

CONEY ISLAND CHRISTMAS

*As houselights dim we hear a song like Justin Bieber's cover of "Drummer Boy."**

Lights up. [Southern California. The present. Blue skies. Palm trees. Cacti. A comfortably middle-class suburb, perhaps somewhere in the San Fernando Valley.]

A bedroom, decorated in vivid colors, with the posters and accoutrements of a modern pre-teen girlhood. An unlit electric menorah is on the windowsill.

Sunshine spills across the frilly, stuffed animal-laden bed in which Clara, twelve years old, is listening to the music through her iPhone earbuds while texting.

Her great-grandmother, Shirley Abramowitz, a petite yet sturdy nonagenarian with an indelible presence and a voice to match, pops her head in the doorway.

SHIRLEY. *(Brightly.)* Hello-o-o? *(Clara can't hear her.)* HEY!

CLARA. Oh, hi, Gramma.

SHIRLEY. How's my great-granddaughter? Hm? How's my little Clara?

CLARA. Not so good.

SHIRLEY. How's that throat of yours? Still sore?

CLARA. Yeah. *(Shirley takes out her knitting.)*

[SHIRLEY. What do you think of the scarf I'm making you?

CLARA. What do I need a scarf for?

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

SHIRLEY. To wrap around your throat, keep it nice and warm! Nice, huh?

CLARA. Yeah, but this is California, Gramma.

SHIRLEY. So?

CLARA. It never gets that cold here.

SHIRLEY. What, it's a crime to wear a scarf in California? Please. Thirty years since I left New York, and *still* this place makes no sense. Eighty degrees at Christmas? It's *mishugeh*.] (*Clara gets a text and responds.*) Who's that?

CLARA. My friend Rachel. Telling me what happened at school today.

SHIRLEY. What happened?

CLARA. Nothing.

SHIRLEY. I hear you're missing some big to-do tomorrow, on accounta you're sick.

CLARA. Yeah, the stupid Christmas play.

SHIRLEY. Why is it stupid?

CLARA. They made us learn all these songs, like for Kwanzaa.

SHIRLEY. What's wrong with learning a song for Kwanzaa? I think it's great they teach you about all kinds of cultures.

CLARA. Yeah, but it's like so obviously a rip-off of Chanukah. Seven candles, instead of the menorah it's the kinara ...

SHIRLEY. I think that's interesting. We're all related. (*Pause. She knits. Clara texts.*) You know, I was in a Christmas play once.

CLARA. You were?

SHIRLEY. Is that so hard to believe? Once upon a time, I was young, too, you know, with rosy, smooth skin just like you, none of this crinkly, wrinkly stuff. The girl inside me never got old. Only the wrapping paper.

CLARA. What was it like?

SHIRLEY. The Christmas play? Oh, you don't want to hear about it ...

CLARA. Yes I do.

SHIRLEY. That was my favorite Christmas. The one that stands out from all the others. And when you're as old as I am, that's a lotta Christmases.

CLARA. Do you remember?

SHIRLEY. Do I remember! Of course, I remember. I remember 1935 better than I remember two minutes ago.

CLARA. Well, then, tell me.

SHIRLEY. I'm not telling you anything until you put away your little gizmo. 'Cause if you're gonna sit there ... (*She mockingly mimes texting.*)

CLARA. (*Surrenders her device, petulantly.*) Okay!

SHIRLEY. Thank you. Now: Close your eyes.

CLARA. Do I have to?

SHIRLEY. Yes! Close 'em! Imagine we're floating. Out the window, up to the clouds...!

CLARA. Is this gonna take long?

SHIRLEY. Shhh! There is a certain place ... Far from sore throats and all the noise and *dreck* we call the Here and Now, a place where everything *is* the way it *was*, the color of faded old pictures. And the smells are ... (*Inhales.*) potato latkes, gefilte fish, and sour pickles.

CLARA. What *is* this place?

SHIRLEY. It's a place called ... Brooklyn! (*The room opens up and she takes Clara into her past. Manhattan skyline. Brooklyn Bridge. 1935.*) Now: Way down in *southern* Brooklyn, as far as you can go without falling into the ocean, there's *another* certain place. Coney Island! A long stretch of beach and boardwalk. Fun-houses, spook-houses, penny arcades. There are roller-coasters there. Ferris wheels. Carousels. (*Sound montage. Waves. Calliope music.*)

HAWKERS. (*Echoing, off.*) — Caramel popcorn! — Peanuts! Get your hot roasted peanuts! — Salt water taffy!

