

PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

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

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Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm

Story by
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Adapted for the Stage by
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Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm was first presented by The Children's Theatre Company for the 1993-1994 season.

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CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

Jane Sawyer
Miranda Sawyer
Aurelia Sawyer Randall (Doubles as Miss Dearborn)
Jeremiah Cobb
Rebecca Randall
Lucy Cobb, Wife of Jeremiah (Played by Aurelia)
Emma Jane Perkins
Elijah and Elisha Simpson, Twins
Seesaw Simpson
Clara Belle Simpson
Millie Smellia
Miss Dearborn, School Teacher (Played by Aurelia)
Alan Ladd, Philanthropist

CAST BREAKDOWN:

4 women: Miranda, Jane, Aurelia (Miss Dearborn), Lucy Cobb.
5 girls: Rebecca, Emma Jane Perkins, Clara Belle Simpson, Elisha Simpson, Millie Smellia.
2 men: Jeremiah Cobb and Alan Ladd
2 boys: John Randall and Elijah Simpson

TIME AND PLACE: Maine, around the turn of the century.

SETTING : Fluid, open setting indicating as needed:

“Sunnybrook” farm, with farmhouse indicated possibly in backdrop, and later,
Aurelia’s sickbed at the farm.

Jeremiah Cobb’s stagecoach

The Brick House in Riverboro, garden with well and pump

The Secret Meadow

Jeremiah and Lucy Cobb’s kitchen

Alan Ladd’s aunt’s porch

Prologue

Lights up on the Randall Farm, up center. A mass of dusty children wrestling, scissors-paper-rock, piling up into a human pyramid, tumbling down again. A game of tage starts: "Got you last!" "Did not!" "No fair!" "Is too!" "Is not." "Not it!" "Not it!" "I'm not playing that ol' game." A clear voice, REBECCA, starts a raucous rendition of a lullaby. The others followed by
MIRANDA, who looks back at the children, muttering disapproval.

REBECCA (Sings) Rockabye baby on the tree tops! (The children crowd together and the smallest child is tossed aloft.)

RANDALL CHILDREN ALL When the wind blows the cradle will rock!
When the bough breaks the cradle will fall
And down will come cradle, baby and all.

MIRANDA That's supposed to be a lullaby! No sooner are we out of sight, then they fall back to savagery --

RANDALL CHILDREN ALL Rockabye baby on the tree tops. When the wind blows cradle will rock. When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall and down will come -- (Individual voices sing out:) m-nah! Rebeck-ah! John-Jo! Jenny! Marky! Fanny! (ALL:) Baby and all!

THE RANDALL CHILDREN fall in a heap. Above the scrambling mass, a pink parasol is pushed aloft and opened up for a moment. Lights dim a little on the farm, up bright on JANE & MIRANDA, their packed bags at their feet.

JANE Hello. ... Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm. ... That's what she called herself, our niece Rebecca, and this is her story.

MIRANDA There's no such place as Sunnybrook Farm.

JANE Well, no, there isn't. There was just an old farm in the state of Maine where Rebecca and her brothers and sisters struggled along, and amused themselves as they could, their father --

MIRANDA -- Lorenzo di Medici Randall, the handsome fool, the wastrel --

JANE -- being dead. (*Aside to MIRANDA*) We won't speak ill of the dead, Miranda? (*AURELIA appears upstage, HANNAH goes and puts her arm around her mother. They watch the children play.*) (*To the audience*) And their mother, our sister, Aurelia, (*Indicates*) in poor health. Excuse us, we haven't made proper introductions. I'm Jane Sawyer. My sister --

MIRANDA They know who I am.

JANE No, I don't think they do. They're not from these parts. (*To audience*) My sister, Miranda Sawyer.

MIRANDA I am a respectable woman. That's all they need to know.

JANE Before that fateful year we didn't really know Rebecca from the others. They did seem like a tangle of dear little puppies.

MIRANDA Puppies, indeed. Dusty and dirty.

JANE: We decided to try and help and so offered to take some of them --

MIRANDA -- one of the children. One child.

JANE -- for a season away with us, to give poor Aurelia a breathing spell --

MIRANDA -- and the child an opportunity to rise -- however briefly- above the dirt. We'll take the oldest girl. That one there. (*Indicated HANNAH*) She seems decent.

JANE She doesn't want to come. She's engaged to be married.

MIRANDA She's not old enough!

JANE She's seventeen and it's none of our business. We'll take Rebecca. It's all decided.

MIRANDA Which one's Rebecca?

JANE You'll see.

MIRANDA Spose I will.

JEREMIAH COBB enters down left, doffs his cap, knocks the dust off.

JEREMIAH COBB You ladies wanting the stage to Riverboro?

JANE Yes, Mr. Cobb. You know we are.

MIRANDA We're going home. And never come back to this place again!

JEREMIAH COBB *(Aside to JANE)* Wonderful visit?

JANE *(Aside to COBB)* Ayeh, t'was! *(They exit.)*

Scene 1: Rebecca Sets Forth

REBECCA in a pool of light, dressed for travel in an odd little hat trimmed with ribbon and porcupine quills, carrying a bunch of lilacs. She opens her parasol, then smooths and furls it tightly.

REBECCA The stage to Riverboro, if you please? (*She sets her parasol down, holds it between her knees, tucks the lilacs under her arm, then opens and peeks into a bead purse. Satisfied, she shuts it and pats it and rearranges herself as before, then strikes a pose and recites to herself:*)

Footloose and free,
A traveler I would be.
Though but a little girl
I aim to see the world.

AURELIA enters, pounces on REBECCA. Followed by JEREMIAH COBB, carrying REBECCA'S trunk.

AURELIA There you are, Rebecca! Who are you talking to now?

REBECCA No one but myself. A new poem. Want to hear it? Footloose and free --

AURELIA Hush, now! (*To COBB*) Here's my Rebecca. You'll keep a special eye on her, please, Mr. Cobb? If she can wriggle out and find other people -- (*They exit, AURELIA leading REBECCA by the elbow. REBECCA pulls free and takes her mother's hand. They enter as lights come up on COBB'S coach. Cob hoists the trunks up onto the back, then helps REBECCA into the coach.*) -- or get people in to keep her company, you can be sure she'll do it. Goodbye, Rebecca. Try not to get into any mischief and sit quiet. (*Shuts the coach door.*) She's in a high state of

excitement, Mr. Cobb. We've been up since five this morning.

REBECCA *(Opens the coach door)* It isn't as if I hadn't travelled before.

AURELIA *(To COBB, tongue in cheek)* She's been to Wareham and stayed overnight. *(tucks REBECCA back in and shuts the door.)* Now, this trip will not be easy, Rebecca, but it's going to be the making of you. You're going to see and learn and -- *(COBB cracks his whip. The stage moves out.)* -- goodbye! *(Exits)*

REBECCA I know and all I want to say is that it is a journey when -- -- it is a journey when you carry your nightgown! *(COBB stifles laughter.)*

Musical Interlude: they travel awhile. REBECCA looks out on side, then the other, waves to COBB, but he's faced forward and can't see her. She points her parasol at him and pokes him.

REBECCA *(Shouts)* I want to speak! PLEASE! LET ME SPEAK!

