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CROSSROADS

by

John Fusco

I went to the Crossroad
Fell down on my knee
Went to the Crossroad
Fell down on my knee
Asked the Lord above have mercy
Save poor Bob if you please.

--Robert Johnson
Crossroad Blues
Recorded San Antonio, November 27, 1936

Original: PINK

Revisions:

4/27	GREEN	5/29	GREEN
4/28	YELLOW	6/3	YELLOW
4/29	BLUE	6/16	COLLATION
5/6	WHITE	6/20	BLUE
5/7	PINK	6/21	SALMON
5/10	GREEN	6/26	PINK
5/13	YELLOW	6/28	GREEN
5/16	BLUE	7/5	YELLOW
5/18	WHITE	7/8	BLUE
5/21	SALMON		
5/23	GOLDENROD		
5/27	PINK		

April 9, 1985

REV. 6/20/85

"CROSSROADS"

FADE IN:

AA1 EXT. CROSSROADS - DESATURATED COLOR - DAY

AA1

A lone man standing near the crossroads--a guitar under his arm. He is a Black Man wearing a dark suit...He stands there...waiting...

A1 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - DESATURATED COLOR - DAY

A1

A man carrying a guitar case appears from around the corner --in silhouette due to the large window with bright sunlight pouring through it at the end of the hallway. The man stops at a door, knocks and after a moment is let inside.

ALA INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

ALA *

Robert looks around.

JOHN MCGRAW

Yes sir, here we are, Robert.
Nothin' to it. You ever recorded before?

Robert shakes his head.

JOHN MCGRAW

Well, you just set yourself down there in front of that microphone and play your heart out. We take care of the rest. Like I said nothin' to it. We got all the machines in back. You just get yourself ready, okay Robert?

Robert nods.

JOHN MCGRAW

Good. Okay, let's get to it.

Walks into the next room.

A2 HANDS

A2

opening the battered guitar case, taking out a worn acoustic with metal strings. A glass slide is slipped over the little finger of the left hand. A few HAUNTING NOTES as the guitar is tuned.

1 INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DESATURATED COLOR

1

A converted hotel room, lit only by dim blades of afternoon sunlight, cutting in through a lone window.

(CONTINUED)

1

CONTINUED:

1

Just out of reach of the natural light, three men sit restlessly in an observation window; a pane of glass crudely installed in the far wall. A bare bulb lights the booth.

FEEDBACK whines momentarily as JOHN McGRAW (33), a National Record Company Rep. grunts into a booth microphone, his eyes fixed across the room. To his left, TWO ASSISTANTS fiddle with the recording machine.

McGRAW

(via speaker)

Okay, Robert, you all set?

In the far corner--half-hidden in the shadows--ROBERT JOHNSON (24) sits in a chair, his back to the camera and observation window. A slender man in a dark neatly pressed suit hunches over the guitar, still TUNING it, and HUMMING away at the microphone. Satisfied that he is now ready, he looks back, nods...

SUPER: SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, 1936.

McGRAW (O.S.)

Okay. Very good. Here we go.
Master number 26-29, Take 1,
Robert Johnson, stand by...

Johnson's right arm snakes toward the floor, setting a bottle of whiskey down. His silhouetted form is suddenly lit red as one of the two wall-mounted lightbulbs begin blinking.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

Behind the observation window, McGraw shifts his careful between his assistants and his artist.

MCGRAW

Ready now...rolling...

Johnson takes on a faint blue tint as the other lightbulb is set aglow. He fidgets...taps a wing-tipped shoe on the floor...

2 CLOSE ON JOHNSON'S HANDS

2

launching their attack on the strings of his instrument, the prelude to "CROSSROAD BLUES"...

ROBERT JOHNSON

I went to the crossroad, fell down
on my knee.

I went to the crossroad, fell down
on my knee...

As his haunting voice barks into the mike, his head jerks to one side...

ROBERT JOHNSON

Asked the Lord above have mercy,
Save poor Bob, if you please--

3 INT. JUILLIARD SCHOOL OF MUSIC CLASSROOM - DAY

3

A fast right hand finger-picks the six strings of a guitar, classical style. The left hand slips up the neck, shifting from chord to chord, favoring us with MOZART: TURKISH MARCH.

EUGENE MARTONE is the young guitarist, seated in a lone chair on a small stage. He hugs the guitar, eyes closed, lips taut; a musician at one with his instrument. He brings the piece to a graceful finish--then suddenly moves into a BLUES RIFF.

Before Eugene sit TWELVE OTHER STUDENTS, each paired with a guitar. They all smile at Eugene's musical joke. At the back of the class DR. SANTIS sits, a gradebook at his lap. He is very decidedly not amused by Eugene's ad lib conclusion to Haydn. The professor is a trim, neat man in his fifties. As Eugene moves back into the classroom, Santis nods in approval and perhaps amazement, writing a mark in his book.

SANTIS

All right. Miss Narciso, please.
That was very good, Eugene.
Very good up to a point. Most
people approach Mozart with

(MORE)

*

CONTINUED:

SANTIS (CONT'D)
respect. That is evidently an
attitude^{which} you are unfortunately
unfamiliar with.

Eugene appears at the professor's side, guitar in tow. He
speaks in a whisper under the TUNING of the next student.

EUGENE

Sorry.

SANTIS

Your apology is accepted, Eugene.

EUGENE

Is it okay if I go to the sound
lab? I've got to really cram for
Advanced Theory.

SANTIS

Yes. I think Mozart and the rest
of us can get through the next hour
without you, Eugene...Miss Narciso,
please.

Eugene moves out of the classroom as MISS NARCISO starts to
play...(PRESTO)

3A

EXT. JUILLIARD SCHOOL OF MUSIC - STEPS - DAY

3A *

MORRIS, a friend, and Eugene walk down the stairs toward
Broadway and 66th, guitar cases in hand.

MORRIS

What's with you anyway Eugene.
Santis is really going to have
your ass one of these days--you
know that man has no sense of
humor.

EUGENE

Yeah, well, maybe I'm beginning
to lose mine, too.

MORRIS

The blues--it's passe, over,
finished--who cares. What're
you wasting all your time on this
Robert Johnson shit for?

EUGENE

Why don't you ask Clapton or Keith
Richards if the blues are passe
--that song is my ticket to the
future.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

3A

CONTINUED:

3A *

EUGENE (CONT'D)

I find that 30th song and the
sky's the limit. I don't intend
to spend the rest of my life
playing Bach in some shitty
coffee house for tips.

Eugene bounds across Broadway, darting in between cars.

MORRIS

(to himself)

Grow up Eugene.

CUT TO:

3B

INT. LIBRARY - MICROFILM LAB - DAY

3B

Eugene seated among the rows of microviewers--huge walls of
books beyond...

3C

VIEW SCREEN

The microfilm speeds past, crawling to a halt on a page that
once broke the news:

BLUESPLAYER SHOT IN ARGUMENT

*

SUSPECT ARRESTED IN HARLEM

Blues singer and harmonica player Blind Dog Fulton, was
arrested early this morning for what police believe to
be an attempted homicide. An altercation with Snooks
Jordan, following a club date in Harlem, resulted in
Jordan's being shot and Fulton being badly cut, apparently
by a liquor bottle.

Fulton, 61, stated that fellow band member Jordan had
been cheating him out of his share of the band's earnings.
Jordan was subsequently wounded in the argument that
ensued. Fulton claimed that the shooting occurred in
self-defense as Jordan attempted to assault him with a
broken bottle while they were driving home last evening.
Fulton is currently being held without bail at the 96th
Precinct. Jordan is listed in serious but stable condi-
tion in St. Ann's Hospital.

Fulton, considered by many the King of the Delta Blues
harmonica, was born in Mississippi and served his blues
apprenticeship with such recognized bluesmen as Son House,
Tampa Red, Robert Johnson, and more recently "Howlin'
Wolf." Since moving to New York City from Chicago 16
years ago, Fulton has been playing almost exclusively in
the Harlem area.

3CA EXT. NEW YORK CITY HALL OF RECORDS - DAY

3CA *

Eugene goes up the steps--looking very intent.

3D INT. DORMITORY - EUGENE'S ROOM - DAY

3D

Eugene at his desk--he thumbs through the Blues Who's Who, stops on the Robert Johnson entry, flips past it to the Blind Dog Fulton entry...

3E THE ENTRY

3E

We hear Eugene's voice as he reads...

EUGENE (V.O.)

"BROWN, WILLIE

(aka: Blind Dog Fulton/
Smokehouse Brown).

Born: January 10, 1907
Yazoo, Mississippi

Presumed deceased.

Inst: Harmonica.

Orphaned at the age of nine,
father a sharecropper, mother a
domestic. Worked in a turpentine
camp on Jim Yaeger's plantation
until the age of seventeen.

Frequently worked picnics and fish
frvs in the Yazoo and Lula areas.
Played with Son House/Kid Bailey.
Began considerable travels in the
thirties, played with Robert Johnson
in local joints, Memphis, TN and
Delta areas. 1938 moved to Chicago.
Recorded for Grafton, Vocalion, R.C.A.
in Chicago. Moved to N.Y.C. in 1952.
Played clubs in Harlem. Recorded
for Epic in 1960 and Folkways in
1962. Continued with club dates
and session work in N.Y.C. area.
Toured with Snooks Jordon 1965-68.
Arrested for deadly assault in 1968,
imprisoned. First acknowledged
master of the country blues harmonica."

3F EXT. JUILLIARD DORMITORY - NIGHT

3F *

A modern cement and glass building--lights twinkle from the
window--Manhattan glows beyond... Eugene and Morris, who is
carrying a trombone case, walking across campus. A student
musical group is PLAYING nearby.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

3F

CONTINUED:

3F

EUGENE

I tried the public records, I tried the prison authority, I tried everything I could think of ...nothing. He went to jail and after that they either have no record or the record's been lost or it's classified and they can't tell me anything because I'm not a blood relative or related by marriage. So what do I do?

MORRIS

I dunno. Hire a detective.

EUGENE

Yeah.

3G

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

3G *

Eugene comes down the corridor, checking the numbers. He enters an office with "Empire Investigations" painted on the glass...

4 INT. DORMITORY - EUGENE'S ROOM - NIGHT

4

A KNOCK on the door--Eugene answers it. A burly man stands outside...

MAN

Mr. Martone?

EUGENE

Yeah?

MAN

Eugene Martone?

EUGENE

That's right.

MAN

I'm Joe Krieger--Empire Investigations.

KRIEGER enters.
Looks around.

KRIEGER

Nice room.

EUGENE

Thanks.

KRIEGER

I always wanted my boy to go to Juilliard. He played the trombone. Gave it up though. Goddamn kid.

EUGENE

That's too bad.

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

4

KRIEGER

Aw, what the hell you gonna do?

Takes an envelope out of his coat pocket.

KRIEGER

Well, here you go, Eugene.
Mr. Canfield, who you talked to,
assigned me to this matter and
this is what I've come up with...

EUGENE

You found him?

KRIEGER

I've gone through the records,
got some old photographs, that
kind of stuff...

Opens the envelope.

Begins to read from a paper...

KRIEGER

Willie Brown, A.K.A. Blind Dog
Fulton, A.K.A. Smokehouse Brown
was arrested in 1968, deadly assault,
seems like he shot somebody, convicted,
sentenced, and began serving time.
According to the best authorities
he was born...

*

EUGENE

In 1907, so he would have been
sixty-one.

KRIEGER

Yeah. That's right. You've done
your homework too.

EUGENE

But, is he still alive?

KRIEGER

He's a resident at Eastwick Security
Nursing Home, here in the city.
116th Street near First Avenue.

EUGENE

Great.

KRIEGER

It's all here in the report.

EUGENE

Terrific. How much do I owe you?

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED: (2)

4 *

KRIEGER

You put two hundred down and
another two-fifty will cover it.

EUGENE

Right.

Eugene goes to his desk, starts to write a check.

KRIEGER

You must've saved up on your
allowance.

EUGENE

That's right, I did...Did you talk
to him personally?

KRIEGER

Nope. We don't violate a person's
privacy if it's at all possible.
We just supply the information.

(pause)

Say, I know it's none of my business
but do you mind telling me why it
was so important to find this old
guy?

EUGENE

Sure. He was Robert Johnson's
friend.

The detective just stares at him.
Eugene signs the check.
Smiles.

5
THRU OMITTED
13

5 *
OMITTED THRU
13

14 INT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - DAY

14

In the long corridor, Eugene waits in front of a nurses'
station. At the sight of a STOCKY NURSE making her way
toward him, he looks to her expectantly...

NURSE ONE

I'm sorry. Willie says he doesn't
know anyone named Martone.

EUGENE

Well, to be honest with you, he
wouldn't know me. But if I could
just talk to him--

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

NURSE ONE

Mr. Brown made it clear that he won't be seeing anyone.

EUGENE

No, look, a minute--Just let me stick my head in one minute...

NURSE ONE

I said, Mr. Brown has made it clear, and I think I've made it clear. He doesn't want to see anyone.

Eugene surrenders. He heads down the hall, back toward the elevators. It is quiet. Dead quiet. And then, breaking through the building in screaming ECHOES, a bluesy HARMONICA lays down the law. Eugene turns, quickly--on the tail of the harp riff. A DEEP VOICE SINGING THE BLUES. Eugene wants to sprint toward the sound.

But, in the shadows of the corridor, the stocky nurse holds her ground, arms folded. Behind her, a burly ORDERLY lurks, eyeing the visitor. Eugene turns and goes...

15 INT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - NEAR ELEVATOR - DAY

15

A frustrated Eugene comes through the heavy glass door separating the corridor from the bank of elevators. He hits the 'down' button when something in front of him catches his attention...

On the notice board--amongst the clutter of old bulletins--"HELP WANTED" announcement, describing the job as "PART-TIME MAINTENANCE." Eugene's hand jerks it from the board...

15A INT. DORMITORY - EUGENE'S ROOM - NIGHT

15A

CLOSE ON A CASSETTE--being snapped into a player. The artist, "Robert Johnson," as the tiny gears begin spinning... the song, "Crossroad Blues."

Eugene sits near the cassette player, a pencil in his teeth. He lifts a photograph from Krieger's envelope--studies it for a moment.

15B THE PHOTOGRAPH - LABELLED 'THE SMOKEHOUSE BOYS'

15B *

The image of THREE BLACK MEN clowing for the camera in some bar. The look of the photo is clearly 40-50 years old. Eugene studies the black man on the extreme left--he wears glasses and holds a harmonica.

15C EUGENE

15C

sets the photo down, picks up an old acoustic guitar and begins to play along with the recording.

16 INT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - CORRIDOR - THE FOLLOWING DAY 16

A mop slaps the linoleum in a spray of soap and water. We pull back to reveal Eugene, now dressed in a blue, one-piece custodian uniform and his Nikes.

He raises the mop into guitar position, and turns on an electric boogie step until MRS. DEAGEN, the Administrative Director of the home, glides past Eugene, making her way carefully down the slick corridor...

DEAGEN

Martone, right? When you finish the halls, would you take care of the coffee room? And let's put a new trash bag in my office. Thank you.

Eugene nods, leaning on his mop handle and watching the boss walk off. When she turns the corner, he continues pushing the mop, glancing into the residents' rooms as he goes.

All around him, gloomy REST HOME SOUNDS: old women weeping, frog-throated old men coughing, nurses coaxing, the receptionist on the intercom, and then, somewhere under it all, that familiar HARMONICA sound.

Eugene jams the mop into his bucket and wheels it forward, searching out each room he passes.

Finally, at the end of the hall, he stops at Room 303, and smiles.

17 INT. WILLIE BROWN'S ROOM

17

In his wheelchair, Willie faces a large, wall mirror, while steaming away on his harmonica. Noting the reflection of an intruder, he cuts the tune off and turns his motorized chair around--An elderly man well into his seventies, wearing glasses...

WILLIE

Okay, what you want, Mr. Janitor Man? I ain' made no mess.

Eugene enters, dragging his mop with him. He creeps forward cautiously, as if approaching some rare and dangerous animal.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

EUGENE

Willie?

WILLIE

That's my name.

EUGENE

I heard you playing harp. I thought
I'd drop in and say hello.

WILLIE

You're new here.

EUGENE

Today's my first day.

WILLIE

Hello, Mr. Janitor Man. Now, let
me be.

He maneuvers his chair around again to face the view. Eugene
steps in closer.

EUGENE

I just wanted to say, if there's
anything I can get for you--

WILLIE

Yeah. You can get gone.

EUGENE

Okay. Sorry to bother you. I'll
stop by later, Mr. Fulton.

Willie spins his chair around...

WILLIE

Mr. Who?

EUGENE

You were Blind Dog Fulton from
about 1939 until 1968, weren't you?

The old man fingers the motor lever at the arm of his chair,
edging forward, closer to the janitor.

WILLIE

Blind Dog Fulton? The music man?
That's who you think I am?

Eugene nods, taking a step back as the chair zeroes in on him.

WILLIE

What you been drinkin', sterno?

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED: (2)

17

EUGENE

Your name's Willie Brown, right?
Well, Blind Dog Fulton was born
Willie Brown. He used that name
until 1938. After his friend Robert
Johnson was killed, he went to
Chicago and changed his name to
Blind Dog Fulton. It's all in the
books.

WILLIE

Listen here, Junior. I got six
cousins named Willie Brown. The
man that run the store down on
125th Street, his name Willie Brown.
If I had a nickel for every Willie
Brown in this world, I wouldn't be
here now, listn'n to your bullshit.

EUGENE

It's not bullshit. I've been doing
research...I paid a lot of money...

*

WILLIE

You paid good money, then you got
robbed...joke's on you.

*

EUGENE

You're not the Willie Brown
Robert Johnson calls out for help
to in "Crossroad Blues?"

WILLIE

Shit, no. Robert Johnson. My
sister had one of his records
once... She's dead.

Eugene looks around the room for clues. It looks like any
elderly resident's room.

WILLIE

I said, my sister passed.

EUGENE

Oh, sorry. I'm sorry. I don't
know...you play harmonica. That
was the real Willie Brown's main
instrument.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED: (3)

17

WILLIE

Where I come from, you don't blow
no harp, you don't get no pussy.

Pause.

EUGENE

This is great. I waste my money
and now I'm stuck here pushing a
mop and you're not even--

*

WILLIE

Well, pardon me for bein' just
another ol' man. Now, like I
said before, get gone.

Eugene heads for the door, disappointed.

