTIMER: My bones tell me. And my bones don't lie.

DARBY: That's not instinct. That's your arthritis.

MORTIMER: And you! Once district attorney for the whole of Creek County.

DARBY: I stepped down since they neglected to offer me a scepter and orb. I was temporary, appointed for only six months after the county D.A. fell in a sink hole.

MORTIMER: Ahah! Just the point I'm comin' to. And they never retrieved the body. It sank too low but they did dig DEEP, and up come buckets of crystals.

DARBY: Crystals. Not diamonds.

MORTIMER: A coverup.

DARBY: It's pure sin to see a man's mind muddled by fabulous Scotch.

MORTIMER: Tell me. How many clues you need?

DARBY: More. Many more.

MORTIMER: Where's your litigator's curiosity?

DARBY: My curiosity? I drank it half an hour ago. Why are you drunk and still making no sense?

MORTIMER: Who is this Preston Dalrymple?

DARBY: A voluptuous though irritating young woman with a ridiculous man's name.

MORTIMER: So why'd she need a man's name?

DARBY: To be taken seriously. I do know something about the world. Nothing new about a nom de plume. George Sand. Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell now known as Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë. I'd lend you their first editions if the moths in the library hadn't eaten the best bits.

MORTIMER: Here's what I really think.

DARBY: Really what?

MORTIMER: Think.

DARBY: Ah, well, if you're gonna tell me *that* then first swallow more Scotch.

Mortimer gulps it down.

MORTIMER: Forget what I said about the FBI.

DARBY: *Did* you say something about the FBI?

MORTIMER: It's BIG. She's one of them new fangled G-men. G-women. Special Service. What's it called? What Ike set up after the war. Gee. I like Ike.

DARBY: So Pegeen -- Preston Dalrymple.....

MORTIMER: That makes her initials P.D.

DARBY: Mortimer, please don't say that's code for police department.

MORTIMER: Her license plates are from Washington.

DARBY: No doubt she's been digging 'round Seattle for emeralds.

MORTIMER: Washington, D.C. Hah!

DARBY: So you're saying she's the CIA posing as a playwright, secretly overseeing a team of archaeology professors on a secret mission to uncover a "Diamond as Big as the Ritz"? The whole of Vermont? Or just Covered Bridge is the next crystalline carbon nexus to rival South Africa?

MORTIMER: That's the stuff's been cloggin' my well. Pure Tiffany dust! Then using whachacallit..... Darb. Help me with this one.

DARBY: Eminent domain?

MORTIMER: That's IT!

DARBY: I'm certain there's another case of that Scotch around here. *(getting up, glancing)* Can't survive much more of this without it.

MORTIMER: This is BIG. Washington, D.C., absorbs another state's rights!

DARBY: Like missile silos in the Dakotas?

MORTIMER: Finally, Darb, you're talkin' sense! D.C. -- the Fed against states' rights. It's them or us. We gotta act fast. Oh, if only the British had succeeded in 1812, the Fed would be outa our hair. Vermont could make us all super rich! We need a militia!

DARBY: Morty.....?

MORTIMER: Aiyah?

DARBY: I can't find the Scotch. I believe it's upstairs ... in the Highlands. May I show you the door?

MORTIMER: I can find it just fine.

DARBY: Do try not slamming. It upsets the bats.

MORTIMER: *(striding away)* To hell with you, Darby Dartmoor.

We hear stomping, then a far-off door SLAM followed by some flapping wings.

DARBY: From the mouth of one hick sociopath, there's never been a more accurate forecast.

Lights are dimming on an inebriated Darby, waving his empty glass.

DARBY: Pity. I'd planned to serve him haggis. Á la Parisienne.

Deafening, flapping bat wings as -- lights gradually cross-fade to the oval "stage."

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Act One, Scene Four

Gradually brightening, the stage is dressed for action. Light glows from a lantern.

