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*Dramatic Publishing*



# JUST DESSERTS

by

NORMA COLE and NANEKI ELLIOTT

Based on Eliza Calvert Hall's

*Aunt Jane of Kentucky*



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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**For Norma Cole**

*Just Desserts* was first produced in play readings by the authors in 1996. Cole and Elliott took the play to schools, churches and other groups in rural areas of Kentucky. In January 1997, the play was awarded a grant for further work from the Kentucky Foundation for Women. *Just Desserts* was presented at the Women Writers' Conference at the University of Kentucky in October 1997. In March 1998, Pat Wetherton and Sylvia Bruton, actors from Louisville, began to perform the play at universities and various organizations in both Louisville and Lexington as well as in rural areas of the state.

# JUST DESSERTS

A Play in One Act  
For 2 Women

## CHARACTERS

AUNT JANE: An elderly widow-woman.

SALLY ANN: also plays 'LIZABETH SPENCER,  
MAYBELLE BUXTON, GERTIE EMBRY.

## TIME and PLACE:

The play is set in a rural community in that amorphous time between the American Civil War and the turn of the 20th century.

Running time: 50 minutes

## JUST DESSERTS

*SET: A rural home of the late 1800s. Two comfortable chairs with a tea table between reveals tea things and a large Bible. A small basket of quilting cloth is near one chair and a knit shawl is visible. (Certain props will be needed to allow SALLY ANN to evoke the other women in the story.)*

*AT RISE: AUNT JANE wears garments suitable to the era and her station as a widow. She hums or sings the old hymn "Sweet Hour of Prayer." She becomes aware of the audience and speaks to them.*

AUNT JANE. Well, there you are. I see you found a chair. I reckon you must be a-wondering what I'm doing, widow-woman that I am, sitting alone in this old house. I'm reading my Bible some and fixing to make one more quilt. Oh, I know I said I was done with such work, but the Women's Mite Society of Goshen Church needs a quilt to raffle off and I think I'll get it started. *(She selects three pieces of quilt cloth to talk about.)* This piece was from my niece, Rebecca. My, she was a fine, young determined woman... This was of a dress I got the spring before Abram died... Now, Sally Ann Flint gave me this bit. Wasn't she a good'un? *(She holds up a long piece of purple cloth that shows where something has been cut*



out.) Lookie here what I found. Sally Ann's suffragist banner was made from this. I wish I could have seen them brave women all dressed in white, wearing their purple banners so proud, marching for their rights... Did I ever tell you about Sally Ann's experience that put us women of Goshen Church to the mind that we could do something for ourselves? Well, it was forty year ago if it was a day. The way of it was this: The men of the church got the roof patched and put in a new window light. We women of the Mite Society begun talking about getting a carpet for the bare floor. Some of us wanted the carpet and some of us wanted to give the money to the foreign mission as we'd set out to do at the first. We got into quite a racket and it took Sally Ann Flint to settle the fuss.

*(SALLY ANN enters. She is younger than AUNT JANE, dressed in a more decorative garment, and could have an outrageous hat.)*

SALLY ANN. Well, if any of the heathen fails to hear the gospel on account of us getting some carpet, they'll be saved anyway, so Brother Page says. If we send the money and they do hear the gospel, like as not they won't repent and then they're sure to be damned. It seems to me that as long as we don't know what they'll do, we might as well keep the money and get the carpet. I never did see much sense in giving folks a chance to damn themselves. *(Exits.)*

AUNT JANE. We began talking about appointing a committee to go to town the following Monday and pick out the carpet. All at once, 'Lizabeth Spencer, our treasurer, spoke up.

(*'LIZABETH enters.*)

'LIZABETH. There ain't no use appointing that committee. I kept the money in the top bureau drawer and when I went for it yesterday, it was gone. I'll pay it back if I'm ever able, but I ain't able now. (*Exits.*)

AUNT JANE. Lizzy? Our 'Lizabeth? You suppose that husband of hers, Jacob, took our money? Brother Page's wife—she was as good a woman as ever lived—said just two words: ... “Judge not.” And then Sally Ann spoke up.

