

(Spot off BETH: Spot up on MOTHER and MRS. MCCARTHY downstage left.)

MOTHER. Why in the world did you call the fire department about a little smoke?

MRS. MCCARTHY. It was a lot of smoke. The ladies' room was full of thick smoke.

MOTHER. It couldn't have been. You just got excited. And now look—the church is full of firemen and the street is full of baby angels crying and shepherds climbing all over the fire truck and half the neighborhood...! Didn't you know it was cigar smoke?

MRS. MCCARTHY. No, I didn't know it was cigar smoke! I don't expect to find cigar smoke in the ladies' room of the church!

(Spot off ladies: Spot up on BETH.)

BETH. Alice Wendleken's mother was mad, too, and the whole Ladies' Aid Society was mad...and Reverend Hopkins said he didn't know what to think.

(Spot off BETH: Spot up on REVEREND HOPKINS and MOTHER, stage left center.)

REVEREND HOPKINS. I've been on the telephone all day, and I can't make heads or tails of it. Some people say they set fire to the ladies' room. Some people say they set fire to the kitchen. Vera Wendleken says all they do is talk about sex and underwear.

MOTHER. That was Hobie Clark talking about underwear. And they didn't set fire to anything. The only fire was in the kitchen, where the applesauce cake burned up.

REV. HOPKINS. Well, the whole church is in an uproar. I don't know... Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," but I'm not sure he meant the Herdmans... Grace, don't you think we should cancel the pageant?

MOTHER. I'll bet that was Helen Armstrong's idea.

REV. HOPKINS. We could blame it on the fire...makes a good excuse.

MOTHER. I'll bet that was Edna McCarthy's idea.

REV. HOPKINS. Every one seems to think it's going to be a...a...

MOTHER. Disaster? (*Obviously, that's the word he had in mind.*) Well, they're wrong! ...It's going to be the best Christmas pageant we ever had!

REV. HOPKINS. But, Grace... I don't think anyone will come to see it!

(Spot out on them: Up on BETH, downstage right.)

BETH. I didn't think so, either, and neither did Charlie... but we were wrong. On Christmas Eve the church was jammed full. Everybody came...to see what the Herdmans would do.

(Spot out on BETH, leaving stage area dark. MOTHER and FATHER enter from back of theatre and walk down center aisle to the stage. She is carrying tote bags, extra sheets, paper cups, etc. He is carrying a very large tree-type potted plant.)

MOTHER. Wait till I turn the lights on. (*house lights up*) Now, watch your step.

FATHER. I can't even see where I'm going. I don't know what in the world you expect to do with this thing...

(MOTHER puts her various burdens on the floor and rummages through the tote bag, looking for an extra script. She pulls out one or two extra halos, rolls of scotch tape, box of tissues and a big white first aid kit with a red cross on the side of it.)

MOTHER. I thought it might look like a palm tree. (*looks at the plant*) I see now that it doesn't... Oh, I don't have any idea what's going to happen tonight! We've never once gone through the whole thing, and the Herdmans still think it's some kind of spy story. It may be the first Christmas pageant in history where Joseph and the Wise Men get in a fight and Mary runs away with the baby.