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Family Plays

The Ghost of Mr. Penny

Mystery
by
Rosemary G. Musil

The Ghost of Mr. Penny

Mystery. *By Rosemary G. Musil. Cast: 4m., 2 boys, 2 girls.* *The Ghost of Mr. Penny* is a mystery play with highlights of irresistible comedy. Playing with her friends in the abandoned stable of the old Penny estate, Sally discovers an easygoing tramp. Her nimble imagination conceives him to be the long-lost Mr. Penny. With the aid of a little circumstantial evidence, she persuades her friends to accept him as “Mr. Penny,” too. Late that night, they all creep into the old Penny house to help “Mr. Penny” recover the hidden treasure with which Sally’s imagination has provided him. In the spooky house they get separated, each thinks the other is a ghost, and the custodian of the house is nearly driven out of his wits by the strange happenings. They do not find a treasure, but “Mr. Penny” finds proof of Sally’s parentage. The next morning, when she is about to be taken off to the orphan’s home, it is “Mr. Penny” who saves the day. *Two sets. Modern costumes. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: G93.*

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By

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(THE GHOST OF MR. PENNY)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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To
SKIPPY
and his pals

The premiere production of *The Ghost of Mr. Penny* was given in March, 1939, by the Children's Theatre of Evanston, Illinois, under the direction of Miss Winifred Ward.

The Ghost of Mr. Penny

CHARACTERS

BILL. A tramp, good-natured, easy-going, lovable.

LEWIS. Twelve years old, whose ambition is to be a “tough guy.”

TOMMY. Lewis’ friend and pupil.

SALLY. Playmate to Lewis and Tommy, a gallant and spirited girl.

ELLEN. Another playmate, rather prim and cautious.

PHINEAS. An awkward boy of 18 or so.

MR. JENKINS. A fussy little middle-aged man.

MR. SIMMONS. Ellen’s father, and the neighborhood policeman.

SCENES

ACT I:

Scene: The abandoned coach-house of the old Penny estate, late one afternoon in autumn.

ACT II:

Scene: The living room of the Old Penny house, after dark, that evening.

ACT III:

Scene: The coach-house, the next morning.

The Ghost of Mr. Penny

ACT I

(Scene: The abandoned coach-house of an old estate. There are three openings in the set—the outside door URC, the wooden casement window ULC, and a door DL which leads into the harness room. There is a manger filled with straw R. The room looks dusty and neglected. Just below the window is a gas plate with boxes piled high upon it. The plate itself protected by an oil-cloth. A rickety old table occupies C and there are two matching chairs piled up against the door, which is locked and barred. An old rusty lantern hangs over the manger.)

AT RISE: *Stage is empty, but outside the window, someone can be heard approaching. The window swings open, revealing a man with a battered felt hat set on the back of his head. BILL is evidently a sailor of sorts, for he wears parts of a sailor costume. He is big and athletic-looking, though lazy, and in his prime of life. He may be 35 or 45. It is hard to tell, for he enjoys life, and his sense of humor and kindness have kept him young. He is neat, in spite of the battered felt hat, and a two-days' growth of beard. He opens the window cautiously, looks inside and expresses his delight in a long, low whistle. He throws a leg over the sill, steps onto the boxes and into the room. He is carrying some provisions tied up in a bandanna handkerchief. He pushes the window closed and looks about him with pleasure, giving out a big sigh of contentment. Then he begins a more detailed examination of the premises.*

He peeps into the harness-room, finding everything to his taste. He crosses to C and tries the table for dust, testing it with a gingerly finger. He brushes his hands off with elaborate care, then spotting the manger R, he crosses and punches the straw to test it for bedding. It all suits him down to a T and he begins to make preparations for a formal supper. Taking a handful of straw, he dusts the table efficiently, then unstacks the two chairs

and dusts them, arranging them at the table, as for a banquet. Then, spying the oil-cloth, he pulls it out and spreads it over the table, straightening it daintily. He puts his bandanna on the table and opens it up, taking out spoon, knife and fork. Placing these carefully, he casts a critical eye over the whole and decides something is missing. He snaps his fingers and springs out the window, returning almost instantly with a handful of golden-rod, which he crams down into the neck of an old bottle which is found among the boxes and debris.