JEREMIAH COBB Whoa! *(Stops the horses)*

REBECCA Well, listen, does it cost any more to ride up there with you? It's so slippery and shiny and lonely down here, and I can't see enough out the window.

JEREMIAH COBB Well, you can come up if you want to. *(He unlatches the door, she pops out and opens her purse.)*

REBECCA How much?

JEREMIAH COBB No, there ain't no extra charge.

REBECCA That's good because I've only got twenty cents, Mr. Cobb. And that's got to go for paper and pencils for three whole months. *(He boosts her up. Raises the reins and they're off again, REBECCA now in high spirits, here head on the swivel.)* Oh, this is better! This is travelling! I'm a real passenger now -- not a

little hen down there in the coop. I hope we have a long, long ways to go?

JEREMIAH COBB Well, we've only just started on it. (*Tongue in cheek*) It's more'n an hour and a half away. 'Most two hours!

REBECCA Only two hours?

JEREMIAH COBB Say, what's that on your hat? Dog whiskers?

REBECCA Oh, dear, no. It's porcupine quills. Aren't they handsome?

JEREMIAH COBB Umm... they're unusual.

REBECCA Yes, exactly!

They ride on, REBECCA, so excited she gets to her feet and stands on the seat, swaying and jerking with the ride.

JEREMIAH COBB Whoa! I'd rest easier if you kept your seat, Miss.

REBECCA (*Sits straight down*) Yes, sir.

JEREMIAH COBB Say, the sun's so hot. Why don't you put up your umbrella?

REBECCA Umbrella? (*Brandishes parasol*) This is not an umbrella. I'd never expose it to rain.

JEREMIAH COBB Oh, that's right. You call that a "parasol", don't you?

REBECCA That's right.

JEREMIAH COBB A sunshade?

REBECCA Why, yes, but pink fades terribly in the bright sun. It's the dearest thing in life to me, but it's a dreadful care.

JEREMIAH COBB "A dreadful care." You don't say? (*Cracks whips. Journey resumes.*)

REBECCA Oh, I do! See the white tip and handle? That's ivory! But, look, the handle is chewed up because Fanny chomped on in church when I wasn't looking. I've never felt the same to Fanny since.

JEREMIAH COBB

Fanny your sister?

REBECCA

She's one of them. Of the many.

JEREMIAH COBB

Well, how many are there?

REBECCA

Well, first, my older sister, Hannah Lucy Randall after "Hannah at the Window Binding Shoes." Then me, Rebecca Rowena Randall out of IVANHOE. Then John Anderson Jo Randall, after "John Anderson my jo, John" -- the poem by Robert Burns -- you know it? (*COBB shrugs*) Then there's Marquis Randall after the Marquis de La Fayette --- but we just call him Mark. Then Jenny Lind Randall named for a singer, Fanny Ellser Randall named for a dancer, but unfortunately Fanny's clumsy on her feet and Jenny can't carry a tune, and last, the baby --

JEREMIAH COBB

That's seven. Seven children? (*Whistles amazement*)

REBECCA

Yes, exactly. And the baby's named Miranda Randall named after Aunt Miranda. But it didn't do any good. Aunt Miranda doesn't like her any better for the name. Or any of us.

JEREMIAH COBB

You wouldn't be referring to Miss Miranda Sawyer of Riverboro?

REBECCA

Yes, sir.

JEREMIAH COBB

Oooh?

REBECCA

Oh, dear, she's a friend of yours and I haven't spoken of her nicely.

JEREMIAH COBB

Well, she's a neighbor. She's up in the brick house. We're a couple doors down.

REBECCA ... The houses in town are all squished together, aren't they? Our farm is away off from everywhere. ... I call it Sunnybrook Farm, if you don't mind.

JEREMIAH COBB Don't make no difference to me.

REBECCA Well, no one calls it that but me.

JEREMIAH COBB I s'pose there's a brook somewhere in it?

REBECCA There's a brook, but not a common brook. It has young trees and baby bushes on each side of it, and it's a shallow, chattering little brook, with a white sandy bottom and lots of little shiny pebbles and it sparkles the livelong day. ... I might miss my farm ... if I didn't so like to travel. Do you know this sunshade was given to me by a painter from Paris?

JEREMIAH COBB From Paris!

REBECCA Yes, exactly!

JEREMIAH COBB You been there?

REBECCA No sir. Not yet.

JEREMIAH COBB I'm sorry to disappoint you, but Paris ain't so great. It's the dullest place in the state of Maine.

REBECCA Why, Paris isn't in Maine at all. Paris is the capital of France, and you have to go to it on a boat, Mr Cobb! Why, if this stagecoach was a boat, we could go there instead.

JEREMIAH COBB Well, I guess we could. But they're expecting us in Riverboro, I believe. My wife, Lucy, is expecting me. And I believe you're expected at the brick house?

REBECCA Yes. By Aunt Jane ... and Aunt Miranda ...

JEREMIAH COBB Well, this is the last long hill and when we get to the top we'll see the chimbleys of Riverboro ...

REBECCA Maybe I'll just go back to the coach, now. Back into the chicken coop. *(Tries to climb back, teeters precariously.)*

JEREMIAH COBB Whoa. *(Reins the horses, grabs REBECCA.)* Say, you're not afraid?

REBECCA I didn't think I was going to be.

JEREMIAH COBB You want me to turn around and take you back home to your farm?

REBECCA No. Oh, no. I might be frightened -- *(Seats herself again beside COBB.)* -- but I'd be ashamed to run. Going to Aunt Miranda's is like going down cellar in the dark. Might be grizzly bears down there, ogres and giants ... but just as well might be elves and fairies and enchanted frogs?

JEREMIAH COBB Why not! Say, you're not the usual little girl, are you?

REBECCA Well ... er, I s'pose ... er, do you mean I'm peculiar?

JEREMIAH COBB Oh, no. No. Just ... you've got some magic to you.

REBECCA Do I?

JEREMIAH COBB Listen, Rebecca Rowena Randall, here's Riverboro coming up. What do you say we make the grand entry in the biggest style we can. I'll take the whip out and put on some speed; you grip your lilacs --

REBECCA -- and open up my sunshade. Just for a moment! *(Does so.)*

JEREMIAH COBB That's it! And we'll just make the natives stare!

REBECCA I'm going to get to my feet. *(She grabs his hand.)*

JEREMIAH COBB All right, hang on. Giddap!

They set off at a gallop. They come into Riverboro. Townspeople: "Who's that?" "The Queen of Sheba?" "New girl!" "Stand back or he'll mow you down!" "Cobb, have you lost your mind?"

MIRANDA Jeremiah Cobb, what is the meaning of this?

JANE Yoo-hoo! Rebecca!

REBECCA Hello, Aunt Jane! (*Gets down from the coach.*)

MIRANDA All we need is extra excitement for a child who's sure to be excited already.

JANE Here you are, Rebecca! (*Kisses her*)

REBECCA Hello, Aunt Miranda.

MIRANDA Mr. Cobb, what's she doing riding out in the open air, getting the dust in her clothes?

JEREMIAH COBB I don't know. Can't say what come over me, Miranda.

