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Family Plays

A GHOST FOR ROSANDA

A mystery by
HERMAN O. AMMANN



A GHOST FOR ROSANDA

Herman O. Ammann's penetrating analysis of his fellow humans added such delight to his adaptations of *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*, *The Little Match Girl*, *The Magic Well* and *The Canterbury Tale From the Wife of Bath*. Ammann now turns his typewriter toward the world of ghosts—for which we are grateful because, as every director discovers when he searches for one, good ghost-story plays are in very short supply. A scary—but not too scary—play is hard to find, especially with excellent roles for six girls, upper-elementary to high-school age.

Mystery. By Herman O. Ammann. *Cast: 2m., 6w.* Four school girls arrive at a dilapidated, lonely old house planning to meet Rosanda, great-aunt of one of them, and spend two nights making up ghost stories. The point: Rosanda, who has lived in France for many years, now wants to return to her childhood home and advertise haunted house tours to make money. Rosanda arrives and describes a long-ago, imaginary murder that took place in an old chest in the room. The girls' fears continue to rise after Rosanda leaves, and they take turns telling ghost stories which culminate in the near death of one girl in the old chest. Exhausted and asleep at last, the girls are unaware that when they awake and hurry away they will see the real ghosts of Rosanda, her French maid, Yvette, and their mutual lover, Chadwick. The murder was real, and the house is already haunted. The play is suitable for presentation by middle schools or high schools. It is an ideal piece with which stage crafters can practice their skills in lighting, sound and special effects. However, it can also be presented without these technical effects. *A director's script is available containing drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging, and discussion of characterization, plot and theme. It also suggests the complete blocking and full stage directions for all movement and business. Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: GB5.*

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A Mystery Drama in One Act

by

Herman O. Ammann

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

To little girls everywhere
who think it would be fun
to haunt a house . . .

BOOO!

A GHOST FOR ROSANDA

Cast

ROSANDA, once upon a time a plantation belle

YVETTE, her French maid

CHADWICK, an adventurer

MELANIE, Rosanda's grand niece

CLARA, Melanie's sarcastic friend

LORAINE, Melanie's quiet friend

PENNY, a prissy little missy

MR. WIGGS, a creepy neighbor

△

PLACE: *An old, dilapidated house*

TIME: *The present*

ABOUT THE PLAY

Herman Ammann – whose penetrating analysis of his fellow humans added such delight to his adaptations of “The Steadfast Tin Soldier,” “The Little Match Girl,” “The Magic Well,” and “A Canterbury Tale from the Wife of Bath” – now turns his typewriter toward the world of ghosts.

For which we are grateful . . . because, as every director discovers when he searches for one, good ghost-story plays are in very, very short supply.

In this one a group of school girls – high school or junior high age – decide to haunt a house at the request of Rosanda Iverson, the great-aunt of one of them. Rosanda grew up in the house and, when she was a teenager, fell in love there with a handsome but reprehensible adventurer named Chadwick. Chadwick was not only carrying on a flirtation with the rich and desirable Rosanda, but also with Rosanda’s French maid Yvette.

As a result of his double-timing, something happened to Chadwick . . . we’re not sure what, but there is some possibility that he may have been locked in an old chest and left to perish.

All this happened 60 years ago, and now Rosanda, who spent the intervening years in Europe where she saw “haunted” castles become lucrative tourist attractions, decides to return to her birthplace and convert it into a commercially profitable “haunted house.”

As it turns out, the house may already be haunted . . . and the four young girls who find themselves alone in it experience some blood-chilling moments.

The play is suitable for presentation by senior or junior high schools. It is an ideal piece with which stagecrafters can practice their skills in lighting, sound, and special effects. However, it can also be presented without these technical effects.

THE DIRECTOR'S PRODUCTION SCRIPT

Stage directions are kept to a minimum in this Acting Script to give cast members an opportunity to create their own business and movement. The **Director's Production Script** has full stage directions to help in achieving proper focus, picturization, balance, etc. The Production Script also includes a full discussion of characterization to help achieve the proper tone of fear and suspense. Detailed information and suggestions are given for lighting, set, costumes, make-up, and special effects.

A GHOST FOR ROSANDA

Curtain rises on a dark stage. A ghostly figure carries a dim lantern slowly across the stage from Right to Left; all we can see of the figure is her face, illuminated by the lantern's glow. It is a pretty face emerging from the top of a black dress and framed by a white maid's cap. We will later recognize it as the face of YVETTE, Rosanda's maid of long ago. The figure pauses briefly at Center and lowers the lantern, allowing us to see an old chest. There is the sound of a woman crying softly, but we cannot be sure whether the sounds come from the figure carrying the lamp or from the chest.

