

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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The House of the Seven Gables

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From the Story by
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Five Actors: 3 men, 2 women

A: Narrator, Jaffrey Pyncheon, Clifford Pyncheon, Gervayse Pyncheon
Male, 50's

B: Narrator, Old Venner, Matthew Maule II
Male, 60's

C: Narrator, Holgrave, Ned Higgens, train conductor
Male, 20's

D: Narrator, Hepzibah Pyncheon, Alice Pyncheon
Female, 50's

E: Narrator, Phoebe Pyncheon, Sam, Gentleman on the train
Female, 20.

The narrators function in a direct conversation with the audience. They must lead the audience through some exposition that might otherwise be heavy-going. It is their job, variously, to woo, to seduce the audience into the shared story. Occasionally, a narrator may comment on one of the characters he/she plays.

NOTE: Narrator A switches between Jaffrey and Clifford. On page 32, Clifford's offstage voice should be recorded. Page 60 requires that there be a substitute for the dead Jaffrey, either a puppet or a mannequin or a non-speaking extra. Note also that the armchair in which he sits should be able to swivel.

THE HOUSE AND STAGE ARE BLACK.
IN THE DARK, A SOLITARY SPOT COMES UP ON A SWINGING GALLOWS NOOSE.
A VOICE RINGS OUT:

VOICE

You will be sentenced for the crime of Witchcraft. You will be hung by the neck at dawn tomorrow!

A HUGE CRACK—ALMOST LIKE A SHOT—IS HEARD SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH A BLACKOUT. THE NOOSE DISAPPEARS.

AS THE LIGHTS COME UP, THE COMPANY ASSEMBLES AND GREETS THE AUDIENCE.

C: Half-way down a by-street in one of our New England towns stands a rusty wooden house with seven acutely peaked gables facing toward various points of the compass.

A: The street is Pyncheon Street; the house is the old Pyncheon House. The House of the Seven Gables.

C: An old elm of wide circumference rooted by the door is familiar to every town-born child by the title of *the Pyncheon elm*.

A: Can you see it? Salem, Massachusetts. Our story includes a chain of events extending over two centuries.

B: The House of the Seven Gables was not the first dwelling erected on this spot. Pyncheon Street formerly bore a humbler name: Maule's Lane. Not much then. Matthew Maule had a shaggy thatch cottage and a cow path. And something much better: a natural spring of sweet and pleasant water—a rare treasure on the sea-girt peninsula where the Puritans first settled.

C: As Salem grew, this site became desirable—

B: Extremely desirable—

C: In the eyes of one prominent, powerful personage.

A: Colonel George Pyncheon. A man driven by an iron energy of purpose, Colonel Pyncheon claimed ownership of this property on the strength of a grant from the legislature.

B: Matthew Maule, on the other hand, was stubborn in defense of *his* right of ownership.

A: No written record of this dispute is known to exist.

C: The controversy dragged on for several years between the ill-matched antagonists until...,the Colonel found a way to solve the problem.

D: The death of Matthew Maule. The ghastly mode of Maule's death affects the mind differently in our day from what it did nearly two centuries ago. In a word, he was executed for the crime of witchcraft.

GESTURE TO A ROPE HANGING FROM THE PYNCHION ELM.

E: Witchcraft...?

BEAT.

B: Clergymen, judges, statesmen—

D: The wisest, calmest, holiest persons of their day stood in the inner circle round about the gallows, loudest to applaud this work of blood, latest to confess themselves miserably deceived in old Matthew Maule.

E: Much later, when the frenzy of that time had subsided, it was remembered how loudly Colonel Pyncheon had joined in the general cry to—

A: Purge the land from witchcraft.

D: At the moment of execution, with the halter around his neck, and while Colonel Pyncheon gazed grimly on the scene....Matthew Maule addressed him from the scaffold with a prophecy:

B: "God will give him blood to drink!"

ECHOS (TUTTI) :

God will give him blood to drink.

God will give him blood to drink....

D: Over this unquiet grave Colonel Pyncheon erected his new house. The House of the Seven Gables.

C: And who do you think was the architect of this mansion? None other than the son of the man from whom Pyncheon had stolen the land: Thomas Maule. Thomas built it so well that here it still stands, two hundred years later.

B: The colonel was perfectly delighted....except for one detail. He had also acquired a vast tract of Indian land up in what we now call Maine. Worth a fortune!

D: A deed, signed and sealed, testified to the purchase of this land.

B: But the Colonel could not find the deed! He must have misplaced it. Oh well, he would find it later.

E: Colonel Pyncheon gave a great party to consecrate his new home. A prayer by the pastor, followed by ale, cider, wine and brandy; and by roast venison, codfish chowder and numerous meats and fowls.

Maule's Lane—or Pyncheon Street—as it was now called, was thronged. Citizens of all classes were invited. They ate and drank and enjoyed. But one absence was noted: the founder of this mansion was as yet invisible. Where was the host?

SERVANT

C: The Master is still in his study, your honor, he said to the mayor. The master wishes not to be disturbed.

MAYOR

D: But don't you see, fellow, the lieutenant governor is waiting. Call your master instantly.

SERVANT

C: My master's orders were exact. I dare not disturb him!

MAYOR

D: Then I must take matters into my own hands! The Lieutenant Governor has been waiting for an hour! He's growing impatient.

THE MAYOR KNOCKS LOUDLY ON THE STUDY DOOR.

No answer. Is he asleep?

A LOUDER KNOCK.

