

SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY

By Craig Sodaro

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CHARACTERS

SCOTTI MACTEER:	Female; mid 20s, preschool teacher
PAUL TIBBET:	Male; mid 20s, her neighbor, a frustrated writer, played by the same actor playing JARVIS
CADBURY:	Male; 60s, the butler at Charlotte's Castle
LILLY DECHAMP:	Female; 30s, owner of a local bed and breakfast
NORMA CARLTON:	Female; 30s, owner of the Conoco station
ETHEL HILDEBRAND:	Female; 60s, a retired entomologist
SIOBOHAN:	Female; 30s, a New Age healer
TONI BASCONI:	Female; 20s, a teller at the local bank
JINX TAGGERT:	Male; late 30s-early 40s, a real estate salesman
MANDRAKE MUFFET:	Male; 60s, richest man in the state
JARVIS O'BRIEN:	Male; detective on the local police force, played by the same actor playing PAUL

SETTING

The Great Room of Charlotte's Castle, a stone fortress built high on a hill. The walls are made of stone, with one window up right and a huge fireplace left with a picture of Charlotte Muffet hanging over it. Desk sits left, drawers and chairs facing upstage. Telephone on desk, along with several papers, books, etc. A chair grouping sits left. Entrance down right leads to hall and bedrooms. Entrance down left leads to dining room, kitchen, servants' quarters and so on. Decor might include banners, shields, weapons, armor.

SCENES

Act I

Scene One - Paul Tibbet's apartment on a stormy spring evening; played before the curtain

Scene Two – Charlotte's Castle, an hour later

Scene Three - The same, a few minutes later

Act II

Scene One - The same, later that night

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ACT I SCENE I

PAUL's studio apartment on a stormy afternoon. The scene is played before the curtain, with a pair of rickety chairs with a small table between them.

At rise, PAUL lies on the table as if HE's fallen asleep - or is dead. A few papers lie scattered across the table and under him. We hear a doorbell. PAUL doesn't move. The doorbell rings again. HE still doesn't move. SCOTTI enters left, wearing a coat and carrying an overnight bag.

SCOTTI: Paul? I stopped by so you could wish me good luck. *(approaches PAUL with growing concern)* Paul? Paul? *(touches him; HE doesn't move)* Oh, no! *(pulls a cell phone from her pocket and dials)* What have you done to yourself? Oh, hurry! Hurry! Yes? Yes! My... my friend is sitting here and he won't move! I live next door to him in the same apartment building and we've got this hole in one of our mutual walls that we usually hide behind pictures, but sometimes we talk through the hole... but this isn't important, ma'am! I mean I think he might be... oh, gosh, just send somebody over here right away!

PAUL: Scotti?

SCOTTI: Oh, Paul! You're alive!

PAUL: Of course I'm alive!

SCOTTI: Well, you could have fooled a mortician, the way you didn't even move, when I came in or called your name or anything!

PAUL: Yeah, well, I wish I were dead.

SCOTTI: At least then we wouldn't be arrested for the 911 false alarm!

PAUL: Don't worry.

SCOTTI: Easy for you to say. You didn't make the call.

PAUL: You didn't give them this address.

SCOTTI: You heard it all?

PAUL: You sounded so... sincere.

SCOTTI: I'd do the same thing for a cocker spaniel.

PAUL: You're very humane, Scotti.

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SCOTTI: And you're very... tired?

PAUL: Worse than tired.

SCOTTI: It can't be all that bad.

PAUL: You wouldn't understand.

SCOTTI: That's right. I'm just a preschool teacher and you're a writer. I know in print, "writer" would be in italics, *bold italics*, for crying out loud.

PAUL: How about just a footnote on my one-line biography? Paul Tibbet: he came, he saw, he flopped.

SCOTTI: Another rejection?

PAUL: Three in the same day.

SCOTTI: I'll bet at least two of them had personal notes scribbled on the bottom. **(PAUL shakes his head.)** One of them? **(PAUL shakes his head.)** Well, there are other publishers. **(PAUL shakes his head.)**

PAUL: *Said the Spider to the Fly* has been seen by every publisher of fiction on the North American continent.