SHIRLEY. Gypsy fortune tellers, sideshows with bearded ladies and men seven feet tall.

HAWKER. (*Off.*) Step right up! See Matilda, the bearded lady! Siamese twins! (*Etc.*)

SHIRLEY. In this certain place called Coney Island, dumb-waiters boom, doors slam, dishes crash; where every window is a mother's mouth bidding the street ... *Shut up!* (*She yells along with the echoes of faraway voices.*) — *Quiet down there!* — *Go play somewhere else!* — *You know what time it is?*

VARIOUS. (*Overlap.*) — *Quiet down there!* — *Go play somewhere else!* — *You know what time it is?*

SHIRLEY. My voice is the loudest. (*Young Shirley, twelve years old, carrying schoolbooks, argues with Evie Slotnick.*)

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Evie Slotnick, I can't believe you told Jackie Sauerfeld I want to marry him!

CLARA. Gramma, is that supposed to be *you*?

SHIRLEY. It is me! See how young I am?

EVIE. *(To Young Shirley.)* I did not tell him! He guessed!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Yeah, after you gave him plenty of hints!
(Evie sticks her tongue out.)

CLARA. Who is *she*? *(Meaning Evie.)*

SHIRLEY. Evie Slotnick? My very best friend. We love each other only as best friends could.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I hate you, Evie Slotnick! I hate you, I hate you!
EVIE. Oh, yeah? Well, I hate you, too!

SHIRLEY. Every Sunday afternoon, Evie and I go to the Tilyou Theater for popcorn and a double feature. *(Young Shirley and Evie are seated together at the movies eating popcorn. We hear a few bars of Shirley Temple singing "Good Ship Lollipop.")* Shirley Temple is my favorite movie star. I figure if her name is "Shirley Temple" ... she's gotta be Jewish. *(Pedestrians pass stores with signs in Italian. Chinese. Russian. Polish. Spanish. Irish names. Yiddish.)* A few doors down from Shapiro the barber and Goldstein the shoemaker; nestled between Needleman the tailor and Feigenbaum the pawnbroker, is a little grocery store — Abramowitz's Appetizing — run by my darling papa, may he rest in peace. *(Mr. Abramowitz appears, wearing a shopkeeper's apron. Shirley Abramowitz assumes the role of Mrs. Kornblum, a customer. The shop doorbell tinkles.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Ah, Mrs. Kornblum. What can I do for you today?

SHIRLEY. *(As Mrs. Kornblum.)* Mr. Abramowitz, what have you got that's fresh?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Everything's fresh. I was at the Fulton Fish Market this very morning, before the sun came up.

SHIRLEY. *(As Mrs. Kornblum.)* That's what you said the last time. That cod fillet you sold me, by the time I got it home, it stank to high heaven.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. The problem with fish ... is it smells like fish. What can I get you?

SHIRLEY. *(As Mrs. Kornblum.)* Half-pound of chopped liver, half-pound of cole slaw, and keep the funny stuff to yourself. *(Mr. Abramowitz fills her order during the following.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Still on the street.)* Evie Slotnick, I HAVE HAD IT WITH YOU! I don't want to talk to you ever again! *(Mrs. Abramowitz appears.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley Abramowitz, enough shouting on the street already!

SHIRLEY. Also in this faraway place, my long-gone mama is there, still as full of breathing as me.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You're giving the neighborhood a headache!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Enters the shop.)* Yes, Mama. Hello, Papa.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Hello, my darling.

SHIRLEY. I plant myself next to the pickle barrel. I'm supposed to be doing homework but my mind wanders. In my head, I'm dancing with Shirley Temple on the good ship *Lollipop*. My pinky makes tiny whirlpools in the brine. *(Her dance reverie is interrupted.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Shirley Abramowitz, get your fingers out of the pickle barrel! What's the matter with you? Do something useful for a change! Unpack those cans. *(She hands Young Shirley a box of cans that the girl proceeds to unpack.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Loudly.)* Campbell's Tomato Soup!

SHIRLEY. *(As Mrs. Kornblum.)* Must she always be so loud?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Campbell's Vegetable Beef Soup! Campbell's Chicken Soup!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. *(Overlap.)* Shirley, please! The labels are coming off the cans!

