

CHRISTIE

By Thomas Hischak

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 - 8 Males, 11 - 23 Females)

CHRISTIE S.	Aged 40, the play's narrator
CHRISTIE	Aged 20, an independent young woman
AUNT BETSEY	A sweet, old-fashioned woman
UNCLE ENOS	A hard, stubborn farmer
MRS. FLINT	The landlady, cold, aloof
MRS. STUART	A wealthy, delicate, affected woman
MR. STUART	A stern, conceited businessman
HEPSEY JOHNSON	A runaway slave, determined, strong
MRS. BLACK	A middle-aged actress, talkative and friendly
LUCY BLACK	Her daughter, an attractive actress
MRS. CHARLOTTE SALTONSTALL	A rich, distracted mother
WILLAMINA	Her pampered daughter, aged 12
TAMARA	Her pampered daughter, aged 10
PHILIP FLETCHER	Their uncle, cynical, bored, good looking, aged 33
MRS. CARROLL	A gentle, worried, secretive mother
HELEN CARROLL	Her depressed, sickly daughter, aged 22
NURSE	An elderly woman
HARRY CARROLL	A cheerful, if dissolute son, late 20s
BELLA CARROLL	A lively, attractive daughter, aged 18

MRS. KING	A hard, businesslike woman, owner of the sewing shop
RACHEL	A quiet, beautiful girl, aged 25 but seems older
MRS. WILKINS	A warm, friendly mother of six young children
MRS. STERLING	An elderly, but spry Quaker woman
DAVID STERLING	Her quiet, moody son, early 30s
ACTORS	In the company
ACTRESSES	In the company
SEAMSTRESSES	In the sewing shop
BOSTONIANS	At the flower show
SOLDIERS	At the hospital

PRODUCTION NOTES

The story of Louisa May Alcott's *Work* takes place over twenty years, from 1846 to 1866, in various places in New England. The play works best with an open stage with furniture pieces and props brought on as needed. The period costumes need not be elaborate, but there should be a distinction between the working women, such as Christie, Rachel, and Mrs. Wilkins, and the wealthy women, such as Mrs. Stuart, Helen Carroll, and Charlotte Saltonstall. Casting notes on Hepsey and character doubling can be found at the end of the play.

PROP & FURNITURE LIST

STERLING KITCHEN

Fireplace
Rocking chair
Stool
Table

Two chairs
Knitting (Mrs. Sterling)
Needlepoint (Bella)
Book (Rachel)
Sewing (Mrs. Wilkins, Hepsey)
Sheets of paper (Christie S.)

AUNT BETSEY'S KITCHEN

Same fireplace
Rocker
Sewing (Betsey)
Carpetbag (Christie)

STUART HOUSE

Small kitchen table
Two chairs
Fainting sofa
Large bowl and spoon (Hepsey)
Umbrella (Mr. Stuart)
Coat brush (Christie)
Guest list (Mrs. Stuart)
Candle (Hepsey)
Theatrical helmet & shield
(Christie)
Large unpainted stage flat

SALTONSTALL HOUSE

One fancy chair
Newspaper (Philip)

Chairs for seamstresses
Sewing for seamstresses

MRS. WILKINS' HOUSE

Bed
Chair
Knitting (Mrs. Wilkins)

STERLING KITCHEN (same as
beginning of play)

Breakfast dishes on table
Box of seedling plants (David)
Bench (to represent wagon seat)
Reins (David)
Crate of flowers (Christie)
Bucket of water and ladle (Christie)
Podium (Christie)

SEASIDE RESORT

Bench
Letter (Christie)
Letter (Enos)
Handkerchief (Philip)
Wrapped package (Philip)
Book (*Jane Eyre*) (Christie)

CARROLL HOUSE

Sette
Two fine chairs
Fainting sofa
Table with framed photo on it
Blanket (Nurse)
Envelope with money (Harry)

SEWING SHOP

SUGGESTED DOUBLING

(for a cast of 4 Males and 11 Females)

FEMALES

CHRISTIE S.
CHRISTIE
AUNT BETSEY / MRS. CARROLL
MRS. FLINT / MRS. STERLING
MRS. STUART / MRS. WILKINS
HEPSEY JOHNSON / MRS. KING
MRS. BLACK / NURSE
LUCY BLACK
MRS. SALTONSTALL / RACHEL / LETTY
WILLAMINA / HELEN CARROLL
TAMARA / BELLA CARROLL

MALES

UNCLE ENOS / MR. STUART
PHILIP FLETCHER
HARRY CARROLL
DAVID STERLING

NOTE ON THE CASTING OF HEPSEY JOHNSON

HEPSEY is an escaped slave and should be played by an African American actress. If an ethnic actress is not available, the part may be played by a non-ethnic actress and a line of narration can be added to the scene.

CHRISTIE: Hepsey, were you a slave?

HEPSEY: All my life, till I run off five years ago.

CHRISTIE S: Hepsey seemed as light-skinned as myself but she was Negro by birth so that made her a slave.

HEPSEY: My mother and my six brothers and sisters are still down South, waitin' for the Lord to set them free. And He gonna do it soon. I been saving my money and when I got enough I gonna go down and buy each and every one of them.

CHRISTIE

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ACT I

Lights rise on a group of six women gathered together in the simple kitchen of a rural house. Old MRS. STERLING sits in a rocker knitting, RACHEL is on a stool at her feet reading a book, HEPSEY and MRS. WILKINS sit at a table sewing with BELLA CARROLL who is doing needle point. CHRISTIE S. stands amidst them reading aloud from sheets of paper. Perhaps there is a fireplace with the glow of a fire seen.

CHRISTIE S: “. . . for I have always been proud to be counted among those working women who have served since the times of antiquity, who have labored in order to make the world better and not just to survive it. But I will be even more proud if someday there is a true democracy, an Ideal Republic, in which each woman did the task she liked and was paid for it in liberty, equality and fraternity!”

RACHEL: Christie, that was marvelous! I can't wait to hear you deliver your speech on Thursday night!

CHRISTIE S: You don't think it was a bit too . . . highbrow? I don't want to talk over their heads.

MRS. WILKINS: I'm used to people talking over my head, dearie. I think I prefer it that way. But I love the words all the same.

MRS. STERLING: That last part about equality . . . Do you suppose folks will think you're talking about women's suffrage?

BELLA: Let them! It's a just cause.

HEPSEY: It's gonna take us another Civil War to get them rights. I can smell it. I already escaped from one kinda slavery, but this one ain't gonna go `way any faster.

CHRISTIE S: I don't want to sidetrack from the important issues. Maybe I shouldn't say "equality."

MRS. WILKINS: You go ahead and say it, Christie. You'll be speaking to mostly women and maybe they got to hear the word if they're ever gonna start thinking about it.

BELLA: Well spoken, Mrs. Wilkins!

HEPSEY: *(to MRS. WILKINS)* Maybe *you* ought to make a speech someday. They'll listen to you, no doubt about that!

MRS. WILKINS: Me? I'm lucky if I get my six kids to listen to me!

(THEY laugh; a child is heard crying offstage.)

MRS. STERLING: There's little Ruth. *(gets up)* She'll be hungry, God bless the child. You stay with your guests, Christie. I'll see to her. *(exits)*

HEPSEY: Maybe the world will be a whole lot different when that child is all growed up. I seen plenty of change in my lifetime. Maybe she will too.

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CHRISTIE S: I certainly hope so, Hepsey. I want Ruth to feel happy and useful when she grows up. It took me many years to feel that I was both. Maybe she won't have to wait so long.

RACHEL: If she does . . . it will be worth the wait.

MRS. WILKINS: Amen to that.

(The WOMEN continue talking to each other in pantomime as CHRISTIE S. leaves the scene and crosses down to address the audience.)

CHRISTIE S: Happy and useful. It sounds so easy. At least I thought so twenty years ago when I first proclaimed to my Aunt Betsey what I was going to do. Twenty years ago . . . Can it be so long? And yet I recall it all so vividly. Of course I was a different person then.

(CHRISTIE enters; lights fade out on the kitchen.)

Younger, of course. But so different. It seems I can stand back now and watch that other person like a spectator in a gallery. I recognize her. But do I really know her?

(The WOMEN exit and take the furniture with them, leaving only the rocker and perhaps the fireplace. AUNT BETSEY enters and sits and sews. CHRISTIE joins her.)

CHRISTIE: Aunt Betsey, there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence!

BETSEY: Bless and save us, what do you mean, child?

CHRISTIE S: *(still to audience)* I was twenty years old and still living with my aunt and uncle who took me in after my parents died.

CHRISTIE: I mean that now that I am twenty, I'm going to take care of myself and not be a burden any longer!

BETSEY: Burden? Nonsense. You do your chores, you help me all the time –

CHRISTIE: Uncle wants me out of the way and, sooner or later, he's going to tell me so. I don't intend to wait for that!

BETSEY: Oh, it's just your uncle's way of behaving. Don't you pay any heed to it, Christie.

CHRISTIE: I won't be doing it for him. There's myself to consider. I must go out into the world and, like in the fairy tales you once read to me, I must seek my fortune!

BETSEY: Fortune! What crazy ideas you get!

CHRISTIE: I've thought it all out. If I had been a boy, I would be out in the world by now. And so I should be. I hate being dependent. And that's what I've been all these years. Well, there's no reason for it any longer. I shall go out and work. I'll leave this town and find a job in a city where I will be happy and useful!

BETSEY: But can't you do that here?

CHRISTIE: It's not the same. I must earn my own bed and board where no one knows me and does me any favors.

BETSEY: Maybe you should have married Joe Butterfield. He asked you twice. Then you'd be contented.

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CHRISTIE: It would be another form of dependency and I won't have it! I've saved up a bit of money from those quilts I sold, and I've got the name of a rooming house from when the Harpers went to Boston for their son's wedding. I can leave in a moment's notice. (*kneels down by BETSEY*) But you haven't said I could go, Auntie.

BETSEY: I ain't got no right to keep you, girl, if you choose to go. But I will miss you. And I am sorry you ain't been happy here –

CHRISTIE: You have been more than wonderful to me, Auntie! I shall never be able to repay you for all you've done. And I will miss you something awful! But you understand why I must leave?

BETSEY: I can't say I do, Christie. But you've always been a bright girl and smarter than me, and I trust that you know best.

(*THEY embrace.*)

CHRISTIE: I am quite sure I won't hear Uncle say such words.

BETSEY: Shush! Here he comes!

(*ENOS DEVON enters, sees the two WOMEN, stops.*)

You're late, Enos. (*rises*) I got your supper warming.

CHRISTIE: I have something important to say, Uncle Enos.

ENOS: You always think you do. Let me eat first.

CHRISTIE: This can't wait. I will be leaving you, Uncle. I've decided I must set out on my own.

ENOS: Is that so?

CHRISTIE: Yes. This town is too small for me. Too small for my ideas and ambitions and my independence –

ENOS: Just like her mother. Full of highfalutin' notions, discontentment, and set in her crazy ideas. All that raving about independence and such, it'll all come to nothing and you'll make a failure of your life, just like her.

BETSEY: Enos!

CHRISTIE: I cannot think that my mother's life was a failure! She took care of herself, she married the man she loved even though he was poor, and she was happy! That's better than most people who frown on the world and only worry about having more money than their neighbors!

BETSEY: Christie, your uncle ain't saying –!

ENOS: I'm saying you'll come to no good. You'd best leave sooner than later so that you'll find out for yourself. (*starts to go*) Enough lecturing for one night –

CHRISTIE: Please, Uncle . . . (*HE stops.*) We cannot part like this. I have so much to thank you and Aunt Betsey for. I have no cause to talk like that to you. Please forgive me. And say goodbye to me without anger.

ENOS: I generally get as good as I give, and I guess I deserved some of it. I wish you well, my girl. I heartily wish you well. And I say that this house will always be open to you and never forget that.

CHRISTIE: Thank you, Uncle.

ENOS: Enough said. I'm going in to my supper. (*exits*)

BETSEY: Oh, I am going to miss you, Christie! (*embraces her*)

CHRISTIE: I shall write you and tell you of my adventures!

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BETSEY: Will you, my dear? I will like that. Of course, I won't be much good at writing you but I'll try –

ENOS: (*offstage*) Betsey! Where's that supper?

BETSEY: Oh! I'm coming, Enos –! (*rushes off*)

CHRISTIE S: I thought to myself as I stood there that I could always come back to that house if I failed. Or I could even marry Joe Butterfield, if he'd still have me. But I was not going to fail!

(*CHRISTIE exits.*)

I was determined to make good and succeed. There would be no reason to ever return to that house and admit failure. I was invincible! Or so I thought.

(*The Devon household is removed and CHRISTIE, wearing a coat and carrying a carpetbag, enters with MRS. FLINT.*)

FLINT: The third floor rear is all I have at your price. But it's a nice room and supper is included.

CHRISTIE: I'm sure it will be fine, Mrs. Flint.

FLINT: One week's rent in advance, you understand. And payment every Friday.

CHRISTIE: I understand.

FLINT: Be sure that you do. This way...

(*THEY exit.*)

CHRISTIE S: It was a small, dark room and not at all what you'd call homey. But as luck would have it, I only stayed there for two weeks because a job came through that required me to live on the premises.

(*A small kitchen table and two chairs are set up on one side of the stage while a sofa or fainting couch is placed on the opposite side. MRS. STUART enters and lounges on the sofa, then CHRISTIE enters and stands before her.*)

The advertisement in the newspaper called for a "servant in a genteel household, good wages, light duties, and a respectful demeanor." I was hoping for something more fulfilling than going into service, but it didn't take me long in the city to realize that employment, whether fulfilling or not, was hard to come by. So I answered the ad and presented myself at the fashionable home of a Mr. and Mrs. Henry Stuart.

MRS. STUART: Your name?

CHRISTIE: Christie Devon.

MRS. STUART: Too long. I should prefer to call you Jane, as I am accustomed to that name.

CHRISTIE: As you please, ma'am.

MRS. STUART: Your age?

CHRISTIE: Twenty.

