

# Over the Anvil

## A Living History Museum Romantic Comedy

By Ellen Dean Price

### CAST OF CHARACTERS:

|                            |            |  |
|----------------------------|------------|--|
| CORDELIA (CORA) HARRINGTON | (F, 30-50) | The Museum Consultant. Not her first rodeo. Even keeled.           |
| DEREK TURNER               | (M, 30-50) | The Blacksmith. Lone wolf. Loves his craft. Of few words.          |
| RANDALL MORGAN             | (M, 40-55) | The Director of Old Bristol Village. Self Assured.                 |
| JODY (JO)                  | (F, 30-60) | The Shoemaker. Likes shoes, not patrons.                           |
| MAYA                       | (F, 25-60) | The Archivist. Every item is precious. Quirky, nervous.            |
| EDITH                      | (F, 55+)   | The Tour Guide. Retired teacher. Knows best.                       |
| CHARLOTTE WILKINS          | (F, 25-50) | The Seamstress. Dedicated to her 19 <sup>th</sup> century persona. |
| HARVEY                     | (M, 50+)   | The Bailiff. Very eager to make 'arrests'. No nonsense.            |
| ALASTAIR                   | (M, 50+)   | The Bookbinder. Esoteric. Boring to some.                          |
| FLORENCE                   | (F, 35+)   | The Broom maker. A fast talking whirlwind.                         |

Other roles: (can be doubled with the above characters)

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| TAYLOR             | The staff photographer, an off-stage voice ( <i>if doubled with cast, must be Randall</i> ) |
| PATRON 1, 2, and 3 | Visitors to the museum.   |
| OTHER PATRONS      | Visitors to the museum. ( <i>Optional, may be cast as an ensemble if desired</i> )          |

Time: Modern Day

Place: Old Bristol Village, a living history museum

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## ACT I SCENE 1

*Old Bristol Village, a living history museum. The stage is divided into zones around the perimeter of the stage: suggestions of an archive and of a 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century front hallway, book bindery, jail, broom shop and blacksmith's shop. MAYA, FLORENCE, EDITH, JODY, CHARLOTTE, ALASTAIR, and HARVEY are dressed in historic costumes. Lights up in the Archive.*

MAYA: Welcome to Old Bristol Village. I'm the Archivist here at our living history museum. This is some of our collection. Come in and look around. But not that close. *(trying to be diplomatic)* Don't touch that. Look with your eyes not with your hands. Maybe you'd rather go outside and make bricks instead. Please.

*Lights up on the 'street'*

CHARLOTTE: I'm Charlotte Wilkins, the seamstress. Welcome to our fair town. You must be exhausted from your trip on horseback. No? You arrived by carriage then, my, my, my, aren't you a lally-cooler. Please stop by my shop, I'll have all the latest fashions for you to try.

*Lights up in the bindery.*

ALASTAIR: *(in a monotone voice)* I'm the book binder. It's a fairly tedious process in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. You take these printed sheets or blank ones, and you fold them, you sew them together, and you cover them with other materials to preserve the paper that's on the inside of the book. I'm so sorry. I'm even boring myself.

*Lights up at the Shoemaker*

JODY: *(irritated)* What am I doing? What does it look I'm doing? I'm making shoes, what's the matter with you? *(Text sound. She pulls out her phone.)* Sorry, I really should leave my phone in the break room. Just give me a second. What? Talk amongst yourselves. I'll be with you in a minute. *(looks down at her phone, annoyed)*

*Lights up in the Saunders home.*

EDITH: You're now standing in the front hall of Mr. and Mrs. Saunders' home. They lived here at the turn of the last century and entertained many guests in this very room. *(severely)* Excuse me. I see that you're distracted by the China cabinet, but I have moved on. You need to listen to me. That's why you're on the tour.

