

# **RUBY'S BUCKET OF BLOOD**

A Play with Songs

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Agent, Olivier Sultan, CAA

*The play is dedicated to Mr. P.C. Shepherd.*

*RUBY'S BUCKET OF BLOOD was originally produced at San Diego Repertory, directed by Sam Woodhouse. It was written under a grant from the Marin County Arts Council.*

**Setting:** The outskirts of a rural town in Southwest Louisiana.

**Time:** A hot Saturday night in July, 1961.

**Characters:** (All speak in a Cajun dialect.)

*Ruby Delacroix*, a black woman in her thirties, owner of the bar

*Emerald Delacroix*, Ruby's 13 year old daughter

*Billy Dupre*, a white man, thirties, singer, oilfield worker

*Betty Dupre*, a white woman, thirties, married to Dupre

*Johnny Beaugh*, a black man, band manager

*The Sugar Kings*, all black men, a four piece live band, including a saxophone, drums, bass, keyboards.

A small ensemble of *bar patrons*, all black, who drink, dance and occasionally sing backup.

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**SONG LIST**

*LONELY NIGHTS (Bingham/Hebert)*

*EVERYBODY'S HIDING (Bingham/Hebert)*

*HONEYTREE (Bingham/Hebert)*

*WINE WINE WINE (Bingham/Hebert)*

*EVEN THO' (Cookie and the Cupcakes)*

*LACHE PAS LA PATATE (Bingham/Hebert)*

*WHAT'S SHAKING ME UP? (Bingham/Hebert)*

*IF YOU WANT MY LOVIN' (Bingham/Hebert)*

*FOR YOUR PRECIOUS LOVE (Mayfield)*

*JOHNNY'S SONG (Bingham/Hebert)*

*OUT OF REACH (Bingham/Hebert)*

*BEFORE DAWN (Bingham/Hebert)*

*WHERE DID ALL MY SOFTNESS GO? (Bingham/Hebert)*

*LONELY NIGHTS (Bingham/Hebert)*

## ACT I.

**Scene One.** Ruby's empty bar, The Bucket of Blood. Saturday evening, 5pm. RUBY sweeps up the bar and prepares for the night. BETTY stands in the trees near her bed. They sing a capella, unaware of each other.

LONELY NIGHTS

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*Morning light through the moss and the trees  
I can see your reflection in the water so still  
Birds in flight 'cross the Gulf of Mexico  
Oh where did my true love go*

(chorus)

*Lonely nights, lonely nights  
Stare at the moonlight through the door  
Lonely nights, lonely nights  
You don't lay by my side anymore*

(Lights fade on BETTY, as RUBY continues to sweep and EMERALD ENTERS.)

EMERALD: Mama, something's happening down below.

RUBY: What you talking about, girl?

EMERALD: Down there.

RUBY: Down where?

EMERALD: In my drawers.

RUBY: What? What's happening in your drawers? Ain't nothing happening in your drawers. Nor mine neither, for that matter.

EMERALD: Blood.

RUBY: Oh, baby. You bleeding?

EMERALD: There's little tiny specks of blood in my drawers.

RUBY: That's your menstruation. I told you 'bout that.

EMERALD: I thought, uh. . . (She sniffs, thinking) I thought it w. . . nothing, I guess.

RUBY: What? You thought what?

EMERALD: I thought it'd be more, that there'd be more blood.

RUBY: There will be. The little specks are just the messengers telling you to get ready here it comes.

EMERALD: But I didn't think about it getting on my clothes. I have to throw my drawers away.

RUBY: No, baby. Just wash 'em out.

EMERALD: Blood won't come out.

RUBY: You'll get used to wearing stained drawers.

EMERALD: I don't want to.

RUBY: I'll buy you some bleach.

EMERALD: I don't want a menstruation.

RUBY: You don't have no choice in the matter.

EMERALD: I'll wear a rag all the time, to keep my drawers clean.

RUBY: No you won't. You'll be happy to get rid of those rags when you can. The safety pins rub you raw.

EMERALD: I don't like it.

RUBY: You'll get used to it.

EMERALD: I DON'T LIKE IT!

RUBY: Well, go tell God because I can't do nothing about it. And anyway, you don't know the half of it. If you anything like me, you gonna get the cramps so you can't walk. You be moaning so loud the rooster'll start crowing and the dog howling. And let me tell you, girl, you won't be thinking about no stained drawers. You won't even care that you sleeping in stained sheets. You just want out your body, and ain't nobody listening. You don't know the half of it.

EMERALD: Maybe I'm not like you.

RUBY: That would be a gift to us all, but something tells me it's a long shot.

EMERALD: Maybe not.

RUBY: Go tear up some facerags for yourself. Tomorrow I'll get some diapers to tear, that's what works the best.

EMERALD: I'm never having a baby, so I don't know why I need this.

RUBY: Just a little burden to see how strong you are.

EMERALD: I'm strong.

RUBY: Hard-headed is all.

EMERALD: Like you.

RUBY: No sense, like your daddy.

EMERALD: How can you say that?!?! I make straight A's.

RUBY: Book smart, but no common sense, Emerald. That's your problem.

EMERALD: I have more sense than you. Sense enough to know I'm getting out of here when I grow up.

RUBY: You got to grow up first.

EMERALD: I'm doing it. Just watch me.

RUBY: Go tear some rags, before you ruin your dress.

EMERALD: (As she EXITS) You like to make me feel small.

(RUBY stops what she's doing.)

RUBY: Emerald Marie Delacroix, what did you say?

EMERALD: Nothing.

RUBY: Don't you accuse me of trying to make you small.

EMERALD: Yes ma'am.

RUBY: Because it's not true and you know it. I'm trying to teach you.

EMERALD: Yes ma'am.

RUBY: So when you do leave, you'll do all right.

EMERALD: Yes ma'am.

RUBY: Don't you "yes ma'am" me. I'm talking to you.

EMERALD: Yes ma'am. I mean, No ma'am.

RUBY: Stop acting like a good A-student and talk to me, girl.

EMERALD: I don't know what to say, mama.

RUBY: You think I want you to feel small?

(Silence)

Tell the truth.

EMERALD: Yes. Because then you feel big.

RUBY: Um. That's what you think?

EMERALD: I know you want what's best for me. But maybe you don't know what that is anymore.

RUBY: Then who does, Emerald? Your daddy who shows up once a year with cheap presents?

EMERALD: At least he treats me like a person.

RUBY: You my child and you do what I say. I know what's best for you and I spend a lot of time thinking about how you gonna get it. And I spend a lot of hours cleaning up piss and beer to make sure you do.

EMERALD: I know.

RUBY: Your daddy treats you like a person because he's not strong enough to be a

father! Or a husband! Goddammit!

EMERALD: I'm sorry, ma.

RUBY: Go on, get out of here. I had enough of this.

EMERALD: See! "Get out of here." You treat me like a dog. . . Why should I listen to you?

(EMERALD EXITS.)

RUBY: (Hitting the bar.) BECAUSE I'M STILL THE BOSS AROUND HERE!

JOHNNY: (Outside) Nobody said you wasn't, Ruby!

(RUBY eyes the door, as JOHNNY ENTERS.)

JOHNNY: Hey, cher, comment ca va?

RUBY: What you want, coming around here so early and calling me "cher"?

JOHNNY: Mais, Ruby, you got a suspicious mind, you.

RUBY: It serves me well.

JOHNNY: Oh yeah?

RUBY: Spit it out, Johnny.

JOHNNY: When we get paid?

RUBY: HA.

(RUBY goes back to work.)

JOHNNY: I'm not kiddin'. We got a man here need some cash fast.

RUBY: Play first, pay after. Same as always.



JOHNNY: Ruby, we need your help this time. We always good for you.

RUBY: Only because I don't let you be bad for me.

JOHNNY: That ain't true.

RUBY: Um-hummm.

JOHNNY: A woman alone like you needs help and I'm always willing. I proved that.

RUBY: You a shiftless dog, John Beagh. How much more mileage you gonna get out of that two-bit lean-to you built a year ago? Everything I store in it gets soaked by the first rain. At least when Earl works he does a good job.

JOHNNY: But Earl ain't here.

RUBY: No he ain't. And I'm not buying your butter. And I'm NOT paying you before you play.

JOHNNY: It's not for me. We got a problem.

RUBY: You got a problem.

JOHNNY: You got a problem, too. Noogie Soileau got called up to New Orleans today for a recording session, and he's not gonna be back to sing tonight.

(RUBY stops what she's doing.)

RUBY: We got a deal, Johnny. You can't go on without a lead singer.

JOHNNY: I already got a replacement, don't worry.

RUBY: Who?

JOHNNY: Billy Dupre.

RUBY: He's white.

JOHNNY: He sounds colored.

RUBY: This is not radio.

JOHNNY: He's a great singer.

RUBY: I never had a white man in here before.

JOHNNY: It's 1961, Ruby. Nobody cares about mixing it up in bands anymore.

RUBY: You a fool, Johnny.

JOHNNY: Anyway, he wants to do it, and I can't find nobody else. It's after five on Saturday and everybody's already got their gigs lined up. It's Dupre or nobody. You got a full house coming, you know that.

RUBY: Why does he want to do it?

JOHNNY: He needs the money.

RUBY: What for?

JOHNNY: That's his business.

RUBY: It's my money, it's my business.

JOHNNY: He won't say.

RUBY: He's out there?

JOHNNY: Sure he's out there, he wants his money. Up front. Or no go.

RUBY: (Crossing to the door) Up front or no go. (Loudly) Whatsa matter, we got a man here who can't talk for himself?

DUPRE: (Outside) I can talk.

RUBY: You scared to come in here?

DUPRE: No.

RUBY: Not scared, just ashamed.

DUPRE: No. Hadn't been invited.

RUBY: You don't get invited into a bar, specially when you asking for money.

(DUPRE ENTERS.)

DUPRE: I ain't asking for nothing that ain't mine.

RUBY: It ain't yours yet, you ain't done nothing for me. Fifteen dollars WILL BE yours after you sing four sets tonight. Around two o'clock this morning you can ask for what's yours. Not til then.

DUPRE: If you don't pay me now, I won't sing.

(Pause)

RUBY: What's your trouble?

DUPRE: My only trouble is money.

RUBY: You think I won't pay you? I always pay, you can ask anybody.

DUPRE: That ain't it. I need the money now. It won't do me any good in the middle of the night. (Pause. HE takes a different approach.) I would like to be paid now. Then I will come back later and play four sets with Johnny's band.

RUBY: I can't do that.

DUPRE: I'm not asking for extra money.

RUBY: I do it for you, then they all hitting on me every week wanting the same thing. No. I can't do it.

DUPRE: In that case, I'm not gonna be here tonight.

JOHNNY: There's nobody else, Ruby. I made the rounds.

DUPRE: Just gimme my cut. I won't tell anybody I got it up front. Johnny?

JOHNNY: I won't say a word, Ruby. You know I'm good for that.

RUBY: What's your trouble?

DUPRE: None of your business.

RUBY: It's my business if you don't show up.

DUPRE: I'll show up.

RUBY: What makes you think I'm gonna believe you?

DUPRE: I'm telling you.

