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No. 82.

# Freddy's Great Aunt

A Play for Female Characters

BY

ELLA CRANE WILKINSON

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A Play for Female Characters

BY

ELLA CRANE WILKINSON

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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# FREDDY'S GREAT AUNT

## CHARACTERS:

MISS HARMON (Freddy's Aunt).

MRS. ALDEN.

MISS CRAGIN (sister to Mrs. Alden).

FREDDY ALDEN.

MISS BEAN (village gossip).

MRS. SCRIB } (afternoon callers).  
MRS. JONES }

SCENE I.—*Ladies' Waiting Room at Railroad Station.*  
*Plain ordinary room with chairs and settees.*

*Costumes modern, but old-fashioned costumes, if possible,*  
*for MISS BEAN, MRS. SCRIB and MRS. JONES.*

FREDDY. (*sitting reading book — dressed for travelling,*  
*— bag, umbrella, etc.*)

FRED. (*closing book*) That train's late and I'm tired to death waiting for it. (*yawns*) I can't imagine why mamma insisted upon my taking this trip so suddenly. There's some mystery about it, that she didn't explain to me — and that's not a bit like mamma. (*gets up and goes to door*) Oh porter, did my trunk come? Yes? You'll check it for me? Thank you! (*rumble heard outside*) Ah, there's the train. (*gathers up bag and goes out but returns immediately*) How provoking! It's the down train. I felt just like getting on and going back. I don't mind travelling so much, but the changing cars is so disagreeable. (*goes to glass and arranges hat and hair*)

(*Enter MISS HARMON, limping and groaning.*)

MISS HARMON. That savage —! that ruffian — He's crippled me for life. (*drops bag, bundle, etc., sits down groaning. Her hat is on awry*)

FRED. Why what's the matter. You are hurt?

MISS H. Fatally injured — I'm afraid.

FRED. (*alarmed*) Has there been an accident? Let me help you — I'll call some one. (*starts toward door*)

MISS H. (*sitting bolt upright*) Don't you do it. I'm not going to have a crowd around me. I prefer to die peacefully.

FRED. But, my dear Madam, can't you tell me where you're suffering?

MISS H. My foot. He trampled all over it. Purposely, too. Young brute!

FRED. (*concerned*) Anything broken? (*she looks at foot which MISS H. has stuck straight out before her*)

MISS H. Every single bone, and it's mashed to a pulp besides. (*groans and wiggles foot*)

FRED. This is dreadful. Don't you think I ought to go for a doctor?

MISS H. (*very decidedly*) I never let a doctor come near me. Don't believe in 'em. But if you could just run out and catch that young villain who has brought me to this pass, I'd be much obliged to you. He wore a blue coat, or a grey one — or *some* kind. That doesn't matter. Seize him, and bring him to me. After I've cuffed his wicked ears I'll feel greatly relieved. He ran up the street, or down — I don't remember which — Well — are you going?

FRED. I'm afraid I wouldn't find the — the *man* — did you say?

MISS H. *Man* I *didn't* say. Boy! Oh, if I could only lay hands on him. There should be police regulations about boys. They should never be allowed to run around loose. They're a menace to human life. (*swings foot and groans*)

FRED. (*aside*) Now, isn't she peculiar? But I think she's really suffering and I'll try and help her. (*to MISS H.*) If I can't catch your bad boy, I may be able to make your foot feel better. (*kneels down and unlaces her shoe, MISS H. jerking her foot and uttering little, sharp cries of pain*) There, the shoe's untied, and I'm sure it will relieve you. I'll hold your foot in my hand — so — and perhaps that will ease it. How small it is!

MISS H. (*pleased*) You think so? Strange how every one notices that. (*aside*) Now that I look at her, she's a charming young girl. (*to FRED*) There, my dear, that will do. ( *rubs hands over face*) How hot I am. Those stuffy cars and the day so warm.

FRED. Let me bathe your face with some cologne I have in my bag. (*gets bottle out of bag, pours cologne on handkerchief and gently bathes MISS H.'s face, smoothes*

*her hair and sets her bonnet on straight*) There, now, I'm sure you'll feel better.

