



FEATHERTOP

ADAPTED FROM THE SHORT STORY BY
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CAST

RIGBY	<i>Old Witch Woman</i>
FEATHERTOP	<i>Scarecrow</i>
WOMAN ONE	<i>Townsperson</i>
WOMAN TWO	<i>Townsperson</i>
BOY	<i>Boy in the Street</i>
GOOKIN	<i>Justice of the Peace</i>
POLLY	<i>Daughter of Gookin</i>

NARRATOR: Mother Rigby, an old, shriveled dame who inhabited the cottage at the end of town, was one of the most cunning and potent witches in New England. It just so happened that this morning she had awoken in an uncommonly pleasant humor.

RIGBY: Dickon, a coal for my pipe!

NARRATOR: Her pipe was in her mouth when she said these words, and as soon as

the order was given, an intense, red glow appeared in the bowl of the pipe ignited by whatever demon or imp acted as her invisible servant.

RIGBY: Hmm. It may be the tobacco talking, but I feel good. Why should I waste my day scaring the children for miles around? Today I will do something fine, beautiful, and splendid—instead of something hideous and horrible.

NARRATOR: In the corner of her cottage lay a scarecrow composed of bits of broken furniture, a bag of musty straw, and several other pieces of trash. Its legs, which stuck out at odd angles, were a hoe handle and an old broomstick that Mother Rigby used to ride upon. The head was supplied by a somewhat withered and shriveled pumpkin, in which Mother Rigby had cut two holes for eyes and a slit for the mouth. Overall, it was quite a respectable face.

RIGBY: I have seen worse heads on human shoulders at any rate! But as with any gentleman, it will be the clothes that make him.

NARRATOR: For her scarecrow Mother Rigby found a velvet waistcoat, scarlet breeches and a pair of silk stockings.

RIGBY: Ah! And the ensemble would not be complete without a wig. This one will do nicely—supplied by my late husband. May he rot in pieces. Hee hee!

NARRATOR: She laid the wig on the bare scalp of the pumpkin and surmounted this with a dusty three-cornered hat. Into this she stuck the long tail feather of a rooster.

RIGBY: I've made many puppets in my day, but methinks this is the finest of them all!

NARRATOR: For some reason there was something wonderfully human in this ridiculous shape.

RIGBY: Hmmm. He is far too good to be sticking him in a cornfield. He's capable of better things. He would make a fine man, I think. I know I've danced with worse ones at our witch meetings in the forest. What if I should give him a chance among the other men of straw and empty fellows who go bustling about the world? Yes, that's it! I'll make a man of my scarecrow—if only for a joke! Hee hee!

NARRATOR: She took the pipe from her lips and thrust into the crevice-mouth of the pumpkin.

RIGBY: Puff, my darling! Puff away! Your life depends upon it!

NARRATOR: As soon as the old dame bade him puff, there came a whiff from the scarecrow's mouth. It was the feeblest of whiffs, but it was followed by another and another, each more robust than the preceding one.

RIGBY: Puff away! It is the breath of life to you!

NARRATOR: There must have been a spell either in the tobacco or the in the fiercely-glowing coal, for a human likeness began to form upon the pumpkin-head—growing more and more perceptible with every whiff of the pipe. The old witch clapped her

skinny hands together and smiled encouragingly upon her handiwork.

RIGBY: Hee hee!

NARRATOR: It may be doubted whether there was any real change at all. It may just have been a spectral illusion—a cunning effect of light and shade so colored and contrived as to delude the eyes of most men. After all, the miracles of witchcraft have a shallow subtlety.

RIGBY: Don't just lurk in the corner, lazy one! Rise! You have the world before you!

NARRATOR: In obedience to Mother Rigby's word the scarecrow extended its arm as if to reach her outstretched hand, the figure made a hitching and jerking step forward. No sooner had the scarecrow taken a step that it began to wobble so unsteadily that it fell as a heap upon the floor. (*crashing sound*) Then the old hag grew irate—showing a glimpse of her diabolical nature like a snake's head peeping with a hiss out of her bosom.

RIGBY: (*screaming*) Stand, you wretch! Puff harder! Or I will snatch that pipe out of your mouth and throw you upon the fire!

