

SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN

DENISE. We have a song we could sing. A youth-oriented song you would call it, that Dennis put together for our church. If you don't mind.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Yes!

DENISE. You do mind?

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. No!

*(THE SANDERS set up for "CHRISTIAN COWBOY."
DENNIS whispers to DENISE.)*

DENISE. Dennis wants to know if you think Jesus would mind if we put a little swing into it?

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. I . . . think He'd be open-minded about it. ~~MISS MAUDE and MISS MYRTLE, don't you?~~

(MISS MAUDE and MISS MYRTLE apparently don't think much of the idea.)

JUNE sets two chairs downstage with their backs toward the congregation. DENNIS and DENISE stand beside the chairs.)

[CHRISTIAN COWBOY]

DENNIS.
THE DEVIL IS A RUSTLER, AND MANY ARE HIS
MEN
WHO RIDE THE PLAINS AND VALLEYS BRANDIN'
SOULS WITH DEATH AND SIN.
IF YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN, COWBOY, THEN
SADDLE UP GOD'S WORD
AND SAVE A SOUL THAT'S HEADIN' TOWARD
THE DEVIL'S HERD.

*(DENNIS and DENISE swing into the chairs on "swing in" and ride their chairs like horses on "start ridin'."
This should look simple, not choreographed.)*

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JUNE * PASTOR OGLETHORPE

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~~was at the wheel when he turned me into the S. Sanders
place.~~

(PASTOR OGLETHORPE is on a roll now. HE could talk all night. JUNE SANDERS enters, running full speed down the aisle. SHE speaks to people as she goes.)

JUNE. I'm sorry. I am sorry. We are very sorry. We are so very sorry. (JUNE arrives on stage out of breath.) Reverend Oglethorpe, I would personally like to apologize on behalf of my entire family for our lateness. Our tardiness. We've had an accident.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Lord have mercy! Is anybody hurt?

JUNE. Just ruffled. But we turned the bus over in a ditch.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. (Overlapping.) Goodness gracious.

JUNE. Out by the pickle plant. (To congregation.) Y'all have little cucumbers floating down the middle of Mount Pleasant. (To PASTOR, accusingly.) Did you know that?

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Why yes, the factory lets a few of them get away, I guess.

JUNE. Looked like thousands. Thousands of baby gherkins. That's a big waste of pickle if you ask me. (To congregation.) The twins got so excited, they got Daddy to pull over for a looksee. We all ran over to that side of the bus for the view. I'm guessing the berm was soft, 'cause we just kept going.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. And no one was hurt?

JUNE. Only my Daddy's pride and my sister's hairdo, which are both sins if you ask me. But I do sincerely apologize.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Where's everyone else?

JUNE. Back with the bus. A couple stopped to help us—Smitty and Joanne Cates—do y'all know them?

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They said they were Methodist, so I didn't know. Miss Joanne gave me a ride over here, and Mr. Smitty stayed to help rock the bus back up.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. That was real nice of them.

JUNE. I asked didn't they want to come hear us sing tonight, but they said it was their card-playin' night. *(Pause. Let the horror of card playing soak in.)* I'm real sorry.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Where are my manners? *(To congregation.)* I'd like you to meet Miss Denise Sanders of the Sanctified Sanders Singers.

JUNE. Excuse me. I'm June. Denise is my sister—one of the twins. Easy to tell us apart. She sings. I sign.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. For the deaf?

JUNE. *(Signing.)* That's correct. *(JUNE begins to sign everything PASTOR OGLETHORPE says.)*

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Well, the Lord made people talented in a lot of different ways. I'm thankful for the variety.

JUNE. *(Agreeing.)* I don't sing. I sign.

(The signing begins to really discombobulate PASTOR OGLETHORPE.)

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. That's wonderful. A wonderful talent. But all our flock is hearing.

JUNE. Mama says I need the practice.

PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Well, that's a wonderful talent.

JUNE. And we're not called the Sanctified Sanders Singers anymore. Mama says all those s's sound like a snake a-hissing.

