

WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED

A Play in Three Acts

by

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Where am I going? I don't quite know. What does it matter where people
go?

— A. A. Milne, "Spring Morning"

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment,
in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be
raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

I CORINTHIANS 15: 51,52

To Barbara

WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED

ACT I

Scene One: "One of Those World War II Days"

No curtain. A STAGEHAND wheels in a portable TV and turns it on. As the video comes up, it appears simultaneously on a large audience monitor mounted above the stage. The sound is muffled, but the picture is clear enough — a long, loosely-edited broadcast of the ATF/FBI attack on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. Amid monotonous stretches of barely audible commentary, the same key images are repeated over and over — the shoot-out, the siege, the compound in flames.

Gradually, expanding from the TV in all directions, a breakaway set is assembled before us, representing the interior/exterior of a weathered, unpainted farmhouse. The TV stands on the front porch of the house, *stage right*, which the occupant has converted into a sunroom. Within the house proper, *stage center*, most of the interior walls have been removed to form a large, cluttered studio. As the set is being put together, a group of six or eight ACTORS enters rather noisily, bearing wooden frames and getting into character as painted portraits, chatting amongst themselves at first, and helping one another to prepare, until gradually silence prevails, and the room grows still, and the actors have taken up their frozen existence on canvas, primarily as representations of local townspeople and brides-to-be, to whom a portrait is a kind of photograph. In one of the paintings, yet to be completed, a MATRON has no nose; in another, an EAGLE SCOUT is missing a hand.

A barren, very old apple tree stands in the front yard, *down right*. At the rear of the house, *stage left*, a tiny lean-to porch. To the *far left*, surrounded by weeds, a bright yellow privy, decorated with large painted flowers.

Sundown. A magenta sky. Along the horizon, a wall of pines.

On the sunporch, EUNICE REDMOND is tying her mother, ADDIE BELLE, into a brass bed, using long strips of cloth torn from a sheet. Addie Belle, wearing a gown, is in her mid-sixties. Eunice, a rather mannish artist of about forty, wears white coveralls spattered with paint. Near the bed, a tubular-steel walker and a plastic carry-home bag from Charlotte Memorial Hospital. The women pay no attention to the TV, which drones on in the background.

ADDIE BELLE

What a relief, child. I can't tell you. I prayed and prayed you'd come rescue me, and you did. If I had to spend another night in that place I think I would croak.

(sighs contentedly)

Such a nice room. And look at the pretty view. Are we very far from Charlotte?

EUNICE

Pretty far, mama. This is Durham. Now you just try to relax. I have to do this so you don't get up in the middle of the night and hurt yourself.

ADDIE BELLE

(amazed)

I never been to Durham in my whole life. This aint the Duke hospital is it?

EUNICE

You're not in a hospital, mama. This is my house. I brought you home with me.

ADDIE BELLE

You won't let them take me back?

EUNICE

No, mama. I promise.

ADDIE BELLE

I'm not sure, but I may be a little bit hungry. What time do they serve supper in this place, do you reckon?

(struggles to reach a hospital buzzer)

Oh Lord, they tied me down again. How'm I spose to buzz the nurse if they tie me down? What if I have to go tinkle? What if somebody calls? What if the phone rings, and it's Baxter trying to call me from Florida?

(crying out feebly)

Nurse. Nurse. Help. Oh God please, somebody help me.

(pause)

What're you looking at? This is all your fault, you spiteful devil. I know what you did. Thought you could trick me. Said we were going home. Took me to the car, drove round and around in circles, and plopped me right back in here again. Oh, it may be a different room, but I can tell. Tell by the smell.

(sniffs)

The G.D. Charlotte Memorial. How could you do it, Eunice? How could you do such a thing?

EUNICE

Mama. Mama.

ADDIE BELLE

(lost in thought)

Hmm?

EUNICE

It's not a hospital, mama.

(pointing to the scraggly apple tree)

See? See my pretty Winesap? Did you ever hear of a apple tree at the Charlotte Memorial? No, ma'am. And the beautiful roses out there on the fence? You're home, mama, with me. And I'm gonna take care of you. But you got to trust me.

(note of anguish)

And ... no more cursing, okay? I never thought I'd live — to hear Addie Belle Redmond — take the Lord's name in vain!

ADDIE BELLE

G.D. is not cursing, I'll thank you to know!

The phone rings in the studio. Eunice races to get it, nearly knocking a painting from an easel. The subject, a local MINISTER, re-arranges himself huffily.

EUNICE

Baxter?

(pause)

No, goddamit—

Hearing the dreaded word, Addie Belle winces and covers her ears.

EUNICE

--we don't want any goddamn vinyl siding! And don't call here again, you hear me?

(as Addie Belle uncovers one ear cautiously)

This house is afflicted by a life and death situation, and if I can't get to my telephone when I need it, I'm gonna sue you for every dime you got and manslaughter too!

She hangs up. Composes herself. Returns to the sunroom. Addie Belle uncovers the other ear.

ADDIE BELLE

Eunice?

EUNICE

I'm here, mama.

ADDIE BELLE

You don't know what it's like, Eunice. They don't tell you the half of it. At night, after they turn the lights off, this blonde nurse comes in with all her colored servants. And if you have to go to the bathroom — if you ask them the slightest thing — they drag you out in the hall and beat you with sticks.

EUNICE

It's just the medication, mama. It'll take a while to wear off, but you're gonna be okay. You're a little confused, that's all. Just a wee bit ... disoriented. Now you rest. In the morning, I'll fix us a big ole breakfast — homemade biscuits, grits and redevye gravy, eggs kind of cut up with the yellows busted — just the way you used to do it, mama.

ADDIE BELLE

If Baxter was here you wouldn't treat me this way. But just you wait. He'll fix your wagon. You and your whole gang.

EUNICE

I been trying to reach him, mama. He's "not in." His so-called secretary says he's out collecting the rent. Knocking on trailer doors. Yelling at the Cubans, Jamaicans, whatever they are. Two weeks you were in the hospital, and he never sent a card, or flowers — never even picked up the phone to ask if you were alive or what. And you think he's gonna fix my wagon? Baxter don't give a G.D. diddlely-damn, mama. When are you gonna learn that?

A pause. Addie Belle studies her for a moment.

ADDIE BELLE

Nobody's perfect.
(a beat)
Except maybe you.

EUNICE

Oh, you bitch.

ADDIE BELLE

You the one.

She turns away, glancing outside again. The sky has grown darker. The sun lies low on the horizon, etching the pinetops in silhouette.

ADDIE BELLE

(suddenly pleased)
Why, look at that.

EUNICE

What?

ADDIE BELLE

All the pine trees. Like one of those World War II days, when papa would take us youngins out to Morris Field to watch the A-20's come in to land. Papa would park the Dodge under the pine trees at the end of the runway, and it was just a con-stant stream of airplanes coming and going. And when one of them would happen to crash, which was fairly often, it was this big ball of fire on the runway, spreading out like the colors of the rain-bow, and us kids would all run over to the fence and swing on it, watching the flames.

A pause. On the TV, the raging fire engulfs the Koresh compound. Addie Belle sighs, smiling gently as we hear the wind and the crackling flames:

ADDIE BELLE

War is a awful thing, but sometimes it can take your breath away.

Darkness surrounds the farm. Stars appear in the sky. A new moon. In the distance, a red warning beacon blinks rhythmically at the top of a radio tower. And we hear MUSIC, faint and far off ... a harmonica, playing the hymn "Children of the Father."

ADDIE BELLE

And papa would get out of the car, and take off his hat,
and lead us in prayer. And you could hear the wind in the
pines, and the other airplanes circling overhead like
guardian angels.

(pause)

And then papa would say amen, and we would hold
hands together and sing a hymn, to help the poor aviator
.... rise back up ... in the sky.

(sings:)

Children of the heavenly Father
Safely in his bosom gather;
Nestling bird or star in heaven,
Such a refuge ne'er was given.

She reaches out to Eunice, who takes her hand and joins in with her, singing alto:

BOTH

Neither life nor death shall ever
From the Lord his children sever;
Unto them his grace he showeth,
And their sorrows all he knoweth.

As Eunice begins the next verse, she finds she's singing alone:

EUNICE

God his own doth tend and nourish ...

A pause. She glances at her mother. Addie Belle has fallen asleep. Eunice tucks the covers about her and turns off the TV. Suddenly, the studio phone rings again. Eunice races to get it.

EUNICE

Hello?

(pause)

Collect? Hah! Operator, would you please remind my
brother that he has half the money in Saint Augustine and
if he wants to place a call to the starving poor in Durham,
he can damn well pay for it.

She hangs up. Paces the floor. Takes a beer from the fridge, pops it open, sips from it nervously. The phone rings again. Eunice answers.

EUNICE

Baxter?

(pause)

No, no, damn you, we do not want any
siding, ever, ever, ever! Get off this phone, get off, get
off!

She slams the receiver down. Reaches for a cigarette and lights it. Coughs and puts the cigarette out. Takes another sip of beer. The phone rings again. Eunice picks up:

EUNICE

Yes.

(pause)

Don't give me any shit, Baxter, I don't want to hear it, okay? In case you didn't get any of the five hundred messages I left with your little whore, mama's been in the hospital.

(pause)

Baxter. Will you stop blubbering? She's all right. She's ... fine. And guess what, she wants to come stay with you.

(pause)

Yeah? When is a good time? Think it's a good time for me? I've got portrait assignments I can't get to for six months, now come on, you're her favorite, you know that

—

A pause, as she listens to his protestations. In the sunroom, a CHERUB descends from the flies and cuts Addie Belle's bonds with a flaming knife. Addie Belle snores on. The cherub sprays her with heaven dust from a squirt bottle. Addie Belle wakes up, staring at the creature.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I never.

The cherub ascends, disappearing into the flies. Addie Belle rubs her wrists and gets out of bed, reaching for her walker.

EUNICE

(on the phone)

Okay, I'll put her in a nursing home, and you can foot the bill. Uh, huh, I thought not. Who's that in

EUNICE (CONT'D)

the back-ground? Who's that talking? Well, tell her to butt out. Listen, will you listen to me?

(pause)

Couple weeks ago, mama's at prayer meeting, and all of a sudden she just falls over, right in the middle of Peace Like a River. They get her to the emergency room, doctor says it's pancreatitis, worst case he's ever seen, on top of which, soon as they can get the infection down, he wants to take out her gall bladder. So they get ahold of me, and I drive down to Charlotte, two speeding tickets which cost me a total of ninety-seven dollars, and time I get there, mama is raving out of her mind and they have to tie her down in the bed to keep her from yanking the IV's out of her arms, screaming won't nobody let her go tinkle. Two entire weeks, Baxter, day and night, and when I try to call my only brother to let him know the situation, your goddamn spick secretary starts singing the Star Spangled Banner because she thinks I'm from the fucking Immigration Service.

During the above, Addie Belle has made her way to the outside door of the sunroom, unlatched it, and maneuvered down the steps into the yard. She stares at the apple tree, which has suddenly, wondrously, filled with fruit. Addie Belle plucks an apple, wipes it with her gown-tail, and bites into it, munching contentedly. We hear the harmonica again, soft and lilting.

Downstage of the house, Addie Belle moves slowly toward the privy out back, leaning on the walker rails like a farmer holding his plow handles.

EUNICE

Is that bitch laughing at me? It's not funny, goddamit, and tell her to get off that extension. Hey, same to you, puta — wanna talk some shit, we can talk some shit — hello? Baxter? Baxter?
(pause)
Goddamit!

She clicks off and punches up Baxter's number. Trailing the long phone cord behind her, she paces the floor anxiously, waiting for Baxter to pick up. A machine answers:

EUNICE

Baxter? Turn off the damn machine, Baxter, I know you're there.
(angry pause)
Okay, you want a message? I got a message. She's dying, Baxter. It wasn't just the gall bladder. Doctor said Oops, little mistake here, looks like it's not pancreatitis -- it's cancer. Her liver's full of it. Bye now.

She hangs up, lights a cigarette, and reaches for another beer. At the privy, Addie Belle knocks on the door politely. No answer. Addie Belle opens the door, coming face to face with ... the dreaded BLONDE NURSE from Charlotte Memorial. Addie Belle gasps, backing away fearfully on her walker. The nurse gives a thin smile, moving toward her. The harmonica falls silent. Heat lightning plays over the sky. We hear the distant rumble of thunder. The nurse snaps her fingers. Filing out of the privy, and drawing up on either side of her, eight BLACK ORDERLIES, naked to the waist, enter with bamboo canes.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh God. Help me God. Please.

She tries to hobble away. The nurse snaps her fingers again. The orderlies surround Addie Belle and beat her senseless with their sticks. Eunice lets the phone ring six times before she answers:

EUNICE

Portrait Parlor, good evening.
(pause)
Stop crying, will you stop crying for chrissake? You can get a full-time aide from Social Services and put her and mama both in one of those upstairs rooms and never even have to look at 'em.
(pause)
Fair? Talking to me about fair? It's her home, remember? — or it used to be, until you tricked her out of it — the house, the stocks and bonds, the goddamn G.D. trailer park — you got it all, babe, and now you won't even let her come down for a little visit?

The nurse snaps her fingers. The blacks stand aside. Addie Belle is on her knees. She flails her arms helplessly, as if still trying to ward off the blows. The nurse takes Addie Belle by the hair and lifts her head up, sticking a thermometer in her mouth. Addie Belle groans. The nurse gestures for silence, putting a forefinger to her lips and then shaking the finger at the old

woman threateningly. The blacks move away in a sinuous, choreographed fashion, disappearing behind the house. A beat, then the nurse turns on her heel and follows them. With a great effort, using the walker for support, Addie Belle pulls herself to her feet and begins an agonizing trek back to the sunroom, the thermometer still in her mouth. As she passes the Winesap, it sheds its foliage, revealing a SERPENT wrapped around the barren trunk. Moving only its head, the snake follows Addie Belle with red, glowing eyes.

EUNICE

Well, what about me? It may come as a surprise to you, Baxter Redmond, but your baby sister is not entirely unfamous in these parts and if you ever saw my work you'd know what I mean. People flock to this little farmhouse from miles around, and you know why? Because I can give them the breath of life, that's the truth, Baxter, it is, only I can't go on like this, don't you see? I can't be a artist and a nurse all at the same time! Baxter?

EUNICE (CONT'D)

(jiggles the phone)
 Dickhead! You shitface motherfucker!
 (hangs up)
 Okay, then. Okay. That rips it. I'll show you. I'll show all of you.
 (popping open another beer and gulping from it)
 Think I'm just a pimple on Gauguin's ass? Just you wait.
 (glances at the portraits)
 What're you staring at? Get out of here! Out! All of you, get out!

The PORTRAITS flee, forming a traffic jam at the door as they all try to leave the stage at once. Eunice pays them no mind. Reaching under her army-cot bed, she pulls out a suitcase and heads for the sunroom. Addie Belle has arrived at the steps and begun climbing them. Eunice moves about the room with manic energy. Lost in thought, she begins throwing Addie Belle's belongings into the suitcase — clothes, medicines, flowers, get-well cards, a pink bunny-rabbit, the whole kit and caboodle. In her excitement, she doesn't notice Addie Belle's absence.

EUNICE

(her back to the bed)
 Wake up, mama! Can't be wasting all our time in bed! Got miles to go, and things to do!

Addie Belle lunges through the doorway clumsily, banging against the frame with her walker. Eunice turns to stare at her in amazement.

EUNICE

What'n the world.

ADDIE BELLE

(garbled, the thermometer still in her mouth)
 Hadda winkle.

Leading her to a chair, Eunice takes the thermometer, gives it a perfunctory glance, and puts it in a glass of salt water by the bed.

EUNICE

The nurse said you were good with those knots. You're a regular Houdini, you know that?

ADDIE BELLE

(stubbornly defensive)

Had to go ... tinkle.

Eunice lowers her into the chair and grabs up some more strips of cloth, wrapping them around her.

EUNICE

Well, I hope you enjoyed your journey, got all your fidgets out, because it's time for a change a plans here, mama, and I'm gonna need your full atten-tion for the next little while.

ADDIE BELLE

I can get loose. I can get loose from anywhere.

EUNICE

You can run your mouth too, can't you? Hold still. And quit sucking your breath in, I know that trick.

ADDIE BELLE

I'm gonna tell. Baxter hears the way you been treatin' me, he'll have a caniption fit.

EUNICE

Ah, Baxter! Baxter, Baxter! Just had a long talk with Baxter, mama, and him and Chiquita Banana-Nana want you to come down and stay with them, isn't that sweet?

(pause)

What's a matter, cat got your tongue?

ADDIE BELLE

I know you. This is some kinda flim-flam, aint it?

EUNICE

Cross my heart, mama. They just can't wait to see you. Es verdad, his casa is su casa.

She latches the suitcase and stands it up by Addie Belle's chair with an air of finality.

EUNICE

There, see? Got your little bag all packed and ready. Amtrak leaves at six in the morning. I'm gonna miss you, mama, I will. All those nights in the hospital, taking care of you, it gave me a new perspective on things.

ADDIE BELLE

That's cause you took all my valium.

EUNICE

I did not.

ADDIE BELLE

Did, too.

EUNICE

Didn't!

ADDIE BELLE

Did!

Eunice rips off a strip of duct tape and slaps it over Addie Belle's mouth.

EUNICE

I told you to pay attention. If you knew what was in my heart, mama — if you had any idea at all — it's like I been a prisoner, all these years, but now I'm free —
 (kneeling beside her)
 — free, mama. You understand?

Addie Belle mumbles angrily. Eunice stands up, takes a hairbrush, and begins brushing her mother's hair.

EUNICE

My whole career, I been paintin' photographs of photographs, things to hang on people's walls, and they weren't even good photographs, mama, they were terrible — but do you think my stupid clients gave a damn? No, ma'am, all that mattered to any of them was to have something to hang above the settee, like if they paid for it ... that would make it real.

She picks up a hand-mirror and holds it in front of Addie Belle's face.

EUNICE

There. Better?

Addie Belle struggles against her bonds. Eunice lowers the mirror pensively.

EUNICE

Yes ... you're right ... something missing ... let me see, let me see ...

(sudden stagy realization)

! know! Of course!

She shoves the chair around so that Addie Belle's back is toward the studio door.

EUNICE

Now you wait right here, and don't peek!

She rushes into the studio, rummaging about in the tiny kitchen area until she comes up with a mixing bowl and a wooden spatula. Then, clamping a new canvas to her easel and arranging her palette, she carries the various items back into the sunroom. Addie Belle glances awkwardly over her shoulder, mumbling in protest.

EUNICE

Hold your horses.

Setting the easel aside, she takes the mixing bowl and spatula and places them in her mother's lap. Addie Belle's eyes widen fearfully.

EUNICE

Just like old times, huh?

She turns away and begins setting up her easel.

EUNICE

It's a new heaven and a new earth, mama — for all of us, you ... me ... Baxter, too. I destroyed my paintings. No more lies, mama. And nothing for sale, ever again. I made a vow, a new covenant — and to celebrate this solemn occasion. I'm gonna do a portrait of you, mama ... Addie Belle Redmond, a true Christian if there ever was one ... on the eve of her departure to go join all the other saints, in the sainted town of Saint Augustine.

Approaching the chair with a knife, she cuts away the restraints and seizes Addie Belle by the wrists, placing the spatula firmly in one of her mother's hands, the mixing bowl in the other.

EUNICE

Now here's the way it goes. Any tricks, I'll fix your wagon good. I mean it, mama — do exactly as I say, or you'll never see Baxter again. I'll lock you up in the basement on bread and water, and won't nobody know the difference.

(pulling Addie Belle to her feet)

Can't do it sitting down, mama. You remember "Praise Him, Praise Him, All the Little Children"?

Addie Belle nods.

EUNICE

'Kay, now I'm gonna take the tape off your mouth, and the only thing I want to hear from your lips, is "Praise Him, Praise Him." But not too loud, I got to concentrate. And while you're singing, make out like you're stirring cake batter in the bowl. Sing and stir, nothing extra, deal?

Addie Belle gives another birdlike nod. Eunice yanks the duct tape away.

ADDIE BELLE

Ouch.

EUNICE

I said nothing extra, mama. Now sing. Sing like you did when I was a little girl. Sing and stir the G.D....batter ... and when you hear me crying in the play room, don't you come to see what's wrong, you bitch, don't you move to help me, even though you know what's happening, don't you, don't you, and you go on stirring and stirring, like

EUNICE (CONT'D)

you're all alone, all by your sweet lonesome, while
daddy's back there kissing my little body and pulling down
my panties, doing it to me, doing it in the very next room!

A pause. Addie Belle stands motionless, her head bowed.

EUNICE

Look at me, you bitch.
(as Addie Belle lifts her head slowly)
Got to hurry, mama, before we lose the light. Now sing.
Raise a joyful noise! Sing, damn you, sing!

A long pause. Addie Belle tries once, falters, clears her throat, and begins again.

ADDIE BELLE

Praise him, praise him
All the little children
God is love ...
God is love ...

Eunice picks up her brush and begins painting, the easel facing away from us.

ADDIE BELLE

Praise him, praise him
All the little children!
God is love!
God is love!

EUNICE

(partially hidden behind the easel)
Yes. That's it. Yes.

ADDIE BELLE

(with growing fervor, stirring batter vigorously:)
Serve him, serve him
All the little children!
God is love!
God is love!

She repeats the verse. Time passes. The moon goes down. The sun comes up. In the distance a rooster crows. Addie Belle sings on:

ADDIE BELLE

Thank him, thank him...
All the little children
God ... is love ...
God ... is love ...

Her voice growing ragged and faint, she manages to get through the verse one more time before slumping into the chair, exhausted. Eunice rushes forward, pulling Addie Belle to her feet again, commanding her and pleading with her all at once:

EUNICE

No, no, mama —no, no, no! Now stand up, come on, you can do it, just one more verse, that's all I need, we're nearly there, please. Please, mama?

