

THE BUBBLE GUM MURDERS

by Jon Jory and Michael Bigelow Dixon

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THE BUBBLE GUM MURDERS

A One Act Comedic Mystery

by **Jon Jory and Michael Bigelow Dixon**

SYNOPSIS: A small-town public library is haunted by the ghost of the Bubble Gum Heiress, who was murdered in 1927 when two feuding bubble gum companies engaged in corporate espionage. Her murder was never solved, and her fortune was never found. Now three men, desperate to discover the whereabouts of the missing gold coin collection, descend on the library in search of clues hidden somewhere deep within the stacks. Their efforts are foiled, though, by the librarian, her crossing-guard sister who dreams of becoming a detective, two teenage lovers named Bobby and Bobbi, and a French novelist who writes the new murder mystery aloud as it unfolds before their eyes. On this dark and stormy night, a crime is committed, a culprit's identified, a best-seller's written, and whoever said "crime doesn't pay," never visited this little library.

DURATION: 35 minutes.

TIME: Present day.

SETTING: A public library in Sweetbriar, a small Southern town.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 females, 4 males)

LUELLEN (f).....	A high school student. <i>(8 lines)</i>
AUDREY (f).....	The librarian and the only one who can see the Ghost of Dorothy Cobble. <i>(97 lines)</i>
FLORA (f).....	Audrey's sister, a crossing guard who wants to be a detective. <i>(83 lines)</i>
BOBBI (f).....	18; a high-spirited teenager enamored with Bobby. <i>(68 lines)</i>
BOBBY (m).....	18; a volatile teenager smitten with Bobbi. <i>(61 lines)</i>

- WILHELM VANDERBOOT (m)..... A well-dressed out-of-towner seeking the fortune in gold coins. *(35 lines)*
- MORDOR GRIM (m)..... A local developer hoping to find the gold coins. *(11 lines)*
- DR. FRANKLIN SCHTEIN (m) A strange stranger and a bit green. *(32 lines)*
- HERCULE POTPURRI (f)..... An effusive female French novelist writing a murder mystery. *(37 lines)*
- GHOST OF DOROTHY COBBLE (f) Straight out of 1927 wearing a gown and hat; invisible to all but Audrey, she speaks but makes no sound. *(Non-Speaking.)*

SET

A library with entrance door and three aisles to the stacks. Books are painted on the back wall.

FURNITURE

Two library tables seating 3 each, one armchair, a desk, and chair.

LIGHTS

Nighttime, lightning, and blackouts. Otherwise general indoor lighting.

SOUND EFFECTS

- Sirens
- Knock at door
- Thunder

COSTUMES

Contemporary except for Dorothy Cobble, who wears a gown, hat, and purse, circa 1927.

PROPS

- desk items one might find at a small-town library: tape dispenser, old computer, notes and note paper, pens and pencils, paper clips, rubber stamp and ink pad, etc.
- office phone
- two dollar bills
- hand-held stop sign for crossing guard to carry
- manila envelope containing old diary and newspaper clipping
- backpack containing 2 copies of *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- baseball hat for Bobby
- box of chocolates
- jackknife for Bobby
- knife (circa 1927) for Dorothy
- several large format old books
- stylish notebook and pen for Hercule Potpurri
- glass of orange water
- large old architectural plans/blueprints, perhaps rolled up
- 2 hat pins
- a large quantity of gold coins

AT START: *The library in the small Southern town of Sweetbriar on a dark and stormy evening as the library is open till nine. We see two long tables, each seating three on the upstage side. To one side of the stage is the Librarian's small desk and chair. At the other side is a comfortable armchair. Upstage are a series of flats with three openings supposedly leading to the stacks. The flats are painted to look like bookshelves filled with books. At lights up we see a high school student, LUELLEN, talking with AUDREY, the librarian, at her desk.*

LUELLEN: Well, I'm just real, real sorry, Miss Booker, but I'd be pleased as punch to pay a fine.

AUDREY: Luellen, this book is seven years overdue.

LUELLEN: Is that bad?

