



A full-length play with music
By Anita Garner

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The Glory Road

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By Anita Garner

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TIME & PLACE

The Deep South & Southern California in the 1950's

SETS

Ideally, a turntable houses a tent revival on one side, and rotates to reveal alternately, homes, porches, picnic grounds, recording studios and other performance venues. Without a turntable, lighting creates the settings. Either way, the look is stark, with canvas suggesting the tent and a rustic wooden platform elevating the band and revivalists.

Sawhorses establish the space outside on the grounds and microphones on stands anchor performances at places other than the revival tent. Homes in the South and in California are revealed by a few iconic items of furniture and mobile set pieces. Locations are loosely defined, perhaps supported by projections on the canvas backdrop of the tent.

COSTUMES

American Gothic gives way to color and a touch of glitter as we see religion becoming entertainment. Costume changes are part of the action. The Revelators wear matching coats to sing, but each of the other characters they play has a simple, instantly identifiable look as the actors move seamlessly back and forth between characters in full view of the audience.

THE GLORY ROAD

CHARACTERS

Brother Ray: Late 20's-30's. A charming country boy, tall, handsome, with some of Hank Williams' hillbilly charm mixed with Elvis' attitude. Sings\talks like a combination of Andy Griffith and Will Rogers.

Sister Fern: 20's. Alto with a big belt. Pretty, sensual. She is vulnerable in private, confident onstage. Sings like a black male blues singer crossed with Patsy Cline.

Zula: 40's-50's. Attractive. Energetic. Bawdy. Passionate. Sings a bit and moves well.

Sister Coker: To play 40's. Mature, sturdy churchwoman and faithful follower. Doubles as a Revelator in a "trouser role" (Probably our Second Tenor).

Brother Janway: 30's. Boyish enthusiasm. Charming & charismatic. Wouldn't hurt if he plays a little Rockabilly piano. Doubles as a Revelator (Probably our lead Tenor).

Kousin Karl: 30's-40's. He changes with the times. Countrified at first, evolving into a successful producer and a snappy dresser. Doubles as a Revelator (Probably our Baritone).

Junior: Any age. A black man with dignity and warmth. Ray & Fern's friend and confidant. Plays a little harmonica or guitar. Doubles as a Revelator (Probably our low Bass).

The Revelators: A gospel quartet. Doubled by the above actors. One must be a true tenor, one an amazing bass. All sing tight four-part harmony. Vegas-goes-to-church.

The Band: Piano, guitar, fiddle, bass & drums. The band is onstage during all musical performances. Some players may double as we add banjo, mandolin, harmonica. Music in the play includes several styles: Southern gospel, country, bluegrass and rockabilly.

THE GLORY ROAD

SCENE LIST WITH SONGS

ACT I

Scene 1: Revival. The Joneses are evangelists. Ray's in charge.

1 - HE'S A PERSONAL SAVIOR – Revelators.

2 - BY & BY - Ray and Fern duet. Traditional country/bluegrass.

Scene 2: Outside on the grounds. The men. The women. The men. The women. Fern's pregnant. Men handle the business of revival. Famous radio/records man, Kousin Karl arrives to "scout" Fern.

BAND CALLS US BACK WITH GOSPEL VAMP

Scene 3: Revival. Fern brings Saturday night to Sunday morning. Sings to a new beat. Collapses after second song.

3 - DO LORD - Fern (Janway responds and encourages audience to participate).

4 - JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS – Fern.

5 - I DO BELIEVE - Fern (excerpt).

Scene 4: Parsonage. The baby dies. Faith healing conflict.

6 - SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT - Band plays under this scene.

Scene 5: Revival. Fern's "testimony" about why she wrote this song. She begins, falters, the quartet helps her finish.

7 - PRECIOUS LORD - Fern (excerpt).

8 - I DON'T KNOW - Fern and Revelators.

Scene 6: Parsonage. Zula and Fern visit. Zula wants her to resume her career. Fern's learning to write gospel, using her honky tonk roots.

9 - MY PRAYER - Ink Spots on the radio.

10 - MY PRAYER FOR THE ONES I LOVE - Fern (excerpt).

Scene 7: Revival. Sister Coker's menu. Her crush on Ray displayed.

11 - IN THE GARDEN - Ray, Audience.

ACT I Continued

Scene 8: Parsonage. Ray & Fern flirt. Fern's restless.

12 - I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED - Fern (excerpt).

13 - HEY GOOD LOOKIN' - Ray (excerpt).

14 - SLEEPY TIME GAL - Ray (excerpt).

Scene 9: California. Fern sings on Kousin Karl's show. Hank Williams dies. Fern rushes home to console Ray. Zula follows to bring Fern back to fulfill commitments to Karl.

15 - WHEN I MEET YOU – Fern.

Scene 10: Parsonage. Fern's home from California. Janway and Coker visit. Zula too. Invitation to build a home in Louisiana.

16 - SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT – First time through everybody in the scene participates. After the scene the actors who double become Revelators to put a musical button on the act, sending us into intermission with a four part harmony version of Swing Low...

INTERMISSION

ACT II

Scene 1: In the Bayou The pink house is built. Fern and Junior decorate. Ray's building new church. Fern's music is getting famous. The two careers are at odds again. She wants to move to California. Big fight.

17 - LET TOMORROW BE - Fern & Junior.

Scene 2: Creekside. Ray confides in Junior. Junior advises.

18 - MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME - Junior & Ray.

Scene 3: New Orleans Tabernacle. Fern sings rockabilly. Karl surprises her, shows up to hear her. Coker visits.

19 - STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING – Fern.

Scene 4: Pulpit. Ray resigns. Revelators appear with Ray.

20 - I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART – Revelators.

21 - WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS - Band (excerpt).

Scene 5: California and Deep South - split stage. Fern's got a new record, tours the South. Ray's home in California, where they live. Karl and Fern butt heads. Phone calls back and forth, while we hear song excerpts from tour.

22 - BE THANKFUL YOU'RE YOU - Fern (excerpt).

23 - I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED - Fern & Revelators.

24 - I AIN'T GOT TIME - Fern (excerpt).

Scene 6: Ryman Auditorium, Nashville. Ray and Zula arrive to surprise Fern. In a gift-of-the-Magi moment, after Ray helped her get the career she wants, Fern announces she's pregnant and going home. Karl threatens. Without a tour, the label won't release a single. The record will die. Fern believes she can revive her career after the baby comes.

25 - I'LL FLY AWAY – Fern & Full cast.

Note

The Band underscores some scene transitions and dialogue. All underscoring is from Fern Jones' catalog or in the public domain.

ACT I

Scene 1. Revival tent. Hot Springs, Arkansas. Early 1950's

In shadow, the BAND prepares, tunes up.

REVELATORS QUARTET enters in silhouette.

Two stagehands, costumed as roustabouts, open canvas flaps, attach each to a pole on either side of the revival platform. At center stage they hook a rope from an overhead pulley to a big whitewashed, rustic wooden cross, trimmed in lights. They hoist the cross up and tie it off. As the cross reaches its position, we hear the echoing sound of large knife-switch being thrown. The lights flicker to life, outlining the cross.

BAND plays up-tempo vamp: **PERSONAL SAVIOR**

Spotlight swings in to pick up REVELATORS

On spotlight cue, REVELATORS begin, in up-tempo, four-part harmony, and the revival is underway.

REVELATORS (*sing*)

1 - HE'S A PERSONAL SAVIOR

YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT A PLACE CALLED HEAVEN
UP IN THE BLUE
I'M GLAD THAT ALL MY SIN'S FORGIVEN
I'M TELLING YOU
I'D LIKE TO SEE YOU GET THIS FEELING
YOU CAN RECEIVE
GOD'S READY NOW TO GIVE THIS FEELING
IF YOU BELIEVE
HE'S A PERSONAL SAVIOR
HE'S MINE I KNOW
I LOVE HIM SO
HE DID MY HEART (YES HE DID MY HEART)
A PERSONAL FAVOR (PERSONAL FAVOR TOO)
THAT'S WHY I TELL IT NOW, WHEREVER I MAY GO
WHEN I AM BLUE (Bass run: WHEN I AM BLUE...)
AND FEELING
OH SO LOW DOWN)
HE'LL TAKE ME THROUGH
OL' SATAN CAN'T GET ME DOWN

AND FROM THE PATH (THE PATH THAT IS MINE)
I'LL NEVER MORE WAVER (I'LL NEVER MORE ROAM)
FOR HE'S A FRIEND, HE'S A FRIEND, HE'S A FRIEND
HE'S A PERSONAL FRIEND

Spotlight finds RAY at rear of house.

RAY, bible in hand, shouts

RAY
There's a meetin' here tonight!

BAND responds

(he jogs toward stage platform, stopping to shout)
I said. There's a meetin'.

BAND responds.

(reaches wooden steps)
Here.

BAND responds.

(jumps onstage)
Tonight!

BAND responds.

RAY *(continues)*
Hot Springs - you better get ready to feel the spirit!

REVELATORS *(react)*
Hallelujah! Amen! That's right!

RAY
Folks, let's hear it for The Revelators!

RAY encourages audience applause and BAND responds.

RAY *(continues, to REVELATORS)*
Thanks men. I heard y'all on the radio this morning.
Glad you're able to be with us.
(to the congregation)
We'll hear from them again, directly.

BAND plays under when he's intimate, punctuates when he's rowdy.
RAY moves away from podium often, in youthful evangelist mode,
graceful in motion, stopping to make a point.

RAY (*to BAND & REVELATORS*)
Y'all are sounding downright *sanctified*!

REVELATORS & BAND react.

RAY
It's good to be here. It's been too long. *Way* too long.
(*he's walking and he's talking*)
My brothers and my sisters, we are about to have us a
revival! Right here under this tent every night for
the next few weeks. But every Saturday, there's no
preaching. It's the All Day Singing With Dinner On The
Grounds. Nothing but music all day long on Saturday.
(*to REVELATORS*)
Y'all gonna be here for the Singing?

REVELATORS respond in the affirmative.

RAY
(*checking his notes back at the podium*)
Tell your friends and your kinfolks in
Texarkana and Shreveport and les-see here,
(*checks his notes*)
We're gonna be all over this part of the country...
...New Orleans - we'll be there soon.
You be sure and tell your people this glory train will
be rolling on into Mississippi after that. We couldn't stay out
here in the evangelistic field like we do,
without the help of some fine folks...
(*slaps the podium for emphasis*)
... this right here, for instance, this pulpit,
was just now built, special, by our friend, Junior.
And out on the grounds, we've got church folks
helping with the parking and such. Come Saturday,
they'll set out the finest food you ever ate.
(*to the BAND*)
About time for a song!

BAND plays intro: **BY & BY**

(distracted by something in back of congregation)

Leon, is that you? I see you there my brother.
Looks like you made a stop at some other
establishment on your way. You got to let some of
that liquid refreshment wear off so you can...
...One of you deacons find him a seat?
...Naw. Now that's not gonna work out.

BAND stops, thinking Ray doesn't want that song

If you're staying, you're gonna need to seddown.
Uh huh. That's the ticket.

(addresses congregation)

Some-a you folks never been to a revival and you're
wondering what to expect.

BAND realizes they need to vamp, begins again

Well you just might see some singing and some
shouting and some testifying. And I don't know about the
rest of you, but I always expect miracles. I believe a miracle
can come along any time and we got to be ready to
recognize it when one shows up. Oh yes I *do* believe in
miracles. I tell you what, I've got proof. Because right here,
tonight...

REVELATORS react, nudge each other, this is an oft-repeated routine

...here comes the miracle that married me –
Sister Fern Jones!

BAND plays FERN on.

FERN enters with a honky-tonk strut, wearing a figure-hugging black
jersey dress. Her sweetheart neckline is just high enough to avoid being
immodest. She is definitely not your average preacher's wife.

RAY meets FERN on her way to mic, takes her hand.
She follows his lead.

RAY

Sugar, come on over here and sing with me.

RAY & FERN (*sing together*)

2 - BY & BY

BY & BY WHEN THE MORNING COMES
ALL THE SAINTS OF GOD ARE GATHERED HOME
WE'LL TELL THE STORY HOW WE'VE OVERCOME
WE'LL UNDERSTAND IT BETTER BY & BY

FERN (sings)
TRIALS DARK ON EVERY HAND
AND WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND
ALL THE WAYS THAT GOD WOULD LEAD US
TO THAT BLESSED PROMISED LAND

RAY (sings)
HE'LL GUIDE US WITH HIS EYE
WE'LL FOLLOW TIL WE DIE
WE'LL UNDERSTAND IT BETTER BY & BY

RAY & FERN (sing)
BY & BY WHEN THE MORNING COMES
ALL THE SAINTS OF GOD ARE GATHERED HOME
WE'LL TELL THE STORY HOW WE'VE OVERCOME
WE'LL UNDERSTAND IT BETTER BY & BY.

Half-light onstage as lights come up on grounds.

We see REVELATORS leave with the light and become other characters

Scene 2. Outside on the grounds. The men

Sawhorses with planks across. Old chairs. Long, bare, wooden table.

JUNIOR (a Revelator) wearing early 1950's work clothes, walks into scene, begins messing with tools.

JANWAY (also a Revelator) enters a beat behind JUNIOR, carrying old church coffee urn. JANWAY's a young preacher at ease in slacks and open shirt, no jacket.

JANWAY sets coffee urn on the table next to cups.

JANWAY

Hey Junior.

JUNIOR

How' do Reverend Janway. How's Miz Jones feeling?

JANWAY

She's gonna rest up a while. Might sing later on if she gets to feeling better.

JUNIOR (*indicates the urn*)

Coffee ready?

