

A script from



“Away From a Manger”

A Christmas "Whodunit"

by

Rachel Benjamin and Suzanne Davis

SYNOPSIS

This is a fun and interactive play with a "choose your own ending" for the audience!

Characters of a church Christmas pageant are thrown into investigative turmoil as their "baby Jesus" nursery doll comes up missing after an untimely power outage. Accusations soar and secrets are revealed as the cast sets out to find the true 'leading role' before the curtain opens!

LENGTH

This play has about 35-40 minutes of dialogue. Times will vary when being used as a dinner theatre.

CAST

STAGE MANAGER (Stage M)

Female (Can also be male, but some language and mannerisms will need to be adjusted). In charge of rehearsal as well as investigation, she/he takes the job very seriously. Efficient and to-the-point; a bit sarcastic at times.

Special requirements: The Stage Manager is in the middle of the dialogue throughout most of the play, and has a very high number of (short) lines. While this character can carry a clipboard, the actor should not be visibly dependent on it.

LAMB

Female child (approximately 6-8 years old). Precocious and a bit devious.

Special requirements: "Lamb" can be played by an older actress, but the character should be portrayed as a young girl aged approximately 6-8.

GABE

Male. Jock-type older high school-er or early college-aged. Reluctant to participate in the production.

MARY

Female. Young married, new mother in her mid-20's or early 30's. Emotionally reactive; idolizes her infant son.

STAR

Female. Young woman in her early 20's with acting ambitions. Craves the spotlight and resents her role outside of it.

WISE MAN

Male. Assistant Pastor in his late 40's or older. Expresses his thoughts in lengthy words and weighty theological concepts; likes to "hear himself talk."

Special requirements: Wise Man must be able to deliver difficult lines (lots of complex words) fluidly, as if giving a speech.

SHEPHERD

Male. Choir Director in his 30's or 40's. Moody, creative, and occasionally passive-aggressive. Special requirements: Shepherd must be able and willing to sing (comically, but still reasonably well).

NURSERY DIRECTOR (Nursery D)

Adult female, any age.

"ACTOR 9"

Male. Needs to be able and prepared to play any and all of the following characters:

Jason- Mary's husband; proud, accommodating new father.

Tommy- Lamb's opportunistic pre-teen or early teenaged brother.

Shawn- Choir member; enthusiastic youth or young man.

Tim- Star's boyfriend; an outgoing executive type.

Intern- Pastoral Intern; studious and intense.

Custodian- Church Custodian; opinionated and vocal about it.

Offstage Voices (OS Voice)- Stage Tech and Director (Director should be higher pitched to sound like a woman's voice)

**Note: "Actor 9" can also be divided up among other actors.*

COSTUMES

STAGE MANAGER

Stage Blacks with a headset and a clipboard

MARY

Plain blue gown with a white sash.

SHEPHERD

Man's bathrobe

WISE MAN

Brightly colored gown with a gold sash. He should also have some type of crown

LAMB

White footed pajamas (all white clothing would work as well). She should have some type of 'ears.'

STAR

Stage Blacks

GABE

Long white gown. Should have some type of halo.

ACTOR 9

Tommy - casual clothes typical of a pre-teenaged boy

Shawn - choir robe

Intern - shirt and tie

Tim - shirt and tie

Custodian - janitor jumpsuit or smock

Jason - shirt and tie

NURSERY DIRECTOR

Nothing specific- neat casual clothing

PROPS

Cell phones- 3 for Stage Manager, Mary and Actor 9

Long stick (i.e. yard stick) with large glittering star attached to the top
Manger

Baby Doll- should at least appear to be a technologically sophisticated doll

Choir robes- traditional, 2 or more

Legal notepad and a stack of thick hardcover books

Bouquet of flowers

Baby carrier, with a suggestion of a baby inside

SOUND EFFECTS

Cell phone ringing

Donkey braying

Infant crying- if "Culprit: Gabe" is chosen as the ending then the more intense the cry is, the better

ACT BREAKDOWN

ACT 1

ACT 2

ACT 3

ACT 4- 6 POSSIBLE ENDINGS, only one will be performed at each event

- Lamb Culprit
- Shepherd Culprit
- Wise Man Culprit
- Star Culprit
- Gabe Culprit
- Mary Culprit

PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

This script is designed to fit with and around a dinner event. While the script can be adjusted (for instance, combining Acts 2 and 3, or lengthening or omitting the "questions from the audience" improvisation portion from the end of Act 3, etc.), here is our recommendation for use of this script:

- As guests arrive and find seats, actors mingle. Actors start the evening in character (and in costume), revealing little information except that they are in a Christmas pageant and some background as to how they feel about their role, etc. Of course, nothing should be said about the "crime" that is to take place later. During this time, you might have an event coordinator/facilitator performing hosting services, while the Stage Manager (in character) rushes around trying to "get people seated before dress rehearsal starts".
- Perform Act 1.
- Serve salad course. During this time, actors can either sit among guests, still entirely in character and costume (this option is encouraged if you have strong actors), or can stay in a backstage location.
- Perform Act 2.
- Serve the main course. If actors are mingling with guests, keep in mind that only half of the characters will have been "interrogated" at this point and may be singled out by guests for questioning.
- Perform Act 3. Afterwards, all actors go to a backstage location, with the possible exception of the Stage Manager.
- Facilitator takes an audience vote as to which character they believe committed the "crime." This can be taken via a show of hands or a secret ballot. (Consider your specific audience before deciding how to collect votes; you also might consider whether or not you are performing the script multiple nights, in which case you will have some returning guests voting.) The facilitator gives the results to the Stage Manager. In the case of a tie, the Stage Manager should decide which of the two (or three) final scenes to perform.
- Serve the dessert course. While guests are eating dessert, actors review and prepare the ending chosen by the audience.
- Perform the final scene. Facilitator (possibly with help from the Stage Manager) dismisses guests.

DIRECTIONS GUIDE

Upstage- US

Upstage Left- USL

Upstage Right- USR

Downstage- DS

Downstage Left- DSL

Downstage Right- DSR

Center Stage- CS

Downstage Center- DSC

Upstage Center- USC

PURCHASE
SCRIPT
TO
REMOVE
WATERMARK
AT
SKITGUYS.COM

ACT 1

*Stage is set for a traditional Christmas pageant. USC there is a make-shift stable complete with a manger. **Stage Manager** centers CS on her cell phone.*

Stage M: *(On cell phone)* Six thirty? But the show is at seven, and dress rehearsal starts- *(checks watch or clock)* fourteen minutes ago. *(Pause)* Well, what happened? Didn't they say we could have the donkey for dress rehearsal at four? *(Pause)* Having his TEETH cleaned? For goodness' sake...okay. Okay. It's out of our hands. See you at six thirty. Just...don't be late! *(Ends the call and addresses the actors with a clap of her hands)*

All right, people! Places!

Actors enter from both SL and SR dressed in traditional Christmas pageant costumes.

Lamb: Where's Mrs. Jennings?

Stage M: She's held up at the farm. I'll run rehearsal till she gets back.

Gabe: No way. She was serious about the donkey? My mom is officially crazy.

Stage M: *(Ignoring him)* Your mom is depending on us to have one final rehearsal before the performance. So, let's go!

