

# **Gammer Gurton's Needle**

**A one-act version adapted by  
I.E. CLARK  
from the first edition of 1575**

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## GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE

The one-act version of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* presented in the following pages is based on the production script developed by I. E. Clark in cutting and directing the play at Schulenburg, Texas, High School. The original Schulenburg cast was as follows:

*Hodge* ..... Jack La Brose  
*Tyb* ..... Susie Herzik  
*Gammer Gurton* ..... Linda Hoehne  
*Cocke* ..... Bernard Leiter  
*Diccon* ..... Clinton Boriack  
*Dame Chat* ..... Janice McFarlin  
*Doll* ..... Jeanette Zemlicka  
*Doctor Rat* ..... Russell Nix  
*Master Bailey* ..... Billy Speckels  
*Stage Manager* ..... Phil Schaefer

The Schulenburg production achieved the following record in the University of Texas Interscholastic League one-act play contest:

### *Champions of District 20-AA*

Best Actor: Jack La Brose  
Best Actress: Janice McFarlin  
All-Star Cast: Linda Hoehne,  
Clinton Boriack, Bernard Leiter

### *Champions of Region III-AA*

Best Actor: Jack La Brose  
All-Star Cast: Linda Hoehne,  
Janice McFarlin, Clinton Boriack

### *State Champions*

Best Actor: Jack La Brose  
All-State Cast: Linda Hoehne  
Honorable Mention: Janice McFarlin

## ABOUT THE PLAY

*Gammer Gurton's Needle* is famous as the second oldest comedy in English (*Ralph Roister Doister* is the oldest). Probably written in the 1550's, *Gammer* was first published in 1575; the title page read: "A Ryght Pithy, Pleasaunt and merie Comedie: Intytuled Gammer gurtons Nedle...made by Mr. S. Mr. of Art." Four hundred years later we still aren't sure who "Mr. S., Master of Art" is.

The first edition listed the characters as follows:

- § Diccon the Bedlem.
- § Hodge Gammer Gurtons seruante.
- § Tyb Gammer Gurtons mayde.
- § Gammer Gurton.
- § Cocke Gammer Gurtons boye.
- § Dame Chatte.
- § Doctor Rat the Curate.
- § Mayster Baylye.
- § Doll Dame Chattes mayde.

God saue the Queene.

\*

The play is a rollicking farce laid in a sixteenth century English hamlet which could have been the model for Li'l Abner's Dogpatch. Among its often-patched, seldom-washed inhabitants is Gammer Gurton, a jolly old gossip whose most precious possession is a steel needle. But, alas!—Gammer loses her needle, and the entire village finds itself in a turmoil. Hodge valiantly searches, Diccon complicates matters with some insane mischief, and Dame Chat dares anybody to accuse *her* of stealing *anything!*

Here's a merie chase through a merie village in merie England—all for the sake of Gammer Gurton's needle.

*God saue the Queene!*



# Gammer Gurton's Needle

Adapted by I. E. Clark  
from the sixteenth century play  
by "Mr. S., Master of Art"

*[Before the curtain opens, STAGE MANAGER steps onto the apron and delivers the following prologue:]*

STAGE MANAGER. Once upon a time—in a very distant year—

Even before the birth of a man named Shakespeare—

A professor at Cambridge wrote a play

Which we intend to show you today.

It's about Gammer Gurton, who, with many wide stitches  
Sat piecing and patching Hodge her man's breeches.

By chance or misfortune, as she her gear tossed,

Somewhere or other her needle she lost.

Then the characters scrambled about on the double,

Hunting the needle—but finding trouble.

So imagine yourselves, my masters, I pray thee

To be in Olde England in the sixteenth century.

The stage is a platform without dimmer or scrim \*

And when night starts to fall, the stage never gets dim.\*

Now, if you're ready, we'll show you the scene—

So on with the play—and God save the Queen!

*[As STAGE MANAGER exits, CURTAIN opens, revealing a street in a sixteenth century English hamlet. On one side of the stage is Gammer Gurton's house, and on the other is Dame Chat's house. HODGE enters carrying a basket. He drops a small bundle out of the basket and stoops to pick*

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\*Omit these two lines if lighting effects are used.

*it up. We hear a very loud rip. HODGE straightens suddenly and his hand goes slowly and in fearful anticipation to the seat of his pants. His worst fears are realized—he feels a big tear.]*

HODGE. Two days have not ended since Gammer Gurton these breeches mended.

TYB. [*Comes flying onstage from Gammer's house*] I am blamed and beaten, lamed and hunger-starved, pricked up all in jags, having no patch to hide my back save a few rotten rags!

HODGE. Tyb? I say, Tyb, what has happened?

TYB. Old Gammer is so out of sorts, and frantic all at once, that Cocke, our boy, and I, poor wench, have felt it in our bones!

HODGE. What is the matter? Go on, Tyb—why does she so take on?

TYB. She is undone, she says; her joy in life is gone!

HODGE. By our Lady! I'm not very glad to see her in this dump. I'll bet her stool has fallen and she has broke her rump!

