

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

(As the play opens the curtain is down. House lights down. Spotlight up on BETH, sitting downstage right.)

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 cussed their teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down tool house.

(Spotlight up on set piece, stage left. 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.)

There were six of them—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. 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.
AND 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