



On Daddy's Birthday

A Play in Two Acts

by

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ON DADDY'S BIRTHDAY

THE SCENE: 1980, LOS ANGELES, ROSE JEWEL'S FAMILY ROOM

A hospital bed is nestled among the original furniture, a sofa, arm chairs, coffee table, TV, etc.. In the black we hear ROSE JEWEL's sweet, quavery old Okie soprano voice singing a hymn "Precious Memories".

ROSE JEWEL

In the stillness of the midnight
Echoes from the past I hear,
Old time singin', gladness bringin',
From the lovely land somewhere.

Precious Memories, how they linger,
How they ever flood my soul.
In the stillness of the midnight,
Precious, sacred scenes unfold.

The lights come up during the song, and we see ROSE JEWEL in a chair pulled up to the bedside of CLYDE STARR. She is about 60, once pretty, though now plump and fading. Clyde is her father, victim of a stroke with complications. He can't move much and can't speak, though he can grunt. The way his bed is positioned, we cannot see his face, though we can see the shape of his body beneath the bedclothes.

Also onstage, holding hands with Rose Jewel, is a fifteen-year-old girl, YOUNG ROSE JEWEL. This script introduces the teenage characters when their older counterparts enter but indicates only a few necessary reactions in rather dire places. It is understood, however, that the teenagers react throughout the first half of the play to everything they hear and see -- everything, that is, that their older selves allow them to hear and see. They are the children the old women used to be, the children the old women still carry around with them, however submerged or emergent.

ROSE JEWEL

Remember that one, Daddy? It was your favorite, wasn't it? Though I just hated it. You made us sing that song at every funeral. I used to look out over all those open graves at all those eyes, all bloodshot and runny, and think "Precious Memories" indeed. I wanted to remember something happy. *(sings)*

Precious father, loving mother... *(breaks off the song)*

You want a Coke? Oh, you poor thing, I guess you've had your last Coke, haven't you? You used to dote on the stuff. "Rose Jewel, bring me in a Coke. I need some dope!" *(laughs, looks at her watch, makes a moue, sings)*

In the stillness of the midnight... *(breaks off)*

I don't know where those girls could be, I told them both it's Daddy's birthday, you get over here, but no, they had parties they just had to go to, I said, parties at your age, well get here by midnight at least, but oh no... Oh, *(goes to TV, flicks it on)* your preacher's on. *(adjusts his blankets)* Now, Daddy, we'll just pull these covers up tight to protect you from the poisonous night air, and...

PREACHER'S VOICE

(from TV) ...say "I believe."

ROSE JEWEL

I believe. Say "I believe", Daddy.

Clyde grunts.

PREACHER'S VOICE

...I believe.

ROSE JEWEL

I believe, we believe here, yes we do, we believe, praise God.

The doorbell rings.

ROSE JEWEL

Well, it's about time. I'll be right back, Daddy. *(exits with Young Rose Jewel bounding eagerly before her.)*

PREACHER'S VOICE

Is that all the louder you can cry out to God. I believe!

(Clyde grunts.)

I believe!

(grunt)

God can't hear that, he's away off up in Heaven. I believe!

(grunt)

Now that's better! I believe!

(grunt)

And I believe you do. Yes, my children, I believe, I believe, I believe you do. Come to God, come into His arms, let him embrace you with His redeeming love.

Rose Jewel returns with VIOLET RUBY STARR who has YOUNG VIOLET RUBY gripped firmly by the hand, holding her close. Violet Ruby is a couple of years older than Rose Jewel but looks much younger for she has been lifted, stretched, and done to the nth detail, dressed in the richest togs Rodeo Drive has to offer. She is a grande dame of the silver screen, as big a star as they come, still a rare beauty, composed, icy, but not without that unassailable generosity that comes from condescension. Her Hollywood style, however, seems not in the least affected; it is as natural to her as a scepter to a queen, claws to a panther. Young Violet Ruby is a zombie.

ROSE JEWEL

...well, yes, but he still has his little accidents. Daddy, look who's here, oh let me just...

(moves to turn off the TV) ...turn this thing off, he likes to watch his preacher.

Over Rose Jewel's lines Violet Ruby sees Clyde. She starts, turns her head away.

ROSE JEWEL

Daddy, see who—

VIOLET RUBY

(stopping Rose Jewel as Rose Jewel approaches the bed) Uh, darling, wait, wait.

(turns Rose Jewel's head to catch the light) Turn. Oh, darling! You were always so proud of your looks. We could get rid of those, you know.

ROSE JEWEL

Could we?

VIOLET RUBY

It's only money, darling.

ROSE JEWEL

But doesn't it hurt?

VIOLET RUBY

Not really. And these, it's very easy. I can set up an appointment with my doctor, would you like that?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, if you think...

VIOLET RUBY

(smiling generously) And darling, tsk tsk, I know how you always loved to eat, but you just can't. I mean, look at you, hmmm?

ROSE JEWEL

Roy says it's becomin' on me.

VIOLET RUBY

Well, Roy is your husband, darling, he's supposed to say that, but, hmmm?

ROSE JEWEL

I don't think I look...

VIOLET RUBY

Darling, how old do I look to you?

ROSE JEWEL

You look... *(sighs)* ...okay. You look okay.

VIOLET RUBY

I am your older sister, darling, and I look ten years, I look twenty years younger than you.

ROSE JEWEL

(after a small moment) I'll give you ten. Daddy! See who it is, come to wish you happy birthday, Violet Ruby!

VIOLET RUBY

(admonishingly to Rose Jewel) Uh, darling...

ROSE JEWEL

Oh, he named you Violet Ruby and I'm going to call you Violet Ruby, and you can just leave Jane Randolph outside for one night, can't you!

VIOLET RUBY

I'm sorry, darling, it's just so foreign to me after all these years. You don't mind, do you, darling; call me Jane. And where's Marge? I thought Marge was going to be here.

The doorbell rings again.

ROSE JEWEL

Oh, there she is. You two! Daddy's been layin' here waitin' all night.

Rose Jewel exits, leaving Violet Ruby alone with Clyde. Violet Ruby moves to his bedside, drawn by a suddenly very strong Young Violet Ruby. They gaze down at him a long moment, then Violet Ruby pulls back the covers. Young Violet Ruby giggles. They look his naked body up and down, then Violet Ruby flicks the covers back in place.

VIOLET RUBY

Well, Daddy, you've changed.

Violet Ruby sits and lights a cigarette, the first of many she will smoke tonight, taking only three precise drags before smashing them delicately, precisely out.

Meanwhile Rose Jewel enters, and with silent opprobrium pulls open the door to allow MARGE STARR to enter, holding YOUNG MARGE tight by the hand. Unlike the Violet Rubies, the Marges are happy to be in each other's company, considerate of each other, kind and gentle to each other, the older protective of the younger. Young Marge is delicate and shy, while the older Marge is a plain, strong, able woman who, dressed as she is in jeans, plaid shirt and boots, with her hair cut close and swept back, is a caricature of a bull dyke. She carries a doctor's case.

They stop in the doorway. Young Marge can't take her eyes off Clyde, while Marge will not look at him but gazes steadily at Violet Ruby who gazes steadily back. A tense moment goes by.

VIOLET RUBY

You dressed for the occasion.

MARGE

I came from a party.

VIOLET RUBY

So did I. But not the same one though, I see.

MARGE

You wouldn't have got out alive.

ROSE JEWEL

I must say, Marge, that you might have gone home and changed out of those horrible clothes before coming here to see Daddy like this, I'd be ashamed.

MARGE

You said come before midnight, don't be late for Daddy's birthday. Well, it's one minute to midnight. *(drops her doctor's case on Clyde's bed)* Happy Birthday, Daddy. *(finally faces Clyde; Young Marge gasps and turns away)*

ROSE JEWEL

Daddy, you've mussed your covers. Oh, good, Marge, you brought your doctor's case.

MARGE

You said bring your doctor's case, make sure it's full. I brought my doctor's case. It's full.

VIOLET RUBY

(to Rose Jewel) Darling, can he hear?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, of course he can hear, he's not dead.

MARGE AND VIOLET RUBY

Not yet.

ROSE JEWEL

(as Marge examines Clyde, checking eyes & pulse) He brightened up tonight when I told him you two were comin' over. I showed him the cake and you just should have seen his eyes then! And I told him we're goin' to sing, and we are, aren't we, we're goin' to sing for him, sing songs for days, just like we used to, and I got out a couple of hymnals, just in case you've forgotten the words. I just imagine you two haven't opened up a hymnal, let alone the Bible, even once in all these years, have you? *(claps her hands)* But we're goin' to sing tonight, be nice, aren't we?

VIOLET RUBY

(to Marge who has finished her examination) How does he look?

MARGE

He'll outlive us all, that heart in there pumping away like a Model-T piston.

All three women find a different corner of the floor to put their eyes in. Clyde grunts. (A laugh?) Violet Ruby pulls a flask from her purse.

VIOLET RUBY

Darling, could you get me some ice, please? I knew you wouldn't have anything hard in the house, so I took the liberty of bringing my own.

MARGE

What is it?

VIOLET RUBY

Chivas? Would you like some?

MARGE

No, I brought my own. *(pulls from the doctor's case a liter of tequila and a lime)*

VIOLET RUBY

Jose Cuervo, that should be tasty.

MARGE

And a lime fresh off the tree in our backyard.

VIOLET RUBY

How homey.

MARGE

Just bring me some salt, kid, and a knife to cut the lime.

ROSE JEWEL

I think you girls might have a little respect for my house.

MARGE

Oh, we have plenty of respect for your house, Rose Jewel.

VIOLET RUBY

It's just you we have no respect for. *(laughs; Marge joins her)* Oh, I'm sorry, darling, it's just a joke. You know we love you beyond all endurance. Now run along for the ice, hmmm?

ROSE JEWEL

(goes to door, hesitates) You're not goin' to get drunk?

VIOLET RUBY

I haven't been drunk in years, darling. I don't think I can get drunk anymore, try though I may. *(to Marge)* What about you?

MARGE

Only on diesel.

Rose Jewel exits.

VIOLET RUBY

Did Juanita bring that tequila up from South of the Border?

MARGE

Oh, you can't get tequila in Beverly Hills? Too civilized?

VIOLET RUBY

You're not still with Juanita?

MARGE

Oh, yes. Yes.

VIOLET RUBY

Not that very same Juanita, with the flashing eye and the mole on her lip?

MARGE

Oh, yes, I still have Juanita. And let's see, you ... have ... Bill? Or no, he was replaced by Mike and then Kurt, and yes, Roger and Robert, but they overlapped, didn't they? I read about them all in the tabloids, the men in the life of Jane Randolph, Queen of the Z Movies. All that coming and going and screwing around. Must have made you pretty dizzy, huh, Violet Ruby?

VIOLET RUBY

Everyone calls me Jane now.

MARGE

I don't. You're looking good, Violet Ruby Starr, for a little Okie gal.

VIOLET RUBY

I think I'll help Rose Jewel get that ice. *(turns at door, sees Marge watching Clyde)*
Did you bring something?