MRS. STUART: You are an American?

CHRISTIE: Yes, ma'am.

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MRS. STUART: A pity. We have just returned from Italy, and I got quite used to foreign servants.

CHRISTIE: I think I can suit you, ma'am.

MRS. STUART: Perhaps you can. There are but two in the family, so the work is light. But I insist on a neat, well-conducted person as I am so delicate of health and cannot tolerate fuss of any kind. The pay is two dollars and a half each week, one afternoon a week off, and time for church on Sunday.

CHRISTIE: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. STUART: I am much too fatigued to go into the particulars. Go see the cook in the kitchen and she'll get you settled.

CHRISTIE: Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am.

(MRS. STUART falls asleep as CHRISTIE goes to the kitchen table. HEPSEY JOHNSON enters the kitchen with a bowl which SHE stirs vigorously.)

HEPSEY: You here to replace Katy, I suppose.

CHRISTIE: I guess I am. My name's Christie Devon.

HEPSEY: I'm Hepsey Johnson. Mrs. Stuart said she was gonna get a new girl once she come back from Italy and I reckon she did. I'd show you your room, but I can't let this set until I stir it a bit more.

CHRISTIE: How long have you been cook for Mr. and Mrs. Stuart?

HEPSEY: Goin' on three years now.

CHRISTIE: Do you like it here, Hepsey?

HEPSEY: I been at lots worse places. Lots worse. I can put up with this place just fine.

CHRISTIE: Mrs. Stuart seems to be . . . very fragile. Is she sickly?

HEPSEY: Nothing a doctor can fix. She just likes to put on how she's as breakable as glass. But she's plenty healthy, take my word for it.

CHRISTIE: And what's Mr. Stuart like?

HEPSEY: He's all right in his way. He don't pay no heed to anyone but missus Stuart. Just don't cross him and he'll leave you alone.

CHRISTIE: I don't suppose I'll have much dealings with him, as I'm really Mrs. Stuart's maid.

HEPSEY: Child, you is the only maid in this house. There is just you and me. You'll see him plenty. *(bells rings offstage)* There he is now. You go and answer the bell and be spry about it. He don't like being kept waiting.

CHRISTIE: Me?

HEPSEY: Who else?

CHRISTIE: But – !

HEPSEY: You hurry or you'll start out all wrong with Mr. Stuart.

(CHRISTIE crosses the stage and lets MR. STUART into the house. HE wears a coat, hat and carries an umbrella, all of which HE tosses at CHRISTIE after HE is inside.)

STUART: You're the new girl, are you?

CHRISTIE: Yes, sir.

STUART: What's the name?

CHRISTIE: Christie . . . er, I mean Jane.

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STUART: Well, whatever you're called, I don't like to be kept waiting. Don't you see it's raining? Better brush that coat, then dry it by the fire. I have to go out this evening.

CHRISTIE: Yes, sir.

(CHRISTIE returns to the kitchen with the coat as STUART goes to MRS. STUART, who awakes.)

MRS. STUART: Is that you, Henry?

STUART: I hope I didn't wake you, my dear.

MRS. STUART: Oh, I am so unsettled, I can hardly close my eyes!

STUART: What has happened, my dearest?

MRS. STUART: What hasn't happened! I couldn't get my needlepoint to come out even and Hepsey said there was no asparagus at the market, and then I had to interview the new girl and – ! Oh, I am so exhausted I can weep!

STUART: There, there, my dear . . . *(sits next to her and pats her head)* My delicate little precious . . .

(Light fades out on the STUARTS and rises on CHRISTIE, who brushes the coat.)

CHRISTIE: Am I to be a valet to that man as well? The next thing he'll have me polishing his boots!

HEPSEY: More than likely.

CHRISTIE: It isn't that I'm afraid of work, but the degradation of it all!

HEPSEY: As I sees it, when a person gets paid to work and does it by her own choice, there ain't much degrading to it. I know what it's like to get no pay and got no choice.

CHRISTIE: Hepsey, were you a slave?

HEPSEY: All my life, till I run off five years ago. But my folks and my six brothers and sisters are still down South, waitin' for the Lord to set them free. And He gonna do it soon. I been saving my money and when I got enough, I gonna go down and buy each and every one of them.

CHRISTIE: I feel pretty small complaining about boots and such . . .

HEPSEY: You go and complain all you likes. But while you do I'm gonna get you your supper. They won't be eatin' till late and I gots plenty to do. You sit here and I'll bring you something.

CHRISTIE: What about you, Hepsey? When do you eat?

HEPSEY: As soon as you're finished, I'll set down for a spell.

CHRISTIE: Why can't we eat together?

HEPSEY: Katy and the others before her wouldn't put up with that. Not at all, child. I'll just wait till you done. That's the way.

CHRISTIE: But I don't like that way and I won't have it! If we can work together, we can eat together.

HEPSEY: Well . . . it would give me more time to –

CHRISTIE: Settled then.

(Lights fade out on kitchen and up on the sofa where MRS. STUART sits going over a list on paper. CHRISTIE joins her.)

CHRISTIE S: Hepsey and I soon became fast friends and in our free moments she told me all about her life as a slave and what she had done since coming up North. As for the Stuarts, I found that Mr. Stuart was not so difficult as he was dismissive to all things and all people except his wife. They often had guests over for dinner and all the talk was about art and poetry as such. But what I heard of it, such talk sounded more superficial than stimulating. It seemed no better than the idle chatter at my aunt and uncle's house in the country.

MRS. STUART: And Dr. Howells and his wife must have the Bordeaux because white wine quite fatigues her, and she is not as strong as she used to be.

CHRISTIE: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. STUART: And Jane, when you take the ladies' cloaks upstairs, please be more gentle. I cannot abide all that tramping up the staircase.

CHRISTIE: It's just with collecting the gentlemen's hats and trying to serve the appetizer, I sometimes have to rush – !

MRS. STUART: Please . . . *(hands to her head)* No arguing. I have such a headache and don't know how I will survive the evening. All I ask is no tramping.

CHRISTIE: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. STUART: Thank you.

(MRS. STUART exits and CHRISTIE joins HEPSEY in the kitchen. It is late at night and a candle sits on the table.)

CHRISTIE S: Sometimes, after the Stuarts had gone to sleep, Hepsey and I would sit up late by candlelight and talk about our plans for the future. I told how I planned to someday find useful employment that would be helpful to others and fulfilling to myself. Hepsey talked of going back South and buying first her old parents and then, one by one, each of the rest of her family.

(HEPSEY puts her head on the table and sleeps. CHRISTIE yawns, then takes the candle and exits.)

It was on such a night, about a year after I had been working for the Stuarts, that I climbed up to my room and fell asleep without putting out the candle. My apron hung on the chair too close to the flame and caught on fire, soon setting my other clothes aflame. As I slept, smoke started to fill the room.

(HEPSEY awakes, smells the smoke, rises and shouts.)

HEPSEY: Mr. Stuart! Mr. Stuart! Fire! *(rushes off stage)*

CHRISTIE S: By this time, I awoke just as Mr. Stuart rushed into my room and put out the fire with his opera cloak.

(CHRISTIE enters the kitchen area coughing with HEPSEY helping her walk. The STUARTS follow.)

HEPSEY: You keep breathing that fresh air, child!

CHRISTIE: I am *(coughs)* so sorry . . . *(coughs)*

MRS. STUART: I think I'm going to faint!

STUART: *(to MRS. STUART)* All is under control, my dear. The fire is out without much damage –

CHRISTIE: Forgive me, Mr. Stuart . . . I must have fallen asleep . . . !

MRS. STUART: Just look at her! She's been at the wine, Henry! We might all have been killed!

CHRISTIE: No!

HEPSEY: You drink some of this water and you'll feel better. *(hands her a cup)*

STUART: We are all quite safe, my precious.

MRS. STUART: She must go, Henry! She must go! I cannot have my nerves shattered by such dreadful scenes! She must leave this house forever!

CHRISTIE: I didn't mean to – !

STUART: You are trembling, my dearest! Let me bring you back to bed. *(starts to exit with her)*

MRS. STUART: I shall not stop trembling until she is out of this house! Do you hear me, Henry? She must go at once!

STUART: Yes yes, dear. Let's get you into bed . . .

(THEY exit as HEPSEY and CHRISTIE turn and look at each other, then embrace.)

CHRISTIE S: And so ended my employment with the Stuarts. More upsetting was having to say goodbye to Hepsey. She was my first friend since I had left home and I could hardly bear to leave her.

HEPSEY: You know where I am and you come and see me when the missus is out of the house. It won't do no good writing me a letter as I can't read nor write. So you just come to the kitchen door and surprise Hepsey sometime.

CHRISTIE: Oh, Hepsey!

(THEY embrace again as the lights fade on the kitchen. HEPSEY exits as MRS. FLINT enters and joins CHRISTIE.)

CHRISTIE S: I found myself back at Mrs. Flint's boarding house and back in the same dark little room.

FLINT: The rent has gone up fifty cents since you were here last, Miss Devon.

CHRISTIE: I see . . .

FLINT: And payment one week in advance, just like before.

CHRISTIE: Of course . . .

(MRS. BLACK and her daughter, LUCY, enter and join them.)

MRS. BLACK: There you are, Mrs. Flint! I told you she'd be up here on the third floor, Lucy. Didn't I say it?

LUCY: Yes, Mama . . .

FLINT: What is it, Mrs. Black?

MRS. BLACK: Far be it from me to complain, Mrs. Flint! Never be it said that "the lady doth protest too much!" But I must mention once again that crack in the mirror. I myself am not a vain woman and can best prepare myself for

both the real world and the greasepaint world without the most rudimentary of looking glasses. But it is dear Lucy that I am thinking of. She is, you will readily admit, a beauty and her public cannot be disappointed with a slovenly appearance from a shoddy mirror.

FLINT: Mirrors are expensive, Mrs. Black.

MRS. BLACK: That is perhaps the reality of the situation, but it was not what you said on the day we first rented our room. You proclaimed then that the mirror would be replaced and so we took our cue accordingly.

FLINT: A second-hand furniture dealer is coming tomorrow. I'll see about getting a new mirror.

MRS. BLACK: There will be much rejoicing if you do, Mrs. Flint! Rejoicing, I say! If not, my daughter and I may be forced to seek other lodgings.

FLINT: I'll see to it.

MRS. BLACK: Wonderful! But who is this enticing young woman? Quite the appealing ingenue, don't you think, Lucy?

LUCY: Yes, Mama.

FLINT: This is Miss Devon who is taking the corner back room.

MRS. BLACK: And so sad am I to hear it, my dear. How could a shining mademoiselle such as she hope to blossom in that dark closet of a room?

CHRISTIE: I don't mind it. Really I don't.

MRS. BLACK: Such innocence! Such attractive innocence! Let me embrace you, my dear! (*a big theatrical embrace*) I am Mrs. Jerome Black, currently of the Prince Street Theatre. And this is my daughter Lucy, who graces that very same stage!

CHRISTIE: You are actors?

MRS. BLACK: First, foremost, and forever!

LUCY: Pleased to meet you, Miss Devon. (*shakes her hand*)

CHRISTIE: Call me Christie, please!

MRS. BLACK: Christie Devon. It does have a theatrical ring to it. I am sure you will go far.

CHRISTIE: Oh, but I'm not an actor! (*laughs*) The very idea of it! I've never even seen a play. Though I love reading my father's volume of Shakespeare and have even memorized favorite scenes!

LUCY: Mama, we must get some passes for Christie!

MRS. BLACK: Without question, Lucy! And as soon as possible.

FLINT: I like going to the theatre myself on occasion. Perhaps . . .

MRS. BLACK: The mirror, Mrs. Flint! That is your role. Play it with gusto! Come along, Lucy. We cannot be late for rehearsal.

LUCY: Yes, Mama.

MRS. BLACK: So pleasant meeting you, Miss Devon! Such a lovely creature. Shine, my dear! Shine! If you can in that dingy little room. (*a glance at MRS. FLINT*) Let us go, Lucy. At least we will find a decent mirror at the theatre. Goodbye, all!

(*SHE exits with a flourish as LUCY follows. Lights fade on CHRISTIE and FLINT.*)

CHRISTIE S: Mrs. Black was as good as her word and I got free tickets to the theatre several times over the next month or so. And Lucy and I became

good friends. She was not so flamboyant as her mother, but on the stage she shone like a professional and I was so envious of her talent and beauty. In the meantime, I searched for work and did not have as much success this time as when I first arrived in Boston. Jobs of any kind were scarce and, though I was willing to accept the most humble of positions, none were forthcoming. My spirits were soon as low as my savings. Then one day Lucy came to my room all excited.

(LUCY enters and joins CHRISTIE.)

LUCY: There you are! I have such good news for you, Christie! All hail the queen!

CHRISTIE: The queen? What are you talking about, Lucy?

LUCY: The Queen of the Amazons, of course! You are to play her in the new spectacle at the Prince Street Theatre!

CHRISTIE: Me? A queen?

LUCY: The pay is half a dollar a night for six weeks. Eight weeks if we're lucky! And you don't have to pay for the costume!

CHRISTIE: A half a dollar a night! But Lucy – !

LUCY: The girl playing the Queen got another engagement and Mr. Sharp was all upset about getting a new Queen of the Amazons at such short notice. So I told him all about you and he said to bring you over right away. Now, don't look at me like that and say no. You've only got to sing in one chorus, march in the grand procession, and lead your band of girls in the terrific battle scene! And the dress is splendid! Red tunic, tiger skin over shoulder, helmet, shield, hair down to your shoulders, and as much cork to your eyebrows as you like! Don't be prim now, Christie, but say yes and let's get over to the theatre!

CHRISTIE: But – ! But – ! Yes!

LUCY: What a lark we're going to have!

(SHE grabs CHRISTIE by the hand and pulls her off.)

CHRISTIE S: I must admit that I was a little taken with the theatre having seen Lucy on stage, but I never dared to consider myself up there. Yet there was very little talent necessary to play the Queen of the Amazons and the manager, Mr. Sharp, liked me enough to give me other roles over the next six months. They were small at first but with time I started to gain confidence and soon I was playing substantial parts. I even got to appear in some plays by my beloved Shakespeare.

