

Five Little Peppers and How They Grow



Adapted from the novel by Margaret Sidney

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Illustration by Hermann Heyer

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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For some other "Little Peppers":

Emily,

Chris and Elizabeth,

Adam, Decima, and Alistair

Five Little Peppers and How They Grew

CLASSIC. Audiences of all ages will enjoy this wholesome, heartfelt classic. Since the death of her husband three years ago, Mamsie Pepper struggles to provide for her five children by mending coats. Though the Pepper family is poor, they make the most of life in their beloved little brown house and weather the hard times with determination, good will, hard work, and a sense of humor. Unable to attend school, the Pepper children must work odd jobs to help support the family, but the two eldest children still manage to learn how to read and write. And even though food is scarce, the children find a way to make Mamsie a birthday cake. However, the family's luck changes when Polly Pepper is stricken with the measles and the youngest child, Phronsie, is kidnapped by an organ grinder. But just when things look the bleakest, the Peppers are befriended by the King family, who offer the Peppers a way out of poverty and hope for a brighter future.

Performance Time: Approximately 75-90 minutes.



Harriett Mulford Stone Lothrop
(1844-1924)

About the Story

Margaret Sidney is the pseudonym for author Harriett Mulford Stone Lothrop (1844-1924). Sidney published her first story in a Boston children's magazine when she was 34 years old. Two of her short stories "Polly Pepper's Chicken Pie" and "Phronsie Pepper's New Shoes" were so popular, Sidney wrote more stories based on these characters. The success of these stories resulted in the "Five Little Peppers" series, which was first published in 1881. Sidney published more than 30 novels before she died at the age of 80.

Characters

(8 M, 5 F)

(With doubling: 7 M, 4 F)

MRS. PEPPER "MAMSIE": Widow who must work hard to provide for her five children; female.

EBENEZER "BEN": Eldest of the Pepper children; hard-working, bright, and self-sacrificing; male.

POLLY PEPPER: Bright, cheerful eldest daughter who cares for her younger siblings; female.

JOEL PEPPER: Mischievous, active middle child; male.

DAVID PEPPER "DAVIE": Youngest Pepper boy; quiet, calm, and eager to please his two elder brothers; male.

SOPHRONIA PEPPER "PHRONSIE": Youngest of the Pepper children; devoted to her sister Polly and loves playing with her two dolls, Baby and Seraphina; female.

GRANDMA BASCOM: Badgertown's community grandmother, who has a special fondness for the Peppers and is a bit hard of hearing; female.

DR. FISHER: Kindly, charitable doctor who nurses the Peppers through a bout of measles; male.

JASPER KING "JAPPY": Lad who lives in a neighboring city; rescues Phronsie after she is kidnapped by an organ grinder and befriends the Pepper family; well-dressed; male.

MR. JASPER KING, SR.: Jasper's father, a well-to-do widower who becomes the Pepper family's benefactor; male.

MARIAN KING WHITNEY: Mr. King's married daughter and mother to Percy.

JOHN MASON WHITNEY: Marian's husband.

PERCY WHITNEY: Marian's son and Jasper's nephew; he is much younger than his Uncle Jasper and is quite rambunctious; has tousled hair, a dirty face, and soiled clothes; male.

Options for Doubling

DOCTOR FISHER/JOHN MASON WHITNEY (male)

GRANDMA BASCOM/MARIAN KING WHITNEY (female)

For Performances Without a Live Dog

If a live dog is not used, please note the change to the script below.

Page 31: Cut Jasper's line, "And this is my dog, Prince."

Page 31: Cut Ben's line, "...and Prince."

Page 30: Eliminate the dog's presence as called for in the stage directions.

Page 45: Cut Phronsie's line, "And Prince, my beautiful doggy!"

Page 47: Cut the stage directions which call for Phronsie to hug dog.

Page 47: Change Phronsie's line to, "And *could* my beautiful doggy come with you?"

Page 77: Prince does not enter at the play's end.

Sets

The sets may be as simple or as elaborate as your budget allows. Sets are suggested below; however, the play may be staged more simply using only black curtains and set pieces to suggest the two locales. A turntable may be used to facilitate the change from Act I to Act II but this is not required.

