

Tabernacle

Book, Lyrics & Music
by
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Setting

A church camp meeting in Cedarville in North Alabama.

Time

Present Day.

Cast of Characters

Carlton Chapell. 30-40. Energetic and charismatic evangelist and ex-con. More interested in the theatre and the pomp and power he commands than the message he purports to tell.

Pearl Sweeney. 25-35. Carlton's Musical Evangelist. Pretty, sexy, completely devoted to Chapell. Has a strong moral sense.

Brother Carruthers. 22-35. Carlton's Youth Director. Handsome, but a snake inside. Manipulative, duplicitous, amoral.

John David Sommers. 50-55. An Elder, and longtime HROACM president. His family built the Tabernacle, and he considers himself its steward. Maybe a little too strongly.

Germaine Sommers. 45-50. His wife, and former Youth Director, but relegated to assistant in the wake of Chapell's invasion. When we first meet her, she is a bit nervous, but she quickly reverts to her natural posture: defensive of her family and her place.

Buddy Townsend. 30-45. Used car dealer and elder of the HROACM. A shallow buffoon, but not a bad fellow. He has had a feud going with John David for ten years now.

Silas Parnell. 60-75. Aged evangelist of the old school, but no longer sure of himself and his preaching. Somewhat waiting to retire, but can't seem to give it up just yet.

Milburne Thorndike. 14-16. Nephew to Germaine. A bit on the shy side, but possessing a streak of satire.

Althea Hollister. 14-16. Lost and Found Youth Camper who is mute. Sweetness incarnate, she carries scars from a painful life.

Katrina Knutsen. 20-25. Missionary to Birmingham. She has a sharp Minnesotan accent. Well-meaning, but definitely out of her element in Cedarville.

Ernie Lincoln. 40-60. HROACM Elder and treasurer. Eccentric and somewhat scatter-brained.

Hammah Henry. 16-18. Older teenage girl, Lost and Found Youth Camper, a tough kid who is the Leader of the Pack. She has,

however, the proverbial heart of gold.

Molly Beasley. 16-18. Older teenage girl Lost and Found Youth Camper. The flirtatious one, looking for the boys.

Leroy Jones. 16-18. Lost and Found Youth Camper, Hammah's lieutenant. Obedient to Hammah, but has attitude as well.

Matthew Tanner. 30-60: HROACM Elder.

Joe Hargrave. 30-60: HROACM Elder.

Sooze Castle. 14-18. Lost and Found Youth Camper.

Dabney Channing. 8-12. HROACM kid.

Morgan Preston. 8-12. HROACM kid

Paul McCormack (Man On Crutches). 25-40.

Warden (of the State Prison). 35-50

Other Lost and Found and HROACM Youth. Younger kids and teenagers

Musical Numbers

Act I

Scene 1.

"Freedom Road". Carlton, Brother, Prisoners & Guards
"I Am Empty". Carlton

Scene 2.

"Just Trust Me". Buddy & the Elders

Scene 3.

"I Am Empty (Reprise)". Silas

Scene 4.

"Moses and Miriam". Germaine, Brother, HROACM Children
"Is That a Cross Up On That Hill?". John David, Pearl & Choir

Scene 5.

"Got It From the Street". Hammah, Leroy, Katrina, Lost & Found Youth

Scene 6.

"Master, Where Do You Dwell?". Pearl, Choir
"Don't Hide Your Talent". Carlton & Congregation

Scene 7.

"No Time To Wait On Heaven". Brother
"All My Life". Carlton

Scene 8.

"Faith". Pearl

Scene 9.

"He's Got the Touch". Carlton & Congregation

Act II

Scene 1.

"Peter Wrote It On the Rock". Elders
"Peter Wrote It On the Rock (Rock Reprise)". Elders & Youth

Scene 3.

"God's Been Good To Me". Carlton, Pearl, & Brother
"Light Inside Of Me". Althea, Silas

Scene 5.

"Shout About My Lord". Congregation
"Don't Look In Here". Carlton, Silas, Pearl, Congregation

Scene 6.

"Upon This Rock". Carlton, Pearl, Congregation

Scene Synopsis

Act I

- Scene 1. State Prison, mid-summer
- Scene 2. Cedarville Tabernacle, early August.
- Scene 3. Tabernacle, two weeks later, Saturday afternoon
- Scene 4. Office, following Monday afternoon
- Scene 5. Dormitory, immediately after
- Scene 6. Tabernacle, Wednesday night
- Scene 7. Office, Thursday afternoon
- Scene 8. Tabernacle, late Thursday afternoon
- Scene 9. Tabernacle, Thursday night

Act II

- Scene 1. Tabernacle, Friday morning
- Scene 2. Office, Friday night
- Scene 3. Tabernacle, Saturday afternoon
- Scene 4. Office, Saturday evening
- Scene 5. Tabernacle, Saturday night
- Scene 6. Tabernacle, Sunday morning

ACT I

SCENE 1

1.1.1 "Overture"

Exterior. A drab building with steel door. Above the entrance, a sign: "STATE PRISON." Prisoners are working, overseen by guards. The door opens, three men walk out: the WARDEN, CARLTON CHAPPELL and BROTHER CARRUTHERS. CARLTON is middle-aged, his bearing shows a forced deference to authority: he once exercised authority. Now he is less sure of himself. BROTHER carries himself carelessly. He has a cane which he handles like a rapier. His manner is friendly, his eyes are hard.

