

David John Preece

Adapted from the 1851 novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne

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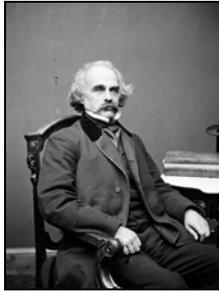
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The House of the Seven Gables

Winner, Best Original Play, New Hampshire Theatre Award, 2009

CLASSIC. Adapted from the novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne. After refusing to sell his land to rich landowner Colonel Pyncheon, Matthew Maule is hanged for witchcraft and places a curse on Colonel Pyncheon before he dies: “God will give you blood to drink.” Colonel Pyncheon takes possession of Maule’s land and builds a grand mansion known as the House of the Seven Gables on the site. However, the Maule curse plagues the Pyncheon family over the next 200 years as a series of tragedies devastate the family and lead to its spiritual and financial ruin. Destitute, Hepzibah Pyncheon, the current resident of the decaying house, has to swallow her pride and open a small shop in the home to support herself and her brother, Clifford, who has just been released from prison after serving 30 years for a murder he did not commit. The gloom hanging over the house starts to lift when Phoebe Pyncheon, a distant relative from the country, appears at the house and convinces Hepzibah to let her stay on to help out with the shop and tend the garden. Soon love blooms between Phoebe and Mr. Holgrave, a boarder at the house and who has been concealing his identity as a descendant of Matthew Maule. In the end, the family discovers that only the love between a Pyncheon and a Maule can transcend the sins of the past and end the curse for future generations.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.



Nathaniel Hawthorne

About the Story

Short story writer and novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) published *The House of the Seven Gables* in 1851 following the success of *The Scarlet Letter* just one year earlier. Hawthorne drew upon the history of his Puritan ancestors for the novel, particularly his great-great-grandfather, John Hawthorne, who was one of the judges at the 1692 Salem witch trials. In the novel, Matthew Maule's curse is taken from accused Salem witch Sarah Good who cursed a minister with the words, "God will give you blood to drink."



The House of the Seven Gables in 1915

About the House

The House of the Seven Gables, also known as the Turner-Ingersoll Mansion, is located in Salem, MA, and was once owned by Nathaniel Hawthorne's cousin, Susanna Ingersoll. Built in 1668, it is the oldest surviving 17th century wooden mansion in New England. The home where Hawthorne was born has been moved to a site adjacent to the House of the Seven Gables. Both buildings have been preserved as museums.

Characters

(9 M, 9 F, 6 flexible, opt. extras)
(Doubling possible.)

HEPZIBAH PYNCHION: 60, unmarried, destitute descendant of the Pyncheon family and current occupant of the House of the Seven Gables who is forced to open a cent shop in the house in order to support herself; proud, kind-hearted, and devoted to her brother Clifford; has a permanent scowl on her face due to nearsightedness.

CLIFFORD PYNCHION: Hepzibah's brother, a broken man, who comes to live with her after serving 30 years in prison after being framed for murdering his Uncle Jaffrey by his cousin Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon; has gray hair.

PHOEBE PYNCHION: 18, Hepzibah's cheerful, vibrant, good-natured cousin from the country who helps run the cent shop and tends the garden.

JUDGE JAFFREY PYNCHION: Late 50s, Hepzibah and Clifford's tall, dark cousin, a wealthy judge and a descendant of the original owner of the House of the Seven Gables; a greedy, sinister, conniving man who believes Clifford holds the secret to finding a long-lost land deed that would make him even wealthier; has an ever-present, deceptive smile and closely resembles the portrait of his ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon; wears a vest with a pocket watch.

HOLGRAVE: 22, Hepzibah's only boarder, works as a photographer, and helps tend the garden; in love with Phoebe Pyncheon and a descendant of Matthew Maule.

AUNT VENNER: 60s, cheerful in spite of her poverty, she does odd jobs for scraps of food and lives on a dilapidated farm; wears old patched clothes.

COLONEL PYNCHION: Early 50s, wealthy landowner whose actions are responsible for the Pyncheon curse;

greedy, heartless Puritan who has a gray beard and wears a cloak and a black velvet cap.

MATTHEW MAULE: 50s, poor farmer who is hanged for witchcraft after refusing to sell his land to Colonel Pyncheon and who places a curse on him before he dies; Maule's land is the site where Colonel Pyncheon eventually hires Thomas Maule to build the House of the Seven Gables.

WILLIAM MATTHEW MAULE: Early 20s, the handsome grandson of Matthew Maule whose hatred of the Pyncheons is revealed when he takes his revenge by hypnotizing Alice Pyncheon, humiliating her, and ultimately causing her death.

GERVAYSE PYNCHION: Early 50s, grandson of Colonel Pyncheon, he allows for his daughter to be hypnotized by William Matthew Maule in order to find out where the long-lost land deed is hidden; elegantly dressed.

ALICE PYNCHION: Late teens, beautiful daughter of Gervayse Pyncheon who falls under William Matthew Maule's hypnotic powers; the sounds of her harpsichord music haunts the House of the Seven Gables.

UNCLE JAFFREY PYNCHION: Late 40s, Clifford and Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon's wealthy uncle who dies a natural death.

YOUNG JAFFREY PYNCHION: Judge Jaffrey as a young man; a wild, reckless spender who lives on a stipend he receives from Uncle Jaffrey Pyncheon.

DIXEY: 40s, a farmer's wife.

COLLINS: Early 20s, a servant girl.

CUSTOMER: Cent shop customer; female.

HOUSEWIFE: Hepzibah's neighbor.

RELATIVE: Gervayse and Alice's Pyncheon's relative; female.

TOWNSPERSON 1-6: Flexible.

EXTRAS (Opt.): As Townspeople and Customers.

Setting

1840s, coastal New England town. Pyncheon Street in front of the old Pyncheon mansion, which is known as the House of the Seven Gables.

Set

The set can be as simple as a black stage with minimal scenery or can be as elaborate as your budget allows.

House of the Seven Gables. Gloomy, dark, decaying New England mansion with a peak-gabled, gloomy exterior and a dark interior. There is an arched window over the porch and a little shop door to one side. The dining room has a table and chairs and a desk with drawers. A haunting portrait of Colonel Pyncheon fixes on the audience with a relentless gaze and remains a central scenic element throughout the play. The cent shop is located in the front gable of the house. There is a table or counter in the shop and miscellaneous goods are displayed in shabby surroundings. The garden is overgrown with weeds and vines. There are roses, posies, and other types of flowers but it is obvious that they have been neglected. There is a flowerbox near the house and three garden or patio chairs. A chicken coop is in the garden's far corner and there is a well in the yard.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Prologue: Stage is dark.

Scene 1: Pyncheon Street in front of the old Pyncheon mansion.

Scene 2: Cent shop, late afternoon.

Scene 3: Pyncheon garden, early morning.

Scene 4: Pyncheon garden and house, early evening.

Scene 5: Pyncheon dining room and cent shop, morning.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Pyncheon house, midday.

Scene 2: Outside the Pyncheon house, the next day, morning.

Scene 3: Passenger section of a train, midday.

Scene 4: Outside the cent shop, late afternoon.

Scene 5: Inside Pyncheon's house, late afternoon.

Scene 6: Outside and inside the Pyncheon house, several weeks later, mid-morning.

NOTE: Scene shifts should be done rapidly to keep the suspense and tension high.

Props

Wooden cart filled with potatoes and vegetables	Dishware for dining table
Haunting portrait of Colonel Pyncheon wearing a cloak, a black velvet cap and gray beard	Book
Golden locket, for Hepzibah	Coffee pot and cups
Coins	Cape, for Alice
Purse, for Hepzibah	Blanket
Biscuits	Pocket watch, for Judge Jaffrey
Bag of food scraps	Posies
Travel bag, for Phoebe	2 Photographs
Broken umbrella	Legal documents
Tea tray and teacups	Empty moving crates
Bread	Misc. household belongings packed in moving crates
Miniature picture in a case	Large suitcase, for Clifford
Lantern	Mechanical device next to portrait of Colonel Pyncheon
Rose	Travel bag, for Aunt Venner
	Folded, dusty document

Special Effects

Harpsichord music sweet at first and then becoming strident and discordant	Haunting harpsichord music
Harpsichord music discordant and alarming at first and then gradually becoming sweet	Storm subsiding
Urgent harpsichord music	Cent shop bell
Faint but increasingly intense strains of harpsichord music	Chickens clucking
Rushing harpsichord music	Muffled sound
Whispers	Approaching footsteps
Sound of a trapdoor	Storm
Neck snapping	Fake blood
Approaching storm	Train rumbling down the track
	Train slowing and coming to a stop
	Sound of a carriage arriving
	Carpetbag, for Phoebe
	Boxes

*"Halfway down a by-street
of one of our New England towns
stands a rusty wooden house,
with seven acutely peaked gables,
facing towards various points of the compass,
and a huge, clustered chimney in the midst.
The street is Pyncheon Street;
the house is the old Pyncheon House;
and an elm-tree,
of wide circumference,
rooted before the door,
is familiar to every town-born child
by the title
of the Pyncheon Elm."*

*—From *The House of the Seven Gables**

ACT I

Prologue

(AT RISE: Stage is dark. A harpsichord is heard sweet at first and then becoming strident and discordant. Whispers, voices from the past, begin to rise above the music and soon become shouts.)

