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Arsenic and old lace play script pdf

Director:Heather Vize-WilleyProducer:Kris Johnson Stage Manager:Kris Johnson Set Design:Costumes: Lighting and Sound:Properties:Stage Crew:NOTES ABOUT AUDITIONS* Attend either day* Please bring your calendar with you to note schedule conflicts!* Auditions start at 1:00pm SHARP* No appointment necessary* Wear clothes and shoes you can move in/dance in* No need to bring prepared material; readings from the script will be used. Visit this page for any updates in advance of auditions. NOTES ABOUT REHEARSAL SCHEDULE* Expect 3 (or more) rehearsals per week.* Not all cast members will be required to be at every rehearsal - we value your volunteer time!!AUDITION SIDESAbby, Martha, ElaineAbby, Martha, Mortimer, Mr. GibbsAbby, Martha, Mortimer, Rooney, WitherspoonAbby, Martha, MortimerAbby, Rev. Harper, TeddyJonathan, Dr. Einstein, Abby, Martha, TeddyJonathan, Dr. EinsteinJonathan, ElaineMortimer, O'haraRev. Harper, Brophy, Klein, Teddy * Choose "Print" from your browser to print the document. Choose "Back" on your browser to return to the document. Overview:Arsenic and Old Lace, by Joseph KesselringAuthor: Joseph (Otto) Kesselring (1902-1967) also known as: Joseph Kesselring and Joseph Otto KesselringDate: 1941 Introduction In 1941, New Yorkers were looking for some entertainment to take their minds off of the war in Europe and the growing fear that America would be pulled into it. On January 10, Broadway gave them exactly what they were looking for in the form of a hilarious new play by Joseph Kesselring, Arsenic and Old Lace. The play became an immediate critical and popular success, running for 1,444 performances. It also became a hit in England in 1942 as theatergoers who were suffering through London post-blitz lined up for tickets. In 1944, Hollywood produced a film version starring Cary Grant that became a huge box office success. The play, a clever combination of the farcical and the macabre, centers on two elderly sisters who are famous in their Brooklyn neighborhood for their numerous acts of charity. Unfortunately, however, their charity includes poisoning lonely old men who come to their home looking for lodging. The two women are assisted in their crimes by their mentally challenged nephew who believes he is Teddy Roosevelt and who frequently blasts a bugle and yells "charge" as he bounds up the stairs. Matters get complicated when a second nephew, a theater critic, discovers the murders and a third nephew appears after having just escaped from a mental institution. In his adroit mixture of comedy and mayhem, Kesselring satirizes the charitable impulse as he pokes fun at the conventions of the theater. Plot Act 1 Arsenic and Old Lace takes place entirely in the Brewster home in Brooklyn, New York, in 1941. As the play opens, Abby Brewster, a sweet, elderly woman is pouring tea for her nephew Teddy and Dr. Harper, a local minister. All note how peaceful the house is, far removed from the war in Europe. They discuss their nephew Mortimer, a theater critic, and his relationship with the minister's daughter Elaine. Two neighborhood policemen, Brophy and Klein, arrive to pick up toys for the local Christmas fund. Teddy asks them what news they have brought him. After saluting him, Brophy responds, "Colonel, we have nothing to report." We later learn that Teddy thinks that he is Teddy Roosevelt, a delusion that family and friends accept. As Teddy draws an imaginary sword, yells "charge" and bounds up the stairs, the others pay no attention. The men discuss how charitable Abby and her sister Martha are. Brophy admonishes Teddy after he blows a bugle call, noting that he used to do that in the middle of the night. The officers discuss the Brewster family's history of mental illness. Martha arrives and helps Abby gather the toys for the officers, who soon depart. Dr. Harper asks the sisters to make sure that Teddy signs admittance papers to Happy Dale Sanitarium, where he will go after their death. After the reverend leaves, Abby tells a delighted Teddy that he needs to go to Panama and dig another lock for the canal. Martha is also elated by the news, but at this point, the audience is not given the details of the situation. Elaine arrives looking for Mortimer, who soon appears. They discuss the play they will be seeing that night and casually flirt with each other. Their talk turns more serious as they discuss getting married, and Mortimer insists that they should not wait more than a month. Elaine promises to talk it over with her father and to set a date. After warmly greeting Teddy, Mortimer informs Elaine that he has a brother Jonathan about whom the family does not like to talk. After Elaine leaves, Mortimer tells his aunts