

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, downstage right.)

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 stage left.)

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 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, downstage right.*)

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, downstage left.*)

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 stage left: 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