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SF PERUSALS

Ken Ludwig's

'Twas the Night Before Christmas

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH

Founded 1830

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KEN LUDWIG'S
'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

In addition the following credit *must* be given in all programs and publicity information distributed in association with this piece:

Ken Ludwig's 'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS
Originally commissioned by
Adventure Theatre, Glen Echo, MD
Michael J. Bobbitt, Producing Artistic Director

KEN LUDWIG'S 'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS was first presented by Adventure Theatre (Michael Bobbitt, Artistic Director), in Washington DC on November 20, 2011. The performance was directed by Jerry Whiddon, with sets by Luciana Stecconi, lighting by Andrew F. Griffin, sound by Brandon Roe, costumes by Chelsey Schuller, movement and choreography by Karen Abromaitis, and music direction by Wayne Chadwick. The cast was as follows:

SIR GUY OF GISBOURNE/UNCLE BRIERLY. . . . . .Gary Sloan

AMOS/AMOS OF KANSAS . . . . . Rex Daugherty

EMILY . . . . . .Emily Levey

CALLIOPE/BRITANNIA SNEED . . . . . Rachel Zampelli

MULCH/SANTA CLAUS/WENDELL SNEED. . . . . .Alex Perez

CHARACTERS

SIR GUY OF GISBOURNE / UNCLE BRIERLY

AMOS / AMOS OF KANSAS

EMILY

CALLIOPE / BRITANNIA SNEED

MULCH / SANTA CLAUS / WENDELL SNEED

(Note: Amos and Amos of Kansas are boy mice and were played by an actor in the original production. They could, however, be played by an actress, as a trouser role – still boy mice, but played by a woman. So the cast is either 3 female and 2 male, or 2 female and 3 male.)

SETTING

In the text of the play, the action begins in a house in Vermont; however each production can be set locally. Thus the reference in the first stage direction can use the state or city name where the theater is located.

Scene One

(The time is Christmas Eve, and at the moment we're in the well-preserved living room of the Brittleback's home at the end of a cheerful, snowy lane in Vermont. Christmas is beautiful everywhere, but it is especially beautiful in an old-fashioned living room with oriental rugs on a hardwood floor, windows looking out to trees laden with fresh snow so heavy that the branches of the trees bow down almost to the ground; a roaring fire with a grate full of glowing embers; and a Christmas tree covered in lights and ornaments that soars to the top of the timbered ceiling and seems to travel right on up to the sky.)

(As the audience settles down, **UNCLE BRIERLY** *enters. He is middle-aged and a bit portly, wearing a tartan vest and a knotted Windsor tie; he has a plummy, resonant voice and a hearty manner; and when he beams at the children he could be the kindly uncle of any one of them, just the sort of man you want to see at Christmas time.)*

(And yet…there's something slightly off-kilter about this moment, this house and this man. Perhaps it's because this is a magical time of year. Or perhaps it's because the people in this house believe in their hearts that Santa Claus is no less real than any one of them. To them he is not a myth, nor is this house or this season a myth. They are all Believers here, and so are we.)

UNCLE BRIERLY. *(entering, calling back into the room he's coming from)* I'll be right back! Enjoy the party in there! Just thought I'd give the kiddies out here a little Christmas poem, that's all! Ha ha!

(He turns and sees the children in the audience.)

UNCLE BRIERLY. *(cont.)* Ah. Children. There you are. Good afternoon and welcome all of you on this snowy and wonderful Christmas Eve to this magnificent home, and may I say to every one of you: *Merry Christmas!* I'm now going to recite for you my favorite poem of all time, one that I'm sure you've never heard before, "'*Twas The Night Before Christmas.*" Ahem.

(He clears his throat and Christmas music begins to play in the background, the kind with jingling sleigh bells, evoking a ride in the country behind a trotting horse. The opening of the first movement of Mahler's 4th Symphony would do nicely. Perhaps a bit of snow falls from above and dusts **UNCLE BRIERLY***'s shoulders.)*

"'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

(At which moment a mouse enters holding a bowl in his arm, stirring the contents with a wooden spoon. The mouse's name is **AMOS**.*)*

AMOS. Hold it! Hold it! Stop the presses! You got it wrong!

UNCLE BRIERLY. I beg your pardon! Who are you? And *what* are you?

AMOS. What do I look like? I'm a mouse. I live here. Now look at me carefully. What am I doin'?

UNCLE BRIERLY. I have no idea.

AMOS. I'm stirring. See? I'm makin' cookies for Santa Claus, so I'm *stirring the batter.* Stir, stir, stir, stir.

