

THE GOSPEL SINGER

Religion is a Drag

A Three-Act Play

by

C. S. Wyatt

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Cast

Ruthie / Isaac Dumont	Ruthie is a blues and jazz singer, the star at The Eden Club, and Isaac's alter ego. Isaac is an African-American in his late 30s.
Donnie Jackson	The Eden Club emcee and Isaac's partner. Donnie is white and 30 years old.
Erica	New pianist at The Eden Club, in her early 20s, Erica moved from Chicago to be with Jessie, her girlfriend.
Mr. Dumont	Isaac's father, circa the mid-1960s. A shopkeeper.
Hank	Superficially, a bad stereotype, Hank drinks, curses, and speaks with a thick regional accent. These are the very qualities that keep Eden open and thriving.
Rev. Walker	Once a friend and mentor to Isaac, the leader of a local "black" church. About 50 years old.
Pastor James	Bigoted man with a sense of self-importance. He once made the Dumont family wait outside the "white" church while Mrs. Dumont sang for the congregation. In his early 70s.

Note: Six to seven actors are required for staging.

Suggested doubling:

Rev. Walker / Mr. Dumont

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Production Notes

Setting

The Eden Club and its surrounding community in Central California.

Time

It is 1987, and there is a sense that the gay rights movement is at a crossroads. Awareness of HIV could either empower anti-gay religious voices or encourage the LGBT community to unify as a political force.

Set Notes

<i>The Eden Club</i>	The club consists of three rooms: 1) the main stage with a microphone and piano; 2) Ruthie's dressing room with two chairs, a makeup desk, and a tri-fold dressing screen; and 3) Hank's office with two chairs, a desk, and a waste basket.
<i>Baptist Church</i>	A lectern for Rev. Walker and a piano.
<i>Isaac's House</i>	<i>(front porch)</i> A porch swing or glider for two and a small table for drinks.
<i>Town Park</i>	A park bench.
<i>Diner</i>	A diner table with four chairs.

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Song List

All songs performed by Ruthie / Isaac, with music performed by Erica on piano.

- I-1. “Fever” by Eddie Cooley and (Otis Blackwell) John Davenport. Copyright 1956.
- I-1. **Note:** Optionally, an abbreviated “My Man (Mon Homme)” by Channing Pollock, Maurice Yvain, Albert Willemetz, and Jaques Charles. Copyright 1916.
- I-1. If time and staging permits a two-song set, “Without Your Love” by Johnny Lange and Fred Stryker. Copyright 1936.
- I-2. “His Eye is on the Sparrow” by Civilla Martin and Charles Gabriel. Copyright 1905.
- I-2. I-3. “Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho.”
- I-3. “Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes.”
- II-1. “In the Sweet By and By” by Sanford F. Bennett. 1868.
- II-1. “Will the Circle Be Unbroken?” by Ada R. Habershon with music by Charles H. Gabriel. 1908.
- II-2. “If He Changed My Name.”
- II-2. / II-3. “We’ve Come a Long Way.”
- III-2. “Cry Me a River,” by Arthur Hamilton. Copyright 1953.
- III-4. “Down by the Riverside.”
- III-6. “Go Down, Moses.”
- III-8. “As Long as He Needs Me” by Lionel Bart. Copyright 1960.
- III-8. “Somewhere (There’s a Place for Us)” from *West Side Story*, by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim. Copyright 1957.
- III-8. **Donnie** sings “Amazing Grace.”
- III-9. Erica plays “Precious Lord” into the final scene.
- III-9. “Amazing Grace” a cappella.

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Playwright's Notes

I have already pondered what people will ask when they first read this or see it produced. No, on the surface you couldn't ask for a stranger proponent of faith. I'm agnostic, or something like that. Then again, I'm also not gay, black, or a singer of any skill — ask anyone unfortunate enough to hear me sing.

Writers should explore what they don't know. Being outside a story gives me more reason to research themes. I learn a lot talking to other people and trying to tell their stories as best I can. It is interesting that few people think their experiences are interesting or could teach lessons to a wider audience. Granted, writers get to fill-in what they don't know with whatever they fancy.

This play is about faith; not the faith in a higher power, which I leave to theologians and philosophers for now, but faith in yourself and what you must do to be true to yourself. If you aren't true to yourself, no other faith matters.

While a work of fiction, *The Gospel Singer* was inspired by real people and the social conservatism of Central Valley of California. There is a truth I hoped to capture beyond the facts; I'm sure "Isaac" and "Donnie" would appreciate my quest for that truth.

The Gospel Singer was developed with support from the *In the Raw Festival* at Bricolage Production Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The original 2013 workshop cast:

Varian Huddleston as Ruthie / Isaac Dumont
Sean Sears as Donnie Jackson
Sally Randa as Erica
Leslie Howard as Mr. Dumont/Rev. Walker
John Gresh as Hank
Mark Conway Thompson as Pastor James
Jimmy Fitzgerald as the Narrator
and Deryck Tines on Piano

Directed by Jeffrey Carpenter; Annie DiMario, Dramaturg

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About the Playwright

We are assured C. S. Wyatt exists. Rumor has it there is photographic evidence that he roams small towns, looking for inspiration. Many suspect this quest is a thinly veiled effort to avoid editing, that painful process of recognizing he makes many mistakes when typing. At least he ventures beyond his home office and into sunlight, regardless of the reason.

Wyatt describes his works as “Writing to understand.” *The Gospel Singer* is Wyatt’s nineteenth attack upon the dramatic form, indicating he still doesn’t understand... something. For some inexplicable reason, he attempts to make a statement with each script. This is a more plausible explanation for his reclusive manner.

C. S. Wyatt is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, Inc. and supporter of the Visalia Community Players. The Players are authorized by the playwright to present his works for fundraising purposes in Tulare County, California.

Script History

2003-Jul-16	Started an outline for the concept.
2003-Nov-25	Worked on revising the outline.
2003-Dec-27	Added park scene discussion about music, 22:38.
2004-Jan-04	Rewrite of script completed.
2004-Jan-25	Revised, acceptable draft completed.
2013-Jan	Revised entire script for submission to Bricolage.
2013-Mar	Submitted to Bricolage “In The Raw” festival.
2013-May-19	First public reading.
2013-Dec-25	Added song list for production.
2014-May-17	Minor revisions to script.

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ACT I

Scene 1: Welcome to Eden

SETTING: The Eden Club, an eclectic 1980s recreation of a jazz joint with décor from years gone by. On stage, it might be the 1920s, the early 60s, or any time in between.

A poster indicates RUTHIE performs Thursday through Saturday nights.

Jazz plays quietly between the club's acts.

A spotlight rises on center stage, where a microphone stands. In the shadows is a piano.

DONNIE enters wearing a white tuxedo and black bow tie. He speaks with a faint Southern accent.

DONNIE

Now the boys are going to take a break. You know what that means. Let's hope the bar is well stocked. Of course, it must be—

(DONNIE motions with his arms.)

—because this is Eden. The only blues allowed are on stage.

ERICA enters and sits at the piano. ERICA wears an oversized black tuxedo with tails.

ERICA quietly plays the piano while DONNIE speaks.

DONNIE

Now, it's time to hold hands, preferably with your lover, and enjoy what makes Eden the best jazz joint in town. Please welcome the amazing... the seductive... the absolutely lovely—

(beat)

Ruthie.

LIGHTS dim.

RUTHIE enters.

Backlighting obscures RUTHIE from the audience. She wears a glamorous 1960s dress, simple and elegant, accessorized with a boa and a string of pearls.

RUTHIE

Just between us, I think that upright man was looking at me like a fox eyeing the hen. Those bass players... all think they're Mingus. Well, now, Ruthie is not about to be his chicken.

RUTHIE pulls the microphone stand closer, while DONNIE watches from behind the curtain.

RUTHIE

Men are nothing but heartache, girls. Let him slide his own trombone. They just break our hearts. Oh, but it's not just men. No sisters, there are things more complex than men. Come to think of it, men are pretty simple. Love is complex.

RUTHIE talks rhythmically, as ERICA plays piano. ERICA tries to get the pacing. It's her first night as RUTHIE's accompanist.

RUTHIE

Everyone knows the story
of Romeo and Juliet,
how two lovers from families
from different parts of town
meet a tragic end.

Extremely skilled, ERICA improvises to keep pace with RUTHIE.

RUTHIE

(talking into the song)

But sometimes,
it's a lot more than being
from the wrong side of town...
You know what I'm saying.
You love someone,
but you aren't allowed to love.

RUTHIE sways for a few beats. She closes her eyes, talking from experience.

RUTHIE

You sneak about,
holding hands only in your hearts,

never talking in public.
It's a forbidden love.
It's the love I knew
growing up...

RUTHIE sings "Fever" by Eddie Cooley and (Otis Blackwell) John Davenport. Copyright 1956. RUTHIE embraces the Billie Holiday style.

{*Note*: Optionally, RUTHIE sings an abbreviated "My Man (Mon Homme)" by Channing Pollock, Maurice Yvain, Albert Willemetz, and Jaques Charles. Copyright 1916.}

RUTHIE

When I think about him, I want to say...
You give me
You give me fever
Never know how much I love you
Never know how much I care
When you put your arms around me
I get a fever that's so hard to bear
Listen to me baby, hear every word I say
No one can love you the way I do
'Cause they don't know how to love you my way

ERICA's confidence increases. She's emphatic, but not overshadowing RUTHIE.

RUTHIE

(singing)

You give me fever, when you kiss me
Fever when you hold me tight
Fever in the morning
Fever all through the night
Sun lights up the daytime
Moon lights up the night
My eyes light up when you call my name
'Cause I know you're gonna treat me right
Bless my soul I love you, take this heart away
Take these arms I'll never use
And just believe in what my lips have to say

*You give me fever, when you kiss me
Fever when you hold me tight
Fever in the morning
Fever all through the night*

DONNIE, his eyes closed, sways to the music.

RUTHIE

*Everybody's got the fever
That is something you should know
Fever isn't such a new scene
Fever started long ago
You give me fever, fever
You give me, you give me fever
You give me fever, when you kiss me
Fever when you hold me tight
Fever in the morning
Fever all through the night.*

DONNIE wipes sweat from his brow with a kercheif. He looks slightly ill and unbalanced.

RUTHIE

(sings)

*Romeo loved Juliet
Juliet, she felt the same
When he put his arms around her
He said Julie baby, you're my flame
He gave her fever
Sun lights up the daytime
Moon lights up the night
My eyes light up when you call my name
'Cause I know you're gonna treat me right
You give me fever, when you kiss me
Fever when you hold me tight
Fever in the morning
Fever all through the night
Fever, with his kisses
Fever when he holds me tight
Everybody's got the fever
That is something you should know
Fever isn't such a new scene
Fever started long ago*

*Fever, when you kiss them
Fever, if you live and learn
Fever, 'til you sizzle
What a lovely way to burn
What a lovely way to burn...*

DONNIE wipes his forehead again.

ERICA plays as RUTHIE holds the last note.

If time and staging permits a two-song set, “Without Your Love” by Johnny Lange and Fred Stryker. Copyright 1936.

Bless you all. Good night.

RUTHIE

The lights dim and RUTHIE exits. For a moment, ERICA is alone on stage, playing the piano.

DONNIE enters.

DONNIE

(to Erica)

Keep playing, new kid. Don't stop until the bass returns.

DONNIE walks to the microphone. He stands in the spotlight.

DONNIE

(stretching out the words)

The Eden Club's very... own... Ruthie!

DONNIE claps earnestly and enthusiastically.

RUTHIE steps from behind the curtain, bows again, and departs.

DONNIE

We want to thank you for spending a night with us at The Eden Club, where you're free to be who you are—or who you wish you were.

DONNIE exits.

Spotlight on ERICA as RUTHIE makes her way to the “Dressing Room” on a corner of the stage.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 2: Ruthie Revealed

SETTING: *Ruthie's dressing room.*

AT RISE: RUTHIE sits on a stool, looking into a mirror. She hums an old spiritual to her herself. She's lost in thought, not yet removing her makeup and costume.

ERICA knocks slowly and lightly.

RUTHIE

Come in. It's unlocked.

ERICA opens the door slightly and peers into the room.

RUTHIE

All the way.

ERICA closes the door.