RUBY: HA. Since when crackers don't lie to niggers?

(JOHNNY softly whistles and turns away.)

DUPRE: I don't go in for that, Miss Ruby.

RUBY: Don't call me Miss, you son of a bitch, I'm a married woman. Give me your driving license.

DUPRE: What for?

RUBY: Give it to me or you ain't getting nothing from me.

JOHNNY: Ruby, you can't keep that. How's the man supposed to drive?

RUBY: Very carefully. Give it to me if you want a deal.

(DUPRE takes his driver's license out and hands it to her. RUBY crosses to the register, looking at it.)

RUBY: Good lookin' picture. You look more human when you smile.

(She counts out fifteen dollars and hold it out to DUPRE. He crosses the room to her. As he grasps the money, she doesn't let go.)

RUBY: If you don't show up, I'm coming looking for you. And I won't be alone.

(She lets go.)

DUPRE: Thanks a lot, Ruby. I won't forget this.

RUBY: Just be here.

DUPRE: Nine o'clock, ready to go.

RUBY: If either one of ya'll tells anybody. . .

JOHNNY: No way.

DUPRE: You got my promise.

RUBY: One shot deal.

DUPRE: One shot deal.

RUBY: All right.

DUPRE: Thanks, Ruby. . . I mean, Mrs. Delacroix.

RUBY: Dress nice!

DUPRE: Yes ma'am.

(DUPRE EXITS.)

RUBY: Now, what's his trouble?

JOHNNY: His wife needs medicine.

RUBY: What's she got?

JOHNNY: A hard life.

RUBY: So?

JOHNNY: She's crazy in the head.

RUBY: That bad?

JOHNNY: That bad.

RUBY: How come he don't send her to Mandeville?

JOHNNY: (Shrugs) He feels bad.

RUBY: What'd he do?

JOHNNY: Ask him.

RUBY: He wouldn't tell me.

JOHNNY: Well I ain't telling you either. It's nobody's business.

RUBY: What's nobody's business?

JOHNNY: (Sigh) Whatever made her crazy.

RUBY: How come you know?

JOHNNY: I listen.

RUBY: What happened?

JOHNNY: Will you let me take you out to eat tomorrow evening?

RUBY: You know better than that. I'm married.

JOHNNY: So I've heard.

RUBY: What happened?

JOHNNY: Tell you tomorrow evening at supper.

RUBY: Don't play with me.

JOHNNY: See you later, Ruby.

(JOHNNY EXITS.)

RUBY: (Sings reprise of LONELY NIGHTS as she finishes her work.)

*Too wet to shovel, too thick to plough  
Too many tales being told out of school  
Too many messengers delivering false hope  
Time to pay the darkness again*

*Lonely nights, lonely nights*

*Stare at the moonlight through the door  
Lonely nights, lonely nights  
You don't lay by my side anymore.*

(EMERALD ENTERS and stands in the doorway not looking up.)

EMERALD: Mama, I don't exactly know how to do these rags.

RUBY: I'm coming.

(RUBY puts her broom away and EXITS after EMERALD.)

**Scene Two.** Betty & Dupre's room, 8pm. There are guns mounted on the walls, and trees seem to be growing in the house. BETTY is in bed. She has run out of tranquilizers. DUPRE ENTERS from outside.

DUPRE: I got your medicine.

BETTY: I don't want it.

DUPRE: Girl, let's not go through this again.

BETTY: I don't want it.

DUPRE: You need it. Period.

BETTY: You need it. You need me to take it so I'll be good. Welllllll, I don't want it, and I'm not gonna take it.

DUPRE: You gonna take it. You gonna take it if I got to shove it down your throat.

BETTY: AGAIN. You mean, shove it down my throat AGAIN.

DUPRE: Yes, AGAIN. You gonna act like a bad child, I'm gonna treat you like a bad child. You know I can't put up with your crap.

BETTY: My crap. My crap. You mean, my life. I know you can't put up with my life.

DUPRE: Betty, everything I do is for you. You don't see it, that's your problem. Now

take your medicine and shut up.

(He throws a pharmacy bag onto the bed.)

BETTY: Yes mas'suh. Ever you say, mas'suh. Could you get me a glass of water, mas'suh?

DUPRE: Get your own damn water.

BETTY: I'm sick. You know that.

DUPRE: Nothing the matter with your legs.

BETTY: You think so? You like my legs?

(She pulls her legs out from under the covers, extending them into the air.)

BETTY: You think I got good legs? What about my ass, boy? I know you like my ass. Come feel how soft and round. It's a miracle. Come on. I'll take my medicine, I'll be a good girl. Come on over here..

DUPRE: What you doin'?

BETTY: Invitin' you in.

DUPRE: Take your medicine first.

BETTY: I don't wanna. I want to feel it all.

DUPRE: You know what'll happen. You'll start crying.

(He strokes her hair.)

DUPRE: Take your medicine.

BETTY: I don't think it'll hurt tonight.

DUPRE: Take your medicine.



BETTY: Just love me up, Billy. Just love me soft.

DUPRE: Honey, I can be soft as goose feathers and I still can't stop your mind from remembering. I can't do it.

BETTY: Try.

DUPRE: I've tried.

BETTY: You don't want to. You like it when I'm tranquilized.

DUPRE: I don't.

BETTY: You do. Less trouble for you.

DUPRE: Less trouble for us both.

BETTY: (Crying) Not for me. I like to cry. I feel good when I cry.

(DUPRE gets a glass of water and BETTY's pills.)

BETTY: I have a lot to cry about and I want everybody to know it. I don't like being hidden away in this house, in my bed all the time. I don't like being dead when I'm supposed to be alive.

(DUPRE hands her the water and pills. She knocks it all from his hand.)

DUPRE: Cot damn it, Betty!

BETTY: I'M NOT TAKING 'EM!

DUPRE: Do whatever you want. I'm goin' to work.

(HE EXITS into the bathroom to change into performance clothes.)

(BETTY gets up, cleans up the glass, water and pills. She smoothes the bedcovers and straightens the room a little, looks in on BILLY. She's trying to be good, but her mind is running too fast.)

BETTY: I had a dream this afternoon. A very important dream. But I can't remember it. That's why I can't take my medicine. So I'll be able to remember it. It was telling me something important, something I need to know. It's on the fringe of my mind. I have to stay clear so I can catch it.

(Finally she puts on a pretty bedjacket, props herself up in bed.)

BETTY: Billy. Billy, why don't you stay with me, tonight? I'll, you know, I'll be very good. I'll be nice. I'll be nice to you.

BILLY: You know I have to go to work.

BETTY: You could sing for me. And we could dance. I could be nice to you.

DUPRE: How come you only want to be nice when you know I got to leave?

BETTY: I don't know. That's not true.

DUPRE: You can be nice to me when I come home tonight.

BETTY: I'll be sleeping.

DUPRE: I can wake you up.

BETTY: (Shakes her head) I won't feel good then. I'll get mad. You know I can't stand waking up in the middle of the night.

DUPRE: Okay. I won't wake you up. We'll go for a walk tomorrow afternoon. I'll take you to the drive-in for supper. We'll be nice to each other, okay?

BETTY: We'll see. We'll see what really happens. We'll see how drunk you get tonight. We'll see how tired you are tomorrow. We'll see what ball game is on the radio. We'll see.

DUPRE: Okay, Betty, we'll see.

BETTY: Right you are, sonnyboy. We certainly will see what's going to happen. No way around that.

DUPRE: Right.

BETTY: Where you playing tonight?

DUPRE: Bucket O'Blood.

BETTY: Ooooooh. Colored club. What's a matter boy, can't you do better than that? You should be more uptown, man of your talent. Or are you drinking your talent away? Is your crazy wife driving you to drink your talent away? Did that woman ruin your life, sonny boy? Or did you ruin hers? Ain't it curious? Ain't it sad? Ain't it curious? Ain't it sad?

DUPRE: Shut up, Betty.

BETTY: You coming home tonight?

(Silence)

Answer me. I need to know.

DUPRE: I always come home. Every night.

BETTY: I know, but I got a feeling about tonight.

DUPRE: You get this feeling two, three times a week.

BETTY: Oh no. No, no. Not like this. You dressing up too much.

DUPRE: Can't you leave me in peace?

BETTY: I'm not hurting you. I just want to know. You got a girlfriend?

DUPRE: You want me to call your mama to come over?

BETTY: So I'm right.

DUPRE: You want me to call your mama?

BETTY: No, indeed. I don't want that woman over here.

DUPRE: Then stop bothering me.

BETTY: I'm right. I can tell. You a fool, boy. You think some young girl wants you. You a fat old man getting soft in all the wrong places. Hahaha. I know. Hahaha. Besides you fart too much. You'll be kissing on a young girl and cut a big one. Boy, I laugh. That girl just take your money and keep swinging her butt through town. And I'll be laughing when you want to come back in my bed. I'll be laughing so hard. But you'll come back. Cause I like to squeeze your soft parts. Hahaha. I'm the best thing you can get.

(DUPRE ENTERS, dressed to perform.)

DUPRE: You losing your mind, Betty. The sooner you lose it altogether, the better.

(He grabs BETTY, and forces a pill into her mouth. He EXITS.)

BETTY: It's been lost for a long time, fool. I'm just getting it back.

(She spits out the pill. BETTY sings, "EVERYBODY'S HIDING".)

EVERYBODY'S HIDING

c 1992. M. Bingham, J. Hebert

*Men have their secrets, men have their rules  
Men have their reasons for always playing the fool  
Rearrange the facts, hold it back and lie  
So afraid of being known, hide behind a face of stone*

*Where do they think it goes?  
Where do they think it ends?  
There are no secrets anyway, it's all out in the open*

*On your face and in your lies  
In your touch, a thousand signs  
Way down deep in your eyes  
No one knows, no one knows*

*Way down deep in your eyes  
I see, I see.  
Everybody's hiding.*

(BETTY EXITS as the lights crossfade to the bar.)

**Scene Three.** The bar, 10pm. DUPRE and THE SUGAR KINGS are onstage in full swing as the BAR PATRONS enter and begin to dance. RUBY and JOHNNY greet

everyone and get drinks.

## HONEYTREE

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*Honeytree. Honey honey honey, honey honey honey*  
*Honeytree. Honey honey honey, honey honey honey*

*Tall and fine as you can be*  
*That's why they call you the honeytree*  
*Is there some honey left for me*  
*Honey from that honey tree*

(chorus)

*Saw you at the dance, I had to know your name*  
*Take you for a walk out in the sugar cane*  
*The widows are jealous and the young girls too*  
*They all know what you're gonna do*

*I'll sing it when I'm drinking*  
*I'll sing it when I'm dry*  
*I'll sing it all night*  
*Til the birds start singing along*

(chorus)

*In the parking lot you make me feel alright*  
*You're the honeytree that likes to bloom at night*  
*All those pretty flowers falling from your eyes*  
*While the moon and the stars all harmonize*

*Everybody calls me crazy*  
*Nobody knows my name*  
*Cause when I see my honeytree*  
*She's all that matters to me*

(chorus)

*You don't need shoes, you don't need money*  
*You don't need to change your name*  
*If you tell me what you want I'll listen real good*  
*I'll run away with you just like I said I would*

(chorus)

(The song ends and they immediately start another.)

