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The Coming of Annabel

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
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No. 5 Hamilton Place, Boston, Massachusetts

The Coming of Annabel

A Comedy in One Act

By

ALICE C. THOMPSON

*Author of "The Wrong Miss Mather,"
"The Scarlet Bonnet," etc.*

BOSTON

WALTER H. BAKER & CO.

1912

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The Coming of Annabel

CHARACTERS

MRS. MARY WRIGHT.
MISS LUCINDA LOVE.
MISS TABITHA TOUCHETT.
MISS JANE WINTER.
MRS. BEULAH BLACK.
MISS ANNABEL GARLAND.

SCENE.—Mrs. Wright's sitting-room.



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PROPERTIES

A white curtain, sewing materials, a pink parasol, small leather traveling bag, a pack of cards.

COSTUMES

The first four characters wear rather old-fashioned, country clothes. MISS TABITHA TOUCHETT and MISS JANE WINTER eccentric. MISS LUCINDA LOVE rather juvenile. MRS. BLACK, very stylish mourning. ANNABEL, a simple well-made linen suit, and pretty flower trimmed hat.

The Coming of Annabel

SCENE.—*A simply furnished room. Braided rugs on floor. Two old-fashioned rockers, one R. C., one at L. C. A small table, a sofa, and straight-backed chair. Entrance at C.*

(At rise MRS. MARY WRIGHT is discovered R. C. sewing on a curtain. She is a pleasant-looking woman, slightly under middle age. A knock C.)

MRS. W. Come in.

Enter MISS JANE WINTER. She is a stern-looking woman with hair beginning to turn gray.

JANE. How do you do, Mary? Am I the first?

MRS. W. *(rising)*. The first?

JANE. The first to come, of course. I hope you haven't forgotten that we're holding a meeting here—an indignant meeting, they call it. Good name, for we're all mad, I can tell you.

MRS. W. Of course *(dubiously)*, about —

JANE *(snappily)*. About Beulah Black. It's got to be stopped, Mary.

MRS. W. Oh, yes. But it's a pity. I got a message just half an hour ago to say that my niece, Annabel Garland, is coming to-day, and I'm rushing to get her room ready. That's why the meeting kind of went out of my head for a while. Sit down, Jane.

(They sit R. C., MRS. W. taking up her sewing again.)

JANE. I should think your niece could have put off her coming for a day.

MRS. W. Oh, I've been expecting her a long time and this is the only day that would fit in, I guess. She's an only child, and it's hard to spare her. I must get these curtains hemmed and up. I want her room to look pretty.

JANE. Well, you'll have to put them away when the other two come. You wait till you see Tabitha Touchett. She won't waste any time coming to the point, I can tell you. (*A knock c.*) I'll open the door. (*Goes up c.*) Here she is.

Enter MISS TABITHA TOUCHETT. She is a thin woman with a very severe expression; speaks quickly and decidedly.

TAB. Good-day, Mary. (*Mrs. W. hastily goes to table and puts curtain down.*) Good-day, Jane. (*Nods.*) I'm glad you're here. Lucindy's late, as usual.

MRS. W. Please sit down, Tabitha.

(Brings her a chair; all sit.)

TAB. I hope this disgraceful affair will be thoroughly threshed out to-day.

JANE. That's what we're here for.

TAB. If Mrs. Black is determined to go on the wrong road, she's not a going to drag the whole village after her into a slough of despond, not if I have anything to say to it.

JANE. And I.

TAB. I hope you agree, Mary.

MRS. W. Certainly. Oh, yes, I'm for morality and good behavior. Would you mind if I go on with this curtain?

TAB. Curtain! What's a curtain got to do with this?

MRS. W. Nothing. But my niece, Annabel, is coming to-day to visit me, and I'm trying to finish her room before she arrives. She'll be here very soon now. (*Brings curtain down c. and begins to sew on it.*) Jonas Worth is going to drive her up from the train. I wish I could go to meet her myself.

TAB. You've got a more important duty at home, Mary. This is a question of saving souls. (*A knock c.*) There's Lucindy. I hope she'll be serious and not giggle.

(Mrs. W. opens door. Enter MISS LUCINDA LOVE. She is "fair, fat, and nearly forty"; carries a ruffled pink parasol.)

LUC. (*cheerfully*). Am I late?

TAB. Naturally.

LUC. I met Jonas Worth driving down to the depot and I stopped to speak to him.