In her own pin spot we see Lola in a fabulous white satin dress embroidered in lace. She carries a lantern. Then full light. Lola reacts, temporarily blinded.

CRATTY: (*sneaking onstage*) Lola! Gorgeous! Where EVER did you get that fabric?

LOLA: It's an homage. They're Mother Drabble's. Rather, her fancy bedroom draperies.

CRATTY: Just like Scarlett O'Hara!

LOLO: Yes, dear, that would be the homage bit.

CRATTY: You look just like a bride. A sateen bride.

LOLA: *Satin*. Genuine satin. Hand stitched. By my hand. Finally I exult in luxurious fashion, the very fabric Mother Drabble dressed her own windows. Monstrous bitch.

CRATTY: Such language. I swan. Sorry, I'm sure.

LOLA: I'm wearin' most of the money that would've put me through the Fashion Institute in New York where Mother Drabble refused me to go. I was only too happy to shred them!

CRATTY: Why I do declare, it's so white it reminds me of ice skatin'.

LOLA: It's called "Ice White." Like my mother's bulging eyeballs. Down under red clay. And that's the last of her! She was too dead in life to ever become a spirit.

From the other side of the stage we easily hear Mortimer, then Clarice shouting.

MORTIMER: Would ya stop yer yammerin' on stage? I'm trying to fix the lights ... what of em' still works.

CLARICE: "Ice White," indeed! At her age she looks like Lillian Gish surfing an ice floe.

MORTIMER: Loudmouth! You want to do the electricals? Your place is onstage, Woman.

In a snit, Clarice strides on stage.

CLARICE: Give me tempo, tempo, girls. Explode like a rocket. Don't wait to be talented.

PEGEEN: (*walking on stage*) Yes! Faster and more talented. Important to the process.

CLARICE: What "process?" This here is openin' night!

PEGEEN: Can you possibly be serious? We haven't rehearsed a single scene all the way through. We haven't touched most of them.

CRATTY: We been too busy with staircases and wardrobe. That's the part we like best.

PEGEEN: Opening night. You don't know a single line of the play!

MORTIMER: Never stopped 'em afore.

CLARICE: That's why we're able to produce so many plays each year.

PEGEEN: How many?

CRATTY: Oh, I'd say about twenty-six.

PEGEEN: You mean twenty-six staged readings!

CLARICE: Even in deepest, darkest January.

CRATTY: What's she talkin' about? What's a staged reading?

LOLA: Don't know. (*shrugs*)

CLARICE: Ahem. Never mind. YOU ... (*to Pegeen*) ... just a writer, are ordered offstage.

Pegeen storms off, tossing her script on the stage floor.

CRATTY: Ya done give us the GIST. And don't you expect an invitation to the cast party either ... *playwright*. Staged reading, my foot. How can ya read it and stage it? We demand to know, Clarice. Have you been keeping something from us?

DARBY: (*entering*) Only that member dues pay her light bill.

CLARICE: That's offensive.

PEGEEN: I'm the insulted party!

CLARICE: I'll get Darby to part with some of his vintage Scotch. Jes you 'n' me.

PEGEEN: I shiver at the thought.

CLARICE: Alright, then we'll skip the ice.

MORTIMER: Here that, Darb?

DARBY: Darn fifty pairs of my Brooks Brothers socks and I MIGHT let you get one finger of my Glenfiddich single malt Scotch. That stuff's my medication!

MORTIMER: (*bellows*) Lights are set! Let's rocket this piece of crap. I had no lunch.

DARBY: Now I'm sure you girls read through all of Clarice's director notes.

CRATTY: Might could have if she'd given any.

Standing beside Morty, Pegeen emits a drawn out moan.

CLARICE: So you're all prepared with the all-important new GIST.

PEGEEN: You refer to my painstaking rewrite as the "new gist"?

CLARICE: Lola, you start as soon as the last Fresnel starts to dangle. I'll be in the first row. *(runs OFF)*

CRATTY: That's a comfort. Maybe it'll fall on her.

