



Albert T. Viola

Adapted from Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Feathertop" (1852)

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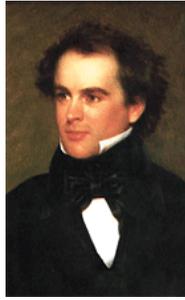
TALLEVAST, FL 34270

Lord Feathertop

CLASSIC. Adapted from the short story “Feathertop” by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Determined to save her corn crop, Mother Rigby, a witch, constructs a human-looking scarecrow and becomes so impressed with her creation, she decides to bring it to life to live among “other men of straw and empty heads who go bustling about the world.” Mother Rigby names her new son, Lord Feathertop, and sends him to the house of Justice Merton. There, Feathertop meets the Justice’s daughter, Rachel, and the two fall in love at first sight. But when Feathertop views himself in a parlor mirror, he sees not a gentleman but a scarecrow. Horrified at seeing his true self, Feathertop no longer wants to live and returns home to Mother Rigby, where he breaks the magical pipe that gives him life. Easy to stage, this show is perfect for Halloween.

Performance Time: Approximately 30-45 minutes.

John Feathertop
4



Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)

About the Author

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born in Salem, MA, and is a descendant of John Hathorne, a judge in the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692. Much of Hawthorne's writing centers on Puritan hypocrisy, intolerance, guilt, and obsession with sin. Hawthorne is best known for his short stories and his novels *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). "Feathertop" (1852) was first published in two parts in *The International Magazine* and was later included in Hawthorne's short story collection *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1854).

Dramatis Personae

(3 M, 4 F, 1 flexible, opt. extras)

MOTHER RIGBY: Witch and blacksmith; powerful, ruddy, proud woman with a masterful beauty; has white hair and wears a loose blouse open at the throat, a dark skirt above the ankles in length, a leather apron, and a workman's cap or kerchief.

LORD FEATHERTOP: Scarecrow who has been transformed into a tall dark handsome English lord; wears fine scarlet breeches and a gold embroidered coat with ruffles of lace.

RACHEL MERTON: Justice Merton's niece who is betrothed to Richard Talbot.

JUSTICE GILEAD MERTON: Stern, self-righteous, greedy man who uses fear to control others.

RICHARD TALBOT: Esquire betrothed to Rachel.

MISTRESS CYNTHIA MERTON: Justice Merton's sister.

MICAH: Justice Merton's servant.

SCARECROW: Non-speaking.

EXTRAS (Optional): As Citizens.

Set

Late 17th century, New England.

Mother Rigby's Blacksmith Shop: The blackened walls of the blacksmith shop are covered with the usual items found in a blacksmith's shop including a collection of old iron, horseshoes, cart-wheels, etc. However, in the right-hand corner, there are many objects that would reflect a witch's den including musical instruments, puppets, tall clocks, skulls, stuffed birds, different colored bottles with things floating inside, and a pumpkin with the eyes and nose cut out. There is also a large standing mirror, the "Glass of Truth," which is framed grotesquely in old gold and draped with a strange embroidered curtain depicting peaked caps and crescent moons. At SL, dried cornstalks, hay, and the yellow ears of cattle corn hang from a loft. At back center there is a wide double door. When the door is opened, a New England landscape is revealed, which depicts a distant wood, stone walls, high elms, and a well-sweep. In the near foreground, there is a ploughed field from which green shoots of early corn are just appearing.

Justice Merton's Parlor: The décor and furnishings reflect an early colonial style. On the wall SR, hangs a portrait of Justice Merton as a young man. On the wall SL hangs an old-fashioned mirror.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Mother Rigby's blacksmith shop, early morning.

Scene 2: Justice Merton's parlor, that afternoon.

Props

Hammer	Large beet
Tongs	Fancy silver pipe
Anvil	Silver box
Piece of iron	Wood plank
Skeleton framework of iron	Feather duster
2 Bellows	Stool
Broomstick	Cane
Bag of coins	Papers, deeds, contracts
Breeches and coat, for Feathertop	Chair
Basket	Table
Dried squash, gourds,	Note with seal
Ears of corn, cornstalks	Book
	Fake rocks

Special Effects

Hammer hitting steel
Flickering flame
Crows cawing
Footsteps
Waltz music

Thunder
Blood-curdling dog howl
Sound of window breaking
Lit torches

*"I see myself for the
wretched, ragged, empty
thing I am."*

—Feathertop

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Late 17th century, the interior of a blacksmith shop. Just before the scene opens, a hammer is heard ringing briskly upon steel. As the curtain rises, Mother Rigby stands at the anvil in the flickering light of a bright flame from the forge. She is shaping a piece of iron. Beside her stands a skeleton framework of iron formed like the ribs and backbone of a man. For a few moments, she continues to ply her hammer amid a shower of sparks till, suddenly, the flame on the forge dies down. She works the bellow to feed the fire.)

