

The Diabolical Circle

BY BEULAH BORNSTEAD

Beulah Bornstead, one of the promising young playwrights of the Northwest, was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, May 5, 1896. She has had her academic training at the University of North Dakota, from which she received her B.A. in 1921. At present Miss Bornstead is principal of the Cavalier High School, North Dakota. Before attempting drama she tried her hand at journalism and at short-story writing.

Miss Bornstead was introduced into playwriting by Professor Franz Rickaby, in whose course in dramatic composition at the University of North Dakota *The Diabolical Circle* was written. In speaking of this play Miss Bornstead writes: "*The Diabolical Circle* is the first play I have ever written. I never enjoyed doing anything so much in my life. The characters were so real to me that if I had bumped into one going round the corner I should not have been surprised in the least. BETTY and CHARLES and ADONIJAH and even COTTON MATHER himself worked that play out. All the humble author did was to set it down on paper." *The Diabolical Circle* was produced May 5, 1921, by the Dakota Playmakers in their Little Theatre at the University of North Dakota.

The Diabolical Circle is one of the best contemporary plays dealing with American historical material. Its characterization is one of its noteworthy elements.

CHARACTERS

COTTON MATHER BETTY, *his daughter* ADONIJAH WIGGLESWORTH, *a suitor, and* COTTON'S *choice* CHARLES MANNING, *likewise a suitor, but* BETTY'S *choice* THE CLOCK

THE DIABOLICAL CIRCLE

SCENE: *The living-room in the Mather home in Boston.*

TIME: *About 1700, an evening in early autumn.*

The stage represents the living-room of the Mather home. A large colonial fireplace is seen down-stage left, within which stand huge brass andirons. To one side hangs the bellows, with the tongs near by, while above, underneath the mantelpiece, is suspended an old flint-lock rifle. On both ends of the mantel are brass candlesticks, and hanging directly above is an old-fashioned portrait of Betty's mother. There are two doors, one leading into the hall at centre left, the other, communicating with the rest of the house, up-stage right. A straight high-backed settee is down-stage right, while in the centre back towers an old grandfather's clock.[K] To the left of the clock is the window, cross-barred and draped with flowered chintz. An old-fashioned table occupies the corner between the window and the hall door. Here and there are various straight-backed chairs of Dutch origin. Rag rugs cover the floor.

As the curtain rises COTTON MATHER is seated in a large armchair by the fire, with BETTY on a stool at his feet, with her knitting.

COTTON, his hair already touched with the whitening frost of many a severe New England winter, is grave and sedate. Very much exercised with the perils of this life, and serenely contemplative of the life to come, he takes himself and the world about him very seriously.

Not so with MISTRESS BETTY. Outwardly demure, yet inwardly rebellious against the straitened conventions of the times, she dimples over with roguish merriment upon the slightest provocation.

As we first see them COTTON is giving BETTY some timely advice.

COTTON. But you must understand that marriage, my daughter, is a most reverend and serious matter which should be approached in a manner fittingly considerate of its grave responsibility.

BETTY. [*Thoughtfully.*] Truly reverend and most serious, father [*looking up roguishly*], but I like not so much of the grave about it.

COTTON. [*Continuing.*] I fear thou lookest upon the matter too lightly. It is not seemly to treat such a momentous occasion thus flippantly.

BETTY. [*Protesting.*] Nay, father, why consider it at all? Marriage is yet a great way off. Mayhap I shall never leave thee.

COTTON. Thou little thinkest that I may be suddenly called on to leave *thee*. The Good Word cautions us to boast not ourselves of the morrow, for we know not what a day may bring forth.

BETTY. [*Dropping her knitting.*] Father, thou art not feeling well. Perhaps----

COTTON. Nay, child, be not alarmed. 'Tis but a most necessary lesson to be learned and laid up in the heart. I will not always be with thee and I would like to be comfortably assured of thy future welfare before I go.

