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'TIS THE SEASON TO GO ON STRIKE

A Christmas play by

Katherine Padilla

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The North Family:

NICK (the neighborhood “Santa Claus”)

NATALIE (an exhausted new mom)

NEAL (older teen)

NANCY (mid-teen)

NAOMI (older child)

NATASHA (young child)

NATHAN (new baby)

The Garland Family:

GUY (a polished professional man)

GABRIELLE (a polished professional woman)

GLORIA (older teen)

GRANT (young teen)

GREGORY (young child)

The Joseph Family:

JOHN (a mechanic)

JOY (the neighborhood cookie-baker)

JOSH (mid-teen)

JULIE (older child)

The Harper Family:

HAROLD (sports fan)

HOLLY (the perfect homemaker, mom, and business woman)

HILLARY (older teen)

HOPE (older child)

SETTING

The play takes place during the Christmas season in a neighborhood in Ridgeville, a small Maryland town. The Norths live in a small colonial with an “It’s a Boy!” banner on or above the front door. The Garlands live in a split foyer home with candles in its four windows. The Josephs live in a split-level home decorated with Christmas lights; on their roof is a racecar in blue lights with Santa in the driver’s seat. The Harpers live in a little rambler-style home with double-decker gazebo next to it.

ACT I

SCENE 1 NORTHS’ CORNER LOT

(CURTAIN opens. It’s a morning in late autumn at the neighborhood bus stop. There is a green utility box and a pine tree and a line of four mailboxes. NAOMI, GRANT, GREGORY, JULIE, and HOPE enter from different places, running and carrying backpacks. GABRIELLE, JOY, and HOLLY follow their children on stage. The younger children throw their backpacks down in a pile and play tag. ALL PLAYERS are wearing heavy coats.)

HOLLY

(Calling to Naomi.) Hey Naomi! We hear you have a new baby in your house!

NAOMI

(She stops running and turns to Holly. Her tone of voice is bright.) Yeah, we do. A little boy. Nathan.

JOY

How’s your mom holding up?

NAOMI

She takes Tylenol a lot. She must have a lot of headaches. *(Runs off to play tag.)*

GABRIELLE

(Shakes her head.) Five children . . .

HOLLY

Can you imagine?

JOY

She’s insane.

(Sound offstage of school bus stopping. NAOMI, GRANT, JULIE, and HOPE pick up their backpacks and line up for the bus. GABRIELLE, JOY, and HOLLY hug their children and wave good-bye. Children exit stage as if getting on the bus.)

HOLLY

(Voice touched with hysteria.) How in the world can a woman have a new baby during the holidays?

JOY

(Slumps her shoulders and sighs.) Oh, I know what you mean. Even without a new baby, I have no idea how I'm going to get everything done.

GABRIELLE

I've been having nightmares for a month!

HOLLY

(Voice charged with stress.) The girls want to have their friends over on the 13th. My husband has invited his boss over for Christmas Eve. My brother-in-law's family is coming over on New Year's Eve, and all of my family will be here on New Year's Day.

JOY

(Even more stressed out than Holly.) I just found out that we'll be having our church Christmas party—you know, the one my husband is in charge of every year—with another congregation.

GABRIELLE

(Voice shrill with panic.) Guy didn't get a bonus this year. All of my credit cards are maxed out. But I still have twenty-two presents to buy and send before the 15th.

HOLLY

My silver needs to be polished; my carpet needs to be cleaned; and my tablecloths need to be replaced.

JOY

Baking cookies and brownies for 200 people is bad enough, but 400 people . . . I don't know how I'm going to do it!

GABRIELLE

That will leave only ten days to shop for Guy and the kids.

JOY

Why do we this to ourselves, year after year?

HOLLY

Just once, I'd like to sit down on Christmas Eve and watch *It's a Wonderful Life* all the way through!

GABRIELLE

And see *The Nutcracker* performed live.

JOY

Why can't our husbands take their share of the load?

HOLLY

(Sarcastically.) You're right. A man who can't cook Christmas dinner is a menace to society.

GABRIELLE

Guy's just going to have to shop for his own family this year.

JOY

And John'll have to buy dessert for the party at the warehouse store!

HOLLY

Harold can take his boss to dinner, and my girls can plan their own party. I'm going on strike!

SCENE 2 NORTHS' NURSERY

(NATALIE is sitting in a rocking chair, breast-feeding her baby. There is also a crib in the room, along with a TV and video player. NICK enters and approaches Natalie.)

NATALIE

(Sighs in gladness and relief.) You're home.

NICK

(Hugs Natalie as well as he can.) Your day's been that bad?

NATALIE

I'm just glad to see you.

NICK

The house looks good. What good fairy came and cleaned it?

NATALIE

Holly. Wasn't that nice of her?

NICK

It was. Anything left in the fridge for dinner?

NATALIE

You have your choice. Chili dogs or frozen burritos. Oh, and there's a little ham left. It'd probably taste good in scrambled eggs.

NICK

I don't know . . . I think the kids are tired of egg burritos.

NATALIE

So am I, to tell you the truth. Oh Nick, what am I going to do? I thought Thanksgiving would be the difficult holiday, and here I am, two weeks after having a baby, too tired to make dinner. How am I going to do Christmas?

NICK

Don't worry about it. You don't have to do everything you normally do.

NATALIE

That's just it. I can't do anything! I sat down at the computer today to write the Christmas letter, and I couldn't think of a thing to say. My brain is gone.

NICK

So don't do the letter this year.

NATALIE

But it would be such a good way to announce the birth of the baby.

NICK

If you feel that strongly about it, write the baby info in the cards, sign them, and send them. Everyone we know will understand why there's no letter.

NATALIE

I wish our families were closer.

NICK

Well, they aren't. There isn't anything we can do about that.

NATALIE

I just want us to have a nice Christmas. Is that too much to ask?

NICK

Yes, it is! You just had a baby!

NATALIE

I didn't say I wanted a *perfect* Christmas, just a nice one.

NICK

Then here's what we'll do. You make a list—a *short* list—of the things that really must be done. Then we'll schedule time to do those things. You do what you can, and the kids and I'll do the rest.

NATALIE

(Laughs.) I can just see us eating your egg burritos off of paper plates on Christmas day!

NICK

Don't worry. We won't have egg burritos. I think I can warm up a ham. And the warehouse store has good potato salad.

NATALIE

The kids hate potato salad!

NICK

Then we'll get them potato chips! *(They laugh together.)*

NATALIE

Sounds more like a Fourth of July picnic than Christmas dinner!

NICK

It'll definitely be a Christmas to remember.

NATALIE

I think I can manage some kind of hot potato dish. But the warehouse store does have good cheesecake.

NICK

You're starting to get the picture! Please, Natalie, don't worry about Christmas. Everything'll be fine. You feel like pizza tonight?