TOWNSPERSON 1: *(Voiceover.)* Satan is in our midst.

TOWNSPERSON 2: *(Voiceover.)* There's evil among us.

TOWNSPERSON 3: *(Voiceover.)* It was witchcraft!

TOWNSPERSON 4: *(Voiceover.)* It was Matthew Maule!

TOWNSPERSON 5: *(Voiceover.)* He has made a pact with the devil!

(Townspersons adlib "Maule has made a pact with the devil," "I see him," "I see the devil next to him," "Maule is bewitching me," "Stop him!" etc.)

MAULE: *(Voiceover.)* I am innocent... *(Shouts.)* I am innocent!

TOWNSPERSON 6: *(Voiceover.)* Having committed the crime of witchcraft, Matthew Maule is from this church, with blessing of heaven, hereby excommunicated and is sentenced to be hanged from the neck until dead.

MAULE: *(Voiceover.)* Pyncheon! Hear me! God...God will give you blood to drink!

(The abrupt sound of a trapdoor and then the sharp sound of Maule's neck snapping are heard. After a moment of silence, the sounds of an approaching storm begin to rise.)

Scene 1

(AT RISE: 1840s, early winter, morning. Pyncheon Street in front of the old Pyncheon mansion, which is also known as the House of the Seven Gables. Lights go up to reveal the home's gloomy exterior. A light dimly illuminates the home's dark interior, where a haunting portrait of Colonel Pyncheon fixes the audience with a relentless gaze. Dixey and Collins push a wooden cart filled with bags of potatoes and other vegetables to the market. They stop in front of the house to take a break.)

COLLINS: Think we'll have a break in the weather?

DIXEY: Storm's been brewin' a long time. It don't look to be clearin' soon.

COLLINS: Dixey, in the time I've lived here, I've never seen anyone 'round this house. Whose is it?

DIXEY: It's Pyncheon House, built 200 years ago or more. Most of us 'ere 'bouts call it the House of the Seven Gables.

(A Customer on her way to the market stops and looks at the house. She eavesdrops on the conversation between Dixey and Collins.)

COLLINS: Does anyone still live there?

DIXEY: The Pyncheon family does...what's left of 'em.

COLLINS: It's a strange house...

CUSTOMER: Strange, indeed, and it's haunted by ghosts.

COLLINS: Ghosts!

CUSTOMER: They say that the house was built on an unquiet grave. I believe it.

DIXEY: *(To Collins.)* You see, it wasn't the first house built on the site. In fact, Pyncheon Street was once known as Maule Lane, named after Matthew Maule, an 'umble and 'ard workin' farmer.

CUSTOMER: *(To Collins.)* There was once a natural spring of soft and pleasant water right about where Hepzibah

Pyncheon's overgrown garden is now. That's why Maule built his house here.

DIXEY: (*To Collins.*) The water's no good anymore. It hasn't been for a long time. After Maule's death, it grew hard and brackish.

CUSTOMER: (*To Collins.*) It produces intestinal mischief and fever in those who quench their thirst there.

COLLINS: What happened to Maule?

DIXEY: Bein' an eccentric and solitary man, Maule fell under suspicion of witchcraft and was put to death.

COLLINS: Witchcraft?!

CUSTOMER: Clergymen, judges, statesmen—the wisest, calmest, holiest persons of their day—they stood in the inner circle round the gallows loudly applauding his execution. Colonel Pyncheon was one of them.

DIXEY: (*To Collins.*) The Colonel was an influential town leader and one of Maule's accusers. Right quick, he snatched up 'is neighbor's land, evicted Maule's family, and leveled their home. In its place, he intended to build a family mansion.

CUSTOMER: (*To Collins.*) Wanting only the best workmen to build his house, he hired Thomas Maule, the son of the dead man, to design and build it. Being that times were hard, Thomas Maule took the job.

DIXEY: (*To Collins.*) From the very moment work began on the house, Maule's ghost came to haunt its chambers.

CUSTOMER: (*To Collins.*) It's said that the terror and ugliness of Maule's punishment still darken the house walls and infect its inhabitants.

DIXEY: (*To Collins.*) When the mansion was completed, the Colonel 'ad an open house for all the prominent townspeople. On the day of the event, the guests gathered, but the Colonel was not there to greet 'em. They found 'im slumped behind 'is desk...dead...with an unnatural distortion in 'is stare and blood on 'is mouth and clothes.

CUSTOMER: (*To Collins.*) There were many rumors about his sudden and mysterious death. Some claimed there were marks of fingers on his throat and the print of a bloody hand on his clothes. Others say there was not a mark upon him, save for a river of blood that flowed from his mouth. Though, of course, Maule has no descendants left in this community or anywhere else that I know about.

DIXEY: (*To Collins.*) For generations, there have been mysterious deaths and strange happenings in this house. Thirty years ago, a young man, a Pyncheon, was tried and convicted of murdering his bachelor uncle and sent to prison for life.

CUSTOMER: You know...I heard from reliable sources that he's coming home soon.

DIXEY: Comin' home?! I thought he was dead and long buried.

CUSTOMER: No, not dead, though he may wish he were! His family isn't so proud anymore. They're sunk in poverty, from what I've heard, except for the Judge, of course.

DIXEY: Now look at that. A cent shop! Who would have thought it?

CUSTOMER: Hepzibah Pyncheon, that old maid, settin' up a cent shop!

(In the cent shop, a faint light goes up on Hepzibah Pyncheon as she hides in the shadows listening to the Women.)

COLLINS: D'you think she'll make it go? I don't call it a very good stand. There's another shop just 'round the corner.

DIXEY: Make it go?! Not a bit of it!

CUSTOMER: Why, her face alone'd frighten anyone. She scowls dreadfully, reason or none, out of pure ugliness of temper!

DIXEY: Besides that, this business o' keepin' cent shops is overdone. I know it, t' my cost. My husband kept a cent shop for three months and lost everythin'.

CUSTOMER: The old maid will probably go broke. (*Exits.*)

DIXEY: Prob'ly.

(Hepzibah steps out of the shadows and watches as Dixey and Collins exit, pushing their cart.)

HEPZIBAH: (*To herself.*) Broke?! No...I have no choice but to earn my keep...or starve. (*Opens a golden locket from her neck and looks at it.*) My memories of you have been the food and drink that have kept my heart alive. (*Looks around at the shabby surroundings of the cent shop.*) What am I thinking? How could I...utterly unpracticed in the world...? (*Takes a small number of coins from her purse and lays them on the table. Slowly, she counts the money and begins to cry quietly.*) Heaven help me!

(Holgrave stands outside the door, watches her for a moment, and enters the shop.)

HOLGRAVE: Good morning, Miss Pyncheon.

(Startled, Hepzibah stands, wipes her tears, and tries to regain her composure.)

HEPZIBAH: Mr. Holgrave, I—

HOLGRAVE: Forgive me. I didn't mean to scare you.

HEPZIBAH: You didn't. Now, what is it you want?

HOLGRAVE: I just wanted to offer my best wishes...and to see if you needed any help.

HEPZIBAH: That's kind of you. I-I— (*Breaks down.*) Mr. Holgrave, I can't go through with it! I wish I was dead. The world is cold and hard. I have no hope to compete in it!

HOLGRAVE: Miss Hepzibah, these feelings will not trouble you when you are in the midst of your business. They are unavoidable at the moment, standing, as you do, at the end of your long seclusion. You people the world with ugly

images. But you'll soon find them to be as unreal as the giants and ogres of a child's storybook. The fears of life lose their substance the instant one faces them.

HEPZIBAH: I was raised a lady—

HOLGRAVE: Let the past go! You're the better without it.

May I speak frankly, Miss Pyncheon? Are we not friends?

HEPZIBAH: We are.

HOLGRAVE: Look upon this as one of the fortunate days of your life. It ends an era and begins another. From now on, you'll at least have a sense of healthy and natural effort of lending your strength—be it great or small—to the united struggle of mankind. This is success...all the success that anybody meets with.

HEPZIBAH: It's natural enough you should have ideas like these. You're a man, a young gentleman, brought up with a view to seeking your fortune. I was born a lady and have always lived like one, no matter the narrowness of means.

HOLGRAVE: I wasn't born a gentleman. Neither have I lived like one. My dear friend, these names of "gentleman" and "lady" had a meaning in a past world and conferred privileges on those entitled to bear them. In the present—and still more in the future—they infer not privilege, but restriction.

HEPZIBAH: I shall never understand these ideas, these new ways, neither do I wish to.

HOLGRAVE: I'll stop, then, and leave you to decide whether it is not better to be true to yourself than to live a life of pretense. Do you really think that any lady of your family's ever done a more heroic thing since the day this house was built than you are doing today? Never. And if the Pyncheons had always acted so nobly, I doubt whether the old wizard Maule's curse would have had much weight with providence against them.

HEPZIBAH: If Maule's ghost, or a descendant of his, could see me behind this counter today, he would call it the fulfillment of his worst wishes. In any case, I thank you for

your kindness, Mr. Holgrave, and will do my best to be a good shopkeeper.

HOLGRAVE: I know you will. Let me have the pleasure of being your first customer. I'm going to take a walk to the beach before work and I would like to buy a few biscuits for my breakfast. (*Reaches into his pocket for some money.*) What is the price of half a dozen?

(Holgrave tries to hand her some money, but she refuses it.)

HEPZIBAH: No. Put your money away.