B: Again, no answer. Finally the mayor flung the door wide open and guests crowded in. And what did they see? Nothing extraordinary at first. Books, maps, a mirror with a shattered reflection...and a portrait of the colonel—

Beneath which sat the Colonel himself, staring fixedly ahead.

There was blood on the ruff of his shirt, and his hoary beard was saturated with it!

A VOICE

E: He's dead!

ANOTHER

C: God hath given him blood to drink!

ANOTHER

D: God *has* given him blood to drink!

A BEAT.

C: Be patient, friends, just a little more history.

B: About that piece of paper—

D: The deed—

B: The claim, which was to be a source of incalculable wealth to the Pyncheon family.

E: They could not find the document. And, alas, there was no public record of it! Generation after generation, the family searched for that paper, to no avail.

C: Time passed.

B: During the Revolutionary War, the Pyncheon of that time adopted the Royal side and became a refugee in London—

WAVES A UNION JACK.

But when the tide turned, he repented just in time to prevent the House of the Seven Gables from confiscation.

WAVES A STARS AND STRIPES.

For the past fifty years the only notable event was the violent death—

C: (Or so it was adjudged—)

B: Of one Pyncheon, Silas, by another. The murderer? A nephew of Silas, Clifford Pyncheon, who was tried and convicted of the crime and lodged in a prison for the criminally insane. This sad affair had chanced about thirty years before we begin our story.

C: So much history. So many names! Patience...for now, let us switch to the present tense.

E: At last!

C: Who is left of the mighty Pyncheon family?

A: Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, nephew of Silas, the murdered man. Jaffrey now lives in the comfort of a grand new mansion elsewhere in Salem. Also, that other nephew, Jaffrey's cousin Clifford—

B: The man imprisoned for that murder thirty years ago...

A: And last but not least, still residing in the House of the Seven Gables, Clifford's spinster sister, Miss Hepzibah Pyncheon.

C: Here she comes, opening a pathetic, dusty little shop on the ground floor of her dwelling: the House of the Seven Gables. The pennies she earns from this humiliating business venture will keep meager food on her table. What are the goods her store offers?

D: Three barrels: one with flour, one with Indian meal, and one with softening apples. A pine box full of soap bars, another with tallow candles (ten to the pound). A pot of rendered lard. A cask of penny nails. And gingerbread...

TWO BOYS APPEAR.

E: You're *never* goin' in? SAM

C: I am. NED HIGGINS

E: But she's a witch. SAM

C: She *looks* like a witch. She don't scare me. NED

E: She has a dreadful scowl on her, Ned. SAM

C: I'm going in anyway. I ain't scared. I've got a penny. NED

E: Watcha gonna buy? SAM

C: Gingerbread. She's got gingerbread shaped like a camel, and an elephant— NED

HE ENTERS THE "SHOP", AND THE BELL RINGS.

LIGHT SHIFT.

A: Across the dusty road Hepzibah sees an older man of dignified demeanor. Anyone could recognize him as a personage of marked influence and authority. It is her cousin, Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon.

His eyes rest on the little shop window.

JAFFREY STARES AT IT THOUGH A PAIR OF GOLD-BOWED SPECTACLES.

At first the sight seems not to please him.

Yet the very next moment he catches a glimpse of Hepzibah, and smiles.

JAFFREY DOFFS HIS HAT AT HEPZIBAH. SHE IGNORES HIM.

HEPZIBAH

There he is! What does he think of my shop? Does it please him?

Take it as you like, Cousin Jaffrey! You have seen my shop window. Think what you like, the Pyncheon House is my own, while I still live!

JAFFREY STARTS OFF, RAISES HIS HAT TO UNCLE VENNER AS HE GOES. UNCLE VENNER ENTERS WITH HIS WAGON OF TOOLS. HE SURVEYS THE SHOP.

VENNER (TO HIMSELF)

So she's done it! She's really gone into trade.

C: Let us welcome another citizen of Salem. He is known to all as Uncle Venner. He collects rags and old bottles. He gathers potato peelings and cabbage leaves to feed his pig. He chops wood for the local widows. And he is considered the Town Philosopher for his amiable opinions of the locals. He has neither kith nor kin, and his origins are obscure. But he is a fixture in the town.

VENNER STICK HIS HEAD INTO THE SHOP.

VENNER

I'm glad to see you at work, Miss Hepzibah.

HEPZIBAH

Thank you, Uncle Venner. I've just begun. Although I'm of an age when I should be giving up.

VENNER

Never say that, Miss Hepzibah, you're a young woman yet. It seems only yesterday when I saw you playing around the house, a small girl. By the way, I just saw your

cousin in the road. He tipped his hat to me. He smiled.

HEPZIBAH

My cousin Jaffrey is thought to have a very pleasant smile.

VENNER

Which is remarkable in a Pyncheon for, begging your pardon, Miss Hepzibah, they were never known as an agreeable lot. Yourself excepted, of course. (HE IS STRUCK BY AN IDEA.) Why, if an old man may be bold to ask, why don't Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, with all his money, give you the means to close the shop—

HEPZIBAH

Don't talk of it, please, Uncle Venner. If I choose to earn my own bread, it is not Judge Pyncheon's fault, nor will he deserve the blame if I, by and by, retire with you to the poor house.

VENNER

Please, I call it The Farm, not the poor house. It's not so bad a place—but you—you never need go there, I foresee. Something better will come to you, I know it in my bones. Meanwhile will you listen to an old friend's advice?

HEPZIBAH

Of course.