FEMALE VOICE (Yvette). Chadwick, *mon cher*, Chadwick. Please return.

[The voice sobs continuously, and we now realize that the crying we heard is coming from this ghostly, hapless figure. And then we hear a muffled male voice, which surely must be emanating from the chest. It is calling, pleading – a ghastly cry for help.]

MALE VOICE (Chadwick). Rosanda, Rosanda, Rosanda.

[The figure carrying the lantern disappears. After a moment of complete darkness, stage lights dim up slowly until we can see the living room of an old house. There are no actors on stage. The furniture is old and in poor condition. At Stage Right are a fireplace and a small stool. On the mantle is an old clock (not running). At Stage Center is the chest we saw in the lantern's light. It is an old sea chest with a large snaplock. At Stage Right

are a table and two chairs. One chair has fallen over; the other leans against the table at a haphazard angle. The outside entrance to the room is a door at Up Right. At Left, above the table, is the entrance to the kitchen. At Up Right Center is a window and at Up Left Center another window. Tattered remains of old curtains or shades may adorn the windows, but they must not completely cover the opening, because through the windows we can see the trees of a forested area. The room has a generally dilapidated, musty tone which an imaginative mind might call a "haunted house look."

A few moments after the stage is lighted, the front door creaks slowly open on its rusty hinges – and then we hear the hesitant voices of a group of girls.

MELANIE'S VOICE. *[Off]* Go on in – if the door doesn't fall to pieces.

[Three girls enter the room, followed by the fourth, MELANIE, who is obviously in charge. They are all about the same age – perhaps 13 or 14 (or a little older or younger). They wander around the room curiously, looking it over. Each is carrying a bedroll.]

MELANIE. Well, what do you think?

CLARA. Melanie Iverson, if you brought us all the way down here just to spend the weekend in an old dilapidated house, I am going to choke you.

LORAINÉ. She'll do it, too.

MELANIE. Don't go jumping to conclusions. There's more to it than just spending a couple of nights.

PENNY. You said you had a letter that would explain it. Why don't you read the letter.

CLARA. *[Throwing down her bedroll]* Not even any place to sleep!

MELANIE. That's why we brought our bedrolls. Put them on the floor . . . *[trying to decide where]* over here.

LORAINÉ. For my part, I'm ready to bed down right

now. That's some walk from the bus stop carrying all this stuff – must be a mile. [*Puts her bedroll where Melanie indicated.*]

MELANIE. It's not that far and you know it. Besides, we've carried them a lot farther than that on weekend outings and no one's complained.

PENNY. They don't seem to weigh as much when we're having fun. [*She puts hers beside Loraine's and Melanie's.*]

MELANIE. We'll have fun here, Penny. You'll see.

CLARA. Read the letter, Melanie. And it had better be good.

MELANIE. [*Takes letter from purse*] Okay, gang. Just settle down and I'll read. [*The other girls sit on the floor or on their bedrolls.*] It's from a great aunt of mine who has lived in Paris for about sixty years. When she was a girl about our age, she lived here, but her father was transferred to Paris. Although they never returned, they had someone keep this place in repair . . . that is, until about ten years ago.

CLARA. So . . . ?

MELANIE. So now she's coming back and she's going to live here – and she wants us to . . . help her.

LORAINÉ. How could we help an old woman? I mean – how old do you have to be to be a great aunt?

MELANIE. Aunt Rosanda must be about seventy-six.

LORAINÉ. Then what could we do for her? We aren't nurses.

MELANIE. No need to be. She's in excellent health according to her letter. Here, I'll read it to you – the parts you'd be interested in. Let's see, she says: "So you see, if you can arrange to meet me at the old house near Wolf's Junction on" – well, it's today's date – "we can get started with the project. But don't forget to bring along a few friends from your school."

CLARA. What's the project?

MELANIE. That's the surprise. Aunt Rosanda wants us to help her make . . . *a haunted house* out of this old place!

CLARA. A haunted house? Why? What for?

MELANIE. She wants to live here. It's where she was born, and she said she wants to live out her days in the same place. She got the idea from all those castles and things around Europe – it seems they all have ghosts in them and it is a great attraction for tourists. We are going to make up some ghost stories and spread it around that *this* house is haunted. Tourists will hear about it and come around to see for themselves.

PENNY. That's your idea of fun?

CLARA. Doesn't look like much of a problem. Say, wouldn't Miss Petite flip her wig! Just imagine – four girls from Miss Petite's Charm School for Junior Misses spending the weekend haunting a house!

LORAINÉ. She'd die. That's what she'd do, just die.

PENNY. That's the last thing she was trying to teach us.

LORAINÉ. La de da. How are we going to haunt a house when we are all so "chawming"! We will just have to invent a new type of ghost – a "chawming" ghost. Look at me . . . *[She puts a book on her head and walks ladylike.]* I am a level-headed "chawming" ghost.

