

# The Best Christmas Pageant Ever

*As the play opens the curtain is down. House lights down. Spotlight up on BETH, sitting DS.R.*

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, s.l. 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.)*

BETH. 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,~~

All  
Children

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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, S.L.C.)*

REVEREND HOPKINS. I've been on the telephone all day, and I can't make head 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?

All Adults