TYB. Oh, if that were the worst, we would not greatly care for bruising of her bones or breaking of her chair. But greater, *greater* is her grief—as we shall all feel!

HODGE. Gog's wounds, Tyb, my Gammer hasn't lost her...?

TYB. Her beloved needle!

HODGE. Her needle!

TYB. Her needle!

HODGE. Her needle?

TYB. Her needle!

HODGE. How—tell me, Tyb, how?

TYB. She was sitting down to rest, and bade me reach your breeches, and by and by—a vengeance on it!—before she had taken two stitches to clap a patch upon your seat, by chance aside she leers, and Gyb, our cat, in the milk pan she spied over head and ears. “Out, cat! Out, thief!” she cried aloud and threw the breeches down. Up went her staff

and out leapt Gyb—outdoors into the town. And since that time we can't lay an eye on the needle.

HODGE. [*About to cry*] And so my breeches are not sewed up—the ones I mean to wear tomorrow?

TYB. No, Hodge, they lie unmended, to my great sorrow.

GAMMER. [*Waddles on stage from her house*] Alas, Hodge, alas! The first day of my sorrow this is, and the last end of my pleasure! Go quickly, Tyb, run, you witch, to the end of the town—there where you carried out the dust, look where you poured it down. [*TYB exits.*]

HODGE. Here's a pretty matter, losing your needle! How shall my breeches be sewed! Shall I go thus tomorrow? [*He shows AUDIENCE the huge hole in the seat of his pants.*]

GAM. Oh, Hodge, Hodge, if I could find my needle, I would sew your breeches with a good double thread.

HODGE. Light me a candle! I will find your needle, be it where it may!

GAM. [*Calling toward her house*] Come hither, Cocke! Cocke, I say!

COCKE. [*Sticks head through window of Gammer's house*] What is it, Gammer?

GAM. Go look behind the old brass pan. There you will find an inch of white tallow candle. Light it and bring it here right away.

COCKE. Right away, Gammer.

GAM. Hodge, help the boy find the candle. [*HODGE, whose search has carried him to Gammer's door, scrambles into the house. TYB comes running in*] Quick, Tyb, what news! Did you find it anywhere?

TYB. I've tossed and tumbled yonder heap within and without to find your needle—but it isn't there.

GAM. Alas, my needle! We shall never meet again. Adieu, adieu for aye.

TYB. Not so, Gammer, we might find it—if we knew where it lay.

COCKE. [*Enters from house, laughing boisterously*] Gog's bread, Gammer, if you want to laugh, look in at the

door and see how Hodge lies tumbling and tossing around the floor—raking there some fire to find among the ashes dead where there is not one spark as big as a pin’s head. At last in a dark corner two sparks he thinks he spies, which were, indeed, nothing but the *cat’s two eyes*! “Puff!” blows Hodge, thinking thereby to have fire without doubt. With that Gyb shut her two eyes—and so the fire goes out!

HODGE. [*At upstairs window*] Help! Come up here! Gyb in her tail has fire and is like to burn the house if she gets a little higher.

GAM. Come down, Hodge, and let the cat alone!

HODGE. Come down, you say? Nay, for then you’ll call me a patch. The house comes down on your heads if the fire reaches the thatch.

GAM. It’s the cat’s eyes, fool, that shine in the dark.

HODGE. Has the cat, do you think, in every eye a spark?

GAM. No, but they shine like fire, as every man can see.

HODGE. By the mass, if she burns up the house, you’ll put the blame on *me*!

GAM. Come down and help see that my needle is found! Down, Tyb, on your knees; I say down, Cocke—to the ground! [*They all search for the needle.*]

HODGE. [*Enters from house, then turns toward house and sticks out his tongue at the unseen cat*] A vengeance on Gyb, and on Gyb’s mother, and every breed of cats, far and near! [*COCKE rises and puts his face very close to HODGE’s; HODGE backs off and stares at him.*] Look on the ground, donkey! Do you think the needle is here?

COCKE. [*Looking at HODGE’s head*] By my troth, Gammer, methought your needle here I saw; but when my fingers touched it, I felt it was straw.

TYB. [*Sitting on floor*] Look, Hodge, what’s this! I’ve found the needle, by jig! [*She holds something, stupidly happy. They all rush to her.*]

HODGE. Nay, fool. Break it and you’ll see it’s just a twig.

GAM. What shall I do! My needle’s still lost, and it’s al-

most night. We'll search another time—when we have more light. [*All exit into her house. DICCON's song is heard off-stage.*]

DICCON. Back and side go bare, go bare,  
Both foot and hand go cold;  
But belly, God send thee good ale enough  
Whether it be new or old.

[*He enters, swaying slightly, continues singing off key*]

I cannot eat but little meat,  
My stomach is not good;  
But sure, I think, that I can drink  
With him that wears a hood.  
Though I go bare, take ye no care  
I am not a bit cold;  
I stuff my skin so full within  
Of jolly good ale and old.  
Back and side, go bare, go bare!  
Both foot and hand go cold;  
But belly, God send thee good ale enough  
Whether it be new or old.