NATALIE

(Shakes her head.) Chinese. With shrimp and lots of veggies.

NICK

Will do.

NATALIE

You're a *fine* cook!

NICK

Aren't I though?

(NICK exits.)

NATALIE

(To the baby in a kind of exhausted contentment.) Are you worth it, Nathan?
(She reflects.) I wonder if Mary had to miss a holiday when the baby Jesus was born . . . Passover, maybe.
(Nods, then lovingly, to Nathan.) Jesus was definitely worth it . . . And so are you.
(Pauses, then looks at Nathan impishly.) But you'd be *more* worth it if you'd let me get some sleep.
(In a high voice, as if she's talking for Nathan.) He-he-he-he . . . Not a chance, Mom.
(As herself.) That was a wicked laugh . . .
(As Nathan.) It's the chocolate, Mom. It's making me crazy!
(As herself.) Watch it . . . or it's Kung Pao beef for you, baby.
(As Nathan.) Bring it on! I survived the egg burritos with Tabasco sauce!

SCENE 3
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(It is a late autumn evening. HAROLD, JOHN, and GUY enter from various directions, as if they're coming from their houses, to get the mail. All are wearing heavy winter coats.)

HAROLD

(To John as he opens his mailbox.) Hey, how's it going?

JOHN

(Approaches his mailbox.) It's going.

HAROLD

(To John, looking in the direction of John's house.) See you finally got your lights put up.

GUY

(Approaching mailbox, gazing in the direction of John's house, voice touched with disdain.) Your racecar is . . . interesting.

JOHN

(With pleasure.) Isn't it?

HAROLD

A manly kind of Christmas symbol. *(JOHN and HAROLD hoot.)*

JOHN

(To Harold.) That watchtower of yours needs a star.

HAROLD

I know. Holly won't go for it, though. Says it would be—

GUY

Tacky?

HAROLD

Yeah.

JOHN

(Shaking his head.) Women. *(Pauses.)* I spent my entire Thanksgiving weekend, in the sleet, putting up lights *for her*, and what kind of thanks do I get? She tells me she's going on strike!

GUY

When am I supposed to shop for my family? I work overtime for two months so that we can afford Christmas!

HAROLD

My wife has her family over every New Year's Day. She won't let me watch football, and she makes me play these stupid trivia games. And now, it's too much trouble for her to cook dinner for my boss on Christmas Eve!

GUY

We get no respect.

JOHN

No respect!

HAROLD

We're supposed to be the kings of our castles, and we're being treated like servants!

GUY

Are we going to stand still for this abuse?

JOHN

No way!

HAROLD

Holly thinks a star would be tacky? Just wait till she sees what goes on top of the watchtower this year.

JOHN

(Interested.) What do you have in mind?

GUY

I don't think I want to know.

SCENE 4
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(NEAL, NANCY, and NAOMI are sitting on the green utility box and are in a bickering mood. ALL PLAYERS in this scene wear heavy winter coats.)

NAOMI

(On the verge of tears.) Dad just *can't* make egg burritos on Christmas!

NEAL

Knock it off, Naomi. He didn't mean it. He just said that 'cause you were whining about having nothing to eat.

NAOMI

Well there *isn't* anything to eat! There's been *nothing* good to eat since Mom had the baby!

NANCY

(Argumentatively.) That isn't true. Several ladies from church brought dinners by right after Mom got home from the hospital.

NAOMI

But those were *weird* dinners!

NANCY

You're too picky!

NEAL

(Nodding.) The dinners may've been different, but they got eaten fast enough.

NAOMI

That's only 'cause Mom ate it all!

NANCY

(Shrilly.) 'Cause having a baby's hard work!

NEAL

(Yelling.) Knock it off!

(Enter GLORIA, GRANT, JOSH, JULIE, HILLARY, HOPE, talking with each other, appearing unhappy.)

NEAL
What's going on?

GLORIA
We're so depressed.

JULIE
We don't know what to do.

HILLARY
Our moms are going on strike.

JOSH
And our dads are furious!

NANCY
(On the verge of outrage.) But the holidays are supposed to be full of fun!

NEAL
(Nodding in agreement.) With music and parties and lots of food!

GRANT
(Shaking his head.) Not this year. Not for us.

NANCY
You're serious? Your moms are really on strike?

(GLORIA, GRANT, JOSH, JULIE, HILLARY, HOPE nod and sigh collectively.)

NEAL
They're not going to do anything for you this year?

NAOMI
(Aghast.) No presents?

GLORIA
My mom says everyone but Gregory's getting cash.

NEAL
That wouldn't be so bad.

JULIE
Speak for yourself!

HOPE
I want presents!

HILLARY

(To Hope.) Mom said we would get presents. Just no parties.

JOSH

My mom won't do Dad's party for him.

GRANT

All the moms told the dads that they have to cook Christmas dinner.

NANCY

And I thought things were just crummy at our house.

HILLARY

Don't you like having a new baby?

NAOMI

I haven't decided yet.

NANCY

Nathan won't sleep at night, and Natasha won't sleep during the day.

NAOMI

Mom's getting weird. And we're starving. All Dad knows how to cook are those gross egg burritos.

JULIE

Sounds like things are pretty crummy at all our houses.

NEAL

(To Nancy and Naomi.) At least our mom's not on strike—yet.

NANCY

(In horror.) You don't think she would, do you?

NAOMI

Mom wouldn't do that!

JULIE

I never thought my mom would.

GRANT

Neither did I!

NANCY

(Miserably.) And our mom has a better reason than any of them.

NEAL

Than any mom in Ridgeville!

NAOMI

(In despair.) What are we going to do?

JOSH

Do you think your mom knows about the strike?

NEAL

Don't know. Prob'ly not. She's pretty out of it.

NANCY

She *is* spaced out.

HILLARY

Then maybe you can keep her from finding out about it.

NAOMI

How?

GLORIA

You could do things for her. Like the Christmas decorating.

NAOMI

That would be fun!

NANCY

(Unsure.) I don't know if she would let us do that. She's usually so funny about getting everything just right.

HILLARY

Don't give her a choice.

NEAL

Hillary's right. We'll just bring the stuff up from the basement and do it while she's feeding the baby.

NAOMI

We could watch Natasha more so that she can sleep.

NEAL

That's a great idea! If she's sleeping, she won't be talking to the other moms in the neighborhood.

HOPE

You could even do the Christmas cards.

NANCY

(Laughing.) Maybe this *will* work! Mom'll be so amazed at all the work we're doing that it will never occur to her to go on strike!

JOSH

(Thoughtfully.) Maybe if the rest of us do stuff for our moms, they'll *stop* going on strike!

GRANT

(Face brightens in hope.) You think?

