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*Dramatic Publishing*



# ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE

A Full-Length Play  
By  
**WILLIAM GLEASON**



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY  
4150 North Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60641



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(ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE)  
ISBN: 978-1-58342-418-6

*PRODUCTION NOTES*

ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE was originally performed in Jefferson, Texas with the following cast:

<i>William Garrett</i> . . . . .	John Taylor
<i>Abigail Garrett</i> . . . . .	.Cheri Smith
<i>Nora Garrett</i> . . . . .	.Midge Hileman
<i>Lula Hawkins</i> . . . . .	Dorothy Simkins
<i>Ira Pickens</i> . . . . .	.Bill Gleason
<i>Violet Pickens</i> . . . . .	.Margie Perot
<i>Nick Lawson</i> . . . . .	James Tribble
<i>Charles Butler</i> . . . . .	Victor Perot
<i>Reverend Fowler</i> . . . . .	.Rev. Greg Megill
<i>Johnny Ward</i> . . . . .	.Jeff Large
<i>Marcus Stoner</i> . . . . .	Ken Tomlinson

ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE

*A Full-Length Play*

*For Seven Men, Four Women*

CHARACTERS

<i>WILLIAM GARRETT</i> . . . . .	<i>A merchant</i>
<i>ABIGAIL GARRETT</i> . . . . .	<i>His wife</i>
<i>NORA GARRETT</i> . . . . .	<i>His daughter</i>
<i>LULA HAWKINS</i> . . . . .	<i>His mother-in-law</i>
<i>NICK LAWSON</i> . . . . .	<i>A merchant and rounder</i>
<i>IRA PICKENS</i> . . . . .	<i>A banker</i>
<i>VIOLET PICKENS</i> . . . . .	<i>His wife</i>
<i>CHARLES BUTLER</i> . . . . .	<i>The sheriff</i>
<i>JOHNNY WARD</i> . . . . .	<i>A young friend of Nora's</i>
<i>MARCUS STONER</i> . . . . .	<i>Federal marshall</i>
<i>REVEREND FOWLER</i> . . . . .	<i>Local minister</i>

TIME: December, 1872

PLACE: The parlor of the Garrett Home in east Texas

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## ACT ONE

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SCENE: As the house lights fade, we hear **ABBIE GARRETT**, as if from a distant room, singing the Christmas carol “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen.” The song continues for several beats as the lights come up to reveal the parlor of the Garrett house, December, 1872. The weekly meeting of the Shakespeare Study Club is in session, which is to say that **WILLIAM GARRETT**, **IRA PICKENS**, **CHARLES BUTLER** and **NICK LAWSON** are playing their weekly poker game. **IRA**, **CHARLES** and **NICK** sit at the table with cigar smoke curling above it and a decanter of sipping whiskey occupying a place of honor in the center. **WILLIAM** stands by the window, looking out pensively. **CHARLES** drums his fingers on the table boredly. **NICK** stares hard at **IRA**, as **IRA** checks his hand for the tenth time and worries about losing his money. **Abbie’s** voice slowly fades away.

**IRA.** Your wife certainly has a lovely voice, William.

**WILLIAM.** Yes. (He continues to stare out the window.)

**IRA.** You’re a very lucky man.

**WILLIAM.** Yes.

**IRA.** She sings like a nightingale. Of course, my wife sings like a bird too – a turkey buzzard.

NICK. I'll tell her you said so.

IRA. Mercy, no! Violet doesn't have a sense of humor, you know.

NICK. Well, Ira?

IRA. Well what?

CHARLES. Make up your mind.

NICK. What mind?

IRA. How can I concentrate on the game if you continue to ridicule me?

NICK. I can't help it, Ira. There's just something about you that invites ridicule.

CHARLES. It's probably his receding chin.

NICK. It goes much deeper than that. His whole personality is receding.

IRA. I'll remember that the next time you've squandered your money and come crawling on your knees for a loan.

NICK. I'm forced to crawl around you, Ira. It's the only way we can see eye to eye.