UNCLE BRIERLY. So?

AMOS. So you fibbed to all those nice little children out there. You said "Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." But I'm a mouse and I'm stirring. Stir, stir, stir, stir.

UNCLE BRIERLY. That's not the kind of stirring I was talking about. The word "stirring" can also mean "moving" – "not a creature was *moving*" – and I was using it in that sense, to describe a house where everything is *quiet* on Christmas eve like this house should be now may I *continue?*

AMOS. Okay. If you feel you gotta. Whatever floats your boat.

*(***AMOS** *stands to the side, watching and stirring.)*

UNCLE BRIERLY. Ahem. Twasthenightbeforechristmasand allthroughthehousenotacreasurewasstirringnotevena mouse. …Right.

(The music and the snow return happily again.)

"The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there."

AMOS. *(to himself)* "Hopes" is right, Mister. Let's "hope" that Santa makes it to the house this time. Just get yourself down that chimney, baby-face, that's all I'm askin', down the old…

*(***UNCLE BRIERLY** *is staring at him.)*

sorry.

UNCLE BRIERLY. …"The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads."

*(***AMOS** *starts dancing and humming to himself. He's now holding a stuffed animal – a pigeon – and he dances with it.)*

AMOS. Dya dum de daaaaa, dya da da da da da daaaaaaa…

UNCLE BRIERLY. What are you doing?

AMOS. I'm dancing.

UNCLE BRIERLY. Why are you dancing?

AMOS. I'm a sugar plum. Dya dum de daaaaa, dya da da da da da –

UNCLE BRIERLY. You are *not* a sugar plum. A sugar plum is a piece of candy. Are you a piece of candy?

AMOS. No.

UNCLE BRIERLY. And what is *that?*

AMOS. A pigeon.

UNCLE BRIERLY. Yes, I see it's a pigeon, but why are you dancing with it?

AMOS. Because you said "while pigeons and sugar plums danced in their heads."

UNCLE BRIERLY. No, I didn't. I said, "*visions of sugar plums.*" Not pigeons and sugar plums. Why would a sugar plum dance with a pigeon?

AMOS. Why would a piece of candy dance at all?

UNCLE BRIERLY. Because it's Christmas Eve!

AMOS. You're tellin' me. That's why I'm makin' these cookies for Santa. So he'll come to our house this year.

UNCLE BRIERLY. He comes every year.

AMOS. He didn't come last year.

UNCLE BRIERLY. Of course he did.

AMOS. No he didn't.

UNCLE BRIERLY. He did.

AMOS. He didn't.

UNCLE BRIERLY. Did!

AMOS. *Didn't! He missed our house! And I wanted a squirt gun and I didn't get it!*

UNCLE BRIERLY. *(overlapping) He comes every year! He's Santa Claus! He doesn't forget things!*

*(***EMILY** *runs in. She's a sweet little girl with attitude, about ten years old.)*

EMILY. Uncle Brierly! Stop yelling! What's going on?!

UNCLE BRIERLY. This-this-this mouse is driving me crazy! Oh – now don't be frightened. He's just a rodent. I'll call the exterminator.

AMOS. Hi, Emily.

EMILY. Hi, Amos.

(They do a hand-greeting.)

UNCLE BRIERLY. You…you *know* him?

EMILY. Of course I know him. He's my best friend. We grew up together. Remember that time I broke my tooth? It was Amos who brought me the ice cream and fed it to me.

AMOS. *(proudly)* Chocolate Broccoli.

EMILY. And that time I fell off my bicycle? It was Amos who ran and got the bandaid. Then he spit on my knee and put it right on top!

AMOS. Aw, it was nothin'.

EMILY. And he taught me to swim, and use a napkin, and eat Swiss cheese without eating the holes -

UNCLE BRIERLY. All right, all right! I get the picture! What's that?

AMOS. The picture. See, there's me, there's Emily…

UNCLE BRIERLY. *Would you stop that!*

EMILY. Uncle Brierly, don't yell at him. You'll hurt his feelings.

UNCLE BRIERLY. I can't help it. He's driving me crazy! First he's stirring, then he's dancing –

AMOS. I'm a happy person.

UNCLE BRIERLY. You're not a person at all, you're a mouse.

AMOS. Oh, thank you for telling me, like I didn't notice.

