

PEACE ON EARTH, AND MERCY MILD,  
 GOD AND SINNERS RECONCILED!"

JOYFUL, ALL YE NATIONS, RISE.  
 JOIN THE TRIUMPH OF THE SKIES.  
 WITH TH' ANGELIC HOSTS PROCLAIM,  
 "CHRIST IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM!"  
 HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING,  
 "GLORY TO THE NEWBORN KING!"

MISS GLACÉ. *Magnifique*, boys and girls! And to think that some of you are just learning English! (*Mr. Hilton knocks on the door frame.*)

MR. HILTON. May I come in?

MISS GLACÉ. (*Blushing.*) Mr. Hilton! Yes, of course. (*Young Shirley whispers to Evie as Shirley speaks to Clara.*)

SHIRLEY. It's obvious to just about everyone that Miss Glacé has her eye on Mr. Hilton.

MISS GLACÉ. Look, children: Mr. Hilton, the drama teacher, is here.

CHILDREN. (*In sing-song unison.*) Hel-lo, Mis-ter Hil-ton.

MR. HILTON. Hello, boys and girls. (*To her.*) Miss Glacé, may I speak to you privately for a moment?

MISS GLACÉ. Certainly. (*He speaks confidentially to her. The close proximity makes her blush. Young Shirley whispers to Evie, who giggles.*)

SHIRLEY. (*To Clara.*) Look at her cheeks. See how they turn pink? (*The school bell sounds.*)

MISS GLACÉ. Class dismissed. (*Above the din.*) Be sure to practice at home! (*The children leave noisily.*) Shirley Abramowitz, would you stay a minute, please?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Me? (*Young Shirley shoots a concerned look at Evie, who shrugs and exits.*) Did I do something wrong? Is it my voice? Was I singing too loud?

MISS GLACÉ. No, no, your voice is wonderful. I wish *all* the children sang as loudly as you.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Surprised.*) Really?

MISS GLACÉ. Mr. Hilton would like a word with you. Mr. Hilton...?

MR. HILTON. Thank you, Miss Glacé. Now, Shirley, as you well know, Christmas is just around the corner.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yes, Mr. Hilton.

MR. HILTON. And, to mark the occasion, Miss Glacé and I are putting on a play, a lovely holiday play. Isn't that right, Miss Glacé?

MISS GLACÉ. Yes. Indeed, we are. That is our hope.

MR. HILTON. Putting on a show is awfully hard work, but it can also bring a tremendous amount of joy. Do you know what joy is?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Um ...

MR. HILTON. Miss Glacé, how would you define "joy"?

MISS GLACÉ. (*Flustered.*) Joy? Oh, dear. (*To him.*) Happiness? But a special *kind* of happiness.

MR. HILTON. What kind?

MISS GLACÉ. The *best* kind.

MR. HILTON. Well put! Shirley, have you ever felt anything like that before?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I don't *think* so ...

MR. HILTON. Oh, you'd know. Believe me, you'll know it when you feel it. It starts at your toes and works its way up. Acting on stage, telling stories to a roomful of strangers, making them laugh and bringing tears to their eyes, why, there's nothing else like it! Nothing in the world! (*He's lost in reverie for a beat.*)

YOUNG SHIRLEY. So, this play...?

MR. HILTON. Yes! Our pageant. Our Christmas pageant. Now: Most of the parts have been given out.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Disappointed.*) Oh.

MR. HILTON. But there's still *one* part yet to be cast.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Upbeat.*) Oh!

MR. HILTON. The most important part. I'd been wracking my brain for days: Who should play this part, who should it be? Then, the other night, at the Thanksgiving pageant, I found who I was looking for.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Who?

MR. HILTON. You! When you made your entrance as the turkey, I thought to myself: Of course! Why didn't I think of it before? Shirley Abramowitz! Now listen carefully: Do you promise to know all your lines by heart, and speak in a loud, clear voice, with lots of expression?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Softly.*) Yes, Mr. Hilton. I do.

MR. HILTON. What? Speak up, I can't hear you.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Shouts.*) Yes, Mr. Hilton! I do!

MR. HILTON. That's the spirit!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. So you don't think my voice is *too* loud?

MR. HILTON. Too loud?! Oh, no. I think it's swell. (*To Miss Glacé.*) Don't you agree, Miss Glacé?

MISS GLACÉ. I most certainly do. Shirley's voice is *formidable*. Made for the stage. (*Young Shirley beams.*)

SHIRLEY. All my young life, people only *complained* about my voice. Now, for the first time, my loud voice was a *good* thing! It made me special!

MR. HILTON. Rehearsals start tomorrow after school. Will you be there?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Will I?! You bet I will! May I go now? I can't wait to tell my parents.

MR. HILTON. Yes, you may. Remember, Shirley: The success of the show rests solely on *you*.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yes, Mr. Hilton. Goodbye. Goodbye, Miss Glacé.

MISS GLACÉ. *Au revoir.* (*Young Shirley starts to go but stops.*)

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Mr. Hilton?

MR. HILTON. Yes, Shirley?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. What part is it? (*Cross cut to: the Abramowitz apartment. Her parents receive the news.*)

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Jesus Christ?! They want you to play Jesus Christ?!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Shhh! Clara! Please!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Mama, not so loud! The neighbors!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You're a girl, for God's sake! A Jewish girl! What business does a Jewish girl have being Jesus Christ? Couldn't they find a gentile *boy*?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. They didn't *want* a gentile boy, they wanted *me*!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Why?! It doesn't make sense!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Mr. Hilton and Miss Glacé love my voice! They said it was just what they needed.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Troublemakers! They should mind their own business!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Clara ...

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. It's a *shanda* for the *goyim*! We're Jews! What do we know from Christmas?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Evie Slotnick's playing the Virgin Mary ...

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Good for Evie Slotnick.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. (*To his wife.*) Need I remind you, *mamaleh*: Jesus *was* a Jew. And so were Mary and Joseph.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yeah!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Is that supposed to be helpful? Huh, Misha?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. No?

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. No, that is not helpful. (*He backs off sheepishly.*)

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Mama, you just don't want me acting on the stage!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. I happen to think there are more important things in life than dressing up and pretending to be something you're not!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. You're just jealous!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley ...

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. (*Overlap.*) Jealous?! Why on earth would I be jealous?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Clara! Please! The two of you!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. You don't like me getting any attention at all. You'll only be happy if I keep my mouth shut and disappear!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. That's it. You're right. Go! Disappear!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Clara...!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Go to your room! Now!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Fine! (*Young Shirley stomps off to her room and slams the door, but eavesdrops.*)

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. (*Attempting levity.*) Ho, ho, ho!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. This is a joke to you?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Christmas, Clara. Really. What's the harm?

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Am I the only one in this house who sees this for what it is?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. It's only a play! It's not the end of the world.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Oh, no? The end of *our* world, maybe. We let our Shirley play Jesus, then what? She becomes a nun?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. We *schlepped* across the ocean — in steerage! In filth! — to get to America! We risked our *lives* to be free. In Palestine the Arabs would be eating us alive. If we'd stayed in Europe we'd be fleeing pogroms left and right. Here we are at last in America and what nasty threat have we got? Christmas!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. If we came here to get away from tyrants and people who hate us, and instead we fall into a *creeping* pogrom, that eats away at us slowly, so slowly we don't even notice what it's doing to us, and makes our children forget who they are and where they come from, who's the joke on then, huh, Misha? (*Pause. He puts his arm around her.*) What happened to the man I married?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. He's right here.