(CHRISTIE enters in Elizabethan costume and strikes a pose.)

CHRISTIE: "My father loved Sir Rowland as his soul,
And all the world was of my father's mind;
Had I before known this young man his son,
I should have given him tears unto entreaties
Ere he should thus have ventured."

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CHRISTIE S: Lucy and her mother helped me immensely at first and were so proud of my success. But as my roles got better and Lucy's didn't, there was a strain between us. I regretted losing Lucy's friendship yet I was getting so caught up in my own glory that I was not aware of how unhappy I was making her.

(LUCY enters and goes to CHRISTIE.)

LUCY: Mr. Sharp sent me to ask you to see him before you leave the theatre today.

CHRISTIE: Thank you, Lucy. I wonder what it could be about?

LUCY: You know we go into rehearsal next week for *The Merry Princess*. I'm sure he wants you to play Catherine.

CHRISTIE: Do you think so?

LUCY: What does it matter what I think? *(starts to exit)*

CHRISTIE: Wait for me, Lucy! Mr. Sharp won't take long. Then we can walk home together.

LUCY: I'm not going home. I have an errand to run for Mama. *(starts to exit, then stops)* My mother played Catherine once, a long time ago. She always said I would make a capital Catherine.

CHRISTIE: Perhaps you will . . . someday.

LUCY: Not at this theatre, I am sure. *(exits)*

CHRISTIE S: How easy it was to forget the feelings of others when you are so wrapped up with yourself. And I was totally distracted and blinded by my sudden success.

(CHRISTIE exits.)

I was given the role of Catherine and Lucy was cast only as a handmaiden to the princess. She rarely spoke to me at the theatre or at the boarding house. Even her talkative mother shut up like a clam whenever I entered the room. But I was so involved in rehearsals that I seemed to have no time for anything or anyone else. A week before we were to open *The Merry Princess*, something happened at rehearsal that brought my vanity to an end.

(CHRISTIE, LUCY, MRS. BLACK and a handful of other ACTORS enter in rehearsal clothes and take their positions. A large unpainted flat is set up behind the ACTORS as they rehearse.)

CHRISTIE: "I will not hear anything said against the Duke, Lady Mountjoy! Not one word!"

MRS. BLACK: "But you must listen to my words, Princess! Only I can tell you the truth about the man you plan to wed."

CHRISTIE: "I will marry the Duke and not you nor any other gossiping fool will stop me!"

MRS. BLACK: "Gossiping fool? I am trying to help you, Princess!"

CHRISTIE: "Then leave my chateau at once and take your prejudices against the Duke with you. Where is Felice?"

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LUCY: "Here, Princess."

CHRISTIE: "Ah, Felice . . . you will help Lady Mountjoy pack. She is in quite a hurry to depart."

MRS. BLACK: "I am nothing of the sort –!"

LUCY: "Come this way, my Lady. (*crosses to the front of the flat then stops*) My, Lady?"

(The flat starts to lean forward but LUCY does not see it. Only CHRISTIE does.)

CHRISTIE: Lucy!

LUCY: What is it? I did it right –

(CHRISTIE rushes over to LUCY and pushes her away from the flat as it falls forward. LUCY lands on the floor away from the flat, but it hits CHRISTIE on the head and SHE falls to the floor and is unconscious. Shouts as the OTHERS pull the flat off of CHRISTIE. LUCY rises and joins them.)

ACTOR: She's unconscious!

MRS. BLACK: Someone call a doctor!

LUCY: Christie! Can you hear me? Christie!

(Lights fade on the scene, the flat is removed and a small bed and a chair are set up.)

CHRISTIE S: I needed to have some sense knocked into me and that was exactly what happened. I had a concussion to the head and a fractured shoulder bone and Lucy went on to triumph as the princess. She visited me every day as I lay in my little bed in Mrs. Flint's boarding house and once again we were friends.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE in bed and LUCY next to her in the chair.)

LUCY: But Mr. Sharp said to Mr. Kent, "If you continue to play the Duke with such slobbering I shall insist that Miss Black be given an extra handkerchief!"

(BOTH laugh.)

CHRISTIE: Did it help?

LUCY: Only for a night or two. Then he was back to his weeping and wailing, worst than before!

(BOTH laugh.)

Oh, Christie, we miss you so! Everyone in the company does! As soon as you are well enough –!

CHRISTIE: Oh, let's not think of that. The season will be quite over by the time I am up and about. And a good thing too.

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LUCY: Don't say that! Oh, I feel so guilty! It's you that ought to be playing the princess, not I. And when I think of how it would have been me under that falling scenery if you hadn't – !

CHRISTIE: We won't talk of that either. I am so glad we are friends again, Lucy. I don't think I much need the stage. But I do need good friends.

(Lights fade out on them as LUCY exits and AUNT BETSEY takes her place.)

CHRISTIE S: During the two months of my recuperation, everyone was so kind to me. Even the chilly Mrs. Flint seemed to smile and fuss, as long as she got her rent one week in advance. And there was a surprise visit from my dear, dear Aunt Betsey.

(Lights rise on BETSEY and CHRISTIE.)

BETSEY: So I said to Enos, if I'm not old enough to travel to Boston to see my dear Christie, when will I be? He didn't have a good answer for that one so he sulked for a day or two then gave me the money for the train and here I am!

CHRISTIE: It is so good to see you, Aunt Betsey! I've missed you so!

BETSEY: I wanted to come once and see you in one of them plays you wrote me about. But Enos would hear nothing of that kind of talk. I'll bet you were something to see on the stage.

CHRISTIE: I don't know, Aunt. It was fun and people seemed to like what I did . . . but I can't say I was all so accomplished at acting. It's all pretending, you see, and I don't think I'm cut out for pretending. You know how I always want to speak my mind . . .

BETSEY: That I know.

CHRISTIE: Well, with acting I felt I was just speaking other people's thoughts. I didn't realize it until I've had to lie here and think about it, but I was becoming rather selfish and self-centered.

BETSEY: You've always been headstrong, Christie, but never unkind.

CHRISTIE: But I was becoming unkind. I fear I hurt my friend Lucy more than just by overshadowing her. I was so caught up in my own ambitions and – Oh, Auntie! Looking back on this past year on the stage, I fear I lost more than I gained. Theatre people are so giving and warm, and they work so hard with uncertain success. Their life is an exciting one and, in its way, a fulfilling one. But it is not the life for me.

(Lights fade on them and the bed is removed.)

CHRISTIE S: When I was feeling much stronger I informed Lucy and the others in the company that I was finished with the stage. There were plenty of entreaties to stay on. Even the manager Mr. Sharp came to my lodgings and asked that I play a role in next season's spectacular. But my mind was set and I started looking for work that was more to my liking. Before long I discovered an advertisement for a governess to teach two young girls at the home of L. N. Saltonstall.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE, LUCY, and MRS. BLACK.)

CHRISTIE: I shall apply for the position and hope for the best.

MRS. BLACK: I played a governess once. It was in the *The Family Secret* and I married an earl at the end of it!

LUCY: Mama, this is a real governess!

MRS. BLACK: I was totally believable in the role! I even spoke a few lines in French!

CHRISTIE: I hope the Saltonstall family does not want too much French. But I know I could teach literature and mathematics and –

MRS. BLACK: Whatever you do, my dear, don't tell them that you were on the stage or it will be the end of you. People have such prejudices against the profession.

CHRISTIE: Oh, but I must tell them. I shall say so right at the beginning so that there will be no secret of it to come back later. If I am personable and teach well, I'm sure the Saltonstalls will not care about my past on the stage.

MRS. BLACK: You'll be sorry if you do tell.

CHRISTIE: I'll be sorry if I don't!

(LUCY and MRS. BLACK exit. A chair is set up and MRS. CHARLOTTE SALTONSTALL enters and sits as CHRISTIE stands before her.)

CHRISTIE S: Two days later I stood before Mrs. Saltonstall in her drawing room on Beacon Hill. The Saltonstalls were indeed wealthy, judging by the fashionable house and all the servants that were needed to run it.

CHARLOTTE: My two girls are much too old for a nurse and I worry about their supervision. Education is a very fine thing, I suppose, but I am more concerned about their demeanor. In a week we will be going to the seashore for the summer and I quite fear they will slip into wild and unmannerly ways. Do you understand me, Miss Devon?

CHRISTIE: Yes, Mrs. Saltonstall.

CHARLOTTE: They have no father to provide guidance and my brother, their uncle, is far too disinterested to become a father figure to them. It is all so distressing! I am looking for someone who can take charge of the little darlings.

CHRISTIE: I shall do my best, Mrs. Saltonstall. But before we go any further I feel I must tell you something about myself –

(WILLAMINA and TAMARA enter noisily.)

CHARLOTTE: Ah, here they are now! Come my precious ones and meet someone.

WILLAMINA: Mama, Tamara took my red hair bow and put it on her queen doll when I was going to put it on my gypsy doll because her shawl is red and – !

TAMARA: *(speaking at the same time)* Willamina won't share and you said we had to share like proper young ladies do, but she's not being proper and won't let me have anything – !

CHARLOTTE: Girls! Mother has a headache and proper young ladies do not argue when mother has a headache.

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WILLAMINA: You always have a headache.

TAMARA: She does not! It's uncle Philip that always has a headache!

WILLAMINA: He just says that so he can go and hide in his study!

CHARLOTTE: That is enough! I want you to meet Miss Devon. She is to be your governess.

WILLAMINA: I don't want a governess!

TAMARA: I do! Mama, tell her she has to have a governess!

WILLAMINA: You may need a governess, but I don't!

CHARLOTTE: Please, girls . . . !

CHRISTIE: What is your name, young lady?

WILLAMINA: Willamina Semmatine Saltonstall!

CHRISTIE: Very pleased to meet you, Willamina. And you are . . . ?

TAMARA: Tamara Noellyn Saltonstall!

CHRISTIE: Such fine long names! I am glad to make your acquaintance, Tamara.

TAMARA: Mama, she's nice!

WILLAMINA: She is not! She's just pretending to be nice. Governess are mean!

TAMARA: Are not!

CHARLOTTE: I don't want to hear another word! Go and see if Justine has tea ready for you yet.

TAMARA: I don't want tea! I was to go outside and play in the garden!

WILLAMINA: I'm hungry for tea! I'll eat all yours! (*exits*)

TAMARA: You will not! (*runs off after her*)

CHARLOTTE: You see what I mean, Miss Devon? Supervision is needed.

CHRISTIE: I understand, Mrs. Saltonstall. But I hope to teach them to enjoy literature and music and –

CHARLOTTE: That is all very well. I leave it to you, Miss Devon. Can you start right away? Let us say tomorrow?

CHRISTIE: Tomorrow will be fine. But I must tell you something –

(*PHILIP FLETCHER enters reading a newspaper.*)

CHARLOTTE: Here is my brother now! Philip, I have just engaged Miss Devon here as governess for the two girls.

PHILIP: (*head still in paper*) Probably a waste of money. But it's your money, Charlotte. Not mine.

CHARLOTTE: Certainly it's mine. Miss Devon, my brother Philip Fletcher.

CHRISTIE: Good afternoon, sir.

PHILIP: What? (*head out of the paper*) Oh yes. Pleased to meet you and all that. Will you have the paper, Charlotte? There's nothing in it.

CHARLOTTE: I must see about the girls' tea. We shall see you tomorrow, Miss Devon. About nine?

CHRISTIE: Yes, Mrs. Saltonstall. Thank you.

CHARLOTTE: Jennings will show you out. Philip, don't be late for tea.

PHILIP: I have a headache.

(*CHARLOTTE exits.*)

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CHRISTIE: Good day, Mr. Fletcher. *(starts to leave)*

PHILIP: Miss Devon, is it?

CHRISTIE: Yes.

PHILIP: Poor little wretch. What a time you'll have of it between Charlotte and those brats. *(exits)*

CHRISTIE S: Less than a week later we were all on the ferry boat to Cape Cod and I experienced my first summer at the seashore. *(sounds of sea and seagulls)* Still recovering from the accident, I grew physically stronger that summer and felt I could take on any task. I can't say that little Willamina and Tamara were much better behaved by the sea and away from the city, but I managed to gain their confidence enough to keep them under control.

(WILLAMINA and TAMARA enter arguing.)

WILLAMINA: I did not! What would I want with your stupid blue hat? It's ugly!

TAMARA: Is not! You took it and I'll bet it got blown out to sea and I'll never see it again!

CHRISTIE: What is the matter, Tamara?

TAMARA: Willamina took my blue hat and –!

WILLAMINA: Did not!

CHRISTIE: The hat with the daisies on it?

TAMARA: That's the one!

CHRISTIE: You left it in my room after your drawing lesson.

WILLAMINA: See!

TAMARA: I hate drawing! I will never draw a picture again in my whole life!

WILLAMINA: I love drawing! Please, Miss Devon, can we do drawing again today?

TAMARA: No!

CHRISTIE: Today the wind is not so strong so I've decided we will walk over to the North beach. Willamina, you will bring your sketchbook and do some drawings of the lighthouse and Tamara, I want you to search the beach for different kinds of shells we can use in our science lesson. Now run along and fetch your hats and parasols. Hurry!

WILLAMINA & TAMARA: Yippee!

(BOTH exit, then CHRISTIE exits the other direction.)

CHRISTIE S: I suppose Mrs. Saltonstall loved her children in her own way, but she seemed more interested in her many summer outfits, romantic novels, and her fashion magazines than any other people. As for her brother, Mr. Fletcher, he took no more notice of me than if I were some shadow that sometimes crossed his path. He was an attractive and aristocratic looking man but a melancholy one. He often seemed bored and when he did make an effort at conversation, he usually sounded pessimistic and cynical.

(CHRISTIE enters reading a letter.)

But halfway through the summer his behavior toward me changed.

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(ENOS enters and stands at the side, speaking his letter.)