SHIRLEY. *(As Mrs. Kornblum.)* Mrs. Abramowitz, really, parents should not be afraid of their own children.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. You hear that, Shirley? You're bothering everybody. Now be quiet!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Let her speak, Clara. — *(The action freezes.)*

CLARA. Her name is Clara? Like me!

SHIRLEY. That's right, *bubeleh*, you're named for my mama, may she rest in peace. *(Action resumes.)*

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. The girl is too loud, Misha!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. So what if she's loud? Better she should use her voice *now*, while she's alive. In the grave it'll be plenty quiet. From Coney Island to the cemetery, it's the same subway, the same fare. *(Mr. Abramowitz completes the transaction with Mrs. Kornblum.)* Goodbye, Mrs. Kornblum. *(The sun begins to set over Brooklyn. He unties his apron and turns out the lights.)*

SHIRLEY. At the end of every workday, Papa closes up shop and we go home.

CLARA. Where?

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

SHIRLEY. A three-room apartment right above the store. *(In the Abramowitz apartment, Mrs. Abramowitz arranges candles on a table. The sun goes down.)* Every Friday night at sundown, we light Shabbos candles. Mama and I say the *brucha*.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ and YOUNG SHIRLEY. *Baruch atah Adonoi, Eloheinu, melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik neir shel Shabbos. Amein.*

SHIRLEY. Most nights after dinner, I clean up and wash the dishes and then we all huddle together in our little living room.

CLARA. And watch TV? *(Seated by the radio, Mr. Abramowitz reads The Brooklyn Eagle, Mrs. Abramowitz knits, Young Shirley does her homework.)*

SHIRLEY. TV?! This is years before TV, before the world could fit in the palm of your hand. Here, the world comes in through a magical wooden box called *the radio*. All you get is sound; the pictures you make up in your head. *(Mr. Abramowitz fiddles with the dial, tuning in a station. Tableaux accompany a sound montage, snippets of music and radio serials. — They laugh at Jack Benny's program. — They are engrossed in a Brooklyn Dodgers baseball game. — Young Shirley is spooked listening to The Shadow and his diabolical laugh.)*

RADIO VOICE. *(Recording.)* "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows..." *(A song like "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen" plays. * Mr. Abramowitz teaches Young Shirley some dance steps. — They listen soberly to the president.)*

FDR. *(Crackly archival recording.)* "... the only thing we have to fear is fear itself ..." *(A breadline forms in silhouette.)*

SHIRLEY. Times are rough in those days. Things are tough all over. Millions are out of work with no place to live. People wait on lines for hours for a little chunk of bread. Kids sell apples on the street for a nickel apiece. *(Her parents tuck Young Shirley into her bed and kiss her good night.)* With what little we've got, we Abramowitzes consider ourselves the lucky ones. At least we have each other.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Good night, my darling.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Good night, Papa.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Pleasant dreams.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Good night, Shirley.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Good night, Mama.

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. No reading under the covers now, go straight to sleep.

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I will. *(Her parents out of her room, Young Shirley clicks on a flashlight under her covers. Starry night over the tenements fades to dawn. An alarm clock rings. Young Shirley rises and readies for school.)*

SHIRLEY. Every morning, after a bowl of oatmeal for breakfast, I pack my books and walk to school. *(Her mother gives Young Shirley a bag lunch and a brusque kiss; the girl encounters Evie on her way to school.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Coolly.)* Oh, hello, Evie. Mind if I walk with you?

EVIE. *(Shrugs.)* It's a free country.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I'm not mad at you anymore. Are you still mad at me?

EVIE. Who said I was mad?

SHIRLEY. A couple of blocks away is a red brick building that has been old for many years. P.S. 100. *(Schoolyard. Young Shirley and Evie join other kids at play: Jackie Sauerfeld, Ira Pushkov, Henry Brown, Giuseppe Sabatino, Pedro Maldonado, Anna Ling, etc.)* Giuseppe Sabatino just got off a boat from Italy. Anna Ling's parents came from China. Pedro Maldonado came from somewhere in Mexico. Henry Brown, from a place called Mississippi. *(Jackie picks his nose.)* Jackie Sauerfeld is the handsomest boy in school. He has thick black eyelashes, like Clark Gable. Every time I try to talk to him, my usually loud voice gets very, very soft.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Softly.)* Good morning, Jackie.