(At this moment, **WENDELL SNEED** *enters like a tsunami. He's* **BRIERLY***'s age, a big, bluff, noisy, good-natured fellow who's been invited to the party and is delighted to see his old friend.)*

WENDELL. *(entering)* Brierly? Brier-leeeeeee! Ha ha! How are you, old man? How long has it *Britannia! (He's calling to his wife,* **BRITANNIA***, who's off stage.) Look who's here! Come quickly!*

UNCLE BRIERLY. Hello, Wendell. Good to see you. Thank you for –

WENDELL. Wonderful party! Food. Drink. Children. I'm delighted to *Britannia! Don't dawdle! Brierly's here!*

*(***BRITANNIA** *enters. She's* **WENDELL***'s wife and just as dotty.)*

BRITANNIA. Yes, dear, I'm coming, I'm *coming!* He's always in such a *Brierly! How marvelous after all this* Wendell, you didn't tell me he was here.

WENDELL. Of course he's here, it's his brother's house! How could Brierly not be How do you do. Hello. *(This was to* **EMILY.***)* I'm Wendell. My wife Britannia.

EMILY. How do you do?

UNCLE BRIERLY. My niece, Emily. Emily, the Sneeds.

AMOS. Bless you.

UNCLE BRIERLY. I didn't sneeze. I said the Sneeds!

AMOS. Bless you!

UNCLE BRIERLY. The Sneeds!

AMOS. Bless you! *(pulls out a handkerchief)* Don't you want to wipe your nose after all that?

UNCLE BRIERLY. *Would you stop it!*

WENDELL. Hello. I'm Wendell Sneed and this is –

BRITANNIA. Britannia. How do you do, it's enchanting to meet you.

AMOS. How do you do. Amos Mouse

UNCLE BRIERLY. *"KIN!" Mousekin.* Amos Mousekin. He's the *son*, you see, of a friend of the family. Not a rodent at all. No, no. The tail – it's a costume. Nothing mousey about him.

EMILY. Oh, stop it, Uncle. He is a mouse, and he's my best friend. We play together all the time.

WENDELL. Like Brierly and I used to do, eh? Ha! Ha ha! We played in the woods, the fields, you name it, we played there – cowboys – Indians – *Robin Hood!* That was our favorite.

UNCLE BRIERLY. *(lovingly)* Robin Hood.

WENDELL. I played Much the Miller's son and Brierly played the villain of course. Oh what was his name, Sir Gee, Sir Goo –

UNCLE BRIERLY. Sir Guy.

WENDELL. That's it! He was Sir Guy of Gisbourne. The wickedest villain who ever *Hya! Hya! Hya!*

BRITANNIA. Oh, what fun! Now *my* friends and I played a different game, we called it "Save the Elf!" We all pretended to be Santa's elves and make toys in the Workshop.

EMILY. The Workshop?! Really? Oh, I'd *love* to see Santa's Workshop. I dream about it all the time when I fall asleep, I really do. But even if it *does* exist I'll never see it now that Santa's forgotten about us …

WENDELL. Forgotten?

BRITANNIA. He's forgotten you?

WENDELL. That's awful!

BRITANNIA. That's terrible!

UNCLE BRIERLY. That's preposterous!

EMILY. No, it's true, Uncle. You see last Christmas Santa visited all the other houses in the neighborhood, but he didn't come here.

AMOS. *(sadly)* Which means he'll probably miss us again this year.

EMILY. *(sniff)* And the year after that.

AMOS. *(sniff sniff)* And the year after that and every year till we get really, really old like your Uncle Brierly!

(He points at **UNCLE BRIERLY** *and they both start crying loudly.)*

AMOS & EMILY. *Ahhhhhhh!*

BRITANNIA. I think we'd better –

WENDELL. – go, of course, you're right, it's time for us to

BRITANNIA. Off we go.

WENDELL. We're gone.

BRITANNIA. No more.

WENDELL. We vanish, poof.

BRITANNIA. Bye-bye.

(And they're gone. Beat. **AMOS** *and* **EMILY** *look at* **UNCLE BRIERLY***…and burst into tears again.)*

BOTH. *Whaaaaaaaaaa!*

UNCLE BRIERLY. All right, that's it! I've had it! Anyone who wants to stay here with my niece and this hysterical mouse may do so. But I have to warn you, they are *young*. When people are young they don't use good

judgment. They take chances, which is silly, and they make mistakes, which is even sillier. They should be level-headed, the way adults are. Look at me. I never make mistakes, and I don't do things that are silly! *Ow!*

(He has rapped his cane on the ground to emphasize his point and has hit his toe by accident.)

