



Audition form

'Rats' by Phoebe Rees

Director: Charlie Warren

Synopsis

Minnie Clatworthy is unhappy, caught between her stubborn smallholder husband Jim and his sharp-tongued sister Martha. But when Jim brings home a bottle of rat poison to deal with pests, Minnie's mischievous father Samuel hatches a plan to turn the tables on his bothersome in-laws. This gentle rural comedy, written nearly 90 years ago by acclaimed local playwright Phoebe M. Rees, is full of the warmth and wit of the West Country that the author spent much of her career celebrating.

- **Rehearsals: Wednesday evenings at 7.30pm, starting 8th January**
- **Performances: 22nd or 23rd March 2025 (if successful then 17th May, 7th June & 4th/5th July)**

Responsibilities: in line with the Thespians' Production Document, actors are expected to arrive promptly for all rehearsals, photo shoots and publicity activities as called in the rehearsal schedule and to learn their cues, lines and moves according to production schedule. Everyone is expected to behave with consideration and respect to everyone involved with the production. Cast and crew **must** be members of the Society.

About you

- **Name:** _____
- **Phone number:** _____
- **Email address:** _____
- **Age (if under 18):** _____
- **Preferred role or roles:** _____
- Examples of previous acting roles:

- **Important:** Holiday dates or other absences during rehearsal period:

If not cast, would you take on a backstage position? tick Or front of house? tick

About the acting roles

Jim Clatworthy:

Age: 20s to 30s

Gender: Male

Personality & Role: Husband to Minnie, son-in-law to Samuel and brother to Martha. A blustering and brusque smallholder who likes to think of himself as master of the house, but is easily flustered when things go awry.

Minnie Clatworthy (née Hodge):

Age: 20s to 30s

Gender: Female

Personality & Role: Wife to Jim, daughter to Samuel and sister-in-law to Martha. A kind-hearted young woman juggling caring for her aged father and the responsibilities of a farmer's wife, all while enduring the snide remarks of Martha. Though gentle in nature she is not afraid to assert herself when necessary, and has inherited Samuel's sly wit to do so.

Martha Clatworthy:

Age: 20s to 30s

Gender: Female

Personality & Role: Sister to Jim, daughter-in-law to Samuel and sister-in-law to Martha. A haughty and imperious woman, adept at domineering those around her with scornful comments. Likes to think of herself as "the brains" of the Clatworthy siblings, but is just as prone to panic as her brother when a situation arises.

Samuel Hodge:

Age: 60+

Gender: Male

Personality & Role: Father-in-law to Jim, father to Minnie and father-in-law to Martha. An older man on the cusp of dotage, he spends his time by the fire philosophising to anyone who'll listen, even if his opinions sometimes outstrip his actual knowledge. Uses wry humour to spar with the in-laws and lift his daughter's spirits, and possesses a cunning mind for mischief.

Henry Higgins:

Age: 40+

Gender: Male

Personality & Role: A respectable country doctor, albeit a little curt when his time is being wasted.

Audition Pieces

Audition piece	Pages	Characters	From Line	To Line
1	3-5	Minnie / Samuel	Minnie: Let me do it...	Samuel: If Samuel Hodge don't...
2	9-11	Jim / Minnie / Martha / Samuel	Samuel: Have 'ee ever heard...	Samuel: Just what you would say...
3	12-14	Jim / Martha	Jim: Wull, he be cheerful...	Jim: There be plenty of plaster...
4	18-20	Minnie / Samuel / Dr Higgins	Dr Higgins: Well now!...	Dr Higgins:Glad to see...

Jim Clatworthy:

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Gender: Male

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To "The Nettlecombe Players," who in this play reached the Divisional Finals of the British Drama League Festival of Community Drama held at Bristol, April 1936.

Rats

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By PHOEBE M. REES.

CHARACTERS :

JIM CLATWORTHY	...	...	...	<i>A Small Holder.</i>
MINNIE	...	...	...	<i>His wife.</i>
MARTHA	...	...	...	<i>His Sister.</i>
SAMUEL HODGE	...	...	...	<i>Minnie's Father.</i>
HENRY HIGGINS	...	...	...	<i>A Doctor.</i>

TIME.—*The Present.*

SCENE.—*The living-room of Clatworthy's cottage. There is a Door Right, opening into the garden and another Left into the scullery. An entrance Right back leads to the staircase. There is a fireplace Left with a high-backed chair by it, a dresser against the back wall Left, a table Right centre and a window Right. By the window is a small table with some books on it. A bottle of medicine stands among the crockery on the dresser.*

When the curtain rises, SAMUEL, a nice-looking old man with a white beard is sitting by the fire struggling with his boots. MINNIE, a plump, good-natured looking little woman is sitting by the table.