HOLGRAVE: But—

HEPZIBAH: No. Let me be a lady a moment longer. (*Walks to the counter, and with a manner of antique stateliness, she puts the biscuits into his hand.*) A Pyncheon must never, especially under her forefather's roof, receive money for a morsel of bread, especially from a friend.

HOLGRAVE: Thank you.

(Hepzibah watches as Holgrave exits the shop. Judge Jeffrey Pyncheon enters, stops in front of the shop, and stares at it. Hepzibah shudders when she sees him. Lights start to fade as Townspeople 1, 2 enter the shop and look over its wares to satisfy their curiosity about Hepzibah. Haunting Harpsichord music is heard. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: The cent shop, late afternoon. As the harpsichord music fades, the lights go up on the cent shop. Wind and rain can be heard in the background. A frazzled-looking Hepzibah tries to help the indignant Customer.)

CUSTOMER: A cent shop, and no yeast!

HEPZIBAH: I'm sorry. I—

CUSTOMER: Whoever heard of such a thing?

(Aunt Venner enters the shop and shakes off the rain.)

HEPZIBAH: But I—

CUSTOMER: You better close up shop today.

HEPZIBAH: Perhaps I should.

CUSTOMER: Well, I've never!

AUNT VENNER: *(Opening the door for Customer.)* May I? *(Watches as the Customer hurries out of the shop.)* You're welcome. *(To Hepzibah, sarcastic.)* Another satisfied customer?

HEPZIBAH: I'm afraid not.

AUNT VENNER: Well, I'm glad to see you're trying. Young people should never live idle in the world, nor old ones neither unless the rheumatism has hold of 'em.

HEPZIBAH: *(Laughs to herself. In disbelief.)* It's hard for me to believe that I've just started working in my life at a time when most people are thinking about retiring.

AUNT VENNER: Oh, you're still a young...and attractive woman.

HEPZIBAH: *(Embarrassed.)* You shouldn't say things like that.

AUNT VENNER: It's true. Though you don't like to hear it, it comes from my heart.

HEPZIBAH: I don't care where it comes from.

AUNT VENNER: I'm sorry. I forgot my place. You're a Pyncheon, and I'm just a patched old woman who does odd jobs for scraps of food.

HEPZIBAH: I didn't mean—

AUNT VENNER: You didn't? You know, I met your cousin Judge Pyncheon ten minutes ago.

HEPZIBAH: Oh, really?

AUNT VENNER: Hepzibah, why doesn't your cousin, with his great wealth, step forward and tell you to close up your little shop at once? It's only to your credit to be doing something, but it's not to his credit to let you.

HEPZIBAH: Generosity's never been one of his virtues, especially to his own family. Let's not talk about him. He's not worth the time that it takes. If I choose to earn bread for myself, it's not his fault. Neither will he deserve the blame if I have to retire to the workhouse.

AUNT VENNER: He'd never allow you.

HEPZIBAH: He wouldn't?! (*Laughs.*) He'd drive me there in his carriage.

AUNT VENNER: You're a young woman. You never need go there. Something better will turn up for you. I'm sure of it. (*Starts to exit the shop, stops, and turns to Hepzibah. Whispers.*) There's something I've been meaning to ask you...about Clifford.

HEPZIBAH: (*Defensive.*) What about him?

AUNT VENNER: Have you heard from him yet? He should be coming home soon, shouldn't he? (*Hepzibah turns away.*) Don't want to talk about it?

HEPZIBAH: No, I don't, and I wish you wouldn't, either.

AUNT VENNER: Well, we'll say no more, though there's word of it all over town.

HEPZIBAH: It's none of their business, or yours.

AUNT VENNER: (*Reminiscing.*) I remember him as a boy, Hepzibah—

HEPZIBAH: Please!

AUNT VENNER: Sorry, I didn't mean to upset you.

HEPZIBAH: Take the scraps for your pig and leave.

(Aunt Venner picks up the bags of scraps.)

AUNT VENNER: I-I didn't mean—

HEPZIBAH: Good day to you. *(Hepzibah closes the door behind Aunt Venner and locks it. The lights go off in the shop. Phoebe Pyncheon enters. She is walking down the street carrying her suitcases, trying to read street addresses, and attempting to keep herself dry under her broken umbrella. She stops at the Pyncheon House and with hesitation knocks at the door. Startled, Hepzibah looks out the window.)* Who can it be? *(Hepzibah unlocks the door and opens it.)* I'm sorry, but the shop's closed for the day.

PHOEBE: I don't wish to buy anything.

HEPZIBAH: Then what do you want?

PHOEBE: This is the Pyncheon house, is it not?

HEPZIBAH: Yes, this is. Now what do you want?

PHOEBE: I'm looking for Hepzibah Pyncheon. Is she in?

HEPZIBAH: You're speaking to her. Now what is your business?

PHOEBE: I am your cousin Phoebe.

HEPZIBAH: Phoebe? *(Looks at her.)* You were only a baby when I last saw you.

PHOEBE: I'm eighteen now.

HEPZIBAH: Yes...of course. Please come in.

PHOEBE: Thank you. *(Phoebe enters the shop and looks around.)*

HEPZIBAH: How's your family? Your mother?

PHOEBE: You've probably heard that my mother has remarried. There's no need for me there anymore. I'm here for a visit.

HEPZIBAH: A visit?! That's completely...I didn't expect—

PHOEBE: It was all in the letter I sent. It was sent over a week ago. You should have received it by now.

HEPZIBAH: Well, I didn't!

PHOEBE: Please, don't be upset with me. Mother said you wouldn't mind having a visitor.

HEPZIBAH: Your mother was wrong! You can't stay here. I don't want to sound rude but—

PHOEBE: *(Pleading.)* I've traveled so far...and I've so little money left. Please reconsider.

HEPZIBAH: *(Thinks.)* You can stay here for one night. But you must leave tomorrow. *(Takes a lantern.)* Bring your bags and follow me. I'll show you to a room.

(From the darkness outside, the shadowy image of a large man stumbles to the house and watches Hepzibah and Phoebe through the window. As the lights fade to black, haunting harpsichord music is faintly heard in the background.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: *As the music fades, the lights go up on the Pyncheon garden, early morning. The storm subsides as rays of the morning sun break through the clouds. A ray shines down on Phoebe as she enters the garden and looks around at the roses and other flowers growing in neglect. Hepzibah watches from the house for a moment, then quietly walks out into the garden carrying a tea tray. Sensing someone, Phoebe turns and is startled to find Hepzibah.*)

PHOEBE: Cousin Hepzibah, I—

HEPZIBAH: What are you doing out here?

PHOEBE: I didn't mean to trespass, but from my bedroom window upstairs, I noticed your garden. It's so dark inside the house.

HEPZIBAH: Did you sleep well last night?

PHOEBE: Yes...I guess. I was awakened during the night by faint sounds of music. I went downstairs to find the source, and it seemed to come from the harpsichord in the parlor.

HEPZIBAH: Nonsense. It's not been played or opened for years.

PHOEBE: But the music—

HEPZIBAH: You were probably dreaming. No human finger has touched its keys since the days of Alice Pyncheon.

PHOEBE: I heard—

HEPZIBAH: Cousin Phoebe...I need to talk with you. Please have a seat.

(*Phoebe sits and Hepzibah takes a patio chair nearby.*)

PHOEBE: What is it?

HEPZIBAH: (*With difficulty.*) About last night...I'm sorry for my lack of hospitality. I'm not used to having visitors.

PHOEBE: You needn't apologize. I can only guess how I'd act if an unknown relative arrived unexpectedly one night.

HEPZIBAH: Still, it was ill-mannered of me to behave the way I did. I must be honest with you. Under the current circumstances, I cannot have you stay here with me.

PHOEBE: I've no place else to go. I'm not needed...or wanted at home. Please reconsider.

HEPZIBAH: You don't understand. I cannot afford food for myself, let alone someone else.

PHOEBE: I don't eat much.

HEPZIBAH: That's not the point.

PHOEBE: Then what is?

HEPZIBAH: I am used to being alone.

PHOEBE: Dear cousin, I can't tell you how it will be. But I really think we may suit one another much better than you suppose.

HEPZIBAH: You're a fine girl...I can see that plainly. Your character's not what makes me hesitate. The truth of the matter is that this house isn't suitable for a young person. As you mentioned, the garret and upper chambers are dark and gloomy. The house lets in wind and rain and snow but never sunlight! As for myself, I'm a dismal, lonesome, old woman, whose temper, I'm afraid, is none of the best and whose spirits are bad as can be. I cannot make your life pleasant.

PHOEBE: I'm not expecting you to. You'll find me naturally cheerful, and I mean to earn my keep. I've not been brought up with the luxuries of a Pyncheon. When my father died, we had no money and I had to work to help support my mother. I am young and there are many things I can learn to do in a New England village.

HEPZIBAH: Why would you want to waste your youth in a place like this? This is not a healthy place.

PHOEBE: There's so much that I can do to help you. There's the garden to be taken care of and the household duties...I'm not afraid to work.

(Hepzibah stands.)

HEPZIBAH: In truth, it's not for me to say who shall be a guest or inhabitant here. The head of Pyncheon House will be home soon.

PHOEBE: Do you mean Judge Pyncheon?

HEPZIBAH: Judge Pyncheon?! No! He will hardly cross the threshold while I live! Here's the man of whom I speak. *(Hepzibah reaches for the golden locket that hangs around her neck and opens it to reveal the picture inside. She looks at it for a moment and then shows it to Phoebe.)* Doesn't he have a handsome face?

