Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing
A LAURA INGALLS WILDER CHRISTMAS

By
Laurie Brooks

Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois
*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR’S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMV by
LAURIE BROOKS

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(A LAURA INGALLS WILDER CHRISTMAS)

ISBN: 1-58342-318-4

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois
For Terry and Judine,
who understand the truest, best thing.
IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the Play must give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author must also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the Author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. In all programs this notice must appear:

Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their invaluable help in birthing this play I’d like to thank Jeff Church, for encouraging me to find the meaningful nugget in Laura’s life or this play never would have been written; Scot Copeland, for his beautiful, imaginative staging; Robert Bedard, my favorite dramaturg ever; and Arizona State University for the space and students to help develop the play. Special thanks to Little House Heritage Trust and Noel Silverman for their support and guidance.
*A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas* was co-commissioned by The Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, Missouri, and Nashville Children’s Theatre. It premiered at The Coterie Theatre, November 2002. Jeff Church was the producing artistic director and Joette Pelster was the executive director. The production included the following:

**CAST**

Laura .................................. Aneliese Krull  
Pa ..................................... Ric Averill  
Mary ..................................... Catherine Queen  
Carrie ................................... Adria Rook  
Ma. ....................................... Jeanne Averill  
Johnny Steadman ...... Carson Lee Teague, Sam Nichols  
Mrs. Starr ............................ Deb Bluford

**ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION COMPANY**

Director ............................. Scot Copeland  
Set & Properties Design/Technical Coordinator . Jason Harris  
Costume Design ........ Greg Benkovich, Lisa Harper  
Lighting Design .................... Art Kent  
Sound Design ........................ David Kiehl  
Production Stage Manager ........ Amy M. Abels Owen  
Production Assistant/House Manager .... Sarah Wienke

© The Dramatic Publishing Company, Woodstock, Illinois
A LAURA INGALLS
WILDER CHRISTMAS

A Full-length Play
For 2m and 5w

CHARACTERS

PA INGALLS
MA INGALLS
LAURA INGALLS .................... ten years old
MARY INGALLS ................. twelve years old
CARRIE INGALLS ................. seven years old
JOHNNY STEADMAN . . ten years old, walks with a limp
MRS. STARR . . . . . . fortyes, the wealthiest woman in town

TIME and PLACE

Iowa, 1876.
NOTES

The play operates in various worlds: actual time, Laura’s imagination, and a distorted, larger-than-life child’s perspective.

The play is done on a bare stage except for a large wooden box at center around which the action revolves. This box transforms from a grave to a wagon, bed, table, seating and becomes a wagon again. The box is also used to store necessary props, which are kept to a minimum. Lighting and sound play an important role in creating mood and atmosphere.

SUGGESTED PROP LIST:

Transforming wooden box, blanket, Ma’s shawl, sled, china shepherdess, schoolgirl figurine, Pa’s fiddle, Mary’s sunbonnet, bucket, stockings with candy, Carrie’s doll, Mary’s apron and Laura’s valise. All other props are suggested with pantomime.

SONGS:

The songs in the play are traditional, including “Where There’s a Will There’s a Way” and “Sweet By and By” which can be found in The Laura Ingalls Wilder Songbook: Favorite Songs from the “Little House” books, by Eugenia Garson.
AT RISE: Lights. The family is gathered at a grave. They sing an arrangement of "In the Sweet By and By" (traditional hymn). During the song, MA ceremoniously takes the family’s china shepherdess and puts it away in the box at center. PA takes his fiddle and adds it to the box. PA tries to lead MA away from the grave. She resists. PA takes her by the shoulders and firmly leads her away. One by one the family leaves the grave, each finding separate spaces, except for LAURA.

INGALLS FAMILY (singing together).
   In the sweet by and by we will meet on that beautiful shore.
   In the sweet by and by we will meet on that beautiful shore.

   (LAURA is left alone at the grave.)

LAURA. Good-bye, Baby Freddie.

   (LAURA closes the lid on the box. In the following scene the action is pantomimed by the actors in their separate spaces. Sounds of rain.)
PA *(slapping the reins).* Hee-ah! Get up, Pip. Get up, Paddy.

*(In their own spaces, the family members are jostled as they ride, huddled against the rain.)*

MARY. If I could feel the sun on my face right this minute I swear I’d never wear my sunbonnet again.

CARRIE. I hate rain!

MARY. Carrie!

CARRIE. Well, I do.

MARY. You must say I dislike rain more than I can say.

CARRIE. Me, too.

*(The family is jolted to a stop.)*

PA *(slapping the reins).* Get up, Pip. Paddy, git! *(Cracking the whip.)* Caroline! *(MA is lost in a reverie.)* Caroline! Take the reins. *(MA takes the reins. PA gets down to help the ponies.)* Come on, Pip. Walk on, Paddy. *(The wagon moves forward out of the mud. PA realizes MA is crying.)* Don’t cry, Caroline. We’ll be there soon. If only it’d stop raining.

MA. I keep hearing him cry, Charles. He’s all alone and…it’s raining.

PA. Try to think about our new life, Caroline. We’ll be far away from this blasted country. The hotel might be the answer to our prayers.

