

Beth, Charlie, Leroy, Emogene, Alice, Gladys, Mother  
Ralph  
Ollie  
Hobe

12 THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER

CHARLIE. I'll get it. (He exits.)

(This leaves FATHER alone at the table, as MRS. ARMSTRONG drones on in the background. He is obviously disgruntled about this situation and after a moment he gets up, takes hat and coat from rack at the door, and exits out the door.)

MRS. ARMSTRONG. You'll have to get someone to push the baby angels on, otherwise they get in each other's way and bend their wings. Bob could do that, and he could keep an eye on the shepherds too. Oh, another thing about the angel choir. Don't let them wear lipstick. They think because it's a play . . . (doorbell buzz or chime)

MOTHER. Helen, I have to go. There's someone at my door.

MRS. ARMSTRONG. . . . that they have to wear lipstick, and it looks terrible. So tell them . . . (doorbell again)

MOTHER. Someone at my door, Helen. I'll talk to you later. (hangs up; doorbell again; starts toward door, calling) Yes. . . . yes, I'm coming . . .

FATHER. (in doorway) Lady, can you give me some supper? I haven't had a square meal in three days.

MOTHER. Oh, for heaven's sake, it's you!

FATHER. (coming in) I was very lonely at the table.

MOTHER. (as they move down to the table) Well, I guess Helen feels lonely at the hospital.

FATHER. Not as long as the telephones are working. (BETH and CHARLIE enter with food.)

CHARLIE. I'll bet she told you about no small parts, only small actors.

BETH. And getting someone to shove the baby angels on, and make the shepherds shut up.

THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER 13

MOTHER. Yes. She suggested your father.  
FATHER. Does that mean I have to go?

(Spot off family: Up on MRS. ARMSTRONG, in mid-sentence of yet another telephone directive.)

MRS. ARMSTRONG. And, Grace, don't use just anybody's baby for Jesus . . . get a quiet one. Better yet, get two if you can . . . then if one turns out to be fussy, you can always switch them . . .

(Curtain comes down during this speech. Spot on BETH, D.S.R.)

BETH. My mother didn't pay much attention to Mrs. Armstrong. She said Mrs. Armstrong was stuck in the hospital with nothing to do but think up problems, and there weren't going to be any problems. Of course, Mother didn't count on the Herdmans. That was Charlie's fault.

(Spot off BETH: Up on LEROY HERDMAN and CHARLIE, entering s.l.)

CHARLIE. Hey, Leroy, you give me back my lunch!

LEROY. Sure, kid, here. (hands him a lunch bag)

CHARLIE. (looks inside) You stole my dessert again!

LEROY. How do you know?

CHARLIE. Because it isn't here.

LEROY. What was it?

CHARLIE. Two Twinkies.

LEROY. That's right. That's what it was. (starts to leave)

CHARLIE. Hey, Leroy! You think it's so great to steal my dessert every day and you know what? I don't care if

side 3  
A start

Some words  
for notes

side 5/13

you steal my dessert. I'll even give you my dessert. I get all the dessert I want in Sunday school.

LEROY. (*interested in this*) Oh, yeah? What kind of dessert?

CHARLIE. All kinds. Chocolate cake and candy bars and cookies . . . and Twinkies and Big Wheels. We get refreshments all the time, all we want.

LEROY. You're a liar.

CHARLIE. . . . and ice cream, and doughnuts and cupcakes and . . .

LEROY. Who gives it to you?

CHARLIE. (*momentarily stumped*) Uh . . . the minister.

LEROY. Why? Is he crazy?

CHARLIE. No. . . . I think he's rich.

LEROY. (*pause*) . . . Sunday school, huh?

(*Spot off boys: Spot up on BETH, ds.r.*)

BETH. That was the wrong thing to tell Herdmans . . . and, sure enough, the very next Sunday there they were in Sunday school, just in time to hear about the Christmas pageant . . .

(*Spot off BETH: Spot up on ALICE and IMOGENE, ds.l.*)

IMOGENE. What's a pageant?