Scene Two: A Difference in Hearts

Lights up on the Sawyer's House in Riverboro. JANE leads REBECCA in, folloed by COBB whose carries the trunk.

REBECCA (*To JANE, indicating MIRANDA*) I told her hello but she didn't say hello back. Didn't she hear me?

MIRANDA You'll go directly up to your room, little girl, and change your dusty clothes. (*REBECCA takes a step*) Not up the front stairs. We're saving wear on the carpet. And the rest of the brick house rules, while I'm at it: Hang the dipper back where it belongs after you fetch water, never sit in that chair, the cat likes it; and pull the screen door closed so flies don't

get in. That's all I can think of at the moment. Go on up, little girl.

JANE (To *MIRANDA*, gently correcting her.) Rebecca. Her name's Rebecca.

MIRANDA Rebecca, are you? Stand still and let me get a fix on you. (*REBECCA proffers the bouquet*) Lilacs? We don't need lilacs in the house. Garden's full of 'em.

JEREMIAH COBB Er, I guess I'll be on my way.

REBECCA Wait. Mr. Cobb -- (*offers lilacs*) Or is your garden full of them, too?

JEREMIAH COBB Why, no. (*To MIRANDA*) Not of these exact type. I'm much obliged, Rebecca. Say, we've had a great trip, and made friends, haven't we? You'll come see me across the street?

REBECCA Yes, I will!

JEREMIAH COBB You won't forget?

REBECCA Never! You won't forget you've invited me?

JEREMIAH COBB Never! Cross my heart!

REBECCA Why, yes! Exactly! (*crosses heart.*)

JEREMIAH COBB (*to JANE, saying goodbye.*) Miss Sawyer.

JANE Mr. Cobb.

COBB exits. REBECCA turns and bravely faces MIRANDA, but after a moment, quails.

REBECCA (*Taking a step backwards*) ... Up to my room.

MIRANDA Wait a minute. Something's funny with your dress. What is it?

REBECCA ... It's my best dress.

MIRANDA Your best dress, and you wore it on the stagecoach?

REBECCA Well, my only dress. (*MIRANDA snorts derisively*)

JANE That's not her fault, Miranda.

REBECCA I brought an apron, too.

JANE We can stitch up some new ones for you, Rebecca. Aprons and dresses for home and school.

REBECCA School! Am I going to school?!? Oh, joy -- can it be true?

MIRANDA Why? Haven't you never been before?

REBECCA Well, I can read and write, of course, but --

MIRANDA Never, ever been to school?!?

REBECCA Well, you see, they don't let you in unless you've got shoes. But now I do, see? Spandy new, though they are a mite pinchy. So I can go to school awhile, if you let me. I've got to make the shoes last, though, 'cause Mark'll be wearing 'em after me.

MIRANDA Mark?

REBECCA My brother. Marquis de Lafayette Randall.

MIRANDA *(overlapping sarcastically)* -arquis de Lafayette Randall.

JANE Come along, Rebecca. I'll show you your room.

MIRANDA We ain't through, yet. I know what it is about your dress. Ain't it on frontside back?

REBECCA Well, I suppose it is, but I'm used to it. We always button up front in my house. When you have seven children, you can't keep buttoning and unbuttoning 'em all the time -- they have to be able to do it themselves. Get to the buttons, see? For convenience.

MIRANDA Convenience? Wild animals have it convenient. wild animals never bother with any inconvenience ever at all.

REBECCA I suppose you mean it's against the rules.

MIRANDA It is. We won't have you stared at in Riverboro. What's that on your head?

REBECCA My hat.

MIRANDA I know it's a hat. What's that on it? A scrub brush?

REBECCA Porcupine quills! Isn't that unusual?

MIRANDA Yes, it is, if you mean it'll make people stare!

REBECCA But it's my best hat. Er... my only hat.

JANE Shall I hang it for you? *(Takes hat from REBECCA)*

REBECCA *(Summoning courage, to MIRANDA)* It's a good hat. I like my hat.

MIRANDA You like it? Do you think we're in this world to please ourselves?

REBECCA Yes, I do! Partly ...

MIRANDA Do you always talk back like this to your elders?

REBECCA I answer questions when asked, Aunt Miranda. Ma'am.

JANE We hang our hats here, Rebecca. *(puts hat on peg.)* Come, we'll go up to your room, now. Up the back stairs and save Miranda's carpet.

JANE hurriedly leads REBECCA off. Once they're gone, MIRANDA sits down, and clutching her brow, shuts her eyes. JANE and REBECCA enter REBECCA's room. A small bed, a dresser.

JANE Here you are. This is your room, Rebecca. I'll leave you alone now to get comfortable.

JANE exits. REBECCA looks around. After a moment she runs and jumps in the bed and pulls the cover over her head. JANE reappears below. MIRANDA doesn't move. JANE sits down in a nearby chair, takes out her sewing basket, brings out a newly finished girl's dress in brown gingham, and checks it over for threads. MIRANDA opens her eyes. JANE meets her gaze.

JANE Spirited child.

MIRANDA And what does that mean? She's noisier than others? Chatters more? Demands attention? self-important, you mean, and conceited.

JANE Spirited. And sensitive, I think. In need of understanding and kindness.

MIRANDA What's she doing now? She cannot be changing out of her dusty clothes. She's got nothing to change to. We'd better stop her 'fore she comes running down here naked. (*gets up*).

JANE I think this'll fit her. (*unfurls brown gingham dress*)

MIRANDA Oh, that's what you've been up to. I'd expect her own mother to send her here decent. But not you. You didn't expect anything. Not soft-headed Jane.

JANE Kindness and understanding, Miranda. Why don't you take it up to her?

MIRANDA takes the dress and exits. In a pool of light beyond the house, JEREMIAH and LUCY COBB appear, out for an evening stroll. MIRANDA bursts in on REBECCA.

MIRANDA Rebecca! What are you laying on your good bed in the daytime for, messing up the feathers, and dirtying the pillars with your dusty boots?

REBECCA I'm sorry, Aunt Miranda! (*jumps out of bed and stands at attention*)

MIRANDA Well?! ?

REBECCA Something came over me; I don't know what.

MIRANDA Well! (*Makes an effort to control herself*) Well. Well, if it comes over you very often, we'll have to find out what it is. Here, put this on -- (*hands her the dress*) -- spread your bed smooth and come downstairs. (*exits*)

Lights down on REBECCA as she scrambles to smooth the bed. JEREMIAH and LUCY COBB pause in their stroll.

LUCY COBB

How old a child?

JEREMIAH COBB

'Bout ten. But land! She might be a hundred to hear her talk! She kept me jumping trying to answer her. Land, mother! I wish you could hear her talk. She has a little pink sunshade umbrella. "It's the dearest thing in life to me," says she, "but it's a dreadful care."

LUCY COBB

Poor little soul! Can't imagine how such a child would get on in the brick house with Miranda Sawyer.

They exit.

Later that night in REBECCA's room. REBECCA in her nightgown, lights a candle, takes up pencil and tablet.

