

# **Love and Tea**

A Comedy-Drama of Colonial Times in Two Acts

## Love and Tea

# CHARACTERS

*MISS LAVINIA BOLTWOOD, a despotic spinster.*

*BETTY BOLTWOOD, her niece.*

*MRS. COWLES, a neighbor.*

*MRS. ADAMS, a neighbor.*

*MRS. STRONG, the village gossip.*

*MANDY, slave of Miss Boltwood.*

*JUDGE INGRAM, a middle-aged bachelor of mild Tory sentiments.*

*WILLIAM DICKINSON, a fiery young Minuteman.*

# SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Place, the living-room of a comfortable village home.

Time, April 1775, a few days after the Battle of Lexington.

ACT II.—Place, the same.

Time, June 1775, not long after the battle of Bunker Hill.

# THE STORY OF THE PLAY

Miss Boltwood, a despotic spinster, is persuaded to join a band of ladies who have sworn to give up tea and all taxed articles till the Revolutionary War is over. The tea habit is too strong for Miss Boltwood and she drinks it secretly. Her niece, Betty, discovers

this and uses the information to compel her aunt to consent to her (Betty's) engagement to the young minuteman, William Dickinson. Miss Boltwood also has a lover, the Tory, Judge Ingram, whom she has kept dangling for years. When he joins the Patriot cause and she hears the (false) report that he has been arrested as a spy, she champions him and finds that she loves him; she becomes an ardent Patriot also—all this just as he has decided that their *friendship* is ideal! Mandy, who is a privileged character, furnishes much fun.



# Love and Tea

## ACT I

*SCENE.—The living-room of MISS BOLTWOOD'S home. There are doors to L. and R., a closed window near R., a fireplace with fire near C. and over it a cupboard that locks; a tea table, four straight chairs, a high winged chair or settle, a mirror, furnishings of a colonial tea table, a black cat (toy), etc.*

*(MANDY is discovered on stage. She pokes fire, looks into kettle, stumbles over cat by the hearth.)*

MANDY. Dere's dat cat agin! Here you, Salem, git out from under Mandy's feet 'fore I break my neck or yours! Black imp o' Satan! *(The cat is supposed to spit.)* He spits! I pray you, spit not at poor old Mandy, please, Mr. Cat! Oh, you looks a very witch cat! Good Salem! Good pussy!

*(Pets the cat.)*

*Enter BETTY BOLTWOOD in afternoon dress but with an apron on.*

BETTY. Mandy, aunt bids you assist me with the porcelain against the tea-drinking this afternoon. Fetch the linen towel and the tray.

MANDY. Yes, missy. Here dey is.

*(MANDY gets towel and tray and she and BETTY wipe the dishes and arrange them on the tea table.)*

BETTY *(holding up cream pitcher)*. I like well this tea set, Mandy. 'Twas a most pleasing gift that aunt's cousin fetched her from China. She surely hath a vast love for tea. 'Tis almost a carnal weakness!

MANDY. True, missy. You' aunt do love tea most 'stravagantly, an' cats too! (*Looks scornfully at SALEM.*) A true sign she will never marry. But Missy Boltwood am so sperity de mens am 'fraid of her, mebbe.

BETTY (*as they set the table*). Aunt is too strong-willed and—and—managing to obey any man. Heard you not that when a girl she was betrothed to Judge Ingram, but could not abide the thought of marriage?

MANDY. Lawsy, Miss Betty! An' such friends as dey is, too! De Judge am a Tory. Is dat de reason Missy Boltwood ain't no patriarch like mos' of de Hartfield ladies?

BETTY. Nay, Mandy, 'tis because aunt lived so many years in England. She thinks there need be no quarrel between the Colonies and the king. Could she but hear William Dickinson defend the cause of our independence——

*(There is the sound of a wagon driven rapidly. MANDY runs to the window dish in hand.)*

MANDY. Why, dere's you' William Dickinson now, a-dashin' by in de wagon!

BETTY (*darting also to the window*). Where? I see only dust. Looked he not up at the window, Mandy?

MANDY. No, Miss Betty. He was racin' dose colts over de groun'!

BETTY (*pouting*). And we have not met in two long days!