PHOEBE: It's more than handsome...it's beautiful. It's as sweet a face as a man can have or ought to have. It has something of a child's expression—and yet not childish. One feels kindly towards him. He ought never to suffer anything. One would bear much for the sake of sparing him toil or sorrow. Who is he, Cousin Hepzibah? I thought there were no other Pyncheons left except yourself and cousin Jaffrey.

HEPZIBAH: Did you ever hear of Clifford Pyncheon?

PHOEBE: *(Thinks.)* Yes, my father once mentioned him. Hasn't he been dead for a long time?

HEPZIBAH: Well, perhaps he has been. But in old houses like this, the dead are very apt to come back again.

PHOEBE: What do you mean by that?

HEPZIBAH: Exactly what I said. Remember when I spoke of the harpsichord and Alice Pyncheon?

PHOEBE: Yes.

HEPZIBAH: She was exceedingly beautiful and accomplished in her lifetime, a hundred years ago. The fragrance of her still lingers about this house, as a dried rosebud scents the drawer where it has withered and perished. She is said to haunt this house, and a great many times—especially when one of the Pyncheons was to die—she has been heard playing sadly and beautifully on the harpsichord.

PHOEBE: Like last night?

HEPZIBAH: You heard the music. Do you still want to stay here?

PHOEBE: Cousin Hepzibah, I can't be scared off so easily.

HEPZIBAH: After all that I've said your courage doesn't fail you?

PHOEBE: It's not a matter of courage. There's nothing to fear here.

HEPZIBAH: Then you are welcome for the present to such a home as your kinswoman can offer you. I've made some tea. Would you like some?

PHOEBE: Yes, thank you.

(Hepzibah pours the tea and hands Phoebe a cup.)

HEPZIBAH: Your great-great-great-great-grandmother had these cups when she was married. She was a Davenport, of a good family. These were almost the first teacups ever seen in the colony. If one of them were to break, I think my heart would break with it. But it's nonsense to speak so about a brittle teacup when I remember what my heart has gone through without breaking. *(Shop bell rings as an impatient Customer waits outside the door. With disgust.)* Even though it's only my second day of keeping shop, I'm beginning to despise that sound.

(Phoebe stands.)

PHOEBE: Don't trouble yourself, dear cousin. I am shopkeeper today.

HEPZIBAH: You?!

PHOEBE: Yes, you shall see that I am just as good a saleswoman as I am a housekeeper and gardener. I'll take care of the shop today.

(Undetected, Holgrave stands watching the two women from inside the house.)

HEPZIBAH: If I could but find a certain document, we could tie up the shop bell for good.

PHOEBE: What document?

HEPZIBAH: Hidden somewhere in the house is said to be a document of Colonel Pyncheon's which deeds to our family a tract of land somewhere in eastern Maine. Apparently, the land is very valuable.

PHOEBE: In the meantime...

(Phoebe heads into the house to answer the shop bell. Hepzibah looks at the garden. Sensing someone, Hepzibah turns and sees Holgrave watching her.)

HEPZIBAH: *(Startled.)* Mr. Holgrave...I—

HOLGRAVE: Good morning, Miss Pyncheon. *(Indicating Phoebe.)* Who is she?

HEPZIBAH: She's no business of yours. Good day, Mr. Holgrave.

(As the lights fade and faint sounds of harpsichord music are heard, Hepzibah scurries into the house. Blackout.)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: *Pyncheon garden and house, early evening. As the music fades, the lights go up on the garden. Weary after a long day of working in the shop, Phoebe enters the garden from the house, nibbling some bread. As she walks around the garden, she hears the clucking of chickens and notices the chicken coop at the garden's far corner. She takes her bread and starts to feed the chickens. Holgrave, who has been working in the garden, sees her.*)

PHOEBE: *(To chickens.)* Here...here are some nice crumbs for you.

HOLGRAVE: They treat you like an old acquaintance.

(Startled, Phoebe turns to face Holgrave.)

PHOEBE: I...I—

HOLGRAVE: You're lucky to be in their good graces so soon.

PHOEBE: Am I?

HOLGRAVE: They've known me much longer and hardly a day passes without my bringing them food, but they have never honored me with any familiarity. I suppose Hepzibah will say that the fowls know you to be a Pyncheon.

PHOEBE: No, the secret is that after many years of feeding them at home, I've learned how to talk with hens.

HOLGRAVE: Ah, but these hens are special. Because of their aristocratic lineage, they would scorn to understand the vulgar language of the barnyard fowl. I prefer to think, and so would Hepzibah, that they recognize the family tone. You are a Pyncheon, aren't you?

PHOEBE: Yes. My name's Phoebe Pyncheon. I'm Hepzibah's cousin from the country. I didn't know that my cousin's garden was under another person's care. The flowers have been much neglected. Flowers are very much like people—they need love and care in order to bloom.

HOLGRAVE: They are a sorry lot, though I've tried. I dig and hoe and weed in this black old earth for the sake of refreshing myself with what little nature and simplicity may be left in it after men have so long sown and reaped here. This is only a pastime. My occupation is with a lighter material.

PHOEBE: Lighter material?!

HOLGRAVE: I make pictures out of sunlight.

PHOEBE: Then what are you doing here?

HOLGRAVE: Since I'm just starting in my trade and have very little money, I have prevailed upon Hepzibah to let me lodge in one of the gables. But the house is dark inside—like a bandage over one's eyes. I need light. Would you like to see an example of my work?

PHOEBE: I don't much like daguerreotypes. They are so hard and stern.

HOLGRAVE: There is truth in what you've said. Most of my likenesses do look unfriendly. But the very sufficient reason is because the originals are unfriendly. There's a wonderful insight in heaven's broad and simple sunshine. We give it credit only for depicting the merest surface when it actually brings out one's secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even if he could detect it. There is, at least, no flattery in my humble line of art. It would gratify me to have your judgment on this character.

(Holgrave pulls out a miniature picture in a case and shows it to Phoebe. She looks at it for a moment.)

PHOEBE: I know the face...that stern eye has followed me about all day. It's my Puritan ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon, who hangs in the parlor. You've found some way of copying the portrait without its black velvet cap and gray beard and have given him a modern coat and satin cravat instead of the cloak and band. *(Gives the miniature back to*

Holgrave.) I don't think he's been improved by your alterations.

HOLGRAVE: You would have seen other differences had you looked a little longer. Here we have the man...sly, subtle, imperious, and...cold as ice. Look at that eye! Would you like to be at its mercy? And that mouth! Could it ever smile? And, yet, if you could only see the benign smile of the original! It's an unfortunate piece of work, as he's a public figure of some eminence, and the likeness was intended to be engraved.

PHOEBE: Well, it is certainly very much like the old portrait. My cousin Hepzibah has another miniature. If the original's still in the world, I think he might defy the sun to make him look stern and hard.

HOLGRAVE: You've seen that picture then. Hepzibah has never shown it to me. I've a great curiosity to see it. And you find favor in his face?

PHOEBE: There never was a sweeter one. It's almost too soft and gentle for a man's.

HOLGRAVE: Is there nothing wild in his eyes?

PHOEBE: No.

HOLGRAVE: Are you sure?

PHOEBE: Quite.

HOLGRAVE: Nothing dark and sinister in his face?

PHOEBE: Nothing.

HOLGRAVE: Could you not conceive the original to have been guilty of a great crime?

PHOEBE: This is nonsense! Talking about a picture you've never seen...judging a person you've never met. You mistake him for some other. A crime, indeed! Since you are a friend of my cousin Hepzibah's, you should simply ask her to show you the picture.

HOLGRAVE: It will suit my purpose still better to see the original. As to his character, we need not discuss it. He's already been judged by a competent tribunal or one which calls itself competent.

PHOEBE: I don't know what you're talking about, and what's more, I don't care.

(Phoebe starts to exit. Holgrave grabs Phoebe's hand.)

HOLGRAVE: Please...stay. Don't go yet. I have a proposition for you. *(Hesitant, Phoebe turns around. Holgrave lets go of her hand. Hepzibah comes to the window and stares out at the couple.)* If it's agreeable to you, it would be a pleasure for me to turn over these flowers and those ancient but respectable fowls to your care. Coming fresh from country air and occupations, you'll soon feel the need of some outdoor activity. I have to confess that my talents, as well as my interests, are not with flower gardening. You can trim and tend them as you please. I'll ask only the least trifle of a blossom now and then in exchange for all the wholesome, honest vegetables with which I propose to enrich Miss Hepzibah's table. Can we strike a bargain then? Will we be united...as fellow laborers?

PHOEBE: Done. I'll tend to the flower gardens.

HOLGRAVE: Good. I was hoping you would. Well, it's time to give up work for the day. Good night, Phoebe. *(Phoebe watches Holgrave start to exit. As he reaches the door, he turns to her.)* Oh, by the way, be careful not to drink from Maule's well. Don't drink from it or bathe your face in it.

PHOEBE: Maule's well? Why not?

HOLGRAVE: Because, like an old lady's cup of tea, the water is bewitched.

(Phoebe looks at the well as Holgrave enters the house. Carrying a lantern, Hepzibah emerges from the house.)

HEPZIBAH: *(To Phoebe.)* I see you have met Mr. Holgrave.

(Startled, Phoebe turns to Hepzibah.)