WARDEN

Chapell, I'm glad to see you leaving here.

CARLTON

That makes two of us.

BROTHER

Make it three.

WARDEN

And my thanks for your help during the riot. Don't know how you did it, but you managed to calm down the whole rowdy bunch.

BROTHER

Let's give credit everywhere it's due, warden. I played a role in that situation.

WARDEN

That's what Chapell told the parole board, Carruthers, so I guess it's true. Personally, I never saw where you did much.

BROTHER

Oh, but I did. Shoulder to shoulder with Brother Chapell, calming the convicts.

CARLTON

It'd been tough without Brother Carruthers.

WARDEN

Well, the parole board made a good decision.
Where will you go now?

CARLTON

There's only one place I want to go.

BROTHER

Please don't say Disney World.

CARLTON

Down that road yonder.

I.1.2 "Freedom Road"

I'M GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I'VE BEEN FREE
THROWING DOWN MY LOAD, AIN'T NOTHING OWED
DON'T HAVE NO CHAINS HANGING ON ME
I'M GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD
'CAUSE THERE'S A PLACE I NEED TO BE
AND IT'S NOWHERE NEAR TO ANY PLACE LIKE HERE
SOME PLACE WHERE I'M FINALLY FREE

LIFE IS HARD, IT'S MIGHTY HARD TO MAKE IT THROUGH
DOING TIME IS HARD ON MY PHILOSOPHY
BUT HERE I AM, MY TIME IS DONE
YEAH, IT WAS HARD, BUT THE BATTLE'S WON
NOW THERE IS THE LOCK, I'VE GOT THE KEY

PRISONERS & GUARDS

HE'S GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD
AND IT'S THE ROAD WHERE HE WANTS TO BE
OPENED UP HIS CELL, AIN'T HE DOING WELL?

CARLTON

DON'T HAVE NO CHAINS HANGING ON ME

PRISONERS & GUARDS

HE'S GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD
YEAH, THAT'S THE ROAD WHERE HE WANTS TO BE
WALKING WILL BE SWEET, ON HIS OWN TWO FEET

CARLTON

KNOWING THAT THAT ROAD BELONGS TO ME

I GOT A DREAM OF A ROOM THAT HAS NO DOORS

BROTHER

I GOT SOME OATS THAT REALLY NEED TO BE SOWED

CARLTON & BROTHER

TO BE FREE, YOU MUST BELIEVE
THAT ALL YOU GOT TO DO IS LEAVE

ALL

LOOK OVER YONDER, NOW AIN'T THAT A PRETTY ROAD?

WE'RE HEADING RIGHT ON DOWN
WE'RE HEADING RIGHT ON DOWN

WE'RE GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD
YEAH, THAT'S THE ROAD WHERE WE WANT TO BE
AND IT'S NOWHERE NEAR, IT'S MIGHTY FAR FROM HERE
THE PLACE WHERE WE'RE GONNA BE FREE

PRISONERS march away. GUARDS pump
shotguns. PRISONERS back up.

PRISONERS

OR MAYBE NOT

ALL

WE'RE GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD
(GOING DOWN THAT FREEDOM ROAD)
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE'VE BEEN FREE
(SINCE WE BEEN FREE)
THROWING DOWN MY LOAD, AIN'T NOTHING OWED
AIN'T GOT NO CHAINS
AIN'T GOT NO CHAINS HANGING ON ME

WARDEN

Good luck, Chapell. You need a reference, call
on me. Johnson, get those prisoners inside.

GUARDS, PRISONERS and WARDEN exit.

BROTHER

A character reference from the warden. That
ought to come in real handy.

CARLTON

I'm thankful for any help I can get.

BROTHER

Let's get moving then. Your old lady said-

CARLTON

She's my music minister, not my old lady.

BROTHER

Whatever, her last letter said you were all set
up at the Holy Rock of Ages Camp Meeting in
Cedarville, wherever the hell that is.

CARLTON

It's a nice little town. I've been there.

BROTHER

Really? Well, she'll handle the music, I'll handle the kids.

CARLTON

You sure you're up to it?

BROTHER

I told you about the counseling service I ran for kids down in Mobile. I couldn't help it if somebody was selling drugs out the back door.

