

Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER

by

CHRISTOPHER P. NICHOLS

Adapted from the Nathaniel Hawthorne story



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

***** NOTICE *****

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed anytime it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

©MCMXCV by
CHRISTOPHER P. NICHOLS

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-508-3

RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER

**A One-Act Play
For Three Men and Two Women**

CHARACTERS

GIOVANNI GUASCONTI a young student from Naples

BEATRICE RAPPACCINI the young, sheltered daughter
of Dr. Rappaccini

LISABETTA Giovanni's elderly landlady

PROFESSOR BAGLIONE a long-time friend of
Giovanni's father; middle aged

DR. RAPPACCINI an elderly, renowned physician
and herbal experimentalist

PERIOD: 1840s.

PLACE: Padua, Northern Italy. Giovanni's room and balcony—Overlooking Dr. Rappaccini's Garden-Courtyard.

RAPPACCINI'S DAUGHTER

AT RISE: *GIOVANNI enters with LISABETTA from off R to his apartment platform. As GIOVANNI enters he lets out a loud sigh.*

LISABETTA. Holy Virgin, Signor Giovanni! What a sigh that was coming from such a young heart. Are you so truly disappointed with these appointments? This gloomy old house? (*GIOVANNI seems embarrassed at being caught in his unconscious exclamation.*) Well, then walk out on to your balcony and see the sunlight of our Padua, surely as bright as what you have lived with in Naples. (*GIOVANNI walks out onto the small balcony and looks up, clearly disappointed with the comparison to his sunny clime. He then looks down and on Rappaccini's garden.*)

GIOVANNI. This garden!...Does it belong to your property?...It's absolutely...Well, beautiful...

LISABETTA. Heaven forbid...that is, unless it grew a different collection of herbs and foliage...No, no; it is the cultivation of our own famous Doctor Rappaccini. Have you not heard of him, even in Naples? It is said he distills these plants into medicines that are as potent as charms. In time you will see the doctor working there, clipping and tending...And perhaps his daughter, too, gathering the strange blooms. Well, Signor Giovanni, welcome to my house. I hope these humble settings are accommodating enough.

Perhaps the garden will inspire your studies. I must attend to my other household duties. May the saints bless you.

GIOVANNI. Yes, thank you, Signora.

(GIOVANNI nods his head toward the leaving LISABETTA and remains at the railing overlooking the garden. Suddenly a figure emerges on stage between the foliage U. GIOVANNI steps back so as not to be seen but still can see the garden. The figure is a tall, bearded, thin, pale, and sickly-looking old man in a black scholar's smock. This is DOCTOR RAPPACCINI. He examines every plant, without touching them or inhaling their odors. As he crosses D he notices a flowering plant that needs pruning, and for this he dons a thick pair of gloves. He then crosses to the fountain and the purple-flowered plant. As he approaches it he pulls down a mask over his face. He reaches towards the plant then pulls back as if repelled. He pulls off his mask and calls out off L.)

DOCTOR RAPPACCINI. Beatrice!...Beatrice!

BEATRICE *(answering from off L)*. Yes, Father. What...do you...? Are you in the garden?

DOCTOR RAPPACCINI. Yes, Beatrice...I need your help.

BEATRICE. Coming...

(BEATRICE enters from the portal at L. She is so beautiful and strikingly fresh that GIOVANNI steps back from the visual encounter as if shocked by her presence.)

DOCTOR RAPPACCINI. Here, Beatrice. Our special treasure needs you to attend to it. I think from now on you must be the only one attending it.

BEATRICE. And...I will gladly be the one. (*BEATRICE approaches and strokes the plant without any fear, and talks to it as if it were a pet.*) Ah!...My flower sister, my beautiful one, I happily am the one to nurse you; and you shall reward me with a flowery kiss and your perfumed breath... The very breath of life to me.