PHOEBE: Holgrave? Is that his name?

HEPZIBAH: Yes. What were you talking about?

PHOEBE: Miniatures and the upkeep of the garden.

HEPZIBAH: The garden?! When I permitted him to take up residence, he seemed to be a well-meaning and orderly young man. Now that he's been here awhile, I hardly know what to make of him. If such things were in fashion nowadays, I should be apt to suspect him of studying black magic up there in his solitary gable.

PHOEBE: Cousin, why do you let him stay?

HEPZIBAH: I have seriously questioned whether I should send him away. But despite all his oddities, he is a kind person. He has a way of taking hold of one's mind, and though I don't exactly like him, I should be sorry to lose sight of him entirely. A woman clings to slight acquaintances when she lives so much alone.

PHOEBE: But if Mr. Holgrave's a lawless person—

HEPZIBAH: Oh! I suppose he's a man of honor, true enough. Should we go inside?

(As Hepzibah leads the way into the house, a muffled sound is heard. Phoebe turns to Hepzibah.)

PHOEBE: What was that?

HEPZIBAH: Excuse me?

PHOEBE: Cousin, did you speak to me just now?

HEPZIBAH: No, child.

(Hepzibah and Phoebe hear the sound again. Both are startled.)

PHOEBE: There it is again. Is there someone in the house?

HEPZIBAH: Probably just Holgrave. Phoebe, my dear girl, you've had a long, busy day. Please go to bed, for I'm sure you must be tired.

PHOEBE: Will you be all right?

HEPZIBAH: Yes, I'll just sit in the parlor awhile and collect my thoughts. It's been my custom for many years. Good night.

(Hepzibah kisses Phoebe on the forehead and holds her close.)

PHOEBE: Good night, cousin.

(Hepzibah watches Phoebe exit and then looks cautiously into the parlor. She sees the shadow of a large man, cowering in the corner. Hepzibah gasps as she recognizes him.)

HEPZIBAH: Dear God!

(Hepzibah stands paralyzed in front of the large man. Harpsichord music is heard. Blackout.)

Scene 5

(AT RISE: Pyncheon dining room and cent shop, morning. Music fades. Carrying a rose from the garden, Phoebe enters the dining room and sees Hepzibah setting the table for three. Hepzibah breaks into a nervous laugh and then begins to cry. Sensing someone behind her, she turns and sees Phoebe watching her.)

PHOEBE: Cousin Hepzibah, are you all right?

(Embarrassed, Hepzibah goes to Phoebe and takes her by the hand.)

HEPZIBAH: Bear with me, child, for truly my heart is full.
Please, bear with me.

PHOEBE: What's happened? Why are you upset?

HEPZIBAH: (Looks toward the doorway and wipes her eyes.)

Hush! Hush! He's coming.

PHOEBE: Who? Who's coming?

HEPZIBAH: Let him see you first, Phoebe, for you are young and pretty and always smiling. He's always liked bright, cheerful faces! And mine is not. (Brushes away her tears.) Why, the tears are hardly dry on it. He never could abide tears. (Continues to set the table.) Could you open the curtains and let in some sunlight? He's never been fond of gloom as some people are. He's had but little light in his life.

(Sounds of approaching footsteps are heard. Hepzibah freezes, her hands clasped, and gazes at the entrance. Phoebe watches Hepzibah with concern.)

PHOEBE: Who has put you in this state? You frighten me, cousin!

HEPZIBAH: (Whispers.) Hush! He's coming. Whatever may happen, be nothing but cheerful. (Rushes to open the door and leads Clifford Pyncheon by the hand into the room. He glances

around the room and looks at Phoebe for a moment.) Clifford, this is our cousin Phoebe. Phoebe Pyncheon. Arthur's only child, you know. She's come from the country to stay with us awhile.

CLIFFORD: *(Thinks.)* Phoebe? Phoebe Pyncheon? Arthur's child? I don't remember. No matter. She is very welcome.

HEPZIBAH: *(Leads him to his place.)* Come, Clifford, take this chair. Phoebe, lower the curtain a little. Now let's begin breakfast.

(Clifford sits down slowly in his chair and watches as Hepzibah pours him some coffee.)

CLIFFORD: Is it really you, Hepzibah? How you've changed. *(Looks at her and touches her face.)* Why do you bend your brow so? Are you angry with me? What have I done?

HEPZIBAH: *(Concerned.)* Angry? Angry with you, Clifford?! There's nothing but love here. Nothing but love! You are home. *(Clifford tastes the coffee and then gulps it eagerly. He reaches for some more.)* Here. Have as much as you want!

(Hepzibah pours more coffee. Clifford drinks the coffee and relaxes in his chair.)

CLIFFORD: This is so pleasant...so delightful! Will it last? *(Looks at the light streaming through the window.)* How beautiful the world is through an open window...an open window. *(Stands and walks slowly toward the window.)* How beautiful the play of sunlight. How fragrant those flowers. *(Turns to Phoebe.)* And this young girl's face...how cheerful, how blooming...a flower with dew on it, and sunbeams in the dewdrops. Ah, this must be all a dream...a dream. *(Painfully remembers.)* And it has quite hidden the four stone walls.

(Phoebe approaches Clifford and hands him a rose.)

PHOEBE: Here is an unusual rose, which I found this morning in the garden. There will be five or six on the bush this season. This is the most perfect of them all, not a speck of blight or mildew on it. And how sweet it is! Sweet like no other rose. One can never forget the scent.

CLIFFORD: Thank you. (*Inhales the rose's fragrance.*) This does me good. I remember how I used to prize this flower. It makes me feel young again. Thank you. (*Sees the portrait of his ancestor Colonel Pyncheon and becomes upset.*) Hepzibah! Why do you keep that picture on the wall?

HEPZIBAH: What's wrong with it?

CLIFFORD: I've told you a thousand times. Take it down at once. Take it down!

HEPZIBAH: Clifford, it's just a painting.

CLIFFORD: Then cover it up. I cannot bear it. It must not stare me in the face.

HEPZIBAH: Yes, Clifford.

CLIFFORD: Why do we live in this dismal house at all? Why not go to the South of France...or to Italy or Paris? Anywhere where there is light.

HEPZIBAH: We do not have the means.

(*Shop bell rings, startling everyone.*)

CLIFFORD: What is that?

(*Hepzibah hurries to comfort him.*)

HEPZIBAH: Clifford, I wish I could keep the sound from your ears. It is very disagreeable. That ugly noise... (*To Phoebe.*) Pray, Phoebe, run and see who's there! (*Phoebe runs to answer the bell. To Clifford, embarrassed.*) That sound is nothing but our shop bell.

CLIFFORD: Shop bell?!

HEPZIBAH: Yes. You must know that we're very poor. There was no other recourse but to earn our living or to

accept assistance from a hand that I would push aside were it to offer bread even when we were dying for it. Alone, I might have been content to starve, but I will not let you go hungry. Do you think that I've brought an irretrievable disgrace on the old house by opening a shop in the front gable? Our great-great-grandfather did the same when there was far less need! Are you ashamed of me?

(Clifford looks at her for a moment.)

CLIFFORD: Shame...disgrace. Why do you speak these words to me, Hepzibah? Are we so very poor?

HEPZIBAH: Yes, Clifford...we are. But we're also very blessed.

(Lights fade over the dining room. Lights up over the cent shop. Phoebe finishes waiting on a Customer as Judge Jaffrey Pyncheon enters the shop. Customer exits. Jaffrey looks around, sees Phoebe, and smiles.)

JAFFREY: Ah, I see how it is. I was not aware that Hepzibah had commenced business under such favorable auspices.

You are her assistant, I suppose?

PHOEBE: I am. I'm a cousin of Hepzibah's on a visit to her.

JAFFREY: Her cousin from the country? Pray pardon me, then. *(Bows to her.)* In that case, we must become better acquainted. Unless I'm mistaken, you're my own kinswoman likewise.

PHOEBE: Excuse me?

JAFFREY: Let me see... *(Thinks.)* Mary? Dolly? Phoebe? Phoebe Pyncheon, the only child of dear cousin and classmate Arthur. Ah, I see your father now about your mouth. Yes, we must be better acquainted! I'm your kinsman, my dear.

PHOEBE: You?!

JAFFREY: Surely, you must have heard of Judge Pyncheon.

PHOEBE: Yes, I have.

(Judge Jaffrey leans to kiss Phoebe but she resists his advances.)

JAFFREY: *(Insulted.)* Well. You're a good child and know how to take care of yourself. A young girl, especially if she is pretty, can never be too careful with her lips.

PHOEBE: Indeed, sir. I didn't mean to be unkind. Perhaps you wish to speak with Hepzibah. Shall I call her?

JAFFREY: Stay a moment. You seem to be a little nervous this morning. Has anything happened to disturb you? An arrival, eh? I thought so! No wonder you're out of sorts, my sweet cousin. To be intimate with such a guest may well startle an innocent, young girl.

PHOEBE: You quite puzzle me, sir. There's no frightful guest in the house but only a gentle, childlike man, whom I believe to be Cousin Hepzibah's brother. He's so mild and quiet that a mother might trust her baby with him. He? Startle me?! Oh, no, indeed.

JAFFREY: I rejoice to hear so favorable an account of Clifford. Many years ago, when we were boys, I had a great affection for him, and I still feel an interest in all his concerns, though I always thought he was weak-minded. Heaven grant him at least enough intellect to repent of his past sins!