about his marriage plans, which elates them. As he searches for a chapter of a book that he is writing, Mortimer looks in the window seat and finds a dead body. He immediately assumes that Teddy has committed the crime and so tells the aunts that they must send him to Happy Dale at once. When Mortimer gently breaks the news of the body to his aunts, they insist he should "just forget about it," and later explain that the man drank poisoned wine that Abby had given him. The aunts are quite nonchalant about the incident as Mortimer's agitation increases. They try unsuccessfully to reassure him with their explanation that they will bury the body in the cellar with the eleven others they also poisoned. All were lonely old men who came to their home looking for lodging. Taking pity on them, the aunts decided to help each of them find peace. Elaine soon returns excited about the wedding plans, but Mortimer tells her that something has come up and she should go home and wait for him. She leaves, confused and angry at Mortimer's peculiar behavior. When an elderly man, Mr. Gibbs, rings the bell looking for lodging, the two aunts quiz him on his background and present situation. As they prepare the wine for Mr. Gibbs, Mortimer, pours himself a glass while talking on the phone to his editor. When he realizes that the wine is poisoned, he screams, which causes Mr. Gibbs to run out of the house. The sisters are crestfallen. Before Mortimer rushes out to review a play, he makes the aunts promise not to do anything until he gets back, including burying the body. They agree, but have no clue as to why Mortimer is acting so strangely. After Mortimer leaves, Jonathan arrives with Dr. Einstein. When the aunts do not recognize their nephew, he explains that Dr. Einstein has surgically altered his face. After Jonathan proves his identity, he tells them that he has come from Chicago where he and the doctor were in business. As the two obviously agitated aunts retreat into the kitchen, Einstein asks Jonathan what they should do, noting that the police are after them for murder and that they have a dead body in the car. Jonathan admits that he killed Mr. Spenalzo because the man said he looked like Boris Karloff after Einstein's surgery. When the aunts return, they tell Jonathan that he must leave, reminding him that he was never happy in the house. Jonathan, however, convinces them to allow the two to stay for dinner. When Jonathan discovers that his grandfather's laboratory is still upstairs, he determines that the house will provide a perfect operating room for Einstein to work on his face as well as those of other criminals who need disguises. Jonathan assures Einstein that the aunts will not be able to prevent them from staying. The act closes when the two men are startled by Teddy's bugle blast and charge up the stairs. Act 2 After dinner, the aunts renew their efforts to get Jonathan to leave, but he warns them how "disagreeable" he had been as a child and that "it wouldn't be pleasant for any of [them]" if they tried to prevent him from staying. He informs the aunts of his plans for his grandfather's laboratory, which they immediately reject. They do agree, however, to let him stay for the night. During this conversation, Einstein has gone with Teddy down into the basement to "inspect the locks in Panama." When he comes back up stairs, Einstein informs Jonathan that he has found a place to bury Mr. Spenalzo, explaining that Teddy has dug a hole in the basement. While Jonathan and Einstein move their car to the back of the house, the aunts decide they will bury Mr. Hoskins, who is still in the window seat, as soon as the two men have gone to bed. When the house is quiet, Teddy brings the body down into the basement. Soon after, Jonathan and Einstein bring in Mr. Spenalzo's body and put it in the window seat when they hear Elaine knocking at the door. She assumes the two are robbers until Jonathan informs her of his identity. Thinking that she saw the two bring in the dead body, Jonathan forces her into the cellar. Her screams bring down the aunts, who are dressed for Mr. Hoskins's funeral. Elaine escapes just as Mortimer arrives. Jonathan and Mortimer quarrel until the aunts insist that they all settle down for the evening. Later when Elaine demands to know what is going on in the house, Mortimer informs her that they cannot marry because insanity runs in his family. When he looks in the window seat and sees Mr. Spenalzo's body instead of Mr. Hoskins's, he talks Elaine into going home. The aunts are quite confused about the identity of the new body in the window seat. When Mortimer realizes that the body is connected with Jonathan, he tries to blackmail his brother into leaving. Jonathan refuses to leave and threatens Mortimer with