

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

EZRA AND EVIL

by

DAVID W. CHRISTNER



A PUBLICATION OF PLAYWRIGHT'S PLACE

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(EZRA AND EVIL)

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Dave Christner

CAST OF CHARACTERS (9 male, 5 female)

EZRA CASEY.....An innocent 17-year-old man child.
MARIKO CASEY.....Ezra's Japanese mother, 38.
DOC CASEY.....Ezra's grandfather, 78 or so.
SILAS CASEY.....Ezra's stepfather & uncle. About 40.
ROSEABETH.....Ezra's 18-year-old steady girlfriend.
PREACHER.....Roseabeth's father, a man of God.
MAGNUS RATTER.....The town constable and undertaker.
JASON CLAY.....The town bully; Ezra's nemesis.
FONDA PETERS.....Ezra's classmate; a dazzling blonde.
PHIL VANDAVER.....A classmate; an MD's son.
OGDEN BURGATROID.....A classmate; a jock.
HILDA FARTOK.....The school and church secretary.
FRANCIS YEAGER.....A store owner in town.
ALAN PERKINS.....A friend from a neighboring town.

The Setting

A small town in southwestern Oklahoma. Action takes place on a modular set constructed around an elevated room at the base of a towering church steeple. Lights illuminate the portion of the set in use. An actress seated at an old upright piano and playing old familiar hymns is highlighted during transitions from scene to scene.

The Time

The fifties, a time when we were all a lot less sophisticated.

Napoleon went forth seeking Virtue,
but, since she was not to be found, he got laid.

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ACT I

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP centerstage in a small, elevated, room situated at the base of the towering white steeple of a church. A door leads down a stairwell to the main stage. Upstage there is a window, looking out over the church roof; tree branches and sky are showing outside. At floor level a modular set constructed on either side of the steeple must be combined with the use of lights and rotated if necessary to show (in different scenes) a street corner, a livestock arena, a porch, a kitchen, the sanctuary of a church, a drug store, a riverbank, a tent meeting, a dance floor and the parlor of a home. Stage right there is an old upright piano; HILDA FARTOK, a matron of 60, is seated on a bench playing *Rescue The Perishing*. EZRA CASEY, a seventeen-year old of Japanese, Irish, and Native American lineage is pacing nervously, mumbling to himself. LIGHTS FADE ON Hilda as she complete the hymn and INTENSIFY ON Ezra in the simple room furnished only with an old army cot, a bureau with a porcelain bowl and pitcher of water on top, a mirror, and a folding chair. EZRA moves downstage to begin a monologue.

EZRA (thinks, then)

I didn't kill Fanny; you gotta understand that. She was dead when I barged in, so I had nothing' to do with what Roseabeth's father called Fanny's "untimely demise." Preacher said the exact same thing 'bout Roseabeth's mother, and added that she had been called away to do God's work elsewhere. Seems to me like God ought to have all the help He needed without Preacher's wife, unless, of course, He doesn't have any better handle on things "up there" than He does down here in the territories.

(He begins pacing, thinking out loud and talking to himself as much as to the audience.)

EZRA

If I did kill Fanny, which I didn't, it was an accident. Jist like what I did to Roseabeth; that was an accident too. I mean I didn't *plan* on doin' anything to either of'em. It was inevitable, I guess, because I've heard so much, and yet know so little about sex. And sex is at the bottom of it . . . sex and religion. So, I'm gittin' punished for carrying out the inevitable with the preacher's daughter, in spite of the fact that she *enjoyed* it, up to a point, I mean.

(As EZRA finishes his monologue, PREACHER, dressed in black and toting his shotgun and Bible, makes his way up the staircase.)

PREACHER (knocking)

Ezra! You in there?

EZRA

Yessir.

PREACHER

You decent?

EZRA

Not accordin' to you, but I'm dressed if that's what you mean.

PREACHER (entering the locked room)

Don't be gittin' smart, Boy. I aim to have a chat with ya about the little incident at Fanny's last night. I've prayed on it considerable, and I've come with the Laud and my Bible to reveal to ya what the Laud has revealed to me.

EZRA

Well, you and the Laud and Mr. Winchester there come right on in. I'm all ears.

PREACHER

Well, Boy, what cha got to say for yerself? (EZRA just shrugs.) Speak up, Boy?

EZRA

Name's *Ezra*!

PREACHER

I know your name, Boy. Nice Biblical name too, but not too fittin' under the circumstances. Now what cha got to say for yerself?

EZRA

I don't rightly know *what* to say for myself.

PREACHER (poking him with shotgun)

You could start with, "I'm sorry."

EZRA (*very* sincerely)

Oh . . . oh, I *am*. I'm *real* sorry. I--I hope I didn't . . . *hurt* Roseabeth. I didn't, did I?

PREACHER

Well, I reckon she'll make out all right, long as she cared for proper. But that don't make what cha done to my angel right.

EZRA (regretfully)

No, I reckon it don't.

PREACHER

I want cha to understand one thing, Boy. (EZRA nods agreeably.) Now you ain't a bad boy, which ain't to say you're a good one, but, aside from takin' advantage of my baby, you ain't all that bad, but, you ain't no prize either, if ya know what I mean?

EZRA (thinks, then)

I don't.

PREACHER

You're plenty bright, and I reckon ya even got some *po--*tential. Ya got basically a kind nature about cha, and I think you'd care for Roseabeth proper. I hope I ain't wrong in this.

EZRA

No, you aren't wrong, Preacher, but I'm kinda young to be thinkin' 'bout something so permanent as matrimony, if you know what I mean. I'm not opposed to marriage as an institution, but as a way of life, I have to admit I have some reservations 'bout it. For instance--

PREACHER (drawing a bead on Ezra)

But I ain't so fond of you that I'd hesitate one second to blast you into the next world if you was *ever* to mistreat Roseabeth. *That's* what I want you to understand!

EZRA

I see. Shotgun diplomacy to go along with a weddin' of the same variety.

PREACHER

The Laud's will.

EZRA

I git the picture.

PREACHER

One more thing. (EZRA is all ears.) I don't want none of my grandkids to come out lookin' like Indians.

EZRA (irritated)

Then you'd better find another husband for Roseabeth, Preacher.

PREACHER

Now, I got nothing against *you*, Boy. Some a your ideas I don't much cotton to, but I think you'll see the light, in time. All I meant was that any kids you two might have will have an easier time of it, if they favor my side of the family, if you know what I mean.

EZRA (thinks, then)

But aren't we *all* brothers in Christ, Preacher.

(Preacher glares at him momentarily.)

PREACHER

In Christ, yeah, but not here in the Mansfield. You oughta know that 'bout good as anybody. (He turns to exit.) One more thing: yonder window there . . . don't even think 'bout it. The Laud and me and Mr. Winchester has got an eye on it.

EZRA

I'm not plannin' on runnin' out on Roseabeth if that's what you mean.

PREACHER (exiting)

So let it be did, so let it be done.

EZRA

Matthew! Chapter seven, verse four?

(Preacher shakes his head and exits.)

EZRA (to audience)

To the best of my recollection . . . the trouble all started the year that I began to--*mature*, in earnest. I was 13; Mantle was hitting .324 for the Yankees, and the Washita River was as full of catfish as I'd ever seen it. But things started goin' downhill when I discovered that first hair.

(LIGHTS COME UP stage left on a KITCHEN. MARIKO, 35, Ezra's Japanese mother, is fixing breakfast. After a moment a

SPOT ILLUMINATES EZRA IN ANOTHER PART OF THE STAGE. He's in a bed looking under the sheets. He looks worried.)

EZRA (to himself)

Where did *that* come from? Wasn't there yesterday.

MARIKO (calling)

Ezra, come on down. Your breakfast is ready.

EZRA

Be right there, Mom.

(He looks back under the sheets.)

EZRA (to himself)

Should I comb it or what?

(LIGHTS FADE IN BEDROOM as he slips on some Levis, a shirt and sneakers and rushes downstairs. Once in the KITCHEN he crosses to MARIKO, lets her kiss his cheek, then stands there self-consciously as she holds him at arms length and looks at him.)

EZRA

Mornin', Mom.

MARIKO

Look at you.

(He glances down at his groin, thinking maybe she can see his new hair.)

EZRA (worried)

Somethin' wrong?

MARIKO

You need a haircut.

EZRA (incredulously)

What?

MARIKO (puzzled)

I said, you need a haircut. You okay? It was just a simple statement of fact.

Oh--*Oooh*, a haircut.

EZRA (covering)

(He more or less stumbles over to a small table and plops down in a chair.)

MARIKO

Goodness, Ezra, sometimes I think you're growing too fast for your own good. Won't be long before you're a man.

EZRA (impulsively)

How long?

MARIKO

Now just relax, Son. It takes a little while.

(She serves him a bowl of rice and a cup of tea.)

MARIKO

Eat up, and be careful with that cup. It's been in the family longer than you have.

EZRA

How much longer do I havta eat rice and learn about Japanese culture?

MARIKO

As long as it takes. Doc told you that you should never stop learning.

EZRA

I know, but--I bet my dad didn't eat this stuff.

MARIKO

Yes, he did. Until . . .

EZRA

He was killed (She nods.) Why was it again that the army sent him to be killed by the Germans instead of the Japanese? So I wouldn't feel so bad?

MARIKO

No, so *I* wouldn't feel so bad.

EZRA

I'd probably feel a lot better if he hadn't been killed at all!

MARIKO

We all would. But Silas has been good to us.

EZRA

But he's jist my uncle. And my stepfather.

MARIKO

And your legal father since he adopted you.

EZRA

So Silas is my uncle and my stepfather *and* my legal father?

MARIKO

Everything but your natural father.

(EZRA thinks on this for a moment, looking bewildered. Then he runs his hand through his hair and glances under the table at his groin.)

EZRA

Mom . . . was--was my real dad, my *natural* father--hairy?

MARIKO (puzzled)

Hairy?

EZRA

You know . . . *hairy*--did he have a lot of hair or what?

MARIKO

I'm not sure I understand.

EZRA

I'm not sure I do either. That's why I brought it up.

MARIKO

Well . . . what does hair have to do with it?

EZRA

Everything, I think!

MARIKO (thinks, then)

I see. (A beat.) Ezra, do *you* have some new hair? Is that what this is all about?

EZRA (evasively)

Mom! No! I was jist . . . wonderin' 'bout hair in general. I hate when you start inferring stuff jist 'cause I have an curious streak. It was jist a simple question.

MARIKO

That's *all*? You're sure.

EZRA

Mom, it's . . . somethin' you wouldn't understand.

MARIKO

Because I'm a woman?

EZRA

No, no. It's 'cause--'cause I'm a boy.

MARIKO

Who's becoming a man?

EZRA

No, I'm jist a kid who's tryin' to stay a kid. Now I gotta run; I'm meetin' Doc at the river.

MARIKO

Okay, but why don't you ask Doc or Silas about . . . becoming mature.

EZRA (exiting)

Okay, I'll do that.

(LIGHTS FADE in KITCHEN and COME UP first on HILDA at the piano. She plays *We Shall Gather At The River* quietly while EZRA delivers the following monologue. As he does so, LIGHTS COME UP ON RIVERBANK where DOC, 78, Ezra's grandfather is dozing beneath a tall cottonwood beside the river. His rod and reel are resting on his lap; the little finger on his left hand is missing. LIGHTS FADE ON Hilda as Ezra completes the monologue.)

EZRA

Doc wasn't a doctor at all, least not the kind that makes people well when they're sick. Fact is, he'd dealt me a nearly fatal dose of metaphysics before I had a real clear understandin' of *The Hardy Boys*. He was my grandfather, a religious liberal, and a Doctor of Philosophy in American literature. I'd been his only student since he retired

EZRA (continuing)

from the university in Norman, and his goal of making me *decent* and *grammatical* was beginnin' to wear on both of us. I didn't understand hardly anything he told me when he told it to me, but I knew he was a wise man and meant well. So I felt sure that he could help me with git this maturity business straightened out, his bein' so wise and all. Only Solomon might of been wiser as far as I knew.

(EZRA moves into the RIVER SCENE, sits down next to DOC and stares into the river. DOC begins to stir and sees Ezra beside him.)

DOC

You thinking about nailing Ole Blue, Son?

EZRA

No sir, Ole Blue's for you to catch. He didn't bite off my pinkie. (They sit silently watchng the river for a moment.) Hey, Doc, did that catfish really bite off your finger? Or or you jist tellin' me that to help me understand Mr. Melville better--*Moby Dick* and *Billy Budd*?

DOC

Ole Blue bit it off all right, when I wasn't much older than you now. And I figure you'll understand *Moby Dick* when . . . when you're more mature, lost finger or not.

EZRA

I'm glad you mentioned that, Doc. I was jist thinkin' 'bout . . . gittin' mature. Seems like a lot a trouble to go to jist to understand a book.

DOC (chuckling to himself)

So, you're thinking about maturity, huh?

EZRA

Yessir. Why don't you tell me 'bout it?

DOC

What's to tell?

EZRA

Dunno. Can't seem to make much sense outta it my ownself.

DOC

Hand me the worms, Son.

(EZRA opens the can and hands it to Doc.)

EZRA
What's hair got to do with it?

DOC
Maturity?

EZRA
Yessir.

DOC
Not much. (A beat.) Tell me, Son, how do you feel about . . . the female of the species these days.

EZRA (not sure)
Girls? Come on, Doc! I asked you a simple question and you havta drag girls into it.

DOC
It's *not* a simple question! And females--girls as you refer to them--might have a good deal to do with it. Now, how do you feel about them?

EZRA (showing some discomfort)
I like girls all right; they're kinda . . . different now, pretty even. Their . . . shapes are--nice, and I like the way they toss their hair back, and . . . hey, wait a minute! Their *hair*! Hey, Doc, are girls more mature than boys 'cause--'cause they got more *hair*? Is *that* what they got to do with it?

DOC (troubled)
Ezra, hair has got very little to do with it. Girls--*females*--of many species do, in point of fact, mature earlier than their male counterparts, but *not* because they have more hair. It's . . . biological.

EZRA (disappointed)
Oh . . . but--I'm gittin' more hair; doesn't that mean that I'm gittin' more mature?

DOC
Yes, that's true, physically, but--

EZRA (excitedly)
And I'm gittin' bigger and stronger and faster. And--and I can jump higher and I'm gittin' quicker and--and that's all part of it, huh?

DOC
Yes, but there's still more to it than that, Ezra.

EZRA

I see! It's like--like *Samson*. He had all this hair, and he was the strongest and most maturest man that ever lived. And he killed a lion and a jackass and all them Philistines--

DOC

Those Philistines.

EZRA

Yeah, them too. And then--then Jane cut off all his hair, and so he got all weak and--and *immature* 'cause he didn't have all that hair anymore.

DOC

That was Tarzan.

EZRA

Tarzan!? He got weak too?

DOC

No! Jane didn't cut off his hair; Delilah did.

EZRA (confused)

Delilah didn't even know Tarzan.

DOC

Ezra, *I* know that, but you said that Jane cut off Samson's hair. But she didn't; Delilah did!

EZRA

Oh . . . well, what did Jane cut off?

DOC

I don't know that Jane cut off *anything*! We were talking about Samson.

EZRA

Then why did you bring up Tarzan?

DOC

Because you brought up Jane!

EZRA (rationally)

But I meant Delilah. *She's* the one that cut off Samson's hair. So does that mean that when you lose your hair, regardless of who cuts it off, you're not mature anymore and that you can't whip the Philistines or the lion or the jackass?

DOC

Ezra, there are any number of things that can make a man lose his hair, not any one of which necessarily means that a man is becoming *less* mature. When you lose your hair as a natural consequence of the aging process, it isn't so much a matter of becoming immature as it is one of becoming . . . say, overripe. You understand that?

EZRA (thinks, then)

No sir.

DOC

All right then, take an apple. Now if you let an apple stay on a tree without picking it, what happens?

EZRA

Birds will git it.

DOC

What else?

EZRA

What else? Why nothing else! Birds git it and it's gone. After the birds git it, what else *could* happen to it?

DOC

Assuming the birds don't get it, what else might happen?

EZRA (guessing)

Worms? (DOC just shakes his head.) It'll *rot*!

DOC (relieved)

Yes! It will *rot*! And why? Because it becomes *overripe*; that is to say, because it passes its prime. It starts out as a bud, you see, then it's small, a little green apple, right?

EZRA

Right. Kids that aren't mature are green too.

DOC

Exactly! Then as the apple matures, it grows. It grows big and red and firm and juicy, but nobody picks it. So, it begins to shrink, to--to shrivel up, wrinkle, to change color and turn mushy, and finally . . . dies. Just like human beings. You see that, Son?

EZRA (mulls it, then)

But apples ain't got hair, Doc. Can you tell me the same story with peaches? They at least got a little fuzz.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY ON DOC.)

DOC

Lord, if Socrates had ever had to deal with the likes of you . . .

(After a moment of darkness, LIGHTS COME UP SLOWLY on EZRA back in the STEEPLE. He shakes his head, getting out of his reflective mood, and speaks to the audience.)

EZRA

Where I'm locked up is in the steeple of the Freewill Baptist Church in Mansfield, Oklahoma. Mansfield is located is what was formerly Indian territory; I guess the whole country is, if you wanna look at it like that, which most people don't. I *do* 'cause of my Indian heritage. My grandmother was a member of the Sac Nation and a cousin of Jim Thorpe, but I never knew her, jist heard 'bout her from Doc who lost her early on. He raised Silas and my father by himself; then Doc took me and Mariko in after my father was killed, and Silas ended up marrying Mariko. That's how I ended up here in the Mansfield learnin' 'bout Japanese culture, religion, history, grammar, Greek thought and God only knows what else. 'Course, what I *really* wanted to know about was *sex*!