MANDY (*earnestly*). Miss Betty, if you' aunt knew how lovery you is wid dat William Dickinson, she would prison you in you' chamber. You know well she can't 'bide de Dickinsons 'count of de old quarrel 'tween de famblies.

BETTY. True, but naught can be said against William. He is the bravest and handsomest minuteman in the company, and——

MANDY. Sh, missy! I hears you' aunt on de stairs.

*Enter MISS LAVINIA BOLTWOOD, handsomely gowned.*

MISS B. Cease your chattering, Mandy. Fetch me the egg cakes and the macaroons from the great cupboard.

[EXIT MANDY.]

BETTY. With your permission, aunt, I will go abroad to take the air. 'Tis too beauteous a day to remain within.

*(Takes off her apron.)*

MISS B. Then I pray you go down to the Meadow Road and buy me some sage cheese from Mrs. Abiel Dickinson. Should you chance to see young William, chatter not with him. 'Tis not seemly for maidens to talk overmuch with men.

*Enter MANDY with a plate of cakes in each hand. She stands listening with the plates slanted so that the cakes are in danger of falling off. She now grins knowingly at BETTY behind MISS B.'S back.*

BETTY (*demurely*). I will heed your counsel, aunt. 'Twill be best to wear my new bonnet. The old one is sadly shabby.

*(Exit BETTY, who returns in a moment and puts her bonnet on before the mirror.)*

MISS B. Mandy, you stupid, lay down the plates and put the teapot to warm.

MANDY (*putting teapot on the hearth*). Is you goin' to give old Mandy jess a leettle tea to-day, missy? I knows tea is powerful 'spensive. Why so, missy?

MISS B. Because the Parliament taxes tea. Have you no remembrance of the Boston Tea Party, more than a year ago, when the tea was thrown overboard in Boston Harbor?

MANDY. Yes, missy, I recommoners, an' lots of lady patriarchs stopped drinkin' tea den. Missy Abiel Dickinson she drink "Liberty Tea," an' I helps her pick de raspberry leaves las' summer——

*(Knocker sounds.)*

MISS B. There is the knocker, Mandy. Do you attend the door. *(Exit MANDY. She ushers in MRS. STRONG, MRS. COWLES and MRS. ADAMS.)* Good-afternoon, Mrs. Strong; good-afternoon, Mrs. Cowles; good-afternoon, Mrs. Adams. I hope I see you all well.

MRS. S. I am in my usual state of good health, thank you, Miss Boltwood.

MRS. C. Save for a slight rheum, I am enjoying the blessing of health, thank you.

MRS. A. Thank you kindly, Miss Boltwood, I am as well as can be expected.

MISS B. Lay aside your cloaks, ladies. Mandy, assist the ladies.

*(They remove their wraps.)*

MRS. S. Did I not see your niece Betty flitting through the lane as I came by?

MISS B. It may be. I sent her on an errand to Mrs. Abiel Dickinson's. 'Tis a safe walk to the Meadow Road.

*(She moves to the fireplace and makes the tea.)*

MRS. S. *(looking meaningly at the others)*. Laws-a-massy! Is she throwing the girl at William's head?

MRS. A. Sh! She does not know how enamored the young people are. When she learns it—poor Betty!

*MISS B. (turning from the fireplace). I pray you, ladies, draw up to the table ere the tea be cold. (They seat themselves. MANDY brings the teapot and places it before MISS B. MANDY looks longingly at the tea, sniffs it, and licks her lips behind their backs. The ladies pour the tea into their saucers and blow it noisily, crooking their little fingers as they raise the saucers to their lips. At a sign from MISS B., MANDY exits.) 'Tis a pity I have none of my rose conserve to give you. I sent it all to my friends in England by the Christmas packet.*

MRS. S. Your conserve is marvelous, Miss Boltwood. The receipt is a secret, I presume.

MISS B. A family heirloom, Mrs. Strong. Pray tell me, ladies, if the tea be sufficiently brewed. I can assure you 'tis prime Bohea and no "Liberty Tea"!

*(She laughs a little scornfully.)*

MRS. C. 'Tis of an elegant strength and 'tis an elegant tea. I feel certain no duty was paid on it. Was it honestly smuggled, my dear Miss Boltwood?

*(All laugh.)*

MISS B. Indeed it was, and through Judge Ingram too. A poor Tory he!