Surveying his handiwork with pride, BILL beams happily, and draws a can from his bandanna. Then he pulls a can-opener from his pocket and starts to tackle the can. The can-opener offers difficulties, and BILL is still trying to make it work, when a voice is heard outside calling, and he stops to listen attentively.

TOMMY (*outside*). Lewis! Hey Lewie! I shot you. You're dead! Leeewie!

(The voice grows fainter, but a scuffling at the window warns BILL, who hastily puts the can-opener in his pocket, gathers up his things, and piles into the manger. The window opens as he does so, and LEWIS, a little boy about 12, climbs in, carrying a home-made shotgun. He squats down beside the table, waiting. The voice of his pursuer comes closer.)

TOMMY (*cont'd*). Lewie! ... Leewwie! Quit your hidin' and come on back here! You're dead! ... Lew ... I bet I know where you're hidin' at!

(TOMMY climbs up on a box from outside, opens the window and crawls in. He is about the same age and size of LEWIS and carries a toy pistol.)

LEWIS. Bang! Bang! ... I got ya! (*Runs out from behind the table.*)

TOMMY. Ah, you did not. I got you outside by the house. You were dead before you came in here!

LEWIS. I was not. You just got me in the shoulder.

(SALLY "yoo-hoo's" from back in the deep yard surrounding the coach house.)

SALLY (*offstage*). Leeewis! ... Tommieeee! Hey, Tommy, I want to play too!

LEWIS. It's Sally! Quick, shut the window! We don't want any ol' girls playing in here.

(The boys slam the window shut, and pull the bar across it.)

SALLY (*at the window*). Tommy! Tommy Higgins! ... I saw you slam this window. Open it up. I want to play in the coach house too.

TOMMY. Ah, go away.

LEWIS. We're playin' G-Men. Girls can't be G-men.

SALLY. I'll be a G-woman then.

(The boys think this remark terribly funny. They go off into gales of derisive laughter.)

BOYS. Ha, ha, ha! She'll be a G-woman. Silly old girls think they can be G-women!

SALLY (*outside*). I've got as much right in there as you have.

TOMMY. Ah, go cook a radish!

(Overcome with this brilliant retort, the boys howl with laughter, and slap each other on the back.)

SALLY. You open this window! The coach house doesn't belong to you.

LEWIS. It doesn't belong to you either.

SALLY. Well, anyway, you let me in!

TOMMY (*whispering*). Don't answer, and maybe she'll go away.

SALLY. You let me in, or I'll—I'll bust the door down!

LEWIS. She'll bust the door down! Ha! Ha! That's good!

TOMMY. Ho! Ha! Ol' doors got about a million bolts in it, I reckon, but she's gonna bust it in! That's good!

SALLY. All right. I'll show you.

(SALLY throws her weight against the door. The boys are surprised at her attempt.)

TOMMY. She's try in't it!

LEWIS. Of all the silly ...

(The rusty old door, weak in the hinges, suddenly gives way, and SALLY falls headlong upon it, into the coach house. For a moment, no one can speak from surprise. Then, SALLY gets up slowly, rubbing certain parts.)

SALLY. Gee, I did it!

TOMMY. Gosh!

LEWIS. She busted the door in!

SALLY. I told you I would.

(The boys examine the door. SALLY smooths her dress and hair.)

TOMMY. Look, the hinges were rusty and they busted right off!

LEWIS. Yeah ... Hey, hadn't we better set up the door?

(SALLY has taken off her shoe and is hopping about trying to find the paper she lost out of it.)

TOMMY. I say we had. What if somebody saw it busted in! Come on, Sally, help us put the door back.

SALLY. Wait a minute, I've got to find the paper out of my shoe.

LEWIS. Paper out of your shoe?

SALLY. Yes, there's a hole in the sole, and I'll ruin my stocking if I don't keep a paper in it.

LEWIS *(picking up folded paper)*. This it?