ENOS: My niece, I hope this letter finds you. I write to tell you that your Aunt Betsey died last Thursday. The funeral was Saturday and all was done as it ought to. She left you her silver locket and two hair combs. I'll send them when I get an address from you more recent than this one. I hope you are well. Your uncle, Enos Devon. *(exits)*

CHRISTIE: Oh, dear auntie! *(sits on the ground, looks at the letter again, and weeps)* My dear, dear Aunt Betsey!

(PHILIP enters and nearly passes her, but stops when HE hears her sobs.)

PHILIP: Miss Devon? Is that you? What's the matter? Are you hurt?

CHRISTIE: No, Mr. Fletcher . . . ! *(weeps)* No . . .

PHILIP: Has my sister been scolding you? Or have the girls been too much for you?

CHRISTIE: Oh, nothing like that. Bad news from home.

PHILIP: Someone is ill, I suppose. We must hope for the best and –

CHRISTIE: No hope . . . ! My Aunt Betsey is dead! I loved her so . . . !

PHILIP: Dear me! That is very sad. I am sorry, Miss Devon. Here . . . *(hands her a handkerchief)*

CHRISTIE: Thank you . . . ! *(takes it)*

CHRISTIE S: When I looked up to him to accept his handkerchief, a strange expression came upon Mr. Fletcher's face. It was if he recognized me from somewhere far away and couldn't quite place me.

PHILIP: You were very close . . . ? Your aunt and yourself?

CHRISTIE: Yes. *(stops crying)* She raised me after my parents died. She was so loving, without any thought of herself but only for others. I shall miss her so . . .

PHILIP: She sounds like a special person. I envy your knowing someone like that.

CHRISTIE: Please don't mention this to Mrs. Saltonstall or the children. I am used to bearing my troubles alone and time will help me do so.

PHILIP: Very brave. If there is anything I can do for you, Miss Devon, you will let me know?

CHRISTIE: Yes, Mr. Fletcher. Thank you.

PHILIP: Very good then. *(tips his hat)* Good day. And again, my most sincere sympathies. *(exits)*

CHRISTIE: O, Mr. Fletcher . . . ! Your handkerchief! *(HE is gone; SHE looks at letter again and the lights fade out on her)*

CHRISTIE S: From that day on Philip Fletcher no longer ignored me when he happened to pass each other on the beach. Sometimes just a smile and a nod of the head, others times a cheerful greeting and even a few words of conversation.

(Sound of the waves and an orchestra in the distance.)

One Saturday night there was a dance at the beach club on the pier. I did not attend, of course, but after Willamina and Tamara were in bed, I walked down the beach and sat near the pier, listening to the music.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE sitting on a bench in the moonlight. PHILIP enters.)

PHILIP: Miss Devon? Wisely listening to the lunatics rather than joining in their antics?

CHRISTIE: Nothing like that, Mr. Fletcher. I am very fond of that sort of insanity but there is no place for me there tonight.

PHILIP: I don't care for such doings, but if it is an escort that you are lacking- ?

CHRISTIE: No, not that. Governess are usually kindly treated in America, but ballrooms are not for them. So I enjoy listening to the music all the same.

PHILIP: May I sit and enjoy it with you?

CHRISTIE: Yes. Please do.

(HE sits next to her on the beach.)

I believe the breeze is lifting the music and carrying it right here, it sounds so close!

PHILIP: To listen to you one would think music is a glorious thing.

CHRISTIE: But isn't it?

PHILIP: I suppose so. I forget. Remind me why it is so glorious.

CHRISTIE: Why, music is –! Oh, you are teasing me, Mr. Fletcher.

PHILIP: Only a little. I have forgotten the joys of so many things. And you seem to have forgotten nothing. I envy you that.

CHRISTIE: No reason to envy me, Mr. Fletcher. My life is rather . . .

PHILIP: Rather what?

CHRISTIE: Simple.

PHILIP: Tell me about it, Miss Devon.

CHRISTIE: I mean, not really simple . . . I have ambitions like any other person!

PHILIP: Tell me about them.

CHRISTIE S: So I told him. All about wanting to find a useful and happy life, and not be dependent on anyone and . . . oh, all sorts of words came out of my mouth! I had never had such a conversation with a man before. And as for him, he told me a little about himself too. His schooling, the death of his parents, and his life with his sister and nieces. Not an awful lot, but for a man of few words it was considerable. We sat near the pier and talked and talked until the orchestra had played its final tune and it was time to return home.

(Music and lights fade out and CHRISTIE and PHILIP exit. Lights rise on CHARLOTTE, WILLAMINA and TAMARA.)

WILLAMINA: But I don't want to go to town! You only go there because Tamara wants to! She gets everything she wants!

TAMARA: Do not!

WILLAMINA: Every time she wants to go to town – !

CHARLOTTE: Please, girls! Mother has a headache today.

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TAMARA: I won't go to town if *she* goes to town – !

CHARLOTTE: Where is Miss Devon? I cannot believe she has deserted me like this – !

WILLAMINA: There she is! (*points off*) With Uncle Philip!

CHARLOTTE: I need her here!

(*CHRISTIE enters with PHILIP, who carried a wrapped package.*)

Where have you been, Miss Devon? The children have been ever so difficult, and I understood that it was a governess's job to –

CHRISTIE: I am so sorry, Mrs. Saltonstall! I – !

PHILIP: It was quite my fault, Charlotte. Don't blame Miss Devon. I asked her to accompany to town to pick out a birthday present for you.

CHRISTIE: Willamina and Tamara were sound asleep and I thought – !

PHILIP: You always complain that I have no imagination when it comes to your birthday gift. So this year I thought . . .

CHRISTIE: I shouldn't have left. I am sorry, Mrs. Saltonstall.

PHILIP: It's no use blaming the girl, Charlotte. It was all my fault.

WILLAMINA: Did you buy me a present, Uncle Philip? My birthday is in September!

TAMARA: I want a birthday present if Willamina gets a birthday present!

CHARLOTTE: Please take the girls, Miss Devon. I am quite beside myself this morning! Go to Miss Devon, girls! And Philip, I think it best if you keep out of the running of this household.

PHILIP: As you wish, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: How I wish the summer would end! The girls are much better behaved in the city. I blame it all on this fresh air . . . ! (*exits*)

WILLAMINA: What about my present, Uncle Philip?

TAMARA: *My present!*

PHILIP: Run along, you little heathens, or I'll eat you! Boo!

(*The GIRLS run off shrieking and laughing. CHRISTIE and PHILIP laugh also.*)

CHRISTIE: Mr. Fletcher, you shouldn't – !

PHILIP: Sorry to get you into trouble with Charlotte. But I do not regret our little shopping spree together.

CHRISTIE: Neither do I. Thank you.

PHILIP: No, thank you, Miss Devon. (*a pause as HE smiles at her*)

CHRISTIE: I'd better catch up with the girls before they find your sister and start tormenting her. Good day. (*exits; lights fade out*)

CHRISTIE S: Was I falling in love with Mr. Fletcher? I don't think so. It was more a novelty than love, for I had never known a man very well before. Our friendship was new and exciting to me. But love? No. As for what Philip Fletcher thought of it, I didn't know.

(*PHILIP exits.*)

At least not until one evening late in August, soon before we were to return to the city. I had just gotten the girls to bed and was reading by the lamp on the porch.

(Lights up on a porch settee where CHRISTIE sits with a book. PHILIP enters.)

PHILIP: What book now, Miss Devon?

CHRISTIE: *Jane Eyre*, sir.

PHILIP: What is your opinion of Mr. Rochester?

CHRISTIE: Not a very high one.

PHILIP: Then you think Jane a fool for trying to make a saint of him?

CHRISTIE: I haven't much faith in those kind of saints. Besides, she is only a governess and he is . . . Well, it is fiction.

PHILIP: Yes. A strong, independent girl brings new life to a jaded, morose man. Definitely fiction. And yet . . . when I approached you a moment ago I thought perhaps you smiled and looked happy. I would like to think that it was because of me.

CHRISTIE: I . . . I was thinking what Mrs. Saltonstall said to me this morning.

PHILIP: And what was that?

CHRISTIE: She asked me if I would be interested in accompanying her and the girls to Paris in the fall. It has always been my dream to go abroad and – !

PHILIP: Don't go, Christie.

CHRISTIE: I beg your pardon . . . ?

PHILIP: Instead . . . go to Paris with me . . . as my wife.

CHRISTIE: I . . . don't know what to say . . .

PHILIP: Don't say anything for the moment. Just listen. I think I am not mistaken in believing that you care for me a little. And you must know how fond I am of you, how you have taught me to want to enjoy life again. Perhaps I was no better than gloomy old Mr. Rochester, and I certainly don't expect you to try and make me a saint. But I think I can make you happy, Christie. We shall travel, if you'd like. And I'll give you whatever you like. My money has always been more an annoyance to me than a blessing. But if it will help to make you happy, then I am grateful for it. *(pause)* You may speak now, if you like. And I'll hope you'll smile and call me Philip and say yes.

CHRISTIE: You are very kind, but you may repent it, you know so little of me.

PHILIP: I know more about you than you think. But it makes no difference to me.

CHRISTIE: What do you mean?

PHILIP: I am not a frequent theatergoer, but how could I forget that face glimpsed across the footlights?

CHRISTIE: You knew . . . all the time?

PHILIP: Not at first. But that day you received word about your aunt's death and were crying, I looked carefully for the first time and recognized you. I think I even started to love you.

CHRISTIE: I meant to tell Mrs. Saltonstall all about it –

PHILIP: You were wise not to. Charlotte is not so open minded. But we are not talking of her or your acting career. I asked you a question and am still waiting for an answer.

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CHRISTIE S: He could give me anything I wanted. I could travel. I could see things and do things I've always wanted to see and do. But I did not love him. I would be forever dependent on him. I would cease to be myself totally and completely. I would have everything . . . and nothing.

CHRISTIE: No. The answer is no. I am sorry.

PHILIP: You are in earnest?

CHRISTIE: Perfectly so.

PHILIP: And am I to understand that to be your final answer?

CHRISTIE: Distinctly and decidedly my final answer.

PHILIP: Well . . . I've made many blunders in my life, but this has been my greatest. I believed in a woman, was fool enough to care for her with the sincerest love I ever knew, and I even fancied that she might care for me. Well, Miss Devon, I am disappointed in the woman but I compliment the actress. I leave the stage for another and a more successful Romeo. (*starts to leave*)

CHRISTIE: You will tell Mrs. Saltonstall. That will be your revenge.

PHILIP: No. I'll not interfere in your life ever again. You may go to Paris with her two brats. Or you may go to the devil . . . I am out of it all. (*exits*)

CHRISTIE S: As angry as he made me, I couldn't help but feel sorry for Philip Fletcher. And I felt sorry for myself as well. Had I done the right thing? Should I chase after him and beg his forgiveness? No.

(*CHARLOTTE enters and CHRISTIE goes to her.*)

Instead I went to Mrs. Saltonstall and told her about my past on the stage and apologized for not telling her sooner. Her reaction quite surprised me.

CHARLOTTE: I see. I value you as a governess, Miss Devon, and feel you are quite accomplished with my girls. So I am willing to bury the past if you are. No one need know of it and it is my hope that you will remain with us.

CHRISTIE: Thank you, Mrs. Saltonstall. I greatly appreciate your understanding. But I fear it will be awkward for me to continue on as governess in this household.

CHARLOTTE: Awkward? Why?

CHRISTIE: I'd rather not say –

CHARLOTTE: Come, come, Miss Devon. We'll play no games in this matter. What has happened?

CHRISTIE: I . . . That is, Mr. Fletcher –

CHARLOTTE: Philip? What has he to do with this?

CHRISTIE: He has asked me to marry him.

CHARLOTTE: What!

CHRISTIE: I have refused him. But all the same –

CHARLOTTE: I should hope so. He had no business proposing to a governess! Perhaps he was just amusing himself. In either case, it was not wise. He has a fortune of his own, you understand, and that money should go to my two darlings, not to . . . to . . .

CHRISTIE: I quite understand.

CHARLOTTE: Then understand this, Miss Devon. I would like you to pack your things and be on the ferry back to Boston in the morning. I think it will be the best thing for all concerned.

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CHRISTIE: Yes, you are right.

CHARLOTTE: I'll have your last month's salary ready by supper.

CHRISTIE: Thank you, Mrs. Saltonstall.

(Lights fade out and CHARLOTTE exits. CHRISTIE picks up a suitcase and moves to another part of the stage. The sounds of seagulls and a boat whistle are heard.)

CHRISTIE S: And so ended my career as a governess. I was getting on the ferry the next morning when Philip Fletcher chased me down once again.

(PHILIP enters.)

He looked haggard, as if he had not slept any better than I had during the night.

PHILIP: Will nothing change your answer, Christie?

CHRISTIE: Nothing, Mr. Fletcher.

PHILIP: Please forgive me . . . what I said yesterday . . . I am so sorry . . . goodbye . . .

(Boat whistle blows; CHRISTIE exits.)

CHRISTIE S: He stood on the pier and watched as the ferry pulled out to sea. He had a heart after all, and he was willing to give it to me. Had I done wrong? It was too late now. Don't look back. Look only to the future.

(Lights fade on PHILIP. The Carroll sitting room is set up: a settee, a few chairs, perhaps a fireplace. MRS. CARROLL sits on the settee and CHRISTIE stands before her. On the other side of the stage a chaise lounge or fainting couch is placed and HELEN lies on it in the dark. There is also a chair and a small table with a picture on it.)

I returned once again to Mrs. Flint's boarding house and began looking for work. Without a favorable reference from my last governess position I learned that no one would consider me for such a job again. But I did find an advertisement for a lady's companion and quickly answered it. I soon found myself in the well-appointed home of Mrs. Carroll.

MRS. CARROLL: It is not for myself, Miss Devon, but for my daughter, Helen. She is not a well person and she has a nurse available at all times. But I feel she needs a younger person, someone her own age, to keep her company. She is prone to depression and rarely leaves the house.