VENNER

One: give no credit. Two: never take paper money. Three: always count your change. Four: ring the silver on the four-pound weight. And five: put on a brighter face for your customers. You'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.

SHE SIGHS. A BEAT.

When's he coming home?

A BEAT.

HEPZIBAH

What?

VENNER

When is he being released?

HEPZIBAH

Who?

VENNER

Clifford, Clifford. Your *brother!* And I wonder who freed him from prison? (BEAT)
Ah, you don't want to talk about it. I see. I'd best be off, for here comes a customer.

BOWING HIS WAY OUT, HE RUNS INTO HOLGRAVE.

Mister Holgrave?

HE GOES.

HOLGRAVE

Good morning, Uncle Venner. And to you, Miss Hepzibah.

B: Into the shop comes a cheerful young man not entirely unknown to Hepzibah, for the fellow, a Mr. Holgrave, has rented rooms on the third floor of the seven-gabled house.

HOLGRAVE

So, my dear Miss Pyncheon, your shop is open! Congratulations! Is there any way I may assist you?

“SHE BREAKS INTO AN HYSTERICAL GIGGLE.”

HEPZIBAH

Ah, Mr. Holgrave, I can never go through with this business. The world's too cold and I'm too feeble, too hopeless! I was once a lady—

HOLGRAVE

A lady? No matter, let go of the past! I was not born a gentleman, so you can hardly expect me to sympathize with such old fashioned thinking. The words *lady* and *gentleman* meant something in the past; but in the present and the future they imply, not privilege, but restriction!

HEPZIBAH

You've got such strange new notions, Mr. Holgrave. I'll never understand them. I shall do my best to be a good shop-keeper. But I'm so lacking in merchandise: no root beer, no yeast, no tallow—

HOLGRAVE

In good time. Let me have the pleasure of being your first customer—

HEPZIBAH

There has already been one—

HOLGRAVE

The second, then. Before I go down to my shop, I'll stroll on the seashore. A few of your biscuits, dipped in seawater, will make a fine breakfast.

HEPZIBAH

Let me be a lady a moment longer, please. A Pyncheon must not receive money from a friend, for a morsel of bread.

HOLGRAVE

As you wish, Miss Hepzibah! Today. But I'll return as a customer often.
HE EXITS, NEARLY COLLIDING WITH YOUNG NED.

NED HIGGINS

C: Here's another penny, Miss. I want a gingerbread elephant.

VENNER (FROM OFF)

Always count your change!

LIGHTS SHIFT.

A: Finally the day ends. Hepzibah has blundered through it, committing the most unheard-of errors. She has sold ginger for snuff, pins for needles, needles for pins, misreckoning her change, sometimes to the public detriment, more often to her own. She is about to bolt the shop door when an omnibus draws to a stop under the elm tree. And a young girl alights.

PHOEBE STRUGGLES IN WITH A VALISE.

HEPZIBAH

Who can that be? They must have come to the wrong house. Who—

PHOEBE NEARS.

Is it—can it be little Phoebe? She looks quite like her mother—

PHOEBE
Cousin Hepzibah! It's me, Cousin Phoebe—I've come—

HEPZIBAH
Without a day's notice?

PHOEBE
For a visit—

HEPZIBAH
Without an invitation?

PHOEBE
To stay with you—

HEPZIBAH
No, no, no!

PHOEBE
For a while—

HEPZIBAH
You can only stay for one night. I'm expecting another guest—
BEAT.

PHOEBE
Oh dear. I am supposed to *stay* with you.

HEPZIBAH
Cousin Phoebe, I really can't see my way clear to keep you—

PHOEBE
You see, my father remarried last month, and he decided I should come here for a long visit.

BEAT.

HEPZIBAH

Oh. Oh my.

PHOEBE

Dear cousin, I really think we may suit each other better than you suppose.

HEPZIBAH

You're a nice girl, I see it plainly, but you've arrived at the wrong moment. This is a melancholy place for a young girl, and I cannot so much as give you bread to eat—

PHOEBE

I mean to earn my bread! I wasn't raised like a Pyncheon, I'm a country girl. And I'll take care of the garden. And the house—

HEPZIBAH

Phoebe, Phoebe! The master of this house is coming!

PHOEBE

You mean Judge Pyncheon?

HEPZIBAH

Jaffrey? Never! That man will never cross the threshold while I'm alive! No! I speak of someone else. Phoebe, come look upon *his* face.

SHE BRINGS OUT A FRAMED MINIATURE.

How do you like this face?

PHOEBE STUDIES IT.

PHOEBE

It is very handsome, with a sweetness. It has something of a child's expression, and yet not exactly childish. One feels very kindly toward him.

HEPZIBAH. GIVES A LITTLE MOAN.

What's the matter, Cousin Hepzibah?

HEPZIBAH

Did you never hear of Clifford Pyncheon?

PHOEBE

I thought there were no Pyncheons left, beside yourself and the judge. And yet...the name sounds familiar. Hasn't he been dead a long while?

HEPZIBAH LAUGHS.

HEPZIBAH

Well, well, perhaps he has. But in old houses, dead people are apt to come back again. (BEAT) Very well, my child. You are welcome...for the present.

SHE WANTS TO EMBRACE THE GIRL, BUT CAN'T BRING HERSELF TO DO IT. BUT PHOEBE THROWS HER ARMS ABOUT HEPZIBAH.

THE SHOP BELL RINGS AND HEPZIBAH BREAKS AWAY.