The Peppers' little brown house. The main room is rustic, comfortable, and simply furnished with a large table and chairs being the central focus. Upstage to one side is an old pot-bellied black stove in a state of extreme disrepair. An old rocker sits in a corner. There are some kitchen shelves. If possible, two levels can be apparent. Stairs from the main floor lead to a sleeping loft, which consists of two bedrooms. One of these two rooms houses Polly and Phronsie; the other, the three boys. Mamsie's room is through a hall on the main floor. If impractical or undesirable to have a second floor, the two upper bedrooms may be suggested as being off the main hall from which Mamsie's room is located in either case.

Kings' home in the city. The Kings are wealthy and the central drawing room displays as much. With its high ceilings, the room seems immense, though homey. A large settee rests to one side with several additional side chairs. At CS along the upstage wall is a large fireplace. A secretary rests against the SL wall, which also accommodates several bookcases. At SR, French doors lead into a study/library/music room. Additional entrances are provided from two arched doorways on either side of the fireplace. The USR archway leads into a hall. Upstage of the left archway can be seen a foyer into which the front entrance is located.

Props

Mixing bowl	Sewing basket
Wooden spoon	Firewood
Old piece of boot leather	Knife
Small leather pouch	White flour
Raisins	Wooden cutting board
Baking powder	Cake pans
Tin of lard	Ink bottle and pen
2 Baby dolls	Letter
Piece of peppermint candy	Hand towel
Hairbrush	Wooden box
2 Plates	Cloth scrap for lining wooden box
Tin of ointment	Teacup
Purse, for Mamsie	Watch, for Mr. King
Dollar bill	Large platter with turkey
Old-fashioned stove	Envelope
Knitting	Stick
Bandages	Whittling knife
Medical bag	3 Toy boat sails
Cloth	Knit neck scarf
Gingerbread boy	Bottle of rubbing alcohol
Pot of soup	Cotton balls
Assortment of old coats for mending	

Special Effects

Smoke

Mozart sonata

Arabesque by Burgmüller

Live dog, opt.

*“I should miss
our little brown house horribly,
but it would be so wonderful
to have us all under one roof again.”*

—Polly

ACT I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: *Badgertown, CT. Autumn 1880. The main room of the Peppers' home. Polly is stoking a fire at the old black stove. Phronsie is sitting at the kitchen table stirring a bowl. Davie is looking out the door.*)

DAVIE: It's most eleven o'clock, Polly. Where are they?
You'll never have it done.

POLLY: No, it isn't, either, Davie. It's only quarter of nine.
(*Referring to a crack in the stove.*) Oh, dear! There goes Ben's putty. It's all come out!

PHRONSIE: Is it enough cinnamon?

POLLY: Yes, Phronsie, I've told you...just keep stirring.

DAVIE: (*At the stove, crouching over.*) So it has. It's bigger 'n ever. It's an awful big hole, Polly. The fire'll never hold.

POLLY: Now what shall we do? That hateful old crack! And Ben clear off chopping wood for Deacon Blodgett.

PHRONSIE: We can't have the cake for Mamsie now?

POLLY: Of course, we'll have the cake. Don't be afraid, Phronsie.

(*Davie heads up the stairs.*)

DAVIE: I can fix it! (*Exits.*)

POLLY: (*To stove.*) Now see what you've done, you ugly old thing, you!

PHRONSIE: Someday we're going to be rich, aren't we, Polly?
And we'll buy a brand new stove!

POLLY: What do you mean?

PHRONSIE: Joey told Baby and Seraphina that we would be rich someday. Isn't it so, Polly?

POLLY: Why, Phronsie, don't talk so! We're rich now! We have Mamsie, and we have Ben and Joel and Davie and our

little brown house...and you have Baby and Seraphina to care for.

PHRONSIE: But how will we have our celebration for Mamsie without the cake?

POLLY: Don't you worry, Phronsie. Joel will be back soon with the flour from Grandma Bascom, and then we'll be able to make Mamsie's birthday cake.

PHRONSIE: It'll be so big that Mamsie won't know what to do, will she, Polly?

POLLY: No, I don't believe she will!

(Davie enters, bounding down the steps with a piece of leather.)

DAVIE: I've got it. It's my old leather boot top.

POLLY: Oh, Davie.