RIGBY: More flame. Gimme more flame! *(Crows are heard offstage. She puts down the bellow and picks up a hammer and a piece of steel and goes back to the fire that is blazing.)* The crows are coming. I can hear them. *(The flame in the forge spits up high. She hammers the piece of iron and takes it to the frame.)* We are going to make a scarecrow—but no hobgoblin in my corn patch or pumpkin field—but a scarecrow that should represent a fine gentleman of the period. That should keep any crow ten miles away and outstand all the nor'easters that blow. I've no notion to lose my corn crop this summer. *(Outside, the faint cawing of crows is heard. Putting down her tongs and hammer, Mother Rigby strides to the double door, flings it wide open, and lets in the gray light of dawn. She looks out over the field and shakes her fist. To crows.)* So, you're up before me, are ye? *(To herself.)* I'll count' em. There's one for sorrow. Two for mirth. Three for wedding. Four for a birth. Four of em'. *(To crows.)* Well, my dear dark flying friends, you're in for a surprise. You'll not be having your breakfast at Mother Rigby's this summer. *(She laughs and places an iron rib onto the other ribs of the Scarecrow. To Scarecrow.)* There, my beauty. Now you have a stout set of ribs and a backbone made of iron! *(To herself.)* I must

quickly finish my beautiful creation. I've made the frame strong, and now I must make the body lifelike so as to fool the crows. To fool philosophers is my specialty. But to fool a crow may take a little bit of doing. *(She grabs a broomstick from the corner of the room. She runs her hand along the broomstick handle with gentleness and care.)* A broomstick for imagination. This trusty piece of wood has taken me to the far corners of the world—Egypt, Ethiopia, and Zanzibar... *(She places the broom inside the skeleton. She picks up two bellows and hangs them in his chest.)* Bellows for eloquence and lungs to breathe. Now we need a proper head. *(She looks around the shop. She finds a Halloween pumpkin in the corner of the shop, picks it up, and carries it back to the Scarecrow. With a big grin, to Scarecrow.)* You are going to be a handsome devil, you are.

(Footsteps are heard.)

RIGBY: *(To herself.)* Someone is approaching. *(She goes to the double doors and looks.)* It's...Rachel Merton! *(To skeleton.)* You'll like her. She's a pretty one. What can she want so early?

(Rachel Merton enters.)

RIGBY: Good morning, Rachel.

RACHEL: Good morning, Mother Rigby.

RIGBY: Is everything all right? I hope your father, Judge Merton, is not ill.

RACHEL: No, Father is quite well, thank you. Oh, I have been meaning to ask you, how do you know my father?

RIGBY: We knew one another...many years ago...when we were young. *(Changes the subject.)* You're up early...

RACHEL: The early morning suits me best for a walk. Are you alone?

RIGBY: Yes, I am.

RACHEL: Is it...is it here?

RIGBY: You mean the—

(Rachel notices the skeleton and steps back, startled.)

RACHEL: Oh, my! Who's that?

RIGBY: It's only a scarecrow, Rachel. I'm going to put him in my cornfield. The crows are annoying this year.

RACHEL: It's frightening, yet fascinating!

RIGBY: *(Pleased.)* He'll do!

RACHEL: I've never seen a scarecrow with ribs of iron.

RIGBY: It's a work of art in progress.

RACHEL: You are always doing something interesting, Mother Rigby. You always keep yourself busy.

RIGBY: And I hear you are busy as well. Is it true you are to be married?

RACHEL: Yes, that is true.

RIGBY: You do not seem happy as a bride to be should be.

RACHEL: It has all been arranged. The union is based on considerations. My father says it is the world we live in.

RIGBY: I see. I wish you well.

RACHEL: Thank you.

RIGBY: Did you finish that last book I gave you on magic potions?