SCOTTI: Well, there's your problem. Send it to a non-fiction publisher. After all, your book's all about bugs.

PAUL: The title's figurative. It's a mystery; a taut, tense thriller. Unfortunately, it's not thrilling enough.

SCOTTI: Well, kill more of your characters.

PAUL: Everyone dies but one.

SCOTTI: Well, kill him.

PAUL: Her.

SCOTTI: Kill her, then!

PAUL: Somebody has to be left to tell the story; because I sure can't.

SCOTTI: That's silly! You've been published in *Reader's Digest*.

PAUL: They liked my joke about Uncle Allen at Thanksgiving dinner.

SCOTTI: It was the way you told it. And you've had stories published in *Effervescence*, *Nocturnal Fates*, *Time Warp Journal*, and what's that other one?

PAUL: Who cares? None of them are in print any longer.

SCOTTI: You're being too hard on yourself.

PAUL: No, everybody else is.

SCOTTI: Well, then, you've got to decide what you're doing wrong.

PAUL: I'm not doing anything wrong! My muse says write, and I write.

SCOTTI: Get a new muse.

PAUL: Very amusing.

SCOTTI: I mean it. Maybe you need to... I don't know... mire yourself in the deprivation and sorrows of the world. Listen to the cries of the people, share their tears!

PAUL: You mean come down and help out at the preschool again?

SCOTTI: Let's not talk about that. I've got two glorious days away and I don't want to think about runny noses or loose teeth until Monday.

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PAUL: That's right. Your big weekend.

SCOTTI: But I won't leave 'til I know you're all right.

PAUL: That's ridiculous. You won a weekend at Charlotte's Crypt. You've got to go so you can tell me all about it.

SCOTTI: It's Charlotte's *Castle*.

PAUL: Same difference! Nobody ever sees the old recluse who lives there. He might as well be dead.

SCOTTI: Maybe he just wants to find some new friends.

PAUL: Maybe he has a problem pre-schooler.

SCOTTI: I heard he's eighty-two.

PAUL: Stranger things have happened.

SCOTTI: Like winning this contest. I don't even remember entering it.

PAUL: Maybe it's the start of a mystery.

SCOTTI: Said the spider to the fly.

PAUL: Don't worry about me. I was actually making a decision when I fell asleep.

SCOTTI: You're not going to do something... rash... are you?

PAUL: Just something I should have done a long time ago.

SCOTTI: Take a writing class?

PAUL: Why waste my time? I'll never be a real writer... and you know why? (**SCOTTI shakes her head.**) Because I've never lived. Hemingway became a great writer because he went off and volunteered to fight in wars. He shot elephants on safaris! He probably beat up John Steinbeck in a bar in California somewhere. Shakespeare fought duels and rubbed elbows with Queen Elizabeth. Samuel Pepys lived through the great fire of London. Actually, maybe he started it so he'd have something real to write about.

SCOTTI: You're being silly. You'd be arrested if you tried to rub elbows with Queen Elizabeth. And you don't have enough money to fly to London to light a barbecue, let alone burn the city down.

PAUL: You don't get it.

SCOTTI: I do, too. You're feeling sorry for yourself like Jimmy Helbert.

PAUL: Is he another writer who fell into the vat of obscurity?

SCOTTI: He's a three year old who brought treats for his birthday... but he wanted them all for himself and ruined his whole day feeling sorry for himself.

PAUL: I don't feel sorry for myself. Even if I'm a washed up never was. Go on. Have a wonderful time at Charlotte's Castle and forget about me. I'm going to burn my latest, throw my computer into Muffet Gorge, and find a real job selling T-shirts.

SCOTTI: I really do have to go. Mr. Muffet sent a car and I'm sure it's outside waiting.

PAUL: Don't worry about me. I'll be a different man when we next meet.

SCOTTI: I hope I like him as much as the old Paul.

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PAUL (*slyly, with a grin*) You might not even recognize me. And, Scotti... be careful. Maybe Muffet wants to put the moves on you or something.

