

**WHILE COWBOYS WATCHED  
THEIR HERDS BY NIGHT**

*by Daniel Wray*



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# **While Cowboys Watched Their Herds by Night**

The Christmas story  
as it might have been ...

by Daniel Wray

## *CAST OF CHARACTERS*

- Cookie:** The camp cook. A grizzled but friendly old coot.
- Cowboy Slim:** The cowboy leader, fair but in charge.
- Cowboy Curly:** Another cowboy.
- Cowboy Rusty:** Another cowboy.
- Cowboy Bart:** A rather inept cowboy who likes coconuts.
- Cowboy Buck:** Yet another cowboy.
- Prospector Eli:** A seemingly crazy gold-seeker — or is he?
- Angels 1-4:** Your typical celestial crew, but with the ability to improvise.
- Mary Beth:** The expectant mother with a twang.
- Lil' Joe:** Good-hearted father.
- Sheriff Harry:** Bad seed with a gun and a title. Has a gruff voice.
- Deputy Festus:** The sheriff's sidekick, but with a good heart down deep.
- W.I.S.E. Guys:** Three really smart guys from back East: Frank, Thomas, and Bill.
- Apple Vendor:** A street vendor selling her fruit.
- Innkeeper:** A henpecked proprietor of the local hotel.
- Innkeeper's Wife:** The cranky proprietor's wife.

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## *PRODUCTION NOTES*

**Setting:** The wild West.

**Set:** The set can be unassuming or elaborate, depending on your time and resources. The original set was achieved with a collection of standard Wild West pieces and a PowerPoint projection of more elaborate pictures for background ambience. A fake campfire works well for the cowboy shepherds to gather 'round. You may use an artificial flame light. Look for them on clearance after Halloween. They give off a flame effect using a combination of a fan, silk cloth, and orange or halogen bulbs. The fabric appears to flicker just like a real fire. One online source for such a light is [www.musiciansfriend.com](http://www.musiciansfriend.com). Search for product number 803151, "Chauvet Bob Jr. Simulated Flame Light." You may arrange real logs around the flame to further achieve the campfire look. You will also need one door at Stage Left. Make a sign that says, "Nellie's Place." Other items to enhance your stage include a section of split rail fence, a fake cactus or two, and a nicely decorated street front of an old Western town, or the picture of one projected up on the backdrop. If you decide to use projected images, you'll also want one of a starry night sky; a pair of bedrooms, split to achieve the dual bedroom effect (Mary Beth's and Lil' Joe's) of the angel scene; a sheriff's office/jail; a stable; and a sunset.

**Cast Notes:** This play was written with a specific youth group in mind, so I added and divided parts according to the ability and number of kids. While there are 21 parts, the cowboys could certainly be cut down to 4 by combining Buck with Slim and Cookie with Rusty or Curly. The Angels 1 and 3 could be combined, as could 2 and 4, and in a pinch there could be only one Angel. Certainly the same actor could play both Harry and the Vendor, and the Innkeeper and his Wife could be played by the angels. This would reduce the cast to 14. Several of the Cowboys were played by females in the original production.

**Costumes:** You'll need a lot of boots and denim, along with Western shirts and cowboy hats. Vests and bandannas don't hurt either. Dirty Harry needs a badge. The Angels may wear a combination of traditional angel and cowboy, such as wings, cowboy hats, white shirts and jeans, and boots. Mary Beth, Apple Vendor, and Innkeeper's Wife may wear ankle-length skirts (think *Little House on the Prairie*). The W.I.S.E. Guys may wear regal-looking robes and crowns.

**Props:** You'll need a pair of toy cap guns (or unfilled squirt guns); a harmonica; a coconut, cut in half; a spittoon (may be a gold-colored bowl); gifts of gold (possibly fake gold coins), incense, and a mirror; a crate with golden delicious apples; a pan with cornbread in it, a coffee pot and some cups, a broom, and a doll for baby Jesus.

**Music:** You may play country-western music between scenes to help set the mood.

**Lights:** Although lighting instructions are included, we simply used our sanctuary lights, turning them on and off as indicated. Theatrical lighting is not a necessity.

**Synopsis:** The story opens with Cookie, the Narrator of the story, an old cowboy cook who hears everything, explaining that Christmas the way it is was not the original way that it was planned. The premise is an allegory in which the birth of Christ takes place in the old West. The shepherds are cowboys, the stable is a corral, the inn is a hotel, the W.I.S.E. men are scientists from neighboring towns, and Herod, or "Dirty Harry," is the sheriff looking to protect his monopoly. The story starts in the fields, where the cowboys are watching their herds — totally unaware of the calamity that is in store for them.

## Scene 1

1  
2  
3 *(Optional music plays. Lights up. Four of the COWBOYS*  
4 *[SLIM, CURLY, RUSTY, AND BUCK] are watching their*  
5 *cattle in a field on a dark, cloudless night. One of them*  
6 *plays harmonica as COOKIE, who is sitting by the fire,*  
7 *notices that the audience is there.)*

8 **COOKIE:** *(Looks up at the audience and does a double take. He*  
9 *looks around at them and eventually moves Center Stage,*  
10 *eying them suspiciously. He may pretend to spit some chew*  
11 *and then finally speaks.)* **I know what yer thinkin'! Yer**  
12 **thinkin', "What in the blue blazes is goin' on?" aren't ya!**  
13 **"We came to see a Christmas play, and there are nuthin'**  
14 **but a bunch of cowboys on the stage!"**

15 Well 'fore ya go and git your hide all chapped, there's  
16 somethin' you should know. OK, so the Christmas story  
17 happened a long time ago in Bethlehem, and we all  
18 know how it went down back then. But what most folks  
19 *don't* reckon is that the first plan was to have it happen  
20 the way yer about to see it! That's right, back in the old  
21 West! See, God was tryin' to hold off on sendin' his Son  
22 until folks *reeeeally* needed it, but then they wandered  
23 a bit too much and, well ... you know the rest.