RACHEL: Yes, I loved it! I've read all the magic books you've sold me from cover to cover. You know, my father, knows nothing of my interest. And you know how he feels about—

RIGBY: Witchcraft? Not to worry, my dear. We must be careful, particularly these days. A witch hunt has started in Salem.

(Rachel looks around.)

RACHEL: Ah, here it is! This is the mirror?

RIGBY: Yes, this is the one.

RACHEL: You are quite sure the glass will do all you say?
It...never fails?

RIGBY: Never. It is the glass of truth. It shows folks as they are—no pretenses, no deceptions. If your sweetheart is unfaithful or untruthful, the glass will reveal it. If a wolf would dress himself in white sheep's clothing, this glass would reflect the black beast inside it.

RACHEL: But what of the sins of the soul, Mother Rigby: vanity, hypocrisy, and infidelity? Will it reveal them as well?

RIGBY: If your lover be false, this glass shall pluck his fine feathers. If you are unhappy with it, or if it does not do the things I said it would do, bring it back, and I will give you back your money.

RACHEL: You have put a steep price on the mirror, Mother Rigby.

RIGBY: I do run risks with such an item, my dear Rachel. Besides, where would you get another?

RACHEL: That is true. Here, I will buy it. This is the sum you mentioned, I believe?

(Rachel hands a bag of coins to Mother Rigby. Mother Rigby opens the bag and counts the coins.)

RIGBY: I'll have it delivered this morning.

RACHEL: Bring it to the side door, knock three times, and wait.

(Richard Talbot enters.)

RICHARD: Good morning.

RACHEL: Richard! What a surprise seeing you here. You're up early.

RICHARD: Not as early as you. I saw you walking in this direction, so I thought I'd try and catch up with you.

RACHEL: How sweet of you. Well, I've done my errand. We can return together. Oh, Richard, this is Mother Rigby.

Mother Rigby, this is my fiancé, Squire Richard Talbot.

RIGBY: *(Curtsyng.)* Squire Talbot! An honor, sir!

RACHEL: *(To Mother Rigby.)* You will make sure that I receive the...the article?

RICHARD: What article?

(Rachel ignores the question and starts to exit. Richard frowns at Mother Rigby.)

RIGBY: *(Stammering.)* Begging your pardon, sir?

RICHARD: "What article?" I asked. *(Short pause. Sternly.)*
Well!

RIGBY: Oh, the article! That old quaint piece of glass, your honor. A mirror, actually.

RICHARD: Rachel, you haven't come here at sunrise to buy...
(Indicating mirror.) ...that thing!

RACHEL: Yes. I came here this morning to buy "that thing" and at sunrise—a pretty time for a pretty purchase. Are you coming, or not?

RICHARD: *(In a low voice.)* More witchcraft nonsense? This is becoming a concern, Rachel.

RACHEL: Well, you knew before you asked for my hand how desperately mystical I am. So let's not discuss it. Goodbye, Mother Rigby.

(Rachel exits. Richard crosses to Mother Rigby.)

RICHARD: Look, you old sorceress, charm all the broomsticks in town, if you like. Bewitch all the tables, saucepans, and mirrors you please. But take not a penny more from my future bride. I'm not blind to what's going on here. Good day! *(He exits.)*

RIGBY: *(With a curtsy.)* Your servant, Master Deuteronomy!
(Mother Rigby laughs as she goes back to the Scarecrow and

studies him. To Scarecrow.) You need to be suitably dressed. What have we got? (Looks around. Picks up the breeches.) Here's a pair of fine scarlet breeches. (Picks up the coat.) And a gold embroidered coat with ruffles of lace. Yes, that will do him right. Two pokers! (She puts the coat over his shoulder and sticks the pants on his front.) One for science and one for mathematics. To fool a crow, I must fashion a creature to deceive a man. You'll be a scholar in both fields. Now, let's see...you'll need some meat on those fine ribs! (She goes to the corner of the room and picks up a basket and carries it to the Scarecrow.) Dried squash, gourds, ears of corn, tassels. (Mother Rigby sets the basket down and goes back to get some corn stalks.) And some corn stalks! Aha! (She picks up a big red beet out of the basket and places it gently under the left side of his ribs. She then puts her ear to a rib.) Do I hear a beat? (She giggles. She studies the Scarecrow.) I've made many a puppet since I've been a witch...out of clay, wax, straw, sticks, night fog, morning mist, sea foam, and chimney smoke, but this is the finest of them all. (Mother Rigby sits in the corner and fills her pipe and stares with great pleasure and curiosity at the Scarecrow. She gets up. To Scarecrow.) You are too good of a piece of work to stand all summer in a corn patch, frightening away the crows and blackbirds. You are capable of better things. I've danced with worse ones, when partners happen to be scarce at our witch meetings in the forest! (Pause.) What if I should let you take your chance among the other men of straw and empty heads who go bustling about the world? (She takes three or four more whiffs of her pipe and smiles.) I'll do it! I'll make a man of my scarecrow, were it not for just a joke! A hoax...a prank! Ha, ha! Now I need to put you all together. (Mother Rigby makes mystic passes with her hands. With rapid shrill rapidity, she recites the following incantation.)

