

SETTING: *Various locations in the world of second-grader Pepper McGee, including a school classroom, the playground, her living room, and her bedroom.*

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. As the music begins, a spot comes up on PEPPER MCGEE standing center.*

#1 Santa Claus is Coming to Town

PEPPER

*Santa Claus is coming!
Coming Christmas Eve!
Bringing toys
To girls and boys
To all those who believe!
So shout the news from chimney tops!
Let Christmas cheer abound!
Cuz Santa, Santa, Santa, Santa
Santa Claus is coming...
To town!*

(Lights come up to reveal the streets of town. Music continues under as JASMINE enters, carrying her school books. She looks behind her.)

JASMINE

Hurry up you guys! We're gonna be late for school!

(As PEPPER continues singing, BRUCE and TOMMY enter and join JASMINE on their way to school. CRYSTAL enters behind them During the following, CRYSTAL trips TOMMY and runs off like a thug. JASMINE and BRUCE help TOMMY to his feet and they exit.)

*Have you been behaving?
Doing what you should?
Santa Claus
Sees all of us
I hope that you've been good!*

*So keep a smile upon your face
Quick! Wipe away that frown...
Cuz Santa, Santa, Santa, Santa
Santa Claus is coming...
To town!*

(The scene shifts to the schoolyard. TOMMY REINHARDT runs on, out of breath. He sees her.)

TOMMY

Pepper! Where you been? We been looking all over for you. The bell's gonna ring any second.

PEPPER

Tommy, guess what? I got the most super-exciting news!

TOMMY

We don't got time for that, Pepper! Something's happened...

(TOMMY falls to his knees and shakes his fists at Heaven.)

It can't be true! Nooooo!

PEPPER

Tommy, is something wrong?

(JASMINE FORTUNA enters with BRUCE HOLLINGSWORTH in tow. BRUCE is clutching his nose.)

JASMINE

Listen up, people! We got a gusher! Pepper, quick! Give me your scarf!

(PEPPER gives JASMINE her scarf. JASMINE slaps it over Bruce's nose, holding it there with one hand.)

That's it, Bruce. Tilt your head back and keep applying pressure.

PEPPER

Jasmine, why is Bruce's nose bleeding?

JASMINE

He gets a gusher every time he gets upset.

PEPPER

I know that. But what's there to be upset about?

(TOMMY instantly stops wailing and looks at her. JASMINE and BRUCE do the same. PEPPER is oblivious.)

PEPPER (cont.)

It's the Friday before Christmas. Santa Claus is coming next week! That makes this the best, most happiest time of year!

JASMINE

You haven't heard.

PEPPER

Heard what?

TOMMY

Please. Don't say it again. I can't take it.

PEPPER

What's going on?!

(JASMINE takes a deep breath then...)

JASMINE

Our teacher – Mrs. Wright – has decided to leave after Christmas.

PEPPER

What?!

TOMMY

Nooooo!

(He covers his ears and collapses into a heap. BRUCE applies pressure.)

PEPPER

Mrs. Wright can't leave! She's the best second grade teacher in the whole world!

JASMINE

It's true. Nobody teaches arithmetic as good as she does.

TOMMY

Or *spelling*, or *science*...

(BRUCE takes the scarf away from his nose.)

BRUCE

Or *art*...

(BRUCE notices JASMINE glaring and hastily applies pressure.)

PEPPER

Don't forget music. That's what she teaches *best*. Mrs. Wright loves to hear us sing.

(CRYSTAL BATES enters.)

CRYSTAL

Then she best start singin' for her supper.

BRUCE

Crystal Bates!

(BRUCE retreats in fear and applies more pressure.)

TOMMY

The biggest bully in second grade!

(TOMMY covers his head.)

CRYSTAL

If Mrs. Wright is so great at teachin' music, how come we ain't entered in the Santa Sing-Off, huh?

PEPPER

The what?

JASMINE

The Santa Sing-Off. It's a contest open to all elementary schools. The class that sings the best gets to ride on Santa's float in the Christmas Parade.

CRYSTAL

I'm dyin' to hitch a ride on that float. Just think of all the candy canes I could pinch from Santy Claus.

JASMINE

Mrs. Wright didn't enter our class in the Santa Sing-Off because our voices aren't *mature* enough. We're only seven years old, Crystal.

PEPPER

Besides, Mrs. Wright doesn't need to win a contest to prove she's the best teacher.

CRYSTAL

That ain't what I heard.

JASMINE

What do you know about it?

CRYSTAL

Plenty. For instance, I know Mrs. Wright ain't leavin' of her own free will. Fact is, she's gettin' the can

PEPPER

Getting the what?

CRYSTAL

The can. The sack. The Big Adios.

(They're still confused.)

Mrs. Wright is gettin' *fired*.

TOMMY

No way.

JASMINE

I don't believe it!

(BRUCE mutters something unintelligible beneath the scarf – perhaps the word “impossible.”)

PEPPER

But Mrs. Wright is the *best* second grade teacher in the whole world!

CRYSTAL

That's not what the head honchos say. They say she's nothin' special – just plain ordinary. They want a teacher what's got *pizzazz*.

JASMINE

Where did you hear that?

CRYSTAL

In detention. That's where I get all the skinny.

PEPPER

This is awful! Poor Mrs. Wright!

CRYSTAL

(Imitating her)
 Poor Mrs. Wright! Poor Mrs. Wright!

