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**Dramatic  
Publishing**

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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

# Faith, Hope, and Cyanide

by  
D. ROOME



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(FAITH, HOPE AND CYANIDE)

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**FAITH, HOPE AND CYANIDE**  
*A Farce in One Act*

**For One Man, Two Women, and a Voice**

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**CHARACTERS**

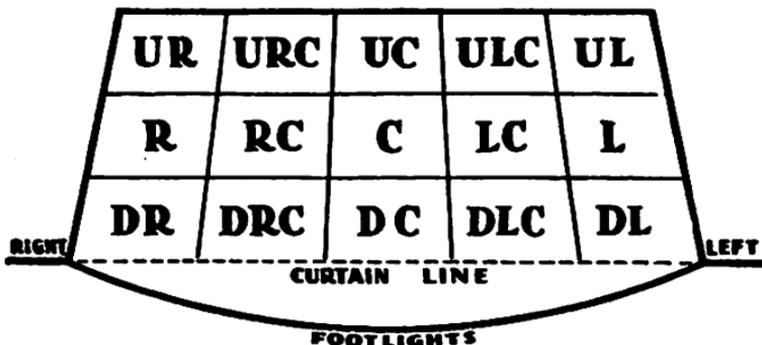
**FAITH SPARROW**  
**HOPE SPARROW**  
**MR. POTTER (voice only)**  
**CONSTABLE FOWLER**

**PLACE:** *A rural community, markedly English in heritage (New England, eastern Canada, New Zealand, etc.)*

**TIME:** *The present.*

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## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



## STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

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**NOTE:** Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

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## Faith, Hope, and Cyanide

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ON FORESTAGE, or IN FRONT OF CURTAIN:

HOPE and FAITH enter from L and stop almost immediately - at a gate.)

HOPE. The lawn looks hearty. Mr. Potter seems to be keeping up with the yard work.

FAITH. But he hasn't drawn the shades.

HOPE. Oh, dear, Cecily's new damask drapes.

FAITH. And her good maple furniture.

HOPE. Poor dear, that long, tiring journey, and all she found at the other end was nasty weather.

FAITH. All that expense for nothing! I frankly don't understand the pleasure she finds in travel. The service is so inferior that to find a waiter or chambermaid who is no more than indifferent is a blessing! And no matter how rude they are they all but demand a tip! (She goes through the motions of opening a gate and passing into the yard.)

HOPE. You're going to call?

FAITH. Didn't Cecily write us that she might return early? (HOPE nods.) Perhaps she's expected today.

HOPE (following after FAITH and closing the gate; they cross slowly, glancing about left and right). Aren't her fuchsias especially nice this year!

FAITH. The borders could stand to be weeded with more care.

HOPE. You couldn't tell from looking at Cecily's yard that we've been having a drought.

FAITH. We'll be eating French toast instead of

lamb chops if our water bill gets any higher.  
(They come to a halt near R limit of the fore-  
stage - the front door of the Potter house.  
HOPE goes through the motions of pushing a  
button. Pause.)

FAITH. Did you press it firmly?

HOPE. Yes.

FAITH. I don't hear the chime, and my hearing is  
excellent.

HOPE (repeating the motion). Perhaps it has a  
faulty connection.

FAITH. Or it's been disconnected.

HOPE. Perhaps Mr. Potter has found work.

FAITH. Considering the effort he makes while  
Cecily is here, that hardly seems likely.

HOPE. . . . How odd, the post hasn't been taken  
in yet.

FAITH. How odd indeed! I wouldn't be surprised  
if that lout Cecily insisted on marrying was  
still lounging in bed. (She goes through the  
motions of using the door knocker.)

HOPE. He certainly isn't the gentleman that  
Cecily's first husband was.

FAITH. Common as dirt! I never will understand  
that weakness in her character. One husband  
is usually one too many! (Uses the knocker  
again.)

HOPE. Are you sure that's a good idea? I don't  
think he cares for us.

FAITH. I'm positive he doesn't. I even suspect  
that he daydreams of being rude to us.

HOPE. What an unpleasant thought!

FAITH. I suppose there's nothing to do but try  
around back.

HOPE. Oh, dear!

FAITH. If something is amiss, it is our duty to  
find out what it is. After all, Hope, we are  
among Cecily's oldest and closest friends.

HOPE. But what if Mr. Potter is ill?

FAITH. All the more reason to persist.