Flail, fli;
Broom, sweep;
Sic itur!

Cornstalk
And turnip, talk!
Turn creature!

Pulse, beet;
Gourd, eat;
Ave Hellas!
Poker and pumpkin,
Stir the old junk in:
Breathe, bellow!

Corncob,
Jumble the rest of the rubbish together;
Dovetail and tune 'em.

E pluribus unum!

(Lights dim. Music underscores action. Mother Rigby begins to finish making the Scarecrow.) And now the coup de gras...

(She goes to the corner of the room and looks around. No one is around. She then moves a plank from the floor and takes out a silver box. She opens the box and takes out a fancy sterling silver pipe. She covets the pipe. She puts the pipe into the Scarecrow's mouth. To Scarecrow.) Puff, darling, puff! Puff away, my

fine fellow! Your life depends on it. Puff away, my pet.

Puff away, my pretty one. It is the breath of life to you.

Take my word for it. *(The pipe falls out of his mouth. To herself.)* What the devil! Have I lost the hang of it? *(To Scarecrow.)* You dropped your pipe. You can't do that. It is

the life and breath of you. If you stop puffing, the pipe goes out, and, my dear boy, so do you! The tobacco is smokeless

and you never have to fill it with tobacco, but you mustn't ever stop puffing. *(She recites incantation.)*

Brighten, tobacco forever.

Smokeless and true!

I' the dusk between us!

Whiten soul!

Propinquit Venus

Puff, puff for the life of you!

(To herself.) One thing is missing. A proper scalp. *(She goes to a shelf and picks up a feather duster.)* Nothing more fitting than scalps from the enemy. The feathers...of a crow. *(She places a feather duster on the pumpkin head.)* Brilliant! *(She laughs.)* I name thee...Feathertop! *(With the lights low, the Scarecrow is replaced by a real actor dressed as Lord Feathertop. Feathertop begins to move very stiffly. He falls. He slowly gets up and bows to Mother Rigby. He moves his fingers. Mother Rigby beckons him to walk toward her. He does but eventually falls into her arms. She moves him to a stool where he sits. She then takes his arms, and he rises once again.)* Speak, my boy. Speak to me!

FEATHERTOP: *(Cries with a shrill voice.)* Mother!

(Mother Rigby lets out a scream of hysterical laughter.)

RIGBY: *(With joy.)* I have a son! *(To Feathertop.)* Say it, again!

FEATHERTOP: *(He now modulates his voice to a proper normal register.)* From the bottom of my heart. Mother!

RIGBY: From the bottom of your heart. How beautiful. Here, you'll need a cane. *(She hands him a cane.)* A gold-headed one that will catch their greedy eyes. Now you are ready to go and play your part in the great world. I will give you a substantial amount wealth. *(She hands him papers and deeds from the same box that the housed the pipe.)* A gold mine in El Dorado, ten thousand shares in a broken bubble, and half a million acres of vineyard at the North Pole, a castle in the air, a chateau in Spain, together with all the rents and income they generate. I have done the best for you, my beautiful boy. Now, where would you like to go? Would you like to visit that pretty maiden who was here earlier?

FEATHERTOP: *(He beams and tries to say Rachel's name.)*
R...a...y.....chel! R....a...y..chel!

RIGBY: Very good! The gold head of the cane will guide you straight to the home of the pretty maiden Rachel you met

here this morning and her distinguished father, Judge Gilead Merton, who wants to hurt your mother. Why don't you say something, lad?

