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The Runaway Presents

A Contemporary Christmas Play from The Paper Bag Players

Book by Judith Martin

Music by Donald Ashwander

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The Runaway Presents was developed in rehearsal with Irving Burton and Pilar Garcia. The play is a Christmas fantasy of runaway presents, from the uniquely creative Paper Bag Players of New York. The characters wear modern clothes; the actors playing the presents are gift-wrapped.

Christmas fantasy. Book by Judith Martin. Music by Donald Ashwander. Cast: 2m., 2w., 2 either gender, plus as many presents as you wish. To the tune of Donald Ashwander’s song “Wrap and Tie,” the play traces the wonderfully unlikely adventures of a group of runaway Christmas presents. The entire town pursues them in vain. Sadly, everyone goes to a party without presents, where they discover that Christmas is beautiful without expensive gifts. Astonished, the dizzy, hide-away presents return to share the fun in a singing, dancing finale for everyone. Ideal for touring and in-school performances. Music in book. Approximate running time: 15 minutes. Code: RA9.
THE RUNAWAY PRESENTS

A Contemporary Christmas Play

from

THE PAPER BAG PLAYERS

by

JUDITH MARTIN

Music by

DONALD ASHWANDER

Family Plays
311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(THE RUNAWAY PRESENTS)


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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”
CAST OF CHARACTERS

MRS. HURRYUP
A very busy lady

PRESENTS
A tall skinny one, a wide one, and as many more as there are children to play the parts

TICKET SELLER
PIZZA MAN
DELIVERY MAN
One quick-change artist inside a box

OL’ PAL
BESS FRIEND
MRS. HURRYUP’s guests

The cast of characters may be expanded if one has more actors than required above. Presents, separate roles for each character now suggested for one actor, etc.

SETTING

MRS. HURRYUP’S HOUSE
A BOX FOR THE PRESENTS
A MOVIE THEATRE
PIZZA STAND
WAREHOUSE

COSTUMES

The PRESENTS are cardboard boxes with no bottoms and a hole cut out of the top or side for the head. Use paper bags for the TICKET SELLER’S cap and the PIZZA MAN’S hat. An old newspaper makes a good shawl for BESS FRIEND, and an egg carton serves as a handbag.

SCENERY

In this play, changes in scenes are represented by a large cardboard carton — with top and bottom removed — that is turned by the TICKET-PIZZA-DELIVERY Man who performs inside it. On one side of the carton is painted a Christmas tree for the opening scene in MRS. HURRYUP’S House. Another side is a movie theatre with a cut-out window for a ticket booth. The third side is painted to look like the front of a pizza store. It also has a cut-out window. The fourth side is a warehouse window with lots of Christmas packages painted beneath it. MRS. HURRYUP’S table is also a cardboard box with legs and maybe a tablecloth painted on it.

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(The scene opens in MRS. HURRYUP's home — the Christmas tree side of the box. She stands at her table surrounded by PRESENTS. Each present is a child standing in a painted box.)

MRS. HURRYUP: Now for the part I like best about Christmas — wrapping presents. I'm so famous for making beautiful packages that I wrap presents for all my friends. We have a Christmas party at my house every year. It’s lots of work, but I just love it. Now, here’s the paper. Here’s the string. Here are the stickers and seals. And here are the presents.

(MRS. HURRYUP sings as she decorates and ties up each package.)

Wrap and tie. Wrap and tie.
I should have started in July.

Knotting, cutting,
Smoothing, closing,
Sealing, Gluing.
Pile ’em up.

Fold it right. Tie it tight.
It’s got to hold
Till Christmas night.

Knotting, cutting,
Smoothing, closing,
Sealing, gluing.
Christmas time!

Oh dear, I’ve wrapped my foot. I’ll just get it out carefully — smooth out this wrinkle and cover this bulge — and everything’s fine.

(She touches one present and it walks away towards the Christmas tree.)

My, this one moves easily. It must have batteries. Uh-oh. I’m getting caught in the string again. Where are those scissors? That one is straightened out. Now for the rest.