MISS H. Thank you, my dear, I'm greatly refreshed. It's very considerate of you to take so much trouble over a cross old woman. Sit down, and let me talk to you a little. You can't imagine how lovely you seem to me after my experience with that horrible boy. And to think, I've always believed I liked them better than girls. I shall hate the sight of anything in caps and knickerbockers after this.

FRED. Now do you know, I've always wanted a brother.

MISS H. You haven't any?

FRED. No. In fact, I haven't a sister either. I'm an only child.

MISS H. Then, of course, you've been dreadfully spoiled. Still you don't show it.

FRED. (*laughing*) Oh, as to that, I have the dearest, most sensible mother in the world. She loved me too well to spoil me, though, of course, I'm not perfect. But it's not my mother's fault. She's worked over me hard enough.

MISS H. She's succeeded pretty well, I judge. But tell me, where are you going? Do you take the down train or the up?

FRED. The up. You see, I started quite unexpectedly. For some reason, mamma decided all at once that I must go to her cousin's for a visit. I'm to stay until I'm sent for. I don't understand it, and I'm afraid I don't quite like it. However, mamma seemed so anxious about it, I didn't make any objections — except just a little perhaps — at first. What puzzles me though is her not giving me any reason for sending me off so suddenly. But she'll tell me all about it when she thinks best for me to know. And I really like Cousin Sarah.

MISS H. (*aside*) Isn't that a sweet disposition! What a pity she couldn't have been my niece. (*to FRED*) I'm sorry you're not going my way. We could have had a pleasant "journey" together.

FRED. You are going down?

MISS H. (*dismally*) Yes. And I'm afraid I'm not going to like the person I'm on my way to see. He's sure to be big and rough and everything that's not nice. How I wish he were a girl. And yet, how proud I've always been to think he had his father's name — Frederick.

FRED. Do you know that's my name too. Odd — isn't it?

MISS H. (*horriified*) Odd! It's barbarous! Who gave you a boy's name? You should have been called Rose

or Lily or Violet, or some such sweet gentle name. But Frederick——

FRED. (*laughing*) Oh, it isn't exactly Frederick. It's Fredericka——after my father. You see every one was so sure I was to be a boy that they felt bound to name me after papa even when I was just a girl. Then, after dear papa died, (*sighs*) every one was so glad I had his name. You can't think what a comfort it is to mamma.

MISS H. Um——. Perhaps there's some little excuse for it then. But I shall call you Fanny, if you don't mind. It's near enough, and more civilized. I do wish you might have been my niece. (*takes FRED'S hand and pats it lovingly*) You don't know how I dread meeting that boy——my nephew, or rather my grandnephew. While I've always been glad to *think* of him, as a boy, I confess I've put off coming in contact with him as long as possible. But I'll have to see him some time, and I really ought to pay more attention to him. Hope I'll live through it.

FRED. Perhaps he won't be so very bad. I know some nice boys.

MISS H. (*decidedly*) Now, my dear Fanny, don't try and raise false hopes. I know he'll be horrid in every way. But I'm going to do my duty, even if I do come out totally done up. I only hope he doesn't sing coon songs.

FRED. Don't you like music?

MISS H. Love it. But a boy bawling coon songs——(*shudders*)

FRED. I'm glad you care for music. I love it too.

MISS H. (*eagerly*) You sing?

FRED. A little. My voice has never been trained——because——well, we aren't rich enough to pay for lessons. So I just sing the best I can without knowing anything about correct methods.

MISS H. And you would like the lessons?

