

O, CHRISTMAS TREE!

By Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It's 1841 and Christmas at Moor Manor doesn't promise to be a happy one. The two daughters of the late Lord Fairchild deeply mourn their father's death. Lady Fairchild has invited her old pupil, now Queen Victoria, and her new husband Prince Albert, for Christmas hoping their presence will cheer her daughters. But the girls act even worse than before. On Christmas Eve, as they are about to run away, they bump into five orphans who have been hiding in the house stealing food. Roused by the commotion, Queen Victoria devises a plan for their "punishment." The orphans must present a "mummer play," a traditional British Christmas entertainment. The story of good triumphing over evil and death makes the daughters realize their father isn't coming back. They are inconsolable until Prince Albert presents a German Christmas custom. He has the orphans bring in a fir tree from outside. The group begins to decorate the tree and in a touching moment, the girls add their own special ornament and join in the Christmas festivities.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(4 male, 10 female, 1 flexible)

NETTIE CRUMB: 40s, the cook and housekeeper.
FERN: 20a, a maid.
BIDDY: 19, another maid.
PEARL: 19, another maid.
CRICHTON: 50s, the butler.
JANE: An orphan.
HARRY: Another orphan.
EMMA: The youngest orphan.
SQUIRT: Either boy or girl, the orphan leader.
BEN: Another orphan.
LADY FAIRCHILD: 40s, mistress of Moor Manor.
CYNTHIA FAIRCHILD: 17, the oldest daughter.
BEATRICE FAIRCHILD: 16, another daughter.
QUEEN VICTORIA: 21, England's ruler.
PRINCE ALBERT: Also 21, Queen Victoria's consort.

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SETTING

The great hall of Moor Manor, located far north of London in the Lake Country. The dominant feature is the stone fireplace up center. Above its wooden mantel is a portrait of Lord Frederick Fairchild, the late master. Under the portrait hangs a shining silver sword. Two chairs flank the fireplace. In the fireplace rests a partially burned Yule log. Up left is a screen. Up right, a table set with two or three chairs. A lamp sits atop of it. A bench sits down left, another down right. The room feels empty, devoid of decoration or cheer.

THE SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Noon, December 24, 1840.

Scene 2: That evening.

Scene 3: Late that night.

ACT II

Scene 1: Late Christmas morning.

ACT I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: NETTY enters left cautiously. She carries a box, then looks back left and gestures other MAIDS to enter.)

NETTY: C'mon, girls! Nobody's about.

(FERN, BIDDY, and PEARL enter left, each carrying a broom, brush, or dust cloth.)

FERN: *(Nervously.)* You're sure they ain't here?

BIDDY: *(Nervously.)* We wouldn't want to disturb 'em or nothin'!

PEARL: Let's just get our work done quick-like.

(NETTY, FERN, BIDDY, and PEARL begin dusting, sweeping, and so on under next dialogue.)

NETTY: Go on, girls! You act like you're afraid of your own shadows.

FERN: You got to admit, Miss Crumb, nothin's been the same.

NETTY: Has Moor Manor shrunk in size? Has the wood turned to stone? Have the windows stopped lettin' in light?

BIDDY: No, ma'am, but all the same ...

PEARL: It just don't feel right, you know? *(Sighing.)* It's all empty and cold.

NETTY: You gotta expect that. It's only been nine months since Lord Fairchild died, and his passing's put everyone else's life on hold.

FERN: I remember when we used to have grand dances in this room!

BIDDY: The food and music was wonderful!

PEARL: And the gowns the ladies wore looked like something Cinderella herself might have put on!

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NETTY: (*Admonishingly.*) And how did you see all this?
You were always in bed during the dances, or so you
made a point of telling me.

FERN: Well, if you must know, I suppose there's no harm in
tellin'.

NETTY: Tellin' what?

BIDDY: There's a secret room, right up there behind the
family crest!

(*BIDDY points up above the audience.*)

NETTY: How come I don't know nothin' about a secret
room? I'm the cook and housekeeper!

PEARL: That's 'cause it's a secret, ma'am.

NETTY: And just how do you get into this secret room?

FERN: You know the tower stairs?

BIDDY: There's a door painted to match the stones. Fools
everybody!

PEARL: Miss Crumb, you've been at Moor Manor for sixty
years! You sure you never noticed it?

NETTY: Sixty years?! And who told you that?

PEARL: Fern did.

FERN: I might have exaggerated a bit.

NETTY: You exaggerated a lot, young lady! And any more
exaggerations and you'll find yourself out of a position.

BIDDY: We'll take you up and show you, Miss Crumb.

PEARL: You can see right down here through the holes
drilled in the eagle's eyes.

NETTY: Hmmmm ... might be just what the doctor ordered.

FERN: What doctor?

NETTY: (*Thinking.*) That's just an expression. It means
that little room might come in handy for finding out ...

BIDDY: Finding out what?

PEARL: If there's really a ghost or not!

FERN: There ain't no ghost! I told you that! Lord Fairchild
wouldn't upset the house so.

NETTY: It's not Lord Fairchild walkin' the halls at night. He
was a good man, a credit to himself and his country, and
he rests in peace.

End of Freeview

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