

CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

*adapted from the
Charles Dickens story*

by Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Dot Dallrimple and her friend May Fielding are Christmas shopping at the Toy Shop run by the miserly Mr. Tackleton. Much to Dot's dismay, the nasty Tackleton has eyes for May. Fortunately, she is soon to be engaged to Edward Plummer, a handsome young man, who has just returned from school. This news, however, spurs Tackleton into action. He has Edward kidnapped and sent to South America, never to return to England.

Ten years pass with no word from Edward. Dot has married John Peerybingle and they have three children. John's delivery business has prospered, and two days before Christmas he brings home a most unusual package. A mute stranger, dressed like a vagabond, is addressed to the Peerybingle home. Moments later, Tackleton arrives with important news: he's to be married Christmas morning. He begs Dot and John to come to tea to meet his bride-to-be.

To Dot and John's horror, May has agreed finally to marry Tackleton. She's desperate to settle down, and Tackleton offers her comfort and security. When all are gone, the stranger hands a message to Dot. Overjoyed, she throws her arms around the stranger and kisses him. Unfortunately, John sees this and leaves furious.

On Christmas morning, Tackleton is ready for the wedding, but May hasn't shown up. Dot eventually arrives, worried about John, who didn't come home last night. Once all have assembled, however, the truth comes out. The stranger is none other than Edward, finally escaped from his enslavement at sea. He and May have married, and John, of course, realizes that he'd jumped to the wrong conclusion. As for Tackleton? He takes Edward's place at sea.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(14 m, 13 w, much doubling possible)

BERTIE: A child.

ANDREW: Another.

ELLEN: Another.

TACKLETON: The toy store owner.

MRS. RICHMOND: A customer.

CALEB PLUMMER: A toymaker.

BERTHA PLUMMER: His blind daughter.

MRS. FAIRWEATHER: A customer.

MRS. JIPPYSPOT: Another.

MAY FIELDING: A young lady.

DOT DALLRIMPLE: Her friend.

EDWARD PLUMMER: Caleb's nephew.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE: A delivery man.

SARAH PEERYBINGLE: Dot and John's daughter.

BARTHOLOMEW PEERYBINGLE: Sarah's twin.

BELINDA PEERYBINGLE: Dot and John's oldest daughter.

TILLY: A servant in Dot and John's home.

THUG ONE

THUG TWO

MRS. FIELDING: May's mother.

MRS. DALLRIMPLE: Dot's mother.

MR. DALLRIMPLE: Dot's father.

CONSTABLE: A policeman.

ONE-EYE PETE: A pirate.

MAD DOG CARTER: Another.

CAPTAIN CREEGE: Captain of "The Skeleton."

DRIVER: Horse carriage driver.

(Doubling: The roles of the Thugs and Constable can be doubled with the roles of the Pirates and Ship Captain. The role of the Driver may also be doubled with the role of Mr. Dallrimple.)

SETTING

The play has four basic settings:

The toy shop – a counter with toys in cases (painted on) and a backdrop of toys on shelves. Perhaps a barrel or crate with dolls and other toys that can be picked up.

Skating pond at Hyde Park – bench with a couple of trees, some snow piled up around the trunks of the trees.

Dot's house (also Dot and John's house later) – fireplace up left, table up center, a couple of chairs. Backdrop, if desired, can have a window, wood stove, etc.

Deck of "The Skeleton" – upstage a ship's railing with two life preservers attached. A crate on which the Captain can sit. If desired, a backdrop can show the ocean and a setting sun.

SYNOPSIS OF THE SCENES

ACT I

Scene 1: Gruff and Tackleton Toy Shop, the day before Christmas, 1880.

Scene 2: Street in front of the toy shop, immediately after. Played before the curtain.

Scene 3: Skating pond in Hyde Park, the following morning.

Scene 4: Dot's home, that afternoon.

Scene 5: A city street in London, weeks later. The deck of "The Skeleton," immediately after.

ACT II

Scene 1: Dot and John's house, ten years later, two days before Christmas.

Scene 2: A street in front of the toy shop, a short time later.

Scene 3: The toy shop, the following afternoon, Christmas Eve.

Scene 4: The toy shop, the following morning, Christmas Day.

ACT I
Scene 1

(The Gruff and Tackleton Toy Shop, London, the day before Christmas, 1880. AT RISE: TACKLETON dusts toys on shelves behind the counter. BERTIE, ANDREW, and ELLEN, three children, look over and touch every toy not placed high on the shelves.)

