

A Cricket on the Hearth

SYNOPSIS

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It's near to Christmas, 1840, when we meet John and Dot Plekkenpoel of New York's Hudson Valley. John is well into his 40's, huge and lumbering, and Dot is in her early 20's, petite and perky – and yet, their marriage seems to work. Into this mix soon comes a lonely old traveler – Mr. Christian – who John found trapped in a snowstorm by the side of the road and who Dot insists should stay until he finds his bearings.

A less-welcome visitor to the Plekkenpoel house is Ernest Tackleton – a greedy, finicky little man in his 50's, owner of a toy company. Old Tackleton is set to marry young May Fielding – like Dot, in her early 20's – but in an effort to convince May that their age distinction matters little, Tackleton invites John and Dot Plekkenpoel to attend a luncheon at his toy shop to show May what (ageless) love looks like.

Indeed, Tackleton has reason enough to be concerned, because May is only marrying him because her parents recently died and she has no security in the world. Not only that, but the one person May truly did love – namely Edward, the young, strapping son of Tackleton's chief toymaker, Caleb – long ago left for South America on a trip and, having not been heard from since, is presumed dead.

Before too long, the day of the luncheon arrives – by which time, John Plekkenpoel can't help but notice that Dot and Mr. Christian are getting along quite well together... and soon he learns why. During the festivities, John secretly discovers Dot and Mr. Christian touching affectionately – and even more bizarre, discovers that “Mr. Christian” is wearing a disguise and is actually a handsome young man.

Bristling with hurt and anger, John contemplates his next move and is ready to confront Mr. Christian and even do him harm - but thanks to the playful sound of a cricket on the family hearth, John's gentler nature kicks in and he remembers who he is... and in one instant, John knows exactly what he should do next...

...but what exactly is John going to do and what is the story behind Dot and Mr. Christian?