[*He stomps a few steps downstage and speaks to the AUDI-  
ENCE with bravado.*] Well done, by Gog's malt; well sung  
and well said; come on, Mother Chat [*gestures toward Chat's  
house*], let's have some bread—[*he looks at Gammer's house  
and then at AUDIENCE with a sly smile*]. Now a truly wise  
man by cunning could define which way my journey lies—  
[*pointing to Gammer's house*] or where Diccon will dine  
[*laughs raucously and drunkenly, slapping his knees. He  
hears some noise from Gammer's house and crouches be-  
hind bench as HODGE comes out of the house taking a huge  
bite from a chunk of bread.*]

HODGE. I am well rewarded—neither butter, milk, nor  
fish—just this poor piece of barley bread—a pleasant, costly  
dish!

DIC. Hail, friend Hodge! I'll share your fare—is that meat  
you eat?

HODGE. Gog's soul, man, save this piece of dry bread

I've bit no bit this livelong day—not a crumb went into my head! And see how rent and torn my heels and knees and breeches?—and I had thought, as I sat by the fire, to have a few stitches.

DIC. Why, Hodge, was there no one at home to patch them for you?

HODGE. Ha! I dwell among such fools I'd be better off in hell. My Gammer, I'm ashamed to say, has not served me well.

DIC. How so, Hodge?

HODGE. She lost her needle!

DIC. Her needle! By the mass, what a shameful loss for your breeches.

HODGE. I would give a crown if they had but three stitches.

DIC. What would you say, Hodge, if I were to find your needle?

HODGE. By my father's soul, if I had one I'd give you a gold-plated beetle!

DIC. Can you keep a secret?

HODGE. Else I'd wish my tongue were out.

DIC. Then take my advice and I will get it without a doubt.

HODGE. I'll run, I'll ride, I'll dig, I'll delve, I'll toil, I'll trudge—as you shall see! I'll hold, I'll draw, I'll pull, I'll pinch, I'll kneel on my bare knee! I'll be your bondman, Diccon, I swear by moon and sun; for I know not how to stop this gap! [*Waves the tear in the seat of his breeches*] I'm utterly undone.

DIC. Is there some special cause for all this sorrow?

HODGE. Kirstian Clack, Tom Simpson's maid, comes here tomorrow! I can't say what may happen between us. She smiled at me last Sunday when I took off my cap!

DIC. Hodge, will you swear to be no blab?

HODGE. I will, Diccon.

DIC. Then lay your hand here and repeat after me

[*HODGE kneels and repeats after DICCON, a line at a time:*] I, Hodge, breechless,

Swear to Diccon, richless,

By the cross that I shall kiss

To work whatever his pleasure is.

[*DICCON pulls HODGE roughly to his feet.*] Now, Hodge, take heed and do just as I say—and do it right! If we are going to find that needle, there is nothing else to do but conjure up a sprite.

HODGE. What—do you mean the—the devil, Diccon! I say!

DIC. Yes, in good faith, that is the way—fetch him up with some pretty charm.

HODGE. Wait, Diccon, be—be not so hasty yet; by the mass, I'm beginning to sweat! I'm afraid of some harm.

DIC. Stand to it, Hodge; stir not. We soon will settle this gear.

HODGE. I say, Diccon, hear me, please hear!

DIC. The devil! I smell the devil! He will be here anon!

HODGE. [*With a terrified squeal, HODGE runs into Gammer's house*] Hold him fast, Diccon, I'm gone, I'm gone!

DIC. Fie, filthy knave, and out upon you! Above all other louts, fie on you! Here is a matter worth musing—of Gammer Gurton her needle losing. [*To AUDIENCE*] Be quiet a moment—let me think—I will take the charge upon this matter further to enlarge within a time that's short. Watch what I'm about to do—and note, I'll give you leave to cut my throat if I don't make some sport. [*He laughs raucously and calls towards Chat's house*] Dame Chat? I say, are you within?

CHAT. [*Poking her head out of her house*] Who have we there making such a din?

DIC. Here is a right good fellow who brings you no danger.

CHAT. [*She comes on stage, holding her door open*] Well, Diccon, come in, come in—you're no stranger.

DIC. Nay, nay, I cannot tarry, I must be on my way—but first, for you alone I have a word to say.

CHAT. Say what you will.

DIC. I would not tell my sister, the matter is so great. But you must swear that you will keep it a secret.

CHAT. Gog's bread, that will I do! As secret as my own thoughts, by the saints—and the devil, too!

DIC. This Gammer Gurton, your neighbor, is a sad and sorry sight; her good, fair red rooster was stolen last night.

CHAT. What! Her rooster with the yellow legs that crowed every night?

DIC. That's the rooster that was stolen. And Tyb has whispered in Gammer's ear that *you* stole the fowl!

CHAT. That I—the old witch! By bread and salt, I'll make her howl!

DIC. What? Soft, I say; be still! Say not one word, Dame Chat!

CHAT. Shall I be made a thief, do you think, by such a begger's brawl as that? Come out, you hungry, needy witch! Oh, that my nails were not so short!