*Everyone moves into place, with the exception of **Mary**, who seems frozen. **Star** moves behind the stable with her prop, a large, glittering paper star on a tall stick. **Shepherd** takes a knee SR of the manger next to the **Lamb**. **Wise Man** takes a knee SL of the manger. **Gabe** stands directly behind the manger.*

Mary: Oh no. Oh no. You mean I have to ride an actual donkey? Tell me this isn't happening.

Star: *(From behind the stable)* What's the big deal? It's a donkey.

Mary: Um, it's riding. I had a traumatic experience. And I don't like their eyes. Also I might be allergic.

Wise Man: Well fortunately, it's just down the aisle and then you're off stage-- and Joseph will be right there to make sure you're safe.

Stage M: *(Checking her notes)* So, shepherds stage right, with sheep...wise men stage left...angels in the loft-- thanks for filling in, Gabe- Star of Bethlehem in the back...Mary and Joseph enter from the back of the

sanctuary, with donkey... *(looking up and realizing there is no manger)*
hey, we need the manger. *(To stagehand offstage)* Manger and the
baby, front and center.

There is a pause.

OS Voice: Where is it?

Stage M: It's under the- you know what, let me just get it. *(She exits.)*

Shepherd: So where's our Joseph?

Gabe: He couldn't make it. He'll be here for tonight's performance.

Shepherd: But not for dress rehearsal?

Gabe: Guess the last day of deer season was more important.

Shepherd: But it's *dress rehearsal*.

Gabe: From what I understand, dress rehearsal was supposed to happen last night. If it weren't for that blizzard, we could all be hunting right now.

Lamb: I don't hunt.

Mary: Unreal. I have a baby at home, and I still made it to dress rehearsal.

Star: *(Emerging from behind the stable, under her breath)* The baby, the baby. That's all she ever talks about.

Mary: I had to get a babysitter, too- which is the worse because poor Joshy screams bloody murder whenever I have to leave him. And, Jason won't be home until six. Poor Joshy will probably cry all afternoon until he sees his daddy.

Star: *(Not very believably)* Oh, poor Joshy.

Mary: *(Whipping out her phone and holding it out)* This is his first Christmas card. Doesn't the bow-tie just crack you up?

Lamb: *(Walks toward Mary for a closer look)* Awww, he's so CUTE!

Mary: I know, isn't he? *(In a "baby talk" voice)* Aww, I miss my widdle man!

Wise Man: Clear something up for me. Why are we using a doll from the nursery for Baby Jesus instead of, say, a real baby? Like Josh?

Mary: Exactly! That's what I tried to tell them!

Lamb: I know why. The doll in the nursery is a magic doll.

Star: Oh yeah? How do you know?

Lamb: When you hold him, he feels warm like a real baby. And his eyes open when you pick him up. And he cries just like my little brother. But only when you put the batteries in him.

Gabe: You put batteries in your brother?

Lamb: Not usually.

Wise Man: Interesting that we'd choose to represent the Incarnation of Christ with a toy.

Lamb: *(Not understanding his comment)* I know. I want one to keep at home.

Wise Man: *("Waxing eloquent")* He became one of us- in all our frailty, in all our broken dignity. He came in the form of a human baby, a creation of God. He did not come as a creation of man.

Mary: So...what are you saying?

Wise Man: I'm saying it borders on the heretical to present a doll as the Baby Jesus. It's incorrect, intrinsically false and biblically blasphemous. But perhaps that's just my pastoral perspective.

Gabe: Yeah, but do you want a real baby on stage screaming its head off?

Lamb: That's why you take out the batteries.

Wise Man: *(To Gabe)* Possibly. It would be a teachable moment for the congregation. Do you truly believe the infant Jesus never cried?

Mary: My Joshy never cries as long as he's with me.

Gabe: *(Making an impatient gesture)* Come ON already. What's taking so long? Let's get this over with.

Star: Not thrilled to be here, huh?

Gabe: You think? I was supposed to be at the *(insert name of local fall sports team)* game tonight. We finally make it to States and I can't even go. *(Mumbling under his breath)* The head angel goes and gets mono,

and my mom JUST so happens to be the director this year. Convenient...for her.

Star: Well, all I do is hold up the star. How much rehearsal could I possibly need?

Gabe: About as much rehearsal as I need wearing a dress!

Star: Oh, come on. You totally pull it off.

Gabe: Oh yeah? I'd like to pull it off. And throw it right in the trash. I should be at the pre-game party right now with the guys.

Star: Can't we just tape the star to the wall? It would be so much less embarrassing than having my friends and my parents- like, the ones who are financing my theatre degree- come to see me play an inanimate object.

Gabe: You have friends coming? No one I know is going to see me like this!

Star: I said I had friends coming. I didn't say I *invited* them.

Lamb: Guy-yys! You're "grumbling and complaining"! Right in front of the Pastor! We're not supposed to do everything without those things. (*Turning to the **Wise Man***) First Philippians...something?

Wise Man: Absolutely. Hey, they're really teaching you something in Kids Church!

Lamb: Uh huh. Also I'm trying to be really good for Christmas. Cause I have the magic doll on my list. Annnnd my dad still hasn't forgotten about how I borrowed my brother's bike and crashed it into a tree.

Gabe: Borrowed it? That's not what I heard.

Lamb: Just because he didn't know I borrowed it, doesn't mean I stole it.

Gabe: Actually it does.

Star: Look, I'm not trying to complain, but...why ARE we doing a pageant this year? I mean, it's always been the Christmas cantata- (*as she says begins the word "cantata", everyone except the **Shepherd** looks at her and/or makes frantic signals to stop talking, so she tries, not successfully, to improvise by striking a pose*) -tata-ta-da! I'm a real STAR, get it?

Shepherd: *(With a little bitterness):* Yeah, I get it. No cantata this year.

Star: Sorry.

Shepherd: It's okay. All good things must come to an end.

Gabe: *(Somewhat apologetically)* My mom's been bugging the senior pastor for years to let her do a drama. I guess they just decided this was the year.

Shepherd: *(Clearly irritated)* AFTER I had written this year's cantata.

Gabe: Yeah, that was a little awkward.

Shepherd: "Awkward" wasn't quite the word I had in mind.

Gabe: If it makes you feel any better, I'd rather you performed the cantata.

Shepherd: *(Expecting a compliment)* Really?

Gabe: Then I wouldn't have to be in it.

Shepherd: I've been choir director here for ten years- voluntarily- and composed seven cantatas. Voluntarily. And then I submit this one, and they tell me it's going to be this year's "plan B."

Lamb: Maybe you can do it next year. Is it good?

Shepherd: Good? Is it GOOD?*(In a low, intense tone, then becoming gradually more animated)* It starts with a hush. Just a low synth, and one single tenor voice- *(Sings):*

"While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground..."

...and then a soprano comes in- *(sings in an exaggerated falsetto)*

"The Angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone arou-ound, and glory shone around."

Then there's a key change-*(hums a half step up, as if he's leading vocal exercises)* -and one alto voice comes in with *(sings):*

"How great our joy, great our joy..."

(sings the next part so loudly that everyone near him jumps)

"JOY, JOY, JOY!"

(Spoken) That's the whole choir, of course. It's absolute brilliance. Or, it WAS, anyways.