REBECCA

(composes) Are we on earth ourselves to please,
And seek the beauty, and climb the trees?
Or did God make us more like mules?
Pull the plough, obey the rules?
... Well, but that's not very fair to mules, is it? ... Dear
Mother, Aunt Jane made supper and it was good and I am
fine. I've unpacked my nightgown, so you know your world
traveller is staying put a spell. In the brick house. *(sobs)* Oh,
why didn't Hannah come instead of me? She's the one they
wanted and she's better than I am -- well, maybe not better
in everything, but she does not answer back so quick.
(catches herself, crosses out) I would not say I am homesick. I
want my adventure and will press on. Tomorrow I go to

school in town! (*bounces on her bed. Then freezes at the sound of creaking footsteps*)

MIRANDA

(*off*) Who's making noise in the middle of the night?

REBECCA snuffs her candle.

Scene Three: Stirring of Powers

Music. Lights up in the schoolhouse, as it fills with children. REBECCA enters in the brown gingham, the buttons properly in back, A tall boy beckons. She goes and sits beside him. A burst of laughter. One of the girls grabs her hand and pulls her onto the girls' bench.

MISS DEARBORN Speak up loudly and clearly, so our new pupil will know you. (*points*)

CLARA BELLE Clara Belle Simpson.

EMMA JANE Emma Jane Perkins. (*shakes REBECCA's hand*)

ELI JAH Elijah --

ELISHA And Elisha --

ELIJAH AND ELISHA Simpson!

EMMA JANE (*aside to REBECCA*) They're twins.

ELIJAH AND ELISHA Mmmm-hmmm!

REBECCA There sure are a lot of you Simpsons. Just like in my family!

MISS DEARBORN Shh! (*points to REBECCA*) Name, please.

REBECCA Rebecca Rowena Randall.

MILLIE Rowena?

As if to defend REBECCA, the tallest boy gets to his feet.

SEESAW Samuel Evan Simpson

A burst of laughter.

CLARA BELLE Samuel Evan?
EMMA JANE That's just Seesaw.
ELI JAH We call him Seesaw –
ELISHA -- 'cause he can't never
ELIJAH AND ELISHA -- make up his mind.
MILLIE Seesaw Simpson -- haw!
MISS DEARBORN My, that was decisive, Seesaw. Or rather, Samuel, if that's what you'd prefer.
SEESAW I don't know. *(sits down casting a glance at REBECCA.)*

MISS DEARBORN points to MILLIE.

MILLIE Millie Smellia.
REBECCA *(to EMMA JANE)* Millie Smelly?
MILLIE Smeh-lee-AH!
REBECCA Oh. I'm sure you can't help it if that's your given name.
MISS DEARBORN Rebecca, hush! I didn't call on you.
REBECCA Huh?
MISS DEARBORN Well, did I call on you, Rebecca?
REBECCA I don't think so. I only arrived yesterday. Maybe you called on my aunts?
MISS DEARBORN I can't imagine what you mean. Just try and do as the others do. English Grammar, Lesson 5: Verb conjugations. Close your books, everyone. We'll start simply. Give me the verb "to be".

Hands go up. ELISHA and ELIJAH wave their hands and whine and grunt to be recognized.

MISS DEARBORN *(stifling her amusement)* Elijah and Elisha?
ELI JAH *(jumps to his feet)* I am, you are, he is.

ELISHA (gets up) We are, you are, they are.

MISS DEARBORN Mmm-hmmm. Now, something a little harder. Verb "to be", potential mood, past perfect tense?

ELIJAH and ELISHA wilt into their seats. EMMA JANE raises her hand. REBECCA does the same.

REBECCA (aside) Why are we putting our hands in the air?

EMMA JANE Ssh. Because we want her to call on us.

REBECCA Call on us? Here?

MISS DEARBORN Yes, Rebecca? I'm calling on you. Speak up.

REBECCA (nervously) You're calling on me. All right. Won't you please sit down and make yourself comfortable? I'll see if I can find us some refreshments. (gets out her lunch pail)

MISS DEARBORN What on earth? Put your lunch pail away 'til lunch time.

EMMA JANE (aside, laughing) She's not paying a call, she's just calling for the answer.

REBECCA (aside) Oh!

MISS DEARBORN Yes, Emma Jane?

EMMA JANE (quickly) I might have been, thou mightst have been, he might have been.

MISS DEARBORN Uh-huh. Clara Belle?

CLARA BELLE (in response to MISS DEARBORN'S gesture) We might have been, you might have been, they might have been.

REBECCA (overlapping) They might have been.

MISS DEARBORN Example, please.

REBECCA (to EMMA JANE) I'm thirsty. Where's the water bucket?

EMMA JANE Ssh. Put up your hand and ask to go. (REBECCA raises her hand)

MISS DEARBORN Yes, Rebecca?

REBECCA May I get a drink of water, please?

EMMA JANE *(aside)* That's better.

MISS DEARBORN All right. *(gestures REBECCA to the bucket.)* Example?
(SEESAW raises his hand.) Samuel? It's good to see you volunteer!

SEESAW Water, please?

MISS DEARBORN Go along. Example, please? *(MILLIE volunteers)* Why, Millie!
At the water bucket with REBECCA, SEESAW studies her as she drinks and then replaces the dipper. He then takes a drink, copying her gestures, and quickly follows her back to the benches.

MILLIE I might have been glad, thou mightst have been glad ...

REBECCA *(raising her hand, speaking and taking her seat all at once)* He, she or it might have been glad.

MISS DEARBORN He or she might have been glad but could it have been glad?

REBECCA Why not?

MISS DEARBORN It's the neuter gender. It's a thing. Things don't have feelings .

REBECCA But, for instance, a hollyhock. A hollyhock is a thing.

MISS DEARBORN Yes, of course.

REBECCA Well, the big hollyhock might have been glad to see the rain, but a weak little hollyhock bud growing out of its stalk might have been afraid to see the rain, never having seen the rain before.

MISS DEARBORN Well, that's an interesting thought, Rebecca. But it runs counter to the rules of English. But I can see you have speaking ability. You'll be right at home when we get to our

Speech and Debate Lesson this afternoon. Wait 'til I tell Miranda what a little speaker has come to live at her house.

REBECCA Oh, no. You won't tell my Aunt Miranda I spoke out?

MISS DEARBORN Why not? I'd think she'd be proud.

REBECCA No, she wouldn't. She doesn't want people staring at me. Why, she doesn't even want anyone to glance in my direction.

MILLIE You're awful bold for a poor girl, Rebecca Rowena Randall.

REBECCA What?

JANE and MIRANDA enter the schoolhouse.

MISS DEARBORN Why, good morning Miss Sawyer, and Miss Sawyer.

MIRANDA Good morning.

JANE *(overlapping)* Good morning, Miss Dearborn. We won't interrupt but a minute. We just wanted to look in and see--

MIRANDA We wanted to see who was learning what. *(pats MILLIE on the head)*

MISS DEARBORN Well, we all learn together here.

MIRANDA *(indicates REBECCA)* Is she behaving?

MISS DEARBORN Oh. Well, yes. Certainly.

MIRANDA Are you quite sure? You sound doubtful.

JANE *(takes MIRANDA by the arm)* We'll be going now. Thank you, Miss Dearborn. Thank you, children. See you after school, Rebecca. Good day.