24 Me? Name's Cookie, and I'm the cook 'round this  
25 here camp, and I know everything that happens around  
26 these parts. All right, my name's not really Cookie. Real  
27 name's Walter, but since I'm the camp cook, it's been  
28 my name for years, so don't go telling anybody about  
29 the Walter thing, you got it?!

30 Now where was I? Oh, yeah — iff'n you don't mind  
31 too terribly much, I'd like to show you how things  
32 *might* have happened, if folks wouldn't have gotten  
33 carried away so long ago. It all started — for me,  
34 anyway — on a cloudless starry night back on the  
35 plains near Davidson, a small town that was the county

1           seat for these parts. We was just mindin' our own  
2           business, watching our herds, when all of a sudden  
3           there was this really bright light — well, look for  
4           yerselfs!

5       **SLIM:** Man, Cookie! That was some mighty fine grub! I'm so  
6           full I couldn't eat another bite!

7       **CURLY:** Yessiree! I don't reckon I've eaten so much since...  
8           I can't remember!

9       **RUSTY:** Try lunch. We always eat well when Cookie's  
10          around!

11       **COOKIE:** My pleasure, boys. Say, how we lookin' on this  
12          drive, anyway? *(Prospector ELI runs across the stage*  
13          *toward the pan on the fire. He will be a recurring figure*  
14          *throughout the play, but only as comic relief. He is on a*  
15          *never-ending quest for gold.)*

16       **ELI:** *Gold!* *(He reaches into the pan and tries to pick up a piece*  
17          *of COOKIE's cornbread. He recoils in pain because it is hot.)*  
18          Owwwww!

19       **COOKIE:** Eli, ya idiot! That ain't gold! That's cornbread!  
20          Now, git!

21       **ELI:** *Dagnabbit!* *(He runs Offstage, holding his burned fingers.)*

22       **COOKIE:** Crazy old prospector. He ain't never gonna find  
23          gold! *(Pause)* Anyhow, you was sayin'?

24       **CURLY:** Well, I figure we'll be gittin' to Laramie before our  
25          deadline without losin' so much as one little dogie! That  
26          is, iff'n Bart comes back with a good report from  
27          circlin' the west perimeter.

28       **SLIM:** Bart? You sent Bart?

29       **CURLY:** Well, yeah. He sorta volunteered ...

30       **RUSTY:** Oh, no. Don't you remember the last time?

31       **SLIM:** Yeah — he forgot what he was lookin' for and nearly  
32          rode all the way to Cheyenne! He was gone for three  
33          days!

34       **CURLY:** It's all right. I made him tie a string around his  
35          finger so he'd remember to come back this time.

- 1     **BUCK:** You think that will work?
- 2     **CURLY:** It always works for me. *(Holding up his finger)* See?
- 3         I got a string around mine to remind me of something.
- 4     **SLIM:** Yeah? What was it you was supposed to remember?
- 5     **CURLY:** *(Pauses for a long time.)* Uh ...
- 6     **RUSTY:** Great! *(He rises.)* Guess I'll saddle up and go lookin'
- 7         for him ...
- 8     **SLIM:** Don't mind now — I think I hear him coming ... *(The*
- 9         *sound of hooves can be heard Offstage. Actually, it is the*
- 10         *sound of two coconut shells being hit together. BART appears*
- 11         *On-stage, hitting the coconut halves together and pretending*
- 12         *to ride a horse. This is an obvious parody of a scene from*
- 13         *the 1975 movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail. BART*
- 14         *should play up bringing his "horse" to a stop.)*
- 15     **BART:** Whoa, there! Whoa! Good boy! *(He pretends to*
- 16         *dismount, then approaches the rest of the group.)*
- 17     **SLIM:** Uh, Bart?
- 18     **BART:** Yeah, Slim?
- 19     **SLIM:** What are you doin'?
- 20     **BART:** Whaddaya mean, Slim?
- 21     **SLIM:** I mean with those things in your hands?
- 22     **BART:** Oh, I was just ridin' the west perimeter checkin' the
- 23         cattle ...
- 24     **SLIM:** But you didn't take a horse?
- 25     **BART:** Well, Curly said I couldn't on account of what
- 26         happened last time, so I just figured ...
- 27     **SLIM:** What in the world are those, anyway?
- 28     **BART:** They're my horse.
- 29     **CURLY:** No they're not! *(Picks up coconut halves and puts them*
- 30         *together.)* Sure as shootin', this here's a coconut!
- 31     **BART:** What?
- 32     **CURLY:** Yer takin' two pieces of a coconut and hittin' 'em
- 33         together.
- 34     **BART:** Yep. I was ridin' along the perimeter, and I noticed ...
- 35     **RUSTY:** Where in tarnation did you find this here coconut?

- 1 BART: Rollin' down the road.
- 2 CURLY: Rollin' down the road? Out here? Coconuts grow in  
3 tropical parts!
- 4 BART: And ...?
- 5 CURLY: This here's what they call a temperate zone.
- 6 BART: So? You was born in Pennsylvania, and yet you live  
7 out here now ...
- 8 RUSTY: Do you reckon coconuts can migrate?
- 9 SLIM: Never mind, you guys. That whole routine has been  
10 done before. (*Hands coconut halves to BART.*)
- 11 BUCK: I thought it sounded familiar. (*To BART*) So how was  
12 the herd?
- 13 BART: Oh, yeah! I was going to tell you guys — there's  
14 somethin' funny goin' on out there!
- 15 CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange?
- 16 BART: Funny strange! I was out there and I noticed this  
17 *really* bright star, just glowin' as bright as I've ever  
18 seen!
- 19 RUSTY: A star — in this big old Western sky. That *is* weird ...
- 20 BART: No, not just a star — (*Looking around for it*) Look!  
21 There it is! (*They all look and notice it.*)
- 22 CURLY: Dang! That *is* bright!
- 23 BUCK: And close! It looks like it's right over Davidson ...
- 24 RUSTY: Wow! How's come we never noticed that before?
- 25 SLIM: That *is* funny ...
- 26 CURLY: Funny ha-ha or funny strange? (*The sanctuary lights  
27 should be at their brightest now.*)
- 28 RUSTY: Funny strange. Probably the same reason we never  
29 noticed that one before! (*Points slightly left.*)
- 30 BART: Wow! That one's even brighter!
- 31 SLIM: Not brighter — it's getting *bigger*!
- 32 BUCK: What is it?
- 33 SLIM: It's like a giant light — and it's heading straight for  
34 us!
- 35 RUSTY: Look out! (*A bright light illuminates the entire group.*)