Gabe: (Not convinced) Obviously.

Star: Well, for what it's worth, I wish we were doing the cantata, too. At least then I'd have a part.

Shepherd: A part? With that beautiful soprano voice, you'd have a solo for sure. Maybe even an aria.

Star: Really?

Gabe: Well, if we don't get started soon, we're going to HAVE to go with Plan B.

Stage Manager rushes in with the manger and the doll, and sets them center stage.

Stage M: All right, we're ready to roll! Quiet on the set! Annnnnd- (CUE SOUND EFFECT- She is cut off by her cell phone ringing) Oh, good grief. Hold on! (Speaking into the phone) Hey, what's up? We're just- (pause) can you hear me? Hello? You're cutting out. (Pause) A power outage? (She steps off the stage and starts to exit, toward the audience) No, we haven't had any power outage. Actually, we're just about to get started-

*Suddenly, all the lights go out and general chaos ensues. All six characters (not the **Stage Manager**) should remain on stage close to the manger; the room should be completely dark at this point. The **Stage Manager** should come off the stage, closer to the audience, still on her cell phone, as if trying to find a spot with a better signal.*

The following lines are spoken simultaneously- actors should continue speaking until lights come back on.

Mary: No way. This is NOT happening. I have to get home. Joshy is going to be so scared and I'm sure the babysitter has no idea what to do... (etc)

Lamb: I can't see! Help! It's really dark! I don't like the dark! Someone turn the lights back on! Turn them on! (etc)

Wise Man: All right, all right. Nobody panic. This happens sometimes with high winds. I'm calling the custodian and we'll get this taken care of. (etc)

Shepherd: Well, it's a good thing we have a Plan B. It won't be much trouble to adapt the cantata for a candlelight service. *(etc)*

Gabe: Well, looks like this show just isn't meant to be. Think I'm gonna head out. Maybe I can catch the second half if I leave now. *(etc)*

Star: Ha! Hey, this is ironic. Usually a star becomes more visible in the dark. Except I'm that much more invisible. Whaddya know? *(etc)*

Characters ad lib until the lights suddenly come back on. There is a general sigh of relief and/or disappointment. As the characters return to their places, we see that the manger remains on stage but the doll is missing.

Stage M: All right, all right! Let's start. So, the prologue opens with the full nativity. *(Speaking quickly as she recaps)* Shepherds, Lamb, Wise Men, Star, Angel, Joseph, Mary- *(stops abruptly as she notices the empty manger)* Where's Jesus?

There is a moment of complete silence as the six "suspects" look at each other, stunned. Then:

Lamb: *(Quickly raising her hand)* Ooh! I know! He's in my heart!

Stage M: *(Ignoring Lamb, rushes onto the stage and checks the manger)* Where is he? SOMEONE must have seen that doll.

There is silence as the six "suspects" continue to look at each other.

Stage M: Did someone TAKE the doll?

Silence.

That's it. Nobody move. This show opens in just two hours and I'm going to get to the bottom of this, if it's the last thing I do.

Actors freeze. Lights Down. Actors Exit. Facilitator takes over.

ACT 2

*All characters are sitting or leaning against the stable as the **Stage Manager** paces.*

Stage M: All right. We've looked onstage, backstage, AND under the stage. I've checked with every single person in this building. All I know is that the six of YOU were on stage with that baby doll when it "mysteriously" disappeared.

Star: *(With an ironic smile)* Hang on a minute. You really think one of us took the Baby Jesus?

Stage M: You got a better explanation?

Gabe: No, but aren't we wasting time? Shouldn't we have rehearsal, or you know, call it off?

Stage M: That's ridiculous! We can't have rehearsal without the main Character!

Star: Let's just get another doll.

Stage M: Another doll? This isn't just about a doll! I want to know who here wants to ruin this pageant. Someone is out to sabotage our show!

Gabe: I think it's just about the doll.

Wise Man: The main "Character" of our Christmas presentation is a doll. That is incorrect, intrinsically false and biblically-

Stage M: Irrelevant. Who's going first?

Shepherd: What? You're going to interrogate us?

Lamb: Interra-what?

Gabe: It means she's going to ask a lot of questions...and probably hold us here against our will.

Stage M: You're in quite the hurry. What's your story?

Gabe: Story? I don't have a story.

Stage M: Well, you are a suspect.

Mary: Suspect! This is crazy!

Star: Well, you are one, too, you know.

Gabe: *(To Star)* And you. You're the one who's bitter about not getting a speaking part.

Star: Excuse me? Look who's talking, Mr. "I'll-do-anything-to-get-me-out-of-this"? *(Then, going for the cheap shot)* Nice dress, by the way.

Gabe: *(Accusing, a little wounded)* Hey! You said I was totally pulling it off!

Star: I WAS LYING!

Lamb: (To **Stage Manager**) Make them stop!

Stage M: All right, all right. We have a donkey walking down this aisle in exactly one hour and forty three minutes! And there had better be a baby Jesus to lay in that manger before then.

Mary: Well, if we don't find him, Joshy could fill in...

Stage M: (To **Mary**) Come to think of it, you HAVE been pushing for us to put Josh in the pageant.

*The other "suspects" sit down or step back as **Mary** is being questioned.*

Mary: So?

Stage M: Well, isn't it obvious? If you hid the doll Jesus, we would be forced to replace him. Possibly with your own baby.

Mary: That's ridiculous. Joshy is not an accomplice!

Stage M: Is that a confession?

Mary: A what? Of course not! How can you accuse me of such a thing?
(*Tearing up*) You think I want to ruin the Christmas pageant!

Stage M: No, I just think maybe you have personal reasons for taking the doll. Do you agree that yes, you wanted your son in the show?

Mary: Yes, I did. I still do!

Stage M: And why is that?

Mary: It just makes sense! It looks more realistic with a real baby. And I could have him with me at all the rehearsals. (*Drifting into baby-talk again*) Plus, he's just such a cutie-patootie, my widdle snuggly-buggy!

Stage M: (*Rolling eyes*) If you didn't want to be away from him, why did you agree to be Mary?

Mary: Well, I was sure if I was Mary, they would ask if Joshy could be Jesus. And who wouldn't want THAT on their resume? I want to give him every opportunity...

Stage M: You didn't want the role of Mary? You just wanted him to be Jesus?

Mary: Listen. I don't like the donkey. I don't like wearing a pillow in my costume. Why else would I be doing this pageant?

Stage M: I'm not sure I care. What I care about is getting Jesus back.

Mary: Well, like I said, I could have Joshy fill in.

Stage M: Or you could return the doll.

Mary: *(Tearing up again)* I told you, I don't have the doll! What kind of mother would I be if I was a thief? I love Joshy too much to taint our family's reputation. Why do you have to be so mean?

Stage M: All right, I'm sorry. Just trying to do my job.

Gabe: *(Standing up, indignant)* Of what, the Grand Inquisitor?

Stage M: I don't appreciate that. But I would appreciate you telling me exactly what YOU were doing when the power went out.

Mary returns to her seat.

Gabe: I was preparing to LEAVE. If we weren't going to be able to have rehearsal, I wasn't going to stick around.

Stage M: Did you by chance happen to take something from the manger as you left?

Gabe: Are you for real? Why would I take the Baby Jesus?