MISS DEARBORN Good day, ladies. *(MIRANDA lingers a moment, her eye on REBECCA.)* Now, where were we?

MILLIE Hollyhocks.

MISS DEARBORN Verb conjugations, I believe.

MIRANDA exits. The school, as a body, exhales relief, with the possible exception of MILLIE.

REBECCA Oh, Miss Dearborn, thank you for saving me! (*puts up her hand belatedly*) My Aunt Miranda just doesn't understand children.

MISS DEARBORN Yes, thank you--

REBECCA Why, she hated our farm. She didn't like to see us play, or speak or sing or anything.

MISS DEARBORN Thank you, Rebecca--

REBECCA I think she felt outnumbered. There are a lot of us. Seven children and a dog and a goat.

ELISHA Seven children! Hurray!

MISS DEARBORN Shhh, now!

ELI JAH And a dog and a goat!

MILLIE Pitiful.

MISS DEARBORN Quiet, please.

REBECCA (*to MILLIE*) Pardon me?

MILLIE I heard all about you, poor girl from the sticks.

MISS DEARBORN That's enough now.

CLARA BELLE scribbles a note, passes it to REBECCA.

REBECCA Aunt Miranda won't like it. Please don't tell her. I'll be quiet now. (*aside to EMMA JANE, indicating MILLIE.*) How does Millie know I'm poor?

MILLIE (*aside*) I've heard about you.

REBECCA (*opens the note and reads it out loud*) "Don't listen to Millie. Millie is nasty."

CLARA BELLE (*ASIDE*) You're not supposed to read the note out loud!

MISS DEARBORN Passing notes, Clara Belle? That's not like you.

MILLIE Oh, really, Clara Belle Simpson? I'm nasty? I don't see how you can hold your head up when you've got that nasty mortgage.

CLARA BELLE Don't you say that.

MILLIE You do. Everyone knows The Simpsons got a mortgage.

CLARA BELLE I'm ready for you, Millie. You're not going to make me cry. You leave us alone about our mortgage!

MISS DEARBORN Quiet! Everybody be quiet. What's come over you children?

REBECCA *(to ELIJAH AND ELISHA)* You have a mortgage? So do we.

MILLIE Figures.

MISS DEARBORN Rebecca, be quiet. I didn't call on you.

REBECCA Miss Dearborn? *(raises hand)* May I have a drink of water?

MISS DEARBORN For the third time? What's the matter with you?

REBECCA I ate salt mackerel for breakfast.

SEESAW *(raises his hand)* Water, please. Salt mackerel for breakfast, same as Rebecca. *(REBECCA clears her throat warningly)* I did.

REBECCA *(growls aside)* I wonder.

MISS DEARBORN Silence please. Rebecca may not know better, but the rest of you certainly do. If you're going to speak out of turn and argue and fight, we'll just have our speech and debate lesson this minute.

REBECCA drinks her water, hands the dipper absentmindedly to SEESAW and stands transfixed, listening. SEESAW drinks, then stands beside her, copying her pose, all admiration.

MISS DEARBORN Millie Smellia and Clara Belle Simpson, I'm calling on you to speak in formal debate. Whatever argument you have, get ready to do it properly.

MILLIE and CLARA BELLE take their places in front of the class. REBECCA hurries to resume her eat. SEESAW follows.

REBECCA I'll argue! I want to debate!

MISS DEARBORN I don't believe you know the rules, do you, Rebecca?

REBECCA No, ma'am.

MISS DEARBORN Arguing the affirmative?

CLARA BELLE I will.

MISS DEARBORN Your resolution?

CLARA BELLE Resolved. ...

MISS DEARBORN Good. That's how you start.

CLARA BELLE Resolved, that poor people ... (*REBECCA brushes her hair back. SEESAW does likewise.*)

MILLIE What? That poor people, what?

MISS DEARBORN Hush, Millie. You'd best hush and prepare your argument.

CLARA BELLE Resolved that poor people cannot always help themselves and so society must help them. (*REBECCA sighs and puts a hand on her heart. SEESAW copies.*) Like with a mortgage.

MISS DEARBORN Define your terms please. What is a mortgage?

CLARA BELLE Well, it's it's ...

MILLIE Ha! A mortgage is when you buy a house, except you don't have the money, so you ask the bank to buy it. Isn't that pathetic?

MISS DEARBORN Millie . . .

MILLIE And then you buy it from the bank over about a zillion years but if you forget even one payment the bank can just snatch it from you !

MISS DEARBORN Millie. (*REBECCA, electrified, looks from MISS DEARBORN to MILLIE, and back again, turning her head sharply. SEESAW copies.*)

MILLIE Why buy a house if you don't have any money? Sleep out on the ground til you get some. And if it rains, it rains --

MISS DEARBORN Millie Smellia!

MILLIE -- and if it snows, it snows!

REBECCA Why, that's mean.

SEESAW That's mean.

REBECCA (*snaps around to face SEESAW*) Quit! You just quit it. Miss Dearborn, Samuel Evan Simpson is aping everything I do. Pay attention! You're a Simpson, aren't you? It's you she's talking about. It's you she's putting out on the bare ground, under the rain and the snow.

MILLIE That's right.

MISS DEARBORN Enough! That is quite enough out of all of you! Rebecca! Samuel! You can just get up, back to back, either side of the water bucket and stand in place, both of you, the rest of the morning. (*SAMUEL complies*)

REBECCA (*complies, facing away from the debaters*) But, but --

MISS DEARBORN Be quiet, Rebecca. It is one thing to have speaking ability, it's quite another to disrupt the whole schoolhouse. I certainly will have to speak to Miranda Sawyer about you! And as for you, Millie, we can just call the debate over and Clara Belle the winner, unless you hold your tongue and obey the rules. Do you hear me, Millie?

MILLIE Yes, ma'am.

MISS DEARBORN All right. State your resolution, if you have one.

MILLIE I do.

MISS DEARBORN And do it decently or 1/11 call you down.

MILLIE Arguing in the negative. You're supposed to say --

MISS DEARBORN Thank you. Arguing in the negative --

MILLIE Resolved, that the poor are an unfair burden to society.

REBECCA No!

MISS DEARBORN (*MISS DEARBORN throws REBECCA a warning look.*) All right. We've heard a resolution from Clara Belle and one from Millie. This may be a hard topic. We may want to lose our tempers. But instead, we can argue and learn something. We will now hear opening statements. Clara Belle?

CLARA BELLE If someone is poor ... that person might be a little child. A little child must eat ... and be clothed ... and have shelter. Yet what can she do to work for money while she is here in school? If her family has a mortgage, she cannot help it. She must simply learn to read and write and hope in the future.

MISS DEARBORN Well done, Clara Belle. Millie?

MILLIE God made us all with a pair of eyes and ears, a pair of hands and feet and every reason to do for ourselves. (*REBECCA turns a little.*) Work is good. It makes us strong and helps us manage for ourselves, which is what we were meant to do. Some so-called poor might just be lazy, and some, their father is a thief!

Clara Belle bursts into tears. SEESAW shrinks into himself and covers his face with his hand while ELIJAH and ELISHA mutter angrily, one getting to his feet and the other pulling him down and vice versa.

MISS DEARBORN You can stop right there, Millie.