JANWAY

Sure is. I'll get us some
(*coffee from spigot into mugs,*
What're you working on?
(*hands coffee mug to JUNIOR*)

JUNIOR

(*shows JANWAY a piece of torn grocery bag he's drawn on*)
See right here. I'm fixing to make a hand rail
she can use to help her up and down the steps.

JANWAY

Good idea.

JUNIOR (*fondly*)

She has grown...uh...
(*illustrates big stomach*)
...considerable.

JANWAY

Her time might be closer than we figured. Well
her mama's here now. She'll keep a close watch.

JUNIOR

You know she will. That woman don't miss a thing.

JANWAY

I like the way you left the pulpit unpainted this time.
It looks real good natural.

JUNIOR

Rev said the same thing.

JANWAY (*he always asks*)
You coming in to hear Sister Fern?
I know you enjoy her singing.

JUNIOR (*he always declines*)
No, Reverend Janway, I 'preciate the invite,
but I'll listen from out here. I wouldn't be
comfortable in there. No offense.

JANWAY
None taken. You ready for the crowd at dinnertime?

JUNIOR
Ready as we can be. We never know how many folks'll
be wanting to eat. I got extra planks, more sawhorses
out yonder in my truck. We can fix us more tables if we need
to.

JANWAY
Junior, I don't know what we'd do without you.
I know we can't pay near what you're used to making.

JUNIOR
My Margie and me - we do all right. We like to give
some back once in a while.

JANWAY
It's like tithing. If you believe in that.
(*he really doesn't know – segregation – they worship separately*)
Does your church teach tithing?

JUNIOR
We're *Baptist*.
(*chuckling at Janway's ignorance*)
Our preacher'll lock the door of a Sunday 'til he makes sure
everybody's doing like the good book sez. Besides, the
Reverend's my friend. Me and him's been knowing each
other a long time. I help when I can. I guess you could call it
tithing.

Cross-fade. Lights up on another location outside.

The women

Another long wooden, well-used old table, folding chairs.

FERN, wearing very full maternity top, is seated, back is to us, mid-conversation with ZULA.

ZULA's handsome in bright colors, makeup, big jewelry, hair waved just so.

ZULA

Why don't you tell him you don't feel like it?

FERN

Mother, quit picking. I am *going* to sing.

ZULA (*teasing*)

Look at you! I bet you can't sashay out there on that stage like you used to.

(*demonstrates a hip-swinging step or two*)

FERN (*enjoying this*)

Help me up. I'll show you.

(ZULA helps, and it's slow going)

FERN

(*one hand on a hip, takes a step, waddling*)

All right now, see, I still know how.

ZULA (*observing, amused*)

Your back porch doesn't swing anymore.

FERN (tickled)

Hush. Somebody'll hear you...oooh let me sit a minute.

(*BOTH get her back in her chair*)

ZULA

(*looking through her purse*)

I need some powder. I'm shiny.

I forget how hot it gets here.

FERN

You say that every time you visit.

You come down here in the summer...

ZULA
(*fanning herself with a hanky*)
...Sticky. So awful hot and sticky...

FERN
...acting like the heat's a big surprise.

ZULA
It's too hot for you to be under that tent.
In your condition. That's for sure.

FERN
People are counting on me.

ZULA
You ought not to be out in this heat today.
You ought not to be pregnant in the first place...

FERN
...Well I am and that's...

ZULA
...You know what the doctor said. You've got the...

FERN
...Anemia. I know it. I take my tonic. And we
are going to stop for a while. Raymond found us
a little church in Murfreesboro that needs a pastor.
We're filling in over there 'til the baby comes.

ZULA
"Fill in?" You mean you're gonna be a *pastor's wife*?
You've got as much business being a pastor's wife as...

FERN
...It's just for a little while. 'Til the baby comes.
I *am* feeling a little lightheaded. Maybe I won't sing
in this heat.

SISTER COKER (also a REVELATOR) enters, carrying a Dixie cup. FERN
doesn't see her. ZULA doesn't acknowledge her.

ZULA

First he makes you quit singing in night clubs, and then he's got you traveling all over the place. Now he's gonna stick you in some little town. What about your music?

COKER

We love Sister Jones' music.

ZULA

Woman, can you see, I am *trying* to talk to my daughter.

FERN

Mother!

COKER

(gestures, never mind)

FERN (to COKER)

I do wish you'd call me Sister Fern.
Everybody's calling me that now.

COKER

I wouldn't feel right, you being the preacher's wife.
(remembers her mission)

Brother Jones said bring you some ice tea.
(hands FERN the paper cup)

FERN

Aren't you the sweetest thing.

FERN

Mother, this is Sister Coker, she's the head of the Women's Missionary Alliance at our new church. She's helping out with Dinner on the grounds.

(to COKER)

My mama's worried about how I'm feeling.
She's not used to seeing me like this.

ZULA

I said you don't look good without makeup.
That's what I said.
(fans herself, addresses COKER)
I sure would love me some of that ice tea.

COKER

Tea's over yonder, Miz...
(*nobody fills in a name for her*)
(*continues, to FERN*)
I think you look just fine.

ZULA (*still only to FERN*)

Last time I was here, you told me you're on a revival tour
and I thought well at least you're still singing on the radio.
Now you're about to be stuck in some little...
(*turns on COKER*)
...in some dinky little church where nobody will know...
nobody will *care* how much talent the pastor's wife has.

COKER

(*aware of ZULA's aim but keeps a sweet tone*)
Go ahead. Take out after us all you want.
The Lord is on our side.

ZULA (to FERN, ignoring COKER)

What about the radio? How will you sing on the radio in that
place?

FERN

I *would* miss singing on the radio
(*explaining to COKER*)
I *have* to sing on the radio. I've been singing
on the radio my whole life.

COKER

There's a radio station in Little Rock. It's not far.

ZULA

She doesn't drive.

FERN

Raymond will take me.

Cross fade. Lights up on the men across the stage.

The men outside.

JANWAY

Junior, I hear you're leaving us soon. Where're you off to?

JUNIOR

I'm gonna drop out after Biloxi. Going to New Orleans to work for Brother Daly.

JANWAY

What are you building for him?

JUNIOR

You know the old auditorium downtown? He's turning it into a tabernacle. He just signed the papers on it.

JANWAY

You fixing it up?

JUNIOR

Way more'n that. It's gonna be something! He wants a big altar down in front like the Catholics have...

JANWAY

Uh huh. Uh huh. (amused) Oh yes he would.

JUNIOR

And...

(a stubby pencil from his pocket, sketches on the brown paper)
...a raised-up platform - real high up - for the pulpit.

JANWAY

(moves closer to look)

What's that, there? Another platform?

JUNIOR

It's a studio in the back. See, here. Then we're puttin' a television camera right in front of that glass.

RAY arrives in the middle of this conversation.

RAY

Who's got a television camera?

JUNIOR & JANWAY

Brother Daly.

JANWAY

Raymond come look at this. Brother Daly's new church.

JUNIOR
Tabernacle. He's calling it a tabernacle.

RAY
What's he need a television camera for?

JUNIOR
So he can put his church service on television.

RAY
Ya'll are putting a television camera *inside a* church service?

JUNIOR
Brother Daly is. Way in the back.

JANWAY
Up on a riser Junior's fixing to build.

RAY (*takes the brown paper*)
Can I see?

JUNIOR (showing it to RAY)
I'll set the camera there and bolt it down and point it toward the altar and all the camera operator has to do is turn it on.

RAY
Camera operator in church.

JUNIOR
Brother Daly says shut-ins will be able to worship same as if they was right there in the pew.

JANWAY
I reckon it'll be a long time before a poor shut-in widow woman will be buying herself a television set.

RAY
Now of course nobody asked me, but I've got some...

JUNIOR JANWAY
(*both know what's coming*)
...Go on ahead, Rev. Now Raymond...

RAY

You know I worry about television. Now you're about to mix up television and religion?

JANWAY

I hear The Revelators are singing on television.

JUNIOR

Rev, everybody don't feel the same as you.
There's a mess've folks don't agree with you at all.

JANWAY

Raymond, Brother Daly might be able to help *more* people.
Those that'll be able to buy a television. Folks who don't get to church anyway.

JUNIOR

Brother Daly says they can mail in their requests and he'll pray for 'em right there in front of the camera.

RAY

They're gonna get their healing through the camera?
Nossir. No siree. Looking at a television set and waiting for your healing's not the same as a laying- on of hands.
I am willing to trust the Lord for my healing, just find me somebody anointed with the gift and start praying.
You're not preaching faith healing anymore, Cecil?

JANWAY

Yes I am. But I believe doctors can be healers too.
I know a man with heart trouble. Asked us to pray for him.
We prayed and the doctor did his work too, and the man pulled through. Faith *and* doctoring.
(the two preachers reach a divergent point in belief. Tension)
Coffee's ready. You want some?

JUNIOR

Rev don't drink coffee. He's waitin' on some

JUNIOR
Ice tea

RAY
Sweet tea

COKER enters, carrying a Dixie cup.

COKER

Reverend Jones, you said let you know when the tea's ready.
Here it is.

JUNIOR and JANWAY exchange a look. Everyone knows the churchwoman has a crush on Ray.

RAY

Thank you, Sister Coker.
(takes the cup)
I'd be much obliged if you'll go see if Sister Fern needs something to drink.

COKER

I already did that, Brother Jones.
(she doesn't move)

RAY

(sending her on her way)
You are a blessing, Sister.

COKER makes a half-move away, then stops, listening to the men

RAY

(takes a folded paper from his pocket, addresses the men)
Y'all got a minute? Coupla things. Who let Leon inside in that condition last time we were through here?

JANWAY *(teasing)*

Aw, Raymond, Leon just likes your preaching.
Every time you come to town, he repents.

JUNIOR

Course he'll be in some joint around the corner soon's you leave.

COKER

(shamelessly eavesdropping, misses their teasing, reacts with a poor soul expression/sound)

ALL the Men react to COKER

RAY

Is he still crop-dusting?

JANWAY

Sure is. He's the one dropped our handbills
for us, when he finished his spraying.

RAY

I hope he *flies* sober.

JANWAY

Tell you what, I'm not planning to personally
test that out for myself.

JUNIOR

Well he comes out here and prays, so maybe that's
what's keeping him safe up there.

COKER

*(misses the irony/teasing in their talk, she just can't help vocalizing her
agreement)*

Mmmm-hmmm

ALL the Men react to her again. Is she still here?

RAY

Junior, can you watch the entrance for us? Turn away
anybody with hootch? We got hundreds of folks due in here
for the Singing. Don't you know this'll be the time Leon'll
show up drunk with a truckload of his boys.

JUNIOR

Naw, Rev, that ain't a job I am willing to undertake.
I'm not telling a bunch of likkered-up white people
where they can and can't be going...

RAY

...I never thought about it like that, Junior.
We'll get somebody else to do it.

JANWAY

I'll put some deacons on it. I can get extra deacons
to work the flaps if there's a storm

RAY

Probably oughta call them in anyway.
If the wind kicks up and those flaps are all closed,

RAY (*continues*)
(*a little preacher humor*)
we're liable to get lifted up to heaven ahead of schedule.

COKER
(*gets this joke, laughs heartily, drawing their attention again*)

JANWAY (*to COKER*)
We're proud to have you in charge of our food volunteers again, Sister.

RAY
No need to mess with what works.

JUNIOR (*to RAY, teasing*)
Bet she's got something special cooked up just for you, Rev.

RAY (*to COKER*)
I imagine you've got plenty of food comin' in about now?
Isn't that right, Sister?

COKER
(*finally taking the hint, begins her exit*)
Oh my yes, I'd better get back over to those tables.

COKER, on her way out, bumps into KOUSIN KARL (one of the Revelators doubling), dressed in 1950's cool casual.

KARL
(*to JANWAY as he enters*)
Cecil! There you are! You gonna M.C. the Singing?
(*to COKER*)
...Oh, beg pardon.

COKER stops, flustered, fussing with her apron.

RAY
Sister Coker, have you met Kousin Karl?

COKER
Yes. I mean no. I mean on the radio.
(*to KARL*)
I heard you this morning. You were talking about the Singing today.

RAY

Karl, Sister Coker and her volunteers are rounding up all the food for dinner.

KARL (*flirty*)

(*takes COKER's hand and holds it*)

Y'all got any coconut cake out there?

COKER

Oh my yes. That's Sister Anthony's specialty.

(*confidentially*)

You want me to save you back a piece?

KARL

Will you? Will you do that for me?

I'll come and find you at dinnertime.

(*releases her hand*)

COKER hurries off, still flustered.

RAY

Karl, you ol' reprobate.

Get over here and let me hug your neck!

KARL and RAY hug.

RAY

Cecil, of course, you know Karl.

KARL and JANWAY greet each other.

RAY

Junior, I don't b'lieve you've met. This here is Karl, with the radio program Kousin Karl's Korral.

JUNIOR & KARL shake hands.

JUNIOR

You here for the Stuckey Brothers? They are something to see, aren't they?.

KARL

Uh huh. I want to hear them play. And The Revelators
(to RAY)
And your wife.

RAY

We're much obliged to you for announcing the Singing.

KARL

I hope Sister Fern can stop at the station this time and sing
for us. You two come on in and do a couple of numbers.

RAY

She'll be wantin' to take you up on that.
(teasing)
Y'know, you've given us so much publicity,
you're starting to sound like a *believer*.

KARL

You're not gonna get me with that one. No sir, I'm not a
churchgoer. I'm just out here for the music.

The women.

ZULA and FERN where we left them.

COKER rushes in.

COKER

Kousin Karl's here! I saw him.

FERN

He *said* he might come out!

COKER

He likes the way Sister Jones sings.

FERN

Sister *Fern*. If he's here, maybe I ought to sing.

ZULA

Maybe you ought to. He went to all this trouble.
Just one song and then we'll get you home to rest.
(makeup bag comes out of her purse again)

FERN
Mother, what are you doing?