A beat. Addie Belle nods. Eunice returns to her easel. Addie Belle sings:

ADDIE BELLE

Crown...him...crown him
All ... the little ... children
God is ... love God ... is ...

EUNICE chimes in to cue her:

EUNICE

Love!
(peeking around the easel:)
Crown him, crown him ...
Do it, do it mama — help me!
Crown him, crown ...

ADDIE BELLE

Him!

Eunice gives a triumphant laugh, painting furiously as she and Addie Belle finish the final stanza together:

BOTH

All the little children!
God is love!
God is love!

A pause. Addie Belle continues stirring, her lips forming the words silently as Eunice, darting this way and that behind the easel, hums merrily to herself. With a few, final decisive strokes, she steps back from the canvas and throws the brush aside.

EUNICE

There. Thank God. Praise Jesus. It's done. Mama?
Look, mama. Oh look.

Addie Belle stares off into space. Eunice sings:

EUNICE

Happy Birthday ... to me ...
Happy Birthday ... to me ...

Addie Belle drops the mixing bowl and spatula, putting her hands over her ears:

ADDIE BELLE

Stop that! Stop your crying, you hear me, stop it! Shhh!
Shhh!

Ignoring her, Eunice keeps it up, her voice rising in contempt as she turns the easel around to reveal the painting for the first time. As she does so, a huge scallop-framed replica of the painting is lowered into position in the virtually empty studio, where it hangs suspended from wires like some hideous wall decoration.

EUNICE

Happy birthday ... dear Eunice!
Happy birthday to me!

With a single glance at the canvas, Addie Belle throws her head back and crosses her arms over her eyes, giving out a long wail of despair. The painting, rendered in a brutal, cubist style, shows Addie Belle's Saint Augustine kitchen on one side, the children's playroom on the other. Addie Belle, monstrous and aloof, stirs cake batter in her bowl, unmindful of the cries from the next room, where her husband, MARCUS EUGENE, his trousers unzipped, holds his erect penis in one hand, pulling his eight-year old daughter toward him with the other. Overhead are balloons and crepe paper streamers and a banner that reads "Happy Birthday Eunice." Baxter, a malevolent child of about ten, kneels at the keyhole of the closed door, looking back at his mother with a wicked grin. Eunice, on her knees, turns her head to the side, a halo floating over her head as she averts her eyes in an attitude of classical innocence, helpless to resist the rape that will surely occur.

ADDIE BELLE

Liar! Liar!

Suddenly, the TV flicks on, and with it, the monitor over-head. In Waco, the compound burns. Greatly amplified, the roaring winds race through the flames and smoke. Eunice tries to turn the set off. Nothing happens. She pulls the plug. The broadcast continues. Onscreen, the fire reaches the arsenal and the munitions go off, popping and booming over the stage. Eunice ducks involuntarily, glancing up in terror as the two cherubs descend again from the flies, hovering overhead. Eunice grabs the walker, holding it in front of her like a shield.

EUNICE

Run, mama! Run!

She lunges forward with the walker, whipping it from side to side in an awkward attempt to scare off the cherubs, who taunt her lazily, just out of range.

ADDIE BELLE

They don't mean no harm.

Eunice lunges again. Accepting the challenge, the cherubs swoop down suddenly, slashing at her with their flaming knives. From the heavens, we hear a full CHILDREN'S CHOIR in a syncopated upbeat arrangement of "Praise Him," backed up by a Stax-Volt ensemble of charging horns.

Eunice, mortally wounded, sinks to her knees, all but consumed by streamers of variegated crepe-paper fire fanning out from her body. The cherubs seize the walker and return it to Addie Belle, who takes a hesitant step toward Eunice, putting a hand before her face involuntarily to ward off the heat.

ADDIE BELLE

(confused)
Eunice?

Eunice reaches out to her mother through the flames, calling to her in a little-girl voice;

EUNICE

Mommie, mommie! Don ' t let them take me, mommie!

ADDIE BELLE

(waving ineffectually with the back of her hand)

Shoo, now, shoo. Y'all be nice.

The cherubs spray her with heaven dust and hook a wire to Eunice, who is lifted away, trailing sparks like a rocket from a Flash Gordon serial. Addie Belle, momentarily blinded by the pink dust, stumbles into the easel and falls over it, getting her walker entangled with the tripod legs. As she struggles to free herself, the cherubs begin torching the house. Addie Belle manages to get to her feet again. With a frustrated, angry cry, she grabs the easel by its legs and smashes the frame against the floor repeatedly, breaking it loose from the tripod support, which she tosses aside. Lunging for the frame, she claws at the canvas until she's pulled it loose and can wad it up in a ball and begin stamping at it with both feet. Holding the walker by the legs, she lifts it over her head and begins beating the easel with it, smashing the tripod legs and breaking them loose from the frame. While she's going through this, the cherubs slash away at the large replica hanging in the studio, cutting it to ribbons. Addie Belle, exhausted, wipes the sweat from her forehead and tries to catch her breath.

ADDIE BELLE

Whew.

The cherubs mimic her response, passing their little hands over their foreheads in an exaggerated fashion.

CHERUBS

Whew.

Suddenly, the phone rings in the studio. Addie Belle hippy-hops toward the sound as fast as she can. Breathless, she lifts the receiver.

ADDIE BELLE

(fakey phone voice)

Redmond residence, hell-oh-oh!

(listens)

Siding? Well, I don't know. But you certainly have a nice voice. Let me just get my daughter.

(calling out)

Eunice? Telephone!

(a beat)

Eunice?

(as it all comes back to her)

Oh God, Eunice! Eunice!

The MUSIC fades away. The cherubs ascend. In the aftermath, only the crackling flames. Dropping the phone, Addie Belle hobbles back to the sunroom. Portions of the house are falling in. Addie Belle picks up her bag and shuffles toward the door. As she's trying to get herself, the suitcase, and the walker through the doorway, the frame falls in around her, along with the rest of the house, and all of a sudden she's outside. She turns around and yells at the smoking remains — charred sticks and a fallen chimney:

ADDIE BELLE

Didn't I tell you to get a smoke alarm, didn't I?

A pause. A shudder of fear. Helpless and totally alone, she takes a deep breath and leaves the stage. When she has disappeared, the serpent peers up at the heavens and hisses in disdain.

Scene Two: "Don't Forget Ye Teef"

A streetcorner in Atlanta. Addie Belle leans on her walker, a tin cup in one hand. She wears a flower-print Minnie Pearl sack-dress and an apron. Behind her, we see a number of TV sets, hooked up in tandem in the show-window of an electronics store. The video is a CNN report of a hurricane crashing into St. Augustine, and the images are repeated and greatly magnified on the monitor over the stage. The audio is piped to the street on a loudspeaker, over which we hear a collage of urgent commentary and scattered interviews, against a background of driving rain and flying debris. Addie Belle sings, her shrill voice weaving in and out of the broadcast like the strident testimony of the homeless and distraught refugees we see on TV:

ADDIE BELLE

Come, Thou Almighty King,
 Help us Thy Name to sing,
 Help us to praise!
 O'er all victorious
 Come and reign over us,
 Ancient of days.

Suddenly, she hears a familiar voice and turns to find her son, BAXTER, being interviewed in the storm. Behind him, solid as a fortress, we see Addie Belle's former home, an ornate stucco mansion;

BAXTER

Well, I lost a few pieces of china and some incidentals, but this place, they don't build 'em like this anymore. My heart goes out to all the unfortunates that got swindled by the unscrupulous builders that go around preying on people nowa-days, but I just thank my lucky stars the good Lord saw fit to lend a helping hand and guide me safely through this terrible, terrible catastrophe. And mama? If you're listenin' in, mama, here's a kiss —
 (blows a kiss)
 — the phone's out and I can't call you, but I love you, mama. I love you, you hear me?

He grins and clasps his hands overhead in a sign of victory. The picture cuts away to the NETWORK ANCHOR as the broadcast continues. Overjoyed at having seen Baxter, Addie Belle turns to face us, singing with renewed fervor:

ADDIE BELLE

Come, Thou incarnate Word,
 Gird on Thy mighty sword:
 Our prayer attend;
 Come, and Thy people bless,
 And give Thy Word success;
 Spirit of holiness
 On us descend.

During the above, the two-dimensional profile of a Cadillac limo glides in from the wings. The passenger rolls down his window and listens appreciatively as Addie Belle sings. He is ELBERT T. RYDER, the greatest evangelist since Billy Sunday. As the verse ends, he steps out of the limo, applauding vigorously. His clothing is extravagant and expensive, with all the flash and originality of a country-western star. He has a large diamond stickpin in his tie, and pink and chartreuse boots and a blue and yellow Stetson hat with a diamond border and diamond

rings on each of his fingers. But it is the eyes that hold our attention ... the red glowing eyes of the serpent.

ELBERT T.

Bravo, bravo. Wonderful, my dear, simply wonderful.

ADDIE BELLE

Don't I know you from someplace?

ELBERT T.

(writing out a check)

Perhaps. Last week we were in the Motor City. Saved twenty-three thousand and change. Exor-cised thirteen demons, two cases a hepatitis, one raving idiot, a syphilitic pimp, and any number of smokers, dopers, alkies, and assorted cripples.

(deposits the check in her cup)

My check, madam, for five hundred dollars, and if you don't have any pressing engagements in the near future. I can use a fresh young talent like yours —

He takes a sudden lunging step forward and puts his open palm on her forehead, crying out in a powerful voice:

ELBERT T.

Out, damned spirit! Away!

Addie Belle blinks and nearly loses her balance. Ernest T. grabs her arm, tossing the walker aside.

ELBERT T.

You won't be needing that anymore, and no more Goody powders either, because them pesty migraines are gone forever, along with your other sundry problems, and if it's wealth you're looking for, or power, or just the best loving you ever had in your entire life, I'm your man —

ADDIE BELLE

Oh my, it's you. You're him, aren't you?

ELBERT T.

Elbert T. Ryder, sugar-pie, the answer to all your prayers. Appearing at the fabulous Buckhead Discount Mall and Tabernacle for one night only, but if you'll present this pass at the door —

(hands her an oversized, gilt-edged pass)

— one of my associates will escort you back-stage for a close-up view of the miraculous proceedings, following which I can outline our basic contract and give you some idea of the marvelous future we got in mind for you.

ADDIE BELLE

But — but why me?

ELBERT T.

Because you're the genuine article, that's why. Think I don't know the real stuff when I see it? Now don't you worry about a thing. Take that money and get yourself a decent outfit. Cross-Your-Heart Bra, whatever strikes your fancy. Show starts at eight, but try to be a little bit early. *Some* a these shitkickers get so full of the spirit they might stomp you to death just trying to get to their seats.

ADDIE BELLE

I — I don't know what to say.

ELBERT T.

That's it. See what I mean? That shy, little girl way you got about you. By God, woman, gives me a hard-on just thinking about it.

(touches her hair)

Yeah, get you one a those Dolly Parton wigs, spike heels, little mini-skirt, woman you're gonna blow 'em away.

ADDIE BELLE

This aint no trick is it?

ELBERT T.

Trick? Whatever give you that idea?

ADDIE BELLE

I mean, you not from the undercovah pleece, come to take me back to the hospital? You promise?

ELBERT T.

Hospital? Don't you hear a word I'm saying here, woman? Hospital! Why, goddamighty sugarfoot, I get through making you over, they'll be building hospitals and naming 'em after you! Keys to the city! Your own masseuse!

ADDIE BELLE

Do you know, what I would like — my late husband was always talking about Paris, France — do you suppose I could —

ELBERT T

(overlapping)

Hello, yes! Concorde too, if you want it!

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I never been there either. Concord, Paris, any of the great cities. I mean, my husband, Marcus Eugene, was fairly well-to-do, but he never wanted me to travel. Woman's place, he said, was in the kitchen. And whenever he would come home from one of his trips to Africa or the Belgian Congo, first thing he would call for was a piece of my marble-swirl devil's food delight.

(sigh of regret)

It isn't that I hated my position in the world. It's just ... it seemed like ... I never got to enjoy my full measure of spiritual adventure. And, of course, there were the children.

ELBERT T.

Children are blessing.

(cautious beat)

Long as they don't get underfoot too much. Stay off to their selves and play Monopoly. Where would the little darlings be now?

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, my children are all grown up, reverend.

(girlish laugh)

I'm not a spring chicken, you know!

ELBERT T.

You are to me.

ADDIE BELLE

(flustered)

Oh, reverend.

ELBERT T.

(closer)

I never even ast your name.

ADDIE BELLE

Addie Belle. It's two names, but it's like one.

ELBERT T.

Well, madam, if the vicissitudes of the world have made you doubt your abilities — if you wake up sometimes and don't know the way to the light switch — if the whole shebang seems sometimes it's just not worf living — there's one message I want to engrave on your heart — the greatest lesson I've learned on this physical plane — that a person — any person — even a lowly insecure individual like yourself — can become anything she wants to — and already, Miss Addie Belle, I can see through the veil, see your true loveliness emerging — coming forth like a, like a apparition in the Okefenokee.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh God. Oh my God, yes. I feel it. I can feel it. The light. The pure white light of God's purposes, descending over me!

ELBERT T.

(putting a hand on her head)

Let us pray.

Addie Belle scrooches her eyes shut, raising her hands to God in supplication. Elbert T. backs her into the recessed entranceway of the store. Unzipping his fly, he pulls Addie Belle's face to his crotch, humping her in the mouth. Addie Belle lowers her arms slowly, bringing them around

Elbert T.'s thighs and holding on tightly. Overhead, on a score of flickering TV screens, the hurricane continues its rampage as Elbert T. prays aloud:

ELBERT T.

Lord Jesus hear the prayer of your pore servant Elbert T. Ryder, healer of the pore and afflicted, all donations tax deductible.

(throwing his head back)

Lord, everywhere we look in the scriptures, and in every particle and portion of this world, we see the mark of your eternal love-uhh, and during my earthly journeys I thought I had truly experienced the radiant power of that love-uhh, but until this very moment-uhh, I had not come to realize the fulsome, magnificent, soul-blinding, incredible godawful REACH of the river of love-uhh, in all its eddies-uhh, and its currents-uhh, its foam-flecked waves-uhh, and I had not comprehended-uhh, how my tiny raft of existence-uhh would be tossed

ELBERT T. (CONT'D)

about in the mighty rushing waters-uhh, of yore precious precious gifts —

(aside to Addie Belle)

— wait a minit — hole yore horses —

(breathless pause)

— here, gimme ye teef.

ADDIE BELLE

(muffled reply)

ELBERT T.

Take ye teef out. Come on, dammit, we gonna lose the rhythm a things here —

Still hidden behind Elbert T.'s legs, Addie Belle takes out her dentures and hands them over. Elbert T. pulls her against him again.

ELBERT T.

Thass it, ohmygodohmysweet baby, gum that thang, ahh, gum me, gum me!

(recovering his prayer)

And Lord — Lord — when it finally come to me what I'd been missing — I threw back my head and I just SCREAMED, LORD FOR PURE JOY!

(another aside)

Easy, easy, wait for the scream-uhh. Oh, thass it, oh you sweet thang, oh love, oh God, here we go, here we —

He screams in triumph. Silence. He shoves her away and zips his fly. Addie Belle sits, staring at the floor. On the TV screens, a government tank rams the David Koresh compound in Waco.

ELBERT T.

Wanna thank ye for sharing iss epiphany wif me.

(awkward pause)

Not often I can get to be so close to one a my penitents.

(holds out her dentures)

Here. Don't forget ye teef.

Without looking up, Addie Belle fumbles for the dentures and puts them back in her mouth.

ELBERT T.

Well, then. See you at the Tabernacle.

A pause. He stares at the TV's. The compound is in flames.

ELBERT T.

The world is a awful place, Miss Addie Belle. But sometimes it can take your breath away.

(a beat of remorse)

ELBERT T. (CONT'D)

Suffer the lil childern.

He returns to the limo, climbing in and closing the door without a backward glance. Addie Belle doesn't move. The limo glides offstage in reverse. Over the flames, we hear the children's choir again, singing "Praise him, praise him."

Scene Three: "Jimmy Swaggart's Gonna Have a Hissy"

Elbert T. Ryder's suite at the exclusive Buckhead Motel and Bowling Alley. By the window, an accountant named MYRON is counting the evening's take on an old-fashioned pull-handle adding machine. Stacks of cash are everywhere. Every time Myron pulls the handle, it rings a little bell. Elbert T., his tie loosened, lies on the bed, one foot cocked awkwardly in the air while he cuts his toe nails. Outside, the lights of the city glow in the darkness. A buffet table of food to one side. WILSON, an attorney, chews on a drumstick, a bib tied around his neck as he walks about the room. ANNETTE, Elbert T.'s secretary, is typing up some notes from a dictabelt. Her type-writer is an antique Smith-Corona, and it clacks away rhythmically in the background, accompanied by the measured ringing of Myron's little bell.

ELBERT T.

You got a ballpark figure there, Myron?

MYRON

Gonna be a big one.

ELBERT T.

Well, hurry it up, all this cash laying around, it might give somebody the wrong impression.

MYRON

Elbert, I have told you and told you, things would move a helluva lot faster around here if you'd get rid of this damn

—

(pulls the handle in disgust)

— antique of a G.D. adding machine.

ELBERT T.

Ahh, but I love the sound of it. You pull that handle, boy, and I know it's money in the bank. Give you a computer, it'd be like sittin' here watchin' a damn Garbo movie —

might be all right for some people, but me, I wanna hear the bitch moan.

Annette lifts her earphones, turning to Elbert T. with a stupid, eager-to-please smile:

ANNETTE

You talking to me, Elbert T.?

ELBERT T.

Not that I recollect, but since you can't keep your so-called mind on your duties, how about you go over there and get me some a them fancy barbecued ribs.

ANNETTE

But — but I thought you didn't like ribs, Elby.

ELBERT T.

Did I say I was going to eat 'em? What I want is for you to take off that sweater and rub 'em on your titties.

ANNETTE

In front of all these people?

ELBERT T.

These aint people, they're yore co-workers. Now git on wif it.

Annette sighs, takes off her phones, and walks to the buffet. She starts to say something else to Elbert T., thinks better of it, and begins unbuttoning her sweater. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door.

WILSON

Whosat?

ELBERT T.

None a your beeswax. Wipe the gravy off your face, Wilson, and get the door.

ANNETTE

What about me?

ELBERT T.

Git back over here, goddamit, is nobody around here got a independent judgment on anything?

ANNETTE

I just wish you'd make up your mind —
 (walking back to her typewriter)
 —sometimes I'd just as soon be back in the choir again —
 (putting her headset back on)
 — least you didn't yell at me all the time.

ELBERT T.

Hey. Shut the fuck up. One more word, I'm a throw you off the balcony. Myron, put that cash away.

Another knock at the door. Elbert T. pulls on his socks, straightens his tie, and gives Wilson the nod. Wilson opens the door. Addie Belle enters with a tentative smile. In spike heels, wearing a long blond wig and long fake nails, fake eyelashes, fishnet hose, and a tight mini-skirt, she walks awkwardly toward Elbert T., who holds out his arms to greet her.

ELBERT T.

My dear Miss Addie Belle. So very pleased you could join us.

Losing her balance in the heels, Addie Belle falls into Elbert T.'s arms.

ELBERT T.

Takes some practice, don't it? We'll get Annette here to hep ye on that walk —

He turns Addie Belle around to face the others.

ELBERT T.

Folks, like you to meet the newest *sanyasi* in our little fam'ly— Miss Addie Belle uhh —

ADDIE BELLE

Redmond.

ELBERT T.

Yeah, first thing we got ta do something about that name. Git somethin' wif a lil zap to it.

(beat; thinks:)

How about Angel? Angel something or other.

ANNETTE

(pulling off her earphones)

You addressing me, Elbert T.?

ELBERT T.

Not less yore name is Angel.

ANNETTE

I had a beau in high school called me Angel of the Morning. He was so sweet. Brought me a Snicker Bar every day.

ELBERT T.

I done tole you, girl — I want anything outa you, I'll pull off yore panties.

(thinks)

Morning ... morning ...

(snaps his fingers)

That's it — Angel Morningdove. Whata you think? Am I right? Is it perfect?

ADDIE BELLE

Can I think about it?

WILSON

(conciliatory tone)

Don't have to be legal, a course. Kind of like a stage name.

ANNETTE

Wasn't they a Marjorie Morningdove?

MYRON

Morningstar.

ANNETTE

I don't think so.

ELBERT T.

(to Addie Belle)

Don't be shy, sugarlips. If you don't like that particular name, maybe we can come up with somethin' almost as good —

ADDIE BELLE

It's not exactly I don't like it, reverend — it's just — if my son Baxter ever heard it, he wouldn't know what to think.

ELBERT T.

He's a grown boy, aint he? He can take it. Now, lissen, best way to approach this situation, to my way of thinking, is to look on it like you was gettin' married again. Changed ye name then, didn't ye? And this is a even bigger move — cause this time you'll be the blushing bride of our Lord and Savior.

WILSON

Amen.

ELBERT T.

Mr. Wilson, get one of our basic contracts and bring it over here for Miss uhh Morningdove's perusal.

(leading Addie Belle to the desk)

Sit right down here, Angel. Relax. Take a load off. Like some ribs? Hawaiian chicken? Got some Reecey cups too, Sweet Tarts, whatever strikes your fancy —

ADDIE BELLE

No, thank you. Now, reverend, about this name business —

(a bit more aggressive)

if I'm gonna be the one to use it, it has to be something I can feel comfortable with. Something that relates to me, to my own background and circumstances.

ANNETTE

Ma'am, he don't like it when you talk back to him.

ELBERT T.

You shut your yap.
 (a forced smile)
 What did you have in mind, dumpling?

ADDIE BELLE

They was three of us sisters in my fam'ly, reverend, and we all three had the name of Belle — Katie Belle, and Lucy Belle, and Addie Belle. Us girls always thought it was kind of silly, but that was how papa wanted it, and in our fam'ly, papa's word was the law. Well, sir, when papa was on his death bed, he confided to me that if him and mama had ever been fortunate enough to have another female child, he woulda named her Belle too, Memphis Belle after that famous B-17 that got through the whole entire war without crashing.

