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**D. H. LAWRENCE'S**

# **THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER**

**A Dramatization by**

**CLARK FULLER**



**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**

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THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER

*A Play in One Act*

For Five Men and Four Women

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CHARACTERS

HESTER CHESMOND..... *an extravagant woman*

GEOFFREY CHESMOND..... *her husband*

PAUL

JOAN

KATHRYN

}.....*their children*

OSCAR CRESSWELL.....*Hester's brother*

MRS. BRADLEY (ANNIE)..... *the cook*

BASSETT..... *the gardener*

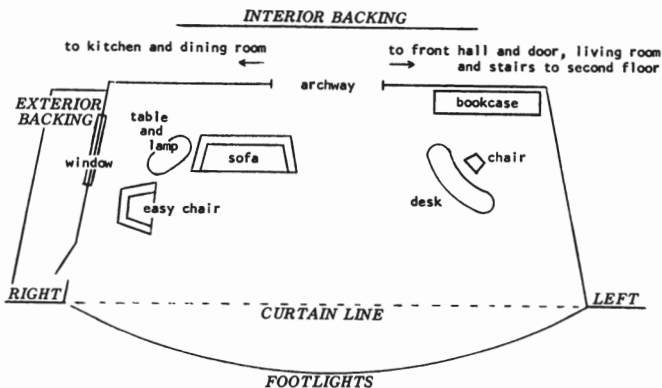
DR. HALLEY..... *a neighbor*

PLACE: *A large country house in England.*

TIME: *A few years ago.*

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## STAGE CHART



## PROPERTIES

**GENERAL:** Bookcase with books in bound sets, writing desk and chair, sofa, easy chair, end table with lamp. Clock, letters, letter opener and hand bell on desk. Other furnishings as desired.

**HESTER:** Jeweled wrist watch.

**ANNIE:** Envelope containing bill.

**OSCAR:** Cup of tea.

**JOAN:** Pillow

**KATHRYN:** Blanket.

**GEOFFREY:** Handkerchief.

**BASSETT:** Large pocket watch.

**DR. HALLEY:** Doctor's bag containing stethoscope, hypodermic and small bottle.

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## THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER

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**SCENE:** The curtain opens to show a study of the Chesmond home. One bookcase up against the back wall UL contains the household's books, preferably bound in handsome sets. There is an archway UC with an interior backing which leads off R to the dining room and kitchen and off L to the living room, staircase and front hall. In the wall R is a window which admits cheerful sunshine. DR is an exit to the garden. UL is a curved oval formal writing desk with a dainty chair behind it. UR is a rather ornate and formal sofa facing the audience with an end table with a small handsome table lamp on it. More or less sharing this end table is an easy chair which faces C. Such additional furniture and props as are appropriate to the setting and size of the stage may be added so as to create a cheerful, rather feminine study in the home of a prosperous upper middle class English home of a few years ago.)

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** Seated L, at a low, old-fashioned and rather handsome writing desk is **HESTER CHESMOND**. She is a beautifully dressed and coiffured English woman in her mid-to late thirties. She is sorting through, opening and looking at letters in the morning mail, separating the bills from the other mail. There are nine or ten letters in all. She slices open the last letter and picks up a dainty hand bell

and tinkles with it twice. MRS. ANNIE BRADLEY, the cook, enters from UC and crosses to stand facing the desk. She is a handsome, middle-aged, no-nonsense Irish cook.)

HESTER. Annie, is Mr. Cresswell back?

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am, he's having his lunch now.

HESTER. Where are the children? I haven't seen them since yesterday.

ANNIE. Master Paul is eating lunch with your brother. The girls went off to read. They waited to have breakfast with you till almost noon.

HESTER (satisfied). Thank you, Annie. (Checking her wrist watch, a flashy, jeweled affair.) Mr. Chesmond will be back any moment, so be ready to give him his lunch. Bring me another cup of tea when you've time. For tonight's dinner with my brother here we'll have the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. He likes simple, hearty food.

ANNIE. With the good china got out?

HESTER. Exactly. Have Bassett get in some asparagus from the vegetable garden. We'll have a salad and, for dessert, a pudding. And wine, Annie, a bottle of the good claret.

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am.

HESTER. Has the butcher come?