BETTY. [*Picking her knitting up.*] Be comfortably assured, then, I prithee; I have no fears.

COTTON. [*Bringing his arm down forcibly on the arm of the chair.*] Aye! There it is. Thou hast no fears. Would that thou had'st some! [*Looks up at the portrait.*] Had thy prudent and virtuous mother only lived to point the way, I might be spared this anxiety; but, beset by diverse difficulties in establishing the kingdom of God in this country, and sorely harassed by many hardships and by evil men, I fear me I have not propounded to thee much that I ought.

BETTY. In what then is mine education lacking? Have I not all that is fitting and proper for a maiden to know?

COTTON. [*Perplexed.*] I know not. I have done my best, but thou hast not the proper attitude of mind befitting a maiden about to enter the married estate.

BETTY. [*Protesting.*] Nay, but I am not about to enter the married estate.

COTTON. It is time.

BETTY. [*Mockingly pleading.*] Entreat me not to leave thee, father, nor forsake thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and whither----

COTTON. [*Interrupting sternly.*] Betty! It ill befitteth a daughter of mine to quote the Scriptures with such seeming irreverence.--I would not be parted from thee, yet I would that thou wert promised to some godly and upright soul that would guide thee yet more surely in the paths of righteousness. There be many such.

BETTY. Yea, too many.

COTTON. What meanest thou?

BETTY. One were one too many when I would have none.

COTTON. [*Shaking his head.*] Ah. Betty, Betty! When wilt thou be serious? There is a goodly youth among the friends surrounding thee whom I have often marked, both on account of his godly demeanor and simple wisdom.

BETTY. [*Nodding.*] Yea, simple.

COTTON. I speak of Adonijah Wigglesworth, a most estimable young gentleman, an acquaintance whom thou would'st do well to cultivate.

BETTY. Yea, cultivate.

COTTON. What thinkest thou?

BETTY. A sod too dense for any ploughshare. My wit would break in the turning.

COTTON. His is a strong nature, born to drive and not be driven. There is not such another, nay, not in the whole of Boston.

BETTY. Nay. I have lately heard there be many such!

COTTON. [*Testily.*] Mayhap thou wouldst name a few.

BETTY. [*Musingly, holds up her left hand with fingers outspread.*]
Aye, that I can. [*Checks off one on the little finger.*] There be Marcus
Ainslee----

COTTON. A goodly youth that hath an eye for books.

BETTY. One eye, sayest thou? Nay, four; and since I am neither
morocco bound nor edged with gilt, let us consign him to the shelf
wherein he findeth fullest compensation.

COTTON. How now? A man of action, then, should appeal to thy
brash tastes. What sayest thou to Jeremiah Wadsworth?

BETTY. Too brash and rash for me [*checking off that candidate on
the next finger*], and I'll have none of him. There's Percy Wayne.

COTTON. Of the bluest blood in Boston.

BETTY. Yet that be not everything [*checks off another finger*]--and
Jonas Appleby----

COTTON. He hath an eye to worldly goods----

BETTY. [*Quickly.*] Especially the larder. To marry him would be an
everlasting round between the tankard and the kettle. [*Checks him off.*]
Nay, let me look yet farther--James Endicott. [*Checking.*]

COTTON. Aye, there might be a lad for thee; birth, breeding, a well-
favored countenance, and most agreeable.

BETTY. Yea, most agreeable--unto himself. 'Twere a pity to disturb
such unanimity. Therefore, let us pass on. Take Charles Manning, an
you please----

COTTON. It pleaseth me not! I know the ilk; his father before him a
devoted servant of the devil and King Charles. With others of his kind
he hath brought dissension among the young men of Harvard, many of
whom are dedicated to the service of the Lord, with his wicked

apparel and ungodly fashion of wearing long hair after the manner of Russians and barbarous Indians. Many there be with him brought up in such pride as doth in no ways become the service of the Lord. The devil himself hath laid hold on our young men, so that they do evaporate senseless, useless, noisy impertinency wherever they may be; and now it has e'en got out in the pulpits of the land, to the great grief and fear of many godly hearts.