MARGE

Yeah.

VIOLET RUBY

Will it work?

MARGE

Just fine. *(turns to Violet Ruby)* Nnnh! Oh yeah, looking good. *(The Violet Rubies exit.)*
Nnnh!

Marge turns back to Clyde. She takes an unwilling Young Marge by the hand and approaches him hesitantly, pulls back the covers hesitantly, looks upon his nakedness a long moment while Young Marge tries desperately to look away, but can't quite. Finally Marge laughs.

MARGE

That old thing! Wait till Rose Jewel brings in that knife.

Clyde grunts. Marge flicks the covers back in place. The Rose Jewels enter with a tray of drinking glasses, ice, etc.

ROSE JEWEL

Okay now, Marge, here's the lime for that stuff of yours, I swan! And watch out, this knife is sharp.

MARGE

Better than a dull knife, right Daddy? *(Clyde grunts.)* Where's Her Majesty? Doing her face?

ROSE JEWEL

Marge, would you be good now? Violet Ruby has never been in this house, and I would like to try to get back some little sense of family here. I don't understand how it could have happened, we used to be so happy.

MARGE

(embraces her) Oh, I'm sorry, kid. I just take one look at that creamy-pure face and I want to vomit.

ROSE JEWEL

Marge, honey, it's time you accepted the way you look.

MARGE

I look fine.

ROSE JEWEL

You have always held it against me and Violet Ruby that we were pretty and you were plain, and it's not fair to—

MARGE

Oh, I don't care that you're pretty. In the first place, you're not half as pretty as you think you are, and— well, Violet Ruby is, but you're not, and in the second—

ROSE JEWEL

Why, Marge! I could have had any boy I wanted to!

MARGE

And did.

ROSE JEWEL

And so what, it was fun!

MARGE

...And in the second place I have never been ashamed of my looks. I can get any woman in this town.

ROSE JEWEL

That is nothin' to brag about. Do you think it was easy for me, growin' up with a twin sister so plain as you? I had to tell everyone first thing, we are not identical twins, don't think we are.

MARGE

Why, Rose Jewel, they could see that straight off.

ROSE JEWEL

Sometimes I even had to pretend you weren't my twin at all, but just a plain old sister.

MARGE

You didn't.

ROSE JEWEL

They always thought me and Violet Ruby were the twins.

MARGE

Oh, no one ever thought that.

ROSE JEWEL

They did so, they all did. They couldn't decide which one of us was prettier, me or Violet Ruby.

MARGE

Rose Jewel, one of us here talking is crazy, and I don't believe it's me. And anyway, I don't care how pretty Violet Ruby is; that's not why I hate her.

ROSE JEWEL

Oh, don't say you hate her, I'd be ashamed, Marge, and in front of Daddy, too. Don't you listen to her, Daddy. Why do you hate her, then?

MARGE

That's between me and Violet Ruby.

VIOLET RUBY

(entering) There's nothing between you and Violet Ruby.

Clyde grunts.

ROSE JEWEL

Daddy, you all right? See, you've upset him, he's got his covers all mussed again. I don't know how he manages to make such a mess, him unable to move like he is! I think the light is hurtin' his eyes!

Rose Jewel goes about adjusting the lamps.

VIOLET RUBY

Why did you bring him here?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, I swan Violet Ruby, what would you have me do! They called me from the hospital and said they had him there. I like to swoon, I really did, after all these years of him being lost.

MARGE

He wasn't lost.

ROSE JEWEL

Well not to you maybe, but he was lost to me, and to God, I shouldn't wonder now, though how that could ever have happened...

VIOLET RUBY

How did they get your number?

ROSE JEWEL

He had my name in his wallet, and unlike some people in this room I have kept my last name and my husband the same all these years, and they looked me up in the book. (*finishes adjusting lamps*) Is that better, Daddy?

VIOLET RUBY

Where is Roy?

ROSE JEWEL

He's ... away.

VIOLET RUBY

Where?

ROSE JEWEL

Fishin'. Fishin' trip.

VIOLET RUBY

In the middle of the week?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, Violet Ruby, I guess Roy can take a vacation if he wants, I guess he can take a little fishin' trip once in a while.

VIOLET RUBY

He ran off.

ROSE JEWEL

He— !

VIOLET RUBY

What did they tell you when they called you from the hospital?

ROSE JEWEL

They didn't tell me anything. They said come right down. I called Marge, but of course she wouldn't come.

MARGE

Bet your ass.

VIOLET RUBY

You didn't call me.

ROSE JEWEL

Well, I knew right enough the blind alley that was! Since when have you returned a telephone call in the last thirty years, Miss Movie Star?

VIOLET RUBY

Then why did you call today?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, today... well, it's Daddy's ... birthday. And I thought wouldn't it be nice for him if his three daughters would... come and cheer him up.

Marge has begun slicing her lime in front of Clyde with the sharp, rather wicked-looking knife Rose Jewel has brought. Clyde grunts energetically.

ROSE JEWEL

What's the matter, Daddy? Marge, what are you doin' there?

MARGE

I'm just slicing this lime for my tequila.

ROSE JEWEL

I think you're makin' him nervous. Is she squirtin' in your eye, Daddy?

VIOLET RUBY

How long have you had him here?

ROSE JEWEL

Four days.

VIOLET RUBY

No wonder Roy took off.

ROSE JEWEL

Roy didn't take off, he went fishin'!

VIOLET RUBY

What did they say is wrong with him?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, I don't know, it was all that gobbledygook they talk. Ask Marge, she's the doctor.

MARGE

They can't find anything.

ROSE JEWEL

They don't know anything down there. I swan you could go in with a headache and come out with a transplanted kidney.

VIOLET RUBY

Where did they find him?

ROSE JEWEL

They didn't say.

MARGE

Of course they did, darling. Where?

ROSE JEWEL

Oh, downtown somewhere.

VIOLET RUBY

Which downtown?

MARGE

(imitating Violet Ruby) Downtown Beverly Hills, darling? Downtown Malibu?

ROSE JEWEL

Downtown L.A..

VIOLET RUBY

My God, on the street?

ROSE JEWEL

Uh huh.

MARGE

As good a place as any, I guess, to pass the winter.

ROSE JEWEL

I think he's just waitin' to die, wantin' to die. *(wipes her eyes)* Then you'll finally get to see Moses, Daddy.

MARGE

What about Mama? Don't you want him to see Mama?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, Mama too, sure. But he always most specially wanted to see Moses. Look at him, how he's changed. Last I heard from him was 1962. He sent me a postcard from New York, had the Statue on it, said he was going missionaryin' in Africa or China or one of those places. Did you do that, Daddy, save all those souls? All those heathens around him, just gives me the shivers to think of it.

VIOLET RUBY

Why didn't he just stay in McAlester, he had that perfectly good little church!

MARGE

Oh, you know him. Probably somebody told him he was cracked, and he went off to pout.
"Teach them a lesson!"

VIOLET RUBY

(laughs) Do you remember when we first came out here and he walked right up to Sister Aimee in the middle of her service and introduced himself?

MARGE

"Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, I am Clyde Starr from Atoka, Oklahoma, and I am goin' to turn this here Foursquare Gospel Church on its ear!"

VIOLET RUBY

"Why, Brother Starr, welcome, welcome. Here's a collection plate. Won't you pass it round?"

ROSE JEWEL

Poor Daddy, she was so demeanin' to you, wasn't she? Nobody ever recognized Daddy's talent. It could have been a better world today.

VIOLET RUBY

Darling, you are so blind.

ROSE JEWEL

Daddy was a healer, in his own way he was. Do you remember that fellow over in Daisy, just had initials for a name, RV something...

MARGE

RV Johnson.

ROSE JEWEL

RV Johnson was his name, and everyone said RV was dyin', and Daddy borrowed Lula Monroe's bay mare and rode—

MARGE

Maude.

ROSE JEWEL

What?

MARGE

(significantly) Maude. Lula Monroe's bay mare was named Maude.

ROSE JEWEL

(trying to evade the memory) Maude. Yes, I remember.

MARGE

Maude.

ROSE JEWEL

And Daddy rode Maude all the way to Daisy on that crookedy road and spent his last ten dollars to buy RV a pair of boots, a brand new pair of boots to put on that dyin' man, and RV got up and walked. *(wiping her eyes)* He didn't die, oh no, sir.

VIOLET RUBY

Well, not just then, darling, but he did die.

ROSE JEWEL

(singing, choked with emotion)

Precious memories, how they linger,
How they ever flood my soul...

VIOLET RUBY

(overlapping) We could have put food on the table for a month with the ten dollars he spent on those boots.

MARGE

And do you remember when Daddy took Pansy, and he put her...

ROSE JEWEL

Pansy who?

MARGE

That little calico mother cat I had in Tulsa, she'd just had a litter of kittens? And Daddy put Pansy in a barrel with three great big rats and let 'em fight it out. *(choking up)*
All day long they fought and Pansy was just... *(breaks off)*

ROSE JEWEL

(after a moment, quietly) No, I don't remember any such-a-thing, and I don't think it happened.

VIOLET RUBY

He said that because she was a mother, she'd fight better. And she did win.

MARGE

But all her tits were torn off, she didn't have a tit left to nurse those babies with, and they all died.

VIOLET RUBY

(takes up Rose Jewel's song)
...In the stillness of the midnight,
Precious, sacred things unfold.

MARGE

I've got that old time religion.

VIOLET RUBY

(singing in a sort of reverie)
I've got that old time religion in my heart
Away down inside— *(breaks off)*
That's not the key we sang it in. *(starts a higher key)*
I've got a new kind of feeling in my heart
True joys abide.

(Marge joins her in tight harmony in a sudden diminuendo, both gesticulating to themselves and the Lord, both about to laugh)

Nobody knows what it means to me,
Nobody knows but my Lord and me,

(Rose Jewel joins Violet Ruby in parts on the descant; their voices are those of old women, but their harmony and flair show that they were once quite a show together)

ALL

I've got that old time religion in my heart
Away down inside.

(Rose Jewel carries sweetly on into the verse, Marge and Violet Ruby following after a moment. Violet Ruby does a rather sexual dance in Clyde's face.)

What a joy to know one who loves us so
He is so kind and true.
He has changed my life from all sin and strife
He'll do the same for you.

I've got that old time religion in my heart
Away down inside.

I've got a new kind of feeling in my heart
Where joy abides.

(sudden diminuendo)

Nobody knows what it means to me,
Nobody knows but my Lord and me.

I've got that old time religion in my heart
Away down inside.

They finish with a laugh.

ROSE JEWEL

Oh, Daddy, did you hear? Just like it always was!

MARGE

When I think of myself standing on street corners, that poor shy little girl, drumming up sinners for him, trying to fill the church!

VIOLET RUBY

Wearing my one and only dress, everyone gawking at me.

ROSE JEWEL

All the people, so glad! Marge, a little flat, as always.

MARGE

You wanted us to sing, I sang.

VIOLET RUBY

It's like it happened to another person, like it was somebody else's life.