ELBERT T.

Asking me to name you after a airplane?

ADDIE BELLE

It's my final offer.

ELBERT T.

(momentary struggle)
 Done.

Wilson lays a sheaf of papers in front of Addie Belle.

WILSON

Need your signature here, Memphis, and here and here. What it says is you pretty much belong to the reverend body and soul, except two weeks out of each calendar year, you get a unpaid vacation, to be spent within a hundred mile radius except in matters of extreme emergency.

ADDIE BELLE

I want something in there about getting to choose my own clothes.

ELBERT T.

No way, José. On all matters of costume there can't be but one authority and that's yores truly.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, it's not right.
 (adamant)
 It don't feel ... holy.

ELBERT T.

You just gettin' started here, Memphis. You aint exactly Tammy Baker, understand? Gotta have patience. Talk about holy, look at Annette here. Stand up, Annette.

Annette gets to her feet with a bored expression, posing like a runway model.

Annette used to be in my choir. She's so holy she got promoted to secretary.

ADDIE BELLE

She can get away with it. Not me.

ELBERT T.

Look. Lots of people that come to my services, they're little old ladies just like you. And if I put a performer up on that stage, it's got to be some-body they can identify with. Tammy Faye's gag was to play like she was dumber than anybody watching, so they could feel superior to her. But with you, Memphis, they gonna find out it's a whole new ballgame.

ADDIE BELLE

(unconvinced)

They'll laugh at me.

ELBERT T.

Sure they will, that's all part of it. But down inside, they're gonna envy you. Wish they had the freedom to toss convention aside and put on sexy outfits like you got — look at Madonna, bitch aint even pretty, but she knows the secret, just like Dolly Parton — if you want 'em to love you, first they gotta hate you. Show 'em you're a whore, flaunt it, by God, and first thing you know, you're gonna be gettin' your pitcher in the paper, and the Cath'lics all stirred up, vice cops on us at every turn, and 'fore you c'n say Jack Rabbit — you'll be leadin' a revolution — and every senior citizen from Coldwater Canyon to Calabash will have a new champeen.

(a pause)

You ... Memphis Belle Redmond. You can be their leader ... their whore of redemption ... their gray-haired Magdelene.

ADDIE BELLE

You really and truly bleeve that?

ELBERT T.

Cross my heart.

WILSON

Jimmy Swaggart's gonna have a hissy.

ADDIE BELLE

Just one more thing, reverend.

(embarrassed)

When you first met me on the streetcorner ... when you had your way with me ... I want you to know it was purely spiritual on my part — that was not me down there on my knees, that was ... that was way back when I was a little

girl and I would go out in the fields and look up and there would be the face of Jesus in the clouds.

(a pause)

What I mean is it was a one-time thing. I ever take out my dentures again, it has to be true love.

ELBERT T.

I wouldn't want it any other way. Amen, sister.

WILSON

Sign here.

Addie Belle signs. Wilson whisks the papers away.

ELBERT T.

(pulling up a chair)

Now. Reason I invited you up here tonight, I think we're all agreed you got the raw talent, but what I need to know is how soon we can put you on the stage.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I don't really have any other plans. Nobody I'm responsible to. My son Baxter is way off down in St. Augustine. And my daughter, Eunice ...

(a glimpse of her grief)

... Eunice got caught on fire and burnt up. I miss my little girl so much. But I guess that don't ever go away. And I ... I got to pick up the pieces and keep going.

ELBERT T.

What I mean, sister, is we don't really have a sense of yore presence on the stage. Like, the Elbert T. Ryder before you is one kind of person, but the man up in front of the multitudes is another individual entirely. Git my gist?

ADDIE BELLE

(a glimmer of understanding)

Like in the movies.

ELBERT T.

(patting her on the knee)

Exactly, my precious. Like if Harold Lloyd didn't paint on his glasses you'd never recognize him.

Folks need to know who you are the minute you walk on.

ADDIE BELLE

(removing her glasses and showing them to him)

I got some glasses. Will these do, do you reckon?

ELBERT T.

(exaggerated show of patience)

Not talking about the glasses, Memphis. Trying ta explain about the histrionics of the situation. Why don't you tell us a little story or somethin'?

ADDIE BELLE

You mean like Brer Rabbit?

ELBERT T.

Or somethin' from the Bible, maybe, or some anecdotal humor about a fam'ly member, just anything you feel easy wif.

ADDIE BELLE

Did y'all ever hear ... the one about ... the woman that found a Hairy Toe?

ANNETTE

(disbelief)

Offa somebody's foot?

ADDIE BELLE

Yes. Big old hairy toe off of a man.

ANNETTE

(shudder of disgust)

Ugghh.

ELBERT T.

Tell it, sister.

ADDIE BELLE

Have to pull your chairs in close. And turn off the lights except this little desk lamp.

Wilson flicks off the lights. Everyone gathers close around Addie Belle.

ADDIE BELLE

Once upon a time, this old woman that never got married went out in her garden to pick some

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

beans. When she was mostly done, she saw this thing sticking up out of the ground at the edge of the field. Look like a burnt stick or something. But when she stooped down, she saw it was ... the Hairy Toe. So she put it in her apron pocket and took it to the house. Put the Hairy Toe in a jar and put the jar in the ice box.

(pause for effect)

That night, when she went to bed, the wind started moaning through the trees. And away off in the distance, the woman heard what seemed like a voice, crying out in the night: "Whooo — Whooo — Whoo's got my Hair-r-ry Toe-ohh? Whooo's got my Hairy Toe-oohhh?"

(pause)

Well, the woman scrooched down under the covers and for a while she didn't hear nothing. But then it rose up again, growling and scratching outside the house like some kind of wild animal. And then it rumbled down the chimney. And rattled the winders. And then — and then

she heard the door creak open — and something slid inside and commenced creeping over the floor. Closer ... and closer ... till the woman could hear it breathing right over her head. And then it bent down ... and it said ... "Where's my Hairy Toe-ooh? Whooo's that got my Hairy Toe-ooh?"

A terrible silence. Addie Belle reaches out swiftly and grabs Myron's arm:

ADDIE BELLE

YOU! YOU GOT IT!

Myron screams. The others laugh and applaud. Elbert T. throws his arms around Addie Belle exuberantly:

ELBERT T.

By God, woman — you're a natural!

ADDIE BELLE

You really think so?

ELBERT T.

Hello, yes — ask Myron. Right, Myron? Am I right?

MYRON

(still shaken)

Better go on and order that computer, Elbert. We're gonna need it.

He leaves the room. Offstage, we hear the Elbert T. Ryder Garden of Life and Blessed Redeemer Chorus, singing "Every Time I Feel the Spirit." A pair of cherubs with flaming swords descends to hover protectively on either side of Addie Belle.

Scene Four: *"I Thought It Would Just Set Him On Fahr"*

The chorus troops in from the wings. We find ourselves in the Bama Skating Rink and Revival Tabernacle in Birmingham, Alabama. As the choir continues singing, Addie Belle steps *downstage into* a pool of light. Elbert T. takes a seat to her left, clutching his Bible. The GHOST OF EUNICE enters to one side, wearing a paint-spattered ethereal gown. She opens up the fire-blackened and partially destroyed easel, patched together with duct tape. Placing a smudged blank canvas on the easel, Eunice takes brush in hand and begins painting the following proclamation as the anthem continues:

GOOD FRIDAY SERMON ON THE WOUNDS OF
CHRIST, DRIVING GO-CARTS ON SUNDAY, AND
FORNICA-TING WITH THE DEVIL, BY SISTER
MEMPHIS BELLE REDMOND.

While the ghost paints, Annette enters with a video camera, training it on Addie Belle, whose image appears on the overhead monitor, out of focus at first, but gradually resolving into a huge close-up. The ghost stands aside. The song ends. Addie Belle speaks.

ADDIE BELLE

0 children of Birmingham before there was any shopping malls or bowling alleys or go-carts in this world there was the Word of God and the Word was God and the Word was good and the Word is the blood and the blood is the stars which are the glistening TEARS of God bleeding from our Lord's precious hands on the cross spilt before the foun-dations of the world-uhh for our transgressions and our INIQUITIES-uhh and the prophet Zacharias tells us it happened in the HOUSE of his FRIENDS so watch OUT for that close friend brothers and sisters for it is written in God's HOLY WORD-uhh that it is not your enemies you got to guard yourself gainst-uhh it is that DEAR so-called BOSOM BUDDY that comes into your living room-uhh with a stick in his HANDS-uhh to beat up on your innocent body and holding you down-uhh so you can't hardly BREATHE-uhh and tying you up in the bed so you can't even go tinkle-uhh! and the LIGHTNING playing all around and the WINDS —

Thunder and lightning rattle over the auditorium. The chorus, pretending to be the wind, moans in the background, growing gradually more intense as Addie Belle continues:

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

— the HOWLING WINDS drowning out your pitiful last words-uhh till the only ones that can HEAR you are the angels —

(reaching out to caress a beaming cherub on the cheek)

— the little angels the blessed angels on high. 0 Brothers Woe to this Sodomistic World and woe to you FATHERS that pull off our little panties —

Elbert T. gives a veiled reaction, not quite certain where all of this is leading.

ADDIE BELLE

— and push your unshaved faces-uhh between our legs-uhh —

Elbert half-rises from his chair. Addie Belle puts her hands on his shoulders and lovingly, but with surprising strength, forces him back again, circling his chair as she continues:

ADDIE BELLE

— and WOE BROTHERS WOE to the go-cart pilots that screech through the living rooms of the faithful ROOTING LIKE PIGS growling in our DREAMS Woe to these WOE! DRUNK ON SPEED and GONE GONE as the owl rises DOOMED beneath the weaving WILLOWS their raiments falling away like lint while they SCREAM-uhh and make their ENGINES TO HOWL-uhh like a father gone MAD-uhh and FALL FALL into Pandemonium-uhh into DANCING-uhh into ROCK MUSIC beating on their tambourines and their guitars straight down to the red clay bottom of Hell yanking at their steering wheels with the pine-trees whizzing by wings tipping over down down 0 God crashing through the ribbons of tarmac and foam-uhh dancing their selves blue in the fiery flames crying out WOE WOE WOE till —

(as the cherubs accompany her in pantomime)
 the angels of JUSTICE unsheathe their BURNING SWORDS
 and rip the veil from the temple-uhh and the HIGH PRIESTS
 OF WHOREDOM-uhh run pell-mell down the steps and the
 sacrificial ENERGY PENETRATES the MIGHTY STRATA
 and the cumulus-uhh and the nimbus-uhh quickens to the
 bones of the pro-phets-uhh and the dead the dead rise UP
 from their graves-uhh and tramp through the streets of
 JERUSALEM! JERUSALEM! and the whistle of the
 DAMNATION TRAIN is heard throughout the land running at
 break-neck speed all the way from Deuteronomy clear
 back to the Garden of Eden down from Kings and Judges
 down from Egypt plowing its

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

way over Jordan blowing for the switch and chugging
 straight on to Calvary till all of a sudden there in the
 bouncing head-lights the engineer sees our Lord Jesus-
 uhh on the tracks-uhh saying Peace be still crying out Why
 Can't We All Just Get Along but unflinching standing his
 ground steadfast-uhh till the cow-catcher sends him flying
 off the rails and up on the cross where his BLOOD the
 precious Savior's BLOOD-uhh ditches the train and sends
 it sliding to the further-most-oh reaches of Hell-uhh and
 everybody that was ever
 WOUNDED-uhh all the ones that got cornered by DARKIES
 and BEAT WITH STICKS-uhh and every unfortunate among
 us that has had her beloved dwelling place in ST.
 AUGUSTINE stole out from under her by her own FLESH
 OF HER FLESH LO! LO! they will rise up again to sit at the
 feet of his beauteous throne —
 (close to tears)
 -- where there ' s no sickness-uhh ... no sorrow-uhh ...
 no doctors-uhh to prescribe and prescribe-uhh and lie and
 lie-uhh and no such a thing as a broken heart ... or having
 to live by yourself all alone-uhh ... or somebody ... some
 wavy-haired DOCTOR coming in your room at the G.D.
 CHARLOTTE MEMORIAL before you even had your
 breakfast ... saying you got CANCER. All in your liver and
 every ...where ...

A pause. In the distance we hear the children singing "Crown him. Crown him." Addie Belle listens. Cradling the imaginary mixing bowl, she stirs her batter. The singing fades. Addie Belle blinks, staring at the audience. Elbert T. stands up and takes a hesitant step toward her, his red eyes glowing in the shadows. The cherubs hold him at bay with their knives.

ELBERT T.

(to the cherubs)
 You aint real. You just figaments a my imagination. Go on
 now, git.
 (stage whisper to Addie Belle as the cherubs
 refuse to budge)
 Call 'em off, you hear me? This don't cut it. This aint it at
 all. Bitch. Whore.. I was gonna make you a star!
 (to the audience)

Listen, uhh. This woman. I found this woman wandering the streets of Atlanta. Took her under my wing. Nursed her back to health. And I thought that if I put her up here and let her testify to some of her experiences and hard knocks it would be a blessing. But I failed. It was a dread-

ELBERT T. (CONT'D)

ful mistake. And you got my abject apologies for this — this unseemly display. But if you'll just bear wif me, we'll continue here as soon as I can escort the broken-down old harpy back-stage to where she can speak wif one a our experienced coun-selors.

He turns to Addie Belle again and takes out a revolver, waving her off with the barrel:

ELBERT T.

I give you fair warning, you connivin' cunt — vamoose. Go on now — skeedaddle. And take them lil shitasses wif you.

ADDIE BELLE

I won't!

CHERUBS

(overlapping)

Wont!

ELBERT T.

Will!

ALL THREE

Won't!

Elbert T. aims the pistol at Addie Belle and pulls the trigger. We hear the bullet ricochet into the distance, deflected by one of the cherubs. Elbert T. fires again. The cherubs split apart and fly about from one position to another, taunting him. Elbert T. empties the gun at them. As the hammer clicks audibly on the open chamber, the ghost of Eunice descends. Wrapping her legs around Elbert T.'s neck, she pulls her gown over his head and grinds her heavenly clit against his face, her body arching back in phantom ecstasy. Elbert T., flailing about blindly, tries to cry out, his voice muffled and incoherent.

ADDIE BELLE

(not looking)

Marcus Eugene? Is that you back there in the playroom?

(listens)

Eunice, honey? Is that your father in there with you?

Eunice rides Elbert T. down to his knees. A cherub hands his knife to Addie but the flame has been extinguished. The gleaming steel catches the light. Addie Belle bursts into the playroom. Eunice disengages herself and floats away, hovering nearby coquettishly as Elbert T. gets to his feet.

ELBERT T.

Now looky here. This aint what you might think.

Addie Belle brings the blade up in an underhanded thrust, plunging it into the reverend's belly. Elbert T. doubles over, grabbing at Addie Belle's arm. She pulls the knife out and stabs him in the back. Elbert T. pushes her away, his guts spilling out like colored serpents as he tries to reach the knife and pull it out. Finally, sinking to his knees again, he dies, his red eyes pulsing slower and slower, dimmer and dimmer, until he expires. Addie Belle stares at her bloody hands. She glances at the audience in dismay, trying to wipe the blood off on her skirt.

ADDIE BELLE

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I thought it would just set him on fahr.

She leaves the stage. Annette follows her with the video camera. Eunice ascends. The unarmed cherub retrieves his blade. Both cherubs depart. The chorus, left all alone, recovers enough to make it through the final number:

CHORUS

Steal away, steal away, steal away
to Jesus
Steal away, steal away home,
I aint got long to stay here
My Lord, He calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds within-a my
soul,
I aint got long to stay here.

On the overhead monitor we see Addie Belle enter a dressing room and begin removing her make-up. In the background, Myron is happily at work on his new laptop computer. Wilson, his feet up on the counter, sits in one of the makeup chairs upstage of Addie Belle, puffing on a cigar laconically as he glances through the Yale Law Review.

CHORUS

Steal away, steal away, steal away
to Jesus
I aint got long to stay here.
Green trees a-bending,
Poor sinner stands a-trembling
The trumpet sounds within-a my
soul
I aint got long to stay here.

The video camera moves in for a close shot of Addie Belle's face in the dressing -room mirror. She pulls off the false eyelashes and rubs cold-cream over her make-up. Wiping her face with a towel, she stares at herself in the mirror.

CHORUS

Steal away, steal away, steal away
to Jesus
I aint got long to stay here.

Addie Belle's image looms in the foreground. Wilson, noticing the camera, and thinking it's pointed at him, stands up irritably and shuts the door in Annette's face. The monitor goes black. The chorus, at a loss how to proceed further, elects the LEAD SINGER — a large, jolly black woman — to speak for them. She steps forward, addressing the audience with an uncertain smile:

LEAD SINGER

Y'all come again. And tell your friends?

In the distance, the wail of a police siren.

SEGUE TO:

Scene Five: "Ere the Winter Storms Begin"

Downtown Birmingham, night. Overhead, the lights of the city. The siren fades away. Softly, the unseen chorus hums "Come Ye Thankful People Come." Addie Belle, in the tattered clothes we saw her wearing in Atlanta, stands in front of a pawnshop, staring at an aluminum walker in the window. In the other window, a sign: THANKSGIVING SALE — 89% OFF ON SELECTED ITEMS. Addie Belle goes inside. Through the window we see her negotiating with the PAWNBROKER. The chorus begins singing:

CHORUS

Come, ye thankful people come;
 Raise the song of harvest home.
 All is safely gathered in
 Ere the winter storms begin ...
 (etc.)

Addie Belle opens her bag, dumping a great pile of cash on the counter. The man shakes his head, refusing the offer. On bended knee, like some damsel in distress in a silent movie, Addie Belle begs the pawnbroker to take pity on her. He gestures for her to leave, crossing his arms with finality. The cherubs descend and squirt him with heaven dust. The man relents, handing over the walker and a coonskin hat as well, to protect her, he says, against the cold. With a grateful smile, Addie Belle shuffles out the door.

CHORUS

For the Lord our God shall come
 And shall take His harvest home
 From His field shall in that day
 All offenses purge away ...
 (etc.)

The walker has only three legs, but Addie Belle, with a resolute sigh, moves off bravely into the night. Beneath the chorus, but rising in volume, the winds begin to howl, and from offstage someone takes up the first snowflakes of winter and flings them at Addie Belle, who puts an arm over her face in a stylized manner, whirling this way and that as she makes a prolonged, Lillian Gish kind of exit into the storm.

ACT II

Scene One: "I Can See His Sweet Face Now"

As the house-lights dim, we hear the sounds of JUNGLE BEASTS — the trumpeting of elephants, the snarl of a leopard, the cries of tropical birds and monkeys — which lead us deep into the forest primeval. VINES and CREEPERS everywhere. A large TREE, *stage left*, and a meandering BROOK, *down center*. Faint beams of SUNLIGHT penetrate through the green

CANOPY overhead. Addie Belle, tired and dispirited, enters from the right. The animal sounds drift into the background.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, praise Jesus — water.

She kneels at the burbling brook, throwing water on her face and drinking from her cupped hands. The stream is polluted, however, and Addie Belle gags on the water, spitting it out. Slowly, exhausted, she gets to her feet again, clinging to the walker. The poisonous brook, something of a joker, giggles at the trick it has played on her.

ADDIE BELLE

Now you stop that, stop it. The very idear. What if it was your mama and somebody tried to poison her to deaf, guess you wouldn't laugh so big then, would you?

The brook thinks it over, frowns, and turns his back on her, burbling to himself in a soto voce manner. Addie Belle lifts her countenance to the heavens.

ADDIE BELLE

Save me, Lord, from the lion's mouth, for thou hast heard me from the horns of unicorns.

Suddenly, a figure pops up from behind one of the great exposed roots at the base of the tree — a large pink RABBIT. Grimacing in pain, the rabbit moans. Addie Belle stares at the animal curiously, reacting with feigned disbelief:

ADDIE BELLE

My goodness, what you think this is, Easter?

She moves toward the rabbit, holding out her arms and calling to it in a singsong voice:

ADDIE BELLE

Here, little bunny-bunny-bunny — here, little bunny —

The rabbit, as big as Addie Belle herself, tries to run away, but is jerked back by the bear trap that holds him by the leg. The trap is anchored to the tree by a chain. The rabbit howls.

ADDIE BELLE

You pore thing. Let me hep you.

The rabbit howls again. As Addie Belle approaches, the animal jerks away again and tries to chew its leg off.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, that's certainly no solution.

She reaches for the trap. The rabbit pulls away again.

ADDIE BELLE

Now, listen here, rabbit, I am older than you, and I definitely know a lot more about traps, not to mention the evils of mankind. You don't want to go to the hospital, do you? No, you do not, take my word for it, you don't want anything to do with that old hospital.

Trembling in fear, the rabbit nonetheless permits her to examine the trap.

ADDIE BELLE

I grew up on the farm, Mr. Rabbit. My daddy always wanted a son, but instead, he got me and my sisters. Not a boy in the bunch. So, from an early age, I was instructed in the ways of the wild, and when I was no more than ten years old, I could drive a A-model Ford and work a thrashing machine.

(tries to pull the jaws of the trap open)

Uh huh, whoever did this was serious. Look like one of those guaranteed things from a Sears catalogue.

(stands up, hands on her hips)

What we need — is something to prise it open with.

(looks around)

Aha!

Moving with renewed energy now — a woman with a mission — she picks up her walker and slams it against the tree several times. The tree groans and tries to pull away.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh hush, you big baby — that don't hurt and you know it.

She hits the tree again with the walker, managing finally to break off another of the legs, which she uses as a fulcrum to spring the trap open. The rabbit leaps free and starts to run off.

ADDIE BELLE

Hold it! I'm not done with you yet. Git back over here.

(as the rabbit thinks it over)

Come on now, I don't have all day.

The rabbit limps back toward her reluctantly. Addie Belle rummages in her bag.