Stage lights dim making the lantern light appear stronger.

MORTIMER: Now where'd I put the sound system.....?

Magic! The essence of theatre, Lola is instantly in character. We hear strong wind, then a roaring fan. The Fresnel dangles. Lola is windblown. Her parasol blows away.

LOLA: OoooooooooH! What am I to do? Here in my delicate, illegitimate condition. No wonder the estate gates is slammed shut. I've disgraced my fabulously aristocratic Southern family -- the mansion fully furnished, even the draperies originally from Scotland. From Duart Castle. On the Isle of Mull. Oh, but the gist is even more interesting now that I'm with child therefore disgracin' the entire Maclean Clan. GOSH. Isn't anyone proud? I remembered some of the actual lines.

PEGEEN: That was ALL background material.

LOLA: I liked it better than the play. Maybe you ought to try novels, Dearie.

PEGEEN: *And*, I don't write exposition or "gist."

CRATTY: La-di-dah.

MORTIMER: Sh! Don't *say* that. You know it's like settin' off fireworks!

Lola slouches. She immediately affects a Southern accent, very Scarlett O'Hara.

LOLA: FIDDLE-DEE-DEE!

MORTIMER: Now you gone and done it!

PEGEEN: Is she acting?

CLARICE: They don't give Tonys for Selective Schizophrenia. As far as I know.

Clarice shouting from her front row position.....

CLARICE: Morty, turn off that goddamn fan!

The fan instantly ceases.

CLARICE: I gave into the full-term centenarian, for what? A preggers octogenarian?

LOLA: Why I'm barely ... how dare you, Clarice! Pegeen, what are you doin'?

PEGEEN: Counting on my fingers.

CLARICE: But is Duart Castle really relevant to the preterm contractions you're 'bout to have in that white dress? *(stepping up to the stage)* And WHY for God's sake would a woman having contractions on

a driveway choose to be clothed in white?

LOLA: I didn't dare wear it to Mother Drabble's funeral. Wanted to though.

CLARICE: What did you say?

LOLA: Doncha remember? I'm here to ring for my groom. Only the bell isn't functioning.

MORTIMER: (*yells*) No request for a bell, Woman!

LOLA: I'm ringing just inside yonder Natchez mansion. Beggin' my parents for my hand in preglock. Wedlock.

CLARICE: My work, never begun! Once again abruptly finished! You..... Assassin!

Lola is shaken as Clarice skips over to Mortimer and Pegeen.

LOLA: Where was I? Where WAS I? Oh, yes..... My parents.

MORTIMER: They TWO hundred?

LOLA: They must be distressed, ah say diss-tressed ovah my sudden disappearance! And my beau. Press!

Darby rushes onstage wearing a white linen suit, colonel tie and straw fedora.

DARBY: I'm here, my sweet! (*turning to Pegeen*) Do I really have to use your words?

PEGEEN: YES!

Lola in the white satin dress does a full curtsy and abruptly slumps to the floor.

LOLA: Oh, Press! I'm bowin' before ya. And my dress is wrinkling faster than I am. (*flops*) Oh! Press! Rumors run rampant. Don't listen. Don't marry that Yankee gal. Oh, Press! Press the dress! Press me to ya. (*sobs*) Have pity, Press, at least on my parents, their daughter unable to find her way back to the gate states, agates, I mean estate gates.

Interrupting, Clarice rushes on stage.

CLARICE: OK. Enough. Let's move on to scene two.

PEGEEN: What?! We haven't established anything.

CLARICE: You're too young to have seen movies so good they affected your whole life. I know *exactly* where this is going. (*shouts*) ACT ONE, SCENE TWO. NOW!

A background scrim turns from translucent to transparent. We see a row of what appears to be a dozen corpses bouncing on metal lawn chairs.

DARBY: Dabnabit, Clarice. Now you've done it. You've ACTUALLY done it!

CLARICE: I swear on my mother's grave just over that hill. I never dug her up. Why, I couldn't wait to put her in the ground. I've never seen any of these corpses.

