

# Glad Angels Are Singing

*By Ray L. Bergman*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Set in a poor tailor's home on Christmas Eve, 1774, a father is depressed he cannot afford to buy his eight motherless children any gifts. Suddenly, he has a thought and instructs all his children to gather around the fireplace. He has a present that won't break—nor wear out—and one they can all enjoy together. He sings a beautiful song about the Savior's birth. The children are enthusiastic when he teaches them the song and they sing along with him happily. Unfortunately, the rich old sea captain who lives above them is bothered by the noise and pounds on the floor for them to stop. When they don't, he comes downstairs and pays Father some money for peace and quiet. He also offers to adopt one of the boys, saying he could give him a good education and home, but none of the boys wishes to leave the family. The captain returns upstairs. Now, without any singing to express their happiness, the mood becomes somber – until Father tells the oldest child to give back the money. The family is going to sing! Moments later the lonely old sea captain, with money in hand, asks to join them. This warm and engaging play brings the spirit of Christmas to the stage.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(Flexible cast: 2 to 3 adults, 7 children.)*

PETER THUMBKIN: A tailor and father. This role could easily be adapted to a mother.

KOPEK: Peter's friend. He has a shabby coat and shaggy gray hair. This role could easily be adapted to a woman.

CAPTAIN: He lives upstairs above Peter's shop.

*(One male actor could easily play both Kopek and the Captain.)*

CHILDREN:

DAVID: The eldest boy, about 14.

ZIA: The eldest girl.

THOMAS: The mischievous one.

PIETER: Named after his father.

JOHNNY: Looks like his mother.

KRISTINA: Little girl.

ROBBY: Still younger.

MARGARET: The baby. (Can be a prop.)

TIME: Christmas Eve, 1774.

PLACE: Peter's shop in Salem, Massachusetts.

PERFORMANCE TIME: About 25 minutes.

## **SETTING**

Peter Thumbkin's tailor shop is more than just a place to order a new pair of breeches. The two murky little rooms are also home for Peter and his eight children. Three steps at ULC lead off to the shop's outside entrance. DSL is a small work table, littered with unfinished garments and patterns, sewing implements, etc. On the table a single candle burns cheerfully, combining with the orange coals in the fireplace at SL to illuminate the room. A chair is placed above the table. There is a dilapidated cupboard DL and another one USR.

On the rear wall, two high windows transmit the faint reflection of a street lamp outside. A large, bare eating table and four stools are between the windows. DC is the only armchair. One small bed and a small cradle are DSR. Off SR is a hall to another room where the rest of the children sleep.

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*(AT RISE: KOPEK sits in the armchair absorbed in his Bible. Right now all of the children except David are tucked among the covers of the beds. DSR, little MARGARET, the newest addition to the family, tosses in her cradle. Little ROBBY lies nearby on a straw ticking on the floor. The rest of the CHILDREN are bedded down in room off SR. The street door opens and DAVID clumps down into the room. His heavy coat and cap are covered with loose powder snow which flies about as he unwinds the dark scarf from around his throat.)*

DAVID: Oh—hello, Mr. Kopek. I didn't expect to find you here tonight—on Christmas Eve.

KOPEK: Hello, David. I came in to see your father. But since the little ones were alone, I decided to wait.

DAVID: Father's delivering a new coat to Mr. Clinton and some new breeches and a waistcoat to his other customers.

KOPEK: And you've been helping?

DAVID: Yes, sir. I've been down on the docks.

KOPEK: That's a long way in the snow, my boy.

DAVID: Yes, sir.

KOPEK: *(As he looks at the cradle DR.)* The young ones were so tired. I sent them off to bed until Peter returns.

DAVID: *(Hanging up his coat and cap on the wall L.)* I'm hungry. Will you have some bread and cheese, Mr. Kopek?

KOPEK: No, thank you. You go ahead, but be quiet about it.

DAVID: *(Goes to cupboard USR and takes out a big loaf of bread and some cheese. He cuts off thick slices of both at the table USC.)* Yes, sir.

KOPEK: Does your father ever read to you from the Good Book, David?

DAVID: Sometimes—before we go to bed. But Robby and the others always get sleepy so soon.

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KOPEK: Would you like me to read to you?

DAVID: I can read it myself now, Mr. Kopek. But I'd like to hear you anyway.

KOPEK: I forget you're going to the minister's school, David. Peter's very proud of your progress.

DAVID: I'm going to own a ship some day, like the Captain upstairs. Then I'll sail around the world.

KOPEK: If you like the sea, David—you can do it. But don't be a pompous fool like him. *(Points up, blows out his chest like the Captain.)*

DAVID: Father says the Captain should find a wife.

KOPEK: Him? No woman would take his orders. Even in a house with ten rooms.

DAVID: He gave me a piece of ivory from India once.

KOPEK: You must have worked for it.

DAVID: No, sir. He asked me what I wanted to be. I said "a sea captain like you." And then he took the ivory out of his pocket and gave it to me. I'll show it to you, Mr. Kopek... *(Starts to go R.)*

KOPEK: Not now, David....

DAVID: On Sundays sometimes he lets me look through his spyglass.

KOPEK: Just the same—there are nine of you here in this— *(Gestures.)* and he's alone in ten rooms upstairs.

DAVID: Don't you like the Captain, Mr. Kopek?

KOPEK: Of course ... but now let us dwell on pleasant things. I've been reading from St. Luke. Just imagine—it was a night like this—over eighteen centuries ago—when a glorious star shone bright in the heavens over Bethlehem—and the Child Jesus lay on his bed of straw...

*(HE reads. DAVID brings his supper over and sits in the chair LC.)*

KOPEK: *(Cont'd reading from his Bible.)* "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid."

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