SALLY. Yes ... Thanks! *(Sits on chair and puts paper back in shoe.)* Now! ... Do you think we can pick it up?

TOMMY. Grab hold of here and shove it as you raise it!

(The children set the door up, and wonder of wonders, it jams into the doorway and stands by itself.)

TOMMY *(cont'd)*. Gee! It sticks by itself!

SALLY. Careful, it might fall down!

(The children hold their hands out for a minute, then breathe easier as they see it is going to stand.)

LEWIS. Nope, she really sticks ... Can't even tell it was knocked down!

SALLY. We'd better get away, in case the wind blows it over, or something!

(They back off and turn to the table, leaning on it. Sally sits in one of the chairs.)

TOMMY *(examining the table suddenly)*. Hey look!

SALLY. What?

TOMMY. There's oil-cloth on the table!

LEWIS. Gee, yes, and the chairs are drawn up too, just like somebody had put them there! I never noticed that before!

SALLY. Do you suppose somebody's been here besides us?

LEWIS. Who could have?

TOMMY. Maybe it was the ghost!

SALLY. The ghost!

LEWIS *(derisively)*. What ghost?

TOMMY *(lowering his voice and looking about him)*. The ghost of Mr. Penny!

SALLY. Of all the silly things! There isn't any such thing as ghosts!

LEWIS. I don't know. They say the big house is haunted.

TOMMY. Yeah, and old Mr. Penny's ghost walks up and down the steps at night, looking for his little boy that shot himself accidentally with a gun!

SALLY. Oh, that's too silly for words! Mr. Penny isn't even dead!

TOMMY. No? Then where is he?

SALLY. Nobody knows. After his little boy shot himself, Mrs. Penny died from shock, and Mr. Penny just wandered away and went to sea.

TOMMY. Well, people have seen his ghost wandering about the big house at night, so he must be dead!

SALLY. The idea! If there'd been a ghost wandering around old Mr. Herman would have seen him, wouldn't he? And Mr. Herman says Mr. Penny isn't dead and that he's coming back some day. That's the reason he stays on there in the big house, waiting for Mr. Penny to come back!

LEWIS. If Mr. Herman saw that ol' ghost wanderin' around, he'd have him arrested fer trespassin'!

SALLY. Shh! Somebody's calling!

(Children listen.)

ELLEN *(outside window)*. Sally, are you in there?

SALLY. It's Ellen! *(Opens window.)* Hello, Ellen, come on in!

ELLEN *(standing at the window)*. I don't want to climb in the window, I'll get my dress dirty. *(Superiorly.)*

LEWIS *(mischievously)*. Then why don't you come in by the door?

ELLEN. Is the door open?

LEWIS. Sure it is! Sally came in that way!

ELLEN. Well for pity sakes, why didn't you say so, Sally?

SALLY. Oh, but Ellen, you—

(ELLEN starts to turn toward the door and LEWIS puts his hand over SALLY's mouth to keep her from telling.)

LEWIS. Just push against the door real hard!

SALLY *(jerking free from LEWIS)*. Don't you do it, Ellen!

(LEWIS grabs her again and keeps her from talking.)

ELLEN. Well, I guess I can do it if you did, Sally Andrews!

LEWIS. Sure you can! Push real hard!

(ELLEN pushes, the door falls in and the boys howl with laughter. ELLEN is mad as a wet cat and SALLY runs to her solicitously to help her up.)

ELLEN. You think you are funny, don't you, Lewis Bleck?

LEWIS *(laughing)*. No! I think you are!

SALLY. I tried to tell you, Ellen!

ELLEN. Well, I came over here to tell you something exciting, but if you're going to act mean—

(ELLEN starts out the door, but SALLY brings her back.)

SALLY. Oh, don't pay any attention to the old boys, Ellen!

LEWIS *(helping TOMMY lift the door back into place)*. Sure, we're sorry. What's doing?

TOMMY. Did your father capture a bandit or somethin'?

ELLEN. No. Mr. Herman's dead!

LEWIS, TOMMY & SALLY. Mr. Herman!

SALLY. Oh, when did it happen?