DUPRE: Here's a song about the Cajuns' second favorite pasttime.

WINE WINE WINE

© 1992. M. Bingham, J. Hebert

*Drinkin' wine, Drinkin' wine, Drinkin' wine*  
*Drinkin' wine, Drinkin' wine, Drinkin' wine*  
*Drinkin' wine*

*Wine Wine Wine*  
*Fine Fine Fine*

*Give me elderberry, mix it up with gin*  
*Gimme red, gimme white*  
*I wantt drink it every night*

*Wine Wine Wine*  
*Wine Wine Wine*

*Pour it in a mason jar*  
*Lick it up right off the bar*  
*Gimme red, gimme white*  
*I wanna drink it every night*

(EMERALD ENTERS in a musical break. She is overdressed, attempting to be grown-up and sexy, looking slightly ridiculous.)

EMERALD: Hey, Johnny.

JOHNNY: Hey, hey, yourself, who is this?

EMERALD: (laughs, embarrassed) Just me.

(He twirls her out to dance with him til the end of the song.)

*Wine Wine Wine*  
*Wine Wine Wine*

(The song finishes and DUPRE announces a short break. JOHNNY and EMERALD catch their breath at the bar.)

JOHNNY: I don't believe it's just you. Looks to me like somebody new's trying to bust out.

EMERALD: Maybe so. Or maybe this is just how I am really.

JOHNNY: Oh, you been hiding it from me, hunh?

EMERALD: No. It's just that I've changed.

JOHNNY: I'll say. I thought you were a tomboy and look what I was missing.

(He delicately runs his fingers down her arm.)

EMERALD: (Beginning to hunch over) I can dress like this. I'm growing up.

JOHNNY: You look grown up to me.

EMERALD: Don't tease me.

JOHNNY: I'm not. Any guy in here would take you for eighteen, if they didn't know you.

EMERALD: I want a drink.

JOHNNY: Root beer?

EMERALD: Coca-cola with rum.

JOHNNY: Is that right?

EMERALD: Yeah. I'm gonna have a night tonight. I have so many ideas, my head's a bowling alley. All my thoughts keep getting knocked down and stood up and knocked down and stood up again. I can't figure anything out, but my skin is tingling and I can't slow down. Doesn't it sound like I need a drink?

JOHNNY: Sure does. I'll get the coke, you get the rum.

EMERALD: Chicken.

JOHNNY: Smart.

EMERALD: You're afraid of my mama.

JOHNNY: When it comes to you, I am.

EMERALD: She thinks she knows everything.

JOHNNY: She knows a few things.

EMERALD: Not about me. Not anymore.

JOHNNY: What doesn't she know?

EMERALD: I got to get out of here.

JOHNNY: She want you to, in time.

EMERALD: I gotta go now. My school is backwards. I'm smarter than my teacher. She doesn't even use good English in English class. Plus I know every boy that lives around here and I don't want to marry any of them.

JOHNNY: You shouldn't put people down, Emerald.

EMERALD: I'm not putting them down, they're just not right for me.

JOHNNY: (Shaking his head) You don't know, baby.

EMERALD: What don't I know? Tell me what I don't know!

JOHNNY: Not something you can tell.

EMERALD: Everybody's scared. Too scared to move. Well, I'm not. I want a drink.

JOHNNY: Your mama would kick my butt and then refuse to pay me.

EMERALD: She won't know.

JOHNNY: (Snickers) Hunh.

EMERALD: She's in everybody's business.

JOHNNY: (Mimicking Ruby) I'M STILL THE BOSS AROUND HERE!



EMERALD: (Laughing, also mimicking Ruby) I'M STILL THE BOSS!

(She indicates Johnny's drink.)

Can I have a sip of yours?

(He shoves it to her.)

EMERALD: I'll show her who's the boss of me.

(She drinks.)

RUBY (ENTERING): I'm the boss of you.

(EMERALD puts the drink down, averts her eyes.)

RUBY: What's this get up?

(Silence)

Why you wearing this trash?

EMERALD: It's your clothes.

RUBY: I recognize my own trash when I see it. Why do you have it on?

EMERALD: (Pause) I'm celebrating.

RUBY: What? Celebratin' what?

EMERALD: (Trying to think how to say menstruation, in code) I'm. . . I'm grown up.

RUBY: All in a day. (She turns.) Johnny, if you ever let this child have another drink I'm gonna fry your balls for breakfast and send you to jail in an ambulance.

JOHNNY: Whatever you say, Boss.

(JOHNNY gives RUBY a dirty look, but he retreats.)

RUBY: (To Emerald) You look ridiculous.

EMERALD: Johnny didn't think so.

RUBY: Shit for brains.

EMERALD: You think I look ugly, you got shit for brains.

(RUBY slaps her.)

RUBY: Just because you got your period today, don't mean you gonna get pregnant tonight. Go in the back and take that crap off. You can celebrate in your room with your homework.

EMERALD: I'm not going in the back.

RUBY: I don't want to slap you again, but I will.

EMERALD: It's time I start deciding things for myself.

RUBY: Like I said, it's common sense you lack. You talk good, you just don't think good. Yet. You are too young to decide things for yourself. Besides, it's against the law for you to drink. I could get pitched into jail for that. And don't you think they wouldn't like to do it. You don't know nothing about real life.

EMERALD: Why don't you tell me?

RUBY: It's not something you can tell somebody. (short Pause) Anyway, I've worked for years to . . .

EMERALD: . . . to hide it from me?

RUBY: . . . to protect you from it. I'll tell you whatever you want to know, when you're older. A little bit older. (Pause) Now please, go take that stuff off and read something in your room.

EMERALD: I am older.

RUBY: Oh yeah?

EMERALD: What have you been protecting me from?

RUBY: (Pause) The meanness.

EMERALD: You don't have to. I know all about it already. More than you know.

RUBY: Not as much as you gonna know. Now go on.

EMERALD: Stop treating me like a kid!

RUBY: Oh really? What do you want to know? Why they'd like to see me in jail? Because whites hate coloreds, and men hate women. So the worst possible thing to be is a colored woman. I know that and you don't.

EMERALD: Thinking like that keeps you down.

RUBY: (Angry) Honey, YOU. DON'T. KNOW. I am not down nearly as deep as they want me. A woman like me is spit in their eye. I pay more so-called "tax" than anybody. More than white bar owners, that's normal. But more than Negro men who run bars in this parish. And if I didn't, do you realize what kind of "accidents" could happen to my place? Everybody wants their little piece of me. And if they don't get it one way, they'll take it another. You see, they think they deserve it. As far as this world's concerned females like you and me are in bad need of a good whipping. (Beat) Just so long as we stay low, we'll be all right.

EMERALD: I don't want to stay low, Mama.

RUBY: Not for long, baby. Just til you get out of high school. We got to be smart for a few more years down here.

EMERALD: I can't wait, Mama. I'm different than you.

RUBY: So you said.

EMERALD: I believe in my dreams.

RUBY: I believe in your dreams, too. Let's not do anything to ruin them.

EMERALD: I won't. (Beat) But, I'm alive between now and then. Don't you think we should do something special? I'll remember today for the rest of my life. Let's have a drink together.

RUBY: Absolutely not. For you, tonight is over with. You go in your room and work on your books.

EMERALD: Yes ma'am. (She begins to EXIT.) Do I really look bad?

RUBY: You gonna be a good lookin' woman, don't you worry about it. (lost in thought)  
Don't you worry about it at all.

(EMERALD EXITS.)

RUBY: You'd be better off if you wasn't.

DUPRE: Wasn't what?

RUBY: Good lookin'. Good lookin' people get into more trouble.

DUPRE: Is that so?

RUBY: Seems like it to me.

DUPRE: You oughta know.

RUBY: From watchin'. I'm not talkin' about myself.

DUPRE: I don't know about that. "Hey, hey good lookin', what you got cookin'?"

RUBY: You slick, Dupre.

DUPRE: "How's about cookin' somethin' up with me?"

RUBY: Too slick.

DUPRE: No ma'am. Just call 'em like I see 'em. You a pretty woman.

RUBY: (Looking at her watch) Isn't it time for your break to be over?

DUPRE: I thought you like breaks, 'cuz that's when people buy beer.

RUBY: (She pulls out a cigarette and he lights it for her.) They've bought what they're gonna buy this break, so now you gotta catch 'em before they cool off and think about leaving.

DUPRE: Sounds like you know what you talking about.

RUBY: That's right.

DUPRE: Slick. Who's slick?

RUBY: Not the same.

DUPRE: Tough and pretty.

RUBY: I'm not pretty. Nobody in their right mind would call me pretty.

DUPRE: Must be outta my mind, then.

RUBY: Always a possibility.

DUPRE: Nothing wrong with my eyes.

RUBY: 'Cept they wandering. Go on with you.

DUPRE: I just wanted to say thanks.

RUBY: (She laughs) For what?

DUPRE: About this afternoon.

RUBY: You shouldn't thank me, you forced me into it.

DUPRE: Well, I had to.

RUBY: Un-hunh.

DUPRE: Just got in a hard spot.

RUBY: I understand that.

DUPRE: I hope you won't hold it against me.

RUBY: No reason to.

DUPRE: Thanks.

RUBY: You showed up. Looking nice.

DUPRE: I appreciate that.

RUBY: Don't sound half bad either.

DUPRE: You want to dance with me? I'll turn the jukebox up.

RUBY: Shit.

DUPRE: Why not?

RUBY: It's bad enough you're in here much less I dance with you.

DUPRE: Cause I'm white?

RUBY: Yeah, I noticed that.

DUPRE: Nobody's said anything.

RUBY: For two reasons. One, they like me and my place. And two, you sing good. People'll put up with it for one night, but you can't come back here.

DUPRE: Oh yeah?

RUBY: Yeah.

DUPRE: So we should dance while we got the chance.

RUBY: I don't dance with anybody except my husband.

DUPRE: Where's your husband?

RUBY: None of your damn business.

DUPRE: Sorry.

(Silence. She hands him a beer.)

RUBY: What band you sing with, regular?

DUPRE: None. I just sit in when I can.

RUBY: How come? You sing good.

DUPRE: No reason.

RUBY: No reason, hunh?

DUPRE: No.

RUBY: Oh.

DUPRE: Anyway. You got my driver's license?

RUBY: Yep.

DUPRE: Well, can I have it?

RUBY: Not yet.

DUPRE: Oh yeah, why not?

RUBY: End of the evening.

DUPRE: I'm not gonna skip out on you.

RUBY: Then you'll be here at the end of the evening.

JOHNNY: Hey, Dupe, come on! They waiting for you, man.

DUPRE: All right. (to Ruby) End of the evening then, boss. Maybe we can squeeze in a dance then.

RUBY: Slick.

DUPRE: (Grinning) Aw no, bebe, I mean every word of it.

(The rhythm section has started. DUPRE and the SUGAR KINGS perform "EVEN THO'" as BETTY steals onto the scene, listening and watching outside the bar, through the trees, through the window screens.)