Stage M: I was hoping you could tell ME. You've been pretty eager to get out of here, haven't you?

Gabe: I've been "pretty eager" for someone else to play the angel. *(Under his breath)* Or for anything to happen that might get me out of this.

Stage M: When did you find out that you were going to step in as Gabriel?

Gabe: My mom came in while I was brushing my teeth last night. She said the head angel guy had mono and I was the only one who could fill in.

Stage M: The only one?

Gabe: The only guy, anyways. She insisted on a male angel. Preferably one who, you know- *(flexes his biceps)* has been working out.

Stage M: So how did you respond?

Gabe: I was pretty mad. I had tickets to the game. I mean, it's not every year that we make State. State!

Stage M: But you agreed to it anyways?

Gabe: Did I have a choice?

Stage M: You tell me.

Gabe: It was last minute and Mom needed someone she could trust. I didn't want to do it, but hey, in our house, if "Mama ain't happy" on Christmas Day, "ain't nobody happy" on Christmas Day, if you know what I mean.

Stage M: *(Summarizing)* You didn't want to be in this, but you also didn't want the responsibility of ruining your mom's show.

Gabe: I also didn't want the Baby Jesus doll *(jerking his head in the direction of Lamb)*.

Stage M: Well, of course you didn't WANT the-oh. *(Realizing what he is implying)* OH. Hmm. *(She takes a deep breath and sits down next to Lamb)* Lamb, sweetie?

Lamb: Uh-huh?

Stage M: We need to have a little talk.

Lamb: Okay.

Stage M: You seem to know a lot about your Bible. Can you tell me the Ten Commandments?

Lamb: Number 1, you shall have no other Gods before me. Number 2-

Stage M: Okay, skip to, oh, let's say Number 7.

Lamb: Seven, you shall not commit adulterness. A-dult-err- something that means don't be an adult. Or at least a mean adult. Right?

Stage M: You know what? I think I meant to say Number 8.

Lamb: Eight, you shall not steal.

Stage M: Aha! Do you know it means to steal?

Lamb: Taking someone else's things.

Stage M: That's right. *(Speaking slowly and deliberately)* So you must know that it makes God very sad when we take things that belong to someone else.

Lamb: Like when I took my brother's bike and crashed it into a tree?

Stage M: Exactly. And you want the magic doll, don't you?

Lamb nods.

Stage M: Have you ever thought about taking it for yourself?

Lamb: No. I didn't take it.

Stage M: *(After a pause)* Okay, keep going with the commandments. Number 9?

Lamb: You shall not bear false testimony.

Stage M: Aha! And that means don't lie about not stealing!

Lamb: I thought it meant don't lie about anything.

Stage M: It does. What I *meant* to say was that whenever we've done something wrong, lied or stolen something, we just need to apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Lamb: Okay.

Stage M: Is there anything you want to apologize for?

Lamb: Ummm. *(Covers her eyes with her hands)*

Stage M: It's ok, Sweetie. We all make mistakes.

Lamb: *(Confessing, speaking very quickly)* I took some extra goldfish crackers after Mrs. Jennings told me not to. But I was really hungry because I left my snack in the car and my daddy had already driven away.

Stage M: *(Giving up)* All right. All right. That's ok. *(Frustrated, inhaling deeply)* We're getting nowhere. Everybody take five.

Actors exit. Lights down. Facilitator takes over.

ACT 3

All characters except **Stage Manager** are back on stage in a "waiting" position.

Star: Longest rehearsal EV-ER.

Shepherd: Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself here, but I'm just wondering when the "rehearse" part is going to start.

Gabe: Haha. Good one.

Mary: *(Murmuring as she texts on her phone):* Will-be-at-least-two-more-hours. Give-Joshy-afternoon-bottle. Please tell him- *(wiping away a tear)* I have not abandoned him...

Stage M: *(Entering)* All right, where were we?

Wise Man: *(Weary)* The beginning?

Stage M: Oh, that's right. *(To Wise Man)* We were about to begin questioning YOU.

Wise Man: Excuse me?

Lamb: But he's a Pastor!

Stage M: Of course. But if God is no respecter of persons, then neither am I.

Wise Man: Note to self- prepare sermon on understanding Scripture in its proper context.

Stage M: You've had issues with the direction of this pageant from Day One, haven't you?

Wise Man: Direction, no. Theology, yes.

Stage M: Please, enlighten us.

Wise Man: It's simple. The Incarnation of Christ is a profound mystery—surpassed only, perhaps, by the mystery of Christ and His Holy Church.

Stage M: True...

Wise Man: At the very apex of the Incarnation is the Christ Child. All the fullness of God, inhabiting all the substance of Man. In that moment of His condescension, we see not only the depth of the mercy of God, but

the affirmation of the dignity, the humble and heavenly potential, of man. The Creator chooses to embody the creation. Amen and amen!
(Pause): Can I get an amen?

Stage M: *(Distracted, looking at her notes, and obviously not having heard anything except the last phrase)* Amen. What does this have to do with the Christmas play?

Wise Man: We deny that holy Incarnation when we present the Baby Jesus as a doll. A hollow, soulless, lifeless bauble. It's incorrect, intrinsically false and Biblically blasphemous.

Stage M: Mmm-hmmm...

Wise Man: *(With passion)* Yes, an actual human baby cries. Yes, an actual human baby may regurgitate its lunch all over the arm of whoever is holding it. Yes, for this is the very design of the Creator God! Who are WE to imply that His design is inferior? To imply that free will, that human expression itself, is a trifle to be improved upon? To imply that choice worship is the choiceless echo of the machine? Oh, Heaven help us, Lord forgive us, of our abominable pride!

Stage M: *(After a hallowed pause, bluntly)* Did you take the doll?

Wise Man: Of course I didn't take the silly doll! I'm a Pastor of this church! Although I can't say I'm surprised it's missing- God Almighty is just, after all. Someone get me a drink of water.

Star: *(Jumping to her feet, in an attempt to escape)* Please, allow me.

Stage M: Oh no, you don't. Not until we've had a little talk.

Star: So close...

Stage M: Why don't you tell me how YOU ended up in your current role.

Star: Well, the conversation went kind of like this. Mrs. Jennings said, "Hey! You're a theatre person. You want to be in the Christmas pageant?" I said, "What do you have in mind?" She said, "I'd like you to be the Star." I said, "Wow, the star? I'm flattered!" Turned out she meant... the star. The twinkling kind.

Stage M: You were under the impression that you'd have the lead role.

Star: Well, yeah. What would you have thought if someone said you'd be the star in a show?

Stage M: You do make a convincing point.

Star: And then I show up, and they tell me to shut my mouth and hold a stick with THIS on the end. Oh, and to wear dark colors and pull my hair back. Just in case someone accidentally, you know, SEES me.

Stage M: Listen, I have every sympathy for your situation. But I must also say, you have the perfect motive for stealing the Baby Jesus doll.

Star: Seriously? SERIOUSLY?

Stage Ma: Disgruntled, bitter, jealous, and with nothing to lose... why not?

Star: Nothing to lose?!

Stage M: In fact, if we did the cantata, you'd have a part. You said it yourself. You might even have a solo. Why wouldn't you sabotage the pageant?