ANNIE. Yes, ma'am. He brought this, too. (She hands HESTER an envelope. HESTER takes the envelope, slits it open, looks at the contents and then slaps it down with some irritation.)

HESTER. Most impertinent! To hand a bill to the cook.

(PAUL CHESMOND enters from UC, almost running, but he slows down as he sees his mother. PAUL is a boy of about thirteen, intense and very sensitive.)

PAUL (at Annie's left). Good afternoon, Mother.

(ANNIE, who has been a little grim-faced in her interview with HESTER, turns to look at PAUL and smiles approvingly at him.)

ANNIE. Did you eat your lunch--every bite of it?

PAUL. Yes, Annie, and some of Uncle Oscar's too. (Continuing to his mother.) He'll be right with you, Mother, he's just finishing up.

HESTER. Come and kiss me, Paul. (As he approaches.) Careful of my hair!

PAUL. Yes, Mother. (He comes and dutifully kisses her on the cheek which she holds out to him.)

HESTER (to ANNIE). That will be all, Annie.

ANNIE. Yes, ma'm. (Exits off U.C.)

PAUL. Uncle Oscar has a new horse.

HESTER (absently). Has he?

PAUL. It's a hunter. I'd rather have a race horse.

HESTER. Whatever would you do with a race horse?

PAUL. I'd like to own a real horse. Could we some time, Mother?

HESTER. Remember, we're the poor members of the family.

PAUL. Why are we poor, Mother?

HESTER. Well--I suppose--(Slowly and bitterly.) --it's because your father has no luck.

PAUL (silent for a moment). Is luck money, Mother?

HESTER. No, Paul. Not quite. It's what causes you to have money.

PAUL (vaguely). I thought when Uncle Oscar said "filthy lucker," it meant money.

HESTER. "Filthy lucre" does mean money. But it's "lucre," not "luck."

PAUL. Then what is luck, Mother?

HESTER. It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich,

you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you'll always get more money.

PAUL. Oh! Will you? And is Father not lucky?

HESTER (bitterly). Very unlucky, I should say.

PAUL (watching her with unsure eyes). Why?

HESTER. I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky.

PAUL. Don't they? Nobody at all? Does nobody know?

HESTER. Perhaps God. But He never tells.

PAUL. He ought to, then. And aren't you lucky either, Mother?

HESTER. I can't be, since I married an unlucky husband.

PAUL. But by yourself, aren't you?

HESTER. I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I'm very unlucky.

PAUL. Why?

HESTER. Well--never mind! Perhaps I'm not, really.

PAUL (stoutly). Anyhow, I'm lucky.

HESTER (with a sudden laugh). How do you know?

PAUL (staring at her for a moment, then blurting out). God told me.

HESTER (laughing again, but rather bitterly). I hope He did, dear!

PAUL. He did, Mother!

HESTER. Excellent!

(OSCAR CRESSWELL enters carrying a cup of tea which he sips. He is a hearty man who likes his food, sports, dogs, horses, even people.)

OSCAR. Good morning, Hester. That's a damn fine lunch Annie puts out.

HESTER. Paul, find your sisters and ask them to join us. But tell them they must be quiet.

PAUL (cheerfully). Yes, Mother. (He exits U.C.)

OSCAR. Lovely place. Can't imagine how Geoff can afford it all. Paul's a fine young fellow.

He should be sent off to school. (He sits down.)

HESTER. Oscar, how can you blunder into a delicate subject within ten seconds after you enter?

OSCAR (with injured good humor). Sorry, old girl.

HESTER. And don't you call me "old girl."

OSCAR. I say--(Standing.)--maybe I'd better go out and come in all over again, do it right, what!

HESTER. Don't be an utter fool. I want to talk about Paul. I know I should send him away to school, but we just can't afford Eton.

OSCAR. Oh, for God's sake. You have to register a boy at birth to get him in Eton--and come from the upper crust to boot.

HESTER. There are schools that would take him if we had money.

OSCAR (gesturing with his head and the cup of tea in a sort of controlled circling motion). In the midst of all this? He's growing up and needs to be off with other young boys.

HESTER (defensively). You think I'm not bringing him up well--that I'm too cold, too particular.

OSCAR. Nothing of the sort, Hester. When I got here last night, I looked in to say hello. He was riding his rocking-horse and never looked up. A boy of thirteen has no business riding a rocking-horse, even a big monster like that one. Rugby, cricket--that's the sort of thing he wants.