ROSE JEWEL

Violet Ruby, a little sharp as always! Only Daddy didn't have his back turned tonight.

VIOLET RUBY

Daddy liked it; look at him?

ROSE JEWEL

Ready for another one, Daddy? Let's see...

(singing a lovely, slow tune, "Farther Along"; Marge and Violet Ruby join in after a moment)

 Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder

 Why it should be thus all the day long,

 While there are others living about us.

 Never molested...

MARGE

What a stupid song. "Never molested"! Every once in a while, you listen to the words.

ROSE JEWEL

(finishing the verse)

 ...Though in the wrong!

MARGE

Jesus.

ROSE JEWEL

Marge! I have told you and told you, I will not have you usin' the Lord's name in vain in my house!

MARGE

Sorry, kid, it's second nature.

VIOLET RUBY

(singing)

Cheer up my sisters...

MARGE

Brother, you have to have a lot of faith!

ROSE JEWEL

Well, some people have kept their faith. *(singing)*

There is a fountain filled with blood...

VIOLET RUBY

Uh, darling, let's not sing.

ROSE JEWEL

Oh, come on!

VIOLET RUBY

I don't think Daddy likes it.

ROSE JEWEL

Sure, he does, don't you, Daddy? Grunt.

(Clyde grunts.)

See. *(sings)* There is a fountain filled with blood...

VIOLET RUBY

Uh, darling...

ROSE JEWEL

Stop calling me darling! She's always calling me darling like I'm one of her flunkies that she never even bothered to learn my name. I got a name, my name's Rose Jewel. Okay, okay, we won't sing, we'll cut the cake. You ready for your birthday cake, Daddy? It's your favorite.
(begins to cut the cake)

MARGE

Rose Jewel, he can't eat cake.

ROSE JEWEL

Sure he can, if I mush it. It's Daddy's birthday, he's got to eat cake.

VIOLET RUBY

Darl..., uh Rose Jewel. It's not Daddy's birthday, darling.

ROSE JEWEL

Sure it is! Or was, before midnight, but oh no you two had to...

VIOLET RUBY

It's Mama's birthday.

ROSE JEWEL

(after a moment) Mama never even had a birthday.

MARGE

Blind faith.

VIOLET RUBY

Of course she had a birthday, darling. You just never knew about it. Daddy never liked his birthday, because it was too close to Christmas and nobody paid him enough attention. So when Mama died giving birth to you two...

ROSE JEWEL

She didn't die givin' birth to me, she died givin' birth to Marge.

MARGE

She died giving birth to both of us, kid. Just 'cause I was the last one out doesn't mean I killed her.

VIOLET RUBY

It doesn't matter. She died. And Daddy took her birthday as his own because it was a better day.

ROSE JEWEL

How do you know that? You were only five years old, you can't remember that.

VIOLET RUBY

Daddy told me.

ROSE JEWEL

He never told me. How come you never told me that, Daddy? I don't think it's true.
(hands Marge a piece of cake) Here, Marge. The biggest piece for you, just like always.

MARGE

I don't want any cake. I think we should just get it over with.

Rose Jewel looks away. Violet Ruby straightens in anticipation. Neither looks Marge in the eye. There is a growing silence. Clyde grunts. Still no one speaks. Rose Jewel goes back to cutting the cake.

ROSE JEWEL

And Violet Ruby, the smallest piece, like always.

VIOLET RUBY

You're sure Roy's not coming back tonight.

ROSE JEWEL

(finally looks at Marge) Yes.

Marge takes a hypodermic needle from her doctor's case and fills it out of a medical vial. Rose Jewel and Violet Ruby keep their eyes averted. Clyde grunts continuously now.

ROSE JEWEL

(feeding Clyde his cake, speaking nervously) Daddy, you ready, makin' all that noise like a pig at a trough? I've mushed it up real soft; just melt in your mouth. Poor Daddy, in such a bad way. Violet Ruby, he was so sweet tonight, I had his preacher on, and he was tellin' everyone, "Say I believe," and Daddy kept sayin' "I believe, I believe", or tryin' to, but God heard you, didn't he? And that's all you got to do to get into Heaven, Daddy, is just keep your faith. *(She has smeared his face with cake.)* Oh, look at you, all gaumed up! And I didn't bring any napkins in. *(The Rose Jewels exit hurriedly.)*

MARGE

Goddamn her! *(puts hypodermic needle down)*

VIOLET RUBY

He kept *her* name in his wallet. He sent *her* a postcard in 1962.

MARGE

You hurt?

VIOLET RUBY

She called *you* to go to the hospital with her.

MARGE

You are something, even after all these years. The Copernican Theory of Heaven and Earth, everything revolves around Violet Ruby Starr! Rose Jewel and I stick together.

VIOLET RUBY

Yes, you do, you always have stuck together!

MARGE

I'd have stuck with you, too, if... if you hadn't... *(breaks off)*

VIOLET RUBY

Don't look at me. I don't like you looking at me.

MARGE

(looks away, her eyes go to Clyde) Isn't that just like her, bringing him back here, for Christ's sake! Don't think, Rose Jewel, just do!

VIOLET RUBY

I'm glad you called me. I wouldn't miss this for anything.

MARGE

I didn't think you'd come.

VIOLET RUBY

Well, of course I wouldn't have if you hadn't called. Rose Jewel made it sound like it was going to be a party.

MARGE

She has to believe that. I almost didn't come myself. I told Rose Jewel I was going out, but I just sat home with Juanita. I had to get my courage up to face this old shit.

VIOLET RUBY

(laughs) Same here. So that's not how you really dress?

MARGE

You kidding? I just put this on 'cause Rose Jewel's always so funny about... *(shouts toward kitchen)* ...my sexual preferences! And I guess I wanted him to see. Look, Daddy, I'm a better man than you ever were.

VIOLET RUBY

That's why I wore this. Look, Daddy, look at me. *(twirls for him)*

MARGE

Oh, Daddy, did you ever think this day would come?

VIOLET RUBY

Oh, Daddy. Oh, Daddy. Oh, Daddy.

Violet Ruby shimmies before Clyde, Marge watching her in disgust. Violet Ruby stops, self conscious, then takes up the hypodermic needle.

VIOLET RUBY

What is it?

MARGE

You don't need to know. It'll do the trick. And nobody's ever going to think to do an autopsy on this old pile of crud.

Clyde grunts.

VIOLET RUBY

We should do it now while she's out of the room.

MARGE

No, she wants us to sing, save his wretched soul, send him to his God damned heaven.

VIOLET RUBY

She forgot the napkins on purpose; she doesn't want to see it. Go ahead.

MARGE

She can turn her back. *(mocking Clyde)* "You girls take care of Rose Jewel, now, you hear."

VIOLET RUBY

"All right, Daddy. Goodbye."

MARGE

"Bye-Bye."

VIOLET RUBY

Do it. How long do you think it takes to get a napkin, for Christ's sake? She's out there waiting for us to get it done.

MARGE

Us?

VIOLET RUBY

Do it.

MARGE

Violet Ruby, do you remember, I think we were still living in Atoka; Daddy was building that ell on the church where he framed and hung that print I won selling Cloverine Salve, remember that print of Jesus and Mary?

VIOLET RUBY

Where it looks like Mary's giving him head.

MARGE

There was a woman who was always around, I think she lived with us.

VIOLET RUBY

No one ever lived with us.

MARGE

She had dark hair, cut just like a bowl on her head. She always wore ...

VIOLET RUBY

There was no one like that.

MARGE

Daddy called her, what'd he call her... Jane... "Jane! I said get in here!" But we all called her... we called her Mama.

VIOLET RUBY

You and Rose Jewel killed Mama.

MARGE

No, you did, didn't you? You and Daddy, when you wiped her out of our memory.

VIOLET RUBY

"Jane, I said get out! I got Violet Ruby now. Violet Ruby'll take care of me, won't you, darling?" God, I hated her. I loved her, I trusted her.

Violet Ruby sits staring, blind with hatred. Marge stares at Violet Ruby, with hatred.

MARGE

Like I loved you.

The Rose Jewels enter hesitantly, taking a moment at the door to appraise the scene. When they see Clyde is still alive, Young Rose Jewel sighs in relief while the older Rose Jewel sighs in exasperation, then enters with firm intent, not forgetting to smile sweetly as she passes out the napkins.

ROSE JEWEL

A napkin for Violet Ruby, one for Marguerite Pearl, one little napkin for Rose Jewel. And a great big one for Daddy. Let me clean you up, Daddy. You hear that singin' we were doin'? *(with dire emphasis which all understand)* We're goin' to sing "He Whispers Sweet Peace" now! You start it, Violet Ruby.

Violet Ruby starts; Rose Jewel, as always, takes the descant; Marge watches them.

VIOLET RUBY and ROSE JEWEL

He whispers sweet peace to me.

Yes, he whispers sweet peace

He whispers sweet peace to me.
He whispers sweet peace to me.
When I am cast down in spirit and soul,
He whispers sweet peace to me.

Rose Jewel, as always, chooses the verse.

ROSE JEWEL

I trust Him through faith
(Violet Ruby joins the song.)
By faith hold His hand,
(Marge joins, picking up the hypodermic again.)
And sometimes my faith is weak.
And then when I ask Him to take command,
It seems that I hear Him speak.

Marge approaches Clyde with the hypodermic. Rose Jewel turns slightly so her back is to the murder. Violet Ruby can't take her eyes away. The teenagers are agog.

VIOLET RUBY/ROSE JEWEL/MARGE

He whispers sweet peace to me.
Yes, he whispers sweet peace
He whispers sweet peace...
He whispers...

The doorbell rings. Marge freezes. They all do, glancing at each other in surprise. Then Rose Jewel claps her hand over her mouth.

ROSE JEWEL

I forgot!

VIOLET RUBY

Uh... uh... darling... what did you forget?

ROSE JEWEL

She said she couldn't make it till she got off work.

VIOLET RUBY

Uh... who, darling?

ROSE JEWEL

Edith.

VIOLET RUBY

Edith!

Young Marge rushes to a corner and hides her head.

MARGE

And Edith, too.

ROSE JEWEL

Well, we couldn't forget Edith.

MARGE

"Don't forget Edith, girls! Marguerite Pearl, you girls take Edith with you! And Edith too!"

ROSE JEWEL

She was almost like a daughter to him, and it's his birthday.

MARGE

(holding Young Marge protectively) Rose Jewel, you are. You are out of your mind.

The doorbell rings again.

ROSE JEWEL

What are we goin' to do?

MARGE

Let her ring! She'll go away!

ROSE JEWEL

Keep singin', keep singin'!

VIOLET RUBY

No, she'll hear us. How on earth did you even meet up with her again?

ROSE JEWEL

I see her just about every night. She works down by my church, and when I come out she's on the corner there down at Sunset and Las Palmas.

VIOLET RUBY

Sunset and Las Palmas. And she's just getting off work now? Darling, she's a hooker.

ROSE JEWEL

Well, I know what she is, Violet Ruby! I'm not stupid!

VIOLET RUBY

Keep your voice down, darling.