CARLTON

Yes, and you took the rap to save those youngsters from doing time. I know. Still-

BROTHER

I'll be fine. Now let's get cracking.

CARLTON

You go on ahead. I need a minute.

BROTHER

I can't believe you could stand even one more second in this place. I'll go buy us a couple of bus tickets. Let's get down to Cedarville, start doing the Lord's work!

He slaps Carlton's back, exits

1.1.3 "I Am Empty"

CARLTON

The Lord's work. That's what it was all about, wasn't it? So what am I doing now?

DON'T LOOK IN HERE, FOR I AM EMPTY
THERE'S NOT A PRAYER CAN MAKE ME WHOLE
THERE'S NOTHING LEFT, NO WAY TO HEAL ME
I AM EMPTY DEEP INSIDE, CAN'T EVEN FIND MY SOUL
DON'T LOOK IN HERE, FOR I AM EMPTY
THE HEART I HAD HAS GONE FOR GOOD
NO TREE OF STRENGTH, NO MAN OF COURAGE
THIS OAK HAS DIED INSIDE, WHERE ONCE THE GOOD WOOD STOOD

ONCE FAITH WAS STRONG AND ALL I ASKED FOR
THE DEEPEST WELL A MAN COULD NEED
NOW FAITH'S A WORD AND NOTHING MORE
A MUSTARD SEED IS JUST A MUSTARD SEED
A BLEEDING WOUND WILL NEVER CEASE TO BLEED
ONCE IN A CAGE, THE PRISONER'S NEVER FREED

DON'T LOOK FOR ME, 'CAUSE YOU'LL SEE NOTHING
A SHADOW HIDES WHAT ONCE WAS CLEAR

THERE IS NO MAN, THERE IS NO MEANING
I AM EMPTY NOW, DON'T LOOK IN HERE

BLACKOUT

1.1.4 "Freedom Road - scene change"

SCENE 2

The Holy Rock of Ages Tabernacle. Prominent is the pulpit, which is actually a huge rock. An oil lamp sits on the table in front of the pulpit. JOHN DAVID SOMMERS, president of the HROACM, stands at pulpit. The other Elders (BUDDY TOWNSEND, MATTHEW TANNER, JOE HARGRAVE and ERNIE LINCOLN) sit in choir pews facing him, talking. His wife, GERMAINE, is prominent on the front row. The only woman in the group, she is nervous.

JOHN DAVID
Order, please. Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

GERMAINE clears her throat.

JOHN DAVID (CONT'D)
And lady. Y'all remember we have a new Elder in the Holy Rock of Ages Camp Meeting Association. Namely, my wife, Germaine. Stand up, Germaine.

ERNIE
Everybody knows Germaine. We've known her all our lives, John David.

JOHN DAVID
Yes, Ernie. I was just emphasizing the fact that Germaine is our first *female* elder.

Perfunctory applause.

GERMAINE
I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve the Lord in this capacity. I just want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the opportunity to have the opportunity to do that.

She sits quickly, embarrassed

JOHN DAVID
Thank you, Germaine. Now if we can get on to the business at hand—

GERMAINE jumps up.

GERMAINE
I second that!

She sits, pleased with herself.

JOHN DAVID

There's no motion, Germaine. There's got to be a motion for you to second it. I told you that.

BUDDY snorts, small snickers

GERMAINE

Oh. That's right. Sorry.

JOHN DAVID

We have two mighty important items to address this morning, so if it's all right with you fellas, and lady, we'll skip the minutes and other preliminaries. If someone would so move?

BUDDY

I so move.

GERMAINE

And I second it!

JOHN DAVID

All in favor?

ALL

Aye.

JOHN DAVID

The motion is carried. One of the two things is electing a new president. My latest term of office expires today. I have served as president for fourteen years, and I'm happy to say it has never felt like a burden.

BUDDY

I guess not.

GERMAINE

Buddy Townsend, just what do you mean by that?

BUDDY

If you don't do nothing, not much burden, is it?

GERMAINE

There you go again. Every year, for ten years, ever since Regina wanted to be Music Director-

BUDDY

She would have been a fine Music Director, but I don't hold it against John David because he wouldn't approve her to that position.

GERMAINE

I'm sure.

BUDDY

The fact is that under John David, this Camp Meeting has gone so far into the red we might as well be communists. Which, if I'm not mistaken, brings us to the other reason for this meeting. Ain't that right, Ernie?

ERNIE

(a little embarrassed)

Well, we do have a little problem with our debits. Or you might say our assets.

BUDDY

Get on to it, Ernie!

ERNIE

Bottom line is we're up to our assets in debts. That's nothing new. But we do have some expenses that need immediate attention.

BUDDY

Tell 'em what the fire marshal said.

ERNIE

Apparently, all these cedar shavings and that shingle roof up yonder are going to have to be replaced on account of being a fire hazard.