HESTER (rising, picking up the pile of bills, pacing a little). Perhaps you're right. At least I'll get rid of the rocking-horse. I'm sorry I snapped at you, Oscar, but really we can't afford anything! Look at these! (She shakes the stack of bills at him.) Bills, unpaid bills, six months old, or

more!

OSCAR. If they don't treat you right, ignore their bills. Regular upper-class thinking, very sound!

HESTER. We *can't* pay them. We're in debt--badly in debt. Geoffrey was supposed to have a promotion--more money. We'd counted on it, maybe counted too much. (She slaps the bills down on the desk.) There's no place to send Paul that we can afford.

OSCAR. My old school would take him.

HESTER (over her shoulder). Oh, Oscar, I can't do *that*. I know it's a perfectly "good"--(She makes the word almost an expletive.)--school and that you're fond of it, but it's not really---- (Her voice trails off into nothing.)

OSCAR (amusedly indignant). I say, old girl, it's very respectable. It was good enough for Father, and good enough for me.

HESTER. Yes. And look at you. Nothing interests you except football and racing. You don't care about position, a social life. I don't think you even care about--money! (Shaking her head sadly.) Well, as long as you're happy----(More cheerfully.) Next year I'm sure Paul can be sent to a *good* school. There'll be more money then. We've taken steps.

(They stop their discussion as PAUL returns U C with his two sisters, JOAN and KATHRYN.

JOAN is four years older than PAUL and KATHRYN is two years older than PAUL.)

KATHY and JOAN (to their uncle). Good morning, Uncle Oscar. (They pause just inside the archway.)

HESTER. Don't just stand there. Come in. You might say hello to your Mother. I haven't seen

either of you all morning.

KATHY. We ate in the kitchen with Annie.

JOAN. We were hungry.

HESTER. I told you last night that I wanted you to have breakfast with me.

KATHY. We waited and waited.

JOAN. Annie gave us breakfast at eleven.

KATHY. We didn't want lunch.

HESTER. Well, at least kiss me good morning even if it's afternoon. (KATHY rushes over but her mother holds out her arms to stop her at arm's length.) Be careful of my hairdo. (She leans over and extends a cheek delicately for KATHY to kiss. KATHY does so and then turns away, hurt. JOAN follows and dutifully pecks her mother's cheek from a distance. HESTER immediately crosses away from them back behind the desk.) I'm glad to see you girls nicely dressed for once. (In a faintly doubtful tone.) They are pretty girls, aren't they, Oscar?

OSCAR. They certainly are--I'm sure you adore them.

HESTER. Of course I do! What a thing to suggest. (KATHY and JOAN, standing U C between OSCAR and HESTER, look at each other, then look away and down after this line. HESTER continues, very firmly). I adore all of my children. You girls may run along now if you wish. Stay neat for dinner--I don't want Annie interrupted to look after you.

OSCAR. Don't go yet. Uncle Oscar should have a kiss.

KATHY (going over to OSCAR and kissing him on the cheek). Uncle Oscar. I'm glad you've come to visit.

JOAN (who is too old to kiss a man; diplomatically). How long are you going to be here, Uncle?

OSCAR (to JOAN). Getting too big to kiss your Uncle Oscar, are you! I'll be here long enough to take you shopping. I won a nice packet at the race track last week and decided to spend it on my favorite nieces.

KATHY. But we're your only nieces.

OSCAR. Makes you my favorites, right?

PAUL. Right.

OSCAR. I'm in town for the month. I'll stay with you till your mother gets tired of me. Younger brothers, as you know, are sometimes hard to put up with.

JOAN (with mock seriousness). Yes, that's true, Uncle Oscar. Sometimes when Paul gets on that rocking-horse of his, it's enough to drive one 'round the bend.

KATHY. That isn't fair, Joan! Paul is nice.

PAUL. She didn't mean anything, Kathy.

HESTER. You're quite old for a rocking-horse, Paul. Your Uncle is right. We should really send you away to school when the fall term starts. Meantime, I'm going to get rid of that ridiculous old toy.

PAUL. If I'm going away, it won't matter if I keep my horse till then. Besides, I want to be here with you and Father.

HESTER. Well--we'll see. Tell Bassett I want to see him.

PAUL (eager to please). Yes, Mother. (He goes out D.R.)

