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Dramatic Publishing

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

SHIRLEY JACKSON'S

The Summer People

adapted by

BRAINERD DUFFIELD

from the short story



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE SUMMER PEOPLE)

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THE SUMMER PEOPLE

A Play in One Act

For Four Men and Three Women

CHARACTERS

ROBERT ALLISON]*the summer people*
JANET ALLISON]
MR. BABCOCK.....*groceries*
MISS TILDA BABCOCK.....*the grocer's sister*
MR. CHARLEY WALPOLE.....*hardware and*
general store
MRS. LARKIN.....*newspaper and sandwich shop*
MR. WITHERS.....*kerosene and ice*

PLACE: *Rural New England.*

TIME: *September of the present year.*

There is no scenery. All properties are imaginary and are pantomimed by the actors. There is no furniture other than the pieces specified in the play-text.

The action occurs within the course of a week. Each time that the lights are lowered will indicate the passage of another day.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

The effectiveness of this play depends on the subtlety of the actors' interpretations. Janet is sprightly and effervescent; Robert is stolid and down to earth. Except for their citified accents, they hardly differ at all from the villagers. They use a broad "a" and pronounce the "r", and do not drop the "g" when they say "nothing" or "something." But they are plain, ordinary people. The villagers are simple, friendly, polite, smiling. Never for a moment should they betray antagonism or hostility. It comes as a shock to the Allison's in the final moments of the play that they are victims of a sinister conspiracy. If possible, the realization should occur to the audience at the same time.

PROPERTIES

Three store counters, each made of two chairs with planks between them.

Two stools.

Two straight chairs.

Two rocking chairs.

The Summer People

The scene is a bare stage. During the first sequence it will represent the village. The lights come up gradually. MR. BABCOCK, assisted by TILDA, erects the grocery store DR. It consists of a counter: two chair backs with a plank between them. At the same time, MR. CHARLEY WALPOLE sets up an identical structure DL where the counter will serve as his hardware and general store. Meanwhile, ULC, a third character, MRS. LARKIN, is repeating the same business for her newspaper and sandwich shop. She also places two stools in front of the counter. Presently, ROBERT and JANET ALLISON, walking shoulder to shoulder, enter from L, each carrying a chair, which they place side by side LC. This is presumed to be the front seat of their car. They sit down and ROBERT, on her left, pantomimes driving. The shopkeepers exit into the wings adjacent to their stores. ROBERT and JANET drive for a little while, jiggling gently up and down to show they are traveling on a bumpy country road. She is the first to speak, and in the ensuing conversation they seem to be trying to reassure one another. It is evidently a discussion they've been through before.

JANET (rather wistfully). Robert, when you think about it, there isn't really anything to take us back to the city.

ROBERT (nodding). I agree with you. We might as well enjoy the country as long as possible.

JANET. Seventeen years we've been coming up here, and we've always felt we had to get back to New York by the first week in September.

ROBERT. Why should we, after all? We don't want to go. Especially when the weather's so fine.

JANET. And we're never as happy as when we're up here in New England.

ROBERT. Exactly what I've been saying right along.

JANET. It's not as though anybody needed us. Both the children outgrew the cottage years ago. They've gone on to families of their own. Margaret's in Los Angeles, and Jerry's in Chicago. (She looks to ROBERT as if he might dispute her statement.)

ROBERT (nodding). Our friends are either dead or settled down in year-round houses. (Amused.) Nobody understands why we like to come up here.

JANET. It's our real home. We spend all winter in that New York apartment, waiting for summer, so we can get back to the country.

ROBERT. Well, Janet, like I say, there's nothing to prevent us staying on into October.

JANET (smiling). I'm glad we decided. I can't tell you how glad. (She looks around to right and left.) Here we are. Such a nice little town. Everybody's so pleasant. It's like an adventure, driving to the village every two weeks. Buying things we can't get delivered. (ROBERT brakes and parks the car. They get out on opposite sides.) You go to Mrs. Larkin's, have your soda and read the local paper. I'll take my grocery list over to Mr. Babcock's.

(ROBERT goes ULC, pantomimes opening and closing

a door, then sits on one of the stools. MRS. LARKIN enters from UL to wait on him.)

MRS. LARKIN. How do, Mr. Allison?

ROBERT. Very well, thank you, Mrs. Larkin. Give me a copy of the Messenger, and I'll have my usual. Double chocolate soda.

MRS. LARKIN. That's right. I could've told without your askin' me. Double chocolate soda.

ROBERT. Janet and I are old enough not to be ashamed of regular habits. Though sometimes, of course, I like to have one of your fried egg and onion sandwiches.

MRS. LARKIN. That's my specialty.

ROBERT. Today I'll just have the soda.

MRS. LARKIN. Should taste good on a day like this. Right warm for September.

ROBERT. Yes, it is.