LOLA: I don't know what to say. Heavens to Betsy.

MORTIMER: That's always good.

DARBY: Morty? Cratty?

MORTIMER: I confess for both of us.

CRATTY: We done it!

Lights up as Cratty approaches one of what is apparently a corpse. She shoves a "dead" woman on the shoulder causing the woman to keel over.

CRATTY: We made 'em with straw, just like the scarecrows. We didn't go near the graveyard, we-

DARBY: Just raided poor tenant farmers' fields! "Most Peaceful Town!" Humbug.

MORTIMER: We'll put 'em back! Them's all "people" made of straw.

CRATTY: Like Ray Bolger. What could be more innocent? Let's put 'em in the front row.

DARBY: Didn't go near the graveyard, huh? What's this then?

LOLA: Why, those are the estate gates.

PEGEEN: There are NO estate gates in my play. There is no estate. Spiraling out of control!

DARBY: Even the rust looks familiar.

MORTIMER: We uh....

CRATTY: Borrowed 'em. That's right.

DARBY (*examining them*): Thank you for not removing the gates from Dartmoor Manor.

MORTIMER: Why, no, we wouldn't disturb the manor. Anyways, those gates are too big.

CRATTY: Why, no, never, Darb. These gates are from Covered Bridge Serenity Graveyard.

CLARICE: I think we already knew that much.

DARBY: I agree. I've never felt more serene.

Mortimer is propping up the straw "corpse" that Cratty knocked over.

CRATTY: Don't fuss with the next one, that's Hamilton.

MORTIMER: He's supposed to be backstage helping me!

CRATTY: Yah. Now I remember. That's his effigy. Dead or alive he looks the same.

Suddenly all lights brighten. Everyone is covering their eyes.

CLARICE: Morty, deal with the lights!

Mortimer dashes to the light board, a confusion of assorted cords next to a wind-up telephone. A "whiz" sound and electrical sparks erupt. Just as suddenly.....

BROWNOUT *as the scene continues:*

We hear everyone's by-now familiar voices in pandemonium. "Oh heaven help us!" and "Is this the end?" and "It feels more biblical than dramatical" and "Pay no attention to that mad man behind the curtain" are included remarks.

CLARICE: Didn't I warn you to upgrade this old box to a circuit breaker?

MORTIMER: Ya mean just like the one ya put up on your own house with member dues!

CLARICE: Snoop.

MORTIMER: Thief.

CLARICE: Do I go all over New England, mucking about, stealing scarecrows?

CRATTY: I'll try stickin' some pennies in the fuse box. That always works at home.

MORTIMER: Before or after your barn burned?

CLARICE: Are ya wearin' work gloves? Stupid cow.

CRATTY: Wowiee! What a cheap orgasm. THERE!

Lights bounce back on. Cratty looks covered in brown ash.

MORTIMER: Go wash up, Cratty.

PEGEEN: Yes, you do look like a weekender in Miami.

Pegeen helps Cratty OFF. Immediately, Lola resumes another monologue, again in her Tidewater accent.

LOLA: "With enough courage you can do without a reputation." Where is now?

DARBY: Who? Press?

LOLA: Not you, Turncoat! Rhett?

DARBY: I'm right here, Lola.

EXCERPT FROM ACT ONE SCENE 5 TO ACT TWO SCENE ONE

JANE: John. Adonis.

JOHN: Hecuba.

JANE: Might I have another go?

JOHN: Psyche. Greek representation of the soul.

JANE: Better. What's the next thing you crave to say to me, Dearest?

JOHN: Female intuition could help me with this.

JANE: It could help me, too.

JOHN: You embolden a man.

JANE: How exactly emboldened are you at present, dear one?

JOHN: So much marble and stone but looking at you.....

JANE: Yes.....

JOHN: I feel like Woody Woodpecker.

JANE: Oh, John.....