the same fate as that of Mr. Spenalzo. At that moment Officer O'Hara arrives, concerned about the lights on so late at night. Mortimer, happy to see the officer, convinces him to stay until Jonathan leaves. O'Hara is pleased to do so since this will give him the opportunity to discuss the play he has been writing. When Jonathan discovers Mr. Hoskins's body in the cellar and threatens to tell O'Hara, Mortimer convinces the officer that he will meet him later to discuss the play. The aunts admit to Jonathan that they have twelve bodies in the basement. The news hurts Jonathan's pride as Einstein points out that the aunts have murdered the same number of men as Jonathan has. As a result, Jonathan determines that he will kill Mortimer and so tip the scale in his favor. Act 3 Later that night, as Jonathan and Einstein are burying Mr. Spenalzo with Mr. Hoskins in the cellar, Mortimer arrives with a doctor's signature on Teddy's commitment papers. He explains to the aunts that he can protect them only if he lets Teddy take the blame for the murders. They threaten to go to the police if Mortimer does not find a way to get rid of Jonathan in the morning. Jonathan tells Einstein to get his medical instruments as he plans Mortimer's slow, painful death. After they bind and gag Mortimer, they pour two glasses of poisoned wine. Just as they are about to drink, Teddy blasts his bugle, and they drop the glasses, spilling the wine. As he is passing the house, Officer O'Hara hears the blast and comes in to complain. Einstein explains that Mortimer is tied up because he was demonstrating what happened in a play he saw that evening. O'Hara decides not to untie Mortimer so that he will be forced to listen to the officer's summary of his play. By morning, O'Hara is coming to the end of his summary when Brophy and Klein arrive, looking for him. They announce that their lieutenant is determined to send Teddy away to Happy Dale because of all the complaints he is getting about the bugle blast in the middle of the night. Jonathan wakes up, sees the officers, and mistakenly thinks he has been caught. When Klein mentions that he looks like Boris Karloff, Jonathan goes for his throat but is knocked unconscious by Brophy. Lieutenant Rooney then arrives and recognizes Jonathan as a wanted criminal and an escapee from an insane asylum. None of the officers believe Jonathan when he insists that thirteen bodies are buried in the basement. Soon after Mortimer tells the Lieutenant that he has Teddy's commitment papers, Elaine and Mr. Witherspoon, the superintendent of Happy Dale, arrive. Mortimer tells Elaine to "run along home" until he calls her, but she refuses to leave. Teddy agrees to go with Witherspoon, who he thinks will be his guide on an expedition to Africa. When the aunts insist that if Teddy goes to Happy Dale, they must go too, Mortimer agrees as does the lieutenant after they begin to talk about bodies in the cellar. After the aunts' commitment papers are signed, they express concern over the validity of the signatures. They decide to tell Mortimer the truth--that he is not a Brewster. They explain that his mother was their cook and that he was born out of wedlock. Mortimer and Elaine are delighted at the news and leave for her house to get breakfast. The officers arrest Einstein and Jonathan, who is content that the aunts will not be able to best his murder record. After they depart, the aunts quiz Mr. Witherspoon about his background and learn that he has no family. The play ends with them inviting him to breakfast and to sample a glass of their elderberry wine. Characters Abby Brewster : Abby and her sister Martha have interchangeable personalities in the play. Neither exhibits distinct characteristics that are identifiable as separate from the other. Abby, like her sister Martha, is old-fashioned in an ironic sense. She appears to be a quite conservative elderly woman who values the conventions of the past. She attends church regularly and donates toys to the local Christian fund. Her traditional values, however, do not extend to her treatment of the elderly men who come to their home looking for lodging. While her desire to help the men find peace is aligned with their Christian faith, her and her sister's methods reflect modern, violent sensibilities as they resort to murder to achieve their goal. Abby is the one who gives the poisoned wine to the first of their murder victims. Jonathan Brewster : Jonathan is a vicious criminal with a penchant for torture. Not much background information is given on him other than the details provided by Mortimer that he was "the kind of boy who liked to cut worms in two--with his teeth." He has no consideration for his aunts as he plots to turn their home into a surgery for criminals who need