



Read Rhyme Repeat

The Minister's Black Veil

Theater Adaptation
by Jill Craddock

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Rhyming Reader's Theater Adaptation by Jill Craddock

SPEAKER 1
SPEAKER 2
SPEAKER 3
SPEAKER 4

SPEAKER 1

The sexton rang the bell for the usual small-town throng of people.
And as usual, he lamented the sagging porch, pined for a proper church steeple.
And, as always, he surveyed the crowd, counting those souls still alive,
Now watching, curious, as the pastor arrived. He couldn't believe his eyes!

SPEAKER 2

The parishioners shuffled together in clusters,
Thoroughly flummoxed, nervous, and flustered.
Their pastor, usually a peaceful man, but today, he had them panicked,
Nearly manic,
When they saw, hiding his visage, a black cloth quite opaque.
What on earth? For heaven's sake!
Why did Father Hooper have a black veil covering his face?
Was it him? Or some other man creeping up in his place?

SPEAKER 3

The people were horrified, mystified, terrified, stupefied.
And if it was their preacher behind the veil, what could his reason be?
The congregation busybodies stirred rumors of dark days to come.
They twisted in their pews and shrunk from his touch,
And thus, their beloved pastor was shunned.

SPEAKER 4

His veil wavering with every breath indrawn,
Parson Hooper proceeded as if nothing were wrong.
From the pulpit, he pronounced the poetry of Psalms,
Although between him and his people, was the veil over his face,
And he spoke of secret sin and gloom instead of grace.

SPEAKER 1

Several squeamish women couldn't stand the sight
And left early with nerves shaky and tight.
At sermon's end, those who remained were glad to exit into daylight.
They all agreed: the pastor's veil was more than strange—it wasn't right.
Some stood in circles. Some walked alone.
Some shook their heads. Some moaned.
Father Hooper, left on his own, turned toward home,
Smiling sadly, behind his drape, at those he'd served and known.

SPEAKER 2

Remembering that crape abounded on bonnets of females,
Together, the doctor and his wife discussed the pastor's veil.
Still, the feeling remained: To be alone with the pastor would be terrible.
They tried to focus, instead, on the message in his parable.

SPEAKER 3

The pastor presided at a funeral later that day,
His veil hanging over his face, exactly the same.
On this occasion, the mourners had nothing to say,
Just followed along as he led them to pray.
But their trembling within, nothing could quell.
Even the corpse shuddered, when the preacher's words fell.

SPEAKER 4

So shaken were they, the mourners expected to see
Parson Hooper walk off hand-in-hand with the deceased,
Himself just another Grim-Reaper draftee.

SPEAKER 1

Of course, the pastor did not, and the maid stayed in her coffin.
But Hooper's eternal veil created a terror that didn't soften.
When next he officiated at a wedding for a most unfortunate bride,
He never once pushed his dark veil aside,
Leading the townsfolk to say that the wedding and funeral had one difference alone.
The bride stayed standing; the maiden was prone.

SPEAKER 2

Gossips and impertinent people chattered
On and on, day and night: what could be the matter?
Despite meetings on issues of more consequence,
The black veil was the town's topic most tense.
Deputies left assemblies speechless, confused.
But though their pastor was trusted from days gone by,
The townspeople never asked him, about the veil, "Why?"

SPEAKER 3

Elizabeth, his fiancée, although miffed, kept smiling.
She told him the cloth hid a face for which she had quite a liking.
"Remove it and explain your reasons," she wailed.
But no, her good man said he'd wear it until all cast aside theirs.
She said he sounded like he'd had too much ale.

SPEAKER 4

To this man of the cloth, his veil was a symbol of his sins and his sorrows.
“It will remain in place, full time and forever,” he stated, “until I run out of tomorrows.”
His fiancée begged him, she cried, she sat staring silently.
She whispered, “Scandal!” he replied, “Patience,” their voices straining quietly.

SPEAKER 1

Elizabeth only wished he had too much ale in him.
But she felt something deeper and darker ailed him, within.
“Do not leave me alone in obscurity and misery,” begged he.
“Then only once look at me,” challenged she.
But that was not to be.
So Liz left him to his grief, left him in a state of disbelief,
That a piece of fabric rendered their love so brief.

SPEAKER 2

After a while, no one tried to learn what secrets the veil contained.
But the insolence and impudence of the townspeople remained.
Their preacher was avoided and discussed, but never approached.
Yet, if the town had had courage, the veil they might have poached.

SPEAKER 3

Not just they, but Pastor Hooper, too, feared his own black-veiled reflection.
The self-dread in his heart spread wider than an infection.
That veil kept him free of his fellow man’s love and sympathy.
Yet, the minister smiled behind it still, however sadly.

SPEAKER 4

While in health and joy, no one wanted to see him.
And fashion, politics, conversation around him turned grim.
The single silver lining in the veil’s black cloud
Was the surge of dying folk repenting aloud.

SPEAKER 1

Eventually, Father Hooper’s flock lay six feet under.
Now he was to meet his Maker, much to his wonder.
In his last moments on Earth, time left him confused.
Yet, regarding removing the veil, he still flatly refused.

SPEAKER 2

Another pastor at his deathbed reached for the fabric.
Our pastor, while sickly, responded quickly: “I won’t have it!”
The guest preacher still tried to reveal the hidden face,
Only to have Hooper snatch at his hands and put the veil back in place.

SPEAKER 3

“Never! On earth, never!” was Hooper’s cry.
The other man warned, “Soul crimes cling to you, even when you die.”
Pastor Hooper sat, still veiled, still with his sad smile.
“It isn’t me,” said he, “that anyone should defile.
You’ve all fled, avoided, shown no pity. You’ve screamed!
But I’m your pastor who loves you.
It borders on blaspheme.
We each have a black veil.
Mine is simply the one you can see.”

SPEAKER 4

To this day in the churchyard grave,
The veil covers what’s left of Father Hooper’s face.
But as for those townspeople he attempted to save,
No one knows if they ever changed the way they behaved.