HILLARY

That's a great idea!

JULIE

You really think we can do all of the stuff our moms usually do?

JOSH

(Waves dismissively.) Piece-a-cake.

HILLARY

We'll let the dads think the moms are doing the work. That'll cool *them* down—

HOPE

And we'll let the moms think the dads are doing the work—

GRANT

That'll cool *them* down.

NANCY

Your moms'll get the break they've been wanting.

GLORIA

We'll form committees and work together to pull this off.

(KIDS nod their agreement and excitement.)

JULIE

And everyone will be happy!

SCENE 5
NORTHS' DINING ROOM

(NATALIE is sitting at the table, working on Christmas cards, frozen in position. NATASHA is at the table with her, also frozen. NEAL, NANCY, JOSH, GLORIA, and HILLARY enter in front of curtain, carrying backpacks and wearing heavy winter coats.)

NEAL

(To Josh.) How's the church party going?

JOSH

I'm going to start making calls today. There're plenty of ladies in the church. They want to eat? They can bring the refreshments.

GLORIA

(Teasingly.) What? Aren't you going to bake cookies for hundreds of people?

JOSH

(Grunts.) Only my mom's *that* crazy.

HILLARY

Why in the world does she do it?

JOSH

I guess she likes for people to tell her how awesome her cookies are—

NANCY

Moms always do seem to like the food other moms cook better than their own.

NEAL

Maybe. But Mrs. Joseph's cookies really are awesome.

JOSH

Don't you know it! I get two bucks for one in the lunchroom, and Julie gets pizza *and* ice cream.

NANCY

You don't think your dad'll be mad?

JOSH

Who knows?

GLORIA

Why should he be? Mrs. Joseph isn't the only mom in Ridgeville who can bake!

(Exit JOSH, GLORIA, and HILLARY.)

(NATALIE and NATASHA unfreeze. NATASHA begins dancing around the room. NEAL and NANCY walk into the room and set their backpacks and coats on the dining room chairs.)

NEAL

Hey, Mom. What's up?

NATALIE

(With a bantering smirk.) My blood pressure.

NEAL

(In a playfully warning tone.) You've got to stop eating those eggs.

(NATALIE and NANCY laugh.)

NATALIE

You guys have any homework?

NANCY

Not today. *(She sits down at the table near Natalie.)* Why don't you let me do those cards?

NATALIE

(In surprise.) Seriously?

NANCY

Seriously.

NEAL

(Sits down at the table.) You go take a nap. We'll keep an eye on Natasha.

NATALIE

Am I dreaming?

NANCY

You'll only dream if you go to sleep!

(NATALIE stands up. NATASHA runs over to her and hugs her.)

NATALIE

Then I'm going to bed! *(She waves to the other kids and exits.)*

NANCY

(Studying the cards that Natalie has already done. She pushes a stack toward Neal.)
Looks like Mom's already addressed the envelopes. Here. You can sign and I'll write in the baby info.

(All actors freeze. Enter JOSH in front of curtain, carrying a cordless phone and something that looks like a church telephone book.)

JOSH

(Dials phone. Speaks with confidence.) Mrs. Frost? Josh Joseph here. I'm just calling to see if you would be willing to bring two dozen cookies to the church party on the 18th.

(Pauses, as if listening.) No. My mother's taking a break this year. She feels that baking 600 cookies is a bit much.

(Listens. Expression turns to one of disbelief.) No, no . . . I didn't realize that the only reason you come to the church party is because of my mother's cookies.

(Listens. Voice rising with irritation.) She *does* know that everyone loves her cookies. She's just decided to let the other women take a turn this year, that's all. Two dozen cookies. That's all you have to bring!

(Listens. Explodes with anger.) Two dozen's too many? When my mother bakes 600 cookies every year?

(Listens. Outraged.) It's your *what*?

(Listens impatiently.) Your kick-back and relax party?

(Listens.) You've got to be kidding.

(Listens.) Yeah . . . yeah . . . yeah . . . Well this year she finally got smart and went on strike!

(Listens.) Yeah, strike. *(Hangs up with a flourish. Says to himself in disbelief and disgust.)* Kick-back and relax party? Give me a *break*!

(NEAL, NANCY, and NATASHA unfreeze. JOSH freezes.)

(NEAL and NANCY work while NATASHA continues dancing around the room. NAOMI enters with GLORIA and HILLARY behind her, throws down her backpack, and dances with NATASHA. HILLARY and GLORIA are carrying homemade tree ornaments.)

HILLARY

(Showing the ornaments to Neal and Nancy.) My mom made these ornaments last year and sold them at craft shows.

GLORIA

We're hoping they would make good gifts for the extended families. What do you think?

NEAL

(Nods, then returns to his work on the cards.) Cool.

NANCY

(Stands up and takes one to hold up in the light.) It's beautiful!

NAOMI

May I help make them?

GLORIA

Sure! As soon as I can get the rest of the stuff.

(NATASHA shrieks happily and runs off the stage.)

NAOMI

(Running after Natasha.) I've got her.

GLORIA

Do you really think they're good enough?

NANCY

They're adorable!

GLORIA

I don't know . . . you don't know my family.

HILLARY

They'll like them. Don't worry! My mom's a pro!

(GLORIA and HILLARY sit down at the table and help with the cards. NANCY gives stamps to one and return address labels to another, then all freeze.)

(JOSH unfreezes and again talks on the phone.)

JOSH

(Dials phone. Speaks with patience.) Mrs. Starr? Hello! Josh Joseph here.

(Listens.) Fine, fine. Hey, the reason I'm calling is to see if you'd be willing to bring two dozen cookies to the church party on the 18th.

(Listens.) No, she doesn't know I'm calling. I'm doing this for my dad.

(Listens.) Yeah, she is on strike. How'd you know that?

(Listens. Takes an irritated stance.) Mrs. Frost? Figures. Now how about those cookies?

(Listens in perplexity.) What do you mean, you'll stand behind my mom?

(Listens in shock.) What picket line?

(Listens, growing in exasperation.) My dad's fault?

(Listens.) Excuse me, but are you nuts?!

(Listens, shaking his head.) You won't bring any nuts to the party either. Yeah, I've got it. 'Bye.

(Hangs up with a sigh.) What is it with these women? *(JOSH exits.)*

SCENE 6
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(HILLARY, JULIE, and GRANT enter carrying notebooks of various sizes and pencils. Perhaps one has a clipboard. Perhaps another has a handheld computer. All are wearing jackets instead of coats to signify change in weather.)

HILLARY

(In a business-like way.) What do you have for me?

GRANT

It looks as if the deli-platter comes with ham, turkey, roast beef, and cheese, plus rolls. It'll cost \$65. For another \$30, we could get some salads too.