CHRISTIE: I see.

MRS. CARROLL: Perhaps you can read to her. Or tell her stories about your life on the stage. Anything to take her mind off of herself.

CHRISTIE: What is the nature of her illness, Mrs. Carroll?

MRS. CARROLL: Not completely physical. Yet she is physically weak and suffers from anemia. I will hint to you, Miss Devon, that the loss of a very dear one is what started my daughter's melancholia. I do not think it wise to

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try and discuss the matter with Helen, but you should know that this loss is at the heart of her illness.

CHRISTIE: Thank you for telling me.

(The NURSE enters.)

MRS. CARROLL: Nurse, how is my daughter today?

NURSE: Poorly, Ma'am. I've gone in three or four times but she only sends me away, saying "Let me be quiet."

MRS. CARROLL: Oh, dear. Perhaps today is not a good day to start.

CHRISTIE: All the same, may I try? I too was ill for quite some time and know all about the loneliness that allows one to sink deeper and deeper into oneself.

MRS. CARROLL: Oh, if you would try, Miss Devon! Nurse, take Miss Devon into Helen. Then leave them alone together.

NURSE: Yes, Ma'am. This way, Miss.

MRS. CARROLL: Thank you, Miss Devon.

CHRISTIE: I cannot guarantee success, but I will do my best.

(The NURSE and CHRISTIE cross over to HELEN and MRS. CARROLL exits.)

NURSE: There's someone to see you, Miss.

HELEN: I told you to go away. I am too ill today . . .

NURSE: This is a Miss Devon who's come to sit with you a while and to cheer you up.

HELEN: Cheer me up? Such nonsense! *(sits up and looks at CHRISTIE)* Miss Devon?

CHRISTIE: Yes. But please call me Christie.

HELEN: I had a bad night. I am too ill to talk with anyone.

CHRISTIE: Then I shall just sit here quietly then and not disturb you. *(pause)*

HELEN: Very well. Leave us, Nurse.

NURSE: Yes, Miss. *(exits)*

HELEN: There are some books there. You may read, if you please.

CHRISTIE: I will, thank you. *(picks up a book and reads as HELEN lies back down)*

CHRISTIE S: I believe we stayed liked that, without uttering a word to each other, for over an hour. I read a silly romance novel, so poorly written, yet it made me think of Philip Fletcher and I started to wonder again if I had made the biggest mistake of my life in refusing him. I must have made a quiet sob or some sound for Helen sat up and addressed me.

HELEN: Miss Devon? *(sits up)* Are you sad?

CHRISTIE: Not sad, exactly. But wistful perhaps. Or maybe . . . *(SHE breaks down a bit and weeps)*

HELEN: Are you crying because you pity me? I am indeed pitiful –

CHRISTIE: No, no. I . . . !

HELEN: Perhaps you yourself have been wretched and ill . . .

CHRISTIE: I was sick for quite a long time. But I am over that now. And I have been wretched over a certain person, but I am over that as well . . . at least I think I am . . . *(weeps)* Excuse me, Miss Carroll.

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HELEN: You must call me Helen. And you must tell me everything.

CHRISTIE: But you have your own troubles. You do not need to hear about mine.

HELEN: I am so much alone that I forget that others – ! Talk with me, Christie. Tell me everything.

CHRISTIE S: So I told her everything. About my leaving home and being on the stage and the accident and even about the Saltonstalls and the marriage proposal from Philip. Helen listened attentively and made few comments. How strange it was! I was paid to be a companion to her and cheer her up, and instead she was comforting me.

HELEN: Then you can understand loss. Perhaps you can understand my loss even. (*goes to the picture on the table and brings it to CHRISTIE*) Look . . . Here he is.

CHRISTIE: A very attractive man. Who is it? Your father? Or brother?

HELEN: Both my father and one of my brothers are dead, but this is neither of them. He was someone I loved. But I lost him. That is all that I will say.

CHRISTIE: I understand.

HELEN: I believe you do understand, Christie. Perhaps you do.

(*HARRY CARROLL enters unannounced. HE is loud, cheerful and a bit drunk.*)

HARRY: Where's my Helen!

HELEN: Harry! (*SHE smiles*)

HARRY: Up and off that couch! Capital!

HELEN: Christie, this is my brother Harry!

HARRY: Pleased to meet you! But even better to see my Helen looking so well! Shall we dance!

HELEN: Harry, I believe you have been drinking!

HARRY: Helen, believe what you will. But you might be right!

(*HE and HELEN laugh.*)

HELEN: Christie, I fear that my brother is a bit of a reckless fellow.

HARRY: Only a bit. Where's Bella? I thought she was supposed to be home from school?

HELEN: Not until Saturday. The afternoon train.

HARRY: Well, I want you looking as bright and cheerful as you do this minute when Bella comes home. What a time the three of us will have!

(*MRS. CARROLL enters.*)

MRS. CARROLL: Harry? What are you doing here?

HARRY: Mother! Time to kill the fatted calf!

MRS. CARROLL: Where have you been these past two months?

HARRY: So many questions! I'm home. For a while. To be with my two sisters. And you, Mother! (*HE sobers up somewhat.*) Sorry I didn't write. I went to the edge of hell and there was no post office.

MRS. CARROLL: You've been drinking again!

HARRY: Again and again and again. How polite of you to notice.

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HELEN: Please! No arguments. I am feeling a bit better today. I think Christie has helped that. Mama, Christie must stay for dinner. And she must come every day to visit me if she can!

MRS. CARROLL: Of course, my dear.

HELEN: And Harry, you must tell us what you've been up to!

HARRY: Certainly! *(laughs)* Cover your ears, Mother!

(Lights fade out on the scene.)

CHRISTIE S: It was such an unusual family and one filled with contrasts. Mrs. Carroll seemed worried and secretive, Helen was quiet and moody, and Harry was loud and seemed not to have a care in the world. On Saturday Bella, the youngest sibling, arrived home from boarding school and struck me as happy if somewhat self-centered.

(Lights rise on all the same characters with BELLA CARROLL added.)

BELLA: But you are looking so much better, Helen!

MRS. CARROLL: I think we have Miss Devon to thank for that.

HELEN: Christie is my dearest friend, Bella! Promise you will be her friend too?

BELLA: For you, Helen, anything! What do you think of Helen's new friend, Harry?

HARRY: She quite makes me want to behave myself!

(HE laughs and BELLA with him.)

MRS. CARROLL: That would be a good thing, if it were true.

HELEN: Please! We are embarrassing Christie. Harry, you are a frightful cad and I should be angry at you. But I am too weak to scold anyone . . .

MRS. CARROLL: Yes. This is perhaps too much excitement for Helen. Let's leave her and Miss Devon in peace for a few hours before dinner.

BELLA: Very well, Mama. We need to go shopping in any case. I have absolutely nothing to wear this season and – !

HARRY: Listen to her! The lady who arrived from school with three trunks of new clothes!

MRS. CARROLL: No teasing, Harry. Everyone out of Helen's room . . .

(Lights fade on scene. ALL exit but CHRISTIE and HELEN, who lounges again on the couch.)

CHRISTIE S: The weeks passed. Some days Helen would not speak a word and only stared up at the ceiling while I read to her or quietly to myself. Other days she felt stronger and wished to talk. Only once did she refer again to the picture of her lost loved one.

(Lights up as HELEN sits up and takes the picture.)

HELEN: Do you believe that thinking about a person can keep that person alive?

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CHRISTIE: Alive in your heart, perhaps. But a person who has died is truly dead and that must be faced.

HELEN: What if one does not wish to face it?

CHRISTIE: I don't know what to say to that. Helen, is that man in the picture dead?

HELEN: Dead to me. Isn't that enough?

(Lights fade out on the scene.)

CHRISTIE S: After the Christmas holidays, Bella Carroll returned to boarding school and the family quieted down during the bleak months of winter. Harry would sometimes disappear for a week or two, which caused Mrs. Carroll additional distress, then returned as if nothing had happened, which also distressed his mother. Helen seemed to grow pale with the cold weather and there were some days I could get no response from her at all. Then one day, when Harry was at home, a letter arrived from Bella that quite upset everyone in the household. Although no one, not even Helen, would tell me what had happened, the tension was tremendous and even talkative Harry was silent. When I arrived the next day, the doctor was leaving the house and only the old Nurse was to be found.

(Lights up on NURSE covering HELEN with a blanket in her room. CHRISTIE enters.)

NURSE: *(a harsh whisper)* Oh, Miss Devon! Not today! You must leave at once!

CHRISTIE: What has happened?

NURSE: Not today! *(takes CHRISTIE out of the room and brings her to another part of the stage)* Miss Helen cannot see you today. Go home! The poor dear . . . !

CHRISTIE: What is it, Nurse? Is she ill?

NURSE: She will be better tomorrow! Go home!

(HARRY enters. HE is drunk but quiet and bitter this time.)

CHRISTIE: Mr. Carroll, I don't understand – !

NURSE: Tell her she must go, Mr. Harry!

HARRY: Go in and stay with Helen, Nurse. Go!

NURSE: Yes, sir. *(crosses to HELEN's room and sits next to the bed)*

HARRY: I'm sorry, Miss Devon. We should have sent you a note at your residence.

CHRISTIE: What is going on, Mr. Carroll? What's happened to Helen?

HARRY: She will be all right in a few days. Well, as right as she ever was. My mother would rather die than have you know, but you deserve an explanation. Helen tried to commit suicide again last night.

CHRISTIE: Oh . . . !

HARRY: She had tried it once before, not too long before you first came here. Then last night the news of Bella was too much for her so she found some cleaning turpentine in the cook's pantry and . . .

CHRISTIE: Will she . . . recover?

HARRY: Most certainly. She threw up all night and was never really in mortal danger. All the same . . .

CHRISTIE: What was the news about Bella? It surely must have upset her – !

HARRY: Sit down, Miss Devon.

CHRISTIE: I am quite strong, Mr. Carroll. Please – !

HARRY: Bella wrote to say that she is engaged.

CHRISTIE: I . . . I don't understand.

HARRY: Sit down and I will explain.

(CHRISTIE sits.)

Do you understand selfishness, Miss Devon? Cruel and deadly selfishness? You think you do but not like the Carroll family understands it. My late father was not a man of upstanding character. He suffered from a social disease since he was a young man. It eventually drove him insane and then killed him. Yet he married and had children, giving each and everyone one of his offspring a gift of the disease in their blood. That is Carroll family selfishness.

CHRISTIE: Oh, dear . . .

HARRY: Then there is my mother. Such a genteel and proper lady. Yet she married him and, while she was spared the disease, gave birth to four children who carried it. That is her brand of selfishness. My eldest brother Augustine joined the clergy when he found out the truth and swore never to marry or have children. He ended up in an insane asylum by the age of thirty and died four years ago. When I found out about the disease, I reacted quite differently. No clerical life for me. I live each day as it comes and care not at all about tomorrow. I may drink and gamble away my money but at least I will not be selfish and let the disease go to any descendants of mine.

CHRISTIE: And Helen? Does she . . . ?

HARRY: Does she know? Yes. But not until she was secretly engaged to a man from Quincy. His family found out about my profligate father and my pathetic brother and broke off the engagement. That was how she found out.

CHRISTIE: The man in the picture . . .

HARRY: Yes. He scorned her and wed a society girl from his hometown. Yet she pines over him as if he were the noble lover who died in battle.

CHRISTIE: And now Bella . . .

HARRY: And now Bella. She doesn't know the truth. We thought we would wait until she was a bit older. Why ruin her youth with knowledge of this curse? Perhaps that was selfish on our part. But now she writes that she is in love with a boy at school and believes herself to be engaged. She is coming home for Easter and will be told the truth. What a happy little quartet we Carrolls will be then.

CHRISTIE: Mr. Carroll, I . . . I don't know what to say.

HARRY: There is nothing you can say. Go home, Miss Devon. Come back in a few days. Helen will need your companionship more than ever then.

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CHRISTIE: Yes . . . Of course. Thank you for . . . being honest with me, Mr. Carroll.

HARRY: Just don't let on to my mother that you know anything. Her selfishness with the truth is all that she has left, poor creature.

(Lights fade on them and HARRY exits. The NURSE exits and CHRISTIE takes her place in the chair next to HELEN.)

CHRISTIE S: When I returned to the Carroll house two days later, Helen seemed weaker than I had ever seen her. I read to her, but there was little conversation. Each day the doctor came to the house and each day Helen seemed to fade more and more into her own morbid thoughts.

(Lights up on HELEN and CHRISTIE.)

HELEN: Christie . . . I will remain sane to the end . . . I know I am weak . . . but I will fight it. To the last moment I will fight it!

CHRISTIE: Do not excite yourself, Helen. You must save your strength and get well.

HELEN: But I am well . . . My mind is clear . . . I remember everything . . . every face I've seen and every word ever spoken and . . . Oh, Christie! Perhaps remembering is a form of insanity.

CHRISTIE: No, Helen. To remember things, especially the good things, can bring piece of mind.

HELEN: Piece of mind . . . Yes . . .

CHRISTIE: Would you like me to read some more?

HELEN: No . . . Let's have quiet. Let's remember good things . . .

(Lights fade out. HELEN and the couch are removed.)

CHRISTIE S: Helen was able to hang on until the spring. But with her last breath she smiled, knowing that she had not lost her sanity. The day after the funeral I returned to the Carroll house one last time. The whole family was preparing to go to their summer home in Maine. I said goodbye to Mrs. Carroll and the others, then Harry Carroll took me aside.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE and HARRY.)

HARRY: Helen is safe at last. The only kind of safety for our family. Thank you, Miss Devon, for all you did to make her happy.

CHRISTIE: I only wish I could have done more –

HARRY: Nonsense. I know Mother paid you regularly for being Helen's companion. But please take this from me. *(hands her an envelope)* Money is such a vulgar thing, isn't it? Especially Carroll money. But that's all we've got to offer and there is so much of it.

CHRISTIE: No, Mr. Carroll, I don't think it right –

HARRY: Right? What do I know about what is right. Take it and put it to good use if you won't accept it for yourself.