NARRATOR: The unhappy scarecrow puffed away for dear life—until the small cottage became all vaporous. Then its rickety back straightened, and the face became even more humanlike.

RIGBY: Now, you have a man's aspect! I bid you speak!

NARRATOR: The scarecrow gasped, struggled, and emitted a murmur.

FEATHERTOP: (*childlike*) Mother!

NARRATOR: Some said the scarecrow was able to speak because the old witch had compelled a familiar spirit into it. Whatever the reason, she had given it complete life.

RIGBY: Speak, you bundle of rags!

FEATHERTOP: Mother, do not be so awful to me! I would happily speak, but without wits, what can I say?

RIGBY: Do not worry. I will fill you with the empty phrases and endless babbling that the men of the world use. So heed all that I say!

FEATHERTOP: I will, Mother—with all my heart.

RIGBY: Hee hee! As if you had a heart!

NARRATOR: The scarecrow's features seemed to wilt at the witch's cruel words.

RIGBY: Now, you must go play your part in the great, wide world, but do not worry—there is not one man in a hundred who is gifted with more real substance than you are! And you will prove how shallow mankind is. Hmmm. Which reminds me...none of these superficial humans will give you the time of day if you are not rich. Therefore, I will give you wealth!

NARRATOR: Mother Rigby, although she had no use for gold, was quite rich. Most of her wealth derived from a gold mine in El Dorado, half a million acres of vineyard land at the North Pole, and the rent from a castle in the air.

RIGBY: This will be a sign to all who see it!

NARRATOR: Mother Rigby placed a shining star upon the scarecrow's breast that glowed with supernatural fire.

RIGBY: This will help dazzle the eyes of all who behold you. Now, go into the town and seek out the worshipful Justice Gookin. I know him, and he knows me. He has a comely maiden for a daughter, and you are just the gentleman to win her heart.

NARRATOR: As he continued to draw smoke from his pipe, the scarecrow truly felt like he had a human heart, for he thought it jumped within his breast at the mention of the justice's daughter.

FEATHERTOP: Do you think I have a chance of winning her?

RIGBY: A chance? I know you have better than that. Justice Gookin owes me a debt from long ago. Tell him my name and your errand, and he cannot refuse you.

FEATHERTOP: But, Mother, I do not even have a name!

RIGBY: If anyone bothers to ask, tell them your name is Feathertop.

FEATHERTOP: Oh, that is a fine name! What is its meaning, Mother? I'm sure it's something grand.

RIGBY: Eh. You have a feather in your hat, and your pumpkin-head is stuffed with feathers. Plus, that wig is of the fashion they call "Feathertop." That is reason enough.

NARRATOR: The scarecrow had continued to grow more human in likeness as long as the vapors of the pipe continued, but the tobacco suddenly reduced to ashes. As this happened, the fine gentleman likeness started to leave the scarecrow's features. (*wilting sound*)

RIGBY: Dickon! Fetch another coal for his pipe!

NARRATOR: The invisible spirit complied, the flame renewed, and the scarecrow reversed its slow wilt. (*reviving sound*)

RIGBY: You must stick to your pipe. Your life is in it. Otherwise, you will change from a gallant gentleman into a jumble of sticks and tattered clothes. Now depart, my treasure, and good luck go with you!

FEATHERTOP: Never fear, Mother! I will thrive—if it is possible for an honest man to succeed in the world!

NARRATOR: At this comment the witch convulsed with laughter.

RIGBY: (*laughing*) Hee hee! An honest man succeed? Stop! You will be the death of me!

NARRATOR: Full of hopes and dreams, Feathertop headed for the town. The wig upon his head was daintily powdered and so well adjusted that he deemed it sacrilege to cover it with his hat, so he carried it beneath the arm of his plum-colored coat. As Feathertop passed, jauntily adjusting the ruffles at his sleeves, the townspeople began to murmur and point at his fine appearance. (*murmuring from the townspeople*)

WOMAN ONE: Oh my! Beyond question that must be some great nobleman!

WOMAN TWO: Perhaps he is a lord who has traveled to this country from his own!

WOMAN ONE: All I know is that he must be a fine man. Just look at how he is dressed!

NARRATOR: Feathertop neared the gossip women, and he tipped his hat to them.