JOHN: Name it and it's yours.

JANE: Fine. Would you mind, awfully, removing your hands from my breasts?

John sheepishly does so.

JANE: Thanks. It's just that this is a Maidenform, the form I wish to remain until at least the word "marriage" is bandied about.

JOHN: Maidenform Marriage?

JANE: Well it's a start. Really, it isn't terribly personal. It's just that everything here has to be catalogue ordered. And this is my last one that "lifts, holds and separates."

JOHN: That's what you do for me.

JANE: Maybe it's the full moon.

He reclines on the staircase to Dartmoor Mausoleum.

JOHN: Hither, Jane.

JANE (*reclining*): How ... when do we just get on with it?

JOHN: When the timing is absolutely right.

JANE: Let's see. We're absurdly alone. In a graveyard. Cornucopic with decay -- very nearly Caravaggio. Full moon. Anything missing?

JOHN: Just this.

Grasping the marble staircase, John balances over Jane. He puckers to kiss her but the slimy green steps beneath him give way. He tumbles but is quickly up, examining the chipped marble.

JOHN: I think it's reparable.

JANE: You could have borrowed the gardening gloves I always keep in my back pocket.

JOHN: Just a scratch. This sort of thing used to happen all the time in Herculaneum.

JANE: With some mohair co-ed?

JOHN (*sitting next to her*): You are my first, Jane. And mohairless.

JANE: You don't know that yet.

JOHN: You must believe me, Jane.

JANE: But what if I were to prefer a man with some experience?

JOHN: Listen deeply to me, Jane. I've read all of Kinsey *and* Edith Hamilton.

JANE: My pet.

JOHN: My wet dream. Women archaeologists have running noses, mud and plaster on their faces that tend to resemble Agatha Christie. Some eat lunch with palette knives.

JANE: You're so cosmopolitan.

JOHN: But my whole life ... all I've only wanted to be is-

JANE (*excited*): Married?

JOHN: A paleontologist. Studying extinct organisms. Exhilarating fossils.

JANE: Sounds scrumptious, pet. Why then did you become an archaeologist?

JOHN: Because no paleontology degree program would offer me a tennis scholarship.

JANE: How odd. Universities are such blandished bureaucracies.

JOHN: (*sighs*) Saddest word.

JANE: Tennis?

JOHN: Paleontology.

JANE: You missed your calling.

JOHN: Then you do understand.

JANE: Missed your call? Oh, yes. Never had one. A telephone.

JOHN (*embracing her*): But we have each other, now, in the moment! The gloves. NOW.

Jane jerks the gardening gloves from her back pocket. Again, John grasps the staircase and balances to kiss her -- this time with gloved hands on the slimy green steps.

JANE: (breathlessly) : I assume you believe in protected ... you know.

JOHN: Hands? Oh. I've had the same prophylactic in my wallet since my senior year.

JANE: Really. Mind if I check the expiration date?

JOHN: It doesn't matter. I have this instead.

John produces a small velvet box. He opens it, then abruptly shuts the lid.

JANE: It's a diamond engagement ring!

JOHN: I was an Eagle Scout. Always prepared.

JANE: A diamond does beat a merit badge. But wouldn't buying another prophylactic to say nothing of extending pleasure have been less expensive?

John sits, dejected.

JOHN: But more embarrassing! I could have died.

JANE: You're in a graveyard. Does that help?

JOHN: I made myself wear a mustache and drew one on my driver's license.

JANE: You're saying after your first penetration in your entire life you'll ask to marry me?

JOHN: Your sensorial orbs comet my cosmos. Yes, Jane. On my word of honor.

JANE: I've never received a more beautiful and/or certainly better organized proposal.

JOHN: I warn you, I shall never be entirely happy, no. However I could teach you tennis! Anyway, these

days and soft summer nights together have been sheer bliss, my imp.

JANE: And we'll have a bassinet next to the telephone. Mother Paxton told me telephones were for spying on people. She spoke with conviction. After all, Nenor was her sister. Mother said anything I had to say to a boy I could say in front of her. Imagine?

