

Barbara Robinson

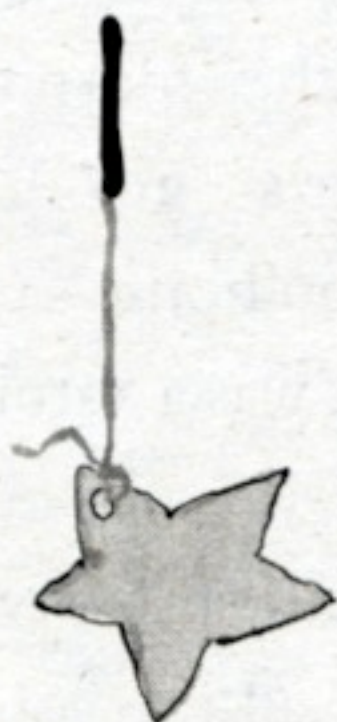
Best
~~The Worst~~

Christmas Pageant
Ever



"One of the best Christmas books ever."

—*Publishers Weekly*



The Herdmans were absolutely the worst kids in the history of the world. They lied and stole and smoked cigars (even the girls) and talked dirty and hit little kids and cussed their teachers and took the name of the Lord in vain and set fire to Fred Shoemaker's old broken-down toolhouse.

The toolhouse burned right down to the ground, and I think that surprised the Herdmans. They set fire to things all the time, but that was the first time they managed



to burn down a whole building.

I guess it was an accident. I don't suppose they woke up that morning and said to one another, "Let's go burn down Fred Shoemaker's toolhouse" . . . but maybe they did. After all, it was a Saturday, and not much going on.

It was a terrific fire—two engines and two police cars and all the volunteer firemen and five dozen doughnuts sent up from the Tasti-Lunch Diner. The doughnuts were supposed to be for the firemen, but by the time they got the fire out the doughnuts were all gone. The Herdmans got them—what they couldn't eat they stuffed in their pockets and down the front of their shirts. You could actually *see* the doughnuts all around Ollie Herdman's middle.

I couldn't understand why the Herdmans were hanging around the scene of their crime. Everybody knew the whole thing was their fault, and you'd think they'd have the

brains to get out of sight.

One fireman even collared Claude Herdman and said, "Did you kids start this fire, smoking cigars in that toolhouse?"

But Claude just said, "We weren't smoking cigars."

And they weren't. They were playing with Leroy Herdman's "Young Einstein" chemistry set, which he stole from the hardware store, and that was how they started the fire.

Leroy said so. "We mixed all the little powders together," he said, "and poured lighter fluid around on them and set fire to the lighter fluid. We wanted to see if the chemistry set was any good."

Any other kid—even a mean kid—would have been a little bit worried if he stole \$4.95 worth of something and then burned down a building with it. But Leroy was just mad because the chemistry set got burned up along with everything else before he had a



Hey! Unto you a child is born!

The Herdmans are the worst kids in the history of the world. They lie, steal, smoke cigars, swear, and hit little kids. So no one is prepared when this outlaw family invades church one Sunday and decides to take over the annual Christmas pageant.

None of the Herdmans has ever heard the Christmas story before. Their interpretation of the tale—the Wise Men are a bunch of dirty spies and Herod needs a good beating—has a lot of people up in arms. But it will make this year's pageant the most unusual anyone has seen and, just possibly, the best one ever.

**“Wiry-tough, tender-hearted,
unsentimental, and consistently funny.”**

—The London Sunday Times

**“The book is outrageous, lively, funny, and wonderful.
The Christmas story takes on a strangely moving depth
of meaning and shines through with a new brilliance.”**

—Denver Post

US \$5.99 / \$7.99 CAN

ISBN-13: 978-0-06-440275-0
ISBN-10: 0-06-440275-4



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Cover art © 2005 by Laura Cornell

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