(From out on the street somewhere comes the SOUND OF A CAR with loud GLASSPACK MUFFLERS. The car slides to a stop, and A DOOR SLAMS. Ezra moves to a window, looks out, then ducks back so he can't be seen. LIGHTS COME UP in the CHURCH YARD on JASON CLAY, 20, the town bully, Ezra's nemesis and his greatest fear.)

JASON

Ezra, you can't hide from me. I know you're up there. Now I gotta see ya, 'bout somethin' important. Ezra! Come on, now. We need to talk. I know you're up there; everyone in town knows you're up there.

EZRA (reluctantly showing himself)

I got absolutely nothin' to say to you, Jason.

JASON

Yeah, ya do. You jist don't know it.

EZRA

Jist leave me be, Jason!

JASON

Not this time, Pal. We got some business to discuss.

EZRA

Like hell we do! And I'm not your pal!

(PREACHER suddenly appears with his
shotgun.)

PREACHER

What the devil's goin' on out here?

JASON (nervously)

I'm jist . . . offerin' congratulations to my pal, Ezra, Preacher. And how are you this fine day?

PREACHER

You jist hightailit outta here, boy. We don't need your kind 'round here. Go on, now. Git! Before I fill that pretty car of yours with buckshot.

JASON (backing away)

Now that wouldn't be too charitable a thing to do, Preacher. (A beat.) I'll be back, Ezra.

EZRA

Well don't come back on my account! I got nothin' to say to you.

(LIGHTS FADE ON CHURCH YARD and
INTENSIFY on EZRA in STEEPLE.)

EZRA

I guess everybody has a Jason Clay in their life, somebody that fills their heart with terror and their mind with rage. The reason I hated Jason was *because* I hated Jason. He brought out the very worst in me, things buried deep down in my soul that I didn't even know were there until they would come out like a snarling rabid dog. (A beat.) I was fourteen when the trouble with Jason started. And it continues to this day, even after the awful thing that happened. It was with Doc and Mariko at the county fair in Hobart . . .

(LIGHTS COME UP stage left on a PATH
going through a LIVESTOCK ARENA. The
ARENA is hardly visible in the low light.
EZRA, MARIKO, and DOC are on the
ILLUMINATED PATH.)

Can I have some cotton candy?

EZRA

Can if you're able, son.

DOC

May I have some cotton candy?

EZRA

We just passed the concession, Ezra.

MARIKO

I know, and I was real strong willed then. Now I got a powerful urge for some.

EZRA

Go ahead and get the truck, Doc. We'll go back. I think I'd like some too.

MARIKO

I'll be right along then. And look . . . long as you're going anyway, might just as well get me some.

DOC

(DOC exits to find the truck. When DOC is gone we HEAR A LOUD, SICKENING "SPLAT" and the NOISE of a FEW MEN watching a fight. LIGHTS COME UP on the ARENA. JASON is fighting with ALLEN PERKINS, a kid from another town. SEVERAL MEN are standing by, watching. The fight catches the attention of Mariko and Ezra.)

JASON (to Allen)

Git up, you piece of shit! I ain't done with you.

(Allen is badly beaten.)

VOICE FROM CROWD

He's had enough.

JASON

Then you git out here, sumbitch!

VOICE FROM CROWD

I got no quarrel with you, Jason.

JASON

Then shut the hell up. (To Allen.) Git up, sumbitch. I want some more of ya!

EZRA (to MARIKO)

Let's git outta here.

(She just stares at him, not moving.)

EZRA

Mom!

(JASON goes over and kicks ALLEN in the stomach.)

MARIKO (to EZRA)

Ezra, do something!

EZRA

What!

(Jason starts to kick Allen a second time.)

EZRA (almost involuntarily)

Leave him alone!

MARIKO (to Ezra as she leaves)

I'm going for Doc.

JASON (to Ezra)

Jist what the hell *you* gonna do 'bout it, Casey? (A beat.) Huh?

EZRA

Just leave 'im be. He's whipped.

(Ezra moves to Allen, kneels down beside him and dresses his wounds with a handkerchief.)

EZRA (to Allen)

You all right?

ALLEN

I've been better. I jist wanna go home.

(Ezra helps Allen to his feet, then starts to leave the pen.)

MAN IN CROWD (to Jason)
You gonna let him git away with that?

JASON
Leave 'im be, Casey. This is my fight.

EZRA
He's all done, Jason. Jist leave 'em alone.

JASON
I wanna hear it from *him*!

ALLEN (hesitates, then)
Okay, enough.

(Jason steps aside to let them pass.)

MAN IN CROWD
Why, I don't think Jason wants any part of that Casey boy.

JASON (now blocking them)
Then I guess you'll havta finish it for 'em.

EZRA
Jason, I've got better sense than to fight with you.

JASON (slapping Ezra)
Then I guess I'll havta slap some of that sense outta ya so you'll act like a man instead of some half-breed chickenshit!

ALLEN
Don't fight 'im, Ezra. He's got brass knucks in his pocket.

(JASON slips a set of brass knuckles on his right hand.)

JASON (irritated)
Come on, half-breed! Show me what ya got.

EZRA
I'd prefer not to.

JASON

You'd *what*?!

EZRA (turning the other cheek)

It's not what I been taught.

JASON (slapping the other cheek)

Well, I'm gonna teach you a lesson you'll never forget. One that'll do ya some good too. Now come on, Injun!

ALLEN

Don't do it, Ezra!

EZRA

I don't know how else we're gonna git outta here.

(DOC suddenly pushes through the crowd.)

DOC

What's going on here?

(He goes to Allen and examines his face.)

DOC

We gotta get this boy to a doctor. Come on, Ezra, your mom's waiting for us in the truck.

(As they start to leave, Jason block their path.)

DOC (to Jason)

Son, one of these days I expect I'll find you in about the same shape as this boy. When I do, I'll do the same for you as I'm doing for him. Now if you'd be so kind as to get the hell out of my way!

(Jason steps away, reluctantly to let them pass as the LIGHTS BEGIN TO COME DOWN on JASON. A SPOT follows the OTHER THREE.)

JASON

This ain't over, Ezra! I'll git you; sooner or later, I'll git you.

EZRA (almost in tears)

He hit me, Doc. He hit me, so I turned the other cheek, jist like you told me . . . and you know what he did? *He hit me again!*

(LIGHTS COME UP ON HILDA at the PIANO. She begins playing *Onward Christian Soldiers* and continues until LIGHTS FADE on her and COME UP on EZRA back in STEEPLE. He is lying back on the cot, reflecting with his hands folded under his head. In the stairwell, MARIKO is making her way up the steps, carrying a tray of food.)

Ezra? MARIKO (knocks)

Mom? Is that you? EZRA (getting up)

I brought you some breakfast, Son. Preacher's on his way up with the key. MARIKO

Great! I'm starvin'. EZRA

Ezra? MARIKO

What? EZRA

About last night? MARIKO

I prefer not to discuss it. EZRA

I can understand that, but I think we need to come to some kind of an understanding. There's a lot of confusion about exactly what did happen. MARIKO

Well, I didn't kill Fanny. She was already dead, and Preacher knows it. EZRA

I know that, but . . . the truck *did* hit her--in her living room. And you were driving? MARIKO

I wasn't driving! EZRA

MARIKO

No? Then . . . who was? Roseabeth?

EZRA

No! *Nobody* was drivin'; that's how it came to happen.

MARIKO

I don't understand that, Ezra.

EZRA

Mom, I was *there*, and I don't understand it either. The whole catastrophe is just a-- a-- misunderstanding.

MARIKO

I'm sure it is, Ezra. Unfortunately, however, you have the misfortune of being who it is that is being misunderstood. (A beat.) Ezra, is--is that Roseabeth's prom gown in your room? (Silence, then.) It looks an awful lot like her gown. (Silence.) Ezra?

EZRA

I can't deny it; it's her's all right.

MARIKO

Imagine that! Roseabeth's gown in your room. (A beat.) How . . . how did it get all torn up like that?

EZRA

I must've run through a patch of briars or somethin' . . . when Preacher and Magnus was chasin' me.

MARIKO

You . . . ran through a patch of briars? In Roseabeth's prom gown?

EZRA

It's hard to explain.

MARIKO

Try.

EZRA

Well, I didn't actually . . . have it *on*.

MARIKO (carefully)

Did . . . Roseabeth?

EZRA

Well, no . . . not then. But she did earlier--at the prom. You saw her didn't you?

(MARIKO gives this some thought.)

MARIKO

Yes, I did. And she looked lovely. But I still don't understand exactly how you ended up running through a briar patch with Roseabeth's gown on.

EZRA

I didn't have it *on*!

MARIKO

You had it, but you didn't have it on? Is that right?

EZRA (irritated)

I *told* you it was hard to explain.

MARIKO

Then you think about it, okay?

EZRA

Mom! All I've been doin' is thinkin' 'bout it! (A beat.) What I can't figure out is why everythin' hasta be so hard.

(MARIKO puts the tray down and leans against the door.)

MARIKO (reflectively)

I suppose it's because we all--everyone of us, has to learn so many things for ourselves.

EZRA (woodenly)

I have this dream sometimes, not so often anymore, mostly after somebody says somethin' rotten about you or Silas or Doc. I'm jist a little kid--maybe three or four--and I'm walkin' down the street, holdin' your hand. And people are yellin' at us, shakin' their fists, even throwin' rocks and bottles and callin' us names. I start to cry 'cause I'm so frightened, but you pick me up and carry me right into the thick of the crowd. Then they suddenly disappear; only echoes of angry voices keeps ringin' in my ears. Is that a dream, Mom, a nightmare, or did--

MARIKO

It was a nightmare, but it's over now.

EZRA

Now there's jist *this* nightmare . . . my havin' to marry Roseabeth, and in the Spring of my years! (A beat.) I sure wish somebody would of told me somethin' 'bout sex instead of metaphysics.

MARIKO

I tried to talk to you, Ezra.

EZRA

Mom! I couldn't talk to *you* about it! Silas and Doc should of told me everythin' I needed to know. And they'd only talk to me 'bout . . . apples and butterflies, for cryin' out loud.

MARIKO (laughing)

Apples and butterflies? What have they got to do with sex?

EZRA

Beats me!

MARIKO (thinks, then)

I suppose they just didn't know how to talk to you. Men don't always communicate so well.

EZRA

Doesn't make much sense, does it?

MARIKO

Not very much of our world does.

EZRA

I guess I've fallen some in your estimation?

MARIKO

Ezra, not a day has gone by since your birth that you have not brought joy into my life. And I know you well enough--probably better than you know yourself--to know that you probably aren't capable of doing anything that you ought to be ashamed of.

EZRA

You have more faith in me than I do.

MARIKO

I'm your mother. That's my job. And I spoke briefly with Roseabeth.

EZRA

How is she?

MARIKO

Awfully upset about what happened and what's happening, but other than that, she's fine. She said to tell you that she's sorry.

EZRA

She's sorry!

MARIKO (thinks, then)

She said to tell you. (A beat.) Do you love Roseabeth, Ezra?

EZRA

I dunno. I can't tell whether I'm in love or insane. (A beat.) Is there a difference? Doesn't matter anyway. Preachers says I havta marry her after what happened--whether I love her or not.

MARIKO

You think he's serious?

EZRA

Dead serious!

MARIKO

He does tend to be dogmatic.

EZRA

He's a fair shot too.

MARIKO (sighs)

Your breakfast is cold.

EZRA

I lost my appetite anyway.

MARIKO

I'll see that you get some lunch. (A beat.) And don't worry. We'll have a talk with Preacher and get this whole mess straightened out. I'm sure he'll listen to reason.

EZRA

And I'll try to think of a way to deduce myself outta the situation. That's what Plato would of done.

(Mariko picks up the tray and starts down the stairs as the LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY. LIGHTS COME UP on the PIANO where HILDA begins playing *Church*)

in the Wildwood. After the first stanza,
LIGHTS COME UP ON EZRA in the
STEEPLE.)

EZRA

The maturity thing really had me baffled after my conversation with Doc. I was dead certain that hair, in spite of what Doc told me, had something to do with it. My good friend Phil Vandaver, a doctor's son, had this book about kids gittin' mature--*Coming of Age in Somoa*. It was written by a woman who been there and watched 'em, so she knew exactly how they did. Overthere, in Somoa, they git the thing over with in a single night. They take all the kids that have hair in all the right places and throw 'em in a pit with some coconuts, palm leaves, breadfruit, and a blessing and leave 'em overnight. In the morning the kids all come climbin' up outta the pit, but they aren't kids anymore. The adults, mature, fully matured and highly satisfied to boot. And I doubt whether they give a hang about understandin' *Moby Dick*.

(LIGHTS BEGINS TO FADE on EZRA and
COME UP on SILAS, sitting on the back
porch of a modest home. He is scratching
something in a Big Chief Tablet. After a
moment, EZRA moves into the scene.)

SILAS (easily)

Hello there, Son. What have you been up to?

EZRA

Oh, I been thinkin' mostly.

SILAS

Not about that preacher's daughter I hope.

EZRA

Roseabeth?

SILAS

The other one. Fonda.

EZRA

No sir. Neither. Been thinkin' 'bout . . . gittin' mature.

SILAS

You can git all you want down at the feed lot.

EZRA

Not *manure!* *Mature!*

SILAS
Oh, like Victor.

EZRA (confused)
Huh!?

SILAS
Victor *Mature!* The guy that played Samson opposite Hedy Lamar in the movie, *Samson and Delilah*.

EZRA (mulling it)
Victor Mature played the part of Samson?

SILAS
Did a heck of a job too. Had a fuller head of hair than Hedy had. Until she took up barbarin' of course. She hacked it all off and left him weak as a kitten. Then the Philistines blinded him on top of that.

EZRA
I think I got the notion of it kinda screwed up in my mind. Maybe--maybe you could explain it to me.

SILAS
Maturity?

EZRA
Yessir.

SILAS
Fact is, it's not all that easy to explain. It's not even the kinda thing you can tell someone anyhow; it's somethin' you have to git for yourself, and when you do git it, believe me, you'll know.

EZRA
You mean it has somethin' to do with Zen?

SILAS
No, believe me, Zen's got nothin' whatsoever to do with it.

EZRA
Well, where do I go to git it, and how will I know whether I got it or not?

SILAS
Actually, it's more a case of it gittin' you. And when it does, you just *know*.

EZRA

Then it *is* like Zen!

SILAS

No, it ain't nothin' like Zen! It's more like--like fruit ripenin', an apple say. You know how it is, they start out as a bud, then--

EZRA

Oh no, don't even start with the apple story, Silas. Doc already tried that on me, and I still didn't git it.

SILAS (reflectively)

I didn't either, at the time. (A beat.) You know, if he'd told me that story with *peaches*, I think it might have made more sense.

EZRA

Yeah, me too. 'Least peaches got a little fuzz.

SILAS

Ezra, do you know what a--a metamorphosis is?

EZRA

A what?

SILAS

I didn't reckon you did. (A beat.) Well, a metamorphosis, you see, is a . . . process of change from one thing into another. It's what happens to a caterpillar as it changes into a beautiful butterfly. (A beat.) Now, the exact same thing is happenin' to you at this very moment.

EZRA (doubtfully)

It is? (A beat.) I have been feelin' kinda strange.

SILAS

I don't mean to say that *you* are going to change into a butterfly! You didn't think that, did you?

EZRA

'Course not!

SILAS

Okay, so don't misunderstand me. But what's happenin' to you is the same thing that happens to the butterfly. A change, you see, is takin' place inside your body.

EZRA

Is--is this what you call a--a--*change of life*?

SILAS

Now where'd you hear 'bout that?

EZRA

Locker room.

SILAS

I thought so. Well, this is *a* change of life, yeah, but it's not *that* change of life. The difference here being that when you finish this--metamorphosis I was tellin' you about, you'll be able to have a baby. And when you finish the other, you won't, if you went through the other, which you don't.

(Ezra is totally bewildered by all this.)

SILAS

Ezra, again, now don't git confused. You, personally, won't be able to have a baby; women--females--have babies--

EZRA

After they've gone through the change of life!

SILAS

No . . . before.

EZRA

Oh. (A beat.) But didn't you jist say--

SILAS

Nevermind that. What I'm tryin' to tell you now . . . is that when you're mature, have completed your metamorphosis, you'll be able to make girls--*females*--have babies.

EZRA

I don't wanna make anybody do anything!

SILAS

Well, you will!

EZRA

Bet I don't.

SILAS

Ezra, there's somethin' here that you jist don't understand.

EZRA

Well, explain it to me for cryin' out loud!

SILAS

I'm *tryin'*! (A few beats.) Remember last Spring when that Holstein of Joe Levy's was calvin'?

EZRA

Is that what she was doin'?

SILAS

That's what you *call* what she was doin'.

EZRA

Yessir, I recall that.

SILAS

Well, what'd you think of that?

EZRA (thinks, then)

It was kinda disgustin' actually. But I was real curious 'bout it.

SILAS

Were you now? How's that?

EZRA

Well, I was curious 'bout . . . 'bout how fast that calf was goin' when he hit.

(Silas stares at the boy incredulously, then suddenly burst in a fit of wild laughter.)