(As BEATRICE is trimming and fluffing the plant DOCTOR RAPPACCINI notices GIOVANNI watching them and suddenly takes BEATRICE by the arm to rush back into the house. BEATRICE is surprised but lets herself be pulled towards the L exit. She then looks up, notices GIOVANNI and freezes. A smile slowly covers her face. She is as charmed by GIOVANNI's presence as he is by hers. DOCTOR RAPPACCINI can see this visual contact, he steps around in front of BEATRICE and gently takes her inside the house off L. GIOVANNI stands transfixed at the railing of his balcony as though just having experienced something beyond his worldly expectations. He is torn from his trance by a knock at his apartment door off R. He crosses to the door and re-enters with PROFESSOR BAGLIONE.)

PROF. BAGLIONE. Ah! Giovanni. You are the image of your father when we were students together. Welcome to Padua. I've brought you some of our renowned Tuscan wine and these should brighten your quarters. (*PROF. BAGLIONE hands GIOVANNI a spray of flowers and proceeds to open the wine. GIOVANNI gets two glasses from his bedroom.*)

GIOVANNI. Professor, this is a true pleasure, I didn't know whether you would remember me or not. I planned to bring you a letter of introduction this week.

PROF. BAGLIONE. Oh! My boy, completely unnecessary. Your father wrote to me of your coming several weeks ago so I had planned to search you out today. And I've known old Lisabetta for years. But these rooms are a bit Spartan; will you be comfortable here?

GIOVANNI. They are more than sufficient as I think my university days here will be as Spartan, but there is the extraordinary garden below the balcony.

PROF. BAGLIONE (*crosses out onto the balcony*). This is much more than a garden...There are herbs and plants growing in this vegetal wonderland that are beyond your medicinal imagination. Yes...it's even more than I imagined. I've known of it for years...but I've never seen it before.

GIOVANNI. Lisabetta told me it belongs to a Doctor Rappaccini.

PROF. BAGLIONE. Yes. We worked together years ago on the faculty of the medical college.

GIOVANNI. He must have been the elderly gentleman I saw just before your arrival. He appeared to have a strange and respectful relationship with his plant wards. Tell me about him, Professor.

PROF. BAGLIONE. "Strange" has always been an acceptable way of describing the good doctor.

GIOVANNI. Why...His appearance definitely is...But I think you're implying more.

PROF. BAGLIONE. Well...I must say, as member of the faculty of the divine art of medicine, that he is eminently skilled as a physician. But on the other hand, I must be honest about a man who could, in the future, by chance hold your life and death in his hands...The truth is, Doctor Rappaccini knows as much science as any member of the faculty, with perhaps one single exception...(PROF. BAG-

LIONE pauses and clears his throat in an expression of modesty.)...in Padua, or all Italy. But there are certain grave objections to his professional character.

GIOVANNI. And what are they?

PROF. BAGLIONE. It is said of him, and I, who know him well, can answer for the truth...that he infinitely cares more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment. He would sacrifice human life, even his own, or whoever else was dearest to him, for the sake of adding so much as a grain of sand to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge.

GIOVANNI. That sounds awful, but isn't it also noble?

PROF. BAGLIONE. No!...no! Heaven forbid. It is Doctor Rappaccini's theory that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances, which we term vegetable poisons...And he cultivates them...

GIOVANNI. The garden? That's why it looks like no other I've seen before...

PROF. BAGLIONE. Yes...I believe he has even produced new varieties which nature alone could not have done and plagued the world with. Now and then, I must admit, he has effected, or seemed to effect a marvelous cure. But that could be due to chance and I firmly believe he must be held strictly accountable for his failures.

GIOVANNI. Well...I don't know how much the doctor loves his science, but surely there is one object more dear to him. He has a daughter.

PROF. BAGLIONE. Aha! So...your secret is out. You've heard of Beatrice?! All of the young men in Padua are wild about her, not more than half a dozen have set eyes on her, and even then from afar. She is said to be an earthbound angel.

GIOVANNI. Yes. I've seen her...She is far beyond just an angel.

PROF. BAGLIONE. Well! This is something...You seem rather smitten...

GIOVANNI. I don't...I've only seen her in the garden, actually just before you arrived...But she is the most striking... or perhaps it's her seeming innocence and beauty combined...or...

PROF. BAGLIONE. Yes, yes; I've heard similar reactions before, but only in rumor, mind you.

GIOVANNI. Please, Professor, what can you tell me of her?