RUTHIE

You're one talented young lady, sugar. I wouldn't have argued with Hank about hiring you if I didn't think you were good enough for Ruthie. Did you like your first real show?

ERICA

I loved it. Especially wearing pants.

RUTHIE

Honey, it's a tuxedo.

(laughs gently)

We want to sound a bit more refined, now.

RUTHIE motions and ERICA sits on the lone extra chair.

ERICA

Tuxedo. I really love the tail.

Ruthie

Tails. It's plural, dear. The tailcoat has two tails, last time I checked.

ERICA

(sighs)

Well, it beats a dress any day.

(beat)

I'm sorry!

An embarrassed pause. RUTHIE looks at ERICA.

RUTHIE

I know what you meant, dear.

RUTHIE turns back to the mirror.

ERICA

Dresses and gowns look wonderful on some people— You. I mean they look wonderful on you.

RUTHIE

Relax, girl. You're a nervous bundle of energy. It's cute.

ERICA

Cute? I don't want to be cute.

RUTHIE

And you've probably done a fine job of avoiding cuteness.

ERICA

I never liked dresses.

RUTHIE

That's all right. Not everyone was meant to like dresses.

ERICA

Guess it always made me feel like a freak.

RUTHIE

Tell me about feeling like a freak. I understand. And more. Oh, lordy, do I understand.

ERICA

How do you deal with it?

RUTHIE

Well, I usually tell people to get with the times. A black jazz singer has every right to love a white man. Times are a-changing, right?

ERICA laughs and RUTHIE smiles.

RUTHIE

What? Black and white not the issue?

(laughs)

Heck, I might as well love a little green Martian. Or a Catholic. That might really shock 'em around here.

ERICA

A Catholic?

RUTHIE

Oh, honey, you don't know a thing about country life, do you? It must seem like a million miles away from...

ERICA

I'm from Chicago.

RUTHIE

Oh, let me guess. That natural red hair of yours... Irish Catholic?

ERICA

That's how I was raised, at least.

RUTHIE

Oh, I hope you have that legendary Irish redhead spunk. I love a little passion in my music.

ERICA

Fiery red-hot temper, sometimes. Just like my father.

(pause)

So why couldn't you love a Catholic?

RUTHIE

Southern Baptists are about all we had around here when I was child. Oh, I was told stories about Catholics and the Pope. Catholics had it all wrong. But we forgave some of them. At least Mama forgave the Kennedy brothers. They were okay, even if they followed that anti-Christ in Rome. I think she adored Jackie more than the boys, though. Yes, Jackie was the real class of that family. Still, I think Mama would have tried to get Jackie into a real church if she had met her.

ERICA

So much for bringing a nice Catholic boy home.

RUTHIE

Excuse me?

ERICA

Well, if you weren't supposed to like Catholics—

RUTHIE

I wasn't about to bring a nice

(long, with emphasis)

boy

(staccato)
home, dear. Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, or even the nicest Southern Baptist young man
you ever did meet.

ERICA

Dammit. I fucked up again.

RUTHIE

Oh, no, no, no. Language, dear. Spunk is one thing, but you need to watch those words.
You won't ever hear Ruthie talking like that and I don't expect it of you. Hank, I expect it
of. You, I don't. Understand?

ERICA

I messed up?

RUTHIE nods approvingly.

ERICA

(smiling)
Yes, ma'am. I messed up.

RUTHIE

Good. You'll be treated with a lot more respect if you treat everything, including words,
with respect.

ERICA

You mean talk and act like a proper lady.

RUTHIE

No. I mean talk and act like a proper

(emphasis)
person.

(pause)

People will use any excuse to support their prejudices, though. Between Los Angeles and
San Francisco, you might as well be in Arkansas or Alabama.

ERICA

So we're in the Deep South... of California?

RUTHIE

It's a state of mind, child. The South is a few miles outside of every city. Some things,
you don't forget. You need to be aware of prejudices, for your own sake.

ERICA

It's better now. A lot better, right?

RUTHIE

Young idealism. Yes, in some ways.

(removing makeup)

But even in the 80s, there's still a lot left unsaid. Especially in a small town. Even in Eden, the guests don't speak it...

(motherly)

People who take every opportunity to say they are tolerant, aren't. And the crudest people? Some are like Hank. He's an honest self-loathing bigot, more tolerant than even he realizes, or he wouldn't own Eden.

ERICA

Ruthie? I know it is a lot to ask of the star...

RUTHIE

Speak up.

ERICA

Can I change in here? I brought my jeans and shirt in a gym bag.

RUTHIE

What's wrong with the band's room?

ERICA

They're all guys.

RUTHIE

(removing wig)

Did you forget something?

ERICA

No. They're men. I mean straight men. Male. Musicians.

RUTHIE

(horrified)

Musicians?

(laughs)

Oh, yes. That says it all. Toss in some cheap whiskey or even cheaper beer and I can see how that might be a problem.

ERICA

I was going to change in the bathroom. There's barely room to—

Ruthie

Yes, I know. Hank never cared to remodel the ladies' room. Cheapskate.

(beat)

You get your bag.

ERICA

Thank you.

ERICA exits to get her bag.

RUTHIE sings “His Eye is on the Sparrow”
by Civilla Martin and Charles Gabriel.
Copyright 1905.

RUTHIE

(deeper than stage voice)

*Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heav'n and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant Friend is He.*

ERICA reenters the room silently, listening intently to RUTHIE. ERICA places a gym bag on the floor, and then removes the tuxedo jacket.

ERICA sits and removes her dress shoes, relieved.

RUTHIE

*His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.*

At this time, ERICA is only half-listening to the gospel ISAAC/RUTHIE sings.

ERICA

(making conversation)

What's that you're singing?

ERICA folds the pants neatly and places them on top of the tuxedo jacket.

ERICA stands, unzips her slacks and sits again.

RUTHIE

What's in my heart. More than anything, I want to stand on that stage and sing the songs in my heart. But Hank doesn't want *that* part of me on stage. Not here.

ERICA

Don't you sing what's in your heart now?

RUTHIE steps behind an art deco trifold screen to change clothes.

ERICA removes the tuxedo's pre-tied bow-tie and the white dress shirt. She does not wear a bra.

RUTHIE

(silhouette)

Do you know who Ruthie is?

ERICA

You?

RUTHIE

Ruthie *is* me, on stage, singing about things I could never say or admit any other way.

RUTHIE places her dress and other items over the screen. She fumbles a bit, in silhouette, to change clothes.

ERICA

A sweet transvestite, I thought.

RUTHIE

No. Not at all.

ERICA

You're not sweet?

RUTHIE

I'm not a transvestite. Oh, I am surprised at you. I'm a performer in costume on the stage. I am a female illusionist.

ERICA begins changing into old jeans and a T-shirt.

ERICA

Drag—

RUTHIE is changing into ISAAC.

RUTHIE

(deeper voice)

No, not a drag queen. I'm an impersonator. Just not of anyone in particular... I suppose.

ERICA

I keep saying stupid things.

ERICA's T-shirt features a cat with a cape and reads, "Pussy Power!"

ISAAC has replaced RUTHIE. He remains fun, energetic, and witty, but without the over-acting of his stage persona.

ISAAC

(transformed, deeper voice)

Ruthie lets me sing about that secret love. All those secrets.

ISAAC steps out from behind the screen. He embodies style, circa 1987.

Noticing the T-shirt, ISAAC shakes his head.

ISAAC

Scrappy-Do, it isn't.

ERICA

"Puppy power" wasn't quite me.

ISAAC

(laughs)

I am not surprised.

ERICA

You're not like anyone else here. You *are* high-class. The rest of us are just faking it.

ISAAC sits and looks into the mirror.

ISAAC

(teasing, exaggerated tone)

I was born to a well-off black family.

ERICA

Huh?

ISAAC

Believe it or not, there were middle-class black families long before you were born.

Spotlight reveals MR. DUMONT, proprietor of Dumont's General Store.

ISAAC

My father had a plan for me.

MR. DUMONT

(to an unseen young Isaac)

Isaac, you're late. You ever gonna' own this store, you better learn to be on time.

ISAAC

I'd stay after school, practicing songs with my music teacher. Sometimes I'd lose track of the time.

MR. DUMONT

No excuses, young man. Your mother wants you to sweep the floor before you stock shelves. You get in there and make yourself useful.

MR. DUMONT smiles and laughs.

A phone rings near MR. DUMONT. He steps inside the store space and picks up the receiver. He nods and listens.

ISAAC

He wanted me to be a shopkeeper.

(to self)

I wanted to be my mother.

MR. DUMONT

(into receiver)

Yes Pastor James, I think that's a grand idea. Thank you, sir.

MR. DUMONT hangs up the phone.

MR. DUMONT

(to an unseen Mrs. Dumont)

Beccah? You know how you've always wanted a bigger audience?

(pause)

Well, we are goin' to the big church this Sunday. You've been asked to sing by that new pastor from up north. Things are changing.

ISAAC

One Sunday, we all dressed up and drove to the new, beautiful church on the other side of town. My mother was going to sing for all the important people. The mayor, the sheriff, they all attended that church.

ERICA

But they didn't let her sing?

ISAAC

Oh, they let her sing.

MR. DUMONT

Yes, Pastor, I understand.

(to Mrs. Dumont)

No, Beccah, it's okay. You just go in there and sing for Jesus.

(MR. DUMONT sits on the ground)

Isaac, don't go kickin' the steps like that. This is still the Lord's house. Now be a good brother and take your sister for a little walk.

ISAAC

I took little Abigail around the back of the church and listened to Mama through an open window. Oh, could that woman sing. She sang and I sat on those back steps listening to her. And I heard my father crying.

MR. DUMONT shakes his head and slouches.

ISAAC

My father wanted to be in there, with the other business owners and town leaders. It wasn't about faith. It was about standing in the community. Middle class doesn't mean much when you're still treated like that.

Lights fade on MR. DUMONT, his head buried in his hands.

ISAAC

(voice slowing, containing anger)

I hated them. All of them. Most of all, I hated Gospel music from that day on.

ERICA

But you were just singing it.

ISAAC

Yes, I was.

(pause)

When I was caring for Mamma, she would ask me to read to her from the Bible every night. Towards the end, I sang to her, because it made her smile.

(looking away)

I sang at my mother's funeral. Amazing Grace. That was six years ago, now.

ERICA and ISAAC finish changing. ERICA stands.

ERICA

If your mother sang anything like you, I wish I had heard her.

ISAAC

She was the definition of class. Both of my parents were. By comparison, Donnie is...
hmmm.

ERICA

Not so middle-class?

ISAAC

Before I even admitted to myself I loved him, I had to consider that I was friends with what my father called “white hick trash.” Father would never approve of that. He thought you should appreciate the finer things and have some class. Donnie still doesn’t know which fork is for salad. I’d say Donnie’s father is a Jim Bob.

ERICA

A Jim Bob?

ISAAC

Bubba. The kind of man you see sitting on the porch of a shack, drinking moonshine and singing twangy country tunes. Or, heaven forbid, even enjoying square dancing.

ERICA

(not quite singing)

Just the good ol’ boys,
Never meanin’ no harm.

ISAAC

(shaking head)

You watched too much Dukes of Hazard. Thank God they cancelled that show.

ERICA

I liked Daisy.

ISAAC

Why am I not surprised?

(beat)

I’ll see you tomorrow night, Erica.

ERICA grabs her things and exits the dressing room.

ISAAC sings in a deeper, slower voice,
“Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho.”

ISAAC

(singing)

*Joshua fought the battle of Jericho,
Jericho, Jericho!*

*Joshua fit the battle of Jericho,
And the walls came a tumblin' down.*

*Now the Lord commanded Joshua;
"I command you and obey you must;
You just march straight to those city walls
And the walls will turn to dust."*

ISAAC stands and dons a blue and gold
choir robe.

ISAAC

(speaking)

Some walls do need to come down.

Lights dim and the "Dressing Room" is
removed as ISAAC crosses the stage,
singing.

Scene 3: Donnie Arrives

SETTING: Baptist Church. It is three years earlier, 1984.

REV. WALKER enters and walks to the pulpit.

REV. WALKER

Sing it, Brother Isaac, sing it loud!