SILAS

How--how fast he was goin' when he hit!? Great God Almighty, Son! Where'd you ever git a notion like that? How fast he was goin' when he hit! You mean you thought that calf ran up that--(Stops suddenly and takes a huge gulp of air.) Goddamn, Ez, are you serious?

EZRA (woodenly)

How *did* that calf git in there?

SILAS

Well, sir, now that's a very interesting story.

EZRA

I love a good story.

SILAS

I know you do. (A beat.) What'd you think: One fine mornin' Miss Cow wakes up, blinks at the morning sun, and there standin' right next to her is a new calf?

EZRA

I didn't know what to think. I jist acted like I knew what was goin' on at Joe's 'cause I didn't want to look like an idiot.

SILAS (putting his arm around Ezra)

Now, Son, surely you must of heard somethin' about . . . sex in school. Don't you boys talk about it in the locker room?

EZRA

Well . . . sure we do, but . . . what's sex got to do with cows?

SILAS

What cows have got to do with sex, Ezra, is *how* the little calf gits into the mother cow. Okay?

EZRA

Okay.

SILAS

Okay. So . . . did you ever notice that cows, that is *bulls--male* cows, cattle--have testicles?

EZRA

Huh?

SILAS

Testicles! Bulls have testicles.

EZRA

Where? I never saw'em.

SILAS (lowers his voice)

They keep'em in a bag--the--the . . . scrotum.

EZRA

In a bag! What good are they in a bag? Can't catch nothin' with'em in a bag, that's for sure.

SILAS

Now, what are you talkin' about? You can't catch anything with testicles anyhow!

EZRA

'Course not, if you keep'em in a bag. But boy those octopuses can sure catch stuff with'em.

SILAS

Octopuses? *Octopuses!* Son, those are tentacles, not testicles. I'm talkin' about . . . *balls!*

EZRA

Balls! Well, why didn't you say so? I know bulls got balls.

SILAS

The scientific name is testicles--testes. Okay?

EZRA

You don't havta git technical.

SILAS

Sorry . . . so, all male cattle have testicles . . . no, I take that back, jist bulls.

EZRA

Aren't all male cows bulls?

SILAS

Well, yeah, to begin with, but in some cases, bulls have their testicles . . . removed, and that makes 'em what we call steers.

EZRA(enthusiastically)

I know all 'bout that. Some bulls have been . . . circumcised, right. Jist like I was . . . or somethin' like that.

SILAS

No, Ezra, that's somethin' completely different. Bulls don't need to be circumcised.

EZRA

But people do?

SILAS

Some, yeah.

EZRA

Why jist some? Why not everybody?

SILAS

Because . . . because of their religious beliefs.

EZRA

'Cause of their religious beliefs? Poo! Why, they did it to me when I was a baby; I didn't *have* any religious beliefs.

SILAS

No, no, Son, you don't understand. It's your parents' religious beliefs. It's a religious rite.

EZRA

Sounds like a religious wrong to me. You mean to tell me that Buddhists and Humanists believe in circumcision?

SILAS

That's *not* what I mean!

EZRA

Then why was *I* circumcised?

SILAS

Probably because you were delivered by a Jewish doctor.

EZRA

Delivered! I was *delivered* to San Francisco?

SILAS

Jesus! Son, you are drivin' me right square out of my mind.

EZRA

Preacher says that Jesus--*delivered* us from evil, from . . . the den of iniquity. Do Jewish doctors do that too, deliver us from evil through the religious rite of circumcision? (SILAS just shakes his head incredulously.) Jesus was Jewish, right? And a doctor too, 'cause he went around healin' all the sick people all the time and deliverin'em from evil. So maybe he did a few circumcsions on the side, huh? Huh?

SILAS

Ezra, I'm tryin' my best to explain to you as best I can how the calf got in the cow, and you're tellin' me that Jesus was a Jewish doctor who went around deliverin' people from the den of iniquity and performin' circumcsions.

EZRA (carefully)

It's jist a theory.

SILAS

Yeah, well that's just what Mr. Einstein said about relativity. Let's jist forget Jesus for the time bein' and concentrate on how the calf got into mother cow, okay? (EZRA nods.) So . . . we were talkin' about bulls--

EZRA

Balls!

SILAS

Right . . . bulls balls. And we established the fact that you are aware of the fact that bulls do, in fact, have balls.

EZRA

Yessir. The technical name is testicles. We did establish that fact.

SILAS

Well, good, because that's where the calf is . . . more or less, in the bull's testicles--balls.

EZRA (confused)

Not the calf I saw. Wouldn't fit.

SILAS

Hang on there, Ezra. I'm not through. The whole thing isn't in there, you see.

EZRA

No?

SILAS

No.

EZRA

How much is?

SILAS

Half.

EZRA

Half?

SILAS

Not exactly a whole half, you see. Most of the other half is in the mother cow.

EZRA

Other half!?

SILAS

That is to say that the *egg* is in the mother cow.

EZRA

The *egg*! I'm not stupid, Silas. Cows don't have eggs. Birds got eggs, and--and--alligators, and chickens, but not cows! That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. Now I want the truth!

(Silas suddenly storms off the porch.)

EZRA

Hey, Si, wait a minute. It's okay if cows got eggs. I believe you; I jist never saw one. Where--where do they lay'em. Si, Si! Who's gonna tell me this stuff? How will I ever git mature unless someone tells me how to do it?

(The back door swings open suddenly and SILAS tosses a dictionary out.)

SILAS

Look it up.

(Ezra begins thumbing through the dictionary, then stops and reads aloud.)

EZRA (reading)

Mature: Having undergone maturation. (Thinks, then.) That's real helpful. (Thumbs through the book again, then reads.) **Maturation:** (1) The last level of differentiation of tissues, organs, or cells. (2) The process in which diploid gonocytes are transmogrified into haploid gametes that includes meiosis and psysiological and structural changes fitting the gamete for its final role in development. (3) The process of becoming mature. (Thinks, then.) Hey, Silas!

SILAS (voice)

What!

EZRA

Was . . . Victor Mature?

SILAS

Shut up!

(LIGHTS COME DOWN on EZRA and COME UP on HILDA playing and singing *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. As she plays, LIGHTS COME UP on PREACHER in his study, sitting in his rocker. He is studying the

Bible and taking notes, preparing a sermon. The shotgun is close at hand. LIGHTS FADE on HILDA and she finishes the hymn. As Preacher practices his sermon three of Ezra's friends--PHIL VANDAVER, OGDEN BURGATROID, and ALAN PERKINS--can be seen peering through an upstage window.)

PREACHER

The Laud, says, "Blessed be the peacemakers for they shall *see* God." And I say are *we* not the peacemakers, we, the *Holy Many* who so valiantly carried the Cross of Jesus and flag of freedom to Europe, to Japan, to China, and more recently to Korea? And shall we not see God for our trouble? Indeed we shall see Him so long as we believe and accept his Holy word and allow the precious blood of Jesus Christ to wash away our sins.

(PREACHER repeats his sermon again, this time with a different emphasis.)

PREACHER

The Laud, says, "Blessed be the peacemakers . . . for *they* shall see God." And I say to you brethern . . .

(OGDEN, PHIL and ALAN suddenly rush in and jump Preacher. A violent struggle takes place during which the shotgun is discharged into the ceiling. Action freezes momentarily in the study as the LIGHTS come up on EZRA in the STEEPLE. He jumps off the cot and starts listening. Then the fights continues below with the three boys beginning to get the best of Preacher. Alan gets caught inside a loop as Ogden begins to tie Preacher to a chair.)

ALAN

Dammit, Ogden! You got me tied up with Preacher.

OGDEN

Damned if I don't. Excuse me, Preacher.

PHIL

Alan, git outta there!

ALAN

I'm tryin'!

PREACHER

Damn you boys. You've got *no* idea what you're gittin' yourselves into.

ALAN

We're gittin' our good buddy, Ezra, outta somethin'.

PREACHER

Like hell you are! I'll have every last one of your hides on a fencepost. The Laud's wrath is gonna come down on you like hard rain.

PHIL

Somebody shut him up. I'll look for the key to the steeple.

(Ogden takes a bandana from his pocket and gags Preacher who continues struggling to free himself while swearing a blue streak.)

OGDEN

Now, Preacher, the Laud don't wanna hear that kinda talk, especially coming from a preacher.

(They stand back, admiring their handiwork.)

PHIL

Good job, boys. Now, let's go rescue our good buddy, Ezra.

OGDEN

Preacher, I'm leavin' this Bible here open to that part 'bout blessin' those who persecute you and all. Now you study that real hard. And--and right here, 'bout forgivin' people their transgressions . . . think about it.

PHIL

Come on, Ogden!

ALAN

Did you find the key?

PHIL

No, but I'll think of somethin'. Let's go!

(With Preacher still sturggling in the chair, the three of them rush up the steps to the steeple. EZRA is listening at the door when they stop outside his room.)

Ezra? PHIL

Phil? EZRA

Ezra? PHIL

Phil? EZRA

Stop it! ALAN

Yeah, it's me and Alan and Ogden. PHIL

What's goin' on? Did I hear a shot? EZRA

Sure as hell did, but nobody's hurt. OGDEN

We've come to rescue ya . . . from the grip of unholy matrimony. ALAN

Listen, Ezra, do you know where Preacher keeps the key to this door? PHIL

Oh, yeah, that's the first thing he told me. EZRA

Don't be a smartass or we'll leave you to your fate. PHIL

Roseabeth's not such a bad fate. OGDEN

Then *you* marry'er, Ogden. EZRA

I mean for one night. OGDEN

EZRA

Okay then.

PHIL

Now, Ezra, you're gonna havta tell us what happened last night after you left the prom 'cause this rescue is predicated on the assumption that whatever did happen was of a serious enough nature for Preacher to insist on you exchangin' nuptial vows with Roseabeth whether you want to or not.

EZRA

He could be right.

PHIL

Can we assume then that you performed sexual intercourse with Roseabeth?

ALAN

Don't get technical, you'll just confuse 'em.

EZRA

I know what he's talkin' about, Alan!

OGDEN (frankly)

Ezra, did you *screw* Roseabeth?

EZRA (thinks, then)

Maybe.

PHIL

What the hell does that mean?

EZRA

That I'm not certain whether I did or not.

OGDEN

If he ain't certain, he didn't!

EZRA

Oh, Ogden you wouldn't know! Besides, how can I be certain 'bout somethin' I'd never done before? Somebody better go check on Preacher.

ALAN

Preacher's tied up real good. Don't change the subject.

EZRA

Does it make any difference whether I screwed'er or not?

PHIL

Ezra, it makes all the difference in the world! 'Cause if you *didn't*, Preacher can't force you to marry Roseabeth.

ALAN

This ain't the dark ages. He hadn't ought to havta marry'er anyhow.

OGDEN

Unless she's pregnant.

PHIL

Ezra . . . did Roseabeth--cooperate with you, more or less?

EZRA

Yeah, I'd say she did . . . more or less.

PHIL

Which?

EZRA

More, I'd say.

OGDEN

All right! So you screwed'er with her permission.

EZRA

She didn't gimme a note or anything.

PHIL

Well, did she say anything?

EZRA

Yeah, she said . . . "Please don't stop," at one point. So I didn't. I don't know how she meant it.

PHIL (skeptically)

I though you said she cooperated?

EZRA

I said I thought that's what she was doin' Then we reached a point where cooperatin' by either of us was beside the point.

The point of no return!

OGDEN (dramatically)

Ezra, did you ever propose to Roseabeth?

PHIL

Not marriage.

EZRA

Hang on, Ez.

PHIL

(Phil huddles together with his two pals and they whisper among themselves as Ezra listens at the door. Having come to some conclusion Phil nods and the huddle breaks apart)

Ezra, what method of birth control did you use?

PHIL

Gravity?

EZRA (thinks, then)

Jeeze! Ezra, you obviously don't realize the gravity of the situation here.

PHIL

Tell me some more, and I'll tell you if I used 'em.

EZRA

Abstinence?

ALAN

Nope, didn't use that one.

EZRA

Rubbers?

OGDEN

Wasn't rainin'.

EZRA

Dammit, Ezra, this is *serious*!

PHIL

ALAN (guessing)
Withdrawal?

EZRA
Maybe.

PHIL
How 'bout the rhythm method?

EZRA
The *what*?

PHIL
Listen, Ezra, when did Rosabeth last have a--a headache?

EZRA
She's probably got one this morning.

PHIL
No, dammit, it doesn't work unless she has it *beforehand*.

ALAN
It don't work anyway. I'm Catholic and I got 11 brothers and sisters to prove it.

PHIL
Ezra, what we're tryin' to establish here is when Roseabeth last had her period.

EZRA
Now how would I know 'bout somethin' like that?

PHIL
'Cause she's your steady. Think about it: Is there any particular time of the month when Roseabeth is hard to git along with?

EZRA
Roseabeth is *always* hard to git along with, but I thought it was 'cause she was a Baptist.

ALAN
Think, Ezra. Think!

EZRA (reflects, then)
Sometimes . . . Roseabeth is easier to git along with. 'Cause she gits all silly, and she's alway rushin' off to the bathroom and gigglin' like she'd got this huge secret. I never did understand it.

PHIL
That's *it*!

EZRA
That's what?

PHIL
When did Roseabeth last act like that, Ezra? Exactly when?

EZRA
Most of last week. I jist figured it was 'cause of the prom.

PHIL
And when did she become her normal domineerin' self again?

EZRA
Day before the prom. Thursday.

THE THREE
Yahoo!

PHIL
Ezra, you are saved my boy.

EZRA
I am?

PHIL
'Course you are! 'Cause if she jist finished her period on Thursday, she couldn't have ovulated by Friday, so it's *impossible* for her to be pregnant, even if you *did* screw'er.

EZRA
Boy, I wish I'd been a doctor's kid.

(From below in Preacher's study there suddenly comes mighty roar, and the LIGHTS COME UP on PREACHER as he releases himself, grabs his shotgun and starts up the stairs. The boys above are all frozen.)

ALAN
I don't like the sounds of that.

EZRA
What's goin' on?

OGDEN
Sounds like Preacher's loose.

EZRA
Has he got his shotgun?

PHIL
Is this the house of the Lord?

(PREACHER is suddenly there.)

PREACHER
Don't none of you boys move so much as an inch or you're all gonna dwell in the house of the Laud forever, if you know what I mean.

ALAN
We got the picture.

PREACHER
Ezra, I hope to hell you're in there, 'cause if you ain't I'll consider you fair game. After what you done to my angel, there no place for you to hide from the Laud's will.

EZRA
I'm here, Preacher, thankin' my lucky stars and stripes forever that I live in a free country.

PREACHER
It ain't, evidently, as free as you think it is.

EZRA
My point exactly.

PREACHER
Now you boys jist git on outta here 'cause your friend Ezra ain't got plans to go nowhere. That right, boy?

EZRA
Not till my honeymoon.

PREACHER
Now ain't that nice? (Silence.) Ain't it!

THE THREE
Yeah! Oh sure. Great!

PREACHER

Ezra thinkin' 'bout his honeymoon and a full life of domestic tranquility. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife."

EZRA

Proverbs, Chapter 16, second verse?

PREACHER

Genesis, Chapter 2, 24th verse.

EZRA

Damn! I was close..

PREACHER

Ezra, the only thing you is close to is hell. And as for you boys, I don't want to see you 'round here again until the weddin'. Now git!

(Phil, Ogden, and Alan rush down the steps, stumbling over each other.)

OGDEN

Best of luck to you and Roseabeth, Ezra!

PHIL

Have a wonderful life, Ez!

ALAN

All the best, Ez!

EZRA

Ain't commitment to a cause a wonderful thing, Preacher?

PREACHER

Ain't it though. (A beat.) Boy?

EZRA

Yessir?

PREACHER

You jist think 'bout committin' yourself to Roseabeth. And think 'bout what you done. Ask yourself if you'd run out on her now, if you did have the chance, which you ain't gonna git. You think 'bout that, you hear?

(PREACHER exits down the stairs as EZRA moves into a POOL of LIGHT in the center of the steeple.)

EZRA

Think about it is what'd I'd been doin' for years. The preacher and the preacher's daughter. Religion on one hand, sex on the other. The mystical union that exists between Christ and His church. The love of God and the hate exhibited against my mom by all these "good" people. I dunno how I got it all so screwed up--circumcision, baptism, birth control, immaculate conceptions, rebirth, eatin' flesh and drinkin' blood--Jesus! This actually isn't the first time that knowin' too much about religion and not enough about sex almost ruined me. I was 'bout 14 at the time, lying in bed, readin', mindin' my own business when Silas called me.

SILAS

Ezra!

(LIGHTS come up on SILAS seated at a table on the MIANSTAGE; he is writing in a legal pad. EZRA, 14 now, enters a little hesitantly.)

SILAS

Hello, son.

EZRA

Hi, Silas.

SILAS

Come on in, but keep it quiet. Your mother's feelin' kinda low--headache or somethin'. What are you up to?

EZRA (skeptically)

Readin'. (A beat.) Why?

SILAS

Boy, if aren't the suspicious one. (A beat.) I got a little errand I want you to do for me. I'd do it myself, but I got a few dishes here to wash up.

EZRA (impulsively)

I'll do'em!

SILAS

And the errand?

EZRA
No, instead of.

SILAS
I'll do'em. No trouble at all. (A beat.) Ezra, how old are you now?

EZRA
Fourteen . . . almost.