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(HARRY puts the envelope in her hand. BELLA enters. SHE is more somber and mature than last time.)

BELLA: Harry, Mother needs you – ! Miss Devon, you're still here?

CHRISTIE: I was just leaving.

BELLA: Thank you again for all that you did for Helen. Perhaps you can do the same for me someday.

CHRISTIE: I . . . Of course . . .

HARRY: It's all right, Miss Devon. Bella knows.

BELLA: Yes. Bella knows.

CHRISTIE: I am so sorry. What will you . . . ?

BELLA: Do? What can I do? I shall not be returning to school. I have broken off my engagement. I must find some other purpose for my life. Something fulfilling and – and I will try and be happy, if that's possible.

CHRISTIE: I believe you will do it, Bella. I believe any woman can.

(THEY embrace as the lights fade out. ALL exit except CHRISTIE S.)

CHRISTIE S: Once I was out of the house, I looked in the envelope that Harry Carroll had given me. Inside was three hundred dollars! I had never seen so much money in my life! It burned a hole in my pocket for two days until I knew what I would do with it. Sunday morning I rapped on the kitchen door of the Stuart house and my old friend Hepsey opened it. Two days later she went South to her old plantation. Her parents had died but with the money Hepsey was able to buy all her brothers and sisters and bring them up North. The Carroll family, without ever knowing it, had bought freedom.

(Light fade out.)

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT II

The lights rise on six SEAMSTRESSES sitting in chairs scattered about the stage, all facing the audience. CHRISTIE is among them and RACHEL sits to the side, a bit away from the others. The shop manager MRS. KING walks about the room, looking over each girl's shoulder and checking on their work.

KING: Straighter seams, Martha. Do that part over again . . . That collar is uneven. Do it again, Mary . . . That looks better, Agatha. Just pull it a bit tighter next time . . .

(CHRISTIE S. enters and addresses the audience.)

CHRISTIE S: It took me several weeks before I could find another job. The pay for sewing in Mrs. King's shop was less than any of my previous employment, but I could not be picky. I had spent most of my savings and owed Mrs. Flint rent, so I took the job gratefully.

KING: Very nice, Christie. You catch on fast . . .

CHRISTIE S: The work was pleasant enough and I liked the girls I worked with. Most were younger than myself and I enjoyed their spirit and enthusiasm during the short breaks we got.

KING: That's fine, Rachel, but try not to be so slow.

CHRISTIE S: There was one girl who was different from the rest. Her name was Rachel and she seemed closer to my age. She was a quiet girl, rarely spoke with the others, and there was a sadness about her, even though she smiled bravely if anyone addressed her. I decided that she needed a friend as much as I did.

KING: Four o'clock, girls. You have six minutes. *(exits)*

(The SEAMSTRESSES get up from their chairs and start chattering together. ALL are gathered on one side of the stage, laughing and gossiping. RACHEL stands alone on the other side, so CHRISTIE goes over to her.)

CHRISTIE: Rachel, do you live down past the trolley terminal?

RACHEL: *(nervously)* Why do you ask?

CHRISTIE: Well, I've seen you walk that direction and just wondered. My boarding house is just beyond those tracks.

RACHEL: I see . . .

CHRISTIE: I only mention it because it seems we are going in the same direction. Perhaps we can walk it together. It's such a long way and one gets lonely sometimes.

RACHEL: Yes. One does . . .

CHRISTIE: Tonight then?

RACHEL: Oh, I can't . . .

CHRISTIE: Perhaps you are taking the trolley tonight?

RACHEL: Oh, no! I couldn't afford that.

CHRISTIE: Neither can I. So let's walk it together. What do you say, Rachel?

RACHEL: But . . . Yes! Let's.

CHRISTIE: Good.

(Lights fade out on the shop.)

CHRISTIE S: It took a while, but Rachel and I became good friends. She spoke little about herself or her family, if indeed she had one. But once she got comfortable with me she was lively in her questions and quite animated in her talking.

(Lights rise on CHRISTIE and RACHEL walking together. THEY both laugh.)

RACHEL: He sounds like quite a character! But you shouldn't disregard your uncle like that, Christie.

CHRISTIE: I don't so much disregard him as he does me.

RACHEL: But that's exactly my point! Because he says little and doesn't seem to care, all the more reason to hold on to him.

CHRISTIE: Hold on to Uncle Enos? *(laughs)* Such a funny way of putting it!

RACHEL: You know what I mean. After all, he is all the family you have left.

CHRISTIE: That's true. And what about you, Rachel? Have you any family members left?

RACHEL: Yes . . . *(nervously)* No, actually. I lost my family. Not dead, you understand . . . but I am dead to them. It comes down to the same thing.

CHRISTIE: I am sorry.

RACHEL: It's all in the past. *(cheers up)* Look, we are at Fulton Street already! That didn't take very long!

(Lights fade out on them.)

CHRISTIE S: Of course, at the shop Rachel was as silent as ever. Even with me.

(Lights rise on the shop where the GIRLS are socializing. CHRISTIE is among a group of them as RACHEL stands apart.)

CHRISTIE: They say it only cost fifteen cents for a complete meal! What do you say we all splurge this Friday when we get paid and go there for a late supper together?

SEAMSTRESSES: Yes! . . . Let's do it! . . . Fifteen cents! . . . It sounds delicious! . . . Where is this place?

CHRISTIE: Down on Chatham Street. I'll bet we can walk there in a half hour or less!

SEAMSTRESSES: Chatham Street! . . . That's not too far from where I live!

CHRISTIE: It's called Frank's Chop House. They say it is quite large so we can find a table for all of us! *(crosses to RACHEL)* What do you think, Rachel? Should we all partake of a fifteen-cent feast?

RACHEL: I . . . I don't think so.

CHRISTIE: Please join us. It will be so much fun! And if you haven't the money, I can lend you some –

RACHEL: I can't. I . . . have other plans.

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(An awkward pause as the GIRLS give each other looks and RACHEL is embarrassed. The tension is interrupted by the entrance of MRS. KING.)

KING: Break time is over, girls. Back to work.

(THEY return to their chairs.)

Rachel, this sleeve must be done over. What were you thinking of? The stitches are all uneven.

RACHEL: I'm sorry, Mrs. King.

KING: Concentrate on your work. All of you.

(Lights fade out on the shop.)

CHRISTIE S: That night, as we walked home together, Rachel seemed quieter and more troubled than ever.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE and RACHEL at the side of the stage.)

CHRISTIE: What are you so afraid of, Rachel?

RACHEL: I don't know what you mean.

CHRISTIE: The world is not such a fearful place, you know.

RACHEL: Is it not?

CHRISTIE: I've seen my share of troubles, just as I am sure you have. But all the same, there is still much to be hopeful for. What do you hope for, Rachel?

RACHEL: I have no wishes or dreams or . . . I just wish to be left alone and to forget –! Oh, I am sorry, Christie! I am so ungrateful. I am ashamed of myself.

CHRISTIE: I want to be your friend, Rachel. I need you to be my friend. Don't you need that as well?

RACHEL: I . . . I think that being my friend will hurt you in the end. I am so afraid it will.

CHRISTIE: Hurt me? How is that possible?

RACHEL: Christie, it would be best for you if you never knew me. I realize that now.

CHRISTIE: I don't understand this kind of talk!

RACHEL: I cannot expect you to understand. Oh, Christie, I am so sorry for everything! Please forgive me!

(SHE rushes off; lights fade out and CHRISTIE exits.)

CHRISTIE S: Rachel did not show up at the shop the next day and there was much gossip and speculation among the girls as to the reason. Mrs. King asked me if I knew of Rachel's whereabouts, but I was not able to say. The morning after that I arrived at the shop at the last possible minute and found the place in confusion.

(Lights rise on the shop. RACHEL sits and weeps in her chair, her face in her hands. MRS. KING stands sternly over her. A few of the other GIRLS quietly weep, OTHERS stare at RACHEL. CHRISTIE rushes in, stops, and looks around the room.)

CHRISTIE: What's the matter?

KING: A very sad thing, Miss Devon. A thing which has never occurred in my establishment before and never shall again. It appears that Rachel, whom we all considered a most respectable girl, has been quite the reverse.

CHRISTIE: *(to RACHEL)* Rachel . . . ?

(RACHEL does not look at her.)

KING: When she did not show up for work yesterday, I was forced to make some inquiries. At her lodgings I found out her true character. All the neighbors knew about her. How her life has not been a respectable one . . . How she had a baby without benefit of a marriage license . . . How the baby died and she tried to cover up her past with a new name . . .

CHRISTIE: My poor Rachel . . . !

KING: Poor Rachel indeed! She deceived you, Miss Devon. She deceived all of us!

CHRISTIE: Rachel?

RACHEL: I did not wish to deceive anyone. Least of all you, Christie. It was a long time ago but . . . that seems to make no difference to people.

CHRISTIE: No one need know about any of this, Mrs. King. Let Rachel stay on here and it need never be mentioned again.

KING: What? Risk the reputation of my establishment! Stain the reputation of these other girls by associating with such a person! No. You must go at once, Rachel.

RACHEL: Yes, Mrs. King. *(rises)*

KING: And tell no one that you were once in my employ.

RACHEL: Certainly, Mrs. King.

CHRISTIE: But how will she get another position? She'll need a reference!

KING: I was foolhardy to hire her without a reference. Perhaps there are others as lax as I.

CHRISTIE: If you let Rachel go, then I must leave as well!

RACHEL: No, Christie – !

CHRISTIE: Rachel is my friend and if she is not good enough for this place, then I must not be worthy of it as well!

RACHEL: Do not listen to her, Mrs. King!

KING: If that is the way you feel, Miss Devon, I think it best if you leave. My workers must keep respectable company and I begin to question if you are such a good influence on them.

RACHEL: Please, Christie! Do not do this! Mrs. King, she must stay! You cannot do this to her!

KING: I think you have both said quite enough for one morning. Good day to both of you.

(Lights fade out on the shop. ALL exit but RACHEL and CHRISTIE.)

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CHRISTIE S: I did not consider what I did noble or self-sacrificing. I only wanted to be with Rachel, to help her, for us to help each other. Together we could survive. But it was not to be.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE and RACHEL on the street.)

RACHEL: I warned you that being my friend would hurt you! But I had no idea how much harm I could bring on you – !

CHRISTIE: Rachel, you have done nothing! It was my own choice – !

RACHEL: As long as you know me, you will suffer like this! We must part, Christie.

CHRISTIE: No!

RACHEL: I will be even more miserable if we don't. We must make our way separately. I cannot be held responsible for holding you back.

CHRISTIE: Don't you value our friendship?

RACHEL: More than anything else in the world. But it cannot be now. Perhaps at some future time, under different circumstances, we will meet and be able to be friends again. But not now. *(embraces her)* Goodbye and bless you, Christie! Bless you forever and ever!

(Lights fade out on the scene and CHRISTIE and RACHEL exit. Three WOMEN, the NURSE, and MRS. FLINT enter and stand with their backs to the audience in different parts of the stage. Each turns to the audience for her lines.)

CHRISTIE S: And so began the darkest period of my life. The next four months or so were like a thick fog and I mostly remember being lost and confused as I was dejected and hungry. To begin with, I could not find work . . . any kind of work, no matter how lowly or undignified.

(WOMAN 1 turns out to the audience.)

WOMAN 1: There's nothing, I tell you. Nothing at all. Now move along before I have to call the police. *(turns her back to the audience)*

CHRISTIE S: The city was crowded with immigrants from Europe, all looking for jobs and few finding any. I went out every day looking and would stay out late, afraid to return to Mrs. Flint's boarding house until after dinner because I was weeks behind in my rent. But still she found me and pestered me every chance she could.

FLINT: In advance, Miss Devon! That was the agreement. It has been one month without your paying me a penny. This cannot go on, Miss Devon. It simply cannot! *(turns her back to audience)*

CHRISTIE S: I tried to turn to old friends for help. I went to the kitchen door at the Stuart residence, hoping that Hepsy could bring me some comfort. But the door was answered by a stranger.

WOMAN 2: Hepsy Johnson? Was she that slave woman who worked here before me? No, she ain't been here for five or six weeks, I suppose. I don't know where she's gone. But the old Negro cook next door told me she's working on a railroad. Something called an underground railroad. But that old woman never does make sense to me. *(turns her back to audience)*

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CHRISTIE S: I was desperate enough to return to the Saltonstall house, hoping they might take pity on me and hire me for any kind of labor. But Mrs. Saltonstall was gone.

WOMAN 3: The Mrs. took the two girls to Patee to get educated. We don't know when she'll be coming back. Mr. Philip? No, he didn't go with them. He can't stand Patee. You ask me, he can't stand Willamina and Tamara. He's gone out West somewheres. Been gone nearly a year now.

CHRISTIE S: Harry Carroll had been so generous giving me that money that I hated the thought of returning and asking for more. But I was so desperate I swallowed my pride and decided to visit the family and ask for a loan of some sort. But the big house was empty and only the old Nurse was still living there.

NURSE: Mrs. Carroll took Miss Bella with her to England. They are supposed to consult some doctor there. I think they just wanted to leave this house. Too many sad memories here. Mr. Harry? No, he didn't go with them. But you know him – just gets up and disappears, he does. I haven't seen him in over a month.

(NURSE, FLINT, and the three WOMEN exit.)

CHRISTIE S: There was one thing I could do, I suppose. I could write to Uncle Enos. I could admit he was right, that I had made a failure out of life and ask for train fare to return home. I was so stubborn I resisted the idea for a long time. But I was also hungry, weak, and confused. The fog was getting thicker and I was more lost than ever.

(CHRISTIE enters, crosses down to the edge of the stage and looks out.)

One night, while roaming the streets until it was late enough to return to the boarding house, I found myself by the river, staring at the icy dark water. How easy it would be to step into that rushing water, to be swallowed up and end all my troubles. I am embarrassed to say that I thought such thoughts, but I was weary and lightheaded and the river seemed so inviting in a macabre kind of way.

