

# Prudence

a new play by

Stefan Lanfer

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[sglanfer@gmail.com](mailto:sglanfer@gmail.com)

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (5W, 2M with doubling)

Prudence Crandall..... School principal, 30s and 80s, white

Sarah Harris..... Student, 20s, African American

William Lloyd Garrison..... Abolitionist, newspaper editor, 20s, white

Andrew T. Judson..... Attorney, legislator, town leader, 40s, white

Samuel J. May..... Unitarian Minister, abolitionist, 40s, white (same actor playing Garrison)

Joyce Peters..... Episcopal minister's wife, 50s, white

Julia Williams..... Student, early 20s, African American

Hope Williams..... Her mother, boarding house proprietress, late 30s/early 40s, African American

William Wolcott Ellsworth..... Attorney, 40s, white (same actor playing Peters)

Man 1..... white (same actor playing Judson)

Man 2..... white (same actor playing Peters)

Mary Denison..... Museum tour guide, 60s (same actor playing Peters)

Time: Early 1830's

Place: Canterbury, Connecticut

Setting: The living room of a simply adorned colonial schoolhouse. There is a fireplace, a set of interior stairs that lead to a second floor, and an upright piano.

Synopsis: In September, 1832, Prudence Crandall, headmaster of a private school for girls in rural Canterbury, Connecticut, agreed to admit a young black woman named Sarah Harris. When the parents of her other students threatened to stop paying tuition and remove their daughters, Crandall dismissed them instead and recruited "young ladies and misses of color" from across the country to take their place. This led to Crandall's arrest, jail, and trial before Connecticut's Supreme Court, where a central question was whether non-whites were citizens with rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. When Connecticut's highest court dismissed the case on technical grounds rather than rule, men of Canterbury took "justice" into their own hands, destroying the school with lead pipes, as Crandall and her students hid upstairs.

**I-1: Canterbury, Connecticut, and Boston, Massachusetts, September, 1832**

(PRUDENCE CRANDALL enters her school. She takes in the scene with a look that says, "I still can't believe it." She hangs up her coat, and, finding her notebook, scans pages until she finds her checklist. As she reviews this, she paces with an excited, but also nervous energy, until, noticing her piano, she pauses, sets the notebook down, sits at the piano, and plays (and plays well). After a few bars, we hear a knock at the door. CRANDALL crosses to the door and opens it to find SARAH HARRIS.)

CRANDALL

Miss Harris. I didn't expect you again so soon.

HARRIS

*(breathless)* I wanted you to have the--

CRANDALL

My goodness. You've run.

HARRIS

I've brought the paper we spoke of - *The Liberator*. Forgive me if--

CRANDALL

Forgive you? What ever for?

HARRIS

Would you like to see it, Miss Crandall?

CRANDALL

I would.

(HARRIS draws the paper from her bag and offers it to CRANDALL, who hesitates, but then takes it.)

CRANDALL

Thank you.

HARRIS

Of course.

CRANDALL

Come in.

HARRIS

Don't let me trouble you. I only wished to--

CRANDALL

It is no trouble. And you wouldn't wish to leave me alone with Mr. Garrison, would you?

(HARRIS enters. They sit and study the paper together. WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON enters another part of the stage. He is poised to address a crowd in Boston, Massachusetts.)

GARRISON

During my recent tour, every place I visited gave fresh evidence that a greater revolution in public sentiment is to be effected in the free states-- and particularly in New England, where I found contempt more bitter, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen than among slave owners themselves. Therefore, I determined, at every hazard, to lift up the standard of emancipation; Let southern oppressors tremble. Let their secret abettors tremble. Let their northern apologists tremble. Let all the enemies of the persecuted blacks tremble.

CRANDALL

It is a lot of trembling.

HARRIS

It is.

GARRISON

I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language.

HARRIS

*(reciting, from memory)* Yet is there not cause for severity?

GARRISON

Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm.

HARRIS

Tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hand of the ravisher.

CRANDALL

You know this word for word.

HARRIS

Tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire.

GARRISON

But urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal, and to hasten the resurrection of the dead.

(Beat.)

HARRIS

To make every statue leap, Miss Crandall.

CRANDALL

I suppose we should not depend upon leaping statues.

HARRIS

I have been a statue. I am prepared to leap.

(Beat.)

CRANDALL

Leap into what, Miss Harris?

HARRIS

*(reciting again from the GARRISON speech)* It is God, who enables me to disregard the fear of man which bringeth a snare.

GARRISON

And to speak His truth in simplicity and power.

*(GARRISON acknowledges his audience and exits.)*

HARRIS

I must be going.

CRANDALL

You've only just arrived.

HARRIS

I only wanted you to have the paper.

CRANDALL

And now I have it. Thank you.

HARRIS

It is nothing.

CRANDALL

When I've had occasion to read it fully, you must return, that we may discuss it together.

(HARRIS nods – a timid affirmation of CRANDALL’s invitation. HARRIS has left something unsaid, and her disappointment in herself shows as she exits. Closing the door after HARRIS, CRANDALL is engrossed in the paper as she crosses into the room. ANDREW T. JUDSON enters onto the front porch, and raps at the window.)

CRANDALL

(startled) Oh!

(JUDSON laughs and tips his hat. CRANDALL sets *The Liberator* on a table, and opens the door.)

CRANDALL

Mr. Judson.

JUDSON

Miss Crandall. I startled you. Forgive me.

CRANDALL

I didn’t hear you approach.

JUDSON

You were engrossed in something.

CRANDALL

Come in. Please. To what do I owe the pleasure?