(*SALLY ANN enters.*)

SALLY ANN. For the Lord's sake, don't let the menfolks know anything about this. They're always saying that women ain't fit to handle money, and I don't want to give 'em any more ground to stand on then they think they've already got. (*Exits.*)

AUNT JANE. We agreed with Sally Ann...all but that Milly Amos. She had mite little sense to begin with and having been married about two months, she'd lost that little ... 'cause I happened to meet her young husband, Sam, and he says to me, “Aunt Jane, how much money you women of the Mite Society got toward the carpet?” I looked him square on and I says, “Sam Amos, if you be a member of the Women's Mite Society of Goshen Church, you already know. And if you ain't, you got no business knowing.” That settled him... Now, none of us saw 'Lizabeth outside her door for most of a month. Though many of us called on her, she told nary one her troubles until that prayer meeting night... We'd sung “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” Brother Page prayed and then he called upon

the brethren to tell of their experience with the Lord this past week. Old Uncle Jim Matthews cleared his throat. I knew as well as I know my name he was fixing to tell how precious the Lord had been...but before he got started, here come 'Lizabeth down the side aisle,

(*'LIZABETH enters.*)

AUNT JANE (*cont'd*). and she stopped right in front of the pulpit.

'LIZABETH. I've something to say. It was me that took the missionary money we was to use for the carpet. I took it to pay my way to Louisville the time I got word that my dear daughter from my first marriage was dying. I asked Jacob three times for the money. When he refused, I tried to put it out of my mind and stay home. Finally, I said to myself, "I'm going anyway." As soon as Jacob had ate his breakfast and went out on the farm, I dressed myself. When I opened the top bureau drawer to get my best collar, I saw it...the missionary money. I tried not to think about keeping it, but the thought kept coming back. Getting Jacob's carpetbag, I happened to look up at the mantelpiece. I saw the candlesticks with prisms all around that my mamma had given me long, long ago. I knew just then what the Lord intended me to do... Some of you recollect I had a boarder summer before last...

AUNT JANE. That genealogy lady from Louisville.

'LIZABETH. That's right. She offered me fifteen dollar for the candlesticks. I wouldn't part with them, but she left her name and address on a card. I got that card out of the big Bible and packed them candlesticks in the carpet-

bag. After I put on my bonnet I went out to the gate. There was Dave Crawford coming along in his new buggy and he offered to take me to town... I got to Mary just two hours before she died. She looked up in my face and says, "Mamma, I knew God wouldn't let me die 'til I'd seen you once more." I believed the Lord was leading me all this time, but the way things turned out, it musta been Satan.

AUNT JANE. I can't hardly tell this without crying. 'Lizabeth talked straight on as if she'd made up her mind to say just so much, and she'd die if she didn't get to say it.

'LIZABETH. As soon as the funeral was over, I set out to find the lady that wanted them candlesticks. She was gone for a few days, but her niece said she was sure her aunt still wanted them and would send the money right off... If that lady'd only come back when her niece said, it would have turned out all right, but I reckon it's a judgment on me for meddling with the Lord's money. I've been a member of this church for twenty year, but, though the money come today, I figure you'll turn me out now. (*Holds out the check.*)

AUNT JANE. The poor thing stood there trembling and holding out the check as if she expected somebody to come and take it. Old Silas Petty was a-glowing at her from under his eyebrows. (*'LIZABETH exits.*) I recollect thinking, "Oh, if only the Lord Jesus would just come in and take her part." And while we sat there like a passel of mutes, Sally Ann Flint got up and stood right by 'Lizabeth.

(*SALLY ANN enters.*)

AUNT JANE (*cont'd*). Well, I felt so relieved. It popped into my head that we didn't need the Lord right now, Sally Ann would do just as good.