EVEN THO'

(Cookie and the Cupcakes)

*Even tho' you've hurt me, I still love you*

*Even tho' you've hurt me, I still care*

*Even tho' you've hurt me, I still want you*

*If you ever need a friend, I'll be there.*

(The bar lights and sound dim under BETTY's speech, but the action and the song continue.)

BETTY: This always makes me feel better. I know where he is, but he doesn't know where I am.

I'll listen, silently in the shadows, all the way in the back. He'll never know I'm there. I'll see into his eyes, like I used to, like he never lets me anymore. He's so wide open when he sings, he can't help it. I'll see inside him again. I'll know what he's thinking and remembering when he sings those words, I'll see the pictures with him. Then I'll let him see me, way in the back, so soft and calm, shadows gone from my face because his voice has worked its magic on me. He'll see deep into me, too. At first he'll want to close down, out of reflex, he's in the habit of being afraid of me. But there's an audience there, he'll have to keep singing, and because he's singing he'll have to stay open, he can't help it. So he'll see me and I'll jump into him through his eyes and he will love me again. After the song he'll walk over and hold my hand, touch my hair. Then he'll kiss me. In front of everyone. Everyone will know he loves me. I'll know he loves me. Even though. Even though everything.

(The lights in the bar brighten and the song resumes its volume. BETTY now sings along with DUPRE.)

*To completely conquer was my first love  
Driven by possessive jealousy  
Part of something good is more than all of nothing  
Even tho' you've hurt me, come back to me.*

*Even tho' vows you've made you've broken  
Keeping all my dreams from reality  
And yet even tho' you've hurt me  
I still love you  
And I'll never feel the same  
Til you come back to me*

(The band plays and DUPRE sings "LACHE PAS LA PATATE". BETTY approaches the bar, standing just outside the screen door for awhile.)

LACHE PAS LA PATATE

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*Lache pas la patate, Lache pas la patate  
We didn't ask to meet, Fate took us by the hand  
I was wish another woman, You were with another man*

*We didn't think too hard, Our minds were made up for us  
Now we'll do our best, To try to make a go of this*



*If we do it's gonna be right  
If we do it's gonna be wrong  
Either way we have to pay  
Why not*

*Lache pas la patate, lache pas la patate*

(During the song BETTY decides to enter the bar, hoping no one will notice her. A couple of the BAR PATRONS see her instantly. Soon everyone, including DUPRE, notices her. The band stops playing.)

DUPRE: Betty. What you doin' here? . . .

BETTY: Don't stop singing! Keep singing, Billy. I just wanted to hear you sing.

DUPRE: You can't be in here. Go home.

RUBY: Johnny, get her out of here.

JOHNNY: (Crossing to BETTY) Mrs. Betty this is no place for you. Let me take you home.

BETTY: No! I'm not leaving!

(Starting to panic, she runs through the crowd to another table.)

I'm not hurting anybody.

DUPRE: Betty!

JOHNNY: Come on, Mrs. Betty. Let's go.

BETTY: I just want to hear him sing.

DUPRE: Fille de putain!

(DUPRE starts to get off the stage.)

RUBY: (To DUPRE) You sing! (To BAND) Start playing.

(They resume playing “LACHE PAS LA PATATE.” DUPRE sings, never taking his eyes off BETTY. Some of the BAR PATRONS resume the two-step, but all are locked in tension. A few moments go by.)

RUBY: Okay, Johnny.

JOHNNY: Just let it be, Ruby.

RUBY: Go.

JOHNNY: Let's just take it easy.

RUBY: Get her out of here.

JOHNNY: Damn!

(JOHNNY crosses to BETTY again.)

Come on, Mrs. Betty. I'm taking you home.

BETTY: NO!

(Band keeps playing. JOHNNY takes BETTY's arm, she fights him off.)

BETTY: Leave me alone! I'm not going anywhere.

JOHNNY: It's all right. Take it easy.

BETTY: NO!

(JOHNNY looks at RUBY.)

RUBY: Take her out of here!

BETTY: I need to hear him sing.

JOHNNY: You've heard him.

BETTY: (Trying to get to DUPRE.) This is my husband. This is my husband.

(BETTY starts crying. JOHNNY is almost dragging her away.)

DUPRE: (Breaks from the song, finally.) Stop it, Betty! Go home. Cot damn it! Cot damn it!

BETTY: Don't be mad! Don't be mad at me!

JOHNNY: Come on, Mrs. Betty, let's go.

BETTY: Billy, help me! Help me.

DUPRE: I'm gonna help you. (He gets off the bandstand, grabs BETTY's arm, hard.)

JOHNNY: Hey, man. . .

BETTY: OW! Stop it! You're hurting me!

(DUPRE takes her outside and throws her on the ground.)

DUPRE: You gotta mess it up! You always gotta mess it up. I can't try to make fifteen dollars without you trying to cut my balls off. I oughta beat you til you can't talk.

BETTY: (On the ground) You'd like that, hunh.

RUBY: (To the Band) Pick it up.

(They play an instrumental, softly. RUBY moves into the doorway, unseen by DUPRE or BETTY.)

DUPRE: You're not gonna stop til you wreck my life right along with yours.

BETTY: I came here because I love you.

DUPRE: What a joke.

BETTY: You hate me because my sex is no good. All cut up.

DUPRE: I don't hate you. Specially not because of that.

BETTY: Yes you do. I see it in your eyes.

DUPRE: No. I hate when you pull this kind of crap.

BETTY: I wasn't trying to cause trouble. I was trying to save us.

DUPRE: Nice work.

BETTY: If you hate me this much, why don't you leave? Why don't you just cut me out altogether?

(Pause)

DUPRE: Can't do it.

BETTY: Why not? Why not?

DUPRE: You know.

BETTY: What?

(Speaking simultaneously)

BETTY: You still love me?

DUPRE: You need me. Its my fault you're like this.

BETTY: Oh my god.

DUPRE: You're my penance.

BETTY: (Starts laughing) Poor baby, he's a martyr. And for his penance he's got to put up with the bitch Betty! It's all his fault and he's got to suffer. But meanwhile he's gonna make the bitch suffer too, by catting around. He's gonna slice up the bitch's heart and suck it through his teeth. Did you have somebody in mind for tonight? Did the bitch mess up your plans? Just remember I'm the bitch on your back that makes you a saint. Without me you're just a pathetic little man looking for a piece of ass in a nigger honkytonk.

DUPRE: Shut up, Betty. Just shut up.

BETTY: "Shut up, Betty." ? What's the matter, you afraid to hit me now . . . too many people around?

DUPRE: You got a flow of poison spilling out of you that nothing can stop. 'Cept your

medicine. You didn't take your medicine.

BETTY: OOOOOPS. Sure must of forgot. Imagine that. I forgot to tranquilize myself into dead meat.

DUPRE: How'd you get here?

BETTY: I walked.

DUPRE: You're a dedicated nut case.

BETTY: (Singing) "Even tho' you hurt me. . . "

DUPRE: I'm taking you home.

RUBY: Let Johnny take her home.

(They turn to look at RUBY for the first time.)

BETTY: Who are you?

DUPRE: I'm taking her home.

RUBY: You gotta come back and play the rest of your sets.

DUPRE: I will.

RUBY: I already paid you.

DUPRE: I'll be back.

RUBY: You better be.

DUPRE: I said I would.

RUBY: Don't expect your license or your equipment back if you decide to show up tomorrow.

DUPRE: Lay off, Ruby.

BETTY: Ruby?

RUBY: I'm running a business here. You don't get time off for family fights.

DUPRE: Pique toi.

RUBY: You better be back fast.

DUPRE: I might.

RUBY: I might decide to keep your equipment anyway. If you take too long.

BETTY: You have to stay with me tonight, Billy. I need you.

DUPRE: Let's go, Betty.

BETTY: I need you so bad.

(DUPRE and BETTY EXIT.)

BETTY: You have to stay with me and hold me. I'm sorry. I'm sick. I'm sorry. Something's wrong in my head. I'm sorry. Don't be mad at me. Don't be mad.

(RUBY stays outside as the band plays and EMERALD appears, still dressed for dancing, unnoticed. They sing "WHAT'S SHAKING ME UP".)

#### WHAT'S SHAKING ME UP

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RUBY: *What's going on here, What's shaking me up?  
I'm holding more trouble than my sins deserve  
Who's that man who's making me sweat  
Sweet talk won't save me or help me forget  
Never should have let him in  
Should have watched him walk away.*

EMERALD: *What's this feeling I've never had before  
My skin is tingling, my body say's tonight's the night  
I want a secret that's just for me  
Just let me out of here, let me see for myself  
I'm gonna have me a night tonight.*

RUBY: *Is he the kind of man  
Who'll take me where I want to go  
And bring me back alive  
Never should have let him in  
Should have watched him walk away*

EMERALD: *I know what to do  
When I walk in the room*

BOTH: *Dance in the light*

EMERALD: *Feel their eyes upon me  
I know what to do, I know where to run  
I'm getting out of here to see for myself*

BOTH: *What's the difference between a woman and a girl*

RUBY: *What's going on here, What's shaking me up  
I'm holding more trouble than my sins deserve.*

(At song's end, EMERALD sneaks away into the full moon lit night, as lights fade on RUBY and the crowded bar.)

END ACT I

## ACT II.

**Scene One.** RUBY's bar. Midnight. The SUGAR KINGS are onstage with RUBY singing lead. DUPRE is nowhere to be seen.

IF YOU WANT MY LOVIN'

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*I'm a woman with a lot on my mind  
But that don't mean I'm the serious kind  
I'll take my fun and my satisfaction  
A taste of Ruby's love will drive you to distraction.*

*If you want my lovin', If you want my lovin' (good good lovin')  
If you want my lovin' you got to show me something  
That I haven't seen a million times before.*

*They can look me up, they can look me down  
They can look all they want  
Cause what I want delivered I ain't seen in years  
And I don't think I'll find it from anyone here.*

(chorus)

*The moon turned red the sky turned white, cars flew in the air  
Pieces of my barroom were scattered everywhere  
Horses ran wild in the street, cats and dogs taught school  
Crawfish preached on Sunday, nutria shot pool  
Seven men came to my door, I turned them all away  
They couldn't give what I wanted, I explained it this way*

(chorus)

*The last man talked the talk, but couldn't walk the walk  
Soon as he got in the door, he fell asleep right on the floor.  
Frankie had her Johnny, Napoleon his Josephine  
But the man who's right for Ruby, better be fit for a queen, 'cause. . .*

(chorus)

RUBY: (After the song, on mic) Only time you'll ever hear that! One time only, folks. Thanks. But Ruby's retired. I don't know what got into me. The band'll be right back with you.

(She crosses to JOHNNY.)

He owes me money if he doesn't come back.

JOHNNY: He's coming back.



RUBY: Yeah.

JOHNNY: What if he doesn't. You made your money tonight.

RUBY: So? We made a deal.

JOHNNY: God bless, Ruby! You saw what happened.

RUBY: That's why he can't get singing jobs?

JOHNNY: I don't know.

RUBY: She's done that before.

JOHNNY: I don't know.

RUBY: You know.

JOHNNY: Can't say.