JULIE

The cheapest pies are about \$5. They're small, so we'll need at least six. They come in cardboard boxes and we could easily hide them under a bed.

HILLARY

What else do you think we need?

GRANT

Soda pop.

JULIE

Yeah, soda pop. And paper plates and cups.

GRANT

Chips, too.

JULIE

And dip.

HILLARY

I don't know if we can afford chips and dip.

GRANT

(Demanding tone.) Well, we'll just have to.

HILLARY

It's going to be tight.

JULIE

A hundred and seventy-five dollars for Christmas dinner! Where in the world is it going to come from?

HILLARY

Neal and Gloria and I will work enough this month to put in \$50 each, and Josh is pitching in the \$25 he got for his old video games.

GRANT

(Whining.) All of this money, and we don't even get a real Christmas dinner.

HILLARY

You know we don't have any choice. There's no way we could cook a real Christmas dinner without our moms and dads knowing what we're doing.

GRANT

But still! Do we have to have a Fourth of July picnic? In Julie's garage? It just seems wrong.

JULIE

(Laughing.) Look on the bright side. It won't be hot, and there won't be any bugs!

(HILLARY, GRANT, and JULIE exit. JOSH enters, talking on a cell phone and wearing jacket.)

JOSH

(Speaks pleasantly. Sits on the green box.) May I speak to Mrs. Frost?

(Waits.) Mrs. Frost? Josh Joseph here. No, please don't hang up. I know you said you weren't going to come to my dad's party. Maybe you'll change your mind when I tell you that we're giving away a whole plate full of my mom's cookies to the lucky person who wins this year's Christmas cookie baking contest.

(Listens and nods.) Yeah. An entire *plate* full. All you have to do is bring three dozen homemade cookies.

(Listens.) I know I said two dozen the first time. You're welcome to bring two dozen cookies if you want to help out. If you want to enter the contest, it has to be *three* dozen, and all *homemade*.

(Listens.) Yeah, you can enter as many types of cookies as you want. It just has to be three dozen per entry.

(Listens.) The judges will be a group of teenagers from my neighborhood.

(Listens.) No, none of them go to our church, so they won't be judging their moms' cookies.

(Listens.) Yeah, the contest *is* a good idea. So, can I count on you to bring three dozen cookies?

(Listens, then replies happily.) Thank you very much, Mrs. Frost. See you there.

(Hangs up with a flourish.) Yes!

(NEAL, NANCY, GLORIA, and HILLARY enter wearing jackets.)

NEAL

(To Josh.) How ya doin' on the church party?

JOSH

Well, I finally got the women to bring the 600 cookies!

GLORIA

That's great!

JOSH

I told them the winner of the cookie contest would get a plate of my mom's cookies.

HILLARY

Cookie contest?

JOSH

Yeah. I had to bribe them all. That's the only way I could get them to bring the cookies.

NANCY

You *do* know how to make your mom's cookies, don't you?

JOSH

Sure, if I could only find the recipe!

NEAL

It can't be that hard to find a recipe.

JOSH

You have any idea how many recipes there are for chocolate chip cookies?

HILLARY

(Nods in understanding.) About a zillion.

JOSH

There's at least one in every cookbook, and my mom has a zillion cookbooks.

GLORIA

There isn't one that looks more used than all of the others?

NANCY

Yeah, you know. With little streaks of dried dough and grease spots?

HILLARY

Oooh! Don't be disgusting! Doesn't your mom put her recipes in plastic?

NANCY

Are you kidding? She doesn't have time for stuff like that.

JOSH

You know, I don't think I've ever seen my mom use a recipe when she makes those cookies.

(JOY enters, carrying a heaping plate of cookies. NEAL jabs the others to silence as Joy approaches. JOY stops when she meets up with the teenagers.)

GLORIA, HILLARY

Hi, Mrs. Joseph. *(They separate from the others and go in the direction of their homes.)*

(JOSH moves to intercept his mother.)

JOSH

(Reaching for the plate of cookies.) Hey, Mom! I'll be happy to take those off your hands!

JOY

(Sternly, jerking the cookies away.) Oh no you don't. These are for Mrs. North. *(Walks away from the kids.)*

NEAL, NANCY

(Look at each other, thrilled.) Cool!

(JOY stops just short of walking off stage. Lifts her fist and knocks. There is a knocking noise.)

(JOSH, in a dancing around way, as if he can't contain himself, points to the cookies behind his mother's back, then points to himself, making it clear to Nick and Nancy that the cookies are his. NEAL and NANCY shake their heads frantically.)

NEAL, NANCY

(Stage whispers.) No way! Not these cookies!

(Not getting a response, JOY knocks again. Knocking noise.)

NANCY

Just go on in, Mrs. Joseph. Mom's probably feeding the baby.

JOY

(Acts as if she's opening a door. Perhaps sound of door creaking.) Natalie! It's me! Where are you?

NATALIE

(Calls from off-stage.) In the baby's room, Joy! Come on up!

(JOY exits. JOSH, NEAL, and NANCY wait to talk until Joy is gone. When they do, it's with passion.)

JOSH

You guys keep your greedy hands off my cookies!

NANCY

(Horried.) You can't steal our mom's cookies!

JOSH

I'm not going to steal your mom's cookies; *you're* going to steal them.

NEAL

(The words of a doomed man.) She'll kill us.

NANCY

(Nodding.) She will. She loves those cookies.

NEAL

It'd be like wrecking my dad's motorcycle.

NANCY

Or pulling the ears off of Natasha's stuffed bunnies.

NEAL

Or taking your 'blades!

NANCY

(Shrieking.) Why don't you just take her baby!

JOSH

(In exasperation.) Get off of it, will you? We're all in this together, remember?

NEAL

(Admits reluctantly.) You've got a point.

JOSH

I'll bring *three* plates of cookies to her from the party. Please! You guys have got to do this for me. I need those cookies!

(NEAL and NANCY sigh and look at each other in unhappy resignation.)

NANCY

(Reluctantly.) All right.

NEAL

You can bury me with the dog.

SCENE 7
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(It's a late winter afternoon, light gradually dimming throughout the scene. On top of the Harpers' double-decker gazebo hangs a new Christmas decoration, an angel constructed of wire and lights. The angel should have bold, flashing lights and look a little like a Las Vegas showgirl. Angel should be gaudy but clothed. Lights are not on yet. Above or next to the angel should be the words "Harper's Heaven.")

(NICK enters with a ladder and begins putting lights on the pine tree in his yard. He's humming a Christmas song and wearing a Santa hat. Enter JOSH on inline skates. JOSH skates back and forth in front of NICK, trying to act casual. ALL PLAYERS in this scene wear jackets.)

NICK

Hey, Josh, my man. Why don't you give me a hand?