PHOEBE: Nobody, I fancy, can have fewer to repent of.

JAFFREY: Is it possible, my dear, that you've never heard of Clifford Pyncheon...that you know nothing of his history? Well, that's all right. Your mother's shown a very proper regard for the good name of the family with which she connected herself. Believe the best you can of this unfortunate person. It's a rule that Christians should always follow in their judgment of one another. It's especially right and wise among near relatives whose characters have necessarily a degree of mutual dependence. Is Clifford in the parlor? If so, I'll just step in and see him.

(Phoebe hurries to the door to prevent him from entering.)

PHOEBE: Perhaps, sir, I'd better call Hepzibah. I'm sure she'd not like him to be disturbed. Please, sir, let me give her warning.

(Judge Jaffrey loses his patience and pushes her aside.)

JAFFREY: No. I know the house, know my cousin Hepzibah, and know her brother Clifford. You needn't put yourself to the trouble of announcing me. I'm at home here, Phoebe. You must remember that you're the stranger. I'll see for myself how Clifford is and assure him and Hepzibah of my kindly feelings and best wishes. It's right, at this juncture, that they should hear from my own lips how much I desire to serve them.

(Jaffrey turns and sees Hepzibah standing at the doorway, blocking his entrance.)

HEPZIBAH: Why are you here?

JAFFREY: *(Startled.)* Hepzibah...my dear, beloved cousin—

(Jaffrey tries to embrace Hepzibah but she pushes him away.)

HEPZIBAH: I wish there was some love in my heart for you, but there isn't. What do you want?

JAFFREY: I've lost no time in hastening to offer any assistance in my power towards making Clifford comfortable. He belongs to us all. I know how much he requires—how much he used to require—with his delicate taste and his love of the beautiful. Anything in my house—pictures, books, wines, luxuries of the table—he may command them all.

HEPZIBAH: You still haven't answered my question. What are you doing here?

JAFFREY: It would afford me most heartfelt gratification to see him. Shall I step in?

HEPZIBAH: No. He cannot see visitors...especially you.

JAFFREY: A visitor, my dear cousin?! Is that what you call me?

HEPZIBAH: No, there are other names that I have for you. But being a good Christian, I cannot repeat them.

JAFFREY: Let me be Clifford's host and your own likewise. Let me do something for him.

HEPZIBAH: You can do something for him. You can leave right now.

JAFFREY: Come at once to my house. The country air and all of the conveniences—I may say luxuries—that I've gathered about me will do wonders for him. I can give him a home.

HEPZIBAH: Clifford has a home...here.

JAFFREY: May heaven forgive you, Hepzibah, if you suffer any ancient prejudice or animosity to weigh with you in this matter! I stand here with an open heart, willing and anxious to receive yourself and Clifford into it.

HEPZIBAH: A heart?! You must have recently acquired it...legally or otherwise.

JAFFREY: Don't refuse my good offices, my earnest propositions for your welfare!

HEPZIBAH: For our welfare?! There's something more lurking behind your propositions.

JAFFREY: I ask you, why would you want to confine your brother to this dismal house with its stifled air when you can have the delightful freedom of my country home?

HEPZIBAH: It would never suit Clifford.

JAFFREY: Woman! What's the meaning of this? Have you other resources? Nay, I suspected as much! Take care, Hepzibah, take care! Clifford is on the brink of as black a ruin as ever befell him yet. Get out of my way!

HEPZIBAH: No, you've done enough to him in his life. You'll not see him!

(Jaffrey forces Hepzibah aside. Hearing the commotion, Clifford comes to the door and spies Judge Jaffrey.)

CLIFFORD: *(Screams in horror.)* Don't let him in!

(As Hepzibah and Jaffrey struggle, Phoebe runs to protect Clifford. Jaffrey loses his balance and falls to the floor. Harpsichord music is heard as Hepzibah hurries to Clifford. Blackout.)

Scene 6

(AT RISE: *Pyncheon garden, early evening. Harpsichord music is heard discordant and alarming at first and then gradually becoming sweet. Music fades as the lights go up to reveal Phoebe reading to Clifford, Aunt Venner, and Holgrave.*)

PHOEBE: (*Reads from book.*)

"I long for scenes where man hath never trod
A place where a woman never smiled nor wept
There to abide with my Creator, God,
And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept,
Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below—above the vaulted sky." (*Closes the book.*)

HOLGRAVE: That was beautiful.

CLIFFORD: (*To Phoebe.*) Thank you for reading it to us,
Cousin.

AUNT VENNER: I enjoy these quiet little meetin's of a
Sunday afternoon. They're very much like what I expect to
have after I retire to my farm. That's the great brick house,
you know, the "workhouse" most folks call it. But I mean to
do my work first and go there to be idle and enjoy myself.

CLIFFORD: Aunt Venner's always talking about her farm, but
I've a better scheme for her by and by.

AUNT VENNER: Ah, Mr. Clifford Pyncheon, you may
scheme for me as much as you please, but I'm not goin' to
give up this one scheme of my own even if I never bring it
really to pass. It does seem to me that men make a
wonderful mistake in tryin' to heap up property upon
property. If I'd done so, I should feel as if Providence was
not bound to take care of me, and, at all events, the city
wouldn't be! I'm one of those people who think that infinity
is big enough for us all...and eternity long enough.

PHOEBE: Why, so they are. But for this short life of ours, one
would like a house and moderate garden spot of one's own.

CLIFFORD: When I'm enjoying myself, as now, I try to recall my earlier life—the happier times I cannot remember. Memories of my past have all been annihilated, and my future's been blotted out. When I close my eyes, all I see is a dark, terrible face gazing at me.

PHOEBE: It's over. You've nothing to fear.

CLIFFORD: (*Extends his hand.*) Take my hand and pinch it hard. Better yet, give me a rose that I may press its thorns and prove myself awake by the pain.

PHOEBE: (*Takes his hand.*) Why?

CLIFFORD: To assure myself that this garden—this sunlight—and your smile are real. For most of my life, I've sat in darkness without any human kindness or contact. I want happiness. I've waited so many years for it. It is late. I want my happiness. (*Phoebe kneels to comfort him as Hepzibah watches from the house.*) I've no rights among human beings. No rights anywhere except this house—this cursed old house. It's this house that I am doomed to haunt. I cannot go outside these grounds. I'd be frightful to my neighbors. They'd point their fingers at me and whisper amongst themselves. Children would cling to their mothers' gowns at the sight of me.

(*Phoebe holds Clifford as he buries his head in his hands and cries.*)

PHOEBE: You shouldn't worry what others may think, Cousin. You're beautiful.

CLIFFORD: I'm beautiful to no one.

PHOEBE: You're beautiful to me.

(*Hepzibah enters from the house.*)

HEPZIBAH: I'm afraid that it's been too long a day for Clifford. He's tired. (*Takes Clifford by the arm. To Clifford.*) Come into the house with me, and I'll fix you a bowl of currants and milk. Would you like that?

CLIFFORD: Yes, I would.

HEPZIBAH: What about you, Aunt Venner? Would you like some, too?

AUNT VENNER: A woman would be a fool to pass up a bowl of currants. (*Hepzibah leads Clifford into the house. To Phoebe.*) We shall miss you next Sabbath afternoon. It's unaccountable how little while it takes some folks to grow just as natural to a woman as her own breath. My years have been a great many and your life is but just beginning, and, yet, you're somehow as familiar to me as if I had found you at my mother's door and you had blossomed like a running vine all along my pathway since. Come back soon, or I shall be gone to my farm, for I begin to find these wood sawing jobs a little too tough for my back.

PHOEBE: Very soon, Aunt Venner.

AUNT VENNER: And let it be all the sooner, Phoebe, for the sake of those poor souls yonder. They can never do without you now, no more than if one of God's angels had been living with them and making their dismal house pleasant and comfortable. Don't it seem to you they'd be in a sad case if some pleasant summer morning like this the angel should spread his wings and fly to the place he came from? They can't bear it, Miss Phoebe, so be sure to come back.

PHOEBE: I am no angel, Aunt Venner, but I suppose people never feel so much like angels as when they are doing what little good they may. So I shall certainly come back.

(Aunt Venner enters the house.)

HOLGRAVE: Do you think Clifford's all right?

PHOEBE: I believe so. It's strange...one moment he's as happy as a child and then suddenly he's disturbed.

HOLGRAVE: Disturbed? By things outside or by thoughts within?

PHOEBE: I don't know. I cannot see his thoughts. Very often, his mood changes without any reason that can be guessed at

just as a cloud comes over the sun. He's known such great sorrow that his heart is scarred by it.

HOLGRAVE: I can understand his feelings.

PHOEBE: Can you? Can you really comprehend what he's been through in his life? Can any of us?

HOLGRAVE: Probably not. What an odd and baffling world! The more I look at it, the more it puzzles me. I begin to suspect that a man's bewilderment is the measure of his wisdom. Men and women are such strange creatures that one never can be certain that he really knows them, nor ever guess what they've been from what he sees them to be now. Take, for instance, Judge Pyncheon and Clifford. What a riddle...a complexity of complexities they represent. (*Turns and gazes at the house.*) Shall we never, never get rid of the past? It lies upon the present like a giant's dead body! In fact, it's just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength carrying about the corpse of an old giant who died a long while ago and only needs to be decently buried. Just think a moment. It will startle you to see what slaves we are to the past—to death, if we give the matter the right word.

