

## THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

Jenny Lynn Bader

Serio comic

CHRIS, 12

*CHRIS is a child, male or female, who is feeling bitter about a parental punishment. This monologue is addressed to the parent who has meted out the punishment.*

**CHRIS** James VI was crowned King of Scotland when he was one year old. Louis XIV was five when he became King of France. So I . . . should be able to take the bus by myself. Okay, maybe I used a strong word, but . . . According to history? All your rules make no sense. The videos you won't let me watch because they're too violent? Kids were at once a major part of official violence! An army of kids marched across Europe in the thirteenth century. The Children's Crusade. Sure, it didn't turn out too well for most of them, but . . . it was a whole war. For kids! Joan of Arc—visited by visions when she was twelve, then became a soldier. I'm as old as she was, and you don't even let me watch wars when they're on TV! I'm not saying I want to start a war. I'm saying I have all these words I'm not allowed to say, books I'm not allowed to read, movies I'm not allowed to see, while at another time I might have been in charge of—Macedonia! Look at K'ang-Hsi, emperor of China at seven . . . Tutankhamen, "King Tut," pharaoh of Egypt at nine. Right now I'm older than either of them, and you still won't let me take the bus. I know you think I'd miss my stop, but all I need is a chance to prove [*Interrupts self*]—and yeah, I know you gave me one when you said you'd let me take the bus by-myself-next-time-if-I-just-got-off-at-the-right-stop, and I realize I messed that up. But my book got so good around

Seventy-Ninth Street . . . it was about the Roman Empire, which Constantine VII ruled the eastern part of when he was just five? Sure it looked bad when I missed our stop, and the . . . three . . . stops after that. But it wasn't a fair test. Because you were there. And you need to trust that if I were alone, I'd stop reading and be able to handle the—f . . . local bus! But you think I'm . . . This . . . idea that I'm a "child"—it's such a recently invented, technical category—can't you see that? How you always say I should play with the Altman's kid, Danny . . . How I'd like him so much, since we're both twelve. Danny Altman collects worms! You think I'd like playing with someone I don't know, with completely different interests, simply because we're both twelve? Do I tell you to play with my gym teacher, Mr. Phelps, because you're both thirty-seven? No. I'd choose friends for you more thoughtfully. For a long time, this "child" thing didn't matter. No one cared. And I wouldn't be in a corner for saying one bad word at dinner. One F . . . f . . . frickin' bad word in a whole otherwise good discussion. You couldn't have put me here, because I would own this corner and all the rooms around it, as part of my kingdom. Because at one time, children would be given kingdoms, over which . . . We . . . would rule.

## THE GIRL WHO SWALLOWED A CACTUS

*Eric Coble*

Dramatic

PEZ, 8 to 15

*In this play, PEZ (who may be played by either a male or female actor) is addressing the audience directly.*

**PEZ** We were all sprawled in the dirt and weeds in the darkness. The twins—"hee hee hee" as per usual—waiting for the next car to drive down the dirt road. We'd get a warning from the headlights. This time Dennis swore the second he saw the headlights, he would be the first one up the ladder into the car-hood-swing-set-monkey-bar tree fort. Sheila knew he was wrong. She'd been eating nothing but Froot Loops all evening (did I mention how GRAND it was being without a mother for a weekend?). And she knew she had the energy to get to the fort first. The whole point was to get in, just barely get in before the passing car lights slid over you and you were caught. So you knew you were tucked safe in the fort and the passing car would have no idea you were there. Desert Ninjas. Or Giggling Desert Ninjas in the twins' case.

But so there we all were when Leon yells "CARI!" It wasn't even Dennis who saw it, how on earth did he expect to get the jump on everyone like that? But Leon: "CARI!" And we RUN!

Like mice exploding from a cheese house, like water drops exploding from a water balloon hitting the asphalt, BOOM.

All these little bodies run, run, run up the monkey

bar ladder—lights getting closer—the twins onto the car hood—lights closer—Leon up and behind the cardboard wall—the lights on the tree now—Sheila's in, she tries to give Dennis a hand . . .