[He starts to his feet and paces the floor.]

BETTY. *[Standing upright.]* But Charles----

COTTON. *[Interrupting.]* Mention not that scapegrace in my hearing.

BETTY. *[Still persisting.]* But, father, truly thou knowest not----

COTTON. *[Almost savagely, while BETTY retreats to a safe distance.]* Name him not. I will not have it. Compared with Adonijah he is a reed shaken in the winds, whereas Adonijah resembleth a tree planted by the river of waters.

BETTY. *[Who has been looking out of the window.]* Converse of the devil and thou wilt behold his horns. Even now he approacheth the knocker.

[The knocker sounds.]

COTTON. *[Sternly.]* Betake thyself to thine own chamber with thine unseemly tongue, which so ill befitteth a maid.

[BETTY is very demure, with head slightly bent and downcast eyes; but the moment COTTON turns she glances roguishly after his retreating form; then while her glance revolves about the room, she starts slightly as her gaze falls upon the clock. A smile of mischievous delight flits over her countenance as she tiptoes in COTTON'S wake until the clock is reached. COTTON, unsuspecting, meanwhile, proceeds to do his duty as host, with never a backward glance. While he is out in the hall BETTY, with a lingering smile of triumph, climbs into the clock and cautiously peeks forth as her father opens the door and ushers in ADONIJAH, whereupon the door softly closes.]

ADONIJAH. Good-morrow, reverend sir.

COTTON. Enter, and doubly welcome.

ADONIJAH. I would inquire whether thy daughter Betty is within.

COTTON. We were but speaking of thee as thy knock sounded. Betty will be here presently; she hath but retired for the moment. Remove thy wraps and make thyself in comfort.

[ADONIJAH is a lean, lank, lantern-jawed individual, clad in the conventional sober gray of the Puritan, with high-crowned hat, and a fur tippet wound about his neck up to his ears. He removes the hat and tippet and hands them to COTTON, who carefully places them upon the table; meanwhile ADONIJAH looks appraisingly about him and judiciously selects the armchair by the fire. He pauses a moment to rub his hands before the blaze, and then gingerly relaxes into the depths of the armchair, as though fearful his comfort would give way ere fully attained. COTTON places a chair on the other side of ADONIJAH and is seated.]

COTTON. And how is it with thee since I have seen thee last?

ADONIJAH. My business prospereth [*mournfully*], but not so finely as it might well do.

[The clock strikes four, but is unnoticed by the two men.]

COTTON. Thou hast suffered some great loss?

ADONIJAH. But yes--and no--this matter of lending money hath many and grievous complications, not the least of which is the duplicity of the borrower. I but insist on the thirty pounds to the hundred as my due recompense, and when I demand it they respond not, but let my kindness lie under the clods of ingratitude. [*Straightening up, and speaking with conviction.*] They shall come before the council. I will have what is mine own.

COTTON. [*Righteously.*] And it is not unbecoming of thee to demand it. I wist not what the present generation is coming to.

ADONIJAH. They have no sense of the value of money. They know not how to demean themselves properly in due proportion to their worldly goods, as the Lord hath prospered them. There be many that have nothing and do hold their heads above us that be worthy of our possessions.

COTTON. The wicked stand in slippery places. It will not always be thus. Judgment shall come upon them.

ADONIJAH. Aye, let them fall. I for one have upheld them too far. They squander their means in riotous living, and walk not in the ways of their fathers.

COTTON. There be many such--many such--but thou, my lad, thou art not one of the multitude. As I have often observed to my Betty, thou standest out as a most upright and God-fearing young man.

ADONIJAH. [*Brimming over with self-satisfaction.*] That have I ever sought to be.

COTTON. An example that others would do well to imitate.

ADONIJAH. [*All puffed up.*] Nay, others value it not. They be envious of my good fortune.