MATTHEW

They've been here longer'n anybody can remember.

ERNIE

That's the problem. Could go up like gasoline if lightning struck or somebody dropped a match. He was especially critical of our Eternal Flame of Righteousness.

JOHN DAVID

That flame has been burning every revival we've ever held. Every August, for one week solid.

BUDDY

Hmmph!

GERMAINE

Don't you "Hmmph" him!

ERNIE

And the bank is getting real antsy about that loan we took out to build the new dining hall.

BUDDY

Which I voted against.

JOHN DAVID

We needed a dining hall. The old one was falling in. Where would we feed the campers?

BUDDY

What campers? We don't *have* any campers.

GERMAINE

You can't fault John David for that. There's a simple reason they haven't been coming to camp.

MATTHEW

What's that?

GERMAINE

They died. They were all old.

BUDDY

There's no excuse for not getting some live ones to take their place. What's our enrollment this year, Ernie?

ERNIE looks in ledger

ERNIE

Including us?

BUDDY

Including us.

ERNIE

Including the choir?

GERMAINE

We're all in the choir, Ernie. Everybody but ol' "Foghorn" Townsend.

ERNIE

Lessee, comes to- twenty. Give or take a few.

Stunned silence.

JOE

You take a few, there won't be nothing left.

GERMAINE

Daddy, do something!

BUDDY

It's what he's been doing that got us in this fix. If I'd been me, I'd a got some young folks in to take the place of those who've passed on.

JOHN DAVID

All they want to do is play video games and listen to rap music. Young people have got zero interest in religion. Unless it's satanic.

GERMAINE

Except for our sweet babies here in Cedarville.

BUDDY

All the more reason to get 'em in here. Kill two birds with one stone. Save their souls and save the Holy Rock of Ages Camp Meeting!

JOHN DAVID

Buddy, if you think you can do a better job—

BUDDY

Never said I'd be a better president than you.

JOHN DAVID

Well, thank you for that.

BUDDY

I would, though.

GERMAINE

I never! A Sommers has been president of the association ever since there was a Holy Rock.

BUDDY

Nothing of this world is permanent.

JOHN DAVID

This rock is permanent! I don't give a fig who's president as long as somebody's preaching from this rock. That's the important thing.

BUDDY

'Course it is, John David. 'Course it is. What we need is a plan to save our camp meeting.

ERNIE

A plan?

BUDDY

A plan. And as it so happens, I have a plan.

GERMAINE

How surprising.

BUDDY

Everybody knows I run a pretty successful used car business here in Cedarville.

MATTHEW

I bought my truck from Townsend's Car Town.

BUDDY

That's right.

MATTHEW

It's been sitting up on blocks for four months.

BUDDY

Sorry about that, Matthew. See me after the meeting, I'll get you fixed up.

MATTHEW

I'd rather get my truck fixed.

BUDDY

Whatever. Now, in my capacity as a successful businessman, I do quite a bit of advertising. And I have developed some important contacts in the television business. Including some very special contacts with folks in TV evangelism.

JOHN DAVID

A television preacher? At the Holy Rock?

GERMAINE

Those people are all crooks!

BUDDY

That's not so. You can't make broad, sweeping statements about a whole group of people.

GERMAINE

I wouldn't trust one of 'em anymore than I'd trust a used car salesman.

BUDDY

Excuse me?

GERMAINE

I *like* to make broad, sweeping statements about groups of people. Especially when they're true!

General commotion.

JOHN DAVID

Please! Whatever Brother Townsend has planned—

BUDDY

He's started with "Brother Townsend." Look out.

JOHN DAVID

Let's hear him out. Go on, Brother Townsend.

BUDDY

You know I love this place. I been coming here since I was baby. My mama'd lay me on a blanket in those cedar shavings just like the rest of you— Ernie, and you, Joe. Germaine, didn't you and me roll around on a blanket together?

She glares at him.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

When we were babies. I love this place, all I'm asking is for ya'll to trust me.

1.2.1 "Just Trust Me"

YOU GENTLEMEN (AND LADY), YOU'VE KNOWN ME ALL YOUR LIVES
I'M NOT A MAN YOU'D CALL UNCOMMON WISE
YA'LL KNOW I AM NOT SMART, I'M A MAN MORE FROM THE HEART
AND I'M NOT ONE WHO'S KNOWN FOR TELLING LIES
A GENIUS I AM NOT, BUT I ALWAYS SAY JUST WHAT IS WHAT
I KNOW THIS, AND SO DO YOU
THIS CAMP I'D NEVER, EVER JEOPARDIZE