JOSH

(Guiltily.) Can't right now, Mr. North. I've got to—

NICK

(Abruptly, to Neal and Nancy off-stage.) Hey! Where're you going with those cookies?

(NEAL and NANCY peek their heads out from behind curtain guiltily.)

NEAL

Well . . .

NANCY

Uh . . .

(JOSH gives them a stare of warning.)

NICK

Did your mother say you could have those?

NEAL

Well, no . . .

NANCY

(Exploding with guilt.) We stole them for Josh!

(NEAL moans.)

JOSH

(Giving Nancy an exasperated look.) I need those cookies!

NICK

(To Josh.) So you're becoming a master thief, huh? Burglar on 'blades?

NANCY

Josh needs his mom's cookies to bribe the ladies at his church to bring refreshments to his dad's party.

NICK

Ahhhh . . . so you killed the "Ladies' Night Out" party.

JOSH

How do you know about that? You don't even go to my church!

NICK

Ridgeville's a small town.

NEAL

Josh really does need those cookies, Dad.

NICK

Oh all right. I'll smooth it over with your mom somehow.

NEAL

(Hands the plate of cookies to JOSH.) Thanks, Dad!

JOSH

Yeah, thanks, Mr. North!

(HILLARY, GLORIA and GREGORY, holding GLORIA's hand, enter.)

GLORIA

(Looking up at the tree.) I always love coming to your house at Christmas, Mr. North. I wish we had a tree like this in our front yard! *(Silently begins directing the other kids to help Nick with the lights.)*

(HILLARY gets up on the ladder and starts straightening the lights, making them perfect. ALL take a part and string the lights on the tree as they talk. Lights on Harpers' exotic angel blink on.)

JOSH

(Watching the angel light up in delight.) Look at that celestial body!

(ALL PLAYERS on stage turn and gawk at the Harpers' angel. The men all look at Hillary and laugh. The women all look at Hillary in sympathy. HILLARY is shocked and horrified.)

GLORIA

(To Hillary.) I can't believe your dad would actually do that.

HILLARY

(Very upset.) I can . . . He's really mad.

NEAL

Can we put one on our roof, Dad?

NICK

I think one casino in the neighborhood is quite enough!

(ALL PLAYERS on stage laugh and turn their attention back to stringing lights on the tree.)

NICK

So Josh, just how'd your dad persuade you to be his number one food man?

NEAL

(In surprise.) You know about the strike?

NICK

Who doesn't?

NANCY

(In alarm.) Mom doesn't, does she?

NICK

Well, yes. Of course she does. The women talk.

JOSH

Dad doesn't know.

NICK

How can he not know?

JOSH

We're not telling him.

NICK

You have to tell him.

HILLARY

We're not telling any of them.

JOSH

We want Dad to think Mom planned the food like she always does.

NICK

You're asking for trouble.

GLORIA

We want to surprise them on Christmas afternoon.

NANCY

They're doing the stuff their moms usually do, and we're helping.

HILLARY

(Her enthusiasm is coming back.) I'm planning the most wonderful Fourth of July dinner on Christmas day.

NICK

(Laughs in understanding.) That's interesting!

(GRANT enters.)

GRANT

(Looks at Harper angel disgust. Says to audience.) This is such a tacky neighborhood.

HILLARY

(Enthusiastically.) I'm making beautiful favors and centerpieces. It'll be perfect!

NICK

(In teasing affection.) When is anything you ever do *not* perfect?

NEAL

Yeah, she's an angel.

JOSH

Like the one on her roof!

(NEAL and JOSH hoot and do a high-five. HILLARY gives them both an annoyed look.)

GRANT

(Skeptically.) I still don't approve of this Fourth of July dinner. Our mothers and fathers are all expecting a real Christmas dinner. It's going to blow up in our faces, and then we'll see fireworks, that's for sure! *(Makes exploding sound with his mouth and throws up his hands.)*

GLORIA

(To Grant.) Don't be such a party-pooper! It'll be wonderful!

GRANT

(Again makes exploding sounds.)

CURTAIN

ACT II**SCENE 1
HILLARY'S BEDROOM**

(HILLARY and GLORIA enter in front of curtain and sit down on stage, legs dangling. Apron should contain an item or two that would be in a teenage girl's bedroom, a lava lamp perhaps, a poster, or a couple of decorated pillows. GLORIA has a cordless phone and phone book.)

HILLARY

(In distress, shoving phone at Gloria.) I can't do it. I can't lie. It's wrong!

GLORIA

What choice do you have? Just think how embarrassed your family will be if your dad's boss and his wife come over and see that horrible angel on your roof!

HILLARY

I should tell my mother. Then she can call and tell them not to come.

GLORIA

(Horried.) But if you tell your mother, she'll tell everybody, and our plans will be ruined!

HILLARY

Maybe Mr. North is right. Maybe we should tell them what we've been planning.

GLORIA

(Grabbing the phone away from Hillary.) What's the number?

(HILLARY reluctantly holds the phone book out opened to Gloria and points. GLORIA dials, putting on a pleasant face.)

GLORIA

Mrs. Snow? Yes. This is Holly Harper. I'm afraid I'm going to have to cancel our dinner engagement for this evening. My daughter and I have the stomach flu. *(She listens.)* And I was looking forward to seeing you. We'll have to get together another time. *(Listens.)* Thank you for being so understanding. Good-bye. *(Hands phone back to Hillary. Says in satisfaction.)* Piece of cake.

HILLARY

(Shaking her head in discomfort.) I don't know.

GLORIA

All you have to do now is catch your dad as soon as he gets home and tell him that Mrs. Snow called and cancelled because *their* family has the stomach flu.

HILLARY

(More uncomfortable than ever.) I feel really wrong about this.

GLORIA

(Mood suddenly changes.) Oh no. Look! Out the window! *(Points toward audience.)*

HILLARY

(Looking in direction of Gloria's finger.) What?

GLORIA

Mr. Joseph is having a truck towed into his driveway. Now they're putting it in the garage.

HILLARY

I've never seen that truck before. It sure does look old.

(HOPE runs toward Gloria and Hillary in anxiety.)

HOPE

This is terrible! I'll bet Julie's dad's going to restore that thing! Once it's in the garage, it's not going anywhere until the engine's rebuilt. What are we going to do about Christmas dinner?

(Exit HILLARY, GLORIA, and HOPE.)

SCENE 2 NORTH'S LIVING ROOM

(CURTAIN opens. NATALIE is sitting on the couch feeding her baby in the soft evening light. New baby swing with big bow on top is positioned nearby. NAOMI enters running.)

NAOMI

Mom! Can Hope come over tonight for Christmas Eve?

NATALIE

(Surprised.) Why isn't she spending Christmas Eve with her family?

NAOMI

(Shaking her head in pity.) She's been abandoned. Only dads are allowed at the Harpers' tonight. They're watching a football game.