ADDIE BELLE

Last thing you wanna do is go wandering off in the woods with a naked wound.

(coming up with a bottle of iodine)

Here, this'll do the trick.

She uncorks the bottle and dabs iodine on the wound with a glass dropper. The rabbit makes a face and whines, hopping around and blowing on the wound.

ADDIE BELLE

Just one more thing.

She takes out a Band-Aid and sticks it on over the wound.

ADDIE BELLE

There now. Won't be long, you'll be good as new.

The rabbit looks at the Band-Aid admiringly, gives her a kind of smile, and hops away.

ADDIE BELLE

You're welcome.

She picks up her damaged walker, examining it sadly.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I guess two legs is better than none.

Gathering some sticks, she props them up on the walker, forming a crude lean-to frame, which she covers with dead leaves. The tree bends down to help her, offering a twig or two to dress things up. While Addie Belle works, she sings:

ADDIE BELLE

All things bright and beautiful
All creatures great and small
All things wise and wonderful
The Lord God made them all.

Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings
He made their glowing colors
He made their tiny wings

The sunlight is fading away. Addie Belle huddles under her little shelter. From the depths of the forest, we hear the jungle beasts growling and moving about.

ADDIE BELLE

If I had a fire, I could fix something to eat. If I had
something to fix. Somebody to tell me how good it was.
(to God)

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

Oh Lord, I'm trying. Don't you know I'm trying? If I wasn't
trying. I'd just hook a hose up to the tailpipe and be done
with it. If I had a tailpipe.

Moonlight spills through the branches of the tree. Addie Belle tries again to sing:

ADDIE BELLE

This little light of mine
I'm gonna make it shine
This little light of mine ...

Someone clears his throat. Addie Belle looks up to see Rabbit, Mrs. Rabbit, and their six children.

ADDIE BELLE

Why, looky here. You came back. And with all your
fam'ly.

Rabbit herds his group forward, a shy, wholesome, "All-American" family.

ADDIE BELLE

(standing up)
If this don't beat all. Such a big, healthy bunch, too. Come
on in the house, come on — welcome!

The family gathers around the lean-to, sitting at Addie Belle's feet. She bustles about, re-arranging a leaf here, a twig there. Mrs. Rabbit has brought a carrot, which she presents as a gift.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, you shouldn't have. A carrot. My favorite food in the whole world, how did you know?

(tucking the carrot in her bag)

I'll just lay it aside for a midnight snack. Here lately, I don't know what it is, I get my days and nights mixed up. That ever happen to you? Guess I'm just getting old, huh.

(taking a seat again)

Six chil'ren. My, my. I was just thinking the other day, seems like you don't see any big families anymore. And you know, I think that's what's wrong with this country. Folks don't stick together. Don't do things together the way they used to.

(smiling at the memory:)

Why, when I was a little girl, everybody was from a big fam'ly, and we was always having reunions and get-togethers, and church suppers and I don't know what-all, just to be with our kin folks and love each other.

One of the children whispers something to Mrs. Rabbit. Addie Belle grins, pointing off to the bushes;

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

It's right over yonder! Run on, child — don't mind us, when you got to go, you got to go!

The rabbit hops off into the bushes.

ADDIE BELLE

Now, that young 'un reminds me of my boy, Baxter. Every time we would go visiting someplace, no matter where, no matter how many times he went to the bathroom before we left, soon as we got where we were going, he would have to go all over again. Baxter lives in Florida, now. That house has got eight bathrooms, unless he's gone and added some extra ones.

(a pause)

I'm heading that way now, to pay my son a visit. And he'll hold out his arms and say, mama, this is the greatest birthday present a person could ever have. Be his Christmas present, too — that's when his birthday is, on Christmas Day.

The missing rabbit scurries back and takes a seat by his mother. Addie Belle puts the raccoon hat on the child's head.

ADDIE BELLE

(sings)

Davy, Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier!

She laughs. The rabbit children giggle amongst themselves.

ADDIE BELLE

Who wants to hear a story?

The rabbit children raise their hands.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, you have to scrooch up close together, and hold hands real tight, cause this is a scary story my daddy used to tell me ...

(as the rabbits huddle together excitedly)

Okay. Once upon a time, this old woman that never got married went out in her garden to pick some ... carrots. When she was mostly done, she saw this thing sticking up out of the ground at the edge of the garden where she had her marigolds. Look like a piece of colored glass. But when she stooped down, she saw it was ... a golden rabbit's foot. So she put it in her apron pocket and took it to the house, cause her daddy had always told her if she found a rabbit's foot, it would bring good luck.

(shiver from the rabbits)

So she put the little footsie in a jar, and put the jar in the ice box.

(pause for effect)

That night, when she went to bed, the wind started moaning in the trees ...

The brook burbles, moving up and down the scale as he tries to moan like the wind. The tree, embarrassed at the attempt, rolls his eyes, but shakes his leaves obediently as the "wind" courses through them. The rabbits shiver again.

ADDIE BELLE

And way off in the distance, the woman heard what seemed like a voice, crying out in the night: "Whooo — Whooo — Whooo's got my little gold footsie? Whooo's got my little gold footsie?"

(another dramatic pause)

Well, the woman scrooched down under the covers and for a while she didn't hear nothing. But then it rose up again, growling around the house like some kind of wild animal — and she could hear these little paws scratching on the window. And then it tumbled down the chimney. And rattled at the door. And then — and then she heard the door creak open — and something slid inside and begun creeping along the floor. Closer ... and closer ... till the old woman could hear it breathing right over her head — and its breath smelled like —

(stage whisper)

— clover. And then it bent down ... and it said, "Where's my precious gold footsie? Whooo's that got my little gold paw?"

The pause. Addie Belle reaches out quickly and grabs the rabbit wearing the coonskin hat:

ADDIE BELLE

YOU! YOU GOT IT!

The rabbit screams. Squeals of delight from the others. All applaud. Addie Belle puts her arms around the little ones, hugging them. Suddenly, an arrow whizzes through the air and strikes Addie Belle in the breast. She sinks to a sitting position, clutching feebly at the shaft of the arrow. The rabbits, terrified, run off into the woods. Addie Belle crawls to the base of the tree and collapses, looking to the heavens with a puzzled expression as she breathes her last.

In the distance, we hear the lonely harmonica again, in a dirge-like rendition of "Praise him, Praise him." Two HUNTERS arrive, out of shape and out of breath. Dressed in starched cammies, they carry wicked-looking crossbows, and search for their quarry with long-barreled flashlights. The younger of the two, an inexperienced sportsman named CARL, stumbles over Addie Belle and nearly falls.

CARL
Ohmygod. Over here, Hubert.

HUBERT
You find him?

CARL
It aint a deer, Hubert. It's a beautiful old woman, kind of resembles Madonna.

Hubert kneels by Addie Belle's side, feeling her neck for a pulse.

HUBERT
Go get the shovel. We'll bury her here.

CARL
Aint that against the law?

HUBERT
What 're you asking me for?
(pulling out the arrow and wiping it on his leg)
It was your arrow that did it. See the tip? Curare-tip Annihilator, that's yours, aint it?

CARL
You — you wouldn't turn me in, Hubert? You wouldn't do that. Goddamit, man, I'm a Mason.

HUBERT
Quit whining. We'll try again tomorrow. Now hustle back to the Hummer and get me a shovel. I'll stay here, say a few words over her.

CARL
I won't forget this, Hubert.

HUBERT
Well, the first time is always the worst. Just remember, boy — it aint how many we kill, it's how we play the game.

Carl nods and leaves quickly. Hubert stares down at Addie Belle.

HUBERT
Don't think too hard of him, ma'am. It was a honest mistake. He didn't mean any harm.

He kneels between her legs and throws back her skirt.

HUBERT

But anybody that says you look like Madonna ought to have his eyes examined.

Unzipping his fly, he falls on the corpse, humping like mad. As he nears orgasm, his body bends backward like a bow, and he cries out in ecstasy;

HUBERT

Marilyn! Marilyn! I love you, Marilyn!

He collapses over the body. Offstage, we hear the Elbert T. Ryder Garden of Life and Blessed Redeemer Chorus, in a reprise of "Every Time I Feel the Spirit." As the singing swells in volume, Addie Belle's soul rises up from her body and ascends to heaven. The rabbits hop out tentatively, watching her until she disappears.

Scene Two: "*Somebody's Ass Is Gonna Be Grass*"

A field at the edge of heaven. *Upstage*, a tall chain-link fence with concertina razor-wire along the top. In the center of the fence is a turnstile entrance, flanked by a guard's hut. A sign overhead: MANE GATE. NO UNARTHERISED INTRY. VILATERS WILL BE PERSECUTE.

Addie Belle enters. She knocks politely on the door of the hut. No answer. She knocks again, louder. With a shrug, she goes to the turnstile and pushes. It doesn't budge.

ADDIE BELLE

(calling out)

Hello? Hello there! Anybody home?

Still no reply. She rattles the turnstile angrily. All of a sudden, we hear the whoop-whoop of a klaxon, accompanied by sirens, flares, the distant clatter of automatic weapons, and the barking of vicious dogs from within the compound. The hut door opens, and the guard, a crafty pensioner in his seventies, yells out peevishly:

GUARD

Aw right, aw right! What's all this rigamarole?

Seeing Addie Belle, he shakes his head in disgust and takes out a large key, which he inserts into an alarm box at the gate. The sounds fade away. The last flare sputters out.

ADDIE BELLE

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cause a commotion.

GUARD

This your first visit?

ADDIE BELLE

Umm, yes.

GUARD

Okay, I'm not gonna say this but once, so pay attention. Deliveries go to gate four, all except UPS, which is gate sixteen. If you're with the cleaning service, that's gate two. All security personnel report to gate twelve. Union grievances and workmen's comp, gate ten. Tours and publicity, gate thirty-nine. Sales people

and whatnot, that's gate twenty-seven. If you're seeking employment, applications accepted at gate fourteen, Thursdays only, nine to four. Questions?

ADDIE BELLE

Umm. What if you're just a new member, and nobody's told you what to do?

GUARD

Member a what?

ADDIE BELLE

The heavenly host?

GUARD

Woman, you beat all.

(reaching for his clipboard)

Okay, if you have to go through the whole routine — name?

ADDIE BELLE

My stage name is Memphis Belle, but you might not have that down yet, it's fairly recent —my real name is Addie Belle — Addie Belle Redmond.

GUARD

Most recent place a residence?

ADDIE BELLE

I was at the Charlotte Memorial, but I don't count that, do you? Where I lived at was on Mt. Tabor Church Road at Barber Junction, North Carolina, which is just outside of Bear Poplar, on the western side of Salisbury, near the county line. And if y'all don't keep better records than this, somebody is gonna to be in deep trouble someday.

GUARD

You the one in trouble, and you better watch your mouth, too, you know what's good for you.

ADDIE BELLE

Excuse me?

GUARD

You're in the wrong place. Don't know how it happened, and I don't care, but if I was you, I'd just back myself on back to where I come from, and forget this craziness. Personally, I don't know what you'd wanna go in there for anyway, old lady like you, you oughta be ashamed.

ADDIE BELLE

Now you listen, you. I got murdered by a hunter that thought I was a deer, and when he went back to the Hummer looking for a shovel to bury me with, his partner raped my dead body and called me names. I've had a long and confusing journey, and if this is the wrong

place, is that my fault? I'm not responsible, you understand?

(tears of frustration)

All I'm trying to do is find my just reward!

GUARD

Ma'am.

(awkward pause)

Ma'am, don't cry, ma'am, please. It's just they get all kinds up here, trying to break in — Kluckers, Nazis, Feminists, you name it — but I can see this here is just some kind a bureaucratic error, and it's not the first time either. You just wait till I call this in — somebody's ass is gonna be grass.

ADDIE BELLE

I don't want to get anybody in trouble.

GUARD

Well, I do. I don't give a rat's little pecker, you understand? And if you had to work here, you'd feel the exact same way. It's them or us, and I'm sick to death a being abused and put down by the sonsabitches. It aint right, it aint never been right, but the only way to win is to let the bastards know they can't run over you. I might not look it, ma'am, but I got a G.E.D. from the Adult Education Division of the University of Minnesota, but you think I can get an inside job? Hell no, they stick together like ticks on a horse's belly, and half of 'em never even finished the fifth grade.

(determined beat)

Well, this is one time they don't get away with it. If a thing is wrong, it's wrong, am I right?

ADDIE BELLE

Maybe if I could just talk to somebody. Explain my circumstances.

GUARD

(a knowing nod)

Grievance Committee. Sure, but it won't do any good. Total waste a time.

ADDIE BELLE

But — but why? What is it I did that was so wrong they won't have me?

GUARD

You aint a nigger, that's what.

ADDIE BELLE

Nih — Nih —?

GUARD

Go on, you can say it, they do, don't they?

ADDIE BELLE

I didn't grow up using that word, and I'm not about to do it now. It's trashy, and it's not polite.

GUARD

That's the trouble with the white race, ma'am — never learned to stick together. But you better bleeve them knee-grows do. That's how they come to be in charge.

ADDIE BELLE

But — but what about all my kin folks — mama and papa, my sisters, my cousins — my Aunt Fanny?

(resigned shrug from the guard)

Oh my. And you mean to tell me it's been this way all along?

GUARD

Course not. Used to be the white man's domain, far as the eye can see or the eagle can fly.

(spits tobacco juice in disgust)

They took it over, like they're taking over every-thing else. White man aint got a chance anymore. Look at me, know what they're trying to do to me? Steal my job, that's what. Move the guard position inside the fence. so I can't qualify, so one of them can have it.

ADDIE BELLE

And God— ? He's — he's a darkie too?

GUARD

Biggest, blackest buck you ever saw.

ADDIE BELLE

And all us white people — we're — we're going to— to —?

She points down. The guard throws his arms open in a gesture of hapless despair.

ADDIE BELLE

Those —coonjiggers! It's ... not fair! It's so unfair! I cannot believe that everything I was ever taught is just ... a fairy tale.

GUARD

Worse 'n that, ma'am. Fairy tales at least have a good ending.

ADDIE BELLE

(a sudden thought)

Wait. I know my dorter's up here. She paid me a visit, and she was wearing her heavenly gown, look like something from Ivey's or Montaldo's —not the kind of thing she would ever pick out for herself, I'll tell you that.

GUARD

Daughter, huh? What's her name?

ADDIE BELLE

Eunice. Eunice Adaline, after her great-grandmother, and, and, Redmond, after her daddy..

GUARD

(going through the printout on his clipboard)
Redmond ... Redmond.
(his surprise)
Well, I be damn.

ADDIE BELLE

I knew it. I knew it!

GUARD

Got burned up, huh?

ADDIE BELLE

Yes, yes, can I see her? Can I talk to her? Eunice and I were never that close, but she tried, bless her heart and she did love me. Oh, please — if I could just see her for just a minute, maybe I could get 'em to give me a little place off to myself somewhere, and Eunice could come visit now and then, and we could —

GUARD

(overlapping)
Hold on there, just hold your horses. Burn victims are a special case. They only let 'em in if they're really gross — if they look enough like niggers, you understand? Like Hawaiians, some of the Cubans. And after while, when they realize they can pass, they start acting like all the rest of 'em, breaking in line at the Super K, illegitimate off-spring everywhere you turn, cut you with a razor that quick.

(sad pause)

She won't know you, ma'am. Won't even recog-nize you. Be better if you forgot all about her, and go join your own kind.

ADDIE BELLE

I'm not going anywhere till I see my dorter. I'll just camp out here on the doorstep. Put a message in a bottle, throw it over the wall. Make a nuisance of myself. Set off that alarm again, and every time you turn it off, I'll turn it on.

GUARD

Okay, okay — simmer down — don't get all bent up about it.

(thinks)

What's it worth to you?

ADDIE BELLE

Why, you trash. So that's your game, is it? You orter be ashamed.

GUARD

How about that wedding ring?

ADDIE BELLE

Now you lissen here, you. My husband Marcus Eugene brought me this ring from the tombs of Egypt, where he got it from a guide that inherited it down through the ages. How can you speck me to part with such a sentimental possession?

GUARD

You take it inside they won't give you nothing, 'less it's pepper spray in your face or cut off your finger, don't make no diff'rence to them. Me, now, you might not think it, ma'am, but I got a lot of respect for you, and for the traditional values in life, including Egypt. They's worse trash than me, Missy, better bleeve it.

Addie Belle hesitates for a moment longer, then removes the wedding band and gives it to the guard. He drops it in his pocket.

GUARD

Still don't trust me, though, do ye? Okay, just for being just a suspicious creature, I'll take that locket, too, you got hanging round ye neck.

Addie Belle's hand flies to the locket dangling from a gold chain around her neck.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, no — please. This locket is the only memento I have of my son, Baxter.

(opening the locket and showing the guard a photograph)

See? Doesn't he have a beautiful smile?

GUARD

Yeah.

He yanks on the necklace, breaking it. Then, flicking open his switchblade, he spears the photo and hands it to her.

GUARD

You keep the smile. I'll take the gold.

ADDIE BELLE

Devil. You, you nigger.

GUARD

(grins)

Ata girl. You'll do. Wait here.

He goes into the guard hut, rummages around, and returns shortly with a quart can of paint and a cotton rag.

GUARD

'Kay, here's whatcha do. This paint is a special high density polymer. Dip the cloth in it and just rub it on. Dries in seconds. Only thing is, once you get it on, you can't remove it with anything but kero-sene — and I gotta warn you, aint no kerosene beyond that fence.

ADDIE BELLE

What if I don't find her?

GUARD

You will. You got forever and ever, don't you?

(laughs)

You can use the guardhouse. I got a mirror in there on the wall.

ADDIE BELLE

I knew we was all 'sposed to be changed, but if anybody ever told my papa one of his precious

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

dorters was gonna get turned into a – a pickaninny, y'all wouldn't never hear the end of it.

(uncertain beat)

This better work.

GUARD

Hey, where you think you are, the Super K? No refunds.

Suddenly, from offstage, the sound of drums and chanting.

GUARD

Oh shit. It's him.

ADDIE BELLE

Him who?

GUARD

Him, him! Get inside, quick — before he sees you!

Addie Belle disappears into the hut. The drums grow to a fever pitch. A group of AFRICAN WOMEN dances onstage, accompanied by MUSICIANS who beat the drums and tap on animal horns with pieces of bone. Progressing slowly from *down right* to *down left*, the group disappears *offstage*, followed by more WOMEN who carry large banners suspended from poles. On the banners are portraits of God, costumed variously as an Idi Amin-type general ... an NBA star (like Michael) ... and a rap singer playing to a sold-out house of enthusiastic black spectators. *Offstage*, the drums and chanting continue. Some HUNTERS enter, bearing the carcass of a deer slung from a pole. Then, a trio of frenzied TAP DANCERS. Then, a group of CHILDREN, tossing flower petals in their wake. And a whole lot more, until finally ...

GOD himself appears, reclining on a low throne-chair attached to a platform borne by the six black orderlies from Charlotte Memorial.

God, who may appear to us as very large or very small, is naked to the waist, clothed in a grass skirt, a pimp's fedora, and a short, open sheepskin vest. Overhead, two BLACK

CHERUBS hover protectively, accompanying the throne to *center stage*, where God holds up his hand to signal a halt.

GOD

(to one of the cherubs)

Germaine, hand me one a my fine Cuban cigars.

The cherub gives him a cigar and lights it with his flaming knife. God rests on one elbow, puffing contentedly and glaring down at the guard.

The throne is surrounded by God's HAREM, a group of young women dressed like Eighth Avenue hookers. The women bear trays of food, which God occasionally samples, tossing away this or that item that doesn't please him. Now and again, he will fart as well, staring into space thoughtfully as he squeezes one off, emitting a sound a bit like rolling thunder..

GOD

(to the guard)

What are you gawking at, you snailhead piece a shit? Git them eyes offa me, don't I tell you not to be eyeballing me?

The guard falls to his knees, covering his head with his hands.

GOD

What a gorgeous day, cheer'ren, one a them days makes me wanna look around me and say, "that's good."

(murmurs of assent from the entourage)

And we got ourselves a deer. Aint seen a game animal out in this scrub growth in I don't know when. Damn poachers, one day we gonna wake up here, cheer'ren, and your God won't have no venison left in the whole firmament. Got to extend this fence, that's what. Get some more help in here. Lift her up, and move her way over yonder. The peoples don't need all that sky anyway, all they do is pollute it and choke up the ozone. Naw, better your God take some of it back, put the seal of his loving hand on it, teach the cocksuckers a lesson.

A sneeze from within the hut. God frowns. Another sneeze.

GOD

Whozat? Somebody git me my magnum. WHO'S THAT IN YONDER?!

(to the guard)

You! Look at me when I'm talking to you. And quit scratching around in my heavenly dirt like a damn chicken!

The guard leaps to his feet fearfully.

GOD

Now what you got in that shed? Some little white trash hooker you trying to sneak in under my nose?

GUARD

No, sir. It's — it's a new arrival. She just wanted to go tinkle. Little old woman, I felt sorry for her — didn't mean no harm —

GOD

At's a lie and you know it. They always make 'em go tinkle before they depart, saves time, keeps

GOD (CONT'D)

things moving at a proper pace. Now git that bitch out here before I lose my patience.

The guard opens the door to the shack and leads Addie Belle out. She has covered herself with the paint, and her skin glows like burnished bronze. Addie Belle picks up the corner of her skirt and curtsies.

GOD

I be goddamn.

ADDIE BELLE

Pleased to meet you. Your Highness.

GOD

Anybody ever tell you, woman, that you kinda resemble Tina Turner? I reckon this is love at first sight. What's your name, baby?

ADDIE BELLE

Uhh. Keisha. Keisha Belle Redmond.

A stifled scream from one of the women in the Harem. It's Eunice, who is so changed in appearance that we haven't recognized her till now.

EUNICE

Oh God!

GOD

What? Who that taking my name?

EUNICE

Mama, you devil, what 're you doing here!

ADDIE BELLE

Eunice? Is that you, Eunice?