I'VE KNOWN YA'LL FOR FAR TOO LONG, SO TRUST ME
I WILL NEVER LEAD YOU WRONG, SO TRUST ME
HERE IT IS, PLEASE HEAR ME OUT
THE ISSUE WILL NOT BE IN DOUBT
THERE'S NOTHING HERE TO FIGURE OUT, SO TRUST ME
I'M A MAN KNOWN FOR MY WORD, SO TRUST ME
I'M ONLY ASKING TO BE HEARD, JUST TRUST ME
PUT ME IN CHARGE, I'VE GOT A PLAN
YOU DON'T NEED TO UNDERSTAND
I'D RATHER YOU JUST SHAKE MY HAND, AND TRUST ME

OTHERS

HE'S ASKING US TO PUT OUR TRUST IN HIM

BUDDY

THAT'S TRUE

OTHERS

WITHOUT A FUSS, JUST GIVE OUR TRUST TO HIM

BUDDY

JUST YOU REMEMBER WHAT WE HAVE AT STAKE, AND TRUST ME
I'LL BE GOOD, FOR GOODNESS' SAKE, SO TRUST ME
OF ALL MY SINS, I DO REPENT
I'M NOT A CROOK, NEVER STOLE A CENT
SO PLEASE MAKE ME YOUR PRESIDENT, AND TRUST ME

OTHERS

HE'S NOT A CROOK, HE READS THE BOOK
HE PRAYS AT NIGHT HIS SOUL IS TOOK
UP THERE WHERE THEY WILL TAKE ONE LOOK, AND TRUST HIM

HE'S AS WORTHY OF OUR TRUST AS A BOY SCOUT
HIS FINGERS IN THE TILL, HE WILL KEEP OUT
HE HAS NOTHING BUT GOOD WILL, THERE IS NO DOUBT
HE IS ABOUT AS FINE A FELLOW YOU COULD FIND
WALKS A STRAIGHT AND NARROW LINE

BUDDY
IF YOU PUT YOUR TRUST IN ME, I'LL EARN IT
TAKE A CHANCE AND WAIT AND SEE, YOU'LL LEARN IT
THE HOLY ROCK WILL ROLL, YOU'LL SEE
WITH A PREACHER FROM TV PEOPLE WILL FLOCK HERE TO SEE
SOON YOU WILL BE THANKING ME
BUT UNTIL THEN, IT'S GOTTA BE: JUST TRUST ME

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM

BUDDY
If I'm lying, I'm dying!

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM

BUDDY
Trust with verifying

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM

BUDDY
I'm not prevaricating.

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM

BUDDY
Truth is what I'm stating.

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM

BUDDY
If I'm joking, I'm smoking.

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM

BUDDY
My word is good as spoken.

OTHERS
JUST TRUST HIM, PUT OUR TRUST IN HIM

BUDDY

Now here's what I propose. First, we hire
Carlton Chapell as the preach-

GERMAINE

Carlton Chapell! He's the worst of the lot!

ERNIE

Didn't he steal money from his own church?

BUDDY

Well-

JOE

And didn't he go to prison?

BUDDY

For a brief time, yes-

MATTHEW

And wasn't he involved with a married woman?

BUDDY

Now that part is simply not true. I think.

GERMAINE

And you want him here? Preaching?

BUDDY

Nobody's perfect! People don't pay that much
attention to a few measly transgressions.

ERNIE

Sounds to me like he's progressing on his
transgressing. That's a powerful lot of sin for
one person.

BUDDY

He didn't steal that money, he borrowed it.
Just didn't have time to get it all paid back.
But he's paid his debt to society.

JOHN DAVID

What about his church? He pay them back? And
how do you know so much about Carlton Chapell?

BUDDY

I told you, I've got contacts. I've been
talking to his music minister, and if we don't
fret about a little prison time, we can get
some first-class preaching here. Why, his last
revival, before he was sent up the river?

(MORE)

BUDDY (CONT'D)

They say a hundred folks come to the altar in one night. Collection plates overflowing. No problem keeping *that* revival going.

JOHN DAVID

No problem except the preacher went to prison.

MATTHEW

Overflowing collection plates, huh?

JOE

A hundred people come to the altar?

JOHN DAVID

Now wait just a doggone minute. Silas Parnell does the preaching here, ya'll know that.

BUDDY

Parnell, hah! All he does is sit in that rocking chair and sleep.

GERMAINE

He's an old man, for goodness sakes.

BUDDY

Old men need to lay back and let the younger men take the lead.

ERNIE

He's right about Parnell. He don't have the same fire he used to.

BUDDY

He ain't even smoldering. Parnell is the past. Chapell is the future.

MATTHEW

But prison, Buddy?

BUDDY

He's done his time.

JOE

I don't know.

BUDDY

He's paid for his crime.

ERNIE

Seems a bit questionable.

BUDDY

He'll work cheap.

ERNIE

How cheap?

BUDDY whispers and ERNIE whistles.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

That's cheap, alright. Say- he didn't murder that woman, did he?

