

CHRISTMAS IN THE COUNTRY

An adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's "A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS"

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CHRISTMAS IN THE COUNTRY

SYNOPSIS: No better place for Sophie Vaughan than Aunt Plumy's farmhouse in Vermont to spend the Christmas holidays and to decide whether she should marry Mr. Hammond, her millionaire suitor or wait for her true hero. The warmth of the family, the beauty of the landscape and the genuine simple ways of country life impress her immensely and when her friends, Emily and Leonard arrive, the merriment is complete.

While they all make plans for the big day, the city people find out that they have a lot to learn from the country folks' genuine ways and realize the importance of simple values that are easily missed in the bustle and hustle of city life.

Of course, true love finds its way, and Sophie soon realizes who her heart belongs to.

CHARACTERS

SOPHIE VAUGHAN 19 years old.

PLUMY BASSET Sophie's aunt, ruddy cheeks, cheerful farmwoman.

RUTH BASSET 17 years old. Sweet and shy.

SAUL BASSET In his twenties. A brawny farmer.

EMILY HERRICK 19 years old. Sophisticated, elegant.

LEONARD RANDAL In his twenties. A writer. Snobbish, intellectual type.

JOHN 20 years old. Ruth's fiancé. A minister.

GREGORY HAMMOND In his thirties. Sophie's suitor, refined.

SETTING: The living room of a country house. A table, chairs, a couch, a rocking chair, a fireplace, a Christmas tree.

TIME: Nineteenth century.

Scene 1: Two days before Christmas. Afternoon.

Scene 2: The day before Christmas. Afternoon.

DURATION: 20 minutes.

COSTUMES: The characters are dressed according to the late nineteenth century style.

Emily, Randal and Gregory are elegantly dressed while the others dress like country people.

At the beginning of Scene Two, Emily wears a crimson gown and Ruth an old wedding dress.

PROPS: Vases, Christmas decorations, a clock, a photo. (On stage), Holly, mistletoe, a letter (Sophie), knitting needles (Plumy), trays, cups, plates (Plumy, Ruth), cigar-case (Leonard), chunks of wood (Saul). a box with a ring (Gregory)

SCENE 1

AT RISE: (*PLUMY is seated in the rocking chair, knitting. SOPHIE enters with a bunch of holly and mistletoe.*)

PLUMY

What lovely evergreen, dear.

SOPHIE

They're ready for their Christmas duty, Aunt Plumy.

(*Puts the boughs in the vase.*)

PLUMY

Nothing merrier than those red berries at this time of the year.

(*Looks at the clock.*)

Saul should be any minute now.

SOPHIE

(*Loudly.*)

Hurry, Sophie, hurry! Emily and Leonard are about to arrive and you haven't finished with the decorations yet.

PLUMY

Let me help you.

(*Puts some sprigs in the other vases.*)

SOPHIE

You've been so nice to let me invite my friends over.

PLUMY

Still can't figure out how you convinced them to exchange the city's holiday fever with the wilds of Vermont.

SOPHIE

A letter, auntie, simply a letter, where I promised to make this Christmas a real old-fashioned frolic in the coziest farmhouse there is.

PLUMY

I'm glad you like it here; I was afraid you'd find it boring.

SOPHIE

(*Hugs her.*)

How could I with such a dear aunt and two adorable cousins?

PLUMY

What about your millionaire? He'll surely be missing you.

SOPHIE

The problem is if I miss him. I came here because I needed some distance to decide whether accept Gregory's proposal and become a queen of society or wait till my true hero comes by.

PLUMY

I'm sure your heart will tell you what to do when the right guy crosses your way, just like mine did with Mr. Basset.

(RUTH enters.)

RUTH

Hey Sophie, I saw Saul taking out the old sleigh with only Punch leading it. Wouldn't the double one and span have been better with those city folks?

SOPHIE

I myself asked him to do so; everything must remain in keeping, that's the only way my friends can get a taste of genuine country life.

RUTH

Oh my, I'm afraid I'm not up to the situation; whatever can I say to a novelist and a true lady?

SOPHIE

(Takes her hands.)

Just be your simple self and everything will be fine.

PLUMY

For sure, I, too, shall say things that will look quite singular to them.

SOPHIE

Will you two stop worrying? You're the best company there is, believe me.

PLUMY

Well, girls, better check if the pies are ready.

(Exits.)

(Sound of horse pulling up.)

RUTH

Why, that's certainly Saul with your friends, Sophie.

(SOPHIE runs to the window.)

SOPHIE

Yes, yes, it's them.

(Rushes to the door.)

RUTH

(Runs to the door that opens on the kitchen. Shouts.)

Mom, come, Miss Herrick and Mr. Randal have arrived.

(SAUL, EMILY, LEONARD enter.)

SOPHIE
(Hugs EMILY.)

My dear, dear, Emily!

LEONARD
Nice to see you again, Sophie.

SOPHIE
Let me introduce you to Saul's sister, Ruth.

EMILY
Hello there.
(Takes off her hat and mantle.)

LEONARD
A most charming cousin.

RUTH
Thank you, Sir. I hope you had a good journey.

LEONARD
We did, the countryside is absolutely lovely, never seen so much snow.

(PLUMY enters, has some flour on her apron, hands.)

SOPHIE
And here is my dear aunt Plumy.