CLARA. *[Curtseys to Lorainé]* I am most "chawmed" to meet you. But you look ridiculous walking around with that book on your head, Lorainé. Now, when a lady wants to be "chawming," why . . . she sits. But, of course, she doesn't look where the chair is because a gentleman is there to push one forward. *[She starts to sit.]*

PENNY. You'd better look, Clara. There isn't any gentleman here and you are going to miss the chair by about a foot.

CLARA. *[Looks quickly and backs up a step]* Thank you, my dear. Now, notice as I sit, I don't cross my legs – I mean limbs – at the knees – just daintily at the ankles . . . and then I swing my legs slightly, oh ever so slightly, to one side. That's the proper way for a lady to sit. And besides, when you sit properly, you look so comfortable that others, especially men, wait on you.

PENNY. That's beautiful, but I couldn't do it. It takes a tall girl to look "chawming" just sitting. As for me, I'm short, so I use another kind of charm.

MELANIE. [*Laughing*] Do it, Penny, do it. You are always so cute at it.

CLARA. Go on, Penny, we're watching.

PENNY. [*Walks coquettishly*] I'm a prissy little missy with a cute little figure . . . but stand back, boys . . . let me get a little bigger.

LORAINÉ. No wonder you barely passed. I'll never forget when Miss Petite caught you doing that. She almost swallowed her teeth.

CLARA. [*Not entirely approving*] Girls who rely on sex are debasing themselves.

MELANIE. Some girls are born with natural talent. Run through that again, Penny, so Clara can see it. She could use some nonsense once in a while; she's too serious.

PENNY. Well, if you insist. [*Begins her walk again*] I'm a prissy little – [*She turns her head to see if the girls are watching, and stops with a start. As we follow her eyes, we see – behind the other girls – an old woman with a pale and expressionless face standing there.*] Oh my! You startled me – I mean . . . who are you?

CLARA. Where did you come from?

MELANIE. [*Approaching the woman*] Could you by any chance be Aunt Rosanda?

ROSANDA. Aunt Rosanda? Then you would have to be my grand niece, Melanie.

MELANIE. [*Again approaching Rosanda a step or two*] Aunt Rosanda! Oh, I'm so glad you're here. [*She considers the propriety of embracing this unknown relative – what would Miss Petite advise? Before she can decide, ROSANDA takes a cold step backward, obviously not wanting to be embraced. MELANIE stops, a bit confused, then remembers her friends and her manners with a smile. She indicates each friend in turn.*] Aunt Rosanda, these are my school friends.

This is Clara, Loraine, and the one you saw doing that silly walk is Penny. *[Each girl stiffly and formally acknowledges the introduction, obviously ill at ease.]*

ROSANDA. Let's relax. I promise I will be much nicer than your Miss Petite.

MELANIE. We were just making fun of her to be doing something. We can't wait to hear about the ghosts you want here. How do we go about it?

ROSANDA. How to go about it . . . let me see. I believe the best way would be to tell you a ghost story and from it you might get some ideas. A long, long time ago I lived here with my parents. They were very strict with me and I wasn't allowed to see young men, although there were plenty that wanted to give me their attentions . . . one in particular, quite aristocratic looking. His name was Chadwick Barrington. Oh, he was a handsome devil, all right. We met secretly in out-of-the-way places . . . *[She pauses in reminiscence.]*

MELANIE. Aunt Rosanda! You were sneaking around!

ROSANDA. Not sneaking, dear, just taking an occasional walk in the woods or along the river. My young man would be there, and he would tell me stories of the river and I'd read to him from my book of verse.

LORAINÉ. It sounds terribly romantic.

CLARA. Did you fall in love?

ROSANDA. Of course I fell in love. What young girl wouldn't have? He'd been up and down the river a dozen times, way on up past Cairo, up the Ohio, and goodness knows where else.

MELANIE. Did he propose to you? If you were in love, I bet you found some way to get him to propose.

ROSANDA. Well . . . I used the book of love poems as a hint, and . . . it was just then that — *[She pauses, and seems to be looking far away — years away.]*

MELANIE. *[Trying to prompt politely]* But what does all this have to do with a ghost story?

ROSANDA. I'm trying to illustrate how you can take a

simple little love story and turn it into something bizarre . . . even terrifying. Let's use our imagination and make up an ending, shall we?

LORAINÉ. Sure! We're enraptured.

ROSANDA. Then I want you to look toward the table . . . pretend you are seeing it happen while I tell it. It's sixty years ago, and a little French maid named Yvette is dusting and cleaning. It is about this time of day.