ROSE JEWEL

You all think I'm stupid. "You girls take care of Rose Jewel now, 'cause she's too stupid to take care of herself."

MARGE

Nobody thinks you're stupid, kid.

VIOLET RUBY

Stupid like a fox.

ROSE JEWEL

Edith is tryin' her best in a life which has been anything but easy, and I might remind you, Violet Ruby, what Christ said about Mary Magdalene, "He that is without sin among you, let

him first cast a stone at her." The only difference between Edith and you is that Edith takes cash for it.

VIOLET RUBY

And you're too stupid to take anything for it. You even throw in dinner.

MARGE

Violet Ruby, you say another word like that to Rose Jewel, and I'll lay you flat.

VIOLET RUBY

Kiss my ass.

MARGE

Looks too much like your face.

VIOLET RUBY

That's the beauty of it.

MARGE

There's no beauty in a horse's ass.

ROSE JEWEL

You girls stop now, I'd be ashamed! (*The doorbell rings.*) That poor girl. I've asked Brother Harper to talk to Edith and just sort of set her on the right path again, but you know, girls, her her her mind is a little ... funny, and sometimes she says some things that...

The doorbell rings insistently.

MARGE

Jesus, doesn't she ever give up!

ROSE JEWEL

Marge, I have told you and told you I will not have you usin' the Lord's name in vain in — !

EDITH

(off stage) Hello?

VIOLET RUBY

Can you believe she's coming right in!

ROSE JEWEL

I swan!

MARGE

Just the same old Edith.

ROSE JEWEL

I just swan!

VIOLET RUBY

Darling, don't you lock your doors?

EDITH

Rose Jewel? Oh, yoo-hoo.

MARGE

Did you tell her we were going to be here?

ROSE JEWEL

Well, I didn't really expect Violet Ruby to come, but I said you'd probably be here.

VIOLET RUBY

I forgot how much I missed this family.

The Rose Jewels rush out to meet Edith.

ROSE JEWEL

(offstage) Oh, Edy, was that you ringin'?

VIOLET RUBY

(in a quick whisper) She does think it's a party!

MARGE

She can't. This whole thing was her idea.

VIOLET RUBY

What exactly did she say to you?

MARGE

She said, "It's Daddy's birthday. He should die tonight."

VIOLET RUBY

Well, those were exactly the words she used with me, too, but I read it not that "he *should* die, he *ought to* die," but that "I *expect* him to die."

MARGE

She expects it all right. She expects that I'll do it for her just like I always did everything for her. Of course she kept her faith! How hard is it to keep your faith when you've got a grubby, devoted little sister to do all the dirty work for you. But then... *(beat)* ...you haven't kept your faith, have you, Violet Ruby Starr?

VIOLET RUBY

Violet Ruby Starr is dead.

MARGE

Yes, I think she is. *(as the Rose Jewels usher Edith in)* Oh, God!
(retreats with Young Marge)

EDITH is in her late forties, with a once-pretty face now dissipated and overly made up in a shag of badly bleached hair. Her body is terrific, though, and is exposed to its very best advantage in hooker duds par excellence. From her slurred, measured speech, she seems brain-burnt from drugs. She clutches a naked, horribly beat up baby doll in her hand.

ROSE JEWEL

Look who it is, everybody, Edith.

EDITH

Why, Jane Randolph, could I get you to write me an autograph?

VIOLET RUBY

(chuckles regally) Hello, Edith. Good to see you again.

EDITH

I bet. You look like a million dollars, you really do. *(puts a delicate hand under Violet Ruby's chin and turns her face to the light)* How do they do that? *(Violet Ruby chuckles regally again.)* Cost you plenty, huh?

VIOLET RUBY

Just part of the business, Edith.

EDITH

Yeah, look at me. Just part of my business.

VIOLET RUBY

You look fine, Edith.

EDITH

They'd never believe me.

VIOLET RUBY

Who?

EDITH

If I pointed you out to 'em on the street and told 'em, that old broad's got a dozen years on me, what do you think of that.

She chuckles. So does Violet Ruby.

VIOLET RUBY

Is it that much? My.

ROSE JEWEL

And here's Marge, Edith.

Edith goes to Marge. Marge does not turn immediately. When she does, she is unflinching, with equal parts bravado and courage.

EDITH

Marguerite Pearl Starr. *(reaches out, flicks Marge's tie)* Seems like I should have seen you around.

Marge and Edith don't break the stare. Rose Jewel watches them a moment.

ROSE JEWEL

Well, say hello, Marge! *(beat)* Marge, it's Edy!
(Clyde grunts.)

And here's the guest of honor.

After a moment more, Edith drags her eyes from Marge and puts them on Clyde.

EDITH

Clyde Starr. *(laughs)* Look at you. *(laughs as if on a roller coaster)*

ROSE JEWEL

It's Edy, Daddy. Say hello. Come on, you can do it, say hello. Say hello to Edith, Daddy.

Clyde finally grunts.

EDITH

Hello, Daddy.

MARGE

He never liked you to call him that.

EDITH

Oh no, Marguerite Pearl, you never liked me to call him that. After you left, that's all I ever called him. "You want some more, Daddy?" "Did you like that, Daddy?" "Daddy, let's do it again."

MARGE

(laughs) You never said that.

Edith laughs too, daring Marge.

ROSE JEWEL

Could I get you something to drink, Edy? Some coke?

EDITH

I brought my own. *(takes a half pint of Vodka from her purse)*

ROSE JEWEL

Well then, here's a glass.

EDITH

I don't require it. *(drinks straight from the bottle)*

ROSE JEWEL

Edith, hon, did you talk to Brother Harper down to the church like I told you to?

EDITH

Yeah.

ROSE JEWEL

What did he say?

EDITH

We... reached an understanding.

ROSE JEWEL

I just cut the birthday cake. You want some? *(with a giggle)*

We can have our cake, and Edith too.

(No one else laughs.)

You girls come on, now! This is a party! You know how Daddy always threw a big party on his birthday, and anything we wanted, we could have. You remember, Edy, right after you came to us? Marge brought you home, and the very next day was Daddy's birthday, and he took us all down to Santa Monica, down to the pier, and I must have gone on that merry-go-round twenty rides in a row, Daddy just kept feedin' that man money, "If Rose Jewel wants to ride, Rose Jewel's gonna ride!" And you were so puny? Just ten years old and your hair so thin and lousy, about half-starved livin' out of the gutter, and Daddy kept feedin' you those hot dogs, do you remember that? And I took you with me one ride on the merry-go-round and you just puked all over? And all those balloons, and the flowers! Remember the flowers, Edy, and Daddy put them all in the back seat of that old La Salle and we were just smotherin' in them, you and me? Oh, on Daddy's birthday, it's just... Heaven.

EDITH

One day out of three hundred and sixty-five.

ROSE JEWEL

He was like a saint to us, wasn't he, Edy? But that was the last birthday I remember. Remember Violet Ruby, you'd been gone a couple of years... and you had just starred in your first picture, hadn't you! "Honor Bright"!

VIOLET RUBY

A good little picture, too. I came over to gloat, remember, Daddy? Everybody loved me. And I was so ... beautiful ... and kind, in that picture.

ROSE JEWEL

You were. I cried my eyes out. And then Marge had to go off, too, and leave us, and I cried my eyes out all over again. And so did Daddy, didn't you, Daddy, when Marge went off? Cried like a baby.

EDITH

He had me then. What'd he need with Marge?

ROSE JEWEL

(warningly) Now, Edy, honey...

Through the next, Edith is matter-of-fact. Marge and Violet Ruby are controlled, tense. Rose Jewel looks away, eventually sings softly.

EDITH

(to the baby doll, to Clyde, to each of the sisters, to the memory)

All I had was that little ten year old hole, didn't even have any hair on it yet. But that's how he liked it. He was as big as a milk bottle. Just about killed me. But it was better than living on the streets...

(Rose Jewel begins to sing "He touched me.")

...taking whatever came. And I got used to it. Never could take it all, though. He tried and tried. Violet Ruby was the only one of us could take it all, he said. He said Violet Ruby could lay around all day long with her legs spread and a hot cock stuffed up her. Marge was no good at all, he said. Marge was always crying. So Marge left, and I took over. I got used to it. *(snorts)* He was so proud of that thing. I took the piss out of him. I told him, when your ear itches, Daddy, you'd lots rather use your little finger to tickle it than your thumb.

(laughs)

I've had lots bigger now, Daddy. Took all of 'em, too.

Meanwhile Rose Jewel has been singing.

ROSE JEWEL

...Neath the load of guilt and shame,
Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
And now I am no longer the same.
He touched me
Oh, He touched me
And oh the Joy that was my soul.
Something happened and now I know,
He touched me and He made me whole.
Reach out and touch the Lord
As He passes by...

ROSE JEWEL (cont.)

Mmm mmm mm mm mm mm mm mm

I can't remember it, Daddy.

Reach out and touch the Lord

As He passes by. ...

Mmmmmmm.

Edith's speech and Rose Jewel's song should be timed to end together.

ROSE JEWEL

Mmmmm.

I just can't remember it.

EDITH

Got used to it. Got through.

ROSE JEWEL

Edy, hon, it's not just gettin' through, it's *how* you get through.

EDITH

That's very whatchacallit, philosophical. *(with a look at Marge)* Someone teach you that?
(to Clyde) Daddy, how come you never taught Rose Jewel any better?

ROSE JEWEL

You're gettin' out of place again, hon. Now you just put away your bottle and...

EDITH

Out of place, I've never felt so at home. With my good sisters all around to take care of me.

VIOLET RUBY

We're not your sisters.

EDITH

You're telling me.

ROSE JEWEL

Edy, I said put away your bottle and I'll call you a taxi. You have any money?

EDITH

Yeah. I probably still got time for a coupla tricks too.

ROSE JEWEL

Wish you wouldn't, hon, you're looking a little tired. Marge, give her a twenty.

EDITH

But wait a minute, wait a minute, I came to... What did I come for?

ROSE JEWEL

For Daddy's birthday, so you could make your peace with Daddy, remember? And see, you...

EDITH

No, wait a minute. I came for you. You wanted me to ... do something.

ROSE JEWEL

Now, Edy, I never asked you to...

EDITH

Oh yeah. Give me that knife there.

ROSE JEWEL

Why?

EDITH

Could I just have a lock of his hair?

ROSE JEWEL

Edy, hon, he doesn't have any hair anymore.

(Clyde grunts as Edith approaches unsteadily with the knife.)

Daddy, hush now. Anyone would think she wanted to kill you.

EDITH

I always planned to kill him. *(waves knife at them)* I was gonna kill all of you. But I was gonna kill him worst. But why bother. He picked up a new girl after me. Jane, her name was Jane.

VIOLET RUBY

(laughs) And the chain comes full circle!

EDITH

Little black girl, 'bout seven or eight, didn't have no one lookin; after her. Jane. Janie. She hated me. You always hate the one who passes it on to you, the one you trusted.

MARGE

Here's some money, Edy.

EDITH

Loved.

MARGE

Let me have the knife.