PHOEBE: I do not see it.

HOLGRAVE: Maybe you don't want to. A dead man, if he happens to have made a will, disposes of wealth no longer his own. Or, if he dies without a will, it is distributed in accordance with the notions of men much longer dead than he. A dead man sits on all our judgment seats, and living judges do but search out and repeat his decisions. We read dead men's books! We laugh at dead men's jokes, and cry at dead men's pathos. We worship the living Deity according to dead men's forms and creeds. Whatever we seek to do of our own free motion a dead man's icy hand obstructs us! We must be dead ourselves before we can begin to have any influence on our world. And then it's no longer our world but the world of another generation where we've no right to

interfere. I ought to have said, too, that we live in dead men's houses...for instance, this house.

PHOEBE: And why not, so long as we can be comfortable in them?

HOLGRAVE: If each generation were expected to build its own houses, that single change would lead to almost every reform for which society is now clamoring. I doubt our public buildings ought ever to be built of such permanent materials as stone or brick. It's better that they should crumble to ruin every 20 years, or thereabouts, as a hint to people to examine and reform the institutions which these structures symbolize.

PHOEBE: How you hate everything old!

HOLGRAVE: I certainly love nothing moldy. (*Points to the house.*) Take this old house. Is it a wholesome place to live in with its black shingles and green moss; its dark, low-studded rooms; its grime and sordidness; the crystallization on its walls of the human breath that has been drawn and exhaled here in discontent and anguish? The house ought to be purified with fire—purified till only its ashes remain.

PHOEBE: Then why do you live in it?

HOLGRAVE: I am pursuing my studies here. This house is expressive of that odious and abominable past against which I have just been railing. I dwell in it that I may know better how to hate it. Did you ever hear the story of Maule, the wizard, and what happened between him and your great-great-grandfather?

PHOEBE: Yes. I heard it once long ago from my father and two or three times from my cousin Hepzibah. She seems to think that all the Pyncheon calamities have sprung from that quarrel with the "wizard," as you call him. And you look as if you think so, too, Mr. Holgrave.

HOLGRAVE: I do. Indeed, the original evil-doer, the father of this mischief, appears to have perpetuated himself. His very image in mind and body still walks the streets with every

prospect of transmitting to posterity as rich and as wretched an inheritance as he has received!

PHOEBE: Who are you talking about?

HOLGRAVE: Judge Pyncheon. Don't you see his resemblance to the old portrait of Colonel Pyncheon?

PHOEBE: You're not serious, are you?

HOLGRAVE: Very.

PHOEBE: You talk of the Pyncheon curse as if it were contagious.

HOLGRAVE: Isn't it?

PHOEBE: You forget that I'm a Pyncheon.

HOLGRAVE: There are exceptions to everything. (*Points to a flower box.*) Do you see those plants over there by the house?

PHOEBE: Yes, I believe they're posies but they've not bloomed.

HOLGRAVE: Nor have they ever. The old people used to call them "Alice's Posies" in remembrance of Alice Pyncheon, who brought their seeds from Italy. Have you ever heard the story of Alice Pyncheon?

PHOEBE: I've heard of her. That's all.

(Note: As Holgrave tells the following story, the lights shift between the present day actions of Holgrave and Phoebe and the flashback involving Gervayse and William.)

HOLGRAVE: (*To Phoebe.*) Thirty-seven years after the house was built, the owner—Gervayse Pyncheon, grandson of the old Colonel—summoned the carpenter William Maule to him. William was the grandson of Maule, the old wizard, and the only son of Thomas Maule, who built the Pyncheon mansion.

(Lights dim on Holgrave and Phoebe. Lights up on Gervayse. Gervayse Pyncheon sits drinking a cup of coffee. Gervayse turns to see William Maule enter the room. Gervayse drinks his coffee slowly and deliberately.)

WILLIAM: (*To Gervayse.*) You sent for me. Please explain your business so th't I may go back t' my work.

GERVAYSE: You've heard, no doubt, that the Pyncheon family's been trying to settle a claim on a piece of land in eastern Maine. My grandfather was in possession of the deed at the time of his death. The deed for this eastern claim has since disappeared.

WILLIAM: What can a poor carpenter have t' do with the grand affairs of the Pyncheon family?

GERVAYSE: Even though I was only a child at the time, I do remember that on the very morning of the Colonel's death certain of his papers were spread out on the table.

WILLIAM: M' father was an honest man. He'd never've carried off those papers.

GERVAYSE: I didn't say he did, did I?

WILLIAM: So why am I here?

GERVAYSE: To discuss a deal.

WILLIAM: A deal?

GERVAYSE: I'll give you anything you want if you can give me information leading to that deed.

WILLIAM: Would y' hand over th' old wizard's homestead together with the House of the Seven Gables now standin' on it?

GERVAYSE: Give up this house?! Are you mad? My grandfather wouldn't rest quietly in his grave.

WILLIAM: 'E never has, if all the tales are true. But that concerns his grandson more than it does me. I've no other terms to propose.

(Gervayse thinks for a moment.)

GERVAYSE: I consent to your proposition, Maule. Put me in possession of the deed so that I may establish my rights to the eastern claim, and the House of the Seven Gables is yours.

WILLIAM: One thing more...if y'want the whereabouts of this document, I must talk with your daughter Alice.

GERVAYSE: What does my daughter have to do with this?

WILLIAM: Do y'want me to find the document?

(Lights dim on William and Gervayse. Lights up on Holgrave and Phoebe. Spellbound, Phoebe listens as Holgrave continues the story.)

HOLGRAVE: *(To Phoebe.)* Despite Pyncheon's objections, William Maule insisted that the young lady be summoned, and he convinced Pyncheon that the only chance of finding the document was through the clear, crystal medium of a pure and virgin intelligence like that of fair Alice. Finally, Pyncheon relented and summoned his daughter.

(Harpichord music is faintly heard as the lights fade on Holgrave and come up on Alice Pyncheon as she enters the room.)

ALICE: Father, you sent for me?

GERVAYSE: Yes, Alice. This young man...his name is William Maule.

ALICE: Maule?

GERVAYSE: He says he may be able to discover, with your assistance, a certain document, which's been missing since long before your birth. You'll oblige me, daughter, by answering his inquiries and complying with his lawful and reasonable requests, so far as they may appear to have this object in view.

ALICE: *(Reluctant.)* Father...I—

GERVAYSE: I'll stay in the room.

WILLIAM: Miss Alice will no doubt feel quite safe under her father's protection.

ALICE: Of course, I'll entertain no apprehension with my father at hand. Neither do I conceive that a lady, while true to herself, can fear from anyone under any circumstances.

(William shows her to a chair.)

WILLIAM: Then, Miss Alice, will you please sit down? *(Alice sits.)* Now fix your eyes on mine.

(Alice stares into William's eyes. After a moment, she becomes entranced by him. Gervayse watches as William starts to hypnotize Alice.)

GERVAYSE: Stop, Maule! I forbid you to proceed any further.

ALICE: Pray, my dear father, do not interrupt the young man. I assure you his efforts will prove harmless.

(William hypnotizes Alice.)

WILLIAM: *(To Gervayse.)* Behold your daughter. Speak to her!

GERVAYSE: Alice...my daughter.

(Alice does not stir.)

WILLIAM: Louder!

GERVAYSE: Alice!

WILLIAM: Touch 'er. Shake your daughter.

(Gervayse takes Alice's hand and kisses her. Alice does not respond. He shakes her violently.)

GERVAYSE: Wake up! Alice! *(To William.)* Give her back to me or you shall climb Gallows Hill in your grandfather's footsteps.

WILLIAM: Softly, Mr. Pyncheon. Is it my crime if you've sold your daughter for th'mere hope of gettin' a sheet of yellow parchment? There sits Mistress Alice quietly asleep. She's

mine. Mine by th'right of th'strongest spirit. (*To Alice.*)

Alice...can you hear me?

ALICE: (*Nods.*) Yes.

WILLIAM: There's a missin' document regardin' a land claim in eastern Maine. Is there a spirit in this room t'help us find it?

ALICE: Yes.

WILLIAM: What d'you see?

ALICE: There are three figures. One is an aged, dignified, stern-looking gentlemen clad as for a solemn festival in grave and costly attire...but with a great bloodstain on his richly wrought outfit.

GERVAYSE: That must be my grandfather.

ALICE: The second, an aged man, poorly dressed with a dark and hateful expression and a broken rope around his neck...and the third, a middle-aged man wearing the clothes of a carpenter.

GERVAYSE: The old wizard...and his son who built this house.

ALICE: They all possess the knowledge of the missing document. One of them... (*Starts to cringe in her chair.*) No...no...

WILLIAM: What d'you see, Alice?

ALICE: The old, dignified gentleman holds the parchment...he tries to give it to me but is prevented by the other two men. He's trying to shout forth the secret. The other two men struggle with him and press their hands over his mouth...there is fresh blood on his clothes.

WILLIAM: (*To Gervayse.*) It'll never be allowed. The custody of this secret that'd enrich his heirs makes part of your grandfather's retribution. He must choke on it until it's no longer of any value. And y'can keep the House of the Seven Gables! It's too dear bought an inheritance, and too heavy with th'curse upon it t'be shifted yet awhile from the Colonel's posterity. So, y'still have old Maule's blood to drink.

GERVAYSE: Give me back my daughter.