(throwing her arms around Eunice joyfully

Oh, Eunice, Eunice, I prayed and prayed I'd get to see you!

Oh, thank God!

GOD

Thanking me for? Somebody wanna tell your God what the hell is going on?

EUNICE

She don't blong here. She's — she's an impostor.
 (collective groan of dismay from the entourage)
 That get-up has got to be some kind of disguise.
 (aside to Addie Belle)
 Devil, you devil!

ADDIE BELLE

You the one.

EUNICE

(to God)
 I'm warning you, she gets a foot in the door, there won't
 be no end to it. She'll drive you crazy, you don't know
 what she's like — she — she'll be trying to run the whole
 shebang.
 (to Addie Belle)
 Busybody bitch!
 (to God)
 Either she goes, or — or I go. Send me to the bad place, I
 don't care — I can't take it anymore.

GOD

Telling me you don't honor yo mama? Chile, that aint right.

EUNICE

Yeah? Ask her how come she burned my house down,
 and me with it —

ADDIE BELLE

Did not!

EUNICE

Did!

ADDIE BELLE

That wasn't me, Your Highness — it was these two little
 cherubs with their flaming swords —

GOD

Germaine, you set this woman's house on fire?

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, it wasn't him. These were these little blonde cherubs
 — cute as they could be.

GOD

(the long-suffering judge)
 Trying to cut you some slack here, Keisha.
 (to the entourage)
 I'm gonna chalk this up to her being in the hospital so long
 and people abusing her remains after she was dead.
 (to Addie Belle)
 Now listen. If I was to let you stay, what's it worth to
 you?

ADDIE BELLE

You mean — material possessions?

GOD

Yeah, what you got?

ADDIE BELLE

All I have to my name —

(showing the tiny photo)

— is this photograph of my son, Baxter, and before I would trade my beloved son's photograph, I —

GOD

(overlapping)

Got a house, aint you?

ADDIE BELLE

Yes, Lord of Hosts, but as I tried to explain to your hired man, my present dwelling is a double-wide mobile home with a whirlpool bath and free utilities situated on the farm of Mr. Willie Kestler, who was my papa's lifelong friend and neighbor, and bleeve you me, if it was not for Mr. Kestler's kindness and generosity, I could never afford such a nice place on a fixed income.

GOD

Not referring to no run-down house-trailer blong to Willie Kestler. Talking about that fine old mansion a yours in St. Augustine — one that weathered the great hurricane?

ADDIE BELLE

You've — you've seen it? My former abode?

GOD

Not me, but my son has. Spent the night there on his way to infiltrate that Koresh cult in Texas. Called me up all excited. Said Daddy, this is exactly the kind of place I need for a way-station on my earthly adventures. My son and me, we been through a lot together, Keisha — and I never went outa my way to make things easy for him, ask anybody — he's down there right now, back in the flesh again, trying to find out what that Koresh got on his mind — and if my only begotten wants that old mansion, by God that's what his daddy wants too, long as he don't know I'm behind it, if you git my drift, so what you say, baby? We got a deal?

ADDIE BELLE

It's not my house. Your Worthiness. I signed it over to my son.

EUNICE

See? Didn't I tell you she was crazy?

ADDIE BELLE

You just jealous —

EUNICE

Am not!

ADDIE BELLE

Are!

GOD

Shut up! Everybody shut the fuck up!

(a dread silence)

'Kay, here's what we do. I'll send you back. You can tell him you aint dead, tell him it was just a bureaucratic error

—

The guard laughs. God points a laser aiming-light at him, moving the red dot until it centers on the guard's forehead. Knowing he's doomed, the guard freezes, waiting like Wiley E. Coyote for disaster to strike. A bolt of lightning leaps from the sky. The guard disappears in the flash of light. God continues as if nothing has happened:

GOD

— tell him you need the place back again because a A-Rab prince that wants to put nekkid statues on the lawn has offered you a million-five in cash, and you'll split the proceeds with him down the middle.

ADDIE BELLE

He'll never bleeve me.

GOD

Course he will. That Baxter so greedy, somebody call him honey, he say money, what money? And if he don't fall for it, Germaine here will throw angel dust on him, scramble his brains so he can't think straight.

ADDIE BELLE

You asking me to go back on my word. I won't do that. I can't.

GOD

(an aside)

You know my boy?

Addie Belle nods respectfully.

GOD

Not even for him?

ADDIE BELLE

I'm sorry.

(trying not to spill the beans)

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry — I never — dreamed it was gonna end up like this — why'd you let him do such a thing? Why? You talk about love — you don't know the first thing about love — letting your precious only son — your pride and joy — go live with those maniacs? — what kind of father are you?

GOD

(uncomfortably)
He be all right.

ADDIE BELLE

He won't be all right! You stupid nigger! They burned the place down! Don't you ever watch television? They're all dead! The children ... the little children ... the mothers everything went wrong ... and it all happened so quick ... the wind ... the wind just ...

(absent wave)
... I'm so sorry.

GOD

Git her outa here.

Two WARRIORS with spears, wearing large ceremonial masks, move to stand on either side of Addie Belle, taking her by the arms.

GOD

You made your bed, woman. Now go lay in it.

The warriors take Addie Belle away.

GOD

Germaine? You'n Rasheed git on down to Waco, see what you can find out.

Germaine and Rasheed fly away. The sky darkens. Lightning and thunder in the distance. God looks off toward the eaves of heaven.

GOD

Look like a storm coming up. Y'all better run along, 'fore you catch your death.

As the entourage drifts away, Germaine and Rasheed return. Rasheed whispers in God's ear. A terrible silence as God learns of his son's death. The lights come down to a soft pool on God's divan.

GOD

(motioning Rasheed away)
Where my archangel? Where Michael?

MICHAEL

Here, Lawd.

GOD

You 'member that summer you'n me stayed at that place down on the Chattahoochee?

MICHAEL

Yes, Lawd.

GOD

That was some good fishing, Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes, Lawd.

GOD

(a heavy sigh)
Hand me up my magnum.

Michael unholsters the big gun and gives it to God.

GOD

No matter how it goes down in history, Michael, it will always be my firm belief that the greatest lure ever devised for the large mouth bass was the Hawaiian Wiggler.

He puts the pistol barrel in his mouth and pulls the trigger. The stage fills with a searing white light, enveloping everything in its path — God, the heavens, the whole shebang.

Scene Three: "Just Another Jigaboo"

The ticket desk at a small commuter airline. Addie Belle, her body still covered with the paint, approaches on her two-legged walker. The AGENT, a rotund, effusive young man in a clown outfit, is studiously touching up the lipstick on his large painted mouth. Seeing Addie Belle, he puts his mirror away and tries to appear professional.

AGENT

Yes, ma'am. Where to?

ADDIE BELLE

Do I have a choice?

AGENT

What about the state of Florida? Lovely beaches, lots of sun, crystal sands, and the greatest of vacation spas, including the incomparable city of St. Augustine.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh my. You mean it? My son lives in St. Augustine.

AGENT

Children are a blessing. Ticket please?

Addie Belle hands him her ticket. He stamps it and returns it to her.

AGENT

Gate four, boarding momentarily. Luggage?

ADDIE BELLE

Just my walker.

AGENT

I'm afraid you'll have to leave it here, ma'am. FAA considers that thing a deadly weapon.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I never.

(leaning the walker against the desk)

Will it be a long trip?

AGENT

Let's just check, shall we?

He keys his computer terminal, staring at the screen.

AGENT

Ah, yes. Be there before you know it. Propeller craft, but it's non-stop. Martin A-20 — agile, responsive — and extremely reliable.

ADDIE BELLE

I orta known it was a trick.

AGENT

Beg your pardon?

ADDIE BELLE

Maybe I could take a train.

AGENT

I'm sorry. Madam. There are no trains to St. Augustine.

ADDIE BELLE

Then send me somewhere else. I'm not getting on any A-20 aeroplane.

AGENT

And why is that, pray tell?

ADDIE BELLE

They crash. They crash all the time. Papa used to take us out to watch 'em try to land. One crash after another.

AGENT

Pilot error. In virtually every instance, it was a case of pilot error. Next thing, I suppose, you'll be wanting a parachute. Well, we don't have any parachutes, you understand? And I'm not going to hold up all the other customers just to change your ticket.

ADDIE BELLE

Who else is there, fool? I'm the only one here.

AGENT

That's what you think. Lost in your own little world. Unconcerned about anyone but yourself. You're blind, Madam, but you can afford it — you don't have to work here — you can go off on your merry way and forget you ever set foot in this place.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I won't do it, and that's that.

AGENT

I see. Perhaps you'd like to speak to my supervisor.

ADDIE BELLE

I most certainly would.

The agent presses a large button. A bell clangs *offstage*. Enter the SUPERVISOR, an even more grotesque clown.

SUPERVISOR

All right, all right, everybody settle down. What's all this rigmarole?

AGENT

She won't do it, and that's that.

SUPERVISOR

Oh, yeah? Your ticket, Madam.

Addie Belle hands it over. The supervisor flips through page after page, nods decisively, and hands the ticket back again.

SUPERVISOR

What's wrong with Florida? You got something against the fabulous state of Florida?

ADDIE BELLE

Not Florida, you idiot. It's the plane. I want another plane.

SUPERVISOR

The A-20 is an excellent aircraft, Madam. Agile, responsive, and extremely reliable.

ADDIE BELLE

They crash. They always crash.

SUPERVISOR

That depends on the pilot, don't it? Now you listen here, Aunt Jemima, I want this ruckus to stop. You mighta thought you was some hotshot out there in the wild blue yonder, but down here you're just another jigaboo, and I'm giving you my last warning — you keep antagonizing people and trying to push 'em around, somebody's gonna string you up and desecrate your body, capish?

(to the agent)

She gives you any more guff, call security.

He leaves quickly. A pause. From *offstage* we hear the sound of the A-20 engines sputtering into life. The agent hands Addie Belle a rumpled WW II officer's garrison hat.

AGENT

Better put this on.

ADDIE BELLE

What for?

AGENT

Beats me, but they all wear 'em.

ADDIE BELLE

Who?

AGENT

The pilots.

ADDIE BELLE

Pilots? You think I'm a pilot?

AGENT

Okay, okay. Aviator.
(lispng like a drag queen)
You people can be so sensitive.

Terrified, Addie Belle grabs her walker and tries to hobble away.

AGENT

Halt! Stop!

AGENT (CONT'D)

(a frustrated cry of rage)

Nigger!

He takes out a large plastic whistle and bleats on it shrilly. Enter the CLOWN POLICE in their smoking jalopy. Stumbling over one another in confusion, they clamber out of the vehicle and pursue Addie Belle about the stage. She tries to fend them off with her walker, but they finally capture her and drag her toward the jalopy.

ADDIE BELLE

Help! Oh somebody help me, please!

One of the cops squirts her with seltzer water. Another slaps duct tape over her mouth. The others truss her up with a ball of yarn. Someone jams the officer's hat on her head.

AGENT

All aboard that's gettin' aboard!

The cops dump Addie Belle into the rumble seat of the jalopy and climb aboard. The car lurches away, slipping into reverse several times before the driver manages to get it offstage. The lights dim slowly. The A-20 engines grow in volume. The agent dons a pair of mechanic's earmuffs and puts on some oversized novelty glasses with glowing red eyes. The agent stares at the audience. The eyes blink on and off like the warning beacons on a conning tower. The sound of the A-20 engines fills the auditorium. The cold stars appear overhead, and the darkness on the face of the deep.

Scene Four: "That Wasn't God — That Was Old Scratch"

An airplane graveyard at the edge of hell. To the *right*, a great pile of demolished WW II planes. *Upstage*, a tall chain-link fence with concertina razor-wire along the top. In the center of the fence is a turnstile entrance, flanked by a guard's hut. Overhead, the same sign we saw in heaven: MANE GATE. NO UNARTHERISED INTRY. VILATERS WILL BE PERSECUTE. Along the outer wall of the orchestra pit, masking the eons and eons of nothingness below, there is a stand of sawgrass.

From above, we hear the scream of an A-20 as it plunges from the sky. The GUARD, a white-haired black, comes out of the hut with an arthritic gait and puts a pair of binoculars to his eyes, peering overhead. His mouth falls open. He lowers the binoculars and runs – if one can call it that – to the far side of the stage, accepting a fire-extinguisher from a PROP PERSON in the wings.

Engines roaring out of control, the A-20 crashes, its tail section rising from the stage floor. The guard approaches and sprays the rudder with his fire-extinguisher. He backs away warily. A Plexiglas hatch in the fuselage is thrown open, and Addie Belle climbs out of the wreckage unsteadily, pulling her walker up after her.

GUARD

Naw, naw — get your black ass back in there, nigger, think you are, tryin' to land that thing here?

ADDIE BELLE

You mean this aint hell?

GUARD

Hell no, it's heaven. And you better skedaddale pronto before somebody sees you.

ADDIE BELLE

But — but I was sent here from above. On the direct orders of His Majesty.

GUARD

Say what?

ADDIE BELLE

I was exiled to this place by God Almighty. I don't like it a bit more than you, and I'll thank you not to speak to me in that uppity tone. Now fetch me some kerosene, and be quick about it.

GUARD

Kerosene? What they want wif kerosene in heaven, fool?

ADDIE BELLE

Call this heaven? You think I don't know heaven when I see it? For your information, I have just arrived from heaven, and it is a far cry from the likes of this. Heaven is surrounded by a big fence, far as the eye can see, and they've got a sign that says —

(suddenly seeing the sign)

Oh my God.

GUARD

And don't be saying his name. He don't like it when strangers be saying his name. 'Specially niggers.

ADDIE BELLE

Now cut that out. I am not a nih — nih — colored person. And if I had some kerosene I could prove it.

GUARD

I seen some crazy fools in my time, woman, but you beat all. Now go on, git away from here, 'fore I call the poh-lice.

ADDIE BELLE

No — wait — I can prove it. Look!

She raises her skirt to the tops of her thighs. From about mid-calf, her skin is white.

ADDIE BELLE

Never thought I'd see the day I'd have to lift my skirts to claim my birthright, but as you can plainly see, you unfortunate wretch, I am not like you at all.

The guard is stunned. He takes out his spectacles and puts them on, moving a bit closer.

ADDIE BELLE

Well? What's the matter? Cat got your tongue?

GUARD

Anybody ever tell you — you kind of resemble Michael Jackson?

ADDIE BELLE

(lowering her skirt angrily)

Now see here, you idiot. I know you have some kerosene in that hut — and if you'll give it to me, I'll — I'll let you rape my dead body and call me names —

(her will crumbling)

oh, please! Think back to your youth — to the sweet old white lady who must've been there when you needed her, who brought you toys at Christmas, and paid your sick mama far more than she was worth, and let you come up to the big house every Sunday, for a piece of her wonderful, home-baked marble swirl devil's food delight —

GUARD

(remembering)

Pineapple. It was pineapple. Bought it fresh from the store and chopped it up herself. Had these big old hands, like a welder — cut that pineapple clean through with one swipe.

ADDIE BELLE

Yes, yes! If not for me, do it for her!

GUARD

Used to make me git down on my knees, bark for it like a dog. Hold a little chunk between her fingers and say here boy, speak, and if I couldn't catch it in my mouth, she made me eat it off the floor. Would that be the woman you referring to?

ADDIE BELLE

(flustered)

I can't help it what other people do! Can I help it if some Methodist maniac felt driven to maltreat you when you were a child? I'm just a single solitary

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

person, and I don't have a mean bone in my body —
(in tears)

— and if — if you want to turn your back on someone that's in need, you go right ahead, but there's a big book somewhere, and somebody taking names, and every time we do bad to somebody it gets wrote down in that book, and when it's all over —

(confused)

— when it's all over — all the sins get totaled up.

GUARD

Then what?

ADDIE BELLE

If you don't know, I can't help you.

GUARD

Okay, let's say I been bad four thousand nine hundred and twenty-two times. You telling me that's why come I'm a nigger guard that can't get into heaven in his whole eternal life?

ADDIE BELLE

Prob'bly.

GUARD

What if it was only three thousand, or two? Think I'd have a chance then?

ADDIE BELLE

That's between you and —and —

(an agonized whisper)

— your God.

GUARD

Which one is that? Not that nigger that put you on the plane? That wasn't God — that was Old Scratch, least that's what they call him here. Cause you know why? Cause he's black, black as sin, just like you, just like me, and worse'n that, he's got fleas and cooties and the clap and God knows what all. And this bunch would sooner let a three-legged Cocker Spaniel through that gate than

one of us. And you know what else? I wouldn't go in there if they begged me.

ADDIE BELLE

Why not?

GUARD

Cause all they do is lay out on the beach all day and see who can get the best tan. Watch the waves come in. Listen to the Beach Boys. Rum and Coke. Cintano umbrellers. Ocean breeze. Gettin' laid under the stars. Sand sticking all over 'em like sugar on gingerbread cookies. Talkin' to each other on their digital phones. Cookin' steaks on a open fire. Catamarans. Surf boards. Hula Hoops. Volley balls flying ever whichaway. Life guards flexin' their muscles. Blue-blockers and bikinis. Condominiums reachin' to the sky. That don't make you wanna puke?

ADDIE BELLE

I bleeve you're jealous.

GUARD

Hah!

ADDIE BELLE

You could always go to the other place.

GUARD

Wrong. Once you crash, that's it. You can't go back. It's here or nothing. But least I got —
 (indicating the guard shack)
 — a roof over my head, TV with rabbit ears, a marshmeller Santy Claus ever now and then — it aint the worst fate that could fall on a person.

ADDIE BELLE

Why did — Old Scratch — put you on the plane?

GUARD

None of your beeswax.

ADDIE BELLE

I didn't mean to be nosy.

GUARD

Let sleepin' dogs lay down, that's my philosopee. And let come what may, I can take it. Remove a man from his fam'ly, take him away from his loved ones, no explanation, no chance to defend his self, just, one day, poof, you're gone. Old Scratch is one cold mother.

ADDIE BELLE

What if I told you he's not there anymore. What if he did away with his self, and somebody else was standing in for him?

GUARD

I'd say you didn't know him very well.

ADDIE BELLE

Cross my heart. He's gone.

GUARD

(still suspicious)

Yeah? How come you didn't turn back?

ADDIE BELLE

Had my marching orders. Already on my way. Just because you change leaders, it don't change the system. But everything was sure in a tizzy, I can tell you that. They were so rushed, they didn't even clean the plane. Somebody left the Sunday paper. That's how I learned about it. Charlotte Observer, special edition.

GUARD

How come it wasn't on TV?

ADDIE BELLE

Maybe they just blacked it out. Maybe they just didn't want the people here to know about it, like that time when President Clinton took that little eight-year-old beauty queen up to the Lincoln bedroom and threatened her with a spray-can of oven cleaner if she wouldn't submit to his advances.

GUARD

Old Scratch gone. Wouldn't that be something?

ADDIE BELLE

You don't bleeve me?

GUARD

I bleeve ... you had a long hard journey, and you got your brains scrambled on the way down. I was that very way myself. Them A-20's are hell on the system. You'll get over it. Meantime, you ought to go off under the trees there and rest yourself. And if I was you, I wouldn't be spreadin' that story around — somebody might estimate you lost your marbles.

ADDIE BELLE

Saying I'm crazy?

GUARD

Said some people, not me. Go flyin' off the handle ever time somebody expresses a gen'ral opinion, you gonna one day get ye sef in some

GUARD (CONT'D)

deep shit. Simmer down, want a Extra Strength Excedrin? Aint no as'prin in it.

Addie Belle takes out a sheet of newsprint from her blouse and unfolds it, holding it up for the guard to see — the front page of The Charlotte Observer. The headline is huge: MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF NEGRO CHARISMATIC.

ADDIE BELLE

Is the Charlotte Observer crazy?

The guard takes the page and moves away somewhat, his back to Addie Belle and his lips moving soundlessly as he reads.

GUARD

Pore devil. He was one uppity nigger, but he never deserved nothing like this. Who woulda ever dreamed?

Suddenly, we hear MUSIC from offstage — a Salvation Army street band playing the familiar old hymn which was transformed into the anthem of the Nazi party in the thirties: the "Horst Wessel Song."

GUARD

Oh hell — here he comes!

Terrified, he crams the newspaper inside his shirt and falls prostrate on the ground.

GUARD

Git down, quick — he don't like people starin' at him.

ADDIE BELLE

(determinedly)

How's he ever gonna know I'm white if I bow down like a burrhead? No, sir, if I can run a thrashing machine, and fly a A-20 airplane, I deserve the same equal respect as any man.

She lifts her head proudly. Down Right, the band enters, followed by the Garden of Life and Blessed Hope Tabernacle Chorus, dressed now as Bavarian peasants and townspeople, singing the slightly-modified "Horst Wessel" lustily:

CHORUS

The flags held high!
The ranks stand firm together!
The angels march with steady,
resolute tread.
Soon the Father's flags will fly
over every street!

Trailing the crowd, an open touring car glides in from the wings — a sleek, black, 1936 Mercedes, flanked by a quartet of brownshirted neo-Nazi Youth, armed with batons. The Mercedes, which is nothing more than a two-dimensional cardboard replica, contains a single

passenger ... THE SERPENT ... Old Scratch ... Belial ... who sits in a coiled-up, semi-erect position on the rear seat, a Hitler mustache drawn on his no-nose face, and wearing an ill-fitting German officer's uniform. With a regal wave of his riding crop, the Serpent motions for the singing to stop. The crowd falls silent instantly.

SERPENT

Did we have a fine day at the beach, or what?

The crowd cheers. The serpent gestures again for silence.

SERPENT

Fuckin' A. And just to show you your God is a merciful God, we're gonna take that stretch of prime real estate and fence it in for the exclusive use of the heavenly hosts. That's the great thing about heaven, children — we decide we want something, we annex the sonofabitch.

(noticing Addie Belle)

Who the fuck is this?

GUARD

Aint my fault, Massah!

SERPENT

Don't be eyeballin' me, bitch. I aint gonna warn you but once.

