

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.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. No. He's not. *That was a man of conviction. Your sense of conviction is not what it once was.*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Neither, my darling, is your sense of humor.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. *That I never had much of.*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Bend a little, Clara.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Bend too much, and you break.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Come on ... Just this much. Look, all I want is peace in my family.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Then go in there and tell her she can't do it.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Ease up on her.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. If you don't do it, I will. *(Pause. He sighs resignedly and starts for the bedroom. He turns to her; she gestures for him to go on. He knocks. Young Shirley hurriedly gets into bed.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Mind if I come in?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I don't care, do what you want.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Hey. Watch your mouth. No need to get fresh, young lady. *(A beat.)* Now listen, Shirley. About this play. I don't have to tell you your mother's not crazy about your doing this.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. What about you?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. What about me?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. What do you think?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Nevermind what I think.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Why? Don't you have an opinion?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Well ...

YOUNG SHIRLEY. You don't mind, do you. You kinda like the idea.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. That's not the point.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Oh, so you *do* like the idea! Why don't you just tell her?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. It's not as easy as that.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Why isn't it?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. It just isn't. Okay? You're too young, you wouldn't understand. One day you'll be married, and have children, and then you'll know what it's like. If your mother says no, we both say no.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. But, Papa...!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. End of discussion.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I promised Mr. Hilton!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Mr. Hilton will understand.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. No, he won't! Please, Papa! Don't do this to me!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Good night! *(He starts to go.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Papa!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. *Gay schluffen! [Go to sleep!] (Mr. Abramowitz joins his wife, who knits, by the radio and picks up his newspaper. Young Shirley sobs loudly.) Shab! Keep it down in there! Enough theatrics for one night! (He holds the paper up in front of his face, to avoid his wife's gaze.)*

SHIRLEY. That night, I cry myself to sleep. *(Transition to sunrise. Alarm clock.)* Morning comes and I drag myself to school, dreading the day. *(P.S. 100. Auditorium. Rehearsal. The children are not in costume and read woodenly from scripts. Ira is King Herod.)* Later, in rehearsal, I'm so nervous about telling Mr. Hilton and Miss Glacé, I make believe nothing is wrong.

KING HEROD. "Go to Buh — Beth —"

MR. HILTON. Beth-le-hem.

KING HEROD. "Go to Beth-le-hem and find this Chuh —"

MR. HILTON. Christ.

KING HEROD. Oh, yeah. "Find this Christ-child we hear tell of." *(An uncertain pause.)*

MR. HILTON. Keep going. *(No response from the Wise Men.)*

Wise Men? Pay attention, Wise Men.

WISE MAN #1. Oh, you want us to say this?

MR. HILTON. Yes, I want you to say the next line. All three of you at the same time, remember? One-two-three: "Yes, Your Highness." *(The line is supposed to be spoken in unison but isn't.)*

THREE WISE MEN. "Yes, Your Highness." *(Mr. Hilton demonstrates how they should back away while bowing.)*

MR. HILTON. "Yes, Your Highness." Now you do it. *(They do, badly.)*

THREE WISE MEN. "Yes, Your Highness."

MR. HILTON. Good. *(He looks for his script.)* Where's my script? Shirley, have you seen my script?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Here it is, Mr. Hilton. Right under your nose.

MR. HILTON. Thank you! How could I get along without you? *(That makes her feel worse. He finds his place in the script and gestures to Shirley, cuing her.)* "And so ..."

YOUNG SHIRLEY. "And so the Three Wise Men set forth looking for me, the newborn King."

MR. HILTON. All right, Wise Men, here's where you trudge through the desert. *(He demonstrates as he speaks.)* Trudge, trudge, trudge. The sun is blazing hot. *(He pants.)* And then you say ... *(He points to Wise Man #2.)*