UNCLE BRIERLY. *(cont.)* Ooh, ow, ooh, ow! Children will tell you they take chances because it's all part of growing up, but that's nonsense. You will grow up either way. That's what Nature is for. It pulls you to heaven. I never took a single chance in my entire life and as you can see, I AM PERFECTLY HAPPY! *(He isn't.) Now* – for those who would like to hear the end of the greatest poem ever written, follow me!

(He turns and exits through a door at the back of the set but walks into the wall or walks out the door and into something.)

Ow!

EMILY. Good-bye, Uncle Brierly! I'm sorry if we hurt your –

(Too late; he's gone.)

He means well. He's just old-fashioned. I mean, if you're going to recite *The Night Before Christmas*, you really ought to express yourself.

AMOS. Modernize.

EMILY. Hypothesize.

AMOS. And *vitalize!*

(Rock/rap music starts to throb and **EMILY** *and* **AMOS** *start dancing and singing:)*

EMILY & **AMOS**.

"'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS AND ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE,
NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING
NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING
NOT A CREATURE WAS STIRRING NOT EVEN A MOUSE!
A MOUSE, A MOUSE,

IN THE HOUSE
LIKE A RAT
ON THE MAT
HANG ONTO YOUR HAT, 'CAUSE THE
STOCKINGS WERE HUNG BY THE CHIMNEY WITH CARE,
IN THE HOPES THAT SAINT NICK,
IN THE HOPES THAT SAINT NICK,
SAINT NICK, SAINT NICK,
GOTTA BE MIGHTY QUICK,
AND HE'S GOTTA BE SLICK,
TO DO THAT CHIMNEY TRICK.
HE'S QUICK, HE'S SLICK,
WITH THE CHIMNEY MADE O' BRICK,
'CAUSE HE'S BRINGIN' HIS TOYS,
AND HE'S MAKIN' SOME NOISE
FOR THE GIRLS AND THE BOYS
WITH A BAG FULLA JOYS
'CAUSE HE'S SANTA
DRINKIN' FANTA
MR. CLAUS BECAUSE
BECAUSE BECAUSE
HE'S SANTA
AND HE CAN'T A–
COME LATE
COMIN' EARLY
IN THE PEARLY
MORNIN' LIGHT
NOT LATE
WE'LL WAIT
FOR THE MAN WITH THE BEARD
AND THE BAG
WITH THE SWAG
CHERRY NOSE
THAT'S HOW IT GOES
BLACK BOOT
AND THE BRIGHT RED SUIT!

(When the number's over, **EMILY** *sees something:)*

EMILY. AHHHHHHHHHH!

*(***EMILY** *has just seen an elf looking through one of the windows. When* **EMILY** *screams, the head disappears from view.)*

Who's that!

AMOS. What?

EMILY. That!

AMOS. Where?

EMILY. There!

AMOS. Who?

EMILY. Her!

AMOS. Why?

EMILY. Why not?

AMOS. Good point.

EMILY. She's gone! Didn't you see her?! There was a girl or something at the window. She looked sort of … otherworldly. Holy cow, I think she was an elf!

AMOS. An elf? Don't be ridiculous.

(At which moment, the elf's head reappears. **EMILY** *sees it but* **AMOS** *doesn't, so he keeps talking.)*

Elves don't come to Vermont. They live at the North Pole with Santa Claus. Besides, they're so busy makin' toys they don't have time to travel around and –

EMILY. Look!

AMOS. What?

EMILY. That!

AMOS. Where?

EMILY. There!

AMOS. Who?

EMILY. Her!

AMOS. Her who?!

EMILY. That that!!…She's gone again.

AMOS. She is? Oh good! Now I don't have to meet her.

(Bing Bong!)

EMILY. Holy Hannah!

AMOS. Who's Hannah?

EMILY. I have no idea, but I think she's at the door. I'll be right back. But don't worry. If she's big and scary with enormous teeth and blood-shot eyes, I'll just tell her we're not home.

(She heads off.)

AMOS. Wait! Don't leave me! What if it's that…teeth and… eyes and…

*(***AMOS** *turns to the audience.)*

I know this is gonna surprise you, but I'm not a brave mouse. I mean I act brave, and I look brave, but inside I'm like, "I don't want to meet strange people. I don't want to leave my safe little house." And I sure don't want to meet some scary elf with pointy ears who flies around on a reindeer or something. When I even think about flying, my fur stands on end like a pin cushion. Which is not to say I can't be forceful when I have to be. Or strong, or *tough!* I'm not a scaredy-cat. I'm not a cat at all. I can be as brave as any mouse in the entire –

CALLIOPE. *(entering)* Hello.