17A INT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - TV ROOM - THE FOLLOWING DAY 17A

Willie watching TV with several other patients. Eugene
moves by with his mop.

WILLIE

Hey, Mister Janitor Man?

Eugene turns...still pouting from yesterday's encounter.

WILLIE

Why a white boy like you so hot
on some long gone harmonica player?

EUGENE

I'm looking for a song. A lost song.

WILLIE

Lost song? What tune you lookin'
for?

EUGENE

Robert Johnson was supposed to
record thirty songs at the Texas
sessions. Only twenty-nine exist.
He never recorded number thirty.

WILLIE

Read that in a book too, huh?

(CONTINUED)

17A CONTINUED:

17A

EUGENE

That's right. And I figure Willie Brown might be the last man alive to know what that missing song was. That part's not in the book.

WILLIE

Why you wanna know about all that kind of stuff?

EUGENE

I'm a bluesman.

WILLIE

A bluesman? You? Where you from?

EUGENE

Long Island.

Willie suddenly cracks up with wild laughter.

WILLIE

Long Islan'! Shit, that is rich, yes sir. Long Islan', famous breeding groun' for bluesmen.

Eugene looks like he doesn't know whether to laugh or turn and run. Before he can respond at all, NURSE TWO enters the room and grabs the back of Willie's chair. *

NURSE TWO

Okay, Willie, time for your weekly with the doctor. Let's go have a check-up.

WILLIE

I feel fine. Why not leave me be?

NURSE

Oh, Willie, come on, stop being such a pain.

As he is wheeled to the door, Willie twists his torso around in his chair and points a finger at Eugene.

WILLIE

Hey! You gonna be a janitor then act like one. Mop my room up, here? Give her a good straighten'n.

And he is gone, his deep laughter barking far down the corridor.

17B INT. DORMITORY - EUGENE'S ROOM - NIGHT

17H

Eugene sits on a high stool--his classical guitar on his lap. He is looking down into an open music book, and practicing CLASSICAL SCALES...

Eugene runs his fingers up and down the neck, smoothly, really trying to become one with the classical piece. But he suddenly puts the guitar aside, lifts his battered old acoustic and begins a blues run that ends in a long, high bend...And then he smiles.

18 INT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - WILLIE'S ROOM - DAY 18

Willie is slouched in his wheelchair, drawing a picture with thick crayons. He gazes up as Eugene enters, carting a large trash bin on wheels. He parks the bin in the doorway and begins hustling about the room, dumping the smaller trash bucket into the bin, gathering crumpled tissue, changing a lightbulb, etc.

WILLIE

Well, lookee here...The famous Long Island bluesman come to pay another visit.

EUGENE

How's it going, Willie?

Willie ignores him and continues his drawing with a stiff hand. Eugene moves in and looks at the picture.

WILLIE

Ever been to Mississippi?

EUGENE

Nope.

WILLIE

Then why the hell you lookin' at it like you know'd the place?

19 CLOSE ON DRAWING

19

Flat Delta country intersected by dirt crossroads...

EUGENE (O.S.)

Hey, come on, Willie, let's forget about the artwork. You gonna blow some harp for me? I'm dying to hear you play.

20 ANOTHER ANGLE

20

Willie adds some finishing slashes to it, then gazes up at the custodian.

WILLIE

Well, I wouldn't want to have no dead janitor on my hands.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

20

He fumbles down around his pajamas, from whence he produces his harmonica...

WILLIE

But, I don't play for free.

Eugene digs a quarter out of his pocket and places it on Willie's Delta drawing, beside a small glass of prune juice...

WILLIE

What you wanna hear?

EUGENE

That Robert Johnson song. You know, that one we talked about. Old number thirty...

WILLIE

Oh, that one he never put down on record?

EUGENE

Yeah, that one.

WILLIE

The one only Willie Brown would know 'bout, that one?

EUGENE

Right, Willie. That's the one.

WILLIE

Don't believe I know it...But here's somethin' call "Gonna jump that train for Heaven, leave my Pontiac in Hell."

Willie proceeds to fan, warble, and pop an outstanding TWO BAR HARP RIFF.

WILLIE

Ever hear that one, boy?

EUGENE

Nope. But that was great.

WILLIE

Don't know that song? An' you call yourself a bluesman? Go on, get your skinny white ass outta here...

Eugene stares the stubborn old man down for a moment, then places a piece of paper on his tray, then hurries out the door. *

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED: (2)

20

Alone, Willie lifts the piece of paper--it is the photograph of the Smokehouse Boys. As he studies it, his hand comes closer to the glass of prune juice...He touches it lightly with his fingers: CRASH!

A YOUNG NURSE sticks her head in to investigate the disturbance.

NURSE THREE

Oh, Willie! Look at that mess!
(calling out)

Can somebody get a mop down here?

Willie sits back in his chair, still studying the photograph.

20A INT. JUILLIARD - LATE AFTERNOON

20A

In a small office, Dr. Santis sits behind a large desk, eyes set on Eugene, who fidgets before him.

SANTIS

You came to us as a classical student. The word prodigy was actually used on occasion, Mr. Martone. And you have proven to be one of the finest guitarists in this school. But now I understand that you've been performing a more... primitive style of music in the student coffee house. Is that correct?

EUGENE

Primitive? Well, if that's what you wanna call it, I--

Santis interrupts--a harsh tone in his voice.

SANTIS

That's what I choose to call it, Mr. Martone.

EUGENE

Well, then, yeah. I've been picking some blues.

SANTIS

Mr. Martone, a word of advice. Don't serve two masters. The discipline of the classical is exacting. If you persist with the other, you will squander your talent.

(CONTINUED)

20A CONTINUED:

20A

EUGENE

What if the other is my talent?

SANTIS

It's not. Excellence in primitive music is cultural. You have to be born into it...You were allowed out of secondary school early to pursue classical studies. You did not come here on a...on a Howling Wolf scholarship. I suggest you re-examine your priorities.

21 INT. REST HOME CORRIDOR - EVENING

21

Eugene has a windbreaker on over his uniform as he approaches the time clock. He locates his time card and forces it into the clock, recording his 5:00 shift's end.

Getting a running headstart, he slides over the slick linoleum floors, all the way to a closet. Unlocking the door, he opens it quickly and drags out a battered, cardboard guitar case.

22 INT. REST HOME - COMMISSARY - NIGHT

22

Willie sits in his motorized chair, parked alone at the end of a long table, poking his fork into his supper. As usual, he ignores Eugene as he approaches.

EUGENE

Howya doing, Willie? *

Eugene sets his guitar case on the dinner table and pulls out his beat-up acoustic.

WILLIE

Oh, man, look at this shit. Here we go. A little soul from the Golden Ghetto.

Eugene tunes the instrument quickly, precisely...

WILLIE

Hey. Hey, Long Islan', let's hear one 'bout the plantation you was born on. Let's hear how you come to doin' time on the pea farm...

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

Eugene suddenly kicks into a stance, and stomps out a hard-driving BLUES PROGRESSION picking out a stinging run of notes...

Willie looks on, stunned, as the kid cuts loose on the song. He plays amazingly well, putting out a sound that belies his appearance. Fanning the strings of his ax, Eugene brings the song to a close.

Willie adjusts his glasses...

WILLIE

Where'd you learn to pick like that?

EUGENE

Listening to a lot of old records-- stomping the rhythm with Willie Brown, first acknowledged master of the country blues harmonica.

*

WILLIE

Sounds like some more shit you read in a book. You ain' gonna let me rest with this music talk, are ya?

EUGENE

You got it.

*

WILLIE

You ain' gonna quit 'til I come to confessin'? That right?

He wheels in closer to Eugene and offers a hand.

WILLIE

Okay. Meet Blind Dog Fulton. The original one and only Willie Brown. You have found your man.

Eugene nods in triumph, and grips the hand.

EUGENE

This is great...But look, I know I'm not Robert Johnson yet...

WILLIE

No, you ain't. You ain' even the beginnin' of a pimple on the late, great Robert Johnson's ass.

Eugene's confident grin fades.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (2)

22.

WILLIE

You might have a little bit of
lightnin' but you're missing
everything else...

EUGENE

Like what?

WILLIE

Mileage. An' you can't get that
livin' home with Mama wipin' your
ass.

EUGENE

I don't live at home.

WILLIE

Where you live?

EUGENE

School dormitory.

WILLIE

Oh, school dormitory?...Yes sir,
times is hard, times is hard.

Willie drives away in his chair--Eugene grabs his guitar and
follows.

22A INT. CORRIDOR

22A.

Willie speeding along, heading for his room--Eugene at his
side, trying to keep up.

EUGENE

You know what song it was Robert
Johnson didn't record that day,
Willie?

WILLIE

Course I do. I was with Robert
when he made it up. Memphis,
summer of 1936.

EUGENE

Will you let me in on it?

WILLIE

Shit, no.

EUGENE

Why not?

(CONTINUED)

22A CONTINUED:

22A

WILLIE

Why should I?

EUGENE

I could record it. Like Clapton did with "Crossroads" and the Stones with "Love In Vain." It could be my intro into the blues scene. We could record it together...

WILLIE

You're just one more white boy rippin' off our music.

EUGENE

Come on, we'd be giving it to the whole world. There's all kinds of people that would give anything. Me an' you...

WILLIE

Nope. No mileage. You ain't deservin'.

EUGENE

Well, look, when I get out of Juilliard, I'll put on some mileage, alright?

WILLIE

When you get out of Julie who?

EUGENE

Juilliard. Music school.

WILLIE

Only one school. Straight on down in the Delta. That's where it all started.

They are now near Willie's room--Eugene jumps in front of Willie, blocking his progress.

EUGENE

Here's another something from the Delta, Willie. Tell me this doesn't sound like Son House.

He begins stroking the strings hauntingly...

WILLIE

Sound like bird shit.

(CONTINUED)

22A CONTINUED: (2)

22A

Willie's eyes follow Eugene's hands up and down the neck of the guitar.

EUGENE

Come on, Willie. We can record the Robert Johnson song right here in the hospital. Imagine what we could do with that track?

WILLIE

You know, I like you, Eugene. An' every once in a while, I think I jest might teach you the song.

Eugene stops playing...

WILLIE

But first I'm gonna tell you what you gotta do.

EUGENE

Sure, go ahead.

WILLIE

Get me outta here.

EUGENE

What?

WILLIE

Get me back down to Fulton's Point, my piece of land outside Yazoo City.

EUGENE

Right. Escape from here. I'd end up in--

WILLIE

You get me out, you got that number thirty song.

EUGENE

Are you serious? You trying to get me arrested or something?

WILLIE

Chicken.

He drives the wheelchair past Eugene and into his room.

22B INT. WILLIE'S ROOM

22B

Willie spins his chair around to face Eugene, who has followed him in...

(CONTINUED)

22B CONTINUED:

22B

EUGENE

C'mon, Willie, let's cut the shit.
I'm serious about this song...

WILLIE

Only shit to cut around here is
you. I been of the mind that you
was another Lightnin' Boy, but
you're just a chicken ass.

A long silence. Then Willie stands and shuffles toward the window on his own two legs. He fixes the curtains to let some light in, then turns to face the boy...

WILLIE

Chicken ass. Chicken shit.

Eugene can't believe it.

EUGENE

You can walk.

WILLIE

I can still do a few other things,
too. No doubt about it. I may be
about ready for another woman. You
know, I been married four times. I
just wore 'em all out...

EUGENE

You're not a cripple. You're always
askin' people to give you a push,
but you're not crippled.

WILLIE

If they found out I could walk, they
take away my Pontiac. A man ain' no
man, got no car...You got a car?

Eugene shakes his head.

WILLIE

Well, you ain' no man yet. Not even
close. Are you, Mr. Chicken Ass?

Eugene realizes that the old man is serious.

EUGENE

Hey, wait a minute. I'm not a
chicken. And I'm not crazy either.
And even if I was, what do you want
me to do? Get you to Mississippi on
what they paid me here for the last
week?

(CONTINUED)

22B CONTINUED: (2)

22B

Instantly, Willie produces a fat, green bankroll. He holds it up alongside his grinning face.

WILLIE

The eagle flies on Friday.

EUGENE

You're really not gonna teach me the tune?

WILLIE

Sure I will. In the great state of Mississippi.

*

EUGENE

I've gotta catch a train. See you around, Willie.

He heads to the door...

*

WILLIE

Well, you go home to your dormitory 'n' git your butt wiped 'n' polished real fine, hear? Make sure you call Mama on the telephone and kiss her g'night for me.

Eugene turns, looks back at Willie, extremely resentful...

EUGENE

Leave my mother out of it. Okay?

WILLIE

Sure. Anything you want, Mr. Chicken Ass.

Pause as Eugene glares at him.

WILLIE

That song Robert wrote was a real good one. You could be the first man to record it. Be quite an honor.

Smiles at Eugene. Another moment, then...

EUGENE

Tomorrow. Five A.M. Be ready to fly. We're going to Mississippi.

WILLIE

You mean it?

(CONTINUED)

22B CONTINUED: (3)

22B

EUGENE

I told you. Be ready.

Eugene turns and walks away--Willie smiles and watches him until he disappears from sight.

23 INT. HALLWAY

23

Eugene walking down the corridor, cursing under his breath. He gets all the way down to the elevator then turns when he hears Willie playing an uptempo blues number on his harmonica. The song echoes through the halls, through the home, through his head...Eugene steps into the elevator and vanishes behind closing doors.

24 INT. WILLIE'S ROOM

24

Willie finishes the piece--turns and looks off...His eyes grow more intense as he FLASHES BACK TO:

25 OMIT
thru
2825
thru
28

29 EXT. DELTA CROSSROADS - 1919 - DAY - BLACK AND WHITE

29

An eerie crossroads, in the middle of nowhere--an old dead tree stands a lonely sentinel. TWELVE YEAR-OLD WILLIE BROWN, wearing Coke-bottle specs and shabby clothing, stands at the roadside, a harmonica handy.

A mule-drawn buck-wagon rolls by--a young girl about thirteen sits in the back. She smiles across at Willie.

GIRL

What you waitin' for? Huh? What
you waitin' for, huh, four-eyes?

Young Willie looks down the road. The girl waits for an answer that never comes as the buck-wagon continues by... *

30 OMIT
thru
4030
thru
40

41 EXT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - DAWN

41

A tall, ugly building...

42 WIDER ANGLE

42

Eugene closes the back door of a Checker Cab. He mounts the steps to the nursing home...

43 INT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - HALLWAY - DAWN 43

Eugene moves through the shadows a short distance from a nurse's station. He glances at his watch.

44 AT THE STATION 44

A YOUNG NURSE looks at the clock on the wall behind her. She speaks quietly to an OLDER NURSE who sits reading a magazine.

NURSE FOUR

Come on, take your break, Marcie.

NURSE FIVE

Sure, why not...

The older nurse looks at the clock and tucks her magazine under her arm. She follows the other Nurse out from behind the counter.

45 IN THE SHADOWS 45

Eugene hugs the wall. The nurses pass by, and he starts down the corridor. After covering a good distance, he slows down and moves against the wall. Another station at the end of the corridor, manned by another PAIR OF NURSES.

Eugene looks at his watch again. He leans on the wall and thinks this one out. Backpedaling slowly, he slips into a resident's room.

46 BEHIND STATION TWO 46

Both nurses look up at a blinking, buzzing CALL SIGNAL.

NURSE SIX

It's George.

NURSE SEVEN

I'll take it.

She hurries out of the station.

47 IN THE CORRIDOR 47

Eugene springs out of the resident's room and races straight across the hall, into another room.

48 BEHIND STATION TWO 48

Nurse Six looks up to see another CALL SIGNAL. She looks perturbed for a moment, but then it begins blinking and BUZZING crazily. She runs down the hall.

49 IN THE CORRIDOR

49

Nurse Seven slips into one room while Nurse Six hurries toward the other. As soon as she scurries through the door, Eugene prances out from behind a hallway beam and turns on the speed.

50 EXT. CORRIDOR - WILLIE'S ROOM - 303

50

He grips the knob and swings the door open.

51 INT. WILLIE'S ROOM

51

Empty. Just a vacant wheelchair by the window. The bed is neatly made.

52 INT. CORRIDOR

52

Eugene's face is pallid. His eyes search the room frantically. But then someone WHISPERS A HISS O.S. He wheels to see--

52A WILLIE

52A

standing at the end of the dimly-lit hallway, dressed in an old, gray, pin-striped suit, suspenders, tie, and a felt fedora tipped to one side.

Beside his leather shoes sits a small black briefcase. Looking more like a sagacious underworld figure than a rest home resident, he grins and adjusts his tie.

Eugene sighs, relieved for only a moment before hurrying to the old man's side and leading him around the corner.

53 INT. CORRIDOR - NEAR ELEVATOR

53

Eugene and Willie arrive through the huge glass doors--Eugene lunges for the 'down' button--Willie is preoccupied with suit adjustments while his partner stares nervously at the elevator. Eugene suddenly fires a paranoid glance over a shoulder, spotting--

54 POV - A MASSIVE ORDERLY - THROUGH THE GLASS DOORS

54

at the far end of the hall, pushing a cart toward the elevator.

55 EUGENE

55

He again jabs desperately at the 'down' button...

56 THE ORDERLY - THROUGH THE GLASS DOORS

56

notices the two characters at the elevator and abandons his cart. He strides forward, suspiciously.

57 OMIT 57

58 EUGENE 58

wheels to see the charging orderly. He curses under his breath and pokes the down button again.

59 ELEVATOR 59

The doors suddenly open.

60 EUGENE 60

leads Willie into the elevator and quickly attacks the "B" button.

61 EUGENE'S POV 61

The Orderly turns on the speed. He is only ten feet away. The elevator doors begin closing as the orderly springs through the glass doors...The Orderly lunges, trying to get a hand in between the doors--doesn't make it.

62 INT. ELEVATOR 62

Willie nods with approval of the escape thus far, eyeing Eugene with great curiosity. The suburban bluesman is nervously fumbling a ring of keys.

63 INT. BASEMENT 63

The elevator opens and Eugene dashes out--Willie calmly follows. Eugene runs to a thick door nearby and jams a key in the lock.

Willie shuffles forward, squinting in the dim light of the basement.

As they pass the door, the big Orderly suddenly appears at the stairwell, slams into the door from the other side. His face presses against the small glass window as he pounds persistently...

64 EXT. EASTWICK SECURITY REST HOME - DAWN 64

The Checker Cab is still parked in the same spot. Eugene opens the back door for Willie and helps him in--the cab pulls away.

