

THE WHITE BIRD OF THE OXENHAMS

This version of the local legend of 'The White Bird Of The Oxenhams' was devised and written by the group who attended Beacon Arts' Summer Drama Club in 2020, mentored by MED Theatre. There was a sharing of the below version for family members on Friday 14th August 2020.

ALEX: The **White Bird** of The **Oxenhams**.

ALICE: The Ancient **Oxenhams family** lived in South Tawton on the North East Fringe of Dartmoor. Legend has it that when a **white bird** appears to an Oxenhams, it foretells of a death in the family.

JESSIE: A young girl called **Margaret Oxenhams** was on a horse ride with her mother, **Mrs. Oxenhams** when she saw a boy riding his own horse and heading straight towards them. When he reached the Oxenhams Margaret said "hello" and the boy said his name was Bertram.

As the years passed, Margaret and Bertram grew closer and became very good friends before, eventually, falling in love. It was soon agreed that the two of them would be married, and they were very excited about this and began planning their **wedding**.

ALL: *(Whispered)* Wedding, wedding, wedding, wedding / Bertram and Margaret

EVERYONE: Margaret *(Gesture to Eleanor)*

ELEANOR: It was a couple of weeks into the summer, a hot blustery day. Bertram invited me to a wonderful ride on the moor. This year had brought a wet spring, so here on the North side of the moor it had taken a good while to drain. Bertram and my horses – Coco and Frost – were in need of the well-earned exercise.

At noon, **Bertram**, riding tall in the saddle, rode up our cobbled drive.

"**Margaret** my dear!" He called, dismounting and walking up to our door. From the window I watched my father welcoming him. Being the gentleman that he was, he took my father, Mr Oxenhams' hand. They shook.

"Bertram, welcome back. Margaret will be delighted."

"The pleasure is mine," and with that I trotted down the stairs to meet my husband-to-be.

"Good afternoon Bertram," we embraced. As we moved away from my father, I gave him a quick kiss.

Once we left Oxenhams Manor and were on the moor, we broke into fluid conversation. Topics considered were wedding plans; Thomas Parker, the local baker; the flour conservation and the roses from the

garden. After our lengthy babble, a gallop, we were down in the valley. We twisted and turned through the wood – the thick canopy of ash leaves above blocked out the sunrays.

“Bertram, darling how is Frosty?” The handsome man peered down at his dapple grey mare.

“Okay, thank you dear; she has been fine so far. Not even spooked.” There was a pause. Suddenly, there came a rustle and a **distressed bird** took flight somewhere above. That was all it took!

“Neeigh!” Frosty reared onto her hind legs, Bertram crashing down behind. There was a sickening crack and all was quiet.

“Bertram!” My voice broke the silence, cracking like a whip. I yelled and screamed until someone came running, and that was when I collapsed.

“Margaret,” A young woman helped me to my feet.

“Yes, who are you?” I questioned, my lip wobbling.

“**Mary**, Bertram’s cousin,” I gasped. The reality of what had happened came sharply back to me.

EVERYONE: Margaret (*Gesture to ABBY*)

ABI: When the doctor told me that **Bertram** would not recover; that he might have long term memory loss, the shock ran through my blood like **an icy arrow**. Would the man I love never be able to marry me? **Mary’s** face bore the shock I felt.

IZZY: **John Roxemcave** arrives at Oxenham Manor and knocks on the door. It opens to reveal a sad and tearful Margaret. She invites him in and they sit down. Margaret tells John how devastated she is about Bertram and how the doctor said he might not recover. She is worried that she will be lonely for the rest of her life. John looks at the clock and tells Margaret that he has to leave but that he would like to come back and keep her company while Bertram is recovering. She agrees to this and then he opens the door and walks out.

EVERYONE: Margaret (*Gesture to Dot*)

DOT: One sunny morning I heard boots coming down the drive of Oxenham Manor. I rushed down stairs to see who it was – it was **John**! He knelt down on the gravel and **proposed to me**. I didn’t know what to say to him because I still loved Bertram, so I said to John: “Leave me two weeks so I can think about it.”

I shut the door and he walked away anxiously, looking back over his shoulder. As he went, I went upstairs and did a lot of **crying** in my bedroom. Then I did a massive **sneeze** before going downstairs.