(Her voice resumes its normal bullying tone.)

Don't you ever get tired of bein' a Teacher's Pet?

(The Children gasp in horror – "Teacher's Pet" is worse than "poopy butt face." or "Your mommy is a leper.".)

PEPPER

I am *not* a Teacher's Pet!

CRYSTAL

(Imitating her)
 Mrs. Wright is the *best* second grade teacher in the whole world!

PEPPER

She *is*!

CRYSTAL

See what I mean?

(Getting up in Pepper's face.)

All your kissin' up can't save her now, Pepper McGee. Mrs. Wright needs a *miracle*. Not even a Teacher's Pet can pull *that* off.

(JASMINE pulls PEPPER away from CRYSTAL.)

JASMINE

Don't listen to her, Pepper. I bet Mrs. Wright isn't really leaving. Crystal probably made the whole thing up.

(The school bell rings.)

CRYSTAL

There's the bell for class. Why don'tcha ask Mrs. Wright yourself?

(MRS. WRIGHT enters.)

MRS. WRIGHT

Come along now, children. It's time for class to begin.

PEPPER

Mrs. Wright! Mrs. Wright!

(They all rush to her. CRYSTAL hangs back, watching.)

TOMMY

Tell me it's not true, Mrs. Wright! Tell me you're not getting the can!

MRS. WRIGHT

The what?

TOMMY

The can. The sack. The Big Adios.

PEPPER

You're not getting fired, are you, Mrs. Wright?

MRS. WRIGHT

Well, children...

(She starts to SOB stormily!)

It's true! I'm getting the can!

CRYSTAL

Told you so.

TOMMY

Nooooo!

(He collapses in a heap on the floor. BRUCE clutches his nose with one hand and grabs JASMINE with the other.)

JASMINE

Get back, everyone. We got another gusher.

(She takes the other end of the scarf and mashes it against Bruce's nose.)

PEPPER

Mrs. Wright, they can't do this. You're the best second grade teacher in the whole world.

MRS. WRIGHT

The folks in charge don't see it that way, Pepper. They say I'm ordinary. They say I lack...

CRYSTAL

Pizzazz.

MRS. WRIGHT

I'm a solid, dependable teacher. My students love me. But that's not enough anymore. Now it's all about the sparkle, the flash, the... the...

CRYSTAL

Pizzazz.

MRS. WRIGHT

Day after day, year after year, I give my all. What more do they want from me?

CRYSTAL

Pizzazz.

MRS. WRIGHT

When I look at a future without teaching all I see is despair and heartache and, and... seven cats. I can't take it! This is where I belong. You children are my family. All of you.

JASMINE

Even Crystal?

MRS. WRIGHT

Sure. Why not?

PEPPER

We can't let Mrs. Wright get fired! We gotta do something! We gotta show the world that Mrs. Wright' got pizzazz!

CRYSTAL

Her? How you gonna do that?

PEPPER

There's gotta be a way!

(BRUCE mutters something unintelligible beneath the scarf.)

What was that, Bruce?

(BRUCE mutters something unintelligible beneath the scarf louder.)

TOMMY

Oil can...?

(BRUCE *thrusts the scarf away from his face.*)

BRUCE

The Santa Sing-Off!

TOMMY

The Santa Sing-Off?

JASMINE

Bruce, don't be silly!

PEPPER

Wait, Jasmine – Bruce is right! We gotta enter the Santa Sing-Off. We gotta enter and *win!* That way we'd get to ride on Santa's float during the Christmas parade...

JASMINE

Everybody would see us!

BRUCE

And wave!

(JASMINE and BRUCE *wave to the imaginary crowd like the King and Queen of England.*)

TOMMY

We could hold up a great big sign that says "Mrs. Wright's Second Grade Class."

MRS. WRIGHT

(*Clasps her hands to her heaving bosom*)

Nothing would make me more proud than to stand in a crowd of spectators and watch you children pass by on that float. To win the Santa Sing-Off... oh!

PEPPER

If that doesn't give you pizzazz, Mrs. Wright, nothing will!

MRS. WRIGHT

Only imagine what winning would do for my career... Oh, but children, it's not possible. The Santa Sing-Off is always won by students in the fifth or sixth grade. Your sweet voices just aren't mature enough.

PEPPER

Mrs. Wright – we gotta try!

(MRS. WRIGHT *looks round at all their dear little earnest faces and contemplates a future without them, a future that includes bedsores and those seven cats.*)

MRS. WRIGHT

All right. We'll do it.

(*The Children cheer.*)

But we don't have much time. This is Friday. The Santa Sing-Off is Tuesday. We have to practice, practice, practice...

PEPPER

You can count on us, Mrs. Wright!

MRS. WRIGHT

Very well then – line up. Line up!

(*They form a choir. JASMINE pulls the scarf off Bruce's face.*)

PEPPER

I hope we win!

CRYSTAL

It would take a miracle.

(MRS. WRIGHT *lifts her arms to conduct.*)

MRS. WRIGHT

We'll start with the Christmas song we learned yesterday.

#2 Santa Claus is Coming to Town (Reprise)

(*The Children start out together after the second line PEPPER begins a descant that makes it obvious she has a killer voice. One by one they stop singing and look at her, slowly sinking to one knee in stunned adoration.*)

CHILDREN/PEPPER

*Santa Claus is coming!
Coming Christmas Eve!
Bringing toys
To girls and boys
To all those who believe!*