FRED. Oh, more than anything else in the world. But it's of no use thinking of it. We never could afford it. Hark! here's my train. Good bye——and I hope your foot won't trouble you. (*shakes hands, snatches bag, etc., and goes out*)

MISS H. (*looking after her*) Now, isn't she perfectly angelic! Sings, too, and wants lessons that she can't afford. And here I am with more money than I can possibly spend. Well, she shall have the lessons and everything else that I can give her. I'll do my whole duty by my nephew——coon songs and all——and then——I'll hunt up Fanny and——(*pauses in dismay*) Well——isn't that stupid of me——I never found out a thing about her——except her name——Fan——Fanny——and even that isn't right. I don't know



where she's going—or where she lives. Frances Harmon—you're a born idiot.

## CURTAIN.

SCENE II.—MRS. ALDEN'S sitting room. A comfortably furnished room with chairs R. and L. Table set for afternoon tea. MRS. ALDEN sitting at one end of the table and MISS CRAGIN at the other.

MRS. ALDEN (*sighing*) Will this dreadful week never end! I've grown so nervous that I start at every sound, and I haven't slept decently since Aunt Harmon came.

MISS C. I think you were very foolish not to have told her in the first place. She's sure to find out sooner or later.

MRS. A. I wish I had. But it's too late now. She wouldn't forgive the deceit.

MISS C. I'd risk it. Anything would be better than living in such constant dread. Let me tell her.

MRS. A. (*hastily*) Oh, no—no—not for the world. You don't understand. She's always supposed Freddy was a boy. At first it was merely a joke and we laughed so much at her writing of her *nephew*, and all the things she meant to do for him when he was older. Then, after my poor Frederick died, she seemed to lose all interest in us and we haven't heard of her in years. I thought she'd forgotten all about us until I received her letter last week. In it she wrote that *Fred* must be a big boy by now—and she felt it her duty to fulfill her promise to do something for him. You know how poor we are, since that awful bank failure, last year. And poor Freddy breaking her heart because she can't have singing lessons. (*leans head on hand and sighs*)

MISS C. I know all that, sister. But I still think you're doing wrong. Freddy could not understand why she was sent away in such a hurry. I don't see how you're ever going to explain it to her.

MRS. A. I never can. But that doesn't worry me so much as keeping her sex a secret from Aunt Harmon. She says she must go tomorrow, and since I've got along so far without her discovering it, I hope to be able to carry it through for one day more. But I do feel like such a miserable fraud.

MISS C. I should think you would. I'm heartily ashamed of it, and in favor of telling the whole thing at once. If she doesn't want to do anything for her *niece* sim-

ply because she isn't her nephew — why let her keep her money.

MRS. A. (*putting handkerchief to eyes*) Oh, sister, I never had your courage and your independent spirit. I can only think what it means to Freddy.

MISS C. Freddy will do very well without her great-aunt's help. Does she ever complain? Well, I think not. There never was a happier, more contented girl. And I doubt if she would thank you for getting anything for her under false pretenses.

MRS. A. Don't, sister, don't. You're so harsh. You make me feel like a thief. (*sobs*)

MISS C. (*aside*) Poor little woman! How weak she's always been. (*to MRS. A.*) Well — well, I didn't mean to make you any more unhappy. Dry your eyes — and look a little more cheerful before any one comes in. (*pats her gently on shoulder*) Here's Miss Harmon.

(*Enter MISS H. in afternoon dress, lace cap and knitting.*  
MRS. A. and MISS C. both rise.)

MRS. A. (*offering easy chair*) Have this chair, Aunt. You'll find it very comfortable.

MISS H. No, thank you, niece. I've never cultivated indolent habits. I can't begin now. (*takes straight-backed chair; to MRS. A.*) When did you say you expected Fred?

MRS. A. (*hesitating*) I — er — well, not until next week.

MISS H. I'm afraid I won't see him then. I leave tomorrow.

MRS. A. Must you?

MISS H. Yes. I never change my plans and I've arranged to go tomorrow.

MRS. A. I'm — so sorry.

MISS C. (*aside*) You hypocrite. (*to MISS H.*) You'd be sure to love Fred. Everybody does. (*goes to table and arranges cups, etc.*)

MISS H. (*slowly*) No doubt. (*aside*) I know just the kind of a nuisance that boy is. Brought up by a weak little mother, and petted to death by that aunt. Grappling irons wouldn't hold me here until he gets back. (*to MRS. A.*) You're sure he won't be back until next week?