ISAAC

(singing)

*Joshua fought the battle of Jericho,
Jericho, Jericho!*

*Joshua fought the battle of Jericho,
And the walls came a tumblin' down.*

*Straight up to the walls of Jericho
He marched with spear in hand,
"Go blow that ram's horn," Joshua cried,
"For the battle is in my hand."
The lamb ram sheep horns began to blow,
And the trumpets began to sound,
And Joshua commanded, "Now children, shout!"
And the walls came tumbling down.*

*Joshua fought the battle of Jericho,
Jericho, Jericho!
Joshua fit the battle of Jericho
And the walls came a tumblin' down.*

REV. WALKER

I can hear the voice of our Lord. I know you all can, too. Rise and join us in song. Let us raise our voices in praise to Him.

ISAAC sings an energetic, jazz-laced rendition of the spiritual "Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes."

ISAAC

(singing)

*Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss within the cup
And I'll not ask for wine.*

DONNIE enters the worship hall. He wears an ill-fitting suit, probably the best he owns. His hair is parted in the middle and feathered, reflecting an outdated 1970s style.

ISAAC notices DONNIE, and not because he's a young white man in a black church.

DONNIE is mesmerized by the singing and ISAAC.

ISAAC

(singing)

*The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.*

ISAAC and DONNIE gaze at each other. They don't yet know each other, but sense something. ISAAC looks away.

REV. WALKER

(talking over the music, nearly shouting)

Sing it out! We need nothing but the love of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to nourish our souls. The love of Jesus fills us with Holy Spirit. Sing it brothers and sisters!

DONNIE mouths the words, in a faint whisper. He's still watching ISAAC.

ISAAC

(singing)

*I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honoring thee
As giving it a hope that there
It could not withered be;
But thou thereon didst only breathe,
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself but thee!*

REV. WALKER

Praise be! Amen!

CONGREGATION

Amen!

REV. WALKER

Enjoy this beautiful day the Lord has given to us.

DONNIE exits the church and loiters outside the door.

REV. WALKER thanks ISAAC and then exits the church to greet DONNIE.

ISAAC exits.

REV. WALKER

(approaching DONNIE)

Hello young man. I wanted to thank you for joining us today.

DONNIE

(with a thick Southern accent, sing-song voice)

I's just, well, wonderin' if this might be the right place—

REV. WALKER

The Lord's House is always the right place for all His children.

DONNIE

Well, seein' as I ain't Catholic or Lutheran or one of them other fancy churches you got around here, I sorta just thought—

(pause)

But I see it ain't quite—

REV. WALKER

White? No, this church isn't white or purple or blue. It is a joyous house of God!

DONNIE looks downward, embarrassed.

ISAAC walks across stage, exiting the church. He wears a perfectly tailored suit and carries a fedora.

ISAAC

(placing the hat on his head)

Reverend, it seems we have new brother amongst us.

REV. WALKER

I do hope so. Isaac, I'd like you to meet Brother...

(patting DONNIE's shoulder)

Forgive me, but I didn't get your name.

DONNIE

Donnie.

REV. WALKER

Oh, dear. The old Buchanan sisters are arguing again. Pardon me, boys.

REV. WALKER exits.

DONNIE

Excuse me. I just—

ISAAC studies the young man, silently. He tilts his head, trying to recall the face.

DONNIE

That music. Your singing. It was somethin' else.

(turning away)

Sorry.

ISAAC

Donnie, is it? You worked on my Nina.

(gestures)

The red Mercedes 350SL over there. You worked on her.

Donnie

Oh. Yeah! New plugs and belts a few months ago. I love that car. Did you know that the 350 was really a 4.5-liter? They changed the model number to 450 within a year. It's a genuine collector's item. Begged Pa to let me service her.

ISAAC notices the double entendre, but only smiles.

ISAAC

I knew there was a reason I named her Nina. A hidden power. Plus, Eunice was out of the question.

(shudders)

When you choose a name, it should mean something. Tell a story.

(offering hand)

I'm glad you enjoyed the service. Will we see you next week?

DONNIE

Next week?

DONNIE shoves his hands into his pockets.

ISAAC

It seems we do this every Sunday. I'm sure Rev. Walker would like to see you in the pews.

DONNIE

You really think so? Even though—

ISAAC

(nodding)

It's the Lord's house. Everyone is welcome. We're all brothers and sisters in His eyes.

DONNIE

That's what the Reverend said. Yeah. Okay. I'll come back.

ISAAC

I'm sure I'll see you. You are hard to miss among the pews.

DONNIE watches as ISAAC walks away.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 4: Move-In Day

SETTING: Porch of Isaac's house, which once belonged to his parents. It is 1985.

There is a porch swing and small table. ISAAC has left a newspaper, a book, and tea cup on the table.

Enter ISAAC, wearing linen slacks and a short-sleeved shirt. As always, he is stylish without trying.

ISAAC

That's it? Everything?

DONNIE, wiping sweat from his forehead, enters with a large cardboard box. He wears old jeans and a Georgia Tech T-shirt.

DONNIE

(with a thick Southern accent)

How much does a man need? Clothes, a few personal things, a handful of mixtapes. Not much, I suppose.

ISAAC

Hobos have more stuff.

DONNIE

Mama don't believe I'm just rentin' a room.

ISAAC

And yet, they refuse to admit you're who you are.

DONNIE

It's easier that way.

(pause)

Why's everything goin' into the small bedroom? You've got that big room upstairs!

ISAAC

I don't like walking up all those steps.

DONNIE looks suspicious.

ISAAC sits on the porch swing and sips his tea.

ISAAC

It's Mama's room.

DONNIE nods.

ISAAC

Hank has informed me that Charles is moving to New York to pursue his acting career.

DONNIE

That's good, I guess.

ISAAC

The Eden Club will need a new emcee. I told Hank you'd be perfect.

DONNIE

Me? I'm a mechanic, just like my Pa. Jackson's Auto Repair is my future.

ISAAC

You are charming and great with people. I can teach you how to play the role.

DONNIE

(firmly)

I ain't no actor. I ain't no emcee.

ISAAC

No, not yet. I would suggest we're all actors, but in your case—maybe not a skilled one.

But an emcee is much more than an actor. He is a tour guide through the fantasy that is The Eden Club. I know you've tried to fit in, especially with your family. But is that who you want to be or who you are trying to be?

DONNIE

Don't know. Not yet. I need to get my mind around what's all happenin' right now. You gotta get that.

ISAAC

Yes. It's a journey.

DONNIE

I've sorta takin' that "trip out of town," if you know what I mean. Away from home. I do know this much.

ISAAC

What would that be?

DONNIE

I ain't never readin' as much as you do.

ISAAC

Oh, you might surprise yourself.

DONNIE

Shit, I just thoughta something. There ain't no TV. I've been here how many times and ain't never noticed you ain't got no TV.

ISAAC

And you never missed it.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 5: Hank's a Class Act

SETTING: Hank's office.

AT RISE: HANK sits at his desk, sorting receipts. He opens a drawer and retrieves a bottle and shot glass. He pours a shot, then drinks from the bottle.

ISAAC enters the office.

ISAAC

What'd you think?

HANK

(exhausted, half-hearted)

Great show as always, my dear. Ruthie leaves 'em wanting more.

ISAAC

I meant about Erica.

HANK

Erica?

ISAAC

(gently)

The new pianist.

The two are good friends, accustomed to bantering.

HANK

Oh, yeah, right. The lesbian kid. She's pretty good. Can't believe it, though.

ISAAC

That a green pianist would be so good?

HANK

No, that we'd have a pair of real tits on stage. Well... almost.

ISAAC

You have so much class—

HANK

(taking a drink)

First real pussy on the stage and she's titless.

(shaking head)

I have bigger boobs.

ISAAC

You are a bigger boob.

HANK

What do you call that? You know, sort of the opposite...

ISAAC

Irony. Like you being my boss.

HANK

We had enough penises on stage in dresses, time for a vagina in a tux. You were absolutely right, my dear.

ISAAC

Either you shatter the stereotypes or you are one. I'm never sure.

HANK

Ouch.

(laughing)

That hurts. Stereotypes. They're all bullshit anyway.

ISAAC

She was good, especially for a first night.

HANK

Yeah, the kid was, at that. She's on. Tell her she won't be renting a tux anymore after tomorrow night's show. I'll... the Eden...

(looks down at receipts)

Just tell her.

ISAAC

Pains you to say it, Jack Benny.

HANK

Hey, it is money. What do you think keeps this place open, the Grace of God? Every shot we sell buys a little less harassment. The free drinks for the sheriff don't hurt, either.

HANK reviews the receipts, counting to himself.

HANK

Yeah. I'll pay for the tux. But only because you're making me. I wouldn't do it for just anyone.

ISAAC

Ah, the power of the diva!

HANK

Don't let it go to your head. She's young and college kids work for peanuts. I'll save money in the long run. Doesn't hurt that she's damn good on the ivories, I'll give you that.

ISAAC

At least you admit when I'm right, which I usually am.

ISAAC exits, Hank watching and shaking his head.

HANK

There ain't nothing right about you.

(drinks)

But you do know music better than anyone I've ever met.

HANK continues to sort receipts, taking drinks to ease his mind.

(LIGHTS)

REV. WALKER

(laughs)

Be a lousy messenger of His word if I didn't.

PASTOR JAMES

The Eden Club. Past the Johnson house, on the edge of town.

REV. WALKER

I know of it. Everyone does. Been there for years now.

PASTOR JAMES shakes his head in disgust.

REV. WALKER

How does The Eden Club concern us?

PASTOR JAMES

Other than being a den of sin and frivolity?

(shaking head)

One of your congregation is employed there.

REV. WALKER

A few people in town work there. The tourists seem to like it. People gotta work. It's harmless.

PASTOR JAMES

Such places are never harmless!

(whispering ominously)

One of your congregation. He sings there. As a woman.

REV. WALKER

Oh, Brother Isaac. What a voice he has. Yes, I've been told he sings there. I don't pay it much mind. Actors do all sorts of things. Why in Shakespeare's time—

PASTOR JAMES

He's an abomination.

REV. WALKER

Shakespeare?

(pause)

You mean Brother Isaac. Oh, my you're confused. No one loves God more, I dare admit, not even us.

PASTOR JAMES

(emphatically)

Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.

REV. WALKER takes a drink of coffee.
He's annoyed with his colleague, but trying
not to let it show.

REV. WALKER

Quoting Leviticus? Say what's on your mind, Brother Lloyd. Why you care all of a sudden about saving one of my flock?

PASTOR JAMES

He's not an actor. He's one of them. He's taken up with a man. One we shunned for his evil ways.

(hushed)

Donald Jackson.

REV. WALKER

Donnie? He used to come to church with Isaac. But we should never gossip. That's not the way of Jesus.

PASTOR JAMES

We must never listen to gossip.

REV. WALKER

(quoting)

They get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

PASTOR JAMES

First Timothy, chapter five, verse thirteen.

(drinks coffee)

I agree. But when I asked Donnie if he was... well... you know... different.

(can't say it, shrugs)

He left our church.

REV. WALKER

And he moved in with Isaac.

(shaking head)

Ain't none of our business. Sin is between God and—

PASTOR JAMES

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove... rebuke! Exhort... with all long suffering and doctrine.

REV. WALKER

Yes, Second Timothy. It calls on us to preach, not judge, Brother. Our duty is to the Word. As the book of James tells us...

(quoting)

He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law.

PASTOR JAMES

Need I remind you,

(passionately quoting)

...The men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly.... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.

REV. WALKER

I know you've read the epistles beyond Romans chapter one, verse twenty-seven. You've done used his letters like a checklist. Pride, boastfulness, maligning brothers, and... whispering. That's all in Romans, too.

(pause)

Paul was not Christ, Brother Lloyd. God doesn't give up on anyone. It's as simple as John 3:16.

(sighs)

That's my faith, and yours, Brother Lloyd.

PASTOR JAMES

(flustered)

I am a sword of God. We must be. Christ said in Luke... No... Matthew. He said

(mangling the quote)

I am not peace... I am a sword... to set man against father, daughter against mother-in-law

(angrily)

Well, you know the Word.

REV. WALKER

Matthew is about knowing God's love.

(pointedly)

I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which persecute you.

PASTOR JAMES glares. REV. WALKER realizes he needs to caution ISAAC about the changing atmosphere.

REV. WALKER

I'll talk to Isaac. I'll tell him what the Good Book tells us. That's all I can do.

