

THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Play in One Act

by
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THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS CAROL
A Play in One Act
A Dramatization of Kate Douglas Wiggin's Famous Story

Pauline Phelps

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CHARACTERS:

MRS. RUGGLES: Around forty, quick-tempered but good-hearted. Wears a calico dress with a colored apron over it and later dons a shabby coat and a sat-upon looking hat.

PEORIA: Eleven, awkward, and with especially unruly hair.

CLEM: Twelve, very bright and alert.

KITTY: Ten, pretty with curly hair.

SARAH MAUD: Fourteen, plain-faced and motherly.

CORNELIUS: Eight, and a bit of a cry-baby.

LARRY: As young as possible. Larry has no solo speaking part, but should contribute to all the choruses. If he is a good little actor, he can add to the general merriment by falling down at frequent intervals, always being comforted and set upon his feet again by the motherly Sarah Maud.

(Note: The clothes of the children should give the impression of being gifts or "hand-me-downs," but they are neat and clean. Peoria wears striped stockings, at least three sizes too large for her, and when he first appears, Clem wears red flannel underwear.)

MRS. BIRD: Pretty and refined, in her late thirties. Dresses well but quietly.

CAROL BIRD: An angelic looking, golden-haired girl of twelve. If possible, she should wear white with a white coat and hat; although, a long coat worn over her white dress and removed the instant she comes into the house will also be effective.

PETER RUGGLES: Sarah Maud's twin, although he does not in the least resemble her. He is at the awkward stage of boyhood, but gives an impression of sturdy character and keen intelligence. He wears a neat but patched dark suit, and a nondescript overcoat, cap and knitted mittens.

SETTING: The living room of the Ruggles' home. Window down R. looking upon the street. Door up R. opening onto same. Door down L. leads into kitchen, door up L. into bedroom. The furniture is of the plainest. Against the back wall, R. and L., are two old sofas or cots which serve as sleeping places for some of the numerous Ruggles family. At L. is a rather large plain table. At R. stands a huge easy chair, with stuffing protruding from one of the arms. Four kitchen chairs, most of them dilapidated, are around the room. On wall at L. is a framed picture of the deceased Mr. Ruggles. On wall at R., between door and window, is a small looking glass.

TIME: Christmas Day in the 1880's.

PROPERTIES: Letter (with red seal), Sarah Maud's skirt with needle and thread, trousers, coal hod, packing box, newspaper, crutch, handkerchief, tissue paper caps, books, watch, four hair ribbons, two pairs of stockings, tool chest, box of candy and letter.

SCENE I

DISCOVERED: MRS. RUGGLES sits at table, sewing the last of a row of brass buttons on Sarah Maud's dark skirt. CLEM, in red flannel underclothes, is partly hidden in one of the cots at back. PEORIA stands at L. looking up at the letter in frame. KITTY is admiring herself before the glass.

MRS. RUGGLES: Peory, don't stand staring any longer at that invitation to the Christmas dinner or you'll wear it out just by looking at it. Kitty, stop prinking before that glass. Beauty ain't but skin deep, which means if the whole Ruggles' family was skinned this minute, a stranger couldn't tell 'tother from which. (Finishes last button, bites off thread, rises and holds up skirt.) There, that job's done. And all these policemen's buttons make Sarah Maud's skirt look pretty tony, if I do say it that shouldn't.

KITTY: (Coming away from the glass) Why can't I have policemen's buttons on my dress too?

MRS. RUGGLES: 'Cause Brother James didn't have but one old uniform to spare. Now remember them thirty-six ringlets that it took me an hour to comb this morning, and count your mercies.

PEORIA: I haven't got thirty-six ringlets, Ma. I haven't got even one.

MRS. R.: No, you poor child, for the Lord didn't make your hair curly and seems as if the more I brush it the worse it looks. But there hadn't nobody ought to feel discontented on Christmas Day, so when you're cast down about your head, look at your feet. (As Peoria puts out her legs) The only pair of whole stockings in the house.

CLEM: (From the cot) Those ain't Peoria's. You borrowed 'em from Mrs. Cullen next door.

MRS. R.: Yes, but when Peory gets home from the party, she's goin' to give Jim Cullen half of her candy to pay for the stockings, ain't you, Peory?

P.: (Doubtfully) I dunno.

MRS. R.: Peory, you said yesterday you would.

P.: But it's awful hard to pay for things after you've got 'em.

MRS. R.: (Advances with outstretched hand to box her ears) Peory McGrill Ruggles--(Pauses) No, I vow I won't lick you on Christmas Day, even if you drive me crazy. But speak up smart now and tell me whether you'd rather give Jim Cullen half yer candy, or take off them stockin's this minnit an' go barelegged to the party.

P.: (Abashed) I'd rather give him the candy.)

MRS. R.: That's a lady! There ain't nothin' that helps in bringin' up children like a little patience, and from now on--(Crossly) Clem Ruggles, what are you squirmin' 'round for, uneasy as a fish out of water?

CLEM: These red flannels you washed out this morning are so wet they don't feel good.

MRS. R.: What if they don't. If I'd waited to have you put 'em on 'til they was bone dry, they'd have shrunk.

CLEM: They're a-shrinkin' now!

MRS. R.: Well, you'll have to stand it. There's always drawbacks about going into fashionable society, and you might as well realize it first as last. (Tremendous howl from kitchen) Mercy sakes, what's happened?

CORNELIUS: (Appearing in doorway down L. followed by LARRY) Sarah Maud washed us too hard. (Holds on to his nose)

MRS. R.: No, she didn't. I told her to give you such a scrubbin' as you never had before an' never will again likely.

COR.: But Maw, she took the skin right off my nose. (Advances to exhibit it)