

Ruggles ranged on the chairs, Larry sitting on the coal hod.

CHARACTERS: Mrs. Ruggles—poorly dressed woman—part may be taken by a tall girl.

"Nine Ruggles"—Sara Maud, Peter, Susan, Kitty, Peoria, Cornelius, Eily (girl), Clem, Larry.

PROLOGUE: Carol Bird, the invalid child from the "big house" nearby has invited the nine Ruggles to take dinner with her on Christmas night. The children are not accustomed to dining out so Mrs. Ruggles feels the necessity of giving them some preliminary training in manners. They have just finished dressing when the curtain rises and "Solomon in all his glory" could not excell the "little Ruggles."

Mrs. Ruggles: (wiping her forehead with the corner of her apron)—"Well! if I do say so as shouldn't, I never see a cleaner, more stylish mess o' children in my life! I do wish Ruggles could look at ye for a minute! Larry Ruggles, how many times have I got to tell yer not to keep pullin' at yer sash? Haven't I told yer if it comes ontied yer waist and skirt'll part company in the middle, 'n then where'll yer be? Now look me in the eye, all of yer! I've of'en told yer what kind of a family the McGrills was. I've got reason to be proud, goodness knows! Your uncle is on the po-lice force o' New York city; you can take up the paper most any day an' see his name printed right out—James McGrill—'n' I can't have my children fetched up common, like some folks'; when they go out they've got to have clo'es and learn to act decent! Now I want to see how yer goin' to behave when yer git there tonight. 'Tain't so awful easy as you think 'tis. Let's start in at the beginning' 'n' act out the whole business. Pile into the bedroom, there, every last one o' ye, 'n' show me how yer goin' to go int' the parlor. This'll be the parlor, 'n' I'll be Mis' Bird."

(Children hurry out of the room through door at back. Mrs. Ruggles draws herself up proudly. Great noise in outer room. Door opens, children file in giggling. Sarah Maud, at head, looks embarrassed. Larry, anxious to get in, pushes ahead of the others and falls head foremost.)

Mrs. Ruggles (severely)—"There, I knew yer'd do it in some sech fool way! Now go in there and try it over again, every last one o' ye, 'n' if Larry can't come in on two legs he can stay ter home, d' her hear?"

(Children back out, frightened. Come in again, Indian file, lock step, each with scared expression of face.)

Mrs. Ruggles (with despair)—"No, no, no! That's worse yet; yer look for all the world like a gang o' pris'ners. There ain't no style ter that; spread out more, can't yer, 'n' act kine o' careless like—nobody's goin' to kill ye! That ain't what a dinner-party is!"

(Children come in a third time with greater success and take seats).

Mrs. Ruggles (impressively)—"Now yer know there ain't enough decent hats to go round, 'n' if there was I don' know's I'd let yer wear 'em, for the boys would never think to take 'em off when they got inside, for they never do—but anyhow, there ain't enough good ones. Now, look me in the eye. You're only goin, jest round the corner; you needn't wear no hats. none of yer, 'n' when yer get int' the parlor, 'n' they ask yer ter lay off yer hats, Sarah Maud must speak up 'n' say it was sech a pleasant evenin' 'n' sech a short walk that yer left yer hats to home. Now, can yer remember?"

All Children— "Yes! Marm."

Mrs. Ruggles (severely)—"What have you got ter do with it?" Did I tell you to say it? Warn't I talkin' ter Sarah Maud?"

All Children (weakly)—"Yes, Marm."

Mrs. Ruggles—"Now we won't leave nothin' to chance; git up, all of ye, an' try it. Speak up, Sarah Maud."

(Sarah Maud tries, but cannot speak)

Mrs. Ruggles—"Quick!"

Sarah Maud (falteringly)—"Ma thought—it was—sech a pleasant hat that we'd—we'd better leave our short walk to home."

(Giggles from all the children during this speech).

Mrs. Ruggles (despairingly)—"Oh, what shall I do with yer? I s'pose I've got to learn it to yer word fer word!"

(During the following speeches Eily and Larry unconsciously repeat to themselves what their mother is saying to Sarah Maud. Larry repeats her gestures. While Mrs. R. is teaching S. M., Peter screws his scarf pin, Kitty flips her curls and straightens her skirt, Peoria borrows the handkerchief on Kitty's lap.)

Mrs. Ruggles—"It was sech"

(Sarah Maud repeats)

Mrs. Ruggles—"A pleasant evening"

(Sarah Maud repeats)

Mrs. Ruggles—"and sech a short"

(S. M. repeats)

Mrs. Ruggles—"walk that we"

(S. M. repeats)

Mrs. Ruggles—"left our hats to home."

(S. M. repeats).

Mrs. Ruggles—"Now!"

(S. M. repeats the whole speech).

Mrs. Ruggles—"Now, Cornelius, what are you goin' ter say ter make yerself good comp'ny?"

Cornelius (amazed)—"Do? Me? Dunno!"

Mrs. Ruggles—"Well, ye ain't goin' to set there like a bump on a log 'thout sayin' a word ter pay for yer vittles, air ye? Ask Mis' Bird how she's feelin' this