RUBY: You owe me fifteen bucks if he doesn't come back.

JOHNNY: He'll be back.

RUBY: We'll see.

JOHNNY: Hey girl, take it easy. (He touches her affectionately.) You sounded pretty good up there.

RUBY: Don't lie to me.

JOHNNY: I never lie to you, Ruby.

RUBY: (Smiles) You may be the only man I know could say that and I halfway believe you.

JOHNNY: You ought to, it's true.

RUBY: Only a matter of time til you do.

JOHNNY: That's not true. I'm in your pocket, Ruby.

RUBY: What are you talking about?

JOHNNY: You heard from Earl?

RUBY: No.

JOHNNY: When you gonna divorce him?

RUBY: Never. I love Earl. He's my husband.

JOHNNY: He doesn't love you.

RUBY: You don't know that. You do not know that.

JOHNNY: Doesn't matter what he says. What's he do? He's never around. You know he's got other women. Probably another family.

RUBY: I married him for life. I made a promise. I keep my promises.

JOHNNY: That's dumb, Ruby. You're not usually dumb.

RUBY: I don't make many promises.

JOHNNY: He didn't keep his.

RUBY: Oh well. That's how men are.

JOHNNY: Not all of 'em.

RUBY: I don't know. I don't know about that. Looks like all of 'em to me. Chicken-hearted liars, what I see in this bar.

JOHNNY: No, think about it now, keep your mind open, and think that there's one man, somewhere, that can keep a promise.

RUBY: (Smiles a crooked smile) Not in South Louisiana, John Beaugh. Wrong kind of blood for it.

JOHNNY: Wait now, keep your mind open, you might be surprised.

RUBY: I would be surprised. Basically, Johnny, I'm not even interested in finding out.

JOHNNY: Now don't mess yourself up, girl. Your life ain't over yet.

RUBY: I'm goin' check on Emerald.

(DUPRE ENTERS, worse for wear, but he's back.)

JOHNNY: Wait, look. (To Dupre) Hey man, how you doin'?

DUPRE: Okay, Johnny, okay.

JOHNNY: How's Mrs. Betty?

DUPRE: Sleeping.

JOHNNY: Good. That's good.

(Pause)

RUBY: You came back.

DUPRE: That's right. I said I would.

RUBY: You said you might.

DUPRE: I was mad. I didn't know how bad off she'd be.

RUBY: So she's all right.

DUPRE: Yeah.

RUBY: She's not coming back.

DUPRE: No.

JOHNNY: It's okay. Everything's cool.

DUPRE: I made sure she took her medicine this time.

JOHNNY: Good, man, good.

RUBY: Well, get on up there.

DUPRE: Ruby, I'm real sorry this happened at your place. I 'pologize I had to leave.

RUBY: It's over.

DUPRE: I owe you.

RUBY: You owe me another set is all.

DUPRE: You got it. We gonna give 'em their money's worth, right Johnny?

JOHNNY: Right, my man.

DUPRE: Let's do it.

JOHNNY: All right.

RUBY: That's what I like to hear.

DUPRE: I'll show you, Ruby. (He touches her.) Keep an eye on the lead singer.

(He crosses to the bandstand.)

JOHNNY: (To RUBY) Everything's cool. (To DUPRE) Hey, wait, man. Just a minute.

(JOHNNY catches up with DUPRE, whispers a few words and clearly hands DUPRE a slip of paper. RUBY does not see this. JOHNNY then crosses back to RUBY.)

JOHNNY: I knew he'd come through.

RUBY: You just happy you saved fifteen bucks.

JOHNNY: You cold-blooded, Ruby.

RUBY: So?

DUPRE: (On the bandstand, over the mic) A gentleman here tonight would like to dedicate this next song to Mrs. Ruby Delacroix.

RUBY: (surprised) What? Good grief.

(She thinks the dedication is from DUPRE. He and the band perform "FOR YOUR PRECIOUS LOVE". This is DUPRE's tour de force. RUBY is mesmerized by his voice, against her will. She sees what BETTY was describing earlier. JOHNNY watches RUBY, waiting for her attention.)

DUPRE: *For your precious love means more to me*

*Than any love could ever be  
For when I wanted you  
I was so lonely and so blue  
So that's what love will do*

*And darling I was so surprised  
Oh when I first realized  
That you weren't fooling me.*

*And darling they say  
That our love won't grow  
But I just want to tell them  
That they don't know*

*For as long as you're in love with me  
Our love will grow wider and deeper than any sea*

*And of all the things that I want  
In this whole wide world  
It's just for you to say  
That you'll be my girl.*

(The SUGAR KINGS play the instrumental introduction to the next song under the following dialogue.)

JOHNNY: (Crosses to RUBY, tries to take her hand.) Ruby, I been thinking. . .

RUBY: (Still taken with DUPRE) Dangerous activity for you.

JOHNNY: No kidding, for a minute.

RUBY: Who's kidding?

JOHNNY: No, really. I want to ask you something. I want you to think about something for me.

RUBY: That guy can sing.

JOHNNY: Yeah.

RUBY: No, I mean it. That was something.

JOHNNY: That was me. That's how I feel.

RUBY: What?

JOHNNY: I dedicated that song to you. That was me.

RUBY: Oh!

JOHNNY: And now I want you to listen to me. I want to talk to you.

RUBY: In a minute, okay? Just give me a minute. I'll be back in a minute. I gotta check on Emerald.

JOHNNY: No. She's fine.

RUBY: I'll be right back.

JOHNNY: Okay.

RUBY: Keep an eye out.

JOHNNY: No problem. But I have to talk to you serious when you get back.

RUBY: Sure.

(RUBY EXITS. JOHNNY frets.)

JOHNNY: Damn.

(He then pulls out a jeweler's box with an engagement ring in it. He sings "JOHNNY'S SONG".)

JOHNNY'S SONG

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*Ooooh, the moment is now  
I can't let it pass  
This is my moment, this is my chance  
To make htis our night  
To do it right, do it the right way*

*Give me a moment, give me a sign  
Give me a night, let me have one chance*

*Won't you let me open up my heart to you  
Speak what I feel, give you all my love*

*Don't leave me alone, give me this night  
I don't want to be alone  
This is my night, this is my time  
This is my moment, this is my opening  
Let me come in  
Won't you let me speak what I feel*

*It's all that I can do  
It's all that I can do  
I just want to give my love to you.*

(As the song ends, he closes the ring box and we hear RUBY offstage.)

RUBY: (Offstage) Emerald! EMERALD MARIE DELACROIX WHERE ARE YOU????!!! EMERALD!!!!!!

(RUBY ENTERS, frantic.)

RUBY: Where is she?

JOHNNY: What are you talking about?

RUBY: Where's Emerald?

JOHNNY: I don't know.

RUBY: Yes you do.

JOHNNY: I don't know what you're talking about. She's not in the back?

RUBY: No she's not. Where'd she go?

JOHNNY: Ruby, I really don't know. She didn't say anything to me.

RUBY: You're lying.

JOHNNY: No I'm not.

(She stares at him.)

I'm not lying. I don't know where she is. She wanted to drink.

RUBY: Where would she go? Noogie Soileau's?

JOHNNY: (shrugs) I guess. She couldn't get in. Everybody knows her around here.

RUBY: What do you mean? You think she went to Lafayette?

JOHNNY: She'd have a better chance of getting into a bar there. I don't know. I don't know how she thinks.

RUBY: She's smart.

JOHNNY: Well then if she's after dancing and drinking, she's in Lafayette.

RUBY: That's so far. She's walking.

JOHNNY: Maybe she hitchhiked.

RUBY: Oh my god. Oh my god. No. No. She wouldn't do that. Not Emerald. Not at night.

JOHNNY: No, you're right, she wouldn't. She's probably dancing outside the window at Noogie Soileau's..

RUBY: Go get her. You got a car, go get her.

JOHNNY: I guess so. Yeah.

RUBY: Go right now.

JOHNNY: How am I supposed to find her if she's not at Noogie's?

RUBY: Just drive around and look. Maybe she's on the road walking right now.

JOHNNY: She'll come back, Ruby. She just wants to have some fun.

RUBY: She's thirteen, John Beaugh. And she's got stupid ideas in her head. She's thirteen and she's my daughter and she's walking the roads by herself in the middle of the night. Oh my god. What if she tries to go in a white bar. Go get her. Go get her and bring her back safe.

JOHNNY: Okay, Ruby. I will.

RUBY: Don't you touch her!



JOHNNY: As if.

RUBY: You bring her back safe, to me, safe.

JOHNNY: Okay, Ruby. It's okay. I'll get her. I'll bring her back.

RUBY: Go.

JOHNNY: I'll take care of it. You can count on me.

(JOHNNY EXITS.)

RUBY: Oh my god.

**Scene Two.** Betty and Dupre's room. 1a.m. Betty is obviously medicated, drinking coffee, trying to stay awake. She sings "OUT OF REACH".

### OUT OF REACH

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*What is it about me?  
My luck's just out of reach  
What's the matter with the way  
I walk through the world?  
Why does it always go  
Go wrong or not at all  
What's the matter with  
The way I walk through the world*

*He's wrong, he's all wrong  
But I catch the suffering  
I catch the last train  
I never get far, far enough away  
He finds me in my sleep*

(Speaking, drinking more coffee.) I gotta wake up. I gotta stay awake. I gotta talk to Billy. I gotta stay awake.

*Am I trying too hard  
Or giving up too soon?  
Does he look at my face*

*And know I'll take it, I'll always take it  
How come he's wrong  
But I catch the suffering?  
What' the matter with the way I walk through the world?*

(BETTY sips her coffee, staying awake.)

**Scene Three.** The bar, 2am. The Band and the BAR PATRONS are leaving, saying goodnight. RUBY sits alone on the steps, waiting. She sings a part of YOUR PRECIOUS LOVE, a capella.)

RUBY: *Your precious love means more to me  
Than any love could ever be*

(DUPRE lingers in the shadows, unseen by RUBY.)

*For when I wanted you  
I was so lonely and blue  
So that's what love will do*

*Darling I was so surprised*

(DUPRE joins her singing harmony, softly. RUBY is startled at first, but finishes the music with him anyway.)

RUBY & DUPRE: *Oh, when I first realized  
That you weren't fooling me.*

RUBY: What you doin' still here?

DUPRE: Listening to how sweet you sound.

RUBY: Get outta here with that baloney.

DUPRE: You got my driver's license.

RUBY: Oh, that's right. I'm sorry, I forgot about it. . . my daughter's. . . gone, missing. . . I, uh . . .

DUPRE: I heard. You all right?

RUBY: Oh yeah. Sure. (Pause) No.

DUPRE: Want me to wait with you?

RUBY: No. I got enough trouble without entertaining a white man in the middle of the night.

DUPRE: You don't have to entertain me.

(Pause)

RUBY: Johnny'll find her.

DUPRE: She's just acting like a kid.

RUBY: Acting like a . . . like a floozy. I guess she doesn't know how else grown-up women act, hanging around here.

DUPRE: She's a good kid. Testing the water.

RUBY: I'm gonna test her behind when she gets back.

DUPRE: Good.

RUBY: You better believe it.