SILAS (reflectively)
Fourteen.

EZRA
Almost.

SILAS
Almost. (A beat.) Well, I reckon that's old enough. I'm gonna be frank, son, no beatin' 'round the ole bush, if you know what I mean?

EZRA
Yeah, I know. We been 'round it a few times.

SILAS
Son, do you know--what a--what a--sanitary napkin is?

with (Ezra show some obvious signs of discomfort this line of questioning.)

EZRA
I don't like the sound of this one bit.

SILAS
Do ya know?

EZRA (nervously)
Is that one that's never been used? Fresh outta the package?

SILAS
You aren't even close. (A beat.) How 'bout a--a--tampon? You know what that is?

EZRA
I know what they *look like*.

SILAS
How's that?

EZRA

Oh, they're 'bout yea long and they go this little string that--

SILAS

I know what they look like! I want to know how you know.

EZRA

No you don't.

SILAS

I'll take your word for it. Jist git yourself down to Yeager's and git me a box of'em.

EZRA

Tampons! You want me to go down to Yeager's and git you a box of tampons?

SILAS

Yeah, one box.

EZRA

I ain't *hardly* gonna git you any tampons, Silas!

SILAS

It's no big deal.

EZRA

Then *you* git'em!

SILAS

I'm not gonna git'em! Now here's a couple of bucks. Git goin'.

(LIGHTS DIM IN KITCHEN and COME UP DOWN STAGE WITH A SPOT FORMING A POOL OF LIGHT that EZRA enters. He kicks an empty beer can on the STREET.)

EZRA

Life is kinda cruel to kids sometimes, most of the time. I mean I don't mind doin' a good deed now and again, but they always seem to have a way of turning on you. Like that time I took up for Alan; Jason's been after me every since. And look at Jesus! Did nothin' but good all his life, except for maybe those years when he was--*maturing*--we don't know jist what he was up to then, and look what happened to him.

(LIGHTS FADE on EZRA and COME UP STAGE RIGHT in a DRUGSTORE.

ROSEABETH, at 15, is sitting in a booth, sipping a cherry-limeade. HILDA FARTOK is at the cosmetics counter, talking with FRANCIS YEAGER. EZRA tries to enter without being noticed. (Hilda spots him.)

HILDA

Why, hello there, Ezra. Looky who's here Roseabeth, Francis--Ezra Casey his ownself.

FRANCIS

Hello, Ezra. How's your mom?

HILDA

Why has your mom not been well, Ezra? I saw'er jist yesterday, and she looked jist fine, I think. With her colorin', it's a little hard to tell whether she's well or not.

EZRA (irritated)

It's when she's *white* that she don't feel so good.

HILDA

Oh . . . well, I jist thought--

EZRA

She's jist got a little headache of somethin'.

HILDA

Well, that's good. Lord knows there's enough sufferin' goin' on in this world.

EZRA

I reckon if anybody would know, He would.

ROSEABETH

Hey, Ezra, ain't you gonna speak to me?

EZRA

Hi Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH

Don't you over do it now.

EZRA

Can't talk right now, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH

Who said anythin' 'bout a talk?

(UPSTAGE a SIGN reading "Feminine Hygiene" is ILLUMINATED at the end of a AISLE OF WOMEN'S products. Ezra stops and stares down the aisle, bewildered and hesitant to enter this "no mans land." He finally enters. FRANCIS YEAGER comes up behind him after a moment.)

FRANCIS

Can I help you find somethin', Ezra?

EZRA (surprised)

Jesus! Oh, . . . Mrs. Yeager, it's you. What?

FRANCIS

Can I help you?

EZRA

Oh, no, no ma'am. I--I'm jist--lookin'.

FRANCIS

I can see that you are. For anythin' in particular?

EZRA

Ah . . . gift!

FRANCIS (skeptically)

A gift?

EZRA

Ah--for Silas!

FRANCIS (not buying it)

A gift for Silas . . . I see--

(She turns and walks away shaking her head, genuinely puzzled. Ezra impulsively grabs a box of tampons off the shelf, stuffs the box under his shirt and lays two dollars on the shelf. Then he begins to leave, sort of sidestepping his way out with his back to the three women. Roseabeth watches him curiously.)

Ezra?
Still can't talk, Roseabeth.
Why are you walkin' like that?
Like what?
Like this.
Roseabeth!
What!

(The others are watching them now.
Roseabeth notices the bulge under his shirt.)
ROSEABETH (pointing)
What's that, Ezra?
What's what?
That!
Oh . . . that? (A beat.) It's--nothin'.
Ezra, what *is* that under your shirt?
Ma'am, believe me, you don't wanna know.
I'll be the judge of that.

ROSEABETH

EZRA

ROSEABETH

EZRA

ROSEABETH (imitating his walk)

EZRA (straining)

ROSEABETH (clueless)

ROSEABETH (pointing)

EZRA

ROSEABETH (tapping the box)

EZRA

FRANCIS (approaches with Hilda)

EZRA (beaten)

FRANCIS

EZRA (frankly)
 Tampons, ma'am. A box of tampons!

ROSEABETH (Hilda begins to wheeze)
 Ezra, what in tarnation!

FRANCIS
 Roseabeth, go git your father!

(Roseabeth hurries off.)

FRANCIS
 And as for you, Ezra Casey. I will not stand here and be lied to by a--a--common thief!
 Now what do you have there?

EZRA
 It's no lie. I am stealing tampons! But I'm not really stealing 'em, you see.

(Ezra lifts his shirt and the tampons fallout.)

HILDA (dropping to her knees, faint)
 Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness!

FRANCIS
 Ahhh! Somebody git the constable! Ezra Casey has done the most *awful* thing!

(LIGHTS fade on the scene and COME UP in KITCHEN where EZRA joins SILAS and DOC, sitting around the kitchen table.)

DOC
 Son, what in the world were you doing stealing' a box of tampons?

EZRA (defensively)
 I was doin' it for Silas!

DOC
 For Silas? (To Silas.) My God, what kind of father--

SILAS
 Uncle!

DOC
 What kind of uncle--

EZRA

Step-father!

DOC

It doesn't matter! What kind of a person sends a *boy*, out to do a man's job.

SILAS

It's not a *man's* job! It's a woman's. They were for *Mariko*. She's got . . . the headache.

DOC

Then why didn't you have him steal some aspirin?

EZRA

I wouldn't of stolen aspirin.

SILAS

It's not *really* a headache, Doc! She . . . you know?

DOC (thinks, then)

Oh . . . *oooh*, well, yeah. That does make a difference. But . . . why did you *steal* them, Ezra?

EZRA

Because it's not a man's job, that's why! (A beat.) I didn't steal 'em anyway; I threw the money on the shelf. I tried to tell 'er, but she got all hysterical on me. Then Hilda fainted! And Roseabeth ran off to git Preacher. It wasn't a pretty sight.

DOC

I can see that it wasn't. (A beat.) Silas, you go back down and straighten things out with Mrs. Yeager. She ought to be calmed down by now. I'll stay here with Ezra.

SILAS

I'll stay here with Ezra. *You* straighten it out!

DOC

Oh no, this is *your* headache.

SILAS

No it isn't. It's Mariko's.

EZRA

It ain't a *headache*!

DOC

Let's send Mariko down . . . when she's feeling better. She'll straighten it out.

SILAS

Good idea. Besides, she's the one with the headache.

(Ezra just shakes his head as the LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY. As HILDA starts playing *My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less Than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, the LIGHTS COME UP on her at the piano. Ezra returns to the steeple and sits down on the cot. When Hilda finishes the first stanza of the hymn, LIGHTS FADE on her and COME UP in the steeple.)

EZRA

I'm not a Baptist, freewill or otherwise, but I'm often mistaken for one. That's my fault; I spend a good bit of my spare time in the company of Roseabeth, and I've occasionally attended regular services and revival meetings at the Baptist meetin' house. And once, briefly, I attended a Baptist Church Camp over in Devil's Canyon. I say briefly 'cause I got thrown out on the third day after my arrival for committin' heresy and blasphemy. (EZRA gets up and starts pacing.) From the moment you got there, preachers was harpin' on you 'bout seeing God. And 'bout everybody there had seen 'em out there in nature at one time or another. Since I never had, they were on me 'bout it most of the time. One kid said God was a tree; another said he saw'em up in the clouds; somebody said he was in the lake, and the preachers said he was in all those places at once. Didn't make much since to me. Anyway, by the third day, I was gittin' kinda desperate to see'em, but I'd 'bout given up on it. Jist when I'd 'bout given up on the whole idea, it happened--a miracle. I'd forgotten my Bible for evening vespers and had to go back to my cabin by myself to git it. When I got back to my cabin, it was nearly dark, and I . . . felt the presence of somethin' there in the cabin. Then I heard somethin'. I figured it was God all right, right there in my cabin all the time. I looked around and finally saw something--two beady eyes staring out at me from under my bunk. Then He made a sort of grunting noise. I was ever so happy, but I had to git my Bible so I switched on the light. That's when He went scurrying away, right through a hole in the wall. I think the light scared'em. I couldn't wait to tell my friends, so I went rushing down to the chapel where Preacher was conductin' services.

(LIGHTS COME UP on the MAIN STAGE where ROSEABETH, OGDEN, PHIL and ALLEN are seated on a simple bench. PREACHER is standing in front of them, praying.)

PREACHER

. . . and bless us our Heavenly Father for without Thy guidance--

EZRA (running in)

Preacher! Preacher! I saw'em.

PREACHER (irritated)

What is it, son? Can't you see we're prayin' here?

EZRA

No--yeah, but . . . this is important. I--I saw . . . *Him!*

PREACHER

You saw the light, son?

EZRA

The light? No! He saw the light.

PREACHER (confused)

He?

EZRA

God!

PREACHER

You saw the light of God?

EZRA

No, I mean, yeah, I saw God. We *both* saw the light; that's when He lit out. It's jist this naked bulb with a pull-chain.

PREACHER

Son, you saw God, you say.

EZRA

That's what I'm tryin' to tell you!

PREACHER (tucking Ezra under his arm)

That's wonderful, son. Hear that boys and girls: Ezra has finally seen God here in the wilderness.

EZRA

He was actually in my cabin.

PREACHER

Share you enlightenment with us, Ezra.

EZRA

I don't understand what the light has to do with it.

PREACHER

Jist tell us 'bout it, Ezra.

EZRA

Well, I'd gone back for my Bible; it was on the shelf over my bunk, but I plum forgot it in the excitement and all. Anyway, I got back to the cabin--

PREACHER (poetically)

And there in the majestic purple haze of the canyon wall--you saw *Him*.

EZRA

No sir.

PREACHER

Then in the sun-drenched western sky?

EZRA

Huh?

PREACHER

Where *did* you see'em, son?

EZRA

He was--ah--in my cabin, number seven, down by the showers.

PREACHER

I know where your cabin is, son.

EZRA

So does He. 'Cause that's where He was--in my cabin--number seven, under my bunk.

(This revelation pretty much breaks up the sanctity of the evening vespers.)

PREACHER

Quiet down out there now! Where was it again you saw Him, son?

EZRA

He was under my bunk, peakin' out at me, and . . . kinda pantin'.

PREACHER (skeptically)
Pantin', you say?

Yessir, kinda like--hah, hah, hah, hah.

EZRA

Like a dog?

PREACHER

No, sir. Like a . . . woodchuck.

EZRA

PREACHER
You *sure* you didn't see Him out there in the woods somewhere?

EZRA

No sir. I mean, yessir, I'm sure I didn't. He was in my cabin all right, number seven. But He's probably in the woods *now*. Like I said, He ran off when He saw the light.

When *He* saw the light?

PREACHER

Yessir.

EZRA

Ran off you say?

PREACHER

Yessir. Went right through a hole in the wall.

EZRA

(This revelation shoots the service all to hell.)

PREACHER
Let me remind you out there: this is the house of God, same as any church. Now settle down. (Thinks, then to EZRA.) Son, in what manifestation did God reveal Himself to you?

PREACHER

Huh?

EZRA

What did God look like?

PREACHER

Oh, well . . . I jist got a glimpse of'em.

EZRA (thinks, then evasively)

Yes? And?

PREACHER

A woodchuck.

EZRA (mumbles)

Speak up, son.

PREACHER

A woodchuck. He looked like a good size woodchuck.

EZRA

Are you tellin' me that God revealed himself to you in the form of a--*woodchuck*?

PREACHER (irritated)

Yessir. But this was no ordinary woodchuck; he was *good* size. A woodchuck to behold. A woodchuck of Divine proportions, I can tell you! There no tellin' how much wood this woodchuck could chuck if this woodchuck could chuck--

EZRA

Get out!

PREACHER

What? But it's the God-awful truth! If He can be a bird or a tree or the sky, why can't He be a woodchuck? Goddamn!

EZRA

(LIGHTS COME DOWN momentarily. Then EZRA walks DOWN STAGE INTO A POOL OF SOFT LIGHT. As he speaks the scene behind him becomes that of a old fashioned tent meeting. HILDA is playing *There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood*. Ezra's friends, are joined on stage by MAGNUS RATTER sitting behind Ezra, and all the other PLAYERS, acting as members of the congregation. PREACHER is standing before a makeshift pulpit. A stand with a bowl of Holy water is next to the pulpit.)

EZRA

My next run-in with the Lord and Preacher was at a revival meetin' not long after I'd gotten booted outta church camp. 'Bout everyone in town was there, and Preacher was intent on savin' every last one of us sinners, especially me, whether we needed it or not.

(LIGHTS COME UP on PREACHER as EZRA finds a place to sit with his friends.)

PREACHER (preaching)

I contend that we have too many thinkers and not enough believers, too much doubt and not enough blind faith. Mind you I'm talkin' faith in God, not faith in science, faith in the

PREACHER (continuing)

Word, not in technology. Science never saved a soul, brethren. Only God, through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ can snatch our souls from everlastin' hell fire and damnation. Join me now you sinners. Come with me now to accept the lovin' mercy of Jesus Christ; let the blood of the lamb wash away your sins. If you never been saved, then now is the hour. If you been saved but have strayed from the flock, then come again now to receive the savin' grace of the Lord. Hilda.

(HILDA nods and starts playing *Just As I Am* softly on the piano.)

PREACHER

Come now brethren. The Lord's blessin' is waitin'.

(A woman starts forward.)

OGDEN (to Ezra)

There goes, Fanny.

PHIL

Jist like clockwork.

OGDEN

Last week the Methodists saved 'er. Guess an ole whore can't be too careful.

ROSEABETH

Shhh!

PREACHER

Don't be afraid sinners! Don't turn away from God.

(Roseabeth goes up.)

OGDEN

Let's go Ezra.

Up there? What for?

EZRA

To git saved from our sins.

OGDEN

I hadn't done anythin' that serious.

EZRA

Then you need to be saved from original sin.

OGDEN

Jesus already paid my dues for that one.

EZRA

Well, Roseabeth is up there!

OGDEN

That's *her* business. Besides, if I go up there too, Preacher's gonna wonder what we been doin' that we both need to git saved from.

EZRA

Ezra, even if you ain't done nothin', you need to git saved in case you do.

OGDEN

You mean you can do it ahead of time.

EZRA

You bet. Says so, right in the Bible.

OGDEN

Well, I'm gittin'outta here.

EZRA (getting up)

(As Ezra slides out of the "pew", MAGNUS RATTER intercepts him, clamps an arm down on his wrist and forces him to the front.)

PREACHER (seeing Ezra)

Laud! Laud! Glory be on high! Look what the Laud hath delivered unto us this day.

EZRA

Magnus Ratter done it! Turn loose a me, Magnus.

PREACHER

Glory be! From the house of heathens and infidels doth this boy come to receive the Laud.

EZRA

Wait a minute!

PREACHER

Come he to the altar of the Laud to acknowledge his manifold sins and be saved by the precious blood of the lamb.

EZRA

I don't want any blood shed on my account..

PREACHER (opens Holywater)

You been baptized, boy?

EZRA

No, but I been circumcised.

PREACHER

That don't count for nothin' here. Do you know that if you was to die at this moment, you'd go straight to hell?

EZRA

Without passin' go?

PREACHER

This ain't no jokin' matter, boy. I'm talkin' hell fire and eternal sufferin'. I'm talkin' damnation; I'm talkin' an eternity of unendurable pain.

EZRA

What of I done to deserve that?

PREACHER

You don't have to do nothin', boy. You can go to hell for what you don't do jist the same as for what you do do.

EZRA

Do do?

PREACHER

Dammit, boy, I aim to save you, but you're sure makin' it difficult.

EZRA

Then lemme go! I'll go do somethin' I need to be save for and come back another time. That way if I don't git saved in time, 'least I won't be goin' to hell for no good reason.

ROSEABETH

Ezra, you don't *havta* go to hell!

EZRA

I think I might prefer it.

PREACHER

No, no! You must be born again.

EZRA

Again! I'm still tryin' to figure out what happened the first time. Now turn me loose Magnus.

ROSEABETH

Ezra, we're gonna save you whether you like it or not.

EZRA (breaking free)

Well, you're gonna *havta* catch me first.

PREACHER

Boy, do you accept Jesus as your personal savior? Think of your soul, boy.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN on tent meeting.
EZRA moves into a pool of light DOWN
STAGE to deliver a monologue.)