[A maid, YVETTE, enters with a duster and hums gayly as she dusts. Her black dress and apron are the type worn 60 years ago. There is a knock on the front door.]

YVETTE. *[Cheerily]* Come in, Monsieur Chadwick!

CHADWICK. *[Opens the door, looks in curiously, sees Yvette, scowls. He wears a costume of 60 years ago.]* Why didn't you open the door, Yvette? Where's Miss Rosanda?

YVETTE. *[Running to him]* Oh, Monsieur Chadwick! *[She embraces him.]*

CHADWICK. *[Pushing her away, astonished]* What the devil do you think you are doing?

YVETTE. Oh, monsieur, the most wonderful thing has happened. I'm just bursting with happiness!

CHADWICK. Take your hands off me! Are you insane?

YVETTE. Not at all, my darling. We are alone here.

CHADWICK. We won't be for long. Where is Rosanda?

YVETTE. She's not here.

CHADWICK. *[Roughly]* When will she be here? She's expecting me. Answer my questions, you idiot!

YVETTE. Monsieur Chadwick, don't talk to me in such a way. Be kind to me. Be good and sweet as you were on the levee.

CHADWICK. Curse the levee! I told you then and it shouldn't be necessary to repeat myself . . . when I am with you there, it is a thing between the two of us. No one else, do you understand?

YVETTE. I understand, but now things are going to be different. There's no need for secrecy. I'm in love with you. You're my whole life . . . but you must know that.

CHADWICK. You are about to get us both in trouble, and if you persist in your nonsense, there won't be any more meetings on the levee. Now you understand? Do you?

YVETTE. You didn't mean it when you said you loved me?

CHADWICK. How stupid can you be? Why should I love a little river wench like you? You shouldn't even be out here – you should be scrubbing in the kitchen.

YVETTE. *[Sinks into a chair crying softly]* You were lying to me. All your sweet words, all lies. This last week . . . all I have been living for is to see you again, to have you hold me.

CHADWICK. All that is over between us! Now stop your sniveling. And what do you mean by sitting in my presence? I'm a guest in this house and you are a servant . . . act as one. Get to your feet and answer my question: Where is Rosanda?

YVETTE. *[Standing, deeply hurt]* She is not here – sir.

CHADWICK. I know that! Let's not go through it again. I'm going to shake the tar out of you if you don't stop crying.

YVETTE. You are right, you couldn't treat me this way if you loved me. It has been I who was the fool. I should have known a man like you, who can attract quality like Miss Rosanda, wouldn't be satisfied with a poor girl like me.

CHADWICK. You should say "trash" like you. That's what you are, Yvette, trash. You are like the flotsam that comes down the river and eddies along the shore; after a while it breaks up and drifts away – there is nothing left; it was never important. That's what you are: flotsam. But don't worry, you'll survive. Your kind always does . . . and in a manner, you are pretty. You won't be lonely long.

YVETTE. You had my heart, monsieur. I never gave that to anyone else. You were the first . . . *[turning away from him, her glance falls on the chest]* you will be the last.

CHADWICK. Sentimental slop. Your real problem is lack of ambition. Let me give you some advice – catch yourself a clerk or a riverman. You know the tricks.

YVETTE. Yes, I know the tricks. You showed them to me. I was innocent and now I know the ways of men. It is a cruel thing when a person like me changes from a girl to a woman. There is a pain that I will live with until I die.

CHADWICK. Bosh! You should be on the stage, Yvette. Now I demand to know – where is Miss Rosanda?

YVETTE. *[Hesitantly; we can tell she is making up her answer as she goes along.]* She – went into town unexpectedly – just before you came. Her parents took her. They told me to tidy up as they weren't expecting to return until late . . . *[looks toward the window]* but now they seem to be coming down the road . . . *[runs to window]* Yes, it is them; they are turning in the gate!

CHADWICK. *[Alarmed]* They mustn't find me here. *[Begins to hurry to door]*

YVETTE. They'll see you leave. You'll have to hide until it's safe to go out. Hurry!

CHADWICK. *[Greatly agitated]* Where can I hide?

YVETTE. Get in the old chest.

CHADWICK. It must be filled with clothing.

YVETTE. No. It's quite empty. *[She opens the lid.]*

CHADWICK. You won't tell Rosanda about – us?

YVETTE. No, I won't tell. Hurry.

CHADWICK. If you promise to keep it a secret, I'll meet you occasionally. You'd like that?

YVETTE. Yes, I'd like that. And I'll do whatever you say. But hurry. Get in the chest.

CHADWICK. *[Gets into chest]* Let me know the moment the coast is clear.

YVETTE. *[Lowers lid, smiles wanly and snaps the lock]* There, Monsieur Chadwick Barrington, you are quite safe now.

CHADWICK. What was that noise? What did you do?