PASTOR JAMES

You should ask if—

REV. WALKER

It's up to the sinner to confess what's in his heart. John tells us, we are all Brothers and Sisters, and

(softly quoting)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(humbly)

I'm just a simple teacher of the Word. If Isaac has done wrong... may the Lord burden his heart to confess.

PASTOR JAMES

If? If he's done wrong? He is an abomination! I remind you of Leviticus 18:22, Willie.

(coldly)

Your congregation might have some opinions on the matter. I might have to talk to some of the businessmen. You know, to remind them of God's dictates.

(with a mouth full of food)

He at least shouldn't be singing the praises in a house of God. It might affect the collection plate.

(pause)

I know you'll do the right thing.

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

Scene 1: Test of Isaac

SETTING: *Porch of Isaac's house, on one half of the stage.*

AT RISE: ISAAC sits alone.

ISAAC closes his eyes and looks upward, arms spread in prayer. He bows his head and then places his hands on his lap, where a Bible sits.

Lights rise to reveal the second setting.

SETTING: *Diner, on other half of the stage.*

AT RISE: PASTOR JAMES is sitting alone.

DONNIE enters and sits next to ISAAC.

ISAAC

I'm not going to lead the choir anymore.

(trailing off)

Rev. Walker said the Deacons might not approve....

DONNIE

(touching Isaac)

I'm sorry, Isaac. I am. But, I recovered from that whole faith thing. Don't know why you didn't. The only time they want us in church is for our funerals. Maybe not even then.

(adamantly)

Face it. Organized religion isn't for us.

ISAAC

Tell that to Gene Robinson or Mel White.

DONNIE

Who?

ISAAC

They're ministers. A gay Episcopal priest a gay evangelical writer. Well, White's not quite... out yet. He writes books with Robertson, Graham, and even Jerry Falwell. Robinson came out in '86. Poor man even tried to have himself cured while in seminary.

DONNIE

Oh, a cure. Run away and become a priest. That makes sure you at least don't have any fun being human. Nothing like praying not to fall in love. You should know that better than anyone.

(rambling nervously)

Episcopalian. Evangelical. What about Baptists? We were Baptist. Right?

ISAAC

Almost everyone we know is or was Baptist.

DONNIE

I'm a was.

ISAAC

It isn't easy to believe. I think that's the point. Faith is supposed be an effort. There is even talk about forming support groups for—

DONNIE

Talk about a group of people in need of a support group. Gay Christians. You plan to have interfaith alliances with all the gay Jews? Gay Muslims? Isaac, have you ever heard of self-loathing?

REV. WALKER enters the diner and slumps into his chair.

PASTOR JAMES

You did the right thing. Now we need to take care of Eden. Fred tells me there is nothing he or the council will do. Course, Fred's married to Abby Dumont, sister of that—

REV. WALKER

The Eden hasn't broken any laws. As far as I know, they never had so much as a bar fight.

PASTOR JAMES

Are you positive? There are so many laws, they must've broken one or two.

REV. WALKER

Short of serving minors or being open on a Sunday, it would be nigh impossible to close Eden. Hank's too smart to make those kinds of mistakes. I don't even know if Hank is *one of them* or not. He's won the county fishing derby four times. Ain't no man 'round here who can tie a fly like he can, neither. He's a good businessman.

PASTOR JAMES

Hank is not a good Christian.

ISAAC

It's not like we can't be Christian, Donnie. Maybe if I talk to Hank again—

DONNIE

Let it go. He's told you that Ruthie isn't going sing those songs.

ISAAC

I just don't get it. What's wrong with him? Ruthie should be singing—

DONNIE

He's thinking like a businessman.

ISAAC

Exactly. See how wrong that is?

DONNIE

(exasperated)

I was defending him.

ISAAC

Defending him? How could you?

DONNIE

I like having a job. No Eden, no job. Seems simple to me. I happen to think a paycheck is a good thing, Isaac. A great thing.

DONNIE breathes heavily and wobbles.

They both know something is wrong, but do not comment.

ISAAC

No Eden? Don't tell me you buy into his fears that the local powers that be would close The Eden Club over a gospel singer.

(pause)

Well? Do you?

DONNIE

(gasps, sighs)

Eden's no place for religion.

(pause)

Do you know who keeps Eden thriving? Who keeps you on that stage you love so much?

(hushed)

It's people like us.

(quietly, passionately)

Fags, queers, gays. Maybe a lesbian or two. People like us created Eden. That's who keeps Eden thriving. In the cold of winter, on the hottest summer weekend, when the tourists are comfortably somewhere else, who do you think fills the seats? Family.

ISAAC

A lot of *those people* love great music. And that's what I want to sing. Great, meaningful, music.

DONNIE

Enough kidding. You want to sing gospel music, Isaac, keep it in church. Spirituals in Eden? Are you nuts? Of course you are. You have to be nuts.

(shaking head)

Ruthie, the gospel singer.

ISAAC

It is The Eden Club.

DONNIE

What? And you're one of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence? Don't you get it? We mock religion. That's why it's The Eden Club.

ISAAC

We? You had better be talking about Hank. We — you and me — met in church.

DONNIE

Thank God you let me buy a TV. Now I spend Sundays watching football like a normal—

PASTOR JAMES

Do you want those abominations in our town? Do you want the perverts and pedophiles coming here because of that place? We must protect the children of *our community*. We must protect our children. Our young boys.

(pause)

What if we make it so no one wants to visit Eden?

REV. WALKER

(worried)

You're not talking about violence, are you?

PASTOR JAMES

I am deeply hurt you'd even suggest such a thing. I am a man of God. A man of peace.

REV. WALKER

You said you were a sword.

PASTOR JAMES

We raise our voices. We stand outside that club and let the sinners know that God is watching them, waiting to judge them all.

ISAAC

You have to struggle to find yourself, sometimes. We all make mistakes. That's life.

DONNIE

Hello? Life? It's a nightmare. Can you live in reality for a bit?

ISAAC

Your reality?

DONNIE

Our reality. We avoid any and all conflict, especially that religion thing. Our nice, quiet, simple, reality. You perform, I emcee, we get paid, you buy books... We did the religion thing. It's over. They didn't want us. That's reality. Our lives are *good enough*, so why upset things?

ISAAC

What about the other reality?

DONNIE

What other reality?

ISAAC

Whispering in public, never holding hands, avoiding your family—

DONNIE

I'd do that if I were straight. I'm me. Deal with it. I'm not about to rush to my family gatherings. Not unless you want me to start chewing tobacco and spitting on the sidewalk.

ISAAC

Trying to hide who we are. That reality.

DONNIE

The reality is... We're nothing but sinners to them.

PASTOR JAMES

Remember,

(quoting)

...If any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

REV. WALKER

Appropriate. Isaac and Job. We've taken away more from Isaac than you realize— but you cannot take Brother Isaac's faith.

DONNIE

Falwell and the Moral Majority will love us and wish us well in your fantasyland. And someday Republicans will elect a gay man to Congress.

ISAAC

There are rumors about Jim Kolbe. He worked for Goldwater. He was even

(sings)
in the Navy.

(talking)
Someday, he'll be out. And someday, you'll be able to be openly gay and serve in the military.

(thinking)
Pretty sure Barney Frank will come out soon, too. He reminds me of an angry Truman Capote.

DONNIE
You have got to be kidding me. Gay history 101. Too bad we don't have Trivial Pursuit, Gay Pride Edition. Where do you get this stuff?

ISAAC
Your subscription to The Advocate. Don't you read it?

DONNIE
Sometimes.

ISAAC
It's usually buried under your Automotive News and Sports Illustrated. You don't read anything but the sports section of the newspaper.

DONNIE
Not true. I read the lifestyle and entertainment sections.

ISAAC
I stand corrected. Sports and entertainment.

DONNIE
And the comics.

(pause)
What is it with you? Are you becoming some sort of crusader? Are you going to march in Pride parades, holding a Bible while dressed as Ruthie?

ISAAC
Why not? An openly gay gospel singer. It's not good to lie about who you are. I'll just explain to Hank that I need—

DONNIE
I'm not lying. Hank's not lying. We're just not buying time on television or sending out mailers to announce how we live in private. I like my privacy.

ISAAC
Self-destruction is better?

DONNIE

Hell, we're the masters of self-destructive behaviors. Society hates us. We hate us. The entire club scene was like racing towards a brick wall. Visit the city and be free for a weekend. Sex, drugs, alcohol, more sex. More drugs. Have you forgotten disco entirely?

ISAAC

I tried to.

PASTOR JAMES

They reject the Lord publicly, Willie. It says in Deutoronomy that

(quoting)

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God.

REV. WALKER

That same chapter tells us not to plow fields with oxen *and asses* together.

PASTOR JAMES

Willie, they are destroying this community. We know what those people are! They flaunt it! We need just 50 good people to take up the Lord's message and block the doors to Eden.

REV. WALKER

Rebecca Dumont sang in your church, years ago.

PASTOR JAMES

What's your point, Willie? His mama has nothing to do with—

REV. WALKER

You listened to a woman.

(quoting)

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak... also saith the law.

PASTOR JAMES

We're allowed to sing His praises. It's all about knowing your place.

DONNIE

Let's just have our lives together, in peace. My classmates knew I was gay before I did. Why the hell do you think my family moved? Pa never said a word about it, though. We just moved and he went on fixin' cars.

ISAAC

Try being black. I can't exactly "whiten up" the same way you "straighten up" around strangers. As if getting pulled over for a D.W.B. isn't bad enough.

DONNIE

D... W...

ISAAC

Driving While Black.

(laughs)

The benefit is that some part of me finds police uniforms sexy. Do you know how troubling that is? I get so conflicted.

DONNIE

Sorry. Forgot.

ISAAC

I didn't. I tried to tell Erica things change slowly.

(assertive)

But maybe they do change too slowly. I'm not going to be silenced.

DONNIE

So you decide, "Let's piss everyone off! With gospel music!" Some of us don't want to be noticed. I want to be left alone. I don't want to be political, I don't want to be an activist, and I certainly don't want to be unemployed.

ISAAC

(sighs)

Donnie—

DONNIE

Do you think everyone is going to join hands and sing.

(sings)

What the world needs now,
Is love sweet love...

ISAAC

Maybe not the world, but Eden would be a start. And that's not a gospel song. I want to sing about the ultimate love, His love for us.

DONNIE

Something you can't even do in church, now. You're an idealist.

ISAAC

That's why you love me.

DONNIE shakes his head.

ISAAC sings "In the Sweet By and By" by
Sanford F. Bennett. Public Domain, 1868.

ISAAC

(sings)

*There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.*

*In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

DONNIE struggles to breathe.

ISAAC

(reaching to DONNIE)

It is great music. I bet Hank—

DONNIE

(pulling away)

I don't want to hear the songs.

(pause)

They remind me of growing up.

ISAAC

Your family listened to gospel music? I didn't know that.

DONNIE

Country gospel Christian stuff. Same songs, sung worse.

ISAAC sings "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" by Ada R. Habershon with music by Charles H. Gabriel in a mocking country style. Public Domain 1908.

Isaac mimics The Carter Family version.

ISAAC

(singing)

*Will the circle be unbroken
By and by Lord, by and by?
Is a better home awaiting
In the sky, in the sky?*

*In the joyous days of childhood
Oft they told of wondrous love
Pointed to the dying Saviour;
Now they dwell with Him above.*

*You remember songs of heaven
Which you sang with childish voice.
Do you love the hymns they taught you,
Or are songs of earth your choice?*

ISAAC

I wouldn't want to think about country music either. Christian or not, that's musical Hell.

DONNIE

It's not just the country music. It's that whole Christian thing. Don't you get it? I don't like anything about it. Nothing.

ISAAC

You and Hank are bigots. I can't believe this.

DONNIE

I am not a bigot. I dislike Christians. I doubt I'd like Muslims much, either. I bet the gay nightlife in Tehran leaves a lot to be desired. Religion is just overflowing with love and acceptance. You of all people should understand.

DONNIE rises slowly, deliberately, and takes on a tent revival tone, despite his wheezing, weak voice.

God created Adam and Eve, I remind you brothers and sisters, not Adam and

(rising tone)

Steve. It is an abomination, yes, an abomination I tell you, for a man to lie with another as he would a woman.

(miming flipping through a Bible)

Right here in this book it tells us that man belongs first to God, then to woman. Right here... somewhere... I'm sure of it.