EDITH

(to Young Marge) Marge! Hello there! Where'd you come from?

Young Marge embraces her.

MARGE

(embracing them both) Hello, Edy. Good to see you again.

EDITH

(to both Marge and Young Marge) You haven't changed, Marge, not a bit, not inside. Look at those eyes. Oh, Marge, do you remember that chain you gave me, with the pearly links?

ROSE JEWEL

Violet Ruby gave that chain to you, Marge.

VIOLET RUBY

Mama passed that chain on to me.

MARGE

I remember, Edy.

EDITH

I can't find it no more.

MARGE

Don't worry about it; it's somewhere.

VIOLET RUBY

You gave the chain to Janie, the little black girl, quite appropriately.

EDITH

I wouldn't do that. Would I, Marge?

ROSE JEWEL

Come on, Edy, I'll see you out.

EDITH

Sorry, Marge. I guess it's up to you after all. Goodbye. Bye, Jane.

VIOLET RUBY

Goodbye, Edith.

Edith casts a last look at Clyde as the Rose Jewels usher her out.

MARGE

God!

VIOLET RUBY

There but for fortune.

MARGE

Yeah, fortune. *(to Clyde, viciously)* Are you having a happy birthday, Daddy?
(picks up the hypodermic needle, sings)
Save a wretch like me.

VIOLET RUBY

(a whisper) Do it now.

MARGE

I once was weak...
You do it. *(Marge gives the hypodermic needle to Violet Ruby who takes it hesitatingly.)*
... but now I'm strong
Was blind ...

Rose Jewel returns, smiles, joins the song.

MARGE AND ROSE JEWEL

...but now I see.

ROSE JEWEL

Can you believe that poor girl! Makin' up that story, tellin' it to Brother Harper, thinkin' I'll swallow it, me! That Daddy's goin' to pass over me and take Marge! *(laughs)* I swan! Oh, Violet Ruby, you goin' to give Daddy his medicine?
(as always choosing the verse)

When we've been there ten thousand years...
(pushes Violet Ruby to Clyde's side) Come on, Violet Ruby, sing for Daddy. Amazing grace!

MARGE

Sing.

MARGE/ROSE JEWEL

...Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing...

(Marge breaks off as she sees Violet Ruby unable to do it)

ROSE JEWEL (cont.)

...God's praise

Than when...

(takes the hypodermic from Violet Ruby and gives it to Marge)

Come on, Marge, you sing for Daddy. Keep singin', singin' for Daddy. *(sings)*

...we first begun.

Praise God...

VIOLET RUBY

(joining Rose Jewel)

...praise God...

ROSE JEWEL

Now come on, Daddy. Sing too.

...praise God, praise God...

You sing. You can do it, yes, you can.

VIOLET RUBY/ROSE JEWEL

(with Clyde beginning to grunt along)

...praise God, praise God, praise God,

Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God,

Praise God, praise God...

Rose Jewel and Violet Ruby draw upstage, while Marge comes hesitantly to Clyde's side and takes his arm, the hypodermic needle in her hands.

The teenage girls fade up with "I'll Fly Away", like a memory from the past. Marge stops and turns to the sound, to the memory. The lights stay bright on Marge as they fade down on Rose Jewel and Violet Ruby and flare up briefly on the teenage girls.

YOUNG SISTERS

I'll fly away, fly away old Glory,

I'll fly away, fly away in the morning

When I die Hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away.

The last chord is unresolved as the lights fade on the girls, then fade on Marge upon the verge of murder.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

In the dark, we hear the exuberant voices of the teenage Starr girls.

YOUNG SISTERS

I'll fly away, fly away old Glory,
I'll fly away, fly away in the morning.
When I die, Hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away, fly away.

The lights come up midway through the song. All characters are in the same positions as at the end of ACT I. Marge is still the focus of the stage and the lights. She is still turned to the young girls. Rose Jewel and Violet Ruby are still in dim lights upstage, singing faint discordant "Praise Gods".

CLYDE STARR

(from the bed) Again! You girls get together now!

Marge looks down at him surprised. The young girls sing again.

During this next, it is to be understood that we are jumping back in Marge's memory to a moment 50 years ago. The girls are inside a church rehearsing the hymns for their departure to California. Clyde remains in his bed, his voice coming from it as robustly as from a 30-year old.

YOUNG SISTERS

I'll fly away, fly away, Old Glory,
I'll fly away, fly away...

Looking cautiously toward Clyde, Young Marge makes a hush sign to her sisters, while still singing, and comes down to the edge of the ACT II playing area, as though looking through a door for someone.

Marge watches her younger self intently. Marge's light fades as she sits beside Clyde's bed in the periphery of the lights on the new playing area. Rose Jewel and Violet Ruby also takes seats upstage in dimness.

YOUNG SISTERS

...in the morning.
When I die Hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away.

CLYDE STARR

Marge, get back into this church!

YOUNG MARGE and OLD MARGE

(calling to Clyde in bed) Coming, Daddy.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

(as always choosing the verse)
Some glad morning when this life is o'er...

YOUNG SISTERS

(as Marge rejoins them, wistfully looking behind her)
I'll fly away, fly away, fly away...
To a home on God's celestial shore.
I'll fly away.
I'll fly away, fly away old glory,
I'll fly away, fly away in the morning.
When I die Hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away.

The girls make faces at each other, pinch and poke each other. Young Violet Ruby, full of life, takes the playful initiative, flapping her wings on the "fly aways", sticking her tongue out at Young Rose Jewel's opprobrious frowns.

MONROE, a handsome, virile teenager, enters the downstage ACT II playing area from off-stage, carrying his toolbox and two pieces of wood. During the next scene he will work with a woodfile, sandpaper and twine to fashion a cross for the church, clearly proud of his work.

CLYDE STARR

I said again! Louder!

YOUNG SISTERS

I'll fly away, fly away old Glory,
I'll fly away, fly away...

MONROE

(joining them lustily)

...in the morning.
When I die Hallelujah by and by,
I'll fly away, fly away, fly away.

CLYDE STARR

Monroe, shut up out there. The girls are practicin'!

MONROE

Yes sir.

Monroe goes back to planing, as the girls sing one last verse, fading out as their lights up-stage fade dim.

LULA MONROE enters. Played by the same actress who played Edith, Lula is in her early forties, graying hair, haggard, but with an unquenchable spirit. She and Monroe both speak with twangy Oklahoma accents.

LULA

So here you are. What are you doin' there, Monroe?

MONROE

I'm finishin' the cross to have it ready for the preacher's birthday celebration this afternoon.

LULA

What's he payin' you?

MONROE

Why, Mama, it's God's work!

LULA

That's what I thought he was payin' you.

MONROE

It's for my soul, Mama!

LULA

The sole of my foot! You're here chasin' after them Starr girls. The whole country's in a depression; Gloria Excelsior, Janet Plantagenet, and Blue are sittin' home with their mouths open waitin' for dinner and I don't know what I'm gonna find to take back to 'em, and you're here brickin' gold, pantin' after...

MONROE

Mama, they can hear you!

LULA

I don't care. *(raises voice)* I got nothin' to hide from Clyde Starr nor any one of them girls of his.

MONROE

Mama, I love Violet Ruby, and she's the girl I'm gonna marry, if she'll have me even though my family is crude and below her station.

Young Marge, unseen by them both, comes to the imaginary back door of the church, and watches them shyly, painfully in love with Monroe.

LULA

Your father was as good a man as you will ever find in this world or the next, and if I ever hear you shame his name again, you'll answer to me for it, do you hear?

MONROE

Yes, Mama, I'm sorry.

LULA

What about Edna Todd? Last month you were gonna marry Edna.

MONROE

Well, she told me something.

LULA

Last minute confessions, that fool girl.

MONROE

Well, Mama, she messed around with Charlie Odom and then after he left, with Aaron Potter. That the kind of girl you want me to marry?

LULA

It ain't easy for a girl, Monroe, tryin' to find a good man, them bein' so scarce. After your daddy, I guess I made my mistakes, too. I had you to feed.

MONROE

Not to mention the kids your mistakes saddled you with.

LULA

I guess you kids pay me back, Monroe. *(laughs)* Though how fair a trade it is I am not yet prepared to say.

MONROE

But you went to my daddy pure, didn't you? Well, I want the girl I marry to come to me pure.

As if in answer to Monroe, Young Marge clears her throat.

LULA

Oh, hello, Marge.

MONROE

'Lo, Marge.

LULA

(puts her arm around Marge's shoulder) You hear him? There ain't a girl in this county whose panties are safe from Monroe's itchy fingers, but yet he turns his back on that nice Edna Todd right at the altar just 'cause her panties ain't lily white. Boy howdy!

MONROE

I love Violet Ruby.

LULA

And when was you struck with this affliction?

MONROE

I think I've always loved her, even before the Starrs came to this dirt hill of a town, even before I was born, even before...

LULA

Violet Ruby Starr is as cold as her name, and the man who marries her will freeze to the bed-sheets. *(Marge would protest here and elsewhere but for shyness and Lula's quickness)* Sorry, Marge, I know she's your sister, but facts is to be faced.

MONROE

Mama, you're talkin' about the woman of my heart.

LULA

The heart that's beatin' in your chest or the heart that's beatin' down your pant leg.

MONROE

Mama!

LULA

I never seen such a boy for simple-minded amorousness. Even when he was just a baby, every bath I give him, that little tupper of his kickin' up like a Mexican jumpin' bean.

MONROE

Mama, I'm a grown man, and you oughtn't be talkin' like that in front of me, or Marge neither; and my tupper ain't little.

LULA

Monroe, baby, all I want is what's best for you. You know that, don't you, darlin'?

MONROE

Yes, ma'am.

LULA

And that just ain't Violet Ruby Starr. Ain't that right, Marge?

MONROE

How about Rose Jewel then? Rose Jewel's a honeypot.

LULA

Oh, I'm just sure she is.

MONROE

And she's almost as pretty as Violet Ruby.

LULA

Born fickle, raised fickle, pickled fickle.

MONROE

And Rose Jewel's got a lot more meat on her. take them legs.

LULA

Yes, Rose Jewel's got legs wasn't meant for nothin' but layin' down.

MONROE

Mmm nnh!

LULA

Sashayin' 'round that altar the other night, pretendin' to talk in the Tongues, dancin' around, hikin' up her skirt and shinin' the whole congregation, every man-Jack just agog.

MONROE

Mama, Rose Jewel was filled with the Holy Ghost.

LULA

I imagine she got filled with a lot more than that before the night was over.

MONROE

Mama, that's blasphemy.

LULA

The Holy Ghost wasn't talkin' out of Rose Jewel's mouth any more than I was! She got stuck in her gibberish, just like I knew she would, goin' "ickala-ickala-ickala" over and over. And then when her old man gets up to translate, he takes ten minutes to put into English what Rose Jewel was supposed to've said in a minute and a half of ickala-ickala. A real sideshow, that sister and father of yours, Marge.

MARGE

Oh, Miz Monroe, I—

MONROE

You just don't like Clyde Starr 'cause he made a pass at you.