JACKIE. Did you say something?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. I said good morning.

JACKIE. *(Disinterested.)* Oh. Hello. *(He goes on playing with the others.)*

SHIRLEY. Ira Pushkov is the wisenheimer. *(Ira teases Henry.)*

IRA. Your shoelaces are on fire! *(Henry looks at his shoes. Ira laughs.)* Made you look, made you look, made you buy a penny book!

HENRY. Stupid idiot.

IRA. Moron.

HENRY. Dope!

IRA. Oh, yeah? Who you calling a dope? *(Etc. Shirley Abramowitz assumes the role of a teacher who blows her whistle and breaks up the escalating fight.)*

SHIRLEY. *(As a teacher.)* All right, boys and girls, recess over! Line up! *(The children form a line.)* Abramowitz, Shirley? Lead the way. *(Young Shirley is distracted.)* Shirley Abramowitz? *(As herself.)* But

my mind is elsewhere. I'm too excited. All I can think about is what's happening the very next night.

CLARA. What?

SHIRLEY. My acting debut in the Thanksgiving pageant! *(The Thanksgiving pageant unfolds on the stage of the school auditorium. Sounds are created by Mr. Hilton, who also prompts and directs during the show.)*

MR. HILTON. *(Whispers, urgently.)* Pilgrims! Go, go, go! *(Mr. Hilton ushers two tentative pilgrims onstage — Myles Standish [Jackie] and Priscilla Mullins [Evie] — who take their places before the red curtain of a proscenium within the proscenium.)*

SHIRLEY. That's Mr. Hilton, the drama teacher. He not only puts on these shows, he also writes them. And he's a perfectionist. *(Mr. Hilton makes Myles Standish spit out his gum. Miss Glacé is visible in the wings, seated at the piano.)* And that's Miss Glacé, the new music teacher, who came to us from the Bronx by way of Paris, France.

MYLES STANDISH. *(Rings a bell.)* Hear ye! Hear ye!

PRISCILLA MULLINS. Attention mothers and fathers and children large and small!

MYLES STANDISH. *(Bows.)* My name is Myles Standish of the good ship *Mayflower*.

PRISCILLA MULLINS. *(Curtseys.)* And I am the Puritan maiden Priscilla Mullins, his lady love. *(Action freezes.)*

CLARA. *(Stage whisper.)* Gramma, are you Priscilla?

SHIRLEY. No, dear.

CLARA. Who do you play?

SHIRLEY. You'll see. *(Action resumes.)*

MYLES STANDISH. We are here to tell the story of the very first Thanksgiving!

PRISCILLA MULLINS. Come with us, back in time, across the ocean ...

MYLES STANDISH. To merry old England in the year 1620! *(They pull open the curtain. A painted backdrop. A map of England. King James [Ira] is seated on his throne.)*

KING JAMES. I am King James! I hereby decree that every man, woman, and child must worship in the Church of England — or else! *(Ira ad-libs a throat-cutting gesture. Pilgrims grumble.)*

MYLES STANDISH. So people across the land prayed as they wished, in secret, but feared for their safety. *(Pilgrims warily look over their shoulders as they furtively pray.)*

PILGRIMS.

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come ...

(Their prayer gets softer.)

PRISCILLA MULLINS. *(Overlap.)* Many citizens grew unhappy.

PILGRIM #1. No one can tell us where we can worship! Not even the king!

PILGRIMS. — Hear, hear! — Yeah! — That's right!

PILGRIM #1. There must be a better life somewhere!

PILGRIM #2. There is! Across the ocean! A new world called America!

PILGRIMS. Ahhh!

MYLES STANDISH. So we Pilgrims packed up our worldly possessions and hired a great big wooden ship —

MYLES and PRISCILLA. The *Mayflower*!

PRISCILLA MULLINS. And one sunny day, we set sail for America!

PILGRIMS. *(Singing a little Gilbert and Sullivan.)*

WE SAIL THE OCEAN BLUE,

AND OUR SAUCY SHIP'S A BEAUTY;

WE ARE SOBER MEN AND TRUE,

AND ATTENTIVE TO OUR DUTY.

MYLES STANDISH. But then ... *(Thunder, lightning, howling wind, pouring rain — created by Mr. Hilton.)* The storms hit!

PRISCILLA MULLINS. The *Mayflower* was tossed about the ocean.