AUDREY: With compound interest, Luellen, the fine would be nine hundred and forty-seven dollars.

LUELLEN: I only have two dollars and some change.

AUDREY: I have sent you seventy-nine reminders.

LUELLEN: Well see, my daddy put it under our dining room table leg to straighten it up.

AUDREY: Things happen, Luellen. I'll settle for the two dollars.

LUELLEN: *(Handing over the money.)* There you go. Can I get me another book?

AUDREY: I didn't take you for such an avid reader.

LUELLEN: Well, it would be for the table.

AUDREY: Bye, Luellen.

LUELLEN: Okey dokey then. Surely appreciate it.

LUELLEN heads out, passing FLORA, sister to AUDREY, on the way in.

FLORA: Bye, Luellen.

LUELLEN: Bye, Miss Flora.

FLORA: *(Looking after her.)* You would never know that girl ran over her father. *(Turns to AUDREY.)* Evening, Sis.

AUDREY: Evening, Sis. Thought you'd be home with your jigsaw puzzle.

FLORA: Well, as a crossing guard I need my beauty rest but you know I'm a wild fool for my hobby and you got all those old letters and such from the Cobble Mansion.

AUDREY: Girl, you have been chewing around the edges of that legend of the gold coins since you were thirteen years old.

DOROTHY COBBLE, a ghost from 1927, enters from the stacks. She wears a 20s gown, a hat and carries a purse. She's unfailingly cheerful and curious. Only AUDREY sees her.

AUDREY: Good evening, Dorothy.

DOROTHY smiles and waves, then stares at FLORA'S dress.

FLORA: Oh my.

AUDREY: Don't "oh my" me.

FLORA: My perfectly sane sister sees ghosts. Where is she?

AUDREY: Checking out your dress fabric. And by the way, I don't see ghosts, I only see Dorothy. And why wouldn't I? She lives in the library.

DOROTHY twirls her way back into the stacks.

AUDREY: I'm quite sure she knows where the gold coins are.

FLORA: Have you asked her?

AUDREY: She talks all the time but only her lips move.

FLORA: All alone are you?

AUDREY: There's a couple out-of-town coin hunters back in the stacks.

FLORA: (*Putting a manila envelope on AUDREY'S desk.*) Well, I brought back that old diary you found for me. Nothing in there, but there was an old clipped-out editorial from *The Daily Chew*.

AUDREY: Worst daily paper in small-town history.

FLORA: Well, it lay out the Bubble Gum Wars pretty clear. Written April 19th, 1929.

AUDREY: Tell.

FLORA: So first we had the Bubble Bubble Gum Company move to town and then in 1924 the Double Trouble Bubble Company set up next door.

AUDREY: Oh those Bubble Gum Wars. Truly sorry I missed them.

FLORA: (*Referencing the old newspaper article she's found.*) Then in 1927, Dorothy Cobble...

DOROTHY, the ghost, dances in and curtsies.

AUDREY: (*Pointing her out.*) Our most famous dead body.

FLORA: Is she here?

AUDREY: Oh yes.

FLORA: Was accused of what we would now call "corporate espionage" for stealing Double Trouble Bubble's secret recipe, and Dorothy was shortly thereafter found stabbed and run through her own bubble gum wrapping machine.

DOROTHY bows and silently claps her hands.

AUDREY: Hard to believe the murder was never solved.

DOROTHY sits at one of the tables and follows the conversation.

FLORA: Then apparently, Bubble Bubble went bankrupt and Double Trouble Bubble packed up its gum and moved to Chicago.

BOBBI and BOBBY, two teenagers, rush in and stop on a dime.

AUDREY: Hello Bobbi.

FLORA: Hello Bobby.

BOBBI and BOBBY: How do!

AUDREY: You kids have homework to do?

BOBBI: We're reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the fourth straight year.

BOBBY: Almost to the end, thank the Lord.

They pull out their books and sit at a table.

AUDREY: So we're up to the gold coins.

FLORA: Dorothy Cobble's gold coins.

DOROTHY does a little twirl.

AUDREY: Roman gold coins she dug out on an archeological dig ...