SCOTTI: I can take care of myself. Now, wish me luck.

PAUL: Good luck.

SCOTTI: And you, too. With reinventing yourself, I mean. (*SCOTTI moves to kiss PAUL, who is ready. Instead SHE gives him a peck on the forehead and exits. PAUL picks up manuscript and dumps it in garbage can as the lights dim*)

ACT I
SCENE II

Charlotte's Castle, a stone fortress built high on a hill. We see the great room, stone walls, one window up right, a huge fireplace left with a picture of Charlotte hanging over it. Table at right set with several chairs. A chair grouping at left. Entrances down left and right.

At rise, CADBURY stands at center, the epitome of the perfect butler down to the white towel folded over his arm. LILLY DECHAMP, wearing a form-fitting dress and a large hat and heels looks about the room discerningly. NORMA CARLTON sits primly in a chair.

LILLY: Always wondered what this place looked like inside. Can't see much from the road, but one night my good friend Betty and me climbed up over the fence and got a good look at the outside of the house. I'll bet you'd never do anything that crazy, would you, Norma?

NORMA: Oh, heavens, no.

LILLY: Yeah... somebody might spill the beans at the annual little league potluck or something, right?

NORMA: Well, now, I've been here once before, Lilly. Legitimately, that is. Charlie... that's my husband... brought me up one Sunday when Mr. Muffet's SUV was stuck in a snowdrift, and we had to tow him out. I got a good look at the place then. And Mr. Muffet tipped Charlie very generously.

LILLY: You actually saw Muffet?

NORMA: Oh, heavens, no. His chauffeur did all the tipping.

LILLY: (*to CADBURY*) You remember that, bud?

CADBURY: My name, Madam, is Cadbury.

LILLY: Yeah, just like those Easter eggs. You got a cream filling upstairs in your egg, too?

CADBURY: (*insulted*) I beg your pardon?

LILLY: (*sighing, bored*) I can tell this is going to be one of those weekends.

NORMA: I can't imagine what you mean.

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LILLY: I can sum it up in two words. A real drag.

NORMA: That's three words.

(Doorbell rings. CADBURY moves down right.)

LILLY: Say, how many of us won this contest, Cadbury, my dear fellow?

CADBURY: I couldn't say, Miss.

(CADBURY exits down right.)

LILLY: He couldn't say. I'll bet in his last life he was a telemarketer and his hell is having his tongue cut out in this life.

NORMA: That isn't very nice.

LILLY: It's the funniest thing I heard since I got here.

(CADBURY enters down right followed by SIOBOHAN and ETHEL. SIOBOHAN wears a brightly colored long skirt, a huge blouse, and quite a bit of jewelry. ETHEL wears walking shorts and a jungle jacket, and carries a backpack.)

CADBURY: This way, ladies. Two other guests are here. Allow me to present Mrs. Norma Carlton and Ms. Lilly Dechamp.

ETHEL: Oh, I know you both. I mean, sir, this is a very small town. I used to baby-sit for Norma and I had Lilly in Sunday school.

LILLY: That's not generally something I spread around, Mrs. Hildebrand.

NORMA: You won this contest, too?

ETHEL: Well, I guess I did! I received that very kind letter... did Mr. Muffet write it himself?

CADBURY: I couldn't say, Ma'am. I will remove your bags to your rooms.

(bows, exits down right carrying bags)

SIOBOHAN: **(with growing horror)** I want to leave.

ETHEL: Hon, we just got here.

SIOBOHAN: I sense bad karma.

LILLY: Sheboygan, if I got out of every place where I felt bad karma, I'd never have gotten where I am today.

ETHEL: I take it The Lilly Pad is doing well?

LILLY: **(proudly)** We're booked up 'til August. Solid. Even the bridal suite. And you know there aren't that many people gettin' hitched in Webhton.

NORMA: Oh, now, Reverend Darcy does a fine wedding and folks always want to come to a pretty, secluded spot for their honeymoon.

LILLY: I oughta know. I had three of 'em.

ETHEL: Wasn't The Lilly Pad one of your husband's family's homes?

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