IRA. Tell them to leave me alone, William.

WILLIAM (distractedly). Leave him alone, gentlemen. He has a soft heart.

NICK. It matches his soft head.

IRA (irately). William!

NICK. I'm sorry, Ira.

CHARLES. The cards are getting cold.

IRA (checking his cards again). Now, how much do I have to bet to stay in?

CHARLES. Eleven cents.

NICK. Or your firstborn son.

IRA (smiling). Very well then, I'll bet Waldo.

NICK. I don't want Waldo.

CHARLES. Nor do I. I've enough hungry mouths to feed as it is on a sheriff's salary.

IRA. Well, what makes you gentlemen think you're going to win?

NICK. How long has the Shakespeare Study Club been meeting now, William?

WILLIAM. Two years this March.

NICK. And how many hands have you won in those hundreds of poker games, Ira? (IRA squirms.) How many?

IRA. I can't remember.

NICK. I can. You've won two. Two hands of poker in almost two years. And we let you win last Christmas just because we felt sorry for you.

IRA (waving his cards). Hope springs eternal. I'll match your eleven cents and raise you . . . (The others are surprised at this.) . . . a penny.

WILLIAM. Watch out, gentlemen. Ira is on a rampage.

NICK. Are you sure you want to chance it? We wouldn't want you to lose your life savings.

CHARLES. Violet would skin him alive.

IRA. Violet knows her place.

NICK. I realize that, but doesn't she get tired of standing on your neck?

IRA. Are we playing poker, Nick? Can we get on with the game, please?

NICK. Very well, I'll see your . . . penny and raise you a nickel. (IRA groans.) Typical banker.

CHARLES. Why are you being so quiet tonight, William? William?



WILLIAM. Were you speaking to me?

NICK. Wake up, William.

WILLIAM. Sorry, my mind was elsewhere.

CHARLES. I'll call your nickel. (He antes up.) Ira?

IRA (looking at his cards as if his life depended on it). Just a moment. (The OTHERS moan.)

WILLIAM (turning from the window). I've decided it's going to be a lovely yuletide. The weather is brisk, business is booming and the spirit of Christmas is ringing in the air like songs sung by a heavenly chorus.

NICK. How much has he had to drink?

WILLIAM. Honestly! Can't you just feel it? There is a palpable sense of optimism that I can only attribute to the Christmas season.

IRA. The spirit of Christmas lies not in the mind, William, but in the heart of man.

NICK. Yes, Reverend Pickens. Shall we rise and sing now?

IRA. Don't be blasphemous, Nick.

NICK. Yes, your eminence.

IRA. It might interest you to know, Nick, that at one time I seriously considered becoming a man of the Gospel.

NICK. That doesn't interest me in the least.

IRA. But, alas, fate dealt me a different hand.

NICK. And a losing one, at that.

IRA. You're a very witty man, Nick. You should have been in a minstrel show. Travelling with a roving band of rogues, misfits and scoundrels would suit your debauched nature.

CHARLES. What does "debauched" mean?

NICK. Fun loving.

IRA. Hardly. No, the calling to serve was great, but my destiny lay in serving in other ways.

CHARLES. Why don't you just serve up a nickel so we can get on with the game?

IRA (looking at his cards). My decision will be forthcoming.

NICK. It's only a nickel, Ira. Your empire will not crumble.

IRA. It's the principle. Would you trust a banker who threw money around as if it were compost?

CHARLES. No, but I would follow him everywhere.

IRA. William, would you look at my hand and give me your opinion as to my chances?

WILLIAM (crossing to IRA). I've lost almost every hand tonight. My opinion shouldn't be taken too seriously.

IRA. I'm afraid it will have to do. (He shows WILLIAM his cards.) What do you think? Should I bet the farm?

WILLIAM. Don't even bet the compost.

IRA (instantly). I'm out. (He folds his cards.)

NICK. Ah, conviction! 'Tis a fleeting thing.

(NORA enters.)