JOAN. Bassett is our gardener.

HESTER. Your uncle knew Bassett in the war. That's how we located such a fine gardener.

OSCAR. He was the best master sergeant in the army. Ran my company for me. (JOAN and KATHY exit D.R.)

HESTER. I thought you'd like some asparagus,

Oscar. It was always your favorite vegetable.

(GEOFFREY CHESMOND enters U.C. He is a pleasant, very carefully dressed man, but the handkerchief in his breast pocket protrudes a little too flagrantly, and the smile is a little too insincere to be impressive.)

HESTER. Here's Geoff.

OSCAR (rising and going to shake Geoffrey's hand).  
Afternoon, Geoff. Get things all buttoned up at Lloyds?

GEOFFREY. I didn't work today.

HESTER. What did they say at the bank?

GEOFFREY (taking out a handkerchief and dabbing at his brow). We've got another three months' extension, but--(He stops a moment, looks at OSCAR, shakes his head slightly at HESTER as if cautioning her to discretion.)

HESTER. Glorious. Don't mind Oscar, darling. He's family.

GEOFFREY. All right. It wasn't easy. They won't do it again.

HESTER (pleased, crossing and kissing GEOFFREY affectionately, but briefly). We'll worry about that when the time comes. I'm going to buy that dress now.

GEOFFREY. Just after the bank's extended a loan --it doesn't seem right.

(PAUL re-enters DR at this moment.)

PAUL. Bassett will be along in a minute, Mother. He had to wash up first.

OSCAR. Paul, you and I can take a walk. Your mother and father have things to discuss.

HESTER. You don't have to be so tactful. When

Bassett comes, tell him we're in the drawing room. Come on, dear. (She tucks her hand in her husband's arm and they go out U.C.)

PAUL (to his uncle). I hope you'll talk to Mother. She keeps wanting to send me off to some boarding school.

OSCAR. And you don't want to go?

PAUL. I can't! I've got to stay home. It's important.

(JOAN enters from DR on the last line.)

JOAN. He wants to stay home to ride his stupid rocking-horse.

OSCAR. What's the name of your horse, anyway? I saw you riding him last night. Were you trying to get somewhere?

PAUL (looking up quickly). How did you know I was trying to get somewhere?

OSCAR. By the look on your face. That's the right thing to do--don't stop 'til you get there, boy. Stay with it. Does the horse have a name?

PAUL. Not exactly.

OSCAR. What do you mean by that?

PAUL. Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week.

JOAN (scornfully). He's always talking about horse-racing with Bassett. It's supposed to be a big secret.

OSCAR (delighted). So there's another racing buff in the family. Sansovino won the Derby.

PAUL. I know.

OSCAR. Do you follow the races much, Paul?

PAUL (suspiciously). Why, do you think I shouldn't?

OSCAR. Not a bit of it. I thought maybe you'd give me a tip on the Sawyer Handicap this afternoon.

PAUL (pleased). Honor bright?

OSCAR (seriously). Honor bright.

PAUL. You won't tell Mother--(He pauses.)--or Father?

OSCAR. I said honor bright.

PAUL. Well--(He looks around and sees JOAN.)  
--I'll discuss it with you later.

OSCAR. Joan's safe.

PAUL (doubtfully). I suppose so----

JOAN. As if I cared, anyway. Horse racing! Infantile! Humph! (She almost snorts and flounces out of the room U.C.)

PAUL (glancing after her to be sure she's gone). You want to know who's going to win the Sawyer Handicap?

OSCAR. That's putting it in a nutshell.

PAUL. Well then, Daffodil.

OSCAR (surprised). I doubt it. Mirza's the favorite.

PAUL (firmly). I only know the winner--that's Daffodil.

OSCAR. You're sure it's Daffodil? He's not exactly a favorite.

PAUL. Uncle!

OSCAR. Yes, son.

PAUL. You won't let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett.

OSCAR. Bassett be damned. What's he got to do with it?

PAUL. We're partners. He lent me my first shilling and then I lost it. I promised him honor bright it was only between me and him, but then you gave me that ten-shilling note and I started to win with that, so I know you're lucky. You won't let it go any further though, will you?

OSCAR (puzzled and much more seriously). Right you are, I'll keep your secret. You're sure it's Daffodil?

PAUL. Positive.

OSCAR. How much are you putting on him?