JOHN: I hear only rabbits rutting in lush, luxuriant, finely textured tall grass. Take me. Now! Please.

JANE: Quick, *change!* You lie on the staircase. It's busting my bum.

JOHN: Will it work that way?

JANE: Be the missionary and you find out.

JOHN: Really?

JANE: Dearest, after thirty-something years of self-imposed celibacy, I have the distinct impression your first time will be over before we both know it.

We hear voices, faintly then definitely those of Clarice and Darby.

JOHN: Oh, Palace of Knossos. Someone's coming! Let us rut in the grass like bunnies.

John is pulling Jane away from Dartmoor Mausoleum.

JANE: But I've done this before and I have allergies! ACHOO! Just the thought of it!

Shirt tails out, they vanish behind shrubbery leaving a trail of gardening gloves.

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END OF ACT ONE

Act Two, Scene One

The scenes are transitional in this act. Each scene takes place in Covered Bridge Serenity Graveyard.

Dartmoor Mausoleum, now three dimensional with its elevated terrace, represents a new architectural order: Dour Neoclassical. In background in act one, here it's down right center. Naturally we are clearly able to hear Clarice before we see her. Darby leads the way, huffing and puffing.

DARBY: Why can't you "HOE" when I say "HEAVE"?

CLARICE: My aching back. Set it down!

Jane's horrified face looks over a tombstone. Now in full view, here it is: a shrouded figure, though certainly not dancing under its seven very soiled veils. It is also someone's idea of a Pharonic

sedan chair -- a gold Damask upholstered, gold leaf Louis quinze bergere secured onto a bamboo platform with handles.

JANE: Somehow I KNEW those two were grave robbers! But I never dreamt it was in such bad taste.

JOHN: Sh!

JANE: Oh, John. I can't afford to bury my parents again.

JOHN: Sh!

John's hand covers Jane's mouth as she nearly shrieks. He tugs her back behind the tombstone.

CLARICE: Sh! What was that?

DARBY: Just rabbits rutting in the grass.

Jane represses John's giggles.

CLARICE: Well, at least the "rabbits" are amused. Can't remember the last time I saw rabbits wearing gardening gloves. *(picking them up)*

DARBY: So I hear tell.

CLARICE: An overgrown disgrace. Mortimer gets a stipend to groom this graveyard.

DARBY: He's slowin' down just like the rest of us.

CLARICE: I disagree. If anything he's more wired than ever. Probably it's the Geritol. What I don't understand is how anyone could crack Mother Dartmoor's sarcophagus. It would require anchor chain and a tractor. How can I not suspect Mortimer?

DARBY: No time to dither. Help me shove Mummy back inside her room of doom.

CLARICE: You left out "gloom." Really, you ought to go into greeting cards. Wait!

DARBY: *Now* what's the trouble?

CLARICE: Really, Darby! Hasn't it occurred to you? The lid is solid marble. Who could shift it? I can't be of any help. You and your entire family give me the shudders.

DARBY: That's close to expressing emotion, Clarice. Keep it up and one day you might have a personality.

They pick up the sedan chair again.

DARBY: Now when I say "Heave" don't wait for the marines to come to your assistance.

A dinner purse drops from the corpse.

CLARICE: OK. Set it down.

DARBY: Son of Andrew Wyeth, what is it now?

CLARICE (*clutching the clutch*) : Hedy Lamar had one of these in ... what was the one with Don Ameche? How many clutches did your rotten mother have? Exquisite beads.

DARBY: Those "beads" are rubies. Damn! I could've reroofed the East Wing with a simple Sotheby's sale. No nest egg. Do you know I don't have a single Vermeer in the manor?

CLARICE: OK, Big Shot, I'm keeping this. What are you gonna do, *tell* somebody?

DARBY: I simply need help entombing my mother. Is that asking too much?