ELLEN. Sometime yesterday, I guess. My mama went over to the big house at supper time to take him some hot soup, and he was lying on the table. He'd had a heart attack. He'd been writing, the papers were scattered all over ... Mama went over and swept them all up in the fireplace!

SALLY. For goodness sake!

TOMMY. Gee!

LEWIS. Poor old Mr. Herman can't have us arrested for trespassin' now, I reckon!

ELLEN. And that isn't the worst of it!

SALLY. No?

ELLEN. My mother went back over there late last night, intending to burn the papers she'd swept up in the fireplace ... and she ... *(Voice breaks with the weight of her horrible tale.)* she took my father's flashlight and went into the old house, and right away ... right away ... *(Voice breaks again.)*

TOMMY. Yeah, go on!

ELLEN. She saw it!

SALLY. What?

ELLEN. The ghost, of course!

SALLY. Aw, that's silly!

ELLEN. Yes? Well, maybe you think my mama would tell a story. Maybe you think ...

TOMMY. Gosh, Ellen, what was it like?

ELLEN. It was a kind of head hanging in space, and pink cheeks, and purple ...

LEWIS. Whiskers!

ELLEN. Whiskers ... er ...

(The spell is broken, the children laugh at ELLEN's story.)

ELLEN *(cont'd)*. It did not! It had whiskers, though ... and a purple tie!

LEWIS. A pink ghost with purple whiskers! Ha, ha!

(Children laugh at her and ELLEN is angry.)

ELLEN. All right, smarties, laugh all you please, but I guess my mama knows what she saw. She was too scared to even burn the papers!

SALLY. Poor Mr. Herman. All these years, he's kept that house open, waiting for Mr. Penny to come back. And now—he's dead.

LEWIS. Gosh, it gives me the creeps.

TOMMY. Let's don't think about it. Let's play G-men. You girls go away now. We want to play G-men.

SALLY. We'll be G-women, and play too.

LEWIS. Of all the silly—there isn't any such thing as G-women! *(Disgustedly.)* G-women!

TOMMY. Why don't we play Secret Service? They got girls in that.

SALLY. Sure! Let's do!

LEWIS. Ah, we don't want to play with girls! *(Throws his gun down on the table, and looks disgusted.)*

ELLEN. You'd better treat Sally nice, cause she's got to go to the orphan asylum tomorrow, and you won't get a chance to play with her any more.

(The children all look at SALLY pityingly. SALLY is serious, too.)

LEWIS. Gee, Sally, do you haff to go tomorrow?

SALLY. I—I reckon so.

TOMMY. Gee, Sally, I'm sure sorry.

SALLY *(rallying and attempting to make light of it)*. Oh, it's ... it's just a temporary arrangement, Uncle Jim says ... I'm just going to stay long enough for Uncle Jim to get well, then he's going to get me back again. Besides, it really isn't an orphan asylum, Ellen ... It's a boarding house for children, and it's got swings and slides, and everything.

(The children are sad, they love SALLY.)

TOMMY *(impulsively)*. Here, you can have my gun, Sally.

LEWIS. Mine too.

SALLY *(lighthearted once more, for she has learned to take her troubles a step at a time)*. Thanks ... but what will Ellen do?

ELLEN (*airily*). Oh, I could have a real gun if I wanted it!

TOMMY. Gee, Ellen, you mean your father's policeman's gun?

SALLY. Ellen, you wouldn't!

ELLEN. I could if I wanted to. I saw where he keeps it, last night!

LEWIS. Gosh, is it loaded?

ELLEN. Of course. Policemen always keep their guns loaded.

TOMMY. Gee! Go get it, Ellen!

ELLEN. All right, wait here a minute!

(ELLEN turns and goes to the window to climb out of it, but the tramp cannot stand by now. He hurries out of the stall, crosses quickly to the window, shuts it and bars the way.)

BILL. Oh, no! No, no, princess! Don't do it!

(The children scream, and scramble together in a heap DL.)

BILL (*cont'd*). Guns is bad medicine fer children ... er anybody fer that matter!

ELLEN. Who—who are you?

TOMMY. You'd better let us out of here!