MILLIE (*quickly*) I just don't understand why we have to help people who won't manage for themselves.

REBECCA (*turns completely around and bursts out*) Because bad things happen out of nowhere! Someone gets sick! Someone has an accident! Flood comes, and famine, and wars! (*declaims*)
A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers!
There was a lack of woman's nursing,
There was a dearth of woman's tears!
Oh, Millie Smellie, have you never heard of mercy?

MISS DEARBORN (*moved*) Why, Rebecca !

REBECCA I'm sorry, Miss Dearborn, but I must speak. Tell my Aunt Miranda if you're going to, and let her lock me in the dark under the cellar stair and never let me set foot in this beloved school again, I cannot keep silent. I myself am poor and will not be made ashamed of it by the likes of Millie Smellie.

MILLIE Smeh-lee-AH! I'm going to tell on you, Rebecca Rowena Randall.

REBECCA Tell who what?

MISS DEARBORN Silence. Silence, everyone. A moment of complete silence! ...
(*after a pause*) Children. children, our purpose here is to learn about ideas and how to argue them. The rules of debate will govern.

REBECCA Oh, dear. The rules.

MISS DEARBORN Yes. You're breaking the rules, Millie. I must call you down for unscrupulous argument. The speaker must never use argument to hurt somebody's feelings.

REBECCA Say, that's not a bad use of rules.

MISS DEARBORN Shh, Rebecca, you're just as much out of order, and on two counts. First, you weren't called to speak in this debate.

REBECCA *(sighs)* That' s true.

MISS DEARBORN And second, your "soldier in Algiers", while a touching reference, is an Irrelevant Claim --

REBECCA What? *(EMMA JANE sneaks to the bucket and slips REBECCA her debate textbook. REBECCA opens it eagerly.)*

MISS DEARBORN -- having nothing whatsoever to do with the poor, and an Inappropriate Appeal to Pity. And with that, we'll recess.
(rings the lunchbell)

The children grab lunch pails and hurry out of the lunch room, SEESAW with a backward look at REBECCA, who hunkers down with her book, by the water bucket.

MISS DEARBORN That's the lunch bell, Rebecca.

REBECCA I should better stay here and read. I need to know this right away. All this. *(indicates debate book)*

MISS DEARBORN You have some to learn, that's true. But you've put in a hard morning, and you ought to go and play.

REBECCA Oh, may I? But if I stay and show you I can learn and improve myself, maybe you won't speak to Aunt Miranda?

EMMA JANE peeks in to see if REBECCA's coming, withdraws.

MISS DEARBORN Oh, I won't speak to Miranda. I'm sorry if I worried you. We've had an unusual day here with you, Rebecca. No ordinary day at all.

REBECCA You don't mean I'm ... peculiar?

SEESAW peeks in.

MISS DEARBORN No. No, you're -- I think you're just fine, and I'm very pleased to have you. Just try to keep your speeches for speech time. Go on out and play -- they're waiting for you.

REBECCA gather books, pail and satchel and starts out.

SEESAW You coming?

REBECCA What do you want now, Samuel Evan Simpson?

SEESAW I don't mean to bother you. I just ... I just want to be friends.

REBECCA Oh.

SEESAW Call me Seesaw, will you?

REBECCA Seesaw. *(they shake)* Friends.

EMMA JANE enters, followed by MILLIE.

EMMA JANE Come on, Rebecca. Everybody's waiting for you.

MILLIE Not everybody. You think you're the queen of the world, don't you? Certain people might be interested to hear how you prance around breaking all the rules. Just you wait.

EMMA JANE Don't mind her, Rebecca. Come on.

All exit.

Scene Four: The Great Debate

Lights up on a sewing circle: JANE, REBECCA, and MIRANDA. JANE sewing a piece of pink gingham, REBECCA, a flower over her ear and another pinned to her front, sewing brown gingham. MIRANDA, darning socks in an angry state, twitches, chews her lip, looks over JANE's sewing, huffs angrily, returns to her darning. REBECCA and JANE dart nervous glances in her direction.

REBECCA (aside to JANE) Is she mad about something? In particular?

JANE I don't know. (JANE shrugs)

REBECCA (REBECCA pokes herself with the needle) Ouch. ... Drat! Thread broke. Aunt Jane, can you -- (JANE threads REBECCA's needle) Thank you.

JANE ... Fine Saturday, isn't it?

REBECCA ... The other children are out in the Secret Meadow.

MIRANDA Mmm.

REBECCA Playing jackstraws and jackstones. Jumping on logs in the river.

MIRANDA You ain't getting your dress wet.

REBECCA Why not, when it can always dry? (meets MIRANDA's gaze and turns quickly back to her sewing) It's against the rules.

MIRANDA Mmm .

REBECCA (stabs herself with the needle) Ouch. . . . Ouch . . . For pity's sake. Just when you think you've come to the end, the cloth stretches on like the Great Wall of China, endless and brown and you must trudge, trudge, trudge on like the starving millions.

MIRANDA You certainly have a lot to say. I'd think you'd have wore out your tongue at school. Chatter day in, day out, do you?

REBECCA I ... participate.

MIRANDA Make speeches up and down the room?

REBECCA Maybe one or two. Speech is one of our subjects. (fishes out her debate book, shows MIRANDA)

MIRANDA Mmm .

REBECCA ... Aunt Jane, isn't that pink gingham you're sewing?

JANE *(suppressing a smile)* Aye, It is.

MIRANDA You can see for yourself plain enough. *(Huffs, stalks out)*

REBECCA Well, what's it for?

JANE That would be telling.

REBECCA Is it a dress for your own self?

JANE Oh, no. I've got all I need.

MIRANDA returns, as angry as ever.

REBECCA Is it for Aunt Miranda?

MIRANDA You wouldn't catch me dead in pink gingham. Folks'd think I was drunk. I can't imagine anyone wearing such a fripperous color.

REBECCA Why, it's my favorite color in the whole world.

JANE *(tongue-in-cheek)* I seem to remember that about you.

MIRANDA Fripperous person, fripperous color.

JANE She's young and attracted to bright things, that's all. I remember how I felt at her age.

MIRANDA You was considerable of a fool at her age, Jane.

JANE Ayeh, I was, thank the Lord!

MIRANDA You don't say? *(JANE meets her eye, but MIRANDA stares her down.)*

REBECCA Aunt Jane ... could that be a dress for me? *(JANE nods, throws a defiant look at MIRANDA)* Oh, could it? Oh, rapture! Oh, I've never ever had that color actually next to my skin. It'll be like head to foot in roses! Oh, I couldn't be happier than if I was a princess!

MIRANDA You are not a princess!

REBECCA Well, I know.

MIRANDA Oh, flaunted yourself in the public schoolhouse, did you?
Corrected other people? Teacher finally stood you up on the
platform for making a disturbance? Oh?

REBECCA Who told you that?

MIRANDA A little bird.

REBECCA A little bird named Millie?

MIRANDA "Oh, don't tell my Aunt Miranda, she'll lock me in the
cellar."

JANE Rebecca, did you say that?

REBECCA Not exactly.

MIRANDA Doesn't matter who told me. You can hide in the weeds out
on that farm, lying, boasting, who knows what -- but you
can't hide in Riverboro!