ZULA
If you're gonna sing anyway, let's get you fixed up some.

FERN (*swatting ZULA away*)
Mother, stop.

COKER
She looks just fine the way the Lord made her.
Our people don't believe in makeup.

ZULA
Your people don't believe in anything. Everything's a sin.
You people...

FERN
Mother!
(*to COKER*)
I apologize.
My mother has not fully accepted Jesus into her heart.

COKER
Oh I could tell that, first time I laid eyes on her.
It's all right, Sister Jones. the Lord is my strength
in the face of the infidel.

ZULA
...What did you call me?...

BAND plays a gospel vamp.

FERN
I need to get in there.

ZULA holds onto FERN's arm to detain her.

ZULA (*steps back to survey FERN*)
You look awful.

FERN

It's my condition, mother. You know it throws off my color.
Well - and *this*.
(*pats her big tummy*)

ZULA

Some jewelry might help.

RAY joins them.

RAY

Honey, you sure you feel up to this?
We can put somebody else on next if you don't...

FERN runs to RAY, clinging. When these two are together, they occupy a tight space.

FERN

Raymond, is my hair frizzy? It *feels* frizzy. All this humidity.

RAY

No sugar, your hair's not frizzy. It's curly is all.
You're my big ol' doll-baby with big ol' doll-baby curls.

FERN

...Are you sure? Because I can't sing good when my hair's frizzy.

RAY

I know.

FERN

Maybe you could put some Vaseline in the back?
(*brings out her compact mirror to look*)

RAY

Sugar, you don't need a thing.

FERN (*tattling*)

...Mother was saying my color's not good.
RAY is guiding FERN into place near tent entrance

RAY (*to ZULA, direct but pleasant. This is not new*)
Zula, you just *will* take on over a thing.

We hear JANWAY's announcement coming from tent

JANWAY

Welcome to our All Day Singing!
All your favorites will be stopping by to play
and sing here all day and on into the night!

RAY

(looks at ZULA to make a point, while answering his wife)
You're perfect. They're waiting to hear you sing.
(gently removes the mirror from her hand, and looks directly into her eyes as he hands the compact to COKER)

RAY & FERN move onto platform.

BAND begins vamp, calling us back to the tent.

ZULA

(reaching to take compact from COKER)
Here. Let me have that. I'll hold onto it for her.

COKER *(refusing)*

He handed it to *me*.

Direct segue to:

Scene 3. All Day Singing

JANWAY at the mic, acting as announcer

JANWAY

Starting us off, we've got our evangelists, Brother Ray and Sister Fern Jones, who are holding a revival here in town for a few weeks. People have been driving from all over just to hear them preach and sing.

(looking for a signal)

Brother Jones? Oh, Sister Jones is coming out first.

(he moves over to help FERN onstage)

You gonnna sing one of your new ones today?

FERN
It'd be my pleasure.
(*she has a different idea*)
Tell you what
(*to the BAND*)
First, give me a little "Do Lord."

BAND begins **DO LORD**

FERN (*snaps a tempo*)
Let's take it about like this.
(*to JANWAY*)
Cecil, come over here and show us.

JANWAY (joking, it's a routine) moves to piano plays a honky-tonk boogie left hand in the tempo she suggests, the BAND picks it up.

FERN (*sings*)

3 - DO LORD

DO LORD, DO LORD, LORD REMEMBER ME
I SAID, DO LORD, DO LORD, LORD REMEMBER ME
OHHHHH DO LORD, DO LORD, LORD REMEMBER ME
WHOOAAA-OH PLEASE REMEMBER ME
(OH LORD REMEMBER ME)
(*to JANWAY*)
Help me out here, Cecil.

FERN (<i>call</i>)	JANWAY (<i>response</i>)
ONE OF THESE MORNINGS	DO LORD
IT WON'T BE LONG	DO LORD
(<i>together</i>)	
WELL LORD REMEMBER ME	
YOU WILL LOOK FOR ME	DO LORD
AND I'LL SURE BE GONE	DO LORD
(<i>together</i>)	
LORD REMEMBER ME	
ONE OF THESE DAYS	DO LORD
OH LORD	DO LORD
(<i>together</i>)	
LORD REMEMBER ME	
FERN (<i>big finish</i>)	
OH PLEASE REMEMBER ME	

Half light on FERN & JANWAY as song continues under.

Lights up on KARL AND RAY, standing off to one side watching.

RAY (*talking over song*)
That woman *testifies*. Oh yes she does.

KARL
The way your wife sings, Reverend, every time I hear her
I think to myself that woman ought to make records.

RAY
She'd agree with you on that. She would like to have some
records to sell when we travel, like the quartets do.

KARL
I mean regular records. To play on the radio.
To sell in record stores.

RAY (*this is not likely*)
Well, sure, but we'd need to find us a company
that'll record a woman singing hymns.

KARL
There's not a song your wife sings that sounds
anything *like* a hymn.

Lights up on FERN at the mic.

BAND plays gospel/blues intro to **JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS**

FERN (*sings*)
4 - JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS

NOW LET US HAVE A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS
TELL HIM ALL ABOUT OUR TROUBLES
HE'LL HEAR OUR FAINTEST CRY
ANSWER BY & BY
WHEN YOU FEEL A LITTLE PRAYER WHEEL TURNIN'
THEN YOU'LL KNOW A LITTLE FIRE IS BURNIN'
AND JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS
MAKES IT RIGHT
I MAY HAVE DOUBTS AND FEARS
MY EYES ARE FILLED WITH TEARS

BUT JESUS IS A FRIEND WHO WATCHES
DAY AND NIGHT
I GO TO HIM IN PRAYER
HE KNOWS MY EVERY CARE
AND JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS
MAKES IT RIGHT

PIANO plays walking bass lines under her for last chorus

NOW LET US HAVE A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS
TELL HIM ALL ABOUT OUR TROUBLES
HE'LL HEAR OUR FAINTEST CRY
ANSWER BY & BY
WHEN YOU FEEL A LITTLE PRAYER WHEEL TURNIN'
THEN YOU'LL KNOW A LITTLE FIRE IS BURNIN'
AND JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS
MAKES IT RIGHT

Cross-fade back to KARL & RAY

KARL

Now that right there. When she swings into that thing she does. That's what I mean. You don't hear how that sounds?

RAY (*delighted*)

I hear her. I hear her getting your attention so you'll listen to the message. She is something, all right.

(*smitten*)

Just *look* at her.

KARL

She is singing *dance hall* music.

RAY

She's singing for the glory of God. I tell you what, when I listen to her, I'm willing to enter into that joy right along with her.

(*kidding*)

Come on my brother, just let yourself be blessed.

KARL

Does anybody ever say her style's unusual for church? That it might be the devil's music? You people have so many rules about what's sinful.

RAY
Anybody brings that up to me..

KARL
...So people *do* mention it?

RAY
I tell 'em when you offer up your music in praise, then it's sanctified. Hank Williams? When he sings "I Saw The Light?" Sanctified. No matter where he sings it.

KARL (*still thinking*)
We could maybe record her singing spirituals the way she does, but the only place that'd play a woman that sounds like her would be one of the race stations. Course if she was to record some love songs too, or some country, blues maybe...

RAY
Once in a while, Karl, I get the feeling that you're trying to persuade my wife in a direction away from our calling.

KARL
Whoa, whoa. Hold on there Reverend. You're giving me way too much credit. I'm just telling you what I hear. Fern could sing for a month of Sundays and to my ear, she still sounds like a Saturday night. I don't know anyplace in the business for a woman, a *white* woman, who sings church music and sounds like that.

RAY
She says you've got a new radio show coming up in California, and you asked her to sing out there. Now how's a Pentecostal woman gonna sing on a program that plays only *worldly* music?

KARL
What I said to her - *exactly* what I said was - if her songs had less scripture, maybe I could use them at the end of the program, an inspirational closing number like they do.

RAY
Music is part of our ministry. It's a calling.

KARL

It's a *business*.

RAY

You ask her, she'll tell you a person doesn't have to sing jukebox songs to get noticed. People love church music. All kinds of people.

KARL

I *know* what people want to hear.
And by the by, Reverend, these people come to hear her, *because* she *doesn't* sing like a church woman.

RAY

I appreciate that, but there's other people doing fine selling their records, with church music. The Revelators...

KARL

...The Revelators are about to make a movie singing cowboy songs. The only gospel singers making money are singing other kinds of music too. The ones I'll put on my show are the ones who'll sing at the concerts I can sell tickets to.

RAY

She's not feelin' that well right now.
(*responds to the threat he perceives*)
She's *choosing* to sing church music, Karl, and I don't envy anybody trying to change her mind.
She's got a stubborn streak.

KARL

(*the politician, attempts to share a private joke*)
I can see how she comes by it. I've met her mama.
I admire a woman who speaks her piece, but it does look like Fern's trying to please you.

RAY

Me? It was Fern who wanted to sing under the big tents. When I heard the calling to preach, I told her I'd be happy pastoring a little church. She persuaded *me* that we oughta be evangelists. It's her and the quartets fillin' up these tents all over the South. Not my sermons.

KARL

Oh come on Reverend, I can tell a man who knows how to work a crowd. Maybe you and Fern oughta be the ones moving into a big tabernacle.

RAY

I am not called in that direction. But I don't want Fern hidin' *her* light. The more people hear her sing, the more people stay to hear the Word.

KARL

Times change, Reverend. There's nothing wrong with keeping up. Why wouldn't bigger towns, bigger auditoriums, make sense for you too?

RAY

You going out to Hollywood directly?

KARL

Yep. Lots of folks from the South are moving out to California.

RAY

(don't let the door hit you)

You won't leave without telling Fern goodbye?
She'll be sorry to see you go.

KARL

I'm not leaving yet. I promised her I'd stay and hear one of her new songs.

BAND plays intro: **I DO BELIEVE**

RAY

I gotta get back up there.

Lights warm on mic where we see FERN.

RAY joins her at mic, arm around her.

RAY

You gonna sing us one of your new ones?

FERN
I sure am. I just now finished writing this one.

RAY
(very close to her, flirty)
Well go *on* then honey, and *sang* us a song!

RAY steps away.

BAND increases tempo, intro to **I DO BELIEVE**.

FERN *(sings)*
5 - I DO BELIEVE

SOME FOLKS SAY THE BIBLE IS NOT TRUE
THEY SAY ITS TEACHINGS WE CANNOT BELIEVE
WELL I DON'T CARE WHAT THE WORLD MAY SAY
I BELIEVE IT ANYWAY
(she grips mic stand, dizzy, something's wrong)

BAND continues to play.

RAY rushes to her, moves her out of spotlight.

KARL *(to JANWAY)*
Should we call somebody?

JANWAY
No! I know what Raymond wants us to do.

JANWAY reaches the mic and takes charge

JANWAY *(signals BAND to stop)*
I'm sure she'll be fine. Let's take a minute right now
to say a prayer for Sister Fern.

Lights begin to fade.

Dear Lord, we hold up the name of your faithful servant...

Scene 4. Parsonage.

In the dark, we hear a woman,

ZULA
Hypocrite!

Lights up on parsonage. A kitchen table. Old chairs.

COKER puts covered dish on the table.

COKER
Don't you talk that way about Brother Jones! You don't have the right...You're not even a believer.

ZULA
Woman, let me tell you something. I believe God doesn't need to be taking little babies. Carrying that baby off to church and praying over her down at the altar.

COKER
We were all praying for her. You saw how we were praying.

BAND softly begins instrumental **6 - SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT.**

RAY and JANWAY enter behind ZULA. She doesn't see them.

ZULA
And what good did it do? I told him, I said Raymond, give me that baby. That baby has crossed over. And he said...

RAY
... I said we have to seek the Lord's will.

ZULA reacts as she sees/hears RAY

RAY (*continues*)
That's what I said. It's what Fern believes too. We pray and we ask God to guide us and if he sees fit to take our baby home to be with him, then we will have to wait and see her again in heaven.

ZULA
If a person believes in heaven in the first place.

RAY

Zula, you need to hold your peace. I know you are grieving,
but I don't have to answer to you on matters of faith.
I answer to God.

ZULA

Next time you talk to him, ask him why he took our little girl.
(to COKER)
Precious little thing. Did you see that hair?
Just like her mama. Baby Fern.

COKER

I saw it. I did.

ZULA

Didn't even get a chance to go to the hospital.
And when your prayers didn't keep her alive,
(to RAY)
you brought a doctor here for Fern. Hypocrite!

JANWAY

I brought the doctor to see Fern.
(this is news to RAY)
She lost so much blood. The women in there
(sits at the table)
with her were afraid she was slipping away.
I brought the doctor while you were at church.

RAY moves away from the group.

RAY

I'm going in to see my wife.

JANWAY

She doesn't know about the baby. We didn't tell her.
Doctor Duncan said she's too weak. He gave her
something.

ZULA

(weary, moves to get up)
I'll get our little girl ready.

JUNIOR enters, carrying a baby-sized basket (with a handle) lined with a pink blanket. We see the blanket spilling over the sides of the basket.

JUNIOR

Reverend Janway, will you ask Doctor Duncan to come back
(*with one hand, he gently tucks the blanket around the baby*)
to pronounce her.

JANWAY

I will do that, Junior.

JANWAY and JUNIOR exit together.

ZULA

I need to talk to the funeral parlor, get a dress for her...

COKER

I can help. I know everybody in town.
Let me go with you, Miz...

ZULA

... Call me Zula.

Lights begin to fade

COKER

Lastena. You can call me Lastena.

ZULA and COKER link arms to move away

COKER

Let's go find our angel a dress.

Cross fade. Lights up on pulpit

Scene 5. Pulpit

BAND plays **I DON'T KNOW** under.