BUDDY

There was no woman! And that ain't all my plan.

GERMAINE

More plans like this we don't need.

MATTHEW

Sshhh! What else you got in mind, Buddy?

BUDDY

Youth! Young people! That's what we need to get this place hopping again. And I know where to get 'em!

JOE

Where?

BUDDY

Birmingham! It's chock full of kids who'd love to go camping. So we use a little marketing savvy, pitch the Holy Rock Camp Meeting as a summer camp. We emphasize the "camp" and hit 'em with the "meeting" after they get here.

JOHN DAVID

Do you seriously suggest we tell children this is a- a- summer camp?

BUDDY

Sure! We do crafts, don't we? We got a pond down there, great place for swimming, canoeing-

GERMAINE

For Pete's sake! That's the baptizing pond!

BUDDY

Okay, swimming, canoeing *and* baptizing. But let's leave the baptizing out of the brochure- might not appeal to everybody.

JOHN DAVID

Brochure? What brochure?

BUDDY

Yessir, we get 'em in there to go swimming, and then we baptize 'em. Two birds with one stone.

JOE

How do we get Birmingham kids to Cedarville?

BUDDY

I found a missionary group in Birmingham. The Birmingham Unitarian Missionary Service.

GERMAINE

A missionary? In Birmingham?

JOHN DAVID

Unitarian? Are those people even Christians?

BUDDY

Maybe not. But if they're not, we get a chance to Christianize 'em.

GERMAINE

Christianize??

BUDDY

And they're just dying for a place to send their kids. Woman named Katrina Knutsen been doing some truly inspired work down there. Why, they'll even pay us twenty-five bucks a day just to take 'em off their hands. That is, you know, Christianize 'em!

ERNIE

Twenty-five dollars a day? How many can we get?

BUDDY

Many as we want.

JOE

I'm for it.

MATTHEW

I nominate Buddy Townsend for president.

GERMAINE

I second it! Oh, sorry. Can I take that back?

BUDDY

No. All in favor of me as president?

MATTHEW, JOE & BUDDY raise hands.

ERNIE

Sorry, John David. I guess I'm for trying
Buddy's way.

He raises his hand

BUDDY

I accept the post. I'll start the ball rolling
right away. We only got two weeks. Ernie, get
me the addresses of our still alive campers.
Joe, you call Hanson's Bull Dozier Service. We
need to widen out that baptizing pond.

MATTHEW, JOE, ERNIE & BUDDY exit.
GERMAINE and JOHN DAVID look
dejectedly at each other.

BLACKOUT

1.2.2 "Just Trust Me - scene change"

SCENE 3

Tabernacle, a week later. MILBURNE THORNDIKE is cleaning pulpit. He looks around, then sits. He pulls out a comic book and begins to read. CARLTON, PEARL SWEENEY and BROTHER enter and watch him for a second. PEARL is beautiful, sweet and alluring, always well-dressed.

CARLTON
Comfortable there, son?

MILBURNE jumps up, stuffs comic in back pocket, starts cleaning

MILBURNE
Yessir! I mean, no sir!

BROTHER
Not comfortable in the Lord's house, son?

MILBURNE
No sir. I mean, yes sir.

PEARL
Do you know where we might find the president of the camp meeting association?

MILBURNE
Mister Townsend? He's down at the office.

CARLTON
Could you run tell him Carlton Chapell is here?

MILBURNE
Yessir.

HE stares at PEARL

CARLTON
You think you might run tell him now, son?

MILBURNE
Oh. Yessir.

He runs out.

BROTHER
What a remarkably dull boy.

CARLTON
Welcome to the world famous Holy Rock.

BROTHER

Man, what a dump!

PEARL

I think it's pretty, in an old-fashioned way.

BROTHER

Maybe, but it's hotter than blue blazes.

CARLTON

It's not as bad as all that. Worn down, perhaps, but its reputation is above reproach.

BROTHER

More than you can say for us.

CARLTON

A temporary condition.

PEARL

Is this the famous rock?

CARLTON

This is it, Pearl. When I was here as a young man, I remember stepping up here a few times. I always liked the feel of it. A man could be moved to do righteous things in this place.

BROTHER

I wish I was moved. Mainly to some other place.

PEARL

Brother, do you really think such sentiments are appropriate considering where we are?

CARLTON

They most certainly are not. We need to treat this place with respect. The Holy Rock is going to be the cornerstone of my comeback.

PEARL

You bet it is! Carlton may have had some bad breaks, but God's always given him what he's needed, right Carlton? And he'll do it again!

BUDDY, JOHN DAVID, GERMAINE enter.

BUDDY

Sister Sweeney, it's good to see you again. And Brother Carlton Chapell, let me make you especially welcome. I'm Buddy Townsend, president of the Association. We are mighty proud to have you here.

