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PAPA PANOV'S MAGIC CHRISTMAS

by Paul Thain

Adapted from a story by Leo Tolstoy

(CHILDREN enter through the auditorium in darkness, each carrying a lighted candle, singing "In Dulci Jubilo")

They all sit around the main acting area and as the song ends, the STORYTELLER steps into the circle of golden candlelight. She smiles & whispers...)

STORYTELLER : Have you ever heard of Papa Panov ?
(The CHILDREN shake their heads)

STORYTELLER : No ? Well, he was certainly a very strange and curious man. Most people thought he was mad, but there were some who believed he had been blessed by God.
(As the CHILDREN imitate a cold Wind ...)

STORYTELLER : It all began one Christmas Eve many, many years ago, far, far away in a land called Russia.
(The Wind howls to a crescendo, but then - prompted by a commanding gesture of the STORYTELLER - it abruptly dies as the CHILDREN simultaneously blow out their candles)

STORYTELLER : Imagine if you will, a little village huddled under a pale moon in a valley of silver snow.
(From the dark Silence we hear a small group of approaching CAROLSINGERS)

Lights slowly rise as PAPA PANOV enters - an old man with a long, white beard, spectacles and straggling hair. He goes to his bench and works on

a pair of riding boots)

STORYTELLER : Papa Panov smiled as he worked at his bench, grateful that the singing children had remembered him. But even their sweet voices couldn't take away his sadness.

(As the singing ends, a young CAROLSINGER knocks on the imaginary door)

STORYTELLER : It had been a hard and painful year.

GIRL 1 : Papa Panov ! Papa Panov !

STORYTELLER : Since the death of his dear wife, his only comfort had been his talent for making beautiful shoes, but now he knew his old and tired eyes would soon no longer be able to thread a needle.

GIRL 1 : Papa Panov ! Papa Panov !

(PAPA PANOV struggles to his feet and goes to answer the door)

CAROLSINGERS : Merry Christmas, Papa Panov ! Merry Christmas!

PAPA PANOV : Thank you, thank you all.

GIRL 1 : Isn't it wonderful ? Isn't it exciting ?

BOY 1 : I've asked Father Christmas for a toy boat!

BOY 2 : So have I.

GIRL 1 : I want a doll !

BOY 3 : I want a rocking horse !

BOY 2 : So do I. I'm getting a rocking horse and a toy boat!

BOY 3 : I've asked for a toy soldier !

BOY 2 : So have I. I'm getting a rocking horse and a toy boat and whole box of soldiers.

GIRL 2 : All I want is a golden ribbon. What's he bringing you, Papa Panov ?

PAPA PANOV : Me ?

GIRL 3 : Yes, what's he bringing you ?

(We hear the tinkle of sleigh-bells as the COUNT'S

sleigh approaches - drawn by four children each wearing a horse's head)

PAPA PANOV : Dear oh dear, I really don't know, but I'm sure he'll think of something. Oh look, I think his Lordship has come to wish us all a Merry Christmas ...

COUNT : Papa Panov !

PAPA PANOV : Yes, my Lord ?

COUNT : Over here - a word, if you please !

PAPA PANOV : (approaching) Yes, my Lord ?

COUNT : My Boots ! My new riding boots ! I was supposed to have them yesterday!

PAPA PANOV : Forgive me, my Lord, a slight delay - my eyes, I fear my eyes aren't quite as -

COUNT : Tomorrow, do you hear ? I need them tomorrow. I must have my boots tomorrow!

PAPA PANOV : But my Lord, tomorrow is Christmas.

COUNT : (whipping his horses forward) Precisely ! That is why I must have my boots tomorrow ! Now get to it, man, or you'll be sorry !
(The COUNT exits and the Sleigh-bells fade into the distance)

GIRL 2 : Oh, dear.

PAPA PANOV : Yes, oh dear.

BOY 1 : And he didn't even wish you a Merry Christmas.

PAPA PANOV : No, no he didn't, I'm sure he's much too busy. But you must excuse me, children, you heard his Lordship, I have to work.

CHILDREN : Goodnight, Papa Panov.

PAPA PANOV : Good night, children. God bless.