RAY

I want to thank you all for helping my family through the
passing... the loss... through our hard time. I don't hardly
know where to start. Well, yes I do. Some of you fed us.
Some of you women sat with Sister Fern while she was in
bed such a long time. Bless your hearts. The things you did...
The things you did for our little girl...
Brother Dial's store gave us the...

COKER, from the shadows, stage whispers to RAY

COKER

Dress.

RAY

Dress. We put it on her when we laid her to rest.

The funeral home. They wouldn't let us...

Wouldn't take a penny.

That little...

(tries with gestures to define a baby coffin)

The white...

COKER, again from the shadows.

COKER *(stage whisper)*

Casket. White. Satin. Casket.

RAY

Casket. That little white casket we put our girl in.

FERN enters. She's dressed the way she looks at home, a full skirt, poet blouse, ballerina flats.

RAY (sees FERN)

You want to say something, honey?

(meets her halfway, arm around her)

FERN (to RAY)

I'm all right. I'm fine.

(disengages his arm, puts papers on the pulpit)

RAY moves away, watches from the shadows.

BAND stops playing.

FERN

Precious Lord is one of the songs I sing to myself when I
don't know what else to do. Y'all know it.

*(sings 7 - **PRECIOUS LORD** a capella)*

PRECIOUS LORD TAKE MY HAND

LEAD ME ON, LET ME STAND

I AM TIRED, I AM WEAK...

(she drops out, doesn't sing next line)

BAND catches up with her and plays the line, "I AM WORN." We feel the missing lyric. BAND continues as she catches up.

FERN (*sings*)
THROUGH THE STORM
THROUGH THE NIGHT
LEAD ME ON TO THE LIGHT
TAKE MY HAND, PRECIOUS LORD
LEAD ME HOME

BAND continues **PRECIOUS LORD** under.

FERN
It was written from the depths of despair by a man
whose wife and baby died. I've been singing it at home
every day. Sometimes when we feel like others have let
us down, there's only one place to turn. This is a song
I wrote about how that feels.
(*to the BAND*)
Y'all got your lead sheet?

FERN speaks as the BAND switches music to **I DON'T KNOW**.

FERN (*has a last minute thought*)
I used to get down on my knees to pray every day,
but now, *this*...
...this is how I pray.

REVELATORS move in close (COKER is now a REVELATOR)

FERN (*sings with REVELATORS*)

8 - I DON'T KNOW

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO WITHOUT THE SAVIOR
WHERE OH WHERE COULD I GO?
I DON'T SEE HOW I COULD GO ON WITHOUT HIM
I DON'T SEE
I DON'T KNOW
IT SEEMS TO ME EVERY HOUR I NEED HIM
SEEMS TO ME, I DEPEND ON HIM SO
OH WHAT WOULD I DO WITHOUT THE SAVIOR?
I DON'T KNOW
I DON'T KNOW

FERN

(doesn't start the next line, struggles, steps back)

BAND keeps playing.

A REVELATOR

(moves toward pulpit where her lyrics are, finds her lyrics, holds them, reads them, sings)

WHEN TROUBLES COME

I LEAN HARD ON THE SAVIOR

AND HE DRIES MY TEARS AS THEY FLOW

RAY moves toward FERN, escorts her off.

REVELATORS *(move in close to sing)*

I DON'T WANT TO BEAR MY BURDENS WITHOUT HIM

THAT I KNOW, THAT I KNOW

IT SEEMS TO ME EVERY HOUR I NEED HIM

SEEMS TO ME I DEPEND ON HIM SO

OH WHAT WOULD I DO WITHOUT THE SAVIOR?

I DON'T KNOW

I DON'T KNOW

Lights fade.

We hear Ink Spots' **MY PRAYER** in the scene transition.

Scene 6. Parsonage.

Spare living room. Old radio on end table. Old couch and chair.

Wooden coffee table with cups, a covered dish, bowls, spoons.

FERN walks directly into this scene from the revival, picks up guitar and pad and pencil. Sits down and sings along with Ink Spots.

FERN *(sings)*

9 - MY PRAYER

...THAT YOU'LL ALWAYS BE THERE

AT THE END OF MY PRAYER

FERN writes on a pad as the recitative comes up.

ZULA enters, as always, fully done up, bright dress, big earrings, a sparkly brooch, bold makeup, sits, picks up coffee cup.

INK SPOTS (*on the radio*)
MY PRAYER IS TO LINGER WITH YOU

ZULA
You used to sing this.

FERN (*scribbles on her pad*)
Shhhh...just a second, Mother.

INK SPOTS (sing)
AT THE END OF THE DAY
IN A DREAM THAT'S DIVINE

ZULA (*burlesques recitative*)
At the end of the day
In a dream that's divine

FERN
Shhh... Mother!

ZULA
What are you doing?

FERN turns down volume. INK SPOTS continue under.

FERN
I take down the songs that play on the radio,
then I study them.

ZULA
Why do you bother with the songs on the radio?
You don't sing that kind of music anymore.

FERN
I'm writing something new, sort of the way they do,
like a sermonette.

FERN turns off radio.

ZULA
Oh lord, you're not gonna *preach* are you? I hope
you're not gonna start trying to preach at me.

FERN
Someday, I'll write a song that'll make a lot of money. *I will.*
Then we will buy us a house, and all new furniture.

ZULA

I hope you do.
(*indicating couch*)
This is pitiful.

FERN

I know exactly what kind of couch we'll have.

ZULA

I told you when he started in preaching, you'll never have anything.

FERN

Raymond doesn't care about money.
He is following his calling.

ZULA

Got you living in this little bitty house, with worn out furniture, right next door to a church.

FERN

But we're gonna tour some more, as soon as I get my strength back. And then when we save up enough for a house, we'll have plenty of room and we'll have a baby.

ZULA

That man owes you. You gave up everything.

FERN

You blame Raymond for everything. You always do.

ZULA

I blame him for not taking that baby girl to a doctor.

FERN

I love my husband.

ZULA

And dragging you out here to *fester*, when you ought to be singing for big crowds.

FERN (wistful)

I do wish I could have sung one of my new songs for Karl that time.

ZULA (*won't leave the topic alone*)
And you could have. (*big sigh*)
Losing that little baby like that.

FERN
I don't want to talk about the baby any more.

ZULA takes out compact, applies lipstick, studies herself in the mirror.

ZULA
What do you think of my hair like this?

FERN
I'm surprised you cut it.

ZULA (*fluffs it*)
Everybody's wearing it this way in California.

FERN
Nuh uh. Not all the movie stars.

ZULA
How do you know what movie stars wear? You don't
go to picture shows anymore. (*sarcasm*) Since they're a sin.

FERN
I see movie magazines at the drugstore. Some movie stars
leave their hair long and they pull one side back like this.
(*demonstrates*)
Sometimes I do that too.

ZULA
Uh huh. That looks good. Here. Put his over there...
(*removes rhinestone clip from her own neckline,*
clips it onto Fern's side-do)
Much better.

FERN reaches for compact, examines the glitter in her hair.

FERN
(*realizes she's been sucked in, removes clip*)
Mother, you know I am not going to wear jewelry.
Our church doesn't believe in it.
(*hands clip back to ZULA*)

ZULA

Can't even find me any decent wine in this town.
Not a single bottle of Mogen David. Course if I did take a sip
of wine in here, Raymond would probably have a fit.

(whiplash subject change, common to these two)

You look pale. Did you take your tonic?

FERN

I take it every day.

ZULA

(a big show of leaning close to study FERN's face)

Doesn't look like it's working. You could use a little
makeup. Oh, that's right. Your husband doesn't want
you to look pretty.

FERN

Hush, mother. You're still blaming Raymond.
You blame him when I'm *tired*. And when I'm *pale*.

ZULA

I can't get used to seeing you like this. The way these
people dress for church! Those churchwomen in their
little wash dresses.

(disgust runs through her like a chill)

You take that woman - Miz Coker. Those dresses!

FERN

She makes them herself.

ZULA

Out of what? Flour sacks?

FERN

Every time you come out here to visit, all you do is
pick, pick, pick. You keep at me, 'til I cry. Is that what
you want, mother, you want to make me cry?

ZULA *(changes the subject again, lifts dish lid)*

Ooooo...fresh peaches!

(serves some into a small bowl)

Did Miz Coker makes this cobbler?

FERN (*mood shift, without rancor*)
Raymond made it for us. Isn't that sweet?
(*dishes herself some*)
He knows you love peaches. He said "You and your
mama like to drink your coffee of an afternoon." He
got that coffee you like and he made us some cobbler.

ZULA
(*companionable, sipping coffee*)
I miss coffee with chickory. They don't sell it in California.

FERN
I'll mail you some.

ZULA
Or put some in your suitcase and get on the train and
come spend some time with me out there.

FERN
I love the train. I'd like to book a compartment.

ZULA
Come to California with me.
You ought to be singing on television.

FERN
I can't right now. Soon as I rest up, we've got revivals
booked in - I don't know - five or six states. Raymond
booked them on account of me.

ZULA (*lightning shift, angry*)
It makes me sick you not using your voice the way you
ought to. You could be making money if it wasn't for
your religion. Your *husband's* religion.

FERN
It's my religion too, Mother. And you would've found
something wrong with anybody I married.
You never have a good thing to say about men.
Just because you never found the right one.
(*whiplash back to girlish, dreamy*)
Wasn't Raymond cute when we met him, Mother?
You said you thought he was cute.

ZULA

He was different back then.

FERN

You danced with him as much as I did! Every Saturday night.

ZULA

He danced with me to get *around* me - I guess.
So he could run off with you. You marry one of the
best dancers in the county and then you join a church
that thinks dancing's a *sin*.

FERN

You *did* like him back then. You *know* you did. Why don't
you like him now?

ZULA

You could have married a man with money. There were
plenty that wanted you.

FERN

I've got a husband who loves me. Takes care of me.
I've got *Raymond*.

(picks up her guitar, strums a chord, brightens)

And the Lord keeps on sending me songs.
This one's about you.

Light down on ZULA, up on FERN as she sings

FERN (*sings*)

10 - MY PRAYER FOR THE ONES I LOVE

THAT THE LORD WOULD WATCH O'RE THEM
WHEREVER THEY MAY ROAM
THAT HE WOULD PROTECT THEM
AND LEAD THEM SAFELY HOME

BAND accompanies, FERN stops playing guitar

THAT NOT FOR ANY MOMENT
WOULD THEY BE FREE FROM HIS CARE
THAT'S MY PRAYER FOR THE ONES I LOVE

FERN
And then I might put in a talking part, right here.

BAND continues melody, FERN speaks these lyrics.

IF ONE OF THOSE I LOVE, LORD
HAS NEVER SOUGHT THY GRACE

ZULA
I told you not to preach at me.

FERN stops recitative, moves on to the end.

BAND drops out. FERN and her guitar finish.

FERN (sings)
OH LORD, I PRAY YOU'LL KEEP THEM
THAT'S MY PRAYER FOR THE ONES I LOVE

Cross-fade lights up inside the tent.

Scene 7. Revival.

RAY (*at pulpit*)
Whoo-ee it's hot in here today.
Can somebody bring me a sip of something?

COKER stands in the shadows

RAY (*coaxes COKER*)
It's all right, Sister Coker, come on in here.

COKER, wears a print dress and apron, carrying a Dixie cup.
A deer in the headlights. She starts, stops.

RAY takes cup, drains it, takes her by the hand, brings her to mic.

COKER fumbles with apron strings.

RAY (*continues*)

Leave that apron on now. Let folks see a picture of a hard-working Christian woman. Standing right here. Sister Coker. My wife and I have been acquainted with this dear soul for some time now and I know her to be one of the best cooks in the South, and one of the best gardeners. Right there, that's two things close to my heart.

COKER inches backward while he talks.

RAY tugs her back next to him. Reaches under pulpit for his bible.

RAY (*to congregation*)

Oh now don't ya'll go getting nervous. I'm not fixin' to preach. No sermons on a Singing day.

But I am looking for a particular bible passage...

(*releases her hand to turn pages*)

Here it is.

(*to COKER, as if it's only the two of them*)

A story that puts me in mind of the work churchwomen like you do when you feed all of us.

(*points out the passage to COKER*)

Tell 'em the chapter and verse.

COKER

(*looks at the Bible page, speaks softly*)

Matthew.

RAY

Speak up, dear heart. I want all the younguns to hear this and learn how to find the best stories in the good book.

Let's hear you now...

COKER

Matthew Chapter 14 verse 19.

RAY

And also verse 20.

COKER

(*believes he wants her to repeat after him*)

And verse 20.

RAY

It's about the miracle of the loaves and the fishes.
How the food increased as the crowd increased.
All that food outside? Well it's people like Sister Coker who
find a way to feed everybody – no matter how many show up
at a Singing.

(to COKER

I'm guessing there might even be some left over tomorrow
to take to the shut-ins and the poor folks home.

(closes bible, pats it)

That's right. That's how we ought to do. And it's all in here.

RAY

(continues - to COKER)

You been out there since sun-up, I know you have.
Meetin' every car, bringing in food, setting it all out for
dinnertime, organizing volunteers from every church
around here. You have, haven't you?

COKER agrees, nods, warming to this praise.

RAY

You know what you are? You are just *all* of it. That's what
you are. You got any of your fried chicken saved for me?

COKER (*very quiet*)

Twice-dipped.

RAY

Beg pardon?

COKER (*a bit stronger*)

Twice-dipped. My buttermilk chicken.

RAY

Mmm. Mmm. Mmm. Don't you let Brother Janway
have all the wings, now you hear?

COKER (*takes him seriously*)

Oh I wouldn't. I never would.

RAY

What else you got out there?

COKER

Some red Jell-O for Sister Jones, like she likes,
with fruit cocktail in it.

RAY

That about takes care of my family. I don't know
what the rest of you are gonna eat.

(tone shifts, trying to wrap this up)

Thank you, sister.

