

Mr. Abramowitz

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Well, obviously she's made her choice.

(He puts on his overcoat.)

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Where are you going?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I'm going to the school to see a play. You're welcome to join me.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. No thank you.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Clara, Clara, my darling Clara, what are you gonna do? Drown your only child? This isn't the old country, it's America.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. I know this is America! Everybody's always telling me where I live!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I thought you knew your history.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. What does history have to do with it?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Christmas is not altogether Christian. It's a holiday from pagan times; candles, lights, even Chanukah is pagan. If non-Jews think Christmas is a private holiday, theirs and theirs alone, well, that's just ignorant. What belongs to history belongs to all men. You want to go back to the Middle Ages?

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Of course not.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I didn't think so. Like it or not, my darling, this is progress.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. I don't like it.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. You don't have to, but that's not gonna make it go away. It's moving faster than either of us. Either you get on the train ... or you're left standing in the station, all alone. *(A beat.)* Well, I don't know about you, my dear, but I'm going off to see my only daughter play Jesus Christ in the Christmas pageant. *(He kisses her cheek.)* Have a nice night. ~~He goes~~ leaving her in a quandry. *Transition. Backstage bustle. The children anxiously prepare. Mr. Hilton and Miss Glacé help with their costumes and fake beards; Jackie struggles with his bow-tie. Jitters.)*

JACKIE. This stupid thing won't stay on!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Here, Jackie, let me help you with that.

JACKIE. Thanks. How do I look?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. You look beautiful. I mean, really, really nice.

MR. HILTON. Thespians, may I have your attention, please? Tonight is the culmination of weeks of hard work. Each and every one of you has lent your best team spirit. And that's what putting on a play is all about. I want you to know that Miss Glacé and I are very proud of you. Aren't we, Miss Glacé?

CALLBACK

MISS GLACÉ. Oh, yes, very proud. Very proud, indeed.

MR. HILTON. We want you, above all, to go out there and have fun! As we say in the theater: Break a leg! *(Ira Pushkov trips and falls down.)*

IRA. Ow! My leg! My leg!

MR. HILTON. Ira Pushkov! Are you all right? *(Ira laughingly recovers. Unamused.)* Very funny.

MISS GLACÉ. Places! Places, everyone! *(The children take their positions. Young Shirley peeks through the curtain and sees her father take his seat.)*

SHIRLEY. From behind the yards of drapes, I look out and see my papa come in. But my mama ... is nowhere in sight. *(A trio of carollers stand in front of the auditorium curtain singing "Carol of the Bells" a cappella, in a round. Jackie is frozen with stage fright. Mr. Hilton moves him to center stage.)*

JACKIE. Parents dear, we are here, to make a Christmas play in time. It we give, in narrative, and illustrate with pantomime. *(Miss Glacé bows, cueing him to do the same. He does, and goes. The curtain parts, revealing a crudely-painted, homey living room backdrop complete with a Christmas tree, a mantle adorned with stockings, and a large, shuttered window. A grandmother, her white hair in a bun, sits in a rocking chair by the fire.)*

GRANDMOTHER. *(Old lady voice.)* Come, children, gather around. Who would like to hear the story of Christmas?

CAROLLERS. — I would! — Me! Me! *(Etc.)*

GRANDMOTHER. Come along, then. Sit by me. *(The carollers sit on the floor. Grandmother opens a large storybook that obscures her face.)*

"Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house,

(Mr. Hilton runs on to lower the book and runs off again.)

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there ...

Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash."

(A child in the pantomime pulls open the drapes, accompanied by a crescendo of organ music, revealing, bathed in bright light, atop the windowsill with outstretched arms, Jesus Christ [Young Shirley seen in beard, wig, and costume for the first time]. She speaks in a deep, manly voice.)

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(As Jesus.)* Greetings, good people! I ... I ...