Minnie (*getting up and kneeling by SAMUEL'S side*): Let me do it for 'ee, Father.

Samuel: Thank 'ee, Minnie. (*She fetches slippers for him*): I reckon it be nice to have the place to ourselves.

Minnie: I expect Martha be having her tay up to the farm.

Samuel: Her've been asked to goo and live up there as help, bain't her?

Minnie: Ay!

Samuel: Will her goo?

Minnie: Not her.

Samuel: I should tell her, her must goo.

Minnie: I don't want to be unkind.

Samuel: Thee'd never be thic !*

MINNIE gets up and goes to the window.

Minnie: If only her'd goo wi'out being asked.

Samuel: Thee be too nice to her, Minnie.

Minnie: She be Jim's sister . . .

Samuel: Ay! How it happened fair beats me.

Minnie: And she's his only sister.

Samuel: The Lord be praised. She's one of those interfering females that can never leave a man in peace.

Minnie: Or anybody else. 'Tisn't as if she had nowhere to go. They want her up to the farm.

Samuel: It be mighty strange taste.

Minnie: Martha be a good worker when she likes.

Samuel: Which bain't often. She takes advantage of your good-nature, Minnie, that's what she does.

Minnie: I've tried to give her a hint but it bain't no good.

Samuel: No. I reckon her hide be as tough as a rhiny osserus.

Minnie: But what be us to do? I can't ask Jim to turn her out.

Samuel: Thee leave her to me, Minnie.

Minnie: You'd best be careful what you say to her, Father.

*Thic = that.

Samuel : Don't 'ee worry, Minnie. In dealing wi' females what 'ee needs be the cunning of the serpent and the wiles of the dove. If Samuel Hodge don't get the better of Martha Clafworthy before . . .

Minnie (*looking out of window*) : Be quiet, Father. Martha be just coming up the path.

Samuel : Wull, what if her be ?

The door opens and MARTHA comes in. She is a tall, thin woman with a dominating personality, one of those people who are pleasant enough to meet casually but who would be unbearably irritating if one had to live with them under the same roof.

Martha (*to SAMUEL, as she takes off her hat*) : One would think it were the middle o' winter the way you're sitting over the fire. (*SAMUEL ignores her remark. MARTHA takes her coat off*). My, what a fug !

She makes towards the window to open it.

Samuel (*sharply*) : I'll thank 'ee not to go opening the window, Martha.

Minnie : Father's a bit poorly today. He feels the cold.

Martha : I don't wonder. The speaker said down to Institute last week that the first things necessary to health were hard work and fresh air.

Minnie (*anxious to change the subject*) : Have you had your tay, Martha ?

Martha : Yes. I've had it up to farm. (*She takes her hat off*). But I'd not mind another cup if it be handy.

MARTHA brings chair up to table. MINNIE fetches cup from dresser, pours it out and gives it to MARTHA.

Minnie : More tay, Father ?

Samuel : Thank 'ee, my dear. Thank 'ee.

MINNIE fetches his cup from a small table by his side.

Martha (*severely*) : I reckon thee drink far more than's good for 'ee.

Samuel : If it bain't nought stronger than tay thee's no call to worrit.

Martha (*hastily*): No thank 'ee, Samuel.

She crosses R.

Samuel (*to MINNIE who has just come back in*): She be afraid this will poison her. Here you be, Jim.

Jim (*attacking kipper*): No thank 'ee. I've changed my mind. It might spoil thickey kipper.

Samuel: I reckon you're right there. Thic be the bitterest medicine I've ever tasted.

Minnie (*laughing as she hands him tin*): You're a baby, Father.

Samuel (*taking peppermint and placing it on table by his side*): Baby be I? That's pot calling kettle black I must say.

He holds his nose with finger and thumb of left hand and drinks medicine down, then, still holding his nose pops humbug in with right hand.