ISAAC

Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy... Usually they cite Leviticus chapter 18, verse 22. But, if you ask me, chapter 20 is more exciting.

DONNIE

A man shouldn't lie with a man. Something about dogs and fleas!

ISAAC

That's a proverb, not from Proverbs.

(quoting scripture)

If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

DONNIE

Oh, that's charming. I know it makes me want to shout "Hallelujah, brother!" And you still believe? That book is nothing but hate and God smacking people.

ISAAC

Smiting. He smites people.

DONNIE

(sitting)

Smite. Smack. God has people whacked, like an omnipotent Don Vito Corleone.

ISAAC

You don't take it all literally.

DONNIE

Don't most of the people around here? It's the Bible Belt without my Southern accent.

REV. WALKER

Brother Lloyd, you do love the Old Testament faith.

PASTOR JAMES

I speak the truth!

ISAAC

Yeah, well you tell people that same part of the Good Book says bacon is a sin.

DONNIE

(flippantly, emphasizing the double entendre)

Sausage certainly is.

ISAAC

Must you be crude? What is wrong with you?

DONNIE

With me? Wrong with me? I'm not the one in love with songs about seeing Jesus in Heaven. Let's sing to this God who hates us, to Hell with the fact He created us. You're right. Glory to God in the highest! Hallelujah, brother!

REV. WALKER

(quoting 1 John 4:7)

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God—

ISAAC

(to self)

and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

DONNIE

(standing slowly)

If there is a Heaven, I'm in no hurry to see it. This is where I want to be.

DONNIE storms off, leaving Isaac sitting alone.

ISAAC

(looking up)

He didn't mean it.

(pause)

Well, he did— but You've got to understand.

(sighs)

I have to believe You made me the way I was meant to be.

ISAAC rises and walks away into the darkness.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 2: The Music

SETTING: Town park.

ISAAC walks towards the park bench. He sings “We’ve Come a Long Way,” another classic spiritual.

ISAAC

(singing)

*We’ve come a long way, Lord, a mighty long way
We’ve borne our burdens in the heat of the day
But we know the Lord has made the way
We’ve come a long way, Lord, a mighty long way*

ERICA approaches.

ISAAC continues to sing, unaware ERICA is behind him. ERICA sits on the top edge of the bench.

ISAAC

(singing)

*I’ve been in the valley and prayed night and day
And I know the Lord has made the way
I’ve had trials each and every day
But I know the Lord has made the way

Wish I was in Heaven sitting down
Wish I was in Heaven sitting down

Wouldn’t get tired no more, tired no more
Wouldn’t have nothing to do, nothing to do
We’ve come a long way, Lord, a mighty long way
We’ve borne our burdens in the heat of the day
But we know the Lord has made the way

We’ve come a long way, Lord,
A mighty long way*

ERICA

That was beautiful.

ISAAC turns to ERICA, surprised.

ISAAC

I’m glad someone thinks so.

ERICA

Who wouldn't?

ISAAC

I can think of a couple of people.

(sitting on the bench)

What are you doing here?

ERICA

Waiting for Jessie to show up. She's late, as usual. Closes the diner during the week. Sometimes she drives me nuts. But, what's a girl to do, right? Love's like that, I'm told.

ISAAC

I keep waiting for it to get easier.

ERICA

You seem to have a pretty great relationship.

ISAAC

Better than most. Just remember, it will always take an effort on your part. Sort of like music. You work hard to make it look easy.

ERICA

What you were singing.... Do you plan to sing that some night at the club?

ISAAC

I hope so. Actually, I pray so, I suppose. Sort of how I became Ruthie.

ERICA

What do you mean?

ISAAC

I happened to be at Ruth's name in the Bible when I needed a new identity. My mother's Bible.

ISAAC sings "If He Changed My Name."

ISAAC

(singing)

I told Jesus it would be all right

If He changed my name

Jesus told me I would have to live humble

If He changed my name

Jesus told me that the world would be 'gainst me

If He changed my name

But I told Jesus it would be all right

If He changed my name...

ERICA

I don't think I've heard songs quite like that before. I mean, I know what it is, but I haven't really heard much of it.

(pause)

I'll need the sheet music. If Ruthie is going to add songs, you need to give me two or three weeks, plus rehearsal time with you.

ISAAC

Ruthie will never perform those.

ERICA

It would be amazing. No one could hear that and not feel something.

ISAAC

You liked it that much?

ERICA

Yes! You'd have to raise it a bit. A whole octave, if you ask me, unless Ruthie's a tenor now.

ISAAC

Two weeks?

(hugging Erica)

You're wonderful.

(standing)

Sheet music. I assume that's at any music store. I've never purchased sheet music. Just sing what I know.

ERICA

I can play whatever you put in front of me.

ISAAC

Tomorrow morning I'm going shopping. I'm buying you a stack of sheet music.

ERICA

Third and Peach, Music Central. Ask for Walt. He knows the sheet music collection better than anyone. If it's on paper, Walt can get it. He's a real miracle worker.

ISAAC

That's good to hear. I could use one.

ISAAC walks away, heading home. ISAAC exits.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 3: Not in Eden

SETTING: *The Eden Club is empty and the main lights are on.*

AT RISE: ERICA plays the piano, learning “We’ve Come a Long Way.”

ERICA wears jeans and a t-shirt featuring a smiling beaver holding a flower, with the word “Nice” above the rodent.

DONNIE enters. He listens, impressed. After a bit, he walks to the piano and stands opposite ERICA.

DONNIE

Damn, Isaac was right about you.

ERICA

(modestly)

Thank you. I know Isaac was used to his last accompanist.

DONNIE

Jimmy was almost a collaborator. He played for Ruthie... I don’t know... at least two years before I met Isaac. You can only remain here for so long, I suppose.

ERICA

At The Eden Club?

DONNIE

No. This small town. Jimmy went to play in recording studios in the city.

ERICA

I don’t think I want to be a studio musician. I want to be on stage. There’s something special about a live audience. I love a loud, crowded club with people dancing to the music and screaming.

DONNIE

Not gonna happen here. Our audiences don’t generally scream. I don’t even recall the last time they got out of their seats during a song.

(pause)

How’d Isaac find you? I didn’t think The Eden Club appealed to anyone under 25.

ERICA

Isaac was at Retro 84 when I was playing with a friend’s band. I guess he liked what he saw.

DONNIE

Isaac, clubbing with the kids. I knew he didn’t sit at home when I went to the city.

ERICA

Isaac offered something the bands couldn't. Rent money.

DONNIE

Rent has a way of making you pragmatic.

ERICA

Still, I wasn't sure I wanted to do it. I was sort of worried I couldn't deal with.... You know...

DONNIE

You thought he might be a flaming drag queen? A farce?

ERICA

They do tend to be jokes.

HANK walks through the club, carrying garish costumes. DONNIE and ERICA stifle laughter.

DONNIE

Hank's other performers are over the top. The Wednesday shows are camp. Isaac won't come to watch Wednesday shows. A lot of performers do it for the easy laughs or the shock value. They don't sing particularly well and don't care. Lazy humor is a sure bet with club crowds, especially if the drinks are flowing. A few drag queens are a step up. They do it because they idolize Marilyn or Liza. Then you have Ruthie. Ruthie's not a joke. That's the shock.

ERICA

I only play for Ruthie. Music matters to me.

DONNIE

The music comes from Isaac's mother. He cares more about the music than anyone I've met. Did you know he calls his car Nina? I didn't know what it meant until we had been together for a year. He wrote a book about Nina Simone.

ERICA laughs.

DONNIE

(wobbling, sweating, using the piano for balance)

While those other shows are pure farce, Ruthie is something else. Ruthie is a voice. Isaac hates performers who lip-sync, can't sing, or make fun of the music.

ERICA

Then why perform in drag at all?

DONNIE

I can't explain it. Not sure Isaac can.

ERICA

When Isaac asked me to audition for him here, he didn't tell me he was Ruthie. But there was this guy, in drag, singing. I didn't even recognize who it was. I don't like flames, on stage or off. Yet... I don't mind Ruthie.

(pause)

A man shouldn't be calling other men "girlfriend" or "sugar." It's just wrong. I don't know why. And that whole girly sing-song voice thing. No man is born talking like that.

DONNIE

No one is born talking. You think it's an act or something? I guess it is with Isaac when he's Ruthie. It's part of the show.

ERICA

(struggling to explain)

It's when someone isn't acting, but they are acting. You get it? It's phony—and I don't care for fakes. It's like screaming, "I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay!"

DONNIE

I am gay. Hello? I'm gay!

DONNIE wobbles again.

ERICA

Are you okay? Why don't you sit down?

DONNIE sits on the bench, next to Erica.

DONNIE

Thanks. I'm just fighting a cold or something.

Silence. ERICA is thinking about Ruthie's show.

ERICA

Ruthie is—

DONNIE

Amazing, isn't she?

ERICA

And Isaac is nothing like her. No lisp, no "you girlfriend."

DONNIE

I can't hide it no matter how hard I try.

(pause)

I want to hide. I want to blend in, to fit in. I don't want to be noticed for who I love.

Silence

DONNIE

Ruthie is an act. Isaac... he's a man. He'll deny it, but no one assumes he's a fag. No, that's my lot in life. I am the stereotype, no matter how hard I fight it. I can work on cars, shoot a gun, but I might as well have a neon sign over my head.

ERICA

I wasn't bothered by anyone until my last two years of high school. People didn't care about me until I turned into a rebel. Called names, teased, taunted. Crank calls. I suppose threatened, but nothing ever happened.

DONNIE

(oblivious to Erica's story)

No one hassled Isaac, either. He doesn't get it. He can't. He never even came out. He's just Isaac. He doesn't worry about what people say or think. Not like I do.

ERICA

You were that one kid everyone torments.

DONNIE nods.

ERICA

That had to be tough. I wasn't a target until I decided to be one. I knew who I was by then. And it only lasted two years. College was entirely different.

DONNIE

Don't let anyone tell you the '70s were all about flower children, free love, and disco. I was being called "fairy boy" and "fruit." You grew up in different times. Better times.

ERICA

And places. I wasn't here. Chicago's large enough you can be invisible.

DONNIE looks at the sheet music.

DONNIE

So what is that you are playing?

ERICA

Something from this Doc Watts guy. Isaac explained it to me. Doc Watts was really named Isaac. Did you know that? He wrote hymns three hundred years ago. Seems ironic that slaves brought those dusty tunes to life.

DONNIE

I'm not much for spirituals or hymns.

ERICA

You don't like the music? I love the energy.

(playing piano again)

Taking slow, solemn tunes and making them something you have to sing. Something that rocks. That's cool.

DONNIE

You can't play that music here. Not in the Eden Club. Hank will toss your little young butt out the door and Ruthie's much older and bigger one, too.

ERICA

It's really great music.

DONNIE

Do you like working?

ERICA

Yes.

DONNIE

Then don't ever, ever let Hank hear you playing that music.

HANK enters, unseen.

ERICA

That's silly. It's just music.

DONNIE

I need to explain things to you. There's a local religious nut....

ERICA stops playing piano.

DONNIE

Why don't we go get something to eat?

ERICA

You paying?

DONNIE

Why not? You need an education and I'm hungry. Let's get out of here.

ERICA rises, leaving the music on the piano.

ERICA and DONNIE exit The Eden Club.

HANK walks to the piano. He sits and plays a few notes, looks about the club, and then notices the sheet music ERICA left behind.

Shit. I warned you. Damn. Isaac.

HANK

HANK walks towards his office, music in hand.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 4: Protest Drinking

SETTING: *Hank's office.*

HANK paces wobbling, carrying the music he found on the piano. He does not sit. He opens a desk drawer and retrieves his whisky bottle and small glass. He pours a drink, looks at the music, and shakes his head.

HANK walks to a window and looks out.

PASTOR JAMES is outside, on the opposite side of the stage, leading a protest. He holds a sign, "Fags Hate God and Love Satan!"

HANK

I wonder what that's all about? It can't be good if Pastor James is involved.

(angrily)

That jackass is capable of anything.

HANK walks to his desk and sits.

HANK

Almost ten years. I suppose that's a good run for a club. Almost survived the Reagan years. That's something. Hell didn't even freeze over. Ten years. Not bad.