BOBBY and BOBBI: ...were never found!

FLORA: Now they've put Dorothy's old broken-down mansion up for sale and we're overrun by treasure hunters who think those coins are still in the mansion walls or whatever.

BOBBY: *(To BOBBI.)* I'mma gonna find them ancient coins and make you a big ol' princess.

BOBBI: Heck yeah!

DOROTHY exits, silently mouthing "Oh no you won't."

AUDREY: I still have some affection for that old mansion. You know, when I moved here for the library job, I rented a room there for seventeen dollars a week and all the cockroaches I could squash. Lived there till you came to join me. What a dump!

FLORA: You probably walked right past those gold coins every day you were there.

AUDREY: Sis, you are downright hypnotized on that.

FLORA: I'm going to find those coins, Audrey, and we'll find us a beach and live the life of Riley.

AUDREY: Dream on.

FLORA: But you don't know, Dorothy showed off those coins to the general public right here in your library for a full week.

AUDREY: Well, I did not know that.

FLORA: Says right here. Then she took those coins up to her mansion never to be seen again.

BOBBI and BOBBY: *(Sort of like a cheerleader routine.)* Gold coins, gold coins, gold coins, RAH!

AUDREY: Now you kids hush up. Care for a chocolate?

BOBBI: Well, I surely do.

AUDREY: Well, come on over here and get it, Bobbi. I'm not the stewardess on this flight.

- BOBBI:** (*Coming over to AUDREY.*) Thank you kindly, Miss Audrey.
Oh-oh, I don't want to take your last one.
- AUDREY:** There's a whole 'nother layer in the box.
- BOBBI:** (*Her beaming smile.*) Well, okey dokey then. (*Goes back to BOBBY.*) Get out your jackknife, Bobby, an' we'll share.
- BOBBY:** Hey, Miss Audrey, did you hunt those coins when you roomed in the mansion?
- AUDREY:** All the roomers did. We darn near tore that ramshackle old house apart. Looked under the floorboard and dug in the garden. Never found a thing but two old umbrellas and a box full of eyeglasses.
- BOBBY:** I been in there when they use it for a haunted house at Halloween.
- FLORA:** Been empty about ten years now.
- BOBBY:** Alice Golightly fell through the floor when she was up there with Slimy Sam Tucket. Tore her nose off.
- AUDREY:** What ever happened to Alice?
- FLORA:** Went to some college up in Boston and got her a new nose through a surgical procedure.
- BOBBY:** She wrote me a postcard once. Boy, it was X-rated.
- WILHELM, a well-dressed middle-aged man appears out of the stacks with two or three old volumes. SFX: There is a crash of thunder and lightning.*
- BOBBI:** Oh my goodness gracious!
- BOBBY:** You all right, girl?
- BOBBI:** That just scared my skin right off my body.
- WILHELM sits at a table looking through what he found in the stacks. DOROTHY enters, looks over his shoulder at the books.*
- BOBBY:** Girl, you got to take good care of that there skin.
- BOBBI:** You hush up, Mr. Flirty!
- AUDREY:** Indoor voices, please. Library rules. (*To WILHELM.*) Did you find what you were looking for, sir?
- WILHELM:** Architectural plans for the Cobble Mansion.
- BOBBY:** We don't cotton to outside coin-hunters, Mister.

FLORA: Hush up now, Bobby.

BOBBI: (*Shaking herself out.*) That nasty ol' sky-lightnin' just ruffled my feathers.

BOBBY: Well, your big ol' Bobby's here to smooth 'em down, Bobbi.

BOBBI: (*Ruffling his hair.*) You hunky ol' Bobby-Bobby.

WILHELM: Why do these children keep calling each other "Bobby"?

FLORA: He's B-O-B-B-Y and she's B-O-B-B-I.

BOBBI: You huntin' those coins, Mister?

WILHELM: We can safely say that is none of your business.

BOBBY shoots out of his chair.

BOBBY: Y'all talk nice to Bobbi, or you'll have Bobby to deal with.

BOBBI: Sit yourself down, Bobby.

