

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

Prancer

by Greg Taylor

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CHARACTERS

JESSICA RIGGS - 9, high-spirited, energy to burn, a true believer

JOHN RIGGS - late 30's, Jessica's father

STEVE RIGGS - 12, Jessica's brother

AUNT SARAH - early 40's, John's sister, Jessica's aunt

CAROL WEATHERBY - 10, Jessica's best friend

DR. BENTON - 50's, the town's veterinarian

TOM STEWART - 40's, the Santa at the mall

MRS. MCFARLAND - 50's, a recluse, the richest woman in town

PASTOR WILLIAMS - 40's, minister of Jessica's church

DORA BENEDETTI - 30's, a Three Oaks policewoman

HERB DRIER - 40's, a butcher, owner of the town's Christmas tree lot

MISS FAIRBURN - 50's, a teacher at Jessica's school

RYAN NICOLSON - one of Jessica's classmates

GAVIN - one of Jessica's classmates

NITA - one of Jessica's classmates

STACY - one of Jessica's classmates

RILEY - one of Jessica's classmates

EMMA - one of Jessica's classmates

TOMMY - one of Jessica's classmates

CREW WORKER - 30's

HAROLD - 8 years old

SAMMY - 6 years old

NOTE: Prancer can be staged with minimal set pieces. A table, some chairs and a counter for the kitchen scenes, for example. A few appropriate set pieces for the shed scenes. Several stacks of boxes in Mrs. McFarland's dark, spooky attic. If desired, it does not have to snow at any point during the play. In addition, Prancer does not have to literally fly across the theater at the end of the play. Jessica's and John's dialogue and their expressions of surprise and wonder, along with suggestive lighting effects, can convey the magic of what they are seeing.

Regarding Prancer, this is where a uniquely theatrical kind of magic should apply. In the original production, imaginative puppetry - inspired in part by War Horse - was used. Three visible puppeteers manipulated the reindeer, but the eye was always directed to Prancer. Although I leave the portrayal of Prancer up to each individual theater, the guiding principle should be that the reindeer - however constructed - become an animal that Jessica, and the audience, can relate to and embrace as a living, breathing character.

PRANCER

SCENE 1 - FOREST - NIGHT

The stage is dark. Sounds of a winter night in the forest gradually become audible. WIND whispers through the branches of the trees. An owl HOOTS. A twig SNAPS as an unseen animal runs through the woods. The wind suddenly picks up, blowing hard. Then, as the wind settles back to a whisper..

There is movement at the back of the stage. An animal, in silhouette. SCURRYING SOUNDS erupt in the dark forest as animals react to the unexpected appearance of this creature. At first, the way the light hits the animal, only its body is visible. Then, the creature's crown of antlers is revealed. When the animal walks from the darkness at the back of the stage, a soft beam of moonlight reveals it to be a reindeer. By now all forest sounds have stopped. Even the wind.

The deer stops at the edge of the stage and regards the audience. Looking this way and that, it is as though the animal is trying to communicate something. After a moment of silent communion with the audience...

The WIND and the SOUNDS OF THE FOREST return. They gradually diminish as the stage FADES TO BLACK.

MUSIC: "Little Drummer Boy", sung by a grade school choir.

LIGHTS UP to reveal...

SCENE 2 - GRADE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

MISS FAIRBURN, the music teacher, is at the front of the classroom, playing piano as her pupils sing "Little Drummer Boy". She frowns and holds up a hand to stop the singing.

MISS FAIRBURN

(indicating one half of the classroom)

Just this half.

Half of the students sing a few verses, then Miss Fairburn stops the singing once again. She gets up and walks between two rows of seats toward the back of the room.

MISS FAIRBURN (CONT'D)

You three. Sing.

Miss Fairburn frowns as the three students sing. One of the students is very loud and off key.

MISS FAIRBURN (CONT'D)

That's enough.

The three students stop singing. Miss Fairburn leans down close to nine year old JESSICA RIGGS.

MISS FAIRBURN (CONT'D)

Jessica, I think you should...

RILEY

Shut up.