DIC. Gog's bread, woman, watch your sport! You must see that Diccon gets no blame!

CHAT. Rest your mind—there will be no blot on your name.

DIC. It's twenty pounds to a goose feather old Gammer will not wait long to fight with you about her rooster, for well I heard Tyb say that he was roasted in your house for breakfast yesterday.

CHAT. Then let the jade beware her throat! I can wait no longer! In faith, old witch, it shall be seen which of us is stronger!

DIC. Well, calm down for a space, and when Gammer Gurton comes to this place, tell her what's on your mind—and spare not. As long as Diccon is blameless, you can do with her as you will—I care not. In the meanwhile go in the house and wait. Now farewell. [*CHAT exits, fuming.* *DICCON laughs and turns to the AUDIENCE.*] You see

now, my masters, one side of my little device. Now must we turn to the other before the smoke begins to rise. [*He turns toward Gammer's house just as HODGE comes out.*]

HODGE. Gog's soul, man, are you still alive?

DIC. If you come any nearer, you will see that I am.

HODGE. Did the devil tell where the needle might be found?

DIC. You foolish dolt, he would have brought it at your command if you had stood your ground.

HODGE. But Diccon; Diccon, didn't the devil cry, "Ho, ho, ho!"?

DIC. If you had tarried where you stood, you would have said so.

HODGE. I would swear on a book I heard him roar as I ran away. Tell me, Diccon, what did the knave have to say?

DIC. Oh, he talked about—let me think—something about a cat, and then he stammered about a rat, and then nearly every word was chat, chat. I gathered, before I told him to scat, that your needle is hid between Chat, Doctor Rat, and Gyb the cat. Now whether Gyb, your cat, has eaten it in her maw; or Doctor Rat, the curate, has found it in the straw; or this Dame Chat, your neighbor, has stolen it, God only knows, but by tomorrow at this time we shall learn how the matter goes.

HODGE. Can't you learn tonight, man? Don't you see what's here? [*He points to his torn breeches.*]

DIC. It's not possible to make it sooner appear.

HODGE. Then I'll run to Sim Glover's shop to seek for a thong. Maybe I can tie this hole before it gets *that* long.

GAM. [*Speaking to herself as she comes through her door. She does not see DICCON*] Good lord, shall it never be my luck my needle to spy? [*She is carrying a bucket of garbage which she empties by tossing its contents into the street. It lands on DICCON. He grunts.*] Who is that? Oh, Diccon, I am lost, man! Fie! Fie!

DIC. [*Rises, wipes garbage off his clothes, takes a step toward her*] Marry, fie on whom you will—but what is your trouble?

GAM. Alas, the more I think of it, my sorrow waxes double! My good strong needle I've lost, and I know not where.

DIC. Your needle?

GAM. My needle. It's something I can't very well spare.

DIC. If that's all, good Gammer, I warrant you all is safe.

GAM. Why, do you know which way my needle has gone?

DIC. Yes, that I do, doubtless, as you shall hear anon. At this very spot, before my face, a neighbor of yours stooped down and took up a needle or a pin!

GAM. It was my needle, Diccon, I know! Who would commit such a sin?

DIC. A subtle quean as any in this town—your neighbor here, Dame Chat!

GAM. Dame Chat?! Diccon, let me go—I want my needle back!

DIC. Get your needle, alack, but take good heed—let it not be known I told you of it, however fast you speed!

GAM. I'll go in, Diccon, and put a clean apron on me; and if I find my needle, I'll surely remember thee. *[Exit]*

DIC. *[Watches her disappear and then laughs raucously. He exits as he says:]* Old Gammer sure intends to beat Chat's bones with staves or with clubs or else with cobblestones.

HODGE. *[Enters admiring a leather thong and nail]* Sim Glover, I thank you; I'm well equipped now; you are as good a fellow as ever kissed a cow. Here is a thong indeed! No matter how you take it, a pitching horse could never break it. And this nail I'm to use as a needle—I wonder how I'll make it?

GAM. *[Enters]* How now, Hodge! I have news to tell: I know who has my needle, and soon, I trust, all will be well!

HODGE. The devil you do!—Ah, it's all a jest.

GAM. It's as true as steel, Hodge, on that you may rest.

HODGE. Do you know where you lost it?

GAM. I know who found it—as you shall see ere long!

HODGE. Oh dear! If that is true, farewell both nail and

thong! But who has your needle, Gammer?

GAM. That false vixen, Dame Chat, who counts herself so honest!

HODGE. Who told you so?

GAM. Our good friend Diccon—he saw it done.

HODGE. Diccon! He's a vengeful knave, Gammer, an awful witch's son! I saw him call up a great, black devil who cried "Ho, ho!" and roared and thundered. If you'd been here, you'd surely have wondered!

GAM. Weren't you afraid, Hodge, to see the devil in this place?

HODGE. No. If he had come near me I'd have laid him on his face.

GAM. Oh, Hodge!

HODGE. The devil, when Diccon had brought him in—I heard him wondrous well—said plainly, here before us, that Dame Chat had your needle.