(drinks from his glass)

Fire Ruthie. How hard can that be? Won't solve everything, but it's a start.

(drinks twice, emptying the small glass)

Sure. She's only the star. Just my main attraction. How much business could I lose?

(drinks from the bottle)

There must be a better way. Yes, there must be. Think!

(drinks)

Sound of a knock at the office door.

HANK

What?

DONNIE

Hank?

(entering office)

You okay?

HANK

Couldn't be more—

DONNIE

Sloshed?

HANK

(nodding)

That might be it. Good friend Jack helps. A little.

(puts bottle down, stares at it)

Your partner is driving me to drink. How can you always be sober? Do you know what he's trying to get away with?

DONNIE

(sitting)

I'm dealing with it.

HANK

Really? You are? Did you see those assholes outside with signs? They already hate us. Ruthie sings those songs—

DONNIE

I told Erica that Isaac is a bit confused.

HANK

Confused is one word for it. That jackass James is tryin' to ruin us. You explain things to that piano player?

DONNIE takes the bottle from HANK and drops it into a trashcan.

HANK

I went to church as a child.

DONNIE is puzzled.

HANK

Church. You know... religion. Heaven is a perfect place, I was taught.

DONNIE

You and religion. It depresses me to think about you and religion together.

DONNIE places his face in his hands and looks downward.

HANK

Heaven didn't seem perfect to me.

DONNIE

(sarcastically)

But the afterlife is perfect. The man preaching—no, screaming—outside tells me that eternal salvation and a perfect kingdom await me if I accept Jesus.

(pause)

And if I stop being me.

HANK

Damn bastard James. You see that crowd gathering?

(drinks)

I can't talk to Ruthie. Can't you? She won't listen to reason... but she might listen to you. Tell her, him... Tell Isaac to drop this once and for all. Tell him I respect all that Christian bullshit, just not here. Not right now. I'm sure God understands.

DONNIE shakes his head.

HANK

(wistfully)

Ah, to be a deity.

(pause)

You need to talk to her.

DONNIE

And say what? I need to think about it. It isn't like I haven't tried. This requires careful planning. But, I said I'll deal with it, Hank. Just need to think—

HANK

You think too much. We got a mob outside and you're thinking how to be nice to Ruthie? When'd you start thinkin' so much?

DONNIE

I can't explain it. Never used to.

HANK

I can.

(slurring his speech)

Too many books. You read and think too much. That's a problem for someone like you.

DONNIE

I never read a book before meeting Isaac.

HANK

Yeah. Exactly. You weren't meant to be readin' all that New Age hokem. Isaac got ya' all interspective.

DONNIE

Introspective.

(pause)

When is the last time you read a book?

HANK

A whole book?

DONNIE

(slowly, nodding)

Yes.

HANK

You own more self-help books than anyone I know. I wait for you to tell me about what you've read. Much easier.

DONNIE

What? I'm your Reader's Digest?

DONNIE starts coughing. He tries to hide his handkerchief, with spots of blood.

HANK

You need to see a doctor, boy.

DONNIE

I have. It's bronchitis or something.

HANK sways in his chair, almost falling.

HANK

No, no. Not the doctors here. I know a place in the city. You got somethin' serious. Ain't gettin' better and I can't have you keelin' over on stage. One problem at a time.

DONNIE

Okay. We'll talk about it.

HANK

(slurring)

You talk to Isaruthiec and I'll give ya' some days off. Tell him ya' vistin' friends.

(pause)

I'm dizzy.

DONNIE

It's the booze—

(looks in trashcan)

Oh, my god. Another bottle?

HANK

As long as I don't bow down before the *porcelain god*, I haven't had too much. No begging God for the spinning to stop—I must be okay.

DONNIE

It is all about faith, after all.

HANK

We have none! And Ruthie should keep hers out of here.

DONNIE

Why don't I walk you home?

HANK

I need to be here. This is home, isn't it?

(slurring)

Eden's all we got.

DONNIE

(standing)

Come on, Hank. You've had enough.

HANK stands, leans on DONNIE briefly,
and wobbles before standing on his own.

HANK

Just that one. Maybe two.

DONNIE

One?

HANK

Bottle. That stuff's expensive, Donnie. Not about to drink more than one bottle.

(CURTAIN)

ACT III

Scene 1: Donnie and Ruthie

SETTING: *Ruthie's dressing room.*

Live jazz can be heard from the stage.

ISAAC enters the dressing room and begins preparing for the night's show.

ERICA enters with her wardrobe on a hanger. The tails are wrapped in dry-cleaner cellophane. ERICA moves slowly and unenthusiastically.

ISAAC notices her in his mirror.

ISAAC

What's wrong? That crowd of rednecks outside? Don't worry. The house is still full.

ERICA

(shaking her head)

Donnie heard the music.

(pause)

Now it's missing.

ISAAC

Missing?

ERICA

The music was on the piano. It's gone, now. Donnie must've taken it when he came back.

ISAAC

He might not like the music, but it wasn't his to take.

ERICA

He says you can't sing those songs.

ISAAC

Donnie doesn't own the club.

ERICA drapes her wardrobe over the back of a chair.

ERICA

You saw the protestors. Donnie said Hank would fire you for inciting them with that music. Blasphemy and all that.

ISAAC

Donnie knows Hank can't fire me.

ERICA

Are you sure about that?

ISAAC

No. But I have to tell myself something.

(starting makeup)

Don't worry. We'll just do the standards tonight.

ERICA

That's probably best.

(moving towards door)

I'm going to take a walk before getting ready. I don't have to do nearly as much as you do before a show.

ISAAC

I'll get this all settled. Just play the piano and let me worry about Hank and Donnie. They're stuck in the past.

ERICA

I liked the music a lot. It was fun. Sorry we're going to Hell, apparently.

ISAAC

Yes, the music is great. There's history behind that music, especially for me. But, if we need to ease into it, so be it. Take a walk and clear your mind.

(concerned)

Take the side exit. Just in case.

ERICA nods and exits the dressing room.

ISAAC continues working on his makeup for the show. He is transforming into RUTHIE with great skill.

DONNIE enters the dressing room.

DONNIE

What the hell are you thinking?

ISAAC

Hello to you, too.

DONNIE

You're still thinking about singing that music, aren't you?

ISAAC

Reggae? Opera? I always thought The Eden wasn't ready for opera yet. Do you think they might appreciate Carmen?

DONNIE

This isn't funny. You're getting out of hand, and Hank won't tolerate it much longer.

ISAAC

He already told me how he feels, and so have you.

DONNIE

Doesn't mean you'll listen. And then what about the club? Those people with Pastor James will probably burn it to the ground.

ISAAC

The club won't close, Donnie. You know that Hank is being paranoid when he says things like that.

DONNIE

Maybe it wouldn't close, but Hank can't take that chance. And think about what that means. Not just to you, but to me, the cast—including Erica.

ISAAC

What do the two of you have to do with this? It's Ruthie singing, not you.

Donnie

And Erica playing the piano. Me? I'm involved no matter what. Erica was practicing today. Your music.

ISAAC

It's not her fault. It was all my doing.

DONNIE

I'm sure it was. I put her straight though. I told her Hank would never tolerate those songs in his club.

ISAAC

I already told Erica we'll do our regular show. No surprises.

DONNIE

You promise?

ISAAC

Yes. I saw how upset she was. I wouldn't risk her career merely to sing a song or two. I'm not that self-absorbed, not even as Ruthie.

DONNIE

That's a relief. I worry about you trying to take a stand without thinking about the rest of us.

ISAAC

It might be the right stand, just not the right time.

DONNIE

You want to give me an ulcer, don't you? No wonder I had to spend two hours getting Hank sober.

ISAAC

Go be Mr. Emcee. I have a transformation to complete and you don't get to see all the magic involved.

DONNIE

Just don't do anything stupid.

(opening door)

Please.

DONNIE exits.

ISAAC is transforming into RUTHIE. He steps behind the changing screen to put on a dress.

ISAAC

Oh, to be a smaller size again! Ouch. This used to be a lot more fun.

Sounds of ISAAC struggling with his clothing.

ISAAC

Lord, give me the strength to suck in this gut of mine!

More sounds of ISAAC dressing.

ISAAC returns to complete his transformation.

ERICA enters, closes the door, starts to change. She has seen the protesters outside and is visibly affected.

ISAAC hesitates with RUTHIE's wig.

ERICA

Your heart not in it tonight?

ISAAC puts on the wig and takes on the persona of RUTHIE.

The club band is heard finishing a song. The audience cheers wildly.

RUTHIE

You hear that?

ERICA

Yeah. It's really something.

RUTHIE

Some of those men on stage are older than my father would be, yet they play like they're 21-year-old kids on stage for the first time. They're thrilled every night they get to play.

Most of them are so old we check them nightly for a pulse. But no matter their ages, another night of music is another night worth living.

ERICA

You okay? Is it the protestors? I really despise them!

RUTHIE

I'm not sure what it is. Maybe if I wasn't fighting something in me so much, I'd learn to hear the music again. It's hard to relax, for some reason. Something's not right.

ERICA

Well, yeah. A dozen idiots are marching in front of the club.

RUTHIE

No, it's Donnie. I don't know what's wrong, but it is serious. He looks like Mama did at the end.

(studies ERICA)

You are beautiful, young lady.

ERICA

I think I like dressing up. I am... dare I say... attractive in tails?

Both laugh as ERICA models.

ISAAC removes the wig, conflicted.

ISAAC

Donnie needs me, not Ruthie.

ERICA

You want to sing as you? Not Ruthie?

ISAAC

(recalling church choir)

I used to sing those songs every week, before...

(to ERICA)

Just some bad memories, kid. Best to let go of them, I suppose. It was easy to choose love over the music.

(pause)

It was the right choice.

ISAAC puts the wig back on and adjusts his makeup. RUTHIE has returned.

Sounds of an audience clapping and cheering.

RUTHIE

That's your cue.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 2: Love in Eden

SETTING: The Eden Club's stage.

DONNIE enters in his white tux. He walks to center stage and takes the microphone.

DONNIE

Ladies and gentleman, welcome to The Eden Club on this beautiful spring evening. Your troubles are all outside, now, left in the past and somewhere in the future. It's 1953 and we all like Ike. He tells us change is coming, if we aren't afraid of progress.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

The rednecks with cardboard signs are afraid!

DONNIE

(smiling broadly)

Ladies and gentlemen, relax and enjoy the music while you chat with your special someone. You won't be saying a word once our very own Ruthie takes the stage.

ERICA enters from backstage. She sits and begins to play the piano quietly.

DONNIE

It's time to slow things down a bit. Our star likes to ease into things.

Lights dim.

DONNIE

For the last eight years it has been our honor to host this region's best female jazz vocalist. From the saddest of blues to the hottest swing, no one can match her. Look into your lover's eyes and listen to the magical voice of Ruthie.

RUTHIE enters, walks to the microphone and sways gently to the music.

DONNIE claps, to encourage the audience.

RUTHIE

Hello, all you beautiful people. I hope all of you are sitting at a table with someone special. If not, maybe you should look around and consider switching with someone.

(tilting the microphone closer)

Always be true to yourself. Find that person and that thing that matters most to you. In this world, it is never easy to be true to yourself. It's even harder to be true to what matters. I want to tell you what matters most to me. It's the one thing that makes life bearable. It's the meaning of life, if you ask me.

DONNIE looks worried, wondering what RUTHIE might say next.

RUTHIE

There's a man. He is everything to me. Everything.

DONNIE, shocked, looks like he might cry. He goes backstage to compose himself.

ERICA plays. Seconds pass with only piano music.

RUTHIE

It's all about love. Yes, love is the thing that matters most. Unfortunately, just when you think you have it, just when it's there to help you be true—you find out it wasn't. He doesn't want you to be yourself. That's not love.

ERICA improvises a bit. RUTHIE sways, lost in thought.

RUTHIE

Send him on his way. And if he comes back, and ladies, the men always try to come back, tell him he can cry you a river. You have to be you.

Ruthie sings "Cry Me a River," words and music by Arthur Hamilton. Copyright 1953.

Ruthie

(singing)

*Now you say you're lonely
You cry the whole night through
Well you can cry me a river,
Cry me a river, I cried a river over you.*

*Now you say you're sorry
For being so untrue
Well you can cry me a river
Cry me a river, I cried a river over you.*

DONNIE coughs at the edge of the stage, while listening.