Martha (*sarcastically*): One 'ud think it *were* poison the way you carry on, Samuel.

MARTHA sits down at table R.

Samuel: P'raps it be. Thee never knows what thickey doctors put in their medicine. When a judge makes a mistake it be the law of the land, when a plumber makes a mistake he do charge twice for un, but when doctor makes a mistake he just buries un.

Minnie (*crossing to table by window*): You mustn't talk like that, Father.

SAMUEL takes out an old clay pipe and fills it. MINNIE takes up sock from table by window and starts knitting.

Samuel: Have 'ee ever heard the story of "The Cornish Jury," Martha?

Martha: No I haven't.

Jim (*with his mouth full of kipper*): Get on, Martha. It were on the wireless t'other night.

Samuel: Ay! About thickey doctor who poisoned his mother-in-law.

Martha: I must a been out.

Samuel : Put some arsenic in her tay he did and on her bread-and-butter.

Minnie : And what happened?

Samuel : Her were took terrible bad and died fourteen hours after.

Martha (*with sudden interest*) : Did he get hung?

Samuel : No. Thic be were the story o' the Cornish Jury come in.

Minnie : I call it shameful the way they jury-men let him off.

Samuel : Ay! It were. It couldn't a happened in Summerset. Summerset folk have more sense.

Martha : The wireless folk should have more sense than to put on such things.

Jim : Ay. They should gie us something to laugh at.

Samuel : I reckon they did! The way the jury let off thiccy doctor o' murdering his mother-in-law! But there, it were only circumstantial evidence after all.

Minnie : What be circumstantial evidence?

Samuel : What be circumstantial evidence?

Minnie : Yes.

Samuel : Ay! Er! Ay! What be circumstantial evidence?

Minnie : Yes. What be it, Father?

Samuel (*at a loss*) : Wull it be . . . it be . . . it be like this it be. It be when it can be proved that someone would have liked to do it if they could and could have done it if they liked but no one actually see'd 'em do it though it do look as if they must have done it because no one else could have done it so to speak.

Jim : That's straight enough, Father. But in this case it mightn't have been the doctor, it might have been the rabbits and onions she had for her supper.

Minnie : That's true, Jim. Dr. Cookworthy did say as how it might have been the rabbits and onions she'd had for her supper.

Jim : And I say what did an old woman like her want with rabbits and onions that time o' night ?

Martha : Ay! If Samuel eat rabbits and onions for his supper and were took ill and died, I'd say it served him right.

Samuel : Just what you would say Martha, and I don't intend to gie thee the pleasure o' saying it.

JIM pushes his cup towards MINNIE who fills it.

Minnie : Another cup o' tay, Martha ?

Martha : Just a spot.

Minnie (pushing tea-pot towards her) : Help yourself then.

MINNIE collects the dirty crockery.

Jim : Save that crust, Minnie. 'Twill do to put some o' thic rat poison on.

Minnie : All the more reason to get rid o' it.

She is marching off with it but JIM stops her and seizes it off the plate. MINNIE makes as if to speak, thinks better of it and goes out.

Martha : Minnie's a fat-head. The place be over-run with rats.

Samuel : She be nervous at having poison about the place.

Jim : One ud think I were going to gie it to her the way she's taking on.

Samuel : There's some sense in her. If one of us were to die sudden and there had to be an inquisition, it might look odd if a bottle o' poison were found in the house.

Martha : Wull, none o' us be going to die.

She drinks her tea and reads the Parish Magazine.

Samuel (getting up) : Thee never knows in this world. Here to-day and gone to-morrow.

He hobbles out Left.

Jim : Wull, he be cheerful and no mistake.

He puts crust in bowl on dresser. As he does so he catches sight of the bottle of poison with the dose out. He pauses aghast.

Have you been meddling with this poison, Martha?

Martha (*without looking up*): No, Jim. Why?

Jim : Someone's been fiddling wi' it. 'Twas full when I put it down and now there's quite a tidy drop missing.

Martha : You must be looking at the medicine. Your poison bottle's up on the shelf.

Jim (*looking at each bottle in turn*): No. That's odd. I could o' sworn I'd put the poison up there out o' the way.

Martha (*looking up*): You did. I'm sure o' it. Didn't I give Samuel his medicine out o' that bottle you're holding?