BOBBY: I don't put up with nobody bein' snobby to Bobbi!

BOBBI: Y'all sit your Bobby-self down! (*Sits.*)

WILHELM: (*To AUDREY.*) Brother and Sister?

FLORA: Oh no, they're our town's little Romeo and Juliet. They've been goin' steady since 3rd grade.

BOBBI: (*To BOBBY.*) Kootchy.

BOBBY: (*To BOBBI.*) Kootchy.

BOBBY and BOBBI: Cool!

BOBBI: Yabba.

BOBBY: Dabba.

BOBBI: Doo!

BOBBI and BOBBY laugh delightedly and blow each other kisses.

WILHELM: I may vomit. (*Exits into the stacks.*)

FLORA: Well, that was exciting. As a detective...

AUDREY: You're a crossing guard, dear.

FLORA: ...I like nothing better than a dark and stormy night. But we seem to be a little short on crime.

AUDREY: Must be discouraging for you as a crime-fighter.

WILHELM enters with another book. As he passes DOROTHY, she pinches him.

WILHELM: Ow! Oooo. Ouch. Oh.

BOBBY: You all right there, Buddy?

WILHELM: Mosquitos, I think.

AUDREY: No, no. It's the ghost of Dorothy Cobble. She founded the library and has haunted it ever since her murder.

WILHELM: (*Doubtful.*) A ghost?

FLORA: Uh-huh.

WILHELM: You believe there is an actual ghost?

DOROTHY walks behind BOBBI and BOBBY, slapping their heads with an open hand.

AUDREY: We don't believe in ghosts, but we believe in Dorothy. Sit down, Dorothy, its library hours.

DOROTHY sits.

WILHELM: Well, I'm glad I'm from Chicago where real things happen.

FLORA: Most of them murders, I understand.

WILHELM: Well, the nice thing about murder is that it always happens to other people.

DOROTHY takes out a knife and stabs herself and dies a theatrical death.

AUDREY: Now stop that, Dorothy!

DOROTHY pops up, blows kisses and returns to the stacks.

WILHELM: You actually see this ghost?

FLORA: Oh, she does, but no one from out of town ever does. I sense you have an interest in the Cobble Mansion.

WILHELM: I have investors who see it as a Museum of Horror.

FLORA: Or do you just want to tear it down to look for the coins?

WILHELM: Never entered my head.

AUDREY: Of course not. It has, however, entered many other heads.

SFX: Another lightning strike and scary thunder. Strong reactions onstage. The lights flicker. The door to the library is thrown open and MORDOR, in a loud sport coat and pork pie hat enters.

MORDOR: Okay, that was a close one!

AUDREY: Mordor Grim! You've finally visited the library!

MORDOR: *(He has a mark of the lightning singed across his sport coat.)* Just spent \$49.50 on this rag and look at it now. I hate storms. Nobody visits my properties.

BOBBY: Well how come is that, Mr. Grim?

MORDOR: I'm a developer, I develop things: grocery stores, movie theatres, clothing shops, restaurants, and when it storms people don't come and I lose money. Mordor Grim does not like losing money. It's like a wound in someone you care about.

AUDREY: Why Mordor that's almost poetic.

MORDOR: Poetry is useless and I don't like useless.

AUDREY: Poetry, Mordor, nourishes the soul.

MORDOR: *(Looks around.)* I came here for something. What did I come here for? Oh yes, the working drawings of the Bubble Gum Mansion.

AUDREY: *(Gesturing toward WILHELM.)* I believe this gentleman has them.

MORDOR: What?

WILHELM: My firm plans to turn it into a Museum of Horror.

MORDOR: My firm will convert it into an indoor water park. Hand over those blueprints.

WILHELM: Finders keepers.

AUDREY: Actually, gentlemen, those architectural drawings are the library's property.

