

# *High Plains Christmas*

*I dreamed myself a Christmas from the comfort of my chair  
Perhaps a foolish notion for one with greying hair  
But dream I did, and more than that, as clear as clear could be  
Rose pictures of my youth, and more, into my memory.*

*Star-studded sky and a three-d moon silvering the night  
Crisp, crunchy snow, harness bells, a wintery delight  
Horse-drawn sleigh, lined with hay, blankets tucked all 'round  
A prairie eve did I conceive, a flood of sight and sound*

*The little two-roomed schoolhouse so lit but once a year  
Central mid the homestead farms, a hailing beacon clear  
Calling to it all its own, for to their great delight  
The High Plains Christmas concert is happening tonight*

*Soon the sleighs did there converge, neighbours, kith and kin  
Parents, friends and relatives tightly crowded in  
With oohs and aahs at the tinsel, the decorated tree,  
The blessed work of little hands for all the world to see*

*The makeshift stage, curtained off, rickety at best  
Opens up on forty youth, or so, proudly Christmas-dressed  
Lined up, from tallest at the back to tiny at the fore  
Excited, nervous giggles, shy eyes firmly on the floor*

*Off to one side the teacher stands, her brow a beam of light  
And, too, the chairman of the board, with words to start the night  
The welcome's done, good words are said, the time at last is here  
To offer up what's been prepared to charm the guests this year*

*Red, green and silver streamers across the backdrop soar  
Cherubs, reindeer, Santas, Christmas wreaths and more  
Festoon the tiny schoolhouse from end to end to ceiling  
And, at least this once a year, send the senses reeling*

*The littlest girls, as angels garbed, in a slightly crooked queue  
Lisp out a "Merry Christmas" and "Happy New Year", too  
Little boys, with slicked-back hair, stammer out their verses  
Off-stage an older group, up next, fervently rehearses*

*I hear that folks on Broadway, that's some place in New York,  
Toss fresh bouquets of flowers, but here that just won't work  
It's a winter night in High Plains, just west of Poplarfield,  
Chocolate bars and candy command much more appeal*

*The little plays and skits are done, solos, recitations  
The curtains close, the drama grows in nervous expectation  
The final act is yet to come, the best is yet before us  
Christmas songs, sweet and clear, voiced in youthful chorus.*

*Back goes the curtain one more time, the children in their places  
Every eye, on stage and off, seeks out beloved faces  
Moms and Dads glow with pride, eyes a-tear unbidden,  
Try, at every cost, to keep all that well-hidden*

*"We Three Kings", "Silent Night", then "Joy to the World"  
In the sweetest, dearest voices, woven, clear and purled  
"O Little Town of Bethlehem", "The First Noel", "Star of the East"  
And, softly, "Away in a Manger", as shivers increase*

*The evening's cusped, at last, then, when there's faintly heard  
A bustle just outside and the stage-whispered word  
"Santa!" Then louder ring the voices, as the flutter swells,  
With "Here Comes Santa Claus", and, of course, "Jingle Bells"*

*Someone's playing Santa, (neighbour Bill, it seems)  
This is not deception, it's putting flesh to dreams  
The moment's jewelled, enchanted, artless hearts o'erspill  
Surely this is magic, this sweet, bone-tingling thrill*

*The stars outside, though shining bright, achieve just second place  
As first belongs, without a doubt, to every youthful face  
And especially the wee ones, for whom this magic's real  
Even now my envy grows so once again to feel*

*Bright red suit, long white beard, classroom bell in hand  
Santa makes his entrance now and everybody stands  
With "Ho! Ho! Ho!" and handshakes he makes his merry way  
To a humble chair, up in front, a seeming throne today*

*Helping hands pull bright-wrapped gifts from his bulging bag  
He calls out, with eyes a-strain, the name on every tag  
Most little ones, grown bashful, pause shyly at their name  
While older ones stride boldly forth their little gifts to claim*

*And Santa has for everyone, the school board has made sure,  
A bag of peanuts, an orange and, from Tim Eaton's store,  
Minty Christmas candy, in canes or ribbons cast  
A true delight, saved and savored, to the very last*

*This is High Plains, Manitoba, hey, about nineteen forty-eight!  
No one there was dining at some sumptuous, kingly plate!  
The smallest, tiny blessings left tracks in youthful hearts  
A trail that pointed clear the way for life in all its parts*

*Yes, life's a kind of concert on a bigger, grown-up stage  
The curtain parts, you read from your own page  
Some acts go well, there's some applause, perhaps by happy chance  
Fortune smiles, or not, and that's the circumstance*

*So I dreamed myself a Christmas from my good, old easy chair  
A dream, I fear, my words may just but feebly share  
How a humble little reverie of a simpler, slower time  
Can fill a heart, and more, a soul, with memories sublime*