

46 THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER

then at the others) . . . It's almost Christmas. (We hear, offstage, the sound of carillon bells.)

MOTHER. . . . almost Christmas, kids.

BETH. . . . almost Christmas, Charlie.

(Lights dim: Candles still on, as they reach out to each other, to touch hands, to draw together. We hear (with the bells and rising above them) a reprise of lines from the pageant, spoken by different people, so there is a mix of voices and pace. The lines should flow together.)

"And it came to pass in the days of . . ."

"And there were shepherds abiding. . . ."

"A multitude, praising God. . . ."

"I bring you good tidings of great joy . . ."

GLADYS. *(offstage)* Hey! . . . *(She runs on to c.s. (spotlight on her), and points at the audience.) . . .*
Hey, unto you a child is born!

(All lights down for slow count of 4-5. Lights up. Entire company on stage, to sing 'Joy to the World'. We should hear the first phrase in a strong burst.)

CURTAIN

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever — Alternate

As the play opens, the curtain is down. BETH is sitting s.r. ALICE and MAXINE are sitting s.l. Spotlight on BETH.

BETH. The Herdmans were the worst kids in the whole history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars, even the girls, and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed their teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken down tool house.

(Spot up on MAXINE and ALICE.)

ALICE. And that's not all! Somebody sent five dozen doughnuts for the firemen and the Herdmans ate them all, and what they couldn't eat they stuffed in their pockets and down the front of their shirts.

MAXINE. And they wrote this really really dirty word on the back of Naomi Waddell's favorite turtle, so now Naomi can't take it to the Y.M.C.A. pet show . . . her mother won't let her.

ALICE. What was the word? *(MAXINE whispers it.)*

ALICE. *(horried)* Oh-h-h!

MAXINE. And that's not all! They did it with fluorescent paint, so it glows in the dark. When you can't even see the turtle, you can still see the word.

ALICE. And they put a whole bunch of tadpoles in the school drinking fountain, and Miss Barnes swallowed

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two or three by mistake. Somebody yelled, "Mildred, stop! You're drinking tadpoles! . . . but it was too late.

MAXINE. Did she get sick?

ALICE. Not right away.

(*Spotlight on BETH, as ALICE and MAXINE move off.*)

BETH. And *that's* not all! (*Change of tone and delivery here, to say to the audience . . . Now I'm going to tell you about the Christmas Pageant and what they did to that.*) . . . There were six of them . . . (*During BETH's speech the HERDMANS come on from the wings left and position themselves on and around the set piece, with GLADYS at the top level, in a pose reminiscent of the first illustration in the book, The Best Christmas Pageant Ever.*) . . . Ralph, Imogene, Leroy, Claude, Ollie and Gladys . . . and they went through the Woodrow Wilson school like those South American fish that strip your bones clean. And they went around town the same way—stealing things and tearing things up and whamming kids. So it was hard to get away from them. There was only one safe place.

CHARLIE. (*offstage, singing*)

Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Because there are no Herdmans there.
But Jesus loves us, as they say,
Because he keeps them miles away.

BETH. That's my little brother, Charlie. That's what he said when the Sunday school teacher asked what was his favorite thing about church. Charlie said, "no Herdmans." That made the teacher mad because all the other kids said nice things about God and Jesus and good feeling. But old Charlie told the real truth—*No Herdmans!*

PROPERTY LIST

Stage right (Dining area)

1 table

4 chairs

a cup/saucer (offstage)

1 newspaper (hand prop—Father)

2 telephones (hand props)

Mrs. Clark

Mrs. McCarthy

4 plates

4 glasses

knives, forks

1 plate with bread

1 butter dish

1 pitcher

1 hat

1 coat

salt-pepper shakers (off stage)

1 plate with chicken (off stage)

Stage left (living room area)

1 sofa

1 lounge chair

2 end tables

1 telephone

2 telephones (hand props)

Mrs. Slocum

Mrs. Clausing

1 hospital bed

1 telephone

1 paper bag (hand prop—Charlie)