Star: I'm three and a half years into a theater degree. My professors go to this church! I have one more semester to get a lead and no way would I put that in jeopardy. The reputation of "sabotagist" won't look too stellar on my resume.

Shepherd: "Stellar"? Nice, I see what you did there.

Stage M: (To **Star**) Oh, I'm sure you weren't intending to get caught.

Gabe: (To **Stage Manager**) Hold on a minute. You still have no right to be accusing anyone of anything.

Stage M: Oh no? You listen, and you listen good. I am responsible for this rehearsal, and we are NOT proceeding until our main Character is returned to his proper place. Either this gets settled, or we have no Christmas show.

Shepherd: (Quietly) Or...we have the cantata.

Stage M: Exactly. And who could possibly want that cantata more than YOU?

Shepherd: Wouldn't that be a little obvious?

Stage M: At this point, I'm not putting anything past anyone. How about if you tell me what you were doing when the lights went out?

Shepherd: I was trying to figure out the logistics of a candlelight service, in the unfortunate event that the power was not quickly restored.

Stage M: A candlelight service where your cantata was the production of choice, rather than the pageant?

Shepherd: With all due respect, it is far easier to sing in the dark than it is to walk a donkey down the aisle in the dark.

Stage M: I think you underestimate our donkey.

Shepherd: I think the whole church underestimates my cantata.

Stage M: So you took the Baby Jesus doll?

Shepherd: What? Of course I didn't take the Baby Jesus doll! Why would I do a thing like that?

Stage M: You said it yourself. If the pageant were to get cancelled, the Christmas production would be Plan B: The cantata you wrote.

Shepherd: Sure. In a world where there are no other dolls or bundles or Joshies to fill in.

Mary: That's right! *(Then, realizing the context of his comment, a bit wounded)* Hey!

Stage M: And I'm sure you're not thrilled with the church leadership right now.

Shepherd: Look, for seven years I've been the Christmas hero around here. This year, everyone's watching to see how I'm handling the demotion. It's already mortifying. Do you think I want to add the reputation of "sore loser" to that?

Stage M: Sore loser or not, you'd still be up there singing and your name would still be on the front of the program.

Shepherd: You just don't get it, do you? I think next time I'll write for someone who'll actually appreciate my art.

Stage M: Oh, don't do this to me. Come on, guys. We've got fifty-eight minutes. *(Silence)* I think I need some help here. *(To the other characters)* You leave me no choice. I'm going to have to bring in the rest of the church congregation. *(To offstage crew)* Can you turn these lights up? I need to ask some church members if they'll help me conclude these interrogations.

Lights up addressing audience. (Note: This is optional. If you choose to skip the question part, then simply skip from Stage Manager's line "Oh don't do this to me. Come on, guys. We've got fifty-eight minutes." to Wise Man's line "It seems we're at an impasse.")

All right. We have six suspects and one missing baby Jesus. I've done the best I can, but I need your help. Is there a question that I've missed? A detail that I've overlooked?

Stage Manager facilitates 5-6 questions from the audience; characters improvise their responses.

Stage M: (To audience) Thank you so much for your help.

Gabe: Help? We've gotten nowhere. We're right back where we started.

Wise Man: It seems we're at an impasse.

Stage M: All I know is that the six of you were up there, WITH the Baby Jesus, when the lights went off. When the lights came back on, the Baby Jesus was gone. He didn't just get up and walk off.

The following lines can be spoken either separately or simultaneously.

Lamb: Not me.

Shepherd: Well, I sure didn't do it.

Wise Man: Not a chance.

Star: As if.

Gabe: It sure wasn't me.

Mary: I'm innocent!

Stage M: (Giving up) Fine! Have it your way. We'll find the doll, and once we do, one of you is getting some SERIOUS coal in your stocking.

Stage Manager stomps out.

Actors freeze. Lights down. Actors exit.

Facilitator takes over and takes a vote from the audience as to which suspect they believe committed the crime.

ACT 4- CULPRIT: LAMB

Lights up DSR **Tommy** enters with **Lamb**.

Tommy: Did you hide the magic doll?

Lamb: Yup!

Tommy: Where?

Lamb whispers in **Tommy's** ear.

Where?!?

Lamb whispers again.

Why did you do that?

Lamb: Well, who's going to look in there?

Tommy: I don't want to!

Lamb: You promised!

Tommy: But I thought you'd hide it somewhere normal, like in a closet or something.

Lamb: Listen, all you have to do is get the doll, wrap it, and tell mom and dad that you bought it for me.

Tommy: But first you're going to give me your allowance money.

Lamb: You get your money when the present is wrapped under the tree!

Tommy: Ok. Ok. Fine.

Lamb: I've been practicing my surprise face. Wanna see it? (*Mimes unwrapping a present*) A magic doll! For me? (*With an overly dramatic "surprise" face*) You're the best brother ever! (*She moves in to hug Tommy.*)

Tommy: (*Backing away from her*) Hugs were not part of the deal.

Stage M: (*From offstage*) Break's over.

Tommy exits.

CUE SOUND EFFECT- BABY DOLL CRYING

All characters enter. The **Nursery Director** also enters, holding the baby doll.

Nursery D: Is anyone looking for this?

Stage M: Oh my goodness! Yes! Yes! We are! Where did you find him?

Nursery D: It was crying, poor thing. I could hear it all the way from my office. The "on" switch must have been shifted when the baby was shoved into the baptismal tub.

Gabe: Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Lamb: Who would do such a thing to the baby Jesus!

Tommy enters slowly. He is soaking wet and clearly very angry.

Tommy: I knew this was a set up! I swam the whole tub and there wasn't a baby doll anywhere! This is worse than the time you crashed my bike! I'm telling Dad.

Tommy runs offstage. All characters look at **Lamb**.

Lamb: *(Bursting into tears)* I just wanted the magic doll. My daddy said I could put it on my Christmas list, but then later he said I wasn't getting it because I had a "problem with deceit."

Gabe: *(Aside, sarcastically)* Wonder why he thought that?

Lamb: *(Starting to compose herself)* I'm sorry.

Stage M: You know taking something that isn't yours is not very nice. Thank you for apologizing. I accept your apology.

Wise Man: *(To Stage Manager)* I think we all owe you an apology. I've been criticizing the baby doll all rehearsal.

Star: And I've been mad about not being the star...you know what I mean.

Gabe: And I just wanted to watch the game. I still want to watch the game, but I guess my attitude has been pretty lousy.

Mary: Mine too. I really wanted Joshy to play the baby Jesus. I guess I've been a little pushy.

Shepherd: I've been upset about the cantata all week. My spirits haven't exactly been cheerful either. *(Pause)* We're Christians, you'd think we'd behave better.

Lamb: Especially at Christmastime.

Wise Man: I guess that's what happens when you take Christ out of Christmas. The whole holiday loses its meaning.

Stage M: Well, let's put him back where He belongs- center stage.

*The **Lamb** picks up the baby doll and places him, reverently, in the manger.*

Stage M: Ok. Let's set for the top of the show.

Characters begin to adjust their costumes, and get into their places for the beginning of the pageant.

Gabe: *(Aside to **Lamb**)* Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Lamb: Baptizing Jesus is biblical.

OS Voice: *(Suddenly)* Hey guys! We're back! Can I get some help here? I've got about twelve bags of hay...