(Pause)

I feel like the shoe has dropped. This is the night I been afraid of ever since she was born.

DUPRE: Nothing's happened to her. I can feel it in my bones. Didn't you play some tricks when you were a teenager?

RUBY: Yeah, but that was different. We knew where we belonged and we stayed there.

DUPRE: She's probably smart enough to stay out of trouble.

RUBY: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's right.

DUPRE: Can I fix myself a drink?

RUBY: Yeah.

(He pours himself a drink.)

RUBY: How many times I've waited for somebody like this. Thinking every terrible thing. This could be the last quiet moment before the world blows apart, before somebody's dead or hurt or missing or changed forever. . . or they can walk in the door and in one split second everything's back to normal and you're just mad cause they didn't call. And the funeral, the jail, the hospital and the tears all evaporate like they were never really in the room with you. I feel like I been let off the hook like that a hundred times, and its getting closer to the time disaster's gonna find me trying to duck my head over here in my corner.

DUPRE: Not tonight. Not your girl.

RUBY: I don't know. When I close my eyes and look at Emerald, I see a long bright light. So you could be right. In a way I think she's gonna be just fine. But tonight's got a funny feeling about it anyway I couldn't, uh. . . I couldn't. . . if anything happened to her, I wouldn't be able to. . . go on.

DUPRE: You'd be surprised.

RUBY: About what?

DUPRE: About how you go on. About the deals you make in order to go on.

RUBY: You talking about your wife?

DUPRE: Yeah, I guess. More or less. Sure. But. . .

(Pause)

RUBY: What?

DUPRE: We had a child.

RUBY: Oh. Oh.

DUPRE: We lost a child.

RUBY: I'm sorry.

DUPRE: Well. It was a long time ago.

RUBY: Oh, I'm sorry.

DUPRE: It's all right, you know. Some things we got no control over.

RUBY: That's what scares me.

DUPRE: No need to be scared if you got no control over it.

RUBY: What happened?

DUPRE: He was a little boy, just an infant. It was a Sunday afternoon, I was listening to a ballgame on the radio and giving all my shoes a spitshine. Basically, I was in hog heaven. Betty said she had told her mama we were going over for Sunday dinner and I said I wasn't going. She said I had to and I said I wasn't going anywhere. Her mama could never cook anyway. She got mad and said she was taking the baby and going without me. And I said good. She was drinking a coke when she went.

She was driving with the baby on the front seat, the coke bottle between her legs. A guy tried to gun his truck to get on the highway fast in front of her, but he spun out in the gravel, then all of a sudden got traction just in time to slam into Betty. He knocked our car clean off the highway and into a stand of trees on the other side. Betty flew sideways and hit the baby. The coke bottle shattered and cut them both up. The baby died instantly, and Betty's been dying ever since.

You know I could have gone. I'd of been driving, Betty holding the baby. We'd of been later because it would've taken me more time to get ready. You know, even thirty seconds later and everything would be different. Say we didn't have a fight, say I'd kissed her goodbye, she would've missed it. The baby would be seven.

RUBY: What was his name?

DUPRE: William. I was Big Billy and he was t-Billy.

RUBY: I'm sorry.

DUPRE: Long time ago.

RUBY: You never wanted more kids?

DUPRE: Oh yeah. She can't do it. The doctors say she's fine, but, uh, she just can't do it. For awhile I thought having more kids would bring her around, but she panics. She can't forget. She cannot forget.

RUBY: Seems like a pretty hard thing to forget.

DUPRE: Uh-hunh. So you make deals. With yourself and everybody else. So you can go on.

RUBY: Bad deals.

DUPRE: I guess. But what's your choice? No good choices anymore.

RUBY: Pretty damn sad.

DUPRE: I tell you what, you get used to it. You get used to it and you don't even notice it after awhile. (Pause) You find your sweetness wherever you can.

RUBY: Yeah, hunh?

DUPRE: Where's the sweetness in your life, Ruby?

RUBY: Emerald.

DUPRE: Yeah, but I mean for you, personally.

RUBY: Hunh. I can't remember that far back.

DUPRE: You ever been in love?

RUBY: Sure. With my husband.

DUPRE: Where's he now?

RUBY: (Pouring drinks) I don't know. Haven't seen him, seven, eight months. He's offshore.

DUPRE: Oh. Do I know him? What's his name?

RUBY: Earl the Pearl.

DUPRE: Aw no. Earl the Pearl and Ruby?

RUBY: Oh yes! And we went back and forth about naming our little girl. Emerald or Jade I wanted. But he wanted to name her Diamond, because it's the most beautiful of all the jewels. I wouldn't let him. Besides I don't think it's the most beautiful. It's just the hardest.

DUPRE: Earl the Pearl, Ruby and Diamond. Diamond Delacroix! That would have been quite a handle.

RUBY: Good name for a floozy. Emerald is her name. She's smart. She's gonna be a nurse or a teacher. I'll see to that.

DUPRE: How you goin' to see to that?

RUBY: I just will that's all.

DUPRE: You got a lot on your back, Ruby.

RUBY: I can take it.

DUPRE: You still love Earl?

RUBY: (laughing) Earl loves the women. He's a good looking man, got a style like nobody's business. I have always loved Earl. But at the same time I can't hardly care too much, because I know him. I love him out of habit.

DUPRE: I know what you mean.

RUBY: I bet you do. Earl don't apologize for being Earl, though. I suspect he's got himself a few more women and babies sprinkled around the delta. But when he's with me, he sees me only. I appreciate that in a man. Earl's simple like that. When he's around I feel him strong and I forget about everything else. It's nice when that happens.

DUPRE: Yeah.

RUBY: It's a wonder he hasn't been killed yet. He walks in that yellow light of pride, never hunches his shoulders over for nobody. Standing full tall with his big muscles popping out of his shirt, his gold earring, the bulge in his pants showing all hours of the day. The man is beautiful and it's a wonder he hasn't been killed for that. His mama always told me he had a star stuck up his ass and he couldn't get rid of it if he tried. He's due. Oh yes, very soon. He's due.

(Pause)

DUPRE: Ruby.

RUBY: (Slightly dazed thinking of Earl) Yeah?

DUPRE: You look beautiful when you talk about Earl.

RUBY: Oh Lord.

DUPRE: It's true.

RUBY: Well now you know, there's a tiny bit of sweetness still in my life.

DUPRE: I knew we could find it.

RUBY: I'm a fool for that man. A damn fool.

DUPRE: Doesn't matter. Maybe that's the price of sweetness.

RUBY: Its an unfair price. He's got a grip on me I can't squeeze out of.

DUPRE: You want to?

RUBY: I don't know. I'm used to it. I guess I kind of gave up on myself.

DUPRE: Johnny'd like to loosen that grip.

RUBY: Johnny's my friend. I don't have it for Johnny. That'd be just another kind of giving up.

DUPRE: Like I say, no good choices anymore. Just make do. Find your sweetness where you can.

(He touches her face. She brushes his hand away.)

RUBY: Now. All the goings on I see around here. I'm not like that.

DUPRE: Ruby, that's a little Catholic girl talking. You're a grown woman who deserves better than to give up on herself.

RUBY: I deserve better than what you're talking about.

DUPRE: True. But maybe a little sweetness is better than none.

RUBY: I don't know. (Pause) I never been with another man. I saved myself til I was married, and kept my promise ever since. Can you feature that? Roadhouse queen of St. Mary parish saving herself for love. (Pause) The secrets are out tonight.

(She puts her face in her hands. DUPRE leans over and strokes her head.)

DUPRE: You're a beautiful woman, Ruby.

RUBY: What you doin'? Isn't it bad enough you sitting here alone with me in the middle of the night? I'm already gonna hear about this. Gonna have to pay for this. Some way.



DUPRE: Nobody knows I'm here.

RUBY: Oh yeah? Where's your car?

DUPRE: Parked where it can't be seen.

RUBY: Oh. You knew what you wanted when you came in here, hunh?

DUPRE: It's not like that.

RUBY: That's right. You didn't know, but you thought just maybe you'd park your car in a hiding spot. And me, full-blooded fool, going for it hook, line and sinker. Get out of here.

DUPRE: I wasn't being false and you're not a fool. Is it so bad that I want to slip away with you for awhile and forget everything else?

(He touches her. She doesn't push him away.)

RUBY: Oh Lord.

DUPRE: You said you liked that.

RUBY: With my husband.

(He turns her to face him.)

DUPRE: He's long gone.

(He pulls her close.)

RUBY: You make me forget what I believe in.

(They kiss. EMERALD ENTERS, quietly, thinking maybe RUBY's gone to bed and she'll be able to sneak in. JOHNNY is close behind. They see DUPRE and RUBY.)

EMERALD: Hey, Ma.

RUBY: (After a moment of shock and relief, she responds as if to a long-lost friend she is surprised to see.) Emerald! Emerald the Grown Up, how are you?

EMERALD: Fine.

RUBY: So glad to hear it. Did you have fun?

EMERALD: Yes ma'am.

RUBY: Did anything not fun happen?

EMERALD: No ma'am.

RUBY: Good! Where did you go?

EMERALD: Dancing.

RUBY: Dancing where?

EMERALD: Lafayette.

RUBY: How did you get there?

EMERALD: I, I. . .

RUBY: Tell the truth.

EMERALD: I hitchhiked.

RUBY: Oh god. (Pause) HAVE YOU LOST YOUR GODDAMN MIND?! DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE? YOU ARE IN SOUTH LOUISIANA. YOU ARE A NEGRO. IT IS THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. YOU ARE THIRTEEN YEARS OLD!!! I WILL NOT HAVE MY DAUGHTER RAPED AND KILLED BY DRUNK WHITE MEN! As a joke. As a big stupid joke. Emerald I could beat you. (She is near tears.) I could beat you and shake you until you get some sense into you.

EMERALD: Ma, I'm all right.

RUBY: By the grace of God. (She makes the Sign of the Cross.) By the grace of God and a lucky chance you're all right. I'm gonna lock you up and throw away the key.

EMERALD: I'm sorry, Ma. I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd find out.

RUBY: What?! I thought I was raising a smart girl, but you an idiot! So what if I didn't find out, you could still be dead in a ditch.

EMERALD: I'm sorry. I was careful.

RUBY: Hitchhiking?

EMERALD: I was careful. And I'm all right.

RUBY: You make me laugh. You make me laugh til I cry. You gonna be punished for a long time, and you're not gonna forget it.

EMERALD: Yes ma'am.

RUBY: Now go to bed. Before I decide to whip you right now.

EMERALD: Please don't talk to me like that.

RUBY: I'll talk to you anyway I want to.

EMERALD: No. I'm sorry I disappointed you, but I'm not a dog. So don't talk to me like one.

(EMERALD EXITS. The adults exchange looks.)

RUBY: Thanks Johnny. She was in Lafayette?

JOHNNY: Yeah. She wasn't drinking, just dancing. Just trying to be a teenager.

RUBY: Don't you say nothing! About how I run my family.

(JOHNNY raises his hands in a "No offense" gesture.)

RUBY: Anyway I owe you for going to get her.

JOHNNY: You don't owe me nothing.

RUBY: Then I'll just say thank you.