ALICE. It's a play.

IMOGENE. Like on tv? What's it about?

ALICE. It's about Jesus.

IMOGENE. (*visibly disenchanted about Sunday school*) Everything here is.

ALICE. And it's about Mary. Mostly, it's about Mary.

IMOGENE. Who's Mary?

ALICE. I am. . . . Well, probably I am. I know the part.

(*ALICE walks off s.l.: IMOGENE watches her go, then looks out at the audience, wearing a cheshire-cat smile. Spot off IMOGENE. Curtain opens on church setting with risers in place. As curtain opens, kids are straggling in, with MOTHER herding them along.*)

MOTHER. Come on, Beth. . . . Charlie, you and David come. (*She leads the reluctant CHARLIE to a seat.*) Now, this won't take very long if you all settle down. . . . Today we're going to decide who will play the main roles in our Christmas pageant, but of course everyone will have an important part to play. You know what Mrs. Armstrong always tells you — there are no small parts, only small actors. Isn't that what Mrs. Armstrong always says?

ELMER. That's what she always says, but she never says what it means.

MOTHER. Don't you know what it means?

MAXINE. I know what it means. It means that the short kids have to be in the front row of the angel choir or else nobody can see them.

MOTHER. Well . . . not exactly. It really means that the littlest baby angel is just as important as Mary.

ALICE. (*full of herself*) I don't think anyone is as important as Mary.

BETH. Well, naturally that's what you think, Alice. I think Jesus is more important.

MAXINE. I still think it means short kids have to be in the front row . . .

END

spot

spot  
3-12

MOTHER. Girls, girls! . . . *Everyone* is important . . . Mary, Jesus, and the short kids. Now, is everyone here? Beverly, will you just step out in the hall and see if anyone else is coming? (*BEVERLY exits.*) Now you little children will be our angels, so please remind your mothers that you'll need bedsheets. . . . (*As she talks, the HERDMANS enter, with GLADYS bringing up the rear, having dispatched BEVERLY. Other children begin to murmur, wiggle around, poke each other, point at the HERDMANS.*) People in the angel choir will need bedsheets too, and if any of you have old bathrobes at home. . . . (*Aware of the rising clamor, she stops.*) . . . Now, what's the matter? (*As MOTHER turns and sees the HERDMANS, they move in. RALPH and LEROY shove their way onto a bench, causing a ripple of movement there: GLADYS does the same on another bench: IMOGENE, CLAUDE and OLLIE start across the stage to do likewise. To forestall any mayhem.*) Well, let's make some room there, for the Herdmans. (*A lot of room is made, like the parting of the Red Sea, and the HERDMANS occupy their space.*)

Now what happened to Beverly?

GLADYS. I think she went home. I think she got sick. MOTHER. Did she say she was sick?

GLADYS. She just left. All I did was, I just said "Hi, Beverly" . . . and she just left.

MOTHER. I see. Well, will someone please tell Beverly about the rehearsals? . . . the next four Wednesdays, after school. Plan to be here for every one.

ELMER. What if we get sick?

MOTHER. You won't get sick. Of course, Mary and Joseph must *absolutely* come to every rehearsal . . .

ELMER. What if they get sick?

MOTHER. They won't get sick either, Elmer.

ELMER. Well, Beverly got sick and we didn't even start yet.

MOTHER. We don't *know* that Beverly got sick. Now, I want you to think about Mary. . . . We all know what kind of person Mary was. She was quiet and gentle and kind, and the girl who plays Mary should try to be that kind of person. Who would like to volunteer for that part? (*Everyone looks at ALICE, but it is IMOGENE who raises her hand.*)

MOTHER. Did you have a question, Imogene?

IMOGENE. No, I want to be Mary . . . and Ralph, over there, he wants to be Joseph.

RALPH. Yeh, right.

MOTHER. Oh. Well . . . Well, I'll just make a list of volunteers for these parts and then we'll all decide who it should be. (*writes on her clipboard*) Ralph Herdman. Now, who else would like to be Joseph? . . . Did you raise your hand, Elmer?