FEATHERTOP: Don't be angry with me, Mother. I would love...to talk but...being...without...wits, what can I say?

RIGBY: Don't worry, my boy. You are now in the brotherhood of the empty skull. I don't know what you will say, but whatever it is, and how many times you say it, still you will have said...nothing!

FEATHERTOP: At your service, Mother.

RIGBY: I will program you to have a few hundred set phrases and a number of different languages to boot! When you go into the world, you will be able to babble like a millstream, if you want. And now, darling, I have taken great pains with you, and you are beautiful. I love thee better than any witch's puppet in the world. I have made a countless number of them, but you are the very best. So give heed to what I say.

FEATHERTOP: Yes, Mother, with all my heart.

(Mother Rigby pulls up a chair to the table.)

RIGBY: Now, my darling, precious one, my treasure, if anyone asks your name, it is Lord Feathertop. Here are your credentials and a letter for the Judge. *(She puts a folded paper in his pocket.)* Lord Feathertop, you must learn to take your first steps before you go forth and explore the wideness and mystery of this world. Let's begin. We'll dance! *(Mother Rigby opens her arms, ready to dance. Feathertop stiffly approaches her and places his hands on hers. Waltz music begins to play and they awkwardly begin to waltz.)* One, two, three...one, two, three...one, two, three....

(As they dance, lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Justice Merton's parlor, that afternoon. At SR stands the Glass of Truth, draped with the same strange embroidered curtain as seen in Mother Rigby's shop. Rachel and Richard are standing in front of the Glass of Truth, and Rachel is about to draw open the curtain.)

RACHEL: Now! Are you willing?

RICHARD: So you really don't trust me?

RACHEL: Don't be silly, of course I do.

RICHARD: Then why am I being tested?

RACHEL: Just...because.

RICHARD: You want to know if I truly love you, don't you?

RACHEL: Well, yes, now that you mention it. I hardly know you, and a girl needs to know.

RICHARD: All right! Then I consent. A true lover always consents to the misgivings of his lady love.

RACHEL: Thank you, Richard. I trust the glass will sustain your character. Now...I draw the curtain...

(Richard raises his hand and stops her from removing the curtain.)

RICHARD: What if I be false?

RACHEL: Well, then, the mirror will reflect you as the subtle fox that you are.

RICHARD: And you as the goose?

(They laugh.)

RACHEL: Now, we mustn't laugh. It may prove serious.

RICHARD: Let's just get on with it. Let's have it. *(She draws back the curtain, covers her eyes, steps back to stand next to Richard, looks at the mirror, and smiles.)* Well, there we

are...just as we have always seemed to each other, true.
Isn't it wonderful?

RICHARD: *(Sarcastically.)* Miraculous! That a mirror bought
in a witch's den, before sunrise, for 20 pounds, should prove
to be actually – a mirror! Amazing!

*(Richard turns his back to Rachel, picks up a book off a nearby table,
and begins to flip through it. Rachel is still looking at the mirror
fixing her hair and admiring herself.)*

RACHEL: I'm truly happy!

*(A crack of thunder is heard and the mirror begins to shake and
rattle. Rachel quickly holds it still and moves away from it.)*

RICHARD: Good! Then God bless Mother Rigby!

RACHEL: Yes.

*(Rachel continues to stare in awe at the mirror. Judge Merton and
Mistress Merton enter.)*

JUSTICE: *(To Richard.)* Strange words from you, Squire
Talbot.

RICHARD: Judge Merton! The old witch may be more
innocent than I thought.

JUSTICE: A witch is never innocent. Soon they will all be
hanging on Gallows Hill.

RACHEL: Father, Mother Rigby said she knew you when you
were young. Is that true?

JUSTICE: I was a student at Harvard, and in the evenings, we
would go to Salem for entertainment. She would tell our
futures reading tarot cards. I was young...and foolish. But
that was long ago. *(Taking Rachel and Richard's hands, he
brings them together, and kisses Rachel on the forehead.)* And
today is today. *(To Rachel.)* It seems like yesterday you were
only a child. And, now, look at you. I want you to know

how pleased I am you have agreed to this arranged union.
Fine stock!

RICHARD: Thank you, sir. I will do my best to provide for Rachel.