COTTON. A most prudent young man! Nay, be not so over-blushingly timid. Thou'rt too modest.

ADONIJAH. [*His face falling.*] But Betty--doth she regard me thus?

COTTON. The ways of a maid are past finding out; but despair not. I think she hath thee much to heart, but, as the perverse heart of woman dictateth, behaveth much to the contrary.

ADONIJAH. [*Brightening up as one with new hopes.*] Thou thinkest--
--

COTTON. [*Interrupting.*] Nay, lad, I am sure of it. Betty was ever a dutiful daughter.

[*All unseen, BETTY peeks out mischievously.*]

ADONIJAH. But I mistrust me her heart is elsewhere.

COTTON. Thou referr'st to young Manning without doubt. It can never be. 'Tis but a passing fancy.

ADONIJAH. Nay, but I fear Charles thinketh not so. I have been told in secret [*leaning forward confidentially*] by one that hath every opportunity to know, that he hath enjoined Goodman Shrewsbury to send for--[*impressively*] a ring!

COTTON. [*Angered.*] A ring, sayest thou?

ADONIJAH. [*Nodding.*] Aye, even so.

COTTON. But he hath not signified such intention here to me.

ADONIJAH. Then there are no grounds for his rash presumption?

COTTON. Humph! Grounds! For a ring! Aye, there'll be no diabolical circle here for the devil to daunce in. I will question Betty thereon. [*Rises.*] Do thou remain here and I will send her to thee. Oh, that he should offer daughter of mine a ring!

[*COTTON leaves the room. ADONIJAH leans back in his chair in supreme contentment at the turn affairs have taken. The clamorous knocker arouses him from his reverie. He gazes stupidly around. The continued imperious tattoo on the knocker finally brings him to his feet. He goes into the hall and opens the door. His voice is heard.*]

ADONIJAH. [*Frostily.*] Good-afternoon, Sir Charles, mine host is absent.

CHARLES. [*Stepping in.*] My mission has rather to do with Mistress Betty. Is she in?

ADONIJAH. [*Closing the hall door, and turning to CHARLES, replies in grandiose hauteur.*] Mistress Betty is otherwise engaged, I would have thee know.

CHARLES. Engaged? [*Bowing.*] Your humble servant, I trust, hath the supreme pleasure of that engagement.

[*He glances inquiringly about the room, and places the hat on the table beside that of ADONIJAH. The two hats are as different as the two men: ADONIJAH'S prim, Puritanic, severe; CHARLES'S three-cornered, with a flowing plume.*]

[*CHARLES is a handsome chap of goodly proportions, with a straightforward air and a pleasant smile. He is dressed more after the fashion of the cavaliers of Virginia, and wears a long wig with flowing curls. The two men size each other up.*]

ADONIJAH. [*Meaningly.*] Her father will shortly arrive.

CHARLES. [*Impatiently striding forth.*] Devil take her father. 'Tis Mistress Betty I would see. Where is she?

[*CHARLES continues pacing the floor. ADONIJAH, shocked beyond measure, turns his back on the offending CHARLES, and with folded arms and bowed head stands aside in profound meditation. The clock door slowly opens and BETTY cautiously peeks out. CHARLES stops short and is about to begin a decided demonstration, when BETTY, with a warning glance toward ADONIJAH, checks him with upraised hand. The clock door closes and CHARLES subsides into the armchair with a comprehending grin of delight. ADONIJAH slowly turns and faces CHARLES with a melancholy air.*]

CHARLES. Prithee, why so sad?

[*The grin becomes a chuckle.*]

ADONIJAH. I do discern no cause for such unrighteous merriment.

CHARLES. 'Tis none the less for all of that. I take life as I find it, and for that matter so do they all, even thou. The difference be in the finding. [*Whistles.*]

ADONIJAH. [*Uneasily.*] It is time her father did arrive.

CHARLES. Where then hath he been?

ADONIJAH. He but went in search of Betty.

CHARLES. Ah, then we'll wait.

