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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.

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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, DS.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

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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.

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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 . . .