*Lights up in the jail*

HARVEY: You're in the jail. Better out watch out or you'll spend the rest of the day here, locked up waiting for the judge. The lock still works. So does the key. If I can find it. *(He laughs.)* I'll find it. *(He laughs again).* No problem. *(More laughter).*

*Lights up on the Broom maker*

FLORENCE: *(speaking very quickly)* I'm the broom maker here and here is one of the brooms I made yesterday out of broomcorn we grow right here at OBV, and I studied broom making back in the nineties at Central State and I've been doing this ever since. Did you know that Benjamin Franklin first introduced the broomcorn seed from France and started the broom industry in the United States, what a busy man he was. He did so many things! *(regular speed)* Do you have any questions?

*CORA and RANDALL enter into the 'town square' at center stage. They both are dressed for business (suits or something similar). MAYA, FLORENCE, EDITH, JODY, ALASTAIR, HARVEY exit one by one, as if it's end of day.*

CORA: Attendance is abysmal today, Randall.

RANDALL: What do you expect in September? It's just the newlyweds and nearly deads.

CORA: You mean patrons.

RANDALL: Just a joke, Cordelia.

CORA: Nothing's funny about the financial position the museum is in.

RANDALL: But you've been responsible for eight museum turnarounds in five years, it's legendary.

CORA: A little dramatic.

RANDALL: We're a museum, it's part of the drill. You sure you want to start with the Blacksmith?

CORA: We've been over this.

RANDALL: *(conceding)* You know what you're doing.

CORA: I do.

RANDALL: The Blacksmith Shop is that way. Want me to introduce you?

CORA: I'm fine.

RANDALL: I'll be in the archive, if you need me.

CORA: Thanks, Randall.

*Randall exits. Cora looks around, then heads to the Blacksmith's shop where Derek is cleaning up for closing. (It can be at the perimeter of the stage with the other stations or preferably brought onto center stage.) Derek wears working class historic clothing of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a leather apron.*

DEREK: Exhibit's closed for the day, Ma'am.

CORA: I'm Cordelia Harrington.

DEREK: Still closed.

CORA: I'm working with the Development Office.

DEREK: Mm. *(Note: Derek uses this utterance throughout the play. It should have resonant sound to convey the actor's inflection.)*

CORA: I assume you've heard a consultant was coming in. You're Derek, correct? I must say, you're not what I was expecting.

DEREK: Sorry to disappoint.

CORA: I didn't mean that I uh— My first day at a new museum I always meet with the interpreter who's both been around the longest and has a popular exhibit. Normally I'm meeting with someone much older.

DEREK: Mm.

CORA: You've been at OBV more than twenty years. When did you finish your degree, were you eleven?

DEREK: Don't have one.

CORA: Most interpreters have at least their Bachelor's.

DEREK: I didn't graduate from college without realizing it.

CORA: Of course. I just uh—You must have been young when you started here.

DEREK: Asking my age seems a personal question.

CORA: I don't want to get off the wrong foot here.

DEREK: *(amused)* Bit late for that.

CORA: Having a new team member from the outside can be difficult. I was hoping to get some assistance from you.

DEREK: Mm.

CORA: We can discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the site from your point of view.

DEREK: Miss Harrington...it's nothing personal, but you suits come in, make a fuss and then you leave.

CORA: I take a different approach.

DEREK: That's what the last one said. I ended up as Mr. July in the museum calendar.

CORA: An exhibit for each month? Seems mild enough. Many museums have them.

DEREK: It was "requested" I pose shirtless.

CORA: I'm so sorry. You must have felt exploited.

DEREK: I felt ridiculous. What nineteenth century blacksmith would work with no shirt, no leather apron.

CORA: He'd be more likely to wear a tuxedo.

DEREK: Right.

CORA: No calendars, you have my word.

DEREK: It's foolish to promise that. They sold a ton of 'em.

CORA: I'm sure they did. I um...I'm glad it was successful. I'm going to spend time here, look around, ask questions.

DEREK: Mm.

CORA: Can I count on you?

DEREK: The way I see it, it's easier to ride it out.

CORA: I think we can make this partnership work.