[*He whistles, while ADONIJAH moves uneasily about the room, glancing every now and then at this disturbing element of his peace, as if he would send him to kingdom come, if he only could.*]

ADONIJAH. [*After considerable toleration.*] Waiting may avail thee naught.

CHARLES. And thee? Nevertheless we'll wait. [*Whistles.*]

ADONIJAH. [*Takes another turn or two and fetches up a counterfeit sigh.*] Methinks, her father's quest be fruitless.

CHARLES. [*Starting up.*] Ah, then, let us go.

[*ADONIJAH., visibly relieved, sits down in the chair opposite.*]

CHARLES. [*Amused.*] Nay? [*Sits down and relaxes.*] Ah, then, we'll wait. [*Whistles.*]

ADONIJAH. [*Troubled.*] 'Tis certain Mistress Betty be not here.

CHARLES. Nay, if she be not here, then I am neither here nor there. I would wager ten pounds to a farthing she be revealed in time if she but will it. Wilt take me up?

ADONIJAH. It be not seemly so to stake thy fortune on a woman's whim.

CHARLES. [*Laughs.*] Thou'rt right on it. If she will, say I, for if she will she won't, and if she won't she will.

ADONIJAH. False jargon! A woman has no will but e'en her father's as a maid, her husband's later still.

[*Enter COTTON, who stops short on seeing CHARLES, rallies quickly, and proceeds.*

COTTON. [*Stiffly.*] Good-day to you, sir.

CHARLES. [*Bowing; he has risen.*] And to you, sire.

COTTON. [*To ADONIJAH.*] I am deeply grieved to report that Mistress Betty is not to be found.

[*ADONIJAH. steals a sly look of triumph at CHARLES.*

CHARLES. [*In mock solemnity.*] I prithee present my deep regrets to Mistress Betty. I will call again.

COTTON. God speed thee! [*And as CHARLES takes his leave COTTON places his hand affectionately upon ADONIJAH'S shoulder, saying reassuringly.*] Come again, my son; Betty may not be afar off. I fain would have her soon persuaded of thy worth. Improve thy time.

ADONIJAH. [*Beaming.*] Good morrow, sir; I will.

[*As the door closes behind them COTTON slowly walks toward the fire, where he stands in complete reverie. Still absorbed in thought he walks slowly out the door at the right. BETTY peeks cautiously out, but hearing footsteps quickly withdraws. COTTON re-enters with hat on. He is talking to himself, reflectively.*

COTTON. Where can she be? Mayhap at Neighbor Ainslee's.

[*He goes hurriedly out through the hall door. The banging of the outside door is heard. The clock door once more slowly opens and BETTY peers forth, listening. The sound of a door opening causes*

her to draw back. As the noise is further emphasized by approaching footsteps, she pulls the clock door quickly to. CHARLES enters. He looks inquiringly about, tosses his hat on the table, and goes for the clock. He opens it with a gay laugh. BETTY steps forth out of the clock, very much assisted by CHARLES.

CHARLES. Blessed relief! Thou art in very truth, then, flesh and blood?

BETTY. And what else should I be, forsooth?

CHARLES. [*Laughing.*] I marked thee for a mummy there entombed.

BETTY. [*Disengaging her hand.*] What? Darest thou?

CHARLES. A lively mummy now thou art come to, whilst I [*sighs*]-I waited through the ages!

BETTY. [*Laughingly.*] A veritable monument of patient grief.

CHARLES. And Adonijah----

BETTY. Yea, verily, old Father Time but come to life. [*Mimics.*] Thy waiting may avail thee naught.

CHARLES. In truth, it may avail me naught; thy father may be back at any time, while I have much to say, sweet Betty----

BETTY. [*Interrupting.*] Nay, sweet Betty call me not.

CHARLES. Dear Betty, then, the dearest----

BETTY. [*Quickly.*] Yea, call me dearest mummy, Hottentot, or what you will, just so it be not *sweet*, like Adonijah. It sickens me beyond expressing.