CLARICE: Completely absurd. Dartmoor Mausoleum -- it's Fort Knox! Just how do you propose to enter? Do you keep a key under the welcome mat?

Darby lifts the welcome mat and produces the key. Clarice tries to speak but she's choked up. They enter the vast space with mysterious angled sources of ambient light.

CLARICE: Capacious. I suppose that pile of marble breasts signifies fertility. There's enough room for a Roman feast.

DARBY: Or an orgy. I suspect something along those lines may have been her fantasy afterlife when she hired Wallace Harrison. That's why Rockefeller Center fell behind.

CLARICE: But ... your father's not buried here.

DARBY: No. Mother had him parked in the ravine. More ignominy. An unmarked grave. She preferred her own liquidity to his seat on the Stock Exchange. She had millions. He died a pauper.

CLARICE: So much for vows.

DARBY: To keep him in his place she obtained his wood office chair from his Wall Street office so he's buried upright too. Just not sure where....

CLARICE: Stone cold in here. Help me on with this coat.

DARBY: What *is* this coat?

CLARICE: Lola made it for you ten years ago when you acquiesced to play Hamlet.

DARBY: Alas, we've never done the Bard.

CLARICE: Naturally since you don't believe he wrote any of his plays.

DARBY: In veritas. I do not.

CLARICE: Just as well. Rehearsals were disaster, everyone refusing to speak in iambs. Discussing 'Hamlet' with that bunch would have been like trying to explain the Rosetta Stone to quarry mice.

DARBY: Seen my torch? I must have my flashlight somewhere. Here!

The torchlight blanches the ambience.

DARBY: My God. Where do spiders come from?

CLARICE: Regardez! The crypt is still sealed.

DARBY: Mother Dartmoor is inviolate!

CLARICE: Damn beads. NOT rubies at all. *(tossing the purse out the door)*

DARBY: Which begs the question: Whose corpse have we been hauling on a bamboo *bergere*?

CLARICE: If those had been bona-fide rubies I might've been coerced to remove the seven veils. So gross. Stuck to her head with gut rot and blood stains.

DARBY: What did you do with those horny gardening gloves? We'll yank the veils. Reveal the corpse. Ready? One, two, three! Oh.

A quite large skeleton bobs and boings on the Louis quinze, tropical sedan chair.

CLARICE: What did you expect? A passport photo face? This belongs in the catacombs.

DARBY: Seven veils over a skull. Who is ... who was she, do you think?

CLARICE: Someone very dead. Buried quickly I suspect since she was obviously never embalmed. *Regardez!* Notice all these long flowing scarves from our theatre costume trunks?

DARBY: Vaguely. Maybe. Seems a long while since I seen 'em.

CLARICE: Something else. She looks older than Salome. Certainly this is the biggest skeleton I've ever seen. The ribs are wider than my Philco television screen.

DARBY: Science owes a debt to your powers of archival description.

CLARICE: Someone may have dug a little too deep, a hominid, maybe Lucy from Africa.

DARBY: God help me. My mother's sarcophagus. Here we are. Dead of night. Must you embellish, Clarice? When is reality lurid enough?

We hear Mortimer approaching. He pushes a wheelbarrow containing Hamilton, his legs drooping over the sides, a plaid blanket over the sword still embedded in his body.

MORTIMER: Doodalee-doodalee-doodle-dee. *(stopping to rest)* Hamilton, dear friend, all my life I been in the theatre and this is the worst openin' night I can remember.

Mortimer notices the "ruby" purse on the turf.

MORTIMER: Run off without her purse. I swear, Hamilton, this place is gettin' a worse reputation than Croak Pond. Grass is a might tall. Hm, better oil up my hand mower. But first, I gotta find a place for your eternal rest. T'ain't easy since the graveyard is the only crowded place in the village.

Mortimer crouches, listening to Clarice's prattle from inside the mausoleum.

CLARICE: I don't know why but I was obviously always under the delusion that attorneys were made of sterner stuff. Haven't you at least any sense of curiosity?

