

**MANSIONS; A
PLAY IN ONE ACT**

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Mansions; a play in one act by Hildegard Flanner

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HILDEGARDE FLANNER

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PLAY IN ONE ACT**

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HILDEGARDE FLANNER

MANSIONS is an original play. It was first produced at Indianapolis, by the Little Theatre Society of Indiana, under the direction of George Sommes.



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TO THE
LIBRARY OF

MANSIONS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY HILDEGARDE FLANNER

CHARACTERS

HARRIET WILDE

LYDIA WILDE [*her niece*]

JOE WILDE [*her nephew*]

TIME: *Yesterday*

[In a small town on the southern border of a Middle-Western state, stands an old brick house. The town is sufficiently near the Mason and Dixon line to gather about its ankles the rustle of ancient petticoats of family pride and to step softly lest the delicate sounds should be lost in a too noisy world. Even this old brick house seems reticent of the present, and gazing aloofly from its arched windows, barely suffers the main street to run past its gate. Many of the blinds are drawn, as if the dwelling and its inhabitants preferred to hug to themselves the old strength of the past rather than to admit the untried things of the present.]

The scene of the play is laid in the living-room. At the back is a wide door leading into the hallway beyond. At the left are French doors opening upon steps which might descend into the garden. At the right side of the room, and opposite the French doors, is a marble fireplace, while on either side of the fireplace and a little distant from it, is a tall window. To the left

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of the main door is a lounge upholstered in dark flowered tapestry, and to the right of the door is a mahogany secretary. Before the secretary and away from the hearth, an old-fashioned grand piano is placed diagonally, so that anyone seated at the instrument would be partially facing the audience. To the left of the French doors is a lyre table, on which stands a bowl of flowers. Above the rear door hangs the portrait of a man.

When the curtain rises Harriet Wilde is discovered standing precisely in the middle of her great-grandfather's carpet, which is precisely in the middle of the floor. To Harriet, ancestors are a passion, the future an imposition. Added to this, she is, in her way, intelligent. Therefore even before she speaks, you who are observant know that she is a formidable person. Her voice is low, even, and—what is the adjective? Christian. Yes, Harriet is a good woman. But don't let that mislead you.]

HARRIET (calling)

Lydia!

(Lydia comes into the room from the garden. In fact, she has been coming and going for more than fifteen years at the word of her aunt, although she is now twenty-seven. Her hands appear sensitive and, in some way, deprived and restless. She is dressed in a slim black gown which could be worn gracefully by no one else, although Lydia is not aware of this fact. In one hand she carries a pair of garden shears with handles painted scarlet; in the other a bright spray of portulaca; while over her

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wrist is slung a garden hat. During their conversation Lydia moves fitfully about the room. Her manner changes from bitter drollery to a lonely timidness and from timidness to something akin to sulkiness. Harriet, whether seated or standing, gives the impression of having been for a long hour with dignity in the same position. She has no sympathy for Lydia nor any understanding of her. There is a wall of mistrust between the two. Both stoop to pick up stones, not to throw, but to build the wall even higher. Lydia employs by turns an attitude of cheerful cynicism and one of indifference, both planned to annoy her aunt, though without real malice. But this has become a habit.)

HARRIET

What are you doing, Lydia?

LYDIA

I had been trimming the rose hedge along the south garden, Aunt Harriet.

HARRIET

But surely you can find something better to do than that, my dear.

(She cannot help calling people "my dear." It is because she is so superior.)

Someone might see in if you trim it too much. We want a bit of privacy in these inquisitive times.

LYDIA

The young plants on the edge of the walk needed sun.

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HARRIET

Move the young plants. Don't sacrifice the rose hedge. (*Pausing as she straightens the candle in an old brass candlestick on the mantel.*) I—it seems to me that the furniture has been disarranged.

LYDIA

I was changing it a little this morning.

HARRIET

May I ask why?

LYDIA (*eagerly*)

Oh, just—just to be changing. Don't you think it is an improvement?

HARRIET (*coldly*)

It does very well. But I prefer it as it was. You know yourself that this room has never been changed since your grandfather died. (*Piously.*) And as long as I am mistress in this house it shall remain exactly as he liked it. (*Lydia looks spitefully at the portrait over the rear door.*)

HARRIET

(*stepping to the window to the left of the fireplace and lowering the curtain to the middle of the frame*)

The court house will be done before your brother is well enough to come downstairs, Lydia. How astonished he will be to see it completed.

LYDIA

Yes. But he would much rather watch while it is being done.

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HARRIET

Well naturally. But from upstairs you can't see through the leaves of the maple tree. Why, Lydia, there isn't another tree for miles around with such marvelous foliage. Great-grandfather Wilde did not know, when he set out a sapling, that the county court house was to be built—almost in its very shadow.

LYDIA

You always did admire any kind of a family tree.

HARRIET

(as if speaking to an unruly child)

If Great-grandfather Wilde heard you say that—

LYDIA

(with a sudden flash of spirit which dies almost before she ceases to speak)

If Great-grandfather Wilde heard me say that, it may be—he would have the excellent sense to come back and chop off a limb or two, so that Joe could have sunlight in that little dark room up there, and see out.

HARRIET

(lifting her left hand and letting it sink upon her knee with the air of one who has suffered much, but can suffer more)

Lydia, my dear child, I am not responsible for your disposition this lovely morning. Moreover, this is a fruitless—

LYDIA

Fruitless, fruitless! *Why* couldn't he have