DAVIE: T'will go in. I know it. And then the hole will be blocked and we can have the cake.

PHRONSIE: *(To dolls.)* Baby! Seraphina! We can have the cake, after all.

(Davie hears something and exits out the door. Polly stuffs the leather scrap into the crack in the stove.)

POLLY: There we are. See what Davie did, Phronsie? Sacrificed one of his very favorite things to fix the stove.

PHRONSIE: And it's baking now?

POLLY: It's warming up. And it will bake away just as soon as we put the cake in.

(Davie runs on.)

DAVIE: *(Breathlessly.)* Joel and Grandma Bascom are here...just comin' up the walk!

PHRONSIE: Hooray! We can bake the cake now!

POLLY: Oh, dear. I told Joel just to ask her for some flour, and here she's come back with him.

(Davie meets Joel and Grandma Bascom at the door.)

DAVIE: Polly don't want you here, Grandma Bascom!

POLLY: No, Davie...

(Grandma Bascom enters with Joel. Grandma Bascom is hard of hearing.)

GRANDMA BASCOM: What's that? The boy here said you needed some white flour.

POLLY: We do, only I didn't mean for you to deliver it yourself.

GRANDMA BASCOM: Nonsense. *(To Joel.)* An old woman's got to get out once in a while, doesn't she, young man?

JOEL: And, here, Polly. See what else we've brought!

(Davie rushes to Joel, grabs a small leather pouch, and peers inside.)

GRANDMA BASCOM: *(To Polly.)* How's your ma?

POLLY: Oh, Mamsie's pretty well. She's helping at Mrs. Henderson's now. And tomorrow's her birthday!

GRANDMA BASCOM: What? Tomorrow'll be a bad day? Oh, don't never say that, child. You mustn't borrow trouble.

POLLY: No, I mean it's her *birthday*, Grandma.

GRANDMA BASCOM: Land's sakes, I know that, Polly. Your brother, here, told me so already. *(To Joel.)* Didn't you, child?

(Joel nods.)

PHRONSIE: And we're making a surprise!

GRANDMA BASCOM: What's that? Somethin's wrong with her eyes?

POLLY: No...

GRANDMA BASCOM: She's workin' too hard...been a-sewin' too much, ain't she?

POLLY: A *surprise*, Grandma Bascom. A cake!

PHRONSIE: A big one!

DAVIE: (*Holds up some raisins he has retrieved from the pouch.*)

And we can put raisins in it!

GRANDMA BASCOM: A birthday cake? Well, that'll be fine.

POLLY: And now you're here, Grandma Bascom, and won't you please help us make it?

GRANDMA BASCOM: Oh, to be sure, to be sure.

PHRONSIE: And I been stirring the cake, right, Polly?

(*Grandma Bascom crosses to the table.*)

GRANDMA BASCOM: Indeed y'have, Sophronia. And whattaya got in there now?

POLLY: Just some brown flour and cinnamon so far.

GRANDMA BASCOM: Well, now. We had that cake down to my niece Mirandy's weddin' last month. 'Twas just elegant! Light as a feather... 'twan't rich, either. Had no eggs in it 't' all, nor—

POLLY: Oh, we haven't any eggs, Grandma. And only the brown flour.

GRANDMA BASCOM: Well, let's just add some o' this white here. Keep stirring there, Sophronia. And bring me those raisins here, Davie.

(*Davie crosses to the table.*)

DAVIE: Can I put 'em in?

JOEL: I'll get the pan!

POLLY: It'll be good, I guess, won't it, Grandma?

(*Grandma Bascom adds some baking powder to the batter.*)

GRANDMA BASCOM: Well, now. I shouldn't be surprised if you all had real good luck. Got any lard?

(Phronsie runs to a shelf.)

PHRONSIE: I'll get it!

POLLY: We so wanted a cake. There just wasn't any other way to celebrate Mamsie's birthday!

GRANDMA BASCOM: Your ma'll set ever so much by it. She's a lucky woman, your ma. After your daddy passed three years ago, so many in Badgertown didn't know as you'd all make it through. How many y'got now? *(Begins counting.)* There's you, Polly, o' course. And Joel, here, who come to get the flour. *(To Davie.)* And the quiet one here...I forget your name, sonny.

[END OF FREEVIEW]