WILLIAM: Your daughter?! Why, she's fairly mine. Nevertheless, I'll leave her in your safe keepin'. But I don't warrant you that she shall forget me.

(Alice wakes up. Lights up on Holgrave.)

HOLGRAVE: *(To Phoebe.)* When Alice awoke from her strange trance, she had no recollection of her visionary experience. *(As Gervayse tries to usher Alice out of the room, she looks back at William and starts to resist. Alice reaches for William as the lights fade out above them.)* While Alice lived, she was Maule's slave in a bondage more humiliating, a thousand fold, than that which binds a chain around the body. *(Lights up on William Maule, who stands alone.)* Seated by his humble fireside, Maule had but to wave his hand, and wherever the proud lady chanced to be... *(Lights up on Gervayse, Alice, and a female Relative in church kneeling in prayer.)* ...whatever her place of occupation, her spirit passed from beneath her own control and bowed to Maule.

(Maule smiles to himself and gestures with his hand.)

WILLIAM: Laugh, Alice.

(To her family's horror, Alice suddenly breaks into wild laughter.)

GERVAYSE: Alice! Please!

RELATIVE: Quiet, child! This is the Lord's house.

GERVAYSE: Alice! That's enough!

(Maule joins Alice in laughter. Maule gestures again.)

WILLIAM: Cry, Alice.

(Alice begins to sob hysterically. As Gervoyse and the Relative try to quiet Alice, she resists their attempts and becomes uncontrollable. Lights dim on Gervoyse and the Relative as they hurry Alice out of the church. Maule watches the scene in his mind with a proud delight.)

HOLGRAVE: *(To Phoebe.)* It wasn't Maule's purpose to ruin Alice but to wreak a low, ungenerous scorn upon her. Soon all dignity of life was lost. One night, William beckoned Alice.

(Alice quickly puts her cape on and tries to sneak out but is caught by Gervoyse.)

GERVAYSE: Alice, where're you going?

ALICE: For a walk, Father.

GERVAYSE: Don't lie to me.

ALICE: I'm not. The house is stuffy and I wanted some air...so I thought I would—

GERVAYSE: You were going to see him.

ALICE: Who? Who are you talking about, Father?

GERVAYSE: William Maule. I've gotten reports that you've been seen loitering around his residence and his shop. Have you no shame...no dignity! You're a Pyncheon. Act like one.

ALICE: Why are you angry?

GERVAYSE: Do you wish to make me happy, Alice?

ALICE: Yes, Father, if I can.

GERVAYSE: You can if you will. It all depends on your will. Give him up.

ALICE: Give up William?

GERVAYSE: Yes, give him up. He is a Maule. Don't you understand?

ALICE: Father, I know he loves me.

GERVAYSE: He doesn't.

ALICE: That's not true.

GERVAYSE: You'll never see or have anything to do with him again.

ALICE: Father, I love him! I've promised myself to him, to stay with him no matter what comes.

GERVAYSE: Did you hear what I said? I forbid you to see him.

ALICE: Don't, Father...please. I love him and I want to be with him.

GERVAYSE: Not if I can help it.

ALICE: No.

GERVAYSE: You'll not leave this house!

ALICE: No. (*Shouts.*) No!

(Gervayse forcefully drags Alice from the room as Alice struggles violently.)

HOLGRAVE: (*To Phoebe.*) Escaping through her bedroom window, she hastened along the street to the small dwelling of a laboring man.

(Lights up on Alice as she walks hesitantly down the street to a house inside of which lively music, laughter, and merriment are heard. She knocks on the door. After a moment, William Maule comes out to her.)

ALICE: You called me to come, sir.

(Alice curtsies low to him and remains in the position with her head bowed.)

WILLIAM: Answer me this...d'you love me?

ALICE: Yes, sir. With all my heart and soul.

WILLIAM: And you'll do anythin' for me?

ALICE: Whatever you desire, I will do.

WILLIAM: Anythin'?

ALICE: My love knows no conditions.

(William kisses Alice gently.)

WILLIAM: Tonight I'm getting married to a laborer's daughter. I want you to wait upon my bride. *(Alice looks up at him blankly. He offers his hand.)* Should we go inside? The wedding is about to begin.

(Lights dim as Alice follows Maule inside.)

HOLGRAVE: *(To Phoebe.)* When the ceremony was over, Maule released Alice from her enchanted sleep. Stripped of all pride—humbly and with a smile steeped in sadness—she kissed Maule's wife and went home. She took cold walking home that night and died a week after. Her sudden death deeply wounded William Maule, for he'd only meant to humble Alice, not destroy her. *(Lights up dimly over William and Alice as they gaze at each other. As lights fade on William and Alice, they come up on Holgrave and Phoebe. It is evening now and the moonlight bathes them with a soft glow. Holgrave gazes at Phoebe, who leans toward him, hypnotized. For a moment while she is under his spell, he contemplates kissing her. He resists the temptation and wakes her gently.)* Phoebe...wake up. You fell asleep at my story.

PHOEBE: Asleep?! No! I was very attentive, even though I don't remember the incidents quite clearly.

HOLGRAVE: It doesn't matter. I don't recall ever seeing an evening as beautiful as this, and I've never felt so much happiness as I do at this moment. What a world we live in! How good and beautiful! How young it is, too, with nothing really rotten or age worn in it. *(Looks up at the moon.)* Moonlight and the sentiment in man's heart responsive to it are the greatest of renovators and reformers.

PHOEBE: The moonlight has charmed me, too. I've never cared much about moonlight before, so why is it so beautiful tonight?

HOLGRAVE: You've never felt it before?

PHOEBE: No...I don't think so. Though life doesn't look the same now that I have felt it. (*Half-melancholy laugh.*) I fear I've changed since coming to this house and knowing Hepzibah and Clifford. In the few weeks I've been here, I've grown older—lost half the lightness in my spirits. Though I have no regrets, I've given them my sunshine. I cannot both give and keep it.

HOLGRAVE: You've lost nothing, Phoebe. Our first youth's of no value, for we're never conscious of it until after it's gone. But, sometimes, there comes a second youth, gushing like a wellspring out of the heart's joy at being in love.

PHOEBE: You mustn't say things like that. You frighten and confuse me.

HOLGRAVE: One day the truth'll be clear to you when you think of this evening.

PHOEBE: I must go in.

HOLGRAVE: Please don't go.

PHOEBE: I have to. Hepzibah's not very good with numbers. I'm afraid she'll give herself a headache over the day's accounts unless I go in and help her.

(Holgrave reaches out and prevents Phoebe from exiting.)

HOLGRAVE: Venner tells me you're going away.

PHOEBE: Yes. I'm returning home.

HOLGRAVE: Hopefully not for too long.

PHOEBE: Only for a little while...a couple of days at most. I've some unfinished business there.

HOLGRAVE: You're needed here more than you realize. Whatever health and comfort exist in the house is because of you.

PHOEBE: You give me too much credit.

HOLGRAVE: No, I don't. These blessings came with you and will vanish when you leave. Your cousins, Hepzibah and Clifford, only exist by your grace.

(Phoebe frees herself from Holgrave.)

PHOEBE: They can continue without me.

HOLGRAVE: I don't think so.

PHOEBE: What's your interest in them?

HOLGRAVE: I care for them in a way. But you've no idea how different my heart is from your own. It's not my impulse regarding your cousins either to help or to hinder them but to look on, to analyze and to comprehend the drama, which for almost 200 years has been dragging its slow length over the ground where you and I now stand. There's a feeling inside of me that the end is near.

PHOEBE: How can you stand there and see them in distress without desiring to help or comfort them? You talk as if this old house was a theater and Hepzibah's and Clifford's misfortunes, and those of generations before, were a tragic series of plays—only the present one appears to be played for your amusement. But the play that serves as a pastime for you costs the performers too much...and the audience is too coldhearted.

HOLGRAVE: You don't understand.

PHOEBE: Don't I? And what do you mean that the end is drawing near? Do you know of any trouble? If you do, tell me at once, and I'll not leave them.

HOLGRAVE: No. Forgive me. If I were aware of anything which would threaten your cousins, whom I consider to be my friends, you, and they, would know it. I've no such knowledge.

PHOEBE: You're holding something back.

HOLGRAVE: I've no secrets but my own. I do know that Judge Pyncheon still keeps his eye on Clifford in whose ruin he had so large a share.

PHOEBE: Cousin Jaffrey?! Are you implying that he was responsible for Clifford's imprisonment?

HOLGRAVE: The Judge's motives and intentions are suspect. He's as determined and relentless as an inquisitor. If he'd

something to gain, Judge Pyncheon would himself put Clifford to the rack and wrench his joints from their sockets.

PHOEBE: Why?

HOLGRAVE: I don't know. I ask myself the same question.

Wealthy and powerful as he is, what does Judge Pyncheon have to hope, or fear, from Clifford?

PHOEBE: You worry me that some tragedy is coming, and I don't know what to do to prevent it.

HOLGRAVE: There's nothing you or I can do.

PHOEBE: That's no comfort.

HOLGRAVE: Honesty rarely is.

(Phoebe sees Hepzibah watching them.)

PHOEBE: I need to go in. Hepzibah will be concerned.

HOLGRAVE: Think on what I said.

(Phoebe hurries into the house. As the lights dim, Holgrave and Hepzibah lock eyes. Harpsichord music is heard. Blackout. Intermission.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]