PHOEBE

Don't trouble yourself, Cousin, I'll be shopkeeper today.

LIGHT SHIFT.

B: And before the next day is over, the girl has manufactured fine yeast—

E: Both liquid and in cakes ; brewed excellent ginger beer; and even baked tasty little spice cakes, which prove very popular with the customers.

HEPZIBAH

What a nice little body she is! If only she could be a lady too—but that's impossible! Phoebe's no Pyncheon, she takes after her mother's family. Pity.

C: Pity indeed. To find a born and educated lady we need look no further than the forlorn Hepzibah, with her cherished memory of long descent, and her shadowy claims to princely territory.

HEPZIBAH DROPS SOMETHING.

By the end of the first week, the neighborhood has become aware of the girl's cheerful presence, and Ned Higgins, the devourer of gingerbread, has consumed the rest of the stock: two dromedaries and a locomotive.

PHOEBE

We must renew our stock, Cousin Hepzibah!

HEPZIBAH

We must contrive to get a peck of russet apples, late in the season as it is!

PHOEBE

And some lard, white sugar, and penny nails and—what an enormous heap of copper we've earned. A mountain of copper!

UNCLE VENNER ENTERS.

VENNER

Well done, well done. I foresee that this young lady will never end her days at The Farm—

PHOEBE

The Farm?

HEPZIBAH

He means the poor house, Phoebe. You've met Uncle Venner?

PHOEBE SMILES. VENNER TAKES HER FACE IN HIS HANDS.

VENNER

A pleasure, my dear. (TO HEPZIBAH) I'm an old man, I've been round the town, but I've never seen a person do her work so much like one of God's angels as this child. Her presence is a blessing for you.

HEPZIBAH

You're quite right, Uncle Venner.

B: As the days pass, the old gentlewoman shares with the girl all the secrets of the house, pointing out the scar made by the mayor's sword-hilt on the study door, where the Colonel lay dead. She shows Phoebe the ancient map of the Pyncheon territory Down East. And the antique mirror with its cloudy reflection, rumored to be magic. And she relates the story of a certain Alice Pyncheon—

C: Alice Pyncheon, another ancestor, a young woman of great beauty, whom a mysterious calamity had overtaken—

B: (to C:) Later, later...

HEPZIBAH

She's supposed to haunt the House of the Seven Gables, my dear.

PHOEBE

We have our own ghost?!

HEPZIBAH

She was very accomplished. She played the harpsichord. Over there, that's Alice's harpsichord. Every time a Pyncheon has died in this house, she's been heard to play...a very sad song, I'm told.

PHOEBE

How exciting! A real ghost!

HEPZIBAH

Enough old tales. The world of the living is more interesting. Have you met Mr. Holgrave?

PHOEBE

Your lodger? Not yet.

HEPZIBAH

He's a daguerreotypist—that's a man who makes portraits. Mr. Holgrave is a Modern Man.

PHOEBE SHAKES HER HEAD, PUZZLED.

PHOEBE

What does *that* mean? What's he like?

HEPZIBAH

To be honest, I don't know what to make of him. He seems kind and orderly, but he has the strangest friends. Men with long beards, dressed in linen blouses and other ill-fitting garments: reformers, abolitionists, temperance lecturers. They acknowledge no law, they eat no solid food. Yes! And I honestly believe they live on the smell of other people's cooking. (LEANS IN, WHISPERS:) And I believe he practices Animal Magnetism!

PHOEBE

Goodness! Dear cousin, if the young man is so dangerous, why do you let him stay? He might burn down the house!

HEPZIBAH

I've considered it. But with all his oddities, he's a kind person. He has such a way of taking hold of a person's mind that, without exactly liking him (for I hardly know him), I'd be sorry to see him go.

PHOEBE

You think he's lawless?

HEPZIBAH

Oh...I think the young man has a law of his own....

LIGHTS SHIFT.

B: And now it's time to meet the other residents of the old house. (CALLS:) Cheep, cheep, cheep. (BEAT) I suppose they're resting back in the hen coop. I refer to the rooster Chanticleer and his two wives, specimens of a breed which has flourished in the garden since the place was built. Now they languish, degenerated like many a noble race which has tried to remain too pure.

SOME CLUCKING, OFF.

And the garden! Its dark rich soil had fed itself on the decay of fallen leaves and rank weeds.

PHOEBE ENTERS.

PHOEBE

Goodness! This garden's a disaster. But...someone's propped up that rose bush. And someone has done a bit of pruning.

AN EXPLOSION OF NOISE FROM THE HEN COOP.

What's upsetting those hens?

HOLGRAVE ENTERS WITH A HOE.

HOLGRAVE

The chickens don't approve of me. You they treat like an old acquaintance. Hello.

PHOEBE

Hello. My secret is that I know how to talk to chickens.

HOLGRAVE

But these hens, I believe, are Pyncheon hens. I think they recognize the family tone. For you are a Pyncheon?

PHOEBE

My name is Phoebe Pyncheon.

HOLGRAVE

Holgrave.

PHOEBE

THEY SHAKE HANDS.

I didn't know this garden was under another person's care.

HOLGRAVE

Care? Not really. I dig and hoe and weed, for refreshing myself with nature. It's a pastime. My real occupation, so far as I have any, is with lighter material.

PHOEBE

Lighter...?

HOLGRAVE

I make pictures out of sunshine.

PHOEBE

You do magic?

HOLGRAVE

Not really. I use sunlight as a tool.

PHOEBE

But you do lodge here?