JANE What did you say, exactly?

REBECCA I said I had to speak out even if the teacher told Aunt
Miranda, and even if Aunt Miranda might lock me
underneath the cellar stair.

MIRANDA I never did no such thing.

REBECCA I didn't say you did. I said even if you might. I exaggerated
to make a point. It was -- it was -- (*grabs the debate book, flips
through, finds a word*) -- "rhetorical".

JANE Rebecca, you gave the impression that it's something
Miranda might do.

REBECCA I exaggerated to make a point. I'd been told to be quiet and I
had to speak up or die. Millie was saying people are poor
because there's something wrong with them.

MIRANDA So?

REBECCA Because they're lazy and lacking in character.

MIRANDA So?

REBECCA Well, I am a poor person, Aunt Miranda.

MIRANDA Aren't you the proof of it, too? Lying about me to make your point.

REBECCA I didn't lie. I only said you might.

JANE You made her seem cruel, Rebecca.

REBECCA Oh. Oh, of course I did. I'm sorry, Aunt Miranda. I didn't think of that.

MIRANDA Too late for sorry. Lying, and lazy. And reckless!

REBECCA Reckless?!?

MIRANDA And totally lacking in character -- your words, not mine. Haven't you snuck up the front stairs more'n once to make a short cut to your bedroom?

REBECCA Well --

MIRANDA Left the dipper on the shelf five times instead of hanging it over the pail? Left the screen door ajar so flies come in.

REBECCA But-- wait --

MIRANDA I'm sure it's just like you do at home, reckless of anything but your own pleasure, strewing flowers about, heedless of the future just like your handsome, foolish, worthless father!

REBECCA Aunt Miranda, you're out of order.

MIRANDA I? I am out of order?

REBECCA I'm calling you down for breaking the rules. (*flips wildly through the book*) Yes! I call you down for "misleading statistics" or "insufficient evidence" or "bias", or "lack of qualification". First, you haven't known me long enough to

know if I'm good or bad. You wouldn't know what we do at home. You're not qualified. You only visited that once, and we were nervous and not ourselves around you.

MIRANDA

Oh, and is that my fault?

REBECCA

I couldn't say, but I only been here a week and just because there's a creak in the house doesn't mean I'm sneaking up the front stair.

MIRANDA

You telling me you never snuck up it?

REBECCA

I may have forgot once or twice. But you've got a bias against me and you're collecting proofs only on one side: the bad.

MIRANDA

I know what I see.

REBECCA

You're looking for an excuse to send me home a failure. It's true I left the dipper on the shelf five times, but that's misleading statistics. Three of those times was before you told me, hang it over the pail. Wherever I put it, I was only trying to do right and please you.

MIRANDA

Ha !

REBECCA

Not that I succeeded. No, I'm a miserable failure at pleasing you but that gives you no cause for unscrupulous argument.

MIRANDA

What? Unscrupulous!?!

REBECCA

(jumps to her feet) Using speech to hurt somebody's feelings. He was my father, whatever he did.

MIRANDA

YOU were tiny when he died. I knew him better than you.

REBECCA

I knew my father. He was himself. And I'm me. And you can't try and hurt me because of him. It's *(hunts through book)*

“irrelevant”. And . . . (*drops book*) I loved him! And I . . .
won't ... can't ... listen! (*rushes off*)

MIRANDA picks up the book, opens it and scans the page.

MIRANDA (*sounding the word out*) “Ir-rel-e-vant.”

JANE gets to her feet, faces MIRANDA and clears her throat warningly. MIRANDA meets her gaze.

MIRANDA I'm going to have to study up on this.

MIRANDA stares her down. JANE unfurls the pink dress and gives it a snap.

JANE She's a little girl, Miranda, not a sparring partner. (*exits*)

Lights up on REBECCA in her room, with pencil and tablet.

REBECCA Dear Mother, You remember when we tied the new dog in the barn how he bit the rope and howled. (*JANE enters and hesitates outside REBECCA's room, concealing the pink dress behind her*) I am just like him only the brick house is the barn and Aunt Miranda the rope, but I cannot bite her because she is the source of my education and will be the making of me so I can help pay off our mortgage. (*JANE knocks*) You can't be Aunt Miranda 'cause she wouldn't knock. Come in, Aunt Jane. (*JANE goes in*)

JANE You made a pretty good argument just now, Rebecca.

REBECCA I did?

JANE Beat her at her own game, arguing all the rules. But one thing puzzles me, knowing you the little bit I do. I wouldn't think you'd be all that much enchanted with rules.

REBECCA Well, but I have to do what I can -- she's trying to prove I'm a bad girl. This is war.

JANE Ayeh, it is. But I thought you were more poetical. Rebecca, Miranda's not feeling so well and I'm afraid the whole world looks bad to her.

REBECCA She isn't well? Why didn't she say so!

JANE She wouldn't, you know. Let's look at her as a figure in a poem. She's just an old woman who was once a little girl.

REBECCA Well, but she's not a little girl, she's my aunt who has charge of me.

JANE Well, but so am I, and whatever she may say about you, I say you're a fine person. Try not to mind her so much. She's like a little girl who's jealous. You know, she never got an education.

REBECCA She didn't?

JANE No, when it was time for schooling, I went, but she wanted to stay home and help Pa with the dairy and the farming. She never took time to strew flowers. And maybe now she regrets it.

REBECCA You were farmers?

JANE Yes, we were, and she did a good job of it, saved up so we could live in town in comfort in our old age. She built this house and paid for every brick. So you can see why she has such a regard for money. You should have seen her in the hot sun, slamming in the bricks, bossing the carpenters. But she got it built. It's a good old house, Rebecca, though I know you haven't been happy in it.

REBECCA She built this house herself? Well, it's a good old house and I can be happy in it! Oh, Aunt Jane, what would I do without you!

JANE Why, you'd do fine, I think, Rebecca. I once lost someone dear to me and I ... I went on.

REBECCA Who was that?

JANE Oh, a soldier who died in the war. A dear young man whom I was to marry. It sounds sad but I just laugh to think of him.

REBECCA You said you were foolish when you were young?

JANE Foolish, yes, and carefree. And life isn't over yet! How's this?
(brings out the pink dress, gives it to REBECCA)

REBECCA Oh, Aunt Jane! *(holds the dress up to herself)* This -- this is --

JANE Roses head to toe?

REBECCA Oh, yes!

JANE Oh, ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross --

REBECCA To see a fine lady upon a white horse!

REBECCA AND JANE Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes, and she shall have music wherever she goes!

Scene Five: Rose in Flames

Lights up on the Secret Meadow where EMMA JANE and CLARA BELLE, ELIJAH and ELISHA are at play. Lights up on SEESAW SIMPSON painting a footbridge. REBECCA enters in her pink gingham, carrying her sunshade. Approaching the bridge, she steps into the light and spins, watching her skirt billow out.

SEESAW Rebecca !

REBECCA

Hi, there, Seesaw.

SEESAW

Look here, I'm getting, well, 60 cents for painting this. And I'm saving it, I don't know, well, for the mortgage and --

REBECCA

Good for you!