GAM. Then let us go and ask if she means to keep it. Seeing we know so much, it's madness for her to refuse.

HODGE. Go to her, Gammer. What have you got to lose!

GAM. Dame Chat, I ask you fairly, let me have what is mine! Therefore, give me my own and let me live beside thee.

CHAT. [*Enters from her house*] Why have you crept from home here to my own door to chide me? Go away, doting drab, begone, or I shall set you further! Are you and that knave intent on committing murder?

GAM. Tush, do not gape at me so, woman! Are you going to eat me? Poor folks must have their rights—give me what's mine, I entreat thee!

CHAT. Give you your rights and hang you up with all your beggarly broods! What, will you call me a thief and say I stole your goods?

GAM. I'll say nothing, I warrant you, but what I can prove well: you took my goods from my very door—that I can tell!

CHAT. Did I, old witch, steal what was yours? How should that be known?

GAM. I cannot tell; but you took it up, as though it had been your own.

CHAT. Ha! Fie on you, you old Gib, with all my very heart!

GAM. Nay, fie on you, you ramp, you rig, with all who take your part.

CHAT. A vengeance on those lips that lay such things to my charge!

GAM. A vengeance on those callet's hips, whose conscience is so large.

CHAT. Come here, hog!

GAM. Who's a hog? I want my right!

CHAT. You arrant witch!

GAM. You bawdy jade! I'll make you curse this night!

CHAT. I'll bet you a groat I'll patch your coat!

GAM. Will you, you drunken beast! [*They fight.*]

HODGE. Stick to her Gammer—take her by the head! I'm behind you in this feast! Smite her, I say, Gammer! Oh, I'm glad you're so wise. Where are your nails? Claw her jaws! Scratch out her eyes! [*GAMMER falls to her hands and knees.*] Gog's bones, Gammer, hold up your head!

CHAT. Take this, old drab, for amends, and teach your tongue to be tame! And say you met at this bickering not your fellow, but your dame! [*CHAT hits GAMMER on the seat, and GAMMER falls flat on her face.*]

HODGE. Up, Gammer, if you are alive! I'll fight for you now! [*To CHAT, who is giving him a menacing look*] Don't come near me, you scald callet—I might kill you somehow! [*CHAT starts chasing HODGE with the broom; he runs into Gammer's house. CHAT exits into her house. HODGE re-enters and calls bravely now that she is gone.*]

HODGE. Where is the strong-armed jade? I'll give her a hall mark!

CHAT. [*Quickly comes out of her house*] Are you here again, you hoddypeg? Doll, bring out my spit!

HODGE. [*Picks up GAMMER's broom and waves it at CHAT; however, he has already begun to retreat.*] I'll break

you with this, by my father's soul! [*DOLL enters from CHAT's house, hands CHAT a spit.*] Hold the door open, Cocke! Open the door, you troll!

CHAT. Stand still, you donkey—you mule-eared boy—I'll teach you I'm no toy!

HODGE. Gog's wounds! Let me in! Cocke, pull the latch! [*Runs into the house.*]

CHAT. In faith, Sir Loose-Breeches, had you tarried, you should have found your match!

GAM. [*Comes up behind CHAT and throws her to the ground*] Now beware your throat, shrew, you'll pay for all!

HODGE. [*Watching the fight from the window*] Well said, Gammer, by my soul. Hoist her, souse her, bounce her, trounce her, pull out her throat-bole!

CHAT. [*Throws GAMMER*] Come up behind me, you withered witch? See what you get! You'll pay for this, you old tarleather—I'll teach you something yet! [*Exit*]

HODGE. [*Running to help*] Up, Gammer, stand on your feet. Faith, if Chat were here, I'd crack her callet crown!

GAM. Hodge, Hodge, where was your help when the vixen had me down?

HODGE. By the mass, Gammer, but for my strength, Chat would have stilled you! I think the drab would not have cared if she'd killed you! But shall we lose our needle thus?

GAM. No, Hodge, I'll never do so! Do you think I'll take that at her hand? No, Hodge, no!

HODGE. I wish this fight were finished and our needle back home. I'm afraid I might kill someone—wherever it be or whom!

GAM. We have a parson, Hodge, you know, a man esteemed and wise, Master Doctor Rat. I'll send for him and ask him for advice.

HODGE. I say! Gammer, Diccon's devil, as I remember well, of Cat and Chat and Doctor Rat a felonious tale did tell. I'll bet you forty pounds that is the way to get your needle again!

GAM. Call out the boy. We'll make him take the pain.

HODGE. Ho, Cocke! I say! Come out! What the devil, can't you hear?

COCKE. How now, Hodge? How's old Gammer? What would you have me do?

GAM. Run to Doctor Rat, hurry; and pray him come speak with me; I am not well at ease. You'll find him at his chamber, or else at Mother Bee's; else seek him at Hob Filcher's shop, for I have heard reported that theirs is the best ale in all the town—

HODGE. It's much supported.

COCKE. And shall I bring him with me, Gammer?

GAM. Yea, immediately, good Cocke.