CUE SOUND EFFECT- A donkey bray is heard.

...and our VIP is finally here and ready for action!

Star: She has NO idea.

Lights down.

Lights up: Characters bow CS

Mary: Now we have a little secret,

Wise Man: On which we'll shed some light.

Stage M: In our Christmas pageant,

Star: Your vote is always right.

Shepherd: So if tomorrow you should think,

Lamb: The ending needs a change,

Gabe: Please come back and vote again,

Nursery D: And we will rearrange.

Tommy: But Jesus always will remain

Mary: The center of our play.

Wise Man: Because without Him, we would miss

Stage M: The reason for Christmas Day.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

All exit.

ACT 4- CULPRIT: SHEPHERD

*Lights up DSR **Shawn** enters singing at the top of his lungs. If possible there should be some choir members with him. They are all dressed in choir robes.*

Shepherd *rushes in SL to quiet them.*

Shawn: *(Singing)* "Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King..."

Shepherd: Sssh! Quiet down.

Shawn: What's the problem? Are we early? I thought you said be here by 6:15 to rehearse the cantata.

Shepherd: I did. But things aren't going exactly as I thought.

Shawn: What do you mean?

Shepherd: The pageant is still on.

Shawn: It is? You told us last night at practice that the pageant was going to be canceled. *(He looks both ways, then, in a stage whisper to the **Shepherd**)* And you know that new guy, the one that Steve introduced to us last Sunday?

Shepherd: The one who sat next to the old lady who made change in the offering plate?

Shawn: That's the guy.

Shepherd: What about him?

Shawn: You were right. He really IS a talent scout.

Shepherd: I knew it! He had that look. Imagine that! A scout right here at our church!

Shawn: I mean, I know he's not coming here to work, but-

Shepherd: If he can kill two birds with one stone...

Shawn: Right!

Stage M: *(From offstage)* Break's over.

Shepherd: Well, the pageant still might be cancelled. Stand by.

Shawn: Stand where?

Shepherd: Just go back to the choir room, and I'll keep you posted.

Shawn, and any other choir members, exit.

CUE SOUND EFFECT- BABY DOLL CRYING

*All other characters enter. **Nursery Director** enters, holding the doll.*

Nursery D: Is anyone looking for this?

Stage M: Oh my goodness! Yes! Yes! We are! Where did you find him?

Nursery D: It was crying, poor thing. I could hear it all the way from my office. The "on" switch must have been shifted when the baby was shoved into the baptismal tub.

Gabe: Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Shepherd: Who would do such a thing to the baby Jesus!?

Shawn re-enters.

Shawn: *(To **Shepherd**)* Just letting you know that the tenors are going to rehearse in the nursery. The sopranos and altos are already in the choir room.

Stage M: Why is the choir rehearsing?

Shawn: For the Christmas cantata.

*All characters look at **Shepherd**.*

Stage M: The Christmas Cantata!?

Shepherd: You know...Plan B...we had to be prepared just in case.

Stage M: Just in case what? In case the choir director just so happened to remove the Baby Jesus from the pageant?

Shepherd: I've been working on that cantata since June, and you decide to throw it in the trash!

Stage M: Okay, first, I really had nothing to do with it. But more importantly-

Shepherd: You stole my joy, my inspiration. All I stole was...(lame) your doll. *(Composing himself)* I'm sorry. I guess I just got caught up in the pageant and forgot why we were here.

Wise Man: *(To **Stage Manager**)* I think we all owe you an apology. I've been criticizing the baby doll all rehearsal.

Star: And I've been mad about not being the star...you know what I mean.

Gabe: And I just wanted to watch the game. I still want to watch the game, but I guess my attitude has been pretty lousy.

Mary: Mine too. I really wanted Joshy to play the baby Jesus. I guess I've been a little pushy.

Lamb: I really wanted the doll. I thought about taking it. But I didn't!

Shepherd: I've been upset about the cantata all week. My spirits haven't exactly been cheerful either. *(Pause)* We're Christians. You'd think we'd behave better.

Lamb: Especially at Christmastime.

Wise Man: I guess that's what happens when you take Christ out of Christmas. The whole holiday loses its meaning.

Stage M: Well, let's put him back where He belongs- center stage.

***Lamb** picks up the baby doll and places him, reverently, in the manger.*

Stage M: Ok. Let's set for the top of the show.

Characters begin to adjust their costumes, and get into their places for the beginning of the pageant.

Gabe: *(Aside to **Shepherd**)* Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Shepherd: Baptizing Jesus is Biblical.

OS Voice: *(Suddenly)* Hey guys! We're back! Can I get some help here? I've got about twelve bags of hay...

CUE SOUND EFFECT- A donkey bray is heard.

...and our VIP is finally here and ready for action!

Star: She has NO idea.

Lights down.

Lights up: Characters bow CS

Mary: Now we have a little secret,

Wise Man: On which we'll shed some light.

Stage M: In our Christmas pageant,

Star: Your vote is always right.

Shepherd: So if tomorrow you should think,

Lamb: The ending needs a change,

Gabe: Please come back and vote again,

Nursery D: And we will rearrange.

Shawn: But Jesus always will remain

Mary: The center of our play.

Wise Man: Because without Him, we would miss

Stage M: The reason for Christmas Day.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

All exit.

ACT 4- CULPRIT: WISE MAN

Lights up DSR Youth Pastor Intern enters with a notepad and pile of books. Wise Man enters from SL.

Intern: Pastor! Pastor! I found it right here.

Wise Man: Please, keep your voice down.

Intern: Do you want the NIV, NASB, or the King James?

Wise Man: Listen, maybe I went a little overboard.

Intern: A little overboard?

Wise Man: They're taking this missing doll thing pretty seriously.

Intern: The incarnation of the divine deity is no small matter!

Wise Man: I think we should give it back.

Intern: Give it back?

Wise Man: Give it back.

Intern: Give it back?!

Wise Man: Yes. Give it back.

Intern: Give it back?

Wise Man: Am I being unclear?

Intern: *(Clearly reciting words he's heard before)* But, Sir! The incarnation of the divine deity is no small matter! We need to stand our ground. Be strong and courageous, do not be terrified, do not be discouraged...

Wise Man: Where did you hide the doll?

Stage M: *(From offstage)* Break's over.

CUE SOUND EFFECT- BABY DOLL CRYING

All other characters enter; Nursery Director also enters, holding the doll.

Nursery D: Is anyone looking for this?

Stage M: Oh my goodness! Yes! Yes! We are! Where did you find him?

Nursery D: It was crying, poor thing. I could hear it all the way from my office. The "on" switch must have been shifted when the baby was shoved into the baptismal tub.

Gabe: Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Wise Man: Who would do such a thing to the baby Jesus!?

Intern: YOU would! And you did! Because you don't allow heretical doctrine to be preached from the stage. You're a hero of the faith to all of us.

Wise Man: No, I've made some real mistakes today. (To **Intern**) Thank you for your support. I'll take it from here.

*The following is said as the **Nursery Director** gently leads the **Intern** offstage.*

Intern: But sir! The incarnation of the divine deity represented by a doll is simply incorrect, intrinsically false and biblically blasphemous-

Wise Man: Maybe I did go a little overboard. I'm sorry. I guess I just got caught up in the pageant, and forgot why we were really here.