MISS FAIRBURN

That's enough from you, Riley.

EMMA

Sounds like a cat dying.

MISS FAIRBURN

Another crack from any of you and you're looking at detention.

That silences the students.

MISS FAIRBURN (CONT'D)

Just sing a little softer, Jessica.

The bell rings, announcing the end of the school day.

MISS FAIRBURN (CONT'D)

Listen up everyone. You need to have your angel costumes ready in two days. If you haven't started them yet, now's the time.

The students start filing out of the classroom. One of them, TOMMY, goes to a calendar which has been drawn on the blackboard.

GAVIN

(yelling)

Can I cross off the Christmas calendar, Miss Fairburn?

MISS FAIRBURN

Yes, you may, Gavin. And don't shout.

Gavin crosses off "December 19" with an exaggerated flourish.

GAVIN

(shouting)

Only six more days until Christmas!

Two stylishly dressed girls, NITA and STACY, walk past Jessica, who is still sitting at her desk.

NITA

(loud enough for Jessica to hear)

I liked Jessica's singing, didn't you, Stacy?

STACY

Absolutely. It's very... original.

Jessica gives the two girls a look as they walk off giggling. RYAN NICOLSON and Gavin now brush past Jessica's desk, one on either side. Gavin mimics Jessica's loud, off-key singing.

GAVIN

Pah-rum-pum-pum-PUM!

JESSICA

Stuff it, Gavin.

Gavin grins at Jessica and makes a face. CAROL WEATHERBY comes up to Jessica.

CAROL

They're idiots, Jess. Forget 'em.

Jessica glares at Ryan and Gavin as they exit the classroom, then opens her desk top and starts pulling out some of the contents. The only student left in the classroom at this point, besides Jessica and Carol, is TOMMY, who cleans the erasures.

CAROL (CONT'D)

Better hurry with that or we'll miss the bus.

JESSICA

It's too nice outside to ride in a smelly old school bus. I'm walking home. Come with?

Carol thinks about that, then shrugs her okay. She sits at the desk next to Jessica. Jessica continues to drag a comical assortment of stuff out of her desk top. This includes a large amount of gold and white cloth material. (For her angel outfit). Some of the stuff she muscles into her backpack, some of it she shoves back inside the desk.

CAROL

Uh... don't you think it's time to clean out your desk?

JESSICA

Why? I never know when I might need some of this stuff.

Done packing her backpack, Jessica gets up from her desk. Bulging to the breaking point, her pack hangs heavy.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

See ya, Miss Fairburn.

MISS FAIRBURN

Jessica, I need to speak with you for a moment. Your language arts worksheet is two weeks late.

JESSICA

Two weeks? Really? I thought it was only --

MISS FAIRBURN

Do you have someone at home to help you with these assignments?

JESSICA

Yeah. No, I mean... I can do it.

MISS FAIRBURN

You do know, Jessica, that students with missing assignments cannot participate in the holiday concert.

JESSICA

I'll finish it in time, Miss Fairburn. I promise.

MISS FAIRBURN

You'd better get started on your angel outfit tonight, as well. Hear?

JESSICA

Yes, ma'am.

MISS FAIRBURN

OK, then. I'll see you tomorrow.

Jessica and Carol head for the door.

JESSICA

(sotto voce, to Carol)

Let's get out of here before she tells me something else I need to do!

SCENE 3 - THREE OAKS MAIN STREET - DAY

Three Oaks' main street is classic small town, but with its own distinctive flavor. There are the usual small town shops - a drug store, a barbershop, an antique store - but also a butcher shop and an empty lot next door that takes advantage of the year's holidays. Currently it is a Christmas tree lot. HERB DRIER, wearing a bloody apron under his open winter jacket, adjusts a sign near the front of the lot, then goes into the butcher shop.

At STAGE LEFT a small crew of workers are stringing up a Santa and his reindeer display between the antique store and barbershop.

Jessica and Carol appear from STAGE RIGHT. DORA BENEDETTI, a policewoman, walks toward Jessica and Carol.

JESSICA

Hi, Dora.