1           *They cover in a huddle. ANGEL 1 and ANGEL 2 enter.*  
2   **ANGEL 1:** Fear not! For, behold —  
3   **BART:** Huh?  
4   **ANGEL 2:** I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall  
5           be to all people! (Luke 2:10)  
6   **RUSTY:** (*Among themselves*) What's a tidin'?  
7   **CURLY:** Fear not? Is she kiddin'? Are you fearin', Curly?  
8   **SLIM:** I'm a little bit scared, yeah. (*The five COWBOYS*  
9           *continue to murmur among themselves as the ANGELS talk*  
10           *to each other.*)  
11   **ANGEL 2:** (*Leaning over to talk with ANGEL 1*) I think there  
12           may be a bit of a communication issue here ...  
13   **ANGEL 1:** Yeah? What do you suggest?  
14   **ANGEL 2:** Well, I think if we bring it more into their  
15           vernacular, it might be better received.  
16   **ANGEL 1:** Good idea! You want to try or should I?  
17   **ANGEL 2:** Go ahead. Give it a shot.  
18   **ANGEL 1:** Here goes. (*Clearing her throat*) Hey, y'all!  
19   **COWBOYS:** (*In somewhat disjointed fashion*) Howdy! Hey! Uh-  
20           huh. (*etc.*)  
21   **ANGEL 1:** Uh ... don't be scared, because I bring you ... uh  
22           ... I mean ...  
23   **ANGEL 2:** Because we got good news!  
24   **CURLY:** Good news?  
25   **ANGEL 1:** Yeah! Good news! And it's for all of y'all!  
26   **BUCK:** What is it?  
27   **ANGEL 2:** Well, unto you — I mean, tonight in the city of  
28           David ... I mean, in Davidson, there's gonna be a baby  
29           born!  
30   **RUSTY:** A baby? (*Pause*) So what?  
31   **ANGEL 1:** Well, not just *any* baby. This here baby will be  
32           the Savior of all of these here parts!  
33   **SLIM:** A savior? What's a savior?  
34   **ANGEL 2:** You know, like a really good guy. Someone who  
35           will do good and save all of y'all!

- 1     **CURLY:** You mean a new sheriff is going to be born tonight?  
2     **ANGEL 1:** Uh, yeah! A new sheriff!  
3     **SLIM:** That would be darn near the best thing that could  
4         ever happen to these parts!  
5     **BART:** Yeah! The sheriff we got is no good! He's a mean ol'  
6         cuss!  
7     **CURLY:** Darn tootin'! The name's Harry. "Dirty Harry," they  
8         call him.  
9     **RUSTY:** He's a bad seed, all right! A new sheriff is just what  
10        these parts need!  
11    **SLIM:** You bet! And he's gonna be born in our little  
12        Davidson?  
13    **ANGEL 2:** That's right! And this is how you'll know it's him.  
14    **ANGEL 1:** You'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lyin'  
15        in a feedin' trough!  
16    **SLIM:** A feedin' trough? Why in tarnation would he be in a —  
17        *(Suddenly the other ANGELS enter.)*  
18    **ALL ANGELS:** *(Together)* Glory to God in the highest, and on  
19        earth peace, good will toward men! *(Luke 2:14)* *(All*  
20        *ANGELS exit and the lights dim.)*  
21    **BART:** Gol-lee! That's funny!  
22    **CURLY:** Funny ha-ha or —  
23    **BART:** I mean, that's somethin' you don't see ev'ry day!  
24    **RUSTY:** Nope! You sure don't! Whatcha think we should do?  
25    **SLIM:** I say we saddle up and take the herd into town to  
26        look for this ... baby.  
27    **CURLY, COOKIE, and RUSTY:** *(Ad lib over each other)* Yeah!  
28        Let's go! Come on!  
29    **BART:** Way ahead of ya, Slim! *(Acts like he's getting onto a*  
30        *horse and starts pounding his coconuts together.)*  
31    **RUSTY:** How do ya reckon that coconut ended up rollin'  
32        down the road?  
33    **BART:** Well, a swaller coulda grabbed the shell in his beak.  
34    **RUSTY:** How do you figure a little bitty bird could carry a  
35        heavy coconut?

1 **SLIM:** *(Points.) Watch out — it's a python! (They all gasp and*  
 2 *run Offstage. The lights go down. Country or bluegrass*  
 3 *music may be played.)*

4

5

## Scene 2

6

7 *(Lights up. COOKIE enters.)*

8 **COOKIE:** Well, I said the story started in that starry field,  
 9 but of course, that ain't totally true. It started for *us* in  
 10 that starry field, but it started for a coupla people a few  
 11 months earlier than that. You see, there was this young  
 12 girl named Mary Beth, who lived out a ways from  
 13 Davidson, and this young farmhand that went by the  
 14 name of Lil' Joe. They had a visit one night from a  
 15 couple of them angels that we saw that night, and they  
 16 got a message that was a little more difficult to swallow  
 17 even than ours!

18 *(This scene takes place nearly simultaneously on opposite*  
 19 *sides of the stage. ANGELS 3 and 4 are positioned exactly*  
 20 *opposite each other, as are MARY BETH and LIL' JOE, who*  
 21 *face them, their backs to each other.)*

22 **ANGEL 3:** Mary Beth?

23 **ANGEL 4:** Lil' Joe?

24 **MARY BETH and LIL' JOE:** *(In unison, even though they*  
 25 *cannot see each other) Who in tarnation are you?!*

26 **ANGELS 3 AND 4:** *(Together) Do not be afraid!*

27 **ANGEL 3:** *(MARY BETH's angel) For you have found favor*  
 28 *with God! (Luke 1:30, NIV)*

29 **MARY BETH:** Favor? God wants me to do him a favor?