NATALIE

(Sighs in disapproval and irritation.) And the moms will all be at the Garlands' watching *It's a Wonderful Life*.

NAOMI

Hope has nowhere to go.

NATALIE

(Hesitates.) You realize I only made a dozen cinnamon rolls and one batch of fudge.

NAOMI

That's okay. I'll share my part.

NATALIE

All right, then.

NAOMI

Where'd the swing come from?

NATALIE

Mrs. Garland. She brought it over a little while ago.

NAOMI

Cool! *(Exits bouncing.)*

(NATALIE puts Nathan in infant seat and points him toward the Christmas tree to watch the lights. NICK, NEAL, NANCY, NAOMI, NATASHA, and HOPE come in wearing makeshift costumes and take places in the family nativity scene. NAOMI—Joseph; NATASHA—Mary; NATHAN—baby Jesus; NANCY—shepherd with a plastic candy cane full of candy for staff; NATHAN—wise man; HOPE—angel, dressed in Halloween fairy princess costume.)

(NICK and NATALIE, as readers, sit on couch, each holding a Bible in lap.)

NATALIE

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.”

(There is a knock at the door. All NORTH KIDS jump up and get ready to run. NICK sternly motions them back into their places.)

NICK

Nancy, you do door duty tonight.

(NANCY goes to the door.)

NANCY

(Calling to her parents from the door.) It's Gloria and Hillary. May they come in?

(NICK glances at Natalie in hesitant question. NATALIE nods reluctantly.)

NICK

Go ahead and bring them in, Nancy.

(GLORIA, HILLARY, and GREGORY, holding Gloria's hand, come in and after hurried discussion and pointing, take places. HILLARY joins Nancy as a shepherd, and GLORIA and GREGORY get down on the floor and pretend to be sheep.)

GREGORY

(In delight.) Baaaa, baaaa . . .

NATALIE

“And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.”

NICK

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not—”

(A knock sounds at the door. NANCY runs to door and brings JULIE into the room. NICK motions Julie to join the nativity scene. JULIE becomes a cow.)

NICK

“For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

NATALIE

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

(A knock sounds at door. NANCY brings in GRANT, who joins Neal as a wise man.)

NICK

“And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

(Another knock sounds at the door.)

NICK

(Loudly.) There's no room at the inn!

(ALL PLAYERS laugh. NANCY brings in JOSH.)

JOSH

Is there room at the North Pole?

(ALL KIDS laugh themselves into hysterics.)

NATALIE

(Smiling.) Come on in, Josh.

(JOSH becomes a donkey. NICK claps his hands or whistles, something to quiet the kids.)

NICK

(When the kids are quiet, he lifts his hands and starts waving them as if directing music. He begins singing.) **Away in a manger . . .**

NEAL, NANCY, NAOMI, NATASHA

(Picking up the song.) . . . **no crib for his bed,**

HILLARY, HOPE

The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head;

GLORIA, GRANT, GREGORY

The stars in the heavens looked down where he lay,

JOSH, JULIE

The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

NATALIE

Asleep . . .

(NATALIE points to Neal, Nancy, Naomi, and Natasha.)

NEAL, NANCY, NAOMI, NATASHA

Asleep . . .

NATALIE

Asleep . . .

(NATALIE points to Hillary and Hope.)

HILLARY, HOPE

Asleep . . .

NICK, NATALIE

Asleep, the Savior in a stall!

NATALIE

Asleep . . .

(NATALIE points to Gloria, Grant, and Gregory.)

GLORIA, GRANT, GREGORY

Asleep . . .

NATALIE

Asleep . . .

(NATALIE points to Josh and Julie.)

JOSH, JULIE

Asleep . . .

NATALIE, NICK

Asleep, the Lord of all.

NICK

The cattle are lowing, the poor baby wakes;

(GLORIA, GREGORY, JOSH, and JULIE begin taking turns making noises of their animals. They get louder as the song progresses.)

NATALIE

But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.

NICK, NATALIE

**I love thee, Lord Jesus; look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.**

(NEAL [horse], NANCY [chicken], NAOMI [pig], and NATASHA [cat], HOPE [dog], and HILLARY [mouse] get down on the floor and join in the animal song.)

(NATALIE puts her hand to her temple, trying to be patient. NICK tries to keep himself from laughing. NATHAN starts crying, which abruptly stops the animal noises.)

JOSH

(Guiltily.) Uh, oh . . .

HOPE

(In horror.) Oh no!

GLORIA

We're so sorry Mrs. North!

(NATALIE gently picks up Nathan and attempts to calm him.)

NICK

(Stands up and waves the kids away.) All right . . . all animals into the kitchen for treats.

(KIDS move on floor as their respective animals, making animal noises, off stage. NEAL and NANCY lag behind. They stop just before going off stage and listen to their parents' conversation.)

NATALIE

(Bursting out in dissatisfaction.) Why do we have to be the ones to provide Christmas for the neighborhood?

NICK

(Gently.) Did you have fun tonight?

NATALIE

(Hating to admit Nick may have a point.) Well . . . yes.

NICK

Then why does it matter?

NATALIE

It's not our problem!

NICK

As far as I can tell, it's not a problem at all. We had a few extra people for Christmas Eve tonight. It's not like either one of us had to do anything differently because of it.

NATALIE

(Sourly.) There's barely enough food.

NICK

So? The kids don't care. *(Reaches under tree for a wrapped candy box and hands it to Natalie.)* And the kids won't get any of *these*.

NATALIE

(Mood brightening.) Ooooh . . . chocolate-covered cherries? *(Unwraps package.)*

NICK

(Pleased.) What else? Why don't you take Nathan upstairs and put in *It's a Wonderful Life*. I'll take care of the animals in the kitchen.

(NATALIE nods in relief.)

SCENE 3 NORTHS' NURSERY

(NATALIE is feeding the baby. NEAL and NANCY enter timidly.)

NANCY

(Hesitates.) May we come in?

(NATALIE looks up at Neal and Nancy in surprise.)

NATALIE

Sure.

NEAL

Is Nathan sleepy at all?

NATALIE

What do you think?

(NEAL and NANCY look at each other and grunt meaningfully.)

NEAL

(Trying to be brave.) Mom . . .

NATALIE

Hmmm . . . ?

NEAL

We . . . we appreciate your patience in dealing with all the crazy stuff that's been going on.

(NATALIE regards Neal in surprise.)

NANCY

And we're sorry we got our family stuck in the middle of it, but . . .

NATALIE

(In understanding.) But you're just worried about your friends.

(NEAL and NANCY nod.)

NEAL

Right.

NATALIE

(Lightly.) You even shared your cinnamon rolls. I'm impressed.

(NANCY laughs.)