MRS. A. Mayhap the good man will become a patriot in time. *(Helps herself to a cake.)*

MRS. S. We ought to scorn to use anything taxed, as the king hath used the Colonies so unjustly! Still, 'twould be a hardship to give up the tea.



MISS B. Well, I am neither Tory nor patriot; so I drink smuggled tea, and shall drink it till I am under better advisement. Pray take of the candied cherries, Mrs. Strong. May I fill your cup, Mrs. Cowles? (*The knocker sounds. MANDY passes through from L. to R. She ushers in JUDGE INGRAM, who carries a newspaper. All rise and curtsey.*) Good-afternoon, Stephen Ingram.

JUDGE. Good-afternoon, Miss Lavinia. Pray do not let me interrupt your tea-drinking, ladies. I but stopped in passing to leave Miss Boltwood's Boston *Gazette*. The news is recent—but four days old—and of great moment. (*He opens the paper.*) The Provincial Congress at Lexington is adjourned. 'Tis said General Gage is resolved to crush the rebellion. (*Ladies show excitement.*) He has now in Boston four thousand disciplined men. I fear me there will be war, long and bloody, before our king is master once more.

MRS. C. Master! Never again in these colonies!

*(The ladies rise in indignation.)*

MRS. S. Our minutemen will match with any British soldiers!

MRS. A. We women can assist our men, if it comes to a war against injustice!

JUDGE (*laughing*). Ladies, ladies! Such ardent patriots, and yet drinking tea!

MRS. A. (*firmly*). If war is coming and our men must fight, I, too, can make some sacrifice. I will give up tea and all taxed articles.

MRS. S. AND I!

MRS. C. I, too! Come, Miss Boltwood, join our league. It shall be named from your house where 'twas born, "The Boltwood Band." Come, now.

MISS B. Nay, I am no patriot.

ALL. Come, come; no denial.

*(They join hands and place hers in theirs.)*

MRS. C. This shall be our oath: "We swear to give up tea and all taxed articles till the war be over." Now, in unison.

ALL *(including MISS B.)*. We swear to give up tea and all taxed articles till the war be over.

*(JUDGE looks on amused.)*

JUDGE *(rising)*. Well, ladies, now that you are all committed to raspberry leaves and linsey-woolsey, I will go. *(There is the sound of a galloping horse, then excited voices of men. All rise and go to the window.)* 'Tis an express. Look you, his horse is smoking! There must be news from Boston. I will go and learn it, then report to you. *[Exit.*

MRS. A. Oh, I pray there has been no bloodshed!

MRS. S. If blood has been shed, let us hope 'twas British!

*(MANDY rushes in from L., greatly excited. She looks over the shoulders of the ladies at the window.)*

MISS B. *(sharply)*. Mandy! Get you to the kitchen!

*[EXIT MANDY, AT L.*

*Enter JUDGE, at R. He looks very grave.*

JUDGE. 'Tis as I feared. The rash minutemen have fired on the king's troops and war has begun. Day before yesterday there was a fight at Lexington and Concord——

MRS. S. Tell us, man! Who was victorious?

JUDGE. The rebels stood their ground, 'tis reported, and the king's troops retreated, but not because of defeat——

MRS. C. Did the Regulars retreat to Boston?

JUDGE. Yes, and I fear it was a rout at the last. Owing to the firing of the rebels from behind walls and trees, the British became panic-stricken.

MRS. S. (*excitedly*). Hurroo for our brave men! 'Tis glorious that they routed the trained troops!

MISS B. But why did the fighting begin out at Lexington, Stephen? 'Tis a good ten miles from Boston.

JUDGE. General Gage was hoping to destroy the ammunition at Concord. In some way his plan was learned, and Paul Revere, the goldsmith, rode all night warning the countryside. When the Regulars came, the minutemen were ready.

MRS. A. (*compassionately*). Did many men fall?

JUDGE. 'Tis reported a hundred minutemen and nearly three hundred of the king's troops.

MRS. S. Well, thanks for that! Each minuteman, it seems, convoyed three Britishers with him out of existence!

MRS. A. My dear Mrs. Strong! Feel you no pity?

JUDGE (*listening*). The Hartfield minutemen are summoned to assemble at once at Clapp's Tavern. Methinks I hear the drums.

MRS. C. I must needs return home with the news, Miss Boltwood. I thank you for a very elegant tea.

