

## ASKEW – THE COARSE-ACTING CAT

*This original imitation of T S Elliot's "Practical Cats" was inspired by a very funny book entitled, "The Art of Coarse Acting", featuring a chap called Askew who specialised in building up his part. (In this title, the word 'coarse' means amateur.)*

Askew's a veteran coarse-acting cat:  
He's got half of Benfield's best speeches off pat.  
He'll eagerly tell you coarse acting's his love:  
That he worships it all other pastimes above.

He started by bringing in tea on a tray,  
And later had one or two speeches to say.  
Ray Cooney has played a large part in his life:  
He's been "Out of Order" and "Run for his Wife".  
He got so well know for his show stealing scenes  
That he even appeared on cinema screens.  
In "Goldfinger", though never right to the fore,  
He stood in as stunt double for Pussy Galore.  
And his Cat Balloo part, critics praised to the skies.  
In Panto, he nuzzled Dick Wittington's thighs.  
He's starred twice in Rattigan's "French Without Tears".  
And snatches of Ayckbourn ooze out of his ears.  
He's waited suspensefully for the Ghost Train;  
He's waited for Godot – in that case in vain.  
But one sorrow haunted him year after year:  
He's never played DARCY throughout his career.

"I've experienced", he says, "several noted mishaps":  
In "Guys and Dolls", I lost the dice, shooting craps.  
In "Spider's Web", while I was prowling about,  
The chap with the golf club almost laid me out.  
The ambulance man in "On Monday Next",  
Trod some of my hair out – that's not in the text.  
I achieved classic status in one show, because,  
I nearly did break a leg in "The Wizard of Oz".  
I've picked up a phone that refuses to ring,  
And my spear once gave quite a shock to the king.  
"I can always", he says, "stand out from the rest".  
And that IS the coarse actor's ultimate test.  
I know how to build my part up if I'm allowed:  
I've drowned out Mark Antony's speech to the crowd,  
Made much more noise than Henry when storming the breach,  
And doubled the length of Macbeth's porter's speech.  
In Dracula, young maidens swooned in my grasp:  
But the plum role of DARCY eluded my grasp.

“Good parts get less frequent as seasons go by;  
You feel you’re increasingly left high and dry.  
In some seasons you’re lucky to play once or twice,  
And the parts that you do play are not ‘very nice’.  
Old codgers, stiff generals, the heroine’s soft dad  
Are often the roles still to be had.  
And you may finish up, in some home counties play,  
Bringing in afternoon tea on a tray.

The ultimate exit arrives for us all –  
Even Geilgud has taken his last curtain call.  
I know I too will reach the last page of my part  
But the end of the run will cause no heavy heart:  
For at last when I tread that great stage in the sky,  
MY Darcy will dazzle the angels on high.

*The U3A Drama Group had just begun some work on CATS by TS Eliot, when the lockdown began. We had been – and still are – intending to incorporate some of the poems into our annual December show. (Who knows if that show will happen.) This original poem written by Richard Clarkson may well be presented as the finale.*

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