COKER

There's hot coffee and sweet tea and lemonade...

RAY *(half-heartedly)*

Uh huh. Can't wait.

COKER

(all wound up and full voice)

There's all kinds of pies and deep dish cobblers and
red flannel cake. Scripture cake. Coconut cake...

RAY

...Well thank you Sister Coker.

You better be saving some of it for a surprise...

COKER

(she will finish her list)

Oh and rice pudding and ambrosia...

RAY

...Now we don't want to hinder your progress out yonder...

COKER

...Corn on the cob...

RAY

(trying to end this, giving the BAND a song cue)

Did you grow that corn

(broad emphasis while looking at the BAND)

IN THE GARDEN?

BAND gets his hint, plays intro: **IN THE GARDEN**

RAY walks over to the BAND, still holding COKER by the hand.

RAY
(holds, pretends he just noticed the tune)
Wait a minute now, that's one of my favorites.
Yes, let's *do* that one.
(to the BAND)
I'm gonna start us off (to audience)
and y'all just jump in, if you feel the spirit.
(to COKER, who hasn't moved)
Now Sister, if you need to leave us to get back to your work,
you go on ahead.
Unless you want to stay and sing with me....

COKER panics and scoots out of there.

RAY (continues, sings)
11- IN THE GARDEN

I COME TO THE GARDEN ALONE
WHILE THE DEW IS STILL ON THE ROSES
AND THE VOICE I HEAR FALLING ON MY EAR
THE SON OF GOD DISCLOSES.

(to audience)
Y'all sing it if you know it.

RAY (and audience continue)
AND HE WALKS WITH ME
AND HE TALKS WITH ME
AND HE TELLS ME I AM HIS OWN
AND THE JOY WE SHARE
AS WE TARRY THERE
NONE OTHER HAS EVER KNOWN

Lights down on RAY.

Scene 8. Parsonage.

FERN sits on the couch with her guitar, strums, stops and writes something down.

RAY enters, taking off jacket, loosening tie.

RAY
How you feeling doll baby?

FERN

(lays down guitar)

Not good. I feel like crying all the time lately.

RAY

I know, I know sweetheart. I do too. We'll get through this, with the Lord's help.

FERN

I miss my mother. I want to go see her.

RAY

But sugar, we've got several more commitments before we can take time off. I booked us places so you could sing.

FERN

I am trying, honey. But some days...

RAY

...you want your mama. I understand. We'll get out there soon. I'd like to keep you close 'til you're feeling better.

FERN

My mother said I can rest up in California, same as here.

RAY

Honey, your mama was just here for a long visit, and you two spent half your time fussing and fighting.

FERN

You don't understand...

RAY (more amused than upset)

I understand that you two are about to wear a rut in the road between here and California. I know that for sure.

FERN

Soon's as I get my energy back, there's a lot I want to do. I need to learn how to drive so I can go to the radio station.

RAY

I'm happy to take you.
You never had any interest in driving before....

FERN

...Mail out some tapes to different people.
(*drifting, vague, running out of steam soon as the idea occurred*)
Other things. Other places.

RAY

I'll teach you to drive, doll baby. Anytime.

FERN

I didn't say for *sure*. I just said I'm *thinking* about learning to drive, so when I get famous, I can get myself places.

RAY

You fixin' to get famous before suppertime? Because I made some chili like you like, and some fried cornbread.

FERN

(*picks up her guitar*)

Honey couldn't you manage the next revivals without me?
You've got plenty of musicians around here. Brother Janway
- everybody loves to hear him play. I could go see my
mama and...

RAY

...I'd sure hate to have to tell all those people - *thousands* of people at all those Singings and the ones who listen to you on the radio - that you won't be there to sing for them.

FERN

I guess.

RAY

How's your new song coming along?

FERN

(*excited-mood change*)

I think this is my best one yet! You know how I usually write songs for my own voice? Well, honey, everybody can sing this one. Listen.

(sings – **12 - I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED**)

THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE
WHO SAY WE CANNOT TELL
WHETHER WE ARE SAVED
OR WHETHER ALL IS WELL

RAY

(sits on coffee table, facing her)

I like it, honey.

You still calling it "I Was There When It Happened"?

FERN

Oh I wouldn't change the name. The Lord sends me my
titles first, then I put the songs to them. Someday,
Raymond, one of my songs is gonna sell so many records...

RAY

(this is a familiar refrain)

I know it, sugar.

FERN

And we'll have a pink Cadillac. And our own house

RAY

If that's what you want, then that's what we'll get.

FERN

I will wear a mink stole to the DeeJay Convention in
Nashville every year.

RAY picks up the guitar and strums a chord.

RAY

You sure are pretty when you're writin' songs, Mrs. Jones.

FERN

Raymond, you go on now. I want to finish this.

FERN reaches for her guitar.

RAY teases, moves the guitar away, stands up to sing to her, props one
foot on the coffee table.

RAY (*sings*)
13 - HEY GOOD LOOKING)

SAY, HEY GOOD LOOKING
WHATCHA GOT COOKING
HOW'S ABOUT COOKIN SOMETHING UP WITH ME

FERN
(*sings a line back to him*)
HEY SWEET BABY, DONT'CHA THINK MAYBE...

RAY (*interrupts*)
...You remember that bathing suit you had - the one I liked?
You still got that?

FERN
Oh honey I threw that old thing out. Got no use for it now.

RAY
What if we wanna go swimming?

FERN
Raymond! I can't put on a bathing suit.
Somebody from church might see me.

RAY (*leans in*)
I know where there's a creek. Never seen a soul there
but me. Water's nice and cool, big trees all around...

FERN
My bathing suit's gone, sugar.
(*she's sad, remembering*)
You know we agreed a Christian woman can't be
showing her bare skin. Give me that guitar back now.
(*plays at tugging it away from him*)

RAY
I've got a picture of you in that bathing suit, swimming
down by your Mama's house.

FERN
You do not! Show it to me.

RAY (*taking out his wallet*)
Carried it in my billfold ever since.
(*sits by her, shows it to her*)

FERN
(*her face close to his*)
Honey, do you think I'm still that pretty - without all
my makeup?

RAY
A doll baby. That's just what you look like. A big ol'
walking talking doll baby with great big doll-baby eyes.

FERN
Remember when we used to dance? Every Saturday
night, every single week, we'd be at the town dance.

RAY
(*a bit puzzled at this subject*)
But darlin' when we got saved, we agreed no more picture
shows. No dances.

FERN
I didn't know how much I would miss dancing.

RAY
(*stands up, surprises himself too*)
You want to dance? I will dance with you. A man oughta be
able to dance with his sweetheart in his own house.
(*takes her hand, lifts her from the couch*)

FERN is delighted.

RAY
What about music, you want to know?
Well I will provide the music.
(*puts her hand in dance position on his shoulder*)
And I dedicate this song to my doll-baby.
This one goes out to Fern Salisbury, the most beautiful girl in
El Dorado, Arkansas.

BAND: Brushes/rhythm keep time as RAY starts to sing

14 - SLEEPY TIME GAL

SLEEPY TIME GAL
YOU'RE TURNING NIGHT INTO DAY
SLEEPY TIME GAL
YOU DANCE THE EVENING AWAY

RAY & FERN dance. It's real dancing, the two of them look like they know what they're doing. Closed position, a bit of open position, a couple of twirls at the end. They are intimate, spontaneous.

FERN and RAY (*sing together*)
BEFORE EACH SILVERY STAR
FADES OUT OF SIGHT
PLEASE GIVE ME ONE LITTLE KISS
AND THEN LET US WHISPER GOODNIGHT

RAY (*sings alone*)
IT'S GETTING LATE AND DEAR
YOUR PILLOW'S WAITING

FERN
(*collapsing, happy, on the couch, picks up guitar*)
Sugar, you go on now. I've got to work.
(*plays a chord*)
When I finish this one, I'm gonna put it on tape and mail
some tapes around and find somebody to record it.

RAY
Now honey, that might take a while. We don't know
anybody who's recording gospel right now – not personally.

FERN
Well of course I will *pray* about it first. The Lord will
send us somebody to record them.

RAY
(*affirms her confidence*)
You tell me where you want me to mail your tapes and
I'll take them down to the post office for you.

Cross-fade.

Scene 9. Radio studio in California.

Control room glass visible in rear. Western-type wood-burned letters on a faux-rustic sign says "Kousin Karl's Korral."

A couple of stools. Two mics.

BAND starts and stops, tuning up, rehearsing

KOUSIN KARL, casual clothes, paces, script in hand, making changes

ZULA enters, dressed to the hilt

KARL

(pulls up a stool for her)

Make yourself comfortable, Zula.

I'm glad you called. We worked her in right here...

(shows her on paper)

...for the closing song. Did she tell you the name of it?

ZULA

It's a new one, "When I Meet You."

KARL

(making a note)

When I...

ZULA

When I Meet You

KARL *(writing)*

...Meet You. Is it a good one?

ZULA

She just played it for me...it's kinda...

(snaps to show him approximate tempo)

...peppy. It's about heaven.

KARL *(gesture - groan)*

Ohhh...

ZULA

It's all right. It's not real preachy.

FERN rushes in, girlish, excited, looking around, charmed.

FERN (*to KARL*)
Can I just hug your neck?

KARL delighted, a bit flustered, hugs her back.

FERN
I cannot believe I am in *this place*. In Hollywood.
On Kousin Karl's Korral. Everybody back home listens to you
every week. I told Raymond to let the whole church know to
tune in. I hope I'm not too nervous.

KARL
Just sing the way you've been singing and you'll be fine.
(*picks up headphones, puts them around his neck*)
We're coming back from a commercial break and then we're
ready for you. Use that mic over there.

FERN moves to indicated mic.

KARL (*to control booth*)
Test. Test. Levels still good? Let's roll tape on Fern...

ZULA (*stage whisper to FERN*)
They're gonna tape you!

FERN
I heard.

KARL (*almost too casual*)
I've got a couple of people who might be interested in
hearing you.

ZULA and FERN
(*signal excitement to each other*)

KARL
(*headphones back on, talks into mic*)
Folks, here's a friend from back home, a little
girl's been singing on the radio all over the South...

BAND ramps up **WHEN I MEET YOU** to tempo under KARL

KARL (*continues*)
... and we're happy to have her visiting us in the Korral
today. We call her Sister Fern!

FERN (*sings*)

15 - WHEN I MEET YOU

OH WHEN I MEET YOU UP IN HEAVEN
UP THERE WHERE SHINING CROWNS ARE GIVEN
WE'LL TALK TOGETHER
WE'LL WALK TOGETHER
HAND IN HAND, HAND IN HAND
WE'LL TAKE A STROLL BESIDE THE RIVER
WHERE SEPARATIONS COME NO NEVER
WHEN I MEET YOU, WHEN I GREET YOU
IN THAT LAND
THERE WILL BE NO STORMY WEATHER
UP THERE IN HEAVEN'S SUNNY CLIME
WE'LL HAVE THE TIME TO SPEND TOGETHER
WE'LL NEVER HAVE TO HURRY
CAUSE THERE'S LOTS OF TIME
THERE'LL BE NO GRIEF
THERE'LL BE NO CRYIN
THERE'LL BE NO PAIN
THERE'LL BE NO DYIN
WHEN I MEET YOU
WHEN I GREET YOU
OVER THERE

KARL indicates to BAND and FERN to sing another chorus

BAND swings into rockabilly style.

OH THERE WILL BE NO STORMY WEATHER
UP THERE IN HEAVEN'S SUNNY CLIME
WE'LL HAVE THE TIME TO SPEND TOGETHER
WE'LL NEVER HAVE TO HURRY
CAUSE THERE'S LOTS OF TIME
THERE'LL BE NO GRIEF
THERE'LL BE NO CRYIN
THERE'LL BE NO PAIN
THERE'LL BE NO DYIN
WHEN I MEET YOU
WHEN I GREET YOU
OVER THERE

KARL

(headphones on - faces control booth)

Y'all got it?

(listening - mood change - serious, speaks to control booth)

No! When? Are they sure?

(to ZULA and FERN)

They're saying Hank Williams died! Last night.

It came over the news.

ZULA

That poor man.

FERN

No. That can't be.

KARL

(holds one side of headphone to his ear, listens)

In the back seat of his Cadillac. On his way to sing
someplace. Driver thought he was sleeping.

FERN *(to ZULA)*

I have to get home right now. Raymond.

ZULA

We can call him.

FERN

I'm gonna call him and tell him I'm coming home
on the next train.

KARL

But you just got here. There's nothing anybody can do for
Hank now except plan his funeral.

ZULA *(to KARL)*

You're wasting your breath.

FERN

You don't understand, Karl, how much Raymond loves Hank
Williams. My husband will be walking the floor and grieving.
He won't eat and he won't sleep until he prays Hank over to
the promised land. It's what he did when his brother died
and he loves Hank just like a brother.

(she's worked up)

I need to be there. Sit with him. Make him some tea.

ZULA *(to KARL)*

The two of them.

I can't even begin to understand the two of them.

FERN

Mother, I'll meet you out at the car. I need to get back to your house and get packed.

FERN is in motion.

KARL

Fern, wait a minute! I was saving this for a surprise. I got you a spot on Cliffie Stone's Hometown Jamboree this weekend.

ZULA

Television! Fern. Wait and sing on Cliffie Stone's show, then you can go back home.

FERN *(to KARL, genuinely torn)*

I would love to sing on television. That's my dream. When I hear about Johnny Cash and them singing on television I always think someday it'll be me.

(we can see her trying to resolve this)

But Raymond needs me. I have to get home right quick.

KARL *(building up a head of steam)*

It wasn't easy convincing Cliffie to let you have the inspirational spot. He's got big stars he can get. Fern, there's not going to be anybody else who *cares* about you the way I do. I want to help you, but you running off like this...