NORA. Father, we need to talk. (The MEN, not used to interruptions, turn and look at NORA. She stares back at them uneasily.)

WILLIAM (shaking his head indignantly, then looking to his friends). I'm sorry for the interruption, gentlemen. This won't take a minute. (He stalks toward NORA, his expression stern.)  
Nora, I have told you . . .

NORA (raising her hands as if to apologize). I realize that I am never to interrupt the weekly meeting of the Shakespeare Study Club, Father, and Mother warned me that to do so was to take my fragile little life into my own hands, and were it not for the

pressing and urgent matter which not only threatens the tranquility of our household, but my very existence, I would have never crossed this threshold and bothered the father that I love, adore, cherish and respect. Throttle me, if you will. Punish me severely, if you see fit. Cast me out into the snow and give me nothing to wrap my birdlike bones in but a burlap bag. I cannot stop you because your home is your castle and you are the king of that castle.

**WILLIAM** (his stern look melting). Nora, you know I wouldn't

. . .

**NORA**. And you are big and strong as a father should be while I am small and fragile and tender, a little swallow with a fluttering heart. (She clasps her hands to her breast, bats her eyelashes and sighs plaintively.)

**WILLIAM** (sweetly). Can't this wait until . . .

**NORA** (her lips trembling, her chest heaving, then sobbing).  
Doomed! I am doomed!

**IRA**. The poor child!

**WILLIAM**. Oh, don't cry, my little angel!

**NICK**. Note how masterfully William has controlled the situation.

**WILLIAM**. Your father is not a brute. Of course I will listen to you.

**NORA** (stopping the crying instantly, then all business). Good. Now . . . (she paces in a businesslike manner.) . . . as you know, my allowance is twenty-five cents a week, for which I am ever so appreciative. With that twenty-five cents, I usually purchase a cherry phosphate every day after school, a length of ribbon, four peppermints, a stick of licorice and an occasional pencil if I can't find any on your desk.

WILLIAM. How many times have I told you not to take things from my desk?

NORA (turning soft, fluttering her eyes, sobbing and crying).

Very well! Thrash me! I deserve so much worse! (She cries.)

IRA. The poor child!

WILLIAM. Nora . . . (He melts.) . . . I didn't mean, well . . . now don't cry. You may have my pencils if you need them. In moderation, of course.

NORA (turning it off). Thank you, Father. (She thinks.) Where was I?

NICK. The subject was money, Nora. (WILLIAM looks at NICK.)

NORA. Thank you, Mr. Lawson. (She paces again.) I also repay Mother five cents a week on the book for which she so kindly advanced me the funds, *Graceful Poses and Appropriate Replies For Young Ladies of Taste* by Eunice Bethel-Heathercroft.

WILLIAM. Aren't you a little young for that?

NORA (with a graceful gesture). Why, whatever is a lady to do? (She sighs.)

NICK. Very good, Nora.

NORA. Thank you. Chapter two, page six. One of my favorites.

WILLIAM. I need a drink. (He starts to cross.)

NORA. Father! There is a lady present.

WILLIAM. Oh, sorry. (He looks around and gestures worriedly. He is losing and knows it.) Couldn't I just have a sip?

NORA. Far be it from me, a dainty leaf in the wind of time, to stand in your way.

WILLIAM. Thank you. (He pours his drink.)

NORA. Of course, you know how agitated Grandmother Hawkins gets when she smells spirits on your breath. (WILLIAM, the drink almost to his lips, sighs weakly and puts the glass on the table.) Not thirsty, Father? (WILLIAM, staggered, gestures vainly as NORA launches into her final assault.) As I was saying . . . (She thinks.) . . . what was I saying?

NICK. A nickel every week for the book. You left off there.

NORA. Thank you, Mr. Lawson. Which leaves me four cents a week which I am saving for my trousseau. (She crosses her heart.)

WILLIAM. Trousseau? But you're not even . . . How old are you now?

NORA. Father!

NICK. Fifteen.

