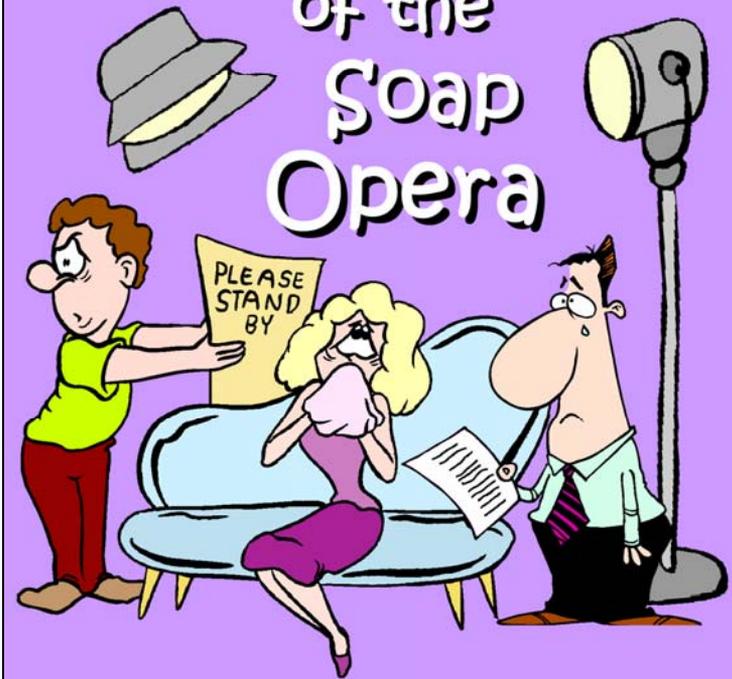


The Phantom of the Soap Opera



Carol Costa

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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The Phantom of the Soap Opera

FARCE. Award-winning "Heartbreak Hollow" is the saddest, most heartbreaking soap opera on TV until Jackson Talbert III sneaks onto the set during a live broadcast and ruins the show by making the audience laugh instead of cry. Then when the soap's director and stars suddenly vanish, the station has no choice but to cancel the show and replace it with "Strange Bedfellows," the first Shakespearean soap opera, where viewers must tune in to see if all that glitters is not gold. Audiences will love all the hijinks and zany fun as they cheer on the hero and boo the villain in this hilarious play!

Performance Time: Approximately 45-60 minutes.

Characters

(6 M, 5 F, 3 flexible)

(With doubling: 5 M, 5 F, 3 flexible)

STEVEN SHOWMAN: Director of the saddest soap opera on TV, "Heartbreak Hollow."

SALLY SHOWMAN: Steven's little sister and soap opera rating tester.

RYAN/RACHEL SPEAKEASY: Soap opera announcer; flexible.

MARY MORNINGSTAR: Heroine of "Heartbreak Hollow"; engaged to Steven Showman.

GORDON WHITEHAT: Dashing hero of "Heartbreak Hollow."

HILDA HOTLIPS: The bad girl of "Heartbreak Hollow."

BOYD BLACKHAT: The lovable bad guy of "Heartbreak Hollow."

JACKSON TALBERT III: Considers himself the world's greatest "Showman" and wants to ruin "Heartbreak Hollow"; male.

MURIEL MADCAP: Jackson's assistant; female.

GLADYS HAPPYBOTTOM: Jackson's assistant; female.

SAM/SAMANTHA MONEYBAGS: Sponsor of "Heartbreak Hollow"; flexible.

SCOOP HANNIGAN: Newspaper reporter; male.

RILEY REDLIGHT: Soap opera camera person; flexible.

DEEP VOICE: Voice only, can be doubled; male.

NOTE: For flexible roles, please change the script accordingly.

Setting

TV set of the soap opera, "Heartbreak Hollow."

Sets

The sets can be as elaborate or minimal as your budget allows.

Soap opera set. There is a sofa on the set with a chair positioned off-camera on the side for Sally Showman.

Abandoned building. There are stacks of crates and boxes.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: TV set of the soap opera, "Heartbreak Hollow," morning.