(RACHEL enters in cloak and goes to CHRISTIE, then puts her arm around her.)

I thought that if I fell into the water, it would not be my doing at all. I could just faint away and slip into the river and – suddenly I felt something. Something was holding my arm . . . helping me stand up.

RACHEL: Christie . . . Come away from here.

CHRISTIE: *(faintly)* But I . . . I . . .

RACHEL: No, Christie. You don't want to. Come away from this place. You will be all right.

CHRISTIE: I will . . . ?

RACHEL: Yes. *(moves her away from the water's edge)* There. Now you are safe.

CHRISTIE: Safe . . . ?

RACHEL: Christie, it's me. Rachel. Don't you know me?

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CHRISTIE: Rachel . . . ? Oh . . . yes. Rachel. I am so . . . I am so . . .

(CHRISTIE faints and RACHEL catches her, kneels down and holds CHRISTIE in her lap.)

RACHEL: Yes, Christie. You are safe now.

(Lights fade out on the scene. A small bed and a chair are set up. CHRISTIE lies on it and RACHEL exits. MRS. WILKINS enters and sits in the chair knitting.)

CHRISTIE S: When I awoke, I was in a strange room. It was not my room at the boarding house. It was so bright and cheerful, and I could see the sun through a little window.

CHRISTIE: *(sits up)* Where am I . . . ? Rachel . . . ?

MRS. WILKINS: You're awake then! Bless you, child! It's been a day and a half! How weak you must have been to sleep so long! But now you're awake and will need food! *(rises)* I've got porridge on the stove and bread and butter and –

CHRISTIE: Where am I?

MRS. WILKINS: Out of the way of danger, that's where you are. My husband, Elisha, brought you here in his wagon the night before last. Rachel come and told us –

CHRISTIE: Rachel! It was Rachel who found me!

MRS. WILKINS: That's right, dear.

CHRISTIE: But where is she now?

MRS. WILKINS: Gone away again. All the way to New York City. But I promised to take care of you until she comes again. I'm Mrs. Wilkins and it was my husband Elisha who carried you in here more dead than alive. Now how about something to eat?

CHRISTIE: You are so kind. You don't even know me or –

MRS. WILKINS: All I know is you want looking after. Now stay there. I won't be but a second.

(Noise of children offstage.)

Maybe a bit more than a second. My children need looking to, it sounds like. But I won't forget you, dear.

CHRISTIE: Children . . . ?

MRS. WILKINS: Yes. There's six of them and each one livelier than the next.

You must have been in quite a sleep not to hear them. They are blessings indeed, but not easy to sleep through. *(as SHE goes)* Ann Lizy, what are you going on about! Andrew Jackson, are you hassling her again? *(exits; lights and noise fade out)*

CHRISTIE S: I stayed with the noisy but warmhearted Wilkins family for a week as I gradually got my strength back. Mrs. Wilkins told me that we were twelve miles outside of Boston. Rachel was from this part of Massachusetts and had always kept in touch with the Wilkinses. This was not the first time

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that Rachel had brought a lost and desperate young woman here to be safe. And it would not be the last.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE sitting on the bed and MRS. WILKINS on the chair.)

MRS. WILKINS: Rachel had her own troubles, as you know. But she rises above them. It got that no place in Boston would hire her because of her past so she went to New York and is doing well. We only see her once every few months or so. Her family don't accept her, you see, so she doesn't stay long in the area. Lucky for you she was in Boston last week.

CHRISTIE: She saved my life. I would have . . . I don't know what I would have done!

MRS. WILKINS: Now don't you dwell on that. It's all in the past now. Our next step is to get you situated. I think you're strong enough now to think about the future.

CHRISTIE: Plenty strong, thanks to you, Mrs. Wilkins.

MRS. WILKINS: I'd keep you here with us if we had room, for I've grown quite attached to you, Christie. But I come across something better . . . and no six young ones to contend with. There is an old Quaker woman who lives a few miles from here. She's a widow and her son is a gardener and knows all about plants and seeds and such. He sells them out of a little shop attached to the house. Well, Mrs. Sterling isn't quite fit to care for a home and help run a shop and they can use some help. They have plenty of room so you can stay there and have yourself a quiet home instead of all our noise.

CHRISTIE: It sounds quite fine. I will work hard and make you proud of me, Mrs. Wilkins!

MRS. WILKINS: I am sure of that. But you must promise to visit us when you can, Christie. The children have taken a bit of a shine to you as well.

CHRISTIE: I promise.

(Noise from children offstage; MRS. WILKINS rises.)

MRS. WILKINS: I wonder what new catastrophe that can be!

(Lights fade out on the scene. The Sterling kitchen, as at the beginning of the play, is set up.)

CHRISTIE S: So I went from the happy, chaotic home of the Wilkinses to the quiet and orderly home of Mrs. Sterling and her son David. Mrs. Sterling was a gentle and loving woman and we immediately became close friends. Her son David was a man of few words, polite but distant, and tended to brood. Mrs. Sterling looked upon him with love and worry.

(Lights up on CHRISTIE, MRS. STERLING and DAVID in the kitchen. THEY are finishing breakfast at the table.)

MRS. STERLING: Will ye be wanting Christie in the shop today, David, or should she help me bake?

DAVID: I've business in town today.

MRS. STERLING: Will ye be gone much of the day? Or should I have lunch ready for thee?

DAVID: I cannot say. (*rises from table*) Bless ye for breakfast, Mother. (*exits*)

MRS. STERLING: I pray to God for that boy every day.

CHRISTIE: I hope my presence here has not made things difficult.

MRS. STERLING: Not at all, Christie. He's been like that since . . . for a long time. We dare not talk about it, he and I. I don't think he'd like me talking about it with you, dear. David's just that way.

CHRISTIE: He's very smart. I am amazed at how he knows everything about every plant and seed and the Latin names and such.

MRS. STERLING: David be very smart, yes. But he's not happy. Something happened that broke his heart and I think it will not mend. I should better say *someone* broke his heart. But he'll not want me to be talking about it, so I'll stop. Let's get started with the baking, Christie.

(*Lights fade on scene and MRS. STERLING exits. DAVID enters with a box of seedling plants, puts it down on the ground, then consults his list. CHRISTIE joins him.*)

CHRISTIE S: Brooding or not, David taught me a great deal about plants and my time with him was more like an education than just a job.

DAVID: These will reseed themselves if you plant them in a protected place.

They thrive best close to the house. But the yarrow is not so fussy. It minds not where it is, as long as there isn't too much moisture.

CHRISTIE: It is as if each plant species had its own personality!

DAVID: That be true. Like people, sometimes.

CHRISTIE: I just hope I can remember everything. It is so complicated.

DAVID: Ye will in time. Once you get to know each plant. Just as you learn about people.

CHRISTIE: I hope so.

DAVID: But plants be more consistent. Once you know them, they do not change on ye.

CHRISTIE: Like people can?

DAVID: Yes. A daffodil will not decide it rather bloom in fall rather than spring. It will not surprise you like that. But people do. They change and . . . (*pause*) Let us separate the columbine before lunch.

(*DAVID exits; CHRISTIE remains and watches him go.*)

CHRISTIE S: I will not delay telling you any longer. I was falling in love with David. He did not pursue me, as Philip Fletcher had. Nor did he give me any more attention than was necessary in our working together and living under the same roof. But I so admired his strength, his silences, and even his moods. Admiration soon turned to love and I was content just to be with him.

(*CHRISTIE crosses to kitchen where MRS. STERLING and DAVID sit.*)

CHRISTIE: Will you read aloud tonight, David? I'll have these dishes washed and put away quickly if you will read to us again.

DAVID: If it pleases thee. But it must not be too late. I have to go to Boston in the morning and must get an early start.

MRS. STERLING: You must if you hope to be safely home before sunset.

CHRISTIE: Do you have a delivery in Boston? I'll help you load the cart in the morning.

DAVID: It be not a delivery. A plant show. They come from all over. I'll get some new seedlings for the shop. And I want to see the new hybrids. There will be dozens of new ones.

CHRISTIE: It must be something to see!

DAVID: If thee can spare Christie for a day, Mother, perhaps she can come too.

MRS. STERLING: I think that would be a good idea, David.

CHRISTIE: Truly? I should love to go!

DAVID: It will be good for thee. There is much to learn at the show. But we must be ready to leave at dawn if we are going to get everything done in Boston that we need to.

CHRISTIE: I'll be ready!

(Lights fade out on the scene. MRS. STERLING exits and on the side of the stage four or five BOSTONIANS enter and look toward the audience at the unseen plants. CHRISTIE and DAVID join them. Sounds of a crowd are heard.)

CHRISTIE S: The plant show was very interesting and I never saw David so animated as he looked through the new specimens, talked with other botanists about plants, and pointed out to me unusual kinds of flowers that I had never seen before. To spend the whole day in his company was like a holiday and I savored every minute – until the late afternoon, when something happened.

DAVID: Those be too expensive. I'm going back to that other stall to buy a dozen. Ye stay here, Christie, and watch our basket. I won't be long.

CHRISTIE: Yes, David.

(DAVID exits through the small crowd as PHILIP FLETCHER enters, sees CHRISTIE, and goes over to her.)

PHILIP: Miss Devon? It is you! Such a pleasant surprise!

CHRISTIE: Mr. Fletcher . . .

PHILIP: I didn't know you were a plant enthusiast!

CHRISTIE: I am still learning. I work for a gardener and . . . Are you interested in flowers, Mr. Fletcher?

PHILIP: Don't know a thing about them. Except that a dozen roses are known to flatter any girl.

CHRISTIE: Is that why you are here?

PHILIP: No. I'm meeting a friend across the way at the hotel and thought I'd see what all the commotion was about. But now that I am here, maybe a dozen roses would not be such a bad idea. They may soften your heart toward me.

CHRISTIE: Do not talk so, Mr. Fletcher. It embarrasses me.

PHILIP: I'm sorry, Miss Devon. It has been so long since . . . since we last met.

And you are looking so lovely and –! Oh, but I must not embarrass you.

CHRISTIE: I trust that your sister and Willamina and Tamara are well.

PHILIP: Darned if I know. Haven't seen them in many months. I was out West, looking for something new and different but . . . Well, there wasn't much in it.

CHRISTIE: I am sorry you were disappointed.

PHILIP: Most things disappoint me. And most people too. You seemed different but . . . but you disappointed me as well. I suppose I deserved it. But I still think fondly of you, Christie –

(DAVID enters with a small crate of flowers.)

DAVID: I think this is a better price. *(sees PHILIP)* Are you all right, Christie?

CHRISTIE: Completely. Mr. Fletcher, this is my employer, Mr. Sterling. *(to DAVID)* I once worked for Mr. Fletcher's sister. A long time ago.

PHILIP: But the memory of it has not faded. I must come and check out your plant shop sometime, Mr. Sterling. Where in Boston are you located?

DAVID: We be in Concord, not Boston. Come, Christie. There are a few more stalls we need to see before we start for home.

CHRISTIE: Good day, Mr. Fletcher.

PHILIP: Good day to you both. It has been a pleasure.

(HE tips his hat then exits. The lights fade on the scene. A bench is set up and DAVID and CHRISTIE sit facing the audience, riding in the front of the wagon. DAVID holds the reins. The sound of horse hoofs.)

CHRISTIE S: During the long ride home from Boston, David was even less talkative than usual. I could tell something was bothering him and soon I realized it was Philip Fletcher. After several miles in silence, David finally spoke.

DAVID: That man . . . the one you were talking to while I was gone . . . he upset thee?

CHRISTIE: Not exactly. I suppose I was just surprised to see him after so long a time. That is all.

DAVID: Sometimes the past should be forgotten.

CHRISTIE: Sometimes.

DAVID: I have tried to forget parts of my past. But I am unable to do so. It is a weakness.

CHRISTIE: Not always a weakness. Sometimes it takes more strength to remember . . . and to live with one's past.

DAVID: Perhaps.

CHRISTIE: I cannot imagine that there is anything in your past, David, that is so terrible to think on.

DAVID: Ye does not know.

CHRISTIE: True. I do not know.

DAVID: My mother has perhaps spoken to you of Letty?

CHRISTIE: She has told me nothing. Mrs. Sterling said it was not for her to speak of your past because you did not wish it.

DAVID: That is the best way. The less said, the better we will all be.

CHRISTIE: Are you sure about that, David? *(pause)*

DAVID: Nothing can help it now. I was hurt by Letty and, in turn, I hurt her. Now she is gone, I don't know where, and she will never return after the things I said. That is the past and it should be forgotten. *(pause)* But I cannot.

CHRISTIE S: Because I loved him, I wanted to help David. I wanted to find Letty and bring her back. And, at the same time, I wanted Letty so far away that David would start to think on me as he had on her. If I couldn't have that, I would be content just being near him.

(Lights fade out on CHRISTIE and DAVID and the bench is removed. CHRISTIE goes to the flower crates on one side of the stage and DAVID exits.)

About two weeks later I was working in the shop alone while David was in the greenhouse.

(PHILIP enters.)

PHILIP: At last!

CHRISTIE: Mr. Fletcher!

PHILIP: I've been to every flower shop in Concord and, finally, I find you!

CHRISTIE: What are you doing here?

PHILIP: Isn't it obvious? I need a dozen red roses.

CHRISTIE: To impress some girl?

PHILIP: Are you impressed?

CHRISTIE: No.

PHILIP: Forget the flowers then. You're the one I want to see. Unless you are engaged to that gardener. Are you?

CHRISTIE: That is an insolent question, Mr. Fletcher!

PHILIP: That means you aren't. Good.

(Lights fade out on the scene. PHILIP exits, MRS. WILKINS enters and joins CHRISTIE.)

CHRISTIE S: So that was how Philip Fletcher came back into my life. He started calling on me, first at the shop and then at the house. I could tell David did not like him and I wondered if jealousy might not encourage David to pay more attention to me. But he was as silent and moody as ever and it was not long before Philip proposed to me again. I was so confused that I told him I needed time to think about it. Then I went to visit Mrs. Wilkins, as I did each week, and posed the problem to her.