CHARLES. Then, *sweet* Betty thou art *not*, say rather sour Betty, cross Betty, mean Betty, bad Betty, mad Betty, sad Betty.

BETTY. [*Suddenly dimpling.*] Nay, glad Betty!

CHARLES. Art then so glad? Wilt tell me why? In sooth, I know not whither to be glad, or sad, or mad. Sometimes I am but one, sometimes I am all three.

BETTY. Wilt tell me why?

CHARLES. [*Stepping closer and imprisoning her left hand.*] Thou wilt not now escape it, for I will tell thee why, and mayhap this will aid me. [*Slips ring, which he has had concealed in his pocket, on her finger.*] Hath this no meaning for thee?

BETTY. [*Her eyes sparkling with mischief.*] Aye, 'tis a diabolical circle for the devil to daunce in!

CHARLES. [*In astonishment.*] A what?

BETTY. [*Slowly.*] A diabolical circle for the devil to daunce in--so father saith. Likewise Adonijah.

CHARLES. [*Weakly endeavoring to comprehend.*] A diabolical circle--but what!--say it again, Betty.

BETTY. [*Repeats slowly, emphasizing it with pointed finger.*] A diabolical circle for the devil to daunce in.

CHARLES. [*Throws back his head and laughs.*] May I be the devil!

BETTY. [*Shaking her finger at him.*] Then daunce!

[*They take position, as though for a minuet. The knocker sounds.*
BETTY runs to the window.

BETTY. Aye, there's ADONIJAH at the knocker. Into the clock--hie thee--quick, quick!

CHARLES. [*Reproachfully.*] And would'st thou incarcerate me through the ages? [*Turns to the clock.*] O timely sarcophagus!

[CHARLES is smuggled into the clock, and BETTY has barely enough time to make a dash for the hat and conceal it behind her before the door opens and in stalks ADONIJAH. He looks about suspiciously. BETTY faces him with the hat held behind her. He removes his hat and tippet and lays them on the table.

ADONIJAH. Methought I heard a sound of many feet.

BETTY. [*Looking down.*] Two feet have I; no more, no less.

ADONIJAH. [*Dryly.*] Aye, two be quite sufficient.

BETTY. An thou sayest the word, they yet can beat as loud a retreat as an whole regiment.

ADONIJAH. Thou dost my meaning misconstrue.

BETTY. Construe it then, I prithee.

ADONIJAH. I came not here to vex----

BETTY. Then get thee hence. [*He steps forward. BETTY steps back.*] But not behind me, Satan.

ADONIJAH. [*Coming closer.*] And yet thou driv'st me to it.

BETTY. [*Backing off.*] Indeed, thou hast a nature born to *drive* and not be driven.

ADONIJAH. [*Highly complimented.*] So be it, yet I scarce had hoped that thou would'st notice. [*Advancing.*] Born to drive, thou sayest, not be driven.

BETTY. [*Retreating.*] Thou hast said it, born to *drive*. But what to drive I have not said. That knowledge hath my father yet concealed.

ADONIJAH. [*Eagerly.*] Thy father, then, hath told thee----

BETTY. [*Who is retreating steadily across the room.*] Thou wert born to *drive*!

[Strikes settee and goes down on the hat. ADONIJAH seats himself beside BETTY. BETTY is of necessity forced to remain--on the hat. ADONIJAH slides arm along the back of the settee. The clock door strikes erratically. He jerks his arm back and gazes in the direction of the clock. The clock hands wigwag. ADONIJAH stares abstractedly and passes his hand over his forehead in a dazed manner.]

BETTY. *[Solicitously.]* What aileth thee?

ADONIJAH. *[Still staring.]* The time!

BETTY. *[Stifles a yawn.]* It doth grow late.

ADONIJAH. But not consistently; it changeth.

BETTY. 'Twas ever so with time.

ADONIJAH. *[Reminiscently.]* Of a certainty they moved.