*[As Sheila:] "The lights are ON you, Dennis!"*

But she pulls him up, twins "Hee hee hee," Leon "Shut up, Shut up!" and the car—or rather truck, it had to be a truck it was so loud and heavy—RUMMMMMBLING by on the dirt and rock road and we all clump silent, a clump of breath and dirty clothes "hee hee hee" "shut up!" The truck is going past us in the dark as all the other cars ever did, "hee hee hee" "Shut Up!" past us . . . past us . . . and then . . . it stops. The truck stopped.

And so did all our hearts.

The twins were not laughing now. The twins were not breathing.

Silent.

Dark.

The truck had definitely stopped. But why? We all sat there blinking . . . should we run? Stay still and hidden? Why had the truck stopped? Why was it so huge? Why—

Silent.

Dark.

Then CHUNK.

A truck door . . . opening.

Now our hearts doubly stopped.

Instinctively, as one body, we all turned to Sheila. And she knew what she had to do. She had to look.

Still silent.

Still dark.

She moved quietly, so so quietly to the eyehole in the card-

board wall. And she looked out at the truck. It was almost too dark to see anything, but the truck was a pickup truck. And old. And rusted. And BIG. The biggest truck she'd ever seen.

And the door was open.

And someone was getting out.

One foot went crunch on gravel and dirt. And then the other. Crunch. And she stared. She wasn't breathing, she needed every single ounce of her life to see in the dark, see who was coming. And she did see. Someone was walking from the truck . . . back toward the fortress.

Right toward us.

Except it wasn't a someone.

It wasn't even human.

## GOD IN BED

*Glenn Alterman*

Dramatic

MAUREEN, 12

*MAUREEN's mother has left to go to Rome to be at the pope's funeral.*

**MAUREEN** Momma's gone. She left; went to see the pope.

He died; and momma went to Rome, Italy, to be with him. Momma, she just loved the pope. Was always talking about him, all the time. He came to this town once, yeah, he did. Came to visit our church when Momma was just a girl. And he let Momma sit on his lap, she said. And Momma said that's when she had like a moment of divine inspiration. That's what she called it—"divine inspiration." I don't know what that means, but Momma says it changed her life forever. Can you imagine? Think that's why Momma made us all go to church every Sunday. And why we had to say grace before every meal, even breakfast, yeah. Momma really loved the pope. Loved him even more than Pappa I think. I think that's what made Pappa seem so jealous all the time. When she'd start going on about the pope, Pappa would like storm out of the room . . . Momma was cryin' real bad when she left. Said she didn't know if she'd ever be back. Said she had to go do God's work in Rome with the new pope. Then she gave me a big hug and then gave me her special rosary beads. Pappa said we're to pretend she's dead. Yeah, that's what he said, "dead." And he said we don't have to go to church or say grace before every meal anymore if we don't want to. God, I miss Momma—I miss her so much.

## SEVEN CHANNELS

David L. Epstein

Dramatic

KATHY, 15

*KATHY is a smart student who spent a summer away from home in a prestigious urban art program. When she returns to her midwestern home, she takes up issues with her parents who are barely prepared for her assault.*

**KATHY** What's my problem?! You picked me up from the bus stop exactly one hour ago, we sat at dinner for ten minutes, and in that time you've managed to insult every creed, religion, and race that crosses your mind. First of all, American Indians are not "greedy" because they run casinos. They were gifted those plots of land and licenses to make up for the decimation of their people! African Americans are not the "most racist people you know" because you don't know any African Americans! I mean, have you ever actually talked to a black person, Dad?! And there is nothing wrong with Mexicans or Hispanics or anyone from Central America. They aren't "dirty people" getting in the way of your construction business. And the Chinese aren't taking over the world—they just, and I know this is hard to believe, happen to be doing *way better than us!* Yes, there are problems. But where is your heart? Where is your compassion? Immigrants come to the United States because it's the last chance for any semblance of a good, decent life. Don't you ever stop to ask yourself, what if that was me? What if things were so bad that the only way you could protect your daughter was to send me to another country, alone, with a hundred other refugee children? Under those circumstances, you'd be on your knees praying for the

compassion of strangers more fortunate than you! It is so upsetting to learn that everything you taught me is wrong, that your value system is so low, that you have such little regard for anyone beyond the border of your own small world! I love you and always will. But I cannot tell you how disappointed I am in you. You know those old televisions? The big boxy ones with a dial to turn the channel? That's you. Seven channels and all of them as white as snow.