MA. But it’s a tavern. What kind of place is that for our girls?

PA. A better place, I hope. *(Cracking the whip.)* Hee-ah! Git up!
LAURA. I’m worried about Ma. She’s gone so quiet.
MARY. She’s thinking, is all.
LAURA. I think she never really left Uncle Peter and Aunt
Eliza’s farm.
CARRIE. But she’s right here.
LAURA. I know she is. But she’s hardly talked since we
left.
CARRIE. Maybe the cat’s got her tongue.
LAURA. I think she’s too sad to talk.
CARRIE. She misses Baby Freddie.
MARY. Hush up about that, Carrie.
CARRIE. Why do I have to hush up? We all miss him.
LAURA. Especially Ma.
CARRIE. Why did he have to die?
MARY (to LAURA). Now see what you’ve done?
CARRIE. He never even got to have his first birthday.
MARY. Don’t be sad, Carrie. Baby Freddie’s in heaven
now and there’s no more beautiful place than heaven.
CARRIE. Then why don’t we all go to heaven? (Silence.)
LAURA. Because we can’t go together. And I wouldn’t
want to go without you.
CARRIE. Will I go to heaven when I die and see Baby
Freddie?
MARY. Yes, Carrie.
LAURA. Maybe Ma wants to die so she can see Baby
Freddie.
MARY. Hush, Laura. What a thing to say.
PA. Hee-ah! Good boy, Pip. Walk on, Paddy.
LAURA. I wish Baby Freddie hadn’t died.
MA. I wish we had a place to call home.
PA. Wish we’d see the end of this blasted rain.
MARY. I wish I knew what lies ahead.
LAURA. I wish I could make Ma smile.
CARRIE. I wish we were at Bird Oak.
PA. That’s Burr Oak, Buttercup.
LAURA. I wish we weren’t going to Burr Oak. I don’t like living in town.
PA. Well now, since you’ve never lived in town before, maybe you better wait and see before making up your mind.
LAURA. It’s backtracking, Pa. I want to go west.
PA. I know, Half-pint. And we will. In due time. We just need to get back on our feet. Times are hard, and not just for us.
LAURA. Those blasted grasshoppers.
PA. You can say that again.
CARRIE. Those blasted grasshoppers.
PA. Better to backtrack than be beholden to folks. Long as I have a beating heart and two working hands, we’ll make it on our own, thank you kindly. Charity’s not for this family.
LAURA (pause). Are we poor, Pa?
PA. We don’t have much and might be headed for even less, but we got each other. (Pause.) Git up, boys.

(LIGHTS CROSS FADE. The family throws off their shawls, coats and hats, and takes up the hustle and bustle of the hotel. Hurrying this way and that they pantomime the work of keeping the hotel running—folding laundry, drying dishes, dusting, stacking wood. This scene is intended to be expressionistic, from a child’s larger-than-life point of view. Soundscapes of the hotel—honky-tonk piano, banging doors, dishes, front desk bell ringing, shuffling cards, laughing.)
LAURA. Ma, can I go out to the barn now?
MA. Not until you finish your chores.
LAURA. It’s so noisy in this hotel.
MARY. Guess we’ll just have to get used to it.
LAURA. It’s hurting my ears.
MA. Stop complaining and start working!
LAURA. Pa, can I have a shot of whiskey?
MA & PA. No!

(Hustle and bustle increases in pace and soundscape increases in volume. LAURA, at center, can’t take it another minute.)

LAURA. Wait!

(All freeze. Barn soundscape. Sounds of horses: a nicker, stomping feet, snorts. During the following, LAURA pantomimes taking care of the horses, feeding them hay, hugging and currying them. She can hear but cannot see the family members who speak to her.)

LAURA (cont’d). Want your supper, Paddy? I’ve got some bran mash for you. (Playful nickering.) Yes, I’ve got some for you, too, Pip. I’m glad you still remember how to play. Mary forgot how.
MARY. I didn’t forget. I don’t have time to play.
LAURA. Her pretty hands are all cracked and chapped.
MARY. Can’t be helped. Got laundry to do.
LAURA. Ma hasn’t put out her china shepherdess. She always puts out her china shepherdess.
MA. This hotel just doesn’t seem like home to me.
LAURA. But it isn’t home until Ma puts out the china shepherdess.
MA. Can’t be bothered about that now.
LAURA. Pa’s put away his fiddle. He hasn’t played one song since we came to this blasted hotel.
PA. Don’t have the heart for playing the fiddle just now, I reckon.
LAURA. “Don’t have the heart for playing the fiddle just now, I reckon.” That’s what you always say, ever since we came to this hotel. Will you play the fiddle again? Just one song.
PA. Got chores to do, Half-pint.
LAURA. But when will you have the time? When will you bother? When will you have the heart?

(Barn soundscape fades. The family fades. JOHNNY STEADMAN enters the space, walking with a decided limp.)