LULA

Him and every other randy gent in this godforsaken church.

MONROE

Mama, if I said something like that, you'd have me spittin' out Fels-Naptha.

LULA

There's something deeply bad in that man, Marge, and I hope that you... Oh, listen to me here talkin', don't you cry now, darlin', I'm just a mindless old... I'll tell you what, Monroe. If I was you, and so stuck on gettin' in the Starr family, I'd go after Marge here. She ain't the looker her sisters is, maybe, but she's all gold. And I think she's cute on you, too. Ever see the way she sits in church, watchin' you? Those eyes of hers just glimmerin'!

Marge is mortified. So is Monroe.

MONROE

Mama, Marge is just like one of the fellas.

LULA

Oh, there's a difference, hon, I'm pretty sure.

MONROE

(escaping) Well, don't you worry about supper, Mama. I'll find us a chicken somewhere and I guess I can...

LULA

Monroe, I won't have you stealin'!

MONROE

...dig up some of them sweet potatoes in the garden. I guess they're probably—

YOUNG MARGE

Monroe... *(Monroe stops)* ...Um, Daddy sent me for that new cross if you're finished with it. He wants to erect it now.

MONROE

Yeah, it's finished. Ain't it a beaut?

YOUNG MARGE

Oh, yes.

LULA

Monroe, with hands like that you could be a carpenter. It's a good job —when you get paid for it! They're always buildin', somewhere. Look at these hands, Marge. *(brings Young Marge to Monroe, puts his hands in hers)* These are good, strong, honest hands. *(takes the cross from Monroe)* Here, I'll take this to your Daddy for you. Sit here, Marge... by Monroe.

Lula leads Young Marge to a seat on Monroe's toolbox. As she exits, Lula exchanges a look with Monroe, who is embarrassed and a bit peeved at her obvious matchmaking; she gestures to him to move in closer. Young Marge doesn't miss anything, but pretends not to see.

MONROE

So you liked my cross.

YOUNG MARGE

Oh, yes. Jesus was a carpenter. You could be, too.

MONROE

Huh uh, not this boy. Listen. *(taps with his pencil on his toolbox)* Morse Code.

YOUNG MARGE

I know. You wrote, "Marge".

MONROE

Yeah, you know code?

YOUNG MARGE

Oh, just a little bit. Not as good as you.

MONROE

I been studying telegraphy, 'cause I hear that Gulf Oil might be takin' on men up in Tulsa, and I want to get me an inside job.

YOUNG MARGE

That's fine.

MONROE

Then I'm gonna buy shares, then a piece of property, and I'm gonna put down my own well and strike a gusher, and then another and another, and I won't stop till I'm a millionaire.

YOUNG MARGE

Oh.

MONROE

What do you think of that?

YOUNG MARGE

That's fine.

MONROE

And then you can say you knew me when.

YOUNG MARGE

There's a woman? And her name is Amelia Earhart? And she flies planes? And she vows that one day she will fly around the world, and I'm goin' to, too.

MONROE

Wonder what it's like up there?

YOUNG MARGE

I saw a photograph once, taken in the clouds. It was like Heaven.

MONROE

Listen. (*taps again*) Could you read that, or was I too fast for you?

YOUNG MARGE

M-o-n-r-o-e.

MONROE

Spells Monroe.

YOUNG MARGE

How come everybody calls you by your last name? Even your mama does.

MONROE

It's my first name, too, and my middle name, too. See, my mama was so in love with my Daddy, Steven Monroe--he was killed? shot in the heart with a German bullet in the Second Battle of the Marne? almost made it through; but didn't-- And my mama was heavy with child with me when she got the news, and I come on early then from the shock, and her lovin' my dead daddy so, she named me every name after him, Monroe Monroe Monroe.

YOUNG MARGE

Monroe Monroe Monroe.

MONROE

Course I shortened it some, Monroe M. Monroe, looks better on paper. But I guess there ain't nobody doesn't know what the M stands for.

YOUNG MARGE

It's a nice name, not like Starr. Starr! Marge Starr!

Young Rose Jewel comes running on, crying. She throws herself into Young Marge's arms.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Marge!

MONROE

Rose Jewel, what's wrong?

YOUNG MARGE

What is it, kid?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Oh, Monroe, your mama's so mean!

MONROE

She is not!

YOUNG MARGE

What'd she do, Rose Jewel?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

She was out there talkin' to that nice, Old Man what's-his-name who's takin' over the church, and I come up, and he said...

YOUNG MARGE

Brother Boone?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Yes, Brother Boone's his name, and Brother Boone said, "Why here's Rose Jewel now. Ain't she pretty." And your mean old mama said, "Well Rose Jewel may be the prettiest, but Marge's got the prettiest hair." And you don't, Marge!

YOUNG MARGE

She didn't mean it, kid.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

My hair's softer than yours, and it's prettier, too.

YOUNG MARGE

Of course it is. Lula Monroe just...

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Your hair's as thick and coarse as a Cherokee Indian's, and she only said that 'cause Daddy was standin' right there, too, and she wanted to embarrass him in front of Brother Boone 'cause Brother Boone wants...

MONROE

Well, maybe she meant it, Rose Jewel. Now that I look at it, Marge does have pretty hair, and she's got pretty skin, too.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Oh! (*bursts out crying again, and runs off*) Daddy!

YOUNG MARGE

Thank you for sayin' that, even though...

MONROE

Sometimes that girl makes me so mad! Why do you let her talk like that?

YOUNG MARGE

Well, Rose Jewel... we, we have to take special care of Rose Jewel, because she's so... delicate.

MONROE

Well...

YOUNG MARGE

Daddy says she's a natural Child of Christ.

MONROE

A natural Child of Christ? Jesus! Because she's simple?

YOUNG MARGE

She's special. And she is pretty, don't you think? All the men find Rose Jewel pretty, don't you?

MONROE

Course.

YOUNG MARGE

See.

MONROE

Well, being pretty ain't everything. Though it helps, of course. Rose Jewel'll never have trouble gettin' herself a man.

YOUNG MARGE

I'm glad she's pretty.

MONROE

What was it she said about Brother Boone takin' over the church?

YOUNG MARGE

You haven't heard?

MONROE

Huh uh, what?

YOUNG MARGE

Well, Daddy found out about this preacher woman, Aimee Semple McPherson, who... see, Daddy's always buildin' a new church somewhere, but then...

MONROE

(laughs) But then he finds out that he likes the church more than the people in the church. And the people sure don't like him back, too.

YOUNG MARGE

Well...

MONROE

Sorry, Marge. I guess that's kind of harsh, ain't it

YOUNG MARGE

I guess it's ... fair, though. But Daddy just wants to do good, Monroe.

MONROE

God's work.

YOUNG MARGE

That's right. And now Daddy's heard about this preacher woman out in Lost And Jealous who...

MONROE

(stunned) Lost And Jealous!

YOUNG MARGE

...and 'cause she's a woman Daddy says she's probably havin' trouble; it's a great big congregation Lost And Jealous has, and so he wants to go out there and, and... and help her.

MONROE

He's not takin' Violet Ruby?

YOUNG MARGE

Yes, she's goin'!

MONROE

Not Rose Jewel, too?

YOUNG MARGE

Yes.

MONROE

My Lord!

YOUNG MARGE

(waits for more from him, then:) I'm goin', too.

He doesn't answer her for another moment, still dazed.

MONROE

But... but... *(falls into a helpless, crazed silence)*

Young Violet Ruby, a movie magazine in her hand, enters behind them, eavesdropping.

YOUNG MARGE

He's already got the La Salle all packed up. We're leavin' right after his birthday celebration this evening. He figures we'll be almost to Amberilla by morning. I don't want to go, but I guess I have to. Daddy's ... he's been ... he's started ... doin' ... and sayin' funny ... funny ... funny things.

MONROE

I've got to find Violet Ruby.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Well, look no further. *(to Marge)* What did you do to Rose Jewel? She's in the choir loft crying her eyes out.

YOUNG MARGE

Nothin'.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Daddy wants you. *(Young Marge hesitates.)* I said Daddy wants you. *(pause)* He wants you now! *(Young Marge still hesitates. Young Violet Ruby takes off her necklace.)* Here. Mama gave me this chain before she ... passed on. And now I'm giving it to you. Daddy says to.

YOUNG MARGE

But...

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

He says I've had it long enough. He wants you now.

MONROE

Violet Ruby?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

You better not keep him waitin'. It's his birthday.

MONROE

Violet Ruby, come sit down.

YOUNG MARGE

(turning to leave, reluctantly) Bye, Monroe.

MONROE

Right here by me.

YOUNG MARGE

See you at the celebration, I guess.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

(to Young Marge, who still lingers) He'll be mad.

Young Marge goes off during the following. Young Violet Ruby sits on the toolbox, leafing through her movie magazine.

MONROE

Is it true?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

I'm not a mind reader. Is what true? A lot of things are true; a lot of things aren't.

MONROE

That you're... Stop lookin' at that damn movie magazine! Is it true that you're leavin' tomorrow?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Isn't it wonderful? You know Los Angeles is right next door to Hollywood. And it's big, too. Great big.

MONROE

What about us?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Who?

MONROE

Us!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

You and who?

MONROE

Me and you!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

What about us?

MONROE

I want you to stay with me.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Why would I want to do that?

MONROE

Didn't the other night mean anything to you?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

What should it mean?

MONROE

That we ... that we love each other.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Well, it didn't.

Young Violet Ruby turns back to her magazine. Lula enters.

LULA

Monroe. *(he doesn't answer)* Monroe. Monroe Monroe Monroe!

MONROE

Oh, what is it, Mama!

LULA

What's wrong with you?

MONROE

Nothin'.

LULA

(looks a moment at Young Violet Ruby) I got something to tell you. *(to Young Violet Ruby)*
I got something to tell Monroe.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

(not moving) Swell.

LULA

(tries to pull Monroe aside; he won't budge) Monroe, Abe Boone just caught me in the church and asked me to marry him.

MONROE

Marry him! Abe's wife ain't been dead two months!

LULA

And so what? She's planted outside, we're gonna sleep in the house. But that's what I come to tell you about *(glances at Young Violet Ruby)*

—I heard the preacher was leavin'— Love, Monroe, real abidin' love. You know, Abe was sweet on me when we was kids in school. But I was so crazy in love with your daddy that I couldn't see nothin' but his eyes. And after I married, Abe settled for Ruth, but he always loved me, he says. And I ... care for him, too.

MONROE

What about all them other ... husbands of yours? Abe don't mind 'em?

LULA

Why should he? He didn't have to sleep with 'em. No, Monroe, Abe sees that I was forced by circumstances to...

MONROE

The circumstances bein' that...

LULA

The circumstances bein' that I was a woman alone, with children to feed, and no chance. Not in this world. But Monroe, see, that's what I'm trying to tell you, darlin'. Your life changes; you change. *(another glance to Young Violet Ruby, who gazes back at her, still leafing through her magazine)* The way you feel now, you're not always goin' to feel like this.

MONROE

Abe still feels about you the same way.