(MRS. LARKIN has handed him an invisible paper which he unfolds and begins to scan. She pumps and mixes the soda, placing it on the counter. During this exchange, JANET has paused DRC, carefully checking through her shopping list. Now she turns the knob and goes into the grocery store. MR. BABCOCK comes from the wings DR to greet her.)

BABCOCK. Howdy do, Miz' Allison?

JANET. Never better. Here's my list, Mr. Babcock.

(TILDA enters from UR, putting boxes on a shelf R.)

JANET. Good morning, Tilda. (Raises her voice. TILDA is a trifle deaf.)

TILDA. Just fine. And you?

JANET. First rate, thanks. We came into town to pick up a few items.

TILDA. So I see. You'll be leavin' soon, I s'pose.
(It is a statement, not a question.)

JANET (with a smile). Matter of fact, no. Robert and I decided to stay on as long as the weather lasts. Another week or two at least.

TILDA. Land's sake! You don't say so?

BABCOCK. Nobody ever stayed at the lake past Labor Day before. (He is occupied with the list, putting articles on the counter.) Nobody.

JANET. But the city . . . it's so hot--you've really no idea.

BABCOCK. Can't say I do. Never havin' been there.

JANET. We're always sorry when we leave.

BABCOCK. That's how summer people are. Hate to leave. I'd hate to leave myself. But I never heard of anybody staying on at the lake after Labor Day.

TILDA. Me neither.

JANET. I realize there'll be problems. And it's a twenty-mile drive to the village. Still, we thought we'd give it a try.

BABCOCK. Never know till you try. Let's see now. Two pounds of sugar . . .

(BABCOCK exits into the wings DR. JANET starts examining the items on the counter. TILDA has finished with shelving things for the moment. She goes out a rear door and crosses from URC to ULC where she has a brief, surreptitious chat with MRS. LARKIN. ROBERT, studying his newspaper, takes no notice. TILDA proceeds UL to L, where she taps on what is evidently a screen door. CHARLEY WALPOLE enters DL and they have a short whispered conversation, after which TILDA retraces her

route via upstage back to her brother's store and starts rearranging shelves again. WALPOLE, expressionless, wipes off his counter, then exits DL. During this, BABCOCK has continued his fetching and carrying, enumerating items as he puts them down for Janet's approval.)

BABCOCK. Cornstarch . . . vinegar . . . coffee . . . sardines . . . Couldn't interest you in some nice red eatin' apples?

JANET. Oh, yes, please. I'll have a big bagful. What are they--McIntosh?

BABCOCK. Yes, ma'am. These are McIntosh. I got some Red Astrakhans, if you'd rather have 'em.

JANET. No, these will be fine. Perfume the whole kitchen.

BABCOCK. Yes, I like the smell of 'em myself.

JANET. This is our big trip into town, you know, every two weeks, so we more or less spend the day at it. We depend on you, Mr. Babcock, for deliveries--but I always seem to need odds and ends I forget to ask for on the phone. Then, of course, we like to get the local vegetables when we come in.

BABCOCK. Got some fresh packaged candy, too.

JANET. I'll take a box.

BABCOCK. Thought you would. Knowing Mr. Allison.

JANET. We've both got a sweet tooth. No doubt about it. I've been thinking I might be real extravagant and use those eating apples to bake a pie. (TILDA has completed her circuit in time to hear this last remark.)

TILDA. I declare. Well, I always say the short cut to a man's heart is through his gizzard.

BABCOCK. That's the whole list. (He presents the bill and JANET pays him.) Shall I carry 'em out to the car for you?

JANET. I'd be grateful. (BABCOCK gathers up the bundles, comes around counter to the door, then crosses to LC and puts the purchases in the back seat of the car.)

TILDA. Bye, bye, Miz' Allison.

JANET. Good-bye, Tilda. Expect I'll be seeing you next time we drive in.

TILDA. Hope you won't regret stayin' on. It can turn chilly overnight.

JANET. We're going to risk it--for once.

TILDA. Suit yourself and you'll live the longer. That's what my mother used to say. (JANET goes out the door DRC and passes BABCOCK, who is on his way back. They beam at one another.)

BABCOCK. Going to Johnson's?

JANET. What? Oh, yes, that's right.

BABCOCK. You take care now.

JANET. We will. Don't worry.

(BABCOCK re-enters his store, exchanges a glance with TILDA, wags his head. Both exit off R. ROBERT looks up from his paper and waves at JANET through the window of the sandwich shop. She waves back, as she now crosses DL. As she enters the hardware store, CHARLEY WALPOLE comes to welcome her.)

WALPOLE. Miz' Allison. Thought maybe you'd be gone back to New York by this time.

JANET (chuckling). No, not yet, Mr. Walpole. Usually we go the first Tuesday after Labor Day----

WALPOLE. That's today.