MYLES STANDISH. Children got sick. *(Pilgrims gag, cough, and "Ah choo!")*

PRISCILLA MULLINS. Men got grumpy. *(Sounds of grumpiness. Pilgrims grumble.)* Women thought this misery would never end.

PILGRIM WOMAN. Oh Lord, will this misery ever end?

MYLES STANDISH. 'Til finally, one day ...

PILGRIM #1. Land ho! Land ho! *(Pilgrims excitedly clamber on deck.)*

PRISCILLA MULLINS. Everyone hurried on deck for their very first look at their new home. *(A collective groan of disappointment.)*

PILGRIM #2. *(Disappointed.)* That's it?

MYLES STANDISH. *(To Pilgrims.)* I declare this place Plymouth Rock! *(The pilgrims sing the opening bars of "Anything Goes." Miss Glacé is an exuberant conductor.)*

PRISCILLA MULLINS. One by one, through the frigid winter, houses grew where there had only been fields.

MYLES STANDISH. Before long, spring arrived!

PRISCILLA MULLINS. And with spring came unexpected visitors. (*Indians appear.*)

PILGRIMS. — Wild Indians! — Run! — Hide! (*Etc. Pilgrims shriek and start to flee in chaos. The action freezes.*)

CLARA. Hold it, Gramma.

SHIRLEY. What now?

CLARA. You can't say "Indian." You're supposed to say "Native American."

SHIRLEY. Give me a break. This is 1935. We didn't know from Native Americans. May I go on with my story now, please? (*Pilgrims resume shrieking and fleeing.*)

PILGRIMS. Indians! Run! (*Squanto steps forward.*)

SQUANTO. I am Squanto, leader of the Patuxet Indians. We come to welcome you.

* MYLES STANDISH. Welcome us? You mean you don't want to harm us?

SQUANTO. On the contrary. We want to *help* you.

MYLES STANDISH. How come you speak English so well?

SQUANTO. I spent some time in England.

MYLES STANDISH. How can you help us?

SQUANTO. We want to show you how to grow corn and wheat and grain.

MYLES STANDISH. Thank you. (*Indians and Pilgrims pantomime farming.*)

PRISCILLA MULLINS. And so Squanto and his fellow Indians gave the Pilgrims valuable lessons in farming. Crops grew taller and taller under the summer sun.

MYLES STANDISH. Soon, it was harvest time! (*Joyful Pilgrims harvest wheat and corn.*)

PILGRIM #1. Let us have a feast to give thanks!

PILGRIM #2. Yes, and let's invite Squanto and our new Indian friends!

CLARA. Native American!

SHIRLEY. Shush!

PILGRIMS. — Yay! — Yes, let's! — Good idea! (*Etc. Everyone gathers at the table.*)

O BREAD TO PILGRIMS GIVEN,
O FOOD FOR SAINTS TO EAT,
O MANNA SENT FROM HEAVEN,
FOR HEAV'N-BORN NATURES MEET.

PRISCILLA MULLINS. And that's how the Pilgrims became the very first Americans.

MYLES STANDISH. Ever since, people from all over the world have come to America for the very same reason:

MYLES and PRISCILLA. To seek a better life. (*Miss Glacé plays "America the Beautiful" as the Statue of Liberty is wheeled in atop a ladder by Mr. Hilton.*)

STATUE OF LIBERTY.

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

(*An American flag unfurls. Sparklers.*)

PILGRIMS. (*Sing.*)

O BEAUTIFUL FOR SPACIOUS SKIES,
FOR AMBER WAVES OF GRAIN,
FOR PURPLE MOUNTAINS MAJESTIES
ABOVE THE FRUITED PLAIN ...

(*Pilgrims hum sotto the next stanza.*)

MYLES STANDISH. (*Over.*) And, lest we forget, no Thanksgiving would be complete without ... the traditional Thanksgiving turkey! (*Young Shirley, dressed as a turkey, struts around the stage.*)

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Loudly.*) GOBBLE GOBBLE GOBBLE!
GOBBLE GOBBLE GOBBLE! (*Etc.*)

SHIRLEY. That's me! There I am!

CLARA. You're the turkey?!

SHIRLEY. My big acting debut!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. (*Coaxes the audience to sing along.*) Everybody sing!