HOLGRAVE

In one of Miss Hepzibah's gloomiest gables. It's so dark that every time I go upstairs it's like a bandage over my eyes. But would you like to see a specimen of my work? (BEAT)
Daguerreotypes

PHOEBE

I don't much like pictures of that sort, they are so hard and stern.

HOLGRAVE

True, most of my subjects look unpleasant, but that's because the originals are. There's a wonderful insight in sunshine, you know. We credit it for merely showing us the surface of things, but sunshine brings out the secrets of character as no painter can.

REMOVES A PICTURE FROM HIS POCKET.

Here's a likeness I've taken over and over. Unpleasant indeed. Yet to most eyes the original wears a positively benign look. What do you think?

PHOEBE

I know this face. It's my Puritan ancestor, his portrait hangs in the parlor. But his dress is modern, how did you---

HOLGRAVE

It *is* a modern face. It's your cousin Jaffrey, the judge. Most people find it a pleasant face, even benevolent. But the sunlight tells a different story: sly, subtle, imperious, cold as ice.

PHOEBE

Yes. He certainly resembles the Colonel's old portrait. Put it away! But Cousin Hepzibah has shown me another picture, a miniature with a family resemblance. If the original is still alive, I defy the sun to make *him* hard and stern.

HOLGRAVE

You judge that face more amiable?

PHOEBE

Oh yes. It is almost too soft and gentle for a man's.

HOLGRAVE

There is nothing wild in the eyes, nothing sinister? You think that man could never have been guilty of a great crime?

PHOEBE

Nonsense. You said yourself that light doesn't lie.
A BEAT.

HOLGRAVE

Touché. By the way, did you know that the word *phoebe* means light?

PHOEBE

Does it?

SHE STARTS TO GO.

HOLGRAVE

Don't go yet. I have a proposition to make you.

PHOEBE

I beg your pardon?

HOLGRAVE

If you agree, may I turn these flowers over to you...
A CLUCK OR TWO.

And those ancient chickens. I only ask a blossom now and then. In exchange, I'll work on the vegetables to enrich Miss Hepzibah's table.

PHOEBE

Fellow-laborers?

HOLGRAVE

We'll be a commune.

PHOEBE

Perhaps we can try it. Mr. Holgrave...have you a Christian name?

HOLGRAVE

Thomas.

PHOEBE

Doubting Thomas?

HOLGRAVE

Touché again. (BEAT It's growing dark. Good night, Miss Phoebe Pyncheon. Any bright day, put one of those roses in your hair, come to my studio in Central Street, and I shall seize the purest ray of sunshine, and make a picture of the flower and its wearer.

PHOEBE

Mr. Holgrave—

HOLGRAVE

And remember not to drink at Maule's Well. Neither drink nor bathe your face in it—

PHOEBE

Maule's Well? Why not?

HOLGRAVE

Because it is water bewitched.
HE GOES.

PHOEBE

Bewitched? Goodness, Mr. Holgrave does know something about magic.

PHOEBE LINGERS FOR A MOMENT IN THE
GLIMMERING LIGHT. SHE SEES A LIGHT GO ON IN HIS GABLE
ABOVE, AND SHE GOES INSIDE.

LIGHT SHIFT.

IN THE DARK, PHOEBE CALLS OUT.

PHOEBE

Cousin Hepzibah? Shall I light a lamp?

HEPZIBAH

Do, if you please, my child.

AS PHOEBE DOES SO:

But put it in the corner. My eyes are weak, and I don't like the lamplight on them.

THERE IS A DIFFERENT MURMER.

A BEAT.

PHOEBE
Cousin, did you say something?

HEPZIBAH
No, child.

A LONG BEAT. PHOEBE IS AWARE OF SOMETHING.

PHOEBE
But.... is there not someone in the room with us?

HEPZIBAH
Phoebe, you've had a long day, and you're over-tired. You need to go to bed.

PHOEBE
But I—
HEPZIBAH APPROACHES PHOEBE AND KISSES HER ON THE
CHEEK.

HEPZIBAH
You need your rest.

PHOEBE
Goodnight, cousin.
SHE GOES.

A FAINT LIGHT COMES UP ON CLIFFORD, IN A CORNER.

LIGHT SHIFT.

E: The next morning, Phoebe finds Hepzibah hustling about.

HEPZIBAH
Stop standing in my way! More wood— (BEAT) No, forgive me, Phoebe. I don't mean to be unkind...oh, my heart is overflowing.

PHOEBE

What's happened? What moves you so?

HEPZIBAH

Hush! Hush, he's coming! Let him see *you* first, for you are young and rosy, and you'll bring him sunshine---he has had little sunshine in his life, poor Clifford.

PHOEBE

Dear Cousin Hepzibah, you frighten me. Is something awful happening?

HEPZIBAH

Hush! Be cheerful! Whatever may happen, be cheerful!

AN ELDERLY PERSONAGE ENTERS , IN AN OLD-FASHIONED DRESSING GOWN. HE IS SLOW AND HALTING, AS IF IT IS "THE SPIRIT OF THE MAN THAT COULD NOT WALK."

HEPZIBAH

Dear Clifford, this is our cousin, Phoebe Pyncheon. Arthur's only child, you know. She has come from the country to stay with us a while.

CLIFFORD

Phoebe? Phoebe Pyncheon? Arthur's child? Ah, I forget. No matter, she is welcome.

B: The guest looks around, as if grappling with the scene in order to bring it to more clearly to his mind. But his mind seems to depart, leaving his wasted, gray figure a material ghost.