30 **ANGEL 3:** No, no. You have *found* favor.

31 **ANGEL 4:** *(LIL' JOE's angel) What is conceived in her is from*  
 32 *the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:20, NIV)*

33 **LIL' JOE:** Conceived? What are you talkin' about?

34 **ANGEL 3:** Well, what I mean is ...

35 **ANGEL 4:** What I'm trying to say is ...

- 1     **MARY BETH and LIL' JOE:** *(Together)* What in tarnation are  
2             you doin' in my room?! *(ANGELS 3 and 4 glance at each*  
3             *other, then nod.)*
- 4     **ANGEL 3:** Howdy, Mary Beth!
- 5     **ANGEL 4:** Howdy, Lil' Joe! Don't be scared!
- 6     **ANGEL 3:** God's really takin' a shine to you, Mary Beth!
- 7     **MARY BETH:** What do you mean?
- 8     **ANGEL 3:** Don't fret none, Mary Beth. You're gonna have  
9             you a youngun!
- 10    **LIL' JOE:** In a pig's eye! Why, we ain't even married yet!
- 11    **ANGEL 4:** Lil' Joe, don't be scared to go ahead and git  
12            hitched!
- 13    **LIL' JOE:** But I only kissed her twice!
- 14    **MARY BETH:** And both times was in my daddy's parlor! I  
15            cain't be in the family way!
- 16    **ANGEL 3:** But Mary Beth! It's *God's* baby!
- 17    **LIL' JOE:** Do you think my momma is gonna swaller that?
- 18    **ANGEL 4:** It ain't no lie, Lil' Joe. The Holy Spirit done filled  
19            Mary with a baby! And you're to name the little one ...
- 20    **ANGEL 3:** Jesus!
- 21    **MARY BETH:** But why me?
- 22    **ANGEL 3:** You're a right good girl, Mary Beth ...
- 23    **LIL' JOE:** I know she is — I wanna provide for her and  
24            make her happy ...
- 25    **ANGEL 4:** And you oughta still! She's fixin' to be the mother  
26            of our Lord and Savior ...
- 27    **MARY BETH:** I'm fixin' to have a lot of explainin' to do!
- 28    **ANGEL 3:** God must think you're somethin' special to be  
29            carryin' his baby!
- 30    **MARY BETH:** Gol-lee! I'm gonna have God's baby?
- 31    **ANGEL 3:** Darn tootin', Mary Beth!
- 32    **LIL' JOE:** But we should go ahead and git hitched anyway?
- 33    **ANGEL 4:** You know it's the right thing, Lil' Joe.
- 34    **MARY BETH:** God's baby ...
- 35    **LIL' JOE:** God's baby ...

1     **ANGELS 3 and 4:** *(Together)* It's all part of God's plan, y'all ... *(They*  
2     *join in the middle and exit.)*

3     **MARY BETH:** *(On her side of stage)* I'm gonna have God's  
4     baby?

5     **LIL' JOE:** *(On his side of the stage)* Mary Beth's gonna have  
6     God's baby!

7     **MARY BETH and LIL' JOE:** *(Together)* I'm not ready for this!  
8     *(Lights down as optional music plays and all exit.)*

9

10

### Scene 3

11

12     *(Lights up. COOKIE enters.)*

13     **COOKIE:** Meanwhile, some fellers from plumb near across  
14     the territory, way out East, were fixin' to make some  
15     big trouble for Lil' Joe and Mary Beth without even  
16     knowin' it. They's some pretty smart fellers, I imagine,  
17     'cause they was all colleged up and all, but you'd not a  
18     thunk it by watchin' 'em real close. They came a-callin'  
19     on Dirty Harry one day to let him know they thunk  
20     they found somethin' in the nighttime sky ... *(COOKIE*  
21     *exits. HARRY sits in a chair, with his boots up on the desk.*  
22     *There should be a jail cell replicating the sheriff's office*  
23     *motif and a spittoon visible. The old prospector ELI is in the*  
24     *jail cell, looking rather haggard.)*

25     **HARRY:** Festus! *(Pause as he pretends to spit in spittoon. A*  
26     *"ting" should be heard.)* Festus! Git in here! *(FESTUS*  
27     *enters, hunched over and bowlegged.)*

28     **FESTUS:** Yes, sheriff?

29     **HARRY:** Festus, how long have I been sheriff of these here  
30     parts?

31     **FESTUS:** Uhhhh ...

32     **HARRY:** A long time, Festus. A long time.

33     **FESTUS:** That sounds about right ...

34     **HARRY:** And in all the time I been sheriff, how many times  
35     you figure we've picked up old Eli fer one thing or the other?

- 1     **FESTUS:** Uhhhh ...
- 2     **HARRY:** At least forty times!
- 3     **FESTUS:** That sounds about right ...
- 4     **HARRY:** Eli, what in tarnation is your problem?!
- 5     **ELI:** (*Jumping to his feet and grabbing the bars*) *Gold!*
- 6     **FESTUS:** That sounds about right.
- 7     **HARRY:** Whatcha run him in fer this time, Festus? Public
- 8             drunkenness? Disturbin' the peace? Tryin' to put slugs
- 9             in the player piano over at Nellie's place again?
- 10    **FESTUS:** Nope. Not this time. This time he done tangled
- 11             with Curtis Whitney outside the livery.
- 12    **HARRY:** Picked a fight? Why, that don't sound like Eli!
- 13    **FESTUS:** Well, yes it do, iff'n you hear the whole tale told!
- 14             Seems Curtis just visited Doc Miller and got his tooth
- 15             fixed — you know, the one his old mule kicked out.
- 16    **HARRY:** Yeah. So?
- 17    **FESTUS:** Well, old Eli seen him from across the way there
- 18             and shot right across and tackled him! Started trying
- 19             to reach into the feller's mouth and pull it back out!
- 20    **HARRY:** Eli! Why in tarnation would you do a fool thing
- 21             like that?!
- 22    **FESTUS:** Seems that Curtis had got hisself a crown, right
- 23             there in the front of his smile! Bright shinin' —
- 24    **ELI:** *Gold!*
- 25    **FESTUS:** That sounds about right ...
- 26    **HARRY:** Oh, brother! Ya dern fool! And what did it git ya,
- 27             Eli? What?
- 28    **ELI:** Dagnabbit! (*There is a knock at the door. Both FESTUS*
- 29             *and HARRY draw their guns and look startled.*)
- 30    **FESTUS:** You want I should just blast 'em through the door,
- 31             sheriff?
- 32    **HARRY:** No, ya dern fool! Last time you did that, you
- 33             winged my mama! Now git over there and answer it!
- 34    **FESTUS:** (*Creeping cautiously toward the door*) Who th' devil is
- 35             it?! (*Three gentlemen — the W.I.S.E. GUYS — stand outside*)