EMILY
So pleased to meet you, Mrs. Basset.

PLUMY
Pleased to have you here, my niece's friends are mine as well.

SAUL
Now these folks might want to see their rooms and refresh, mom. I'll get their luggage and carry it upstairs.

(Exits.)

PLUMY
And I'll get them something to eat and a warm cup of coffee.

SOPHIE
Come along, guys, the staircase's that way.

(EMILY, LEONARD follow SOPHIE out.)

RUTH
(Sighs.)

How pretty and elegant is Miss Emily. I believe I wouldn't mind living in the city at all.

PLUMY

That's no place for folks like us, too many fellows gadding about and getting their heads so full of foolish notions that they forget all the useful things their mothers taught them.

RUTH

Now, now, mom, you know I'd never do that.

PLUMY

Better get those pies out of the oven, Ruth, our guests must be dead hungry.

(PLUMY, RUTH exit as SOPHIE and EMILY enter.)

EMILY

What a lovely view from my window. This place reminds me of the snowy hills of Switzerland.
(Looks around.) Wow! That's a big tree.

SOPHIE

Saul brought it in and Ruth and I decorated it.

EMILY

Say, your cousin's truly handsome, a quite different type from your Mr. Hammond.

SOPHIE

My Mr. Hammond? I haven't made a decision yet.

EMILY

You'd be mad to let go such a millionaire.

SOPHIE

Couldn't there be things more important than millions?

EMILY
(Sneers.)

A sleigh ride in the snow, perhaps?

SOPHIE

Now, Emily, I know you're saying that for my own good,

(LEONARD enters.)

SOPHIE

but I'm not too sure I'd be happy with Gregory despite his money and position.

LEONARD

Better listen to your friend's advice, my dear; she knows well how the world turns. She'd marry me on the spot if only I asked her.

EMILY

You silly boy!

LEONARD

Ever seen a more refined and well-off guy than me?

SOPHIE

Neither a more conceited one, my dear Leonard.

EMILY

I'm afraid our Miss Vaughan has set her eyes on her cousin, quite taciturn, but so, so comely...

LEONARD

A true man of muscles too. He lifted your trunk in the wink of an eye, Emily; (*Sneers.*) should have been called Goliath.

SOPHIE

Sarcasm is forbidden here and sincerity the order of the day, guys. You are country folks too now.

EMILY

(*Laughs.*)

What a quick transformation.

SOPHIE

It will do you good to try their simple ways for a few days.

LEONARD

Sophie's right,

(*SAUL enters.*)

LEONARD

give me a fork and I'll go straight to the barn.

SAUL

Want to do some work, buddy? We're always in need of extra hands here. You can start feeding the pigs.

LEONARD

You want *me*, a novelist, to feed the pigs?

SAUL

What's wrong with that? We eat, they eat.

(*PLUMY enters followed by RUTH with coffee and pies.*)

PLUMY

Time for some refreshment, guys.

(PLUMY serves the coffee, RUTH the pie.)

LEONARD

Why, this is most kind of you, Mrs. Basset.

SOPHIE

Aunt Plumy's apple pie is the best there is.

SAUL

(To LEONARD.)

Say, why won't you tell us something about your book? We've been reading it as it comes out in the magazine.

RUTH

Will Lady Margaret marry the duke, Mr. Randal?

LEONARD

Do you really read my serial up here?

PLUMY

Sakes alive, why shouldn't we? We are country folks, but we do appreciate light literature as well as city people.

LEONARD

I wouldn't mind your opinion, Mrs. Basset.

PLUMY

I'm no judge, but methinks you'd better hunt up more common folks, young man. Books are more sustaining if they're full of everyday people and simple things just like bread and butter.

LEONARD

Like bread and butter, ma'am?

EMILY

Hey, Leonard, you look as if a pail of cold water had just been poured over you.

PLUMY

Help yourself to another slice, Miss.

EMILY

No thank you, I'm full.

PLUMY

I hope you're not dyspeptic, dear.

EMILY

Simply a bit tired.

LEONARD

You know, city life is so demanding, friends, parties; during ball seasons we don't go to bed till dawn.

RUTH

Really?

PLUMY

Hum... always thought that midnight was an unheard-of hour for Christians to be up.

(LEONARD sees SAUL's photo in uniform.)

LEONARD

So you were you in the army, Saul...

SOPHIE

Oh yes, he is *Major* Basset now although he prefers his plain name.

SAUL

Now, now Sophie... And you, Leonard? What regiment were you in?

LEONARD

Unfortunately, I couldn't enlist because I was abroad at the time, quite busy with a novel.

EMILY

Our country had to do without him, Major.

SAUL

Too bad, for I believe our war was a finer story than any you could find in Europe, with lots of true heroes and heroines.

LEONARD

A good reason to let me hear your martial memories.

SAUL

Have to fodder the cattle first; heroes can wait, pigs can't.

(Exits.)

SOPHIE

Let's tell them about our Christmas party, Ruth.

EMILY

A Christmas party? Wow!

RUTH

All our friends are coming up, the village fiddler too.

SOPHIE

Aunt Plumy will let us wear some of her great-grand-folks' costumes. Before going to bed, I'll show you yours, Emily.

PLUMY

(Gets up.)

Have to get supper ready now.