COCKE. I'll have him here anon—or Cocke will take a sock on the dock! [*Runs out*]

HODGE. Now, Gammer, shall we two go in and wait for his coming? What the devil? Pluck up your heart and leave off this glooming. Though she were stronger at the first, as I think you found her, yet, Gammer, you hit the drunken sow each time you got behind her!

GAM. Nay, nay, I'm sure she'll remember all, both the end and the beginning; I doubt not but she will make much boast of her winning. [*COCKE comes running in*] Quiet! Let us hear what news you bring from Doctor Rat.

COCKE. Gammer, it will not be long before he comes, I'll swear by a book.

GAM. Where did you find him, boy? Where I told you to look?

COCKE. Yes, at Hob Filcher's house. Doctor Rat will find your needle—I'll bet a cup of ale!

GAM. I'm glad to hear it, Cocke, and trust he will not fail. Let us go in and wait. [*They exit into house.*]

RAT. [*Enters and x to Gammer's house and knocks*] A man were better twenty times a mule that has to work here among such sort to be parish priest or clerk. I hadn't time to drink two pots of ale before Gammer's boy was straight way at my tail saying she was sick, and I must come, to do I know not what! If her finger nail begins to ache—trudge! call for

Doctor Rat! How are you, Gammer Gurton? Here is your friend, Doctor Rat.

GAM. [*Coming out*] Ah, good Master Doctor—alas! I have lost my needle—what do you say to that? A drab came by and spied it, and when I asked her for it, the pig flatly denied it!

RAT. What did you say she was?

GAM. A dame. She began to scold and brawl. Alas! Come hither, Hodge! [*To Rat*] This wretch can tell you all.

HODGE. [*Entering from house*] Good morrow, gaffer Vicar!

RAT. Come, fellow, let us hear. Your dame says you know all about this gear.

HODGE. My Gammer Gurton here, see now, sat her down at this door, see now; and as she began to stir, see now, her needle fell on the floor, see now; and while her staff she took, see now, at Gyb, her cat, to fling, see now, her needle was lost on the floor, see now; is not this a wondrous thing, see now? Then came the quean, Dame Chat, see now, to ask for her black cup, see now; and right here at this spot, see now, she picked that needle up, see now; and then my Gammer begged her, see now, the needle again to bring, see now; and she was beat on the head, see now; is not this a wondrous thing, see now? She tore my Gammer's coat, see now, and scratched her by the face, see now; I thought she'd stopped her throat, see now; is not this a wondrous case, see now! When I saw this, I was wroth, see now, and came between the twain, see now, else I dare to take an oath, see now, my Gammer had been slain. See now?

GAM. This is the whole story. Now tell us what to do—or we'll both be beaten and lose our needle, too!

RAT. Are you sure Dame Chat has the needle? Was it really found?

GAM. [*She sees DICCON entering*] Here comes the man who saw her take it from the ground. Ask him, if you don't believe me—but find my needle, for Saint Charity!

RAT. Come here, Diccon. Will you swear you saw Dame Chat with this woman's needle here?

DIC. Nay, by Saint Benet, I will not; or you might think me queer!

GAM. Did you not tell me so? For shame—can you deny it?

DIC. Marry, Gammer, I said I would not abide by it.

RAT. Then we are no nearer, for all that you can tell?

DIC. Yes sir, if you will take my advice and counsel. If Dame Chat see all us here, she will know how the matter goes. Therefore, I bid you three go inside and stay there close. I'll go into Dame Chat's house upon some excuse—and if I can find the needle, you'll soon have better news. [*All but DICCON exit*] Now with Dame Chat, my gossip, talk first I must, for she is the chief captain to lay the Rat in the dust. Good evening, Dame Chat! Are you in your place?

CHAT. [*Enters from her house*] Good even, friend Diccon. Why do you walk in this space?

DIC. By my troth, to see you, to learn how the world goes. Have you heard any more of the matter relating to those?

CHAT. In faith, I wish you had seen! Oh, Lord, I beat them bravely.

DIC. Hodge swore he would avenge his sorrow and leave you not one hen alive by tomorrow.

CHAT. The knave had as well go hang himself as enter my ground!

DIC. Well heed what I say while I look around. Have you not about your house a hole where a crafty knave might creep in like a mole?

CHAT. Yes, by the mass, a hole broke here just two days ago.

DIC. Hodge intends this very night to slip in there, by Jo!

CHAT. By Gog's bones, when he comes, now that I know the matter, at the very first step he shall slip into scalding water—with a strong beating besides! When he's ready, let him come!

DIC. I tell you as my sister; you know the meaning of mum. [*He pushes her into her house.*] Now I need my

Doctor to play his part again—[*sees him coming from Gammer's house*] and lo! here he comes—much to his pain!

RAT. What good news, Diccon? Is Mother Chat at home?

DIC. She is, sir. To some!

RAT. Did you see the needle? Quickly, I pray thee, tell.

DIC. I saw it; in faith, sir, I handled it myself.

RAT. Oh, Diccon, I wish I'd been there instead of you!