MISS B. As 'tis your last for the present, I am glad it pleased your taste.

MRS. S. (*rising*). Forget not your vow, ladies. 'Tis for our hostess to uphold the "Boltwood Band."

MISS B. I have passed my word, and shall keep it. I never break a promise. (*Ladies curtsey.*) Farewell, ladies. (*Exeunt MRS. C., MRS. A. and MRS. S.*) I fear me, Stephen, troublous times are before us, and there is a matter I would discuss with you. Should the war prove serious I may return to England. I would Betty were well settled, for she is over-impulsive and filled with romance. You are a Tory and will fare well when the patriots are punished, as they doubtless will be. Why should you not marry the child? 'Twould be a most excellent arrangement.

JUDGE. Marry Betty! Impossible! How can you suggest such a thing? The girl would not abide one old enough to be her father. Besides, there is an obstacle.

MISS B. An obstacle! Pray what?

JUDGE. Yourself, Lavinia. My heart is still yours though you cruelly condemn me to single living. I am ever hoping that you may reconsider your decision.

MISS B. Say no more, Stephen. I thought the old flame had died for lack of fuel. I like you well in friendship, but as I have declared, I will not be at the bidding of any man. I will not.

JUDGE (*sadly*). As you will, Lavinia. But if you consent not to my happiness, at least do not mar Betty's. She and young William Dickinson are lovers. He is a fine, upright youth. Let her marry where she will.

MISS B. (*horrified*). What? Betty philandering with William Dickinson! The sly minx! She shall never marry any Dickinson, however "upright" he be.

*Enter MANDY at L., much excited, carrying carpet-bag and bundles.*

MANDY. Oh, missy, missy! De Britishers is comin'! I'se all ready to run!

MISS B. Hush, stupid! They will not come here.

*[Exit MANDY, running from L. to R.]*

JUDGE (*moving toward door at R.*). Good-night, Lavinia. Is there never to be hope for me?

*(He takes her hand.)*

MISS B. (*positively*). Stephen Ingram, I have declared I will never marry, and I am not the sort to break my word. (*Listens.*) List! There are the drums. Let us go view the minutemen. [*Exeunt.*]

*Enter MANDY excitedly from L., with bundles. She runs to window and looks out. Then sees tea table with remains of the tea-drinking. She peers about to see if the coast is clear, then drinks tea left in the cups and teapot, eats cakes.*

MANDY. Might as well eat dis 'fore de Britishers gets it.

*Enter BETTY. MANDY jumps guiltily away from the table.*

BETTY. Oh, Mandy! The minutemen are summoned. William must go. What if he should be shot—killed! (*She covers her face with her hands. The knocker sounds, MANDY answers it, R., and ushers in WILLIAM DICKINSON. BETTY runs to meet him. MANDY exits at L.*) William! William! I feared I should not see you before your leaving. Never did I dream that matters would come to war. 'Tis dreadful!

*(She weeps.)*

WILL. Nay, nay, Betty. 'Tis not dreadful, 'tis glorious to fight for our independence. Your tears are unseemly. Come, look up. I have brought you a keepsake. (*Takes a string of gold beads from his pocket. BETTY smiles through her tears.*) When last I was in

Boston these confronted me in a goldsmith's window and straightway I had a vision of them about your fair neck. Let me see the reality.

*(He puts the beads around her neck and embraces her.)*

BETTY. I thank you, William. I will ever wear them hidden thus (*tucking them under her kerchief*) with thoughts of you when you are far away. Would that there were no need for you to go.

WILL. But there is need, and I go gladly if I go with your promise to wed me some time.

BETTY. But my aunt——

WILL. I know you have ever put me off because of your aunt's disrelish for my family. But now, dear Betty, give me this comfort as I leave. Do you not love me?

BETTY. Indeed I love you with all my heart, William, yet I cannot promise without aunt's consent. She has been father and mother to me since I was an infant child. 'Twould not be right.

WILL. (*impatiently*). You will not promise without her consent and you forbid me to ask it as she will of a surety say "No." Then it lies with you to obtain it by fair means or foul.

BETTY (*firmly*). William, I will do my best to obtain it even by craft.

