

THE COAL CAMP MADONNA

**A play by
Daniel S. Kehde**

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It's winter in a poor coal mining town in the early 1900s. When a foundling baby girl appears on the doorsteps of the company store, Annie, the possessive wife of the proprietor, Fergus, takes a shine to her. But Arly, who works at the store and makes Christmas presents for all the kids in town, learns that the real mother is Francine, the wife of a miner. Francine loves the baby, but is too poor to raise her and her older daughter, Gabrielle. A cave-in at the mine sows tragedy among the miners and their families and complicates matters further. Francine, who loses her husband in the disaster, has to leave town, but she desperately wants to hold her baby once more. On Christmas Eve, Arly engineers a pageant at the store with Annie as the Angel and Francine as Mary, holding her baby in the manger, fulfilling her Christmas wish. When Francine hands the baby back, Annie, who has recognized her as the birthmother, invites her to come and visit the child at any time. This profound, beautiful story goes to the heart of what Christmas is all about - generosity of spirit and redemption through love.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Early afternoon, 2 weeks before Christmas.

Scene 2: Later that night.

Scene 3: The following morning.

ACT II

Scene 1: One week later, late afternoon.

Scene 2: Christmas Eve, early afternoon.

Scene 3: Christmas Eve, late, after church.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 male, 5 female, extras)

FERGUS: Youngish, mid-thirties, ambitious but not unkind.

The proprietor of the store.

ARLY: An older man, mid-sixties, graying. He walks with a distinct limp. He is a man to whom a laugh comes easily, a man whose age and past has given him a sharp sense of irony and a great appreciation of the human condition.

ANNIE: Fergus' wife.

ANNETTE: Their 12-year-old niece – happy, bubbling and spoiled.

FRANCINE: A woman, about 25 years old.

GABRIELLE: Her daughter, about 9 years old.

VIOLET: A woman in her fifties.

BUTCH: The sheriff.

DOC: The town doctor.

TOWNSPEOPLE and **MINERS**

SETTING

The Whipple Company store. There are counters left and right with a center aisle between. UC is the front door, a large double door with a glassed in panel above reading Whipple Company Store in reverse. A door off UL leads to Arly's workshop. The door off right leads to the stairway. The main exit is upstage center. Arly's living quarters as well as Annette's playroom is up the stairs. The counters are deep wood glass-front or glass topped. This was before the time of self service and Fergus and Annie work behind the counters to service their customers. There are signs on the walls advertising products such as Listerine and Arm and Hammer, bolts of cloth in one section of the store, oil cans in another, miners supplies in yet another.

PROPS

Broom
Christmas doll, fancy (in window)
Shopping list (Francine)
Bundle wrapped in brown paper (Francine and Gabriella)
Plate that gets broken (Gabriella)
Red mailbox with "Santa" painted on its side
Pie (Violet)
Letters in Santa's mailbox
2 plates (for pie)
Silverware (for pie)
Basket woman leaves with baby
Cup of tea
List for Francine's second order
Goods and brown wrapping paper (Fergus)
Tea in tin
Fancy tea pot and cups
Ropes and blankets (Fergus and Arly)
New toy on shelf (Annette and Gabriella)
Tea tray
Letter to Santa (Annette)
Letter to Santa (Francine)
Tray with tea, cups and accessories
Toys and brown wrapping paper, including a wiener dog and
a wooden doll
Brightly colored wrapping paper (for Christmas doll)
Metal tin (Violet)
2 boxes with wrapped toys
2 burlap sacks for toys
Bibles

ACT I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The Whipple Company store. It is early afternoon two weeks before Christmas. The store appears empty. FERGUS enters and crosses to Arly's workshop.)

FERGUS: Hey Arly. Arly. Arly? Where are you?

ARLY: *(Entering from HIS workroom door, right.)* Yes sir?

FERGUS: What do you think. Is it or isn't it?

ARLY: *(Turning and looking out the door.)* I'd like to tell you it's going to blow over, but the way my knees feel today, I'd be lying if I said it. Nope. I'm surprised it's not snowing already.

FERGUS: You'd better start sealing up the windows then. You know how the wind blows through this place as it is.

ARLY: Ain't gonna keep the snow out.

FERGUS: No, but it'll keep the storm down.

ANNIE: *(From offstage.)* Fergus. Fergus!

FERGUS: Yes, dear.

ANNIE: You get that no good Arly outside this minute. The wind's blowing through these windows like there's no glass in them at all. You tell him he better get those storm windows up now or he'll be doing it in the snow.

ARLY: I'll get my coat. *(Exits and quickly reenters.)*

FERGUS: I'll help you. *(Starts to get HIS coat.)*

ANNIE: *(Entering.)* Did you hear me?

ARLY: Everyone from here to the mine hears you, Mrs. Mac.

ANNIE: *(To FERGUS.)* Where are you going?

FERGUS: To help Arly.

ANNIE: Arly can do it on his own. He's no cripple.

ARLY: Well, technically, I am. That's how come I walk like this.

ANNIE: If you can walk, you can get those windows up. It must be twenty degrees in this room.

ARLY: *(To HIMSELF.)* It seemed much warmer when you weren't here.

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ANNIE: What'd you say?

ARLY: I said the storm windows will make it much warmer in here. *(HE looks at FERGUS as he leaves.)*

ANNIE: You ought to fire that man, Fergus. He does nothing but waste your money. You know he does. He sits back in that room of his all day long and all night long too and, come the end of the week, he takes home more than some of those men up there that put in their sixty hours.

FERGUS: *(Picks up a broom and starts to sweep.)* That ...

ANNIE: There you see? You see what you're doing? What are you doing sweeping. He should be sweeping. You're the manager, you should be making him sweep.

FERGUS: I can't. You're already making him put up the storm windows. He can't be two places at once.

ANNIE: Well, he's usually no place at all – except that room of his.

FERGUS: He lives there, Annie. The Captain gave him that room and this job as soon as he got out of the hospital. You know that. And you know well that he was the last man to be taken out of that mine alive after the explosion. The nurses at MacKendree said he shouldn't have lived at all.

ANNIE: Well, it's still no reason to be taking from us.

FERGUS: He doesn't. The company pays him, the same as us.

ANNIE: Well, he earns too much.

FERGUS: *(Exasperated.)* Fine. He earns too much. He's a regular John D. Rockefeller. Why, it wouldn't surprise me if he doesn't have it all salted away in coal and oil and he's just working here to check up on his investment.

ANNIE: Are you making fun of me?

FERGUS: I wouldn't dare.

(Enter ANNETTE, their 12-year-old niece.)

ANNETTE: Hi, Poppy, hi, Annie. *(Hugs FERGUS.)*

FERGUS: Hi, Punkin.

ANNIE: Make sure you wipe your feet next time you come in here. Your Uncle Fergus is cleaning the floors today.

ANNETTE: Is Arly sick?

End of Freeview

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