RUTHIE

(singing)

*You drove me mad and drove me out of my head
While you never shed a tear
Remember, I remember all that you said,
Told me love was true for me an...*

*Told me you was... you an... me an...
Now you say you loved me
Well, just to prove you do*

*Go on an
Cry me a river
Cry me a river*

I cried a river over you...

DONNIE manages to stop coughing and wheezing. He walks onto the stage.

RUTHIE

Thank you all. It's been lovely.

RUTHIE exits.

DONNIE walks to the microphone.

ERICA looks at DONNIE, concerned. She realizes DONNIE isn't recovering from whatever he has.

DONNIE

Ruthie will return again, accompanied by The Eden Orchestra, so you can dance with the special someone. But right now, we're all going to take a short break and enjoy some Southern hospitality. Let your waitress know if there's anything at all we can do for you.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 3: Hank Surrenders

SETTING: Hank's office.

HANK sits at his desk, drinking. He drinks to deal with any stress. Lately, there's a lot of stress.

SOUNDS of PASTOR JAMES and his protestors can be heard outside. The ruckus increases throughout the scene.

ISAAC knocks and enters the office.

ISAAC

Donnie said you wanted to see me.

HANK

You bought music for the new kid. Why?

ISAAC

I've been thinking about the song list.

HANK

I'm going to need another drink, aren't I?

HANK drinks from the bottle.

ISAAC

It means a lot to me.

PASTOR JAMES and his followers sing various hymns and chant.

HANK

And you know my answer. With the pricks in front of this place two or three nights a week? No. Never. Not in my lifetime. No way, no how. Nyet. Nein. All those no's. If there's another way to say no, add it to the list. Pastor James is an evil old bastard with powerful friends.

ISAAC

One night. It's a Thursday. The audience is small.

HANK

It ain't never small enough for what you want to do to me. My customers would never come back once word spread that we're surrounded by rednecks with pitchforks and torches.

ISAAC

How do you know? The audiences love Ruthie. They love Eden.

HANK

'Cuz a gay drag queen singing those songs is just plain... what's that word?

ISAAC

Sacrilege.

ISAAC approaches the desk and lifts
HANK's nearly-empty bottle.

HANK takes back the bottle.

HANK

That's it. Sacrilege. Heresy. Definite heresy. That's a word for it. Gay gospel singer. That'll get me closed down and run out of town. Oh, sure, dress in drag and sing all about Jesus. I can see the villagers marching up the street ready to get all Joan of Arc on your ass. Burned at the stake! Do you forget where we are? It's still the twentieth century, in case you forgot.

PASTOR JAMES marches with an anti-gay
sign, trying to get the audience's support.

ISAAC

The San Francisco Gay Men's Choir sings Christmas music and even did Messiah one year.

HANK

That's a couple hundred long miles away—in a real cosmopolitan city. Not here. No way they'd do that here.

ISAAC

You have no faith in people.

HANK

I know exactly what to expect. I have faith in human nature. Humans are naturally wicked, vile, disgusting creatures. I know. I'm one of them.

ISAAC

We fill this place, in case you forget.

HANK

If we didn't draw tourists, The Eden wouldn't exist in this town. It's all about money, Isaac. Money. We bring it in, so the town council leaves us alone. Eden is no place for religion!

Silence.

ISAAC

Eden is the place for anything. Anything at all.

HANK

I will fire you.

ISAAC

You wouldn't dare. I am The Eden Club.

(deliberately)

One hundred and fifty shows a year. Thursday through Saturday.

HANK

I own Eden. I own your microphone. Hell Isaac, I own your dresses and wigs. For all I know, I own your bras and panties.

ISAAC

This is bigger than ownership. It's bigger than money.

HANK

Dream on. It's always about money.

ISAAC

This is about peace and love and—

HANK

Money can buy a lot of peace and something close enough to love for a lot of us.

ISAAC

Do you really believe that? That's your faith?

HANK

Yes, I do. Hell, enough money buys peace even for an old fag like me. It don't get much better than that if you ask me.

ISAAC

You're disgraceful.

HANK

For now. But I can't be disgraced if I don't give a damn. I get enough money in the bank, I won't give a damn. See? That's my goal. Goals are important. It should be yours, too.

ISAAC

So until you have enough money, you have no spine?

HANK

Spines cost a lot.

ISAAC

And you think I don't bring in enough to get away with one or two songs? One or two?

HANK

Look at yourself. Well, not at the moment. Do you understand what you are? What Eden is to this community? We are the sideshow, sweetheart, nothing more, nothing less. You just happen to be the main attraction of the moment. But you cross a line, then you're Satan's progawhatsit.

ISAAC

(exasperated)

Progeny.

HANK

Yeah. That. You're special for one reason, and only one reason.

ISAAC

Ruthie is sexier than most of the local women?

HANK

Dammit, Ruthie. This is serious.

ISAAC

In costume, I am Ruthie. Do I look like I'm in costume to you? Ruthie brings people in, but she sleeps in that dressing room. Never forget that. Never.

HANK

Got your attention, huh?

(drinks)

You listen carefully, diva. You're special because you are Ruthie. You don't lip-sync. You ain't a fraud. No one I've seen can do what you do. Not in New York, not in San Francisco, not in Paris. I've been there, saw the shows, and know the meaning of burlesque. It's one two-bit word I do know.

(tilting back and looking at the ceiling)

When you sing, people close their eyes, hold hands, and hear Ruthie. As long as you're singing about men and women in love, broken hearts, and pain, the illusion works. You do anything else, it's all fucked up and the magic dies.

HANK looks at ISAAC, both pleading and threatening.

HANK

Ruthie dies.

ISAAC nods.

HANK

I'd rather go back to lip-syncing comedians than kill the magic. I don't mind people laughing at us, but I won't be lynched because they realize I've been laughing at them.

ISAAC

Fine. Maybe it's too early for the walls to come down, but that time will come.

HANK

What the hell are you talking about?

ISAAC

Paul Robeson.

PASTOR JAMES and protestors sing,
getting louder, hurting HANK's ears.

HANK

(drunken and confused)

Shit, I love Robeson. And we know what happened to him. Damn pinko leftist. Still, what a voice. Hell, probably the best damn voice—

HANK walks to the window. PASTOR
JAMES holds a sign, reading "Repent, Fags!
Repent! God Loves You!"

(drinks)

Fine. Next Sunday.

ISAAC

What?

HANK

Sundays. We ain't got no church of our own. The damn protestors and that bastard James got me plenty angry. Fine. I'll give you Sunday afternoons.

ISAAC

You're serious?

HANK

No advertising. No posters, flyers, nothing. Not even here. Understand?

ISAAC

Then how—?

HANK

I don't know. Don't care. But no promoting it. You can sing whatever the hell you want Sunday afternoon. Technically, we can't even charge or serve alcohol on Sundays. We're

closed. Understand? I'm here checking the books and shit anyway most Sundays. Two o'clock. No earlier, dammit.

(drinks)

Normal show tonight. Okay?

ISAAC

But I get Sundays? Open rehearsals of sort.

HANK

Yeah, whatever. Don't mention it. Literally, don't mention it.

ISAAC exits.

HANK

Damn nightmare, dealing with singers. Ain't no Robeson. Thinks he's so damn important I wouldn't fire...

(drunkenly singing to himself)

And the walls came a tumblin' down.

HANK snorts, lowers his head, and then begins to snore.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 4: Sunday in Eden

SETTING: The Eden Club, on a Sunday afternoon.

ISAAC sits in a chair, on stage, with ERICA at the piano. DONNIE sits at a table with a sober Hank.

Several empty tables with chairs are on stage.

DONNIE

I can't believe Isaac dragged me here on a Sunday.

(to HANK)

You sure about this?

HANK

Look around. No one is here except us. A few weeks of this and the whole notion that anyone wants to hear Ruthie or Isaac or Aretha Franklin sing spirituals at The Eden Club will sink into his stubborn skull.

(standing, stretching)

Yeah, might as well get those books done and orders ready to fax. Been selling a lot of booze, it seems.

DONNIE

Selling—or drinking?

HANK ignores the comment and exits for his office.

ISAAC

I guess it's just us, kid. Go ahead and play a bit and we'll treat it like a rehearsal.

ERICA

(playing softly)

Rehearsal for what?

ISAAC

The future.

ERICA starts to play "Down by the Riverside." ISAAC stands, no microphone, and sings with stunning power.

ISAAC

(singing)

*Gonna lay down my sword and shield
Down by the riverside
Down by the riverside
Down by the riverside
Gonna lay down my sword and shield
Down by the riverside
Ain't gonna study war no more.*

DONNIE smiles, without realizing it.

Two Eden Club employees enter, quietly.
They sit and listen in awe.

ISAAC

(continuing song)

*I ain't gonna study war no more,
I ain't gonna study war no more,
Study war no more.
I ain't gonna study war no more,
I ain't gonna study war no more,
Study war no more.*

More people enter the room and sit.

ERICA plays with an edge, a Southern Rock influence.

ISAAC

(singing)

*Gonna shake hands around the world
Down by the riverside
Down by the riverside
Down by the riverside
Gonna shake hands around the world
Down by the riverside
Ain't gonna study war no more.*

As ISAAC holds the final notes, ERICA improvises with a flourish. The audience cheers and stands.

ISAAC bows. He looks to ERICA and motions for her to stand and bow, too.

ISAAC

Well. I guess this is welcome to the first *Sunday in Eden* concert. I'll admit, it isn't much. No techs, no band, and no food.

(sits in chair)

The Eden is closed Sundays, so we can't serve food or drinks. Sorry about that. But we can serve some great songs. If you know anyone who might—

(reconsiders, speaks slowly)

It would be great to fill the seats on Sundays. I'm going to do this every Sunday. And if you want to sing, join in.

ERICA starts playing again. ISAAC stands and they run through a number of classical spirituals.

HANK returns, holding a bottle. He looks at the audience and drinks.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 5: Wages of Sin...

SETTING: *Porch of Isaac's house, dusk.*

AT RISE: ISAAC sits on the porch swing, wearing his glasses and reading.

Several days have passed.

DONNIE enters, exhausted, with an overnight bag.

ISAAC

How was the city?

DONNIE

It was a long drive.

(Looking down.)

Isaac, we need to talk.

ISAAC looks up from his book. He removes his glasses and places them in a shirt pocket.

DONNIE

I didn't just see friends.

(struggling)

The have this clinic in the city. You know, for—

(pauses)

They did some tests.

ISAAC

(looking away)

That's where you went last month, too.

DONNIE

Yeah.

ISAAC sits silently.

DONNIE

I'm not well. We both knew things aren't right.

ISAAC

(damp eyes, not yet crying)

You don't need to say it.

DONNIE

I did a lot of stupid things before meeting you. Really stupid things.

ISAAC
People make mistakes.

DONNIE
My mistakes—

ISAAC stands, places his book on the table,
and walks to DONNIE. He pulls DONNIE's
head against him.

DONNIE
I never loved anyone before you, Isaac. I thought it would last forever.

ISAAC
Don't you dare talk that way. I'm not letting go of you. Whatever it takes.

DONNIE starts coughing. He's barely able
to stand.

ISAAC
Why don't we sit and enjoy the moonlight?

The couple sits. ISAAC looks at the moon.

ISAAC
God, it's so beautiful.

DONNIE
Why do you insist on believing?

ISAAC
I can't help but believe. God is with us. Especially now. Just look for him.

DONNIE
I haven't seen him. Of course, it's after midnight. I can't see a lot. What I can see is the
filth. The suffering. The disease. The murder—

ISAAC
Man created those things.

DONNIE
Right. The apple. That fall of man nonsense. You think God knows everything. Right?

ISAAC
Yes, I do.

DONNIE

And you're telling me He didn't know Adam would listen to Little Adam when Eve offered the apple?

ISAAC

We don't know it was an apple.

DONNIE

Whatever. Adam wanted the cherry, I'll tell you that. If God didn't see that coming, then I suppose He must be a man. All-knowing?

ISAAC

He is.

DONNIE

Then Adam was set up? Yep, man needs a companion to fuck up the garden.

ISAAC

You shouldn't talk that way.

DONNIE

Oh, that's right, He's everywhere. Then why do I feel so damned alone at times? Where was He when I was in high school, getting the shit kicked out of me every week? Where was He when my own father couldn't look at me without wanting to punch me in the face?