EZRA

I actually thought 'bout my soul a lot, 'bout good and evil, mostly evil, 'cause it was by far the more interestin' of the two. Preacher said that Doc was evil, but Doc, I know, did nothin' but good all his life. And Nathan Burton, a *Deacon* at the Baptist church, shot a man *dead* in a card game. And poor Dotty Langford drowned her baby 'cause she thought God could take better care of her than she could. I don't know. Preacher said that the root of all evil was the snake and the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. I don't think that's right. I think the root of all evil came from the Crusades in the Middle Ages when *Christians* went around plunderin' and robbin' and stealin', even in Christian cities like Constantinople. Why with the Christians carryin' on like that they 'bout put Satan outta business. Lucifer had to think of all kinds of *new* evils jist to stay ahead of the Christians. That's why I thought the Crusades was the root of all evil. Worst kind of evil is evil done in the name of good. That's what Doc said.

(He pauses, thinks a moment, then continues.)

EZRA

I got a whole lot more to figure out and to tell you about girls--females as Doc calls'em--and sex. And especially 'bout Roseabeth, who I find to be a very confusin' person. Maybe it's jist me; I'll let you judge for yourself when you come back. (He looks around his "cell.") Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as Hilda plays and sings *Rescue The Perishing*. END of ACT I.)

CURTAIN

EZRA AND EVIL

by

David W. Christner

ACT II

SCENE: LIGHTS COME UP on HILDA at the piano. She begins playing *Rescue The Perishing*. After one stanza, LIGHTS FADE on Hilda and COME UP on the porch of a house. ROSEABETH and EZRA are seated in an old hanging porch swing or on the steps, sipping lemonade, holding hands and gazing at the stars, glittering in the night sky. In the background we HEAR the occasional low growl of rolling THUNDER. Now and then heat LIGHTNING illuminates the far horizon.

EZRA (awed)

Roseabeth, do you even think 'bout--'bout space and the stars, the vastness of it all, the nature of the cosmos, and what we're doing here.

ROSEABETH

What's there to think 'bout, Ezra? We're jist sittin' here drinkin' our lemonade. I was wonderin' 'bout one thing though.

EZRA

What?

ROSEABETH

Oh, 'bout whether you think I'm pretty or not?

EZRA

Roseabeth, you're 'bout the prettiest girl in Mansfield.

ROSEABETH (smile fades to a pout)

What do you mean "***bout*** the prettiest", Ezra?

EZRA (straining)

Is that what I said? "'Bout the prettiest?"

ROSEABETH (irritated)

It sure is. I heard you plain as day. Now what did you mean?

EZRA

What I meant was that you're *one of* the prettiest girls in *all* Mansfield.

ROSEABETH (curtly)

Oh, I see what you mean now--*one of*. (A beat.) Well, who do you think is prettier?

EZRA

I didn't mean to say that I thought that *anyone* was prettier than you, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH (evenly)

What *did* you mean?

EZRA

Jist that there are a number of girls in Mansfield that are all 'bout the same--all *real* pretty.

ROSEABETH

For instance?"

EZRA

Well, you, like I said, and Norma and Kathy and Heather and Patricia and Elizabeth and Fonda and . . .

ROSEABETH (irritated)

That's enough, Ezra! I git the point.

EZRA

Okay, okay. Jeeze!"

ROSEABETH (irritated)

I don't see how you can say we're all 'bout the same when some of us are tall and some short, some with blond hair and some brunette, some with freckles and some without."

EZRA (thinks, then)

I should of said *equivalent* instead of the same, Roseabeth. There are a number of girls in Mansfield who I consider to be of equivalent but not necessarily identical beauty. It's a matter of personal preference, I reckon.

ROSEABETH

And your personal preference obviously doesn't lie with brunettes!

EZRA

Of course mine lies with brunettes, Roseabeth. Otherwise, why would I be *your* steady?

ROSEABETH

Well, that is jist what I'd like to know. If Fonda was a brunette and I was a blond, you might jist as well be *her* steady!

EZRA

But you *are* a brunette, Roseabeth!

ROSEABETH

That's exactly the point I'm tryin' to make--that you would go out with *any* brunette without any regard whatsoever 'bout a girl's other characteristics.

EZRA (under his breath)

I'm beginning to see your point.

ROSEABETH

What?

EZRA

I said, I see your point.

ROSEABETH

And you of all people, Ezra Casey. I'd expect you to look beyond the mere physical aspects of a girl's beauty. I mean, do you think it matters to me that you're part Chinese?

EZRA

Japanese, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH

Whatever, and part Kiowa Indian?

EZRA

Sac! And it's actually the Irish part that causes most of the trouble.

ROSEABETH

You see, Ezra, I look beyond what you look like to what you really are.

EZRA

And jist what is that, Roseabeth?

ROSEABETH

Well, you're on the honor roll in school, class president, All-state in basketball, and you git along with 'bout everybody, 'cept Daddy, of course.

EZRA (mulling it)

You really think I'm all those things?

ROSEABETH

It's a fact, Ezra. Why, what'd you think you are?

EZRA (anxiously)

Jist a kid tryin' to make some sense outta growin' up. And half afraid to 'cause I don't much like what I see in the adult world.

ROSEABETH

What don't you like, Ezra?

EZRA

The poverty, the misery, prejudice, all the bad things.

ROSEABETH

Well all you gotta do is shut your eyes and you won't see 'em That's what I do.

EZRA

I tried that a few times, Roseabeth. But when I opened my eyes all the bad things were still there, and most of'em had gotten worse!

ROSEABETH

Daddy says that when bad things happen to people they're bein' punished for their sins.

EZRA

The people weren't sinnin' that I know of--a bunch of poor people in India washed out to sea in a typhoon.

ROSEABETH

That's 'cause they weren't Christians!

EZRA

In Italy a bunch more were buried in a earthquake, jist simple people that didn't even have the energy to be bad.

ROSEABETH

That's 'cause they weren't Protestants!

EZRA

Well, what 'bout those people in Shawnee that got hit by that tornado?

ROSEABETH

They was Presbyterians!

EZRA

And those *Baptists* in Hobart? What the heck were they doin'?

ROSEABETH

Don't you know?

EZRA

Evidently, I don't.

ROSEABETH

The preacher's wife was jist runnin' all over the place with the Choir Director, and they was the exact ones who was killed when lightin' struck the church steeple. Now if that's not bein' punished for your sins, I don't know what is.

EZRA

What about everybody else, Roseabeth? You think God would do things like that to people He don't even know?

ROSEABETH

Well, I don't reckon He'd do it to somebody He was real chummy with. It's all in the Bible, Ezra. Daddy can show you.

EZRA

Roseabeth, you should open up your mind to go along with your open heart and open Bible because none of what you jist said makes any sense.

ROSEABETH

Not to you, 'cause you question every little thing. Some of us jist accept what the Lord says in the Gospel; that makes things a lot easier. But you gotta go 'round frettin' all the time 'cause the world don't work right. You'd be a lot happier, and I might add, a whole lot better company if you'd stop frettin' and start believin'. God knows what He's doin'! Speakin' of things of a theological nature, I hope you recall that I'll be goin' off to church camp next week.

EZRA

I know that, Roseabeth. You must of told me 12 times already.

ROSEABETH

That's 'cause you're so forgetful.

EZRA

I have a great memory, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH

Of course you do, Ezra. For things like--*baseball statistics*--that are of no importance at all.

EZRA

To you.

ROSEABETH

Which is exactly my point! You don't recall anythin' that's important to me.

EZRA

Like what?

ROSEABETH

Now that's jist what I'm talking 'bout, Ezra. You don't even remember what it is that you're not supposed to forget.

(This line of reasoning has Ezra completely bewildered.)

EZRA

Well, you don't have to tell me anymore. I know you're goin' to church camp next week.

ROSEABETH (waits, then)

Is that *all*?

EZRA (carefully)

Is that all what?

ROSEABETH

Is that all you gonna say?"

EZRA (groping)

Well, Mantle hit two home runs last night, had seven RBIs.

ROSEABETH

Oh, Ezra, I don't care beans 'bout the New York Dodgers!

EZRA

Yankees!

ROSEABETH

Well, I don't care nothin' for them either. You could at least say you're gonna miss me.

EZRA

Well, *of course*, I'm gonna miss you, Roseabeth; that goes without sayin', but not until you leave. How can I miss you when you're sitting right here next to me lookin' as pretty as--

ROSEABETH

Kathy or Fonda or Elizabeth or Heather!

EZRA

That's not what I was gonna say.

ROSEABETH

Oh, Ezra, you don't havta actually miss me now, but you could at least start worrying 'bout it.

EZRA

Why should I worry 'bout it before hand?

ROSEABETH

Well I am!

EZRA

Then don't go; you've been 'bout a hundred times already. It's the same old thing year after year.

ROSEABETH

I want to go.

EZRA

You do?

ROSEABETH

Yes, I do.

EZRA

How come?

ROSEABETH

Because--because I think the separation will be good for us

EZRA

But you jist said that you're already worried 'bout missing me.

ROSEABETH

I am. And I'll miss you whether you miss me or not.

EZRA

I'll miss you, Roseabeth; you know that.

ROSEABETH

Then you come too.

EZRA

Oh no, not after what happened last year! I'm not goin' back under any circumstances. I-- I've got plenty of stuff to do here. Besides . . . I think the separation will be good for us.

ROSEABETH

What on earth do you mean by *that*?

EZRA

Jist that--that, I don't know, maybe--maybe you're right: maybe we're seeing too much of each other.

ROSEABETH

I had no idea *you* felt like that! Maybe I'll stay a month.

EZRA

Roseabeth, all I'm doin' is repeating the statement you made a second ago. I didn't mean anythin'.

ROSEABETH

And all I'm sayin' is that I had no idea that you felt that way!

EZRA(concerned)

Roseabeth, I don't know how to feel or how you want me to feel. You're the one that . . .

ROSEABETH

If I'm away a while, maybe you'll appreciate me a little more when I git home.

EZRA

Roseabeth, I appreciate you now. I jist don't . . .

ROSEABETH

Don't what?

EZRA

Understand you.

ROSEABETH

That's 'cause you spend so little time with me when I am here.

EZRA

What?!

ROSEABETH

What'd you gonna do while I'm gone, Ezra?

EZRA (guessing, desperately)

Miss you?

ROSEABETH

What else?

EZRA

Oh, jist sit around gazin' at your picture and think 'bout how easy you are to git along with.

ROSEABETH

Ezra, what are you *really* gonna do?

EZRA

Help 'round the house; play some ball, ride my bike, read, talk with Doc. Maybe I'll take in a movie or two.

ROSEABETH

Oh, I see, a movie. (A beat.) And jist *who* will you be goin' to the movies with?

EZRA

Doc, I reckon or Uncle Silas and Mariko. Maybe I'll go by my ownself.

ROSEABETH

And that's *all*?

EZRA (carefully)

What are you gittin' at, Roseabeth?

ROSEABETH

Jist that ordinarily, people don't go to the movies by themselves.

EZRA

Well then maybe I'll be goin' with some of my adolescent chums.

ROSEABETH

But not with any members of the fairer sex?

EZRA

Girls?

ROSEABETH

Yes, girls!

EZRA (rationally)

No, 'cause I'm goin' steady with you.

ROSEABETH

And if you weren't?

EZRA

Roseabeth, don't do this. Talk to me of metaphysics, the nature the universe, the chicken or the egg, Mr. Einstein's Theory of Relativity, but don't start with one of your hypothetical situations.

ROSEABETH

I'm not startin' anythin', Ezra, that you didn't already start when you implied by your silence that you'd take somebody else to the movies if you weren't goin' steady with me.

EZRA

How did I imply something by my silence?

ROSEABETH

Oh, you do it all the time, Ezra Casey!

EZRA

But, Roseabeth . . . I *am* goin' steady with you!

ROSEABETH

What difference does *that* make?

EZRA

It makes all the difference in the world 'cause as long as I'm goin' steady with you, I won't be goin' to the movies with anybody else, even if I have a notion to.

ROSEABETH

Which you so obviously do!

EZRA

Okay, Roseabeth, I'll admit that I do sometimes *wonder* what it would be like to go to the movies with somebody. But that don't mean that I'm gonna do it.

ROSEABETH

Well, then what if I said you could jist go ahead and go out with anyone you darned well pleased while I'm gone?

EZRA (suspiciously)

Well, I reckon I'd pass Roseabeth. For two weeks I figure it'd be less troublesome to do without female companionship than to go to all the trouble of gittin' used to someone new.

ROSEABETH

What do you mean exactly by *trouble*, Ezra?

EZRA

Trouble was a poor choice of words, Roseabeth. I should of said . . .

ROSEABETH

Worry?

EZRA

No!

ROSEABETH

Agony?

EZRA

Roseabeth, will you stop it? What I meant was--

ROSEABETH

"Trouble" is what you said, and I reckon trouble is jist what you meant. Now if I'm so much trouble I don't know why you bother to go out with me anyhow!

EZRA

You're not now.

ROSEABETH

But I *was*. Oh, great!

EZRA

Roseabeth, the trouble wasn't with *you*; it was with me.

ROSEABETH

I'll bet!

EZRA

Roseabeth, what I mean was that it would be a lot of trouble for me to git used to someone new. That's all.

ROSEABETH

I see. You're already--*used*--to me. And *bored*! Which is why you want to go out with somebody else.

EZRA

Roseabeth, I don't.

ROSEABETH

Well, if that's the way you feel, you jist go right ahead--maybe you're right--maybe we are seein' too much of each other. Besides, there's a good chance I'll be selected queen of the camp, and if I am, that means I'll have to go to the coronation dinner with the king, whoever he might be.

EZRA

Roseabeth, if that's what this is all about, all you had to do was say so. I don't give a hang 'bout who you go to any ole coronation dinner with.

ROSEABETH

You don't?

EZRA

No, why I'd pleased as pie for you to be queen of the camp.

ROSEABETH

And what if--what if the king had to--kiss me?

EZRA

He could do a whole lot worse.

ROSEABETH

That's not what I mean, Ezra!

EZRA

Then I don't reckon one kiss would do any harm.

ROSEABETH (thinks, then)

Oh--ooooh, I see what you're doin' plain as day now, Ezra Casey. What's good for the goose is good for the gander, huh?

EZRA
 Jeeze!

ROSEABETH
 Don't you swear at me, Ezra Casey.

EZRA
 Roseabeth, you jist go ahead and do whatever you want to do, and leave me out of it.

ROSEABETH
 Ezra, I can't leave you out of it 'cause you're my steady. All I want to do is to do what's right, what's *fair*. So, if I have to go out with the king, whoever he may be, then I thought you ought to know that I'd have no objection to you goin' out with someone while I'm gone. Isn't that fair?

EZRA (doubtfully)
 Okay, that's fair.

ROSEABETH
 But that don't mean you *havta* go out with someone.

EZRA (thinks, then)
 I know, but . . . I want to be *fair*.

ROSEABETH
 That's the most important thing--to be fair.

EZRA
 I know. 'Cause you are the fairer sex. And that's what I want to--to be fair.

ROSEABETH
 Then you *will* go out with someone?

EZRA
 If you insist, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH
 I'm not insistin', Ezra! I'm doin' nothin' of the kind.

EZRA
 But to be fair I have to. Cause if I didn't and you did, you'd probably feel real bad, now wouldn't you?

ROSEABETH

Well, of course, I would, Ezra, but--

EZRA

And I couldn't stand the thought of you feelin' all down and out on my behalf. So, to be fair, and to keep you from feelin' guilty, I reckon I'll havta go out with someone--jist to be fair.

ROSEABETH (innocently)

But what if I'm *not* selected queen?

EZRA

Huh?

ROSEABETH

That would mean that you would be at home jist havin' yourself a grand ole time, hobnobbin' with all the pretty girls while I'm at church camp doin' nothin' but singin' and prayin' all day and night. That wouldn't be fair!

EZRA

No, I don't suppose it would.

ROSEABETH

Then what shall we do, Ezra?

EZRA (reluctantly)

Well, maybe you should go out with someone even if your not selected queen of the camp..

ROSEABETH

Why, Ezra, that's a *good* idea. I wouldn't of thought of that in a million years.

EZRA (skeptically)

No, I don't reckon you would of.

ROSEABETH

If you insist, I guess that's what I'll do.

EZRA (irritated)

I don't recall insistin'!

ROSEABETH

But it's only fair. You said so yourself. Okay?

EZRA

Okay.

ROSEABETH

Okay, I won't say another word about it. Okay?

EZRA

Okay!

(Ezra stares into her eyes as she pours them both some lemonade. Then she settles back in the swing with her head on his shoulder. There is a flash of LIGHTNING and the low growl of THUNDER in the distance.)

ROSEABETH

Ezra, while I'm gone to camp . . . you can go out with 'bout anyone you please, 'cept for *one* girl.

EZRA (thinks, then)

Fonda?

ROSEABETH (nods)

It's not that I have anythin' against her personally, but, you have to admit, her reputation is . . . not exactly what you'd call pristine.

EZRA (smiling)

I know.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY and Roseabeth EXITS. Hilda begins banging out *Your Cheatin' Heart* on the piano. LIGHTS COME UP ON EZRA back in the steeple. He is looking out the window, ruminating. He turns to address the audience.)

EZRA

The Monday following Rosabeth's Sunday departure I took Fonda over to my house for dinner, then to Madison to see *Streetcar Named Desire*. I had hoped to learn something about sex from her, and I did, but my own, not hers.

(LIGHTS FADE IN STEEPLE. EZRA moves into a pool of white light on the main stage.)