Jim (*aghast*): You gave Samuel his medicine out o' this bottle I'm holding?

Martha : Yes.

Jim : Be 'ee sure?

Martha : Yes. If that be the bottle standing in front o' the dresser.

Jim : Wull, I'll be hanged.

Martha (*getting up and going to dresser*): What's the matter?

Jim : What's the matter? Why, the medicine you gave Father be a dose of my rat poison.

They both stand aghast.

Martha : You've been and muddled those bottles.

Jim : I'm hanged if I have. Here be the bottle labelled poison with a dose missing and here (*Taking it up*) be the medicine bottle full to the brim.

Martha : You're crazy!

Jim : Crazy be I? (*Pointing to label on medicine bottle*).
 "To be taken three times a day after meals." Be that
 for rats? (*He puts medicine bottle down*). Samuel said
 the medicine tasted bitter. Thee's been and poisoned
 him, Martha, that's what thee's been and done.

Martha (*moving down stage*) : But I could a sworn that the
 bottle I . . .

Jim : It's no good a swearing anything. There be the
 poison a missing. This all comes o' chattering wi'
 Minnie instead o' minding your own business.

Martha (*flaring up*) : It's all your fault, James Clatworthy,
 for a bringing such stuff into the house. Minnie said it
 wasn't safe and I reckon she's right. It be your fault
 you gurt* . . .

Jim : My fault be it? And who gied him the poison?
 You, I reckon and no circumstantial evidence either. I
 see'd it wi' my own eyes and Minnie did too. Thee'd
 best hold your tongue or I'll send for the police and
 they'll soon know who's fault it be.

Martha (*sobered*) : But what be us to do? Do 'ee think
 Samuel will goo and die?

Jim : I reckon it won't be as bad as that, Martha. (*He
 thinks*). 'Twill take more to kill Father than to kill a
 rat.

Martha (*anxiously*) : You think it may only give him a
 pain in his stomach?

Jim : We must hope so, Martha. We must hope so.

Martha (*rushing to table by window and seizing "First
 Aid" book off it*) : We be doing First Aid down to Insti-
 tute. It do say in this book what to do in cases of
 poisoning. (*JIM follows her and looks over her shoulder
 She finds the page then reads :*) "General treatment of
 Poisoning." That be it. "Remove as much of the
 poison as possible from the system. This may be done by
 emetics, which are methods of producing vomiting. The
 following are simple methods: 1. Tickle the back of
 the throat with a finger, a feather, or a rolled up piece
 of note-paper, etc."

*Gurt = fat.

Jim : Don't be a fat-head, Martha. How could us a do thic wi' out him knowing. Here gie it to me. (*He seizes the book from MARTHA who follows and looks over his shoulder while he reads.*)

Jim (*reading*) : "Administer the proper antidote which makes the poison a harmless substance. Classification of poisons. Arsenic."

Martha (*helpfully*) : It might be that. They do give arsenic to rats.

Jim (*reading*) : "Dilute by quantities of water, tea or milk. Give salad oil or eggs beaten up in water. Keep the patient warm. Oil of Vitrol." That be more usual for rats, Martha.

Martha : Be that the stuff that burns 'em up inside ?

Jim : Ay'. (*Reading*) Dilute at once with water. If possible add to water one or two table-spoonfuls of chalk, whitening, plaster or whitewash.

Martha : We must get him to drink some directly he comes back.

JIM gazes up in direction of ceiling. MARTHA looks first at the ceiling, then at JIM, then at the ceiling again.

Jim : There be plenty of plaster on the ceiling. If you stood on the table could 'ee knock some down ?

Martha : I daresay. (*She gets on chair*). Here ! Give me a hand. (*JIM does so. MARTHA gets with difficulty on to the table and gazes blankly at the ceiling*). I can't reach.

Jim (*rushing for poker*) : Try this.

MARTHA takes it and makes a vain lunge in the direction of the ceiling.

Martha : It's no good. (*She wipes her brow with her handkerchief*). Get me the broom.

Jim : Where be it ?

Martha : In the corner, by the dresser.

JIM has just got hold of the broom and has handed it to MARTHA when MINNIE comes back in. MARTHA remains with the broom poised in mid-air.

Samuel : White-wash ! Plaster !

