

and good feelings. But old Charlie told the real truth—
No Herdmans!

(Spotlight off BETH. HERDMANS exit stage left. Curtain rises on living room/dining room set. There is a table and four chairs stage right; a door upstage right center; a sofa, lounge chair, end tables, one with telephone, stage left. As curtain rises, MOTHER, FATHER, and CHARLIE enter through the door. BETH moves back to join them. They are returning from church, and all except BETH wear coats. FATHER has a newspaper under his arm. CHARLIE speaks as he enters.)

START CHARLIE. I don't care what everybody else said, that's what they really thought. All that other stuff is okay but the main good thing about church is that the Herdmans aren't there, ever. *(CHARLIE drops his coat on sofa.)*

FATHER. *(taking his coat off)* That's not a very Christian sentiment, it seems to me.

MOTHER. *(collecting the coats)* It's a very practical sentiment. Charlie was black and blue all last year because he had to sit next to Leroy Herdman in school. *(She exits to hang up the coats.)*

FATHER. Is he the worst one? Leroy?

CHARLIE. They're all the worst one.

BETH. Ralph's the biggest, so if Ralph gets you...

CHARLIE. That doesn't make any difference. Gladys isn't big, but she's fast, and she's mean, and she bites.

FATHER. I'm sorry I asked. Just stay away from all of them.

CHARLIE. That's what I said. Stay away from them. Go to church.

MOTHER. *(as she enters)* I'm glad to hear you feel that way.

CHARLIE. *(suspicious)* Why?

MOTHER. No arguments this year about the Christmas pageant.

CHARLIE. I don't want to be a shepherd again!

MOTHER. Tell Mrs. Armstrong you want to be a Wise Man.

CHARLIE. I don't want to be *in it!*

MOTHER. Everybody's in it. Think how I'd feel sitting there on Christmas Eve, if my own children weren't in the pageant. Think how your father would feel.

(There is a moment of silence, as everyone looks at FATHER, knowing exactly how he feels on this subject.)

You'd feel terrible, wouldn't you, Bob?

FATHER. Well...actually, I didn't plan to go.

(as MOTHER starts to protest)

You know how crowded it always is, they can use my seat. I'll just stay home, put on my bathrobe, relax... There's never anything different about the Christmas pageant.

MOTHER. There's going to be something different this year.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. Charlie's going to wear your bathrobe. *(She exits into kitchen.)*

END

~~**FATHER.** *(calls after her)* You just thought that up, Grace!~~

~~**BETH.** *(to CHARLIE)* Why don't you be Joseph? Elmer Hopkins'll pay you a dollar to be Joseph, *(to FATHER)* Elmer's sick of being Joseph all the time just because his father's the minister. Nobody wants to be Joseph.~~

~~**CHARLIE.** Nobody wants to be *in it!*~~

~~**FATHER.** *(to BETH)* What are you going to be this year?~~

~~**BETH.** I'm always in the angel choir.~~

~~**FATHER.** Well, why can't Charlie be in the angel choir?~~

~~**CHARLIE.** Because I can't sing!~~

~~**FATHER.** From what I've heard in the past, that's not a serious drawback. *Away In A Manger* always sounds to me like a closetful of mice.~~

~~**CHARLIE.** *(to BETH)* What do you wear in the angel choir?~~

~~**BETH.** Bedsheets.~~

~~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!~~

~~(During the ALICE and BETH conversation the curtain closes behind them. At the end of the conversation they move off. The phone conversations are spotlighted in different areas of the forestage. Spot up on MRS. MCCARTHY, telephoning.)~~

START MRS. MCCARTHY. Jane? ...Edna McCarthy. Did you hear about the... Well, it must be Grace's fault somehow! How else would the six of them end up in a Christmas pageant, when they ought to be in jail!

~~(Spot off MRS. MCCARTHY: Up on IRMA SLOCUM, telephoning.)~~

IRMA. Vera? ...Irma Slocum. I just heard that Imogene Herdman is going to be Mary in the Christmas pageant, and I... Is that a fact? All six of them? Vera, I live next door to that outfit and I'd rather live next door to a zoo. Has Grace gone crazy?

~~(Spot off MRS. SLOCUM: Up on MRS. ARMSTRONG in hospital bed, or in wheelchair, with leg in a cast, propped out in front of her.)~~

MRS. ARMSTRONG. Where did they come from? Who let them in? Imogene Herdman! ...What kind of a child

is that, to be Mary the Mother of Jesus? Where was Reverend Hopkins, I'd like to know... He was what? ... Visiting shut-ins! Well, I'm shut-in, and he wasn't visiting me!

(Spots up on all ladies: Following speeches are simultaneous, till MRS. ARMSTRONG's last line.)

MRS. MCCARTHY. I said, why don't you let them hand out programs at the door? Grace said we never have programs for the pageant, but I said...

MRS. SLOCUM. ...Better nail down the church and lock up the silver service and hide the collection plates before they clean them out...

MRS. ARMSTRONG. What was the matter with Grace? Couldn't she have sent them away? Tell them to go home? Oh, I feel responsible... If I'd been up and around this never would have happened!

(Spots off all three ladies: Up on MOTHER and FATHER as they enter from the wings stage right. Each is carrying a grocery bag, and we can assume that some good friend in the supermarket has relayed MRS. ARMSTRONG's message.)

MOTHER. *(in high dudgeon, mimicking MRS. ARMSTRONG.)* ... "If I'd been up and around, this never would have happened!" Well, let me tell you...

FATHER. Don't tell me, I'm on your side... The car's over there.

MOTHER. Helen Armstrong is not the only woman alive who can run a Christmas pageant! I made up my mind just to do the best I could under the circumstances, but now I'm going to make this the best Christmas pageant ever, and I'm going to do it with the Herdmans! After all, they raised their hands and nobody else did, and I don't care...

FATHER. Good for you, Grace, *(trying to move her along)* the car's over there...

MOTHER. And you're going to help me!

FATHER. *(stopped by this)* Does that mean...

MOTHER. You have to go! **END**