DEREK: You do.

CORA: I have a reputation to maintain.

DEREK: What kind of reputation is that?

CORA: Success.

DEREK: You've got your work cut out for you.

CORA: I've faced worse.

DEREK: You've been here five minutes.

CORA: This is a beautiful site. Right by the creek, it's idyllic.

DEREK: It's just geography.

CORA: My last museum bordered train tracks and a water treatment plant.

DEREK: Maybe you are up for it. Doesn't mean I want to get involved.

CORA: I can be pretty convincing.

DEREK: I do like confidence.

CORA: A point in my favor.

DEREK: Just one.

*A light moment of affinity between them. Randall enters, the mood shifts.*

RANDALL: Hey there, Derek, I see you've met Cordelia.

DEREK: Yes, sir.

RANDALL: Just make sure you give her whatever she needs.

DEREK: I'm going to clean up here.

RANDALL: We'll leave you to it then.

CORA: *(to Derek)* See you soon.

DEREK: *(mildly sarcastic)* Can't wait.

RANDALL: *(taking his comment at face value)* Wonderful.

*Randall and Cora exit to center stage. Lights down in Blacksmith shop.*

RANDALL: *(to Cora)* How'd it go?

CORA: If this is to work, you need to let me do my job.

RANDALL: Derek is a tough character.

CORA: I can handle it.

RANDALL: Just wanted to check in.

CORA: These interpreters all care deeply about their area of expertise. They're resistant to change.

RANDALL: Derek can't be that much of an expert.

CORA: I was surprised he doesn't have a degree.

RANDALL: You think it's a problem?

CORA: I need all the facts to make my recommendations.

RANDALL: I can help.

CORA: Your employees don't need to feel like they're under a microscope.

RANDALL: But they are.

CORA: I have found to get results, these interpreters don't need their boss and an outsider all at once. It's hard enough to trust me.

RANDALL: I hadn't thought of it that way.

CORA: Part of why I'm here.

RANDALL: Sorry, I'll keep out of it. Just keep me informed?

CORA: Fair enough.

RANDALL: You really think you can turn this backwoods place around? Right the ship, so to speak.

CORA: I'm just getting started.

## ACT 1 SCENE 2

*Town Square at Old Bristol Village. Alastair, Edith, Derek, Maya, Jody, Florence, Charlotte, and Harvey sit casually on benches or chairs. Florence is fiddling with a broom. Derek reads a book. Jody scrolls her phone.*

MAYA: It makes me nervous when they bring these 'experts' in.

EDITH: Oh Maya, everything makes you nervous.

FLORENCE: Miss Harrington is going to shake things up.

MAYA: Don't say that.

CHARLOTTE: She stopped in to see the blacksmith yesterday.

EDITH: She's already meeting with interpreters? She hasn't met with me yet.

HARVEY: Why do you want that?

EDITH: I give the House tour. It's the most important site at the museum.

HARVEY: Wonder why she met with Derek first?

JODY: Probably saw the calendar.

FLORENCE: *(to Harvey, an explanation)* It's the busiest exhibit at the museum.

JODY: Because they've all seen the calendar.

CHARLOTTE: The blacksmith is essential to our village. He made my cooking utensils and the tools I need for my work.

EDITH: *(to Charlotte)* We're not even open yet, Charlotte.

JODY: *(to Edith)* Don't bother.

CHARLOTTE: *(to Edith)* Whatever do you mean?

JODY: *(to Edith)* You're new here, Edith. Nothing breaks her first-person interp.

MAYA: Charlotte isn't even her real name.

JODY: It's her persona.

HARVEY: What's her real name?

ALASTAIR: No one knows.

EDITH: Somebody must.

JODY: I doubt she'd respond to it anyway.

EDITH: That sounds hyperbolic.

JODY: Charlotte, who's the President of the United States?

CHARLOTTE: Why Chester A. Arthur, of course.

JODY: Did you vote for him in the last election?