65 INT. CHECKER CAB - DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN - DAWN 65

Willie gazes out the window, taking in the sights. Eugene sits tense, cradling his guitar case and a duffle bag. A SIREN SCREAMS out behind them, and he slinks low in his seat...

66 EXT. STREET

66

A POLICE CAR cruises up on the tailgate of the cab...then passes, turning down a side street. The cab drives on.

67 INT. PORT AUTHORITY - DAY

67

Willie stands off in the middle of the early morning bustle, looking around curiously. Eugene emerges out of the crowd, extremely nervous.

EUGENE

Hey, Willie? Look, I only have enough cash to get us from here to Memphis where we change buses. I'll need you to kick in a hundred-and-twenty-five to get to Mississippi. You got that money roll?

WILLIE

Been on my hip, half-inch from my whip for fifteen years now. 'Course I got it.

EUGENE

Okay, great. I need a-hundred-and-twenty-five dollars.

WILLIE

Don't be so green, Long Island. You never pull out a wad of bacon like that in New York City. When we get to Memphis, I'll pick up the tickets there, pay you back for the rest...

Eugene slips back into the crowd and jogs toward the ticket counter.

EUGENE

Right.

As Eugene moves away, Willie turns and admires two very attractive Young Women wearing tank tops and tight skirts.

68 INT. MOVING BUS - HIGHWAY - DAY

68

Eugene and Willie are sitting in the very last seat--the one across from the john. Eugene turns slowly to look out the rear window.

69 EUGENE'S POV - THROUGH TINTED GLASS

69

New York City receding into the distance.

69A EXT. TURNPIKE - PENNSYLVANIA - DAY

69A

The bus rolling along...

69B EXT. ANOTHER TURNPIKE - NIGHT

69B

The bus continues through a dark, industrial city...

70 INT. BUS - NIGHT (PROCESS)

70

Eugene looking out at the passing lights. Willie's eyes are half-closed, his right cheek pressed against the window.

WILLIE

I travel with Robert on and off between 1932 and 1938. Last time I saw him was couple of months before he died. I wanted to go on to Chicago--he wanted to go back to Mississippi.

EUGENE

He should of stuck with you...

WILLIE

His time come. Ain't no avoidin' things. See, when Robert
--What I'm about
to tell you is the flat bottom truth--he wanna learn himself blues--and make a name--so he went on down--

*

Eugene interrupts.

EUGENE

I know, I read all about it, Willie. He went down to the crossroads. That's where Robert Johnson made his deal with the devil.

WILLIE

You read about it?

EUGENE

Yeah. There's a lot of books on the blues folklore.

WILLIE

Don't give me that folklore shit. It happened. That's where Robert made his deal. An' after he told me about it, that's where I made mine...They learn you in school what happened to Robert?

EUGENE

Some books say Robert Johnson was poisoned. Some say he was shot.

(MORE)

70 CONTINUED:

70

EUGENE (CONT'D)

Some say he was poisoned and then
stabbed. I guess nobody really knows.

WILLIE

I know what happened to him, and
it all means one thing--dead.

EUGENE

They say it was over a woman.

WILLIE

Course it was. Women have killed
more men than all the wars put
together.

EUGENE

(skeptical)

Right. And you made your deal at
the crossroads...

WILLIE

I made the deal an' had my piece
of fame, my fortune. And what
come of me? The state pen, the
prison ward. Old folks cage.

EUGENE

Did you really shoot someone? I
mean I know that's why they put you
in jail--but you really did it?

WILLIE

Damn right I did. Snooks Jordan.
He was my guitar man. Only he was
takin' more than his share of the
money, tellin' me that's all the
man was payin'. Smack him right in
the face while he was drivin'. He
took this half-pint, broke it out
on the road, come back in on me.
Shot him in the neck.

EUGENE

And you got six years.

WILLIE

Like I said, hellhounds on my trail.
Wound up worse off than Robert.
Worse than dead.

(CONTINUED)

70 CONTINUED: (2)

70

EUGENE

It's not over yet, Willie Brown.

WILLIE

You're damn right, it's not.

Willie nestles in the corner, suddenly quite sleepy.

Eugene looks at him for a moment then leans back...

*

71 EXT. OPEN HIGHWAY - DAWN

71

The bus cruises along. The sound of a lone BLUES GUITAR, sliding and bending notes as we lose the Greyhound out toward the highway's vanishing point, where the sun is beginning to rise...

72 EXT. BUS STATION - MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE - DAY

72

The bus pulls into a large parking lot and slows to a stop in back of the station.

73 INT. BUS - DAY

73

The driver comes down the aisle, walking slightly hunched over. He reaches the back of the bus and shakes a passenger.

It is Eugene. He jumps at the driver's touch, looking up wildly over his shades.

DRIVER

Time to wake up. We're in Memphis.

Eugene looks up at him.

DRIVER

Memphis, Tennessee, son.

74 EXT. REAR OF BUS STATION - DAY

74

Eugene comes down the steps of the bus, looking about...He pauses at the last step to help Willie down.

Willie steps unsteadily onto the pavement, holding his suitcase at his side. *

EUGENE

Well, we're here, Willie, We're down south. What do you say?

Willie scans the area. *

EUGENE

How's it feel to be back in the land of cotton?

WILLIE

Tennessee ain't bad, but she ain't a pretty piece like old home Mississippi. *

Eugene chuckles patiently and speaks to Willie the way one speaks to a young child.

(CONTINUED)

74 CONTINUED:

74

EUGENE

Won't be long now. This is where
we change buses, remember?

WILLIE

Sure thing, I remember.

74A INT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION

74A

Eugene and Willie enter from the parking lot.

EUGENE

Okay, Willie, you want to give me
the money. I'll go get the tickets.

Pause.

EUGENE

It's one-hundred-and-twenty-five
dollars.

WILLIE

I thought you was payin' the
freight.

EUGENE

I just picked up the fare from New York to
here. You're taking care of the tickets
from here to Mississippi.

WILLIE

I'm pickin' up the fare?

EUGENE

Yeah. Come on, just it give it
to me, and I'll go get in line.

WILLIE

That's gonna be a problem.

EUGENE

Why?

WILLIE

What I look like to you, John D.
Rockefeller? I ain't got that
kind of money.

EUGENE

You're joking, right? You're just
jerking me around. C'mon, give me
the money roll, Willie, and we'll get
out of here.

Another pause.

74A CONTINUED:

EUGENE

The money roll, Willie, let's go. *

Willie reaches inside his jacket and pulls out the fat, green roll. Eugene sighs, relieved and takes it from him—he pulls the elastic band off the cash, and begins counting.

WILLIE

Better count her up. I don't recall just how much I got. *

75 EUGENE'S HAND

75

A couple of twenties being peeled away to reveal neatly-sheared newspaper, rolled tight.

Eugene tears through the roll, sending bits of newspaper flying in the breeze.

EUGENE

Shit. There's only sixty bucks here. *

WILLIE

That's it. That's about right. *

EUGENE

I don't believe this shit. I don't believe you pulled this on me. *

WILLIE

Sixty dollar ain't nothin' to sneeze at. *

EUGENE

But it can't get us to Mississippi, you know that. This sucks. *

Willie shrugs, stares straight ahead. Eugene stands fuming for a minute, clutching the sixty dollars.

EUGENE

Wait here. I'm gonna go see how deep in the shit you got us. *

He moves across the station toward the ticket counter. *

76 AT THE TICKET COUNTER - WILLIE'S POV:

76

Eugene at the window--a brief conversation follows,
inaudible...Eugene starts back to Willie.

77 WILLIE

77

now leaning on a bench as Eugene arrives.

EUGENE

Nice going, Willie. Yazoo City
is over two-hundred miles south of
here. Now, what the hell are we
gonna do?

WILLIE

Simple. You just have to call your
mama and have her put it on one of
her credit cards...

EUGENE

Bullshit. I told you before, leave
her out of it. I'm not calling my
mother, I'm not calling my father
in Chicago, I'm on my own, I'm not
calling anybody!

WILLIE

What's your daddy doin' in Chicago?
I thought you come from Long Island?

EUGENE

They're divorced, okay!

WILLIE

That's what comes of gettin'
married.

EUGENE

Aw, screw you and I'm not calling them.
Either one of 'em.

WILLIE

Well, ain't you got pride...guess,
there's only one thing a fella can do
unner this circumstance.

EUGENE

What?

WILLIE

Hobo.

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED:

77

EUGENE

Hobo?

WILLIE

Yes, sir. I done it seventy years of life. Robert Johnson done it all of his. No sense in stoppin' now.

Willie snatches the money roll away from Eugene.

WILLIE

Welcome to bluesville, son.

He walks toward the exit, Eugene trailing reluctantly.

78 EXT. HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

78

A pick-up truck with several chicken crates stacked in the flat-bed pulls to a stop--Willie and Eugene riding the open gate. Willie waves at the Driver, who toots his horn and pulls off down a side road. Willie looks over at Eugene, who doesn't look too happy.

WILLIE

Nice man, that farmer. What's the matter, Lightnin', you're lookin' awful down at the mouth.

EUGENE

Hey, no problem. I like sharing the back of a truck with a lot of chickens. It's my idea of a real good time.

WILLIE

Should be. You're in Mississippi, home of the blues and standin' on highway sixty-one.

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED:

78

EUGENE

Hip, hip hooray.

WILLIE

You go down this road, you go right into the heart of where it all started. Course I understand why you ain't happy. This is the real thing--ain't no book.

Willie begins pulling off his tie, replaces it with a string-ribbon number.

EUGENE

What are you doin'?

WILLIE

Changin' my tie. And I could use a little help.

Eugene helps him tie the ribbon. *

EUGENE

I ought to choke you. *

WILLIE

You do an' you'll get knocked right on your ass... This here is a Mississippi string tie. That's what a bluesman wears in this state. These other kind of ties are for city folk. *

Eugene finishes the job--a very nice bow. *

WILLIE

Thanks, Lightnin'. Now get your thumb out there and get us another ride. We got a long way to Fulton's Point.

Eugene walks backward, his thumb extended, as a lone vehicle races past.

78A EXT. HIGHWAY 61 - FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD - DAY

78A *

Eugene and Willie come around a narrow turn on the country road. Eugene glumly checking out the swamp-like surroundings. *

EUGENE

Look at this place..they got snakes down here?

(CONTINUED)

78A CONTINUED:

78A

WILLIE

Sure thing. Bite ya right in the
ass. Most of 'em are deadly poison.

EUGENE

They got cottonmouth moccasins? *

WILLIE

No, you don't got worry about them.
Cottonmouths can't survive down here.
Not with all the alligators aroun'. *

Another car flies by. Eugene again looks nervously into the
swampy area at roadside. *

WILLIE

Shit, we ain' gonna get no ride,
you lookin' like you do. You look
like Mama jest peel you off the
ironin' board...You look worse
than that, you look like you're
from New York. No wonder nobody's
stoppin'.

EUGENE

No, really, they've got alligators
around here?

Willie doesn't answer. He stops dead in his tracks peering
down into a thicket.

WILLIE

Hey. Hey, Lightnin' Boy, get a
look at this here.

Willie wanders off the road and stands at the edge of a shallow
bayou, dense with weeks. He struggles to bend his knees,
craning and searching the distance.

WILLIE

Oooh, Lord, look at that. I ain'
seen one of them in a long time.

Eugene steps up alongside him and peers into the weeds and
water. He crouches and leans forward, his hands on his knees.

EUGENE

I don't see shit. What do you see?

(CONTINUED)

78A CONTINUED: (2)

78A

Willie takes a step back, drops his briefcase and shoves his hands onto Eugene's ass, sending the surprised kid tumbling into the muck hole.

WILLIE

A muddy-ass white boy, that's what I see!

Eugene howls in protest as he thrashes about in the mud and hyacinth-choked water. Willie laughs like hell as Eugene pulls himself up to the edge of the bog. He is plastered with mud.

EUGENE

ASSHOLE! I've had it with your bullshit, Willie! You hear me? I've had it!

Willie claps his hands and WHISTLES.

WILLIE

Now, you look ready for the road, yes sir. C'mon, boy, get outa that alligator hole.

Eugene climbs onto dry grass, still spitting and cursing.

EUGENE

I don't get it. What is your problem? Why are you such a mean, shitty old man!?

Willie keeps smiling.

WILLIE

Maybe cuz I been playin' my music and gettin' nothin' for it for more'n fifty years, then some snotnose kid comes along and wants Robert's song so he can make it big. You can kiss my ass, white boy. If I'm too tough on you, go on back home.

Willie steps out onto the road and flags down an old Stake Truck. The truck slows to a stop, and the BLACK DRIVER moves across the cab to open the door for the old hitchhiker. Willie looks back, yells...

(CONTINUED)

78A CONTINUED: (3)

78A

WILLIE

You comin'?

After a moment, Eugene snatches up his guitar and duffle bag and hurries to the truck...

79 EXT. CONCRETE BRIDGE- HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

79 *

Two figures crossing the cement expanse. A gentle GUITAR STRUMMING as Eugene walks and plays. The mud has dried on him and most of it has been brushed away, giving him a rumpled look...

*

*

WILLIE

About forty more miles, we'll make 'er to Greenville.

(CONTINUED)

79 CONTINUED:

79

EUGENE

That's great, Greenville,
Mississippi is just where I
always wanted to be.

WILLIE

You don't know nothin'. Lots of
good bluesmen from around Greenville.
Lots of fast, pretty women to go
'round as well. Yes, sir. Greenville
is famous for pussy.

A TRAIN WHISTLE BOOMS off in the distance.

WILLIE(O.S.)

Answer her, Long Islan'.

Eugene turns quickly, a little surprised by Willie's request.

The WHISTLE SOUNDS once again.

WILLIE

You heard me. Answer that whistle.

Eugene gazes off across the river in the direction of the moving
train. He feels about the fretboard of his instrument
for a moment, then executes a CHORD, train-like, but not quite
capturing it. *

WILLIE

That ain' no train, that's just a
sick tit mouse. Jes' sit 'n'
listen. Listen to her good. There she is.

Eugene tries again, but fails miserably.

WILLIE

Here. Let me show you a trick or two. *

The TRAIN WHISTLE BELLOWS again and the old man responds to
the call with his harmonica--he produces a PERFECT TRAIN RIFF...*

Eugene raises his eyebrows and smiles. The TRAIN SINGS once
again, and Willie PLAYS IT BACK. He now adds a CHUGGING
RHYTHM.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

You gotta think what it feels like
to be movin' down them tracks with
nothin' to cross your way.

Willie blows some more, then laughs proudly. He awaits
Eugene's whistle. Close...but no freight train.

WILLIE

You wanna learn that lost song, you
better know how to make that train
talk.

EUGENE

I'll get it. Just give me time.

WILLIE

Shit, the way you're playin', gonna
take ten years.

EUGENE

Maybe I should go down to the
crossroads and make a deal with
the devil. Learn some hot licks
just like you did...

Willie suddenly lashes out and SLAPS Eugene across the face.
It is a hard blow, and Eugene is left stunned. He touches
his cheek and looks at the old man... The TRAIN WHISTLE
BOOMS O.S.

WILLIE

Don't you ever say that again.

Eugene stares at Willie for a moment then turns, keeps walking
across the bridge.

81 EXT. HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

81

Willie and Eugene are coming slowly toward us.

WILLIE

First lesson. It ain't so much
what you play as how you play it.
Sometime you got to play with a
heart like you been wronged. Some-
time you play it like a Chicago wind.

(CONTINUED)

81 CONTINUED:

Eugene turns to face an oncoming car. He throws out a thumb. The car veers toward them.

WILLIE

Sometime you play it like the
heat on the Delta highway...

82 EUGENE'S POV

a new shiny red pick-up truck appears to be pulling over for them, but it is not slowing. It is slicing in at them from behind a confederate flag license plate and an opaque windshield.

83 REVERSE ANGLE - EUGENE

throws himself into Willie, knocking him out of the way. Their gear goes flying with them.

The pick-up swerves in and several full, but open, cans of beer are rifled out of the windows along with SHOUTS of "nigger!," "git off the road!," etc.

Eugene is lying protectively over Willie as the truck races off down the highway, its HORN BLOWING, and SHOUTS FADING.

A DEEP SILENCE follows as they look down the road, still in a state of shock. After a moment, Eugene stands, picks up Willie's hat and glasses from the dust. He wipes them clean, then helps his companion to his feet.

The old man looks down the road--he catches his breath, then spits some dust away.

WILLIE

And sometime you gotta play with
a heart like railroad steel...son
of a bitch.

Eugene hands Willie his hat and glasses, then looks down the road bitterly.

84 EUGENE'S POV

the last traces of the redneck car, vanishing into the distance.

85 EXT. GAS STATION - COUNTRY STORE - HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

An old building boasting two archaic pumps and a soda machine

85A INT. COUNTRY STORE

Willie at the counter, smiles at the woman behind the register

(CONTINUED)

85A CONTINUED:

85A

WILLIE

Excuse me, ma'am. A half pint
of Wild Turkey, if you please...

She rings it up.

85B EXT. COUNTRY STORE

85B

Willie comes out of the store with his whiskey bottle.

EUGENE (O.S.)

Hello? Hello, Mom? Yeah, hi.

Willie glances over at the old wooden phone booth where Eugene stands, shifting his weight nervously from foot to foot. When he notes Willie's gaze, he turns away, squeezing into the corner of the booth.

86 INT. PHONE BOOTH

86

Eugene carries on his long distance conversation with his mother.

EUGENE

What? Sure. Classical History's
an ace, easy. Styles and Performance?
Breezing, absolutely. Mom? Yeah,
Advanced Theory's going great;
transposing F sheet at like ten
seconds a page.

Willie struts up to the booth, bottle in hand. He glares in at his young companion. Eugene closes the doors of the booth and the old man leans on them, swigging from his half-pint.

EUGENE

Santis is pleased. Already gave me
another free ride for next semester.
No, everything's fine. Great.
Okay. Yeah. I'll call ya next week.
Right. School's great...see ya.

He cradles the phone to his shoulder for a moment before hanging up. The old man peers in at him and smiles.

WILLIE

How's your mama?

*

EUGENE

C'mon, let's get back on the road.

*

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

She okay? Wouldn't want your
mama upset about her little Long
Island bein' out on the road with
all the mean, nasty men. No sir.

EUGENE

Dry up, Willie.