*Enter MISS B. unobserved. She listens.*

WILL. Craft would be fair enough. She cannot appreciate true affection. A woman who has flouted one of the best men in the world and yet doth keep him dangling! Bah! If he were not a saint he would betake himself to another woman and be happy. Betty, I love you better than anything in life save honor, but I will not be

put off like Judge Ingram. I swear that I will wed you e'en though a dozen frozen-hearted spinsters barred my way.

MISS B. Highy-tighty, young man! By what right do you embrace my niece?

*(The lovers start apart.)*

WILL. By the right of the great affection between her and me, madam. I duly crave your permission to marry her.

MISS B. *(coldly)*. You are a Dickinson. That permission you will never have.

WILL. If there is naught against me save my name, I beg of you to reconsider your decision.

MISS B. *(positively)*. Nay, my mind is made up on that point.

*(Sound of drums.)*

WILL. 'Tis the last call; I must go. Farewell, Betty. *(He gathers her in his arms before MISS B. can come between them.)* Miss Boltwood, I am resolved to wed your niece with your permission or—without it! [*Exit.*]

*(BETTY runs to the window.)*

MISS B. Betty Boltwood, I am amazed that you should permit yourself to become interested in a Dickinson! I forbid you to receive this presumptuous young man again.

*(BETTY begins to wave her handkerchief at the window. Her aunt snatches it from her hand. They both stand at the window watching the minutemen.)*

CURTAIN

## ACT II

*SCENE.—The same. A fire is on the hearth, the cat by the fire. The window is open and the roses are seen climbing near the sill. It is an afternoon in June not long after the battle of Bunker Hill.*

*(As the curtain rises, enter MISS B. She is in summer dress. She carries a reticule or bag. She goes to door at L.)*

MISS B. MANDY!

*MANDY (appearing in door). Yes, missy.*

MISS B. Fetch me the parcel of old linen. We roll bandages this afternoon for those wounded at Bunker Hill.

[*EXIT MANDY.*

*(MISS B. sits down, takes the cat in her lap. She sighs.)*

*MANDY (entering with a roll of linen in her hand). Here's de linen for de poor boys in Bos'on. Dis war am dreadful. All de mens gettin' killed and all de rest of us goin' widout tea! Isn't you hankerin' for jus' a leetle tea, missy?*

MISS B. *(looking embarrassed)*. Why—why.... Oh, stop your chattering, Mandy!

*(The knocker sounds. MANDY exits and returns with a letter.)*

MANDY. De post left dis letter, missy.

*(MISS B. opens letter, reads, looks thoughtful. MANDY gazes, all curiosity.)*

MISS B. 'Tis from Judge Ingram at Boston.

MANDY. Glory! Glory! De Judge am fighting de Britishers!



MISS B. Stupid! You know the Judge is a Tory. I sent him to Boston to arrange my affairs in case I should return to England. He says (*taking up the letter*) that he is attending on young Dickinson who was badly wounded at Bunker Hill—while bearing the colors at the head of his company. Humph! He doth not lack bravery, 'twould seem. The Judge requests me to send word to the young man's mother. Perchance neighbor Kellogg's boy would bear the message to Mrs. Dickinson. I will go and see.

*(Exit MISS B., at R., leaving letter on the table. MANDY exits at L.)*

*Enter BETTY with knitting. Sits by the window which is open. She takes the cat and lifts it to the sill.*

BETTY. Smell the roses, Salem. How sweet they be. You are a wise pussy; tell me if William has the rose and the letter I sent him some days since. The post is so tardy these days. (*Puts down cat; rises and goes to the mirror; pulls beads from their hiding-place under her kerchief; arranges them around her neck.*) 'Tis a pity I cannot wear William's keepsake openly. The beads become me well.

*Enter MANDY and BETTY forgets to hide the beads. MANDY brings in the teakettle and hangs it on the crane.*

MANDY. Oh, missy, missy! You' William Dickinson am shot!

*(BETTY screams and falls back horror-struck, then seizes MANDY by the arm.)*

BETTY. Not killed! Tell me instantly!

MANDY. He am mortally wounded but will recover. De Judge say so in dat letter. (*Points to letter on table. BETTY seizes letter and begins to read. MANDY is horrified that she should read her aunt's letter.*) Oh, missy, missy! You' aunt would scalp you did she catch you readin' her letter. She mos' awful 'ticular 'bout her letters.

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