EZRA

I don't know how to explain it, but the evening was very confusing, especially for me. Things were complicated by the fact that Fonda was a whole lot more than I thought she was, and, I suppose, 'cause I was somethin' less than I was supposed to be. Anyway, like

EZRA (continuing)

I said, I took her to my house for dinner. No one had ever done *that* with her before, and she was fascinated with the stories that Doc and Mariko had to tell about the things they'd seen and lived through. Not all of it was a pretty story, of course. Most of it wasn't, but it was history happening to people you knew, and, in my case loved, and sometimes it hurt an awful lot to hear about it because so much of history was the story of people doing awful things to other people, usually for some "noble" cause. And it made you think that you were part of history too, and that if you weren't careful you might end up doing awful things yourself, whether you meant to or not. (A beat.) After the movie we were sitting out on Fonda's porch, talking, and I was trying to get up nerve enough just to hold hands. That's when the evening just went all to pieces.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN on Ezra and COME UP ON FONDA on another part of the stage. She is a lovely blond of 17, a year older than Ezra at this point. She is wearing a pale yellow sun dress. As the scene begins EZRA ENTERS, sits beside her and keeps brushing his hand against hers.)

FONDA

Well, I've never heard history told like Doc and your Mom tell it. Imagine, Ezra, when Doc was born we didn't even have cars or airplanes.

EZRA

I know. No Hank Williams or Elvis. What a world.

FONDA

Do you think we'll see changes like that?

EZRA

Doc says we will; says we'll see people on the moon and Mars. Say we're embarkin' upon a new age of science and technology--Mr. Huxley's, *Brave New World*.

FONDA

What's that?

EZRA

A book, 'bout the future, kinda.

FONDA

Good?

Then jist do it. For cryin' out loud, Ezra, girls don't mind holdin' hands with their date. And you gotta let a girl know what you want.

EZRA

I guess I didn't know that. Roseabeth always lets me know what *she* wants.

FONDA

How come you go out with her anyhow? You've got about as much in common with her as you have a diamondback rattler. Besides, I think she's two-timing you with Jason.

EZRA

I know all 'bout that. Roseabeth is jist tryin' to convert him.

FONDA

Well, good for her. Ezra . . .

EZRA

What?

FONDA

It sure was nice of you to take me to your house for dinner. Nobody ever did that with me before.

EZRA

Well, I don't know why not.

FONDA

Well . . . I do. But I don't think it's fair.

EZRA

What?

FONDA

About how some things are awful if girls do'em, but jist great if boys do.

EZRA

Yeah, I don't think so either. (A beat.) Like what?

FONDA

Never mind, Ezra. You--never . . .

EZRA

Never what? I might of.

FONDA

I'd better go.

EZRA

No, wait!

(He slips his arm around her, pulls her to him and attempts to kiss her.)

FONDA

Ezra! What on earth are you doin'?

EZRA

Well, I--I wanted to show you my intentions, jist like you said I outta do. I--wanted to--to kiss you.

FONDA

On the first date?

EZRA

In case there wasn't a second.

FONDA

What kinda girl do you think I am?

EZRA

Well, I thought . . .

FONDA (icily)

Thought what?

(He just stares at her then looks away.)

FONDA (bitterly)

Oh, I guess you've heard plenty of stores 'bout me. Haven't you, Ezra Casey? Stories 'bout how wild and easy I am. (A beat.) Is that why you asked me out? Is it?

EZRA (woodenly)

I guess so. (A beat or two.) But--but I don't feel that way now, Fonda. I had a swell time.

FONDA

But not as swell as you'd like to of had!

EZRA

Different. Probably a whole lot better.

(She suddenly squeezes close to him, shuts her eyes and thrust her chest out.)

FONDA (bitterly)

All right. Go ahead! Kiss me. Feel me up all you want. (A few beats.) Go on; it's jist like holdin' hands. (Ezra can't move.) Go on!

EZRA

I don't want to.

FONDA

Why not? That's what you're here for. (A beat.) What's wrong?

EZRA

I feel kinda rotten 'bout the whole thing. I didn't know we'd have such a good time, didn't know I'd--I'd like you so much.

FONDA (touching his arm)

All right, we'll forget all 'bout this, pretend it never happened. I'm sorry I got so upset with you, Ezra, but now do you understand? It jist isn't--*fair*!

EZRA

Yeah, I think so. But Fonda, I don't even care 'bout all those stories now. Guys are always bragging 'bout stuff that never happens, and I'd like you jist the same whether they're true or not.

(She smiles and they sit for a moment.)

EZRA (carefully)

Fonda, would you be offended if I tried to kiss you now?

FONDA

No. I'd probably be offended if you *didn't*. But that doesn't mean I'd let you.

EZRA (confused)

Why wouldn't you?

FONDA

'Cause I'm fond of you, Ezra.

EZRA (slipping an arm around her)

I'm fond of you too, Fonda. That's why I want to kiss you.

FONDA

And that's jist why I can't let you.

EZRA (retracting his arm)

I don't understand that, Fonda.

FONDA

That's 'cause you're still pretty *immature*, Ezra.

EZRA

Immature!

FONDA

Ezra, I *know* 'bout how boys are, and I know how I am and one thing leads to another even if you don't particularly like each other. That's why I can't let you kiss me, Ezra.

EZRA

But you would if you weren't fond of me Fonda?

FONDA

I'd be a lot more likely to. That way I wouldn't mind hating you and maybe even myself later if things got off in the wrong direction.

EZRA

I don't give a hang 'bout direction!

FONDA

But I do. Besides, you don't even know where a kiss might lead. Ezra, I jist don't want to git involved with you 'cause you're so nice.

EZRA

No. No! I'm not! Honest. Those are all lies. Lies!

FONDA

Yes, you are. You're a sweet kid, and I don't want to change you.

EZRA

It's okay. I don't mind.

FONDA

Well, I do. You have an unblemished reputation.

EZRA

That's not my fault! And I'm makin' an honest effort to change it.

FONDA

Besides, you're still goin' steady with Roseabeth; until that changes I figure I'd better not see you again. It'll be easier for both of us. I do like you, Ezra, and I know I'm doin' the thing by sayin' no to you. Now you jist run along now; stay as sweet as you are, and thanks for the wonderful time. I love your family.

(She gives him a peck on the cheeks then EXITS through a door upstage. A CLEAR POOL OF LIGHT is focused on EZRA as he thinks, then stands and begins pacing downstage.)

EZRA

The only logical conclusion I could draw from the experience was that it was as hard to live down a good reputation as it was a bad one. You've thought that would have ended it but it didn't. Over the week that followed that one, things only got worse for everyone concerned. First, I ran into my pal, Phil Vandaver.

(PHIL enters and meets EZRA on the "street" DOWNSTAGE.)

PHIL

Hey, Ezra. Hear you been seein' Fonda.

EZRA

Yeah, we sorta went out once.

PHIL (winking, smiling)

How'd you make out? Huh? Huh?

EZRA

I didn't do anything. She's really a very nice girl.

PHIL (thinks, then)

You sly devil. You got some, didn't ya? Huh? Huh?

EZRA (earnestly)

Phil, I'm tellin' you the truth. She's not like that at all. All we did was . . . where you goin'?

PHIL (hurrying away)

To spread the good news.

EZRA

Phil! No! Wait! (A beat. Then to audience.) It got worse. Even when I tried to change it. The same afternoon, I had the misfortune of crossing paths with Ogden Burgatroid.

(OGDEN enters.)

OGDEN

Hey, Ez, I hear congratulations are in order.

EZRA

Huh?

OGDEN

Huh's ass. Don't give me that innocent act. You took Fonda out.

EZRA

Oh no.

OGDEN

Tell me. How was she? Huh? Huh?

EZRA (thinks, then)

Oh, you know, Ogden. You've been around.

OGDEN (thinks, then)

You lyin' dog. You didn't do anything; you wouldn't of had the nerve.

(He rushes off.)

EZRA

Don't tell anybody. I don't want my reputation to git all . . . ruined or unruined . . . or whatever? (A beat. Then to audience.) It wasn't over yet. I still had Fonda and Roseabeth do hear from.

(FONDA enters in tears.)

EZRA

Hi, Fonda.

FONDA (slaps him and exits)

Ezra Casey! How could you?

EZRA

Fonda, how could I what? (A beat. To audience.) A few days later, Roseabeth got home from church camp.

(ROSEABETH enters.)

Hi, Roseabeth.

EZRA

Ezra Casey! How could you?

ROSEABETH (slaps him)

How could I what?

EZRA

You know perfectly well, what! Go out with--*that girl!*

ROSEABETH (exiting)

Oh, that.

EZRA

(LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY ON EZRA AND COME UP ON HILDA at the piano. She begins playing *Oh Young and Fearless Prophet*. Ezra is resting back on his bunk when the LIGHTS COME UP in the steeple. Suddenly we HEAR THE ROAR of Jason glasspack mufflers. Ezra gets up, goes to the window and peeks out. The SOUND fades away slowly. Ezra shakes his head, walks downstage and addresses the audience.)

EZRA
After the awful thing that happened, I thought things would have been okay with Jason. They should have been, but . . .

(LIGHTS FADE IN STEEPLE and COME UP MAIN STAGE on a street scene. Jason is standing on the street, smoking a cigarette and waiting. He is swinging a two-foot length of chain. After a moment, EZRA enters pushing a bicycle with a flat tire. He is breathless and limping a little. Jason steps in front of him, blocking his path.)

Nice ride, Injun?

JASON

EZRA

It was okay--until I blew out a tire. Guess you don't wanna give me a lift?

(JASON sneers at him.)

EZRA

Well, that jist shows what a poor judge of character I am.

JASON

Yeah, I guess it does. (A beat.) Ain't you kinda big to be riding a tricycle?

EZRA

Yeah, I am, but this is a *bicycle*, Jason, not a tricycle. Tricycles have *three* wheels. This machine has two, one of which, as you can see, is flat.

JASON

It's gonna be a damn unicycle when I git done with it!

EZRA

Are those fightin' words?

JASON

That's what they sound like to me. You ready for a ass kicking?

EZRA

Don't waste your fightin' words on me, Jason.

(Ezra tries to pass; Jason blocks his path.)

EZRA (straining)

You're pushin' real hard, Jason, and I'm tired and irritated already.

JASON (taunting)

You gonna take it? (A beat.) Or do somethin' 'bout it.

EZRA

I jist wanna go home.

JASON

Not 'till we settle things.

(A few people gather in the background.)

EZRA (distressed)

What things?! I don't know what you're talkin' 'bout! Somebody call Doc or Silas for me.

JASON

I'm talkin' 'bout you and me settlin' things once and for all. I been waitin' a long time to kick your ass.

EZRA

Okay, fine. Tomorrow come down to school, put on the gloves, and you can have all of me you can git in a fair fight.

JASON

I don't wanna fair fight! And I don't wanna wait. I wanna kick your ass *now!*

EZRA

This is probably not a good time to bring it up, Jason, but do you realize that you have a somewhat limited vocabulary.

JASON

Shut up!

EZRA

What's the chain for?

JASON

You'll see. Come on Jappo. Show me what you got!

EZRA

Jason, I don't want to fight you! Fightin' is jist real stupid.

JASON

What's this: you gonna *cry*?

EZRA (almost in tears)

Jist lemme go!

JASON

You yellow? Jist like you mother!

EZRA (angrily)

Shut up!

JASON

Yeah, that's it. You're yellow, jist like you Jap whore mother!

Son of a bitch!

EZRA (savagely)

(Ezra lunges at him, pushing the bicycle in front of him. Jason swings the chain, but it gets caught in the spokes. Ezra grabs Jason and throws him against the curb where he strikes his head and shoulder. He lies motionless with Ezra standing over him, crying. DOC ENTERS and kneels beside Jason.)

EZRA

I didn't mean to do it, Doc. I--I don't know what happened.

FRANCIS

It weren't Ezra's fault, Doc. Jason started it. Ezra tried to leave; Jason jist wouldn't let 'em be. Weren't his fault at all.

DOC

Fault doesn't matter right now; this boy is hurt. (To Ezra.) Go get the car, Son. We've got to get this boy to a doctor right away.

(Ezra rushes off as the LIGHTS COME DOWN. LIGHT COME UP THEN ON HILDA playing *Blest Be The Tie That Binds*. After the first stanza, LIGHTS FADE ON HILDA AND COME UP ON EZRA back in the steeple.)

EZRA

It was finally over. At least then I thought it was. I'd cracked his skull, given him a major concussion, dislocated his shoulder and broken his collar bone. I'd been scared to death of Jason Clay for years, but I came out of our fight much more afraid of myself than I'd ever been of Jason. I don't know how it got there, but I knew there was something evil deep down inside Jason. What I didn't know was that it was down there inside of me too, and it scared me to think that sometimes I couldn't control it, no matter how hard I tried.

(Ezra walks to the window and stares out, continuing his monologue.)

EZRA

Not long after the fight the worst thing of all happened. It was on the riverbank where Doc had spent so much time tryin' to teach me to be decent--and grammatical. When I

got there I found him slumped over a log, one foot dangling in the water, and the biggest catfish I ever saw still hooked on his line. It was Old Blue, I think, the fish that had taken off his finger years before. The excitement of hooking 'em and fighting 'em to a standsstill was more than Doc's old heart could take. I ran home and told Mariko and Silas that Doc had died. Mariko held me. Then Silas held us both, and we all cried, and I thought that it was good when someone in your family dies and everyone can cry--and everyone can mean it.

(Lights come down slowly on Ezra as he completes this monologue. There is a moment of darkness, then LIGHTS COME UP on HILDA at the piano; she begins playing *Graduation Day*. As she completes the stanza, LIGHTS COME UP in Roseabeth's PARLOR. EZRA approaches the door and knocks, nervously. He is dressed for the prom, wearing a Indian madras jacket and cowboy boots. He has a flower for Roseabeth. PREACHER answers the door. MUSIC fades and LIGHTS COME DOWN on Hilda.)

PREACHER

Who's there?

EZRA

Ezra! I've come for Roseabeth. We're goin' to the prom.

PREACHER (opening the door)

Well, I declare, if it ain't Ezra Casey, and right on time too. Don't you look fit to kill?

EZRA

I'm not plannin' on it.

PREACHER

Git on in here, and let me git a look at'cha. (A beat.) Boy, if you don't look like Joseph his ownself in that coat.

EZRA

I know. And it hasn't even started to bleed yet.

PREACHER

Solomon in all his glory was not adorned like one of these.

EZRA

Isaiah?

PREACHER

St. Matthew, son. The *New* Testament. (A beat.) Roseabeth! That no count boyfriend of yours is here. (To Ezra.) No offense.

ROSEABETH (off stage)

What'd you say, Daddy?

PREACHER

Come on in here, Hun.

ROSEABETH (off stage)

Is Ezra here?

PREACHER

Yep, he's a standin' right here in the sittin' room.

ROSEABETH (off stage)

Well you find him a chair, Daddy. What's that sittin' room for anyhow? I'll be down directly. You two can have a--man to man talk while I finish up.

PREACHER

Sit down, boy.

EZRA

I'll sit, but I don't know 'bout that "man to man" talk.

PREACHER

What's in the box, boy?

EZRA

An orchid for Roseabeth.

PREACHER

A orchid. Ain't that nice. I don't reckon Roseabeth's ever had a orchid before.

EZRA

Not that I know of. Guess there's a first time for everythin'.

PREACHER (aggressively)

Meanin' what?

EZRA

Well, ah, nothin' in particular, and--everythin' in general. First date, first kiss, dance--

PREACHER

First *dance*! Now I won't have ya dancin' with my angel. Dancin' a sin.

EZRA

I know that. Thou shalt not dance; it's not in the top ten, but it's right up there. Number 12, I think, right after, "Don't Be Cruel", which we got from Elvis, the Patron Saint of rock n roll.

PREACHER

I'm relieved to hear you feel that way 'bout it, and I'll hold ya to your word.

EZRA

My *word*?

(ROSEABETH enters wearing a long formal gown that practically fills the room. It is a flame colored taffeta covered with yards and yards of nylon net. Her shoulders are bare and her breasts bulge out of the gown, revealing a lot of cleavage. She stops, spins around and curtsies. Ezra can't take his eyes off her breasts.)

ROSEABETH

Well?

EZRA

They're beautiful.

PREACHER

What?

EZRA (covering)

Beautiful. Roseabeth looks beautiful.

ROSEABETH

Why thank you, sir. You look right comely yourself.

(Ezra continues to stare at Roseabeth's breasts, almost in awe; he becomes aroused and surreptitiously tries to adjust his crotch.)

ROSEABETH

Come over here, Ezra. Daddy's gonna make our picture.

EZRA (covering his crotch)

What?

Over *here*, Ezra.

You wanna looks over here, boy!

Huh. Oh, yeah, I was jist--

I *know* what you was doin'.

Don't jist stand there, Ezra. Hold me!.

Right.

Okay, Daddy. Shoot.

Say Jesus.

Jesus Christ!

Ahhhh! I've gone blind. God is punishing me.

He isn't either. It's jist the flash.

Roseabeth, what--what's your opinion of--of gravity?

What?

ROSEABETH (grabbing him)

PREACHER (composing the shot)

EZRA

PREACHER

ROSEABETH

EZRA

ROSEABETH

PREACHER

EZRA (straining)

EZRA (as flash explodes)

ROSEABETH

(She tries to pull him closer for another shot, arousing him even further. He struggles and finally breaks free.)

EZRA (desperately)

ROSEABETH (incredulously)

EZRA

Gravity! What's your opinion of it?