(CONTINUED)

86 CONTINUED: (2)

36.

WILLIE

You're awful sensitive about
your mama and daddy.

EUGENE

That's right, I am. They got
divorced, both of 'em got
remarried, had kids. I played
the guitar and got sent off to
boarding school. Anything else
you need to know?

Eugene walks away.

87 EXT. HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

87

Willie and Eugene hug the side of the bumpy road as they move
south. Eugene holds his instrument at his hip, executing
several haunting NOTES. The old man carries the cardboard
guitar case under his arm, swigs from the bottle with his
free hand...

WILLIE

That guitar ain't talkin' too good.

EUGENE

Don't worry about it. By tomorrow
morning, I'm gonna have that goddamn
whistle down, then you're teaching
me the song.

WILLIE

Why you bring that old kicked-up guitar?

EUGENE

Aw, come on, you know, it's the heart
of the blues. You need an old ax
that'll stay true to you.

WILLIE

That sounds real knowledgeable.
Sounds like you got it out of one
of those books you been readin'
in your school dormitory. Sounds
like you almost know what you're
talkin' about...Can I see it?

Eugene hands it over proudly.

WILLIE

I'll tell you something. People
that write the books about it are
all alike. They can't play a lick
That's why they write them books.

(CONTINUED)

87 CONTINUED:

87

Looks at the guitar...

WILLIE

Maybe we better trade this baby in
for a new model.

Hands it back.

WILLIE

In case you haven't heard, Muddy
Waters invented 'lectricity.

Willie takes another pull on his bottle.

Eugene just looks at him as Willie gives him his very best
smile.

88 EXT. PAWN SHOP - DAY

88

A dirty storefront window advertises:

DOWNTOWN PAWN SHOP
Buy--Sell--Loan--Trade
Gold--Silver--Old Coins--Guns

ELECTRIC BLUE NOTES are crying out from inside the shop,
causing PASSERSBY to slow and glance in.

89 INT. PAWN SHOP

89

Eugene stands amongst the clutter of the one room shop, gripping
an old, very worn Fender Telecaster.

PROPRIETOR

Yes, sir, they call this here a piggy-
back. You just hook 'er up on your
belt, plug in and you're amplified.

*

EUGENE

You mean I can walk around with an
amp on?

*

PROPRIETOR

Sure thing--you can be a walkin'
concert.

*

He plugs the Fender into the piggy-back...

*

Eugene immediately sends searing riffs out through the small
amplifier. He smiles--high in seventh heaven--as he chops out
the opening licks of Robert Johnson's "TERRAPLANE BLUES."

Willie leans on the sales counter, watching his apprentice
with a grin. The BLACK SHOP OWNER stands motionless behind
the glass counter, a picture of cagey, southern reticence.

*

(CONTINUED)

89 CONTINUED:

89

EUGENE

It's a pisser, Willie! I want
it. This is a great rig. I can
go electric and portable. You
hear what he said? I'm gonna
be a walkin' concert.

*

WILLIE

You ain't lackin' for confidence,
I'll give you that.

Willie pulls a piece of copper metal tubing out of an old
barrel.

(CONTINUED)

89 CONTINUED:

89

WILLIE

We'll just take about three inches of this tubin' here. You need a slide. You play delta blues, you gotta use a slide.

Tosses it to Eugene. Willie taps a finger against his wrist as if signalling for the time. Eugene hesitates before stripping off his Rolex watch. He tosses it into the waiting hands of the shop owner--who takes it under a small lamp for scrutiny, nodding thoughtfully.

WILLE

Yes, sir. Mighty fine watch. Let's move down the way here, an' talk some business...

The shop owner agrees, polishing the watch as he moves down to the end of the counter. Eugene has started up some SQUEALING bends, trying out his new slide.

EUGENE

Hey, Willie, come on down here and give me a lesson.

WILLIE

I'll be right with you, Lightnin', right with you.

Eugene reaches past the counter and grabs an old hat. A bluesman's hat--tries it on--it fits.

EUGENE

Willie. Now all I need is a Mississippi string tie.

WILLIE

You need a lot more than that.

EUGENE

Ah, Willie, cool out.

*

Willie continues talking in confidential tones to the shop owner as Eugene continues to play.

90 EXT. HIGHWAY 61 - DAY

90

Eugene and Willie walk the roadside.-- Eugene testing out his new guitar, strumming a few notes.

*

WILLIE

Ol' Miss. Yes, sir. The land where the Blind Dog Fulton-Willie Brown legend was born. January tenth, nineteen-hundred an' seven.

(MORE)

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Fulton's Point, Yazoo County.
Thirty-six miles north of Vicks-
burg. Born on ol' Mister Croakis'
plantation.

EUGENE

That's not what the books say.
They've got you born two years
before...

WILLIE

How many times I got to tell ya?
Your books are shit. I started
playin' harmoni-co at the age of
three. Made my first music dollar
with Mr. Son House at a big fish
fry down the road from Griffin's
mill.

EUGENE

Jesus, that's some sharp recall,
Willie. You must know that lost
song note for note.

WILLIE

What song that?

Eugene shoots a worried look at the old man. But Willie
can't keep a straight face. He smiles as they start around
a bend in the road.

At the apex of the turn, they stop dead in their tracks.

Standing farther down the road, in the undulations of a heat
mirage, a YOUNG WOMAN in a hitchhiking stance, a duffel-bag
at her feet.

Willie and Eugene exchange glances then look back at the
Girl.

WILLIE

Down here, it's best to be
polite to a woman.

Willie removes his hat politely, Eugene imitates the action.

The Girl lifts her backpack, swings it over her shoulder and
walks toward the two men. They move apart and she walks
between them, and past...A place that puts her at a hitch-
hiking advantage over her road rivals.

(CONTINUED)

90 CONTINUED: (2)

90

Willie and Eugene turn and watch her as she extends her thumb to an oncoming car.

The vehicle pulls up to a stop, and she crawls in the passenger side. As it drives off, the Girl glances out the window at Eugene--he steps out onto the road and looks after the retreating vehicle.

WILLIE

What she lookin' at like that? She lookin' at you, Lightnin' Boy?

EUGENE

Yeah, she was definitely giving me the look.

WILLIE

The look. What look?

EUGENE

Ah, you know...The "I'm ready for some action" look. Hot to trot. You know what I mean.

WILLIE

She gave you the "you is a dumb asshole" look, fool. That gal just run off with our ride, so get your thumb back on out there.

They move past.

EUGENE

Hey, I didn't see you doing anything about it, Mr. King of the Hobos. She got over on you, too.

WILLIE

That's a lie. Green ain' the word for you, boy. I was just bein' polite to a white girl--which, as usual, turned out to be an honest mistake.

Their voices trail off as they get farther away, farther down the lonesome road.

91 EXT. GRAVEL ROAD - DAY

91

A heavily wooded area. Eugene and Willie appear amid a vicious downpour. The old man appears to shrink under the rain's force. Eugene has his ax wrapped in his jacket.

Eugene and Willie huddle together at roadside, rain funneling in the brims of their hats--they are soaked to the skin.

(CONTINUED)

91 CONTINUED: 91

THUNDER booms and lightning cuts through some distant tree-tops. Eugene wraps an arm around the old man and begins guiding him down the side of the road--peering through the rain. He spots something inviting, and guides Willie off the road into a flooded, overgrown field.

92 EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - EUGENE'S POV 92

A large, handsome, but now dilapidated, wooden construction that dates back well into the nineteenth century.

92A EUGENE AND WILLIE 92A

trot through the downpour, eventually reaching the porch of the big house...

93 PORCH - ABANDONED HOUSE 93

Eugene pushes at the flimsy door. It won't give. He takes a step back and gives it a hard tug, sending it swinging wide open with a loud bang. He freezes at the sight of something inside.

WILLIE.

What is it? Whatcha see?

94 INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - LIVING ROOM 94

Standing next to a stack of old pecan crates, wet and shivering, the girl hitchhiker--She is barefoot and bare-backed, changing into drier clothing--an oversized T-shirt quickly falls to her thighs. She turns, shocked at suddenly seeing Willie and Eugene. She reaches into her bag and pulls a switchblade, snaps it open.

95 EXT. PORCH 95

Willie thinks on this for a moment then pushes his way past Eugene. Eugene remains outside on the leaky porch, looking on cautiously.

96 INT. ABANDONED HOUSE 96

Willie stumbles into the house, rain spilling from the brim of his hat, rinsing over his face. The girl continues holding the blade threateningly...

GIRL

You better move your ass right back out that door, sucker.

*

(CONTINUED)

96 CONTINUED:

96

WILLIE

C'mon, Missy. You won't be the first woman ever cut me. But let me tell you, won't be the first woman I ever whupped her ass, too, hear?

Willie keeps coming. The girl backpedals, stepping around the stacked crates...

GIRL

Okay, it's your funeral. You wanna get out, keep coming.

Willie moves in on her, backing her to the wall. He points a weathered finger at face level.

WILLIE

Go 'head! You gonna stand there or you gonna carve me up? Jump!

The girl lowers the knife slowly. She folds the blade in and tucks the jack-knife away in a fist. Her eyes are still angry, but she's also a bit embarrassed.

WILLIE

You should be ashamed of yourself. Stealin' a ride from an ol' man, half-blind.

He turns away from her, sits on an old chair.

WILLIE

Back in my day, hobos respect each other. Didn't go stealin' another boy's ticket home.

The girl looks over her shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

96 CONTINUED: (2)

Eugene steps in, dripping from fedora to sneakers. He removes his brim and walks over to Willie, never taking his eyes off the girl.

GIRL

What are you looking at?

Eugene studies her.

EUGENE

Nothin'. I'm used to seein' wet, half-naked girls with knives in their hands.

She gives Eugene a frown then struts over to her backpack again and drags it across the room, sitting on it when she is a safe distance away.

WILLIE

What name you go by?

GIRL

Frances.

WILLIE

They call me Blind Dog Fulton. Also known as Willie Brown. Also known as Smokehouse Brown. Also--

FRANCES

What about him?

Eugene stands off in a corner, drying his guitar carefully with the towel.

EUGENE

Lightnin' Boy Martone. Also known as...Eugene.

FRANCES

Blind Dog and Lightnin' Boy? What are you guys supposed to be?

EUGENE

We're both bluesmen.

WILLIE

I'm the bluesman. He's from Long Island'.

(CONTINUED)

96 CONTINUED: (3)

96

She walks over to Willie.

*

FRANCES

So what you doing hitching through
this boring, piece of shit place?

WILLIE

Hey, don't be talkin' about my home
that way.

FRANCES

Sorry, no offense.

*

Takes her knife back.

*

EUGENE

We're hoboing. What about you?

FRANCES

I'm migrating from the great city
of Philadelphia, going to L.A.
I've got a dancing gig out there...

*

WILLIE

This road ain' no place for a
sweetpants like you. Take that
from the greatest hobo that ever
lived. How old are you, anyhow?
Under sixteen?

Willie looks at Eugene to get his opinion on the matter.

EUGENE

Yeah, you're right, Willie. I'd
say she's definitely jail bait.

Frances turns with an amused smile

FRANCES

Oh, yeah? Take a look at yourself, honey.
I don't see many signs of puberty on you.

*

Willie breaks into a hearty guffaw.

FRANCES

Anyway, I'm seventeen...How old are you?

EUGENE

Seventeen...You're a runaway?

FRANCES

Four-time veteran. My step-dad has
them haul my ass back every time. But

(MORE)

96 CONTINUED: (4)

96

FRANCES (CONT'D)

I'll tell you what: this time I think
I threw them a curve, taking the
southern route.

Frances goes to the doorway and leans there, looking out past
the porch into the rain as if she's reminded herself of her
dilemma.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

We had some curves ourself since
Lightnin' Boy broke me out...

Frances turns in the doorway, shifting her eyes between the two.

FRANCES

You broke him out of jail?

EUGENE

No. A nursing home

Willie smiles.

FRANCES

A nursing home, gimme a break...
Excuse me, while I put my pants on. *

Frances moves to the back wall, where her wet jeans hang on a
rusted nail. She yanks them down, turns her back and begins
squeezing into them. *

FRANCES

Which way you guys headed?

EUGENE

South...Yazoo City, Vickburg... *

FRANCES

Staying on 61?

WILLIE

Damn right. That's the road home,
honey.

Frances moves quickly toward the door, scooping up her suitcase
on the way. Behind her, we see that the rain has let up. *

FRANCES

Well, I've got a longer hike. I'm
goin' down to Jackson, cop a ride
there. Since the rain's let up, why
don't you be a couple of good guys
and give me a head start? *

EUGENE

Yeah, go ahead. Hope you make it
to L.A. fast. *

FRANCES

Thanks. *

(CONTINUED)

96 CONTINUED: (6)

96

And she is gone, moving out the door, across the porch, kicking barefoot through the overgrown field toward the gravel road...Willie rises, shuffling quickly toward the door.

WILLIE

Let's go, boy. Can't let that get away.

EUGENE

What are you talking about? She's bad news.

Willie struts across the floor, jabbing an index finger in the air to make his point.

WILLIE

That thing has got a leg on it. An' a leg gonna pick up more rides than your thumb.

Eugene picks up his duffle bag and reluctantly follows the old man out.

97 EXT. GRAVEL ROAD

97

Frances stands at roadside, hitching. An old car begins slowing for her at about the same time she spots Willie and Eugene coming across the field.

FRANCES

Shit.

Frances lifts her backpack quickly and takes a few hurried steps toward the car as it rolls up, a YOUNG MAN at the wheel.

98 IN THE FIELD

98

Eugene helps Willie move along at a quick pace.

99 ON THE ROAD

99

Frances jumps into the passenger seat. As she closes the door, she looks off into--

100 THE FIELD

100

where the two travelers press on toward the road, toward the ride.

101 INT. CAR

101

The driver looks at Frances.

*

FRANCES

Hold on, will you? I've got a couple of friends with me.

*

The driver leans forward and looks past his passenger into the field.

102 EXT. ROAD

102

Frances steps out and opens the back door.

FRANCES

If you're comin', get the lead outta your ass.

*

The bluesmen finally reach the road, Willie panting hard. Eugene helps the old man into the back seat then starts to climb in himself...

FRANCES

This dude's taking us into the next town. From there we go to our separate ways.

EUGENE

Hey, no problem. We don't want you slowin' us down.

*

Eugene and Willie climb in the backseat, Frances in the front, and the car lumbers off.

103 EXT. SMALL TOWN MOTEL - NIGHT

103

The threesome get out of the car behind the parking lot of an old, beat-up motel. The car drives on...

WILLIE

Well, let's go, Lightnin'.
Let's go get us a nice pair of catfish, hushpuppies, some cold beer...

Frances looks on surprised as Eugene and Willie start for the motel.

FRANCES

Hey, wait. You guys got some money?

Willie turns, flashing his harp.

(CONTINUED)

103 CONTINUED:

103

WILLIE

We got music. An' where there is music...there's money. C'mon, Lightnin', we're gonna park ourselves outside this motel and play some. Just like the old days.

EUGENE

Great. I'm with ya, Willie, all the way.

(to Frances)

We're gonna go crank up some blues. See you later.

They continue toward the motel bar, a dirty-looking place called "Lloyd's". Frances watches for a moment then runs after them.

FRANCES

Hey, Willie, Eugene, wait a sec.

She catches up with them...

FRANCES

Listen, I'm gonna work the inside, see what I can scrape up. Why don't we meet out here in an hour. Pitch into the kitty, see what we come up with.

EUGENE

Hey, I thought you were the one that wanted us to all go our separate ways?

FRANCES

I do. But we're all piss poor at this point, right? Three hustlers are better than two. We'll make a killing, split it, then go separate ways.

EUGENE

What do you got to hustle with?

She takes off her jacket, throws it over a shoulder.

FRANCES

I'm cute.

Eugene looks to Willie. The old man ponders for a moment, then nods. Frances smiles and leads the way.

104 EXT. MOTEL LOUNGE - NIGHT

104

Eugene stands by the lounge door, his electric ax and portable amp squealing up a storm. Willie nearby, fanning his harmonica. They play a jump piece--back and forth, much in the manner of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. Each time a CUSTOMER passes by, Willie holds out his hat for change. There is little forthcoming.

(CONTINUED)

104 CONTINUED:

104

Suddenly a car pulls right up in front of the lounge at an urgent speed; a big pink Cadillac convertible...The MOTEL OWNER (LLOYD) hops out and struts toward the musicians.

LLOYD

What the hell's goin' on here?
Y'all tryin' to run off my
business?

Eugene lowers his guitar--Willie keeps blowing harp, defiantly.

LLOYD

Hey, boy, I'm talkin' to you. Get
that porch monkey outta my chair
before I call the troopers.

EUGENE

Okay, relax. We're going.

LLOYD

Damn right you're going. Tell
that ol' mud duck to stop with
that blowpipe and get his ass up
off my property. Decent folk
like to come here. Move it.

Eugene turns, glaring at the tense man.

EUGENE

Hey, okay, you made your point,
so lay off. You got no right to
talk to people that way.

Willie looks at Eugene in surprise, then stands, tucking his harp inside his jacket.

LLOYD

No right? Where you from?

EUGENE

New York.

LLOYD

Well Mister New York, suppose I
go in my office and bring my .357
out here an' we'll see who's got
the right.

(CONTINUED)

104 CONTINUED: (2)

104

WILLIE takes Eugene's arm and they walk off.

EUGENE

I didn't think that kind of shit
still went on.

WILLIE

You gonna learn some deep blues.
Yes, sir.

105 EXT. TOWN STREET BEHIND LLOYD'S LOUNGE - NIGHT

105*

Frances approaches Willie and Eugene--who are leaning
against a parked flat-bed truck.

EUGENE

How'd you do?

FRANCES

Some redneck bought me a beer.

EUGENE

That's it?

FRANCES

Yeah, that's it. Nothing bout a
bunch of old farts in there. The
guy that bought me the beer was
married and scared of his wife.
How'd you do?

EUGENE

We picked up five bucks and seventy
five cents. We might not be as
cute as you but we sure know our tunes.

FRANCES

Big deal, you made five bucks.

EUGENE

Well, in case you hadn't noticed,
it's a lot better than nothing.

FRANCES

Keep rubbing it in my face, Eugene,
ha?

Eugene positions his guitar across his lap and plays a lick.

EUGENE

I mean we can split the sandwich
three ways. I mean, we don't want
you to feel left out or nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

This is too much--Frances springs into action.