E: As Phoebe looks at him, she realizes that this person is the *original* of that beautiful miniature that Hepzibah had shown her.

HEPZIBAH HOVERS OVER CLIFFORD. HE STARES AT HER.

CLIFFORD

Is that you, Hepzibah? How changed you are. (TO PHOEBE) Is she angry with me? Why does she scowl so?

HEPZIBAH IS HURT.

HEPZIBAH

Angry? Angry with you, Clifford? There's nothing but love here, Clifford. You are home!

PHOEBE

Hepzibah loves you dearly, Cousin.

HE SHAKES HIS HEAD, CONFUSED.

CLIFFORD

More! More! I need more!

HEPZIBAH

More what, Clifford? More jam?

CLIFFORD

More beauty! More light! I must have only sweet and lovely things about me!

C: His vision seems suddenly to clear and take note of his surroundings.

It is not so much that his expression grows more intellectual, but a certain fine temperament is now betrayed....

Of which it is the function to deal with all beautiful and enjoyable things.

B: In a character where love of beauty was the chief attribute, it would bestow on the possessor an exquisite taste. Beauty would be his life; all his aspirations would tend toward it.

C: Such a man should have nothing to do with sorrow, strife, martyrdom, *ugliness*.

B: Not to speak it harshly, Clifford's nature is to be an Aesthete, a Sybarite. One can read it in his appreciative notice of a vase of flowers, in the way his eyes are attracted to the play of sunbeams. And it is betrayed in the unconscious smile with which he regards Phoebe, whose essence is both flower and sunbeam.

C: Alas, his eyes avoid his sister Hepzibah, so yellow and wrinkled.

B: But does he not owe her affection for so much she had silently and lovingly given?

C: He owes her nothing! A nature like Clifford's can contract no debts of that kind.

CLIFFORD

Perhaps this is only a dream. How pleasant, how delightful. An open window, the play of sunshine on that young girl's face. How fragrant the flowers. Will it last? But it must be a dream, a dream!

PHOEBE

Here's a new kind of rose, Cousin, I found it this morning in the garden.

CLIFFORD

Let me see---let me hold it! I used to prize this flower. Very long ago, I suppose. Or was it yesterday?

HE RISES, LOOKS AROUND, SEES THE PORTRAIT OF COLONEL PYNCHON, AND BECOMES FRIGHTENED.

Hepzibah, why do you keep that odious picture? Ha! I see, it is precisely *your* taste! I've told you a thousand times that it's the evil genius of this house! You must take it down immediately!

HEPZIBAH

You know I cannot—

CLIFFORD

It must not stare me in the face!

HEPZIBAH

I shall cover it, my dear.

HE LOOKS AROUND.

CLIFFORD

Why must we live in this miserable house at all? Why not go to the South of France? To Italy! Paris, Venice, Naples, Rome?

TO PHOEBE:

Hepzibah will say we haven't the means. A droll idea, that!

THE SHOP BELL RINGS. IT RINGS AGAIN.

CLIFFORD

Good heavens! What a noise? Why do you allow it? I have never heard such an ugly clamor!

HEPZIBAH

Phoebe, pray run, see who it is! Clifford, it's nothing but the shop bell.

PHOEBE GOES.

CLIFFORD

Shop bell?

HEPZIBAH

You must know, we are very poor. There was no other choice for me. Either I must accept money from a dirty hand that I would push aside, or earn our living honestly, by my own hand. Have I brought disgrace upon our name, dear Clifford? Our great grandfather did the same when there was far less need. Are you ashamed of me?

CLIFFORD

Ashamed? You use that word to *me*, Hepzibah? What further shame can befall me?

HE WEEPS. THEN SUDDENLY LOOKS UP AND SMILES.

Are we so very poor, Hepzibah?

B: And then, without even waiting for an answer, he falls fast asleep.

LIGHT SHIFT.

THE SHOP.

NED HIGGINS HAS A MEMORIZED LIST.

PHOEBE

Hello, Ned Higgins. What does your mother want?

NED

C: Three eggs, a half-a-pound of raisins, and a....a....

PHOEBE

(ON TO HIM) Well?

NED

One of *them*...

PHOEBE

Yes?

NED

Whales.

PHOEBE STARTS PUTTING THE EGGS IN HIS BASKET, WEIGHS THE RAISINS, ETC.

And...

PHOEBE

A whale! And what else?

NED

And Mother wants to know how Old Maid Pyncheon's brother does. Folks say he's home.

PHOEBE

Her brother? Oh, her *brother!* Cousin Clifford. Where has he been?

NED HANDS HER A COIN, GRABS HIS BASKET AND RUNS.
HE PASSES JAFFREY PYNCHION ON HIS WAY IN.
JAFFREY LOOKS AROUND, SEES PHOEBE, A STRANGER TO HIM.
HE SMILES UNCTIOUSLY.

JAFFREY

Ah, I see. I was unaware that Miss Hepzibah had commenced business under such favorable auspices. Are you her assistant?

PHOEBE

I certainly am. I am her cousin.

JAFFREY

Her cousin? And from the country? (HE BOWS) That makes you my kinsman as well. Let me see...Mary? Dolly? Polly? Phoebe? Yes, Phoebe, that's the name. You're the child of my dear cousin Arthur? (SHE NODS) Then we must be better acquainted. You're quite enchanting, my dear. Surely you've heard of me? I'm Judge Pyncheon—
HE LEANS FORWARD TO KISS HER, BUT SHE INSTINCTIVELY
PULLS BACK, AND HE IS LEFT TO KISS THE EMPTY AIR.
HE STRAIGHTENS UP, GLOWERING AT HER. THEN, IN AN INSTANT
HE SMILES BENEVOLENTLY AGAIN.