JOHNNY. Laura Ingalls!
LAURA. What do you want, Johnny Steadman?
JOHNNY. I got a horned toad.
LAURA. You do not.
JOHNNY. I surely do. Wanna see it?
LAURA. Your ma’ll whup you if she catches you with that thing in here. No animals allowed in the hotel.
JOHNNY. See if I care. I bring all kinds of sundry creatures to home and never get caught. (Pause.) I got it hidden right here in my pocket.
LAURA. Can I hold it?
JOHNNY. Naw. You’ll drop it ’cause it’s too squishy.
LAURA. Will not.
JOHNNY. You’re afraid of squishy things. All females are.
LAURA. Not this female. I’m not afraid to hold a smelly old toad.
JOHNNY. It’s not smelly.
LAURA. Smells like a cow pie.
JOHNNY. That’s because I found him in a field.
LAURA. I’ll be careful. I won’t drop him.
JOHNNY. Cross your heart and hope to die?
LAURA. Stick a pin in my eye. *(LAURA holds out her hands to receive the toad. JOHNNY gives her the “toad.” It is a cow pie.)*
JOHNNY. Got ya! Ha! Ha!
LAURA. Ooooo! You liar!
JOHNNY. Fooled you. Fooled you. *(LAURA throws the cow pie at JOHNNY.)* Laura’s got a cow pie in the house!
LAURA. I hate you, Johnny Steadman. You’re the worst boy I ever met! *(JOHNNY fades, laughing.)*
MA. What’s all this shouting, Laura?
LAURA. It’s that awful, mean Johnny Steadman.
MA. Now, Laura, is that a nice way to talk about a friend?
LAURA. He’s not my friend.
MA. Why, of course he is. I’m sure he’s happy to have someone his own age right here at the hotel. It must have been lonely for him before we came.
LAURA. He’s mean and hateful. He pulls my hair and he makes fun of us and… *(LAURA looks at her hands, still smelling of cow pie.)*
MA. And what?
LAURA. And everything. He’s awful, horrible, and dreadful.
MA. Laura, we must be mindful of his infirmity. None of us can know how difficult life is for him, dragging that useless foot.

LAURA. Being crippled is no excuse for being mean.

MA. Nonetheless, you must be extra nice to him, Laura, like a good girl. Do you hear me?

LAURA. Yes, Ma.

MA. Remember the Golden Rule.

LAURA. “Do unto others as you would have done unto you.” I know, Ma. (MA fades.) But I still hate him.

(LIGHTS CROSS FADE. LAURA and MARY sing “The First Noel” in two-part harmony. CARRIE listens nearby. During the song, MA is in spotlight. MA’s shawl becomes a baby that MA rocks in her arms. By the end of the song, MA realizes that her arms are empty and the shawl becomes just a piece of cloth.)

LAURA & MARY (singing).

Noel, noel, noel, noel.
Born is the King of Israel.

(MA fades.)

MARY. That was much better.

LAURA. If we keep practicing every day, we won’t even be nervous Christmas Eve.

MARY. I will be. Everyone at church listening and looking at us. I wish I had a good dress to wear instead of this old thing.

LAURA. Me, too. But we’ll sing our part so perfectly no one will even notice what we’re wearing.
MARY. We’ll have to be awful good.
LAURA. We better practice that last part again.

(MARY leads and the two girls sing the refrain again, a capella.)

LAURA & MARY (singing).
Noel, noel, noel, noel…

(CARRIE joins on the last line, but sings loudly and off key.)

LAURA, MARY & CARRIE (singing).
Born is the King of…
LAURA. Carrie!
CARRIE. What?
LAURA. You’re not supposed to sing.
CARRIE. But I like singing.
LAURA. You sing off key.
CARRIE. No, I don’t.
LAURA. You can’t even carry a tune.
CARRIE. I don’t have to carry it, I’m singing it.
LAURA. Well, don’t.
MARY. Laura, you’re hurting Carrie’s feelings.
LAURA. I don’t mean to hurt Carrie’s feelings, but Carrie will hurt the churchgoers’ ears.
CARRIE. You don’t like my singing.
LAURA. I do. I like your singing.
CARRIE. Then can I sing with you at church on Christmas Eve?
LAURA & MARY. No!
MARY. I mean maybe you can sing with us next year.
CARRIE. But why can’t I sing this year?
LAURA. Because. Ma and Pa will be lonely if they have no one to sit with them.
MARY. Yes, Carrie, you have an important job already.
CARRIE. Okay, but I’d rather sing.
LAURA. Go ahead, Mary, let’s practice the reading.

(During the following, JOHNNY sneaks up on the girls. He carries a sled. The girls elocute with high diction and overblown gestures.)

MARY. And Mary brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn.
LAURA. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them…
MARY. Louder, Laura. Project.
LAURA. 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… (JOHNNY pulls LAURA’s hair.) Ouch!
JOHNNY (imitating them). “And they were sore afraid.”
LAURA. You skedaddle, Johnny Steadman.
JOHNNY. I live here, too, remember?
LAURA. How could I forget?
CARRIE. Is that your sled?
JOHNNY. Yes. I’m going sledding. Have you ever seen a more beautiful sled? Come all the way from Chicago.
CARRIE. It’s the most beautiful sled in the whole wide world. I’d give anything to have a sled like that.
MARY. It is a lovely sled.