FEATHERTOP: Good morrow, fine ladies! I beg your pardon, do you know the honorable Justice Gookin?

WOMAN ONE: Oh, of course, sir! The worshipful justice is known all around this town as the finest man who ever lived. He is a deacon in our church, and his wise rulings on civic matters are unparalleled!

NARRATOR: Feathertop thought this strange that such an honorable person should have had past dealings with the dark magic of Mother Rigby, but the thought soon passed. His brain was made of feathers after all.

WOMAN TWO: The justice lives just down this street in the finest house I ever did see.

NARRATOR: Feathertop bowed dramatically to the two ladies, who giggled at such attention. (*giggling*)

FEATHERTOP: I am most indebted to you. My compliments to you and your families! Good day!

NARRATOR: The two women were impressed with the style and grace of the wobbling bag of straw.

WOMAN ONE: I have never seen a finer man than he!

WOMAN TWO: It is only right that he is going to meet with the justice.

WOMAN ONE: Why, maybe he is coming to court the justice's daughter! What a doll she is! A finer match could not be made!

NARRATOR: As Feathertop wended his way toward the door of Justice Gookin, a dog, an impertinent cur, barked at him. (*growling of a dog*) Imagine its fright at seeing a pumpkin propped up on top of a rickety skeleton of old wood fragments! As the dog put its tail between its legs and skulked backward, its owner, a young boy, came forward to see what the trouble was.

BOY: What is it, boy?

NARRATOR: The boy, too, saw Feathertop for the mess of sticks he was. The flashing star upon his breast did try to deceive the boy's eye, but he was too common and plain to be fooled by it.

BOY: (*cry of fright*) A pumpkin! A walking pumpkin—smoking a pipe!

NARRATOR: The other genteel people gathered there in the street just looked at the boy as if he were babbling nonsense.

Feathertop reached the mansion-house of Justice Gookin and ascended the steps of the front door. The servants did nothing to hinder his progress. By the sight of him, they knew that he must be a fine gentleman.

He was introduced to the worshipful Justice Gookin at once, a white-haired man, who went suddenly pale when Feathertop mentioned Mother Rigby.

GOOKIN: (*to himself*) Mother Rigby? Heaven help me!

NARRATOR: The old judge stared at the bowl of Feathertop's pipe, where tiny figures were painted—little demons, complete with horns and tails, dancing hand in hand. The shocking thing was that they actually seemed to be dancing. Justice Gookin regained his composure.

GOOKIN: I see. I know my debt to Mother Rigby. Let me fetch my daughter at once.

NARRATOR: Within the mansion-house in her private chambers, Polly Gookin had been viewing herself in the large looking glass all morning—practicing pretty airs, kissing her own hand, tossing her head, and managing her fan.

POLLY: Oh, Polly, you are simply the finest lady a lady can be!

NARRATOR: Polly was a damsel of a soft, round figure, light hair and blue eyes, and a fair, rosy face. When she heard the servants announcing a visitor, she flew down the stairs at once. She saw Feathertop standing in the foyer—the star glistening upon his chest and his pipe-smoke filling the air with a dreamy vapor.

POLLY: (*breathlessly*) Oh my!

NARRATOR: Polly Gookin was immediately smitten, for you see, her head was as full of feathers just like Feathertop's

was. Like him, she, too, was a complete artifice.

GOOKIN: Come here, Polly—my dear daughter! Come and meet this fine gentleman. He has brought a token of remembrance from...an ancient friend of mine.

NARRATOR: The justice was nervous, fidgety, and very pale, but neither Feathertop nor Polly seemed to notice. The young girl extended her porcelain hand to the handsome gentleman, and he took it and kissed it most grandly.

POLLY: Tee hee. Oh my!

NARRATOR: It seems strange that someone should be so charmed by something so artificial, but this type of occurrence happens all the time.

Five minutes later Feathertop and Polly were promenading around the room—his golden star emitting actual flames and throwing flickering gleams upon the wall. Fifteen minutes later, Polly Gookin was beginning to be in love. This was not the working of witchcraft necessarily—just the effect of a simple, shallow heart. She saw herself reflected in her beloved’s hollow eyes.

POLLY: I have never had such a wonderful day as this!

FEATHERTOP: Neither have I!

NARRATOR: Feathertop, too, had found himself in Polly’s fawning adoration. No matter what Feathertop said, his words sounded deep in her ears. No matter what he did, his actions were heroic in her eye.

The little demons on his pipe danced with even more merriment, for a silly maiden’s heart was about to be given to a shadow!

POLLY: I could dance like this forever!

NARRATOR: As Justice Gookin looked up on this, lamenting the shady dealings of his past, the couple happened to dance before the full-length looking glass that hung upon the wall. It was one of the truest mirrors in the world and incapable of flattery. Those who looked into it saw themselves exactly as they were.

Polly’s azure eyes happened to glance into this mirror, and she shrank from Feathertop’s embrace—shrieking.

POLLY: (*shrieking*) Ah!

NARRATOR: Staring at the reflection in wild dismay, she no longer saw the glittering outside show, but the sordid patchwork of his reality stripped of all witchcraft.

POLLY: (*in confusion*) What does this mean?

NARRATOR: She turned to the face of her beloved and saw the same reality there. The visage that had seemed so infinitely handsome was now nothing more than a shrunken pumpkin.

POLLY: (*fainting*) Ooooooh...

NARRATOR: Without another word, Polly fell backward to the floor and laid there insensible. In shock Feathertop turned to the mirror as well, seeing himself for what he truly was—an illusion.

Sitting in her cottage, knocking the old

tobacco from her pipe, Mother Rigby heard from the direction of the road a hurried tramp, which sounded more like the clattering of sticks. (*door slamming*) A figure burst headlong into the cottage door. It was Feathertop!

RIGBY: (*in shock*) Ah! What has gone wrong?

NARRATOR: Feathertop, still puffing halfheartedly at his pipe, did not respond.

RIGBY: Did that old hypocrite Gookin refuse you? If he did, I will send twenty fiends to torment him!

FEATHERTOP: No.

RIGBY: Did that foolish girl of his scorn you? I'll cover her face with pimples! I'll make her face as red as that coal in your pipe! In a week she won't be worth having!

FEATHERTOP: No. It was not that.

RIGBY: Then what was it, my treasure?

FEATHERTOP: I've seen myself, Mother! I have seen the ragged, empty thing that I am!

RIGBY: Nonsense! You are more real than any of the rest of them!

FEATHERTOP: Perhaps I could have been. Perhaps if I had received but one kiss from Polly's sweet lips, it would have made me real. But I have seen my own wretchedness.

NARRATOR: The witch caught the teetering wooden skeleton in her arms.

RIGBY: Go back! Laugh at this! Love another! Live!

FEATHERTOP: I cannot. I exist no longer.

NARRATOR: Feathertop snatched the pipe from between his lips and flung it with all his might against the chimney. (*Shazam!*) In the same instant, he sank upon the floor—a medley of straw and tattered garments with a few sticks protruding from the heap. A shriveled pumpkin crowned the pile—the eyeholes now lusterless and the inhuman mouth twisting itself into a despairing grin.

RIGBY: Hmph.

NARRATOR: The witch poked at the pile with her walking stick.

RIGBY: Poor fellow. There are thousands upon thousands of coxcombs and charlatans in the world. All of them are made up of worn-out, forgotten, and good-for-nothing trash like you were. Yet they live in fair repute—with all the world's praise heaped upon them. They never see themselves for what they truly are.

NARRATOR: The witch sucked thoughtfully upon one of her few remaining teeth.

RIGBY: I could send him back tomorrow. Hmmmm. But I think he has too much heart to exist in such an empty and heartless world. I'll make him a scarecrow after all.

NARRATOR: Mother Rigby nodded her head in satisfaction and replaced her pipe between her lips.

RIGBY: Dickon! Another coal for my pipe!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the theme of this story?
2. Is Mother Rigby good or evil? Explain.
3. Do you know people who are pleasing to the eye on the outside but empty on the inside? Explain without naming names.
4. What comment is Nathaniel Hawthorne trying to make about the “fine gentlemen” of his day?
5. What comment is Hawthorne trying to make about the world in general?
6. Hawthorne wrote this story nearly 200 years ago. Has society changed much since his time? Explain.
7. Why does Feathertop destroy himself at the end of the story?
8. How can we make sure we don't become vain and empty like the characters in Hawthorne's story?