ADDIE BELLE

I'll thank you not to call me a buh — buh — bitch. My name is Addie Buh —

SERPENT

(overlapping)

Give a fuck what your name is. You keep starin' at my visage, I'm gonna make it rain frogs and shit to make you wish you was never born.

ADDIE BELLE

Can't anybody even ask a question around here?

SERPENT

Anybody but Ubangis. Now avert them eyes.

Addie Belle looks away.

SERPENT

Down on your knees.

Leaning on her walker, Addie Belle lowers herself with an effort.

SERPENT

Now. What's a dried-up old hussy like you doin' on my doorstep?

ADDIE BELLE

I — I'm a new arrival. I was sent down here from —
 (points to the sky)
 — the bad place.

GUARD

(lifting his head, a hand over his eyes)
 One a them A-20 aviators, Massah —

SERPENT

Shut your yap.
 (to Addie Belle)
 You know what we do with squatters, woman? First we
 string 'em up, then we drag 'em behind my Mercedes till
 we get bored. Then we chuck 'em over the edge. Eons
 and eons of nothin' but nothin', at's your future.

ADDIE BELLE

I am not a squatter! I have a perfectly legitimate ticket
 issued by Old Scratch his self, and you can
 threaten me with frogs if you want to, but I know my rights
 —

(looking him straight in the eye)
 — and if this is the way you treat a senior citizen in
 distress, you needn't think you'll get my vote in
 the next election, and I might just send a letter to the
 AARP, too.

SERPENT

Ticket, huh? Gimme.

Addie Belle takes the ticket from her bag and hands it to one of the brown-shirts, who passes it on to the serpent. The serpent dons his reading spectacles to examine the document

SERPENT

Well I be damn. Signed it in cursive, too. Didn't know the
 coon could write.

(to Addie Belle)
 Git up.
 (as Addie Belle struggles to her feet again)
 I got no quarrel with this piece of paper. It's the
 destination that bothers me. Says here it's a one-way to
 the beach. But that beach aint public domain no more.
 Blongs to me. And that means no jungle bunnies allowed,
capish?

ADDIE BELLE

I'm not a juh-juh-juh —

SERPENT

Yeah? You know how to shag?

ADDIE BELLE

How to what?

The serpent gestures with his crop. The band strikes up "Sixty Minute Man" and the crowd shags. The serpent waves his crop again. Silence.

SERPENT

Well? Think you can do that? Come on, nigger, show us your stuff.

A pause. Addie Belle gives a sigh of defeat, and shakes her head.

SERPENT

Uh-huh. You can skip rope all you want to, and you can hippy-hop to that rap-crap till the cows come home, but I never met a coon-jigger yet that could shag worth a damn.

ADDIE BELLE

My daddy never allowed dancin' in the house, I'll thank you to know. And my husband, Marcus Eugene, always insisted a woman's place was in the kitchen.

(pause)

I've led a sheltered life, your majesty, but that doesn't make me a nih-nih — pickaninny.

SERPENT

Don't make you a good cook, either. Tell you what — if you can fix my fav'rit dessert, I'll consider your petition.

ADDIE BELLE

Desserts are my specialty.

SERPENT

Yeah? You ever heard of a Marble-swirl devil's food delight?

ADDIE BELLE

(a wink to the audience)

Seems to me I have.

SERPENT

Do me one a those, just the way I like it, and we got a deal.

ADDIE BELLE

I'll need some utensils.

The serpent waves his crop. Some of the peasant women scurry about, wheeling in a stove, a table, some flour and other necessities. A brownshirt hands Addie Belle her mixing bowl and spatula. Her back to the serpent, Addie Belle puts on her apron and starts to work. The serpent removes his headpiece and stands up in the car, stepping out of his costume entirely, clad only in a vee-neck undershirt and candy-striped boxer shorts, a balding, middle-aged man. Addie Belle stirs her batter vigorously, singing to herself in a fervent voice:

ADDIE BELLE

Praise him, praise him
All the little children
God is love
God is love
(etc.)

SERPENT

God, it's good to be home!

ADDIE BELLE

(over her shoulder)

Where did your travels take you this time, Eugene?

SERPENT

Had to go sell gee-gaws in the Holy Land. Conditions was filthy beyond belief. Jerusalem is a awful place, but sometimes it can take your breath away.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, you just rest your weary bones, while I fix you your fav'rit dessert in the whole world.

SERPENT

That's nice. I'll just go check on the children.

He gestures to one of the brownshirts, who unlocks the trunk of the car. Eunice, her burned features miraculously healed, rises up, stretching languidly. Dressed like a child, she's wearing a short pinafore and pink panties, her hair in pigtails. The serpent lifts her from the trunk and into the back seat.

ADDIE BELLE

Praise him, praise him
All the little children
God is love
God is love
(etc.)

Seating Eunice on the upstage side of the car, the serpent hands her a ragdoll and works her panties off, tossing them aside. Eunice clutches the doll to her breast and sings along with Addie Belle:

BOTH

Thank him, thank him
All the little children
God is love
God is love!

Eugene helps Eunice up onto his lap and wraps his arms around her in a bear-hug. He puckers his lips and she gives him a chaste kiss. The kiss deepens. Eunice struggles. Eugene holds her tightly, moving rhythmically beneath her. Eunice beats at him with her tiny fists, screaming as she breaks away from the kiss. Eugene slaps her, forcing her down out of sight on the seat. Addie Belle stops singing, cocking an ear quizzically toward the play-room/Mercedes. We hear the faint sounds of a struggle from within.

ADDIE BELLE

You children don't play so rough — your father needs his rest.

Silence. Addie Belle pours the batter into a pan and resumes her singing:

ADDIE BELLE

Crown him, crown him
All the little children

God is love ...
 God is love!

She puts the pan into the oven, wipes her hands on her apron, and turns toward the car.

ADDIE BELLE

Eugene? Eugene, honey? You want to lick the bowl?

No answer. She goes to the Mercedes and opens the rear door. Eugene sits up angrily.

EUGENE

Get outa here! Out! Get out!

Eunice lunges over the back of the car like Jackie Kennedy in Dallas. The brownshirts catch her and stuff her into the trunk again, closing the lid. Eugene stands up in the car. Watching Addie Belle warily, he pulls his serpent costume on again, his dignity restored. Addie Belle tilts her head back slowly and gives a silent, heartbroken scream.

SERPENT

What did you think, bitch? Somebody tell you the hereafter didn't have nothin' to do with the past? Aint but one rule in heaven. Time you learned it: everything that goes around, comes around. And I can play this little video anytime I want to.

ADDIE BELLE

Devil. You devil.

SERPENT

You the one.

Addie Belle screams and grabs her walker, raising it overhead threateningly. As she rushes at the serpent, two brownshirts seize her and yank the walker out of her hands, tossing it aside.

SERPENT

Chuck her over the side. And this other one with her.

GUARD

No! Wait!

(leaping to his feet frantically)

Permission to gaze on your countenance, Massah!

SERPENT

Denied.

(waving his crop for them to take him away)

And kick him in the balls before you throw him over.

GUARD

(as the brownshirts drag him toward the apron)

No, no, Massah — you got to listen to me, please! The woman's carrying secret information — infor-mation about Old Scratch!

The serpent leans forward suspiciously and raises his crop, signaling a halt in the proceedings. The brownshirts have the guard teetering on the lip of the apron, but stop just short of tossing him over.

SERPENT

Kinda secret? I'm the one with all the secrets.

GUARD

It's in The Charlotte Observer, Massah — I seen it myself!

SERPENT

Mule shit. Aint no Charlotte Observer in heaven. What I want with a rag like that? Only person on The Charlotte Observer that ever wrote the truth was young Marion Hargrove, and that was clear back in World War II. Kinda lies they tellin' now?

GUARD

Story about Old Scratch, Massah — she found it on the airplane and snuck it in — wasn't gonna tell nobody, either — only showed it to me because she thinks niggers is all alike, but we aint,

GUARD (CONT'D)

Massah, we aint, I swear! And I can't go off into the eons and eons of nothingness with a revela-tion like this on my conscience!

SERPENT

Hell you know about revelations?

GUARD

He got kilt, Massah.

SERPENT

Who?

GUARD

Old Scratch. He's ded.

An awed murmur from the crowd. The serpent glares at Addie Belle.

SERPENT

Is this true, woman?

Addie Belle turns away quickly, pulling the newspaper from her blouse and trying to eat it. The brownshirts take it away from her and hand it over to the serpent, who reads the article with some effort, his lips moving soundlessly.

SERPENT

Well, I be damn. You done good, jigaboo — but you hesitated, and he who hesitates is lost.

He flicks the crop. The brownshirts take the guard by the arms and legs and toss him into the orchestra pit. The man's descent into eons and eons of nothingness is hidden by the sawgrass, but his long falling scream lingers behind him like a broken contrail.

SERPENT

Break out your funeral duds, children. Gotta go pay our last respects. And then, we gonna annex that place. Winters here, summers there. Best a both worlds.
(as the brownshirts lead Addie Belle to the apron)
Leave her be. Hear me, cooze? I'm taking mercy on you. But when I get back home, my fav'rit dessert better be on the table.

ADDIE BELLE

You can just go to hell.

SERPENT

Yes, ma'am. I'm on my way.

He taps the driver on the shoulder. The big Mercedes backs offstage slowly. The band strikes up a rousing "Dixie," and the jubilant crowd shags away. As the music fades, Addie Belle sits down at the table disconsolately. In the distance, a storm is coming up. Thunder and lightning along the horizon. Suddenly, Addie Belle looks up to see a YOUNG RABBIT at the other side of the stage, wearing whatever teenage style is in vogue nowadays. Overjoyed, Addie Belle stands up slowly, calling out in a soft, tentative voice:

ADDIE BELLE

Here, bunny. Come here, precious. Here, little bunny. Here, bunny, bunny, bunny.

The rabbit hops away fearfully, disappearing into the wings. Addie Belle gets her walker and gives chase awkwardly.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, wait — please! Didn't your folks ever mention me? I'm Addie Belle!

Scene Five: "If It Was Jesus You Wanted, You Ort to Gone to Waco"

Another guardhouse, at the far reaches of hell. The chain-link fence ends *up center*, taking a ninety-degree turn and continuing *upstage* to infinity. The guard shack sits on a sand dune, *down right*, which slopes from the fence to the beach beyond. Next to the shack is a sign on a pole: PUBLIC BEACH. The sign has been X'd through with red paint. Dozing in front of the shack is a familiar figure — Elbert T. Ryder.

The rabbit enters down left and hops across the stage, stopping just short of the guardhouse as it sees Ryder. Tip-toeing in an exaggerated fashion, the rabbit continues past the shack and disappears offstage. Ryder comes awake suddenly. Peering into the wings, he calls out to the rabbit angrily:

RYDER

Hey! Stop! Halt!

A figure appears in the guardhouse window. It's Wilson, Ryder's attorney. His face covered with lather, Wilson has been shaving. He leans out the window curiously.

WILSON
What is it?

RYDER
Rabbit.

WILSON
Where?

RYDER
Going off down the beach.

WILSON
Aint no rabbits in heaven.

RYDER
Hell you say. Git my magnum.

Wilson bends over behind the window and comes up again with the pistol, handing it out to Ryder. As the reverend takes aim, we hear Addie Belle's voice Off Left:

ADDIE BELLE
Here, bunny, bunny, bunny — here, little bunny.

Ryder turns to see her hobbling *onstage*, huffing and puffing as she approaches awkwardly on her two-legged walker.

RYDER
Aw right, nigger — hold it up right there. No huntin' on the beach.

ADDIE BELLE
I'm not hunting, I'll thank you to know. And what I do outside of this fence is none of your affair.

RYDER
Wrong. We got a order here annexing this entire piece of prime real estate. Boundaries now extend from way over yonder —
(points out over the audience)
— clear up there —
(sweeping gesture upstage)
— to the city limits of St. Augustine. No tres-passin' to wetbacks, transients, boat people, and coons. So git on back where you came from.

ADDIE BELLE
Don't I know you from somewhere?

RYDER
I doubt that seriously, Miz Kinkyhead. And them feets better git movin', y'hear me? Nothin' pers'nal, but I got a job ta do here —

ADDIE BELLE

How come they make you stay outside?

RYDER

Make me? That's all you know. Woman, this job is a honor and a privilege.

WILSON

Hah!

RYDER

Shut your yap, Wilson.

ADDIE BELLE

Listen, can't you just turn your head the other way? Nobody has to know, do they? That rabbit is a friend of mine, and I'm afraid he's lost his way — let me go, please. I won't tell a soul.

RYDER

Fat chance.

(to Wilson)

Call the Cap'n. Ask him do we chuck her over the edge or what.

With obvious reluctance, Wilson picks up the phone and dials. Suddenly, we hear the whoop-whoop of a klaxon, and a voice booms out from a speaker on the side of the shack:

VOICE

Now hear this! All personnel report to the parade ground immediately for mobilization! Vilaters will be persecute!
That is all!

Wilson and Ryder exchange wary glances. Wilson ducks down and comes up with a towel, wiping the shaving cream off his face hurriedly.

RYDER

Hold it, stupid! They don't mean us!

WILSON

I aint takin' no chances.

He comes out of the shack with his briefcase, knotting his tie hurriedly.

WILSON

And don't call me stupid, stupid. Wasn't for you, I wouldn't be in this fix in the first place. And if there's a chance in hell I can get inside that fence, — I'm gonna grab it.

He wheels a bicycle out from behind the shack and mounts it awkwardly, riding away.

ADDIE BELLE

Is it very far to St. Augustine?

RYDER

None a your beeswax.

He reaches through the window of the shack and picks up the phone, dialing frantically. Addie Belle hobbles past him, trying to make her getaway. Ryder slams down the phone, aiming the gun at her with a two-handed police stance.

RYDER

Hold it. Make another move, and you're one dead burrhead!

ADDIE BELLE

Takes one to know one.

Turning her back on him, she sucks in a deep breath, and scrooches her eyes shut. Very slowly, she raises her foot and takes a deliberate, cautious step away from Ryder. He pulls the trigger. The big gun jerks in his hand, the sound reverberating over the stage time and again as he empties the cylinder. Addie Belle cringes under the rolling thunder, putting her hands over her ears. Finally, the hammer falls on a dead chamber. Ryder clicks the trigger several times as Addie Belle straightens up, checking her person for wounds. Ryder lowers the pistol, staring at her in awe. She turns to him with a triumphant smile.

ADDIE BELLE

Oops.

RYDER

Jesus.

ADDIE BELLE

And don't be calling on him. If it was Jesus you wanted, you ort to gone to Waco.

She hobbles away, calling offstage:

ADDIE BELLE

Here, little bunny. Here, bunny, bunny, bunny.

Dumbfounded, Ryder watches her disappear behind the dune. Then, shaking off the experience like a bad dream, he turns in Wilson's direction, calling out to him:

RYDER

Wilson! I'm sorry, okay? Wait up! Wait for me!

He takes off running. From the loudspeaker, we hear a scratchy recording of the "Horst Wessel Song," which hangs up in the groove, repeating a single phrase over and over until someone lifts the needle.

Scene Six: "All the Carrots You'd Ever Want to Eat"

The beach. A moonlit night, the sky filled with stars. In the distance, we see the lights of St. Augustine winking on the horizon. *Stage left*, in diminishing forced perspective, are the charred remains of the forest, destroyed by fire. At *stage center* is an ancient, ruined fishing boat, the mast broken off and a large hole in its side. Here, all grown-up and married now, JUNIOR RABBIT has taken refuge with his family. Still wearing the coon-skin cap that Addie Belle gave

him, Junior rises up from his hammock on the deck as the fleeing rabbit child approaches, breathless and afraid. *Off-stage*, we hear Addie Belle calling plaintively, her voice hoarse with exhaustion:

ADDIE BELLE

Here ... little bunny. Here ... bunny, bunny.

Junior leaps down from the deck, arming himself with a piece of driftwood and hugging his son in a protective embrace as Addie Belle enters.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, I never. Junior, is that you?

The rabbits dart inside the boat through the gaping hole.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, don't be afraid, please! It's only me. Don't you remember?

(her story voice)

Whooo's that got my little gold footsie?

A pause ... and then Junior pokes his head through the hole cautiously. All around him, from every nook and cranny on the boat, other rabbits appear, including Junior's wife, MARCILENE, who wears a bonnet.

ADDIE BELLE

Well I swan. Little Junior, all grown-up and married. And such beautiful children. I wish I had my camera. Well, don't be bashful —

(opening her arms joyfully)

Who wants a big hug?

The little ones look to Junior, who gives an assenting nod. The rabbits run to Addie Belle's embrace. Junior and Marcilene look on, beaming.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, yes! Oh my goodness! Whew! It's so good to see everybody! And you're all so handsome, and your sweet little smiles, just look at you!

(to Marcilene)

Aren't children a blessing? I had about forgot what a normal existence was like!

(glancing at the forest)

But — what happened to the forest?

Junior mimes a motorist puffing on a cigarette, throwing it out the window carelessly to start a forest fire.

ADDIE BELLE

You don't mean it. Some people don't care what happens to this world do they? Act like they never even heard of Smoky the Bear. I'm sorry, Junior.

(a resigned shrug from Junior)

Well. So this is your new home. You done good, young Mister Rabbit. Put a roof over their heads ... lots of fresh

air and sunshine ... watch the pleasure boats go by ... it's
a right purty place.

MARCILENE suddenly puts a hand to her mouth and runs back inside.

ADDIE BELLE

Did I say something wrong?

Junior kicks the boat and throws up his paws in disgust to indicate his and Marcilene's unhappiness with their circumstances.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh. I see. Well, I know from experience, it's no fun being away from your real home, battered by the elements, not knowing from one minute to the next when somebody 's going to change the rules, or make out like you're the wrong color, tell you you can't do this, can't do that, make you try to shag, beat you with sticks, threaten to toss you over the edge — it's happened to me too, you know. I might look like I never had a worry in the world, but that's not the real me. And I can't stand it, Junior, to see your fam'ly have to suffer all because some selfish lunatic throwed his cigarette out the car winder and burned your house down.

(a determined beat)

Would you please ask your wife to please come outside again?

Junior leads Marcilene back out of the boat. She hides her face on his shoulder.

ADDIE BELLE

Miz Rabbit? You don't have to be ashamed around me. Your fam'ly is just like my own kin. And I want you to know ... I love all of you, just like your were my own children.

Marcilene looks up, wiping away her tears. Addie Belle opens her arms again, embracing Junior and his wife.

ADDIE BELLE

There now. What if I told you, I know of a place with trees all around, and marble steps, and a roof of terra-cotta, and all kinds of places to play and dig holes and all the carrots you'd ever want to eat?

The children jump up and down excitedly.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, y'all see them lights way over yonder? That's the beautiful city of St. Augustine. And I'm extending y'all an invitation to come there and live with me. Everybody will have his own room and never want for anything. Please accept. The only blood kin I've got left in this world is my son, Baxter, but I know you're gonna love him just like I do — and he's gonna welcome us all, with open

arms. Will you do it, Junior? Will you bring your fam'ly and come live with me?

A pause. Junior considers. Anxious looks from the children. Junior nods. The children hug him gleefully.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, wonderful! All we have to do is follow the beach, and we're there. If we get a move on, we ort to be knocking at the door before morning. And you know what tomorrow is? It's Christmas Day, when we all gather around the tree and hand out presents. And you know what else? It's my son Baxter's birthday, all at the same time. Oh, I can't wait to see his darling face — he's gonna be so surprised, he'll just have a hissy!

ACT III

Scene One: "Your Mama Never Treated People Like This"

The front yard and facade of the Redmond estate in St. Augustine. The house is a two-story, sprawling affair of stucco and terra-cotta, dating from the twenties. The yard is crowded with tents and lean-to shelters occupied by Baxter's dispossessed tenants, whose mobile homes were destroyed by the great hurricane. A storm-ravaged palm tree stands to one side, with a string of Christmas lights extending from its decapitated trunk to the side of the house. Seated under one of the lean-to's, a TROUBADOUR TENANT strums his guitar and sings to a group of tattered survivors:

TROUBADOUR

I'll be home for Christmas,
You can plan on me.
Please have snow and mistletoe
And presents on the tree ...

Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams

The front door of the house opens, and Baxter steps out onto the porch, accompanied by his mini-skirted secretary, DELORES, who carries a grocery bag in one hand and a dinner triangle in the other, suspended from a string. Baxter takes out a metal rod and strikes the inside of the triangle in a circular motion, calling the tenants to the steps:

BAXTER

Aw right, let's gather 'round. Got a few announce-ments, then you can eat.

(glancing at notes)

First thing, I know you're all concerned about the new mobile homes we ordered from Baton Rouge. I'm happy to

report that the first shipment is scheduled to arrive on June first.

(groans of disappointment from the tenants)

Well, you aint the only ones concerned. It might be a roof over your heads, but it's my livelihood we're talking about here. Meanwhile, I managed just yesterday to get hold of a few used domiciles from a retired naval Commander over at Pensacola. These units, which are in fair to medium condition, should be arriving in just a few days, and will be available on a first come, first serve basis, which means one month's rent and a small security deposit of four hundred dollars, no pets allowed.

A GRUFF TENANT speaks up:

GRUFF TENANT

What's it mean, "fair condition"?

BAXTER

You in to me for six hundred dollars, mister. No way you're eligible for one a them domiciles, so whata you care?

GRUFF TENANT

Just curious.

BAXTER

Yeah, well, curiosity killed the Walking Catfish. Keep that in mind, and you better have me some cold cash by tomorrow morning, or out you go, understood?

GRUFF TENANT

Tomorrow's Christmas. Where 'm I gonna git money on Christmas?

The man's WIFE steps forward, a thin woman clutching a baby in a blanket.

WIFE

You ought to be ashamed, Baxter Redmond. Your mama never treated people like this.

BAXTER

Don't you be talkin' about my mama. Can I help it she didn't have biddy-brains? Why you reckon I had to get power-of-attorney? Think I enjoy this

BAXTER (CONT'D)

awesome responsibility? You don't like it, go live in somebody else's yard.