ISAAC

You don't let Him in to your heart.

DONNIE

(coughs)

I only want people to accept me for who I am. God seems picky.

ISAAC

We're all imperfect. If we followed that book literally, who wouldn't be getting stoned to death? But the anger and punishments are from a different time. That's why there's a New Testament. Things changed.

DONNIE

Even God?

ISAAC

Trust me, He's allowed to change His mind.

DONNIE

So in your faith, God's okay with us. I'm just a little ill. It'll pass. No judgment at all...

ISAAC looks into DONNIE's eyes and takes his hands.

Let's go inside.

ISAAC

ISAAC and DONNIE stand.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 6: Another Sin Day

SETTING: The Eden Club.

It is Sunday, again. The club is filled with people, their styles a mix of Elton John and Miami Vice.

ISAAC and ERICA are on stage.

HANK storms into the club and runs up to ISAAC.

HANK

(fuming)

Have you seen the crowd outside?

ISAAC

I take you don't mean there's a crowd waiting for the show.

PASTOR JAMES and REV. WALKER stand outside the club. PASTOR JAMES carries a bullhorn.

PASTOR JAMES

How dare these people desecrate the Lord's day? Sunday is not Sin Day!

REV. WALKER looks uncomfortable. He looks around and sneaks into the club. He looks about nervously before taking a seat.

HANK leaves the club to reason with PASTOR JAMES.

PASTOR JAMES

Hank, what's goin' on here?

HANK

Nothing, nothing at all. Just an open rehearsal.

PASTOR JAMES

You aren't open, now, are ya'?

HANK

No, no. Open rehearsal. The Eden is closed on Sundays. We ain't servin' and ain't no one gettin' paid for nuthin' inside. Just a rehearsal. I swear.

PASTOR JAMES

I demand you close this club. You're violating town, county, and state laws by operatin' on a Sunday.

HANK

Ticket window there seems closed to me. Look closed to you?

PASTOR JAMES

Then why are people goin' inside?

HANK walks away from the argument.

ISAAC

Mama sang at the Baptist over on Oak. It was 1967, twenty years ago, now. I had to sit on the steps with my father.

HANK sits by REV. WALKER. HANK shrugs to himself and watches ISAAC.

ISAAC

Now, the church that wouldn't let me in is trying to stop the singing here at The Eden on Sundays. God told Moses, go tell Pharaoh to set My people free. Well, I believe that God wants us all to be free.

ERICA plays as ISAAC sings "Go Down, Moses."

ISAAC

(singing)

*Go down Moses
Way down in Egypt land
Tell ole Pharaoh
To let my people go
When Israel was in Egypt land
Let my people go
Oppressed so hard the could not stand
Let my people go
"Thus spoke the Lord," bold Moses said
"If not, I'll smite your first born dead
Let my people go."*

REV. WALKER looks dazed. He sneaks out of The Eden Club while the audience is cheering.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 7: Erica's Gift

SETTING: Ruthie's changing room.

AT RISE: ERICA's tux hangs on the outside of the changing screen. She has been sharing the room with RUTHIE for some time.

Jazz music plays, the show having started.

ERICA enters the dressing room. She wears black jeans and a light pink T-shirt with the slogan "Jazz Dyke" across the front. The lowercase "d" is a musical note. ERICA carries a dress and a bag. She goes behind the dressing screen and hangs up the dress.

ERICA sits on her chair to begin changing into her tuxedo.

ISAAC enters.

ISAAC
Good evening, kid.

ERICA
You're running late.

ISAAC
I suppose I am. I... uh...

ERICA
Donnie was late, too. Something's wrong. Really wrong.

ISAAC
(changing the subject)
What in the world are you thinking? Did you go around town wearing that?

ERICA
(sarcastically)
Under a leather jacket while riding my hog.

(laughing)
Actually, I save the really good shirts for wearing under the tux, now. Jessie said I should wear something underneath. It's my own discreet rebellion.

(retrieves her tux and starts to change)
Someday, maybe I won't be so discreet. I'll wear whatever the hell I want.

ISAAC

I do get sick of being discreet.

ERICA

People think a lot of strange things, especially around here.

ISAAC

But love brought you here, anyway.

ERICA

Yes, it did. Jessie says this is home.

(teasing)

It seems to keep you here, too.

ISAAC

For now. Actually, I just like being the best female vocalist in the seven counties. Big fish in a small pond.

ISAAC goes behind screen to change.

ISAAC

What are these?

Erica

I went thrifting. That dress is even your size.

ISAAC

How do you know that?

(stunned)

My, my, so it is. You peaked at my tags, didn't you?

Sounds of ISAAC looking in the bag.

What on God's green earth is this?

ERICA

You needed a T-shirt of your own.

ISAAC

You are incredible.

ERICA

You of all people should know words are deeds. If they call us fags, homos, queers, dykes—it matters. The words hurt until I took ownership of them. So what if I'm a lez, a dyke, or a queer? Let the people outside shout.

ISAAC comes from behind the tri-fold in a beautiful floor-length dress.

ISAAC

I love it.

ERICA

What about the protesters?

ISAAC

I'll sing all the louder, to drown them out. God is on our side. I know it deep down in my heart.

ISAAC sits and puts on his makeup

ERICA

(teasing)

I hope you've been praying a lot, then.

ISAAC

I have, but for other reasons.

ERICA

I'm proud of who I am. I shout it when I have to. This time, I'll take my cue from you.

ISAAC

Really?

ERICA

If you ever do need to shout, I'll be your accompanist.

ERICA quickly finishes dressing, with her shirt underneath her white tux shirt. She bows to ISAAC.

ERICA

I'm going out early. Donnie said I could solo for a few minutes to warm up. Someday, I'll earn an introduction.

ERICA exits the dressing room.

(LIGHTS)

Scene 8: God Made Us

SETTING: The Eden Club stage.

ERICA walks to the piano and sits. She plays while ISAAC changes into RUTHIE.

DONNIE enters and walks to the microphone.

DONNIE

Ladies and gentleman, on the ivories, Eden's very own Erica!

DONNIE claps, but ERICA remains seated, stunned.

DONNIE

(hushed, to Erica)

Stand up and bow.

ERICA stands, bows politely to the audience.

ERICA sits and begins to play quietly.

DONNIE

And now, the reason people can't wait to get into Eden.

Lights dim.

DONNIE

Close your eyes and hold the hand of that someone special. You are about to hear the angel of our private heaven. The Eden Club presents...

(beat)

Ruthie!

DONNIE claps and RUTHIE enters.

RUTHIE

(taking microphone)

Donnie, I am thrilled to be your angel. Good evening, all you beautiful people. Sometimes, you have to express what is in your heart, no matter the price. Right now, I feel the need to sing something I have wanted to for years.

ERICA stops playing, unsure of what is about to happen.

RUTHIE sings “As Long as He Needs Me”
by Lionel Bart, copyright 1960.

RUTHIE

(sing-song)

*As long as he needs me,
Oh yes, he does need me.
In spite of what you see,
I'm sure that he needs me.*

RUTHIE and DONNIE locks eyes.

ERICA joins in, playing the torch song
restrained yet passionately.

DONNIE approaches RUTHIE and stands
slightly off to her side. They don't touch, but
DONNIE sways with RUTHIE.

RUTHIE

(singing to Donnie)

*Who else would love him still,
When they've been used so ill?
He knows I always will,
As long as he needs me.*

RUTHIE steps away from DONNIE and
sings to the audience.

RUTHIE

(emotional)

*I miss him so much,
When he is gone.
But when he's near me,
I don't let on.
The way I feel inside,
The love I have to hide,
The hell, I've got my pride,
*As long as he needs me.**

For the first time, DONNIE takes the
microphone from RUTHIE, surprising
everyone including himself.

DONNIE

(singing, softly but with unmistakable talent)

*He doesn't say the things he should.
He acts the way he thinks he should.*

*But all the same,
I'll play this game his way.*

ERICA adjusts to the slower, softer style of
DONNIE made necessary by his illness.

DONNIE

(singing)

*As long as he needs me,
I know where I must be.
I'll cling on steadfastly,
As long as he needs me.
As long as life is long,
I'll love him, right or wrong.
And somehow I'll be strong,
As long as he needs me.*

RUTHIE puts an arm around DONNIE and
they close the song together.

RUTHIE and DONNIE

(singing)

*I won't betray your trust,
Though people say I must.
I've got to stay true, just
As long as you need me.*

LIGHTS rise and the couple steps forward
to bow, holding hands.

DONNIE steps back.

ISAAC removes his wig. He looks into the
spotlight and begins to sing "Somewhere
(There's a Place for Us)" from *West Side
Story*, by Leonard Bernstein and Stephen
Sondheim, copyright 1957.

ISAAC

(singing)

*There's a place for us,
Somewhere a place for us.
Peace and quiet and open air
Wait for us
Somewhere.*

(unzipping dress)

*There's a time for us,
Some day a time for us,
Time together with time spare,
Time to learn, time to care,
Some day!*

ISAAC lets RUTHIE's dress drop to the floor. ISAAC wears a tight T-shirt reading "God made me!"

ERICA playing increases in energy and passion.

ISAAC

(singing)

*Somewhere.
We'll find a new way of living,
We'll find a way of forgiving
Somewhere...
There's a place for us,
A time and place for us.
Hold my hand and we're halfway there.
Hold my hand and I'll take you there
Somehow,
Some day,
Somewhere!*

HANK enters with the latest half-empty bottle.

HANK

Damn, I don't need this. Shit, I need to clear my head.

ISAAC and DONNIE kiss.

HANK drinks the bottle empty.

DONNIE starts to cough. He wobbles, in a great deal of pain.

DONNIE

(struggling, speaking quietly without the microphone)
God made me.

ISAAC gets a chair for DONNIE and hands him the microphone.

God made me.

ISAAC stands behind DONNIE.

DONNIE

I thought if there was a God, why is He punishing me? Why? What did I do?

(coughing)

Turns out, I did a lot. My bitterness, my shame, my fear—

(coughing)

God doesn't hate me. I hated myself. I hated other people.

DONNIE sings weakly, but well.

DONNIE

(singing)

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind, but now....*

ISAAC reaches out, but DONNIE collapses on stage.

DONNIE looks up and sees REV. WALKER running towards him.

ISAAC cradles DONNIE in his arms, while REV. WALKER kneels and prays, crying.

(CURTAIN — LONG BREAK)

Note: ERICA plays “Precious Lord” **into the final scene.**

Scene 9: Donnie's Love

SETTING: *The Baptist Church.*

AT RISE: ERICA plays "Precious Lord."

REV. WALKER greets people as they arrive
for the service.

HANK enters, sober and well dressed.

REV. WALKER

Hank?

HANK

Yeah, Willie, it's really me. I'm here. In a church.

REV. WALKER

Jesus be praised.

HANK shakes his head and takes a seat.

REV. WALKER makes his way to the front
of the church.

REV. WALKER

A year ago, I thought I knew Jesus. I thought I was a man of God, doing His work from
this very spot.

(pause)

I was mistaken.

(looks at pews)

My mind was closed. My heart was closed. And when your heart is closed, you're
keeping Jesus out.

REV. WALKER opens a Bible and reads.

REV. WALKER

All whom I love, I rebuke and chastise; therefore be earnest and repent. I am now
standing at the door and I am knocking.

(excited)

If anyone listens to My voice and opens the door, I will go in to be with him and will
feast with him, and he shall feast with Me.

(closing the Bible)

Donald Ethan Jackson heard that voice. Brother Donald opened that door. And he did it
after many of us, including me, closed a door to him. I know I disappointed God with the
way I treated Donnie and his beloved... our Brother... Isaac.

(pause)

Donnie had one request.

(beat)

I ask you to stand for our choir

(pause, invoking Donnie's style)

and the absolutely... lovely—

RUTHIE enters from the side.

REV. WALKER

Ruthie.

RUTHIE sings “Amazing Grace” a cappella.

RUTHIE

(singing)

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.*

ERICA joins in with piano. The song shifts into a celebration.

RUTHIE and CAST

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
We have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.*

*Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.*

HANK joins in, crying.

*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.*

RUTHIE

(singing, solo again)

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.*

(CURTAIN)

(BLACKOUT)