FRANCES

I'll be back here in a half-hour
with fifty bucks.

Willie laughs softly, amused by the girl's competitive spirit. Eugene plays another configuration as he watches Frances move away. Willie glances over at Eugene's quick fingers. *

WILLIE

What that supposed to be? *

EUGENE

One of Robert Johnson's down-and-out
licks. You remember him doing this one?
(plays and sings)
I'm going down to the Mississippi, I
believe I'll take a long, lonesome dive. *

WILLIE

I remember. And he played a whole lot
better than that. *

The old man leans back lazily and dips his brim over his eyes
for a cat nap. Eugene plays on, lonely and hungry. *

106	OMIT	106	*
107	OMIT	107	*
108	EXT. MOTEL LOUNGE - TIME CUT -NIGHT	108	*

The flashing neon beer light is the only movement around
the dark lounge. Then Frances steps out and heads down the
sidewalk, passing motel rooms.

109	EXT. TOWN STREET - BEHIND THE LOUNGE	109	*
-----	--------------------------------------	-----	---

Willie is now sleeping. Eugene catches sight of Frances
across the way and sits up on the bench. He pats Willie's
arm. The old man turns his head slowly to investigate.

110 WILLIE'S POV

110

Frances goes to the last room of the motel and inserts a key in the door. She enters. A moment later, Lloyd, the familiar motel owner, heads down the walk toward the room.

EUGENE (O.S.)

She's not doing what I think
she's doing? Is she?

WILLIE O.S.)

Uh-huh.

EUGENE (O.S.)

Holy shit.

111 INT - MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Frances sits on the edge of the queen-sized bed, looking tense and uncomfortable. Lloyd is at the window, securing the shades.

FRANCES

It's simple. I got to have a hundred
dollars.

LLOYD

A hundred dollars? You must be
somethin' special, that it?

FRANCES

Could be. Guess you'll have to find
that out for yourself, huh?

He turns from the window and smiles at her.

LLOYD

What's your name, sweatpea?

FRANCES

Journey.

Lloyd moves very close to her.

LLOYD

Journey. My. my. Isn't that a
pretty name. Very poetic. I'm
Lloyd. I'll tell you what, Journey:
why don't you call this an introductory
offer, on the house. Then in return,
showin' what a nice fella I am, I'll
let you push ass outta this room all
night long.

FRANCES

You're a real direct kind of fella.

Lloyd

That's right I am.

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED:

111

FRANCES

I like the little ducks on your tie.

*

LLOYD

Yeah. I'm a sportsman. I'm into ducks and beaver.

*

Smiling, he crosses the room, kills the overhead light--the small lamp on the nightstand is now the only source of illumination. Lloyd sits beside Frances, starts to strip his shirt off, kicks off his loafers.

FRANCES

A girl can get nailed for that around here, can't she, Lloyd?

(CONTINUED)

111 CONT

FRANCES

I like the little ducks on your tie.

Lloyd

Yeah. I'm a sportsman. I'm into ducks and beaver.

FRANCES

Only problem is a girl can get nailed for this kind of stuff around here, can't she, Lloyd?

LLOYD

Me and th local law enforcement officials have an understandin' I even got some girls come up from Jackson, work outta this motel every weekend. I keep an orderly shop. Nobody gets in trouble...Matter of fact, girl as young and pretty as you probably be real popular around here. Now we got a deal?

FRANCES

I don't think so Lloyd. I still need fifty bucks to get settled in. It's against my principles to give anything away for free.

LLOYD

Again your principles? Can't give it away for free? What you got? Some kind of high grade porcelain pussy?

FRANCES

Fifty dollars cash, you'll get the answer.

LLOYD

Great! Get them rags off.

Lloyd goes for her T-shirt gripping it roughly..Frances stops him from further activity with a hand on his chest he tenses for a moment but she cools him...

FRANCES

Don't jump the gun, Lloyd. I've been on the road for two days. A shower comes first. Take a shower with me?

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED

111

LLOYD

I only got ten -- twenty minutes
here... I got a business matter
that needs my attention.

Frances blows him a kiss, and turns on her most sirenical smile.

111 CONTINUED

111

FRANCES

Three minutes in the shower. The other fifteen in heaven. C'mon. Lloyd.

The motel owner sits there staring at her for a time before giving in.

LLOYD

Well, I guess we got a deal. I always liked takin' a shower with a healthy young girl.

FRANCES

You get the water going, I like it nice and warm, then I'll be right in.

She begins slipping out of her blouse as Lloyd hurries off to the bathroom.

112 EXT. TOWN STREET - BEHIND THE LOUNGE

112

Eugene still has his shaded eyes glued to the motel room. Willie chuckles, quite entertained by Eugene's concern.

EUGENE

She's only seventeen...What if that red neck hurts her! She's with us now. Willie, and she's a minor. A runaway.

WILLIE

It's a dangerous road, Lightin'. And seventeen ain't no minor in this state.

Eugene looks at the old man beside him - - not liking the intensity of the situation. Eugene looks back toward the motel...

WILLIE

Didn't look to me like she was goin against her will. look to me like she thought she knew what she was doin'.

113 IN MOTEL ROOM

113

Frances is sitting on the bed slowly undoing her shoes. the sound of a powerful SHOWER is heard.(O.S.)

Lloyd appears from the bedroom, clad in his boxer shorts.

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED

113

LLOYD

Shower's ready. Lloyd's ready.
(grabs himself)
And Henry's ready. Ain't got all
day, hear? Come on journey. Let's
get to showerin'...

FRANCES

Yeah. Okay, Lloyd. Just as soon
as I get my pants off. Make sure
the water's hot, okay?

Frances begins to pull her jeans off. Lloyd takes in the sight
over his shoulder as he ducks back in the bathroom.

114 OMITTED

114

115 EXT. TOWN STREET - BUS BENCH

115

Eugene rises from the bench.

116 EUGENE'S POV:

116

The motel room...

117 REVERSE ANGLE - EUGENE

117

turns to Willie for help but the old man now seems to be
asleep. Eugene starts running toward the motel.

118 EXT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

118

Frances is startled as Eugene pulls the door open.

FRANCES

Hey, what are you doing in here!?

She pulls her shirt back on...

EUGENE

What are you crazy? Come on, let's
get you out of here.

She runs toward the door.

FRANCES

Eugene. Get lost. you don't know
what you're doing.

(CONTINUED)

118 CONTINUED

118

EUGENE

I know what I'm doing. And I'm not goin' without you.

LLOYD (O.S.)

Journey! Get your ass in here or I'm gonna get nasty now.

FRANCES

Shit! Okay. Hide in the room. When he comes out of the shower, put his lights out. I'll grab his money and we'll take off.

EUGENE

What?!

FRANCES

You know, knock him on his ass. Punch him in the head. You wanted to rescue me. so do it.

119 INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

119

Frances pulls a terrified Eugene into the room by his arm. She closes the door gently behind him then leads him to his ambush position behind the open bathroom door.

Their timing is perfect as the shower cuts off, and wet feet slap the floor. Frances hustles back to her place on the bed...

Behind the door, we see only half of Eugene--He swallows hard.

The freshly-showered man comes out of the bathroom with a towel around his middle. Frances looks past him to the bathroom door, biting her bottom lip.

LLOYD

What you got your shit on for?
What the hell's going on here bitch?

He steps up to her, blocking our view of her tense face.

120 CLOSE ON EUGENE

120

Suddenly, he sprints out from behind the door. Before Lloyd can wheel around, the attacking bluesman lands on his back, straddling him, and trying to form a choke-hold.

Frances jumps up pulling her pants back on--The towel-clad motel owner shakes free of Eugene's hold and throws the kid onto the bed. He pounces on him, taking a handful of hair and guns a fist into his face.

(CONTINUED)

120 CONTINUED

120

Frances runs out the room, slamming the door shut behind her,

Lloyd
I got your ass good, boy. Tryin' to
roll me, huh?

WILLIE (O.S.)
Let him go, Mister, or these walls
be gettin' a free paint job.

Willie stands at the door, his briefcase in one hand, a .38 Special
in the other. Frances is beside him...

Lloyd releases Eugene and crawls off the bed slowly. Frances picks
up Lloyd's coat and throws it to him.

FRANCES
I think you're a little underdressed,
Lloyd.

WILLIE
She's right. Maybe you better put your
coat on.

Lloyd eyes Willie as he pulls his coat on...

LLOYD
Okay, let's just call this quits
here...Everyone is getting a little
out of hand...

Willie gives Lloyd a nice grin.

WILLIE
You just have a seat there on the
bed, Mister.

Eugene moves across the room, touching his battered nose. Lloyd
stops out of the way of the old man's wavering gun and sits on
the bed.

EUGENE
Where'd you get the gun?

WILLIE
Same place you got your guitar. Made
a deal with the pawn shop man. A bluesman
never travels the road without a pistol.
No, sir.

FRANCES
His wallet and car keys must be in his
pants -- in the bathroom.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

You heared what the lady say,
Lightnin' Boy.

EUGENE

We're gonna steal his car, too?

WILLIE

That's right. Now go get the wallet
and the keys...

EUGENE

Let's just get out of here, okay?

Willie turns to him, still keeping the pistol on Lloyd.

WILLIE

What you 'spect out here, a picnic?

Eugene looks at Willie, unconvinced...

WILLIE

Now, you gonna stand up and be
somethin' or you gonna call Mama
on the telephone?

Eugene goes into the bathroom to get the keys and wallet. Frances
moves close to Lloyd.

FRANCES

Listen, Lloyd. We're going to
borrow that car of yours for
awhile. Twenty-four hours,
that's all we want. We get any
heat before that, we're gonna
have to tell the statutory story,
since I'm only fifteen, and I'll
have to blow the whistle on your
family meat market.

Willie steps up and rests the barrel of the .38 against the frozen
man's temple.

WILLIE

That wouldn't be too good for
business would it, Mister Motel
Man? Now, like the lady say,
twenty-four hours. You find your
car safe n'sound in the parking
lot of the bus station in Jackson-
ville, Florida.

Eugene stands at the door with the car keys and wallet. His wide
eyes are fixed on Eugene.

120A EXT. LLOYD'S MOTEL - COURTYARD- NIGHT

120A

Willie, Eugene and a very disheveled and disgruntled Lloyd emerge from Cabana 5 as they see...

120B LLOYD'S CADILLAC

120B

Frances driving -- it spins a do-nut, tears down the asphalt, and slams to a stop in front of them...

*

FRANCES

It's in pretty good shape. I guess we'll take it, Lloyd.

LLOYD

You really think you're gonna get away with this?

FRANCES

Shit, yes. Unless you want more trouble than you ever thought of. Remember, I'm only fifteen...

WILLIE

What do you say, Mister Motel man?

FRANCES

24 hours, Lloyd. All you got to do is pick 'er up in Jacksonville.

A moment.

LLOYD

Okay, you take good care of my car.

WILLIE

Good. Saves me the trouble of shootin' you.

They throw their baggage in the caddy and pile in.

FRANCES

You take it easy, Lloyd. It was nice knowin' you. Tell Henry hello... and goodbye.

*

The car burns off, hits the highway doing fifty... Lloyd stands there ...dressed in his towel and sport coat -- a very unhappy look on his face.

121 EXT. OPEN COUNTRY ROAD - DEEP DELTA - DAWN

121

A long, lonely stretch of back country marked by a gentle morning breeze rustling through the still green cotton. a few birds glide down from old wooden telephone poles. A HAUNTING BLUES GUITAR comes up and a moment later, the Cadillac races by on the road beyond...

122 INT. CADILLAC - DAY

122

Eugene is behind the wheel, looking worn. Frances sits Beside him, her feet up on the dash, and Eugene's guitar case across her lap. Willie sits in the back seat, enjoying the smooth ride. Frances twangs a string.

FRANCES

Willie teach you how to play
this thing?

EUGENE

No. I've been on it since I was six.

FRANCES

Six? Late bloomer, huh?

EUGENE

Yeah, well, it took a few years
for my parents to decide on my
instrument. My father wanted me
on accordion but-

FRANCES

I was only kidding Eugene. I mean who
the hell plays guitar when they're six
years old, You should be playing with
Crayolas or something.

EUGENE

Hey, Willie, tell Frances how old you
were when you started blowing harp.

WILLIE

Started on the harmoni-co at
three. Made my first music dollar
with Mr. Son House at the big fish
fry in-

EUGENE

Hey, I think that was a State Trooper
parked back there on that side road.

FRANCES

That was an old Chrysler with a guy
hanging the snake. What are you talkin'
about?

EUGENE

Ever hear of unmarked cars?

WILLIE

One thing I learned an' that's when
you're runnin', you stay runnin' til
you get where you tryin' to go.

122 CONTINUED

122

EUGENE

Bullshit. Number one, we're driving a stolen pink Cadillac in the state of Mississippi. Number two, we've also got seven hundred dollars stolen from the man who owns the Cadillac. Number three, we've got an eighty-year old fugitive and a runaway girl from Philadelphia. That sounds to me like we're pushing our luck. Right?

Willie spots something down the way.

WILLIE

Pull up over there.

EUGENE

What?

WILLIE

You heard me, right over there, you two got to get educated.

123 &

123

124 OMIT

124

125 EXT. OLD CHURCH - DAY

125

A small, white clapboard church at the side of the country road, trampled a good twenty-five yards from the road. A choir can be heard within...A few stragglers are heading into the church.

The Cadillac swerves off the road and rumbles to a stop. Eugene and Frances look around confused but do not budge from the car. Willie steps out, his face crinkling into an excited grin.

WILLIE

Let's go, children. It's Sunday.
Looks like we're almost late.

EUGENE

What's going on, Willie?

FRANCES

Yeah, what with the church?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

125

125

Willie adjusts his suit and starts for the small wooden construction--Eugene and Frances get out of the car more than a bit uncertainly.

WILLIE

This is where it all started.
You wanna know the blues, you
gotta know where it all started.

EUGENE

I'm Catholic, I can't go in there.

WILLIE

You want to be a bluesman, don't
you? What they got in there is
a whole lot more valuable than
what you get out of them books.

Eugene slowly steps forward, tucking his guitar under his arm.

FRANCES

I think I'll just wait out here,
cop some rays.

Willie wheels and points a finger at the dishevelled young woman.

WILLIE

You get your unholy ass inside that
church right now. You might just
learn somethin' besides how to
peddle it...

Frances stands there a bit taken aback. She looks down the road as if deciding whether she should put up with this shit or leave. Willie enters the church, and Eugene signals for Frances to follow. She does so, shaking her head in disbelief.

126. INT. OLD CHURCH - DAY

126

REVEREND DUNN speaks "the truth" from a pulpit--It is a fiery delivery, as frightening as it is inspiring.

127 MOVING THROUGH PEWS

127

the CONGREGANTS, riveted to Reverend Dunn's sermon...

128 IN A MIDDLE PEW

128

Frances and Eugene seat themselves between an OLD BLACK WOMAN and Willie. Willie sits at the end of the pew, illuminated by sunlight slanting in through a broken window. The younger

(CONTINUED)

128 CONTINUED:

128

travelers look about the church, nervous and uncomfortable, while Willie stares ahead, transfixed.

REVEREND DUNN

We are here, children...we are here today, to hear the truth. To hear what the spirit has to say...! As we all know, we got hellhounds on our trail. Yes, they is on our trail! Hellhounds on our trail!

*

Suddenly, the woman next to Eugene jerks her body toward the pulpit and cries out, inspired.

WOMAN

Yes, Jesus! Amen!

Eugene flinches. He glances back at Frances who looks scared shitless. Suddenly Willie bellows, and it's her turn to jump.

WILLIE

The truth! Tell it, yes sir!

129 IN THE PULPIT

129

the Reverend scans the congregants, his face contorted, sweat-drenched. He focuses on the visitors as he CONTINUES THE DELIVERY.

REVEREND DUNN

Now let us ask the question, Can two walk together, unless they be agreed? Will a lion roar in the woods, when it hath no prey? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?!

*

What God is saying is this is a rebellious people: They have turned away from the Word of God. Their pleasure is running after the sinful things of this world. It has always been a self-centered world from the beginning, in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate the apple!

Yea! a rebellious nation. A rebellious people from the beginning! But the Lord will judge His people! Hallelujah! There will come a time when the Lord God of Israel will separate the sheep from the goats. Oh brothers and sisters, that time of opportunity has come--in Jesus. Don't think for one minute that judgement will not come to those who have rejected the truth. The Bible says that "all have sinned and come short (MORE)

129 CONTINUED:

REVEREND DUNN (CONT'D):
of the glory of God." That where sin
is concerned man is insatiable. Hearts
are trained for lust and greed!

But, oh brothers and sisters, don't fret,
nor weep, nor moan, for God is not mocked!
Praise the Lord! No sir! Yet, the day of
the Lord will come like a thief in the
night..." The roar of the lion will be
followed by the growl of the animal who
has taken his prey.

But, oh sinners, don't despair! Our God
is merciful to those who call upon Him with
a broken and contrite heart. Don't despair,
for the Lord will make a way for you.
Hallelujah! God will provide Himself a
lamb. Praise God! You think you are lost
because you been a slave to Satan, a slave
to sin. But Jesus said: "If any man come
unto me I will in no ways cast him out! Glory!

Oh brothers and sisters, how I love the Lord!
I love Him because He is able. Because He
reached down and lifted me from the gutters of
this world. When sin and suffering had me
bound! He snatched me from the hands of the
devil, the father of lies...He saved me! He
washed me in His precious blood!...And I'm
here to testify that it is my determination
to hold on to that solid rock of my salvation!...

I was a slave to sin, but Satan can't touch me
no more! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

130 IN THE MIDDLE PEW

130

Eugene and Frances slide closer together, sitting up straight and attentive. Frances looks at Willie again.

Willie is staring out the window in back of the pulpit, in an almost trance-like state, the sun reflecting off his glasses. He mumbles along with the Reverend.

131 EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY - FLASHBACK - 1925 - BLACK AND WHITE

131

Bottomland stretching for miles in all directions.

YOUNG WILLIE BROWN (17), wearing Coke bottle glasses, steps out of a cotton field and stands on the West Road. He is dressed in the shabby overalls of a down home section gang.

At the East Road, a Sedan noisily pulls over and parks. A BLACK DUDE in a natty suit gets out and walks toward Young Willie in a long, cool gait. He lugs an alligator briefcase and smokes a hand-rolled Prince Albert cigarette.