~~JUNE. Mama! Here they are!
PASTOR OGLETHORPE. *(Gettin' carried away.)*
The Sanders Family, Ladies and Gentlemen. I mean,~~

DENNIS & VERA

MKW

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~~(PASTOR OGLETHORPE moves back to his chair. DENNIS pulls out a folded scrap of paper, spreads it out, and begins. To say DENNIS is a poor public speaker is an understatement. That his mother wrote the sermonette goes without saying.)~~

DENNIS. The greatest day of my life was when I was saved. And my favorite holiday, and not because of the new dresses, is Easter.

(On "new dresses," THE FAMILY steals a disgusted look at VERA.)

DENNIS. Because Easter symbolizes the death of Jesus for my own personal sins. I know that if Jesus had not spilt His blood for me personally, that even though I try to keep my sins to a minimum, I would wind up . . .

(DENNIS has lost the rest of his sermonette. HE looks through his pockets. Frantically. His sisters search their pockets.)

VERA. In everlasting Hell.

DENNIS. In everlasting Hell.

VERA. Where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

DENNIS. Where the worm . . .

VERA. Mark 9:44.

DENNIS. Mark 9:44. (Pause. To VERA.) I guess the rest of it is on the bus.

VERA. Dennis!

DENNIS. (To congregation.) We turned the bus over trying to get here tonight. Everybody was upsidedownwards. I reckon my sermonette got lost in the fray. (Pause.) My Mama wrote it. I'm no good at talkin' to people, and Mama . . .

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(DENNIS hangs his head for a long moment. Is he crying? Praying? THE SANDERS hold their breath. Finally, HE places the paper on the pulpit and quietly says:)

DENNIS. The Lord has called me to preach, and I believe He'll fill my mouth. *(DENNIS moves to the side of the pulpit and waits a moment for God's inspiration. HE begins quietly.)* When I was little bitty, I would kneel and pray through with the grown folks—the big sinners. And they'd say to me, Dennis, you're not a bad boy. But I felt I had the potential of all the evil that y'all big folks have, I just hadn't done it yet.

And right then, I committed my life to preaching. I'd turn up a five-gallon can and try preaching to my sisters. When they'd laugh at me, I'd take up my dog and pray for him. I'd say, *(Addressing his dog.)* Rufus, Jesus can save you. He can take up your soul and make it His own. Give Him your soul, boy. Give it to him today. *(Talking to Rufus begins to free DENNIS up.)* Fasten your eyes upon the cross and your heart will grow lighter, the sky will be brighter. Jesus can help you find the way. Shake hands with Jesus, give him your foot.

(DENNIS starts to cook. THE FAMILY urges him on.)

DENNIS. Walk side by side with our Savior, and you'll never be alone.

(PASTOR OGLETHORPE and THE FAMILY begin a call and response with DENNIS.)

DENNIS. Oh, there'll be things in the beginning the Devil will throw in our way.

VECA:

~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR OGLETHORPE.~~ Yes!

DENNIS. Oh, he'll throw things in our way!

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VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, Yes, he will!

DENNIS. But we can smile at Satan's rage—

VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, Smile!

DENNIS. —I said smile at Satan's rage, and move on.

VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, Move on!

DENNIS. It won't hinder us, no sir.

VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, No sir!

DENNIS. No sir!

VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, No sir!

DENNIS. Praise Jesus, we will never suffer the sting of death.

VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, Praise Jesus!

DENNIS. Praise Jesus, He has written our names in the Book of Life.

VERA: ~~THE SANDERS FAMILY and PASTOR~~
~~CLARENCE~~, Amen!

(JUNE and DENISE rush to hug DENNIS. VERA hugs DENNIS as THE FAMILY assembles for The Blood Medley, DENNIS is showered with praise. JUNE sings The Blood Medley.)

BURL. *(Starting the song.)* One, two, three, four—

THE BLOOD MEDLEY

[NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD]

THE SANDERS FAMILY.
 WHAT CAN WASH AWAY MY SIN? NOTHING BUT
 THE BLOOD OF JESUS.