EVERYONE: Aaaachhooo!

DOT: “Margaret my dear, did you hear that thunder?”
“No mother, it was me sneezing!”

EVERYONE: Mary (*Gesture to Matilda*)

MATILDA: I woke up to a cold, rainy morning; unlike the other sunny days we'd had this summer. I sighed. If only **Bertram** could get better. Slowly I pulled open Bertram's door... He was sat up in bed! I just couldn't believe it. I flew down the stairs to greet **Margaret**.

"He's better, he's better – come on!" For a second Margaret looked flabbergasted then a second later, she was smiling from ear to ear and she ran upstairs. I watched from the doorway as they chatted non-stop.

"Margaret my love, what a pleasure! Are the **wedding plans** still going ahead? And how's Frost?" Said Bertram, once again a fine gentleman.

Margaret replied, "Oh Bertram, how good it is to see you! Frost is happy in the field with Coco. Don't worry, there are still plenty of **flowers blooming** in the garden." And so on. They carried on talking for a while, Margaret updating Bertram on recent events. She was just telling him about the disastrous effects leading on from **Thomas Parker's sugar scandal** when it happened.

Bertram suddenly turned and glared at me. "Who is this woman in my bedroom? Why is she holding my hand? I never want to see her again; make her go!"

Margaret ran from the room in floods of tears.

Later that day, Margaret and I were hugging in the Oxenham's driveway when suddenly we spotted a certain young gentleman who went by the name of 'Roxemcave' striding towards us. Margaret ran from my arms and told him of the mornings events. And then she accepted his proposal...!

TEDDIE: **Mary** had pleaded with the Oxenhams to have an invitation for her and **Bertram** to attend the wedding. **Mr. Oxenham** wasn't sure, but **Mrs. Oxenham** had put her foot down and said of course.

Upset by her parent's disagreements, **Margaret** swept out of the room and closed the door none too gently. Mr. and Mrs. Oxenham exchanged a glance. Margaret's mother gave a quick smile, happy in the knowledge that she and her daughter were of one accord. Mr. Oxenham saw the smile and heaved a sigh; he wished he could feel as certain as his wife that Margaret was doing the right thing. He had his daughter's best interests at heart and wanted her to be happy, but there was something he couldn't quite name. He knew it was about Bertram and a sense of betrayal.

Mr. Oxenham stepped over to the window and observed a curiously darkening sky. As he gazed **west** towards the edge of the forest, his eyes came to rest on a majestic oak tree, which had been there as long as he could remember. A sense of calm began to settle upon him, but suddenly a **flash** of something pale in the branches disturbed his

reverie as **two outstretched wings** caused him a sharp intake of breath.

“Wife!” He said, “Come here quickly!”

As she approached the deep bay window, wondering what had alarmed her husband, there came an **unearthly shriek** from the skies, loud enough to pierce the thick glass and echo around the room. There was a flash of downy feathers as the spectacular yet frighteningly beautiful **bird swooped by**, casting a gloomy shadow over the grass below.

Mrs. Oxenham let out a startled **cry and crumpled** into a chair that was at her side.

“Oh, my love!” She cried. “Surely this is the omen: the white bird of the Oxenham’s and harbinger of death! Maybe I was wrong... Quick, it’s not too late.”

At these words, her husband summoned a servant who was unceremoniously dispatched with a letter to Bertram and Mary informing them that their company was no longer requested at the ceremony and marked: Urgent – no reply needed.

EVERYONE: The day of the wedding... (*Echo*)

ALEX: All of the guests had arrived, and **Margaret** and **John** were waiting at the top of the aisle.

Suddenly, however, one more carriage pulled up and inside it was **Mary** and **Bertram**.

ALICE: Mary and Bertram tried to enter the church but a **servant stopped** them. **Mary insisted** that they had an invitation, but the servant informed them that the invitation had been **taken back**.

ABI: In a sudden rage, **Bertram pushed** the servant aside and ran down the side of the church and jumped through a window, **smashing** the glass as he went.

ALEX: In his fury, Bertram ran to Margaret and grabbed the brooch pin from her dress and **stabbed her** with it, before **stabbing himself**.

ALICE: And outside the church, it is said, was seen a **white bird (echo)**, flying up into the sky.