1           *the jailhouse door.*)  
2   **FRANK:** Please, sir, are you the sheriff?  
3   **FESTUS:** I'm his deputy! What business you got with the  
4           sheriff?  
5   **BILL:** We wish an audience with him.  
6   **THOMAS:** Yes. We have some information which we think  
7           he will find very interesting!  
8   **HARRY:** Danged door-to-door salesmen! Commence to  
9           blastin' 'em, Festus!  
10   **FRANK:** No! We're not salesmen! We're scientists! We have  
11           some very important information to pass along to you!  
12   **FESTUS:** Whaddaya think, Sheriff?  
13   **HARRY:** It's a slow night. Let 'em in and see what they have  
14           to say. We can always blast 'em later ...  
15   **FESTUS:** *(Goes to the door and lets them in.)* Come on in. Mind  
16           yer weapons at the door.  
17   **THOMAS:** We don't have any weapons, sir.  
18   **FESTUS:** No weapons? You sure as shootin' ain't from  
19           around here!  
20   **FRANK:** No, sir. We have traveled far to tell you what we  
21           have found.  
22   **HARRY:** Which is ...?  
23   **BILL:** You see, sir, we're from the Worldwide Institute of  
24           Space Exploration, back East.  
25   **FESTUS:** What in tarnation is that?  
26   **HARRY:** Worldwide Institute of ... what?  
27   **THOMAS:** Worldwide Institute of Space Exploration. W-I-S-  
28           E for short.  
29   **HARRY:** W.I.S.E. guys, eh? Whatcha doin' in these here  
30           parts?  
31   **BILL:** Well, sir, we have reason to believe that a mighty  
32           leader is about to be born in a town very near here.  
33   **HARRY:** A new leader? How in tarnation would ya reckon  
34           that?  
35   **FRANK:** Well, sir, we've been studying the stars and the

1           prophecies of old, and a new star has appeared in the  
2           night sky.

3       **BILL:** We think the star points to the birth of this great  
4           leader. It's settled over a town called Davidson, just a  
5           few miles from here.

6       **THOMAS:** We'd like to go there and see if this is the case,  
7           but we need your permission to travel through these  
8           parts safely.

9       **HARRY:** Lemme see if I got this straight. You boys was  
10          looking through yer tellyscopes and the stars just  
11          spelled out that there was gonna be some new leader  
12          born in this here part of the country?

13       **BILL:** In a manner of speaking, yes.

14       **FESTUS:** Gol-lee! Iff'n I could read like that, I'd be a  
15          W.I.S.E. guy, too!

16       **HARRY:** *(With disdain in his voice)* Iff'n you could read at all  
17          it'd be a miracle!

18       **FESTUS:** That's true ...

19       **HARRY:** Uh, let me discuss this with my deputy fer just a  
20          second. You fellers make yerselves comfortable. *(They*  
21          *look around to see if there is somewhere they can sit without*  
22          *success.)* It's an expression — just wait over there!  
23          *(FESTUS and HARRY move to one side of the stage while*  
24          *FRANK, BILL, and THOMAS talk among themselves. As*  
25          *they are talking on either side of him, ELI follows the*  
26          *conversation by turning his head from one side to the other,*  
27          *as if watching a tennis match.)*

28       **FESTUS:** What do you make of it, Sheriff?

29       **HARRY:** I don't like it, Festus. I don't like it one bit.

30       **FESTUS:** I know! Them fellers can read the stars, and I  
31          cain't even read a newspaper!

32       **HARRY:** Not that, you idiot! I'm talkin' about this new-  
33          leader-bein'-born thing!

34       **FESTUS:** Oh, yeah. That.

35       **HARRY:** Now look here, Festus! I'm the sheriff in these here

- 1 parts, and I don't take kindly to no other sheriff bein'  
2 born!
- 3 FESTUS: But, Sheriff! Iff'n he's just bein' born, he's just a  
4 little critter!
- 5 HARRY: Younguns grow up, Festus! You and me got a good  
6 thing goin' here, and I don't need no new sheriff  
7 messin' things up!
- 8 FESTUS: I think I understand ...
- 9 HARRY: You do?
- 10 FESTUS: Not really, no ...
- 11 HARRY: Oh! Look. These fellers are real smart, see? If they  
12 think there's gonna be a new sheriff born, then they're  
13 prob'ly right. So here's what we're gonna do.
- 14 FESTUS: All right ...
- 15 HARRY: They want to go look for this baby, right? Well,  
16 you're my deputy, and I think you should go with 'em.
- 17 FESTUS: What? Why?
- 18 HARRY: Because they ain't got no guns, and this is a  
19 dangerous territory. You can guarantee that they git to  
20 where they're going safely, right?
- 21 FESTUS: Right. So then what?
- 22 HARRY: Then you come back here and tell me where he is.  
23 Got it?
- 24 FESTUS: Got it! *(Pause)* Why?
- 25 HARRY: *(Angrily)* So's I can come and ... *(More calmly)* uh  
26 ... deputize him. OK?
- 27 FESTUS: Aw, Harry! That's plumb sweet! I never thought  
28 you'd have a soft spot for the little feller!
- 29 HARRY: Oh, there's a soft spot all right ...
- 30 FESTUS: Right!
- 31 HARRY: So you go with them —
- 32 FESTUS: I go with them.
- 33 HARRY: Find the baby —
- 34 FESTUS: Find the baby.
- 35 HARRY: Then come back and tell me where he is.