SEESAW

That's a new dress, ain't it? Don't you look -- I don't know, if I could put it in words, I'd say you just look ... just ...

REBECCA

Thank you!

She skips away. SEESAW finishes the paint job, hangs wet paint signs on the bridge, and exits.

EMMA JANE and CLARA BELLE sit playing jackstraws in the Secret Meadow. REBECCA approaches.

EMMA JANE

Here you are. Oh, my, Rebecca, aren't you magnificent!

REBECCA

It's spandy new and my favorite, favorite color.

MILLIE

(Enters and crosses the bridge, careful of the wet paint) Well, Rebecca. I'm surprised to see you going free and not locked in a cellar somewhere.

REBECCA

Oh, no, it's Sunday and I'm allowed out. I've guessed you tattled to my Aunt Miranda, Millie. But I'm not fighting with you. This is my day to be happy.

MILLIE

Homemade, isn't it? That dress?

REBECCA

'Course it is. Every stitch put in by my Aunt Jane.

MILLIE

But homemade is always a little old-fashioned, isn't it? The really elegant clothes you find in stores. Store bought. My Papa takes me twice a year and tells me pick out whatever I like.

REBECCA

How very nice for you.

MILLIE Yes, it is. That's what money can do. Give a person self-respect and pleasure. Why, if you've got money you can get whatever in life you want.

REBECCA *(to herself, ruefully)* Such as pay off the mortgage.

MILLIE Oh, yes! And when you walk by people say, "There she goes!"

REBECCA How very nice for you.

MILLIE Yes, I've got a dollar in my pocket right now and anytime I want, I can have another. I only wish you could have the same. Tell you what, Rebecca, 1/11 do you a favor and give you my dollar for that frowsy little worn-out umbrella.

REBECCA Umbrella? This is not an umbrella!

MILLIE One whole dollar. *(displays silver dollar)* Ain't it nice and shiny?

REBECCA This is a sunshade straight from Paris, ivory tipped and handled and I would never, never sell it.

MILLIE Well, all right, be that way. I'm only trying to do good with my money.

REBECCA Put it away!

MILLIE Some people, if they won't let you do them a favor, you just can't help them.

REBECCA Whose turn is it?

EMMA JANE Yours.

REBECCA *(REBECCA bounces the jack ball but flubs her retrieval. Growls)*
Butterfingers.

ELIJAH and ELISHA SIMPSON enter, pulling a wagon loaded with soap boxes labelled "Snow

White and Rose Red".

ELI JAH Oh, soap! Soap for sale!

ELISHA Two cents a cake. Soap for sale!

REBECCA Hello, Elijah and Elisha! Helping Seesaw earn the mortgage, are you?

ELI JAH Well, no. We have to send the money we collect --

ELISHA -- back to the soap company.

REBECCA What, all of the money?

ELI JAH They award prizes --

ELISHA -- for soap sold --

ELI JAH -- and we are going to earn a Banquet Lamp.

ELISHA A lamp so we will have light after dark. See, here in the catalog?

ELI JAH A brass lamp with a scarlet globe.

EMMA JANE The Banquet Lamp. Oh, how pretty.

REBECCA What a great thing to have!

ELISHA Yes, and we'd like to surprise Mother with it --

ELI JAH At Thanksgiving!

REBECCA How many cakes of soap must you sell to win it?

ELISHA Er ... eight hundred.

EMMA JANE How many have you sold so far?

ELI JAH Er ... eight.

REBECCA I know someone who wants to buy. Millie, here. She's got a dollar burning in her pocket. She's just begging to do good with it.

MILLIE Why, I never --

REBECCA Two cents a cake? A dollar -- that's a hundred cents divided by two. Why, that's fifty. Millie will take fifty cakes of soap.

MILLIE -- I never asked for you to spend my money --

REBECCA Give 'em the dollar, Millie. You "can always get another".
You said ... unless you were exaggerating and are not so
very rich after all ... (*MILLIE hands over the dollar. The twins
hurrah, toss their hats, etc. MILLIE exits.*)

EMMA JANE (*aside to REBECCA*) "There she goes."

CLARA BELLE AND EMMA JANE (*on their feet calling*) There she goes!

REBECCA (*to ELIJAH AND ELISHA*) You'll have to haul it home for
her. Go along, now. (*the twins exit*)

EMMA JANE It's getting late. See you tomorrow.
They wave and part. REBECCA crosses to the bridge, oblivious of the "Wet Paint" sign.

JANE (*offstage, calling from a distance*) Rebecca? Oh, Rebecca?

REBECCA (*ascends the bridge, leans over the railing*) Stay still, oh water. I
want to see myself. (*leans farther*) Oh, there's a pool. (*moves to
the other side, leans over the far rail*) Can't quite - - well, never
mind. (*Turns and leans her back against the far rail. The dress is
by now quite botched with paint. REBECCA opens her sunshade,
gazes far and declaims.*)
Great, wide, splendid, lovely World,
With the sparkling water around you curled,
And the glimmering grass upon your breast:
World, you are marvelously dressed!

JANE (*off calling*) Rebecca?

MIRANDA (*off*) Rebecca Rowena Randall, time to set the table!

REBECCA (*looks down and sees the paint on her dress*) Sakes alive! Oh no!
(*looks around the back of her dress*) Lord have mercy! Oh, oh,
oh!

MIRANDA (OFF) Rebecca Randall! Don't make me call again!

REBECCA Aunt Miranda – what'll she say? Heedless -- reckless – and she'll be right! Worthless!

JANE (off) Yoo-hoo, Rebecca! Where are you?

REBECCA Oh. Aunt Jane! I'm done for -- I'm sunk -- (*rushes off*)

Lights up on the brick house garden. JANE nervously filling a bucket at the well. MIRANDA comes out into the garden.

MIRANDA That's the fourth bucket. Jane. You've fetched enough water.

JANE I wonder where she could be. (*to audience*) We've grown accustomed to Rebecca, you see.

MIRANDA Not that we had much alternative.

JANE Three places on the table, and news of the world she brings us every day. How she's brightened up our lives -- (*fusses with the tea towels on the clothesline*)

MIRANDA And kept us awake at night.

JANE Mirandy, you're the one who's up at night, not Rebecca.

MIRANDA It's the thought of her that wakes me.

JANE It's just you're not feeling so well and that's hard around someone so young and rambunctious. ... Where is she? I hope nothing's wrong.

MIRANDA Oh, I doubt anything's wrong. She'll be along. I'm going inside and have my supper and whenever her ladyship may arrive -- (*MIRANDA goes in*)-- she can eat hers cold, which is all she deserves --

JANE Now, Mirandy .

MIRANDA -- being such an addlepatented little fool.

JANE Mirandy.

*REBECCA appears in her upstairs bedroom, gets her satchel and packs her few things.
Reluctantly stacks her school books to be left behind.*

MIRANDA "Mirandy". Why is it you only ever see her side of it?

REBECCA goes to her window, opens it and looks down.

JANE Oh, I see your side, too. I do. She can be considerable to put up with. But she's just a little girl.

MIRANDA A girl who, unless someone takes her in hand, is sure to grow up into a driveling idiot.

END OF ACT ONE

(INTERMISSION OPTIONAL)