CARLTON

Not as proud as we are to be here, Brother Buddy. Who are these Holy Rock campers?

BUDDY

This here is John David Sommers and his wife Germaine. John David is the immediate *past* president of the Association.

CARLTON

How do you do, Brother John!

JOHN DAVID

John David.

CARLTON

John David. What a glorious place, a sanctified place. Cedarville has some lovely folks, Brother John. There was a nice looking young man cleaning up in here—

GERMAINE

That was Milburne Thorndike. He's our nephew.

CARLTON

Sister Germaine. Yes, an exceptionally fine looking boy. My associates were just remarking on what a high caliber of youth ya'll must have around here if that boy is any example.

PEARL

Brother hopes all the children here are just like your nephew.

GERMAINE

(less antagonistic)

The children of Cedarville are a blessing.

BUDDY

I don't believe I've met your other associate, Brother Carlton.

CARLTON

You already know my music minister, Sister Pearl Sweeney. Pearl has been with me for many years now. And this is a recent addition to our team, Brother Brother Carruthers.

JOHN DAVID

"Brother Brother"?

BROTHER

Brother is my given name. You see, my mother called my father "Father," and he called her "Mother," and when my sister and I came along, mother naturally named me "Brother."

JOHN DAVID

So your sister's name is "Sister"?

BROTHER

No.

CARLTON

Germaine is a lovely name. I haven't heard it in years. Is it a family name?

GERMAINE

As a matter of fact, my grandmother—

JOHN DAVID

Family name is "Sommers." Has been for years.

CARLTON

Yes, of course it has. Brother Buddy, we're all anxious to get situated. Sister Pearl will want to get acquainted with the choir. And since Brother Brother will be handling the Youth Ministry, he'll need to inspect the dormitory facilities and so forth.

GERMAINE

Excuse me? Did you say Brother Brother will be in charge of the youth?

CARLTON

None other.

GERMAINE

I'll have you know that I've been in charge of the youth for fourteen years now.

JOHN DAVID

Buddy, you can't mean you hired somebody to take Germaine's place, too? You neglected to mention that little fact to the Elders.

BUDDY

Wasn't necessary. I did what was best for the association. Besides, it's a package deal. One tidy sum for all three, like getting air conditioning and power steering thrown in for free, right, Brother Carlton?

CARLTON

Right as rain. Think of Brother Brother as the power steering for your young people.

GERMAINE

Then think of me as the emergency brake. You listen to me, *mister* Brother. I know these children right down to their toenails. I practically raised most of 'em. If you think some stranger is going to waltz in here—

BROTHER

You know, Germaine— do you mind if I call you Germaine?— I always feel fortunate to find some exceptionally spiritual person to help with the youth. I can see that you are very spiritual. Perhaps you might show me around?

He takes her arm and leads her off

CARLTON

They'll do fine together. Brother is the Napoleon Bonaparte of persuasion.

JOHN DAVID

He may have met his Waterloo.

PEARL

Brother Buddy, I don't suppose you'd be kind enough to show me where I can store my things?

BUDDY

Why, certainly Miss Sweeney.

PEARL

Just call me Pearl.

BUDDY

I don't think there's any reason to stand on formality. Why don't you just call me Buddy.

PEARL

If you insist, Buddy. Are you in the choir?

BUDDY

I am now.

They exit.

CARLTON

You have a beautiful place here, Brother John.

JOHN DAVID

John David.

CARLTON

John David. You were the association president?

JOHN DAVID

For fourteen years.

He steps thoughtfully to pulpit

JOHN DAVID (CONT'D)

But I suppose everything changes eventually. Everything except this rock. You know about our Holy Rock of Ages, Mister Chapell?

CARLTON

I've heard a little. Story goes that a farmer found it when he was cutting woods for a field.

JOHN DAVID

David Augustus Sommers. My great-grandfather. This was all one solid stand of cedar. He came across this clearing, and smack in the middle, this rock rose up.

SILAS PARNELL, an old man in a black suit, enters quietly, unnoticed and sits in a pew.

JOHN DAVID (CONT'D)

My grand-daddy was with him. He used to tell about walking up to it, suddenly a shaft of light came shooting down, right onto the rock. My great-grandfather stood stock-still for a long time, like he was listening to something. Next day, he started building this tabernacle.

CARLTON

That's quite a story.

JOHN DAVID

It's not really a rock at all. State geologist came here once and investigated. You see, it's not separate, like a boulder lying on the ground. It's part of the stone that lies beneath us. Just one continuous rock, the rock of ages. Real unusual, he said.

CARLTON

Yes, a very unusual rock. I imagine quite a bit of preaching has been done here.

SILAS stands

SILAS

And I reckon I've done my share of it.

JOHN DAVID

Silas!

CARLTON

Silas Parnell?

