

John Muir Play

ACT 1

Scene: Spring 1903. The Muir house in California. John Muir, his wife Louie, and their daughters Helen and Wanda are sitting on the front porch. A special delivery letter has just been delivered to John Muir.

NARRATOR: In 1903, the United States was growing as an industrial nation. The country's natural resources were being abused by some land developers, timber companies, and ranchers. A handful of naturalists saw how important it was to protect nature and to keep it safe for future generations. John Muir was of those naturalists. On a camping trip to Yosemite Valley, he convinced President Theodore Roosevelt that land should be set aside in national parks. John Muir almost didn't go on that camping trip with Roosevelt. . .

LOUIE: Who's the letter from, John?

MUIR (reading a letter and shaking his head): I don't see how I can do it.

HELEN: Do what, Daddy?

MUIR: I've been planning this trip to Japan and China and Russia for so long . . . I don't see how I can drop that to go to Yosemite.

WANDA: Who wants you to go to Yosemite, Dad?

MUIR: I'm sorry, Wanda. Did you say something?

WANDA: Who wants you to go to Yosemite, Dad?

MUIR: The President. Teddy Roosevelt himself. Listen to this: "I want to drop politics for four days and be in the open with you."

WANDA: That's great!

HELEN: Can we all go?

MUIR: I don't see how. The dates the President wants to go camping would mean delaying my trip.

LOUIE: John, you have to go with the President. It's an honor.

WANDA: And besides, once you've got him in Yosemite, he'll listen to you. He'll see for himself how much it needs to be protected.

MUIR: I had my heart set on seeing those trees in Asia—

LOUIE: And they'll be there next year. You need to concentrate on the trees in Yosemite. If Roosevelt listens to the wrong people, you may have to go to Asia to see any trees at all.

HELEN: Daddy—if I can't go to Yosemite, can I go to Japan in your place?

ACT 2

Scene: A hotel in Yosemite Valley. Four parks commissioners are waiting for Roosevelt to arrive.

NARRATOR: The Parks Commission was a group of state officials who were suppose to look after Yosemite Valley. Some of the commissioners were more interested in making Yosemite a money-making attraction. Under their care, more roads and buildings appeared in the valley. John Muir's belief that Yosemite should be under the control of the federal government didn't sit well with those commissioners.

COMMISSIONER 1: We have a real good chance to get Roosevelt to see things our way on this trip.

COMMISSIONER 2: Listen, after all the parties and the food and a good night's rest on the softest bed in this hotel, he'll pay attention to us, I guarantee it.

COMMISSIONER 3: Wait till he sees the valley all lit up by the floodlights! I mean it. Is there a prettier sight?

COMMISSIONER 4: Pretty soon Teddy will forget all about taking Yosemite out of our hands.

COMMISSIONER 1: But what about Muir?

COMMISSIONER 2: Don't worry about him. I've made sure his room is nowhere near Roosevelt's—

COMMISSIONER 3: Ssh! Ssh! Here comes the President now.

NARRATOR: Teddy Roosevelt came to Yosemite prepared to camp out. Muir was with him as well as Archie Leonard, who was a ranger, a mountaineer, and a guide; and Charles Liedig, who was a ranger, a cook, and a guide. Roosevelt hadn't come to Yosemite for parties and light shows.

COMMISSIONERS 1,2,3: Welcome to Yosemite, Mr. President!

COMMISSIONER 2: Oh, and you, too, Muir.

ROOSEVELT: Thank you, gentlemen. It's a bully place.

COMMISSIONER 1: Welcome, welcome. Your luggage is at the hotel, sir. And we have a big party planned for you later—

ROOSEVELT: Not for me! We're off to Glacier Point.

MUIR: Enjoy your party, commissioners.

(Roosevelt, Muir, Leonard, and Liedig leave. The commissioners look at each other in dismay.)

COMMISSIONER 1: What do we do now?

COMMISSIONER 2: Don't worry. I've been up to Glacier Point. When the President comes back, he'll be so happy to see civilization that he'll listen to anything we say.

ACT 3

SCENE 1: Nighttime. The two rangers, Muir, and Teddy Roosevelt sit around a campfire.

NARRATOR: It looks as if the commissioner was wrong. Watching Teddy Roosevelt warm his hands by the fire and breathe deeply, it's hard to imagine that he'll be glad to leave Glacier Point. He seems as at home in the outdoors as Muir and the two rangers do.

ROOSEVELT: Charlie, you make the best cup of coffee I've ever tasted.

MUIR: You're not sorry you didn't stay at the hotel?

ROOSEVELT: And miss one of Charlie's steak dinners? No sir! (He sips his coffee and looks around happily.) Muir, this is the most amazing place I've ever seen.

MUIR: I feel the same way. Half Dome and El Capitan still take my breath away every time I see them.

ROOSEVELT: And you think that a river of living ice—a glacier—carved it all? Well, however it happened, I feel very small.