LULA

Well yes, but... but... *(confused)* I had a point I wanted to make.

MONROE

Mama, you got to let me live my own life. You've already lived yours.

LULA

Darlin', I'm still livin' it! Don't put me in my grave, I just negotiated a new lease on this life. I just don't want you tyin' yourself up to a mistake. I want you to have something like your Daddy and me had, praise God.

MONROE

God give you a couple of months with Daddy, then he took him off to war and kilt him and left you worse off than if you'd never...

LULA

Well then, what Abe and me has.

MONROE

Abe Boone spent all those years trapped with that Christian Science Ruth, lovin' you, yet watchin' you get passed down from scoundrel to scoundrel, and that's what you want for me! No thanks, Mama, praise God.

LULA

Don't you be talkin' 'bout the Lord like that! I'll wash your mouth out!

MONROE

And praise God again, look what he's doin' to me and Violet Ruby. I won't have it, Violet Ruby, your daddy settin' hisself up like God, jerkin' you all over the continent just on his little whim. I won't have it!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

You can't stop it.

MONROE

I'll assassinate him.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

(considers this) And then what?

LULA

Monroe, come to your senses, if any.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

(entering) Lula Monroe, I come to say sorry. Daddy says I got to.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Where is he?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

In the Sunday school room.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Is Marge with him?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Yes, but I'm not talkin' to Marge. It's all on account of her and her old coarse ugly hair that I got to say sorry to this old sow. Daddy says it's the Christian thing to do.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

He must be startin' Marge on her special lessons.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

How come I never get any special lessons! It's always you, and now Marge!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Because you're already special. You're a natural child of Christ.

LULA

Oh, Rose Jewel's a natural, all right.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Thank you.

LULA

But you got a ways to go as a child of Christ.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

I'm tellin' Daddy! *(runs off again)*

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Don't go into the Sunday school room, Rose Jewel! I hope he locked it.

LULA

Just what's your daddy tryin' to get away with, labelin' Rose Jewel a natural child of Christ?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

She is a natural child of Christ. She's inviolate.

MONROE

You're Violet, Violet Ruby.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

IN-vio-late, unassailable.

LULA

If she's a child of Christ then of course what's that make him but Christ himself. That man, he should be...

MONROE

Mama...

LULA

...dipped in tar and rolled in feathers and rode...

MONROE

Mama, me and...

LULA

...out of town on a wood cross all notched and slivered and covered with thorns and briars and...

MONROE

Mama, I have something very important to say to Violet Ruby!

LULA

But Monroe, what about Marge, she—

MONROE

And personal, too, Mama! So if you will—

LULA

Monroe, Marge is worth a thousand Violet Rubys with change due!

MONROE

So if you will leave us alone. Now. *(Lula goes off with a backward glance of admonishment to Monroe.)* Violet Ruby!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

I wonder if you could.

MONROE

Could what? I could do anything!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Do ... what you said ... do that to Daddy.

MONROE

Oh... you mean... assassina— *(stops himself)*

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

No, you're just a boy. Oh, Monroe, sometimes at night I dream... of...

MONROE

What? Dream on a star, I'll snag it for you.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

I dream ... of ...

MONROE

Do you dream of ... a man?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

A man? *(long beat)* I used to dream of a man... a man who would come and take me ... far far away. But now I just dream of far far away. I dream of that first day out of this place, I dream of Hollywood, of walkin' into that Warner Brothers Studio, you know where that is, of course you don't, doin' up my hair, gettin' me a special outfit with stars on it, none of these damn gingham and country cottons, and I'm gonna go in, and I'm gonna be someone new.

MONROE

Oh, Violet Ruby, I love you just the way...

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Violet Ruby Starr is dead! No one's ever gonna call me that again. From this day on I am Jane... I haven't got the last name yet, but Jane. Jane. Jane is strong. Jane doesn't need anybody. Jane can tell him to go to hell, walk out whenever she wants. See this? *(shows him a picture in the magazine)* Joan Crawford? You know what her real name is? Lucille La Sewer. And that new girl, that little blond in that nurse movie down at the Rialto, Barbara Stanwyck? Ruby Stevens. Ruby! Barbara changed it, you bet she did. Ruby. Sounds like I take in washing. Jane Stevens. No, I'm not taking anything cast off, not any more. Jane... Webb. Jane ... Gunn. Jane ...

MONROE

Violet Ruby?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Stop it!

MONROE

Jane?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Yes, what is it?

MONROE

Jane, I'm asking you to marry me. Jane Monroe.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

You're very sweet, darling. No. Jane ...What do you think?

MONROE

I think I'm gonna die.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

No, I mean about my name. Jane ... Ransom. Jane ...

MONROE

I mean it. Feel my heart. I'm gonna die right here and now.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Uh ... uh ... darling, I'm trying to think. Jane ...

Young Marge enters, clings to the periphery. Young Violet Ruby sees her. They stare hard at each other for a moment, while Monroe stares inward, oblivious to everything but his own misery.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

(finally) Did Daddy give you your special lesson.

YOUNG MARGE

(a whisper) We didn't finish.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Why not?

YOUNG MARGE

There was ... too much.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Don't tell me that.

YOUNG MARGE

He wants you to go finish ... for me.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

No.

YOUNG MARGE

Yes, he says so.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

You've got to learn to do it all.

YOUNG MARGE

I can't. There's too much.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Yes, you can. I learned to do it all, and you can too.

YOUNG MARGE

He's waitin' for you. He'll be mad.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

It's your turn! Your turn!

Young Violet Ruby goes off. Young Marge turns to Monroe, who is still blind and deaf with his own anguish.

YOUNG MARGE

(approaching him cautiously) Monroe.

MONROE

Marge.

YOUNG MARGE

I don't want to go with him. I would go anywhere, with anyone, before ... If anyone would take me, anyone. If I was a man, I could go... I could go hop the freights, the way you do, go down into Texas, maybe. They're taking on men in the oil fields, I hear. Or Mexico. It's cheap there, and far away. If I was a man, that's where I'd go. And if I knew a woman who would come with me, I'd take her.

MONROE

Far away. So far away!

YOUNG MARGE

Of course, you got your family, but your mama can find herself another man, and you're just free to go.

MONROE

I thought she loved me.

YOUNG MARGE

I ... love you.

MONROE

What am I gonna do? *(after a long moment, he looks up suddenly at Young Marge; he studies her face; she is barely able to breathe)* What'd you say? ... About Mexico?

YOUNG MARGE

If you'll have me, I'll go with you.

MONROE

(after another long moment) Why not? Why in hell not?

YOUNG MARGE

We can't tell anyone, Monroe; he'll find out and come after us. *(Monroe doesn't answer, but is scheming.)* How will we go?

MONROE

Huh?

YOUNG MARGE

We gonna hop the freights? You'll help me, won't you?

MONROE

We'll take Mama's bay mare, Maude.

YOUNG MARGE

Maude. Yes, we'll take Maude.

MONROE

Mama'll give Maude to us. She'll be happy, oh just won't she!

YOUNG MARGE

Monroe, I'm hap...

MONROE

I'll go fetch Maude. You go pack up. We gotta go light. *(starts off)*

YOUNG MARGE

Monroe. *(he stops)* I'm so happy. Thank you.

LULA

(entering) Oh Monroe, have you seen Marge? Marge! I've been lookin' all over for you. I wanted to tell you...

MONROE

Are you happy now, Mama! Are you! *(storms off)*

LULA

(confused, then after a beat) Why, yes, I think I really am. Marge, I got good news. I'm goin' to be married!

YOUNG MARGE

Oh, Lula, are you! So am—

LULA

Abe Boone! Well, of course he's not Steven Monroe. I give my heart to Steven, and then he took that German bullet, and I lost him. Like to kill me. But I got through. And then that string of no-goods, the no-good Mr. Hoyle, the no-good Mr. Roan...

YOUNG MARGE

Lula...

LULA

...the no-good Mr. Grayson. I got through.

YOUNG MARGE

Lula, are men bad? Are all men bad?

LULA

Bad? Oh no, honey, men are just ... as you find 'em. Abe's a good man, and I'll still get through. Why, Marge, what is it? You're shiverin'!

YOUNG MARGE

I'm so afraid.

LULA

Afraid of what, child?

YOUNG MARGE

God.

LULA

God? Well, of course you are, you're a God-fearin' Christian!

YOUNG MARGE

But I've been so bad, and...

LULA

You, bad?

YOUNG MARGE

...what if I was to die today?

LULA

Oh, you're not goin' to die for such a long time, and then God's goin' to say, 'Why look who it is, Marguerite Pearl, come home to heaven, my sweet good little Marge!' 'Cause with a heart as good and solid as yours, God's goin' to open his arms wide.

YOUNG MARGE

I don't know what God... who God... is.

LULA

That's your daddy talkin' out of your head. Now, forgive me for sayin' it --it ain't my place, I guess-- but your daddy's got some peculiar notions about the Lord. When he showed us all that photograph of those silly clouds passin' across the sky, and pointed with his finger to the face of God, and said—

YOUNG MARGE

Wasn't it?

LULA

Honey, you can't see God! He's all around, you can't point to him. Is he bigger than a bread-box, no he's—

YOUNG MARGE

He's as big as a milk bottle.

LULA

(laughs) That's just exactly right, honey. As big as a milk bottle, as small as the sky. *(sings)*
Higher than a mountain, sparklin' like a fountain,
All sufficient grace for even me!

YOUNG MARGE

God the Father...

LULA

God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

YOUNG MARGE

He's *your* son.

LULA

Yes, he is. God is everyone, you're so right, the Holy Spirit is in us all. You hold onto it, Marge, don't you ever lose your faith. It's not so much just gettin' through, it's how you get through.

YOUNG MARGE

I'm goin' away.

LULA

I know, your daddy told me. Don't you lose yourself in that big old sinful town.

YOUNG MARGE

No, I'm goin' to Mexico. With—

LULA

Catholics, they're all idol-worshippin' Catholics down there. But live and let live, Lula. Just don't you go marryin' one of 'em, honey, they'll raise your kids Catholic, every one.

YOUNG MARGE

(laughs) I won't. I sure won't. ...Mama.

LULA

Awwooh! *(hugs her; holds back tears)* Goodbye, lamb. I'll miss you. I'll keep after that darn Monroe for you. *(sees Young Rose Jewel who has entered behind them)* Oh!

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Sow.

LULA

Piss-ant. (*exits*)

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

You called her Mama! I'm gonna tell Daddy!

YOUNG MARGE

No, kid, don't tell Daddy. I tell you what, you can call her Mama too if you want, 'cause pretty soon, she's gonna be one of the family. But listen, kid, I got something to tell you.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

No, Marge, I got something to tell you; it's the Christian thing to do. I was awful mean to you just a while ago, those things I said about your hair. The Christian thing is to say sorry.

YOUNG MARGE

Oh, kid, that's okay. Listen, I got to tell you—

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Your hair's not that bad, and if you was to thin it a little bit, and brush it every night, 200 strokes, just the way I do, you hair'd be almost as pretty as mine.