AMOS. *YAHHHHHHHHH!*

*(***EMILY** *reenters with an elf named* **CALLIOPE** *who is dressed in a trench coat and has a fedora pulled down over her face.* **AMOS** *is shaking like a leaf.)*

EMILY. Please come in.

CALLIOPE. *(using a deep voice, being very "official")* How do you do, how do you do. I'm here from the government.

EMILY. The government?!

CALLIOPE. I'm with the Elf-B-I. We ask questions. We get to the bottom of things. For example, do you live here?

BOTH. Yes./Yes, we do.

CALLIOPE. *(writing it down)* Good, good. And what did Santa bring you last year for Christmas?

AMOS. He didn't come last year.

CALLIOPE. He didn't?

BOTH. No./Nope.

CALLIOPE. Are you sure?

BOTH. Yep./Uh-huh.

CALLIOPE. *(throwing off her coat and hat)* I *knew it!* That is *just what I thought! I was right!*

AMOS. Oh my gosh!

EMILY. You *are* an elf!!

(She is an elf, a Christmas elf, with pointy ears. She takes off her coat and we see that she's wearing a green jerkin and tights with sparkles on them and a Robin Hood-type hat with a feather. She's 518 years old but she looks like she's 14 and a half. Her name is **CALLIOPE**.*)*

AMOS. *(agog)* Are you a Christmas elf?

CALLIOPE. That's right. How do you do. My name's Calliope.

EMILY. Emily.

AMOS. Wow! A real elf! And look at your necklace. Is that like a symbol for the North Pole or something?

CALLIOPE. No, it's called a Star of David. I'm a Jewish elf. There are five of us in all. We don't work on Friday nights.

AMOS. This is the best day of my life!

CALLIOPE. Mazel Tov.

AMOS. Mazelwhat?

CALLIOPE. Now listen to me, I need your help. We have an emergency at the North Pole and you're the only two people in the world who can help us!

AMOS. I'm not a people.

CALLIOPE. Don't get technical. You see, I've suspected for almost a year now that *this house* was somehow taken off the Naughty-and-Nice List just before Santa started his

rounds last Christmas. But the problem is, he doesn't believe me. He thinks that everything is hunky-dory – Santa always thinks everything is hunky-dory – but *I* think there's something funny going on.

AMOS. Funny ha-ha or funny *yulhhhhh.*

CALLIOPE. Funny *yulhhhh.* So you two have to tell Santa that he *didn't* visit here last Christmas because then he'll believe it and he'll *do* something about it. Now let's go.

EMILY. Go?

AMOS. Go where?

CALLIOPE. To the North Pole so you can tell Santa! Now come on!

AMOS. *(politely)* Uh, excuse me. When you say, "the North Pole," you mean that place about ten thousand miles from here where they have the glaciers and hungry polar bears and you can lose your fingers 'cause they freeze and then fall off like little ice sculptures?

CALLIOPE. Yeah, that's it.

AMOS. I see. …*ARE YOU CRAZY?! ARE YOU NUTS?! HAVE YOU LOST YOUR LITTLE ELFIN MIND?!!!*

EMILY. But Amos, this is important!

AMOS. So is my life important! And-and-and-and how are we supposed to get there, huh?! Use *pixie dust?!*

CALLIOPE. As a matter of fact, I'm out of pixie dust, so we'll have to fly.

AMOS. "Fly"? Oh, oh, oh, that's great. So what do you think, I'm a bird now? Huh? *(He holds up his tail.)* Does this tail look like a *wing* to you?! Cause I know this is gonna surprise you, but I CAN'T FLY!

CALLIOPE. Look, don't you understand that Christmas is at stake?! If you don't help me, there'll be no Christmas for kids all over the world like you and you and him and her, *(i.e. two kids in the audience)* now would you please stop making excuses and *come on!*

*(***CALLIOPE** *hurries out.)*

AMOS. Polar bears…icicles…my fingers…

EMILY. Oh, Amos, don't be scared. We have to do this. And just think, some day we can tell our children about it!

*(***EMILY** *hurries out.)*

AMOS. Children? I'm ten years old. I am a children. *(calling to her)* And I don't even like adventures!

I like my house. I like my bed. I like those nice warm covers that I can snuggle into every –

EMILY. *(off) Amos, hurry up!*

(From out on the lawn we hear the engine of a small airplane sputter into life. Amos runs and looks out the window.)

AMOS. An airplane? It looks like a crop-duster! Oh, I'm not gonna like this…

CALLIOPE. *(off) Amos, come on!*

AMOS. *All right, I'm coming! Geronimooooooooooo!*

(And he runs out the door.)

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