BOBBY: Y'all hustlers are just lookin' for the coins, huh? Y'all think you're so smart? I been climbin' up that old oak tree right by the mansion an' gettin' in through the attic since I was nine years old. How you know I didn't find 'em? Huh? How you know I didn't trade 'em for the most valuable comic book in the durn world? Yeah, that's right, the first Superman comic book from 1938 an' nobody can see it cause... *(He's now nose to nose with MORDOR.)* ...it's mine, all mine! *(BOBBY rocks out.)*

BOBBI: He is so sexy!

MORDOR: Get your filthy hands off my lapel.

BOBBY: You call me "filthy," I'm gonna take you out, put you face down in some pig slop!!

BOBBI: Bobby, baby, boo-boo, you come along with baby Bobbi an' we'll snuggle like a buggle in those nice dark stacks!

BOBBI drags BOBBY off to the stacks. SFX: Suddenly there is a lightning strike, a burst of thunder and we are plunged into darkness. A moment later we hear a blood-curdling scream from BOBBI.

AUDREY: What was that?

FLORA: I think that was Bobbi.

MORDOR: Her prehistoric boyfriend has probably killed her.

AUDREY: Everyone stand still.

WILHELM: But what happened?

The lights pop back on. BOBBY enters from the stacks carrying BOBBI. He has lipstick kisses all over his face. He's hysterical.

BOBBY: She just went down like a crosscut redwood!

AUDREY: Calm down, Bobby. She probably fainted.

BOBBY: My purty little puffabilly, she's dead.

AUDREY: I can see she's breathing.

BOBBY: Don't be dead, Bobbi. Don't leave me here alone like a dust mote in an empty universe! Help me! Help me! My Bubby-Bobbi, she's all corpsed out!

AUDREY slaps him. BOBBY is immediately himself again.

BOBBY: Okay, that fixed me right up.

AUDREY: Let's get her up on a library table.

BOBBY lifts BOBBI onto a table.

BOBBY: *(Regarding BOBBI on the table.)* Boy howdy, that girl looks good lyin' down.

AUDREY: Bobby?

BOBBY: Yes ma'am?

AUDREY: Go wash you face, you are covered in *amore*.

BOBBY has lipstick kisses all over his face.

BOBBY: Yes, ma'am.

As BOBBY exits, FRANKLIN, a man in a dark suit enters from the stacks. He is a touch green.

FRANKLIN: Good afternoon.

Everyone jumps. The ghost applauds soundlessly.

FLORA: Who, sir, are you, sir?

FRANKLIN: I am Dr. Franklin Schtein. Bio-surgeon and expert in Roman coins.

WILHELM: You!

FRANKLIN: So, Vanderboot, ve meet again.

WILHELM: Those coins will be mine.

FRANKLIN: That only time vill tell.

MORDOR: They're mine.

WILHELM: Mine.

FRANKLIN: Mine! (*He turns to AUDREY.*) You vere busy, Madame Librarian, ven I entered.

BOBBI: (*Sitting up.*) You're green.

FRANKLIN: It is a schkin condition and you are a very rude young voman.

BOBBI: But you're green.

FRANKLIN: Yes, I am green and you are an imbecile.

BOBBI: But you're green.

BOBBY returns.

FRANKLIN: Enough!

BOBBY: Enough of what, Mr. Creepy?

FRANKLIN: I haf plans for your body parts.

FLORA: Now boys, we have too many problems to get sidetracked into toxic masculinity.

AUDREY: (*Trying to take over.*) Perhaps I can help.

FRANKLIN: I am interested in any documents pertaining to your Bubble Gum Vars that mention the Roman coins of Dorothy Cobble.

DOROTHY is standing right next to FRANKLIN when he says that.

AUDREY: Well...

MORDOR: Those coins will be mine!

BOBBY: Them coins is mine, baby!

SFX: There is a lightning flash and then deafening thunder followed by another blackout.

AUDREY: Stand still where you are.

FRANKLIN: Someone is on my foot.

BOBBY: Well, I'm supposed to stand still.

FRANKLIN: Vell, schtand schtill on your own foot.

BOBBY: Bobbi?

BOBBI: Bobby?

BOBBY: Bobbi?

BOBBI: Bobby?

BOBBY: Bobbi?

BOBBI: Bobby??

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