BERTIE: I want a dolly just like this one!

ANDREW: No! A soldier wearing a sword!

ELLEN: What about a beautiful carriage?

BERTIE: Then I could put my doll in it and stroll about the park!

ANDREW: My soldier could protect your doll.

ELLEN: And we could cover her up all warm and nice!

BERTIE: Sir! Sir! *(TACKLETON turns around nastily.)*
How much is this dolly?

TACKLETON: *(Nastily.)* Too much for you!

ANDREW: We've got tuppence between us!

TACKLETON: Give me that, you street urchin!

ELLEN: But we'll give you the tuppence for the dolly.

TACKLETON: This doll costs three pounds! And I'd like to see the day when you can afford that!

BERTIE: Three pounds!

ANDREW: That's a king's ransom!

TACKLETON: To the likes of you it is!

ELLEN: And I don't suppose the carriage is worth a tuppence?

TACKLETON: I don't suppose it is!

(MRS. RICHMOND enters left.)

MRS. RICHMOND: Good morning, Mr. Tackleton!

TACKLETON: *(Sweetly.)* Why, Mrs. Richmond! What can I do for you today?

MRS. RICHMOND: I need to do a bit of Christmas shopping for my niece and nephew.

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TACKLETON: Certainly, madam. As you can see we've got everything a child's heart desires!

MRS. RICHMOND: That doll is lovely!

TACKLETON: Shall I wrap it up?

MRS. RICHMOND: No, I'll have my servants do that. But I will take that soldier ... it looks so cute in a little boy's hands. And the carriage ... and I'd like one of those ... and those ... and those ...

BERTIE: Lady? Do you need any more nieces and nephews?

ANDREW: We'd volunteer!

ELLEN: And you wouldn't even have to wrap anything up!

TACKLETON: Go on, you urchins! Get out of here at once!

(TACKLETON scares BERTIE, ANDREW, and ELLEN off left.)

TACKLETON: Ragamuffins!

MRS. RICHMOND: Every day there are more and more of them everywhere.

TACKLETON: A shame! And the worst thing is, there's plenty of room in the workhouse for 'em and plenty of work that can be done!

MRS. RICHMOND: Amen!

(CALEB and BERTHA enter right carrying boxes. Bertha is blind.)

CALEB: Excuse me, Mr. Tackleton ...

TACKLETON: I'm with a customer!

MRS. RICHMOND: Quite all right, Mr. Tackleton ... you can just put these on my account. Good day!

TACKLETON: A Merry Christmas to you, Mrs. Richmond!

(MRS. RICHMOND exits left.)

CALEB: Sorry to disturb you, sir ...

TACKLETON: At least you didn't ruin THAT sale!

BERTHA: Good morning, Mr. Tackleton.

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TACKLETON: Morning, Bertha. You've got all the doll clothes sewn?

BERTHA: I have.

CALEB: And all the Noah's arks you ordered are here, Mr. Tackleton. Twenty of 'em.

TACKLETON: They ought to sell today. Let me go upstairs and get you your money from the safe.

CALEB: If you don't mind, Mr. Tackleton.

TACKLETON: Yes, well, I s'pose you gotta get paid, though letting you live for free in the back room ought to be good enough considering the rent I could get for that place.

(TACKLETON exits right.)

BERTHA: Papa ... tell me again what the toy shop looks like!

CALEB: It's very big ... very grand. The shelves are all gold and there are three chandeliers that hold twenty candles each. The floor is marble and so shiny you can see yourself in it. On one shelf are all the beautiful dolls ... wearing every color you can imagine.

BERTHA: Do any of them look like me?

CALEB: None as beautiful!

BERTHA: And does he have stick ponies?

CALEB: A whole herd of 'em!

BERTHA: And beautiful doll houses?

CALEB: Yes ... and one so beautiful that the queen herself is coming to buy it for one of her nieces.

BERTHA: I'll bet the furniture is all gold and silk.

CALEB: That it is!

BERTHA: Can I touch it, Papa? Please?

CALEB: Oh, I don't think Mr. Tackleton would like you to touch something the queen herself is going to buy.

BERTHA: I promise I wouldn't break anything.

CALEB: Besides, it's too high on a shelf for you to reach ...

BERTHA: But you can! You're tall! You're over six feet!

CALEB: It's too high even for me!

BERTHA: Oh, well ... I can dream about it. And is Mr. Tackleton his usual smiling self?

End of Freeview

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