BLACK DUDE

What your name, blind boy?

YOUNG WILLIE

Ain' blind too much. Not yet. No sir. My name Willie Brown, sir.

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED:

131

BLACK DUDE

Whatcha doin' down this crossroad
alone, Willie Brown?

YOUNG WILLIE

Robert Johnson tol' me I can makes
a deal here.

BLACK DUDE

A deal with who?

YOUNG WILLIE

Robert say, man call Legba. You
him?

BLACK DUDE

No. I'm his assistant...Now let me
see here, you got to tell me what's
on your mind, Willie Brown?

YOUNG WILLIE

I wanna play music like Robert. I
wanna learn them songs.

BLACK DUDE

You know what Robert had to pay,
doncha, Blind Boy?

YOUNG WILLIE

He say, his s-s-ssss...

BLACK DUDE

Spit it out, chicken boy, what
price do the bluesmen pay?

YOUNG WILLIE

(digs into pocket)
I got two dollar--

BLACK DUDE

You green don't buy nothin' down
where Legba come from, boy. You
wanna play music like Robert Johnson?
You wanna play like Peetie Wheatstraw?

YOUNG WILLIE

I sure do, sir, Mister Assistant.

The Black Dude kneels and opens his briefcase. He pulls out
a contract, hands it--along with a pen--to Young Willie.

(CONTINUED)

131 CONTINUED: (2)

131

BLACK DUDE

Say goodnight to your soul, son. Or
go back an' work in the turpentine
camp for your four dollar a week.
Go on, Blind Boy, sign.

The contract is shoved at him...

The Assistant smiles. While holding out the paper, he puffs
his Prince Albert--Cigarette smoke drifts around his face...

After a moment Young Willie signs the papers with a trembling
hand, then steps back awkwardly.

The Black Dude puts the contract in his pocket with the casual
professionalism of the local insurance man, hands young Willie
his copy.

BLACK DUDE

Be here before twelve, every
Saturday night an' you learn them
blues.

He turns and starts for his sedan but remembers something and
turns back.

BLACK DUDE

About that two dollar...I'm runnin'
a little low on gas...

Young Willie hands it over. The Assistant slaps him on the
shoulder and walks off.

BLACK DUDE

See you in hell.

132
thru
135 OMIT

132
thru *
135

135A INT. CADILLAC - DAY

135A

As it speeds down a country road. Frances now driving, Eugene in the passenger seat--Willie in back.

FRANCES

Hey, wow, I mean that's some religion you got there, Willie.

WILLIE

It's all simple. You choose between the good and the bad. God and the devil. Hard choices.

EUGENE

Aw, come on, that's no choice. What's so hard about that?

WILLIE

Because the devil is the liquor and the pretty women and the good music. And those things make a man feel real good.

EUGENE

Yeah, well, I guess we know what choice you made.

A police car drives by, moving in the opposite direction. *

WILLIE

That's right, Mister smart alec from Long Island. But there's always hope for sinners like me...Now instead of discussing religion all afternoon, which you know nothin' about, I figure it's about time we done somethin' about our car.

135B EXT. COUNTRY AUTO WRECK - DAY

135B

A small wrecking yard on the edge of a Delta town. Old cars are stacked throughout--the pink Cadillac drives up...Willie heads for the office.

135C OFFICE DOOR

135C

A YOUNG BLACK MAN wearing a baseball hat looks up as Willie approaches.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, sir. What can I do for you?

WILLIE

Want to sell a car. And I don't want no questions asked. And I don't want no bullshit about

(MORE)

135C CONTINUED:

135C

WILLIE (CONT'D)
papers an' licenses an' such. I
just want to talk about money.

YOUNG MAN
(eyeing the car over
Willie's shoulder)
Well sir, that's a mighty fine
lookin' car.

135D INT. CADILLAC

135D

Eugene and Frances in the front seat.

EUGENE
It's funny, I thought I'd be
missing New York by now but I
don't.

*

FRANCES
I miss my mom. And I miss my
little brother, he's great. But
I don't miss Hank. That's my
step father.

*

EUGENE
He gives you a hard time? Yells
at you and shit?

*

FRANCES
He hardly even talks to me lately,
especially since I almost totalled
his Buick.

*

EUGENE
What happened?

FRANCES
Got loaded. You know, havin' a
good time. I made a fast turn and
hit a phone pole...I screwed up.

EUGENE
Ah, he'll get over it.

FRANCES
Yeah. I wish that's all there was to it.

*

EUGENE
What do you mean?

*

FRANCES
Hank has this...illusion that one of these
nights I'm gonna sleep with him, you know
what I mean?

*

(CONTINUED)

135D CONTINUED:

135D

EUGENE

What about your mother? Why
doesn't she throw him out?

*

FRANCES

She doesn't wanna believe it. She
knows I don't like him, and thinks
that I'm just trying to get him
outa the house. So Hank keeps hitting
on me...and I keep running away.

*

EUGENE

Shit, who wouldn't?

Frances glances over at Eugene. He sits back, clutching his
guitar case, and staring out at the dismal automobile
graveyard.

*

FRANCES

Thanks for comin' up to that room
to help me out, Eugene. That was
really cool.

*

EUGENE

Ah, that's okay. It was the old man
who saved the whole mess.

*

FRANCES

I wonder if that moron is in
Jacksonville, looking for his car.

*

EUGENE

I hope so. Why'd you go in the room
with him?

*

FRANCES

Why do you think?

*

EUGENE

Nobody needs money that bad.

*

FRANCES

Look, Eugene. I'm getting to
California this time, any way I can.
I've made up my mind to never go back.

*

EUGENE

You really have a dancing job out there?

FRANCES

Oh, yeah. I know the dude who runs
the club. Met him in Atlantic City
last summer. He said if I made it out
(MORE)

*

135D CONTINUED: (2)

135D

FRANCES (CONT'D)

there I had the job. Hundred bucks
a night.

EUGENE

Sounds like some dancin'.

Willie approaches.

WILLIE

Okay, children. Let's be with the
road. We're headin' out on foot.

EUGENE

What about the car?

WILLIE

We got five hundred and seventy-
five dollars for it. They'll
tear'er up and sell the parts.
Thank you, Mister Motel Man. Let's
be goin'.

Turns and walks away.

Eugene and Frances look at one another, then follow.

136 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

136

Three figures against a vast Delta landscape--Willie trails
behind, playing his harmonica. No vehicles in sight.

EUGENE

See, Willie was one of the last
guys to play with Robert Johnson
before he died.

FRANCES

Wait a minute. You want to run
this by me one more time? You
think Willie's gonna teach you
this lost song you keep talkin'
about, and that's gonna make you
famous?

EUGENE

Right. I'm gonna learn the tune
from him, get it down to the note,
add a little of my own stuff and
that's my ticket into the blues scene.

FRANCES

Yeah, well I hate to tell you this
Lightnin' Boy, but it all sounds like
(MORE)

136 CONTINUED:

136

FRANCES (CONT'D)
a crock of shit to me.

EUGENE
You don't know anything about it.
Hendrix and Clapton got a lot of
their chops from the old blues
guys. The Rolling Stones got their
name from Muddy Waters.

Willie stops playing, begins to cough, he lags farther
behind.

EUGENE
Hey, Willie, you all right?

WILLIE
Don't you worry, Lightnin'. I
ain't gonna fall down dead tonight.

He begins to cough again, Eugene looks across the field to
where a tall abandoned-looking farmhouse looms. An old barn
sits off from it.

(CONTINUED)

136 CONTINUED: (2)

136

EUGENE

Let's get him over to that barn.
He's gotta rest. Hang on, Willie
Brown, we're almost back to
Fulton's Point. We'll make it
tomorrow.

WILLIE

Damn right we will.

And they lead the defiant old man across the field to the
barn through the Delta twilight.

137 INT. BARN - NIGHT

137

A match is struck. A moment later, a lantern flickers alive
and the inside of the flimsy wood and tin construction is
revealed:

An archaic tractor put in barn thirty winters ago. Stacks
of wooden skids, three or four fifty-gallon drums, part of
a rusted swing set and a car seat of turquoise upholstery.
Eugene helps Willie sprawl out...He covers the old man with his
jacket.

*

FRANCES

What if some of these Mississippi
rednecks find us in here?

EUGENE

No rednecks are gonna find us.
Like Willie said, we've got the
man upstairs pulling for us now.
Right, Willie?

Willie lies motionless, his breath quietly coming forth.

Frances stands by the lantern--Eugene crosses to her.

*

FRANCES

How is he?

EUGENE

I don't know. He doesn't look
good. Jesus, if anything happens
to him out here, I'll--

FRANCES

I think you should get him into a
hospital. You know what I mean, check
him out.

*

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED:

137

EUGENE

I can't. They'll find out who he is and ship him back to Harlem to die. I can't let that happen. I promised I'd get him home.

Frances eyes Willie's sleeping body.

FRANCES

You really think there is a home?

EUGENE

Now, what the hell is that supposed to mean?

FRANCES

How do you know he's this famous blues dude he says he is? You got any proof?

EUGENE

He told me he was, and I trust him, that's all.

FRANCES

Hey, look, don't get me wrong, I'm falling in love with the old guy, he's a mean one but he's okay. But I know a con man when I see one. I just think that Willie's dreamed up this story to throw at somebody real gullible so he can stay out of rest homes and hospitals for the rest of his life.

EUGENE

You're full of shit.

FRANCES

What will you do if he kicks it out here? Really what will you do? It could happen you know?

Eugene points a threatening finger in her face.

EUGENE

He's Willie Brown. First acknowledged master of the country blues harmonica. A legend...You're just a little runaway shit with a quick mouth, so get off my case. Do me a favor, go "migrate" someplace else. Leave us alone.

FRANCES

Fuck off.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED: (2)

137

Eugene leaves her there in the glow of the lantern.

Frances picks up her backpack and walks over to a rickety ladder. Without testing its sturdiness, she mounts it athletically and climbs up into the loft.

Eugene has returned to Willie's side, adjusting the jacket around his neck. He stares into the lantern, then slowly looks up to the loft.

Frances sits in some old hay, pulling her boots off. Eugene looks away quickly, blinking in the glare of the lantern. He checks Willie again. Another adjustment of the jacket. It is dead quiet.

138 INT. LOFT

138

Frances is spreading out her denim jacket to make a crude bed. Wearing only a T-shirt and underwear, she turns in surprise when she sees--

Eugene crawling up the ladder toward her...O.S. a FREIGHT TRAIN is passing...

*

Eugene moves up beside Frances, who looks away from him, hurt.

EUGENE

Hey, look, I didn't mean anything...

*

Frances looks at him, looks away again.

EUGENE

I really don't want you to take off.

Frances looks out past Eugene, who touches her shoulder. He leans over slowly, hesitantly, and kisses her. Frances falls back as if a great strain has been removed and, there in the heat of the Delta night, the Lightnin' Boy steals another kiss.

*

139 INT. BARN

139

Willie stirs in his sleep. He rolls onto his side, pulling the jacket with him. A snoring cough sputters forth, and he awakes. He lifts his head.

Frances and Eugene can be heard from the loft above...

*

(CONTINUED)

139 CONTINUED:

139

Willie listens for a moment then grumbles with displeasure. He returns his head to the car seat and pulls the jacket entirely over him.

139A THE BARN DOORS - DAWN

139A

As they suddenly swing open--three black men enter (A FARMER and TWO POLICEMEN), holding lanterns and shotguns. Dawn's first light cracks through the now open doors.

140 A LAWMAN'S POV

140

MOVING IN ON the sleeping form under the jacket. He gets closer. Right up on it, then yanks the jacket back. Willie looks up...

141 REVERSE ANGLE - THE LAWMAN (O.Z.)

141

spins away from the old man at a sound up in the loft. He aims his .357 at Eugene and Frances, allowing the SECOND POLICEMAN space to jam the shotgun in on the aging vagrant.

O.Z.

Keep the twelve on him. I got a couple of love birds up top.

Chester, the Second Lawman, sticks the gun closer-- Up in the loft, Frances and Eugene exchange a petrified look...

Willie sits up slowly, his arms raised.

WILLIE

We wasn't doin' nothin', Officer. I'm a sick man. These children tendin' to me.

O.Z.

Keep him quiet, Chester.

(looks up)

You kids better get dressed and come on down. Real quick.

142 BACK NEAR WILLIE - TIME CUT

142

O.Z. stands over him.

O.Z.

Name, ol' man?

WILLIE

Willie Brown.

(CONTINUED)

142 CONTINUED:

142

O.Z.

You, boy, name?

*

EUGENE

Eugene Martone.

*

Eugene sits next to Frances, both of them now at ground level.

*

O.Z.

How 'bout you? You workin' in
these parts?

Frances stares in front of her.

FRANCES

No, I don't work around here.

*

And I've got a name, too. Frances.

The Deputy makes a note on a clipboard, then dumps Willie's Boston bag upside down. Articles of clothing fall out--but no gun. O.Z. pulls the copper slide out of Eugene's coat pocket and holds it up in the light.

O.Z.

What you snort up your nose
through this?

EUGENE

It's a slide. For playing guitar.
I'll show you if you--

O.Z. drops it on the floor and crushes it under his heel, then begins going through Frances' bag. He finds the roll of money, holds it up to the light.

O.Z.

Lookee here, lookee here. Well,
I hate to inform you good folks,
but I'll be leavin' you in the
hands of Sheriff Tilford.

*

Smiles.

143 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD NEAR BRIDGE/INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

143

Still early morning, but the sun is now up...on the road beyond a police car is parked--O.Z. and the other Deputy stand waiting. Bubblegum light flashing. Eugene, Willie and Frances handcuffed and miserable in the back seat.

(CONTINUED)

143 CONTINUED:

143

EUGENE

What do you think this Sheriff
Tilford's gonna do with us,
Willie?

WILLIE

I don't know. Back in the old days,
sometimes they put us in a police
car like this an' drive us way out
into the fields. Not everybody always
come back.

FRANCES

Great.

EUGENE

How come they didn't find the gun?

WILLIE

You just keep your mouth shut
about the gun.

EUGENE

They can't hear me.

WILLIE

Keep it shut anyway.

144 EXT. ROAD NEAR BRIDGE - DAY

144

Another police car tears up--comes to a stop. SHERIFF
TILFORD, a very large black man, steps out and approaches
the First Car. He leans through the window and stares at
the trio.

TILFORD

Sleepin' in Nathan Edward's
barn...foolin' about indecent
up in the loft...

He raises his eyes and shifts them back and forth between
Frances and Eugene.

TILFORD

Now, no identification...electric
gui-tar...clothing suggestive of
vagrant-types.

He stares Eugene down.

TILFORD

Vagrant types aren't real popular
in this county. Where you from?

(CONTINUED)

144 CONTINUED:

144

EUGENE
Long Island.

TILFORD
Long Island. New York?

Eugene barely nods.

TILFORD
Old man?

(CONTINUED)

144 CONTINUED:

144

WILLIE

I'm from Fulton's Point, Mississippi,
just outside Yazoo City, on my way
home.

TILFORD

Outside Yazoo? What about you?
Where you from?

FRANCES

Philadelphia.

Tilford eyes each one of the vagrants coldly...

TILFORD

The boy's from Long Island, New
York. The old man's from around
Yazoo. And the gal's outta
Philadelphia. Don't make no
sense, you ask me...Get on out.

The three of them get out of the car.

TILFORD

O.Z....Uncuff 'em.

O.Z. begins unlocking the cuffs.

TILFORD

You don't come into my county
and break n'enter an honest man's
barn. But you three caught me on
a mornin' when I'm in a good mood.

He hooks the collection of cuffs onto his belt and takes
three steps back. The trio grow tense.

TILFORD

Once you cross that bridge, you're
in Sheriff Larry Fowler's county
and you're his problem not mine.
Pick up your personal belongings
and start walkin'. Don't come
back. I don't like vagrants and
I don't like trespassers.

FRANCES

What about the money?

TILFORD

What money?

(CONTINUED)

144 CONTINUED: (2)

144

FRANCES

Your deputy took three hundred
dollars out of my clothes bag.

TILFORD

O.Z. didn't say nothin' about it
to me. Now get goin'.

FRANCES

That's not right. It's not fair.

Eugene takes her arm.

EUGENE

Come on, let's go.

She pulls away.

FRANCES

They stole my money.
(to Tilford)
It's not fucking fair.

TILFORD

(leans very close to her)
Really? Well, tell you what I
can do. I can put you in the
County farm for criminal women.
You can stay there while you're
pressin' charges. They'll treat
you real nice out at the County
farm. Nice pretty girl like you
would do real fine. Yes, ma'am.

WILLIE

Things seem to have changed in
this county.

TILFORD

That's right, they have.

WILLIE

Then again, they kind of seem the
same. We'll just be on our way,
Captain. Ain' no point in makin'
a fuss.

He leads Eugene and Frances away toward the bridge.

145 ON THE BRIDGE

145

They walk along, crossing the small lake--police cars still
in the background...

(CONTINUED)

145 CONTINUED:

145

FRANCES

It isn't fair. It just isn't fair.

Willie doesn't say anything--he just begins humming a blues tune.

146 EXT. RUINS - MID-DAY

146

One of the most haunting sights in the Delta: a burned out Ante-Bellum mansion, now only the columns remaining.

Nearby, a small fire is kindling. Willie sits on a suitcase, cooking some frankfurters over an open fire.

Eugene sits across from him, practicing scales. He looks worn and tired--Frances at his side is peeling an orange.

EUGENE

How far off you think we are from Fulton's Point?

Willie doesn't look up.

EUGENE

I said, how far off you think we are from--

WILLIE

Close.

EUGENE

How close?

Willie lifts the franks off the fire, checks them out, then continues cooking.

WILLIE

So close I can taste it. But we gotta raise up some money, or we ain' gonna get nowhere. Another thing. We need some lodgin'. I'm tired of sleepin' in barns and cookin' out over open fires.

146A INT. HODDING'S HOTEL - LOBBY - DAY

146A
**

An old, out-of-the-way hotel on the highway--fifty years past its prime.

A black Woman hands the register over--Willie signs in as Frances and Eugene watch.

(CONTINUED)

146A CONTINUED:

146A
**

WOMAN

Two rooms be twenty-five dollars
for the night.

WILLIE

That's just about what we got here
in the emergency fund.

WOMAN

You all travellin' together?

WILLIE

That's right.

A curious look on the woman's face as she looks over at Eugene
and Frances.