(Carefully shakes and smooths out parasol.)

TAB. (*acidly*). Of course.

JANE. Do put your parasol away and come and sit down. The subject has been opened up.

(LUC. *sits, holding parasol on lap.*)

LUC. The subject !

TAB. Mrs. Beulah Black.

LUC. Oh, yes.

TAB. I wouldn't mind so much her being a stranger in the village —

JANE. And that's bad enough.

TAB. In addition to her dressing the way she does, even though it is all in black. Every one turns around to stare at her.

JANE. I did myself.

TAB. She's so conspicuous. Why, I believe the very cows turn their heads away when they meet her.

LUC. (*flippantly*). And even the corn is shocked.

(JANE and TAB. *frown upon her.*)

TAB. But when it comes to her giving a card party in Petersville, it's about time we took a firm stand.

LUC. And none of us asked.

JANE. Lucinda Love, that may be your reason for being against her, but it's not mine.

TAB. And if you can't say anything more sensible than that my advice to you is to listen. (LUC. *opens her parasol and retires behind it.*) For thirty years (*dropping voice*) or more have I lived in Petersville (LUC. *shuts the parasol suddenly and smiles meaningly at TAB.*), and never once have I been asked to a card party.

JANE. They say they had prizes.

LUC. No, really? I wonder what they were.

TAB. And when a perfect stranger, a lady calling herself a widow —

MRS. W. (*interrupting*). Now, Tabitha, we ought to take her word for that.

TAB. When such a person comes to a respectable, virtuous, law-abiding village and then proceeds to tempt our sons and daughters —

LUC. (*innocently*). Your sons and daughters, Tabitha?

TAB. (*impatiently*). I was speaking figuratively, of course. When she tempts them with games of chance, cards — I

have never handled a card in my life, not even a visiting card. Once I got a valentine from my own sister's child, a foolish thing with a wreath of flowers around two of those little fat cupids—I tore into pieces. I will have no trafficking with vice.

MRS. W. Oh, how could you have the heart, Tabitha—your own niece? Why, I keep and prize every card Annabel has ever sent me.

JANE. Well, the question is, What are we to do?

TAB. Something must be done at once, for I have reason to believe this Mrs. Black has come to stay.

MRS. W. She will learn wisdom in time. She's young, you know, and pretty.

JANE. I believe she's older than she looks. These city people do all sorts of things to keep off old age. They use cold cream on their faces.

TAB. If we had been intended to use cold cream, it would have growed on bushes ready made. Handsome is as handsome does, I say, and if a woman is going to demoralize a whole village then she's not handsome to me. (*Suddenly.*) And she's after Jonas Worth. I know it.

LUC. Oh, ho.

JANE. I think Mrs. Black knows—I think she's overheard something of our all being against her, and the reason, too.

TAB. I'm glad of it.

(*Mrs. W. rises and goes to door.*)

JANE. Mary doesn't say much.

TAB. No, she's too taken up with the thought of this girl Annabel.

LUC. Have you ever seen her?

TAB. Never.

LUC. I wonder if she's pretty.

JANE. She's well raised, anyway. And I reckon she'll be scandalized to find folks play cards in Petersville.

TAB. It's just to protect such young people as this Annabel that this indignation meeting was called.

MRS. W. (*eagerly*). I think she's coming. I believe that is Jonas's buggy.

TAB. Where? Where? (*Jumps up and runs to door.*)

LUC. Oh, Jonas! Mrs. Black! Cards! (*Giggles.*)

JANE. Do try and be serious, Lucinda Love. Remember

we've got to set an example in Petersville. What will Annabel think?

MRS. W. Here she is, here she is. The dear girl.

(Waves hand.)

TAB. I wonder if he's coming in too. He's helping her down. Yes, she is pretty. *(Disappointed.)* No, he's gone on. *(Comes down c.)*

MRS. W. She's running—she's here. Dear little Annabel.

JANE. Her mind is on nothing but that girl.

(All look up c.)

Enter MISS ANNABEL GARLAND. She is a pretty girl about eighteen years old. Carries a small traveling bag.

MRS. W. Annabel! *(Opens her arms.)*

ANNA. Here I am! *(MRS. W. embraces her.)* Dear Aunt Mary. You haven't changed a bit, not a little bit. Oh, I love this place. I had such a lovely drive. And Jonas is so nice. I feel as if I'd known him for years and years.