MRS. WILKINS: You say this friend of yours cannot make up her mind?

CHRISTIE: That's right. The man she loves shows little interest in her. But she does not love the man who has shown interest in her.

MRS. WILKINS: And this second man has proposed to her?

CHRISTIE: That's right.

MRS. WILKINS: And you say the girl, this friend of yours, is poor and has no money?

CHRISTIE: Very little.

MRS. WILKINS: And the man who wants to marry her is rich?

CHRISTIE: Yes. Very rich.

MRS. WILKINS: Well, if she is goin' to marry to make her fortune, she should do it and not think twice about it!

CHRISTIE: She should?

MRS. WILKINS: But my guess is that your friend is not the type to marry for money and she would never be happy with him, even if she should make the effort.

CHRISTIE: Even though she might not be happy, she could use the money to do good . . . and possibly make many others happy.

MRS. WILKINS: She might, but I doubt it. Money got that way wouldn't prosper well. Your friend is better off waiting and hoping for the other man to ask her.

CHRISTIE: But he is in love with someone else, someone he lost long ago. It is hopeless!

MRS. WILKINS: Not hopeless, my dear. I don't think your friend is aware of all the facts. You tell her to put her faith in the man she loves.

CHRISTIE: I'll . . . tell her. *(starts to walk away)*

MRS. WILKINS: And Christie . . .

CHRISTIE: Yes? *(stops)*

MRS. WILKINS: I'll wager that David loves you too. I know him enough to know he ain't the kind to show it. Some men ain't. But put your faith in David and you will not be disappointed.

CHRISTIE: Thank you, Mrs. Wilkins.

(MRS. WILKINS exits and PHILIP enters and joins CHRISTIE.)

CHRISTIE S: So, for the second time in my life, I turned down a proposal of marriage from the wealthy Mr. Fletcher.

CHRISTIE: I am sorry . . . Philip.

PHILIP: I will not scold and curse, as I did the first time. We're both much too mature for that. But I will say that I am disappointed . . . again. You were tempted this time. I see that. But there is someone else.

CHRISTIE: All that matters is that I do not love you. It has nothing to do with anyone else.

PHILIP: It has all to do with someone else. Well, I hope you'll be happy with your big, quiet gardener. He obviously has captured your heart.

CHRISTIE: Is it so obvious, Philip?

PHILIP: To everyone but him perhaps. I wish you happiness, Christie Devon. I sincerely mean that. And I will bother you no further. *(exits)*

CHRISTIE S: I had been so sure of myself when I turned down Philip Fletcher's proposal. But as he walked away I started to wonder if I had made another major blunder in my life. Yet I must put my faith in David, as Mrs. Wilkins said. And so I did.

(CHRISTIE exits as the lights fade out.)

David noticed that Philip no longer called on me and I think he was pleased to see it, though he never said a word about it. And he seemed less morose and more talkative. We worked hard together, for it was a busy spring and

there was much to be done. I loved working with David and being close to him all day long. And, in his way, I think he was happy being with me. Perhaps Mrs. Wilkins was right. By that June matters were resolved . . . and in a manner I never imagined they could be.

(Lights up on the Sterling kitchen with DAVID and MRS. STERLING looking at a letter together. Both are beaming with joy.)

MRS. STERLING: Will ye write her at once, David? Will ye not?

DAVID: Right this very minute! Oh, Mother, it is a miracle!

(THEY embrace.)

MRS. STERLING: And you forgive her, David?

DAVID: I forgave her a long time ago. But I thought it was too late. Now I can make it up to her!

MRS. STERLING: Thank you, merciful God!

(THEY embrace again as CHRISTIE enters the kitchen.)

DAVID: There is great news, Christie!

MRS. STERLING: Miraculous news, my dear!

CHRISTIE: What has happened?

DAVID: She is coming home! At last!

MRS. STERLING: It's a letter from Letty! She writes that she wants to return home and asks if she may!

CHRISTIE: Letty . . .

DAVID: Of course she may! I will go upstairs and write her. Then I must get to the post office without delay!

MRS. STERLING: Yes, David! Without delay!

(DAVID starts to exit but CHRISTIE stops him.)

CHRISTIE: David . . . I am so happy for you.

DAVID: Thank ye, Christie.

(HE exits and the lights fade out on the scene.)

CHRISTIE S: I was not being untruthful when I said I was happy for David. I loved him so and his happiness was what mattered. That night, as I quietly wept in my bed and saw all my hopes vanish, I decided that it would be best if I left the Sterling house. It would be too difficult for me to work and live with David once he and his beloved Letty were married. But I would wait two days before I told David and Mrs. Sterling because I did not want to cast a gloom over their joy. On the day I was to tell them, all three of us were surprised by the sudden appearance of Letty herself.

(Lights up on the kitchen with DAVID, MRS. STERLING and CHRISTIE at the table.)

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CHRISTIE: Mrs. Sterling . . . David . . . This past year, living and working with you, has perhaps been the happiest of my life. You took me in when I was at my lowest and you both taught me how to love life again. I will never be able to thank you enough and I hope to repay you both for what you have done.

DAVID: We will not be repaid, Christie. You owe us nothing.

MRS. STERLING: David speaks the truth, Christie.

CHRISTIE: All the same, I have decided that some changes must be made. Changes for me, that is.

MRS. STERLING: What kind of changes, Christie – ?

(Knocking at the door.)

Who could be calling at supper time?

DAVID: I'll see who it is. *(rises and exits)*

MRS. STERLING: You aren't thinking of leaving us, Christie, are ye?

CHRISTIE: Mrs. Sterling . . . I don't want you to think me ungrateful –

(DAVID enters with RACHEL wearing her long cloak, and wrapped in his arms. CHRISTIE cannot see who it is at first.)

DAVID: Mother, it's Letty!

MRS. STERLING: Letty!

(MRS. STERLING rises and THEY rush to each other and embrace.)

My Letty!!

DAVID: She's home again!

RACHEL: I couldn't wait and write you. As soon as I got David's letter, I left New York and –

MRS. STERLING: You're back with us! That's all that matters!

DAVID: And isn't she looking well, Mother?

RACHEL: I'm covered with cinders from the train! But I'll clean up fine, I promise you!

(THEY laugh.)

MRS. STERLING: I can hardly believe you are here!

RACHEL: I am. And I'll stay, if you'll have me.

DAVID: This is your home, Letty. That will never change.

CHRISTIE: *(rising from her chair)* Rachel . . . ?

DAVID: Christie, this be our Letty!

RACHEL: Yes, Christie. It's me. When I left this house in disgrace five years ago, I started to use the name Rachel.

MRS. STERLING: *(to CHRISTIE)* You know our Letty?

CHRISTIE: Yes. It was she who rescued me . . . who brought me to Mrs. Wilkins and –

RACHEL: It was Mrs. Wilkins who convinced me to write to David and ask forgiveness for what I had done –

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MRS. STERLING: We will not talk about the past. All that matters is that we are together again!

DAVID: It was I, Christie, who sent Letty away when she was in trouble. It was the cruelest and most regrettable act of my entire life and –!

RACHEL: No, David –!

MRS. STERLING: We must forget those dark times!

DAVID: To cast out one's own sister and tell her never to return –!

CHRISTIE: Sister?

RACHEL: Didn't you know, Christie? David is my brother.

CHRISTIE: But I thought . . .!

MRS. STERLING: I am sorry, Christie. I could not talk of it to you. David thought –

DAVID: I was wrong to try and hide the truth. I would not have it spoken of. It was my stubbornness and –!

RACHEL: Poor Christie. I am afraid none of us has been completely honest with you.

MRS. STERLING: But you are one of our family now, if you will forgive us. We want you with us and won't hear any talk of changes or your leaving us.

DAVID: Mother speaks true for all of us, Christie. Will you stay? *(pause)*

CHRISTIE: You were my dearest friend, Rachel . . . I mean, Letty . . . and when I lost you I thought I'd never have another nearly as close. And Mrs. Sterling . . . you have been just like a mother to me these past months. And David . . . I . . . I . . . I have learned so much from you and . . . I don't know what else to say. You are . . . my family!

(CHRISTIE embraces MRS. STERLING, then RACHEL, then DAVID. Then the all ACTORS freeze in position.)

CHRISTIE S: And we were a family. With his great burden of guilt removed, David was not the brooding man he had been and he started to notice that I loved him dearly. Or perhaps he always knew but was not allowed to show it. We married a few months later and were as happy as any two people ever were.

(Lights fade out on the scene and the ACTORS exit.)

If my life was like one of those romantic novels that Mrs. Saltonstall was always reading, the story would stop here and one would be tempted to use "happily ever after" or some other expression in describing the way things were. But it was not to be so simple. I must show you a few more images to explain how I came to be the person I am today.

(Lights rise on DAVID and CHRISTIE embracing, then a farewell kiss.)

War broke out two weeks after our wedding. Being a Quaker and a pacifist, David felt he should stay out of the conflict. But as the war moved into its second year, David could no longer remove himself from it and he joined Mr. Lincoln's army.

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DAVID: You must care for Mother and Letty while I am gone. I depend on you, Christie.

CHRISTIE: I cannot be separated from you, David. It has taken so much of our lives to find each other. We cannot be parted this way!

DAVID: We must not be selfish.

CHRISTIE: Letty will care for Mother and the shop. I will go with you!

DAVID: You cannot. You know that you cannot, Christie.

CHRISTIE: I will not be selfish. There is work to be done and I can do it!

(Lights fade out on them.)

CHRISTIE S: So I became a hospital worker. I traveled first to Baltimore and then Washington where I spent the next three years caring for the wounded and writing letters for sick and dying soldiers. I saw David whenever he went on leave and we managed to be happy in a very unhappy time.

(Lights rise on FOUR WOUNDED SOLDIERS lying on the floor. CHRISTIE goes from one to the other with a bucket of water and a ladle.)

I have had many different jobs over the years but none was more challenging than caring for those wounded men. I was needed and I did my best. Never have I felt so useful as during those three years working in the hospital.

(CHRISTIE goes to the last SOLDIER who sits up. It is PHILIP FLETCHER.)

PHILIP: Christie . . . ? Christie Devon?

CHRISTIE: Mr. Fletcher!

PHILIP: We meet again. And in most unlikely circumstances. May I have some water?

CHRISTIE: Of course!

(SHE hands him the ladle and HE drinks.)

Are you . . . very badly hurt?

PHILIP: Right as rain, actually. I'm going home in two days. I will miss my right leg though.

CHRISTIE: Oh, Mr. Fletcher . . . ! I am so sorry.

PHILIP: Just another one of life's disappointments, Miss Devon.

CHRISTIE: My name's Christie Sterling now, Mr. Fletcher.

PHILIP: Is it? And mine's Philip. I wish you'd call me that.

CHRISTIE: Certainly, Philip.

PHILIP: And where is Mr. Sterling?

CHRISTIE: In Tennessee.

PHILIP: Terrible fighting in Tennessee. I wish him well. He has much to live for. All the reason in the world to live . . . if he has you.

(Lights fade out on the scene. PHILIP and SOLDIERS exit.)

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CHRISTIE S: The fighting was indeed terrible in Tennessee and my David was wounded twice. But he was such a strong man that he quickly recovered both times and returned to his regiment. The both of us returned home to Letty and Mother for Christmas. It was the last time our happy little family was together. David was severely wounded in Virginia the following March, and I went to the hospital there to be with him.

(Lights up on DAVID laying on the ground and CHRISTIE at his side.)

DAVID: I knew ye would come . . . I knew nothing could keep my Christie away . . .

CHRISTIE: Yes, I'm here, David. And I will stay at your side until . . . until you are well again.

DAVID: It's not like the other two times, my dear . . . not this time . . .

CHRISTIE: Don't speak, David. You need to save your strength.

DAVID: Plenty of time for resting later . . . I need to hear your voice, Christie . . . speak to me . . .

CHRISTIE: I . . . I received a letter from Letty last week. It was a month old. All is well at home . . .

DAVID: Yes . . . And you . . . ? Are ye well?

CHRISTIE: Yes, David. I am well . . . but I have missed you. *(pause)* There is something I needed to tell you . . . but I didn't want to put it in a letter . . .

DAVID: Letters . . . are slow . . .

CHRISTIE: David, we are going to have a baby. In the fall.

DAVID: A baby . . . In the fall . . .

CHRISTIE: Yes . . .

DAVID: Then . . . then . . .

CHRISTIE: Yes, David?

DAVID: Then . . . it will continue to grow . . . One plant dies . . . but the garden will continue to grow . . . !

(Lights fade out on the scene. DAVID exits and CHRISTIE crosses over to CHRISTIE S.)

CHRISTIE: When I lost David, it seemed I lost a part of myself . . . my past self.

CHRISTIE S: Yes. The young and headstrong Christie Devon who fought for independence was now a new person.

CHRISTIE: And she could only think of her past self with a shudder and a tear and a smile. *(exits)*

CHRISTIE S: Our baby girl was born in September, and I named her Ruth. She knew no father. But with my love, and the love of her grandmother and her Aunt Letty, Ruth was not wanting for affection. We three women ran the flower shop with success and it kept us all very busy. But I was restless for something more useful to do. And I soon found it.

(CHRISTIE S. moves to the other side of the stage where a podium is set up. SHE stands behind it.)

I started to speak in public. I belonged to various woman's organizations and soon found myself addressing them. Then I was asked to speak at

even larger functions, sometimes traveling to different cities and towns in New England. And what did I talk about? Women. Working women. Women who made a difference. I was not a forceful speaker but neither was I lacking in fervor. I spoke as plainly and clearly as I could and audiences responded favorably to me.

(Sound of applause; SHE bows, then moves away from the podium.)

After a speech I made in South Boston, a well-dressed woman came up to me with tears in her eyes.

(BELLA CARROLL enters, goes to CHRISTIE S.)

BELLA: I don't suppose you remember me, Mrs. Sterling . . . ?

CHRISTIE S: Bella! Bella Carroll! Of course I remember you.

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