SILAS

John David. Hello, Carl- Owens, isn't it?

CARLTON

It was. It's Carlton Chapell now.

JOHN DAVID

Wait a- You've been here before.

SILAS

Yes, he has. Twenty-five years ago, just a teenager he was. Worked with me one summer.

JOHN DAVID

Well, I'll be dogged. I didn't realize you were a friend of Silas. I'm sorry if I didn't welcome you more warmly-

CARLTON

I'm not exactly a friend of Silas Parnell. We, uh, he just helped me out one summer a long time ago. Isn't that right, Mister Parnell?

SILAS

I reckon that's right, Mister- Chapell.

JOHN DAVID

Well, if Silas Parnell saw fit to help you, well, Silas has been helping folks as long as I've known him, and a while longer than that.

CARLTON

Nowadays, I'm trying my best to help others. It's certainly a surprise to see you again, Brother Silas. I expect I need to get on and see about my quarters.

He starts to leave

JOHN DAVID

Silas, Brother Carlton here is, well, he's the featured preacher at this year's meeting.

SILAS

Yes, I know that.

JOHN DAVID

You do?

SILAS

It's plastered on the sign down on the highway.

JOHN DAVID

Buddy's been at work again.

CARLTON

You'll still be handling several of the services, Brother Silas. We're all going to have our hands full. Well! Tomorrow is going to be a great day! First day of camp meeting. Perhaps I'll see you later this evening, Brother Silas? Good day, John David.

CARLTON exits. JOHN DAVID sits beside SILAS.

JOHN DAVID

I do remember him, now that I think about it. How'd you get to know a fella like him, Silas?

SILAS remains silent

JOHN DAVID (CONT'D)

Silas, you feeling all right?

SILAS

All right? I'm fine.

JOHN DAVID

I tried to get in touch with you to let you know what had happened, but you never answered the phone. I wondered if you were even coming.

SILAS

Sorry I missed your call. I was in Nashville.

JOHN DAVID

I know this Chapell thing must be a shock-

SILAS

You don't put fifty-eight years in this line of work and not learn to accept what the Lord sends. If you felt it was time to hire somebody else, you're doing what you see fit.

JOHN DAVID

I didn't hire him. I'm not president anymore.

SILAS

What?

JOHN DAVID

Lots of things have changed, Silas. We finished the new dining hall! Want me to show you?

SILAS

Maybe later, John David. I'm mighty tired. I think I'll just sit here and rest awhile.

JOHN DAVID

And you're not upset about Chapell?

SILAS

(pauses)

How many did we have Sunday night last year?

JOHN DAVID

About a hundred, I guess.

SILAS

(chuckles)

About a hundred. We were fortunate if there were twenty-five folks here that night.

JOHN DAVID

But—

SILAS

Average age, say, sixty-five. The same twenty-five that were here closing night the year before, and the year before that, and so on.

JOHN DAVID

That's one reason they elected Buddy Townsend.

SILAS

Buddy? Did he hire Owens— I mean, Chapell? Buddy never was a good judge of character.

JOHN DAVID

Is Chapell that bad?

SILAS

He might have been one of the best that ever was. But he was a proud boy. I think he likes the sound of his own voice a little too much. Nevertheless, he has got a power. If he's a changed man, he could really help you.

JOHN DAVID

I hope he is. We need all the help we can get. Come on, Silas. I'll walk you to your cabin.

SILAS

Just leave me here for a minute, John David. Us
old preachers need our rest. I'll be all right
when I rest a bit.

JOHN DAVID

Sure, Silas. I'm sorry about Chapell.

SILAS nods and JOHN DAVID exits.

SILAS

Son, that doesn't bother me at all. When you
don't have anything at stake, it doesn't matter
who robs the claim.

1.3.2 "I Am Empty (Reprise)"

DON'T LOOK IN HERE, FOR I AM EMPTY
NO SONG TO SING, NO CROSS TO BEAR
SO FULL OF FEAR I WON'T GO GENTLY
INTO THE NIGHT THAT'S WAITING, WAITING FOR ME THERE

ONCE I WAS STRONG AND FULL OF PURPOSE
NO DOUBTS DISTURBED THE FAITH I BORE
NOW YEARS GROW SHORT AND I GROW NERVOUS
I'M ASKING THINGS I NEVER ASKED BEFORE
I ASK MYSELF WHAT FATE WILL LIE IN STORE
I ASK MYSELF WHAT'S ON THAT OTHER SHORE

DON'T LOOK FOR ME, 'CAUSE YOU'LL SEE NOTHING
A SHADOW HIDES WHAT ONCE WAS CLEAR
THE MAN'S GROWN OLD, HIS STORY'S ENDING
I AM EMPTY NOW, DON'T LOOK IN HERE.

BLACKOUT

1.3.3 "Don't Look In Here - scene change"