MRS. A. Quite sure, Aunt, unless you insist upon my sending —

MISS H. (*hurriedly*) No — oh, no — not for the world. Some other time I may see him. (*aside*) I won't risk my life in the house with that young Indian. I'm sure he's that.

MRS. A. (*relieved*) Very well, Aunt. As you say, some other time when you're not so hurried.

(*Enter MISS BEAN. MRS. A. and MISS C. greet her and present her to MISS H.*)

MISS B. (*dropping into chair and fanning herself*) Am I the first one here? Well, you know I always like to come early — it gives one a chance to see everybody else. Nothing like these little afternoon teas for promoting sociability I say. Just the place to hear all that's going on in the village. You know what a neighborly creature I am — what an interest I take in every one? I'm what you may call sympathetic. Mrs. Alden, *have* you heard the dreadful rumor about Jamie Lane? (MRS. A. *shakes head*) You haven't? Well, of course, I don't want to be the first one to spread an evil report about any one. Least of all, a young man that's always been so well thought of. Though they do say he hasn't been as straight as people supposed. His mother always humored him too much, *I* think.

MISS C. I'm sure Jamie's always behaved himself, and I should be very sorry to hear anything to the contrary now. I daresay, there's some mistake about it.

MISS B. Oh, there isn't any doubt of it's being true. Miss Hale's cousin told Jane Seamon, and Jane's cook overheard her telling Miss Daniels. I got it straight from her.

MISS H. (*severely*) The *cook*, Madam? Do you ever believe servants' gossip? I *never* do — on general principles.

MISS B. Well — er — you see — I couldn't doubt this, coming as it did so straight. I know servants gossip — it's one of their worst faults. I never believe in talking about my neighbors' private affairs. I wouldn't speak of this if I hadn't felt so sorry for Mrs. Lane. I can feel for her — even if I do think she's brought that boy up all wrong. But she never would take my advice, and now she must bear her disgrace as best she can. Of course, you won't any of you mention my telling you of this dreadful affair. By the way, Mrs. Alden, wasn't he very intimate with Freddy?

MISS H. (*aside*) Freddy has bad companions, it seems.

MRS. A. They were always good friends. Indeed — we have known Jamie ever since he was a baby. In fact, he and Freddy have grown up together.

MISS B. Um —. Rather unfortunate for you under the circumstances. A young girl —

MRS. A. (*alarmed*) My dear Miss Bean, what are we thinking of to let you sit so long without a cup of tea. (*pours tea and hands to MISS B.*) I hope you will excuse

my thoughtlessness. Cream and sugar? (*aside to Miss C.*) Keep her busy eating and drinking the rest of the time she is here. (*Miss C. offers cakes, confections, etc., to Miss B. and Mrs. A. gives tea to Mrs. H. and Miss B.*)

Miss B. (*eating rather greedily*) When did you say you expected Freddy back?

Mrs. A. (*nervously*) I — we — don't know how long the visit will be this time.

Miss B. (*looking astonished*) You don't know? Well, that's strange. Who should know if not you?

Miss C. You see, Miss Bean, Freddy went rather unexpectedly, and didn't say for how long. (*aside to Mrs. A.*) Give her some more tea.

Miss B. (*confidentially to Miss H.*) Now isn't that a very peculiar way for a child to treat a mother?

Miss H. Is Fred inclined to be *headstrong*?

Miss B. I never thought so before. But this looks like it.

Miss C. Do have some more cake, Miss Bean (*Miss B. helps herself liberally*)

Mrs. A. And some hot tea. (*offers some*)

Miss H. (*aside*) That Fred is a spoiled child, if ever there was one. I shall be thankful when I'm once out of this house.