(consults notes again)

Which brings me to the second thing. Some a you people been taking it upon yourselves to go shopping at the 7-11 and that damn Walmart. I have tole you time and again, if you want something just come ta me — if I aint got it, I can

git it, and at a reasonable price without no middle-man in between. Now this is my last warning — anybody that don't want ta do bidness wif me can pack up and git offa my property, and I mean pronto.

(taking the grocery bag from Delores)

Kay, is anybody hungry? In honor of our Lord's birthday, I'm offerin' a special Christmas Eve treat —

(lifts a loaf of homemade bread from the bag)

— fresh, homemade sour-dough bread, just like my dear mama herself used to bake when I was a little boy.

Anybody wants a slice a this mouth-waterin' delicacy, get in line — cash customers to my right, credit on the left.

Most of the tenants scramble to line up on the left. One man, wearing a torn derby, goes to the right, pulling out his billfold.

DERBY MAN

How much?

BAXTER

Five dollars a slice.

DERBY MAN

Why, that's highway robbery.

BAXTER

No, it aint. Highway's over yonder. And you don't like the way I do bidness, you can hit the tarmac right now, amigo, and take your damn scabby fam'ly wif you.

A beat. The man averts his eyes and steps over to the other line, motioning for his family to join him. Baxter plops the loaf on the stone wall at the top of the steps, accepting a bread knife from Delores and cutting the first slice.

FIRST CREDIT CUSTOMER

Five dollars you say?

BAXTER

No, sir. Five if you got cash, but if you want credit, I got to cover my overhead — six dollars a

BAXTER (CONT'D)

slice, and a dollar interest for every day you don't pay.

The customer looks to his wife, who responds with an tightlipped nod of acceptance.

BAXTER

Good. Show him where to sign there, Delores —

Delores opens a ledger and gives the man a pen. The man signs. Baxter hands him a slice of bread.

BAXTER

Next!

As the second customer steps up, Addie Belle enters with the rabbits.

ADDIE BELLE

Merry Christmas, everybody!

BAXTER

Why, looky here — a whole bunch of little bunny rabbits. Aint that somethin'? Don't be shy, come on over here, bunnies, and git a slice a this fresh home-baked bread, just like my mama used to make.

ADDIE BELLE

Baxter, honey? Don't you recognize me?

BAXTER

No offense, booger-head, but y'all all look the same to me. And I'll thank you not to call me honey.
(puts an arm around Delores)
This here is my honey. Sweetest thing from here to Birmingham.

ADDIE BELLE

Baxter, don't be like this Baxter. I'm your mama.
(holds up her skirt to show her white thighs underneath)
See?

BAXTER

Put your skirt down, you old biddy. And don't be talkin' about my mama. My mama died.

ADDIE BELLE

I know, I know! And the only reason we can even communicate on this earthly plane is things is all mixed up and they can't decide which place to put me. But I'm grateful, I'm really so very grateful, because without this unfortunate ... confusion, I

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

wouldn't be able to spend Christmas with my precious son — or help him celebrate his birthday — and Baxter, you don't know how long it's took us to get here, Baxter, and what all we've had to endure — I tell you, son, this has materialized into one hellacious journey.

BAXTER

(to the rabbits)
She been with y'all long?
(as Junior shakes his head)
Kinda just fell in with you, huh? Yeah, I know the type.
(pointing a forefinger at his temple and twirling it to indicate Addie Belle's insanity)
Never can tell what you'll meet up with when you're on the road. Well, y'all don't mind her. Come on over here beside me. And don't worry about money, it's on the house. Anybody that's concerned about the preservation of our wild life, it's yours truly. And as a gesture a my sincerity,

y'all can stay here long as you want to, free a charge,
how about that?

(an arm around Junior, leading him up the steps)

Course, we're a little short on space just now, what with
all the flotsam and jetsam we got living here on the dole,
but I can put you up in the kitchen, fix you a little place right
next to the stove, and everybody gets his own pillow and
his own little blanket — whata you say, is that bein' a good
Samaritan or what?

(as the credit customer tugs at his sleeve)

See I'm busy here? Whata you want?

CREDIT CUSTOMER

This bread. It's got mold growing on it.

BAXTER

Yeah? Well, don't talk so loud. They'll all be wantin' some.

(to the rabbits again)

Y'all come on inside — them little ones look plumb tuckered
out —

(as Addie Belle tries to follow them)

Not you, burrhead. And don't think you're stayin' in my
yard, neither. Go on now, — git on off down the road.

He holds the door open for the rabbits, but Junior hesitates, reluctant to leave Addie Belle.

ADDIE BELLE

Y'all run along. Don't worry about me. I'll be all right. And
in the morning, we'll get us some kero-sene from the 7-11
and go pay a visit to lawyer Jimmy Joe Dunwoodie who is
a personal friend of mine and will vouch for my true
identity.

(staring Baxter in the eye)

And when my son discovers what a awful mistake he's
made, he'll be so ashamed he'll regret it to his dying day.

(to the rabbits again)

Night-night. Sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs bite.

The rabbits follow Baxter inside. Delores brings up the rear, closing the door after her. With a
deep sigh, Addie Belle looks around for a place to sleep.

ADDIE BELLE

(surprised)

Why — what happened to all my roses? Somebody dug
up all the roses.

OLD MAN

Needed the space. Saying you care more about roses
than you do people?

ADDIE BELLE

No, no! — but he promised me, said he wouldn't change
anything, said he'd leave it just exactly like it was —

OLD MAN

Aint none of us like we was.
 (crawling into his tent for the night)
 Better git used to it.

Addie Belle curls up under the broken palm tree, covering herself with some of the fronds. The troubadour strums his guitar softly. A YOUNG WOMAN sings;

YOUNG WOMAN

O little town of Bethlehem,
 How still we see thee lie ...

The facade of the house rises into the flies, revealing Baxter's kitchen. The rabbits are bedding down by the stove. Baxter and Delores issue blankets and pillows.

YOUNG WOMAN

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
 The silent stars go by.

BAXTER

There now — everybody comfy?

The rabbits nod gratefully, nearly asleep already. Delores lights a candle and Baxter closes the blinds, shutting out the glowing 7-11 sign in the distance.

BAXTER

See you in the morning. Sweet dreams. And a very
 merry Christmas.

He and Delores tip-toe out of the room. In the yard, the young woman continues singing:

YOUNG WOMAN

Yet in thy dark streets shineth
 The everlasting light;
 The hopes and fears of all the
 years
 Are met in thee tonight.

Baxter and Delores re-enter. Delores is wearing shortie pajamas, and Baxter has on a robe, a night cap, and slippers. Delores holds up the candle. The rabbits are sound asleep. Baxter takes a pistol from his pocket and screws on a silencer. As the woman continues singing, Baxter approaches the rabbits stealthily and begins shooting them in the head, one by one, the sound of the pistol retorts no louder than the pop-top on a drink can.

YOUNG WOMAN

How silently, how silently,
 The wondrous gift is giv'n!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 The blessings of his heav'n

The final victim, one of the rabbit children, sits up in alarm, clutching her blanket about her fearfully.

BAXTER

Whatsa matter, child? Havin' a bad dream?
 (as the rabbit nods uncertainly)

Well, you just lay back down, honeybunch — aint nothin'
gonna bother you here.

The rabbit lies back slowly. Baxter kneels, gives her a kiss on the forehead, and puts the pillow over her face suddenly, firing the gun into it. He stands up, shivering a bit in spite of himself. Feathers from the pillow drift about him like snow flakes.

BAXTER

(to Delores)

Git the pot.

Delores takes a large cooking pot from the cabinet. Baxter lifts Junior's body up and drags him to a chopping block by the sink, dumping him on his back. Junior's legs dangle from the block, and his head hangs back in the sink. All the while, the woman continues singing:

YOUNG WOMAN

No ear may hear his coming
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will
Receive Him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

Baxter grabs a meat cleaver from the rack and holds it poised over Junior's throat. Slowly, he lifts the gleaming edge up in the air. Then, with a single, powerful stroke, he chops off Junior's head, holding the dripping thing up by the ears.

BAXTER

Hope you come from good stock, rabbit, cause that's
where you're goin' — in the stock pot!

He tosses the head into the pot. Delores reaches inside and removes the coonskin hat, making a face as she tosses it aside. Baxter bends over the body, chopping away with gusto. The facade of the house glides down, closing off the carnage.

Scene Two: "I Bleeve They Call It the Shag "

Dawn. The first rays of light touch the sky. The birds begin chirping. The 7-11 sign comes on in the distance. In the yard, the tenants are still asleep. Junior and his family enter, standing over Addie Belle. The rabbits are wearing pink outfits now, spattered with dark bloodstains. The costumes stop at the wrists, neck, and ankles, revealing the faces and hands and feet of the actors themselves, whose pale, innocent features represent the departing spirits of the rabbits.

JUNIOR

(nudging Addie Belle gently)

Addie Belle? Time to get up, Addie Belle.

Addie Belle groans and pulls a palm frond back over her head. Junior smiles, lifting the frond away.

JUNIOR

Rise and shine!

Addie Belle wakes up. She blinks in surprise and sits up slowly.

JUNIOR

Morning.

ADDIE BELLE

Junior? I didn't know you could talk — and you look so diff'rent this morning, all of you, so rested and fresh. Isn't it a wonder what a good night's sleep will do for a person?

JUNIOR

We'll have to hurry. We don't have much time. He'll be waking up soon, and we've got to catch him by surprise.

ADDIE BELLE

Who?

JUNIOR

Your son, Baxter. He killed us, Addie Belle. Me, and Marcilene and all the little ones.

ADDIE BELLE

You're ... dead? Oh, my. Oh, no. Baxter? My Baxter?

JUNIOR

Yes. And we'll have to leave shortly, but before we go ... I was hoping you'd invite us to his birthday party. Bake him a marble swirl devil's food delight.

(locking eyes with her)

The children — they've never been to a party. Be a real treat, don't you think?

ADDIE BELLE

He won't let me in.

JUNIOR

He will if we get some kerosene from the 7-11 and clean you up.

ADDIE BELLE

(struggling to her feet)

Time is it?

JUNIOR

Must be going on seven. They turned the sign on already.

ADDIE BELLE

Hand me my walker.

One of the little ones gets it for her.

ADDIE BELLE

Thank you, sugar.
(to Junior)

How we gonna buy kerosene You have any money? I
don't have a dime.

JUNIOR

Put it on the tab.

ADDIE BELLE

I can see you never been to the 7-11.

JUNIOR

No, ma'am. But they never seen a rabbit try to pump
kerosene, either. Trust me. They won't believe their eyes.
Think they come across a ghost or something.

(as the children giggle)

Whoose that got my little gold footsie?

The children hoot with laughter, jumping up and down excitedly. Addie Belle grins and rolls her eyes. As the group moves out of the yard, Junior is already adding to their shopping list.

JUNIOR

Get the children some bubble gum, too, and Marcilene
wants to try one of those slurpies, and me — I'd like to
taste a Budweiser beer and smoke a real Marlboro
cigarette —

(aside)

— hear they're a lot diff'rent from rabbit tobacco!

When they have left the stage, the front door of the house is flung open suddenly. Baxter and Delores come out onto the landing, carrying the pot of rabbit stew between them and setting it down carefully at the top of the steps. Baxter is still wearing his blood-stained robe, and Delores remains in her shortie pajamas. She holds out the triangle and Baxter clangs on it with his metal rod, waking up the tenants.

BAXTER

Aw right, lissen up! Got no news this morning but good
news — special Christmas breakfast! Big
old pot a fresh rabbit stew, prepared in the cajun manner,
and guaranteed ta please the most discriminatin' palette!
Step right up, folks — cash customers on my right, credit
on my left.

A beat. A lone cash customer steps forward — the same one as before.

CASH CUSTOMER

How much?

BAXTER

You again? You got my rent money?

CASH CUSTOMER

(holding up a five)

No, but I got five dollars.

BAXTER

(grabbing the bill)

Git this genulman a bowl a stew.

Delores ladles stew into a Styrofoam bowl and gives it to the customer. Baxter turns to his credit line:

BAXTER

Next!

CREDIT CUSTOMER

How much?

BAXTER

Be six dollars, my good man, and a dollar interest for every day you don't pay.

An angry murmur from the crowd. They close in on Baxter and Delores threateningly.

BAXTER

(a note of fear in his voice)

Aw right, aw right, no interest for ninety days!

The crowd presses closer. Baxter gives up, backing toward the door and using Delores as a shield.

BAXTER

Okay, what the hell, it's Christmas, right? Enjoy!

He drags Delores inside, bolting the door behind them. The facade rises into the flies again. In the kitchen, Addie Belle is seated at one end of the table, in the center of which we see a freshly-baked marble-swirl devil's food delight, with the candles already lit. All but a few smudges of the body paint washed away, Addie Belle sings in a purring voice reminiscent of Marilyn Monroe's performance at the famous Garden bash for JFK:

ADDIE BELLE

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday ... dear Baxter

Happy birthday to you!

BAXTER

(stunned)

Mama? Whata you doin' here?

ADDIE BELLE

I wouldn't miss your birthday for all the tea in China, you know that.

BAXTER

But — aint you dead?

ADDIE BELLE

Why I never. Who told you such a thing as that?

BAXTER

Uhh.
(snaps his fingers, trying to remember)

DELORES

His seester Eunice. Lef a message weeth me, personal.

ADDIE BELLE

And who might you be?

BAXTER

My fie-ancey, Miss Delores del Mucho.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, fie-ancey or not, missy, you are sadly mistaken. And I'll thank you not to put aspersions on my dorter.

DELORES

Hey, I don' geeve a sheet, honderstan'? I don' care eef jew ded or what. And don' be cuttin' them eyes at me, jew broke down old puta.

BAXTER

Delores. That's enough, Delores. I can't have you bad-mouthin' my mama.

DELORES

Hey, folk jew too, beeg-chot.

BAXTER

That rips it. Pack your bags and get out of here, and I mean pronto, Miss Mucho.

A dumbfounded stare from Delores.

BAXTER

Go on, git.
(as Delores stalks off)
I'm sorry, mama. I ought to consulted you before I ever got involved with that person.
(hugs Addie Belle with exaggerated warmth)
Welcome home, mama. It's so good to see you —
(sitting down at the table)
— and my fav'rit dessert. I — I don't know what to say.

ADDIE BELLE

It's enough for me — just to see your sweet face again —

She kisses him on the forehead and steps back, trying to control her conflicting emotions.

ADDIE BELLE

Go on, now. Blow out your candles, honey. And close your eyes. And make a big wish.

Baxter takes a deep breath and blows out the candles. As he shuts his eyes, the lights come up behind a scrim wall, revealing Junior and his family, who look on silently. Baxter completes his wish and opens his eyes again, reaching for his fork.

ADDIE BELLE

Don't be rude, Baxter. Aren't you gonna ask your little friends if they want some?

BAXTER

Friends? I aint got no friends.

ADDIE BELLE

Your little furry friends, honey. Don't tell me you forgot all about 'em?

Baxter spins in his chair. Seeing the rabbits, he tries to get up, but finds himself held back by some invisible force.

ADDIE BELLE

All right, then, if that's the way you feel, I guess we'll just have to teach you a lesson. Eat your cake, Baxter. Eat it all. Every last morsel. And maybe then, once in a while, you'll think about somebody besides your own self.

BAXTER

Lemme outa here. What 're you doin' ta me? Mama? Don't just stand there, mama — hep me!

ADDIE BELLE

No use strugglin', Baxter. And I know you're hungry, I can see it in your eyes. Don't be bashful. Eat.

BAXTER

No. I won't. You can't make me.

Against his will, the hand lifts up with the fork. Baxter forces the hand back to the table, holding it down with all his might.

BAXTER

Think I want your old cake? Hah! I hate your damn cakes, hated 'em all my life! But that's you, mama — always so sure you know everything, and you're blind as a damn bat! Godamighty, don't you have any idea the way you force your-

BAXTER (CONT'D)

self on people? — always pushin' — tryin' ta weasel your way into a person's mind — tryin' ta make the whole world be like you! Well, I'm not like you, hear me? I'm like him — like my daddy, bless his bones!

ADDIE BELLE

You don't have to shout.

BAXTER

(as the fork rises again)
Stop it! Goddamn you, stop it!

The fork stabs him in the eye. Blood gushes forth. Baxter screams and tries to turn aside. The fork stabs him in the other eye. With an agonizing effort, Baxter manages to fling the fork away, putting his hands over his bleeding eyes. The hands are jerked away. They fall into the

cake and begin grabbing at chunks of it, cramming them into Baxter's mouth. He tries to push himself away from the table, but suddenly, as if shoved from behind, he falls face-forward into the cake, his arms thrust out behind him, and still he eats, snarling and protesting, his mouth working uncontrollably as he snaps at the cake like a wild animal. Finally, it's over. The plate is empty. Baxter sobs in relief.

ADDIE BELLE

Did you clean your plate?

BAXTER

Yes, mama.

He picks the plate up with both hands, holding it out to Addie Belle in abject surrender.

BAXTER

Can I — may I please be excused, please?

ADDIE BELLE

Think you can behave yourself now?

BAXTER

Yes, ma'am.

ADDIE BELLE

And you won't forget the starving children in Europe?

BAXTER

No, mama.

(barely able to hold up under the pain)

Mama, please.

ADDIE BELLE

Give us a hug, then, before you go.

Baxter stands up, reaching blindly in the direction of her voice. Addie Belle doesn't move, resisting the impulse to help him. Baxter finds her. He touches her face. Puts his arms around her. A pause.

ADDIE BELLE

Baxter, baby. I loved you so much. Where did I go wrong? Where?

Baxter pulls away, lurching toward the door. He misses by several feet, crashing into the wall. He feels his way along the wall, moving even further from the door.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, honey — let me hep you.

BAXTER

Shut up! Leave me alone! Can't you ever leave me the hell alone!

ADDIE BELLE

If that's ... what you really want.

Suddenly, Baxter doubles over in pain, clutching his stomach. With a great effort, he straightens up again, grunting in disbelief.

BAXTER

Bitch. What did you do to me? What was in that cake?

ADDIE BELLE

Rat poison. From the 7-11.

BAXTER

But — why? Why, mama, why?

ADDIE BELLE

It was the only place open.

Baxter sinks to his knees, lifting his face to the heavens, his voice almost a whisper:

BAXTER

Now I lay me ... down to sleep ... Pray the Lord ... my soul ... to keep ... And if I die before I wake ... Pray the Lord ... my —

Suddenly, from the distance, we hear the strains of "Sixty Minute Man."

BAXTER

Whatzat? Whatzat music?

ADDIE BELLE

I bleeve they call it the shag.

BAXTER

Beach music.

(getting to his feet with a grin)

I used to could do that.

(as he shags awkwardly)

See? Yeah. How'm I doin'?

(with more confidence, shrugging out of his robe)

Pretty fancy, huh?

He's still dancing as he's lifted away.

BAXTER

(tugging on the line)

No, wait — whatsa big hurry? — I'm not finished here!

He disappears into the flies. The music drifts away. Silence. Addie Belle kneels and picks up Baxter's robe, gathering it to her breast and pressing her cheek to the fabric.

ADDIE BELLE

He aw ways was a good dancer. Even when he was a little boy. Get out on the sidewalk and dance up a storm. And every girl in the neigh-borhood was crazy about him. Couldn't keep their

hands off him. Everybody loved him. We all did. We loved him so.

(a tearful glance to Junior)

I can't just hate him, can I? I'm his mama. And what I don't understand, is why don't they at least fix it so you can visit with him once in a while. Look in through the fence or something? How would that hurt anything? Wouldn't it still be hell, if all you could do is look in on him, and never be able to touch his a sweet face?

JUNIOR

That was some trick, that thing with the fork. How'd you do that?

ADDIE BELLE

Me? Oh, Junior, I thought it was you.

JUNIOR

Rabbits can't do magic, Addie Belle. It's us they pull out of the hat.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, it wasn't me, and I baked that cake the same way I aw ways do, exactly. You saw me, didn't you? Stood right beside me. Marcilene? How could I stab out my own son's eyes and put rat poison in his cake? What mother could do such a thing?

JUNIOR

We got to go now, Addie Belle.

ADDIE BELLE

You not leaving me? Where?

JUNIOR

It's 'spose to be kind of a secret.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, please. I won't breathe a word! Cross my heart!

MARCILENE

We going home, Addie Belle. You're welcome to come, but you wouldn't like it.

ADDIE BELLE

I lived in the woods before. I can do it again. And we'd all be together, wouldn't we? And I could tell stories to the little ones, and mind 'em when you went shopping, and sweep and make up the beds. I wouldn't be in the way, I promise.

MARCILENE

It's not the woods, Addie Belle. It's a briar patch. Way off in the sky. Far as the eye can see.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh.

(pause)

I could do it. I'm stronger than you think. If you was ever at the Charlotte Memorial Hospital, you'd know what I mean, and I was in that place a whole month.

MARCILENE

Have to get you a bunny outfit. Don't know where you'd find one on Christmas Day.

ADDIE BELLE

I could try the 7-11?

JUNIOR

We'll wait for you in the garden.

ADDIE BELLE

You promise? This aint some kind of trick is it, Junior?

JUNIOR

Cross my heart.

Addie Belle shuffles across the room to get her walker. The lights fade behind the scrim, and the rabbits gradually disappear. As Addie Belle turns back again, only the wall remains. Leaning on the walker, Addie Belle makes her way to the door. Suddenly, she spies something and stoops to pick it up — Junior's coon-skin hat. Addie Belle waves it in the air, calling out to the void:

ADDIE BELLE

You forgot your hat!

No answer. Addie Belle puts the hat on her head and opens the door. The facade glides away. Addie Belle comes outside. The joyful tenants lift their bowls to greet her, dancing and singing:

TENANTS

Joy to the world!
The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart
Prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing
And heav'n and nature sing
And heav'n and heav'n and nature
sing!