BURL & VERA

MKKW

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~~DENISE: Nabs, Daddy.~~

~~BURL: Nabs. I thought it was foolishness, but the young'uns began to talk to 'em, and they surely humbled me. There's a good living to be made selling Nabs and~~

~~_____~~
BURL. The Esso man was so excited, he dug the hole himself, buried the tank. And my boy Dennis turned out to be a whiz-bang mechanic.

(DENNIS beams.)

BURL. And the automobiles rolled in. We couldn't ask to do no better. Now, Vera here had been worrying me to death to build her a back porch for I don't know how long.

VERA. Six years.

BURL. And one day, I said, Vera, if President Roosevelt can borrow all that money for his WPA, CCC, FWA, and every other initial up there in Washington, I reckon I can borrow a parcel for your back porch. I loved building that porch, Ten by twenty feet, six posts—

VERA. Turned, not square.

BURL. Tongue and groove floor. I never feel closer to the Almighty than when I'm building something. I guess because Jesus was a carpenter himself.

~~THE SANDERS FAMILY AND PASTOR~~

~~_____~~
BURL. But about halfway through that porch, something happened. My business at the station just dried up. I'm telling you, nobody stopped. I was sitting in front of the store one day and a DeSoto I know WELL flew by so fast, I couldn't get my hand up to wave . . .

VERA. *(Bursting with it.)* It takes very little investigation on my part to find out the store up the road is selling beer!

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BURL. (*Shaken by his wife's interruption.*) Selling beer on Highway 11. Overnight it was a real popular establishment.

VERA. Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. Proverbs 20:1.

BURL. (*Interrupting.*) Thank you, Mother.

VERA. (*Sliding back into the pew.*) You're welcome.

BURL. Now, it's always been my conviction to sell only what the Lord would eat and drink. But I'm sitting there with a half-built porch, a loan due at the bank, a family of five, (*To STANLEY.*) six to feed, and I have not sold so much as a cellophane cracker in three days.

(The reference to STANLEY sends a tense wave through the rest of the family. STANLEY does not like "having to be fed.")

BURL. And just like the icing on the cake, you-know-who drives up. Big old Mercury car, one of them pricey felt hats like they wear in town. He was . . . What's that word you use, Denise? Suave. And I thought to myself, as I'm watching him crawl out, this man reminds me of somebody. He takes hold of my hand and is shaking and grinning like I've been shook and grinned at so many times.

And this beer man sets right in to making his play. Oh, I'm gonna be a rich man to hear him tell it. Two cents on every bottle is mine to keep.

~~BURL. He's talking profits and revenues, and I'm seeing the bank take over my store, my family wasting to nothing. Now I've never told this, not even to my family, but . . . I was backed into a corner here. I thought, "That's it. I'm gonna have to do it. I'm gonna have to sell beer in my store."~~

~~And just as I'm about to say load in, the beer man's car starts hissing. Hissing and moaning out the back, a-roaring on its tires like there's something alive back~~

STANLEY P.1

MEGW

SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN

STANLEY. Six months ago, you wouldn't have seen me here. Five minutes ago, I didn't think I'd see myself here. I went out to the road just now, and if a car had come by, I'd-a been in it.

[REDACTED] (To [REDACTED] and some of the other working people I've ever [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] in [REDACTED])

For the past eighteen months, I've been dangling over the Yadkin River popping rivets into bridges. It's called hard labor.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I think a lot of times [REDACTED] those men out there [REDACTED] got no [REDACTED] their heads.

The crew on the Yadkin was made up of the roughest bunch of men I've ever knowed. I was friendly with a fella name o' Leighton. Arms as big as my leg. Mean.

One day, we're sitting under a shade tree waiting for our dinner. That sounds nice, don't it? There was a fellow with a shotgun twenty yards down the line. (To BURL.) They didn't want us running off. The foreman's wife would bring us a plate. She had to feed the mess of us—and look after a little daughter, too. Sweetest little girl. Reminded me of June when she was a baby.

But this little girl had no fear. She's a-toddling along behind her Mama when she fixes her eyes on ole Leighton. Walks right over, crawls up in his lap, stretches out her little baby arms, and hugs Leighton's neck. Her little cheek up there next to his. Now, you don't even want to brush up against Leighton. You don't want to get near him. So, I turn easy-like to pull her off him, and I see a big ole tear roll down his ugly face. Leighton turns to me and says "What you looking at?"

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And he squeezes that baby with those big ole ham hands of his and sends her back to her Mama.

We eat our dinner. Leighton's chewing on an ole cold biscuit and says, "That's the first hug I've had since I was twelve."

When the Lord looked out over the five thousand, he was moved to feed them. And that multitude included the likes of Leighton and me. I wanted to come home. And I'm gonna try to stick it out. (To BURL.) My brother here just said come home.

~~(STANLEY begins "I Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now." The rest of THE FAMILY looks to BURL, and HE signals to them to join in. VERA moves to STANLEY as the verse progresses, THE SANDERS let STANLEY know he's forgiven and begin to sing like a family again.)~~

~~I WOULDN'T TAKE NOTHING FOR MY JOURNEY NOW~~

~~STANLEY.
I STARTED OUT TRAV'LING FOR THE LORD
MANY YEARS AGO.
I'VE HAD A LOT OF HEARTACHES, MET A LOT OF
GRIEF AND MOE.
AND WHEN I WOULD STUMBLE, THEN I WOULD
HUMBLE DOWN,
AND THERE I WOULD SAY
VERA and STANLEY.
I WOULDN'T TAKE NOTHING FOR MY JOURNEY
NOW.
THE SANDERS FAMILY.
WELL, I WOULDN'T TAKE NOTHING FOR MY
JOURNEY NOW.
I'VE GOT TO MAKE IT TO HEAV'N SOMEHOW,
THOUGH THE DEVIL TRIED TO TEMPT ME AND
HE TRIED TO TURN ME AROUND.~~

JUNE

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M&KW

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~~WHERE THE ANGELS WAIT TO JOIN US
IN THY PRAISE FOREVERMORE.~~

~~PASTOR OGLETHORPE. Miss June?~~

~~JUNE. Oh, no, I don't . . .~~

~~(JUNE shakes her head. The FAMILY urges her to
speak.)~~

~~JUNE. I want to say something, but I go ahead.~~

JUNE. Well. (JUNE reluctantly rises. She had planned to speak. SHE thinks for a moment.) I've been sitting over here listening to these songs and them doing their parts, and it reminds me of hydroelectric plants. I took a tour once of the Fontana Dam. The tallest dam in the Tennessee Valley Authority. Fifteen hundred feet high. It took a million barrels of concrete to build it. Think what that would look like in pickles!

Our guide took us all over the thing, even to the control room. And there inside the room were rows and rows of switches and buttons. And there was this one big blue button that he said raised the control gate. By pushing that button, he said, the Fontana would make enough light for every house from there to Siler City. Well, I'm from Siler City, and that was a long way away.

Then, the guide looked square at me and said, "Push it." I tried to say "No, thank you," but it wouldn't come out. "Go ahead, miss," he says. "Push it. It's time." So I set my mouth, walked up to that button like one big blue eye staring out at me, put out my finger, and pushed.

And you could hear it! The gate started groaning up. And the water starts whooshing in—like a flood. You can't see it, you hear it. And the turbine starts rolling over, and the roar is nothing but power. Power of the water and the moving and the turning. And in my mind I can see little houses lighting up all the way home.

Tonight, when that couple stopped to help us rock the bus back up, we were so shook up we about talked them to death. (JUNE crosses to her family.) Even as Miss

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Joanne was driving me over here, I was jabbering away like a magpie. Till I caught myself. And when I got to listening, she got to talking. It was just like the dam. She said she knew she shouldn't complain, but her job was about driving her crazy. She rubs the stickers off the cucumbers down at the plant. That she sings hymns to herself to pass the time. And that she was so happy to help my family. And when we pulled up here, SHE thanked ME. Said she'd say a little prayer for us on our first night back. "My first little prayer in a goodly while." Just by lending her a good ear, I believe Miss Joanne did some thinking and I bet some praying, too. So what if I can't sing and none of y'all are deaf. My job is listening. God's power is loud like thunder, but it's soft, too, like Miss Joanne. (To DENNIS.) I'm done.

~~THE SANDERS move into place for "Smoke On The Mountain." DENNIS pretends to sign the last line of the Bible verse to tease JUNE. JUNE hits him.)~~

~~DENNIS and JUNE. May the Lord rejoice in his works~~

~~ALL. He who looks at the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke.~~

~~[SMOKE ON THE MOUNTAIN]~~

~~VERA.
THERE IS A CHURCH
BURL.
(THERE IS A CHURCH)
VERA.
UP ON THE MOUNTAIN~~

VERA

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MKKW

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~~VERA. And Jesus said: "Suffer the little children to come unto me. Amen. I cannot tell you how truly inspiring it is to see so many bright and youthful faces shining with the promise of Jesus' love here tonight. I love children, but I don't have to tell you mothers out there how hard it is to raise three children in today's world."~~

~~it fell on me to do the children's devotional tonight. So, children, scoot up to the edge of your pew. This is for you.~~

The other night I was sitting out on my back porch having a nice cold glass of delicious lemonade and contemplating hard this coming evening of song and worship and the great challenge the Lord has given to me to share his love and guidance with you, when whoop! Something plopped into my nice glass of lemonade. Now, can anybody guess what plopped into my glass? It being JUNE and all? *(Pause.)*

Nobody? A JUNE BUG! That's right. And I turned to my husband Burl who was sitting out on the porch with me, and I said, "Burl, would you look at that, a June Bug just jumped into my lemonade." And Burl said, "Well, you can't have mine." And I said, "Burl!" *(Laughs.)* And he said, "Flick it out with your straw, there's nothing wrong with it."

~~VERA.~~ And I just had to sigh, 'cause there was wasted a whole big glass of refreshing lemonade. And I admit it, I was right mad with that June Bug. But while I was digging around for his little drowning body, the Lord in his wondrous way spoke to me, and He said, "Think on that June Bug." And I did. And God, in his wisdom, let me see that we, too, all of us, are June Bugs in this world. Flying aimlessly, hitting the screen doors of life, and drowning in the refreshments! And the Lord was speaking to me so loud and clear that I made Burl put on

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his shoes and go out and trap me a couple of June Bugs for our lesson tonight.

~~VERA displays her dominions with bugs. (To JUNE BUG.)~~
~~The [redacted] by the [redacted]~~

~~VERA. It took me longer than an hour in the [redacted] pitch~~

VERA. ~~[redacted]~~ Now, if I open my hanky like this, the June Bug will fly away.

We-e-e! Look at that! Look at him go! Just like a sinner. No direction, no purpose, doomed to an unhappy end. BUT what if we had tied a little thread on the old June Bug's back leg? Have you ever done that? I bet you have. What would happen if we let *him* go? (To JUNE BUG.) Fly! Get up from there and fly.

(The BUG finally flies.)

Well, look, he's flying perfect circles around my head. Just like a Christian. I don't even see that other old June Bug. He's lost. But this June Bug with the thread isn't going anywhere.

This thread is just like Jesus's love and hold on us. But you see how that June Bug pulls on his thread? Well, we pull on our threads, too. That's SIN. And if we pull too hard on our thread, what will happen? It'll pull our leg right off!

Now, which June Bug would you rather be? This nice June Bug flying in perfect circles or a nasty June Bug flying around helter-skelter getting into God know's what? Nobody? Well, I think I know the answer. And I'm here to tell you tonight that Jesus wants to run a thread from His mighty hand to the hind leg of your soul. Let Him tie it on tonight, and as long as we don't pull too hard on that thread, it'll get stronger and stronger.

~~VERA.~~ Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us to be good June Bugs in your eyes and not to pull on our threads too hard. Make the lemonade of sin a bitter drink. May all our hind legs stay attached to our bodies so that we may be whole when we reach your heavenly palace where there are no nasty bugs to scare the life out of us. And if any did show up, your glorious band of Angels would exterminate them before we even had time to mention it. We ask this in Thy name. Amen.