(*Enter Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Scrib. Mrs. A. and Miss C. greet them and present them to Miss H. Miss B. nods, but is too busy eating to rise. They seat themselves, and Mrs. A. serves them with tea and Miss C. with cakes, etc., all talking at once meantime.*)

Mrs. A. (*seating herself*) It's so kind of you ladies — to come in this afternoon. I wanted you to meet my aunt before she left us.

Mrs. J. You are going soon?

Miss H. Tomorrow.

Miss B. Oh, then you won't see Freddy.

Miss H. I fear not. (*aside*) I mean I *hope* not.

Mrs. S. What a pity. Really, you don't know what you're missing.

Miss H. I daresay. (*aside*) I can guess part of it, though.

Mrs. S. (*to Mrs. A.*) Why don't you telegraph Fred to come back tonight?

Miss H. (*hurriedly*) No — no — I beg you not to think of it. It's always very confusing to me to have a person sent for in that hurried way. I'm — I'm coming again very soon. (*aside*) Between them all they'll contrive to

get that boy here before I'm out of the house. I've a mind to start tonight and not run any further risk.

MRS. A. (*aside*) I must get them to talk of something else. (*to Miss H.*) What is that pretty bit of work you have there, Aunt?

MISS H. Slippers.

MRS. S. For Freddy?

MISS H. (*scornfully*) For Fred? Nonsense! For Fanny.

MRS. J. Another niece, I suppose.

MISS H. No. (*sighing*) I wish she were. A niece is a very nice thing to have if she happens to be the right kind — and Fanny is.

MRS. J. But if you were to see Freddy I'm sure you'd be quite satisfied. We all think —

MISS C. (*hastily*) Do have some more cake, Mrs. Jones. (*aside to Mrs. A.*) Give her some tea.

MISS B. Is — Fanny any relation of yours, may I ask?

MISS H. None whatever. I don't even know her name, or where she lives, but I mean to find out.

MRS. S. How odd to be making something for a person you know so little about. You have at least seen the young lady?

MISS H. Once. And of all sweet tempered, sensible, sympathetic beings I ever met, she was the most so. Oh, never fear — I'll find her. And then I mean to travel with her, and let her have music lessons — and everything else she wants. She told me she could sing. (*during this Mrs. A. has listened in dismay — exchanging glances with Miss C.*)

MISS B. Well, Freddy sings too. (*all, "Beautifully," "lovely voice," etc.*)

MISS H. Coon songs — most likely. (*all, indignantly, "No, indeed"; "nothing of the kind," etc.*)

MRS. A. (*sinking back into chair and speaking aside to Miss C.*) There goes my poor Freddy's last chance and for an utter stranger.

MISS C. (*resolutely*) I mean to tell her. Once she sees Freddy she will love her instantly — Miss Harmon —

MRS. A. (*clutching at Miss C.'s arm*) No — no — you must not. I couldn't bear it before all these people. I'll tell her after they go, or write her.

MISS H. (*turning to Mrs. A.*) Did you speak, niece?

MRS. A. No — yes. Where did you say you met — er — Fanny?

(*Enter FREDDY, unexpectedly.*)

FRED. Good afternoon everybody. (*rushes up to Mrs. A., embraces her and kisses her, and does same to Miss C. All act delighted to see her.*)

FRED. (*to Mrs. A.*) You didn't expect me, did you, dearie. (*holds mother's hands*) How could you when I didn't know myself I was coming until about an hour before I started. You're not vexed, are you little mommie?

MRS. A. (*kissing her*) No, of course not. But how did it happen?

FRED. Well, you see Cousin John had to come down this afternoon. I did so hate to take the journey alone that I came with him, instead of waiting until tomorrow, as you wrote me to do. And I'm so glad to be here. (*kisses her mother*)

MISS H. (*to Mrs. J.*) That's Fanny.

MRS. J. (*astonished*) Ridiculous! Why that's Freddy.

MISS H. (*with great dignity*) Madam, I think I know Fanny when I see her. I may also add that I know a sweet young girl from a horrible, howling, nerve-racking boy. (*knits very energetically*)

MRS. J. (*to Mrs. A.*) Oh, Mrs. Alden, there's the most ludicrous mistake here. (*FREDDY turns and sees Miss H.*)

FRED. (*running toward Miss H.*) Oh, it's you. And how is your poor foot — and — and — however did you happen to be here?