HOPE (stage whisper). But what if he's a secret drinker?

FAITH. I suspect that he has any number of hidden vices; most men do. (Lights down, then up on kitchen interior.)

SCENE: The Potter kitchen. At DR is a simple sink and counter unit, its length to the "fourth wall." At R is the door to the cellar. At U R C is a kitchen table with chairs right and left. On the table are a telephone and a cooking sheet containing pastry. At U L C is a cupboard. At L is a door to stairs [or the bottom treads of the stairs] .)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: The muffled sound of digging comes from off stage R. Otherwise the stage is empty. After a moment FAITH and HOPE enter from R on the forestage. They pause at DR and look in over sink, as if through a window. Then they continue on to D L C where they stop, as if before a door. FAITH peers in and HOPE sniffs the air.)

HOPE. I smell fresh pastry.

FAITH. Yes - and the screen door isn't latched. She must have returned. (Knocks and calls.) Hello! . . . Cecily! . . . It's Faith and Hope!

HOPE. Do you hear an odd sound?

FAITH. Yes, and it seems to be coming from the cellar. (They enter through the imaginary door.)

HOPE. She must be home; there's a sheet of tarts set out to cool. (She crosses to table.)  
Gooseberry tarts!

FAITH. Look at how clean the kitchen is. That settles it: Cecily is home!

HOPE. I wonder why she didn't give us a call?

FAITH (crossing to cellar door R). Doubtless she planned to as soon as she had her house in order. (Opening door and calling in a familiar tone.) Cecily! What are you doing down there, counting your preserves? (The digging sound stops.)

POTTER (from the cellar, off R, in a deep, clear voice). Who is it?

FAITH (taken aback). Oh! It's Miss Faith Sparrow and her sister.

POTTER (off R). Cecily isn't home from her holiday yet.

FAITH (aside to HOPE). Isn't she now! . . . (Calls.) We had a card from her saying how disappointing the weather was. She gave the impression that she might return sooner than she'd expected.

POTTER. That's news to me.

FAITH. It was the tray of fresh tarts that misled us into thinking she'd returned.

POTTER. She made them before she left. I was just heating them over. . . . Help yourself.

FAITH. Thank you, I believe we will. My sister and I have always been partial to Cecily's gooseberry tarts. (Closes door and crosses to cupboard. The digging sound resumes.)

HOPE. How very nice of him!

FAITH (getting plates and forks from the cupboard). Something is quite definitely wrong here.

HOPE. Perhaps he's been keeping up with things. Not all men are untidy. (She goes to table.)

FAITH. I'm reserving judgment until after I've sampled one of the tarts. (She gives HOPE a plate and fork and they serve themselves. They taste the pastry critically. FAITH is indignant, HOPE uncertain.)

FAITH (demanding). Now what do you say?

HOPE. Oh, dear! . . .

FAITH. The impertinence of the man, thinking we wouldn't know fresh gooseberry tarts from ones that had been warmed over.

HOPE (trace of foreboding). But why should he lie?

FAITH. I shudder to think.

HOPE (crossing to cupboard and getting a water glass). My throat is suddenly painfully dry. . . . (Crosses to sink, starts to reach for tap, but her movement is arrested by something she sees in the sink.) Faith, did you notice the two cups and saucers in the sink?

FAITH. What! . . . (Crosses quickly to sink, lifts one of the cups, then sniffs loudly.) Just breakfast tea in that one. (Repeats action with other cup. Stiffens.) . . . The blackguard! Smell this one!

HOPE (sniffing). . . . It smells like an extract. (Sniffs.) Almond.

FAITH (dramatically). Burnt almond!

HOPE (missing the significance). How eccentric . . . Though a little vanilla extract in cocoa is sometimes a pleasant change.

FAITH. How infuriating! I can't for the life of me remember whether the odor of burnt almond indicates the presence of cyanide or strychnine.

HOPE (horrified). What are you saying, Faith!

FAITH. Look around you, Hope! Tarts fresh from the oven, two cups in the sink, and Hubert Potter digging in the cellar!

HOPE (sinking voice). I feel faint . . .

FAITH. Courage, Hope!

HOPE. But what . . . (Clutches at her throat.) . . . What if the tarts . . .

FAITH. Compose yourself. Cecily made the tarts.

HOPE. But he could have tampered . . .

FAITH. He did, but with the tea, not the gooseberry tarts.