NEAL

(Soberly.) What else could we do?

(NATALIE finishes feeding the baby. NEAL takes him from her. NATALIE is relieved.)

NATALIE

Do I dare ask how the arrangements are going for tomorrow's activities?

NEAL

There's a problem. Mr. Joseph bought an old truck.

NATALIE

Surely *that's* no surprise.

NEAL

No, but it does make it tough to use the Josephs' garage for the dinner.

NANCY

And that garage would have been just perfect too! It's even heated!

NATALIE

(Amused.) The reason the man has a heated garage is because he likes to work on cars all winter long!

NEAL

(With a meaningful glance at Nancy.) Everyone's hoping you and Dad'll let them have the dinner in our yard under the Christmas tree.

NATALIE

(Looking as if she might burst out crying and laughing hysterically at the same time.) Really . . .

NEAL

This nice weather's supposed to hold out for a couple more days.

NANCY

We could even share our Christmas food with everyone.

NATALIE

(Laughs.) And just what am I supposed to get out of this?

NANCY

More different kinds of food.

NATALIE

Josh isn't keeping that deli tray under his bed, is he?

NEAL

Of course not! It's in the fridge.

NATALIE

(On the verge of laughing again, voice touched with hysteria.) In our fridge . . . where else?

NANCY

I'll make the dip and Jell-O salad tonight—

NATALIE

With that deli tray in the way, where will you put them?

NANCY

(Light-heartedly.) I'll just . . . rearrange.

NATALIE

This isn't the dishwasher, Nancy. It's not like you can just leave the Jell-O out to go into the next load.

NANCY

Don't worry! I'll even make a cake if you'd like.

NEAL

And I'll stay up with Nathan so you can sleep.

NATALIE

(Surprised and touched.) You would do that? Really?

NEAL

We want this to work, Mom.

NANCY

And they've all already promised to go to their own houses to use the bathroom.

NATALIE

(Busts out laughing.) Considering the condition our bathrooms are in, it's a good thing!

NANCY

Go to bed, Mom.

SCENE 4
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(ALL KIDS are gathered around a picnic table and a patio table or two loaded with food. Even the utility box has been covered with a tablecloth and holds dessert. All are excited. NICK and NATALIE each bring out one more dish or tray and set it on the table. HILLARY is fussing with the table decorations, attempting to get them perfect. JOY and JOHN, GABRIELLE and GUY, and HOLLY and HAROLD enter from direction of their respective homes. All are puzzled; perhaps some of them are irritated. ALL PLAYERS are wearing jackets.)

HOPE

Here they come!

(JOY, JOHN, GABRIELLE, GUY, HOLLY, and HAROLD gather around the picnic table.)

HILLARY

(Proudly.) Dinner is served!

(Argument begins. As it progresses, the kids' expressions change from shock, to horror, to, in some cases, outrage. HILLARY, in particular, is deeply hurt and angry.)

JOY

(Genuinely puzzled.) What have we here?

GABRIELLE

(Alarmed.) What's going on?

JOHN

(Hungry and irritated.) Where's the turkey?

GUY

(Accusing.) This food's wrong!

HILLARY

(Trying to explain.) We wanted you to be surprised.

HAROLD

(Retorting.) This isn't the Fourth of July!

GLORIA

(Defensively.) This is the best that we could do.

JOY

(Shaking head at Gloria.) It's not your fault.

HOLLY

(Angrily to Harold.) I blame you! You were supposed to cook!

HAROLD

(Bitterly.) Give me a break!

HOLLY

Don't you yell at me!

GABRIELLE

(Demanding, to Nick and Natalie.) What was your part in all of this?

GUY

(Annoyed, to Gabrielle.) Don't be inane.

JOY

(Accusing, to Nick and Natalie.) You butted in!

NICK

(Takes a "don't blame me" tone and stance.) We did nothing of the sort.

JOSH

(Outraged.) How can you do this?

GLORIA

(Passionately.) We've worked so hard!

NATALIE

(Indignant, demanding tone; she's irritated the parents would behave in such a childish way.) Will you please at least *listen* to your children?

GABRIELLE

(To Natalie.) Why should they be upset?

JOY

(To Natalie.) They got their presents!

JOHN

(Orders.) Stop this right now!

HILLARY, NATALIE

(Hillary is deeply offended, says to the parents. Natalie is outraged; throws up her arms and leaves through the back curtain.) You have no clue!

(NICK starts to follow Natalie, then looks at his kids and sees how upset they are and decides to remain. He sighs as if exhausted.)

HAROLD

(Shocked, to Hillary.) Don't you smart off!

HILLARY

(Acidly.) So sue me!

JOHN

We're out of here.

(JOHN determinedly leaves the picnic, followed by GUY and HAROLD. They head in the direction of the Garland house.)

JOY

(Shouting after the men who are leaving.) You've got a lot of nerve!

(JOY, GABRIELLE, and HOLLY storm off the stage in the direction of the Joseph house.)

HILLARY

(Furious and on the verge of tears.) I won't stand for this!

(HILLARY storms off the stage in the direction of her house. GLORIA follows her in concern. HOPE runs off the stage, crying. NAOMI follows her. JOSH exits in a strange direction, muttering in anger under his breath. A car starts up off stage.)

JULIE, GRANT, NEAL, NANCY

(Helplessly to Nick.) What should we do? . . .

(A silent moment of shock lingers.)

NICK

(He pulls himself together and squeezes their shoulders.) Think about that baby who was born in Bethlehem and why He was sent to the earth in the first place.

GRANT

(Curiously.) What was He sent to earth to do, Mr. North?

NICK

(Gently.) To save us from all the bad things we do.

NANCY

(Thoughtfully.) And to give us comfort when other people do bad things to us.

NICK

(Nodding.) That's why you shouldn't let what happened depress you. It's still Christmas, after all, a time of peace and joy, despite all the crazy things going on.

JULIE

But how can we find joy in this, Mr. North?

NICK

Didn't you have fun this Christmas?

GRANT

Hardly. The fireworks bothered me more than I thought they would.

NICK

I don't mean just today. I mean the whole Christmas season.

JULIE

Well, yes, I had a lot of fun.

GRANT

So did I.

NICK

Hang onto that! Your parents love you, and, believe it or not, they love each other.

JULIE

Then why did they get so mad?

NICK

This fight has been building since the day the moms went on strike. I think the moms and dads were all just looking for an excuse to explode. Once they stop and think about what really happened, they'll realize how wrong they were to get so mad.

JULIE

You really think so?

NEAL

They're really ticked.

NICK

Give them a couple of hours to cool off.

GRANT

Then what?

NICK

We'll put the food out again at 4:00. Maybe you guys can get them back out here with a little caroling.

JULIE

That's a great idea!