- 1     **FESTUS:** Then I come back and tell you where he is.
- 2     **HARRY:** Right! Think you can handle it?
- 3     **FESTUS:** A'course! That's simple!
- 4     **ELI:** *Gold! (FESTUS and HARRY look at him briefly, then*  
5         *away.)*
- 6     **HARRY:** Good. Now go on and grab your pack, and I'll tell  
7         them the good news!
- 8     **FESTUS:** What good news?
- 9     **HARRY:** That I'm sendin' you with 'em!
- 10    **FESTUS:** With who?
- 11    **HARRY:** Those guys from W.I.S.E. — you're gonna head up  
12       the posse we're sendin' out to find the baby!
- 13    **FESTUS:** What baby?
- 14    **HARRY:** Ah! (*Exasperated*) Look. Just go get your pack. I'll  
15       have one of the W.I.S.E. guys 'splain it to you on the  
16       way.
- 17    **FESTUS:** Right! (*He exits to go get his pack. HARRY shakes his*  
18       *head in weary disbelief.*)
- 19    **ELI:** Dagnabbit!
- 20    **HARRY:** You got that right. (*HARRY crosses over to the three*  
21       *W.I.S.E. GUYS.*) Gentlemen! I believe I have an  
22       arrangement which will ensure your safe passage to the  
23       destination you seek!
- 24    **FRANK:** That's wonderful! Thank you very much, Sheriff!
- 25    **BILL:** Yes, sir. Thank you very much!
- 26    **HARRY:** Don't mention it. My deputy Festus here (*FESTUS*  
27       *emerges with his pack*) will accompany you to protect you  
28       from any ne'er-do-wells that may cross your path.
- 29    **FESTUS:** Sounds excitin'! Where we goin'?
- 30    **HARRY:** (*Sighs.*) To find the baby leader that's bein' born!  
31       Remember?
- 32    **FESTUS:** Oh, yeah! So's you can deputize him!
- 33    **HARRY:** Uh, right. Anyway, good luck on your journey! My  
34       deputy here will return and tell me where you find him  
35       so that I can come and pay my respects as well!

- 1     **THOMAS:** Sheriff, you don't have to send anyone! We can  
 2            come back through here and tell you when we find  
 3            him!
- 4     **HARRY:** I insist! After all, a sheriff needs to know what's  
 5            going on in his territory, right?
- 6     **BILL:** I suppose so, but ...
- 7     **HARRY:** (*Drawing his gun and cocking it*) I said, I insist!  
 8            These is dangerous times, and I wouldn't want nothin'  
 9            to happen to ya, you bein' unarmed and all. (*He holsters*  
 10           *his pistol. As he does, it goes off, shooting FESTUS in the*  
 11           *foot. FESTUS hops up and down in pain.*) Oops. Sorry,  
 12            Festus. Anyway, ol' Festus can look after ya iff'n there's  
 13            any trouble.
- 14    **FRANK:** (*Afraid*) Actually, I think an escort might be just  
 15            what we need.
- 16    **HARRY:** I figured you'd see the logic. Now, go on ahead on  
 17            and find the youngun!
- 18    **FESTUS:** (*Still hopping on one foot*) Right! Let's go, boys!
- 19    **HARRY:** Don't forget to come back and tell me so's I can  
 20            give the baby my blessin'!
- 21    **FESTUS:** You got it, Sheriff! (*He heads out the door and the*  
 22            *three W.I.S.E. GUYS follow him.*)
- 23    **HARRY:** (*Watching from the door.*) Hey, Festus? Davidson's  
 24            that way! (*Pause*) There you go! Good luck! (*Back inside*)  
 25            I gotta get me a new deputy. (*Going over to the cell, he*  
 26            *looks at ELI.*) Well, Eli? Iff'n I let you out, you gonna  
 27            stay outta trouble?
- 28    **ELI:** *Gold!*
- 29    **HARRY:** You crazy old coot! Keep yer hands outta other  
 30            people's mouths! (*He opens the cage.*) Go on, now. Git!
- 31    **ELI:** Dagnabbit! (*He exits, but as HARRY's back is turned, he*  
 32            *quietly picks up the spittoon, mouths the word "Gold!" to the*  
 33            *audience while pointing to the spittoon, and silently sneaks*  
 34            *Offstage. HARRY is oblivious.*)
- 35    **HARRY:** A new sheriff, huh? (*Pause*) We'll just see about

1           **that!** (*Lights off. All exit. Optional music plays.*)

2

3

#### Scene 4

4

5           (*Lights up. COOKIE enters. MARY BETH and LIL' JOE*  
6           *appear from Stage Right in front of an old hotel called*  
7           *Nellie's Place. They look weary from a long day's ride.*)

8       **COOKIE:** Meanwhile, Lil' Joe and Mary Beth had traveled  
9           a long spell to Davidson, where Lil' Joe had to pay the  
10          taxes on his farm. Mary Beth was just about ready to  
11          have that baby, too! But when they got there, they  
12          found out that there ain't a lot of hotel rooms in  
13          Davidson, which could be a bit of a problem ...  
14          (*COOKIE exits.*)

15       **LIL' JOE:** Are you doin' all right, Mary Beth?

16       **MARY BETH:** Compared to what?

17       **LIL' JOE:** Well, I mean how are the pains?

18       **MARY BETH:** They're gone for now, but Joe, we gotta get  
19          us a place for the night, and fast! I feel like it's about  
20          time!

21       **LIL' JOE:** I know, Mary Beth, but those last two hotels were  
22          plumb full! I wish we didn't have to come to Davidson,  
23          but it's the county seat, and if I didn't get the taxes  
24          delivered today, we was gonna lose the ranch!

25       **MARY BETH:** I know, Joe, but iff'n we cain't find  
26          somewheres where I can lay down and have this baby,  
27          we won't be namin' him Jesus like the angels told us  
28          to!

29       **LIL' JOE:** What do you mean?