(She continues to sing the song until all the presents are wrapped. Each present then joins the others by the tree.)

Phew! All done! Now to put them around the tree. They look
absolutely beautiful. Well, I'd better keep moving. I still have to bake my famous fruitcake.

(She arranges the presents in front of the tree and takes the things for the cake from behind the table and puts them on top.)

Here's my large bowl and my wooden spoon. I know the recipe by heart: one bag of flour, one box of sugar, three oranges, two bananas, a handful of nuts... (She throws everything into the bowl: unpeeled bananas, whole oranges; nuts in their shells.)

And mix well. The secret of a good cake is plenty of good mixing.

(While MRS. HURRYUP stirs her cake, the PRESENTS look more and more uncomfortable.)

PRESENTS: (Whispering among themselves)
You're leaning on me.
I can't help it.
How long do we have to stay here?
Till Christmas.
When's that?
I dunno.

(MRS. HURRYUP is so busy mixing she doesn't hear the PRESENTS.)

MRS. HURRYUP: This cake is still lumpy. I just have to keep on mixing.

PRESENTS:
Now someone is leaning on my box.
I'm getting wrinkled.
Can't you move over just a little?
I can't. My knot's too tight.
Well, I've got to move.
Me too.
Be careful. I'll slip if you move.
Well, hold on.
Whoops!

(They fall over, making a great commotion.)

MRS. HURRYUP: My nice presents have fallen all over the floor! I'd better arrange them more carefully. (She puts them back into a pile.) Now, to get back to my cake and get the rest of those lumps out.
PRESENTS:
I don’t want to stay in this pile.
I’m cramped.
I’m squashed.
I’ve got to get out.
Watch where you’re going.
There’s the door.
Follow me.
Wait. I’m coming too.

(The PRESENTS run behind the box on which the tree is painted.)

MRS. HURRYUP: E E E E K! Those presents rolled right out the door. I’ve got to get them. Help! Stop! Runaway presents!

(MRS. HURRYUP runs after them. The box whirls around, turned by the person inside. Then it stops with another side showing: a ticket window of a movie theater. Neither MRS. HURRYUP nor the PRESENTS are to be seen.)

TICKET SELLER: Hardly anyone is coming to see the movie today. I guess everybody is shopping. That’s what I should be doing. I still have so many things to buy and all my presents to wrap!

PRESENTS: (stopping as they run past)
Say, here’s a movie house.
Let’s go to the movies.
May we have three tickets, please?

TICKET SELLER: Children or adults?

PRESENTS: (looking at each other) I dunno.

TICKET SELLER: Say, who are you?

PRESENTS: I dunno.

TICKET SELLER: Where’s your mother?

PRESENTS: I dunno.

TICKET SELLER: I can’t sell you a ticket! You wouldn’t even fit in a seat.
PRESENTS: Can we go in and just buy popcorn?

TICKET SELLER: No.

PRESENTS:
I don't want to go to the movies, anyway.
How about a pizza?

TICKET SELLER: There's a very good pizza place three blocks down.

PRESENTS:
Thanks.
Let's Go.

TICKET SELLER: Merry Christmas.

PRESENTS: Merry Christmas.

(The PRESENTS run behind the box. In comes MRS. HURRYUP.)

MRS. HURRYUP: Did you see some things whirling by?

TICKET SELLER: Did they look like presents?

MRS. HURRYUP: They are presents and they belong to me! They're runaways!

TICKET SELLER: They went that way looking for pizza! They were very nice-looking presents.

MRS. HURRYUP: I know. I wrapped them. Help! Stop! Runaway presents!

(MRS. HURRYUP pursues PRESENTS. Movie theater turns around again and this time becomes a pizza stand. The person inside the box takes off his TICKET SELLER's cap and puts on a white hat and a mustache and becomes the PIZZA MAN, tossing his dough in the air.)


(The PRESENTS run out from behind the box.)

PRESENTS: It's real pizza.