Scene 2: TV set, a week later.

Scene 3: TV set, a few days later.

Scene 4: Abandoned building.

Scene 5: TV set, the next morning.

Scene 6: Abandoned building, two days later.

Scene 7: TV studio, same set as "Heartbreak Hollow."

Scene 8: TV studio, that evening.

Scene 9: Soap opera Tearjerker Awards ceremony.

Props

Large box of tissues	Large hat that covers face, for Jackson
Microphone	Makeup compact
White medical coats, for Jackson, Muriel, and Gladys	Boxes
Stretcher	Crates
Medical bag	Cheap costumes
Large saw	Assorted stage props
Hammer	TV camera or camcorder
Screwdrivers	Scripts
Misc other tools	Mask
Wig, for Jackson	3 Black hoods
Reporter's notebook	Dress with a large stain on it
Pencil	Plastic dagger

Sound Effects

Doorbell
Explosion (opt.)
Sad music

“Don’t you know
that our fans look forward
to the pain and suffering
we bring them every day?”

—Mary

Scene 1

(AT RISE: TV set of the soap opera, "Heartbreak Hollow," morning. Steven and Riley are making a last minute check before filming begins.)

STEVEN: Be sure to get the right angle on the sofa. You know how angry Gordon gets if his nose looks shiny.

RILEY: No problem. We're all set.

(Sally enters.)

SALLY: Good morning. Are we ready to go? *(Walks over and takes a solitary chair positioned off-camera on one side of the set.)*

STEVEN: Hi, Sally. I think we're set. Are you ready?

(Sally takes out a large box of tissues.)

SALLY: Ready and waiting.

(Scoop Hannigan enters, carrying a pad and pencil. He approaches Riley.)

SCOOP: *(To Riley.)* Excuse me, I'm looking for Steven Showman.

RILEY: *(Points at Steven.)* Right over there.

(Scoop hurries over to Steven.)

SCOOP: *(To Steven.)* Mr. Showman, I'm Scoop Hannigan of the "Chronicle."

STEVEN: Nice to meet you, Scoop.

SCOOP: We just got word that "Heartbreak Hollow" has been nominated for the Tearjerker Award. How do you feel about that?

STEVEN: I'm thrilled. This is the third year in a row that our show has been nominated. And, of course, it will be the third year in a row that it wins the award.

SCOOP: You're pretty confident...any special reason?

STEVEN: Just the fact that we've got the saddest, most heartbreaking show on the air. Why, "Heartbreak Hollow" is so sad, the Kleenex company keeps sending us thank-you notes.

SCOOP: How nice. Tell me, Mr. Showman, do you think the show's popularity stems from the fact that each episode is live? That's pretty unusual these days.

STEVEN: Right, but it gives "Heartbreak Hollow" that wonderful spontaneity that you just can't get with a taped show.

SCOOP: But don't you worry about all the things that can go wrong during a live broadcast?

STEVEN: (*Indignantly.*) When Steven Showman is directing, there is no room for mistakes.

(*Sally gets up and adjusts her chair. Scoop notices her.*)

SCOOP: (*To Steven, indicating Sally.*) Who is that attractive young lady sitting over there?

STEVEN: That's my little insurance policy. Sally sits there every day, watches the show, and cries her little heart out. And as long as Sally keeps crying, we know that our ratings will stay high.

SCOOP: What a fascinating occupation. Would it be okay if I interviewed her?

STEVEN: Yes, of course, but after the show.

(*Mary, Gordon, and Ryan enter. Gordon lies down on the sofa. Mary stands off-camera waiting for her cue. Ryan goes to the microphone.*)

The Phantom of the Soap Opera

10

SCOOP: Oh, that's the lovely Mary Morningstar, and the gentleman is Gordon Whitehat. They look just like they do on TV. What's going to happen today?

STEVEN: You'll see. *(To Cast and Crew.)* Five seconds to airtime... *(Counts down.)* ...5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

(Filming begins.)

RYAN: *(Into microphone.)* "When we left Heartbreak Hollow yesterday, Gordon—our handsome, wonderful hero—had just been shot by a mysterious person and may be near death..."