MISS H. I came to visit my nephew.

MRS. A. (*astonished*) You've met your aunt before?

FRED. Why, yes — if this is my aunt. But I don't understand. (*looks from Mrs. A. to Miss H.*)

MRS. A. I — I — will have to explain. Oh — oh — how can I do it! (*sobs in hands*)

Miss C. Let me do it for you, sister. You've had enough to bear. (*to Miss H.*) You see, Miss Harmon, you've been under a delusion all along. You've always taken it for granted that Freddy was a boy. Now, no one ever really told you she was.

MISS H. No one ever told me she wasn't. If you or my niece had done so I might have been spared a very miserable week.

MRS. A. Aunt! I'm sure I've tried my best to make you comfortable.

MISS H. So you have, my dear, so you have. But you don't know how I've suffered expecting Fred in *trousers* to pounce down upon me. However, I'm ready to forget it all since this is really my niece. (*embraces FRED*)

FRED. Now isn't this exactly like something out of a story-book. Mamma, dear, I never dreamed you didn't

want me to meet Aunt Harmon. Why, just think, I saw her before you did. It's all too delightful for words. I must tell Jamie Lane all about it when he comes in this evening.

MISS H. (*grasping FRED'S arm*) My dear, don't you have anything to do with that young man.

FREDDY. (*astonished*) Why not?

MISS H. (*solemnly*) He's disgraced his mother.

FRED. What!

MISS H. (*still more solemnly*) He's disgraced his mother.

FRED. Jamie? (*indignantly*) Never! Who says so?

MISS H. Miss Bean.

FRED. But how?

MISS H. She didn't say. (*to Miss B.*) Can you bring proof of what you said, Madam?

MISS B. (*confused*) Why—er—well—I—— Well, you know I merely referred to that affair in church last Sunday.

FRED. Oh, that! It was the funniest thing. (*laughing*) I'll tell you about it. It was this way. Jamie, you know, always goes to church with his mother.

MISS H. (*glaring at Miss B.*) A very proper thing to do.

FRED. Well, last Sunday old Mrs. Grey fell asleep during the sermon——

MISS H. (*severely*) And he made fun of a poor tired old woman—whose age caused her to slumber when she shouldn't.

FRED. Oh, not at all. But Miss Grey had some artificial berries on her hat and a swallow had flown in the window and lighted on them. It was so funny to see the bird try to pick those berries off, and Miss Grey wake up once in a while just enough to shake her head a little. Finally the swallow succeeded in loosening the whole bunch, and flew away with it in his bill. Miss Grey woke up then and put her hand up to her hat. When she discovered that part of the trimming was gone she turned around to Jamie (he sits in the pew back of her) and called out so that everyone around heard her: "Young man, hand back those berries." Jamie, of course, forgot for a moment where he was and laughed outright. His poor mother was dreadfully mortified, and Jamie told me she felt quite disgraced. I suppose that was what Miss B. meant.

MISS H. (*to Miss B.*) Was it?

MISS B. (*confused*) Why—er—yes. Of course you don't approve of such irreverent conduct?

MISS H. I should have laughed myself if I had seen it.

FRED. I'm sure you would. It amused me so much even to hear of it that I don't see how Jamie could have helped it. (*laughs in which Miss H. joins*)

FRED (*to Miss H.*) And you're really and truly glad that I'm not a boy?

Miss H. My dear, I never was so pleased at anything in my life.

Mrs. A. (*rising and holding out her hand to Miss H.*) And you can forgive me for deceiving you?

Miss H. (*taking Mrs. A.'s hand*) As Miss Cragin says, I began by deceiving myself.

Miss C. Then you will have to pardon our not undeceiving you.

Miss H. For the sake of this dearest and sweetest girl I can overlook everything. (*puts arm around Freddy*)

CURTAIN.





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