JOHNNY: Good enough. Good enough. Well, Dupre, you're here late.

DUPRE: Just keeping company while she waited.

JOHNNY: So I see.

DUPRE: I'm heading out.

JOHNNY: Good.

RUBY: Both of ya'll get out of here. Bar's closed.

JOHNNY: You want to have a drink, Ruby?

RUBY: Not tonight. I'll see you tomorrow.

JOHNNY: No. Let me buy you a drink right now.

RUBY: (shakes her head, no) No.

JOHNNY: If you're sure.

RUBY: Yeah, I'm sure.

JOHNNY: That's what it'll be then.

DUPRE: Bonsoir.

RUBY: Bonsoir.

(DUPRE EXITS.)

RUBY: Thanks again, Johnny.

JOHNNY: Hey, cher. Let me hold your hand and talk to you for a minute.

RUBY: No, bebe. I'm too tired.

JOHNNY: Okay. Whatever you need. Whatever you need, Ruby.

(JOHNNY EXITS. RUBY sings alone on stage.)

BEFORE DAWN

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*I need more  
Than anyone can give  
So I stopped asking  
For anything from anyone*

*All this sadness comes along  
To hold me again  
But I don't need anything from anyone*

(EMERALD ENTERS, crying. Music underscores the dialogue.)

EMERALD: Mama.

RUBY: What is it, baby?

EMERALD: My stomach hurts.

RUBY: That's not your stomach, Emerald, that's your womb. That's gonna hurt you the rest of your life.

EMERALD: What do I do?

RUBY: Come here.

(EMERALD crosses to RUBY, who holds her, rocks her.)

EMERALD: I'm sorry.

RUBY: I know, baby, it's alright.

EMERALD: I'm mixed up. I'm sorry, but I'm not sorry.

RUBY: I know. It's hard to figure out what's right sometimes. We just got to hold on a little bit longer, and then it'll be a smooth stretch of road for you and me.

EMERALD: I don't know if I can do what you want.

RUBY: You can. Don't worry. We'll talk about it later. It's time for sleep.

(RUBY and EMERALD slowly EXIT, as JOHNNY and DUPRE sing "BEFORE DAWN".)

JOHNNY & DUPRE: *I don't want to go home  
Something's telling me not to  
This night's not over, I feel in my bones  
There's something more for me  
Before dawn*

JOHNNY: *It was my night tonight  
I thought the moon was on my side  
But no, she shone against me  
She shone against me.*

DUPRE: *I don't know anything  
I can't remember my name  
All I want is to touch this woman again  
To touch this woman again.*

(Lights up on BETTY.)

BETTY: *I want him to come home  
Something's telling me trouble*

ALL THREE: *This night's not over  
I feel in my bones  
There's something more for me  
Before dawn.*

(As the song finishes and seques into the next piece, they all EXIT.)

**Scene Four.** Bar. 2:45am. RUBY crosses into the darkened bar, in her robe, smoking. She sings "WHERE DID ALL MY SOFTNESS GO".

WHERE DID ALL MY SOFTNESS GO

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*Where did all my softness go?*

*Was I ever seventeen?*

*I forget to listen to my heart*

*How'd I ever get so mean?*

*Could I even respond to the touch*

*Of his fingers on my skin?*

*Have I been hard too long?*

*Could I let anybody in?*

*Waiting for so long for him*

*I've been waiting for so long for him*

*My body's aching for his touch*

*Dancing in the night.*

(There is a knock at the door in the darkness. Again. Lightly.)

RUBY: Nobody's home.

(Knocking again.)

RUBY: Who is it?

(Knocking again, lightly. She slowly walks to the door. Puts a palm on it, trying to feel which man is there. She stands behind the door as she opens it. DUPRE ENTERS, not seeing her at first.)

RUBY: It's you.

(He turns to her.)

DUPRE: Oh. I'm sorry. I'm sorry to bother you.

(They give each other wide berth. She closes the door and says nothing.)

DUPRE: Ruby?

RUBY: Yeah?

DUPRE: Are you all right?

RUBY: Yes. Are you?

DUPRE: No.

RUBY: What's the matter?

DUPRE: I don't know. I . . . I . . . I couldn't. . . (His courage fails him.) I forgot to get my license.

RUBY: (a small laugh) Oh. I'll get it. (She does. Then, looking at his photograph) You are a handsome man.

DUPRE: Thanks.

RUBY: Many women have told you that?

DUPRE: No.

RUBY: Don't lie.

DUPRE: Yes.

(She laughs.)

DUPRE: I'm sorry.

RUBY: Never be sorry for telling the truth.

DUPRE: Okay.

RUBY: Is this all you want?

(She gives him the license.)



DUPRE: No.

RUBY: What?

DUPRE: To touch you again.

RUBY: You make me laugh.

(She walks away.)

DUPRE: Good. Good, laugh. I saw you smile tonight, talking about your husband. It's a wonderful thing to see a woman light up like that. So soft and laughing and telling how you like a man's body. You escaped yourself for a minute. I want to hold you and escape with you again.

(No answer. He crosses to her. He touches her. She pulls at the neck of her dress, as if she can't get enough air, moving away from him.)

RUBY: I can't do this.

DUPRE: Why?

RUBY: Why. People get killed for this, that's why.

DUPRE: Nobody will know. Johnny saw me leave.

RUBY: Your wife.

DUPRE: She took her medicine, she's out.

RUBY: (Pause) What do you want from me?

DUPRE: I just want to slip away for a while, make you feel beautiful.

RUBY: It's been a long time.

DUPRE: You have such a sweet smile.

RUBY: Do I?

DUPRE: Yes, you do.

RUBY: I never heard that before.

DUPRE: There's a lot of things I'll like to tell you that I see.

RUBY: Like what?

DUPRE: Your shine, how you hide your heart, the roundness of your ass.

RUBY: Now that I have heard.

(He crosses over and takes her by the waist.)

RUBY: Oh.

DUPRE: What?

RUBY: Nothing.

(They kiss.)

RUBY: I'm surprised.

DUPRE: Why?

RUBY: Not at you.

DUPRE: At what?

RUBY: At myself.

(Pause. She crosses to the door, hesitates a moment, then locks it.)

DUPRE: You are a sexy woman.

RUBY: I smell like cigarettes and beer.

DUPRE: I smell like sweat and beer. So what?

RUBY: Yeah. So what.

(She crosses back to him and starts to lead him off. Seeing the stairs, she hesitates for a split second.)

DUPRE: Don't worry, Ruby. Don't worry. We'll forget about everything. I'll take care of you.

(They slowly cross up the stairs.)

**Scene Five.** Betty and Dupre's house. 3am. BETTY ENTERS finishing dressing, as RUBY and DUPRE EXIT. She takes one of the guns from the wall, a small handgun. Then she sits on her bed and is very still.

BETTY: My dream. I remember my dream. There's blood on the windshield and my head is pounding, pounding. I'm cold, so very cold. I want out of the car, but I can't move. and the water's coming in. Then, something hits the car, shakes the car. A body rolls down. A dead woman, naked, blue. Again. Another one. Again. Somebody's throwing dead women on me, burying me alive with my baby, burying me alive with blue, fat dead women. "Hey!", I want to say, "Hey! I'm in here. I'm alive!" but my mouth won't open and my jaw hurts and makes a little snapping sound. Snap, snap. I look up and there's Billy. Working hard. Throwing another dead woman on me.

(She checks the gun to be sure it's loaded.)

How'd I get to be so invisible? I talk and he doesn't listen, I move and he doesn't notice. I scream and cry and he doesn't see. Even when I whisper he can't stand to listen. Even when I whisper. I remind him. I remind him and he reminds me.

How do people start over? How do people forget? How do you know if it's too late?

He's got to listen to me tonight.

(She EXITS with the gun.)

**Scene Six.** The empty, darkened bar. 4am. RUBY's laughter is heard offstage. She comes running in on tiptoe, wrapped in a sheet. DUPRE is not far behind, chasing her.

RUBY: Shhhhhhh!!!! You gonna wake up Emerald!

DUPRE: You the one making all the noise.

RUBY: You the cause of it and you know it. Stay away from me!

DUPRE: I can't help myself.

RUBY: You tickle me one more time and I'm gonna lose my mind.

DUPRE: You got a weakness and I found it!

RUBY: Oh lord, I'm too old for this.

DUPRE: You didn't seem too old for nothing a little while ago.

RUBY: Well you right, I'm not too old for that.

DUPRE: Come here.

RUBY: No.

DUPRE: Then I'm coming over there.

RUBY: Stay away from me. Don't you tickle me.

DUPRE: I promise.

RUBY: I don't trust you as far as I can throw you.

DUPRE: Hey now, I promise. No tickling behind the knees.

RUBY: You're a devil and I don't believe you.

DUPRE: You'll have to take your chances.

RUBY: No I don't.

DUPRE: Oh yes. You want another kiss, I can tell.

RUBY: You bad, you know it and you don't care.

DUPRE: I'm coming over.

RUBY: No tickling.

DUPRE: We'll see.

RUBY: No! Promise.

DUPRE: I promise.

(He crosses to her. They kiss.)

RUBY: How come you so sweet to me?

DUPRE: I'm sweet to you because you deserve it.

(They kiss.)

BETTY: (From behind the closed door.) What's all this quiet?

(RUBY and DUPRE jump back in surprise, unsure what to do.)

BETTY: Hey, answer me.

RUBY: Go away. The bar's closed.

BETTY: Oh yeah? Sounds like you're doing a little business in there.

RUBY: Who are you? Get out of here.

BETTY: Too late for games, girl. .

RUBY: What are you talking about?

BETTY: I know Dupre's in there.

RUBY: This is my place and I want you out of here before I call the sheriff.

BETTY: You wouldn't do that with a white man in there.

RUBY: It's none of your business who I got in here.

BETTY: My husband is my business. I heard his voice.

DUPRE: (to Ruby. whispered) I'm sorry. I'll go out the back.

RUBY: No! You get her out of here. Fast.

BETTY: Billy! Billy!

DUPRE: Okay. I'll get my clothes.

RUBY: Don't wake up Emerald. Bring me my robe.

(He EXITS.)

BETTY: (shouting) DUPRE! Open the door. I gotta tell you something.

RUBY: Shut up. He's not here.

BETTY: LIAR!! I HEARD HIM LAUGHING!! DUPRE!!!!

RUBY: SHUT UP! TAIRE TOI!

BETTY: DUPRE!!! OPEN THE DOOR!!!

RUBY: Hey Hey Hey. Quiet down. Quiet. It'll be all right.

BETTY: I don't want to talk to you. BIIIIILLLLY! I NEED YOU!

RUBY: Please be quiet. Please. He's coming.

BETTY: Where is he? WHERE IS HE?!

RUBY: He'll be here. He's coming.

BETTY: Oh. He's putting his clothes on. (She starts to cry.)

RUBY: Oh god. Oh god.

BETTY: (Hitting the door) Let me in there. Let me in.

(DUPRE ENTERS. He hands the robe to RUBY, who puts it on.)

DUPRE: Here. (Pause) I think you're daughter's still asleep.

BETTY: Billy? Billy?