SALLY ANN. Where's that eight hundred dollar 'Lizabeth had when she married you, Jacob Spencer? Down in that ten-acre meadow lot and in that new barn you built last spring? A man that won't even give his wife some of her own money to go to her dying child is too mean to stay in a Christian church. Elders sure ain't changed much since Biblical times.

AUNT JANE. Old Deacon Petty rose up. "Brethren," says he, "this is awful! If this woman wants to give her religious experience, why, of course she can do so. But when it comes to a *woman* standing up in the house of the Lord and reviling an elder as this woman is doing, why I tremble for the Church of Christ. For don't the 'postle Paul say, 'Let your women keep silence in the church'?"

*(During the following nine speeches by SALLY ANN, AUNT JANE may add an "Amen," "Yes, yes," "Aye," as suitable.)*

SALLY ANN. The 'postle Paul has been dead ruther too long for me to be afraid of him. If he don't like what I'm saying, let him rise up from his grave in Corinthians or Ephesians or wherever he's buried and say so... I've got a message for the menfolks of this church and I'm going to deliver it, Paul or no Paul.

AUNT JANE. You're telling it true, Sally Ann.

SALLY ANN. As for you, Silas Petty, I ain't forgot the time I dropped in to see Maria one Saturday night. I found her washing out her flannel petticoat and drying it

before the fire. Ever time I've had to hear you lead in prayer, I've said to myself, "Lord, how high can a man's prayers rise toward heaven when his wife ain't got but one flannel skirt to her name?" No higher than the back of that pew, Silas Petty.

AUNT JANE. Job Taylor was a-setting right in front of Deacon Petty. I reckon he thought his time had come so he gets up, easy-like, and starts to sneak to the back door.

SALLY ANN. You come back here, Job Taylor. You set right down and hear what I've got to say. I've knelt and stood through enough of your long-winded prayers. Now it's my time to talk and yours to listen.

AUNT JANE. And bless your life if Job Taylor didn't set down, meek as Moses.

SALLY ANN. The only thing that stands in my way of telling some of your meanness is that there's so much to tell I don't know where to begin... We women know how Marthy scrimped and saved her egg money to buy a new set of furniture, how you took her money with you that time you went to Cincinnati the spring before Marthy died. You come back without the furniture...and when she asked about the money you said that everything she had belonged to you and that your mother's old furniture was good enough for anybody.

AUNT JANE. And nobody knew where the money went.

SALLY ANN. It's my belief that's what killed Marthy. Women are dying ever day. The doctors will tell you it's some new-fangled disease or other, when, if the truth was known, it's nothing but wanting something they can't get and hoping and waiting for something that never comes. I've watched 'em and I know...and furthermore, Job Taylor, where were you when your own

sister, Gertie Embry, had to cut up her wedding skirts to make gowns and didies for that first baby? Did you step in to help that young pair? Knowing how things are with Gertie these days, I think not.

AUNT JANE. Job sat there looking like a sheep-killing dog. I heard Dave Crawford shuffling his feet and clearing his throat. Dave come up against Sally Ann in a lawsuit one time and he lost. He's been calling her a "he-woman" ever since.

SALLY ANN. Do you think your scraping and hemming is going to stop me, Dave Crawford? You've been known to be generous...but most of the time you're one of the men that makes me think it's better to be a Kentucky horse than a Kentucky woman... Many's the day I've seen your poor wife, her head tied up, crawling around trying to cook for sixteen harvest hands and you out in the stable rubbing down your three-year-olds to get 'em ready for the fair... It's mighty hard to understand how a man can have more mercy on his horse than to the woman he married. July's found rest at last out in the graveyard and ever time I pass your house I thank the Lord that you got to pay a good price for your cooking now as there ain't a woman in the county fool enough to step into July's shoes.

AUNT JANE. Sally Ann had her say about nearly ever man in the church. Just as I was a-wondering if she was going to let the minister off, she began...

SALLY ANN. Brother Page, you're a good man, but you ain't so good you couldn't be better. When it comes to the perseverance of the saints and the decrees of God, there ain't many can preach a better sermon than you. But there's some of your sermons that ain't fit for much but...