PREACHER

What in tarnation?

EZRA

I've got to know. I--I can't be goin' out with a girl that doesn't have a high opinion of it. Wouldn't be right when I'm so sold on the concept myself. It's like a--religion to me.

ROSEABETH (irritated)

Well, gravity is jist a wonderful thing, I think. If we didn't have it things would go flyin' all over the place all the time, and things that went up wouldn't ever come down. Does that satisfy you?

EZRA

Hardly.

ROSEABETH

Well, git over here anyway. I want of shot of me kissing your cheek.

EZRA

Oh, God!

(He moves away and starts dancing.)

EZRA

Heya, heya, heya.

ROSEABETH (shrieking)

He's gone crazy, Daddy. Ezra's plum lost his mind, and on the night of the prom! Do somethin'!

PREACHER

Boy, what the *hell* are you doin'?

ROSEABETH

He's jist gonna ruin *everythin* '!

EZRA (continuing his dance)

No, Roseabeth, I'm not--heya, heya--I jist wanted to show you this dance of my people--heya, heya, heya. It's to drive the evil spirits away *before* a celebration--heya, heya--so--so everybody *will* have a good time. No evil spirits around you see to louse things up. Heya, heya.

PREACHER (erupting)

Stop it! I don't allow no dancin' of any kind in the house of the Laud.

EZRA (stops dancing)

Now, Preacher, is this the house of the Laud, or is this the house of a man of the Laud?

PREACHER (thinks, then)

It don't matter. I don't want you dancin' in it, whatever it is.

ROSEABETH

Daddy, you leave Ezra alone. He obviously don't feel well.

PREACHER (grabbing his shotgun)

Then git 'em outta here before I decide to put 'em out of his misery.

ROSEABETH (grabs him)

Ezra, come on!

(Ezra retrieves the orchid on the way out. LIGHTS COME DOWN on them and COME UP ON HILDA who starts playing *Graduation Day* again. After a moment, LIGHTS FADE ON Hilda as she quits playing and come up on EZRA and ROSEABETH in an area of main stage that represents a dance floor. All that is required here are some decorations, a few folding chairs and a punch bowl. FONDA and PHIL, OGDEN and his DATE played by a cast member doubling in a role are gathered around the punch bowl.)

EZRA

Here we are.

ROSEABETH

'Bout time. Boy! you are in some mood tonight, the likes of which I have *never* seen. I swear, Ezra Casey, *when* are you gonna grow up?

EZRA

I wish I knew.

ROSEABETH

What you got in the box?

EZRA (handing her the box)

It's for you.

Ezra, must you be so romantic?

ROSEABETH

I'm sorry. It's an orchid--for you.

EZRA

Oh, Ezra, it's beautiful! (She kisses him recklessly.) Pin it on me.

ROSEABETH

Where?

EZRA (doubtfully)

Right here.(He is all thumbs.) Ouch.

ROSEABETH (lift one side of gown)

Oh, sorry.

EZRA

Be gentle, Ezra. I'm very tender there.

ROSEABETH

Oh, boy. (A beat.) How's that?

EZRA

How was it for you?

ROSEABETH (provocatively)

Wonderful!

EZRA

I'll git us some punch.

ROSEABETH

(Ezra falls back in a folding chair floor and waits. Roseabeth meets the others at the punch bowl.)

FONDA (coolly)

Well, look here, the preacher's daughter.

ROSEABETH

That makes two of us.

FONDA

And doesn't she look . . . beguiling.

OGDEN (looking down her dress)

Wow, you look at size of--that gown. I don't think I've ever seen so much nylon net in one place.

ROSEABETH

Why thank you Ogden. Are you serving the punch?

OGDEN

Sure am. How do you want it--with or without?

ROSEABETH

With, of course.

OGDEN (spiking the punch)

Good thing. There ain't any without.

PHIL

I'm gonna say hello to my buddy, Ezra.

PHIL (crossing to Ezra)

Hey, Ezra. Did you get a load of Roseabeth's tits?

EZRA

Yeah, I--noticed 'em.

PHIL

Boy, would I like to be in your pants tonight?

EZRA

My pants?

PHIL

Jesus, Ezra! Your *shoes, her* pants.

EZRA

Oh!

PHIL

That punch is gonna loosen everybody up real good, huh?

EZRA

Right.

PHIL

Reckon you'll git into Roseabeth's panties tonight, Ez?

EZRA

Come on. Roseabeth's a nice girl.

PHIL

Didn't say she wasn't. But nice girls like it as much as anybody. You know what they say?

EZRA

No I don't! What *who* says?

PHIL

You know . . . *they*.

EZRA

Oh . . . *that* they. (A beat.) What do they say?

PHIL

To treat a lady like a whore and a whore like a lady. Jist like Stanley Kowalski treated Blanche DuBois. He had his way with her.

EZRA (thinks, then)

I should treat Roseabeth like a whore then?

PHIL

Of course you should treat 'er like a whore, a nice girl like Roseabeth!

EZRA (not sure about this)

Okay, I'll give it a go.

(Roseabeth returns with the punch and Phil walks back to the group. In the background, the *Hawaiian Love Song* starts to play, the couples begin dancing.)

EZRA

What the hell were you doin' over there?

ROSEABETH (taken aback, then)

Ezra Casey, don't you swear at me! I was over there gittin' you some punch.

EZRA

Then lemme have it!

ROSEABETH

Oh, I'm gonna let you have it all right. What's wrong with you?

EZRA

Nothin' wrong with me that a little respect won't cure.

ROSEABETH

Well, you sure won't git any by actin' like--like--Stanley Kowalski. That's for sure. Now you behave yerself or I'll leave this instant. What's gotten into you?

EZRA

I'm sorry, Roseabeth. I was jist--tryin' out a theory of Phil's. It didn't work.

ROSEABETH (hands him the punch)

Well, I knew that wasn't you speakin' to me like that.

EZRA

You look lovely tonight, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH

That's more like it.

(They sit down and hold hands. The *Hawaiian Wedding Song* continues in the background, a little louder now. The other couples are dancing up stage somewhere.)

EZRA

I'm sorry, Roseabeth.

ROSEABETH (dreamily)

I jist love this song, don't you, Ezra?

EZRA

It's okay, I guess.

ROSEABETH

You know how the words go? "I do. I do. Love you. Love you. With all my heart."

EZRA

Yeah, I love you too.

ROSEABETH

Those are the words to the song, Ezra.

EZRA

Oh, I thought--

ROSEABETH

Oh, *you!* You knew that. What am I gonna do with you?

EZRA

I dunno know. What?

ROSEABETH

You'll see.

(They sit for a moment watching the couples dancing. Around the perimeter of the dance floor some TOWNSPEOPLE have gathered to watch the festivities. PREACHER enters with HILDA and goes purposefully towards MAGNUS RATTER.)

ROSEABETH

There's daddy!

EZRA

Great!

ROSEABETH

What's he doin' here? He *promised!*

EZRA

He's gittin' Magnus. Somebody must of died. There he goes with Magnus and Hilda.

ROSEABETH

I wonder who. And on prom night. Ain't that a shame.

(MUSIC IN BACKGROUND changes to *Graduation Day*. The couples begin dancing closer and more seductively.)

ROSEABETH

Looks like fun, don't it?

EZRA

Dancin'?

ROSEABETH

No! Sittin' here like potted plants, Ezra.

EZRA

Roseabeth, do you realize that you have quite a sarcastic streak?

ROSEABETH

I don't see why us Baptists havta sit here stewin' in our doctrinal juices while the Methodists and Presbyterians and Lutherans git to dance the night away!

EZRA

'Cause it's a sin, Roseabeth. Your daddy reminded me already.

ROSEABETH

What he meant, was that *he* considers it a sin.

EZRA

I thought you agreed with him on everythin'.

ROSEABETH

Since I've become a woman, Ezra, I've found that I differ with my daddy on several points. Dancin' is jist *one* of them. Now come on!

EZRA

But I don't even know how to dance!

ROSEABETH

Jist follow my lead. I'll teach you everything you need to know.

(She drags him onto the dance floor and they begin dancing, clumsily at first, then more smoothly and very close. As they dance the LIGHTS FADE AROUND THEM until it is almost dark. ALL OTHERS EXIT the scene, then a SPOT COMES UP AND INTENSIFIES ON Roseabeth and Ezra.)

ROSEABETH

Ezra, let's go someplace where we can be alone.

Where?
EZRA

Fanny's Hill.
ROSEABETH

(LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY as
MUSIC FADES. Roseabeth EXITS and Ezra
MOVES DOWN STAGE to address the
audience.)

EZRA
What happened next was the most amazing thing: It was the best and worst of times; the agony and the ecstasy; the pinnacle of pleasure and the depths of humiliation. It was, in short: The *catastroph*e. I parked Si's pickup on the hill overlooking Fanny Boltwood's place. Roseabeth kissed me in a way that she had never kissed me before, and before you could recite The Ten Commandments we were in the bed of the truck, lying on an old army blanket with our clothes strewn all over the countryside. I was as awed by the beauty of Roseabeth's body as I was bewildered by not knowing exactly what to do with it. While making an awkward attempt to consummate our relationship . . . all hell broke loose. And then some.

(LIGHTS COME DOWN UNTIL SET IS
TOTALLY BLACK. The next scene is played
in darkness. In the darkness, first we HEAR
VOICES and then the SOUND OF A TRUCK
RUMBLING DOWN A HILL AND
CRASHING THROUGH A FENCE, A
PORCH AND THE LIVING ROOM OF A
HOUSE).

Do you love me, Ezra?
ROSEABETH (voice)

I think that's what I'm doin', Roseabeth.
EZRA (voice)

But are you *in love* with me?
ROSEABETH (voice)

Roseabeth, if this is love, then I guess I'm in it.
EZRA (voice)

ROSEABETH (voice)

Not yet you aren't. (A beat.) What's that?

EZRA (voice)

What's what?

ROSEABETH (voice)

I heard a noise. (A beat) Feel that?

EZRA (voice)

Yeah, it feels great.

ROSEABETH (voice)

Not *that!* The truck. I think it's movin'!

EZRA (voice)

It can't be--oh, God, it is! We must of knocked it out of gear. And the emergency brake is broke!

ROSEABETH (voice)

The brake is broke?

EZRA (voice)

Yeah!

ROSEABETH (frantic, voice)

Well, do somethin'!

EZRA (voice)

I am. I'm lookin' for my pants.

ROSEABETH (voice)

I threw 'em outta the truck. There's nothin' here but my gown and this ole blanket. Do somethin' else!

EZRA (voice)

Jeeze! We're headin' right for Fanny's!

ROSEABETH (voice)

God, we're gonna die!

EZRA (voice)

No. We might jist git a little maimed. Hold on to me!

I don't wanna die!

ROSEABETH (voice)

Roseabeth, will you jist hold still.

EZRA (voice)

(Now comes the CRASH of the truck hitting the porch, the outside wall and finally tearing into Fanny's sitting room. OTHER VOICES and screams are heard during this sequence. Finally as the sounds die away, the LIGHTS BEGIN TO COME UP SLOWLY in the SITTING ROOM. A couch and table are overturned, chairs are askew, and worst of all, a WOMAN is stretched out across the hood of the truck. EZRA rises up from the back of the truck and looks around.)

You all right?

EZRA (to Roseabeth)

(She manages to raise up, cover herself with the old army blanket and nod. Ezra covers himself with Roseabeth's gown.)

Oh my God!

EZRA (surveying the damage)

(HILDA FARTOK crawls out from behind an overturned chair, sees Ezra, begins to wheeze and then faints. MAGNUS RATTER fights his way out from beneath an overturned couch.)

What the goddamn hell was that? Sky fall in or somethin'. (Reaches for someone.) You all right, Preacher?

MAGNUS

(Ezra looks at a panic-stricken Roseabeth. They stare at each other, frozen as MAGNUS and PREACHER begin to dust themselves off.)

Now I believe that's Ezra's truck, ain't it, Brother Ratter?

PREACHER

MAGNUS

I believe the truck actually belongs to Silas, Preacher.

PREACHER

But Ezra was driving it. And he was with Roseabeth!

ROSEABETH

That's Daddy!

EZRA (nodding)

Don't worry.

ROSEABETH

Don't worry! Oh, God, I take it all back; I *do* wanna die.

PREACHER

Who's that?

(Magnus and Preacher move to a position where they can see in the back of the truck. Roseabeth hides. Ezra rises to face them.)

EZRA (forcing a smile)

Evenin' Preacher, Magnus. Nice night. A little warm maybe, but that moon is sure nice.

MAGNUS

Preacher, I do believe we caught the boy here with his pants down, if you know what I mean.

PREACHER (venomously)

I know all right!

EZRA

I can explain this.

PREACHER

Where's my angel?

(ROSEABETH sobs.)

EZRA

Right, your angel? Now that may be stretchin' the use of the term a bit.

Roseabeth!

PREACHER

(She rises slowly from the back of the truck, sobbing, looks around, then yells.)

Rape!

ROSEABETH (hysterically)

Roseabeth!

EZRA

You son-of-a-bitch!

MAGNUS

She--she doesn't mean that. We--we didn't . . . I mean--I--she--

EZRA

You're gonna hang for this.

MAGNUS

Where's my shotgun?

PREACHER (looking for his gun)

Roseabeth, *please!* This is no time to git hysterical on me.

EZRA

(She collapses in a heap, sobbing. Preacher can't find his gun so he grabs a piece of timber and starts swinging it at Ezra. Ezra jumps out of the truck and runs out with Preacher and Magnus in hot pursuit. LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY. There is a moment of darkness then HILDA starts in on the piano, playing *There is a Balm in Gilead*. After the first verse, LIGHTS COME UP ON EZRA in the steeple.)

EZRA

And that's how I ended up where I am now. 'Course Roseabeth told 'em it wasn't rape once she got settled down. Otherwise they would have hanged me. Now if I really wanted to run off, I could of tried the window already. But I wouldn't run out on Roseabeth if there is even the slightest possibility of her bein' pregnant; 'cause God knows there's nothin' in this world worse than an unwed mother to the good people of

Mansfield. 'Course if she's not, like Phil says, that's a different matter entirely. (A beat.) Isn't it?

(Ezra walks to the cot where a black suit and white shirt are laid out. He then goes to the bureau, slips off his shoes and socks, takes off his shirt and starts washing with water from a pitcher that he pours into a porcelain bowl. Suddenly a rock crashes through the window, showering the floor with glass.)

EZRA

What the--

(He treads carefully to the window.)

EZRA

Jason, you idiot! You're gonna pay for that window.

JASON (voice)

Ezra! Be quiet!

EZRA

Like hell I'll be quiet. Preacher's runnin' 'round here with his shotgun. If he thinks I'm tryin' to escape, he'll blow me to kingdom come.

JASON (voice)

Dammit, Ezra, will you jist shut up? I gotta talk to ya!

EZRA

I already told you: I got nothin' to say.

JASON (voice)

But I do. And it's *important!*

EZRA

Who for?

JASON (voice)

Both of us.

EZRA

What's this "*us*" shit?

JASON (voice)

Ezra, dammit . . . *listen!* (A beat.) Look, I'm sorry, okay. I apologize for everythin' I've

JASON (continuing)
said and done to you over the years. I was wrong; I was bein' a real shit. I know that now; I've grown up, matured.

EZRA (suspiciously)
So?

JASON (voice)
Look, I can't talk like this; I'm comin' up.

EZRA
What? What for? Preacher 'ill shoot you dead for sure.

JASON (climbing in the window)
No, he's prayin' with Roseabeth. She got 'em occupied.

(As Jason climbs in the window, Ezra unconsciously starts backing away, stepping into the glass and cutting his feet.)

JASON
Ezra! Look out, the glass!

EZRA
Oh! Dammit, my feet! I knew I shouldn't have listened to you, Jason.

JASON
Now you can't blame *this* on me.

EZRA
I've blamed you for everythin' bad that happened in Mansfield for years.

(Jason grabs Ezra, picks him up and carries him to the cot. VERY FAINTLY, Fanny starts playing *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*. She plays one or two stanzas then stops.)

EZRA
Hey!

JASON

Everybody else has blamed me for everythin' bad happenin' in Mansfield too. And it ain't fair.

(Jason starts picking glass from Ezra's feet. Then he goes to the bureau, returns with a dampened cloth and begins to wash the blood away.)

JASON

It's not as bad as it looks. What'd you think you are? One of those--whachamacallits from India?

EZRA

Fakir.

JASON

Yeah. One of them.

EZRA

I'm not fakin'.

JASON

I know. That's real blood, even if it is half Indian.

EZRA

Watch it, Jason!

JASON

I was jist, jokin', Ezra. Couldn't you tell that?

EZRA

To tell you the truth, Jason, I never had the opportunity to get acquainted with your marvelous sense of humor.

JASON

I guess I never gave ya the chance. (A beat.) That feel any better?

EZRA (standing and walking)

Yeah, it feels okay. I think the wounds are largely superficial.

JASON

Not like mine.

EZRA (feeling guilty)

No, I guess not.

JASON

There's somethin' I been meanin' to tell ya, somethin' I *need* to tell ya, Ezra.

EZRA (skeptically)

What?

JASON

Well, I jist want to--to *thank* ya for what you did for me.

EZRA (puzzled)

What'd I do besides break your shoulder and bust your head open?

JASON (with difficulty)

You--ya made the world a hell of a lot safer for me.

EZRA

That's funny. I thought I made the world safer for everybody else.