MUIR: We could end up destroying it. Look around, Mr. President. This may be the last time you see Yosemite like this. We need the federal government to step in and create a system of parks that everyone can enjoy.

ROOSEVELT: Now Muir, we need roads here and Charlie and Archie have got to live somewhere, don't they? So there have to be some buildings—

MUIR: Right now, Mr. President, greedy people want to log the trees; they want to build huge hotels inside the valley; they want to let sheep graze in the meadows. Sheep eat the grasses and flowers so close to the ground that they'll destroy the meadows.

ROOSEVELT: Gifford Pinchot says that sheep grazing doesn't hurt the meadows. Like you, he's a respected conservationist.

MUIR: He's wrong! He knows the truth, but he's trying to please the ranchers! He is no friend of the parks!

ROOSEVELT: I see your point, Muir, but I can also see the other side of the coin.

MUIR: I'm sorry for losing my temper, but we have no right to think that nature is here to be used. We're part of nature—only a part.

ROOSEVELT: I agree with you Muir. Now, let's put some more wood on that fire.

NARRATOR: Instead of getting more wood for the fire, Muir goes off quietly and lights a huge dead tree in the meadow. When he returns to the President, the blaze is awesome.

ROOSEVELT: Hurray! That's a candle it took 500 years to make! Hurray! Hurray for Yosemite!

SCENE 2: Dawn. The third day of the camping trip. Snow has fallen overnight.

ROOSEVELT (shaking the snow from his blankets and laughing): Wake up, Muir! There must be four inches of snow on you.

MUIR: Good morning. . .how did you sleep?

ROOSEVELT: Like a baby. I didn't think the valley could get any more beautiful, but I was wrong. Look at it all dressed in snow.

MUIR: It smells like Charlie's cooking up some ham and eggs.

ROOSEVELT: Let's eat quickly and head out. I'm anxious to see how the valley looks in the snow.

NARRATOR: The four men broke camp just before dawn and rode off to Glacier Point.

SCENE 3: Dawn at Glacier Point.

ROOSEVELT: What a magnificent sunrise. Look at the valley. . . covered in snow. . .it looks like it's shining from the inside out. It's simply amazing.

MUIR: Look over there sir. That's Overhanging Rock. It's got a straight drop of 3,500 feet to the valley.

ROOSEVELT: Can we get to it? Can we get to the top of it?

NARRATOR: Throughout the rest of the day on the trail, Muir did most of the talking, filling the President's head with ideas of expanding Yosemite, creating a system of national parks in the United States and preserving nature. When the camping trip came to an end, Roosevelt felt rested and happy. He was ready to go back to politics.

ACT 4

SCENE: Sentinel Bridge in the valley floor. A crowd of reporters and politicians are watching Roosevelt, Muir and the two rangers approach.

MUIR: Well, Mr. President, there's Stoneman House. That's a sure sign that we're close to civilization.

ROOSEVELT: When you compare that thing to the magnificent natural formations all around, it looks like it doesn't belong.

MUIR: It doesn't belong, and if you don't do something about it, a lot more hotels will be popping up in the valley.

ROOSEVELT: (smiling as he comes closer to the waiting crowd): Don't worry, Muir. I've heard you. I had no choice. You're the only man who can outtalk me!

COMMISSIONER 2: (to the Governor of California and Commissioner 4): Everything's ready. We're planning fireworks tonight. It'll be a great party—colored searchlights bouncing all over the place—it'll be spectacular!

GOVERNOR: I don't think the President will go for that.

COMMISSIONER 4: I don't think so either.

COMMISSIONER 2: (winking at Commissioner 1 and 3) : I guess the President pretty much likes what we like—

COMMISSIONER 3: Ssh! Here he comes!

COMMISSIONER 2: Welcome, Mr. President. You must be so tired. I've been up to Glacier Point, and I know—

ROOSEVELT: (in an excited tone): Tired? Not me! Why, just last night we were in a snowstorm, and it was just what I wanted!

REPORTER: (to Commissioner 2): I've been covering Teddy for years. I don't think I've ever seen him so. . . happy.

COMMISSIONER 2 (ignoring the reporter): I know you're hungry, Mr. President. We have a buffet waiting for you.

ROOSEVELT (ignoring Commissioner 2): Not hungry. No, this is my last night here. What about it Muir? Think you can stand one more night out in the wild? Where's Archie? Hold on, Charlie! Don't unpack your gear!

COMMISSIONER 3 (sounding desperate): But we have fireworks planned—and, a light show, and—

NARRATOR: Muir, Roosevelt, and the two rangers camped by themselves the last night. The next day, the President returned to Washington, but he and Muir remained lifelong friends. From that day on, not another giant tree was cut down in Yosemite Valley, and sheep were banned from the valley's meadows. In time, with the help of Governor George Pardee, Yosemite Valley became part of Yosemite National Park, which was enlarged and protected forever by the federal government. In later years, President Roosevelt created other national parks. And that's how John Muir became father of our national parks.