to alter their appearance. When Mortimer threatens to interfere, he plans on causing a slow, painful death for his brother. His pettiness surfaces when he becomes jealous that his aunts have committed more murders than he has. Martha Brewster : Martha is as ironically old fashioned as her sister. She exhibits kindness and compassion with the neighbors and follows social conventions of behavior. For example, when Mortimer breaks tradition and asks Elaine to meet him at the Brewster's instead of calling for her at her home, she criticizes him for his lack of chivalry. She also condemns the theater for its provocative subject matter and popular films that frighten their audiences. Like Abby, Martha's charity is limited by the macabre nature of the murders they commit and by their own prejudices. Abby would rather ignore the devastation of the war in Europe because it is beyond their scope. When Jonathan arrives, Martha, with Abby's help, does everything in her power to get rid of him from the moment he walks in the door, insisting that he is too much trouble. The two also have no time for foreigners, refusing to let Jonathan bury one in their basement along with their "good Methodist" Mr. Hoskins. Mortimer Brewster : Mortimer is teasing and flirtatious with his fiancée Elaine and exhibits genuine affection for her, his aunts, and for Teddy. As soon as he discovers the dead body in the window seat, his immediate goal is to protect his aunts. He bravely stands up to his brother Jonathan at the risk of his own safety. His bravery, however, is tempered by his arrogance, which sometimes blinds him to what is happening around him. He insists that he is much more intelligent than the plays he must review and refuses to agree to Elaine's claim that they often have a humanizing effect on him. His pride gets him in trouble when he does not take the proper precautions with Jonathan, and as a result, he almost loses his life. He also proves himself to be quite excitable and does not handle the stressful situation in the Brewster household very rationally. All ends well less through Mortimer's actions and more through coincidence and the fact that the police cannot fathom the sweet Brewster sisters could ever have twelve bodies buried in their basement. Teddy Brewster : Teddy has lost all contact with reality, completely immersed in the delusion that he is Teddy Roosevelt. This static character is used primarily as a plot device. He covers up the aunts' murderous activities as he buries the dead bodies in the basement, which he insists contains the locks of the Panama Canal. Brophy, Officer : Like the Brewster sisters, Officers Brophy and Klein are interchangeable with no distinct personalities. They help the plot develop by providing background information on the Brewster family and rescuing Mortimer from Jonathan's clutches. Brophy also provides some foreshadowing as he notes in the beginning of the play that Teddy has been disrupting the neighbors' sleep with his midnight bugle calls. Einstein, Dr. : Dr. Einstein, Jonathan's evil sidekick, is little more than a stock figure. He adds to the comedy through his alcoholic tendencies, which cause him to remake Jonathan into the image of Boris Karloff. He also stirs up the action when he chides Jonathan about the fact that the aunts have murdered exactly as many men as he has. As a result, Jonathan decides to kill Mortimer so that he will tip the balance in his favor. Elaine Harper : Elaine exhibits a modern sensibility for a woman during this period. She is self confident, quick witted, and "surprisingly smart for a minister's daughter." She engages in witty, flirty banter with Mortimer and shows a great deal of patience with him. Harper, Reverend Dr. : Like the Brewster sisters, the Reverend Harper maintains old-fashioned values, appreciating the "gentle virtues" that have gone out of style in the twentieth century. His disapproval of the theater makes him initially wary of the union between his daughter Elaine and Mortimer. Klein, Officer : Klein, like his partner Brophy, appreciates the sisters' charity and believes them to be among the kindest inhabitants of the neighborhood. He also serves as a plot device, especially when he suggests that Jonathan looks like Boris Karloff, which sends the latter into a murderous rage. O'Hara, Officer : Officer O'Hara distinguishes himself from his fellow officers by the fact that he has written a play. He adds to the farcical action when he leaves Mortimer tied up all evening in order to ensure that the theater critic will listen to the entire summary of his play. Source: "Arsenic and Old Lace," in Drama for Students, Vol. 20, Thomson Gale, 2005. Source Database: Literature Resource Center

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