PROF. BAGLIONE. I know little of the Signora Beatrice, my young friend, except that Rappaccini has protected her more than the usual extreme. She is not allowed out to be any part of society. It is said that the doctor has instructed her deeply in his science, and that young and beautiful as fame reports her, she is already qualified to fill a professor's chair. Perhaps he has destined her for mine.

GIOVANNI. Professor Baglione, are you sure? She seems very young to know...But, then, the old doctor did call her for help...and...

PROF. BAGLIONE. Giovanni, no, those are only stories that I've heard...And we may never know for sure. Now, I must end this first of what I hope will be many visits here in our lovely city. Please feel free to come to the medical faculty, and perhaps join one of my lectures. It's not far from your philosophies. (*PROF. BAGLIONE rises to exit.*)

GIOVANNI. Thank you for the gifts, and of course, we will be together again. (*PROF. BAGLIONE exits. GIOVANNI crosses to balcony platform and looks out over the garden.*)

(*LISABETTA enters R into Giovanni's room.*)

LISABETTA. Signor Giovanni?

GIOVANNI. Signora, I'm here on the balcony. (*LISABETTA crosses to balcony.*)

LISABETTA. How was your visit with the professor? He's a good man to know here.

GIOVANNI. It was very good. He and my father are old friends.

LISABETTA. Yes, he told me. You seem to be enjoying the view.

GIOVANNI. Earlier I saw Doctor Rappaccini and...his daughter. I asked Professor Baglione about the doctor and he had few good things to say.

LISABETTA. Doctor Rappaccini is a strange one, but it also could be professional jealousy. The good Doctor Rappaccini helped me through an illness years ago when no other doctor could, with no more than an herbal concoction. You saw the lovely Beatrice?

GIOVANNI. Yes, please tell me about her!

LISABETTA. Well, even after all these years I barely know her. She waves from the garden and appears to be very sweet, but I have seen some unusual things while she was in the garden tending to the plants...

GIOVANNI. How so? Professor Baglione only mentioned her rumored expertise in botanical sciences.

LISABETTA. I can't doubt that. But what I have seen is more magical and frightening...(*GIOVANNI looks at LISABETTA askance, as if he is about to hear an old wives' tale.*)

GIOVANNI. Magical? Signora, what are you...

LISABETTA. I've seen her kill with her touch and her breath...

GIOVANNI. Senora!

LISABETTA. No...not a person; I saw a butterfly land on her hand, she held up her hand to look at it then gently blew it on its way. It dropped dead to the ground. Then another time she reached to brush a small lizard from one of her blooms with the same result...And...

GIOVANNI. I can't imagine anything of that sort happening from her. She appears to be the essence of innocence and purity of beauty. She saw me watching her and her smile affected me deeply. May I meet her? Would you...?

LISABETTA. No, Signor Giovanni. The doctor would never allow it. She is protected even from someone as harmless as me. But, then...Hmm...There is a secret entrance to the garden...I don't think Doctor Rappaccini even remembers it's there.

GIOVANNI. Tell me, Signora Lisabetta...Where is it?...How do I...?

LISABETTA. Why, it's right there. (*LISABETTA points to the U end of the balcony that is blocked with plants.*)

GIOVANNI. Where? Through the foliage?

LISABETTA. Yes. There is a step down hidden through the plants. Follow around the wall very closely and you will come to an opening, small, but you can get through it easily. Years ago it was a limited passage gate that has since fallen apart...but you must be very careful because I don't know what Doctor Rappaccini would do if he discovered you.

GIOVANNI. If I ever decide to try it, I can assure you I'll be most careful. Thank you, Signora.

LISABETTA. Good, Signor Giovanni. I guess you may consider yourself very lucky to have seen the Signorina Beatrice; few young men have.

(GIOVANNI follows LISABETTA into his room and escorts her off politely. He then returns to his room, looks around, grabs up the flowers PROF. BAGLIONE brought him. He crosses out to his balcony and looks out over the garden, pauses as if to get up his nerve. He turns U and pushes through the plants, finds the step, and disappears between the foliage. After a few beats he appears UL between the plants in Doctor Rappaccini's garden. He is both amazed and relieved to have found his way there as he strolls around admiring the incredible botanical wonders. As he works his way D, unnoticed to him BEATRICE enters. She watches him, smiling.)