(Sally begins to cry and dabs her eyes with a tissue.)

GORDON: "Oh, I must not pass out. Mary will be here soon, and she can call for help. Oh, my darling Mary...I know this will upset her terribly."

(Mary enters and approaches the sofa.)

MARY: "Gordon, darling, why are you napping at this time of day? We're supposed to go shopping."

GORDON: "I'm not napping, my love. I've been shot."

(Mary kneels down beside him.)

MARY: "Oh, no! Who would do a terrible thing like this? Was it Boyd Blackhat? You know he's never liked you. Or was it that awful Hilda Hotlips? She's always been jealous of us. Or then again—"

GORDON: *(Groans.)* "Please, Mary, I need a doctor. I can't hold on much longer."

(Doorbell rings.)

MARY: "That's funny. I'm not expecting anyone. You stay put, Gordon. I'll get it."

(Mary answers the door. To her surprise, Jackson, Muriel, and Gladys run in wearing white medical coats. Muriel and Gladys are carrying a stretcher with a medical black bag on top of it. They run around the set looking everywhere.)

JACKSON: "Where's the patient? We've lost the patient!"

MARY: *(Breaks character. To Jackson, Muriel, and Gladys.)* Wait just a minute. You people are not in this scene.

(Sally laughs. Steven is having a fit, but since the show is live, there's nothing he can do about it. Suddenly, Gladys stops running and looks down at Gordon.)

GLADYS: *(To Jackson, indicating Gordon.)* "I found him, Doctor. He's on the sofa."

MARY: *(To Gladys, Muriel, and Jackson.)* "Leave this house immediately, and don't come back until I call you."

GORDON: *(Breaks character. To Gladys, Muriel, and Jackson.)* Mary's right. I'm not supposed to be saved for three more episodes.

JACKSON: "Can't wait that long, Son. We'll operate now! Tools!"

(Jackson's assistant, Gladys, starts handing him things out of the black bag: a large saw, a hammer, screwdrivers, and other tools. Mary and Gordon are frozen in place, not knowing what to do. Sally has now stopped crying and is laughing hysterically. Steven is jumping up and down and frantically waving his arms.)

STEVEN: *(Shouts.)* Cut! Quick, go to a commercial! *(To Gladys, Muriel, and Jackson.)* Who are you lunatics? How did you get in here? Are you trying to ruin my show? *(Turns to Sally, who is still laughing. Shouts.)* Sally, shut up!

(Sally stops laughing. Muriel and Gladys run offstage with the props they carried on. Jackson pulls off the wig he is wearing and goes over to confront Steven.)

JACKSON: It is I, Steven. Jackson Talbert the Third, the world's greatest showman.

STEVEN: You?! How did you find me? What are you trying to do to me?

JACKSON: Really, Steven, I've been watching your drab little show, and I think it's time that some real talent got into this timeslot.

(Sam Moneybags runs on.)

SAM: Showman! What's going on here? I was watching on the monitor. You're making a laughingstock out of all of us. I demand an explanation!

JACKSON: *(Indicating Sam.)* Who's this?

MARY: This is our sponsor. Please, Sam, it wasn't Steven's fault.

SAM: I have no quarrel with you and Gordon, Mary. You were very good. But who are those other baboons?

GORDON: We don't know. They just came running on the set.

MARY: Yes, it was terribly upsetting.

(Mary begins to cry and Sally joins her.)

RILEY: *(Annoyed.)* Please, ladies, not now.

(Mary and Sally stop crying. Ryan enters.)

RYAN: Everything is under control. The station is running an old Lana Turner movie.

(While the Cast and Crew voice their approval of Ryan's announcement, Jackson makes a quick exit.)

STEVEN: Okay. Everyone off the set now...except for you, Sam. We need to talk.

(As the others exit, Scoop approaches Steven, writing furiously in his notebook.)

SCOOP: Just a few more questions, Mr. Showman. That man seemed to know you. Who was he, and why does he want to ruin your show?

[END OF FREEVIEW]