

The Little Theatre

A Play in One Act
by
Con Chapman

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STORY OF THE PLAY

THE LITTLE THEATRE follows four speech and drama students and their coach as they prepare for a tournament. Charles is the team's supremely confident extemporaneous speaker. Patty is the group's entry into the category of original oratory. Cathy is both a debater and, at least in her own mind, a talented actress.

And then there's Chris Higgins, a former football player whose mother forces him to participate in public speaking as a way of overcoming his stuttering problem. Unable to participate in the athletics that used to bring him glory, he is a reluctant participant in the activities of this group, a group which he views with condescension.

When Chris is teamed with Cathy in a dramatic interpretation, she forces him to confront his alienation and negative attitudes. It becomes a start for dealing with others and even himself.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CATHY -- An emotional performer and determined individual. Refuses to allow Chris to sabotage their performance through his indifference.

MR. OR MS. WHEATLEY -- The pedantic but supportive faculty advisor to the team.

CHRIS HIGGINS -- A former football player who stutters, now forced to give up the game due to injuries. Views this new group of teammates with condescension.

PATTY -- A bit of a conformist; follows Wheatley's directions with slavish dedication.

CHARLES -- A likable egotist; an enthusiastic member of the speech and debate team who is highly confident of his own abilities.

Also, an OFFSTAGE VOICE.

**Note: The actor who plays Chris should use the points in his lines where stammers are indicated only as guidelines and not as requirements. The actor is free to choose which words his character experiences difficulty with, but should bear in mind that most instances of the verbal blockage that characterize stuttering occur on syllables beginning with consonants rather than vowels.*

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SETTING

All action takes place in a school setting. No scenery is necessary.

PROPS

Four school chairs
Clipboard
School books, backpacks
Box of file cards
File cards
Manuscripts (2 or 3)
Tournament schedule

THE LITTLE THEATRE

(AT RISE: The stage is dark. A SPOTLIGHT shines on a point DSC, revealing CATHY on her knees. She is grasping at the floor and making tearing motions, as if uprooting something, her hands balled into fists.)

CATHY: *(Brushing HER hair back from her brow with the back of her hand.)* With God as my witness, I will never ... never be poor again.

(SHE slumps to the floor and the LIGHTS come up to reveal THREE STUDENTS sitting in a semicircle around her. There is a fourth, empty chair. WHEATLEY is standing behind the students, holding a clipboard with arms crossed.)

WHEATLEY: *(After a moment to allow the melodramatic effect of CATHY'S peroration to subside.)* Well? Comments? Criticism? Somebody? Anybody? Come on - you people are supposed to be our best and brightest!

PATTY: *(Enthusiastically, as CATHY gets up off the floor and takes the empty chair.)* I thought it was good.

WHEATLEY: "Good" and "bad" tell me nothing. Remember, your first job as a critic is to understand, then to explain.

CHARLES: *(Warily, in light of this didactic prescription.)* ... Um, I thought Cathy did a good job of getting into the character of Scarlett O'Hara.

WHEATLEY: A little better. But "getting into" sounds like artsy-fartsy jargon to me, pardon my French. Chris?

CHRIS: I thought it w-was a little over-r-r-wought.

WHEATLEY: Okay. Now we're getting somewhere.

CATHY: *(Defensively.)* But I'm supposed to be overwrought. The Yankees have just burned down my plantation!

WHEATLEY: Chris, your response?

CHRIS: I m-mean, instead of just screaming y-you could have a tone of sadness in y-your voice.

CATHY: I wasn't just screaming.

CHRIS: Forget it.

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WHEATLEY: No, let's keep going with that thought. Patty?

PATTY: I don't think she was too, what did he say, overwrought.

CHARLES: Maybe just a little. On the other hand, maybe if she cried the audience would empathize with her.

WHEATLEY: And why is that important?

CHARLES: Well, otherwise they may think she got what was coming to her. You know, a big plantation, lots of slaves. Then they'd be glad Tara burned down.

WHEATLEY: Chris?

CHRIS: Yeah, I agree with Charles.

WHEATLEY: Sorry, you don't get credit just for agreeing with him ... explain.

CHRIS: Well, he did put his f-finger on it. You can come off sounding like a sp-spoiled brat. You don't want to go so far that you d-don't get the sympathy the author was aiming for.

WHEATLEY: *(In a pedantic tone.)* Assuming the author got the dramatic development right, correct?

CHRIS: Right.

WHEATLEY: *(Looking at watch.)* Well, we're near the end of the hour. People, we've got a tournament coming up in two weeks and I want to go over the assignments. Solo dramatic interpretation, Cathy doing "Gone With the Wind." Debate, I've got Chris and Charles and Cathy and Patty. Extemporaneous speaking, that's you, right, Charles?

CHARLES: *(Patting a box of file cards proudly.)* That's me!

WHEATLEY: Patty, original oratory. That leaves dramatic pairs. I think I want to do something from "A Farewell to Shiloh." Calls for one male, Dr. Lowe, and one female, Sitter, his daughter. Any volunteers? *(Waits a moment.)* The silence is deafening in here. Cathy?

CATHY: Well, sure, if it's not too long.

WHEATLEY: Five minutes. Chris?

CHRIS: Do I have to?

WHEATLEY: *(Looks around as if scouting for reinforcements.)* Ain't nobody here but us chickens. We don't have a very deep bench, Chris. Are you interested or not?

End of Freeview

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