NANCY

(To Neal.) Let's call the others and tell them the new plan.

SCENE 6
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(It is late afternoon and the Christmas tree lights are on. ALL KIDS and NICK and NATALIE are sitting around the picnic table. They begin singing "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.")

NICK, NATALIE and ALL KIDS

Hark! The herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King!

(HOLLY, JOY, and GABRIELLE enter from Josephs' house, carrying plates of cookies, and join in the song.)

NICK, NATALIE, ALL KIDS, and HOLLY, JOY, and GABRIELLE

Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!

(HAROLD, JOHN, and GUY enter from direction of Garland house, juggling many bags of microwave popcorn, and join in the song.)

NICK, NATALIE, ALL KIDS, HOLLY, JOY, GABRIELLE, HAROLD, JOHN, and
GUY

Joyful, all ye nations rise;
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem!
Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King!

(As they sing, JOSEPH, GARLAND, and HARPER families reunite with tears and embraces.)

SCENE 7
NORTHS' CORNER LOT

(It's a morning in winter. ALL PLAYERS are again wearing heavy coats. The tree has been stripped of its lights. NAOMI, GRANT, GREGORY, JULIE, and HOPE enter from

different places, running, carrying backpacks. GABRIELLE, JOY, and HOLLY follow their children on stage. The elementary-school children throw their backpacks down in a pile and play tag. NATALIE comes running breathlessly onto the stage, holding NATASHA's hand.)

JOY

(In delight, to Natalie.) You're back!

NATALIE

Nathan slept for five hours straight last night. I feel like a new woman!

GABRIELLE

Have you recovered from the holidays?

NATALIE

It's really strange. This was the best Christmas I've had in years. Nick and the kids were so good to me, and I had lots of time to think about what's really important. I feel rejuvenated!

(Offstage there is the sound of the school bus stopping. NAOMI, GRANT, JULIE, and HOPE pick up their backpacks and line up for the bus. NATALIE, GABRIELLE, JOY, and HOLLY hug their children and wave good-bye. Children exit stage as if getting on the bus.)

HOLLY

(With regret, after the kids are gone.) This was the worst Christmas I can ever remember. I don't know if I'll ever forgive myself for the way I treated the kids on Christmas day.

JOY

Me neither. They worked so hard.

NATALIE

I'm still amazed by all they did.

GABRIELLE

And to think we were so blind with our own selfish desires that we didn't see it coming!

HOLLY

They put us to shame. And I can't bear the thought that they lied to everyone about our families being sick. Harold feels worse than I do!

GABRIELLE

I was too hard on Guy. He does work a lot of overtime during the holidays. It wasn't fair of me to expect more out of him than I was willing to give.

JOY

I still can't believe my kids spent Christmas Eve at your house, Natalie.

NATALIE

Where did you think they would go?

JOY

Hang out with their friends. Do you have any idea how hard it is to get Josh in at 10:00 every night?

NATALIE

Do I ever!

JOY

Who would have thought he'd even want to spend Christmas Eve with John and me? We barely saw him on Thanksgiving. And I thought Julie would want to watch *It's a Wonderful Life*.

GABRIELLE

(To Natalie.) I'm sorry we intruded on your Christmas in this horrible way.

NATALIE

(Smiling.) I forgive you.

HOLLY

Things will be different next year. From now on, Harold and I will put most of our effort into being with the girls. We won't invite any more than one other family to our home during the season.

JOY

We've decided to get the whole family involved in planning the church party. We've already put Josh in charge of the food. The cookie contest was a huge success!

GABRIELLE

Next year, I'm going to start buying my presents in July.

NATALIE

(To Gabrielle.) Speaking of presents . . . thank you for the baby swing. It's been a lifesaver!

GABRIELLE

(Pleased.) With all of those kids, I can't believe you've never had one.

NATALIE

I never needed one before I had Nathan—he's been one tough baby.

GABRIELLE

(Sighing, as if exhausted.) Only heaven knows what we've been through.

JOY

(Relieved.) Thank goodness it's over—for now.

HOLLY

(Emphatically.) Hallelujah!

CURTAIN

'TIS THE SEASON TO GO ON STRIKE PROP LIST**Scenery (for stage backdrop and theater walls):**

A small colonial house with an “It’s a Boy!” banner on or above the front door.

A split foyer home with electric candles in its four windows.

A split-level home decorated with Christmas lights; on the roof is a racecar in blue lights with Santa in the driver’s seat.

A little rambler-style home with double-decker gazebo next to it.

For visual balance as play progresses, all lights should be real.

Sets:*Norths’ Corner Lot*

Pine tree
Row of four mailboxes
Green utility box

Norths’ Nursery

Crib or cradle
Rocking chair
Nightstand next to rocking chair holding books and remote control
TV and video player
Miscellaneous baby equipment and furniture

Norths’ Dining Room

Table and chairs
Christmas cards, stamps, address labels, pens

Norths’ Living Room

Couch and chairs
Christmas tree with a few presents around it, including wrapped box of candy
Infant seat

Act I:

Scene 1: Winter coats and hats, backpacks and instruments

Scene 2: Baby/doll for Natalie

Scene 3: Winter coats and hats, mail for each of the four men

Scene 5: Winter coats, hats, backpacks and instruments for five teenagers; cordless phone and church phone book for Josh; homemade tree ornaments for Hillary and Gloria

Scene 6: Jackets for all players; writing paper and utensils such as notebooks, clipboards, pens, pencils and handheld computer for Hillary, Grant, and Julie; cell phone and church phone book for Josh; plate of chocolate chip cookies for Joy

Scene 7: An angel constructed of wire and lights. The angel should have bold, flashing lights and look a little like a Las Vegas showgirl. Angel should be gaudy but clothed. Above or next to the angel should be the words “Harper’s Heaven.” Jackets for all players; Santa hat, tall stepladder, and Christmas lights for Nick; inline skates, helmet, and pads for Josh; plate of chocolate chip cookies for Neal and Nancy

Act II:

Scene 1: Items that could be in a teenage girl’s bedroom, such as a lava lamp, poster, and decorated pillows; cordless phone and phone book

Scene 2: Baby/doll for Natalie; infant seat; new baby swing with bow on top; costumes for Joseph, Mary, shepherd (plastic candy cane full of candy for staff), angel (Halloween fairy princess costume), and wise man; Bible; wrapped box of candy.

Scene 4: Jackets for all players; picnic table and patio or card tables—enough for nineteen people; matching table cloths for tables and utility box; center pieces; table favors; napkins, paper plates, plastic cups and utensils; trays, bowls, and dishes of food.

Scene 5: Same as Scene 4, along with three plates of chocolate chip cookies and several bags of microwave popcorn.

Scene 6: Winter coats and hats for all players; backpacks and instruments for children; lights have been removed from pine tree.