I like you, Cousin Phoebe. Yes indeed, you know how to take care of yourself. A young woman, especially a pretty one, cannot be too chary of her lips. I applaud you!

PHOEBE

Indeed, sir, I did not mean to be unkind. I'm pleased to meet you, sir; and I must say, you have the true Pyncheon look, so very much like your ancestor---

JAFFREY

Colonel Pyncheon? Why *thank* you, my dear.

THAT'S NOT EXACTLY WHAT SHE MEANT.

What's the matter, young woman, has something frightened you?

PHOEBE

Frightened?, Why nothing, sir, nothing in the world. Do you wish to speak to Cousin Hepzibah?

JAFFREY

Stay a moment. You seem a bit nervous. Or shy, perhaps. Or perhaps the air of Salem doesn't agree with your fresh country habits? Or has anything happened to disturb you? A recent arrival? Ah, I thought so. Such a guest might well startle an innocent girl—

PHOEBE

You puzzle me, sir. We have no frightening guests. Only the gentle, childlike man who is Hepzibah's brother.

JAFFREY

I rejoice to hear so favorable an account of my beloved cousin Clifford. When we were children, I used to have great affection for him, and still feel a tender concern. Heaven grant he repent of his past sins!

PHOEBE

None, I think, can have fewer to repent of.

JAFFREY

Then you know nothing of his past history? I see. That's a Christian rule we all must follow...and hope for the best. (BEAT) But is Clifford in the parlor? I'll step in and have a look—

PHOEBE

No, wait, I'll call Cousin Hepzibah. Her brother is asleep, and she wouldn't want him disturbed. Pray, let me give her notice—

JAFFREY

No, no, stay you here, Miss Phoebe. No need for my country cousin to announce me! I am at home here, you must remember, and you are the stranger.

HE GRABS HER ARM.

Out of my way, I *will* step in and see for myself how Clifford is---

AS THEY STRUGGLE, HEPZIBAH APPEARS, LOOKING FIERCE.

JAFFREY

Ha! Here's Hepzibah herself! Hepzibah, my dearest cousin, I am rejoiced that he is home. At last you have something to live for. Yes, and I'm here to offer any assistance to make Clifford comfortable. Clifford belongs to us all. Shall we go in?

HEPZIBAH

No! He cannot see visitors!

JAFFREY

Visitors? How can you call me so? Ah, but here's a better idea: why don't you both come to *my* home, and let me play the host? I will lavish all luxuries on him—

HEPZIBAH

Clifford has a home here!

JAFFREY

Don't refuse my good offices---

SHE SHAKES HER HEAD.

Woman! You have no resources. Clifford is on the brink of as black a ruin as ever befell him yet! But why do I stand here and talk—out of my way!

HEPZIBAH, LOOKING LIKE A DRAGON, SPREADS HER ARMS WIDE.

AT THAT MOMENT WE HEAR CLIFFORD'S VOICE.

CLIFFORD (OFF)

Go down on your knees to him, kiss his feet. Beg him not to enter! Oh let him have mercy on me, mercy!

JAFFREY THRUSTS FORWARD AGGRESSIVELY, THEN A CHANGE COMES OVER HIM. HE OPENS HIS ARMS BENEVOLENTLY.

JAFFREY

You do me great wrong, Cousin. But I forgive you. I shall watch over his welfare as if he were my own brother...from afar.

HE BOWS TO THE WOMEN, AND EXITS, SMILING.
THEY STARE AFTER HIM IN SILENCE.

HEPZIBAH

Watch over his welfare indeed! My brother Clifford was ever a tender soul, fragile. And Jaffrey never missed an opportunity to tease and torture him!

LIGHT SHIFT.

C: Truly there is something generous and noble in poor old Hepzibah. She asks nothing more of Providence than that she be allowed to devote herself to this brother, the lost one, to whom she gives not only the daily bread to sustain his physical existence, but also the love to keep him morally alive.

She tries reading to him, the favored books of his youth, but her harsh voice displeases him. She tries to play soothing music on Alice Pyncheon's old harpsichord, but her stiff fingers strike jarring notes.

But the hardest stroke of fate for poor Hepzibah is Clifford's distaste for her scowling appearance. For remember, he is an *aesthete*, and a lover of beauty. She therefore turns his care over to Phoebe, whose sunny temper and blooming smile calm and cheer him.

For Clifford Pyncheon, naturally endowed with the liveliest sensibility to feminine influence, has never quaffed the cup of passionate love. Never.

PHOEBE (FROM OFF)

Come into the garden, Cousin Clifford. The sun's shining.

C: Phoebe he rewards with a love as chaste as if she is his daughter.

DURING THE ABOVE NARRATIVE, THE GARDEN APPEARS.

PHOEBE (OFF)

THE ROOSTER, CHANTICLEER, SQUAWKS.

Oh, Chanticleer, do get out of my way!

LIGHT SHIFT.

SOUNDS OF CLUCKING HENS. PHOEBE IS CUTTING FLOWERS,
CLIFFORD RESTS IN A CHAIR. HOLGRAVE IS HOEING.

CLIFFORD

Take my hand, Phoebe, pinch me. Or give me a rose so I may press against its thorn to prove I'm not dreaming...for this is Eden.