YOUNG MARGE

Kid, listen to me.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

You're trembling. Are you sick, Marge?

YOUNG MARGE

No. I can't tell you. I got to go fast, but, kid, I want you to be happy for me. Will you promise you'll be happy for me?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Happy for you for what?

YOUNG MARGE

Just be happy. I'm goin' away now, and I'll never see you again.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

That's Violet Ruby's chain she got from Mama. What are you doin' with it?

YOUNG MARGE

Violet Ruby gave it to me, but I'm givin' it back.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

I want it.

YOUNG MARGE

No, kid, you give it to Violet Ruby for me, will you? I'm not goin' to see her again either. Or Daddy. (*gives Rose Jewel the chain*) Now you're not to have this chain, Rose Jewel, you're to give it to Violet Ruby. Rose Jewel, you hear what I say?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Oh, yes!

YOUNG MARGE

And kid, if Daddy says ... or does ... anything you don't like, you're to tell him you're a natural child of Christ and he's not to. You remember that?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Sure, that's easy.

YOUNG MARGE

Say it, "Daddy, I'm a natural child of Christ and you're not to—"

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Well, I *am* a natural child of Christ and Daddy knows it so why do I have to—

YOUNG MARGE

Say it, kid.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Daddy, I am a natural child of Christ.

YOUNG MARGE

"And you're not to do that to me."

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Do what to me?

YOUNG MARGE

Anything you don't like.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Well, like what? Marge, you know something that's always bothered me, I know that I *am* one but just what is a natural child of Christ? And you bein' my twin, how come you ain't one too?

YOUNG MARGE

A natural child of Christ is inviolate. You're protected, Rose Jewel.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

By Daddy?

YOUNG MARGE

By God.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

And by Daddy too?

YOUNG MARGE

By Daddy by way of God. Because Daddy's God-fearin'. You remember RV Johnson? Layin' over to Daisy sick to the bone? And Daddy rode over there on Lula Monroe's bay mare Maude and give RV a new pair of boots?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

And come back and told the congregation that RV was healed? High heeled. (laughs)

YOUNG MARGE

Yes, but he did it, Rose Jewel. He saved RV's life. Through hope. By way of God. You keep your faith, kid, and—

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

My faith? What's so good about my old faith?

YOUNG MARGE

All you need is your faith, kid, and God's goin' to hold you safe. It's not so much just gettin' through, it's *how* you get through.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

What about you? And Violet Ruby?

YOUNG MARGE

We just got to get through whichever way we can. Which is why I'm goin' now. I got to go pack.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

(holding her) No! You're so mean! Twins, together, one! Like you always said.

YOUNG MARGE

(crying) We'll always be together, kid, in our soul. Twins, together, one!

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

(crying too) We got heaven.

YOUNG MARGE

Yes. See you in heaven.

Young Marge runs off. Young Rose Jewel wanders to the toolbox and sits, putting on the chain. Monroe walks on forlornly.

MONROE

Oh, hello Rose Jewel.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Hello, yourself.

MONROE

I just came back for my tools. *(begins to collect his tools)*

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Daddy always says a workman is only as good as his tool. Monroe? *(he continues)*
Monroe! *(he stops)* Did anyone ever tell you you had a cute fanny?

MONROE

Yes. Violet Ruby told me that. I guess you Starr girls all think alike, don't you.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

What are you gettin' so mad about? I thought you'd like me sayin' it. All the other boys do.

MONROE

All the other boys? How many other boys are there, between you and your sister?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Which sister do you mean? My twin sister? Or Marge?

MONROE

I thought Marge was your twin.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Good Heavens, no, do I look like Marge to you? You better answer that right.

MONROE

I've got a lot of respect for Marge. In fact ... and you can just tell this to your twin sister, Violet Ruby ... I love Marge. And me and Marge are running away together...

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

You're what!

MONROE

..and I'm doin' it because I love Marge. I love her with all my soul, because of her goodness, because of her ... because of her soul, which doesn't have a mean particle in it. And we'll live through life together, and when we get to heaven, we'll live through eternity together.

(ready to cry) And you just tell that to Violet Ruby.

Young Violet Ruby has entered during this speech, has heard most of it, and is thinking fast.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Tell her yourself. She's standin' right there.

MONROE

(to Young Violet Ruby) I'm running off with Marge.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Was that her idea?

MONROE

We both planned it.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

When?

MONROE

Does it hurt? Does it hurt good?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Where'd you get that chain, Rose Jewel?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Nowhere.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Daddy told me to give that chain to Marge.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Well Marge gave it to me.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Marge gave you that chain? Rose Jewel, answer me! Marge gave you that chain?

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Yes!

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

That little ... cheat! That filthy little... Give it to me!

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

It's for me!

VIOLET RUBY

Daddy says you're not to have it! He'll be mad!

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Oh! Fuck!

Young Violet Ruby gasps. Then she slaps Young Rose Jewel hard across the face.

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

You are a natural child of Christ, and you are not to use language like that, do you hear me?
Now, Rose Jewel, take that chain from around your neck and put it in my hand.

MONROE

(as Young Rose Jewel, weeping, takes off the chain) Violet Ruby, ain't just any little piece of your heart achin' just any little bit that I'm runnin' off with Marge?

YOUNG VIOLET RUBY

Well, no. Not really. *(putting her arm around Young Rose Jewel)* If it had been *Rose Jewel*, then I would have been hurt, very hurt. *Rose Jewel's* so lovely, and I've always felt that *Rose Jewel* and I were ... in competition. If you had chose *Rose Jewel*, then I would be devastated. But Marge? What do I care about Marge? If it makes Marge happy to run off and leave her family, leave her twin, all alone, passin' down a cheap little chain as a keepsake, then it makes me happy, too. Aren't you happy too, *Rose Jewel*, happy for Marge that she's leavin' you? So, I'm just glad you're not running off with *Rose Jewel*. I would be very hurt if you ran off with *Rose Jewel*. And Marge would be hurt, too. *(having manipulated Young Rose Jewel close to Monroe, Young Violet Ruby starts off, but turns back)* *Rose Jewel*, you'd better come on up to the house soon, because if Marge is leaving, you'll be left all alone, and you'll have to do more.

Young Violet Ruby goes off. Monroe and Young Rose Jewel have a moment together to consider all this. Then Young Rose Jewel begins to make erotic body movements, tossing the hair off her neck, pulling the cloth of her bodice.

YOUNG ROSE JEWEL

Mmmmm. Oooh! I swan, ain't it hot! Oooh! Wish I could be runnin' away.

For his own part, Monroe responds to her every movement, her every sigh, her every glance. Young Rose Jewel meanders offstage, watching him over her shoulder. Monroe follows.

After a moment, Young Marge returns. She has a small bag packed, and another bag of food. She sits on the toolbox, rubbing her hands over it, barely able to contain her happiness. She paces, looks nervously back the way she came, and sits again. She fumbles into the food bag,

tries to eat, but can't. She giggles. Then she gasps and holds her heart. And she giggles again, tears in her eyes. Then she hums. Then she sings.

YOUNG MARGE

Mmmmmmm, mmmmmmm,
I'll fly away, fly away.
Like a bird from prison bars has flown,
I'll fly away.
I'll fly away, old Glory,
I'll fly away, in the morning,
When I die—

(breaks off in sudden fear of the thought) Oh! I'm so afraid! Lord?

OLD MARGE, in the dim lights in b.g., has stood and come forward a bit with the lights coming up more brightly on her as she continues to watch her younger self. She starts a new song.

OLD MARGE

I trust him through faith,
By faith hold his hand...

OLD MARGE/YOUNG MARGE

...And sometimes my faith is weak...

YOUNG MARGE

Monroe... Monroe... Monroe. Oh, thank you, Lord, thank you for my savior!
(giggles, sings)

...All sufficient grace for even me.

(giggles again, changes to "Amazing Grace")

Mmmmm, praise God, praise God, praise God...

The lights come up on the older Starr Sisters where we last saw them, Marge still with the hypodermic needle in her hand. Rose Jewel and Violet Ruby join the song.

ALL BUT MARGE

...Praise God, praise God, praise God...

The lights dim out on Young Marge, Marge watching her younger self all the while.

ROSE JEWEL

(coming forward) Come on, Marge, you can do it.

VIOLET RUBY

Do it!

ROSE JEWEL/VIOLET RUBY

...Praise God, praise God...

Marge hands the hypodermic needle to Rose Jewel.

ROSE JEWEL

No now, Marge, no now. *(tries to give the needle back to Marge)*

VIOLET RUBY

Do it, Rose Jewel, do it!

MARGE

Rose Jewel, do you remember that day I said goodbye to you.

ROSE JEWEL

(nervously) The day you left to live with Juanita?

MARGE

No, the day I tried to leave. The day you betrayed me.

ROSE JEWEL

I never.

MARGE

You did, you know you did.

ROSE JEWEL

Violet Ruby made me.

VIOLET RUBY

I was fighting for my life.

ROSE JEWEL

And look what you ended up with.

VIOLET RUBY

Not too bad.

MARGE

Rose Jewel, I'm talking to you. Violet Ruby did all she could; and she is what she is.

VIOLET RUBY

Do it, Rose Jewel!

MARGE

But you took what was mine.

ROSE JEWEL

Monroe? But Monroe didn't...

MARGE

Not just Monroe, Rose Jewel, though I loved him. But Monroe wasn't mine. What you took from me was...

ROSE JEWEL

You could've had him back if you'd wanted him, Marge. That whole time bumpin' along on that bony old bay mare, there wasn't a word come out of Monroe's mouth wasn't "Marge this, Marge that." And we never got anywhere near Mexico, never even made it to the Red River but he left me, just abandoned me with that colored family, remember Daddy, you had to come fetch me?

MARGE

What you took from me that day, Rose Jewel, was my faith.

ROSE JEWEL

Your faith? Oh, Marge, don't talk morose. Don't listen to her, Daddy.

VIOLET RUBY

Do it, Rose Jewel. Do it!

ROSE JEWEL

Shut up, shut up!

MARGE

Even while I was trying to protect you, keep your faith safe, you took my faith from me. And now tonight if this is to be done...

Clyde is grunting manically now.

ROSE JEWEL

(thrusting the hypodermic at Marge who keeps her hands to her side) Marge, here, hurry. Look at Daddy, he needs it, he wants it.

MARGE

...If this is to be done, Rose Jewel, it's for you to do.

VIOLET RUBY

Praise God, Praise God...

MARGE

And then I'm going home. Juanita's waiting up.

VIOLET RUBY

...Praise God, Praise God...

ROSE JEWEL

Marge! Twins, together, one!

VIOLET RUBY

Oh, give it to me, I'll do it! I'll do it, for God's sake!

MARGE

Over my dead body. *(Violet Ruby backs away in fear.)* It's for Rose Jewel to do. (sings)

Praise God, Praise God...

With the final chord hovering unresolved, with Violet Ruby trembling in anticipation, with Marge resolutely watching on, Rose Jewel approaches Clyde Starr with the hypodermic needle, and the lights dim to black.

THE END