TAB. Jonas!

(MRS. W and ANNA. come down c. MRS. W. puts traveling bag on table.)

ANNA. Oh, you've asked some of your friends in to meet me. How kind!

MRS. W. Miss Tabitha Touchett. *(TAB. gives a stiff bow.)* Miss Jane Winter. *(JANE smiles feebly. ANNA. beams upon each in turn.)* Miss Lucinda Love. *(LUC. runs to ANNA. and kisses her.)* My niece, Miss Annabel Garland.

LUC. I feel sure we'll be friends.

ANNA. Every one is so kind in the country. That's why I like to come. There's so much friendliness and real affection and charity in a village, isn't there?

JANE. We—we hope so.

ANNA. Oh, but there is. You feel it in the very air. You see it in the faces of the people you meet. It's like a big family, all brothers and sisters, all familiar and easy and honest with one another and always ready to stick up for one another.

TAB. Yes, provided you were born and raised in the township.

ANNA. You're just as good to strangers. Now I know it.

Look how you've come to meet me on the very day I arrive.
It's lovely of you.

(TAB. and JANE exchange glances. LUC. picks up the curtain and examines it intently.)

MRS. W. Did you have a pleasant journey, dear?

ANNA. Oh, yes. It was so interesting.

JANE. It's rather a long trip to take alone. Didn't you get tired of it?

ANNA. No. I looked out of the window for a while, and then, you know, I had my cards to amuse me.

TAB. (*piercingly*). Cards!

JANE (*stepping back*). Cards!

(LUC. drops curtain. MRS. W. picks it up.)

ANNA. Yes. Whenever I travel I always put a pack of cards in my bag.

TAB. (*bitterly*). Another come to Petersville.

JANE. And we were going to protect her from this very thing.

ANNA. They're not playing cards, you know, but fortune-telling cards, just for amusement. Where's my bag?

MRS. W. Here it is, dear.

ANNA. (*opening bag*). Here they are. (JANE and LUC. go up to her.) You see, each card has some prophecy on it.

LUC. How interesting!

JANE. How curious!

MRS. W. They appear to be very harmless.

ANNA. Yes, look at them.

(JANE takes one very gingerly. TAB. knocks it out of her hand.)

JANE. Tabitha Touchett!

(LUC. picks up card and returns it to ANNA.)

TAB. Cards!

ANNA. But there's no harm in them. Why, how could they hurt any one? I don't understand.

MRS. W. Of course not, dear. (*To TAB.*) I won't have her spoiled by any narrow-minded ideas. She sees good in everything. Leave her alone.

ANNA. It's such fun having your fortune told. Of course,

no one believes it altogether. But it's very amusing. I told the fortune of a very dear friend of mine a little while ago. She is a widow. She nursed her husband through a long illness with the most wonderful devotion and patience. But he died and she was very sad and lonely. A year later I told her fortune with these cards. I said, "Beulah, you will be going to a new place and will make lots of friends."

LUC. Beulah!

ANNA. Well, she did go away. Wouldn't you like me to tell your fortune?

LUC. Oh—er—oh, yes—I'd *like* it.

TAB. I advise you, Lucinda Love, to refuse.

MRS. W. Let her judge for herself, Tabitha.

LUC. It would be a strange experience. Yes, I would like to have my fortune told, Miss Annabel.

ANNA. Very well.

(Sits gipsy fashion on floor facing audience and begins to sort cards. After a moment LUC. kneels beside her.)

MRS. W. I'll just go on with my curtains.

(Sits and sews. JANE and TAB. stand looking down at ANNA., JANE the nearer to them.)

TAB. This is folly.

ANNA. I will shuffle the cards. Please draw one. Thanks. I'll put that here and place three cards above and three below. *(Places cards.)* Now we'll see what they say. *(Turns up cards, one by one.)* Oh, a legacy. You will come into money somewhere about middle age.

LUC. That's a long way off.

TAB. *(coming nearer)*. Not so very far.

ANNA. You have two sweethearts.

LUC. *(smiling)*. Have I?

ANNA. One is tall and dark. Avoid him.

LUC. It will be rather hard.

ANNA. But the fair one will make a good, true husband. You will be married soon.

LUC. Yes, yes.

JANE. Well, Lucinda Love, you might have told me about it.

LUC. I don't tell everything.