WILLIE

We'll be on our way come mornin'...
one more thing...

He reaches into his pocket.
Unfolds the drawing of the crossroads he made back in the
hospital.

WILLIE

You recognize this place? This old
crossroads around here?

WOMAN

Nope. Never seen it.

WILLIE

Look hard. It must be around here.

WOMAN

Only thing around here is Weevil,
two miles down the road.

WILLIE

Weevil. I know that old town...

WOMAN

But I don't know about no crossroads.

Willie folds up his drawing.

EUGENE

How about askin' about Fulton's
Point, Willie.

WILLIE

I know where that is. Come on,
let's be gettin' to our rooms.

146B INT. WILLIE'S ROOM - GAS STOVE - EVENING

146B
**

Willie holds a wine bottle over the blue flame--he swings it off, smacks it a couple of times with a kitchen knife, knocking off the excess glass, douses it in a mug filled with water, then files down the sharp end--a smooth bottle-neck is left...

WILLIE (V.O.)

Bluesman had two tools he never did without. First one is his whip. Second one is his pistol. I had to shoot my way out of lots of trouble many a time.

146C EUGENE

146C
**

looking over at Willie.

WILLIE

Yes, sir. Blood on the walls, blood on the towels. I remember one night in Yazoo I'd been with this old gal and her boyfriend showed up about the time we was finishin' up in back. The boyfriend had a cold blue .44 in his hand and a real mean look in his eye, specially when he saw his girl was such a musical appreciator that she had no clothes on to speak on. Well sir, I rolled over with my gun...

He looks over at Frances.

WILLIE

Guess I better tell you this story some other time, Lightnin'...

FRANCES

Don't go sensitive on me, Willie. I wouldn't know how to take it.

Willie tosses the bottleneck to Eugene, who begins stroking some chords on his guitar.

FRANCES

Now that we got Eugene his new slide, what say we go into old Weevil and do a little barhoppin'... Maybe we can shake 'em up.

WILLIE

Maybe.

(CONTINUED)

146C CONTINUED:

146C
**

FRANCES

How come they didn't find the gun,
Willie?

WILLIE

How come who didn't?

EUGENE

Come on, Willie, the cops.

WILLIE

Cause I got a special compartment.

Tips his Boston bag upside down over the bed--all his clothes
spill out. But no gun.

WILLIE

Keep my gun and my money in the
same place.

146D INT. BOSTON BAG - INSERT

146D
**

He snaps the compartment open. The gun and his money roll
are visible. He lifts them both out.

146E WILLIE

146E
**

shoves the gun in his pocket, counts the money.

WILLIE

Twenty-three dollars. Lightnin'
got nothin' and the cops cleaned
you out...We are down to it.

147 EXT. CRUPP'S PLACE - WEEVIL, MISSISSIPPI - NIGHT

147

An old cotton town with a Jukehouse and a Honkytonk Bar and
Grill showing the only signs of life. LOUD HOEDOWN MUSIC
sounds from inside the latter establishment--a neon beer
light tosses strange shadows around the cars and pick-up
trucks parked in the street.

WILLIE (O.S.)

Yes, sir, Sonny Crupp's place. Looks
about the same as it did forty years
ago. Used to charge you a good fifty
cents for a glass of whiskey. That
was robbery.

148 ACROSS THE ROAD

148

Eugene and Frances help Willie stand by an old building.

EUGENE

You know that place?

WILLIE

Like yesterday.

FRANCES

Looks like maybe it's a good place to
scrape up some bucks.

EUGENE

How we gonna do that?

WILLIE

That's my boy--still green. I hope
you wasn't too green up in that hay
loft where I heard all them birds
an' bees.

EUGENE

Okay, lay off me, Willie.

WILLIE

I hope you did some justice to
the hobo name. We got a real
tradition in that department.

EUGENE

I said, cut it out.

WILLIE

You wanna be a bluesman you better
be able to use your whip, yes sir--

She cuts him off.

FRANCES

He was an animal.

Willie stops smiling--He looks from Frances to Eugene who
reddens a bit.

FRANCES

You don't have to worry about him,
Willie. He's got all his parts in
working order.

Not what Willie wanted to hear.

WILLIE

Well, well, real big man, ain't ya?

(CONTINUED)

148 CONTINUED:

148

Takes out the pistol and hands it to Eugene.

WILLIE

Now take this piece inside an' bring home the big eagle. You ought to be able to make some money in there.

Frances steps in between the two.

FRANCES

No way. This isn't 1935, Willie. You don't pull gigs like that anymore.

WILLIE

This boy come out on the road for a reason. Don't get in his way. Ya go in there, have a drink and play 'em a few songs. You play good, they'll give you some money. But they're probably rough boys, so keep the iron handy.

FRANCES

Are you crazy? What are you--nuts?! Don't send him in there with a gun. What are you talking about?

WILLIE

What you gotta say for yourself, Long Island?

EUGENE

I should be committed, that's what I've got to say. I should be committed for listening to you.

WILLIE

My, my, my.

Eugene walks toward the old man, slowly, suspiciously.

EUGENE

What happened to Willie Brown, the greatest hobo that ever lived? One of the all-time great harp players? Wouldn't he be able to walk in there and clean up?

WILLIE

Sure thing. Done it lots of times.

(CONTINUED)

148 CONTINUED: (2)

148

EUGENE

The problem is, I'm startin' to think Robert Johnson's friend Willie Brown isn't within a thousand miles of us. And if he is, he's probably buried somewhere out there in an unmarked grave.

WILLIE

Somebody sayin' they don't believe what I been speakin'?

EUGENE

That's right. I'm sayin' you're full of shit. Every time you mention Fulton's Point down here, nobody's even heard of it. I'm startin' to think you're just a con man that used me to get you out of that old folks home...

Eugene spins away from his two companions and makes his way toward Crupp's Place. Frances watches him go, turns back to Willie, who is moving toward the second bar.

FRANCES

Where you going?

Willie walks on...

WILLIE

You smartass kids don't need me... I do my business on this side of the road, you white folk do your business on that side. That's the way things get done in Mississippi.

And he continues up the front steps of the Jookhouse. When he opens the front door, LOUD AMPLIFIED VOCALS spill out into the night. He slips in, closes the door and leaves us in silence once again.

Alone, Frances stares off at the opposite Honky Tonk...

She crosses the road to Crupp's Place. When she opens the front door, there is a sudden burst of COUNTRY MUSIC soon muffled to a dull bass tempo when she closes the door behind her.

149 INT. CRUPP'S PLACE - NIGHT

149

A spacious, dimly-lit bar-room, packed with a MIXED AGE CROWD. Not only do highway crews and local rednecks drink here but the younger crowds from the dry counties, too.

(CONTINUED)

149 CONTINUED:

149

Some big fellows sit around playing cards, shouting over the COUNTRY MUSIC. The bar is packed tight; stool-to-stool rednecks. The dance floor has most of the young crowd, a handful of older regulars, and passing workmen who are taking drunken pleasure in swinging about the local gals.

The smoke is thick throughout the room, and Eugene emerges from it like some funky ghost. He walks up to the bar and tries to find a chink between the accumulated tonnage. He can't, so he walks all the way to the end.

There, the BARTENDER, an old man with a beer-soaked towel slung over his shoulder, is spinning a yarn to a pretty WOMAN. She laughs.

WOMAN

You're making that up...

He spots the new customer.

BARTENDER

What can we do ya' tonight?

EUGENE

Excuse me?

BARTENDER

I said, what would ya' have to drink?

EUGENE

What do you got?

BARTENDER

What would ya' want?

EUGENE

I don't know...uh, whiskey.

The Bartender shakes his head on his way after the house bourbon. Eugene steps back deeper into the shadows at the end of the bar. He pretends to scratch his neck with one hand then slowly brings it downward...

150 CLOSE AND MOVING DOWN

150

with his hand. It runs over the buttons of his shirt all the way down to his waistband where we REST to examine the butt of the .38 sticking up.

He grabs at it. Grabs again. He feels around his waistband frantically as we CONTINUE MOVING DOWN his pantleg where we can see the bulging outline of the gun traveling. He clutches at his pantleg, trying to chase it but it gets away, sliding right down to the floor with a quiet THUD. Bending down, he grabs the gun and stuffs it back in his waistband.

(CONTINUED)

150 CONTINUED:

150

When he stands again, he bangs his head off of a brass rail going the length of the bar.

BARTENDER

That'll be a dollar, friend.

*

151 AT THE BAR

151

Eugene looks up surprised. There is a short glass filled with sour mash sitting before him.

*

BARTENDER

I said it's a dollar, friend.

*

*

EUGENE

I didn't think it was gonna be that much...I mean...Well, how about I play a few songs on my guitar for the drink?

*

BARTENDER

What kind of songs?

EUGENE

I play the blues.

BARTENDER

I don't want no blues in here. This here's a country music place. Got a jukebox and everybody's havin' a real good time. I'll stand you the drink then you haul ass outta here.

*

Eugene sees it's hopeless--he sips his drink, looks down the bar and sees:

152 ACROSS THE WAY - EUGENE'S POV

152

Frances is sitting on a stool with her back to the counter, several LOCALS milling around her, offering to buy her drinks. She has her best smile on and appears to be coming on to them.

One drunken GOOD OL' BOY named HARLEY TERHUNE moves in very close to her, smiling over his beer. Frances places her hands affectionately on his shoulders and slides them down his back. The other local doesn't look real happy about it, he turns away bitterly.

*

153 CLOSER SHOT - GOOD OL' BOY

153

from his backside where Frances' hands are cruising softly down his spine. Down his spine and right to his back pocket where she gently removes a beat-up wallet...

HARLEY

Yes, sir, mighty pretty lady. Since you're not from around here, you probably wouldn't of heard of me, but my family's been on the land down here since before the war for Southern Independence...Terhune family is no late arrival. Not that we're against late arrivals, long as they look like you...

154 INT. JOOKHOUSE - NIGHT

154

A large, smokey room, dim and packed to the walls with a hell-raising BLACK CROWD. There is a small bar in a corner, and a kitchen nearby throwing out smoke and spit from frying sausages.

On stage, FRANK FROST and his band laying down some mean Mississippi blues--the real thing. (SONG #1, "THE COTTON NEEDS PICKIN' SO BAD.") *

At a back table, Willie Brown, the oldest face in the crowd, participates in a poker game with FOUR YOUNG MEN--two of them shirtless and powerfully built. A bottle of whiskey fills each of the five glasses around the table.

Willie has just won a hand. He smiles at the faces of stone around him as he sweeps a stack of bills in, and tucks them away inside his jacket.

155 INT. CRUPP'S PLACE - NIGHT

155

Frances is now standing at the juke box with a GROUP OF LOCALS, picking out songs. The locals race each other in a draw for quarters. Everybody has a beer, everybody is having a good time.

At the bar, Harley signals for the Bartender, then reaches for his back pocket. He slaps at his jeans frantically, scans the bar, then looks into the crowd, spotting--

Frances at the juke box. She does a take when she catches his suspicious eyes on her--he moves to her.

HARLEY

Okay. Where is it?

(CONTINUED)

155 CONTINUED:

155

FRANCES

What?

HARLEY

My wallet.

FRANCES

What are you tryin' to say?

SECOND LOCAL

The girl take your billfold, Harley?
Suckered your ass good.

HARLEY

C'mon, you little thief, cough it up.

FRANCES

You think I have your wallet, you
just go ahead and search me. I
don't give a damn.

HARLEY

I just believe I will.

And Harley takes a two-handed grab at Frances' hip pockets
to the WHCOPING of bystanders. A hand grips his arm.

EUGENE

Get your hands off her.

Harley turns quickly, angrily, to see Eugene standing there,
looking up nervously from under his brim. Eugene seems
suddenly aware of his grip on the 6'1" Terhune's arm and
releases it, taking a step back. His eyes dart back and
forth between Frances and the gathering locals.

HARLEY

Is this your lady?

EUGENE

Yeah. She's with me.

HARLEY

Well, she snagged my wallet, and
she don't wanna give it back. Seein'
that she's your property, it looks
like I'm just gonna have to take it
outta your ass.

BARTENDER

Hold on. You boys got a problem,
maybe you better settle it somewhere
else.

(CONTINUED)

155 CONTINUED: (2)

155

SECOND LOCAL

You just stay on back. This ain't gonna be no trouble.

Eugene looks around hopelessly as the local boys close in. Frances looks frightened, watching Terhune square off with her outmatched companion. Harley stares into the younger man's eyes as he rolls up his sleeves.

EUGENE

She says she doesn't have your wallet. You don't have his wallet, Frances, do you?

FRANCES

No, I don't. And if you guys know what's good for you, you'll back off before he takes out his gun.

Everyone gives Eugene a look.

HARLEY

You got a gun?

EUGENE

Well...uh...yeah.

HARLEY

Let's see it.

Eugene uncovers the handle.

HARLEY

Well, fella come in here packin' a gun. Maybe I better go home and get mine.

EUGENE

I really don't want any trouble. It's not my gun actually...

The Bartender levels down with a shotgun from behind the bar.

BARTENDER

Any gunplay in here and I'll be doin' it. You hand that piece over.

EUGENE

Holy shit. I really don't want any trouble.

BARTENDER

I said hand it over...

(CONTINUED)

155 CONTINUED: (3)

155

FRANCES

Don't do it, Eugene. *

EUGENE

Look, I don't want the gun. I just want to get out of here. *

Tosses the gun over to the Bartender. *

HARLEY

Sure, you can get out of here. Just one little thing I want to show you first. *

Harley hauls off, gunning a sizzling right for Eugene's open face. But Eugene ducks and the man standing directly behind him takes the full force of the blow. *

SECOND LOCAL

You son of a bitch, Harley. Watch what you're doin'. *

He blasts Harley back with a right to the jaw. Two more blows are exchanged by the behemoths before the Barkeep fires his shotgun into the ceiling. *

BARTENDER

Now hold on just a goddamn minute! *

(CONTINUED)

155 CONTINUED: (4)

155

All is silent.

BARTENDER

Now knock it off, ain't gonna be no more fightin'. What the hell's got into all of you? Harley, Alvin, you just settle down.

Pause.

BARTENDER

I guess this here girl's just drove you all crazy. Did you take his wallet, Miss? If you did, give it back to him. Harley's dumb, but that don't mean he deserve to have his wallet stolen. He's got a family. They need the money. Today's payday and he comes in here an' lets off a little steam. No harm in that.

Pause.

Then Frances flips Harley the wallet.

BARTENDER

And you. Don't be bringin' pistols into bars. Likely to get yourself killed or, worse yet, somebody else. You two got a lot of growin' up to do. You both ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Now get on out.

HARLEY

Hey, wait a minute, Buck. I want this kid's ass.

BARTENDER

Shut up, Harley. You hadn't been such a fool over this girl, nothin' would've happened. Now you two get on out.

Very sheepishly, Eugene and Frances exit.

BARTENDER

Now let's everybody get back to drinkin'. I'll buy a round for everybody standin'.

155A
thru OMIT
166

155A*
thru
166

167 INT. JOOKHOUSE - NIGHT

167

Willie sits at the same table, sharing it now with a young BLACK WOMAN. She smiles, amused as the old man inches his chair closer to her by the minute. The FRANK FROST MUSIC CONTINUES...(SONG #2, "I'M A MAINTENANCE MAN BABY, I'LL FIX ANYTHING FOR YOU") and under the jookhouse chatter...

WILLIE

An' she was howlin', see, runnin' bout the room naked. He jump up an' start goin' out the window, sayin' "Oh, shit, here come Blind Dog." I call out my .38 Special, see, an' say, "Ain' so blind I can't see your naked ass goin' out my window..."

Willie gives in to hoarse, hysterical laughter as he remembers. The woman throws her head back and matches him.

WILLIE

Shot him on the lef' side. An' that's how I come to makin' up that song.

The woman's laughter simmers but never quite dies.

WOMAN

I'm supposed to believe you were Willie Brown and Blind Dog Fulton?

WILLIE

You ain' s'posed to believe nothin'. If you want to do somethin', then here I am.

The joint has suddenly gone quiet. The chatter reduced to a curious mumbling. Willie and his companion look across the room.

Eugene and Frances come through the crowd, braving the cold eyes on them. Their movements are slow and cautious as they search for Willie.

A T-shirted young buck approaches them, blocking their path. A TALL MAN in a colorful jacket spins off the bar and investigates too.

168 CLOSER SHOT - EUGENE AND FRANCES

168

are sandwiched between both men, and now several others form a tight circle around them.

TALL MAN

You lookin' for Crupp's? Crupp's
'cross the road.

FRANCES

No, we've been there. We're looking
for somebody in here, that's all.

TALL MAN

You see this boy, Ledell?

LEDELL, the T-shirted one, with bulging muscles, studies the electric ax outfit...He lifts the brim of Eugene's hat to look at the eyes. Behind, Frank Frost and the group have stopped playing--it looks like there's going to be a fight. *

LEDELL

You come in the jook with a guitar,
dress to play? In a black man's
jook? Surprised you can walk, you
got balls that big.

Willie has gotten up from the back table and tries to fight his way through the crowd to reach his endangered companions. Impossible. He breaks off from the curious swarm and makes his way to the vacant stage, climbing up stiffly.

In the crowd, Ledell and Tall Man tug at the young white man's jacket and hat. A FEW BLACK WOMEN have slipped in to question Frances. Things seem to be growing tense.

But then, a HARMONICA. An AMPLIFIED BLUES SCREAM crying for attention. All heads turn toward the stage.

169 ON STAGE

169

Willie Brown stands under a spot, clutching a microphone stand and blowing a "gather 'round" riff. With all eyes on him, he clears his throat and speaks into the microphone.

WILLIE (via mike)

Yes, sir, peoples, the Lightnin'
Boy has arrived, an' if you be so
kind to let him and his girl come
toward the stage, we gonna blow
the roof up off this joint, an'
show you how a barrelhouse come
alive.

170 IN THE CROWD

170

Ledell and Tall Man look away from the old man on stage to each other, and then to the kid with the guitar. There are a few WHOOPS of encouragement from the crowd and Eugene is eventually released.

WILLIE (O.S.)

Let him to the stage, I say, he's traveled far to show you how he can play that thing. You wanna hear some music, peoples?!

MORE HOOTING and WHISTLING as Eugene takes Frances' hand and leads her toward the stage. Customers step out of the way haltingly, unsure of the situation.