BEATRICE. Are you a connoisseur of flowers?...Signor...?!

GIOVANNI *(turns in surprise and is charmed immediately by her smile)*. I...well, yes...no, that is, I think now I would like to be...

BEATRICE *(laughs, almost a giggle, covering her mouth)*.

Oh! Signor, please let me show you our garden...But...Of course...We haven't met...I mean I've seen you...I...I'm Beatrice Rappaccini. I don't meet many people...Or...I don't meet anyone...well, except for some of my father's patients...I don't think we have any friends...A lady comes and makes my dresses and hats...Our maid buys everything for us...I don't think anyone else has ever rented a room from Signora Lisabetta before...

GIOVANNI. Signorina, slow down. Hopefully there's plenty of time for us to talk...*(GIOVANNI reaches out innocently to put BEATRICE at ease, she steps back suddenly. GIOVANNI reacts as if she felt he was going to hurt her.)* Signorina Beatrice, I wasn't going to touch you...I...

BEATRICE. Oh! Signor, I'm sorry. I'm not used to being with anyone my own age...

GIOVANNI. Please forgive me...I haven't even introduced myself yet...I am Giovanni Guasconti [Gwas-cón-ti] from Naples.

BEATRICE. Well, Signor Giovanni Guasconti from Naples... What are you doing in Padua and living at Signora Lisabetta's?

GIOVANNI. I'm a student of philosophy at the university. My father also attended the university here years ago and he knew Signora Lisabetta through a friend of his. It was a special favor she granted to let me take a room. It certainly is more special than I imagined...that is, your garden is very beautiful, and...you...I didn't expect to see or meet someone...

BEATRICE. Signor Giovanni, please tell about the university and your classes...I had hoped that some day I could go to a school where I could meet and talk with educated people...

GIOVANNI. Well, I haven't actually started my classes, but I attended the university in Naples. Why couldn't you go to a school?

BEATRICE. My father says I'm too frail and that he needs me here. I don't think I'm frail at all but I do help him everyday in our garden. He was on the medical faculty at the university for many years but he does all of his work at home now. There are many patients who come from far away, and he consults with medical botanists.

GIOVANNI. I saw you helping him from my balcony. You appeared to be able to do things he couldn't...

BEATRICE. Oh! No...It's just there are some plants that I have raised myself...Well, there are many wonderful plants here. I think it is a very rare collection. He has spent a lifetime studying them, and this garden is his whole world.

GIOVANNI. And yourself, Signorina, I have heard that you likewise are skilled in the virtues of these rich blossoms with their spicy perfumes. Would you guide me? I promise you I shall be a proper scholar...even better than if your father were instructing me.

BEATRICE. That is a silly rumor. Who says I'm skilled in the science of my father's plants?

GIOVANNI. A friend of my father's...a Professor Baglione, but then he didn't...

BEATRICE. I've heard my father mention him...I think they had some disagreement years ago when Father was on the medical faculty. Well, I'm not anywhere near as knowledgeable as my father, but I, too, have spent my life here with his...as he calls them, "his treasures."

GIOVANNI. I've never been so close to so many heavy scents, they do take over the air, and with every move the perfume changes.

BEATRICE. Let me give you a small tour and you can tell me, please, what life is like outside these walls. Yes?

GIOVANNI. I will talk throughout the day and into the night, if you will permit it. All of the time you will give to me...

BEATRICE. Oh, Signor Giovanni, I don't understand...

GIOVANNI. You are so beautiful. Are you always so friendly with young men? And please, just Giovanni, I feel as if you're addressing my father.

BEATRICE. Signor...I mean Giovanni, I don't know any other young men. I've told you I hardly know any other people! Tell me, "Giovanni," do you want to talk with me because you think I'm beautiful? My father tells me he thinks I'm beautiful, but then he's my father.

GIOVANNI. You are beautiful! It's more than how you appear. So, you were speaking truthfully; you've never been away from your house or garden.