NORA. Thank you, Mr. Lawson. It won't be long, Father. I am rapidly approaching the age of burgeoning womanhood.

WILLIAM (whispering urgently). Not so loud, Nora.

NORA. Which brings me to my point. (She stares at WILLIAM.)

WILLIAM. Which is?

NORA. As you know, the Ladies of the Buttercup are sponsoring a Christmas Cotillion this year. As you also know, they have selected five young ladies to serve as Belle Fleurs — that's French for pretty flowers — a position of great prestige and importance. As you also know, I am among the five selected because of my — and I am quoting the letter — “good nature and joie de vivre.” That's French for joyful exuberance.

CHARLES. What is exuberance?

NORA. That's English for joie de vivre.

WILLIAM. I thought you were coming to the point.

NORA. Are you being short with me, Father? (Her lips tremble.) Is my presence here so grating that wrath is my only

reward for speaking my heart? (She strikes a pose of atonement.)

WILLIAM. Easy now. Continue.

NORA. Thank you, Father. (She thinks.) Ah, yes. Look at me, Father. What do you see?

WILLIAM (looking). I see Nora Garrett, my daughter.

NORA. And what is your daughter wearing?

WILLIAM. My daughter is wearing a dress. (He smiles at the OTHERS, pleased with his success.)

NICK. Smashing, William. You're ever so good at this game.

WILLIAM. Not bad. (The OTHERS smile and nod.)

IRA. Can I play too? (He smiles.) The dress is brown.

NORA (killing IRA with a look). Were it not for the seriousness of the subject at hand, I, too, would engage in light banter. But my distress and humiliation prevent effervescent repartee.

CHARLES. What is effervescent?

NORA (ignoring CHARLES). Do you realize how long I have had this dress, Father? (WILLIAM shrugs.) You bought it for me over two years ago when I was just a child, a mere babe.

WILLIAM. It's a pretty dress.

NORA. As pretty as any garment worn to a frazzle can be. Mother has let it out three different times to accommodate various increases in my . . .

WILLIAM (aghast). Don't say it!

NORA. Height. (WILLIAM recovers.) Among other things. (She smiles and looks at her chest.) Where was I? Never mind. (She turns a pitiful gaze to WILLIAM.) Father . . . Father . . . Dear Father. How can I be a Belle Fleur if I attend the cotillion in faded petals? Would you want your only daughter to be the laughingstock of the town?

WILLIAM. I don't think that would be the case, dear.

NORA (a hard edge to her voice). Well, Betty Jamison would be laughing and that's enough for me. Her father bought her a new dress and everybody knows he's the biggest skinflint this side of the Mississippi.

WILLIAM. I'll thank you to remember you're a lady, Nora. And ladies do not speak in such a manner.

IRA. He is a skinflint, William.

NICK. Everybody knows that.

CHARLES. Walked two miles out to Kissie Carter's for three cents she owed him . . . in the rain. (WILLIAM tries to speak.) In February. (WILLIAM tries to speak.)

IRA. With a bad case of gout. (WILLIAM tries to speak.)

NICK. And stone cold sober at that.

WILLIAM (to the OTHERS.) May I speak with my daughter now?

NICK. Go ahead. (WILLIAM tries to speak.)

IRA. We won't interrupt you. (WILLIAM clenches his fists.)

NORA. There's a positively lovely dress at Mrs. Lattimer's. I showed it to Mother and she glowed, so enchanted was she with it. I think I even saw a tear form in the corner of her right eye and she mumbled something like . . . I think it was . . . "Wouldn't your generous father be ever so proud of his darling little girl in such a dress." Yes, those were her words exactly. Or almost exactly. (She strikes a pose of subtle pleading.) My life . . . is in your hands.

IRA. The poor child.

NICK. Faded petals. (He and IRA nod.)

CHARLES (deciding he needs to comment). Exuberance. (NICK and IRA look at him and he shrugs.)

WILLIAM. Very well. You may purchase the dress.