DARBY: I had been an innocent. I became curious only when I also became flat broke.

CLARICE: And that's when you accepted Montpelier's offer for the job of County Coroner.

DARBY: Yes! For the stinking fee. I have a lot of stray cats to feed.

CLARICE: Isn't that position usually reserved for someone who happens to be a doctor?

DARBY: The last doc we had died in Iwo Jima. I got through six months of pre-med before the vomitus stench drove me to Bankruptcy Law. You take what you can get.

CLARICE: I want you to look at something. There's a locket.

DARBY: A what?

CLARICE: Around the ... well ... neck of the skeleton, excuse me, corpse. (*opening it*) As I suspected, it's an antique photo of Bettina.

DARBY: Who? I'm not going near that thing, woman, skeleton. Isn't there a bar in here?

CLARICE: Oh, alright, I'll unclasp this antique locket. Have a look as I open it. It's Bettina.

DARBY: Who in hell was antique Bettina?

CLARICE: I recognize you're under stress.

DARBY: Clarice. I'm standing in my mother's mausoleum well past midnight. Does stress creep up on you for a better reason?

CLARICE: Well, Bettina cinches it.

DARBY: There is no one who has ever lived in Covered Bridge whom I've not known including this "Bettina."

CLARICE: Yes, there is. Mother Drabble's sister. She let herself get "knocked up" as I believe the expression now goes. On an overnight visit Bettina revealed she'd missed twice and was spirited back to Boston, a city never known for concealing unwed mothers. She perished in childbirth with a son who later moved to Bangor to seek his fortune in I know not what -- *snow*? Died, we'll never comprehend how appropriately, in an avalanche. Sorry for the red herring, Darb, at a time when you appear to be seeing snow blind yourself. So to the point. Do you see those four marks on the snow white marble floor?

DARBY: I do.

CLARICE: They match the legs of the Louis-Tiki sedan chair we've been lugging since we discovered it tonight in the theatre wings. You realize of course what that means?

DARBY: Only that you find it an irreducible objection.

CLARICE: And so should you. Darby? Are you seriously telling me that you've never once been inside this, your mother's mausoleum, since she was interred?

DARBY: What of it?

CLARICE: Well, for one thing you would know -- in fact we both now know that Mother Drabble was never buried. Instead, Mortimer as graveyard custodian, the lazy lout placed the two mutually loathing dominatrixes side by side here, like Elizabeth and Mary in Westminster. Consequently, Mortimer must also have known you would never return to this spot. Why?

DARBY: Mummy was delicious, uniquely overqualified for life, an intellectual bon-bon. She was also unbearably cruel, evil, devious, self-absorbed and monstrous. I hated her. I've never said that, not even to myself. I suppose that's the reason I avoided this place.

CLARICE: Again, Mortimer knew you would.

Mortimer dives behind a tombstone.

DARBY: You recall his father was our butler. What Mac McFife didn't know he concluded -- which in this village equally amounts to evidence. Morty and I played as children. He was persistent even then, always inquiring where my mother was, and I stupidly replied that I "didn't know or care." No secret from below stairs remains there for long.

CLARICE: You didn't attend Mother Drabble's funeral.

DARBY: I don't attend funerals. Or weddings. They're too similar.

CLARICE: Everyone else was there though probably no one recognized Lola's overwrought set design of the Louis-Tiki sedan chair that the cortege dropped in front of *your* mother's mausoleum -- since that's always been as far as the grass has been mown!

Mortimer scrambles behind another tombstone, and stumbles.

MORTIMER: Oof!

On the precipice of the terrace to the mausoleum, Clarice stands, arms akimbo.

CLARICE: You can come out now, Mortimer. I've known all along you've been eavesdropping. And your raccoon stealth proves your conviction, ghoulish sloth!

Darby joins her.

DARBY: Why didn't I choose to be a funeral director? Early morning cadaver gardening?