CHARLOTTE: Women don't vote. Although it would be wonderful someday.

JODY: What's your favorite boy band?

CHARLOTTE: Band of boys? Marching bands are always wonderful to see. I love the euphonium.

JODY: *(to Edith)* She'll do this all day.

ALASTAIR: But we'd prefer not to listen to it that long, Jody.

JODY: Am I boring you, Alastair? How ironic.

HARVEY: Well. I don't want another one of these soulless corporate types telling us what to do. We got it.

MAYA: Well said, Harvey.

FLORENCE: I hear the consultant is gunning for Heritage Landing.

JODY: Why would Heritage need someone like her?

FLORENCE: How do you improve on perfection?

MAYA: Maybe she wants to end up there permanently. Be a part of the mystique.

HARVEY: *(with disgust)* Heritage Landing.

EDITH: Right? All we hear is Heritage this and Heritage that. What makes them so special?

ALASTAIR: It's the largest, oldest, and most visited living history museum in the United States.

EDITH: Besides that.

MAYA: It's unfair. Heritage is right near Adventure Oasis.

JODY: And there's a new splash park.

EDITH: It's a vacation spot.

FLORENCE: What are we near?

ALASTAIR: The fourth oldest continuously operating farmers' market.

MAYA: In the Midwest.

EDITH: I thought we were the third.

JODY: Like that would make a difference.

ALASTAIR: We're also known for the famous Breyerfield Apples. Only place you can get them.

JODY: Because no one else is foolish enough to grow them.

EDITH: They're worse than Red Delicious.

ALASTAIR: I like those.

EDITH: You would.

HARVEY: Heritage probably has better apples than we do.

JODY: They do.

MAYA: Imperial Golds are so tasty.

CHARLOTTE: I do have a friend in fair Heritage Landing. I must take the coach and visit.

EDITH: *(to Jody)* It gets old.

JODY: You get used to it.

ALASTAIR: Heritage provides us a fair amount of business. Derek has multiple orders for hinges.

JODY: I have shoes going out next week.

CHARLOTTE: My dresses are always in demand.

EDITH: It's a good thing they want everything to be authentic.

HARVEY: *(mockingly)* Look at Heritage. They're so authentic.

ALASTAIR: It keeps us running.

*Randall and Cora enter.*

RANDALL: *(to Cora)* Here is the rest of the crew from OBV eastside. *(to the staff)* This is Cordelia Harrington.

EDITH: *(under her breath)* Derek already knows her.

JODY: *(to Edith)* Give it a rest.

RANDALL: She'll be helping us with some changes around here. Cordelia?

CORA: Good morning to everyone. Great to be here. I'll be stopping by the exhibits, observing, talking to patrons. I have some bigger things planned as well, but we'll start with that. Anyone with any burning questions?

*Harvey raises his hand.*

RANDALL: Yes, Harvey.

HARVEY: *(to Cora)* How long you gonna be here?

CORA: Right now my plan is three months. But it's open ended.

*A few ad lib grumbles*

RANDALL: Now, now, she's just here to help.

*Edith raises her hand.*

RANDALL: Edith?

EDITH: *(to Cora)* So, you haven't been to the historic home of the Saunders yet...

JODY: For the love of Pete.

EDITH: It should've been first on your list. It is the premier exhibit of Old Bristol Village.

CORA: I'm looking forward to seeing it.

EDITH: You'll be impressed with the fine tour.

CORA: I'm sure I will, Edith. Who is the archivist?

RANDALL: That's Maya.

MAYA: *(waves a hand)* Hi there.

CORA: You're first on my list today.

EDITH: *(bitterly)* Of course.

CORA: *(to Edith)* I'll be on your twelve o'clock tour.

EDITH: They start at nine.

CORA: *(diplomatically)* I'll see you at noon.

RANDALL: Time to head out people. It's a good day at OBV.

EVERYONE: Good day.

HARVEY: *(under his breath)* But not for us.

***END OF EXCERPT***