

A PIONEER CHRISTMAS

By Stan Hudson

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DEDICATION

To Patsy, who cried real tears in our first performance. And to Wendell and Chris, whose love and encouragement made this possible.

The Playwright, Stan Hudson

STORY OF THE PLAY

The Rev. Robert Harper came out West to serve the needs of other pioneer settlers, but he and his wife, Sarah, find their faith wavering. As Robert says, "It seems that all the labor never brings results, the plans never bring success, all our prayers for the work are never answered. The constant sacrificing no longer seems worth it." Finally, in the midst of a terrible snowstorm, after having attended to an ill woman, Robert and Sarah concede that they were naive in thinking they could withstand the harsh living conditions for themselves as well as spiritually uplift the other settlers, too. When a neighbor goes to great trouble to deliver an unexpected box from back East, however, a box filled with warm clothes, food, and long-wished for toys for their children, Robert and Sarah's faith is renewed. They have weathered the storm outside, and their own storm inside as well.

SETTING

The cabin of Robert and Sarah Harper located out West in the late 1800s. A table CS holds a kerosene lamp, a few books, pencil and paper and coffee mug. Old chairs are SL, SR, and UPS sides of table. A window can be located UPS if it can be made to look like it is snowing outside; otherwise the window should be out of the line of sight of the audience on the SL wall. A hat stand or wall pegs are SL holding an old hat, scarf, worn man's coat and a large pair of socks. Another pair of socks are lying on the floor beside the stand. Under the window, if one is there, is a table holding a large basin, a few dishes and cups, towel and a hammer. An old pump would be effective if it can be obtained. At SR is an old wood or potbellied stove and an old chair with a large Bible on it. The bedroom door is USR. Any items that may add to the scene of a pioneer kitchen such as old bushel basket filled with potatoes, etc. can add to the ambiance.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 1 w, 5 children)

ROBERT HARPER: A pioneer minister. Soft spoken, but has a subtle sense of humor.

SARAH: Robert's wife.

MARY: Their oldest child.

MATTHEW: Their oldest son.

MARK: Their youngest child.

MR. AUGSBURGER: Older man but energetic.

TWO CHILDREN: Any age will do.

Playing Time: About 45 minutes.

SYNOPSIS

Scene 1: Afternoon of Christmas Eve, late 1800s.

Scene 2: Later that evening.

Scene 3: Still later that evening.

Scene 4: Early Christmas morning.

COSTUMES

All characters are dressed in pioneer style clothes which reflect their simple lifestyle and the cold winter season. In addition, Robert may wear suspenders and Sarah a long apron and their children will need to change into nightclothes. All characters need winter coats.

PROPS

A horse bridle or pitchfork for Augsburg, basket for Mary, coffee pot and cups, Family Bible, hammer, a large wooden crate containing canned goods, candy, a man's overcoat (new looking), ladies gloves with a piece of paper in them, clothing, pajamas, two pair of boys' skates, and one attractive china doll.

MUSIC and SOUND EFFECTS

The family sings several Christmas carols including "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," "Some Children See Him," and "Joy to the World." In addition, Sarah sings "A Cradle in Bethlehem." Other background music includes Debussy's "Engulfed Cathedral" and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

SOUND EFFECTS: Howling winter winds, sleigh bells, and door knocks.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT comes up on MR. AUGSBURGER standing CS. He is dressed for outdoors and is holding a horse bridle or pitchfork.)

MR. AUGSBURGER: *(Shouting greeting.)* Reverend Harper! Mary! Merry Christmas. *(Enter ROBERT and MARY from SL. Mary is holding a basket.)*

ROBERT: Hello there, Mr. Augsburg, Merry Christmas to you.

MARY: Merry Christmas, Mr. Augsburg.

ROBERT: Thought we might as well stop by and see if there was any mail.

MR. AUGSBURGER: Sorry, Reverend, nothin' today. You folks in town gettin' your Christmas supplies?

ROBERT: We've done a little shopping. *(Looks down at MARY.)* And a whole lot of lookin'.

MR. AUGSBURGER: Ah, got your eye on somethin' special, I bet.

MARY: *(With a big smile.)* Yes, sir! I sure do!

MR. AUGSBURGER: *(Laughs. To ROBERT.)* Christmas and bright eyes ... think they kinda go together. *(To MARY.)* Bet you've been extra good then.

MARY: Yes, sir! *(Pause.)* But Dad says I need to be good anyway. Since there's so many more folks that don't get than do, the world would be a mighty miserable place if that was the only reason people were good.

MR. AUGSBURGER: Well, you do have a point there. *(Both MEN act chilled and bundle up clothing tighter around necks. Mr. Augsburg grabs hat to keep it from blowing away.)* Whoa! Sure don't like the way that wind's a whippin' up.

ROBERT: Yeah, I've been noticing those big storm clouds moving in. They look pretty menacing.

MR. AUGSBURGER: You're sure right about that. When you see 'em rollin' in from the northwest like these here are, it can mean a real damagin' storm.

ROBERT: Real bad, huh?

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MR. AUGSBURGER: Oh, folks around here get used to the snow but these here storms can be real killers on crops. Few years back we had a couple roll in, one right after the other, so bad they froze the buds right off the trees. Really hurt the apple orchards and completely destroyed the peaches.

ROBERT: Yes, I know. I still hear people talking about that.

MR. AUGSBURGER: Caused some folks to pull up and move on; others still haven't recovered from it. *(Pause.)* You know, Reverend Harper, folks around these parts are mighty happy that a man, *(Beat.)* like yourself, would come way out here and try to build up a church. I don't think you realize what a blessin' you've been to us all.

ROBERT: *(Somewhat embarrassed.)* Thanks, Mr. Augsburg. Just trying to be in God's will, that's all. *(ALL three again pull clothing tighter around them and act chilled by another gust of wind.)*

MR. AUGSBURGER: Well, I think you better be tryin' to get home before you and Mary get caught in this storm ... instead of standin' here cacklin' like a couple old hens.

ROBERT: You know, I think you're right. *(As an afterthought.)* About the storm I mean, not about the old hens. *(BOTH laugh.)* You better get home, too.

MR. AUGSBURGER: Ah, don't worry about Betsy Mae and me. We've plowed through many a snow storm in our time.

ROBERT: Well, Merry Christmas to you and your family. C'mon, Mary, we'd better hurry.

MARY: *(As THEY exit SR.)* Merry Christmas, Mr. Augsburg.

MR. AUGSBURGER: *(Shouts.)* Merry Christmas *(Turns and begins to exit SL.)* C'mon, Betsy Mae, we've still got work to do.

(LIGHTS fade.)

End of Freeview

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