BETTY. Yea, verily, 'tis not uncommon.

ADONIJAH. But backwards!

BETTY. *[Joyfully.]* Why, then, my prayers are answered. How often I have prayed them thus to move! Yet hath it never come to pass.

ADONIJAH. Nay, had'st thou seen----

BETTY. Prithee calm thyself. Thou'rt ill.

ADONIJAH. *[Steals his arm along the back of the settee and moves over closer.]* Sweet Betty! *[BETTY looks away with a wry face.]* Thy indifference in no wise blinds me to thy conception of my true value. *[BETTY sits up, round-eyed.]* There was a time when I despaired-- *[The clock again strikes wildly. The hands drop and rise as before.]* ADONIJAH *excitedly points at the clock.* Again! Did'st mark it? Something doth ail the clock!

BETTY. Yea, truly thou art ill. The clock behaveth much more to the point than thou.

ADONIJAH. [*Tearing his gaze from the clock.*] As I was on the point of saying--[*glances at the clock*] thy father hath given--[*another glance*] me to understand--[*with eye on the clock he hitches up closer*] that thou art not averse to mine affections----

[*As he attempts to put his arm around BETTY the clock strikes a tattoo and startles him excitedly to his feet, as the hands travel all the way round.*

ADONIJAH. [*Pointing.*] Now look! Mark the time!

[COTTON *enters.*

COTTON. Tarry yet awhile, my son, the time doth not prevent thee.

ADONIJAH. Tarry? Time doth not prevent? Little knowest thou! [*Gazes abstractedly about. Sights the ring on BETTY'S finger, who in excitement has forgotten to keep her hands behind her back.*] Aye, there it is, the diabolical circle. It is a charm. It harms her not, while all about me is askew. Whence came she here? [*Points at BETTY.*] She neither came nor went, and yet she was not there and now she is. A manly form did enter. Yet hath vanished into thin air. Yea, verily, it was none other than the devil himself in one of his divers forms, of which he hath aplenty. The very clock indulgeth in unseemly pranks. A strange influence hangs over me. I cannot now abide. I must depart from hence. My conscience bids me go.

COTTON. [*Striving to detain him.*] Hold! Thou'rt mad!

BETTY. Nay, father, he is ill.

ADONIJAH. [*Wildly.*] Aye, if I be mad, thy daughter be to blame. The spell did come upon me. I have seen strange things.

COTTON. What meanest thou?

ADONIJAH. [*Pointing at BETTY, who regards him wonderingly.*] Thy daughter is a witch!

BETTY. [*Runs to COTTON.*] Oh, father!

COTTON. [*Consoles BETTY; thunders at ADONIJAH.*] What? Darest thou to bring forth such an accusation?

ADONIJAH. Aye, while I yet have strength to order mine own will. We shall see what we shall see when the fires leap round the stake. All the diabolical circles the devil may invent or his helpmeets acquire will be of small avail when the leaping tongues of flame curl round you, false servant of the devil. I can delay no longer. I will repair to the council at once, and report what I have seen.

[*BETTY faints away. COTTON is at once all paternal solicitude. ADONIJAH gazes in stupefaction. All unobserved CHARLES slips out of the clock. Finally ADONIJAH, as BETTY shows signs of reviving, turns himself away, only to find himself face to face with CHARLES. ADONIJAH stops dead in his tracks, absolutely nonplussed.*]

CHARLES. Thou goest to the council? Thou lackest evidence. Behold the devil an' thou wilt.

[*ADONIJAH'S jaw drops. He stares unbelievably. COTTON looks up in surprise as CHARLES continues.*]

CHARLES. An' thou goest to the council with such a message, the devil will dog thy very footsteps. And match word of thine with word of truth in such a light that thine own words shall imprison thee in the stocks over Sunday.