JASON

You did that too, When they put that plate in my skull, where ya busted it, the doctor told me that I couldn't fight anymore, that I could be killed easy as anythin'.

EZRA

I'm sorry' bout that, Jason, but--

JASON

That meant . . . that I didn't *havta* fight anymore, never again, that I didn't havta prove myself to anybody ever again, not--not to my old man, my buddies or the creeps in Mayville or even to myself. Nobody!

EZRA

I thought you *liked* to fight?

JASON

Yeah, I thought I did too for a while, but I didn't, not really. I hated it, *hated* it! But I was scared, scared of my old man, scared of not livin' up to my tough reputation and of one day gittin' the livin' hell beat outta me. But I couldn't see no way out of it without *lookin'* like I was scared. I couldn't let anybody know that. (A few beats.) I never hated *you*, Ezra, not 'cause you're Indian or Chinese or whatever the hell it is that you are. What I hated was that you were so safe in your world with Doc and Silas and your mom always frettin' over you. There was jist so much . . . love in your family, even with everythin' lookin' so crazy from the outside. And for me, there was nothin' but fear, all my life all I remember is fear. My folks never wanted me, and they didn't mind lettin' me know it. If

I hated you, it was 'cause I wanted what you had. I reckon that's why I bullied you for so long: 'cause you knew what it was to be loved and cared 'bout and safe.

EZRA (after a moment)

You have a real knack for makin' me feel like shit, Jason. (A beat.) You said you had somethin' important to talk about.

JASON (sighs heavily)

I do . . . Roseabeth.

EZRA

Roseabeth?

JASON

Ezra, ya . . . ya *can't* marry 'er!

EZRA

What are you talkin' 'bout? After what happened, Preacher says I *havta*.

JASON

Ezra, do ya even *know* what happened?

EZRA

Well--well, yeah, we--we--sorta--went all the way, I think, if you know what I mean.

JASON

Yeah, I know what ya mean, but I don't think *you* do.

EZRA

What's it to you anyhow?

JASON

It's *everythin'* to me, Ezra, 'cause *I'm* gonna marry Roseabeth!

EZRA (stunned)

You are? (JASON nods.) Does . . . she know it?

JASON

Of course she knows it; she *wants* to marry me.

EZRA

I don't believe it. Roseabeth loves me!

JASON

Wrong! She *likes* ya, Ezra; she likes ya a lot, but she loves *me*.

EZRA

You're crazy! Where'd you ever git such a notion as that?

JASON (frankly)

From Roseabeth. (A beat.) Ezra, I been seein' her for a long time.

EZRA

Behind my back?

JASON

Not exactly. You knew we'd been together before. You saw us.

EZRA

Yeah, I know, but Roseabeth said--said that she was tryin' to--to convert you.

JASON

She did, try, at first. Then we got to likin' each other, and I guess you could say that I ended up convertin' her.

EZRA

Into what?

JASON

A woman.

EZRA

You mean . . . you mean to tell me that--that you and Roseabeth have . . .

JASON (nodding)

For a long time. We love each other, Ezra.

EZRA

Then, then I--I didn't--*ruin* 'er, like Preacher said?

JASON

Ezra, neither of us ruined 'er. Boy, the way you talk.

EZRA

But--but how can you wanna marry 'er after--after what happened last night?

JASON

I talked to Roseabeth, Ezra. And I hate to be the one to tell ya, but ya didn't do anythin' with Roseabeth last night.

I didn't.

EZRA (disappointed)

'Fraid not.

JASON

But--but I *tried*, and--and she sure let me try.

EZRA

That was my fault.

JASON

Your fault. Oh. *Huh?*

JASON

We had a little spat, ya see. I was mad 'cause she was goin' to the prom with you, so I took Fonda out and made sure that Roseabeth knew 'bout it. To git even she was gonna let ya have a little fun. But from what I understand, things gotta outta hand.

EZRA (thinks, then)

A little fun, huh? (A beat.) You mean, I'm still a virgin?

JASON

Far as I know.

EZRA

Damn! And Roseabeth isn't pregnant or ruined or even *mad*?

JASON

She's jist fine, a little nervous is all. And awfully sorry 'bout the "rape" thing, but she was hysterical. You can understand that. There she was in the back of the truck with nothin' but an old army blanket. Preacher and Magnus was right there. It didn't look to good for 'er.

EZRA

No it didn't, for either of us. In fact, *I* was gonna yell rape. She jist beat me to it.

JASON

She don't wanna marry ya though.

EZRA

You keep sayin' that.

JASON

'Cause *I* wanna marry 'er.

EZRA (thinks, then)

It's okay with me, Jason, but--

JASON

Dammit, Ezra, *thanks!* And--and don't you worry. You'll find someone . . . why, Fonda would marry ya I bet. Or Heather; she'd marry ya in a minute.

EZRA

Now jist a minute here, Jason. I'm not ready to--leap into the breach again jist yet.

JASON

I know. You're gonna need some time to git over Roseabeth.

EZRA

Right. I will git over her though, provided we can figure out a way to keep me from marryin' 'er without one or the both of us gittin' shot. 'Cause, pardon my sayin' so, Jason, but I don't think Preacher is all that well acquainted with your more admirable qualities.

JASON

You're right 'bout that. So here's my plan: I don't know exactly when it will be 'cause I don't know if the your weddin' or Fanny's funeral is first. It's going to be a kinda double ceremony. Anyway, ya know that part of the weddin' where the preacher asks if anybody has any objection to the weddin' takin' place?

EZRA

Don't you think that's cuttin' things a little close?

JASON

Don't worry.

EZRA

Don't worry!

JASON

What can Preacher do when I tell 'em that the ceremony can't go on 'cause Roseabeth loves me?

EZRA

He could shoot you. He could shoot me! Silas. Roseabeth.

JASON

No, no! I jist step in, ya see, trade places with ya, and you stay on to be my best man. The ceremony goes on. I've already got a license and everythin'.

EZRA

Now that's a right beautiful plan all right, but I'm not dead certain Preacher will go for it. For one thing, and I hate to keep harpin' on this, but you're ignorin' that shotgun. And for another, I think he's dead set on me weddin' Roseabeth, whether *she* wants to or not.

JASON

Ya don't honestly think he'd shoot one of us, do ya?

EZRA

I think he'd shoot *both* of us!

JASON

A good man like Preacher, a Christian?

EZRA

Jason, there is nothin' more dangerous in this world than a good man with a shotgun who's absolutely convinced he's right 'bout somethin'. One thing Doc taught me as that you can lead a horse's ass to water, but you can't make him *think*.

JASON

Then what'd we gonna do?

EZRA

Well, we'll try your plan, but jist in case it don't work we'll need a plan to fall back on. (A beat.) So, git hold of Silas: tell 'em the whole story and to have his truck ready, jist in case. And you think of a way to git Roseabeth outta town, if need be.

JASON

I'll think of somethin'.

EZRA

And git hold of Silas. (Jason nods.) Okay, git goin'. I'll see you in an hour or so. Good luck.

JASON

You too, good buddy.

(JASON exits. LIGHTS FADE in steeple and COME UP ON HILDA at the piano in the SANCTUARY. She is beating out the *Wedding March*. All the TOWNSPEOPLE

and Ezra's friends begin filing in as do SILAS, MARIKO, and EZRA. Ezra is wearing a dark suit and white socks. The pulpit is located stage right; upstage there is a "stained glass window". Pews need be nothing more than simple benches, facing the pulpit. Next to the pulpit there is a stand with the water used in Baptisms.)

SILAS (to Ezra)

Truck's under the west window, if we need it.

EZRA (worried)

Where's Jason?

SILAS

He'll be here. Don't worry.

EZRA

Don't worry!

(PREACHER enters and goes to front of church. His shotgun is tucked beneath his long black robe.)

EZRA (to Silas)

Where *is* he?

SILAS

I dunno know. He said he'd be here.

EZRA

Damn!

PREACHER

Watch your mouth, boy. This is the house of Laud.

(Hilda continues playing, louder now as MAGNUS RATTER enters from the rear, pushing in Fanny's coffin.)

PREACHER (irritated)

Magnus! (Magnus looks up.) The *weddin'* is first!

MAGNUS

Did you say somethin' 'bout a funeral for Ezra?

PREACHER

What I said was that, "It was gonna be Ezra's funeral if he don't marry Roseabeth." Now git her outta here!

MAGNUS

But Ezra ain't dead?

PREACHER

Yet! Now go on. Git! And tell Roseabeth to come on down.

(Hilda notices the commotion, realizes her "mistake" and stops playing. She waits a moment. Roseabeth starts to enter, and Hilda starts playing *Sweet Hour of Prayer*. Roseabeth takes a few more steps and then stops and looks around confused. Preacher closes his eyes and shakes his head.)

PREACHER

Hilda. (Keeps on playing.) Hilda! (Keeps on playing.) **Hilda!** (She jumps on the piano stool and turns.) The weddin' is first!

HILDA

I thought so. But there was Magnus with Fanny.

PREACHER

There was a misunderstandin', Hilda. Roseabeth is here now.

(Hilda looks.)

HILDA

So she is. And don't she look . . . pretty.

(Hilda starts playing the *Wedding March* again. Roseabeth continues down the aisle in the midst of a good deal of speculation. She is wearing her mother's gown, and the years have not been kind to the silk and satin folds of the gown. It has yellowed with age, and the fit is almost comical. A thin veil hardly conceals her strained expression as she scans the crowd

for Jason. She stops when she gets next to Ezra and notices that he has on white socks.)

ROSEABETH

Ezra, you got on *white* socks!

SILAS

I brought you some dark ones, Son.

EZRA

I know. But I couldn't put dark socks on my bloody feet.

MARIKO

What did he say about bloody feet?

EZRA

I cut my feet walkin' on the glass.

SILAS

What glass?

EZRA

From the window that Jason broke.

PREACHER

So Jason broke that window. I'll take care of him.

EZRA

It was an accident; he was tryin' to hit me, and . . . it's hard to explain.

ROSEABETH

He was tryin' to hit Ezra, Daddy.

EZRA

Don't be so sympathetic, Roseabeth.

PREACHER

Then Ezra can pay for the window. Now everybody jist settle down; this here is a *sacred* ceremony. I'd like a moment of silence.

(Preacher enters a state of reverie.)

EZRA (to Roseabeth)

Where's Jason?

ROSEABETH

I dunno. He'll be here. Don't worry.

EZRA (worried)

Don't worry! Why should I worry. It's jist my life we're dealin' with here. (A beat.)
Why didn't you tell me 'bout Jason?

ROSEABETH

'Cause I didn't think you would of--

EZRA

Have.

ROSEABETH

Have understood.

EZRA

Well, I wouldn't of!

ROSEABETH

Have!

EZRA

Okay.

ROSEABETH

That's why I didn't tell you.

EZRA

Well a fine fix you've got me into now.

ROSEABETH

You! You're always thinkin' of yourself, Ezra Casey.

PREACHER (coming out of it)

What are you two bickerin' about?

ROSEABETH

Nothin' important, Daddy.

PREACHER

Well, stop it. This ain't no time to argue!

SILAS

Right! That comes after the weddin'.

EZRA

There ain't gonna be a weddin' if I can help it.

PREACHER (snarls)

The *hell* there ain't!

EZRA

You're right. There's gonna be a weddin' for sure.

PREACHER

That's enough, Hilda. (She stops playing.) Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses, to join this man--

EZRA

Man? I'm jist a boy!

PREACHER

Boy, if you don't settle down you ain't ever gonna become a man either!

PREACHER

. . . to join this man and this woman in Holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted by God, and signifying unto us the mystical union which exists between Christ and His church. (Ezra and Roseabeth continue looking around for Jason.) It is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discretely, and in fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons come now to be joined. If there be anyone here among you who should state why this man and this woman should not be wed, let him step forward and state his objection or forever hold his peace.

ROSEABETH (elbowing Ezra)

Say somethin', Ezra!

EZRA

What?

ROSEABETH

Anything!

EZRA (reluctantly)

Ah, Preacher.

PREACHER

This better be good.

EZRA

Preacher, now don't git me wrong, 'cause I don't have any objection to weddin' Roseabeth; I most surely don't. However, maybe you oughta find out 'bout how *she* feels 'bout weddin' me.

PREACHER

Roseabeth 'll do what I tell 'er.

(From outside comes the ROAR of Jason's mufflers, the SQUEAL of tires, and SOUND of a DOOR SLAMMING. Then JASON rushes in.)

JASON

Stop the weddin'!

PREACHER

What in tarnation! You git outta here! This here is a sacred ceremony.

(JASON crowds in between Ezra and Roseabeth.)

JASON

I don't care nothin' for that. Roseabeth don't love Ezra; she loves me!

PREACHER

Like hell!

ROSEABETH

It's true, Daddy. I do!

JASON

And *I'm* gonna marry 'er!

PREACHER

Like hell!

(Preacher unveils his shotgun and Roseabeth along with it. Her veil dangles from the barrel like some poor bird of prey.)

PREACHER (to Ezra)

This is *your* fault!

EZRA
Like hell!

PREACHER (raving mad)
You're the boy that led my angel from the path of righteousness.

EZRA
Now wait a minute! I didn't do anything to Roseabeth!

SILAS
You didn't?

EZRA
No, I tried, but evidently I didn't do it right. Didn't Jason tell you. He's the one that--

SILAS
How could you not do it right?

EZRA
I dunno! You never told me how to do it.

PREACHER (screams)
Silence!

SILAS
Why don't you let the kids do what they want, Preacher? This union of Ezra and Roseabeth is not exactly one that was made in heaven.

ROSEABETH
Daddy, I know who I love. And Ezra isn't ready for marriage; he so . . . *immature*.

EZRA
Now wait a minute!

PREACHER
No, no! That boy ruined you.

ROSEABETH
No, *he* didn't. Jason did.

JASON
Now wait a minute!

PREACHER

What!?

Roseabeth! JASON

Daddy! ROSEABETH

SILAS (to Ezra)
We're gittin' outta this madhouse. You know where the truck is.

(Preacher lifts the shotgun to over his head and lets go with both barrels into the ceiling. Now he is clearly out of control, spilling over with self-righteous indignation.)

PREACHER (to Roseabeth)
You mean to tell me that *both* a these boys ruined you?

Boys will be boys. SILAS

Daddy! They didn't *ruin* me. ROSEABETH

No sir. I tried to, but-- EZRA

ROSEABETH
Oh, Ezra, will you be quiet. Daddy, nobody *ruined* me. I--I'm a woman now, not your little girl. I've grown up. You havta face that.

PREACHER
No, no! They done it. They havta pay!

JASON
Who the hell are you to tell us how to live our lives. You ain't God; you can't pass judgment on Roseabeth or me or Ezra. You don't own us! And I'm gonna marry Roseabeth, and if you don't like it, you can go to hell!

ROSEABETH
That's not the way to handle Daddy, Jason.

JASON
And if you didn't *ruin* her mother, how'd Roseabeth git here anyhow?!

I never touched her mother!

PREACHER (incoherently)

What? What did he say?

ROSEABETH (stunned)

He said he's ain't your papa, but we ain't got time to talk 'bout.

JASON

Laud, have mercy upon me for I know what I must do to right this terrible transgression against me and Thee. Give me a steady hand, a keen eye, and a cold heart so that I might see Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So let it be did, so let it be done! Amen.

PREACHER (praying)

(He reaches under his robe.)

He's reloadin'!

MAN

(Suddenly, all hell breaks loose in the house of the Lord. Jason picks up the Holy water and throws it in Preacher's face, blinding him momentarily. Then Jason runs out with Roseabeth. Silas escapes with Mariko; people are diving under pews and running out the back door. Hilda starts banging out the *Wedding Recessional* at a frantic pace as the scene continues. Ezra remains frozen at the altar. After a moment Silas calls him from outside the rear window.)

Ezra. Ezra! Come on!

SILAS

(Ezra comes out of his trance and starts up the aisle as Preacher clears his vision and draws a bead on him.)

Look out, Son!

SILAS

(Ezra dives under a bench as Preacher fires. Hilda starts to wheeze and continues wheezing)

until Ezra's final monologue. Preacher starts up the aisle slowly, reloading as Ezra rolls on the floor under the benches.)

PREACHER (crazed)

Ezra. Justice is seekin' you, boy. You gotta pay for what you done. You can't run from sin, boy. Stand up. Stand up for Jesus. I got justice here waitin' for ya. Stand up, repent, lemme wash away your sins.

WOMAN (voice)

Don't you do it, Ezra. He's gonna blow away your sins, and you with 'em.

PREACHER

Boy! Come on now. Where you at? Me and the Laud and Mr. Winchester here wanna have a little visitation with ya.

(Ezra peers up from behind a bench. When Preacher is looking away, Ezra takes a Bible from the bench, stands, and lets it fly, catching Preacher in the side of the head. Preacher is stunned momentarily; he staggers back and falls to his knees. Ezra rushes him, wrestles him to the ground and takes the shotgun away. He stands over Preacher, unloads the shotgun and then begins disassembling the weapon piece by piece. Next he throws the shotgun aside, and heads for the window where Silas is waiting with the truck. Ezra exits, we HEAR THE SOUND OF the truck pulling away, and then Hilda starts playing *Amazing Grace* very quietly. Preacher rises slowly, walks to the window and stares out shaking his head. LIGHTS COME DOWN SLOWLY AS HILDA INCREASES VOLUME OF HER HYMN.

CURTAIN