

Storm-Breeder

Dramatized by Brian C. Billings

*From the story "Peter Rugg, the Missing Man"
by William Austin*

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Dedication

*This show is dedicated to the friendly talespinners
of the San Antonio Storytellers' Association.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

This play tells the story of the phantom coachman Peter Rugg, a man doomed forever to race along the roads to Boston but never to arrive there. Overtaken by a fit of rage while traveling during a stormy night, Bostonite Peter Rugg made a dangerous promise: "Let the storm increase! I will see home tonight in spite of the tempest, or may I never see home again!" He never arrived in Boston.

Now his ghost rides the roads leading to and from that city, and he always brings behind him the ferocious storm he sought to defy. Pity the man or woman who blocks his path, for he will not be stopped!

The original nineteenth-century story by William Austin ("Peter Rugg, the Missing Man") has been split into several narratives, including one from Rugg himself, which may be delivered sequentially or in a fragmented, stream-of-consciousness fashion to heighten the chill factor. Each speaker adds a personal dimension to the legend.

Cast List for the play's original reading on August 15, 2007

*Celestina Campos as Betsey Croft
Regan L. Durham as Mary McCreedy
Daniel C. Grafton as Jonathan Dunwell and Peter Rugg
Blanca R. Martinez as Malcolm (Mildred) Ruddy
Jeannette Mejia as Matthew (Maria) Trilby
Jessica M. Ortiz as James (Jemima) Felt*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 2 w, 3 flexible)

MATTHEW (or MARIA) TRILBY: 20s, the toll-gatherer for Charlestown Bridge.
MALCOLM (or MILDRED) RUDDY: 40s, a carriage driver.
BETSEY CROFT: 60s, a gentle spinster.
JAMES (or JEMIMA) FELT: 80, a garrulous old fool.
MARY MCCREEDY: 20s, keeper of a common-house.
JONATHAN DUNWELL: 20s, an enterprising man of business.
PETER RUGG: 90s (*appears in his 40s*), a cursed man.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Prologue: A private study. Afternoon. Jonathan Dunwell.
Scene 1: The tollhouse of the Charlestown Bridge. Afternoon. Matthew Trilby.
Scene 2: Outside McCreedy's Common House. Early evening. Malcolm Ruddy.
Scene 3: The Croft residence on Middle Street. Morning. Betsey Croft.
Scene 4: A Boston pub. Afternoon. James Felt.
Scene 5: Inside McCreedy's Common House. Evening. Mary McCreedy.
Scene 6: A private study. Afternoon. Jonathan Dunwell.
Scene 7: The road to Boston. Evening. Peter Rugg.

SETTING

The action takes place in and around Boston in the early nineteenth century.

SOUND EFFECTS

The sound effects play a big part in setting the dark, mysterious mood of the play. Effects include the following: carriage noises (approaching, departing, and racing), snap of a whip, musket shot or gunshot, thunder, rain, horse neighs, harness jingles, hollowed door knocks, wood snapping, babble and laughter of a lunch crowd, and kitchen pots clinking.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The kinesics, lighting, set, and sound effects notes written into the script are useful but not wholly necessary. At the very least, the actors should be placed in a staggered line on the stage with Peter Rugg in the central position. Each actor should be hit with a spotlight when delivering a monologue and be left in darkness at all other times.

For a polyphonic effect, each actor can deliver only a portion of his or her monologue (at least five or six sentences) before being overtaken by another actor's monologue. The prologue should not be included in this delivery; present the prologue normally. (The prologue may also be omitted if an immediate immersion into the revelations is preferred.) Peter Rugg should always speak last in the sequence if the polyphonic method is practiced. He should definitely close the play with his final words.

Delivery of the language should be speedy but crisp. Allow for the short pauses inherent in northeastern linguistic rhythms.

Prologue

(The private study of Jonathan Dunwell. Afternoon. Dressed comfortably but politely for a day of receiving visitors, DUNWELL leans against a stuffed armchair DC facing DS. His build is robust, but his penetrating stare is what captures one's attention. A rosewood desk stands proudly to the left of the chair.)

JONATHAN DUNWELL

My dear friends, many of you have wondered at the alteration in my character during these past months. Numerous remarks of concern have been made about my haunted look and stony demeanor. I wish to allay your suspicions of overwork or illness. Jonathan Dunwell is quite fit physically. His mind, alas, has been made much less correct. I have become acutely aware of how slight is the division between this world and the next. To state myself more plainly, I have encountered a specter. Do not scoff. I have conversed with him as easily as I engage you presently, and you would mark him a solid man were it not for his ghoulish capacity to travel unscathed inside a thunderstorm. Lest you ascribe my experience to overactive imaginings, I have combined my own testimony with accounts from other individuals who have encountered this phantom. The tale that emerges from this motley assortment of observations cannot help but astound even the most disbelieving of audiences. I offer it here as a caution for the prideful and the brazen, and the careful listener will soon know why.

(Blackout)

End of Prologue

Scene 1

(The tollhouse at Charlestown Bridge. Afternoon. MATTHEW TRILBY sits on a stool enjoying a full pipe. He is of traditional Dutch dimensions and demeanor. Indeed, he considers a friendly hand as much his business as the matter of his livelihood.)

MATTHEW TRILBY

I've been gathering the toll at Charlestown Bridge for the past five years. It's mostly a quiet job. People like to give me a little extra coin, too, if I can drop a few morsels of the Boston gossip when a group passes. I don't pretend to be a mighty man, but I do have a pistol and a cudgel; and I can use them properly if I'm given cause.

It was on one of those darkest and stormiest of nights—near the witching time when no object can be made out in the murk—that I heard a horse and wheel carriage pass over the bridge. The noise was equal to a troop, and I mistook it for God's own thunder at first.

(As TRILBY speaks, the SFX of a racing carriage rises. The snap of a whip can be heard at intervals, and a man roaring for speed cries, "Yee-ah!")

I dashed out of the waiting house calling for the toll ... but too late, too late. The man had passed fully in contempt of the rates. I do lose a few, mind you, and I would have put the matter past my thought if it had not occurred again not a week later around the same time. Then it returned once more, again at the same strike of the hour. So regular did the occurrence become and so agitated did I grow that I finally conceived a plan to stop the carriage and its driver.

(SFX: The carriage noise fades away.)

End of Freeview

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