STORYTELLER : Papa Panov trudged through the thick snow back to his little wooden house.
(PAPA PANOV goes to his bench, picks up his sewing needle. 'Outside', the CHILDREN sing "Silent Night")

STORYTELLER : Again and again he tried to thread the needle, but each time his old eyes failed him. It was hopeless.

(PAPA PANOV sighs, gives up and goes to his chair, where he picks up his Bible

As the Children softly hum "Silent Night")

STORYTELLER : Close to despair, Papa Panov picked up his Bible and tried to read, but again his old eyes failed him. But then, then something wonderful happened - just as the words began to float from the page, the whole room suddenly filled with a soft silver light ...

(The Singing is suddenly silent

A shaft of soft, silver Light appears ...

Silence

The INNKEEPER - played by the same actor as the Count - enters, followed by MARY & JOSEPH)

INNKEEPER : Are you people deaf ? Haven't I told you ? Haven't I said ? How many more times ? We're full ! There is no room at the Inn! Kindly go away!

JOSEPH : Please, you don't understand.

INNKEEPER : Can't you see ? My riding boots ! I'm looking for my riding boots ! Now go away, you silly little man!

MARY : Please, we've tried everywhere, there is no where else.

JOSEPH : My wife is expecting a baby.

INNKEEPER : She's what ? A baby ? Dear oh dear, that is unfortunate.

MARY : There must be somewhere ?

INNKEEPER : My dear lady, I'd be only too delighted to oblige, but as I've already tried to explain -

JOSEPH : Anywhere.

MARY : Please.

JOSEPH : Please.

INNKEEPER : Well ... there is a stable round the back. It's hardly suitable but at least it's dry.

MARY : Thank you, thank you.

INNKEEPER : (leading them off) This way then ...
(PAPA PANOV struggles to his feet ...)

PAPA PANOV : ... no, no ... wait, wait - I have a room. Let them stay here. And I've a blanket, a nice, warm blanket they can ... Gone, they've gone.
(Puzzled, PAPA PANOV shakes his head, sits down again

The CHILDREN imitate a strange, cold wind

The three KINGS appear)

PAPA PANOV : Who ... who are you ?

KING 1 : We are the three kings.

KING 2 : We have travelled far, bearing gifts for the little Prince.

KING 3 : I bring Gold.

KING 1 : I bring Frankincense.

KING 1 : I bring Myrrh.

KING 1 : And who are you ?

PAPA PANOV : Me ? Oh, I'm nobody. I'm certainly no King.

KING 1 : But surely you must have a gift for the Prince of Peace?

PAPA PANOV : I've nothing. I'm only a poor shoemaker. What can I give? (standing)
No - don't go. Don't leave me. Take me with you. Take me to Bethlehem.

KING 3 : Our journey is long and you are too old.

PAPA PANOV : Too old ? Well, yes. Yes, I suppose I am.
(The KINGS quickly confer)

KING 2 : Perhaps it would be better if He came to see you.

PAPA PANOV : Who ? You mean Jesus ?

KING 1 : Tomorrow. He will come tomorrow.

PAPA PANOV : But my Lord, tomorrow is Christmas.

KING 1 : Christmas Day, without fail.

KING 2 : Be ready.

KING 3 : Be sure to be ready.

PAPA PANOV : Jesus ? Jesus is coming here ?

KING 1 : Tomorrow.

KING 3 : Farewell, Papa Panov.

PAPA PANOV : But what will he look like ? Will He be a baby, or a man, or a - ?

KING 1 : God be with you.

KING 2 : Be ready.

KING 3 : Be sure to be ready.
(The strange, cold Wind fades to Silence. Papa Panov urgently goes to his bench, picks up a pair of baby shoes)

PAPA PANOV : No, wait ! I've just remembered - I do have a gift! Shoes! Beautiful shoes, the finest I ever made. Please take them and give them to...
(When he turns back, the THREE KINGS have vanished. PAPA PANOV sighs, returns to his chair where he falls asleep

Lights slowly rise as we hear the approach of SLEIGH BELLS

The COUNT's sleigh draws up and he strides across and bangs on Papa Panov's door)

COUNT : Papa Panov! Papa Panov!

PAPA PANOV : (shaking himself awake) ... what ?

COUNT : Open this damn door!

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