FERN

(gives KARL a long hug and a kiss on the cheek)

I can't help it, Karl. I've got to go.

FERN grabs her purse and runs out the door.

KARL is stunned, like a rejected suitor

ZULA picks up her purse, turns back to KARL

ZULA

She *will* come back, if I have to bring her back myself.

Blackout.

Scene 10. Parsonage

Background is the front of a modest white frame house, getting on toward dusk. Everybody's on the porch.

Old wooden steps for seating. Couple of wooden chairs from the kitchen. A simple bench.

JANWAY, RAY and FERN lounge. A guitar is nearby. One picks up the guitar and strums once in a while during conversation.

FERN (*to JANWAY*)

I bet all the church ladies loved you singing and playing while I was gone.

RAY

You *know* they did.

JANWAY

Come on now, Fern, nobody can replace you. They'll be glad to see you come Sunday.

ZULA enters, finds a place to sit.

JANWAY (*continues*)

Now that you're home, I'll be heading down to my new church in Westwego.

ZULA

Cecil, what's this I hear, you're moving to the bayou *and* you're getting married?

JANWAY

I found me a pretty woman who said yes to being a poor preacher's wife, so I figured I better grab her quick.

ZULA (*flirty*)

I thought you were gonna wait for me. You don't think I'd make a good preachers wife?

JANWAY

Nope. Noooo. I do not.

ZULA

It's true I've got no use for church, but I do enjoy the music.
I know it by heart.

JANWAY

How do you like living in California?

ZULA

It's where the jobs are, Cecil. Folks from the South keep coming, and a bunch of us get together, so when you're out my way, you know where to find a welcome. Fern'll be back to California soon. Karl might put her on television.

FERN (*jumps in to defuse RAY*)

Singing the "inspirational" song at the end like Pat Boone and Tennessee Ernie do.

JANWAY (*rubbing his arm*)

Whoo! That right there, that gives me chill bumps, I don't mind saying. Sister Fern on television.

RAY

Looks like Karl is sweet on my doll-baby.

FERN

I doubt he's planning to put me on television anytime soon. Last time I tried to talk to him, he was still mad at me for leaving that day.

RAY (*too casual*)

You been talking with Karl?

FERN

About my new songs. To see if he knows any singers who might record them.

COKER arrives, carrying a dish

COKER

Welcome home, Sister Jones.

FERN gets up to hug her.

FERN
Sister *Fern*.

COKER
I made chicken and dumplings.

JANWAY
You promise you'll teach me how to make those dumplings
before I leave?

COKER
I wish you weren't going so far...

JANWAY
Louisiana's not that far.

COKER
Well, on the bus...

SOMEBODY strums a chord.

SOMEBODY hums the first notes of **SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT**

RAY
Tell you what, you can ride with us when we go down there
to visit him.

GUITAR plays the first notes of SWING LOW and JANWAY starts.
It's spontaneous front-porch singing.

JANWAY (*sings*)
16 - SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT

SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME

GUITAR stops. Singers join one at a time a capella, leaning into the
blend physically. Very tight bluegrass/Appalachian harmony.

FERN adds a second part.

JANWAY & FERN (*sing*)
SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME.

Chorus will repeat with three parts, before the verse.

JANWAY (*sings*)
SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT

RAY joins in, adding a third part.

JANWAY & FERN & RAY (*sing*)
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME
SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT
COMIN FOR THE CARRY ME HOME

RAY (*solo*)
I LOOKED OVER JORDAN
AND WHAT DID I SEE

JANWAY & FERN & RAY
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME

RAY (*solo*)
A BAND OF ANGELS
COMIN AFTER ME

JANWAY & FERN & RAY
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME

FERN (*solo*)
(*changes tempo to swingy-blues*)
SOMETIMES I'M UP, SOMETIMES I'M DOWN

JANWAY (to ZULA & COKER)
C'mon. Jump on in here.

ZULA's up and moving around, snapping her fingers, swinging her hips,
moving across the porch.

ALL (*sing*)
COMING FOR TO CARRY ME HOME

JANWAY (*likes this sound*)
That's the time!

FERN (*solo*)
BUT STILL MY SOUL FEELS HEAVEN-BOUND

ALL
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME
(*there's snapping and clapping and ZULA moving around*)
SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME
SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT

(*exaggerated slow finish, everybody watching each other*)
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME

Murmurs, smiles, delighted with themselves.

COKER
It's sure nice to have you back singing
on the porch with us, Sister Jones...*Fern*.

RAY
Well, I'll be! You got her to call you "*Fern*," Fern.

FERN (to COKER)
Dear heart, why don't you stay and have supper with us?
Looks like you brought plenty.

COKER
(*doesn't need to be persuaded, gets up, picks up her dish*)
I'll just warm this up inside.

ZULA
I'm fixing to go make some coffee.

COKER and ZULA continue talking companionably as they leave.

COKER
Maybe some cornbread?

ZULA
You use bacon grease in yours?

COKER

Can't hardly call it cornbread 'less it's made
with bacon grease

RAY (*conspiratorial*)

Cecil, tell Fern what you found out...
(*prodding Cecil to start his sales pitch*)
...about the land...

JANWAY

Raymond told you about the families looking
to build a new church in Bogalusa?
(*not wanting to step on any toes*)

RAY

I mentioned it.

FERN

He told me, yes.

JANWAY

They want pastors with a strong music ministry and when I
said you two might be available, they offered, as a *gift* mind
you, some land for you to build a house on. And now they're
offering to pay to *build* the house too.

FERN

It wouldn't be a parsonage? It would be *ours*. Belong to us,
No matter what?

JANWAY

It would belong to *you*, not to the church. The District feels
like you two have a gift to pioneer, to bring in people. With
your music and your dedication to the Word, you two can
plant a new church anywhere and it'll grow.
Louisiana needs you.

RAY

Just wait, sugar, 'til you hear the rest of it!

JANWAY

...and they will give a sum of money - it's a love offering -
to use for decorating. New furniture and such.

FERN

New furniture? That I get to pick out?

RAY

And honey, Junior and Margie are living right there.
Junior might be able to build our house.

FERN

Junior is so talented. He could help me decorate!

JANWAY

I expect he would.

RAY

I *know* he would. Doll-baby, you could sing at Brother Daly's
tabernacle. It's a quick trip to New Orleans.

FERN

How far from Bogalusa to New Orleans?

RAY (*checking with JANWAY*)

Sixty - sixty-five miles?

JANWAY

Across Lake Ponchartrain, on the new causeway.

FERN (*to RAY*)

(*the child again*)

You'll drive me?

Lights inside the house coming up.

JANWAY

If he won't, I'll come over there and take you.

FERN

I'm gonna go call Junior and Marge right now.

JANWAY (*delighted*)

Now, did she just say yes?

RAY

I b'lieve she did.

(*to FERN, holds her hand, he is proposing*)

Sugar, will you do this with me? Build a new church in
Louisiana and pastor there?

FERN
As long as I can use my music too, well...yes, I will.

JANWAY
I know I heard yes that time.

FERN (*hugging RAY*)
A home of our own. Raymond, we are going to have a home!

JANWAY
Who's going to tell Sister Coker the Joneses are leaving
Arkansas?

Good natured arguing as all begin to move.

FERN
Will one of you do it?

RAY
Awww honey I don't want to tell her.

FERN
Well I can't do it. I'll be on the phone.

RAY
Cecil, I figure you'll want to tell her.

JANWAY
Oh no. Not me.

Lights begin to dim on porch.

BAND vamps **SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT**

Lights up on REVELATORS standing nearby. JANWAY moves toward them. One of them hands JANWAY his REVELATOR coat. He puts it on. REVELATORS quickly move into a show-biz verse of the song. Up-tempo, rockabilly/gospel harmony.

REVELATORS (*sing*)
IF YOU GET THERE BEFORE I DO
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME
TELL ALL MY FRIENDS I'M COMIN TOO
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME
SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT
COMIN FOR TO CARRY ME HOME
SWING LOW SWEET CHARIOT
(the four parts stack, one at a time, to a big finish)
COMIN
COMIN
COMIN
COMIN
FOR TO CARRY ME HOME

Blackout
House lights up

ACT BREAK

INTERMISSION

ACT II

Scene 1. Pink house in the bayou.

Lights up on living room in Bogalusa. Boxes stacked. Sparse furniture.

FERN sits on a straight chair, strums a chord on guitar

FERN (*sings*)

17 - LET TOMORROW BE

BY TOMORROW, ALL YOUR FEARS
MAY UP AND SLIP AWAY
ALL THE CLOUDS OF DARKNESS
MAY SOMEHOW TURN TO DAY...

JUNIOR (*as he enters*)

It's here!

JUNIOR interrupts, pushing a couch into the room. The couch is bubble gum pink. Curved back. Legs are mid-50's blonde wood. It is boudoir-deco and supremely impractical. Junior's clipboard is on the couch.

FERN (*lays down guitar, jumps up*)

Oh Junior, isn't it beautiful? My pink couch!

(*she moves the clipboard, bounces, stretches out, sits up again*)

Sit down.

(*pats the seat beside her*)

Try it.

JUNIOR

No thanks. Oh all right.

(*dusts off his bottom, sits*)

THEY grin at each other like two kids.

FERN

I never had a new couch before. Ever.

Never had *any* new furniture. Did you, Junior?

JUNIOR

Things I build from time to time. When Margie wants something new.

FERN

Margie is a lucky woman. She is.
Did I hear you made her a dining room table?

JUNIOR

I did.

FERN

And chairs to match?

JUNIOR

Oh sure. Gotta have matching chairs.

FERN

And then she covered them?

JUNIOR

She's good like that.

FERN

I'm gonna learn how to do that too. Upholstery. That's one of the things I'm gonna learn now that we've got our own home. I'll probably learn to crochet (*CROW-shay*) too.

JUNIOR

(points to his clipboard on the floor – full of paint samples)

Look here, Miz Jones. I brought some more samples.
You got to pick a color today.

FERN

(leans over and takes a quick look)

Not any of these.

JUNIOR

The painter's wanting to start. I got to pay him for the day, can't bring him all this way over here and...

FERN

I know, but none of these are right.

(jumps up, grabs a magazine)

Junior, look at this. It's matching chairs. They're pink, just like this. I ordered them special from the Maison Blanche in New Orleans. They'll be here soon.

JUNIOR

Uh huh.

FERN

They'll be covered in this same fabric. It's so unusual. Feel.

JUNIOR

(gingerly rubs the couch)

FERN

It's raised.

JUNIOR

Bumpy.

FERN

(treats his statement seriously as if "bumpy" is a decorating term)

I know it! Exactly. I want to say almost like a brocade, wouldn't you say?

JUNIOR

It's supposed to be bumpy?

FERN

Yes, it's very elegant. It's a whole living room suite. Did you find out about the pink bathroom fixtures. Can we get the you-know in pink too?

JUNIOR

Commode? Yes, you're gonna git your pink bathroom for sure. *Everything* in there will be pink.

FERN

Junior, can I tell you a secret?

JUNIOR

You like pink.

FERN

About music. I sent off a tape of one of my songs back a while ago before we moved here and somebody famous likes it and somebody *else* famous is about to record it.

JUNIOR

No!

FERN

Yes, but I can't say who yet because I haven't told Raymond.

JUNIOR

He'll be proud for you. He always is. But Miz Jones, you oughta be recording your songs your own self. Nobody sings like you do. I oughta tell you what my Margie sez. No I better not.

FERN

Oh yes you better!

JUNIOR

She heard you singing on the radio and she sez, Margie sez to me....

FERN

What?

JUNIOR

She sez, Junior, that's Rev's wife on the radio. I sez yes I believe it is and Marge sez, Miz Jones sings like a man. And then she sez - she sings like a *colored* man.

FERN (*delighted*)

No! She did *not*!

(*hand over heart, genuinely moved*)

My heart is full. Junior, please tell her I am honored.

JUNIOR

Now, was that a *new* song you were playing when I came in?

FERN

Uh huh. I got the idea from my mother. Every time I'm worrying that something bad might happen, she says, "Don't borrow trouble. Let tomorrow take care of itself."

(*strums a chord, sings*)

17 - LET TOMORROW BE

DON'T TRY TO CROSS THAT RIVER
THAT YOU CANNOT SEE
DON'T TRY TO TUNNEL
THROUGH THAT MOUNTAIN
THAT MAY NOT BE

JUNIOR (*an active listener*)

Uh huh. That's right.

FERN (*continues singing*)

DON'T TRY TO BEAR THAT BURDEN
THAT WOULD BRING YOU SORROW
JUST LET TOMORROW BE
UNTIL TOMORROW

FERN

(*explains the arrangement she hears in her head*)

And then, the backup singers come in behind me, and one of them takes a line, like this...

(*sings*)

FOR BY TOMORROW ALL YOUR FEARS
MAY UP AND SLIP AWAY

JUNIOR

You tell it.

FERN

Then I'll come back in. Here.

(*hands him her notes*)

Sing it with me.

JUNIOR reads and follows her melody a fraction of a beat behind.

FERN & JUNIOR (*sing*)

(*repeating the line she just sang*)

FOR BY TOMORROW ALL YOUR FEARS
MAY UP AND SLIP AWAY
ALL THE CLOUDS OF DARKNESS
MAY TURN TO DAY
FOR ALL THE TROUBLES YOU HAVE FEARED
YOU'LL FIND THERE'S GRACE TO BORROW

FERN
(explaining her vision)
And then one person will sing this last line
(sings)
SO LET TOMORROW BE
(still explaining)
And somebody else will repeat it.

JUNIOR *(sings)*
SO LET TOMORROW BE

FERN & JUNIOR
UNTIL TOMORROW

FERN
What do you think?

JUNIOR
I think it's a good one. A real good one.
You make everything into a lesson.