DIC. Well, if you wish, you can go, too. I will bring you to a place, as the house stands, where you shall catch the drab with the needle in her hands.

RAT. Oh, do so, Diccon, I pray.

DIC. Follow me a little, and mark what I say. See what is here? A hole wherein you can creep into the house and suddenly, unawares, among them leap!

DIC. [*Helping him crawl through the hole into Chat's house*] Go softly, and make no noise.

RAT. [*From hole*] Help, Diccon! Out! Alas! I shall be slain among them!

DIC. [*Enjoying the spectacle ecstatically; calls to CHAT inside house*] Save his life, but give him some pain—Gog's bread, I am afraid they will beat out his brain. [*DICCON exits. RAT emerges from hole with blood on his head.*]

RAT. Woe unto the hour that I came here! Master Bailey, I trust, will behead these murderers if he is worth half an ear! [*Holding his bleeding head in his hands, he staggers off.*]

## SCENE 2

[*There is no curtain or blackout at the end of Scene 1. After RAT and DICCON exit there is a very brief pause. Then STAGE MANAGER enters and addresses AUDIENCE:*]

STAGE MGR. A moment of your time we will now borrow

To change the scene from yesterday to tomorrow.

And here is a newcomer I want you to know—

[*He gestures; BAILEY enters.*]

Master Bailey will take charge. So—*on with the show!*

BAILEY. Dame Chat! [*CHAT enters from her house followed by DOLL.*] Gammer Gurton, Doctor Rat! [*GAMMER enters, followed by TYB. HODGE follows TYB on stage. He is wearing a different pair of pants, but this fresh pair is as badly torn as the former. RAT enters from Gammer's house.*] Dame Chat, Master Doctor here has made a complaint that you and your maid disturbed his peace, and further, that you assaulted him with intent to murder...

CHAT. That I would have murdered him? Fie on him, the liar! Not for seven weeks has he sat by my fire!

BAILEY. Perhaps, then, Master Doctor, you have simply forgot....

RAT. Do you think I'm so mad that I *was* where I *was not*?

CHAT. What, man, do you say *I* broke your head?

RAT. How can you prove the contrary?

CHAT. Nay—how can *you* prove I did?

RAT. Too plainly, by St. Mary. This proof, I trust, may serve to show. [*He takes off his hat and shows his head wrapped in the blood-stained bandage.*]

CHAT. Just because your head is broken, was it I who gave the blow? I have seen you, Doctor, I tell you, not once within this fortnight.

RAT. No, marry, you saw me not—because you had no light!

BAILEY. Answer me this, Dame Chat, was it to someone else a blow you gave?

CHAT. Yes, by my faith, Master Bailey, I did strike a knave. And well did he deserve it, it seemed to me! But what is that to this man, since it was not he!

BAILEY. Who was it then? Let's hear.

RAT. Alas, sir, ask you that! Isn't it clear enough by the very mouth of Dame Chat? The time agrees, my head is broken, her tongue cannot lie. You have only her word that says it was not I!

CHAT. No, marry, it was not indeed.

BAILEY. But you don't say who it was—I wonder if you can?

CHAT. It was that crafty cullion, Hodge,—Gammer Gurton's man.

BAILEY. Bring the knave here—he shall surely kiss the stocks. I'll teach him a lesson for filching hens and cocks!

RAT. Ha! She blames someone who wasn't even there!

CHAT. He wasn't there? Ha! Look on his pate—look in his hair!

BAILEY. [*Beckoning HODGE to him*] Sir, answer me this: is your head whole or broken?

HODGE. Is my head whole? I warrant you, by every good token!

BAILEY. Come nearer. By our Lady, I see no harm. This head is whole enough in spite of Chat's alarm.

CHAT. However he hides the thing, or smolders, I know the blows I gave his head and shoulders.

HODGE. A plague on all your faults and fuss. [*Rising and pointing an accusing finger at her*] You're the one who stole from us!

GAM. Yea, Master Bailey, there is something you don't know, mayhap; [*pointing to CHAT*] she carried away my needle in her big fat lap!

BAILEY. Keep ye content a while! See that your tongues you hold! I suspect, from the looks of things, that this brawl first began with the pranks of a knave called Diccon—a lying, mischievous man.

RAT. Diccon is the cause of all this brawl, that dirty, lying lout! The villain has tricked us round about! [*He looks at CHAT*] He taught me the weight of your door-bar—what a bolt.

HODGE, I'm happy I was saved that jolt—had I not had the better wit, I'd have been made a dolt!

DIC. [*Strolling in*] God bless you, and bless you—so many all at once!

CHAT. Come, knave, we ought to thrash you, by Cock's bones! See your handiwork? Sir Rat, can you forbear him?

DIC. A vengeance! My hands came not near him!

BAILEY. Have you not told a lie or two and set these people by the ears?

DIC. What if I have? I've told a few over the years.

RAT. By all hallows, his punishment, if I may judge, shall be nothing but the gallows.

GAM. He's nearly undone us all; that's as true as steel. And yet for all this great ado, I'm never the nearer my needle!

BAILEY. What do you know about that, Diccon?