A woman tilts her bowl, drinking it down. A man stands by the pot, ladling it out as fast as he can. All over the yard, the tenants stumble about happily, dazed on soup and good cheer. Addie Belle pushes her way through the crowd. Someone offers her a bowl of soup. Addie Belle shoves the Samaritan out of the way. Finally, at the edge of the yard, Addie Belle turns back, shouting to the tenants vehemently:

ADDIE BELLE

Y'all ort to be 'shamed of yourselves!

No one pays her any mind. A PREGNANT TEENAGER picks up a rock and heaves it through one of the windows. Two MEN try the front door. Finding it locked, one of them buries an axe in it. Someone pulls off a storm shutter. A SINGLE MOTHER and her CHILDREN drag a surf board across the yard, piled high with stolen goods. An OLD MAN tries to climb a makeshift ladder to the second floor of the house. Another CHILD, all by himself on the porch roof, tap dances over the terra-cotta tiles, wearing a top hat and tails and waving a cane. As Addie Belle retreats to the road, the last thing we see is someone spray-painting a graffiti icon on the face of the stone arch bearing the Redmond name.

Scene Three: "You'll Always Be My Little Girl"

Inside the 7-11, a convenience store specializing in beer, cigarettes, and condoms. On the counter is a see-through dispenser for the slushy fountain drinks called "slurpies." As Addie Belle enters, a security buzzer sounds at the entrance, but the clerk is nowhere to be seen.

ADDIE BELLE

(calling out)

Hello! Anybody home? It's me again!

The clerk straightens up behind the counter, grinning malevolently. It's the nurse from Charlotte Memorial — the creature who ordered the blacks to beat Addie Belle in Act I. Over her starched uniform, she wears a 7-11 apron and a Carolina Panthers jacket.

NURSE

Hi! Welcome back!

Addie Belle gasps and tries to escape. A black orderly appears at the door, menacing her with his bamboo pole. The other orderlies wheel in a hospital bed from the back room.

NURSE

Time to go beddy-bye!

The orderlies seize Addie Belle and force her to the bed.

NURSE

Tie her down, and I mean good!

Addie Belle gives a screechy little scream. An orderly slaps duct tape over her mouth. The others tie her to the bed with strips of cloth torn from a sheet. The nurse draws a slurpy and approaches the bed. Addie Belle struggles silently, her eyes wide with fear. The nurse sucks her slurpy. The drink rattles through the straw like the close-up breathing of some predator in a horror movie.

NURSE

Get her back to the room.

(to Addie Belle)

And the next time you have to go tinkle, honey — you better say please.

The orderlies wheel the bed back into the storeroom. As the nurse follows them out, the 7-11 breaks away to reveal Addie Belle's hospital room at the Charlotte Memorial. Over the intercom in the adjacent corridor, we hear a litany of perfunctory announcements — doctors being

paged, squadrons of personnel being dispatched hither and yon, and various other coded activity, all of it delivered in a kind of garbled Ruritanian.

None too gently, the orderlies maneuver Addie Belle's bed down the corridor and into the room. The nurse hooks up an IV and takes Addie Belle's temperature. In a corner of the room, we see a large basket-bouquet of flowers with a bunny-rabbit balloon suspended above, anchored to the basket with a string. The cartoon bunny holds a garish cartoon sign: HAPPY EASTER! GET WELL SOON!

In a chair by the window, Eunice is curled up under a blanket, fast asleep. On the room TV, another of the endless follow-up reports on the tragedy at Waco. The nurse pulls the duct tape from Addie Belle's mouth.

ADDIE BELLE

Ouch.

The nurse puts a finger to her lips, motioning for Addie Belle to keep quiet, Eunice stirs, but doesn't wake up. The nurse leads her entourage out of the room, closing the door behind them.

ADDIE BELLE

(softly)

Eunice?

(louder)

Eunice?

(yelling it out)

EUNICE!

Eunice leaps up, startled out of her wits.

EUNICE

Mama, what the hell!

ADDIE BELLE

How long have I been cooped up here?

EUNICE

(trying to settle down again)

Ten days. Now go back to sleep, mama. Try to get some rest.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, Lord. They tied me down again.

(struggles a bit)

What if I had to go tinkle, what if I –

(another thought)

What time is it?

EUNICE

Four o'clock. Mama, please.

ADDIE BELLE

Day or night?

EUNICE

Morning, mama. It's Easter Morning. Now, you want me to move out in the hall or what? Another hour, they'll be here for more lab work. I have got to get some sleep.

ADDIE BELLE

Look at the pretty flowers. Thank you, Eunice, that's sweet.

Eunice sits up, glaring at her.

EUNICE

Okay, okay — you wanna talk, we'll talk. Me first, okay? Number one, I didn't send the fucking

EUNICE (CONT'D)

flowers. And if I had sent the fucking flowers, do you think, in your wildest dreams, that I would ever, ever, in my life pick out anything that goddamn putrid?

(angry sigh)

They're from Baxter. Excuse me, Baxter's secretary, the little slut. Baxter don't even know you're here. Can't nobody find him.

(pause)

Don't look at me like that. I been on the phone five hundred times. I'm sure as hell not shirking my duty here — got a few things to tell the bastard myself.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, just be sure and let him know how much I 'preciate the lovely bouquet.

(tearful)

I don't understand why you have to be so mean. If I was dead and gone you wouldn't talk to me like this.

(blows her nose)

And you ort not to be so hard on your brother. Baxter's a busy man, he is, and he knows the value of a dollar, which is more than I can say for some people.

On the TV, a choir is performing Handel's Messiah.

ADDIE BELLE

Turn it off. Turn the damn thing off.

Eunice aims the remote at the TV. The screen goes dead.

EUNICE

That's a new one on me.

ADDIE BELLE

What?

EUNICE

First time you ever wanted to skip something that had Jesus in it.

ADDIE BELLE

Aint no Jesus. Jesus ... died in Waco.

EUNICE

Yeah? Well, it wasn't on CNN.

ADDIE BELLE

(trying to sort things out)

ADDIE BELLE (CONT'D)

Oh my, what possessed me to say such a thing?. You reckon I been dreaming?

EUNICE

When would you have time to dream? You stay awake twenty-four hours a day.

ADDIE BELLE

Don't pay me no mind, honey. I'm just feeling ... kindly sicky like.

EUNICE

Want me to call the nurse?

ADDIE BELLE

No, no, just hand me that wet warsh-cloth

Eunice puts fresh water on the cloth, wrings it out, and hands it to her mother, who presses it to her forehead.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh. It feels like some midget got behind my eyeballs, shooting at 'em with a bow and arrow.

(a pause)

Eunice?

EUNICE

Hmmm?

ADDIE BELLE

You know how the colored people have these little colored Jesus dolls, how they try to make him into their own image?

(pause)

Would it — would it shock you to deaf if you was to learn that God was not a white man?

EUNICE

I guess he can be what he wants to be. Same for the Devil. Bible says they both a couple slam-bang wizards, don't it?

ADDIE BELLE

There's so much to consider in this world. Takes more brains than I got. And who's gonna know, anyways, what it's like to be dead, unless you're there in person?

EUNICE

You want some breakfast?

ADDIE BELLE

No, but you could bring me a Goody powder and a coke.

EUNICE

Aint no wonder you in the hospital. Didn't you ever read about where they put a ten-penny nail in a co-cola and it ate it all up?

ADDIE BELLE

'At aint true, if that was true, how come when a baby is sick all he can hold down sometimes is a lil sip of coke? You don't remember when Baxter used to suffer from the colic? I raised that boy on co-cola, and to this day he won't touch coffee less it has cream in it.

EUNICE

Coke aint got cream either, what's cream got to do with it? And I can do without baby-boy Baxter stories, okay?

ADDIE BELLE

Oh just — hush, Eunice.

(another rush of pain)

I don't have — the energy to argue with you. I only hope, when you get old and sicky like, you'll have a easier time of it than I did.

Eunice stands up, reaching for her purse.

EUNICE

Cafeteria won't open till six. I'll drive over to that little diner near the Observer. Sure you don't want a sausage and egg or something?

ADDIE BELLE

(shakes her head)

Don't forget to put your — seatbelt on.

EUNICE

Mama, you are such a worry-wart. If you knew anything at all about my car, you'd understand — a seatbelt is the about the least of my problems.

ADDIE BELLE

I don't mean to nag.
 (sniffles again)
 Oh, Eunice. Why can't we ever have a single solitary
 conversation without fussing?

EUNICE

(pulling on her jacket)
 Way it is in this world, mama. You got your coffee people
 and your co-cola people — and never the twain shall
 meet.

She bends over to kiss Addie Belle on the forehead, and puts the call-buzzer where she can reach it.

EUNICE

I won't be long. You need anything, just press the buzzer
 — they'll come running.

ADDIE BELLE

Hah.

EUNICE

(moving to the door)
 They better.

ADDIE BELLE

Eunice?
 (as Eunice turns back to her quizzically)
 You'll always be my little girl. And I love you. And I
 couldn't bear it to see you ever get hurt, not ever.

A pause. Eunice struggles with her emotions, but makes no reply. Turning away again, she leaves the room, walking off down the hall. In the distance, we hear the wail of an ambulance. Addie Belle fidgets absently with her restraints, trying to undo a knot with one hand. Lights up behind the scrim wall, to reveal Junior. He is fully costumed again, his face hidden behind the rabbit headpiece. Under one arm he carries a gift-wrapped box. Addie Belle, staring at the ceiling, doesn't see him. Softly, her voice laden with remorse she sings:

ADDIE BELLE

Praise him ... praise him
 All the ... little ... children
 God is ... love
 God is ...

Her voice drifts away. A single, audible sob rises in her throat. Turning her face to the side, she sees Junior.

ADDIE BELLE

Junior?

JUNIOR

Mornin', Addie Belle. Gonna be a beautiful Easter.

ADDIE BELLE

I thought you forgot all about me.

Junior walks through the wall, approaching the bed.

ADDIE BELLE

And you got your fur all back. You look real handsome, Junior.

(as Junior takes out a pocket knife and begins cutting away the strips of cloth)

Where we going?

JUNIOR

Home, Addie Belle. I'm taking you home.

ADDIE BELLE

But — but I aint got no proper clothes. And my hair's a mess. I can't go nowhere looking like this. And I got to tell Eunice. She comes back and I'm not here, she'll be worried sick.

JUNIOR

Time you gave a little thought to yourself, Addie Belle. Don't fret about Eunice, she'll be just fine.

He helps her up to a sitting position and puts the gift in her lap.

JUNIOR

Here. From me and all the family. Happy Easter.

ADDIE BELLE

(moved)

Oh, Junior. I don't know when was the last time somebody gave me a gift.

She pulls off the ribbon excitedly, but with great deliberation, folding the tissue carefully before she lays it aside.

ADDIE BELLE

And I can't stand it — I didn't get y'all nothing. I swear, I don't know what it is nowadays, but I can't seem to keep things straight in my mind anymore, and the days get so mixed up, I can't tell some-times if I'm coming or going.

A gasp of wonder as she lifts a rabbit costume from the box.

ADDIE BELLE

Oh, Junior. You shouldn't have. It's so beautiful. Thank you. But wasn't it awful expensive?

JUNIOR

Marcilene made it herself.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, that is the finest job of sewing I ever saw in my life.
(holds the fur to her cheek)
And it's so soft. Just like a baby's bottom.

JUNIOR

Go ahead, try it on.

ADDIE BELLE

We planning to just waltz out of here? What if somebody tries to stop us?

JUNIOR

I'd like to see 'em try.

He picks up the bouquet from Delores and dumps out the flowers, striking a pose with the Easter basket in one hand, the string balloon in the other.

JUNIOR

Don't nobody rag the Easter Bunny.

Addie Belle grins and goes into the bathroom to change. Junior sits on the edge of the bed, holding the balloon rabbit on his knee.

JUNIOR

What's your name, kid? Kinda resemble my cousin Wiggly.

Scene Four: "Don't Anything Count For Anything?"

A rocky plateau, high above the fog-shrouded void. *Upstage*, the mouth of a cave, with a large, cast-iron cookpot standing nearby. To the *left*, a path ascends from the plateau, meandering through the padlocked gate of a chain-link fence to another precipice that hangs out precariously over the orchestra pit. On the fence, a hand-painted sign: DAINDRUS LEGE. NO RABITS ALOUD.

Breathless from their climb, Addie Belle and Junior appear *down right*, crouching behind a bush. Junior is wearing the coon-skin hat. He motions for Addie Belle to be quiet, and picks up a rock, tossing it at the pot. The sound clangs in the stillness. Cautiously, Junior throws another rock. A pause. Junior stands up slowly, relaxing a bit.

JUNIOR

Okay. Looks like he's not here.

ADDIE BELLE

Who?

JUNIOR

Brer Fox. Prolly gone fishing.

ADDIE BELLE

I ought to know it was a trick.

JUNIOR

(hopping out into the clearing)

Didn't want to scare you. But we're almost there now — just have to climb over that fence and up on that little piece of rock.

ADDIE BELLE

(with growing trepidation)

Then what?

JUNIOR

Close our eyes ... and jump. Piece a cake, huh?

ADDIE BELLE

Jump off that ledge? Are you crazy?

She hops out to join him. Unaccustomed to her new identity, she will walk a few steps, then give a hop — a bit like Grandpappy Amos on *The Real McCoys*.

JUNIOR

Addie Belle, I done it a hundred times. Nothing to it. Just float down through the clouds, and there it is — biggest, most beautiful briar patch you ever seen.

ADDIE BELLE

It aint I don't bleeve you. Junior — it's just —

(wringing her paws)

— I'm scared. All my life I been fearful a heights. I won't even get on a elevator!

JUNIOR

You just have to trust me, Addie Belle. If there was some other way, bleeve me. I'd take it. I promise you, you won't get hurt. You won't feel a thing. But we got to hurry, before he gets back here.

He reaches for her paw. Addie Belle pulls back, terrified.

JUNIOR

It's all in your mind. Look how high we've climbed already, and you dint hardly notice it.

ADDIE BELLE

That's diff'rent! I'm on the ground, not hanging out on some little rock in the middle a nowhere.

JUNIOR

This was meant to be, Addie Belle. How do you think we got this far? You know you wanna go home. You do.

(anxious pause)

Don't make me leave you.

ADDIE BELLE

(wringing her paws)

I — I can't do it!

JUNIOR

Okay, it's your funeral.

He hops off toward the fence.

ADDIE BELLE

What's that spose to mean?

JUNIOR

(turning back)

You think going over the edge is hard, wait till Brer Fox gets you in that cookpot and eats you for supper. I been there, Addie Belle — remember? I wouldn't wish that on nobody, especially you.

A beat. Addie Belle hops over to join him. Junior kneels by the fence and puts his paws together, forming a step to lift Addie Belle up. She struggles to the top of the fence. As she's about to go over, BRER FOX suddenly leaps out from the bushes.

BRER FOX

Aha! What chall rabbits doing on my property?

A rather slow-witted animal despite his reputation, the fox wears bifocals and carries a fishing pole, his overalls rolled up top the calf. Junior turns to face him, pressing back against the fence. Addie Belle slides back down fearfully, huddling up to Junior's side.

JUNIOR

(mock fright)

Dint mean no harm, Brer Fox. We just lookin' for Easter eggs.

BRER FOX

Aint no eggs up here. This is the middle a nowhere.

JUNIOR

Yes, sir — but these eggs is made out of gold. Found a secret map and it led us straight to your farm.

BRER FOX

Yeah? Well, any gold on this land blongs to me. Diamonds, rubies, Easter eggs, don't make no diff'rence — they all mine.

JUNIOR

How 'bout we split fifty-fifty?

BRER FOX

How 'bout I just throw you in that pot and cook you for supper?

JUNIOR

Nothin' I like better than a good hot bath. Rejuvenates the spirit — right, Addie Belle?

(hefting something in his palm)

But before I warsh up, think I'll just take this here gold egg and chuck it over the side.

BRER FOX

You aint got no egg.

JUNIOR

(holding out his cupped palms)

Sure have.

(peeking inside his paws)

Diamonds and rubies all over it. Buy enough rabbits to feed you till kingdom come.

BRER FOX

This better not be a trick, bunny. Hold it out cheer. Lemme see it.

JUNIOR

You'll let us go?

BRER FOX

Think you're dealing with here, a buzzard? Course I'll let you go. Fair's fair. Hand it over.

Junior approaches the fox slowly, holding his cupped paws out in front of him. Brer Fox leans over to examine the egg. Junior throws dirt in Brer Fox's eyes, running to the fence and climbing it frantically. Brer Fox stumbles about, yelling in rage and pain. Junior reaches down to give Addie Belle a lift up. She struggles but can't make it. Junior loses his balance and falls over the fence to the other side.

ADDIE BELLE

Go on, Junior! Leave me! Save yourself!

Junior clings to the fence, staring through the links like a prisoner.

JUNIOR

I can't! I can't do it! I'm coming back!

ADDIE BELLE

(wrestling with the half-blind fox)

No! Run, Junior! Run!

BRER FOX

(as Junior scales the fence again)

At's right, bunny! Come on back over here with your little friend! I'll cook you both!

ADDIE BELLE

(breaking loose momentarily)

No, listen. Wait. I'm not a rabbit. Brer Fox. Really, I'm not. I'm just a little old woman.

(pulls off her headpiece)

See?

A shocked pause. Brer Fox wipes his eyes again. Peers at her in disbelief.

BRER FOX

You!

He pulls off his own headpiece, revealing the face of Addie Belle's husband, Marcus Eugene.

ADDIE BELLE

You! You touch my little girl again, you'll regret it to your dying days!

Through his stern, impassive mask, Eugene laughs, pulling Addie Belle into a close embrace. She struggles, clawing at the mask, trying to rake his eyes. As Eugene drags her toward the cookpot, Addie Belle grabs him by the hair, pulling off another headpiece to reveal a mask of Baxter's grinning face.

ADDIE BELLE

Baxter. Baxter, no. You wouldn't cook your own mama?

BAXTER

Why not? It's all pink inside, aint it?

He giggles maniacally, bending her backwards over the edge of the cookpot. Addie Belle screams. Baxter holds her by the throat with one hand, taking out his hunting knife with the other and raising it over his head. Suddenly, Junior leaps on Baxter from behind. As they scuffle, Baxter loses the knife. Addie Belle picks it up

JUNIOR

Stick him, Addie Belle! Stick him!

Addie Belle stands frozen, unable to move. Baxter gains the upper hand, throwing Junior to the ground and trying to strangle him. Junior's movements grow weaker. Addie Belle stands up slowly behind her son and puts an arm around him in a trance-like, almost loving gesture. Baxter grabs her arm. Swiftly, Addie Belle plunges the knife in his back and steps back in horror. Baxter, mortally wounded, gets to his feet awkwardly, reaching over his shoulder and trying to get at the knife. Junior rolls away, rising to a crouched position of readiness. Baxter, gasping for breath, pulls off the grinning headpiece to reveal yet another mask — a DOUBLE of Addie Belle. Staring impassively at Addie Belle herself, the double sinks to her knees, still clawing at the knife, but in an absent fashion, as if the wound were no longer of any importance. Addie Belle kneels to face her, pulling at the headpiece with a terrible cry of anguish:

ADDIE BELLE

No! No, no! No!

But it's no use. There are no more layers. The dying double sinks to Addie Belle's breast. Glancing at Junior helplessly, Addie Belle holds the creature in her arms.

JUNIOR

We have to go.

ADDIE BELLE

We can't just leave her like this. Can't you see she's hurt?

JUNIOR

She's dying.

ADDIE BELLE

I know that, you damn fool rabbit, don't you think I know that?

Frantic, having only the vaguest familiarity with CPR technique, she tries to breathe into the double's mouth, but to no avail. She shakes the body violently. Beats on its chest.

ADDIE BELLE

Live! Live! Oh, live!

Giving up, she falls silent, rocking the double in her arms. Junior bends over and cuts the key ring loose from the leather thong attached to Brer Fox's belt. He walks to the fence, chooses a key, and opens the padlock.

ADDIE BELLE

I never meant to hurt nobody. Not anyone on this whole earthly plane. If my cat caught a little mouse out in the field? — I'd make him let it go. If a baby bird fell out of its nest. If anybody needed me, didn't matter who it was, I tried to be there. Oh, Junior. Don't anything count for anything?

JUNIOR

One hop at a time, Addie Belle. That's all I know.

Addie Belle lowers the double gently to the ground and stands up, staring at the body.

ADDIE BELLE

She wasn't a bad person, surely. And anybody wants to know, that's what I'll tell 'em. Did what she had to in this world, according to the Good Book, and how her papa raised her.

(a respectful pause)

She seems so peaceful, don't she? Kinda resembles the Mona Lisa.

Junior smiles softly and swings the gate open. Addie Belle retrieves her headpiece and pulls it on.

ADDIE BELLE

Do I look all right?

JUNIOR

You look just fine.

Addie Belle wiggles her whiskers and hops over to join him, putting her paw in his. Together, they move carefully up the winding incline to the precipice.

ADDIE BELLE

Is it a long ways down?

JUNIOR

Long or short, whichever way you want it. Main thing is to relax. Just close your eyes and don't worry about a thing.

They reach the precipice. Addie Belle shudders, like someone getting on a Ferris Wheel for the first time.

ADDIE BELLE

Well, all right. But I may as well tell you, Junior, when papa was teaching us kids how to dive off the diving

board? I never could do it without getting water up my nose.

(closes her eyes, grimacing in anticipation)

I'll just play like I'm going down to the root cellar to fetch a big old Vidalia to put on my beans.

A tense pause. Addie Belle holds her nose. She and Junior leap out into the void. The lights dim slowly. In the distance, we hear the lonely harmonica, playing "Children of the Father." The large TV monitor appears overhead. Onscreen, the Koresh compound in flames. On the sound track, a clear soprano voice singing:

VOICE

God his own doth tend and nourish
In his holy court they flourish
From all evil things he spares them
In his mighty arms he bears them

The voice falls silent. The harmonica dies away. The compound burns.

CURTAIN