PILGRIMS. (*Reprise.*)

AMERICA! AMERICA!
GOD SHED HIS GRACE ON THEE
AND CROWN THY GOOD WITH BROTHERHOOD
FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA!

MYLES and PRISCILLA. Happy Thanksgiving, everybody! (*The company takes a bow as Myles and Priscilla draw the curtain. We're now backstage. The mood is celebratory. Mr. Hilton and Miss Glacé help the children take off their costumes.*)

MR. HILTON. That was swell, boys and girls!

MISS GLACÉ. *Très, très bon! (Parents, including Mr. and Mrs. Abramowitz, greet their kids.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. What a show! And what a turkey!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Happy to see him.)* Papa!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Wasn't our Shirley exceptional, Clara?

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. *(Standoffish.)* Very nice.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. I can't recall ever seeing such a fine portrayal of a turkey! Can you?

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Never.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Why, that may just be the best poultry ever seen on stage!

MRS. ABRAMOWITZ. Speaking of poultry, I've got a *schissel* of chicken livers waiting to be chopped. Hurry home, it's late. *(She goes.)*

YOUNG SHIRLEY. *(Disappointed.)* Goodbye, Mama. *(To her father.)* Is Mama mad at me? *(Mr. Abramowitz helps his daughter out of her costume.)*

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Nah, you know your mother: always so much on her mind. *(A beat.)* Boy, oh boy! The way you gobbled! So dramatic! So loud! I heard every gobble!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Papa, don't make fun of me!

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Who's making fun? I'm impressed. I couldn't take my eyes off you!

YOUNG SHIRLEY. That's because you're my father.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. That's not the only reason. You know how to take command of the stage. *(They walk home through the neighborhood.)* You're not the only Abramowitz with theatrical aspirations, you know. When I first came to America, I had dreams of being on the stage, too.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. You did?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. What, you thought I always wanted to sell pickles and herring? There was a theater I used to go to, on the Lower East Side. A Yiddish theater. I couldn't afford a ticket but I used to sneak in for the second act. I saw the second act of so many plays, I never knew how they started, only how they ended. There was one show, I must have seen it a dozen times. A man sings about the home he left behind in the old country, in the *shtetl*. I tell ya, there wasn't a dry eye in the house, night after night.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Do you remember how it goes?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Of course I remember. You see something a dozen times, you remember.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Sing it.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Now? No ...

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Please, Papa. I want to hear it.

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. *(He sighs, then sings the Yiddish folk song "Mayn Shtetele Beltz" and translates as he goes along.)*

... OY, OY, OY BELTZ, MAYN SHTETELE BELTZ,

MAYN HEYMELE, VU IKH HOB

MAYNE KINDERSHE YORN FARBRAKHT.

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Wait, what does it mean?

MR. ABRAMOWITZ. Beltz, my little town! The little house where I grew up!

OY, EDEN SHABES FLEG IKH LOYFN

MIT ALE INGLEKH TZUGLAYKH

TZU ZITZN UNTER DEM GRINEM BEYMELE,

LEYNEN BAY DEM TAIKH.

Every *Shabbos* I would run to the riverbank to play with other children under a little green tree.

MAYN SHTETELE BELTZ,

MAYN HEYMELE, VU KH'HOB GEHAT

DI SHEYNE KHALOYMES A SAKH.

Beltz. My little town where I dreamt such wonderful dreams! Come, kiddo, let's go home. *(They exit. Transition. Another day. Young Shirley and the other children, with the help of Mr. Hilton, take down Thanksgiving-themed arts and crafts and put Christmas decorations in their place.)*

SHIRLEY. The following Monday, we tear paper turkeys off the walls. Goodbye, Thanksgiving. Red and green decorations go up. Hello, Christmas. *(Mr. Hilton whistles "Jingle Bells.")* Mr. Hilton gets happier and happier, his head ringing like the bells of childhood.

MR. HILTON. *(To Young Shirley.)* I love Christmas! Don't you?

YOUNG SHIRLEY. Actually, I'm Jewish. My family doesn't celebrate Christmas; we celebrate Chanukah.

MR. HILTON. Oh, of course. But don't you just love it?!

SHIRLEY. In music class, Miss Glacé teaches us songs I never heard in synagogue. *(Miss Glacé conducts exuberantly to coax a response from the bored children. Only Young Shirley makes a real effort.)*

CHILDREN.

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING,

"GLORY TO THE NEWBORN KING;