Star: And I've been mad about not being the star...you know what I mean.

Gabe: And I just wanted to watch the game. I still want to watch the game, but I guess my attitude has been pretty lousy.

Mary: Mine too. I really wanted Joshy to play the baby Jesus. I guess I've been a little pushy.

Lamb: I really wanted the doll. I thought about taking it. But I didn't!

Shepherd: I've been upset about the cantata all week. My spirits haven't exactly been cheerful either. (Pause) We're Christians. You'd think we'd behave better.

Lamb: Especially at Christmastime.

Wise Man: I guess that's what happens when you take Christ out of Christmas. The whole holiday loses its meaning.

Stage M: Well, let's put him back where He belongs- center stage.

The **Lamb** picks up the baby doll and places him, reverently, in the manger.

Stage M: Ok. Let's set for the top of the show.

Characters begin to adjust their costumes, and get into their places for the beginning of the pageant.

Gabe: *(Aside to **Wise Man**)* Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Wise Man: Baptizing Jesus is Biblical.

OS Voice: *(Suddenly)* Hey guys! We're back! Can I get some help here? I've got about twelve bags of hay...

CUE SOUND EFFECT- A donkey bray is heard.

...and our VIP is finally here and ready for action!

Star: She has NO idea.

Lights down.

Lights up: Characters bow CS.

Mary: Now we have a little secret,

Wise Man: On which we'll shed some light.

Stage M: In our Christmas pageant,

Star: Your vote is always right.

Shepherd: So if tomorrow you should think,

Lamb: The ending needs a change,

Gabe: Please come back and vote again,

Nursery D: And we will rearrange.

Intern: But Jesus always will remain

Mary: The center of our play.

Wise Man: Because without Him, we would miss

Stage M: The reason for Christmas Day.

ALL: Merry Christmas!
All exit.

ACT 4- CULPRIT: STAR

Lights up DSR **Tim** enters with a bouquet of flowers. **Star** enters from SL.

Tim: There she is!

Star: Tim, now isn't a good time.

Tim: I wanted to get here early and make sure that I had a seat right up front! Look, I've got the whole row saved.

Star: Listen, there's something I've been meaning to tell you. When I said that I was the "star" of the show, what I meant was-

Tim: I know. I know. Jesus is really the star of the show. (*Hugging her*) But Mary isn't too shabby of a part either! You're so humble. But you're going to be famous some day! And all of us are going to say we knew you "back when"!

Star: I just didn't know you were going to come. Or...my parents. Or my musical theatre advisor...

Tim: Isn't it great? They'll finally get to see you shine.

Star: Oh, I'll be shining, all right. But actually, the pageant may not go on after all. There's been a little... turn of events.

Tim: What? Seriously?

Star: Yeah. The Baby Jesus doll is missing. No Jesus, no pageant.

Tim: No way. I'm not letting them cancel your debut. Who do I talk to?

Stage M: (*From offstage*) Break's over.

CUE SOUND EFFECT- BABY DOLL CRYING

All other characters enter; Nursery Director also enters, holding the doll.

Nursery D: Is anyone looking for this?

Stage M: Oh my goodness! Yes! Yes! We are! Where did you find him?

Nursery D: It was crying, poor thing. I could hear it all the way from my office. The "on" switch must have been shifted when the baby was shoved into the baptismal tub.

Gabe: Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Star: Who would do such a thing to the baby Jesus!?

Tim: Looks like you don't have to cancel the pageant after all! I'll get our coats and save another row. (*Looking at Star*) And hey- break a leg, Mary.

Mary: Thanks.

Tim: (*Looking back at Mary, a little confused*) Yeah...you break a leg too! (*Exits*)

Mary: He thinks you're playing Mary?

Star: Umm...I don't know, why would he think that? Freak misunderstanding, huh?

Stage M: Wait a minute. Did you tell him you were going to play Mary?

Star: I just told him I was playing the Star. He drew his own conclusions. And then...he kind of told the whole theatre department at school.

Tim: (*Re-entering briefly, just enough to be identifiable*) Hey, Babe? Your coat sleeves are drenched! What, did you fall into a pool or something?

Everyone turns to look at Star.

Star: Okay, okay! I did it, okay? I guess I just freaked out. I felt like if we couldn't do the pageant, we'd do the cantata and then I'd be the star, instead of the Star. I mean, the-oh, you know what I mean. It was a ridiculous thing to do. I'm so sorry.

Stage M: Wow. Well, thank you for telling me. I accept your apology, and we'll start over.

Wise Man: (*To Stage Manager*) I think we all owe you an apology. I've been criticizing the baby doll all rehearsal.

Gabe: And I just wanted to watch the game. I still want to watch the game, but I guess my attitude has been pretty lousy.

Mary: Mine too. I really wanted Joshy to play the baby Jesus. I guess I've been a little pushy.

Lamb: I really wanted the doll. I thought about taking it. But I didn't!

Shepherd: I've been upset about the cantata all week. My spirits haven't exactly been cheerful either. *(Pause)* We're Christians. You'd think we'd behave better.

Lamb: Especially at Christmastime.

Wise Man: I guess that's what happens when you take Christ out of Christmas. The whole holiday loses its meaning.

Stage M: Well, let's put him back where He belongs- center stage.

Lamb picks up the baby doll and places him, reverently, in the manger.

Stage M: Ok. Let's set for the top of the show.

Characters begin to adjust their costumes, and get into their places for the beginning of the pageant.

Gabe: *(Aside to Star)* Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Star: Baptizing Jesus is Biblical.

OS Voice: *(Suddenly)* Hey guys! We're back! Can I get some help here? I've got about twelve bags of hay...

CUE SOUND EFFECT- A donkey bray is heard.

...and our VIP is finally here and ready for action!

Star: She has NO idea.

Lights down.

Lights up: Characters bow CS.

Mary: Now we have a little secret,

Wise Man: On which we'll shed some light.

Stage M: In our Christmas pageant,

Star: Your vote is always right.

Shepherd: So if tomorrow you should think,

Lamb: The ending needs a change,

Gabe: Please come back and vote again,

Nursery D: And we will rearrange.

Tim: But Jesus always will remain

Mary: The center of our play.

Wise Man: Because without Him, we would miss

Stage M: The reason for Christmas Day.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

All exit.

ACT 4- CUPRIT: GABE

CUE SOUND EFFECT- BABY DOLL CRYING

Gabe enters SR obviously sneaking away quickly. The **Custodian** enters from SL holding the baby doll, which is "crying" loudly.

Custodian: Any of you folks lookin' for THIS?

Gabe: (Hurriedly) Yup. Yup. I am.

Custodian: (Still holding the crying doll out of **Gabe's** reach) Ya know, you kids these days. This here baby could've gotten seriously injured.

Gabe: It can't get injured. It's not real.

Custodian: Oh yeah? Well, it's cryin' loud enough to wake the dead. If it ain't real, how do you explain that? Huh? Huh?

Gabe: Batteries. Can you keep your voice down?

Custodian: I ought to report you. Shovin' that kid into the baptismal tub!

Gabe winces.

Hey, do you know a little baby like her can drown in an INCH of water in about two-

Gabe: It's a DOLL. It's fine.

*All other characters enter from SR; **Nursery Director** also enters. They notice the **Custodian** holding up the doll.*

Stage M: Oh my goodness! Where did you find him?