DUPRE: I'm sorry. I'm. . . I. . .

RUBY: Just go.

DUPRE: Okay.

BETTY: Billy.

(He crosses to the door and opens it.)

DUPRE: Come on Betty, let's go home.

BETTY: No.

(The gun is down by her side.)

DUPRE: What are you doing. . . ?

(He reaches for the gun.)

BETTY: No.

(She pulls the gun up and holds it on him.)

I don't want to go home. I want to talk to you.

DUPRE: You can talk to me. All you want. You don't need this.

BETTY: Yes I do. You never listen to me. I want you to listen to me.

DUPRE: I'm listening.

BETTY: It hurts me. When you stay out. When you stay home. Everything about you hurts me. I love you so much and I'm so mad at you. I hate you because you don't love me. Tonight I stayed awake because I was gonna tell you, "I forgive you". And ask you to forgive me. And then you didn't come home. And it was like an alarm clock went off in my head. And I said, "Betty, you got to do something about all this mess. Nobody's ever gonna save your life but you."

I'm so tired, but I feel good. I found you.

DUPRE: Yeah, you found me. Betty, I'm sorry I didn't come home tonight to talk to you.

BETTY: Me, too.

DUPRE: We can go home now.

BETTY: No. I don't want to go home. I'm dying there.

DUPRE: What do you want to do?

(She clicks the gun into firing position.)

BETTY: Shoot this gun.

DUPRE: Not in here. We can go outside and shoot at the trees.

BETTY: No. (She turns to Ruby) What's your name?

RUBY: Ruby.

BETTY: Oh yeah. Did you enjoy my husband?

RUBY: It didn't mean anything.

BETTY: It does to me. Do you have a husband?

RUBY: Yes.



BETTY: Does he do this?

RUBY: Yes.

BETTY: Ohhhh. I don't understand why it cuts me so deep.

DUPRE: Betty, I'm sorry. It was a mistake. I'm sorry.

BETTY: No you're not. If you had it to do over again, you would and you will. Unless I do something to change it.

DUPRE: Give me the gun.

BETTY: You think I'm stupid?

RUBY: I don't think you're stupid. If you're smart you'll go home right now and take your husband with you.

BETTY: I'm not going back in that house.

RUBY: He stays with you. More than I can say for mine.

BETTY: He stays because he feels bad. Stupid reason.

DUPRE: Betty, put the gun down and let's go home. I'm sorry you saw this, I'm sorry it happened.

BETTY: You sorry you got caught. And that's all. Don't lie. DON'T LIE!!

DUPRE: Okay. Okay.

BETTY: You look at me with pity and I can't stand it! I am choking and when I look down it's your hands I see on my throat. I want to shoot you but I don't want to live without you. Isn't that stupid? I'm scared to shoot myself. And I don't want to shoot her, I don't even care about her.

DUPRE: It's all right, Betty, it's all right. We'll work it out.

BETTY: NO. NO. NO. It's not alright! Nothing's all right. I love you and it's not all right. I want you to forgive me but I can't forgive you. I just want to start over.

(BETTY weeps. DUPRE moves toward her.)

DUPRE: Betty. . .

BETTY: No! Stay away from me! DON'T PITY ME! Don't look at me like that.

(DUPRE keeps coming.)

DUPRE: It's all right.

(He reaches for the gun.)

BETTY: No!

(BETTY fires. DUPRE falls dead, shot in the chest. RUBY screams.)

BETTY: Oh! Oh god, oh god, oh Jesus. Oh Jesus.

(She drops the gun and falls to her knees near DUPRE.)

Billy. Oh god. Billy? We have to call somebody.

EMERALD: (Offstage) Mama? Mama?

RUBY: Yeah baby. I'm coming.

EMERALD: You all right? What was that?

RUBY: Yeah, I'm all right. Don't come in here.

BETTY: (Trying to stop the blood.) We have to get help.

EMERALD: What happened?

RUBY: Nothing. Nothing. Be quiet.

EMERALD: Who's in there?

RUBY: Go back to your room.

BETTY: Call somebody!

(EMERALD ENTERS.)

EMERALD: What's the matter?

RUBY: Get out of here!

(EMERALD doesn't leave.)

BETTY: Call somebody, damn it!

(RUBY goes to DUPRE, feels for his pulse, looks at his eyes.)

RUBY: He's dead.

BETTY: I don't think so. We can get help!

RUBY: (Shakes BETTY) Wake up! He's dead. You shot him and he's dead.

(BETTY starts keening.)

RUBY:: (To herself) I can't hide this. I can't hide this at all.

EMERALD: Mama?

RUBY: Emerald. Call Johnny. And tell him to come over here right this minute. Tell him it's an emergency.

(EMERALD EXITS.)

I'll pay for this. I'll never stop paying for this.

(RUBY slowly EXITS. Music underscores the lights dimming, leaving BETTY and DUPRE in shadowy moonlight, then rising again as we hear JOHNNY approach.)

**Scene Seven.** The Bar. 4:35 a.m. JOHNNY rushes in.

JOHNNY: Ruby. It's Johnny. What's the . . . (He sees BETTY and DUPRE. He looks around for RUBY and EMERALD, who are nowhere to be seen.)

JOHNNY: Mrs. Betty. What happened?

BETTY: I shot him.

JOHNNY: What?

BETTY: I shot him and he's dead.

JOHNNY: Oh man. Oh man Oh man Oh man. What are you people doing here?  
Where's Ruby?

BETTY: I don't know.

JOHNNY: Christ Almighty in heaven. (Pause) Cover him up.

(He covers DUPRE with the sheet that RUBY wore. RUBY ENTERS.)

RUBY: Johnny.

JOHNNY: What the hell is this? What happened here? What are these people doing here?

RUBY: Never mind that. I need your help.

JOHNNY: DON'T YOU NEVER MIND THAT! You deal with me straight now, Ruby.

RUBY: It doesn't matter.

JOHNNY: You tell me what happened here.

RUBY: Use your imagination.

JOHNNY: I want to hear you say it.

RUBY: You're not my husband.

JOHNNY: But you sure the hell can call on me when you need me!

RUBY: All right. Fine. GET OUT OF HERE! I don't need you. I don't need anybody. Screw the whole goddam world!

(She starts to push him away, he grabs her, she fights, he holds her.)

JOHNNY: Stop it. Stop it.

RUBY: Let go of me!

JOHNNY: Stop it, now. You know I'm gonna help you, you know I will.

RUBY: I don't need you!

JOHNNY: Stop it, now. Calm down. It's all right.

(He holds her, she relaxes into his arms.)

RUBY: I'm so scared.

JOHNNY: Oh, baby, it's all right, it's all right. We'll figure it out. Don't worry. Let me think, here.

(EMERALD ENTERS.)

EMERALD: Mama, should I pack my coat?

JOHNNY: What? Wait.

RUBY: Yeah. And your books.

(EMERALD goes back upstairs.)

JOHNNY: Wait a minute, here.

RUBY: We got to leave. They'll get me on my knees for this.

JOHNNY: Wait. You didn't shoot him.

RUBY: You think that matters? They'll know I slept with a married white man. And he got killed because of me.

JOHNNY: You didn't shoot him. Mrs. Betty's not going to lie about that.

BETTY: I never lie.

RUBY: The truth is enough to do me in. The door's open and I'll never get it shut again. Can't let Emerald see that.

JOHNNY: I'll say I was here, with you, and Dupre. And she came back, and they had a fight, and she shot him. I'll say I was here and I saw everything. We can even say you were in the back, you weren't even here.

RUBY: You think she's going to lie for me!?

BETTY: I never lie.

RUBY: Un-unh, Johnny. It's time to cut bait.

JOHNNY: What?

RUBY: I got to get Emerald out of here. Before it starts.

(RUBY begins to collect money from the cash register, photographs from the wall, her statue of the Virgin Mary, etc.)

JOHNNY: You were born here.

RUBY: And I'm gonna miss it! But I'm not gonna let them take my dignity! Because I forgot my place for a few minutes... because I acted like a human woman for one tender hour, those white bastards are going to own me. You think I don't know that? You think I don't know that?!

JOHNNY: Good God. Ruby, listen to me, we can work our way out of this.

RUBY: NO. I'm not going to be a slave because of this night. I'll never get out unless I do it right now.

JOHNNY: I'm coming with you.

RUBY: No.

(BETTY softly sings EVEN THO' to DUPRE, under the dialogue. The others listen to her for a moment.)

BETTY: *Even tho' you've hurt me, I still love you  
Even tho' you've hurt me, I still care  
And yet even tho' you've hurt me, I still want you  
And I'll never feel the same, til you come back to me.*

JOHNNY: Oh god.

RUBY: I got to get out of here.

(She pulls an envelope out of her pocket.)

I want to give you the deed to my building in exchange for the pink slip to your car.

JOHNNY: Ruby. I want to go with you. I want to take care of you.

RUBY: Nobody can take care of anybody else.

JOHNNY: I want to marry you.

RUBY: Johnny. . . I. . . No, I. . . I can't. It's not right.

JOHNNY: It's not right.

(He pulls out the jewelry box with the ring in it.)

Take this. It doesn't mean anything. It's yours. Sell it and use the money to live on. You'll need it.

RUBY: (She takes the box and opens it.) Oh Lord.

JOHNNY: Good God, woman, close it up!

RUBY: I can't take this.

JOHNNY: Don't be a fool. You'll take it and you'll sell it and you'll rent a place by a

good school for Emerald. Never mention it again. You got that?

RUBY: I got it.

(EMERALD RE-ENTERS, carrying a suitcase.)

JOHNNY: Now, I'm going to go get my pink slip, and I'll be back faster than you can say Chicago.

EMERALD: Is that where we're going?

RUBY: I'm not saying.

JOHNNY: Humh! You got an aunt in Chicago.

RUBY: So? I might go somewhere where nobody knows me at all.

JOHNNY: (He touches Ruby) You can't cut everybody out of your life, Ruby.

(She kisses him.)

RUBY: Meet us back here in ten minutes.

JOHNNY: Nine.

(He EXITS.)

EMERALD: Mama?

RUBY: What?

EMERALD: Did you shoot him?

(RUBY looks carefully at EMERALD.)

RUBY: No.



(EMERALD considers this.)

EMERALD: Then why do we have to run?

RUBY: It's not running...

(She pauses, ashamed.)

It is running.

(She holds EMERALD.)

I don't trust fairness for a woman like me down here.

EMERALD: I wish I was a lawyer, then we wouldn't have to run.

(RUBY strokes EMERALD's hair.)

RUBY: One of these days. Go pack some clothes for me, baby.

(EMERALD EXITS. RUBY gets a box for her photographs. She fills the box, then counts out the money from the register as she sings "LONELY NIGHTS".)

*The ruins crumble gently, the hours pass slowly  
I've tried to prepare myself for this  
Trouble has found me alone in my corner  
Time to pay the darkness again*

(Very softly, BETTY sings with RUBY.)

*Lonely nights, lonely nights  
Stare at the moonlight through the door  
Lonely nights, lonely nights  
You don't lay by my side anymore.*

(The lights slowly fade as the music finishes.)

END OF PLAY