

Scene 11

Lights come up on the fellowship hall. Lost in thought, Twink flicks a lighter off and on. G.J. enters from the sanctuary and watches Twink. Rhonda Lynn enters from the kitchen, sees Twink, then edges over to G.J.

G.J. *(She whispers.)* I don't think leaving Aunt Twink alone is a good idea.

RHONDA LYNN. *(She whispers.)* Everything's gonna be okay as long as none of us tell her where Wiley is. Now, let's go cheer her up.

G.J. *(She and Rhonda Lynn approach her.)* What are you doing out here all by your lonesome, Aunt Twink?

TWINK. Just thinking about all the things I'd like to give Wiley Hicks for Christmas. Can you gift-wrap a compound fracture?

RHONDA LYNN. Darlin', I know what it's like to be betrayed by a man. My last ex, Talmadge Lampley, had a back so hairy, I had to vacuum the sheets before I could make up the bed. After burning out my second Dust Buster, I sent him to the cosmetology school to get that mess removed. And wouldn't you know it? He ran off with Little Miss Hot Wax.

TWINK. Am I supposed to get something from this, Rhonda Lynn?

RHONDA LYNN. I'm just saying, I know you're furious with Wiley, but you can't stop believing there's a good man out there for you. I haven't.

G.J. That's what I always say at work. Even though we're doing artificial insemination, I remind my cows to have faith that one day maybe the right bull will come along.

TWINK. Thanks for trying to make me feel better. But honestly, the thing that would really do the trick is for one of you to just tell me where I can find Wiley.

G.J. Uh ... I think he's out of town?

RHONDA LYNN. Know what? I think G.J.'s right. Now, let's get your mind off your troubles, Twink. Here. *(She takes a scrapbook off*

the table.) It's the scrapbook from last year's Christmas Program. (She gives the book to Twink and eases the lighter out of her hand.)

TWINK. *(She thumbs through the pages.)* This was a good one. Everyone was having so much — Oh, my Lord. Look at these pictures of Wiley and Maryjack playing Joseph and Mary. This is where it started. They were makin' moon eyes at each other over the manger!

G.J. *(She takes the scrapbook and hands it to Rhonda Lynn.)* You know, maybe the scrapbook isn't such a good idea.

TWINK. Then can I have my lighter back?

RHONDA LYNN. I don't think that's such a good idea, either. *(She exits.)*

TWINK. *People must think I'm an idiot!!!*

RAYNERD. *(He enters from the sanctuary pulling his wagon.)* You'll get used to it, Miz Twink. I have. Miz Honey Raye says I can eat my supper now. I'm really hungry, too, Miz Twink. *(He goes around the table filling a plate.)* Mostly 'cause I've had to pull the little drummer boy around all afternoon. That hateful sheep keeps trying to kill him. I just love Christmas.

HONEY RAYE. *(She hurries in from the sanctuary.)* We've got two more cast members down. Turns out everyone who's blown their groceries ate at the Band Boosters Pancake Supper last night. Any moron would know that nasty Sissy Fowler and a pancake griddle are a recipe for disaster. *(She goes to the tub of soft drinks.)* Look, I'm going to fish out as many ginger ales as I can. G.J., get some saltines and see if we can resurrect Elvis.

G.J. Oh, if we only could. *(She grabs a box of crackers and exits into the sanctuary.)*

TWINK. Saltines and ginger ale won't cure food poisoning. Tell you what, give me your keys and I'll run out to the drug store for you.

HONEY RAYE. We're all on to you, Twink Futrelle. You only want my car so you can go out and hunt down Wiley Hicks. Can't you just forget your revenge for now and give me a little help? I've left six phone messages for Dr. Ballard, Wendall Poovey's dishing out Kaopectate and Miss Tenny's playing "Nearer My God To Thee." We're sinking like a stone here!

FRANKIE. *(She enters from the sanctuary.)* Ozella Smoot's kicked the hem out of her choir robe again. This is the last time I'm going to — *(She holds her stomach and groans.)* Ohhh! Ohhh!

HONEY RAYE. *(She and Twink race to Frankie's side.)* Is this it, Frankie? Are the babies coming?

TWINK. John Curtis can turn his siren on and get you to the hospital in two minutes flat.

FRANKIE. Wait! It's my phone. I have it on vibrate. *(She pulls it from her pocket and answers.)* Hello?

RAYNERD. Miz Twink, you might want to get you a plate before Miz Frankie does. A lady that size is liable to polish off the whole buffet before we get ours.

TWINK. Can't argue with that.

FRANKIE. *(Into the phone.)* Oh, no! Is he okay? Well, when you find Doc Ballard, call me back, Justin. *(She hangs up.)* Dub's passing a kidney stone. That poor, sweet man. Can you think of anything worse than passing a kidney stone?

TWINK. Yeah. And Honey Raye's directing it.

HONEY RAYE. Thank you for that vote of confidence. I have worn myself to a frazzle trying to create a work of art as my gift to this community! *(She wails.)* Why is all this happening? I feel like I'm being tested. All I need now is for Satan himself to walk through the door. *(Patsy Price, 50s, well-coiffed, dressed in an elegant gown, enters from the sanctuary. The sisters freeze.)*

PATSY. Hello.

TWINK. *(To Honey Raye.)* You just *had* to say it, didn't you?

PATSY. *(She eyes the women coolly.)* Ah, the Fertile, the Flirt and the Felon. Just another day at the Futrelle Family Circus.

RAYNERD. Hi, Miz Patsy. Wanna stuffed jalapeño? Fried 'em myself.

PATSY. Complete with sideshow.

FRANKIE. Patsy, it's Christmas, can't we play nice? It's bad enough Parker and Tina Jo can't be with us.

PATSY. Yes, *my* son and *your* daughter are really enjoying *my* gift of the ski trip to Vail. And Parker wanted me to thank you for the present you and Dub gave them. One can never have too many

salad spinners.

HONEY RAYE. We'd all love to stand here and compare bank balances with you, Patsy, but you need to leave. I'm trying to stage a show here.

PATSY. About that, you're going to have to try harder. You can't expect me to carry the entire program alone.

HONEY RAYE. And I don't, since you're not in it.

PATSY. Oh, but I am. Beulah Dodge Hargis has done a delightful job of mumbling through *The Christmas Story* every year since the *Mayflower* docked. But I convinced the Deacons — with a sizeable donation — it would be a nice change to have someone vivacious and young do the honors.

TWINK. But they settled for you, instead?

FRANKIE. Why am I not surprised you bought your way into this show?

RAYNERD. Don't worry, Miz Patsy, you'll do good. And if you get mixed up on the words, I know it by heart, 'cause I just love Christmas. (*He touches her dress.*) You look like an ornament on a tree ... or Tinkerbell ... if she got old and broke down and couldn't fly so good.

PATSY. (*She turns to Honey Raye.*) Would you please get him out of here? I will not have Boo Radley pawing my gown.

HONEY RAYE. Raynerd, Shug, I need you to help me. Go check on everyone who's sick and report back to me, okay?

RAYNERD. Yes, ma'am. I won't be long. (*He hurries to exit into the sanctuary, pulling his wagon behind him. He points at Frankie.*) Y'all don't let her eat nothin' from my plate while I'm gone. (*He exits.*)

HONEY RAYE. Patsy Price, don't you ever talk that way to Raynerd again. I'm proud to have him in my show and I'd better be able to say the same about you at the end of the evening.

PATSY. If there's another highlight in this program besides my performance, I'll be stunned.

HONEY RAYE. Oh, this show is nothing *but* highlights. And now I'm more determined than ever to make sure tonight's program is wonderful.