TAB. And what about me, Lucindy? I've always been your friend.

MRS. W. (*dropping her sewing*). Oh, don't take it so seriously. It will never do.

ANNA. (*laughing*). No, no, it's only for fun.

LUC. Of course. Tell me more.

ANNA. Yours is a fortunate hand. You will be happy and healthy and live to a good old age.

TAB. (*suddenly going down on her knees*). Tell mine.

ANNA. Do you really want me to?

TAB. Yes, please.

(MRS. W. *rises and comes to them*. LUC. *rises*.)

ANNA. Draw a card, please. (TAB. *draws a card, holding it by the extreme edge of the corner*. ANNA. *takes it*.) Oh, the clover leaf. That is lucky. (*Places cards on floor as before and turns them up*.) Beware of a short, fair woman. She will do you harm if possible.

(TAB. *looks sharply at LUC*.)

LUC. Oh, don't suspect me.

ANNA. (*turning up a card*). Be careful of all wheeled vehicles at the change of the moon, or you may have an accident.

TAB. Nonsense. I don't believe it.

ANNA. A friend is going to give you a present. It looks like something to eat.

JANE. That's me. I left a pun'kin pie at your house for you this morning.

ANNA. There is not a great deal in this hand.

TAB. (*disappointed*). Nothing—romantic? (*A gentle knock c.; no one hears it*. TAB., *eagerly turning over the cards, leans forward on her hands*. Enter MRS. BEULAH BLACK. *She is a very pretty, extremely stylish young widow*.) What's this one mean?

(*Holds up a card*. MRS. B. *comes down c*.)

MRS. B. I hope I'm not intruding, Mrs. Wright. But I knocked.

(LUC. *pokes JANE with her parasol*.)

MRS. W. (*going to her*). Oh, Mrs. Black. I'm very glad to see you.

MRS. B. What are they doing? Telling fortunes. How very shocking!

(ANNA. *looks up.*)

ANNA. Beulah! (*Jumps up, scattering cards, and runs to her.*) Beulah darling! (*Embraces her.*) Why didn't you tell me you were coming to Petersville?

(TAB. *begins to gather up the cards.*)

MRS. B. I didn't know it myself. Chance brought me here, and I thought I would see if I liked it before I decided to stay and let my friends know.

ANNA. (*to MRS. W.*). This is the friend—the very one I was speaking of. You know every one, of course, Beulah? Oh, I suppose you're the pet of the village already. (*To JANE.*) No one can know her and not love her.

LUC. (*to JANE.*) And none of us has even called.

(MRS. B. *goes to TAB.*)

TAB. I s'pose you wonder what I'm doing with these, Mrs. Black.

MRS. B. I'm glad to see you are amusing yourself. I was led to believe there was a certain amount of narrow prejudice in Petersville, but I see I have been misinformed. (*Smiles.*)

TAB. (*rising and holding cards.*) They're not mine.

ANNA. (*impulsively.*) Yes, they are. I make you a present of them, for I *never* saw any one more interested in them.

TAB. (*aghast.*) No, no. (*Holds them out.*)

ANNA. Yes, yes. I won't be refused. I can get another pack.

MRS. W. Take them, Tabitha.

ANNA. Yes, take them home and when you're lonely or dull amuse yourself with them and think of me.

TAB. (*slowly.*) Thank you.—If I think of you it will be like thinking of sunshine. (*Goes up c.*) Good-bye, Mrs. Black. I've sort of changed my mind about things. Mary, if I'm a-going to take these home I'll do it in the face of every one. No hiding in the woods for Tabitha Touchett.

(*She goes out, holding the cards in front of her with both hands.*)

MRS. W. There goes a narrow but an honest soul.

JANE. And I go with her, cards and all. (*Goes to ANNA., seizes her hand, then suddenly kisses her.*) Good-bye. Hold on there, Tabitha. (*Runs out.*)

LUC. Mrs. Black, I'm coming to see you if I may.

MRS. B. Oh, do. I'll be delighted.

LUC. (*going to ANNA.*). And you—I tell you, my dear, I can't thank you enough for coming here to Petersville. I'd like to do something for you. If you ever want the loan of my parasol, let me know.

(*Exit LUC. ANNA. goes up c. and waves her hand from the door. MRS. W. goes to MRS. B. and takes her hand in both of hers.*)

ANNA. There's nothing like the country for real kindness.

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