PHOEBE

No, Cousin, it is Salem. And here's a rose, but I've taken the thorn away.

HE SMELLS IT RAPTUROUSLY.

And look at Mr. Holgrave's beans! The scarlet flowers attract the humming birds—

CLIFFORD

Mr. Holgrave's beans? Are they his?

PHOEBE

He found a packet of old seeds in the cellar. You ate a few last night.

UNCLE VENNER ENTERS.

VENNER

Ah, Mr. Clifford Pyncheon! Enjoying the Sabbath afternoon? Miss Phoebe, Mr. Holgrave.

PHOEBE

Uncle Venner, come in!

CLIFFORD

Welcome, my patched philosopher!!

VENNER

I do enjoy these quiet little gatherings on a Sabbath afternoon. I expect it to be like this after I retire to my farm.

CLIFFORD

Uncle Venner is always talking about his "farm". But I have a better scheme for him, by and by. (TO VENNER) You'll see.

VENNER

Scheme for me all you like, Mr. Clifford Pyncheon, but I'll not give up this one scheme of my own, even if I can never make it happen.

PHOEBE

Make what happen?

VENNER

My independence! My freedom! (HOLGRAVE LOOKS UP.) Freedom from the entrapment of possessions.

HOLGRAVE

Why, Uncle Venner—

VENNER

Men make a wonderful mistake in trying to heap up property, young man. If I had been born rich, I'd think that Providence wasn't obliged to care for me; and at all events the city wouldn't be. I think that infinity is big enough for us all, and eternity long enough.

HOLGRAVE

Why, so they are, Uncle Venner.

CLIFFORD

Is not old Venner a philosopher?

PHOEBE

A deserving one, but I do believe one should have a house and a modest garden-spot of one's own.

HOLGRAVE

Should one? I think Uncle Venner has Mister Emerson's principles at heart—

HEPZIBAH (FROM OFF)

Phoebe, bring out some fresh currants.

PHOEBE TAKES FROM HER A BOWL OF CURRANTS.

B: And now, while the yellow richness of the declining sunshine falls in the garden, they nibble the sweet currants and converse. Holgrave takes pains to engage Clifford—

PHOEBE

(ASIDE) How pleasant that young man can be—

E: Phoebe says to herself.

C: And Holgrave tries not to stare at her for too long.

HOLGRAVE

(ASIDE) Phoebe, Phoebe, you are prettier than any rose....

B: But, as the sunlight leaves the peaks of the Seven Gables, the excitement fades from Clifford's eyes.

CLIFFORD GAZES MORNFULLY ABOUT.

CLIFFORD

I want my happiness! I have waited so long for it. It is late, it is late! I want my happiness.

PHOEBE SIGS TO COMFORT HIM..

LIGHT SHIFT.

C: Upstairs in the House of the Seven Gables, there is a large arched window, where Clifford often sits with Phoebe, gazing into the street. Things familiar to the youngest child seem new to him.

A: An omnibus, stopping to drop a passenger, or pick up another: thus typifying that vast rolling vehicle, the world. Twice or thrice a day, a water cart passes the Pyncheon House, leaving a broad wake of moistened earth instead of the usual dust. It seems to Clifford like a summer shower. He is always surprised to see it, but he forgets what it is between appearances.

It is the same with the railroad. Clifford hears the obstreperous howl of this steam-devil, and by leaning out the window, can catch a glimpse of the train flashing by. Its terrible energy seems new at every recurrence. Its noise horrifies him.

C: Indeed, Clifford is the most inveterate conservative. He looks for his own youth, complaining that there are no longer stage coaches, nor wagons drawn by plow horses.

A: One day a political parade marches down Pyncheon Street, with banners, fifes and drums.

D: The next day an organ-grinder appears. He turns a crank, and lo—atop the organ a little wooden shoemaker appears, and a blacksmith with a hammer, a soldier with a sword. Music pours out of the organ!

E: And he has a monkey, with a thick curling tail, who turns his wrinkled visage up to the window where Phoebe and Clifford sit. He doffs his little bonnet and bows to them.

D: Now Clifford, who has taken delight at the music, is suddenly shocked by the monkey's ugliness, and bursts into tears. Clifford shudders, climbs up over the window sill, and onto the balcony—

PHOEBE

Cousin Clifford, be careful, don't—you might fall!

HEPZIBAH

Clifford, are you crazy?

CLIFFORD

I hardly know, Hepzibah. Don't worry, it is over now. But had I taken that plunge and survived it, methinks it would have made me another man.

LIGHT SHIFT.

C: And so he dreams on, changing from a boy into an old and broken man, and then swings back again, to linger near to his childhood...

CLIFFORD (OFF)

Hepzibah! Hepzibah!

HEPZIBAH

What is it?

CLIFFORD (OFF)

I want—I want to blow soap bubbles!

HEPZIBAH

What next! (TO PHOEBE) We used to do that when we were children.

C: Behold him, in the arched window, scattering airy spheres abroad into the street!
Brilliant fantasies...

WE SEE BUBBLES FLOATING FROM THE WINDOW, BUT NOT
CLIFFORD.

At length an elderly gentleman of great dignity passes below as a large bubble sails majestically and bursts on his nose.

JAFFREY

Aha, Cousin Clifford! What, still blowing soap bubbles?! Time has come for me to pop them, cousin. Pop, pop, pop.

HE LAUGHS HARSHLY.

THE BUBBLES CEASE ABRUPTLY.

LIGHTS BLACK OUT.