FERN *(thinking about it)*
I guess so. Well yes, it's the way my songs come to me. I
started writing this one back when I'd be thinking about the
baby and then I would worry about... what if I have another
baby and then what if...

A beat, each of them looking off somewhere else

JUNIOR
Uh huh. And then this song came through?

FERN
All because I called up my mother one day and she said,

FERN
"Don't borrow trouble."

JUNIOR
"Don't borrow trouble."

JUNIOR
Now see, I don't know how you do that. You take some good
advice and put music with it. It turns out just like one of the
songs on the radio.

FERN (*she's not bragging*)
It's my gift, Junior. All my songs *will* be on the radio.
I know they will. We're going to record this one ourselves
and then I'll sell my records in New Orleans and at Singings.
(*takes a breath*)
Guess what?

JUNIOR
What?

FERN
I know what color I want.
(*she pats the pink couch*)
This is the color.

JUNIOR (*Jumps up from sofa*)
Pink?
(*He picks up clipboard from the floor, looks at it, looks at couch, then shows her the clipboard*)
No, Miz Jones, I mean for the *outside* of the house.

FERN
Certainly. Pink on the outside. And I want a white roof with
sparkles on it.

RAY enters, holding a batch of mail.

RAY
Mail's here.

JUNIOR (*talking to himself*)
Pink. Pink house.

RAY
Hey, Junior.

JUNIOR
(*ignores him as he starts slowly to the door*)
I gotta go talk to the painter.

RAY
We still going fishin' later?

JUNIOR (*still in shock*)
Sure, Rev.

RAY
See you there after while (after-whahl).

JUNIOR exits as RAY crosses over to kiss FERN.

RAY
Doll-baby. You got your new couch!
(*circles it one time*)
Do you like it?

FERN
I love it honey. Is there anything in the mail for me?

RAY
I didn't look at it yet. See for yourself.

RAY hands her the mail, sits on the chair vacated by JUNIOR, facing her.

FERN looks through the mail, pulls out a big manila envelope.

FERN
I've been waiting for this. From Governor Davis.

FERN rips open the envelope, removes a letter.

FERN
Listen to this.
(*reading fast, skipping parts, skimming*)
...and Johnny Cash recorded your song, *I Was There When It Happened* at Sun Records... and there's more.
(*puts the letter in her lap*)
Johnny Cash. My song.
(*picks it up, continues scanning*)
Sheet music will be for sale soon. And Governor Davis says he's coming to Bogalusa to the Auditorium - wants us to appear. Raymond, won't that be exciting? The man who wrote *You Are My Sunshine* is asking us to play on the same bill with him!

RAY

I told you before, doll-baby, I don't feel right about playing out except for church work.

FERN

(she misses his answer, dreaming)

I've been thinking about California. Everybody's out there now. Even Governor Davis goes out there to be on the television programs.

RAY

(weary of this subject already)

You want to go visit your mama again. Sing at some concerts out there. Okay, doll-baby. We'll work it out. I'll have to get somebody in to play piano for church.

FERN

No, I don't mean *visiting* California, honey. I was thinking we should move there.

RAY

Move? Move to California? You know good and well our work is here. I don't hardly see how you could sing much more than you do now and still help me with the church.

FERN

Maybe I could get a recording contract and then I wouldn't have to carry around my own records in boxes. Oh honey, I am so tired of being poor.

RAY

I don't think it matters one iota how much a person has.

FERN

It does, Raymond. If all you've ever been is poor, it matters a lot.

RAY

Money is not the reason for the work we do.

FERN

God gave me a talent that can maybe help us get ahead and you've said yourself that all talent comes from the Creator.

RAY

And we are meant to dedicate it right back to Him. If you're thinkin' I will ever agree that it's all right for you to record worldly music...

FERN

... I never said, never once said I want to sing anything but gospel. I'm not looking to sing other music in public, but I am certainly looking to sing *anyplace* I can.

RAY

I don't know who's trying to persuade you...

FERN

Persuade me? I'm sick and tired of everybody thinking I can't make up my own mind. My mother keeps picking at me, about how if I hadn't married you, I'd have my own television show, I'd be making records. And you, well you remind me every minute what to believe. I don't need either one of you telling me what to do. I've got my own opinions about all of it. *All* of it.

RAY (*stunned, quiet*)

Honey, we both believe the same way, don't we?

FERN

Maybe not. Maybe not any more. Not since our baby died.

RAY

We have talked about that, and prayed about it, how our faith is sometimes tested. That's when we have to trust in the Lord even stronger.

FERN

I trusted in you. You believed in faith healing.
I believed in you.

RAY

And you don't anymore?

FERN

It's *all* different now.

RAY

So now you decided you want to go off on your own?
Go off without me?

FERN (*stricken*)

Oh no honey. I don't like to be away from you a day of my life. I can't hardly sing when you're not with me. We could go together. Could we talk about it?

RAY

Talk about what?

(*he jumps up from his chair*)

About throwing away everything we've worked for
our whole lives?

FERN

No. Wait. Sit down. Listen to me. Raymond, sometimes I think you feel like preaching is everything. The only way to testify. I feel like music might be just as important to the Lord's work. Radio programs that play all kinds of music might play my songs someday. And that would be *me* testifying.

RAY

We can't be sure that will happen. Even Karl told you that. Your songs are for *church* people, honey. What's wrong with that?

FERN

Brother Daly's reaching thousands of people with his television program from the church.

RAY

You're acting like this is not enough for you anymore. You are a pastor's wife. When I asked you about coming here in the first place, you said yes.

FERN

I am trying, Raymond. I sing in church. I play piano. I go to the Women's Missionary Alliance meetings on Wednesdays.

RAY looks at her and raises his eyebrows.

Sometimes.

RAY
Sometimes? Twice.

FERN
Sometimes I just don't feel up to it.
Maybe pastoring is not my calling.
(*determined, back to her topic*)
I don't know what I'll do if we have to be apart.

RAY (*volume rising*)
What do you mean, "apart?" You are sittin' on a brand new couch in your brand new house, and we've got a congregation counting on us. *This* is where we live. You've got no reason, no reason whatsoever to talk about going off to make a record or sing on television or some fool thing.
(*now he's hollering*)
You're a married woman and you need to start acting like it.

FERN
You have *never* talked to me like that before.

RAY
Well maybe I should have.

FERN
You sound just like my mother when you take that tone.

RAY
You can pout all you want to, and stomp around here all the livelong day, and you won't make me change my mind.
Your place is here.

FERN
You are acting like my mother and I don't like it.

RAY
I never held you back. I help all I can with your music, but I will not move across the country. The subject is closed, Fern. We are not going to California. The only place I'm going is out of this house.

FERN
(*picks up the letter again*)
And what am I supposed to do?

RAY
I don't much care what you do right now. I'm going fishing.

Door SLAM as we go to black.

Scene 2. Creekside

Lighting effect: Ripples on water.

JUNIOR is seated with a fishing pole. Another pole lays beside him.
A harmonica nearby.

RAY walks into this scene, rolls up shirt sleeves, sits by Junior, picks up the extra fishing pole.

JUNIOR
That's a good song your wife is working on.
That new one. Let Tomorrow Be.

RAY
Uh huh.

JUNIOR
The woman's got more talent than...

RAY
...Sometimes, Junior, I think how much easier life would be if
I'd-a picked another line of work.

JUNIOR
A calling to preach is a sacred thing.

RAY
No money in it.

JUNIOR
Money's not everything.

RAY
My wife feels different, Junior. I never needed to make much
money. Never had any. Never thought I would.

JUNIOR

Miz Jones likes to buy once in a while. Women, that's how they do. But that's not the most important thing to her. You see how she gets, the way she is with a new song.

RAY

I know it, Junior. Yes I have seen it. Let me ask you. And you say exactly what you think. Do you believe that writing songs could be a sacred calling? Could making music be as important as preaching the Word?

JUNIOR

I'm gonna tell you a little story.

RAY

I wish you would.

JUNIOR

When I was working over in New Orleans at the tabernacle, the band would be in there playing and it'd be hot of an afternoon.

(a good Southern storyteller, waiting for affirmation)

RAY

(a good Southern listener reacts)

Whooooee. Hot Yes. And humid.

JUNIOR

And the doors'd be open and the choir'd practice and people'd start comin' in to lissen. Walk in off Canal Street. With they grocery bags and all. I'd take a break, go down to the corner, get me a Co-Cola, come back and the place'd be filling up - lissening to the band and that choir.

RAY *(teasing him)*

Junior you are talking about a hot day and a cool place to rest.

JUNIOR

That's not all. Did I say I was done?

RAY

No you didn't. Continue on.

JUNIOR

The next Sunday, I had to stop by to fix something - I forget what - on the way to my own church and the thing is, I seen some of those same people cleaned up and setting in the pews. At Sunday service. They came back.

RAY

I take your point, Junior. But some of those people might have come out to hear Brother Daly preach.

JUNIOR & RAY

(a take - both shake their heads - no)

JUNIOR *(double-take)*

That place is full, they're turning folks away. Gonna have to add some services. Somebody (teasing) said, "Music can save your soul."

RAY

Fern says that. And I believe it.

JUNIOR

I've seen it.

(picks up harmonica, blows a note)

RAY

What's that?

JUNIOR

Heavenly Father.

RAY

Start us off

JUNIOR blows a note using harmonica as a pitch pipe.

JUNIOR *(sings)*

18 - MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME

I TRUST IN GOD WHEREVER I MAY BE

RAY

Takes me back.

JUNIOR (*sings*)
UPON THE LAND OR ON THE ROLLING SEA
FOR COME WHAT MAY FROM DAY TO DAY

RAY & JUNIOR (*sing together*)
MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME
JUNIOR (*sings*)
I TRUST IN GOD I KNOW HE CARES FOR ME

RAY (*echoes*)
CARES FOR ME

JUNIOR
ON MOUNTAIN BLEAK, OUT ON THE STORMY SEA
THOUGH BILLOWS ROLL HE KEEPS MY SOUL

JUNIOR & RAY
MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME

JUNIOR
That woman's crazy about you. And you know it.

RAY
But I got other problems, Junior. Fern's saying she'd rather
live in California.

JUNIOR
Leave Bogalusa?

RAY
I don't think this'll pass. Johnny Cash just recorded her
song. And Governor Davis has already got it on a record.

JUNIOR
Well I'll be! I reckon we should-a seen this comin' from a
mile off. She's a woman with uncommon talent. And there
you are, no offense, worrying about her fixin' to backslide.

RAY
I never said I was afraid of her backsliding.

JUNIOR

Maybe not in so many words. But you act like it and I don't know why. She could-a got her a contract at Sun Records, like the rest-a them, if she'd sing different kinds of songs. You said yourself that's what Karl told her. But she didn't. I don't see no sign, no sign a-tall of her puttin' one foot outside the faith.

RAY

I'm worried myself all the time about whether I'm letting the Lord down. Am I being a good husband? And staying true to my own convictions too? Junior, remember me in your prayers, will you?

JUNIOR

I'll say a word. I always do.

RAY

(pulling up his fishing line)

I better get back home. Fix us some supper.
I didn't catch a thing. You?

JUNIOR

Not a one. We'll get 'em next time, Rev.

RAY

Next time.

Cross fade.

Scene 3. New Orleans Tabernacle

Lights up on microphones.

FERN sits backstage at a dressing table/mirror. She wears a clingy red version of her earlier outfit, with the neckline pulled considerably lower and fastened on either side with rhinestone clips.

JANWAY's nearby, visiting.

COKER enters

FERN *(hugging COKER)*

No! You are not all the way down here in New Orleans!

COKER

I came on the bus. I watch Brother Daly's television program every week and when he said you were coming...

JANWAY

Guess who else is coming tonight?
Our old buddy, Kousin Karl!

FERN

Are you sure? Last I heard, Karl doesn't want anything to do with church music.

RAY enters. Greets COKER. Chatting. Hubbub.

JANWAY

(a little awkward with RAY)

I uh didn't know if we'd see you here tonight.

RAY *(a bit sarcastic)*

Somebody had to drive her.

JANWAY *(to COKER)*

(feeling the tension, trying to give them some room)

My dear, if you come with me right now, I just might be able to get you a seat right down front.

COKER

Oh, my...

JANWAY takes COKER's hand, tucks it into an arm, exits with her

RAY *(to FERN)*

Sing pretty. God bless you, baby.

FERN *(grabs his hand)*

Say a prayer.

RAY

(kisses the top of her head)

Always.

BAND plays gospel vamp.

Spotlight on mic

JANWAY steps up to mic as M.C.

JANWAY

Welcome to Canal Street Tabernacle! Starting us off tonight,
one of our favorites, a beautiful woman, with a voice like
nobody else, it's Sister Fern!

BAND swings into blistering intro: **STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING.**
This is the rowdiest, rocking-est song so far.

FERN (*sings*)

19 - STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING

OH WE HEAR CHURCH PEOPLE SAY
THEY ARE IN THIS HOLY WAY
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

ON THAT LAST GREAT JUDGEMENT DAY
WHEN THEY DRIVE THEM ALL AWAY
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

(chorus)

EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

(verse)

IF YOU WANT TO VIEW THE PRIZE
YOU MUST LEARN TO QUIT YOUR LYING
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

IF YOU HEW RIGHT TO THE LINE
YOU CAN LIVE RIGHT ALL OF THE TIME
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

(chorus)

EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING
EVERY DAY

EVERY DAY, EVERY DAY
THERE ARE STRANGE THINGS HAPPENING EVERY DAY

Lights up on KARL, off to the side watching.

FERN steps in his direction. KARL mimes exaggerated applause.

KARL

Now that's the way I like to hear you. For a minute there I thought Sister Rosetta had stopped by here.

FERN

It *is* you!