DIC. Marry, sir, this much I can say....

GAM. Quickly—where can it be found?

DIC. Your needle is...lost! But I know not where—if you gave a hundred pound!

BAILEY. Well, Master Rat, since Diccon has confessed, I will give him a penance so the wrong will be redressed. [*To DICCON*] Here you must kneel down, as the law teaches, and take an oath of penance upon Hodge's poor old breeches. [*DICCON kneels.*]

HODGE. [*X to DICCON's left; slaps DICCON on back*] Come on, fellow Diccon, I shall be even with you now!

DIC. By my father's skin, I will never say it, but on Hodge's new breeches I take my hand and lay it! [*He gives HODGE a hard slap on the seat.*]

HODGE. [*Grabbing his seat*] Gog's legs! [*Hopping a-round stage*] The villain bit me—or stuck me with a pin!

BAILEY. Here we go again!

HODGE. I say, Gammer! Gammer!

GAM. How now, Hodge, how now?

HODGE. Gog's malt, Gammer Gurton!

GAM. You are mad, I trow!

HODGE. [*Pointing to it*] Your needle, Gammer! Your needle!

GAM. [*Looking*] My needle!

CHAT. Now, you see, I didn't steal it!

BAILEY. Her needle? Let me feel it. [*He tries to pull the needle out.*]

HODGE. Ouch! Soft! Gammer! Soft. Tarry a while! [*He yelps in pain as BAILEY pulls on the needle.*]

GAM. My own dear needle! Now I can smile!

CHAT. By my troth, Gossip Gurton, I too am glad!

HODGE. See, Gammer, am I not a good lad! [*He yells in pain as they give a strong tug.*]

BAILEY. And I!—I'm glad to add my voice!

RAT. I am happy to see you rejoice! [*They have a tug of war with HODGE as the rope.*]

DIC. And I am glad to hear all this noise. Thank me, Gammer, for springing the game!

GAM. Thank you, Diccon, twenty times! [*They give a strong tug, and the needle comes out. They all fall backward, screaming and laughing. GAMMER holds her needle up proudly, calling:*] Oh, how glad I am!

THE CURTAIN FALLS

## THE DIRECTOR'S PRODUCTION SCRIPT

Stage directions have been kept to a minimum in this playscript for a specific reason: Many directors encourage their actors and actresses to create their own characterizations without help from the play book. An imaginative cast member often introduces exciting bits of business and line readings if he is made to do his own thinking. But if printed stage directions do his thinking for him, his own creativity is nearly always stifled. Full stage directions may be found in the Director's Production Script prepared especially for this play.

Most directors are so deluged with details of publicity, ticket sales, and house management that they can never find time enough to devote full attention to staging, blocking, and characterization while also trying to design costumes and set, plan the lighting, arrange for sound effects, and solve all the other problems that play directors are heir to. For these harried directors, the I. E. Clark Company provides a Director's Production Script (prompt book) for many of our plays. The Production Script is loaded with detailed help in staging the show.

Costume sketches, a floor plan drawn to scale, drawings of scenery and hard-to-find props, details of make-up, lights, sound, special effects – the Production Script supplies whatever information is needed to stage the play successfully. Also included are full stage directions showing every actor where to be and what to do virtually every moment he is on stage.

To save the director even more time, the Production Script gives information on the background and significance of the play and goes into detail in describing and discussing the characterization of each role.

Experienced directors know how many hours of research must be spent to stage a play successfully. Our Production Scripts save valuable time even for the most experienced director by supplying authenticated details of period, locale, and other factors which the director or an assistant would have to search for if we hadn't supplied them.

If you find life boring, with plenty of time to do all the things you want to do, our Production Scripts won't appeal to you. But if you have discovered the value of using aids and shortcuts which lift the burden of routine, time-consuming work from your shoulders, you will find our Production Scripts are worth their weight in gold.

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# The Magic Well

"The Magic Well" is another of Herman Ammann's delightful plays for children of all ages. For those who are young in years, there's Old King Cole...not a very Merry Old Soul as the play begins. And there's a real live dragon, and three beautiful—er, well—*interesting* princesses; and a frog that has been bewitched and made to live in the well for a hundred years.

For those who are young in spirit if not in years, Ammann was a master of putting real everyday people with real nowadays problems into the Fairyland costumes. King Cole is un-merry because he has three daughters of marriageable age—and no prospective sons-in-law to take them off his hands. And the King has the problem of all political leaders: "To never be able to admit you are wrong...it is a curse." Then there's an old witch who has to fight inflation—the price of bats' teeth and lizard tongues has gone out of sight.

The professional dragon hunter has his problems: environmentalists want to declare dragons an endangered species. Then there's...but part of the fun in reading a playscript is discovering these delights for yourself.

"The Magic Well" can be played by adult actors or by pre-adults of virtually any age. The set may be a simple outdoor scene with cut-out trees and a cardboard well. The Production Script has full details and drawings of set, costumes, props, etc. Costumes can be of any period, or—like the original production—a kaleidoscope of all periods. After all, the play is as modern as ecology and as old as Fairyland.

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