30       **MARY BETH:** We'll have to call him (*Beat*) **Dusty!** (*APPLE*  
31          *VENDOR enters.*)

32       **LIL' JOE:** Now don't you worry none! I'll find us a room  
33          somewheres! (*Notices a VENDOR selling apples on the*  
34          *street.*) Excuse me, ma'am?

35       **APPLE VENDOR:** Apples! Git your apples here!

- 1 LIL' JOE: Excuse me?  
2 APPLE VENDOR: Ah, yes sir! Would you care to buy an  
3 apple?  
4 LIL' JOE: No, ma'am. You see, my wife here ...  
5 APPLE VENDOR: Just one, sir? They're delicious, and  
6 they're only three fer a nickel!  
7 LIL' JOE: I'm sorry — we just need to find a place —  
8 APPLE VENDOR: How about for your missus, then?  
9 They're good for what ails ya!  
10 MARY BETH: *Oooohhhh!*  
11 APPLE VENDOR: Well, they're good for *most* of what ails  
12 ya! (*Just then ELI comes bolting across the stage and grabs*  
13 *an apple.*)  
14 ELI: *Gold!*  
15 APPLE VENDOR: Eli! (*She picks up a broom and starts to*  
16 *clobber him with it.*) Give me back my apple! How many  
17 times do I have to tell ya, it ain't gold! (*She grabs it back*  
18 *as she whacks him one.*) Now, git!  
19 ELI: Dagnabbit! (*Exits.*)  
20 APPLE VENDOR: Now, where was I? Oh, yeah. Mister, if  
21 you ain't gonna buy an apple, then kindly move along  
22 so I don't miss a sale.  
23 LIL' JOE: Miss, I just need to ask you if you know where  
24 we might find a room for the night. My wife here is  
25 about to have a baby, and the hotels up that way are  
26 plumb full.  
27 APPLE VENDOR: Hmmm. The town's mighty busy this  
28 weekend, but there's one more hotel — Nellie's Place,  
29 right there. You might try them ...  
30 LIL' JOE: Thank you, ma'am!  
31 APPLE VENDOR: No problem. Good luck! (*Back on the job*)  
32 Apples! Git your apples here!  
33 LIL' JOE: See, Mary? I know that the other hotels were full,  
34 but I know this one's gonna have a room! I can feel it!  
35 (*He knocks on the hotel door.*) Did you say Dusty? That's

- 1           really funny, Mary Beth!
- 2   **MARY BETH:** (*Wincing in pain*) *Thanks!*
- 3   **LIL' JOE:** (*Going to her side*) **Are you OK?**
- 4   **MARY BETH:** **Just hurry!**
- 5   **INNKEEPER:** (*Opening the door*) **Can I help you folks?**
- 6   **LIL' JOE:** (*Running over to the INNKEEPER*) **My wife is heavy**  
7           **with child! We need a room!**
- 8   **INNKEEPER:** **Holy smoke!** (*Pause*) **I'm sorry, mister, but**  
9           **there's a homestead and garden show in town, and**  
10          **every single room is booked. Has been for weeks!**
- 11   **LIL' JOE:** **But you don't understand! She's going to have the**  
12          **baby tonight!**
- 13   **INNKEEPER:** **Oh, dear! That is a bit of a problem, now isn't**  
14          **it? Uhhh ... wait right here!** (*He exits behind the door.*)
- 15   **LIL' JOE:** **See, Mary Beth? I told you it would work out!**  
16          **He's gonna go see what he can do.**
- 17   **MARY BETH:** **I hope so! I can't wait much longer!**
- 18   **LIL' JOE:** **Remember the breathing exercises the doctor told**  
19          **us about ...**
- 20   **MARY BETH:** **If it's all the same to you, I'd like to focus on**  
21          **not blacking out from the pain of the contractions!** (*She*  
22          *grabs his arm again and he crumples to his knees as she*  
23          *squeezes it.*)
- 24   **LIL' JOE:** (*From his knees, wincing in pain*) **Of course!**  
25          **Whatever works!** (*The INNKEEPER returns.*)
- 26   **INNKEEPER:** **Uh ... I'm afraid I've a bit of bad news. My**  
27          **wife is really the manager of this establishment, and**  
28          **she said no.**
- 29   **LIL' JOE:** **What? How in tarnation ... ?**
- 30   **INNKEEPER:** **Yes, I'm afraid she's a bit of a neat freak.**
- 31   **MARY BETH:** **What does that have to do with ... ?**
- 32   **INNKEEPER:** **Well, I told her you were in a bit of a**  
33          **desperate spot, but she said that no babies were going**  
34          **to be born in her hotel.**
- 35   **LIL' JOE:** **Oh, come on! She *can't* have it out here!**

- 1     **INNKEEPER:** No, I suppose not, but ... (*INNKEEPER'S*  
2            *WIFE enters.*)
- 3     **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Did you tell them, Albert? Did you  
4            tell them that there wouldn't be any room for having  
5            babies in this ... (*Noticing them*) Oh! Hello!
- 6     **LIL' JOE:** Please, ma'am. My wife here is about to give  
7            birth, and we really just need a place where she can lay  
8            down and do that. Could you find it in your heart to —
- 9     **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Absolutely *not!* Good heavens! We're  
10           running a hotel here, not a hospital!
- 11    **LIL' JOE:** But ma'am, she needs to lay down now!
- 12    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Put yourself in my position. I run a  
13           business here. This is one of the busiest nights of the  
14           year. I have a hard enough time cleaning up after these  
15           cowboy homesteaders without having to clean up after  
16           a birth. Can you imagine?!
- 17    **MARY BETH:** *Oooohhhh!*
- 18    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Exactly! See? Your wife there  
19           understands!
- 20    **INNKEEPER:** Dear, I think she's in pain!
- 21    **LIL' JOE:** Don't you have anything? I'll pay you double.  
22           Triple!
- 23    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Wish I could help, but we're full.
- 24    **INNKEEPER:** Wait! I know!
- 25    **LIL' JOE:** What is it? Anything!
- 26    **INNKEEPER:** Well, I just bedded the animals down for the  
27           night in the stable out back. I know it's not inside, but  
28           at least the hay would be warm and there would be  
29           someplace to lay down ...
- 30    **LIL' JOE:** You can't be serious! This is a *baby* we're talking  
31           about — not a colt! There is absolutely no earthly way  
32           that we would even think about —
- 33    **MARY BETH:** (*Grimacing as she grabs his arm hard*) *Joe!*
- 34    **LIL' JOE:** (*Falling to his knees in pain as she grabs him*) Which  
35           way would that stable be?