[*ADONIJAH recovers from his temporary abstraction, and seizing his hat and tippet, tears out the door as if a whole legion of imps were in full pursuit. CHARLES contemptuously turns on his heel and goes over to BETTY, who is now clinging to her father's arm.*]

BETTY. [*Faintly.*] They will not burn me for a witch?

CHARLES. [*Savagely.*] Aye, let them try it an they will.

COTTON. [*Hotly.*] Aye--let them! [*Then starting suddenly with a new thought.*] But how cam'st thou here? Yea, verily, it seemeth to me thou did'st materialize out of thin air.

[*Surveys CHARLES with piercing scrutiny.*]

CHARLES. Nay, see through me an thou can'st. Thou wilt find me a most material shadow, the like of which no eye hath ever pierced. 'Twas not out of the air, but out of yonder clock that I materialized.

BETTY. Yea, father, I put him there.

COTTON. [*Going to the clock and opening it.*] Of a truth, the evidence, all told, is here. Thou wert of a certainty in the clock. [*Takes out the detached pendulum. Steps back and surveys the timepiece, whose hands clearly indicate a time long passed or not yet come.*] And as far as pendulums are concerned [*looking ruefully at the one in his hand*], thou certainly wert no improve----

CHARLES. Aye, that I'll warrant. And may I never more be called to fulfil such position; the requirements be far too exacting for one of my build and constitution.

COTTON. But what extremity hath induced thee to take up thine abode in such a place?

[*Lays the pendulum aside and gives CHARLES his entire attention.*]

CHARLES. Why, that came all in the course of events as I take it. When I returned a short time ago, hard upon mine heels came Adonijah; and, being loath either to leave the field or share it, I hid within the clock. Once there, the temptation to help time in covering its course grew strong upon me in the hope that Adonijah, misled by the lateness of the hour, would soon depart. Only I looked not for such a departure. Judge me not too harshly, sire, for I love thy daughter, and if thou wilt give thy consent to our marriage I will do all that becometh a man to deserve such treasure.

COTTON. I like not thy frivolous manner of wearing hair that is not thine own; it becomes thee not. And I strongly mistrust thine attitude toward the more serious things of life.

CHARLES. If my wig standeth between me and my heart's desire, why, I'll have no wig at all. [*He pulls the wig off and tosses it aside.* BETTY, *with a little cry, picks it up and smooths its disarranged curls.*] And as for mine outlook on life, I promise thee that hath but matched the outer trappings, and can be doffed as quickly. I am as serious beneath all outward levity as any sober-minded judge, and can act accordingly.

COTTON. See to it that thou suit the action to those words. My heart is strangely moved toward thee, yet I would ponder the matter more deeply. [*Turns to BETTY, who has been absent-mindedly twirling the curls on the wig.*] And where is thy voice, my daughter? Thou art strangely silent--[*as an afterthought*] for the once. But it is of small wonder, since thou hast had enough excitement for one evening. Methinks that scoundrel, Adonijah, needeth following up. Do thou remain with Betty, Charles, and I will hasten after him.

CHARLES. Nay, thou need'st not trouble thyself regarding Adonijah. He hath much too wholesome a regard for the ducking-stool to cause further mischief.

COTTON. Nevertheless, I will away to the council and make sure. [*He plants his hat on his head and departs.*]

CHARLES. [*Turning to BETTY, who has dropped the wig on the settee, and who is now gazing demurely at the floor.*] And now to finish up where we left off. The devil hath led us a merrier dance than we suspected. Thou hast not truly given answer to the question I have asked of thee.

BETTY. What more of an answer would'st thou yet require?

CHARLES. Why, I have yet had none at all.

BETTY. Must tell thee further?

CHARLES. [*Gravely.*] Thou must.

BETTY. [*Mischievously.*] Then--put the question once again.

CHARLES. Thou knowest the question, an thou wilt.

BETTY. An' thou knowest the answer.

[CHARLES *takes her in his arms.*

BETTY. [*Holding up her hand so that the ring sparkles.*] Look,
Charles--the diabolical circle!

CURTAIN