KARL

Passing through. A musical pilgrim, that's what I am. Always in search of a new star. You gonna hug my neck, Fern?

They hug.

FERN

What are you doing here?

KARL

I'll be in Memphis tomorrow. Then to Nashville. The Opry.

FERN

Do you have an extra business card for an old friend?

KARL

(digs one out of inside coat pocket)

Here's the Nashville office number.
They always know how to find me.

While KARL watches, FERN takes the card, opens her purse, fishes for a tissue, wraps the card in tissue slowly and carefully, treating it like a treasure. Closes her purse.

KARL

I'm gonna go find a cold drink. You want something?

FERN

Well aren't you precious to offer.

Blackout.

Scene 4. Pulpit.

The cross is lighted. Two mics, one by the pulpit, the other across the stage in empty spotlight.

BAND vamps up-tempo intro to **I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART.**

RAY's at pulpit.

REVELATORS walk into this scene, and we see them changing from their last character into glittery jackets. They gather at their mic.

BAND continues under RAY.

RAY

It's good to be back!
(*gestures to BAND to lower volume*)

BAND continues under

RAY (*continues*)

Y'all have been following the news about my wife?
She's singing out in California. The Revelators...
(*addresses them*)
...you fellas are touring too?

REVELATORS (respond)

RAY

Glad you could stop by.

REVELATOR

We've got some concerts, the Louisiana Hayride, then we're headed back to Hollywood to make another movie.

RAY

Gonna be in a picture show? Don't tell Sister Fern about that, or we might never get her back to the South again.

REVELATOR

She said for us to bring you a song.

RAY

Here they are - The Revelators!

REVELATORS (*sing*)

20 - I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART

I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART
WAY DOWN INSIDE
I'VE GOT A NEW KIND OF FEELING IN MY HEART
WHERE TRUE JOY ABIDES
NOBODY KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO ME
NOBODY KNOWS BUT MY LORD AND ME
I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART
IT IS DOWN INSIDE

(new verse)

WHAT A JOY TO KNOW
ONE WHO LOVES US SO
HE IS SO KIND AND TRUE
HE HAS CHANGED MY LIFE
FROM ALL THE SIN AND STRIFE
HE'LL DO THE SAME FOR YOU

(A REVELATOR motions to BAND to modulate up)

I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART
WAY, WAY DOWN INSIDE
I'VE GOT A NEW KIND OF FEELING IN MY HEART
WHERE TRUE JOY ABIDES
NOBODY KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO ME
NOBODY KNOWS BUT MY LORD AND ME
I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART
IT IS DOWN INSIDE

RAY is visible, pacing a bit, removing a folded note from suit pocket, glancing at it, unfolding then folding it back again.

BAND PLAYS under conversation.

REVELATOR (*to RAY*)

Come over and join us, Brother Jones.

RAY (*distracted at first*)

Naw. You know I can't keep up with you on that one.

REVELATOR (*teasing*)

Sure you can.

Move over fellas, make room for the Reverend.

REVELATORS make a show of making room.

REVELATOR

Jump right in here and grab a part
(motions for *BAND* to modulate up again)

RAY (teasing back)

Now you are just showing out!

REVELATORS (sing to a big finish)

I'VE GOT THAT OLD TIME RELIGION IN MY HEART
(tenor holds the note for a while, then the finish on high note)
IT IS DOWN INSIDE

RAY (at his mic as REVELATORS exit)

Spread the good word out there, fellas!
(visibly changing mood, storytelling)

I was a very young man when I heard my call to preach.

Piano or guitar plays softly, **21 - WHAT A FRIEND**

With a wife in her teens. She gave up a lot to follow me.
(takes wallet out of inside pocket of suit coat, removes a card)

This right here - this is proof of my ordination.
(reads from the card)

This certifies that Reverend Raymond D. Jones is an ordained minister, fully authorized to perform the ritual...
(begins to paraphrase, still holding the card)

...it says I can marry you, I can say words over your departed, pray for your needs, and because I am ordained, you know that I care enough about my calling to keep studied up and prayed up.
(pauses, thinks on what he'll say)

BAND fills the space.

RAY (continues)

Every year I get a form in the mail to renew my ordination.
(still holding onto the card, looking at it)

Next time, when they mail me that form, they'll be sending it to California. That's right. *California*. I don't know where I'll be preaching next, but I'll carry this card with me as long as I live.
(returns the card to his wallet)

RAY (*continues*)

My wife has heard a calling of her own, and she needs to answer it. I believe she should. And I believe I ought to support her work, just like she came with me wherever my calling took us. She followed me, even when we didn't always agree. But we held on and worked it out together. And now I am on my way to California.

(*puts the wallet into inside coat pocket*)

Y'all take care of each other, y'hear?

Blackout.

Scene 5 California - South. Split stage

Lights up on California side:

A different living room. The pink couch is here. A modern, glass-topped coffee table. Glass end table with phone.

ZULA and RAY on the couch, chatting, sipping coffee.

ZULA

What do you hear from her. Did she already call today?

RAY

This morning. She forgets the time difference between Mississippi and California. She's already saying she's homesick.

ZULA (*fondly, shaking her head*)

It's only been two weeks.

Cross-fade. Lights up on the South. Spotlight and mic remain fixed.

Background projections will change to indicate location.

Costume additions at each tour stop to mark each city and progress on the road. First - a guitar with glittery strap. At another FERN adds rhinestone clips on low-necked dress.

Projected background banner says "Jackson Auditorium"

FERN (*sings*)
22 - BE THANKFUL YOU'RE YOU

DON'T ENVY YOUR NEIGHBOR
WITH ALL OF HIS WEALTH
AND THINGS THAT HIS MONEY CAN DO
WITH ALL OF HIS RICHES
HE MAY NOT HAVE HEALTH
(ending)
BE THANKFUL, BE THANKFUL
YOU'RE YOU

Cross-fade. Lights up in California

RAY (*finishing conversation*)
Okay doll baby, I sure will. I miss you too.
(*hanging up the phone, reporting to ZULA*)
Karl wants her to sing only songs from the new album.

ZULA
Makes sense.

RAY
But she likes to mix in an old favorite once in a while.
They're going at each other.

ZULA (*she knows Fern*)
He's got his hands full.

Cross-fade. Lights up on the South

Projected background banner says "Welcome to Ellis Auditorium"

BAND plays Vegas rockabilly vamp

Lights circle, rock and roll.

OFFSTAGE ANNOUNCER (*pre-recorded*)
You've heard Johnny Cash sing it right here in Memphis. As
well as Governor Jimmie Davis and many others - But
tonight, it's the woman who wrote it!
Here she is - Sister Fern, with The Revelators

FERN & REVELATORS (*sing*)

23- I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED

THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE
WHO SAY WE CANNOT TELL
WHETHER WE ARE SAVED
OR WHETHER ALL IS WELL.
THEY SAY WE ONLY CAN HOPE
AND TRUST THAT IT IS SO
BUT I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED
AND I GUESS I OUGHT TO KNOW
WELL I KNOW WHEN JESUS SAVED ME
THE VERY MOMENT HE FORGAVE ME
HE TOOK AWAY MY HEAVY BURDENS
LORD HE GAVE ME PEACE WITHIN
SATAN CAN'T MAKE ME DOUBT IT
IT'S REAL AND I'M GONNA SHOUT IT
I WAS THERE WHEN IT HAPPENED
AND I GUESS I OUGHT TO KNOW

Cross-fade. Lights up on RAY

RAY

Well, sugar, I understand it's hard. We miss you too.
Your mama's here cooking us some supper.
I guess I better...

Lights up on FERN

FERN (*on the phone*)

...and besides, my hair's frizzy. You know I can't
sing good when my hair's frizzy.

ZULA enters, wiping her hands on an apron. Listens.

RAY (*to FERN on the phone*)

I know. I know it, honey.
(*covers mouthpiece, speaks to ZULA*)
Her hair is frizzy.

ZULA (*this is serious*)

Uh oh.

FERN (*on the phone*)
I've gotta go, hon, KARL's waiting for me. I love you too.

Lights down on RAY.

KARL
The Blue Room said okay, they won't serve drinks while you're singing. You know, Mahalia Jackson sang there and it didn't bother her that people had drinks.

FERN
We don't believe in liquor. I am honoring what we believe.

KARL
The Blue Room is a *nightclub*, Fern, and you are causing them to lose money while you're there.

BAND plays intro: **I AIN'T GOT TIME**

FERN (*waves off his concern*)
Oh they'll make it all back when Bob Hope comes through.
Or Jack Benny.
(*focused on her own performance*)
There's my music.

FERN steps up to mic. Spotlight brightens.

FERN (*sings*)
24 - I AIN'T GOT TIME

JUST A PILGRIM ON A JOURNEY
WELL I GOT NO TIME TO TARRY HERE
DON'T YOU STOP ME
CAUSE I'M GOING
TO A LAND WHERE SKIES ARE CLEAR
AND I AIN'T GOT TIME
TO LINGER LONGER
I AIN'T GOT TIME
I'M ON MY WAY
I GOT A HOME, OH LORD
JUST OVER YONDER
AND I AIN'T GOT TIME
TO STOP TODAY

Cross-fade. Lights up on California

RAY (*reading a letter to ZULA*)
She says she's not feeling good. I think she's just lonesome.

ZULA
Where to next?

RAY (*reads itinerary*)
They're heading to the Louisiana Hayride, and then the rest of the week, they'll stop at radio stations on their way back to Nashville. And (*reading again*) Ryman Auditorium on Saturday night.

ZULA
Ryman? That's her dream. Let's go out there and surprise her, Raymond.

RAY
Drive to Nashville?

ZULA
We can make it in time if we leave right now.

ZULA reaches behind couch and pulls out a suitcase, ready to go.

RAY
Well, don't you beat all?

ZULA
Raymond, I've been wondering, how did Karl happen to hear Fern that night in New Orleans? And right after that, he offered her a record deal.

RAY
I expect somebody must have let him know she was singing there that night.

ZULA
Somebody? It was you. You called him.

RAY
Why would I go and do a fool thing like that?

Lights dimming in California living room.

RAY picks up ZULA's suitcase, exits.

ZULA looks around, finds her purse, follows RAY out.

ZULA (*to unseen RAY*)

Raymond, does that girl have any idea how much you love her?

Scene 6. Ryman Auditorium. Backstage.

BAND tunes-up, preparing for a live show, then noodling under dialogue.

SISTER COKER arrives, toting her awful looking purse.

FERN spots her, hugs her

FERN

What a surprise! Aren't you the *best* friend, coming all this way on the bus. I'm so glad to see you. I'm homesick. I miss my husband.

(*very emotional*)

I need to see Raymond.

RAY and ZULA arrive. We see them. COKER seems them. But FERN doesn't see them yet.

COKER

What's this on the back of your dress? Why don't you let me fix it. Turn around.

COKER turns her around. FERN sees RAY. They cling to each other.

Everyone greets everyone. KARL, COKER and ZULA.

BAND stops tuning. All is quiet.

ZULA (*to FERN*)

You look peaked.

FERN (*laughing*)

Mother, don't start! I am *not* that pale. I'm just a little queasy.

ZULA
Morning or nighttime?

FERN
Mostly mornings, but sometimes at night.

ZULA
You're not...?

FERN
Uh huh.

Excitement. Everyone reacting.

RAY
Doll-baby, are you sure?

ZULA (*looks FERN over*)
She's sure.

COKER
A baby!

ZULA (*to COKER, woman to woman*)
You know she's got no business having a baby.

FERN COKER
Oh mother, hush. Zula!

FERN (*to KARL, holding onto his hand*)
I have to go home, Karl.
I've got to take good care of myself this time.

KARL (*defeated, sad*)
Fern, if you leave now, you'll miss your chance. The label won't release a single to radio stations unless you promise to tour. You know that. Your album will die. We put so much into it.

FERN (*daunted, sad, but not broken*)
Karl, we made a beautiful album, but I don't want to take any chances this time. I'm going to have this baby...
(*patting the belly*)
...and then I'll come back.

KARL (*that won't work*)

I understand that Fern, and I'm sorry, but if you leave this tour, you're throwing away your one opportunity.

FERN (*trying to climb back up*)

Oh I'll come back, Karl. I will. The Lord gives me my songs and the Lord will find *somebody* that wants to hear my music.

RAY

My wife has got a whole lot of faith.

FERN

Raymond, I never did believe any *less* than you. I just believe a little different.

KARL

What're you gonna sing for your big night at the Ryman?

FERN

I already told the band. I hope you don't mind.
It's an old one.

BAND plays intro to **I'LL FLY AWAY**

FERN (*sings*)

25 - I'LL FLY AWAY

SOME GLAD MORNING WHEN THIS LIFE IS O'ER
I'LL FLY AWAY
TO A HOME ON GOD'S CELESTIAL SHORE
I'LL FLY AWAY

FERN (*to RAY*)

Come on over here, honey and sing it with me.

FERN & RAY (*sing*)

(chorus)

I'LL FLY AWAY (OH GLORY)
I'LL FLY AWAY (IN THE MORNING)
WHEN I DIE HALLELUJAH BY AND BY
I'LL FLY AWAY

CAST (*trade off lyrics*)
WHEN THE SHADOWS OF THIS LIFE HAVE GROWN
I'LL FLY AWAY
LIKE A BIRD FROM PRISON BARS HAS FLOWN
I'LL FLY AWAY

(chorus)
I'LL FLY AWAY (OH GLORY)
I'LL FLY AWAY (IN THE MORNING)
WHEN I DIE HALLELUJAH BY AND BY
I'LL FLY AWAY

JUST A FEW MORE WEARY DAYS AND THEN
I'LL FLY AWAY
TO A LAND WHERE JOY SHALL NEVER END
I'LL FLY AWAY

ENCORE: Invite audience to join on chorus

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

THE END