OFFICER BENEDETTI

(good-naturedly)

That's Officer Benedetti to you, Jessica. Hi, Carol.

As Officer Benedetti moves on, Tommy comes running up to Jessica.

TOMMY

Jessica, I heard you might not be in the concert because you didn't do your homework. I can help you if you want.

JESSICA

I'll be fine, Tommy. Thanks, anyway.

Gavin and Ryan run up behind Jessica, Carol and Tommy. They're followed by Riley and Emma.

GAVIN

C'mon, Tommy! We gotta go.

RILEY

I'm going home to get my sled.

The group disperses. Tommy gives Jessica a wave, then follows his classmates.

JESSICA

Speaking of sleds... check it out, Carol.

Jessica goes to the all-purpose drug store. A gleaming Mountain Boy Ultimate Flyer snow sled is displayed in the front window.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

An Ultimate Flyer. What a beauty. I'd love to have that.

CAROL

So put it on your Christmas list.

JESSICA

I have to be very selective with my list this year. That's what my dad says, anyway.

CAROL

Why would he say that?

JESSICA

I don't know. It's like he knows something about Santa I don't. Hey, we're goin' sledding after school tomorrow, right?

CAROL

If it snows.

JESSICA

Oh, it's gonna snow. At least six inches. Hi, Dr. Benton.

DOCTOR BENTON, the town's veterinarian, walks briskly past. He gives Jessica a curt nod.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Carol! Look!

An older woman with an unruly mane of grey hair, grasping a small pet carrier in both hands and dressed in drab clothing, stalks down the sidewalk. She turns into the Christmas tree lot and disappears among the trees.

CAROL

That was Mrs. McFarland, wasn't it?

JESSICA

Yeah. She never comes to town. What a sighting!

CAROL

She gives me the creeps.

JESSICA

She gives everyone the creeps. Hey, I just got a great idea.

CAROL

What?

JESSICA

We're going sledding tomorrow at Mrs. McFarland's.

CAROL

What? No way! Why would you want to go there?

JESSICA

Her back yard has the best sledding hill in town.

CAROL

That woman's crazy. For real. Besides, didn't your dad tell you to stay away from her place after you...

JESSICA

That's what's gonna make it all the more fun. I'm not supposed to go there, and Mrs. McFarland is crazy. 'Course if she catches us she'll kidnap us and make us prisoners in her attic.

CAROL

Stop it, Jess.

JESSICA

You know what Mrs. McFarland really for real does, though?

CAROL

What?

JESSICA

Keeps all her dead cats in her attic.

CAROL

Okay. I've heard enough.

JESSICA

I'm serious. She has 'em all stuffed, in all different kinds of positions, and she puts 'em in her attic.

CAROL

Stop talking.

Just then, there is a commotion down at the end of the block. One of Santa's reindeer has broken away from the display and falls to the ground with a thud! Jessica and Carol run to the scene of the accident.

Herb Drier appears from his butcher shop.

HERB DRIER

Look at this! I've been telling the council for years we need a new Santa display.

Jessica walks toward the fallen reindeer.

HERB DRIER (CONT'D)

Stay away from there, Jessica. It's lucky no one was hurt already.

JESSICA

They're going to fix him, aren't they?

HERB DRIER

Of course they'll fix him. We can't have Santa missing one of his reindeer, now can we? I'm going in and calling the Mayor right now.

Drier heads back into his store. Jessica watches as a crew worker picks up the fallen reindeer.

CAROL

I gotta get home, Jessica. I'm already gonna catch it for being late.

JESSICA

Okay, Carol. See ya tomorrow.

Carol heads off as the crew worker props the damaged reindeer up against the wall of the antique store.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Poor deer.

(to the crew worker)

You're gonna fix him, aren't you?

CREW WORKER

Yeah, we're going to fix him, already!

The harried crew worker walks away from Jessica.

JESSICA

Thank you.

The crew worker stops and looks over his shoulder at Jessica.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Happy holidays!

CREW WORKER

(gruff, but with a smile)

Happy holidays to you, too.

Jessica waves and heads offstage.

PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT