

UNITED ARTISTS
A FAMILY THING

by

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FIRST REVISIONS

March 20, 1995

Rev. 5/1/95 (Blue)

Rev. 5/9/95 (Pink)

Rev. 5/12/95 (Yellow)

Rev. 5/15/95 (Green)

Rev. 5/16/95 (Goldenrod)*

*On location the production office used blue colored revision paper.

A FAMILY THING

FADE IN:

- 1 EXT. IN AND AROUND ^{SOMMERVILLE} ARKANSAS - DAY

It's a drowsy, hot August afternoon in the hill country of southwest Arkansas...

On the great silver bulk of a water tower is painted ^{SOMMERVILLE} Pigeons with irridescent necks squat and walk around on the walkway that circles the tower, making CHUCKLING-COO NOISES.

- A1 In the back yard of a house in the black section of town, a YOUNG BLACK WOMAN throws out chicken feed to some hungry competitive chickens. A LITTLE BOY is riding his tricycle in the midst of the chickens. *
- B1 TWO YOUNG WHITE GIRLS are riding their bikes down a pretty street. *
- C1 They pass the red-brick, white-steepled Baptist church, where an ELDERLY BLACK MAN is mowing the bright green lawn. *
- D1 On the outskirts of town, a MIDDLE-AGED WHITE FARMER sits on a tractor pulling a bushhog across a wide, half-mown field of tall grass. The water tower looms in the distance. A pipe juts out of the farmer's mouth. *
- E1 Town Square, in front of a white barber shop, a MASSIVELY FAT BLACK MAN sits on a little stool, a fat cigar jutting from his mouth. He observes, across the street on the grounds of the courthouse, a GROUP OF MIDDLE-AGED TO ELDERLY BLACK MEN gathered around a game of dominos, laughing and talking. *
- F1 An old Plymouth sits on blocks under a shade tree in the front yard of a white frame house, with FOUR OR FIVE GOOD OLD BOYS of varying ages gathered around the open hood, smoking, drinking, and conferring. There's the faint sound of a dog BARKING persistently in the distance. *
- G1 EXT PILCHER TRACTOR SALES *
- Out on the highway that leads into town, bright tractors stand in rows in the Pilcher Tractor Sales and Rentals lot. The dog we heard is sitting in the back of a pickup truck. Its BARKING seems to be directed toward the office...

- 2 INT. PILCHER TRACTOR SALES AND RENTALS OFFICE - DAY

EARL PILCHER JR.'s face beneath his red Peterbilt cap looks angry.

EARL

Now, let me run this by you one more time
real slow so you can understand it. If
you rent a piece of equipment, you are
liable for it if you bust it.

Earl, early 60's, with a balding head and a compact, bantam-

A FAMILY THING

FADE IN:

1 EXT. IN AND AROUND JANSON, ARKANSAS - DAY

It's a drowsy, hot August afternoon in the hill country of southwest Arkansas...

On the two-lane blacktop highway that runs into town we see a small metal sign, drilled with a couple of rusty bullet holes: JANSON POP. 9,596.

On Main Street, in front of a barber shop, a MASSIVELY FAT BLACK MAN in faded overalls sits on a little stool smoking a fat cigar.

One car and a couple of pickup trucks are parked in front of the Dairy Queen.

An old Plymouth sits on blocks under a shade tree in the front yard of a white frame house, with FOUR OR FIVE GOOD OLD BOYS of varying ages gathered around the open hood, smoking, drinking, and conferring.

On the sagging porch of a ramshackle house in the black section of town are an old washing machine, a sleeping dog, a WOMAN in a rocking chair shelling peas, TWO SMALL CHILDREN playing, and an ancient red Coke machine.

THREE OR FOUR YOUNG WHITE BOYS throw a baseball around at the Little League field, while a COUPLE OF YOUNG GIRLS sit astride their bikes and watch.

An ELDERLY BLACK MAN mows the bright green lawn of the red-brick, white-steepled First Baptist Church.

Outside town, a MIDDLE-AGED WHITE FARMER sits on a tractor pulling a bushhog across a wide, half-mown field of tall grass.

And out on the highway on the outskirts of town, bright tractors stand in rows in the Pilcher Tractor Sales and Rentals lot...

2 INT. PILCHER TRACTOR SALES AND RENTALS OFFICE - DAY

EARL PILCHER JR.'s face beneath his red Peterbilt cap looks angry.

EARL

Now, let me run this by you one more time
real slow so you can understand it. If
you rent a piece of equipment, you are
liable for it if you bust it.

Earl, early 60's, with a balding head and a compact, bantam-

rooster body, wearing, along with his Peterbilt cap, a plaid shirt and blue jeans and cowboy boots, stands behind the counter across from a YOUNG MAN with a vivid sunburn.

SUNBURNED MAN

(with a Midwestern accent)

Well I don't think I'm responsible for faulty equipment. The thing just flew apart.

EARL PILCHER SR., Earl's 86-year-old daddy, sits in a chair behind the counter as if the argument's not even happening. A cigarette dangles from his mouth, and he's cracking walnuts into an ashtray.

EARL

I didn't rent it to you to bust up a building with. That's not what it's for.

SUNBURNED MAN

It's none of your business what I rented it for. I paid good money for it. I'm the customer. And I'm not being treated like one.

In the b.g., a phone begins to RING. SONNY PILCHER, Earl's nephew, late 30's, and dressed about like Earl, appears from the back and answers it.

EARL

I guess it damn well is my bidness. I own this place and every piece of equipment in it. You ain't about to cost me any money either, by God.

EARL SR.

(looking up from his walnuts)

Where'd you say you was from again?

SUNBURNED MAN

Me? Wisconsin.

EARL SR.

West-consin. There's your trouble, Junior. I ain't never seen a damn Yankee yet that could operate more'n a wheelbarrow.

SUNBURNED MAN

(his face flushing)

I paid the rental and that's all I'm paying.

Sonny has hung up the phone now, and, his face somber, he approaches Earl.

SONNY

Earl, that was Aunt Ruby on the phone--

EARL

Tell her I'll call her back.

SONNY

It's about Granny. She's about ready.
She's, uh...

(his voice trailing off)

It's about time...

Earl looks at Sonny, and then at his father. Cracking walnuts, the old man either hasn't heard, or is pretending not to have heard. Earl moves over to him.

EARL

(gently)

Come on, Daddy, let's go to the house.

SUNBURNED MAN

Where are you going? We've got to settle this.

EARL

We're closin' up. I got other things to take care of besides hoo-hahin' with you. Lock up, Sonny. Come on, Daddy.

Sonny locks up the cash register. Now the three men start for the door.

SUNBURNED MAN

I'm not leaving till we settle this.

EARL

(switches off the lights)

I'll see you tomorrow.

The three Pilchers walk out the front door, leaving the Yankee ranting by the counter.

SUNBURNED MAN

You better sign something saying I'm not responsible.

EARL

(calls from the door)

Are you comin? I'm lockin' this door.

SUNBURNED MAN

I'm not leaving till you sign something--

3 EXT. PILCHER TRACTOR SALES AND RENTALS - DAY

Earl locks the door to the shop. He and Sonny and Earl Sr. climb into Earl's pickup, as the sunburned man begins POUNDING on the door and SHOUTING obscenities. Earl starts the truck and they're gone.

4 EXT. EARL'S HOUSE - DAY

It's a nice three-bedroom ranch-style brick house, on a quiet, shady, pretty street. Earl's pickup pulls into the driveway.

Earls Jr. and Sr. and Sonny get out. RUBY, Earl's wife, meets them on the porch, tears in her eyes. One guesses Ruby was beautiful 30 years and 30 pounds ago.

RUBY

She's been talkin' out of her head, Earl.
She's been callin' for you.

5 INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The room is dark. CARRIE, Earl's mother, is lying in the bed. She's wearing an old flannel nightgown; there are dark circles under her pale eyes, and she is very thin. The three men, her husband, her son, and her grandson, stand around the bed. Ruby stands in the doorway, sobbing.

EARL

Ruby, why don't you go on and make some coffee or somethin'. That cryin' ain't helpin' any.

Ruby goes.

EARL SR.

Carrie, how you feelin'?

CARRIE

(weakly)

Tolerable, I reckon. How y'all doin'?

EARL SR.

I'm kindly down in my back, but I reckon I'll do. You want me to get you somethin' 'nother d'eat?

CARRIE

Naw, I don't feel much like eatin' nothin'.

The three men stand and stare in silence for a moment.

CARRIE

I seen your daddy today, Sonny.

SONNY

Daddy's dead, Granny.

CARRIE

He ain't no sech of a thing. He's out there in the back buildin' me a little old shed to keep things in. I told him he was gonna catch the pneumonia if he didn't put on a coat. I never could get him to wear a coat.

SONNY

(his eyes filling with
tears)

Granny, don't talk like that.

Earl motions for Sonny to leave, and he does.

EARL SR.

Carrie, I'm gonna get me some coffee. You want some?

CARRIE

Naw, I don't believe I do.

EARL SR.

I been kindly thinkin' about goin' to church Sunday. You want to?

CARRIE

All right.

Earl Sr. walks slowly out of the room; Earl pulls a chair up and sits by his mother.

CARRIE

Reckon why your daddy's playin' like I'm all right.

EARL

You are all right, Mama. Doctor said you're liable to live to be a hundred. He said you're too ornery to die yet. You're just havin' a spell.

CARRIE

You never was no good at storyin', Junior. I'm 84 years old. That's plenty of stayin' alive to do.

Now she fixes her pale eyes on Earl.

CARRIE

You take care of things, Earl. You do things right. I don't want you to be layin' here some of these days like me wishin' you'd done different.

EARL

You've done real good, Mama.

CARRIE

Pride and jealousy and lies are the old devil's work, Earl.

EARL

(puts his hand on hers)

Everything's fine, Mama. You just rest.

CARRIE

You take care of your family, Earl. You use my memory to hep you do that.

EARL

Mama, you know I'll take care of them. I always do. That's the first thing.

Now Carrie's eyes drift away from her son, take on a far-away look.

CARRIE

I had a dream I was hangin' a load of warsh on a tree limb down at the river. Ain't that the silliest thing?

There's a long silence. Earl looks closely at his mother. Her eyes are still open, but they seem very still.

EARL

(softly)

Mama?

No answer.

EARL

Mama...you still here?

Silence. Earl gazes at his mother...

6 INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

Earl walks in. Earl Sr. and Sonny and Ruby are sitting silently at the kitchen table. A coffee pot's beginning to percolate on the counter.

RUBY

Earl, the Sheriff just called. He said some man called him from the store and said you locked him up inside of it.

Now KAREN, Earl's 25-year-old daughter, a dark, raven-haired beauty, walks into the room, her purse over her shoulder, just home from work.

KAREN

(cheerfully)

Hey, Daddy, what's goin' on. I bought you a new cap today. It says, "Hunters do it with both barrels."

EARL

(quietly)

She's gone.

Karen looks shocked. Ruby reaches over and takes Sonny's hand. Earl Sr. keeps staring straight ahead, and gives no sign of having heard Earl.

EARL

Ruby, you better call whoever you're supposed to call.

Ruby nods.

EARL SR.

When's that coffee a-goin' to be ready?

Earl looks at his father, and then turns and leaves.

7 EXT. EARL'S HOUSE - DAY

Earl walks out onto the front porch. He leans against a pillar, stares out at the street. The sun's dropping behind the trees now, and is casting long shadows.

8 EXT. THE CEMETERY - DAY

Earl Jr. and Ruby and Karen and Sonny and Earl Sr., all in their Sunday best, sit in folding chairs near the flower-heaped casket. Other MOURNERS sit behind them. A pavilion-type tent shields them all from the hot sun. They are all waiting for the preacher, BROTHER CONNERS, a young man with a soft round face and neatly trimmed blond hair, to begin the service.

Earl looks disapprovingly at Karen, whose dress clings to the curves of her youthful body.

EARL

(whispers)

How come you to dress like a damn party girl at your grandma's funeral?

KAREN

This is a hundred and fifty dollar dress.

EARL

You might make a hundred and fifty dollars wearin' it too.

The preacher interrupts the fight.

BROTHER CONNERS

You remember Lazarus. Martha was his sister. And when Jesus came to the place where Lazarus was buried, Martha said to Jesus--

(opens his Bible and begins to read)

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said unto her, "Your brother will rise again."

Brother Connors closes his Bible and looks kindly into the grieving faces of the Pilcher family.

BROTHER CONNERS

Carrie requested that these verses from John be read here today; and as sure as the sun rises in the morning, I can tell you that our sister in Christ, Carrie Louise Pilcher, will rise again too...

9 EXT. PILCHER HOUSE - DAY

It's after the funeral. Parked cars and trucks jam the driveway and the street. KIDS are running around and playing in the yard. Karen and a COUPLE OF HER FRIENDS are unloading some flowers from a station wagon. Sonny and a fat friend named T.W. are standing on the front porch, smoking cigarettes.

10 INT. HOUSE - DAY

The CAMERA DRIFTS through a CROWD OF PEOPLE, talking, laughing, eating from paper plates heaped high with fried chicken, potato salad, sliced ham--it looks more like a family reunion than the aftermath of a funeral. Ruby is busy as a bee playing hostess. We discover Earl in the kitchen, standing with a group of OLD MEN near a table covered with all manner of cakes and pies.

ONE OF THE OLD MEN

So where's ol' Gator, Earl? Out back?

Earl's face grows solemn.

EARL

Naw, Gator got killed last month. Followed a old bitch in heat across the highway and got hit by a car.

ONE OF THE OLD MEN

Well, I'm sorry to hear that. He was a good dog.

EARL

The best damn squirrel dog I've ever seen. Did whatever I told him. Smart too. I taught Gator a trick, I'd say, "Gator, would you rather be a nigger or a dead dog?"--and ol' Gator, he'd just roll over on his back and play dead.

The old men chuckle. Now a tiny OLD LADY, hunched over and using a cane, 90 years old if she's a day, comes up to Earl with tears in her eyes. She takes Earl's hand and pats it. She's half deaf, and compensates by talking extremely loud.

OLD LADY

Earl, did I ever tell you about that time I got my hand caught in that old ringer washer and Carrie was over at the house--heppin' me put up pickle peaches?

EARL

Yes ma'am, I think you did tell me about that.

OLD LADY

(either not hearing or ignoring Earl)

Well, I was puttin' up pickle peaches, and Carrie come over...

11 INT. PILCHER HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

All the people have left. Earl and Earl Sr. are sitting in armchairs watching TV. Ruby is cleaning up--she heads for the kitchen bearing a load of glasses and napkins and paper plates. Karen comes through the room in tight jeans and fresh lipstick and heads for the front door.

EARL

Where you goin'?

KAREN

Ridin' around with Mary Burns and them.

EARL

Not till you help your mama clean things up you're not.

KAREN

Daddy, come on. Mama said she don't need any help.

EARL

Well, I said she does. You show your mama some respect.

KAREN

Daddy, Mary's expectin' me to pick her up in 10 minutes.

EARL

Get on the phone and tell her to wait.

Suddenly, Earl Sr. gets up, sobbing softly, and walks slowly toward the bedroom.

EARL SR.

(under his breath)

Oh, Lord...Lord, oh Lord...

Earl and Karen stare at the old man till he exits--and then they look at each other.

EARL

(his manner softening)

They buried your grandma today, honey.
Can't you just settle down for one night?
You mama needs help.

Karen, her eyes moist, nods, and goes into the kitchen.

Earl is left alone for a few moments with the TV--and then the front door opens, and in come Sonny and T.W. Sonny's clothes are torn and dirty, his face is bruised and swollen, and he's bleeding from an eyebrow.

EARL

What in the hell happened to you?

SONNY

(heading for the bathroom)

I just run the truck into a sign post.
You just watch your TV show, I'm all right.

12 INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Earl follows Sonny and T.W. into the bathroom. Sonny wets a towel and starts to wipe his face.

EARL

Bullshit, Sonny. You been fightin'. I see them scratch marks and your clothes all tore up! Who was you fightin' with? Did you run into that redneck fuckin' Bill Parmer again?

T.W.

It was him and two of his brothers. That Leon and that other big ol' one--Jackie I think's his name.

EARL

(looks at T.W.)

Where was you when this was goin' on? You don't look beat up.

SONNY

(sourly)

In the truck with the door locked.

T.W.

(sheepishly)

I was tryin' to raise somebody on the C.B.

EARL

You're pitiful, T.W.

(pause)

It's about time somebody did somethin' about them bastards.

SONNY

Now wait, Earl, don't go over there and get yourself killed. I'm all right.

EARL

Just tell me one thing. Did you start it?

SONNY

No, I didn't start it.

Earl starts for the door.

13 EXT. PARMER HOUSE - NIGHT

Earl's truck pulls up in front of the house. The yard needs mowing, and the house needs painting.

Earl, Sonny, and T.W. get out. Sonny and T.W. hang back a

little, as Earl walks purposefully up on the front porch and KNOCKS on the door firmly.

Two big dogs run up from around the back, and begin BARKING and GROWLING at them. Moths and long-legged bugs lay siege to the porch light. Now the door's opened by MR. PARMER--about Earl's age, but much bigger. He's in khaki pants and no shirt, with a hairy chest going to gray. He stares at Earl through the screen door.

PARMER

(surly)

What you need, Pilcher?

EARL

I want you to keep them white trash kids of yours off of my boy.

PARMER

I didn't think you had no boy.

EARL

He's my nephew. That's close enough. He's my blood. You don't fuck with my blood.

PARMER

My boys is all up over 30 years old. One of 'em's 42. That boy of yours is up close to 40, ain't he? That's they own bidness. They grown men, they ain't childern.

EARL

(points back toward an embarrassed-looking Sonny)

One more hair of his head's touched by one of them sons of bitches I'm takin' it out on you, Parmer. Now keep them monkeys under control.

Parmer opens the screen door and steps out onto the porch.

PARMER

By God you don't come on my proppity and threaten me, Pilcher. My boys'll do what they goddamn well please to do. If you want a piece of me come get it.

Earl lowers his head and charges Pilcher, laying a shoulder in his bare belly.

14 INT. EARL'S HOUSE - THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ruby sits in a chair, dozing, a magazine across her lap. Now her

eyes open as Earl and Sonny come in through the front door, both a little unsteady on their feet. Earl's face is scratched up and bruised.

RUBY

Earl, my stars, where've y'all been? And what happened to you?

EARL

You just thank your lucky stars I'm alive. I been in a fight with them Parmers.

RUBY

Oh Earl, did them Parmers hold you down and pour beer down your throat? Sonny, how could y'all go out and get drunk and get in a fight on the day of your grandma's funeral?

SONNY

I'm goin' to bed. I gotta work tomorrow.

Sonny leaves the room as Earl plops down in his easy chair. Ruby goes into the kitchen. By the time she returns with a wet towel, Earl has passed out. Ruby takes Earl's shoes off--and then, tenderly, she starts to clean the scratches and bruises on his face and arms. She looks at her husband with love and sadness, as we:

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

15 INT. PILCHER TRACTOR OFFICE - MORNING

Earl is standing behind the counter going through a stack of bills. Brother Conners, the young, round-faced preacher, comes in, wearing a coat and tie.

EARL

How 'bout ya, Reverend? What you doin' over this way?

BROTHER CONNERS

Earl, how you doin'? Listen, I've got this letter your mama gave me before she passed and she wanted me to wait a few days and then give it to you.

The preacher has taken an envelope out of his coat, and now he hands it to Earl.

EARL

What is it?

BROTHER CONNERS

Well I haven't looked at it and she didn't tell me. She just said give it to you and not anybody else. It's private she said.

Earl looks at the envelope, puzzled.

EARL

Thank you.

BROTHER CONNERS

Well, I better go, I've got rounds to make. Roy Bailey is in the hospital with his gall bladder. I'm gonna go see him a minute.

EARL

All right then, I'll see you later.

BROTHER CONNERS

(as he goes out the door)

Sunday. I'll see you Sunday.

Earl is left alone with the letter. Now he tears open the envelope, and takes out several sheets of stationary covered with big, neat handwriting. He begins to read.

After a few moments, the color begins to drain from his face...

16 EXT. PILCHER TRACTOR LOT - MORNING

Earl Sr. is out back washing off a tractor with a pressure hose. Now Earl comes walking up behind him. He stops and stares at the back of the old man. He's holding the letter, and his face is ashen.

EARL

Daddy?

Earl Sr. doesn't hear him over the SPRAY of the water.

EARL

(louder)

Daddy! Turn that off!

The nozzle of the hose quits spraying water, as Earl Sr. turns around to face his son.

EARL SR.

It's gonna be a hot one, Junior.

EARL

Daddy, Brother Connors just brought me a letter that Mama wrote to me before she passed.

EARL SR.

A letter...from your mama?

EARL

Yes sir.

(pause)

I'm gonna read it to you.

Now Earl unfolds the pages of the letter, and begins to read.

EARL

"Dear Earl,

When you read this letter I pray I will be in Heaven with our Dear Lord if He is willing to have me there. I done it this way because I could not face you and tell you this thing I need to tell you. I guess I could have not told you at all but I could not take this to my grave.

Before I write this thing to you

I want you to know that I love and I have always loved you. And your Daddy loves you too."

*

Earl looks up from the letter for a moment at his father, who is listening with no expression on his wrinkled face.

EARL

You always heard you was born in Alabama because I went there to stay with my cousin that was sick and my Aunt Grace so she could take care of us both because your Daddy was off in Oklahoma working. It hurts me to tell you this but that is not the truth of things.

(pause)

We had a colored woman named Willa Mae that worked for us."

*

Earl Sr. looks as though his knees are becoming a little weak, and he sits down slowly on the water tank hooked up to the pressure hose.

EARL

"She was a real nice woman. She used to set and talk with me a lot. I couldn't really have a colored friend in town. But in the house nobody knew about it. She

(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

was real smart and believed in the Good Lord.

(pause)

She cried one day and told me that your Daddy had been with her a while back but she didn't want to. She said she was scared of him and scared not to. I was mad at her for a while and mad at your Daddy. But he said he didn't do it. I believed him against her until she come up pregnant and he had to come up with the truth. Because she had a white baby."

Earl pauses, swallows, glances at his father.

EARL

"Willa Mae is your real mama by blood, Earl. You come up looking white so nobody never knew the difference. But I have always loved you as my own, Earl. Please forgive me. If you do I have a wish for you to do for me. Willa Mae had another boy before you named Raymond Lee. Raymond Lee Murdock. They called him Point because when he was little he had a pointy head. Willa Mae was my friend and Raymond is your brother.

(pause)

Their whole family was good people to us and they are your family. If you don't ever have another thought about me or look at my pitcher or anything I wish the one thing you would do for me is find your brother and know him as your family.

*

Tears are beginning to brighten the old man's dim eyes.

EARL

"Willa Mae died having you. I was right there. She told me after you just came into this world that you was beautiful and she loved you. The last I heard, Raymond was in Chicago and was a policeman. That's all I ever heard. I will always for Eternity love you as my Son.

Mama"

Now Earl looks up from the letter at his father, who is sitting slumped on the water tank, staring at the ground.

EARL

Daddy? Mama's mind was goin' there at the end, wasn't it? I mean, this is all just a bunch of crazy stuff she dreamed up...

Earl Sr. lifts his head slowly, and looks at his son. He opens his mouth, but closes it without saying anything. Tears wet his cheeks.

As he stares at his father, Earl's breathing starts coming faster. He suddenly turns and starts walking rapidly back toward the office. As he passes a dumpster, he crumples up the letter and tosses it in...

17 EXT. BACK OF THE PILCHER HOUSE - DUSK

Lightning bugs flash in the dreamy green back yard. Through the kitchen window, we see the Pilcher family sitting around the table having supper.

18 INT. KITCHEN - DUSK

Present are Earl and Ruby and Sonny and Karen. Conspicuously absent is Earl Sr.

KAREN

...They put in a new computer system and they expect us to learn it in five minutes, I'm tellin' you I'm just about fed up with that place--

EARL

You better not quit that job. Jobs don't grow on trees around here.

KAREN

Who said anything about quittin', I just said I--

EARL

Complain. That's all you do.

SONNY

Where's Granddaddy?

RUBY

He went to bed already. Said he was feelin' all wore out. Poor thing...

KAREN

(to Earl)

I wasn't complainin', I was just talkin' about my day. What's the matter with you anyway?

EARL
(chewing his food grimly)
Nothin'. Just tryin' to eat my supper in
peace.

19 INT. EARL AND RUBY'S BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN

The lights are off. Earl and Ruby are in bed. Ruby's asleep. Earl's wide awake, staring at the ceiling. *

Now Earl throws the covers off, and swings his legs out of bed. He just sits there for a moment in his underwear. Now he gets up and walks quietly out of the room. *

19A INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Earl is walking slowly down the dark hallway. Now he reaches his mother's room. The door is closed. Earl opens it. *

He stands in the doorway, looking in. A faint wash of moonlight comes in through a window. Earl looks around the quiet, empty room, his gaze finally falling on his mother's bed.... *

20 EXT. PILCHER TRACTOR SALES AND RENTALS - DAWN

The highway's deserted. The sky is beginning to grow gold above a stand of pine trees. Earl is behind the building, rummaging through the dumpster.

His face is unshaven, his eyes are exhausted and red-rimmed. Now Earl finds what he's looking for.

He smooths out the pages of the crumpled-up letter, begins reading it again.

Now Earl walks slowly back over to his pickup truck. As he's about to get in, he catches sight of himself in the outside rearview mirror--and now he looks, looks, and looks...

21 INT. EARL AND RUBY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Earl is standing in front of a closet looking through some hangered clothes.

EARL
Where's my blue britches?

Ruby is standing near him, staring at him with incomprehension and worry.

RUBY
Under your nose. Earl, what on earth are you doin'?

Earl takes his blue britches off the hanger and carries them to a half-packed suitcase on the bed.

EARL
I told you, I'm just takin' off for a few days. I ain't had a vacation or been anywheres since that cousin of yours married that chiropracter in Shreveport.

Earl is ineptly packing the pants into the suitcase, and now Ruby takes them away from him.

RUBY

Here, let me do that, you'll wrinkle 'em.
But where are you goin' ?

EARL

I don't know exactly. I'm gonna take my fishin' pole with me, and maybe I'll do some fishin' somewhere.

RUBY

Bu what about the shop?

Earl tosses some underwear and socks into the suitcase.

EARL

Sonny'll take care of it.

RUBY

(softly)

Earl...it's your mama, ain't it?

Finished with his packing, Earl closes the suitcase and snaps the fasteners shut. Now he turns and looks at his wife.

EARL

Yeah, Ruby...I guess it is...

22 EXT. AND INT. EARL'S PICKUP - DAY

Earl is driving down the main street of SommervilleAs he passes the barber shops, he looks at the massively fat black man in faded overalls sitting out front on his little stool and smoking a cigar. When Earl looks back at the street, he sees he's about to run a red light, and brakes the truck to a sharp stop. A middle-aged BLACK WOMAN and her TWO KIDS are in the crosswalk, and the woman gives Earl a what-the-hell-are-you-doing? look. As the woman and her kids move on across the street, Earl gazes after them... *

A22 MONTAGE OF EARL TRAVELING

Earl waves at crop duster as it swoops down over him. *

B22 Earl and his truck move down a two-lane highway in the country. Earl changes the radio station several times--can't find anything he wants to listen to, and turns it off. *

C22 The truck rolls along the highway through the green beautiful hills of Northwest Arkansas. *

D22 Earl's at a filling station. The sun's going down. He buys a pop from a machine, takes a long pull on it, and gets back in his truck. *

It's nightttime now, as Earl's truck exits off a freeway in Missouri.

END MONTAGE.

23 INT. DINER - NIGHT - OMIT

*

24 INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Earl is sitting on the side of the bed talking on the phone.

EARL

Chicago... Yeah, do you have a listing for a Raymond Murdock? Or it might be Raymond Lee... No, I don't have a street. How many Raymonds are there?... Can you just give me all of 'em?

DISSOLVE TO:

25 THE MOTEL ROOM, A LITTLE LATER

Earl's still on the phone.

EARL

Is this Raymond?... Are you the Raymond on the police force?
(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

(pause)

Okay, thank you.

Earl hangs up, and looks at the sheet of paper he's holding. There are four numbers on it. He wads up the paper and throws it in the wastepaper basket.

26 INT. MOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Earl sits at the bar drinking a scotch on the rocks. He's had several.

The bar's empty except for a few LOCAL TYPES. An OLD LADY in her 80's at least sits a stool or two down the bar from Earl drinking a glass of whiskey and staring at Earl. She's wearing round sunglasses and has only her bottom teeth.

OLD LADY

You ain't from here, are you?

EARL

No ma'am, I'm not. I'm travelin' through.

OLD LADY

I'm in here ever' night and I never seen you. Where you goin' to?

EARL

Chicago I think.

OLD LADY

You got people there?

EARL

(pause)

Yeah. That's what they say.

OLD LADY

You couldn't pay me to go to Chicago. I hear the news. Chicago or St. Louis neither one. They's too many cutpurses and headknockers in them towns.

The old lady leans closer to Earl, and lowers her voice a little.

OLD LADY

They's more niggers than they is white people. You better watch out up there.

27 EXT. MOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Earl comes outside, a little unsteady on his feet, very drunk. A cool wind has sprung up, and the dark sky flickers with lightning. Earl stops, and stares out at a giant truck thundering past on the interstate...

28 EXT./INT. EARL'S TRUCK - DAY

Earl is on the freeway going into Chicago. The downtown skyline looms in the distance. The freeway is many lanes wide, and the traffic is terrible.

Appearing harried, Earl looks to the left and the right, and up at the green and white freeway signs with their exits for unfamiliar streets. Earl suddenly changes lanes, and a car BLARES its horn and the driver gives him the finger.

EARL

Kiss my ass you son of a bitch!

Earl takes the truck into an exit lane.

29 EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Earl pulls into the station, gets out, and goes into the office.

30 INT. GAS STATION OFFICE - DAY

A MIDDLE-AGED BLACK MAN is behind the desk reading a paper.

EARL

How you doin' today?

MAN

Doin' all right. Could I help you?

EARL

Yeah, could you tell me where the main police station is?

MAN

It's a whole bunch of main police stations. Which one you lookin' for?

EARL

I'm not real sure.

MAN

They's one 'bout six blocks down 14th Street right there. I can't think of that street but it's six blocks on the left. To the left two blocks.

EARL

All right. Appreciate it.

31 INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Earl stands at the front desk, waiting. Now a blue-suited POLICEMAN comes to the desk.

POLICEMAN

Are you the one looking for a Raymond Murdock?

EARL

Yes sir. I understand he's a policeman, or used to be.

The policeman looks him over.

EARL

I ain't an escaped convict lookin' for revenge or nothin'. It's family bidness.

The policeman looks satisfied.

POLICEMAN

He works downtown. At the mayor's office.

32 EXT. CHICAGO CITY HALL - DAY

We're downtown on LaSalle Street. Earl stands on the sidewalk, looking at a piece of paper with some information written on it, and then up at the huge building.

33 INT. CITY HALL LOBBY - DAY

Earl walks up to the information desk, where a YOUNG BLACK WOMAN's on duty.

EARL

Pardon me, could you tell me where I could find the mayor's office?

Earl, in his red Peterbilt cap, plaid shirt, belt with big buckle, blue jeans, and cowboy boots, gets the once-over from the woman.

WOMAN

Do you have an appointment?

EARL

No ma'am, I'm not here to see the mayor. I'm lookin' for a policeman that works there. His name is Raymond Lee Murdock.

WOMAN

(pointing)

Ray Murdock's right over there in that snack bar. He just went in there with three other old men to tell lies and drink coffee.

(smiles)

He's already been out here lyin' to me this mornin'.

*
*
*

EARL

Thank you.

34 INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Earl comes in and scans the room. He spots a table of FOUR BLACK MEN drinking coffee. One has on a police uniform.

Earl walks over to the table, and just stands there a moment as the men LAUGH and TALK. Now the policeman looks up. He's about 65 and has gray hair.

POLICEMAN

Can we do something for you, sir?

EARL

Are you Raymond Murdock?

POLICEMAN

Does he owe you money or know your wife?

A couple of the other men CHUCKLE.

EARL

No sir, he don't.

RAY (POLICEMAN)

Well then I'm Ray Murdock.

EARL

Can I talk to you a minute?

RAY

Go right ahead.

EARL

(glances at Ray's friends)

I mean somewhere else besides here.

RAY

Well, I'm on my break now. What's it got to do with?

EARL

It's a personal thing. A family thing.

RAY

(to his friends)

I'll be right back.

35 INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Earl and Ray come out of the cafeteria into the hallway, and now Earl turns and faces Ray.

EARL

I don't really know where to start tellin' you this.

RAY

Just start movin' your mouth and see what comes out.

EARL

I don't even know for sure it's all real or not, but--I just drove all night from Arkansas to see you about somethin'. You are the Raymond Murdock from Arkansas, ain't you?

RAY

That's right.

EARL

My name's Earl Pilcher.

Ray looks at Earl for a long moment.

RAY

(quietly)

I know who you are.

(long silence)

What do you want from me?

EARL

How'd you know who I was?

RAY

I just know. What do you want from me?

EARL

My mother wanted me to look you up.

RAY

Are you tryin' to be funny?

EARL

No, not at all. My mother just passed on a week or two back. She left me a letter about a crazy story about you and me and your mama and my daddy and some stuff. She asked me as her wish to come find you. I don't know why I did it. For her, I guess.

RAY

I know the story. I know all about it. I know all about your sorry-ass daddy. Why did you think I'd want to see you?

EARL

Like I said, I did it for my mama.

(pause)

If I was you, I wouldn't talk about my daddy that way.

RAY

If you were me, I think you would.

EARL

I'd like some questions answered.

Some PEOPLE walks past them into the cafeteria, and Ray looks at them uncomfortably.

RAY

Look here, I'm workin' now. I'll be off for lunch at one. If you want to talk for a minute then meet me at the Tavern. It's right around the corner to the right as you go out the door. At one o'clock.

(pause)

Then you can go on back to Arkansas.

EARL

That's what I plan on doin'.

36 EXT. STREET - DAY

Earl stands near a hot dog stand eating a hot dog and looking up at the buildings of downtown Chicago. He checks his watch.

37 INT. THE TAVERN - DAY

Ray and Earl sit in a corner booth. Earl, drinking a beer, watches Ray reading his mother's letter. Now Ray finishes and hands it back to Earl.

RAY

So what do you need to know? It looks like your mama did a pretty good job of tellin' to me.

EARL

I guess I just had to see for myself... I guess I needed to see for myself.

RAY

See what, your nigger brother?

Earl's face turns a little red, but he doesn't say anything. Now Ray takes a sip from his cup of coffee.

RAY

Your mama seems like she was a good woman.

EARL

She was.

Now Ray leans back, and sighs and stretches.

RAY

You know, I learned to live my life and pretty much put this in the back of my mind. I've lived pretty happy, I've got to say. Now you show up and bring it back to the front of my mind. Do you feel better? It's all true, Mr. Pilcher. Every word of it. Now you can go back to Arkansas knowin'. I hope I've helped you out.

A WAITRESS comes up with the check.

WAITRESS

That's gonna be it, Ray?

RAY

Yeah, Jackie, thanks.

Ray waits for the waitress to leave before continuing.

RAY

One thing I know out of all this is blood don't mean shit. I'm not your brother, Mr. Pilcher. What happened to our family was wrong. You were born out of wrong. You have to live with that. At least my conscience is clear.

Ray smiles a tight smile.

RAY

I used to hope your daddy would burn in hell. Now I don't even waste my time and energy givin' him a thought.

Now Ray stands up, and puts a five dollar bill down on the table.

RAY

Drink's on me.

(looks at Earl)

When I look at you I see him. I can't look at you no more.

There's silence for a moment, and then Ray laughs a little.

EARL

What's so damn funny?

RAY

How does it feel, Mr. Pilcher?

EARL

How does what feel?

RAY

To be colored.

Earl glares at Ray, then downs the rest of his beer, stands up, puts five bucks of his own on the table, and pushes past Ray and heads for the street.

38 INT./EXT. EARL'S TRUCK - DAY

Earl drives down a crowded Chicago street. He glances at the bar where he just left Raymond and shakes his head. Now he stops at a red light and looks around. It's not a good neighborhood, but since it's near the City Hall there's a wide variety of people in cars and on the sidewalks, business people, winos, regular Joes.

Now a car pulls up beside Earl BLASTING rap music. There are THREE YOUNG BLACK GUYS, gangbanger types, in it. Earl glances at them. The guy in the front passenger seat eyes Earl and his truck.

GUY ONE

Hey man, you look like your truck.

Earl puts his eyes straight ahead.

GUY ONE

How much those redneck trucks cost?

(Earl ignores him)

Hey, motherfucker, I'm talkin' to you!

The light changes and Earl takes off. The guys pull into the lane behind him. Earl has to slow down for a jaywalking BUM. Suddenly there's a BANG and his truck gives a lurch as it's rearended by the gangsters.

EARL

Goddamn it! You little bastards--

39 EXT. THE STREET - DAY

Earl gets out of his truck and walks around to the back to survey the damage. The black guys are all three already out of their car.

EARL

We're gonna get a cop on this one 'cause I'll bet you ain't got a damn bit of insurance. Where the hell were you lookin' anyway?

GUY ONE

The keys in it?

EARL

(looks puzzled)
Yeah, the key's in it. Why's that your bidness?

GUY TWO

Give me your wallet.

Now Earl's face reddens as it dawns on him what's happening.

EARL

You kiss my ass

The first guy runs and jumps in Earl's truck. Earl, cussing, gives chase, but is caught by the other two as his truck takes off with a SCREECH of tires.

One of the guys has a pistol out. He points it at Earl, SCREAMING "white motherfucker" type comments, as the other guy punches Earl in the face and knocks him down. Earl's head bangs on the pavement.

A crowd gathers on the sidewalks to spectate.

One punk gets Earl's wallet out of his pocket and then kicks him several times in the head and side, and then the two guys jump back in their car and take off, leaving Earl moaning in the street.

The people on the sidewalks and in passing cars look at Earl with that familiar horrified, fascinated, don't-get-involved look in their eyes.

Earl staggers to his feet. Blood is running from his nose and forehead. He sees his Peterbilt cap on the street, bends down, picks it up, puts it back on his head, and then just stands there in the traffic, swaying and dazed, like a wounded bull...

40 INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - DAY

Ray stands across the desk from a WOMAN who's sitting in front of a computer. The woman is handing Ray a wrinkled sheet of paper.

WOMAN

He was pretty out of it when they brought
(MORE)

WOMAN (CONT'D)

him in. He didn't have any ID on him, but we found this in his pocket.

Ray looks at the piece of paper: it has "Raymond Murdock, Mayor's Office" on it, plus an address and phone number.

WOMAN

That's you? Raymond Murdock?

RAY

(reluctantly)

Yes ma'am. Guess it is.

WOMAN

Are you his responsible party?

(Ray looks a little blank)

For his bills, I mean.

RAY

(taken aback)

Now, ma'am, listen, I just--

WOMAN

(already typing on her computer)

What kind of credit card do you have, sir?

41 INT. EMERGENCY ROOM HALLWAY - DAY

Ray is talking to a YOUNG DOCTOR.

RAY

So he's not too bad off then, really. He's okay to leave.

DOCTOR

There's no reason to admit him, but he's in no shape to travel any distance for a day or two. Certainly not to Arkansas.

RAY

Then maybe you'll keep him here then till he's ready to travel--I mean for observation or whatever. Isn't that what you do? Or till his family comes to get him.

DOCTOR

We can't keep him here. This place is full. Like I said, he'll be fine. He shouldn't go to sleep though for 10 or 12 hours, because of the concussion you know. By the way, he refused to let his family know where he is.

RAY

Is that right.

(checks his watch again)

Listen, I gotta get back to work, so--

A moaning shooting VICTIM is trundled past on a gurney. The doctor begins to follow.

DOCTOR

(over his shoulder)

We'll release him here in a little while.
Like I said, just keep an eye on him for
tonight and don't let him fall asleep.

RAY

(calls after him)

But doctor, I'm not--

Doctor and victim disappear through a doorway.

RAY

(his voice dropping)

Responsible for him...

42 INT./EXT. RAY'S CAR - AFTERNOON

It's a five-year-old Ford. Ray is driving through a tenement neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. The downtown Chicago skyline is visible in the distance.

Earl's with Ray. He's got his cap lifted up, and he's delicately touching the neatly sutured wound in the upper part of his forehead as he looks at it in the rearview mirror.

RAY

Don't be pickin' at it. You'll get it infected.

Earl lowers his cap, and groggily looks out the window at the decaying neighborhood.

EARL

This is where you live?

RAY

Yeah. Y'all got the same thing in your town,
just smaller. You know, nigger town.

*

*

*

*

*

Earl is silent for a moment, then...

EARL

Maybe you could lend me \$20, if it ain't any trouble.

RAY

What for?

EARL

A motel room. There's no sense in me puttin' you out.

RAY

Shit, you can't get a motel room in Chicago for \$20, 'less you're talkin' about one of those hooker places.

EARL

That'll do.

RAY

Somebody's gotta make sure you don't fall asleep.

EARL

I can take care of myself--

Ray looks at Earl's battered figure and laughs.

RAY

You look like it.

Earl flushes, but is silent. He looks out the window at some young black kids playing basketball on an outdoor court behind a chain-link fence.

43 EXT. AN APARTMENT BUILDING - ESTABLISHING - AFTERNOON

It's an eight-story brick structure, moderately better maintained than its neighbors. Ray's car arrives.

*

44 INT. RAY'S APARTMENT - THE LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Ray enters through the front door, holding Earl by the elbow. The living room is small but well kept. A WOMAN in her 80's, wearing dark glasses, sits in a rocking chair sleeping.

EARL

You don't have to hold on to me that way. I'm not crippled.

RAY

All right then, fall down and bust your head again.

The old lady wakes up.

OLD LADY

Ray, who's that with you?

RAY

Aunt T., I brought somebody from work home. He's fell and hurt his head. He's gonna stay here for a little while.

AUNT T. (OLD LADY)

What's your name, son?

EARL

Earl. I won't be stayin' here but just for a little bit and then I'm leavin'. I won't put you out.

AUNT T.

You ain't puttin' me out none. Ray, put him in there in my bed. I'm settin' out here anyway.

RAY

He has to stay awake for a while. We'll just stay out here in the front room. You go about your business.

Ray points to a chair and Earl sits. Ray goes over to the TV and gets on his hands and knees and starts going through a stack of video tapes. Aunt T. cocks her head in Ray's direction.

AUNT T.

Raymond, you not gettin' in those old loud pictures again to worry me.

RAY

Well I figure if I play something on TV he'll stay up better.

AUNT T.

Everybody stay up better with all them old shootin' and cussin' pictures you look at. If you gonna play that mess I'm goin' to my bedroom and put my earphones on.

The old woman gets up and begins to move slowly toward her bedroom. Earl, watching her, realizes she's blind. Aunt T. mumbles to herself as she walks.

AUNT T.

I'd rather listen to that old crazy talk show, Republicans, than that old nasty-talkin', blowin'-up-thangs kind of show. Cook me somethin' 'nother d'eat. Listen to that St. Louis station on the radio.

Ray smiles as she leaves.

RAY

She's a wildcat, Aunt T. She'll be back in a minute wantin' to know if you want somethin' to eat. Take my advice and tell her you ain't hungry. Ever since she went blind there ain't no tellin' what she might put in somethin' to eat. She'll pepper some greens like it's salt till your eyeballs pop out. One day she brushed her teeth with Preparation H.

(pause)

'Course I guess bein' 88 she's lucky to have her own teeth to brush.

Aunt T. pokes her head back out of the bedroom.

AUNT T.

You boys want me to fix you somethin' d'eat?

EARL

No ma'am, thank you, I just ate not too long back. I appreciate it though.

RAY

(as he continues to look through his tapes)

Don't worry about us, Aunt T. You go on and listen to your radio.

CUT TO:

45 THE SAME SCENE - EARLY EVENING

Ray and Earl are watching whatever "ROCKY" has Mr. T. in it. Earl looks miserable.

RAY

I didn't think about it but you might not want to look at a boxin' picture since you just got the hell beat out of you.

EARL

It don't make me any difference. This knot feels the same one way or another.

RAY
You want a aspirin?

EARL
I got ulcers. Aspirin gives me the belly
ache.

CUT TO:

46 THE SAME SCENE - NIGHT

Ray and Earl are watching "RED DAWN." Russian paratroopers float
down on Colorado.

EARL
Listen, I'm feelin' all right. I'm gonna
call my wife and get some money wired and
get a plane ticket.

RAY
Doctor said you wasn't fit for travelin'
for a day or two.

EARL
I'll go first thing in the mornin'.

RAY
Suit yourself. This movie ain't worth a
shit to me either, I'm just tryin' to keep
you awake. We can't sit here and talk.
We start talkin', you know what we'll
start talkin' about and I don't think
either one of us--well, you know what that
would be like.

EARL
(irritably)
I'll leave in the mornin' I said. You
don't have to worry about it.

RAY
(irritably)
I ain't worried about it.

CUT TO:

47 THE SAME SCENE - NIGHT

Earl and Ray are drinking beer and eating potato chips and boiled
eggs. They are in the middle of a heated discussion.

EARL
You can talk to me till you're blue in the
face about ever'body bein' created equal
(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

and I'll still say, bullshit, people are different. Goddamn it, we don't have little bastards around town knockin' people in the head and stealin' their trucks. Created equal maybe, but different.

RAY

There ain't no white people in jail then. There ain't no white criminals.

EARL

I didn't say that.

RAY

You'd be full of shit if you did. Those "little bastards" that jacked you up, you think I like them any better than you do? This ain't Po'ville, Arkansas, this is Chicago, man. These motherfuckers would steal my shit and beat me quick as they would you. Maybe quicker. I'm a cop. I live in this stuff. I see it every day. You think I like that shit? I don't give a shit if somebody's green or white or from Venus, you start hittin' on people and stealin' and shootin' at folks, I say you go to jail.

(pause)

Damn, man, this world's gone crazy, don't look at me like I'm helpin' it along. See, you don't live in the world, you wouldn't know. You got a taste of it today though.

EARL

You don't know shit about me. I've seen plenty to know I don't want any part of this kind of mess up here. I got my own problems.

RAY

You sure do.

They sit in silence for a moment, then Ray begins to laugh.

EARL

What the hell you laughin' for?

RAY

This ain't funny to you?

EARL

What?

RAY

All of this shit. Think about it. Us sittin' here arguing Ain't that some shit.

*
*

Ray looks at his watch, and then gets up.

RAY

I'm goin' to bed. I've done my time.

(nods toward the couch)

There's you a pillow and a blanket. I'll see you in the mornin' unless you slip off into a coma.

Ray heads off into his bedroom, leaving Earl sitting in the chair staring after him, angry, confused, and just a little amused...

CUT TO:

48 THE SAME SCENE - NIGHT

Earl is snoring on the couch. The lights are off, but his face is lit softly by the glow of streetlights through the window.

Now the front door opens, and a good-looking young black man comes in. He's wearing a uniform of some sort, and is carrying a lunch bucket. He looks exhausted. This is Ray's son, VIRGIL MURDOCK.

Without turning on the light, Virgil begins to walk softly toward the kitchen. Now he hears the snoring on the couch and turns.

VIRGIL

(softly)

Daddy? Hey Daddy, you better go get in the bed, what are you doin' out here?

Virgil goes closer and sees it is not Daddy. Earl doesn't wake up. With a frown, Virgil walks into Ray's bedroom.

49 INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ray's snoring too. Virgil shakes him awake.

RAY

(startled)

What?!.. What you doin'?

VIRGIL

Daddy, who's that white man on the couch?

RAY

Virgil, what you doin' wakin' me up?

VIRGIL

I said who in the hell is that white man on the couch.

RAY

(groggily)

He's s'posed to be there. He came home with me. I'll tell you tomorrow. He's leavin' tomorrow. Now go on and let me go to sleep.

VIRGIL

Where am I supposed to sleep? That's my couch.

RAY

Sleep in here with me.

VIRGIL

I can't sleep with all that snorin' you do.

Ray rolls back over, fussily rearranging the covers.

RAY

(groggy and grumpy)

Let me sleep, boy. He'll be gone tomorrow.

Virgil stares down at his father, and then gazes, mystified, toward the living room and the faint SOUND of Earl's snoring...

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

50 INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Virgil is sleeping in the bathtub. He's wearing a T-shirt and underwear, has his head propped up on a pillow, and has a blanket pulled over his cramped stuck-up-in-the-air knees. The shower curtains are drawn.

Now, on the other side of the curtain, we hear somebody PEEING loudly and copiously into the toilet. The sound awakens Virgil. He pushes back the curtains a little and peers out.

VIRGIL'S POV: EARL, standing at the toilet with his back to Virgil. Now Virgil watches Earl shake out the last few drops, zip up, flush, and exit the bathroom.

51 INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Virgil comes out of the bathroom in his underwear. Earl, his back to Virgil, is standing at the couch, carefully folding up his blanket. Virgil, staring at Earl, crosses the living room and enters Ray's bedroom.

52 INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ray's putting on his cop uniform as Virgil comes in.

VIRGIL

(in a soft voice, so Earl
won't hear)

All right now, who is that in there?

RAY

He's an old friend of mine.

VIRGIL

Shit, you ain't got any friends like that.

RAY

What do you know? You don't know
everything about me.

VIRGIL

So where do you know him from?

Ray thinks about it for a moment.

RAY

Korea. We were in the Marines together.

VIRGIL

(sarcastically)

Don't tell me, he saved your life.

Ray thinks a moment again.

RAY

No. Matter of fact, I saved his.

Virgil looks at his father skeptically.

VIRGIL

So what's he doin' here?

RAY

Well, he's from down south, and he was up
here visitin', and he got carjacked
yesterday and hit in the head.

VIRGIL

Carjacked?

RAY

Yeah, some guys stole his truck. You know how those good ol' boys are about their trucks. He's real tore up about it.

Now Virgil rolls his head around and rubs his neck.

VIRGIL

Well my neck's real tore up from sleepin' in that damn bathtub. He better be out of here today.

RAY

Virgil, this is my house, and I'll have people stayin' here if I want to. You stay here.

VIRGIL

Yeah, but I'm family.

Ray, sitting on the side of the bed tying his shoes, looks at Virgil but doesn't respond. Now he gets up and heads out the door.

RAY

Better beat Aunt T. to the kitchen before she gets in there and makes some of her ol' glue-your-jaws-together oatmeal...

53 INT. DINING AREA - MORNING

Ray, Earl, Virgil, and Aunt T. sit around the table, eating a breakfast of scrambled eggs, bacon, and buttered toast. Aunt T., behind her dark glasses, nibbles at a small portion of eggs and a piece of toast.

RAY

Aunt T., you're not eatin' enough. Have some bacon.

AUNT T.

Raymond, you know I don't eat your old burn-up bacon.

RAY

It's just crispy.

Virgil eyes his extremely well-cooked bacon dubiously.

VIRGIL

Daddy, I think this is a step past crispy.

EARL
I'm kinda like your daddy. Never could
eat limp bacon.

RAY
(to Earl)
So how you feelin' this mornin'?

EARL
I feel all right.

RAY
Up to travellin'?

EARL
I'm up to it. I'm gonna call my wife and
have her wire me up some money so I can
buy a plane ticket.

AUNT T.
You won't get me up in a airplane. No
sir.

Earl and Virgil are studying each other across the table. Earl
looks at the uniform Virgil's wearing.

EARL
What are you, a security guard or
somethin'?

VIRGIL
(mildly offended)
I'm a bus driver.

EARL
School bus?

VIRGIL
For the city.

RAY
So what you doin' dressed up to go to
work? Thought you were workin' nights.

VIRGIL
They flip flop me around till I don't know
night from day.

RAY
No respect, huh?

VIRGIL
No, it's not that, I -

RAY
(winks at Earl)
Virgil's big on that. Respect.

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*

VIRGIL

You oughta be glad somebody in the family is.

RAY

Maybe you can give me some respect lessons after breakfast.

AUNT T.

Now y'all don't start that fussin' again. Let me eat my watery eggs and my burn-up toast in peace.

Virgil is scrutinizing Earl again.

VIRGIL

So Daddy says y'all were in the Marines together.

Earl quits chewing his eggs, and looks warily at Ray. Ray, looking uncomfortable, smiles weakly.

VIRGIL

He saved your life in Korea.

Earl starts to chew again, slowly.

EARL

Yeah, I was in Korea. But I wasn't in the Marines. I was in the Navy.

RAY

(quickly)

Yeah, Virgil, you just misunderstood me. I said I met him when I was in the Marines. Yeah, but Earl there, he was a swabbie.

VIRGIL

So how'd you save his life?

Ray looks uneasily at Earl, who seems to be enjoying his predicament.

RAY

Well, it's what they call a long story.

EARL

I'd kind of like to hear it again myself.

RAY

(clears his throat)

Well--

Ray is saved by the bell as the phone RINGS.

Virgil gets up and goes to a nearby phone and picks it up.

VIRGIL

Hello. Yeah, Ann, how you doin'? Uh huh.
Well I thought I'd take 'em to Grant Park.
Have a picnic or somethin'. Sure, we can
meet there. Okay. Bye.

Virgil hangs up and reseats himself.

RAY

(eager to change the
subject)

Ann bringin' the girls over tomorrow?

VIRGIL

Yeah.

AUNT T.

(to Earl)

Virgil has got the most brootiful
children--

EARL

(to Virgil)

Daughters, huh?

Virgil nods, as Earl sighs and shakes his head.

EARL

Yeah, I got a daughter.

RAY

(to Earl)

It's a big responsibility, isn't it?
Havin' kids.

VIRGIL

(soft, but threatening)

Don't start that shit. I mean it.

RAY

What shit? What are you talkin' about?

VIRGIL

(abruptly gets up)

I'm goin' to work.

Virgil strides away from the table and crosses the living room
and goes out the front door, shutting it SHARPLY behind him. Ray
looks at Earl and raises his hands helplessly.

RAY

What you gonna do? Like talkin' to the wall.

Earl looks sympathetic, as Aunt T. gets up from the table and begins carrying her barely touched plate of food back to the kitchen.

AUNT T.

I know what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna get in that kitchen and cook me up some oatmeal.

(grumbling as she goes)

Feed this stuff to the cat, if I had me a cat.

54 EXT. RAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - MORNING

Ray and Earl are walking out to the street where Ray's car is parked.

EARL

Think the police'll find my truck?

RAY

They may find it. May not be much left of it.

EARL

(shakes his head sadly)

Shoot.

They reach Ray's five-year-old Ford. Now they stop and look at each other, a little awkward. This is good-bye.

RAY

Well--have a good trip.

EARL

Thanks.

(pause)

And thanks for savin' my life in Korea.

Ray laughs, looking a little embarrassed.

RAY

Virgil just wouldn't of understood about you.

EARL

I understand that.

RAY

Were you really in Korea?

EARL

(nods)

I was on the Phillipine Sea. That's a
aircraft carrier.

RAY

Yeah, I 'member the Phillipine Sea. When
were you there?

EARL

'51... '52...

RAY

That's when I was there.
(thinks about it)
Ain't that some shit.

Now Ray looks at Earl, and holds out his hand.

RAY

Well--good luck.

EARL

(as they shake hands)
Same to you. And thanks for lookin' after
me last night.

RAY

No problem.

Ray walks around to the driver's side of his car, and opens the
door.

RAY

Tip your hat to Dixie for me.

EARL

I'll do that.

Now Ray gets in his car, starts up the engine, and drives down
the street. Earl stands on the sidewalk, watching, till the car
turns a corner and is gone.

55 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - MORNING

Earl comes back in the entrance and walks up to the elevator and
pushes the up button. After a few moments, the elevator opens,
to reveal Aunt T., wearing a big sun bonnet, and holding a cane
in one hand and a big purse in the other.

Unaware of Earl, Aunt T. comes out of the elevator, tapping her
cane in fron of her. A little awkwardly, Earl announces his
presence--

EARL
Hello. It's Earl.

Aunt T. turns her sunglassed face in Earl's direction, and smiles.

AUNT T.
Earl. I was lookin' for you. I want you to go to the store with me.

EARL
What for?

AUNT T.
'Cause I'm blind as a bat, that's what for! I need somebody to help me.

Aunt T. heads off rather quickly in the direction of the front entrance. Earl has no choice except to hurry ahead of her and open the door.

56 INT. GROCERY STORE - MORNING

It's a small corner store, kind of dingy, with old fashioned shelves and freezers. A heavy-set black MAN in his 50's sits behind the counter.

Aunt T. and Earl enter.

MAN
How you doin' today, T.?

AUNT T.
I guess I'm gettin' along all right. How 'bout yourself, Tommy?

TOMMY (MAN)
Ain't no use complainin', don't do no good.

Tommy eyes Earl a little.

AUNT T.
(to Earl)
Son, you get one of them plastic baskets by the counter there and let's get to gettin'.

Earl picks up a basket. Aunt T. takes up a position near the counter and, obviously remembering from when she still had her sight, starts pointing with her cane to the exact area of the store she wants something from.

AUNT T.

Get a sack of corn meal, and get the yellow meal, now, and right by it get Gold Medal flour, all purpose not self-risin'. Two bags of Cheetos, the red bags not the puffed up kind. Tommy, you can slice me a pound of baloney and a half a pound of liver loaf. Son, you get two loaves of white bread and a jar of Miracle Whip and two sticks of butter, make sure it's salted, I don't know why anybody wants to eat unsalted butter. Might as well eat Vaseline, ain't got no flavor to it.

Earl is getting quite a workout running around throwing things in the basket, as Tommy takes the meat out of a display case and slices it.

AUNT T.

That's about all I can think of. You want anything, son?

EARL

No ma'am, I can't think of anything. I'm leavin' anyway.

AUNT T.

Well bring it on up and put it on the counter there. Tommy, you can go 'head on and ring this up.

Tommy brings the wrapped meat to the counter and Earl puts the basket in front of him. Tommy starts ringing the stuff up.

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AUNT T.

Tommy, I want you to meet my nephew Earl. He's visitin' from Arkansas. He's Ray's brother.

*

It's not clear who is more shocked, Earl or Tommy. Tommy slowly puts his hand out and shakes with Earl.

TOMMY

Good to meet you, Earl.

(pause)

You're Ray's brother?

EARL

Well I--

(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

(pause)

It's good to meet you too.

57 EXT. THE STREET - MORNING

Earl, carrying a sack of groceries, is walking with Aunt T. past the chainlink fence of an elementary school playground.

EARL

Ma'am, how in the world did you come up with somethin' like that? That's the craziest thing I ever heard. You must of been jokin' around with your friend or somethin'.

AUNT T.

You might as well quit bullshittin' me, Earl Pilcher. I know all about your half black ass.

EARL

Ma'am, I'm not tryin' to be funny, but can't you see that--

AUNT T.

It don't take eyes to see. Ray ain't got no old white war buddy from Korea that I heard about before. And I heard y'all talkin' in there last night. I ain't deaf. Talkin' about my cookin' and everything else and hushin' one another up. And you might as well stop callin' me ma'am and start callin' me Aunt T., 'cause I'm your Aunt T.

Earl stops and grabs on to the chainlink fence as though to hold himself up. He stares through the fence at children on the playground, as Aunt T. talks--

AUNT T.

I knew both of your mama's, son. And they were both good women. Your mama Carrie had to be to live with that man and put up with his stuff all them years. And my sister was the sunrise and the sunset to me. You can't help how you was born and you can't help how you was raised, but it's the way it is. I loved my sister and you're her boy and so I love you too, and there ain't a thing in the world you can do about it.

EARL

I'd better get back and call my wife and
(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)
get ready to get out of here. I
appreciate y'all's hospitality.

AUNT T.
I could tell you stories about your mama
that would--

(pause)
She was an angel, son. I just wish I
could see you so I could see her in you.
And I know I could.

EARL
(quietly)
This has me all messed up. I don't know
what to think of it. You don't know what
it's like to--

Earl's voice trails off.

AUNT T.
You're right about that. I don't know
what it's like for you. Nobody knows what
it's like for nobody else. That's always
the problem.

(pause)
It might do you some good to stay around
here for a while longer. I'd sure like
for you too. I'd like to know Willa Mae's
boy.

EARL
Your folks don't won't me around, I know
that much.

AUNT T.
I don't care what Ray says, I know he
wants to know you. It don't matter what
he tells you. I know better. Yeah, I
could tell you about your family all
right. You and Ray are just alike. Both
of you big-talkin' little boys.

(pause)
You ain't foolin' me, I know why you came
up here. I know it prob'ly better than
you do. You need to know your history,
son. Now let's get on back before that
butter melts and I get mad. You don't
want to see me get mad.

58 INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Earl is on the phone.

EARL

Yeah, I want to make a collect call. 501-425-2897. Earl.

(after a moment)

Ruby, how are you? I'm fine. I'm in Chicago. Well, that's just where I wound up. Look, I want you to wire me some money up here. Five or six hundred dollars. I lost my wallet, I left it somewhere.

(smiles a little)

No, Ruby--I don't have a woman up here...

59 INT. CITY HALL - HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Ray stands with a MOTHER and her KID, pointing down the hallway.

RAY

Bathroom's just down this hallway and to the right.

As the people depart, Ray turns and is about to go into the mayor's office--but then he sees Earl, walking down the hallway toward him. Ray looks surprised, Earl uncomfortable.

EARL

Bet you never figured to lay eyes on me again.

RAY

No, I didn't. You get robbed again?

EARL

(laughs a little)

Naw, nothin' like that. I went to Western Union to pick up the money from my wife, and then, I was just kinda in the neighborhood, so...

RAY

What time does your plane leave?

EARL

Well, see, that's the deal. I got to thinkin' about my truck...

RAY

Yeah...what about it?

EARL

Well, I just got that truck paid off and all, and...also, I had a lot of personal stuff in there--a damn good rod and reel, few things like that.

RAY

Uh huh.

EARL

So I thought I might just stick around a day or two and see what the police turn up. I mean, what if they had some suspects they wanted me to come in and identify? If I was back in Arkansas, I'd just have to come right back up here.

RAY

Yeah...well...guess that's possible.

EARL

So you don't think it's a bad idea for me to stick around another day or two.

Ray just looks at Earl.

EARL

Now I don't intend to put y'all out anymore. Now I got some money I'll find me a motel. Maybe you know of a good one.

Ray continues to just look at Earl...

CUT TO:

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60 EXT./INT. A CITY BUS - AFTERNOON

Virgil maneuvers the bus through heavy rush hour traffic. His bus is packed to the gills with riders, a BABY sits on his MOTHER's lap and SQUAWLS, some energetic TEENAGERS in the back of the bus are raising a racket.

Virgil rubs the crick in his neck and rolls his head. Now he checks his watch, and sighs...

61 INT. RAY'S APARTMENT - THE LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The front door opens, and Virgil comes in. He's unpleasantly surprised to see Earl sitting on the couch, with Ray in his easy chair talking to him.

RAY

Well, I imagine if they're gonna find it they'll find it in a few days or not at all.

(looks up at his son)

Hey, Virgil.

VIRGIL

(to Earl, very cool)

I though you were leavin' this mornin'.

EARL

I thought I was too.

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RAY

Virgil, where's all them motels over there on that strip of street?

VIRGIL

(to Earl)

You goin' to stay at a motel?

EARL

Yeah.

Virgil is more willing to be helpful now that he sees Earl is leaving.

VIRGIL

Stoney Island Boulevard. There's a whole bunch of 'em, they're cheap too.

RAY

(to Earl)

It's not the best neighborhood...

VIRGIL

It's fine. He'll be fine.

Aunt T. appears in the door of the kitchen.

AUNT T.

Ray, get in here, I need to talk to you.
You too, Virgil.

VIRGIL

(starts toward the
bathroom)

I'm takin' a shower. I want to get out of these clothes.

AUNT T.

I said get in here.

62 INT. KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Ray and Virgil enter. Aunt T. has a big pot of an unidentifiable something simmering on the stove, which she's stirring with a huge wooden spoon. Ray looks at it suspiciously.

RAY

What is that?

AUNT T.

(ignoring the question)

Raymond Murdock, you're not lettin' that boy go to any of them ol' hooker motels. He stayin' right here like he been doin'.

RAY

Where do you want him to sleep, on the ceilin'? There's not enough room. The grandkids are comin' over tomorrow and they'll be here all weekend.

VIRGIL

It don't matter who's comin', he can't stay here. I'm tired of it.

AUNT T.

You shut your mouth about it. It ain't none of your business.

VIRGIL

I guess it is--

RAY

Aunt T., he's a grown man, he can take care of himself. It ain't my responsibility.

63 INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The conversation is getting louder now. We see that Earl is up off the couch, and listening.

64 INT. KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

AUNT T.

It's your responsibility to treat your own people good.

VIRGIL

Our own people? He's not my own people.

RAY

Aunt T.--

AUNT T.

That's your brother in there, Ray, and you're gonna treat him like it.

Ray looks startled.

RAY

What are you talkin' about?

AUNT T.

Don't bullshit me, Ray. I know all about Earl Pilcher sittin' in there on that couch. That's my sister's boy in there and your brother and

(to Virgil)

your uncle. And you're not puttin' him in the street with them whoremongers and headknockers.

RAY

(getting angry)

How did you know, did that son of a bitch tell you?

VIRGIL

Wait a minute, back up a minute, what in the hell's goin' on here? Daddy ain't got a brother.

(points toward the living room)

And he's white, Aunt T.! What's wrong with you?

RAY

(to Aunt T.)

Did he tell you?

AUNT T.

He ain't told me nothin'. I'm not an old fool.

VIRGIL

Tell what? Goddamn it, somebody tell me what's happenin' here!

Aunt T. slaps Virgil.

AUNT T.

Don't you ever take the Lord's name in vain in the house! Yeah, that's your own flesh and blood out there, both of you, now don't shame this family and my sweet sister's soul puttin' her little boy out on the street. Ray, I think you need to get a backbone and sit your son down and tell him the truth.

(to Virgil)

That's your daddy's half brother in there. If he looks white it's 'cause his daddy's white. I don't know how he looks, I can't see him the way you can and don't need to. I don't have the blessin' of bein' able to separate people by lookin' at 'em anymore.

This is all too much for Virgil.

VIRGIL

Daddy, straighten this mess out. I'm gonna go take a shower. When I come out, I want that man gone and I want you to tell me what this is all about.

Virgil starts out the door, Ray follows.

RAY

You don't tell me, boy! You don't tell me what I'm gonna do. It's the truth, what she's sayin'. Like it or not, I sure don't. But that's the truth and--

VIRGIL

I don't want to hear it! Y'all both crackin' up or somethin'.

Virgil goes into the bathroom and SLAMS the door.

65 INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

After following Virgil, Ray is now in the living room. He turns to face Earl, but there is no one there. Ray stares for a moment at the empty couch.

66 EXT./INT. RAY'S CAR, MOVING DOWN A STREET - SUNSET

Ray is driving slowly, keeping an eye on the sidewalks. Now he spots Earl, walking down the sidewalk rapidly.

Ray pulls the car alongside Earl, leans over and cranks down the passenger window. Earl keeps walking and doesn't look up, as Ray's car rolls along beside him.

RAY

I already drove over by Stoney Island and didn't see you. I knew you didn't have time to get far, so I figured you were goin' the wrong way.

Earl doesn't answer, keeps walking.

RAY

You hear me? You're goin' the wrong way! You're walkin' right into the bad part. You keep goin' and you'll end up knocked in the head again. Probably worse. You listenin'? You got a lot of cash on you, why don't you come get in the car?

No answer from Earl.

RAY

You're an old fool, you know that? Get in. Aunt T. wants you to come home and stay with us. Those motels over there are dangerous. It's damn sure dangerous the way you're headin'. Come on and get in now.

Earl keeps walking. Ray pulls ahead a few yards and parks the car.

67 EXT. THE STREET - SUNSET

Ray gets out of the car and walks to the sidewalk and blocks Earl's path. When Earl reaches him he tries to go around him, but Ray puts his hands on his shoulders. Earl stops.

RAY

Listen, my son is talkin' out his ass. That's my house and I say who stays and who goes.

EARL

That's between you and him. I ain't deaf. I heard how much I'm welcome. I knew this was an ignorant-ass notion to start with.

*
*

RAY

We want you to stay. We need to talk, you and me.

Earl attempts to go around Ray, but Ray blocks his way again.

EARL

Let me by. I don't really give a shit to talk to you. I might as well be on Mars as to be up here with y'all people.

*
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*

RAY

(bristling)

What do you mean "y'all people"?

EARL

Aw, save your poor ol' black me shit for somebody else. That's not what I meant. Now get out of my way before I have to run over you.

RAY

Don't threaten me you old hard-headed bastard.

EARL

You kiss my ass!!

Earl tries to push past and Ray shoves him back. Earl shoves Ray. Ray shoves Earl.

RAY

I want you to get in the car, don't make me change my mind!!

EARL

I don't give a shit, I done told you!

Earl shoves, and knocks Ray down. Earl starts off rapidly down the street. Ray gets up and chases him down and tackles him. They fall on the lawn in front of an apartment building. They wrestle and roll around on the grass. It looks more like two little boys fighting than it does grown men. As they fight in the golden light of the setting sun, they yell at each other.

RAY

I'm tryin' to be nice to you but you're not makin' it easy.

EARL

I don't aim to make it easy. I told you, I don't give a shit! Your boy don't want me around. He can kiss my ass!

RAY

He can kiss mine too! I make the rules in my house.

EARL

You don't enforce 'em too good.

RAY

Fuck you!

EARL

Fuck you!

Someone in the apartment building opens a window. A middle-aged black WOMAN sticks her head out.

WOMAN

(calls out)

Want me to call the police?

RAY

No ma'am, we're just talkin'! Thank you!

They get tired and stop fighting. They sit up on the grass, breathing heavily. As he begins to catch his breath, Earl pulls a blade of grass out of the lawn, sticks it in his mouth, and chews on it. As Earl steams and chews, Ray starts to laugh.

RAY

You don't ever think anything's funny, do you?

EARL

No, not anymore. I don't have a lot to laugh about.

RAY

Po' pitiful black you.

EARL

(looks at Ray)

You got a smart mouth, you know it? I oughta knock you on your butt again.

RAY

You didn't do it the first time.

Earl throws down his blade of grass, and gets to his feet.

EARL

To hell with you.

Ray gets up too, exasperated, and starts walking back toward his car.

RAY

Go on then if you're so damn rough!
I was tryin' to help you. I don't know why.

*
*

EARL

'Cause you're scared of your blind aunt I guess.

RAY

(opening the car door)

Go on then. Be a big man.

EARL

(starts away)

I will! I'm not afraid of you or any other nigger on the street.

Earl stops, realizing he's really said the wrong thing. Ray stands frozen by the door of his car. They stare at each other for a moment.

EARL

I didn't mean it like that.

RAY

There ain't but one way to mean it.

Ray gets into his car and slams the door. Now Earl watches as he does a U-turn.

RAY

(out the window as he
passes by Earl)

Don't call me when you need help! I'm
through helpin' you!

Earl stands watching Ray's car disappear down the street. Then he starts walking quickly in the same direction he had been walking in.

EARL

(muttering to himself)

Fine with me. I don't need his damn help.
Think's he's somebody. Thinks he's a big
man. Well, he can kiss my ass.

68 INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ray's lying fully clothed on top of his made bed, looking through a newspaper in a half-assed way. After a moment, he puts the newspaper down. He glances at the clock on the bedside table. It's nearly 8:30.

Now Ray gets up and goes over to the window. He pulls the curtains back, and looks out into the city...

69 EXT. THE PROJECTS - NIGHT

Earl is walking down the sidewalk. The neighborhood he's in now makes where he was look like Palm Beach. He sees a FEW GUYS hanging out on the corner ahead of him. He pauses a moment, then walks toward them purposefully. He walks right up to them, and then begins shaking hands with each one of them. *

EARL

How y'all doin' this evenin'?

The guys stop talking with each other, and stare at Earl.

EARL

You know where a man could get a drink
and somethin' to eat around here? *

The guys look at each other, and then back at Earl...

70 INT. RAY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ray's sitting on the couch, staring at the TV. Aunt T. is sitting in her rocking chair. Her chair is lined up so it's pointing exactly at Ray.

The phone RINGS, and Ray reaches over quickly and answers it.

RAY

Hello.

(disappointed)

No, there's no Gene here. All right.

That's okay.

Ray hangs the phone back up. Now he glances uneasily over at his aunt. Her sunglassed face is inscrutable. It's like she's looking right at him.

RAY

Aunt T., quit starin' at me.

AUNT T.

Now how I'm gonna stare at you?

(pause)

Ray, why don't you leave your pride on that couch and go find him.

Ray pretends to be puzzled.

RAY

I'm not studyin' that fool.

Now he looks resolutely back at the TV...

71 INT. A BAR - NIGHT

Earl sits at the bar with a plate of french fries and a hamburger and two bottles of beer. It's a rundown seedy place full of mostly YOUNGER PEOPLE, all black. Earl motions for the BARTENDER.

EARL

I'll get two more of those beers.

The bartender gives him a look, then gets two bottles of Budweiser and puts them down in front of him. Earl takes a thick roll of cash out of his pocket and puts down some money. We can tell that he's a little lit up.

BARTENDER

You want me to keep the change again?

EARL

Absolutely.

BARTENDER

You know you've already gave me 30 somethin' dollars worth of tips.

EARL

I know that. I'm in a good mood. I'm celebratin' you see.

BARTENDER

Your birthday?

EARL

Just celebratin' the fact that I'm free,
white and 21.

The bartender looks around uneasily.

BARTENDER

I wouldn't say that too loud. You might
want to quit orderin' them beers two at a
time. You're gettin' a little too happy.

EARL

A man can't be too happy.

(pause)

Let me ask you somethin'. Are you scared
of anything?

BARTENDER

Some things. I'm scared of people that
tip me five dollars a beer.

EARL

(chuckles)

That's a good one. You're a pretty good
old boy, Chester. Well, me, I'm not
scared of a fuckin' thing. I'll stand up
on this bar and tell a incorrect political
joke at the top of my lungs if I want to.

CHESTER (BARTENDER)

I sure hope you don't want to.

EARL

Well, I don't. Not right now.

(leans over the bar toward
Chester)

Chester, you know why I can get by with
callin' somebody a nigger and callin'
somebody else a cracker?

CHESTER

Listen, you gotta get somebody to come get
you or somethin'--

EARL

Because I've got a little of all of it,
that's why. How much you think it would
set me back to buy ever'body in here a
drink.

CHESTER

You go on now. You got no business in this neighborhood to start with.

EARL

Hell, this has been my neighborhood ever since I got to Chicago.

CHESTER

You better find another neighborhood and keep that money in your pocket.

EARL

Now Chester, I like you so far, don't make me mad. A mad Octoroon or whatever I am will kill you as soon as look at you.

CHESTER

(finally gives up)

Okay, you got it.

(loudly to the bar)

Hey everybody listen up! This man wants to buy everybody a drink. He's celebratin'!

Everybody looks curiously at Earl.

EARL

There you go, Chester! Figure yourself a 15 per cent commission or tip in on that.

72 EXT. RAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Ray comes out, walking quickly down the sidewalk to the street, shaking his head. Now he reaches his car and unlocks it.

RAY

(muttering to himself)

Damn old bastard...messin' up my Friday night...

73 INT. A NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

We OPEN on a huge glittering multi-faceted slowly revolving silver ball.

The ball's suspended above a dance floor. Mostly OLDER COUPLES are dancing there to a FIVE-PIECE BAND playing slow bluesy MUSIC. The couples are all extremely well-dressed. Other PEOPLE sit at plush red-leather booths around the dance floor.

Earl sits at the bar, the only white person in the club. He's switched from beer to whiskey. The BARTENDER is a large, surly-looking young man who eyes Earl as he tends to other customers.

Earl watches as a WAITRESS brings a cake with candles on it over to a near-by booth where THREE COUPLES sit. The booth breaks into a round of "HAPPY BIRTHDAY." One of the women blows out the candles.

Earl, watching all this, smiles crookedly, then dismounts his stool and walks with only a slight bit of unsteadiness over to the booth.

EARL

What you got here, a birthday? Are you the birthday girl? How old are you?

The occupants of the booth stare at Earl. The Birthday Girl gives an embarrassed laugh, and looks at her husband.

ONE OF THE WOMEN

She's 50 today.

EARL

Well I'm sure glad to find some people more my age. I was startin' to think nobody but kids went to bars around here. Are you her husband?

HUSBAND

Yeah I am.

EARL

You must be proud. You care if I take her for a spin around the dance floor? You know, kind of a birthday dance.

The man looks at Earl in a good-natured, half-apologetic way.

HUSBAND

Look, sir, we're just tryin' to--

BIRTHDAY GIRL

James, it's okay. I'll dance with him.

HUSBAND

You sure?

BIRTHDAY GIRL

(smiles at Earl)

Yeah.

Now her husband gets up to let his wife out, and she and Earl go out on the dance floor. Earl starts dancing with her in a style that is at a certain variance with the music.

74 EXT./INT. RAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Ray's cruising slowly down the street of a bad neighborhood, looking this way and that, checking out the sidewalks. Now he

gives an exasperated sigh, and pulls over in front of a liquor store.

75 EXT. LIQUOR STORE - NIGHT

Ray gets out of his car and goes over to a pay phone and puts a quarter in the slot and dials. After a moment--

RAY

Yeah, this is Ray Murdock, is Palmieri on duty tonight? Thank you.

(waits a few moments)

Frank, it's Ray Murdock, how you doin'? Listen, I wonder if you could do me a favor, I'm lookin' for somebody. If you could just kinda put the word out? Yeah, Earl Pilcher, white male about 60 years old, last seen on foot in the vicinity of 39th and Grand, wearin' blue jeans and a plaid shirt and a baseball cap. Yeah. Walks kinda bow-legged.

*
*
*

76 INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Earl's pulled up a stool from the bar and is sitting at the booth with the three couples. He's got a piece of birthday cake in one hand, and a scotch on the rocks in the other. He's gotten significantly drunker. The couples are listening politely enough to Earl as he talks, but are exchanging glances with one another that Earl doesn't catch.

EARL

All I'm sayin' is it's kind of a twist on things. See they got all these quotas, gotta hire blacks and women. So it's discriminatin' if I want a job as a white man and can't get it even if I'm more qualified, supposin' I was, that is.

(emphasizes by pointing his finger skyward)

But! With me it's even worse 'cause I'm black as a coal miner's drawers and still can't get on the quota wagon 'cause I look like a white man.

(pause)

Of course I own my own bidness but I'm just sayin' supposin'. Anyhow, forget all that, I'm buyin' a round for the house to celebrate.

(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)
 (calls out to a passing
 waitress)
 Hey miss! I wanna buy a round for the
 house!

A sharply dressed young man, obviously the owner or the MANAGER of the club, has been standing by the bar observing Earl, and now he comes over to the booth.

MANAGER
 (to the couples)
 Everything all right over here?

EARL
 Yeah, just fine, thank you.
 (looks for the waitress)
 Where'd that gal go, I wanna buy a round
 for ever'body--

MANAGER
 Do you have the money?

EARL
 'Course I got the money.

Earl reaches in his pocket and pulls out his roll of bills. The roll, however, has been sadly diminished. It consists now of a ten and a five and a few singles. Earl gives a dry embarrassed laugh.

MANAGER
 (quietly)
 All right, sir. Time to go home.

EARL
 What do you mean, I'm just gettin'--

The manager takes Earl's arm.

MANAGER
 (crisply)
 Okay, let's go--

EARL
 (swings his arm violently)
 Get your damn hands off of me!

77 EXT. THE NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

The front door opens, and Earl is forcibly expelled by the manager and the big young bartender. Earl stumbles and falls down. Now he looks at the two men blearily as he rises to his feet. He lifts an admonishing finger to them.

EARL

You people--

The manager and the bartender look at each other and shake their heads and laugh and go back inside. Now Earl turns around slowly. Swaying a little, he looks at the people passing on the sidewalk, at the people passing in cars on the street, all black, all black, all black...

EARL

(softly, with a sort of
horror)

You people...

78 EXT./INT. RAY'S CAR - NIGHT

Ray is driving slowly down a mean-looking street. It's very late now, and not much is going on.

Suddenly the engine of his car SPUTTERS, GASPS, and DIES. Looking puzzled and dismayed, Ray guides the car over to the curb. He tries the ignition. It GRINDS, GRINDS...

Now Ray looks at the gas gauge. It's empty.

Ray just sits there for a moment, shaking his head in slow disbelief. Finally he gets out of his car, locks the door, and starts to walk.

There's a flicker of lightning in the sky...

79 EXT. A BRIDGE - NIGHT

There's a low RUMBLE of thunder, as Earl walks slowly across a bridge over the Chicago River.

Earl's eyes look dull, drunk, confused, crazed, and frightened as he observes the bleak cityscape around him. Now he sees a pay phone at the end of the bridge.

He walks up to the phone, stops, and, swaying a little, stares at it for a long moment.

He reaches in his pocket, pulls out a crumpled piece of paper, and looks at it. Ray's phone number.

He looks back at the pay phone. Now he takes it off the hook.

Lightning flashes again, closer and brighter this time, and a sudden cool breeze gusts down the street, sending an empty coke can rolling and CLATTERING past Earl's boots. Suddenly, Earl starts BANGING the phone against the hook like he's hammering a nail. Then with a series of violent jerks he tries unsuccessfully to rip

the phone out by the cord. Next he drops the phone and looks around and sees a trash can, and he runs over to the trash can and picks it up and with a YELL hurls it against the phone. The CRASH the can makes sounds very loud in the stillness.

A few fat drops of rain begin to fall. Panting, Earl backs away to observe his handiwork--and then he looks up the street and sees a police car cruising across another, nearby bridge.

A panicked look appears in Earl's eyes. He begins to run away from the police car...

80 EXT. ANOTHER STREET - NIGHT

Ray is trudging along with a gas can, on his way back to his car. The summer thunderstorm is on top of Chicago now, with its wind and rain and thunder and lightning, and Ray is quickly becoming soaked.

Now rain-glittering headlights fill the street; a moment later, a car is rolling along slowly beside Ray. Ray glances over. TWO YOUNG BLACK MEN obviously up to no-good are in the car and observing Ray and his gas can, sizing him up. Ray sighs and rolls his eyes a little and keeps walking.

YOUNG MAN IN CAR

Hey man--what's goin' on?

Ignoring the guy, Ray keeps walking. Now Ray and the car pass beneath the dark geometry of el-train tracks.

YOUNG MAN IN CAR

Hey, old man, you deaf or somethin'? I'm talkin' to you.

Looking more irked than anything else, Ray finally stops walking, and turns to face the car.

RAY

All right, listen--

YOUNG MAN IN CAR

(with a sudden nervous smile)

Yo, Everett. What's happenin'?

The guy is looking past Ray. Ray turns, and sees EVERETT moving slowly out of the shadows toward him. He's a big man, totally bald, and is wearing a rather thread-bare coat. He's obviously taken shelter from the rain beneath the tracks.

EVERETT

(in a low, soft, raspy voice)

Why don't y'all just run along.

YOUNG MAN IN CAR

Sure, Everett. Catch ya later.

The car moves away, leaving Ray alone with Everett. Ray might have been unintimidated by the guys in the car, but now there's an edge of wary anxiety in his eyes as he looks at Everett.

RAY

(with a small nod)

Everett.

EVERETT

Murdock.

RAY

When you get out?

EVERETT

Around Christmastime.

RAY

No hard feelin's, I hope.

EVERETT

Well the way I look at it...you was doin' your job...and I was doin' mine.

(very softly)

You was decent to me.

Ray looks at Everett, nods a little--and then he starts walking. As he emerges into the rain again, he glances over his shoulder...sees Everett still standing beneath the tracks, watching his progress like some ominous guardian angel...

81 EXT. BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

Lightning splits open the black sky and thunder EXPLODES in our ears as we see Earl, running through the rain. He's running along the big blank brick wall of some anonymous building, through a wasteland of rocks and scrubby weeds, with the bank falling steeply to the river. Suddenly there's a YELP AS Earl stumbles across something, pitching headlong on the rocks. He looks around and sees in a white-hot flash of lightning, a dog. It's an ugly dog, a mutant dog, a river dog, with a protruding ribcage and strange looking matted fur. The wretched animal bares its teeth at Earl, and Earl gets up, and escapes across a huge black railroad bridge running across the river.

82 EXT. BENEATH A RAILROAD BRIDGE - SUNRISE

The storm has passed. In the deep shadow under the bridge, the river makes a soft sound. Now the CAMERA DISCOVERS Earl, lying passed out on his side a few feet from the river.

Now Earl, slowly and painfully, comes to. He groans as he pushes himself up off the ground and rises to his feet. His clothes are wet and muddy.

Earl looks around, appearing confused, as though he, has no idea where he is or how he got there. Now he sees his Peterbilt cap lying just outside the shadow of the bridge. He walks over, emerging from the shadow into the sunlight, and picks the cap up. He examines the wet, bedraggled object--and then he looks up at the sun, which is rising, golden, big, and beautiful, above the horizon of the city...

83 EXT. RAY'S DINING RM- EARLY MORNING

Ray sits huddled miserably in a bathrobe at the table, sipping gratefully from a steaming cup of coffee.

Now Ray hears the phone RINGING in the living room. The rings are cut short, and Ray hears Virgil's VOICE.

84 INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Ray comes in. Virgil is sitting on the couch talking groggily on the phone. He's in his underwear, and has obviously been woken up.

RAY

Who is it, Virgil?

VIRGIL

(into the phone)

Hold on a minute.

(to Ray)

Some security guard or somethin' from the railroad. I think he's found Earl.

RAY
Dead or alive?

VIRGIL
(into the phone)
Dead or alive?
(listens a moment, and then
to Ray)
Alive.

85 EXT./INT. RAY'S CAR - MORNING

Ray is at the wheel, Earl's on the passenger side looking out the window. They're on a street in the vicinity of the railroad yards.

They ride in silence for a while--and then Ray looks over at Earl.

RAY
You look like somethin' the cat drug in.

EARL
Yeah, I had a long night.

RAY
Yeah, I know. Destroyin' a public
telephone--

EARL
(surprised)
How'd you know about that?

RAY
It was a big headline in the mornin'
paper: "Crazed Arkansas Hillbilly Runs
Amok in Chicago."

Earl laughs. He seems to be in a strangely good mood. Ray looks at him, trying to figure it out.

EARL
I want to apologize for something. For
yesterday. I was out of line--

RAY
Damn right you was out of line--

EARL
I said I was, didn't I?
(pause)
Anyhow--I'm sorry.

RAY
(after a pause)
Well, I guess ever' man's entitled to make
(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

a complete and total fool of hisself ever'
now and then.

Earl chuckles again. Ray looks at him quizzically.

RAY

What the hell you laughin' about? You
ain't goin' nuts, are you?

Earl looks out the window for a moment before he answers.

EARL

Naw, I think I'm doin' all right. Now,
last night I believe I was out of my
gourd. I think I was hopin' I wouldn't
wake up this mornin'. But I did. I take
that as a sign from the Good Lord that--
that maybe I ought to keep doin' what I'm
doin' up here--

RAY

You mean lookin' for your truck--

EARL

(smiles a little)
That's right.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

86 EXT. GRANT PARK - DAY

It's a beautiful day, and the park is filled with people. The
park has lots of green grass and trees. Lake Michigan sparkles
in the b.g.

Aunt T., all dressed up, and wearing a sun bonnet, sits in a portable lounge
chair, soaking up the sun. Virgil is doing a vigorous set of push-ups. A
blanket is spread out on the grass. *

Now Earl and Ray come walking up, with armloads of paper sacks. Earl is
wearing some of Ray's clothes, which are too big for him. *

RAY

Wake up, Aunt T. *

AUNT T. *

I ain't asleep. *

RAY

(to Virgil) *

I see you're workin' up an appetite. *

✱

✱

✦

+

✱

AUNT T.

I don't know why we're wastin' our money on store-bought chicken. You oughta taste my chicken, Earl.

EARL

Well if it's half as good as that stew you fed me this mornin', I'd surely love to.

Aunt T. beams. Ray rolls his eyes, then says in a low voice to Virgil:

RAY

The way to a woman's heart is through eatin' her cookin'.

AUNT T.

I heard that.

RAY

(shakes his head)

Aunt T., you can hear a fly walkin' across the wallpaper.

AUNT T.

That's right.

VIRGIL

There they are.

ANN, a pretty young black woman, is walking across the grass toward them with two kids, DANIELLE, nine, and KINDRA, seven. Virgil gloomily checks his watch.

VIRGIL

Hour late.

RAY

Now Virgil, don't you start with her--

As the kids break away from their mother and begin to run toward Virgil, he gets up and, with a laugh, scoops up his daughters in his arms.

VIRGIL

Damn, Danielle, I think you've grown since last week. You're gettin' too big to pick up.

KINDRA

Me too. I'm too big too.

VIRGIL

I think you nearly are.

Now Virgil looks up as Ann arrives.

VIRGIL

(quietly)

Hey, Ann.

ANN

Hello.

Virgil and Ann look at each other across the distance that separates an estranged husband and wife who still care about each other.

AUNT T.

Y'all get over here and eat!

Virgil and Ann and their daughters walk on over to the blanket, where Ray and Aunt T. exchange AD-LIBBED greetings with the kids, as Earl watches.

*

ANN

(kissing Ray on the cheek)

Sorry we're late.

*

RAY

Now you're gonna stay and eat with us, aren't you?

ANN

(glances at Virgil)

Oh no, Ray, this is virgil's day with the kids--

RAY

Come on. Let's act like a family for a change. What do you say, Virgil?

The idea is not unpleasant to Virgil, but he tries to be casual about it:

VIRGIL

I don't mind.

RAY

It's all settled then. Let's put the feed bags on.

Looking a little uncomfortable, Ann sits down by the blanket with her kids. Now she looks across the blanket at Earl, who no one's thought to introduce.

*

*

ANN

(smiles)

Hi, I'm Ann.

EARL

(as they shake hands)

Earl. Pleased to meet you.

Virgil is helping his daughters fill up their paper plates.

VIRGIL

(to Danielle)

I really like those pictures you drew me.
I was lookin' at 'em just this mornin'.

DANIELLE

Thank you.

VIRGIL

You're real talented. Ann, she's really
talented. We oughta get her in some kinda
art class.

ANN

(to Danielle)

Would you like that?

Danielle smiles and nods as she chews her chicken leg.

VIRGIL

Danielle Murdock, Famous Painter. Yeah,
maybe you'll make the world sit up and
take notice someday.

ANN

The main thing is, just being happy. You
don't have to conquer the world.

VIRGIL

But see, conquerin' the world, that makes
you happy. I know. I been there.

EARL

(curious)

You been there?

Virgil shrugs. Ray steps in.

RAY

Virgil used to play football. In high
school, he was first team on the Parade
All-American team.

EARL
(impressed)
Is that right. What position?

VIRGIL
Wide receiver.

EARL
Yeah, I used to play a little ball. I was small, but I made up for it by bein' slow.

Earl's little joke doesn't elicit much response beyond a polite smile from Ann.

EARL
You play college ball?

VIRGIL
(reluctantly)
Yeah, I, uh--went to Ohio State.

EARL
Buckeyes? Damn, that's big time. How'd you do there?

Virgil doesn't answer. Ray and Ann exchange an uneasy look.

ANN
(softly)
His freshman year, he hurt his knee.

VIRGIL
Didn't just hurt it. Destroyed it. Doctor said if I was lucky, someday I might be able to walk without a limp.
(gives a bitter laugh)
Well, guess I was lucky.

A silence falls around the blanket.

RAY
(to Earl)
Pass the potatoes, would you?

Now the booming rhythmic chanting of a RAP SONG begins to wash over the picnickers. THREE TEENAGERS in baggy clothing and backward-turned baseball caps are walking by, one of them with a boom box. The lyrics of the song are violent and obscene, and the most frequently repeated word is "motherfucker."

VIRGIL
(calls to the teenager with the boom box)
Hey man, could you turn it down some? We
(MORE)

VIRGIL (CONT'D)
got kids over here, I don't want 'em
hearin' that stuff.

TEENAGER
Fuck you, man.

Virgil does a slow burn, and glares at the teenager, who is
glaring back defiantly. Virgil's two kids look anxiously at
their father. Ann lays a restraining hand on Virgil's arm. *

ANN
Virgil, let it go. It's not worth it.

The teenagers pass on by, and the song slowly begins to fade.
Earl is looking at Virgil with interest. Virgil eats his food
slowly, now staring at his plate.

VIRGIL
(softly)
You can't even have a damn picnic at the
park with your kids without some shit
happenin'...

CUT TO:

87 THE PARK, LATER

Virgil's playing Frisbee with Danielle and Kindra in an open
grassy area. Danielle's fairly proficient, but Kindra's tosses
are apt to go anywhere, straight up in the air, into the ground,
backwards. But they're all obviously having a good time.

Ann sits off to the side, spectating. As she watches Virgil
good-naturedly retrieving another errant Kindra throw, and then
patiently instructing her, she smiles a little.

Now Earl comes walking up, drinking a Dr. Pepper. Behind him, we
see Ray and Aunt T. still at the blanket. *

ANN
Get enough to eat?

EARL
(pats his stomach)
Just about.

ANN
Have a seat.

EARL
All right.

Earl squats down in the grass by Ann. They watch the Frisbee
action in silence for a little while--then Ann looks curiously
over at Earl.

ANN

Virgil tells me your...Ray's brother?

EARL

Yeah...evidently.

ANN

That's...interesting.

Earl doesn't say anything. Ann looks out toward her husband and daughters. Virgil happens to look over at her, and they both smile. Now Virgil leaves the Frisbee with his kids, and begins walking toward Ann and Earl.

EARL

What line of work you in? Or do you stay home with the kids?

ANN

No, I'm a workin' girl. I work at a bank.

Virgil arrives.

EARL

What are you, a teller?

ANN

Well, that's how I started out, but--

VIRGIL

(picks up on the conversation)

A teller? What makes you think she's a teller?

EARL

I don't know--most people that work at banks are tellers, ain't they?

VIRGIL

Well, she ain't "most people." She's assistant vice president in charge of loans.

EARL

(tries to make a joke out of it)

Well, maybe you can loan me some money for a new truck then.

ANN

(laughs)

Well, maybe I can. What you got for collateral?

EARL

Well, I had a helluva rod and reel rig--
but that got stole with my truck.

VIRGIL

(won't let it go)
I know what the deal is. You think just
'cause she's black she's gotta be low man
on the totempole.

ANN

Virgil, he didn't mean that--

Now Earl slowly stands up.

EARL

Son, if you got a problem with me, why
don't you just say it.

VIRGIL

I got nothin' to say to you, man.

Ann gets to her feet herself now.

ANN

Virgil, cool out, he's your uncle--

VIRGIL

My uncle? Well, if his daddy rapin' my
grandmother makes him my uncle, then I
guess he is. I don't look at it that way
though.

EARL

I don't like people talkin' about my
daddy.

VIRGIL

Yeah, I'll bet you don't.

ANN

(exasperated)

Virgil, you're doing it again.

VIRGIL

What?

ANN

You say you can't have a picnic at the
park without some shit happenin'? Well,
that's the way I feel right now. And I'm
sick of it. Sick of the shit.

Their parents' raising their voices have caught the attention of
Danielle and Kindra.

EARL
(to Ann)
Excuse me--

Earl walks back toward the blanket, as the argument continues behind him. *

VIRGIL
What shit you talkin' about?

ANN
I'm talkin' about I was having a perfectly nice conversation till you came over--

VIRGIL
I was just stickin' up for you.

ANN
"Stickin' up"?! Well you know where you can stick your stickin' up?

88 INT. RAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The curtains on a window in Ray's living room are pulled apart, and we see Danielle, dressed in pajamas, looking down at the street.

89 INT. RAY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Virgil's spreading out the sleeping bags on the floor, with Kindra's help. Now he turns to Danielle at the window.

VIRGIL
Girl, get away from that window in your pajamas. People can see you.

DANIELLE
(leaving the window)
I don't care.

VIRGIL
You better start carin'.
(to Kindra)
Thanks, sweetheart. Okay, into the bags.

The girls go into the sleeping bags, Kindra enthusiastically and Danielle reluctantly.

DANIELLE
Can't we watch TV?

VIRGIL
No. I'm turnin' the lights out.

Virgil starts making his bed on the couch.

DANIELLE

Mom lets us stay up till midnight on Saturdays.

VIRGIL

Do I look like Mom? My rule's 11.

KINDRA

Daddy?

VIRGIL

Yeah?

KINDRA

When you comin' home?

VIRGIL

Kindra, if it was up to me, I'd be home tonight. This is all your mom's idea. As a matter of fact, maybe y'all can work on her.

DANIELLE

What do you mean?

VIRGIL

Well, just start tellin' her you miss your daddy. Say it all the time. Drive her crazy. Okay?

His daughters nod dutifully.

VIRGIL

Let's practice. Say:
(in a pitiful voice)
"I miss my daddy."

DANIELLE & KINDRA

(pitifully)

I miss my daddy.

Now the sisters look at each other and giggle.

VIRGIL

That was good, let's try it again. But this time, put kind of a little sob in your voice. Like this.

(sobs)

"I miss my daddy!"

DANIELLE & KINDRA

(sobbing)

I miss my daddy!

They giggle again.

VIRGIL

Outstanding. Let's do it again. A little louder this time.

90 EXT. RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ray is folding out the legs on an army cot, when from the living room he hears:

DANIELLE & KINDRA (O.S.)

(wailing pitifully)

I miss my daddy!

RAY

(shaking his head)

Those poor children.

Now we see Earl, sitting on a chair and pulling off his cowboy boots.

EARL

Yeah--trouble between the parents is tough on kids.

(pause)

I hate to say it, but I think your boy's got a chip on his shoulder.

RAY

Yep.

EARL

Out there at the park? Well, if Virgil hadn't of been my--if he hadn't of been your son, I might've taken a swing at him.

RAY

(after a pause)

You know, there for a second, I thought you were about to call Virgil the "N" word.

Earl looks at Ray.

RAY

Nephew.

Earl doesn't say anything. Ray goes to the closet and gets a pillow and blanket and tosses them over on the cot.

RAY

Well, that should do ya. In the Marines, I spent many a night on a cot like that. That was on my lucky nights.

Earl moves to the cot and tries it out, as Ray walks to his bed and turns down the bedclothes.

EARL

You see any action over there in Korea?

RAY

(somberly)

Yeah--I saw action.

(pause)

How about yourself?

EARL

No, I was never actually under fire. I was always kinda sorry about that.

RAY

You didn't miss out on nothin'.

Ray sits down on the side of his bed and takes off his shoes.

EARL

Did you kill anybody?

RAY

I did.

(pause)

I'm not proud of it.

EARL

Were you ever wounded?

RAY

No. Aunt T. gave me a rabbit's foot to take over there with me, and I guess it worked. Never got hurt in nearly 40 years as a cop neither. In my life, I been shot at, stabbed at, artilleried at, had bricks thrown at my head--once I was breakin' up a marital dispute and a woman tried to throw a pot of boilin' water in my face--I dodged that too.

Ray pauses in his undressing, and smiles a little to himself.

RAY

Somehow the good Lord has always seen fit to keep me out of harm's way. I been blessed. Very blessed.

Earl, sitting on the cot, is pulling off his socks. Now he looks at Ray, sitting on the side of his bed and thinking.

RAY

You know, they say nobody can save another person. Well that's bullshit. You can save another person if they want to be saved. I been saved three times in my life. When my mother died, Aunt T. took responsibility for me. We moved up to Chicago, and it was just her and me, and she worked 16 hours a day cleanin' houses, workin' in a laundry, whatever, and she made sure I was never hungry, and I always had shoes, and she would whup me when I was bad. And she saved me. But when I got to be a teenager, I was too big to whup, and I started gettin' in trouble. One day I stole a car--yeah, I was a car thief--and the cops caught me. I was taken before a judge. The judge gave me a choice: prison or the military. And so I joined the Marines, and the Marines made me a man. That judge--he saved me. And then I got out of the Marines and came back to Chicago--but I brought home that war with me. I started drinkin' hard, and I didn't care about what happened to me.

(smiles a little)

And then I met my wife. It was like openin' up the curtains in a dark room, and the sun just pourin' in. And I was saved again, by her.

Now Ray falls silent. Earl, who's been listening raptly, looks at Ray.

EARL

(quietly)

Is she dead?

RAY

Yeah. Eight years ago.

Now Ray looks over at Earl, a little embarrassed.

RAY

Didn't mean to go on that way.

The two men resume undressing for bed. Earl pulls off the red polo shirt.

RAY

I saw you wipin' your old chicken-greasy fingers on my shirt today.

EARL

Ran outa napkins.

Earl starts to take off his trousers--but then something catches his attention.

EARL

Ray, come over here. I want you to take a look at somethin'.

Ray looks at Earl, whose pants are down around his knees.

RAY

(suspiciously)

Take a look at what?

EARL

Come on over here. I ain't gonna bite ya.

RAY

(still suspicious)

I ain't gonna bite you either. What do you want?

Ray comes over to Earl's cot. Earl points at some long vivid ugly scars that cross his upper thigh.

EARL

Looky there. I was never under fire, but I got wounded. I was a fireman on that flattop, and one day a fire broke out in the engine room and I was down there fightin' it, and then somethin' blew up, and I got this.

Ray gives a low, impressed whistle.

RAY

Ain't that some shit.

EARL

You bet it is. I still got more metal in that leg than they make new cars with.

Now Ray notices a small faint scar above one of Earl's eyebrows.

RAY

(points at it)

What happened there? You get that in the explosion too?

EARL

Oh hell no, I got that when I was a kid. It's actually about my first memory. I was about three years old, and this little colored kid--

Earl stops, realizing he's made a faux pas.

RAY

(tolerantly)

"Colored"'s all right. It's comin' back. "People of color" and all that.

EARL

Anyway, this kid hit me with a rock.

RAY

You were comin' out of Burk's Grocery Store on Apple Street with your daddy.

EARL

(looks at Ray in amazement)

How'd you know that?

Ray, looking sly, doesn't answer.

EARL

(with dawning comprehension)

Wait a minute. Hold on.

RAY

(grins widely)

See, you never knew who I was, but I knew exactly who you were. And I hated your half-white guts. So when I saw you walkin' out of that store with that old daddy of yours, I picked up a rock and--well, I just did what came natural.

(walks back to his bed)

The only bad thing about it, Aunt T. found out, and she like to of skinned me alive.

Now Ray turns out the light and climbs into bed. Earl, mulling all this over, lies down in his cot, and pulls the blanket over him. He lies there in the darkness, running a wondering finger over the little scar on his forehead--and then, suddenly, an indignant look appears on his face.

EARL

What the hell you mean "the only bad thing"? You coulda put my damn eye out! Or killed me.

The only answer is Ray's rich chuckle in the dark. Now Earl, thinking about it, laughs a little too. After a few moments, the laughter of both dies down, and all is quiet--then:

EARL

Good night.

RAY

Good night.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

91 EXT. RAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Virgil is out by the street, hugging and saying good-bye to his daughters, as Ann stows their bags in the back seat.

VIRGIL

I'll call y'all during the week, okay?

KINDRA

Okay.

VIRGIL

(whispers in Danielle's
ear)

Remember: "I miss my daddy!"

Danielle smiles and gives him the A-OK sign. Now Virgil looks at Ann.

VIRGIL

Well...bye.

ANN

(cooly and curtly)

Bye.

(to her daughters)

Y'all get in the car now.

(looks toward the front of
the building and waves)

Bye, Ray! Nice meeting you, Mr. Pilcher!

CUT TO:

EARL AND RAY, standing on the front steps of the apartment building, waving back to Ann.

EARL

You know, I like that Ann.

RAY

Yeah, me too.

Earl watches Ann's car pulling away from the curb, and observes Virgil standing rather forlornly all by himself on the sidewalk, watching his family go...

92 EXT. A NEIGHBORHOOD BAR - NIGHT

Ray and Earl are playing eight ball in the back. Faced with a tricky shot, Earl strokes the cue ball across the smooth green table, and clicks a ball into a corner pocket.

RAY

(shakes his head)

Luck.

EARL

Yeah, well, I been "lucky" all night.

Earl misses his next shot.

EARL

Shit.

RAY

Uh oh. You done messed up. You're at my mercy, and I have no mercy.

As Ray takes a swig of his beer and then puts it down and lines up a shot, Earl hears loud LAUGHTER. He looks up toward the front, and sees among the few customers Virgil sitting at the bar, drinking a beer and talking and laughing with another MAN.

Ray POPS a ball into a pocket.

CUT TO:

VIRGIL, talking with his friend at the bar. Now Earl comes walking up. Virgil's back's to Earl and he doesn't see him, but his friend, a rather sloppily dressed young man with a plump face and a scraggly goatee, does.

VIRGIL'S FRIEND

Virgil, some dude starin' at you.

Virgil looks around at Earl.

EARL

I want to talk to you.

VIRGIL

Could we talk later? I'm right in the middle of a conversation--

EARL

I'm ready to now. I might not be in the same mood later, now come on.

As Virgil and his friend stare at him, Earl walks across the bar and then out the front door. Virgil and his friend look at each other.

VIRGIL'S FRIEND

(laughs)

Wooo, nigger, look out!

93 EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF THE BAR - NIGHT

Virgil comes out, looks around, then sees Earl down the street a little ways, squatting at the base of a light pole, and chewing on a blade of grass. Looking a little cautious, Virgil walks over to him.

VIRGIL

Okay--I'm here. What do you want to talk about?

EARL

You might as well sit down.

Virgil sighs, and sits down on the curb. He and Earl are facing in different directions. Traffic on the street is sparse. They sit there in silence for a moment in the cool bluish glow of the streetlight.

EARL

When I was drivin' up here from Arkansas, I did a lot of thinkin'. I thought about things I never really thought too much about. I thought about some things I'd seen in my lifetime that the first time I just let 'em kind of roll off my back. Now I really paid attention.

VIRGIL

(starts to get up)

Is this gonna be some kind of walkin' through snow to school and eatin' what you killed hillbilly lecture or somethin'?

EARL

You goddamn right it is. Maybe you might wanna listen to it. You obviously ain't been listenin' to anybody so far.

VIRGIL

I don't need this.

EARL

I think you do.

Virgil reluctantly sits back down.

EARL

When I was comin' up back home, there was a guy about four or five years older than me named Bill Whatley. Bill's folks both got killed by lightnin' at the same time. Same stroke, while they were clearin' He was their only kid. Well he started workin', he was about 15 then, right after they died. He was pretty much on his own, no other people to speak of really, started haulin' hay and then worked at a sawmill. Bill was a big ol' boy, kind of ugly in the face, not too popular around town, real quiet. Well he worked his ass off till he finally saved up a little and opened up a little sort of a fix-it shop, appliances and small engines and what-not. He finally married a gal when he got to be in his 30's. She made him look like Elvis Presley, just butt ugly, but he loved that gal like you wouldn't believe. Not havin' any family I guess made him just worship her. He worked all the time and then once a month he took their spare money and took her to Little Rock and bought her somethin', one time a dress then maybe next time a little doo-dad or earrings or somethin'. Me and Daddy used to go around to his shop every now and then, Daddy always liked people that didn't talk much, I don't know why, and Bill didn't say much. Every time I saw him when it was gettin' time to take her to Little Rock he talked a little more and had this spark in his eyes. That's what he lived for.

(pause)

I thought that was pathetic. I thought "why that simple-minded son of a bitch." I felt sad for him. That's all he had. Then after they'd been married 10 or so years, she died from somethin', some kind of cancer or leukemia or somethin'. He quit talkin' altogether for a while, till he got approved to adopt a boy. Same thing started over. Every fourth Saturday him and that boy went to Little Rock. When he was little he bought him a toy or two, then when he got older it'd be a suit

(MORE)

EARL (CONT'D)

and tie or a book on baseball or whatever else. He spent ever' bit of himself, body, mind, soul, and money, on that boy.

(pause)

A few years ago I was by there and somehow I got around to askin' the poor son of a bitch about the bad luck he'd had, and he said one thing and went back to sharpenin' an ax blade. He said, "Well, you know bein' happy ain't nothin' more than havin' somethin' to look forward to, and helpin' your people to have somethin' to look forward to. I reckon that's what gets me through till tomorrow."

Earl sits in silence for a moment, chewing his grass. Virgil sits on the curb, caught up by the story, waiting for Earl to go on.

EARL

I didn't think too much about it then. I thought about it a lot drivin' up here after I got through my spell of feelin' sorry for myself and just damn near goin' out of my mind.

(pause)

You and me have somethin' in common. We both found out one day later on in life that life wasn't gonna be what we thought it was. Your knee's busted all to pieces. You ain't never gonna be a football star. And me, I'm not all Scots-Irish. I have to go face my family and tell 'em they have to get used to it.

(pause)

Two things, Virgil: You better get somethin' to look forward to instead of backwards at. And you've got a woman and some children that you owe them somethin' to look forward to. It ain't all about you.

Some people walk by on the sidewalk, and stare at them. Earl waits till they've passed.

EARL

Your daddy's a good man and I'm proud to call myself his brother. Don't tell him I said that, or I'll kick your ass. And don't think I can't do it.

(pause)

You can go back inside now.

But Virgil stays where he is, his face looking thoughtful and troubled. Now the CAMERA moves away from them to the entrance of

the bar, where, unseen by either, Ray is standing, gazing out curiously at his brother and his son...

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

94 INT. RAY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Earl is in the shower, vigorously lathering himself up.

95 INT. RAY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Wearing Ray's bathrobe, Earl comes out of the bathroom. Aunt T.'s talking on the phone.

AUNT T.

Yes sir, I'll tell him. Okay. Thank you.

(hangs up)

Earl, is that you?

EARL

Yes ma'am.

AUNT T.

That was the police. They found your truck. It was just a-sittin' on the street over in Rosewood.

EARL

They found it? Was it all right?

AUNT T.

Said it was fine, 'cept for the bullet holes.

EARL

Bullet holes...

AUNT T.

They say you can pick it up tomorrow. Right now they're checkin' it for fingerprints and such.

EARL

Hold on a minute. What happened?

AUNT T.

Them fools that took it robbed a bank. Shot it out with a security guard.

Earl has a dumbfounded look on his face.

EARL
(softly)
Ain't that some shit.

96 INT. RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Earl's sitting on the side of Ray's bed. He's staring at the phone on the bedside table. Now, finally, he picks it up, and dials a number.

EARL
(to the operator)
Collect from Earl.
(after a few moments)
Ruby? Yeah, I'm fine. I'm still in Chicago. I'm comin' home tomorrow, Ruby. Naw, I didn't find my wallet. I found my truck though. Well, I'm fixin' to tell you.

Now Earl pauses, and takes a deep breath.

EARL
I'm fixin' to tell you a whole lot of things...

A96 EXT. RAY'S APT. BLDG. - ESTABLISHING SHOT - NIGHT
97 INT. RAY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT *

Earl's sitting on the sofa, Ray in his easy chair. The TV isn't on. The room is quiet. The mood is somber. They seem to be waiting for a train they don't want to get on.

Aunt T. sits in her rocking chair by the window. If she weren't blind, we'd think she was looking out the window. She too is quiet and somber.

Ray shifts restlessly in his chair.

RAY
You know, just 'cause you found your truck, you shouldn't feel like you gotta rush off. I mean, if you wanna hang around for another day or two--

EARL
Naw, I need to get back. That nephew of mine's probably run my kidness into the ground by now.

Ray shifts in his chair again.

RAY
Listen, there's somethin' I have to get off my chest. If I don't it's gonna come
(MORE)

RAY (CONT'D)

out sometime and I'd just as soon get done with it.

EARL

All right.

RAY

You can be a pain in the ass in a lot of ways - but I don't really have anything toward you in the way of bad feelin's...

*
*
*

EARL

Well, I appreciate that. So what's your point?

RAY

It's your daddy. The way I feel about him.

EARL

Hadn't we already been through this?

RAY

I want to make you understand. I've lived my life with a hatred for that man and no way to get it out. Since there's not a lotta chance of me havin' it out with him, I guess you're the closest thing to it. Like I said, I can't help but see him in you.

EARL

Are you sayin' you want to have it out with me? We already wrestled all over the neighborhood once. That wadn't good enough for you?

RAY

I've wanted to kill your daddy, 'cause I always felt he killed my mama. I just had to say it to you that way.

*
*
*

Earl nods a little, but doesn't say anything.

RAY

I know it's not right to, or so they say, but I don't think I can ever forgive him.

Now we hear a KEY in the front door. It opens, and Virgil comes in.

Virgil glances at them, and holds a look with Earl for a moment.

VIRGIL

(starts for the kitchen)

Think I'll make me somethin' to eat.

AUNT T.

Virgil, it's a big envelope on top of my chester drawers in my bedroom. Bring it in here to me.

Virgil goes into her bedroom. Ray and Earl lapse into uneasy silence. Aunt T. sits quietly in her chair by the window. She's given no indication that she's been listening to Ray and Earl.

Now Virgil returns, and walks over to Aunt T. and holds out an envelope to her.

VIRGIL

Aunt T?

Aunt T. takes the envelope, puts it in her lap, and rests her hands on it. Virgil goes off into the kitchen. After a few moments, Aunt T. begins to speak, slowly and quietly.

AUNT T.

Earl, have you ever seen anybody be born?

EARL

Well, yeah, I was there when my daughter was born, there at the hospital. July the 28th, 1971.

AUNT T.

I'm not talkin' about lookin' at TV and smokin' cigarettes in some waitin' room. I mean have you seen somebody, a little baby, new little soul come right out of its mother's womb and draw its first

(MORE)

AUNT T. (CONT'D)

breath of life and see its first light of day or dark of night?

EARL

No ma'am, I hadn't seen that before.

AUNT T.

Well out of all the things in God's world there's nothin' any more powerful or more wonderful. And when you see it, you never are the same again. Any time your bones ache or your mind's on fire with worry, you can think about it and it takes away all the fever and you can just set and breathe and live. And if you've seen that it makes you love to live every day. Come over here, I want to show you somethin', both of you. Come on now.

Ray and Earl look at each other, and then get up from their seats.

AUNT T.

Set down. Pull them footstools over here besides me.

They do. Aunt T. pulls a three by five photograph out of the envelope and holds it out towards them. Ray takes it and looks at it.

AUNT T.

Is that you Raymond, took that picture?

RAY

Yes ma'am.

AUNT T.

When you get done lookin' at it, I want you to hand it to your brother.

Ray hands it to Earl. We see the photograph close up. It's an old dog-eared black and white. It shows a beautiful young light-skinned black woman. Earl stares at it for a moment.

EARL

You were a pretty woman, all right.

AUNT T.

Fool, there ain't nothin' wrong with the way I look now.

(pause)

That's not me anyway, that's your mama. That is if Virgil brought me the right envelope.

RAY

It's the right one, Aunt T.

AUNT T.

Earl, put that in your pocket and don't bend it and don't lose it. It's your mama.

EARL

You don't have to give me--

AUNT T.

I ain't gotta do nothin'. You take care of that picture.

EARL

Thank you.

Now Aunt T. slips back into a gentle reflective tone.

AUNT T.

You was born on May the 4th, nineteen and thirty-three, and it was somewhere around 10:30 at night at the old house on Section Line Road right by the tracks.

EARL

I've always been told I was born on November the 23rd.

AUNT T.

You always been told a lot of things.

*

FLASHBACK TO:

98 EXT. A HOUSE NEAR SOME RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

*

Railroad tracks cross a dirt road. A freight train is lumbering past, concealing the house. *

*

Now the tail end of the train passes, and we see a small ramshackle house with a tarpaper roof. On the sagging front porch, JUNIOR TURNER, a black man in his mid 20's wearing faded overalls, is talking to a young woman of about 25. This is the AUNT T. of over 60 years ago. Young Aunt T. gives Junior some instructions and then gives him a shove and he starts running up the dirt road. There's a flash of lightning as Aunt T. stands on the porch watching Junior run across the tracks. *

*

AUNT T. (V.O.)

There wasn't any real doctor down there in that part of town. Old man Collins down the road knew some docterin' but he'd had a stroke.

99 INT. KITCHEN AND PARLOUR - NIGHT

Young Aunt T. comes through the kitchen, where there's a kerosene lamp burning, and then passes through a small parlour and moves toward a bedroom.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

So Maotis Jones come down to the house. Most of the time Maotis was lit up like a Christmas tree, but she'd been a midwife for a long time and she could sober up right off when it was a baby comin'.

100 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young Aunt T. enters the bedroom. By the dim light of another kerosene lamp, we see a young woman lying in bed in terrible pain-- she's naked from the waist down, and her belly is huge. We recognize her from the photographs as Ray and Earl's mother, WILLA MAE.

WILLA MAE

Oh, dear Lord. Dear Lord.

MAOTIS, middle-aged and fat, is putting some pinches of pepper into the pillow case of Willa Mae's pillow, and then pinching some on each corner of the bed.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

Maotis was puttin' pepper in the bed. She told me the pepper was to ward off evil things.

Willa Mae is in agony. She is bathed in sweat. Young Aunt T. puts a damp washcloth on her forehead, as Maotis continues with the pepper.

MAOTIS

Willa Mae, you rest for a minute and then we'll start in tryin' again.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

Maotis said the baby was all turnt around wrong and maybe the cord was around its neck and if it was gonna make it we was gonna have to hurry and she didn't know for sure if she could do it.

There is a blue flash of lightning at the window, and a low RUMBLE of thunder. Willa Mae takes Aunt T.'s hand.

WILLA MAE

Sister, I hurt so bad. I don't want my baby to die.

YOUNG AUNT T.

Your baby's not gonna die, honey. I promise you. We gonna see to it.

WILLA MAE

You don't think the Lord is punishin' me for how this baby came to be, do you?

YOUNG AUNT T.

Now you stop that talk, sister. Every little baby that s'posed be born is born. The Good Lord loves all the little babies. He don't care none about that.

WILLA MAE

Tiara?

YOUNG AUNT T.

Yes, honey.

WILLA MAE

(closes her eyes)

Go get my boy and bring him in here. I want to see him before I get any worse off and can't see him as good.

CUT TO:

A100 THE PRESENT

As Aunt T. continues talking to Earl and Ray, we see that Virgil has come in from the kitchen. He's finishing up a sandwich, as he leans in the kitchen door frame, listening.

AUNT T.

I went out on the porch and got you, Raymond, and I took you in to see your mama. You was so scared to see your mama that way. She held on to your little hand and just for that minute or two she held up and acted like wasn't nothin' wrong, and then she pulled you in close and hugged you so hard I thought your little eyes would pop out.

FLASHBACK TO:

101 INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Willa Mae is hugging Raymond as Aunt T. and Maotis look on. The SOUND IS DOWN and we hear Aunt T.'s VOICEOVER as Willa Mae begins to speak to her child.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

She said everything gonna be all right, I love you, and you know your Aunt T-- She couldn't even finish sayin' my name, some pain come over and she stopped talkin' till it was gone. Then she told you to go on back out on the porch and play. You looked up at me and said, "Aunt T.?"

CUT TO:

A101 THE PRESENT

AUNT T.

(smiles a little at Ray)

And that's what I been ever since. Aunt T.

(pause)

I'm certain of it that your mama knew she wasn't never gonna see you again.

Aunt T. stops talking, it's obvious she's holding back tears. Earl looks at Ray, and now Ray looks back at him. Virgil is still in the doorway. Now Aunt T. takes a long deep breath, and starts again.

AUNT T.

Maotis said we'd have to get a white doctor from up in town but I knew there wasn't much chance of that. That's why I sent for your daddy, Earl. It was his mess that caused all this to start with and I sent our cousin Junior Turner up to town to get him. But your daddy said he wouldn't come.

FLASHBACK TO:

102 EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

Aunt T. is standing on the front porch, looking anxiously down the road toward the railroad tracks. There is a restless wind in the trees and more flashes of lightning.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

Said he wasn't goin' down to niggertown in the middle of the night. And besides he didn't have nothin' to do with all that

(MORE)

AUNT T. (V.O. CONT'D)

anyhow, that was that gal's problem. I don't know if you know this, Earl, I s'pect you do, but your mother Carrie that raised you was a good woman. Good as they come.

Now the headlights of a car come knifing over the tracks, and, to Aunt T.'s great relief, a battered Model T comes bumping over the tracks, and down the road.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

Junior said she lit in to Mr. Pilcher like a water moccasin. Told him to get over and get Dr. Parks and get down there and save that little child of his. That she wasn't no dummy and knew what was what about that baby. And to be a man and help that woman and baby out.

The Model T stops in front of the house. Out of it get DR. PARKS, a skinny bespectacled man of 60, CARRIE PILCHER, a pretty woman in her early 20's, and Junior. Staying in the car behind the wheel, a dark silhouette smoking a cigarette, is EARL PILCHER SR.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

Well he did go get Dr. Parks and they all showed up together, Earl Pilcher, Dr. Parks, Carrie, and Junior. Earl wouldn't come in though. He stayed out front in that car. I looked out every now and then and could see his cigarette burnin'.

CUT TO:

A102 THE PRESENT

AUNT T.

But Carrie, she came in. She loved your birth mother, Earl. They was friends. Real good friends.

FLASHBACK TO:

103 INT. THE PARLOR - NIGHT

Through the frame of the open bedroom door, we see Willa Mae lying in her bed of pain. Now Carrie appears, goes through the door, and shuts it softly behind her.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

Willa Mae ask to see Carrie alone for a minute. I don't know what they talked about in there at the time, but I figured it out pretty much over the years. I've got my ideas anyway.

A103 THE PRESENT

AUNT T.

Well old Dr. Parks got to work and somehow or other started to get you straightened out a little and on your way out. Your poor mother was in so much pain till finally she just wore out so bad she couldn't even make a sound.

(smiles in Earl's direction)

Than, finally, you came.

SCENE 104 OMITTED

FLASHBACK TO:

105 INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

The old doctor has his hands between Willa Mae's legs. Carrie is standing beside Willa Mae, holding her hand, while Aunt T. has a hold of one of Willa Mae's legs. And now the baby appears, as Aunt T.'s VOICE continues over the action.

AUNT T. (V.O.)

In all your glory, face up and eyes wide open and white as bed linens. I was standin' right there holdin' Willa Mae's leg and I look at you and your little eyes was lookin' at me. Some say babies can't see right off. I don't believe that.

(pause)

Yeah, son, I was the first person you ever saw.

(pause)

The doctor cut you loose and cleaned you off and handed you to your mother. She looked at you like you was—well I don't even know how to say it. Like you was an angel. She put you on her breast and it didn't take you anytime to figure out what to do with it. You took to eatin' right off.

CUT TO:

A105 THE PRESENT

AUNT T.

Then the doctor started in workin' on her, she was real bad off and she was bleedin' and he had me take you after a minute and said I better go in the other room with you and let him work. I bundled you up in a blanket and took you and Miss Carrie in the kitchen and after a minute Junior and Raymond come in."

FLASHBACK TO:

106 INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Carrie and Aunt T. are sitting at the kitchen table with the baby, as little Ray comes in with Junior.

YOUNG AUNT T.
Raymond, look here at the baby.

RAYMOND
That's my baby.

YOUNG AUNT T.
(smiles)
That's right, sweetheart. That's your
baby. He's your brother. You want to
hold him?

Raymond nods, and Aunt T. puts the baby in Ray's arms and helps him hold him up. Ray looks in his face and smiles.

RAYMOND
He look funny.

The doctor comes into the kitchen, cleaning his hands on a towel. Everybody looks at him. His face is grim and exhausted.

DR. PARKS
She lost a lot of blood. I would of had
to get her to a good hospital. There just
wasn't any time to.
(pause)
She's gone.

Stricken looks appear on Carrie and Aunt T.'s faces. Junior, in the b.g., looks solemn. Raymond's too young to know what's happening.

DR. PARKS
I'm gonna need some help in there cleanin'
things up.

CARRIE
(to Aunt T.)
I'll go. You stay here with the baby.

Carrie gets up and walks away with the doctor. Aunt T.'s weeping now. We hold on Ray and Aunt T. holding little Earl...

CUT TO:

A106 THE PRESENT

*

AUNT T.

Yessir Ray, you held this boy in your arms
right after he was born. Ain't that
somethin'.

Ray and Earl can't seem to look at each other. In the kitchen
doorway, Virgil watches them, smiling a little.

AUNT T.

After you came out lookin' like you did I
knew the best thing I could do was give
you over to them so you could have a
better way to go in life. I wanted to
raise you so bad. But you would have had
nothin' but trouble. I knew that. But
you and me, we always been joined
together. Because of that night, that
moment you came poppin' your head out and
seein' me and me seein' you.

(pause)

Funniest thing about that night. It
thundered and lightnin'd all night long,
and never did rain.

(tears finally come to her
eyes)

Oh God, Earl, your mother...she wanted to
stay and just didn't have the stren'th.

(pause)

I sure do wish I could see you.

As Ray and Virgil look on, Aunt T. reaches out with both hands
and finds Earl's face and touches every part of it slowly, taking
it all in; then finally she rubs her hand over the top of his
bald head, and smiles.

AUNT T.

Bless your heart, boy. You gonna go out
the same way you came in...

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

107 EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF RAY'S APARTMENT BUILDING -
MORNING

Earl's leaving to go home. Aunt T. and Virgil are walking with
Earl and Ray out to Ray's car.

RAY

Hope that truck of yours'll run with all
those bullet holes in it.

EARL

Yeah, guess I'll go home lookin' like I tangled with Al Capone.

They reach Ray's car. Earl turns to Virgil.

EARL

Well, Virgil--tell your wife and kids I was glad to meet 'em.

(pause)

I was glad to meet you too.

Virgil hesitates a moment, then smiles and shakes hands with Earl.

VIRGIL

You have a safe trip, Earl.

Now Earl turns to Aunt T.

EARL

Ma'am? I want to thank you for everything.

Aunt T., crying behind her sunglasses, reaches out for Earl and they hug.

AUNT T.

Don't forget your old Aunt T.

EARL

I don't think I could hardly do that.

108 EXT./INT. RAY'S CAR, MOVING DOWN A CHICAGO STREET -
MORNING

Ray and Earl drive in silence for a few moments, each lost in his thoughts. Finally...

RAY

Goin' home to Po'ville, huh?

EARL

Yup.

RAY

Yeah, I ain't been back there since I left it. Nearly 60 years ago.

(pause)

Probably hadn't changed much.

EARL

Aw, I guess it's grewed up a little. They built a new Wal-Mart out on the highway. Just about killed downtown.

RAY

(casually)

Yeah, I always wanted to get down there
someday and visit Mama's grave.

EARL

Well you oughta come on down some time and
do it.

RAY

One of these days.

(turns a corner)

The police impound yard's right up here.

EARL

You got any vacation time comin' up?

RAY

Done took it this year.

(pause)

'Course I got quite a few sick days piled
up. Takin' one today, as a matter of
fact. Guess they'll have to ask someone
else where the bathroom's at.

Earl sees ahead of them a high chainlink fence topped with barbed
wire, and inside row after row of cars.

EARL

This it?

RAY

This is it.

EARL

(after a pause--casually)

Yeah--some time you oughta come on
down--

CUT TO:

109 EXT. INTERSTATE HEADED SOUTH OUT OF CHICAGO - MORNING

In the busy flow of traffic, we pick out Earl's truck.

As we move in on the truck, we can see Earl's elbow hanging out
the driver's-side window. Beneath the elbow in the door are
several bulletholes.

On the passenger side is Ray.

110 INT. EARL'S TRUCK - MORNING

RAY

How long a trip you say it was?

EARL

'Bout 18 hours drivin' time.

RAY

(shakes his head)

18 hours in a truck with you.

(reaches for his seat belt)

Guess I better hunker down and buckle my belt...

111 INT. A CHICAGO BANK - MORNING

Ann Murdock sits at a big desk in the quiet wide-open space of the bank, conferring with a young female ASSOCIATE.

VIRGIL (O.S.)

Hey, Ann.

Ann looks up and sees Virgil, wearing his bus driver's uniform, standing in front of her. She doesn't say anything.

ASSOCIATE

Hi, Virgil.

VIRGIL

Hi, Laurie.

ASSOCIATE

(discreetly excusing
herself to Ann)

We can talk later.

The woman leaves. Virgil and Ann look at each other.

VIRGIL

Man, I like that dress. Is it new?

ANN

(quietly)

What do you want, Virgil?

VIRGIL

Well, I just wanted to--

ANN

(sarcastically)

To "stick up" for me again?

VIRGIL

To apologize for Saturday. I was wrong.
Real wrong. There wasn't two sides to
that argument. There was only one side.
Yours.

Ann can't help but smile a little at so complete a capitulation.

ANN

I wish I had a tape recording of this.

VIRGIL

Now it only applies for just this
argument.

Ann laughs a little now. Virgil looks encouraged.

VIRGIL

I got two things I'd like to ask you.
First thing, till I started actin' like a
fool, I thought we were all havin' a great
time Saturday. Maybe we can make it like
a regular deal--every Saturday, the four
of us havin' a picnic or somethin'. Kind
of give us all somethin' to look forward
to.

ANN

(looks at Virgil with a
musing smile)

That's possible. What's the second thing?

VIRGIL

(with sudden passion)

Baby, I miss you so bad. Maybe you'd just
let me hold you sometimes--for 30 seconds
a week--just hold you.

Ann looks at Virgil, and doesn't say anything. Very slowly and
deliberately, as though not wanting to scare off a shy forest
creature, Virgil walks around the desk, and stands beside Ann's
chair.

VIRGIL

(softly)

Don't sometimes you wanna hold me?

After a moment, Ann slowly stands up, and turns to Virgil. Their
arms go around each other. Ann lays her head on Virgil's chest,
her eyes fill with sudden tears, and then she closes her eyes...

112 EXT. A DENNY'S - NIGHT

The Denny's is off the interstate. Through the window we see Ray

and Earl sitting in a booth and eating supper. Earl is talking, while Ray is listening and chewing his food. Suddenly Ray stops chewing and stares at Earl.

113 INT. DENNY'S - NIGHT

Earl looks across the table at Ray's aghast face.

EARL

What are you lookin' at me like that for?

RAY

You're a Republican?

EARL

What else would I be?

Ray shakes his head, and resumes chewing.

114 EXT./INT. EARL'S TRUCK, MOVING DOWN THE INTERSTATE - NIGHT

It's early in the A.M. Now Ray's at the wheel. He sees a big "WELCOME TO ARKANSAS" sign.

Ray looks over at Earl. Earl's eyes are closed, and his chin's on his chest. On his lap, between loose fingers, is the old black and white photo of Willa Mae. Ray smiles a little.

115 EXT. SOMMERVILLE CITY LIMITS - SUNRISE

A rim of orange sun is showing above some pine trees. We see by the highway the bullet-riddled sign that says "SOMMERVILLE POP. 9596". *

Now Earl's truck goes by the sign, headed into town.

116 INT. EARL'S TRUCK - SUNRISE

Earl, behind the wheel, reaches over and shakes his sleeping brother's knee.

RAY

(coming to with a startled snort)

What?!

EARL

We're here. We're home. Somerville *

Ray looks out the window groggily, and with a touch of wonder.

CUT TO:

A116 SHOTS OF EARL AND RAY DRIVING THROUGH TOWN

They drive down Main Street, through the still-deserted business *

district. They pass the barber shop, where the fat black man in overalls we saw in the beginning is sweeping off the sidewalk, a stubby cigar jutting from his mouth. They drive through some pretty tree-lined streets with nice houses in the white part of town. Finally we see them on a patched-up blacktop road, bumping over the railroad tracks we saw in Aunt T.'s flashback. Now Earl pulls the truck over to the side of the road.

117 INT. EARL'S TRUCK - SUNRISE

Earl and Ray are both gazing out the passenger window.

EARL

You sure this is it?

RAY

(quietly)

I'm sure.

THEIR POV: The lot where Willa Mae and Aunt T.'s house was is now vacant and overgrown with weeds. There's an old rusted out metal barrel overflowing with burnt trash right in the middle. As they watch, an old mongrel-looking dog trots over to the barrel, sniffs it, raises its hind leg, and pisses on it.

EARL

Now that's a fine way to honor my birth place.

Ray laughs--and then he gazes solemnly at the woods that start not too far behind the lot.

RAY

Mama's grave's back there in the woods some place.

Earl gazes toward the woods. He and Ray are silent for a moment. Neither seems in a hurry. Finally--

EARL

Well...

And Earl reaches for the door handle.

118 EXT. THE LOT - SUNRISE

Earl and Ray both get out of the truck. They start to walk toward the woods, but then a thought strikes Earl, and he returns to the truck and reaches through the passenger window and opens the glove box and pulls out a flask of scotch.

EARL

That's the only thing the little bastards didn't get.

119 EXT. THE WOODS - SUNRISE

Earl and Ray are walking slowly along. It is quiet and beautiful. Shafts of sunlight shoot down through the leafy tops of the hardwood trees.

Now they reach a little clearing. There are a few grave markers sticking up above some weeds. The graves have been neglected for a long time.

Ray and Earl stop at the edge of the clearing, and look toward the headstones. None can be read for the weeds.

Now Ray begins walking toward the graves. Earl stays where he's at. He seems uncomfortable, as if he's not sure what to do.

Ray stops, and looks back at him.

Earl looks at Ray, and they both smile a little. Ray waits for Earl, and now they walk to the graves together.

Now Earl and Ray move separately among the graves, looking down, parting weeds, bending over, reading weather-worn names of people who have been dead for a long time.

EARL

(calls to Ray)

Be careful or you'll get up on a copperhead.

Ray looks at Earl, then back at the weeds, and begins to move more carefully.

Now Earl parts the weeds from a headstone, and stares at it for a long moment. Ray looks over at him—and then he comes and joins him at the headstone.

THEIR POV:

WILLA MAE LAMBERT

1908

1933

They stand back, and look at the stone in silence for a while. Soft sunlight streams down on the clearing, a breeze RUSTLES the trees.

RAY

It's kind of a pretty mornin'.

EARL

Yeah it is.

Rev. 5/1/95 (Blue)

RAY

Sure hadn't been taken care of much, has it?

EARL

Naw. Sure hadn't been. We can come back out here later and clean it up and maybe put some flowers down.

RAY

You know, I was thinkin' maybe later we could go out to visit your mama Carrie's grave too.

*
*
*

EARL

That'd be real good.

Now Earl pulls the flask of scotch out of his hip pocket, and takes a drink. *

EARL

Y'ont a snort?

Ray takes the bottle and drinks a little and makes a face.

RAY

Whoa, Lordy! Man, I never could drink that scotch.

Earl laughs a little as he takes the bottle back.

EARL

The folks are up and about by now, prob'ly.

RAY

Yeah?

EARL

(after a pause)

You ready to go have it out with Daddy?

RAY

Is he in pretty good shape for an old man?

EARL

Well, no, he's not limber like me. He's all stove up. But he's mean as a snake when he wants to be.

RAY

Well, I took you, I guess I can take him too.

They both laugh a little--and then Ray goes quiet. He stares off a moment through the trees...and then he looks back down at the grave.

RAY

I don't hardly know what I feel anymore.
Guess I'll know when he's standin' in
front of me.

Earl smiles a little.

EARL

Now listen, this ain't gonna be like a
Sunday picnic. Ruby and my girl, they'll
be all right I guess--but that nephew of
mine makes your boy look like Mahatma
Ghandi. He might take a swing at you. Or
me, or maybe both of us.

RAY

(thinks about it)

Maybe I'll have another drink of that
scotch.

Earl hands Ray the bottle. Ray takes a drink, and then Earl
takes a drink. Now he returns the bottle to his pocket.

EARL

Well, I guess we better get to it.

Looking resolute, they turn and begin to head back the way they
came. We watch the two brothers disappear among the trees, as
we:

FADE OUT

THE END