LEWIS. Yeah, her father's a policeman.

ELLEN. And he'll arrest you for trespassing!

BILL. Aw, shucks! Don't be afraid of me ... I wouldn't hurt no one, and I like kids! I wouldn't 'a let you know I was here, but shucks, I couldn't stand by and let the princess here get her pappy's loaded gun ... Why, you kids might of shot each other! That would have been awful!

ELLEN. You were hiding in there!?! (*Pointing to the stall.*)

BILL. Aw, now!

TOMMY. Yes, and you'd better get out of here!

BILL. Aw, shucks, I'm not a goin' to hurt nothin' er nobody; I wasn't goin' t' stay long nohow. I'll go now if you say so. But, listen, kids, about guns—guns don't do nobody any good ever! Not even grown up people, let alone kids!

LEWIS. Yeah? Well, I'll bet they do G-men some good!

BILL. G-men? Why, they don't even use 'em most of the time!

TOMMY. Aw, like fun they don't!

(The boys have forgotten to be afraid, and come out and speak boldly with the gentle BILL.)

BILL. Naw, they don't. They use their brains to catch crooks! Take this here feller at the head of the G-men ... you know what he says?

LEWIS. What?

(The children relax perfectly now, grouping themselves about BILL who is at the table.)

BILL. Well, he says only cowards use guns ... you know, people who are afraid! And he never uses a gun 'ceptin' in self-defense, 'cause he's seen so many cowardly people dependin' on guns to make 'em brave, that he's downright ashamed t' have a gun!

LEWIS. Honest?

BILL. Sure, that's what he says ... and me, I never like guns! I don't even like to see kids play with toy guns, 'cause I've seen too much grief they've caused in the world.

TOMMY. You mean like in wars?

BILL. Sure, and in peace times too. So don't ever fool with your pappy's loaded gun, princess. Why, didn't that poor little Penny boy get killed playin' with his pappy's gun? Just like you were goin' t' do!

(SALLY looks at him and catches her breath in sudden excitement. Maybe this tramp is Mr. Penny come back!)

SALLY. Why! How did you know that?

BILL *(unconsciously contributing to her thought)*. Oh, I know a lot of things that would surprise you!

ELLEN. You're just a tramp, that's all, and you can't boss us around! I'll tell my father ... he's a policeman, and he'll have you—

BILL *(patiently)*. Yeah, I know ... arrested fer trespassin' ... but first we got to sort of figure out which one of us is trespassin', ain't we?

ELLEN. Which one of us? Why, you are, of course!

BILL. Well, that depends. Now this here coach house don't belong to you kids, does it?

ELLEN. It doesn't belong to you either! It belongs to Mr. Penny, only he's dead!

SALLY (*quickly*). No, he isn't dead, either!

BILL (*amused*). Now, you see there? You don't know much about it after all, do you? Why, for all you know, maybe I own the place!

SALLY. Oh! Oh, are you ...

ELLEN. Own the place! Why, you're just a tramp!

TOMMY. Are you?

BILL. Am I what?

TOMMY. Just a tramp like Ellen says?

BILL. Me a tramp? Shucks, matey, I'm a sailor!

TOMMY. A sailor?

SALLY (*suddenly sure of herself*). Of course he is!

(BILL looks at her surprised.)

ELLEN. Oh, what do you know about it? If you aren't a tramp, why were you hidin' over there in the manger?

BILL. I just stopped in the manger there to take a little seesta!

LEWIS. A what?

BILL. Seesta! You know ... a beauty nap. I was kinda tired when I got off the train this morning, so ...

ELLEN. I knew it! You're just a tramp that comes off of freight trains. My papa's arrested them plenty of times. He'll arrest you, too!

BILL. Aw now, princess!

SALLY. Her name's Ellen.

BILL. Is it now? She's the very spittin' image of a princess I once knowed in the South Sea islands, time I got wrecked off the coast of Singapore.

TOMMY. Gee, are you a sailor sure enough?

BILL. Me a sailor? Why shucks, matey, look here!

(BILL rolls up his sleeve, and the children crowd about him, even ELLEN.)