Nursery D: I thought I heard someone crying! Oh, you poor thing. *(She turns the switch and the doll stops "crying")* That's better, isn't it, little guy?

Gabe: It's just a doll, people.

Nursery D: Usually it's almost impossible to change the settings on this doll without a screwdriver. *(Brightly)* Whoever had the doll last must have been working out!

*Everyone looks turns to look at **Gabe**, who holds up his hands as if arrested.*

Gabe: Look, I was just having fun. It was a harmless practical joke. And then you all took it so insanely serious that I didn't really have a plan.

Stage M: So this whole afternoon was one big PRACTICAL JOKE to you?

Gabe: Hey, I didn't mean to cause a whole scene.

Stage M: One big practical joke!?

Gabe: Hey, when you're a dude wearing a dress, you either go crazy or laugh. *(He starts to laugh, then realizes he's the only one laughing and composes himself.)* Ok. I kinda wanted the show to be canceled so I could go to the game. I'm sorry. I guess I just got caught up in the pageant, this RIDICULOUS DRESS and forgot why we were here.

Wise Man: *(To **Stage Manager**)* I think we all owe you an apology. I've been criticizing the baby doll all rehearsal.

Star: And I've been mad about not being the star...you know what I mean.

Mary: I'm sorry too. I really wanted Joshy to play the baby Jesus. I guess I've been a little pushy.

Lamb: I really wanted the doll. I thought about taking it. But I didn't!

Shepherd: I've been upset about the cantata all week. My spirits haven't exactly been cheerful either. *(Pause)* We're Christians. You'd think we'd behave better.

Lamb: Especially at Christmastime.

Wise Man: I guess that's what happens when you take Christ out of Christmas.
The whole holiday loses its meaning.

Stage M: Well, let's put him back where He belongs- center stage.

*The **Lamb** picks up the baby doll and places him, reverently, in the manger.*

Stage M: Ok. Let's set for the top of the show.

Characters begin to adjust their costumes, and get into their places for the beginning of the pageant.

Shepherd: *(Aside, to **Gabe**)* Umm- the baptismal tub? Really?

Gabe: Baptizing Jesus is Biblical.

OS Voice: *(Suddenly)* Hey guys! We're back! Can I get some help here? I've got about twelve bags of hay...

CUE SOUND EFFECT- A donkey bray is heard.

...and our VIP is finally here and ready for action!

Star: She has NO idea.

Lights down.

Lights up: Characters bow CS

Mary: Now we have a little secret,

Wise Man: On which we'll shed some light.

Stage M: In our Christmas pageant,

Star: Your vote is always right.

Shepherd: So if tomorrow you should think,

Lamb: The ending needs a change,

Gabe: Please come back and vote again,

Nursery D: And we will rearrange.

Custodian: But Jesus always will remain

Mary: The center of our play.

Wise Man: Because without Him, we would miss

Stage M: The reason for Christmas Day.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

All exit.

ACT 4 CULPRIT: MARY

Spot light up on DSR. Jason enters DSR carrying a baby carrier. He is on his phone.

Jason: Mary? Mary can you hear me?

Mary enters USL, also on the phone.

Mary: Jason! Listen, things aren't exactly going like I thought. Maybe you shouldn't come.

Jason: You're breaking up. I can't hear you.

Mary: I said, maybe you shouldn't come.

Jason: What? I'm standing here in the parking lot with "wittle Joshy."

Mary: *(Still not hearing him)* Just don't come, ok?

Jason: I'm already here.

Mary: You are?!

Jason: Josh is sleeping. He looks very divine, like the little Lord "asleep on the hay."

Mary: *(Melting)* Awwwww, he does? My sweet wittle Joshy!

Jason: Just wait till they see him. They'll be so happy they decided not to use the doll.

Stage M: *(From offstage)* Break's over!

Mary: I have to go! Love you bye. Goodbye, Joshy I wove wove wove you wittle baby boy!

Jason: Mary? Did you say something? Hello?

Lights down DSR. **Jason** exits.

CUE SOUND EFFECT- BABY CRYING

All other characters enter; **Nursery Director** also enters, holding the doll.

Nursery D: Is anyone looking for this?

Stage M: Oh my goodness! Yes! Yes! We are! Where did you find him?

Nursery D: It was crying, poor thing. I could hear it all the way from my office. The "on" switch must have been shifted when the baby was shoved into the baptismal tub.

Gabe: Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Mary: Who would do such a thing to the baby Jesus!?

Jason enters, carrying a baby carrier.

Jason: Here he is! The star of the show! Sleeping silently, no crying he makes. *(He laughs at his own joke.)*

Stage M: Jason, what are you doing here?

Jason: Mary told me last night that you decided to use Joshy instead of that baby doll. *(Aside to **Stage Manager**)* And may I applaud you on such a good decision. I mean, wook at that perfect wittle face!

All characters look at **Mary**.

Mary: *(Bursting into tears)* I know, I know! It was wrong! I'm such a...a...despicable person but I...I just...had to do it! I was just thinking of my poor Joshy...how he should have been here with me...it's only right! I'm his mother! *(Fans her face with her hands in an attempt to calm herself.)*

Jason: *(Awkwardly)* Okay. Well, Joshy and I will just take the front row in case you need backup. *(He exits.)*

Mary: *(Gradually composing herself)* I'm sorry. I guess I just got caught up in the pageant and forgot why we were here.

Wise Man: *(To **Stage Manager**)* I think we all owe you an apology. I've been criticizing the baby doll all rehearsal.

Star: And I've been mad about not being the star...you know what I mean.

Gabe: And I just wanted to watch the game. I still want to watch the game, but I guess my attitude has been pretty lousy.

Lamb: I really wanted the doll. I thought about taking it. But I didn't!

Shepherd: I've been upset about the cantata all week. My spirits haven't exactly been cheerful either. *(Pause)* We're Christians; you'd think we'd behave better.

Lamb: Especially at Christmastime.

Wise Man: I guess that's what happens when you take Christ out of Christmas. The whole holiday loses its meaning.

Stage M: Well, let's put him back where He belongs—center stage.

*The **Lamb** picks up the baby doll and places him, reverently, in the manger.*

Stage M: Ok. Let's set for the top of the show.

Characters begin to adjust their costumes, and get into their places for the beginning of the pageant.

Gabe: *(Aside, to Mary)* Um, the baptismal tub? Really?

Mary: Baptizing Jesus is Biblical.

OS Voice: *(Suddenly)* Hey guys! We're back! Can I get some help here? I've got about twelve bags of hay...

CUE SOUND EFFECT- A donkey bray is heard.

...and our VIP is finally here and ready for action!

Star: She has NO idea.

Lights down.

Lights up: Characters bow CS.

Mary: Now we have a little secret,

Wise Man: On which we'll shed some light.

Stage M: In our Christmas pageant,

Star: Your vote is always right.

Shepherd: So if tomorrow you should think,

Lamb: The ending needs a change,

Gabe: Please come back and vote again,

Nursery D: And we will rearrange.

Jason: But Jesus always will remain

Mary: The center of our play.

Wise Man: Because without Him, we would miss

Stage M: The reason for Christmas Day.

ALL: Merry Christmas!

All exit.