JUSTICE: Once you have joined my old firm, your future is secure. However, I have but one warning, my fair daughter and son-in-law to be, beware of witchcraft!

MISTRESS: And Mother Rigby, too, brother?

JUSTICE: That woman shall answer for her deeds.

RACHEL: How, Father?

JUSTICE: She shall hang!

RACHEL: Because of my purchase this morning?

RICHARD: Because of the good book, Rachel. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." Exodus 22:18.

JUSTICE: *(To Rachel.)* Your purchase?

MISTRESS: *(Points to the mirror.)* That, I suppose.

JUSTICE: *(To Rachel.)* What?! You purchased that mirror from her? You brought it here?

RACHEL: No, it was delivered!

JUSTICE: *(Angry.)* You purchased it! From her shop! From her infamous den she disguises as a blacksmith shop! Into my parlor! *(Shouts.)* Micah! Come in here this instant and remove this...this *thing!*

RACHEL: *(Defending herself.)* I bought it, Father. I bought it with my own money!

JUSTICE: What in God's name would the neighbors think? Me, a justice, associated with witches who serve Satan with evil deeds in exchange for special powers like flying and performing feats of super strength.

RICHARD: Yesterday, warrants were issued in Salem for the arrests of Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tibuta, the slave from Barbados. The black woman confessed that there was a conspiracy of witches at work in Salem.

JUSTICE: The witch hunt has begun. *(Micah enters. Indicates mirror.)* Take that thing away.

MICAH: Yes, sir.

RACHEL: But Father!

JUSTICE: Out of my house!

MICAH: Yes, sir. But first, sire, I need to inform you that there is a visitor at the door.

JUSTICE: Visitor?

MICAH: Yes, sir. Shall I show him in?

JUSTICE: Visitor? In the morning? Who is it?

MICAH: A lord, sir.

(The sound of a dog giving a blood-curdling howl is heard.)

MISTRESS: Oh, my. I've never heard the dog howl like that before. You'd think he'd seen a ghost!

JUSTICE: Show the gentleman in. Don't keep the gentleman waiting, Micah. A lord! *(To Rachel.)* We will talk about this matter later. *(To himself.)* A lord!

(Judge looks at the mirror hanging on the wall and arranges his attire. Micah enters.)

MICAH: *(Announcing.)* Lord Feathertop: Marquis of Oxford, Baron of Wittenberg, Elector of Worms, and Count of Cordova.

(Lord Feathertop enters.)

JUSTICE: Your lordship, you are excessively welcomed.

FEATHERTOP: Truly honored. And you must be...

JUSTICE: Justice Merton...of Merton House. May I present my sister, Mistress Merton.

FEATHERTOP: Mistress Merton.

JUSTICE: *(Introduces.)* Our young neighbor, Squire Talbot. Squire Richard Talbot of...of...

(Justice looks at Richard for help.)

RICHARD: Of nowhere, sir.

FEATHERTOP: (*Nods with a serious gentle smile.*) Nowhere, of course.

JUSTICE: And permit me, Lord Feathertop, my daughter, Mistress Rachel Merton.

FEATHERTOP: (*Bowing low.*) Mistress Rachel Merton.

(Rachel and Lord Feathertop lock eyes. Feathertop takes his pipe out of his mouth. Both drop their arms to their side. Everyone is still. Lights dim on everyone in the room except for Rachel and Feathertop. They slowly walk toward one another as though in a dream, completely lost in each other, unaware of anything, any place, any time.)

RACHEL: (*To Feathertop.*) Have we met before?

FEATHERTOP: Perhaps. (*He takes her hand and kisses it.*) I feel I have known you all my life.

RACHEL: And I you.

(Lord Feathertop, who is feeling a little dizzy, slowly puts his pipe back into his mouth as the lights slowly come up and everyone is active again. Mistress spies the pipe.)

MISTRESS: (*Stage whisper. To Justice.*) A pipe! Gilead! In the parlor!

(Justice Merton frowns. Silence.)

JUSTICE: (*To Feathertop.*) Your lordship—ahem—has just arrived in town?

FEATHERTOP: From England.

JUSTICE: England!

FEATHERTOP: (*Sing-Songs the following as if giving Judge Merton a clue.*)

“London bridges are falling down
Falling down

Falling down..."

JUSTICE: Yes, London, of course. Your lordship must travel a great deal.