Minnie (*with a withering glance at MARTHA*) : Will 'ee mind your own business, Martha ?

MINNIE'S eyes travel from MARTHA to the ceiling and then to the First Aid Book lying open on the table. She snatches it up and starts to read at the open page.

Minnie (*reading*) : " Classifications of poisons ? " Oho ! " Oil of vitrol. Dilute at once with water. If possible add to water one or two table-spoonfuls of chalk, whitening, plaster, or white-wash." So that is what 'ee were doing, Martha Clatworthy, standing on the table so innocent looking for a cobweb. Thee's known all along what 'eed done.

Martha : I don't know how I comed to do it, Minnie, really I don't.

Minnie : Thee hold thy tongue and don't stand staring there like a gurt fool. Thee be a murderess that's what 'ee be, and if Father do goo and die, thee shall hang for it and if he don't thee cans't clear out. I'll have no poisoners in my house.

Martha : Thee's no need to tell I to go. I be going. I'll not stay in this house and be called a murderess and I'll not set foot in it again after the things thee's said to I . . . (*She picks up coat and hat.*) Not if 'ee were to goo down on your bended knees and ask me.

She goes out slamming the door after her.

Samuel : That's right, Minnie ! That's right ! I might have forged her if she hadn't tried to gie me a bit o' the ceiling !

Foot-steps are heard coming up the path. MINNIE sees DR. HIGGINS through the window and goes to open door.

DR. HIGGINS enters followed by JIM.

Dr. Higgins (*putting his gloves down on the dresser*) : Well now ! What's all this about ? Been eating something that disagreed with you, Hodge ?

Samuel : No sir. I bain't been eating no rabbits and onions.

Dr. Higgins : Oh ! So that's it. Been listening to the wireless the other night and imagining you've been poisoned.

Minnie : He bain't imagining nought, Doctor. Martha went and gied him a dose ó' rat poison.

Dr. Higgins : Rat poison ! Let's see the bottle.

Jim (*handing it him*) : 'Tis the same as 'ee gied me, sir.

DR. HIGGINS crosses to fire-place examining the poison bottle as he goes.

Dr. Higgins (*to MINNIE*) : How much did she give him ?

Minnie : She didn't mean to. I think she . . .

Dr. Higgins (*impatiently*) : How much did she give him ?

Minnie : The same as it said on the medicine bottle. A tablespoonful in a wine-glassful of water.

Dr. Higgins (*looking relieved*) : Good ! This is a very weak solution of arsenic. (*He puts the bottle down on the mantelpiece.*) I tried it myself.

DR. HIGGINS feels SAMUEL'S pulse and raising his eyelid examines his eye.

Minnie : It won't hurt him, Doctor ?

Dr. Higgins : May make him feel a bit uncomfortable in his inside.

Jim : Do 'ee mean it won't kill him ?

Dr. Higgins : Good Heavens ! No.

Jim : I thought it would take more to kill Father than to kill a rat.

Dr. Higgins (*to MINNIE*) : You'd better keep him on eggs and milk to-morrow, Mrs. Clatworthy.

Minnie : Yes, sir.

Dr. Higgins : And if you'll come along with me, Clatworthy, I'll make something up for him.

Jim : Right, sir.

He goes out.

As DR. HIGGINS is about to collect his gloves from dresser he catches sight of medicine bottle and picks it up.

Dr. Higgins : I shouldn't give him any more of this medicine for a bit. He's had enough arsenic inside him for a day or two.

He puts bottle down again and starts to draw on his gloves.

Samuel : Do 'ee mean there's *arsenic* in thic there medicine?

Dr. Higgins : Yes, a little.

Samuel : And you've been giving I arsenic dree times o' day, after meals?

Dr. Higgins : A little arsenic is a very good tonic. Good-night, Hodge. Good-night, Mrs. Clatworthy. Glad to find it's nothing serious.

DR. HIGGINS goes out shutting the door after him.

Samuel : Nothing serious, the gurt fool! And he's been gieing I arsenic dree times o' day after meals! Dree times

Minnie : Don't be a zahny, Father.

Samuel : I be a zahny be I? Bain't I got rid of thic two-legged rat for 'ee—and I reckon there's enough medicine left—*(He jerks his thumb in direction of medicine bottle)* to do for all t'others.

QUICK CURTAIN.