- 1 SLIM: Amen! Bart? You think that since we're in town now  
2 you could dismount? My ears are startin' to bleed ...
- 3 BART: Oh, all right! (*Pretends to get off.*)
- 4 RUSTY: By the way, who's mindin' the herd?
- 5 CURLY: We left 'em out back of the saloon at the edge of  
6 town. They'll be fine!
- 7 BART: I don't see why we couldn'ta stopped fer some  
8 sarsparilla! I'm thirsty!
- 9 SLIM: I told ya, Bart. We're here to see the baby the angels  
10 told us about!
- 11 RUSTY: Yeah. (*Going over to the APPLE VENDOR*) Excuse me,  
12 miss? You're workin' kinda late, aren't ya?
- 13 APPLE VENDOR: The Homestead and Garden Show's in  
14 town, sir. That usually makes for a long sellin' day.  
15 Would you like to buy an apple, sir? Three fer a nickel!
- 16 COOKIE: Actually, give me a dime's worth! I'm gonna make  
17 the fellers a pie!
- 18 SLIM: And if you don't mind, ma'am? We're lookin' for a  
19 baby supposed to be born here tonight.
- 20 APPLE VENDOR: A baby?
- 21 CURLY: Yes'm. (*Motions with his hand as to height.*) 'Bout yea  
22 high, cries a lot ...
- 23 RUSTY: Supposed to be an important baby — gonna be the  
24 new sheriff!
- 25 APPLE VENDOR: Really? Well, I ain't seen no baby, but  
26 there was a couple through here earlier this evenin',  
27 and the lady looked like she'd swallered a watermelon  
28 seed ...
- 29 SLIM: You know where they went?
- 30 APPLE VENDOR: Well, they said they tried the hotels that  
31 way and they was all full'd up, so's I pointed 'em to  
32 Nellie's Place.
- 33 SLIM: Thank you, ma'am. (*Tips his hat and turns back to*  
34 *BART.*) Bart? Carry those apples for Cookie, would ya?
- 35 BART: Me? Why me?

- 1 SLIM: You're the only feller here with a horse.
- 2 BART: *(Thoughtfully)* That's true ...
- 3 RUSTY: We goin' to Nellie's Place?
- 4 SLIM: Sure. *(Points.)* It's right there. It's the last hotel in
- 5 town, so I cain't imagine they wouldn't be here.
- 6 RUSTY: I hope so. The star looks about right ...
- 7 CURLY: Let's find out! *(Knocks on the door.)*
- 8 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: *(Opens the door.)* Sorry — we're all full
- 9 up tonight!
- 10 CURLY: Yes, ma'am. We don't really need a room — we're
- 11 lookin' for someone who might be stayin' here.
- 12 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: You know the name?
- 13 RUSTY: No, ma'am. We was sent by some angels out in the
- 14 field ...
- 15 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: What?
- 16 SLIM: It's a long story, ma'am. The person we're lookin' for
- 17 is a baby.
- 18 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: A baby? Ain't had no babies stayin'
- 19 here tonight!
- 20 CURLY: Are ya sure? 'Cause the angels said a baby would
- 21 be born in Davidson tonight that would be the new
- 22 sheriff!
- 23 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Born tonight, you say?
- 24 SLIM: That's right, ma'am. And that lady over there sellin'
- 25 apples said she saw a lady with child head over to your
- 26 establishment.
- 27 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Uh-oh. What did she look like?
- 28 BART: See fer yerself! She's right over there! *(Points to the*
- 29 *APPLE VENDOR.)*
- 30 RUSTY: I think she meant the lady what swallered the
- 31 watermelon, you lamebrain.
- 32 BART: Oh ...
- 33 SLIM: We ain't never seen her. Have you?
- 34 INNKEEPER'S WIFE: Well ...
- 35 CURLY: Well, is she here, or ain't she?

- 1     **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Look. We were completely full, so I  
2           told them they couldn't stay here.
- 3     **SLIM:** So where did they go?
- 4     **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Actually ...
- 5     **INNKEEPER:** (*Running in from Offstage*) Honey! You gotta  
6           come see!
- 7     **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** Albert, I'm kinda helpin' these  
8           gentlemen right now.
- 9     **INNKEEPER:** But that lady just had her baby in the stable  
10          out back!
- 11    **BUCK:** In the stable?!
- 12    **CURLY:** What is she doin' out in the stable?
- 13    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** I told you we was full!
- 14    **RUSTY:** I bet he's layin' in the feed trough, just like the  
15          angel told us!
- 16    **INNKEEPER:** As a matter of fact, that's what they're usin'  
17          fer a crib!
- 18    **SLIM:** Still, havin' a baby out in the elements like that ...
- 19    **BART:** You oughtta be 'shamed a yerself!
- 20    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** But like I said ...
- 21    **INNKEEPER:** Oh, but he's just the cutest little thing! You  
22          got to come see!
- 23    **SLIM:** Come on, boys! Let's go see this new sheriff!
- 24    **INNKEEPER:** Sheriff? He ain't wearin' no star that I could  
25          see.
- 26    **CURLY:** We'll 'splain it to you when we get back there.
- 27    **RUSTY:** Let's go see! (*They all follow the INNKEEPER*  
28          *Offstage — all but BART, who slowly walks past the*  
29          *INNKEEPER'S WIFE.*)
- 30    **BART:** (*Disdainfully*) Ma'am.
- 31    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** But we was full!
- 32    **BART:** Ma'am, if I didn't treat ladies as good as I do, I'd  
33          have my horse step right on yer foot!
- 34    **INNKEEPER'S WIFE:** What horse?
- 35    **BART:** (*Claps his coconuts together at her.*) Good evenin',



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