FEATHERTOP: Egypt, Ethiopia, Zanzibar...

RACHEL: Zanzibar?

FEATHERTOP: "Onga mahundo." That means "good morning" in Swahili, the predominant language in Zanzibar.

JUSTICE: Well, now!

RACHEL: How interesting!

(Feathertop takes another step toward Rachel.)

FEATHERTOP: "Ni hao ma?"

RACHEL: *(Smiles.)* What?

(Feathertop takes a step toward Rachel. He is stiff.)

FEATHERTOP: "Ni hao ma?" That's "How are you?" in Chinese Mandarin.

JUSTICE: Amazing.

RACHEL: *(To Feathertop.)* I'm well, thank you.

(As if in a daze, Rachel's eyes are fixed on Feathertop.)

RICHARD: *(Aside to Rachel.)* Is he staring at you? Are you ill, Rachel?

JUSTICE: We are ministers of the law, your lordship. I am a justice, and Richard, a lawyer. How does your lordship occupy his day?

FEATHERTOP: I minister the operations of my holdings—a goldmine in El Dorado, a chateau in Spain, and a million acres of vineyard at the North Pole, as well as other holdings.

RICHARD: Vineyards at the North Pole? Well, I must say, that is rather odd...

FEATHERTOP: I believe in futures, sir. Each day the earth is becoming warmer and warmer, and one day grapes will grow in the far north, producing an exotic and special wine.

RICHARD: And very chilled, I suppose.

RACHEL: (*Disapproving.*) Richard!

JUSTICE: Lord Feathertop honors my humble roof.

FEATHERTOP: The roof of my father's oldest friend.

JUSTICE: Your father?

FEATHERTOP: My father has never forgotten your kindness and companionship given to him by his worship in the days of his youth.

JUSTICE: (*Bewildered.*) Companionship? Kindness? Well, now...

FEATHERTOP: My father remarked, sir, that your worship had often swung me about and sat me on your worship's lap as a child.

JUSTICE: (*Trying to remember.*) Oh, yes...I suppose so. However, I don't—

FEATHERTOP: Father is not well. He has temporary lapses of the mind.

JUSTICE: Oh, I'm sorry!

RACHEL: Then you must have seen his lordship's home in England.

JUSTICE: As you say.

RACHEL: (*To Feathertop.*) Do describe it to us. We are so isolated here from the grand world. Do you know, I always imagine England to be an enchanted isle, like one of the old Hesperides, teeming with fruits of solid gold.

FEATHERTOP: Ah, yes. My mother raises them.

RACHEL: Fruits of gold?

FEATHERTOP: Like the rising sun. She calls them... pumpkins.

MISTRESS: Pumpkins!

FEATHERTOP: And corn.

RACHEL: Your lordship pokes fun at us. Quiet. Seriously now, please describe to us your hall.

FEATHERTOP: Quite serious...the hall. Yes, yes. In the middle, burns a great fire...on a black...ah, black alter.

RACHEL: A Druidical heirloom? Your lordship's mother collects antiques? How fascinating!

FEATHERTOP: Quite fascinating! On the walls hang pieces of iron.

JUSTICE: Possibly trophies of Saxon warfare.

FEATHERTOP: And rusty horseshoes.

RICHARD: Horseshoes?

MISTRESS: Fascinating! I hear they have discovered horseshoes worn by steeds of Charlemagne and some are in museums.

FEATHERTOP: Broken cartwheels

JUSTICE: Relics from British chariots, no doubt.

RACHEL: How medieval it must be! *(To Justice Merton.)* To think you never described it to us.

JUSTICE: Permit me, it is impossible to report all one sees on one's travels.

MISTRESS: Evidently.

FEATHERTOP: My mother felt I needed to go forth in the world and explore the wideness and mystery of this world. She made me promise to call upon his worship...the Justice Merton. *(He hands Justice Merton a sealed document.)* My mother's letter.

(Justice examines the envelope seal with awe.)

JUSTICE: *(Aside, to Mistress Merton.)* Cynthia, a crested seal!
(He quickly opens the letter and reads it.)

RACHEL: *(Aside, to Richard.)* Have you noticed his bearing, Richard? What personal distinction! What inbred nobility! Every inch a true lord!

RICHARD: He may be a lord, my dear, but he walks like a broomstick!

[END OF FREEVIEW]