ELMER. No.

MOTHER. Just raise your hands, please, any volunteers. . . . Any of you shepherds? (*Her eye falls on CHARLIE, who makes every effort to seem invisible.*) Very well . . . Ralph Herdman will be our Joseph. Now, Imogene has volunteered to be . . . (*Tiny break here, as if she can hardly bear to connect IMOGENE with MARY.*) . . . Mary. I'll just write that down. . . . What other names can I put on my list? . . . Janet? . . . Roberta? . . . Alice, don't you want to volunteer?

ALICE. (*choking it out*) No, I don't want to.

GLADYS. I'll be Mary!

IMOGENE. Shut up, Gladys. I'm already Mary. You be a Wise Man.

MOTHER. Well, the Wise Men are usually boys. Of course, they don't *have* to be, and we could . . .

18 THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER

LEROY. I'll be a Wise Man!  
OLLIE. Me, too. Claude, you wanta be a Wise Man? Raise your hand.  
CLAUDE. What's a Wise Man?  
RALPH. Just raise your hand! (CLAUDE raises his hand.)  
GLADYS. What's left to be?  
IMOGENE. Some angel.  
GLADYS. I'll be that. What is it?  
MOTHER. It's the Angel of the Lord, who brought the good news to the shepherds. (There is a flurry of raised hands among the shepherds.)  
MOTHER. There, we do have some volunteers after all! Yes, HOBIE, would you like to be a Wise Man?  
HOBIE. No, I just wanted to say I can't be a shepherd. We're going to Philadelphia.  
MOTHER. Why didn't you say so before?  
HOBIE. I just remembered.  
DAVID. My mother doesn't want me to be a shepherd.  
MOTHER. Why not?  
DAVID. I don't know. She just said, don't be a shepherd.  
CHARLIE. I'm not going to be a shepherd!  
MOTHER. (reverting from pageant director to exasperated parent) Oh, yes, you are! . . . What's the matter with all of you?  
ELMER. I don't want to be a shepherd . . . Gladys Herdman hits too hard!  
MOTHER. Why, Gladys isn't going to hit anybody! The Angel of the Lord just visits the shepherds in the fields and tells them Jesus is born.  
ELMER. And hits them!  
MOTHER. Elmer, that's ridiculous, and I don't want to hear another word about it, from anyone. No shepherds

THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER 19

may quit . . . or get sick. Now that's all for today, boys and girls, and you can go. . . . (There is a scramble for the door. BETH and ALICE move D.S. calling after them.) . . . but I expect to see everyone here on Wednesday at 6:30! (MOTHER moves D.S. and takes ALICE's arm.) Alice, what's wrong with you? Why in the world didn't you raise your hand?

ALICE. (miserably) I don't know.

MOTHER. You don't know! Alice, I expected you . . .

~~(Sounds of a scuffle offstage; yells = ouch! . . . Cut it out! . . . Let go. . . . Let me go!)~~

~~VOICE. Mrs. Bradley! Get Gladys offa me!~~

MOTHER. . . . to volunteer. Don't you want to be Mary?

~~VOICE. Mrs. Bradley!! (MOTHER exits, with an exasperated look at ALICE.)~~

BETH. Oh, come on, Alice! (mimicking her) I don't know. . . .!

ALICE. I didn't dare raise my hand. Imogene would have killed me! She said, "I'm going to be Mary in this play, and if you open your mouth or raise your hand you'll wish you didn't." And I said, "I'm always Mary in the Christmas pageant." And she said, "go ahead then, and next spring when the pussywillows come out I'll stick a pussywillow so far down your ear that nobody can reach it . . . and it'll sprout there and grow and grow, and you'll spend the rest of your life with a pussywillow bush growing out of your ear!"

BETH. You know she wouldn't do that!

ALICE. She would too! Herdmans will do anything. You just watch, they'll do something terrible and ruin the whole pageant . . . and it's all your mother's fault!

END