At the front of the stage, Frances trails off and stands near several BLACK WOMEN. *

171 ON STAGE

171

Eugene joins Willie, and the old man drops the mike stand down to harp level. He leans away from the microphone and pulls Eugene to his side. *

WILLIE

What's wrong with you? I tol' you not to come in here.

EUGENE

We got heat from the other side. And I lost your gun. *

Willie realizes that the skeptical audience is getting restless so he gets the show on the road.

WILLIE

You dumb shit. We're gonna have heat from this side unless we take 'em back home. *

Eugene takes a step back, counts off a tempo with his foot then squeals out the opening riff of a WILLIE BROWN BLUES.

This is Willie's song, featuring a strong harmonica and gutsy barrelhouse vocals. Eugene plays a strong rhythm guitar, adding tasty licks and executing hot harmony runs. The crowd goes absolutely wild, stomping their feet, banging their mugs on the tables. *

172 IN THE CROWD

172

Tall Man and Ledell look at each other and smile, pleasantly surprised. They lean on the bar and order a round of drinks. Ledell whistles in approval.

173 ON STAGE

173

Willie shaking the microphone free of its stand. He moves to the front of the stage and blows an outstanding harp solo, singing along with it...

174 IN THE CROWD

174

a SMALL MAN in his late forties is slowly surfacing up from a bad drunk, the music ringing a thousand bells. He squints at the stage then elbows another man sitting next to him.

SMALL MAN

Hey, Luther. Luther, that's Willie Brown up there, yes sir.

LUTHER realizes this now too and passes the word on. The next man in turn passes it down the line and soon the word is traveling throughout the club.

Near Frances, the word reaches the black women. A big one with a loud, shrill voice leans across the table and announces:

BIG WOMAN

That's Willie Brown. That's Willie Brown. Up there singin'.

Frances turns and looks at the woman, surprised.

FRANCES

It is?

BIG WOMAN

Sure. I used to see him when I was jus' tiny. Used to play with all the big ones. Yeah, that's him.

Frances looks around her to see everyone making the connection. She looks back to the show.

175 ON STAGE

175

Willie goes into a little dance, signals to the floor...

176 ON THE FLOOR

176

the patrons begin to leave their seats one after another, and take to the floor, dancing. The Tall Man drags the pretty black woman who questioned Willie's identity onto the floor. Her eyes are on the old man as she dances.

177 OMIT

177*

178 OMIT

178*

179 ON STAGE

179

Willie SINGS THE LAST VERSE...

*

At the end of the verse, Eugene and Willie get back to back and play a pair of harmony leads that take us into a CRASHING 7th chord.

Willie and Eugene bow to the crowd as bills and silver come flying toward the stage.

*

CROWD

Willie Brown! Willie Brown!

Eugene stands with his guitar, his eyes on the old bluesman for a moment then back to the chanting crowd. He is convinced now that Willie is the real McCoy.

*

180 EXT. HODDING'S HOTEL - A LONELY DELTA ROAD - NIGHT

180*

Highwayside. The rickety but cozy two-story building has several lights on upstairs.

*

181 INT. EUGENE AND FRANCES' HOTEL ROOM

181*

Frances lies on the bed, in T-shirt and underwear, eating a donut.

*

Eugene looks like night's end; his jacket off, shirt untucked, hanging loose. He paces barefoot up and down in front of Frances' bed, gets an apple from a fruit bowl, washes it at the small sink...Willie is nowhere to be seen.

*

EUGENE

It was history. That's what it was. Willie Brown--the Prince of Delta blues--blows into a jookhouse that's been dead for forty years, and he turns the place inside out. And who was up there filling Robert Johnson's shoes?

FRANCES

Must of been that dipshit from Long Island...

Frances winks at him over the map.

EUGENE

Aw come on, I was great. That's what the owner said. Walked up to Willie, hands him three one-hundred dollar bills and says "Your boy can play." Let me borrow your knife, okay?

(CONTINUED)

181 CONTINUED:

181

She tosses him the switchblade.

FRANCES

No doubt about it, Euge, you guys
make a dangerous team.

Eugene begins to peel the apple with her knife and paces
some more.

EUGENE

Us guys, you mean. Don't count
yourself out.

FRANCES

Thanks, Euge. Your heart's in the
right place...Hey, you know what?
Weevil's not far outside of Vicks-
burg. That's about thirty miles
miles shy of Yazoo County. We must
be gettin' close.

This information lifts Eugene even higher. He launches
himself onto the bed and crawls up beside Frances, sharing
the map with her.

EUGENE

Willie says it's the most beautiful
piece of land in the state. When we
get there, maybe we should hang with
Willie, settle in Fulton's Point while
he teaches me the song. Then we'll
get a van, load our gear and tour the
country. Blind Dog and Lightnin' Boy,
pedalling the lost blues.

FRANCES

Hey yeah, great, what do I do, get
to drive the van?

Eugene sneaks a look at her, thrown for a second and not
sure how to answer that.

Frances begins folding the map neatly--a task that keeps her
attention elsewhere. She prepares to say something but the
DOOR BANGS OPEN.

Willie comes through the half-open door, bottle bag under an
arm, Eugene's hat in the other hand. He waves hello in a
hurried manner then closes the door behind him.

Eugene spreads his arms wide and dramatically.

(CONTINUED)

181 CONTINUED: (2)

181

EUGENE

And ladies and gentlemen, here he
is, the Prince of the Delta blues:
Willie Brown!

Willie stands stone-faced, eyeing the boy.

WILLIE

Bright lights fry your brain? Guess
maybe that's why you forgot your hat.

EUGENE

Hey, I just played my first barrel-
house, Willie. I'm a bluesman now.

Willie sets the hat on the dresser and turns his back to
Eugene.

WILLIE

Bluesman, shit. Only one bluesman
in town tonight, an' that was me.
Where you learn them pussy chords?
In music school?

EUGENE

Only one school, Willie. I played
chords I learned out here on the
road. And I kicked ass. The
people felt it.

WILLIE

The people felt whiskey. An' that's
what I'm feelin' as well, and I'm
about to do some more.

Takes a drink from his whiskey bottle.

FRANCES

Hey, Willie, get off him. He
was great.

WILLIE

He's on the road to learn somethin'.
Can't be learnin' if he thinkin'
he the Boss of the blues.

EUGENE

You won't give an inch, will you,
Willie? You can't walk in and
say "Nice job, kid."

Willie downs some more whiskey.

(CONTINUED)

181 CONTINUED: (3)

181

WILLIE

You know what you want, Lightnin'?
You want me to sit here n'say, "Boy,
you as good as Robert Johnson." But
you ain't. If you would spen' as
much time with your hands on them
strings as you did on this girl's
ass, you might get somewhere.

Eugene stands fuming... *

WILLIE

Excuse me, I think I'll go to my
room. Leave you two lovebirds be.

He walks out, slams the door--Eugene looks over at Frances.

EUGENE

Mean, shitty old man. *

182 EXT. HODDING'S HOTEL - DELTA ROAD - NIGHT

182*

Clouds. Light drizzle. THUNDER rumbles, announcing a storm.
A TRAIN WHISTLE sounds miles off...

183 INT. WILLIE'S HOTEL ROOM

183*

Willie lies at the far side of his bed, sheet up to the breast
of his blue pajamas. He SNORES BRUTALLY. MOVE IN CN WILLIE
as an arm flinches in his sleep. We enter his dream state:

184 INT. STRANGE ROOM - WILLIE'S DREAM - BLACK AND WHITE

184

The image is distorted as a massive door opens slowly and
the Black Dude--the devil's assistant--leans in, smiling.

BLACK DUDE

Shame on you, Willie Brown.
Travelin' all the way back down
home as if you stand a chance.
Ain' got no chance, Blind Dog.
You sold your soul. You...goin'...
down. All the way down. Hellhound
on your trail, boy. Hellhound on
your trail.

185 INT. HODDING'S HOTEL - WILLIE'S ROOM - BACK TO PRESENT - NIGHT

185*

Willie sits up in bed, wild-eyed. He hears a sound and
moves to the doorway... *

186 CORRIDOR

186

As Willie emerges from his room, he sees Frances standing frozen in the adjacent doorway, her backpack on...

FRANCES
(a whisper)
Willie. It's me.

WILLIE
Hand it over. Right now.

FRANCES
Hand what over?

WILLIE
Our money that you up an' leavin' with.

FRANCES
Your money is in your bag, right where you left it, Willie, don't be a dipshit.

He moves back, looks for his bag on a chair near the door in his room. Frances quickly takes it out of his hand, removes the money and slaps it into his palm.

WILLIE
Why you sneakin' 'round?

FRANCES
I'm goin', Willie.

WILLIE
Goin' where?

FRANCES
I got to get to L.A....I'm just like you and Eugene, I got places to go.

WILLIE
What about the boy? He--

FRANCES
Ain't no goodbyes out here. It doesn't work that way.

Frances catches her backpack slipping and gives it a heave back into place.

(CONTINUED)

186 CONTINUED:

186

FRANCES

I've got debts to pay, got to keep movin'. I'm just marking time down here. You give Lightnin' Boy a big hug for me and tell him I'm really gonna miss him...I guess I love him a little bit.

WILLIE

You're right. Ain' no goodbyes on the road. *

Willie offers a hand. She takes it and is surprised to feel the fold of the money slipping into her palm. She turns it over in her fingers several times, eyeing the old man.

FRANCES

What's this?

WILLIE

Hundred dollar. Keep you out of trouble for a while. Get you to L.A. safe--Don't want you havin' to deal with no more motel men. *

FRANCES

Jesus, I can't believe you.

Frances stuffs it in her jeans and gives Willie a tearful smile.

FRANCES

I'll miss you.

And she wheels quickly, hustling toward the door at the end of the corridor.

187 INT. HODDING'S HOTEL ROOM - RAINY DAY MORNING

187*

Willie sits in a big chair in a corner, fully dressed, facing the window and playing a slow harp accompaniment to the FALLING RAIN. Eugene walks in...

EUGENE

Where'd Frances go, Willie? She getting breakfast?

Willie doesn't answer. But his harp playing intensifies.

EUGENE

Hey, Willie, where's Frances?

(CONTINUED)

187 CONTINUED:

187

The harmonica is the only answer. He begins to panic, approaching Willie.

EUGENE

Where'd she go?

Willie unplugs the harp from his lips, looks up at Eugene.

WILLIE

She gone.

EUGENE

What?

WILLIE

She gone. Up n'left. No goodbye.
Took our money too.

Eugene backpedals toward the door, stunned. He gropes for the knob behind his back, throws the door open and walks out into the corridor wearing only his slacks.

Willie leans back in his chair, continues his HARP SOLO.

188 EXT. HODDING'S HOTEL - DELTA ROAD - RAINY DAY

188*

As Eugene comes outside, the sky goes blue with an electrical explosion. He starts down the lonely road, WILLIE'S BLUES SOUNDING OVER--a talking blues.

He moves to a tree stump and takes a seat there, letting the storm punch at his bare torso. A huge EIGHTEEN WHEELER roars by--throwing water off the massive wheels...

189 INT. HODDING'S HOTEL - EUGENE'S ROOM - RAINY DAY

189*

The door flies open. Eugene stands there, drenched from his head to his bare feet...

In the center of the room, his guitar has been propped up on a chair so he can't miss it. It has been spit shined.

Eugene stumbles inside, passes Willie, who is in a chair in the corner.

Willie walks over and sets the bottle of whiskey down on the dresser then pulls up a chair next to the hurting young man. Willie pours a shot into a bathroom glass and hands it to Eugene. He then fills a glass for himself.

(CONTINUED)

189 CONTINUED:

189

WILLIE

Some man with a whole lot of sense
said that the hobo builds palaces
and sleeps in shacks. He builds
the pullmans but rides the rods.
He reaps the harvest but stands
in the breadline. He rescues the
princess...but he sleeps alone.
That's what the man said.

Willie is silent now. He waits on Eugene. Finally, the
Lightnin' Boy puts it away in a single swallow. Willie nods
with approval then knocks his straight down.

WILLIE

The blues ain' nothin' but a good
man feelin' bad...thinkin' 'bout
the woman he once was with.

EUGENE

I miss her, Willie...I'm really
gonna miss her.

WILLIE

I been all over hoboin' my trade
with the greatest bluesmen who
ever lived. I know'd 'em all.
An' nobody ever played like Robert
Johnson. Nobody ever will.

He takes a hard swig of bourbon.

WILLIE

But you're gettin' real good.

Eugene gazes up, glossy-eyed. He can't believe his ears.

WILLIE

So stop cryin' an' tune up that
machine.

*

189 CONTINUED: (2)

189

EUGENE

You gonna teach me the song?

WILLIE

Ain't no song.

A long pause.

WILLIE

I'm sorry, Eugene. I lied to you. I just wanted to get out of that place awful bad...Robert give us twenty-nine songs. It was enough. Never was a number thirty that I knew about.

Pause.

WILLIE

You got to do it for yourself, son. You got to play with your head an' heart--practice an' play. Got to do it for yourself. That's what Robert would tell you.

Eugene stands, picks up his guitar--plugs it in and plays. A long, wailing note...

Another.

And another.

WILLIE

I been down the road a long piece. Lots of towns, lots of songs, lots of women. Good times, bad times. When I die only thing I want anybody to say is, 'He could really play. He was good.' Nothin' else matters. Nothin'.

Eugene continues playing.

190
thru OMIT
190C

190
thru
190C

191 EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

191

An old beat-up convertible moves slowly through the streets of a small, rundown town.

192 INT. CAR - DAY

192

Eugene and Willie share the backseat--two elderly black men in the front. Willie gazes out at the passing scenery while Eugene sits, cradling his guitar.

193 WILLIE'S POV - SMALL TOWN - MOVING

193

past rows of tall houses and barns and mini-junkyards. A big old-fashioned white house set back in an overgrown front lawn comes into view. A beat-up pick-up in the drive.

WILLIE (V.O.)

*

Hold on.

194 REVERSE ANGLE - WILLIE

194

An old convertible pulls to a stop. Willie and Eugene get out.

*

EUGENE

What are we stopping here for, Willie? Why don't we just go on to Fulton's Point? It's not that far from here.

*

WILLIE

I gotta deal with somethin', Lightnin', or there ain' no going' home.

EUGENE

What are you talkin' about. What do you have to deal with?

*

Willie doesn't answer the question.

*

WILLIE

Yeah, this is the one. Hottest cat house in the great state of Mississippi.

*

The car drives off after Willie gives the driver a couple of bucks.

*

195 OMITTED

OMITTED

195 *

196 MOVING UP THE FRONT WALK

196

Eugene tries to figure this one out. Willie stares intensely at the house.

197 EXT. OLD BROTHEL

197

Eugene and Willie walk up the steps to find an OLD WINO sitting motionless, trying to bear with the humid Delta air.

*

Empty wine bottles litter the porch.

*

Willie ignores the man and walks to the screen door. Eugene can't seem to take his eyes off of them. The old man knocks, long and hard. A RADIO SOUNDS inside, in some back room.

*

(CONTINUED)

197 CONTINUED:

197

After a time, a BLACK WOMAN of 20 comes to the door and looks out.

WILLIE
Woman name Lily La Fontaine
still live here?

*

The girl shakes her head. Her eyes are on the white kid.

BLACK WOMAN
Lily dead long time.

*

WILLIE
You related?

BLACK WOMAN
She was my grandma. You a friend
of her?

*

WILLIE
Yes, ma'am. I used to play piano
here, when Lily runned it. Where
all the girls?

*

BLACK WOMAN
Boardin' house now. Got a room
open. That one over there keep wet
his mattress so he goin'. Got a
room open, you need it.

WILLIE
Don't need it. But I would like
to ask you a question...

She cuts him off...

BLACK WOMAN
What's your name?

WILLIE
Willie Brown. Sometimes known as
Blind Dog Fulton.

BLACK WOMAN
Lily talk about you. You real
famous.

*

She unlocks the screen door and lets them in.

198 INT. OLD BROTHEL - STAIRWELL

198

Eugene and Willie come up the stairs with the Black Woman.

*

(CONTINUED)

BLACK WOMAN

Lily always say you play all the time and flirt with the girls and always in some mess with the law.

WILLIE

Glad to be remembered. It was a long time ago.

BLACK WOMAN

My Grandma talk about you a lot.

WILLIE

She was a real good woman. One time, me an' Slim Waterman got in a fight over her. A real knockdown, gouge your eyes out kind of fight.

BLACK WOMAN

Oh, yeah? Who won?

WILLIE

Can't remember exactly...But she was a good woman.

A tiny, narrow kitchen, dishes piled in the sink, blades of sunlight cutting in through torn shades. The floor is only half covered in linoleum. A BABY CRIES somewhere in the house.

Lily's granddaughter moves to the sink, filling two glasses of water. She brings the glasses over and hands them to the two travelers.

WILLIE

Somewhere 'round here there's a place where a road crosses this way...where a crossroads is. You know the language I'm talkin'?

The girl looks down at her faded nail polish. A pause. Eugene looks impatient.

BLACK WOMAN

I know what you're talkin' about. Grandma told me all about it.

WILLIE

I need to get back to the crossroad. You tell me how?

She looks up and nods.

(CONTINUED)

198 CONTINUED: (2)

198

BLACK WOMAN

Hollis?

A young black man appears from one of the rooms behind Willie and Eugene.

BLACK WOMAN

Hollis? You drive these fellas down to The Point. Friend a Lily's.

Hollis walks past, leads them back down the stairwell.

WILLIE

You're just as pretty as your Grandma ever was. Willie Brown says so, 'case anybody's askin'.

Willie smiles, tips his hat, and follows Eugene and Hollis.

199 OMIT

199

200 EXT. COUNTRY CROSSROADS - DAY

200

A beat-up old car rumbles off, leaving Eugene and Willie alone at the deserted crossroads. Willie looks around, his eyes seemingly scanning some fiery horizon.

WILLIE

This is it. This is the place where it all happen. Now what you gotta do is go on over there, see, an' start playin' a piece.

EUGENE

Why?

WILLIE

Why? Cuz there's a fella I gotta see, and playin' hot music helps bring him around.

*

EUGENE

Okay Willie, right. Now who is this guy?

*

WILLIE

Don't ask me who. You know damn well who.

Eugene drifts to the side of the road, props his ax up and begins playing a blues tune. (TUNE #1--"LANDSLIDE")

*

Willie wanders to the center of the crossroads and looks in all directions.

200 CONTINUED:

200

WILLIE

Keep it goin'. You're standin'
at the crossroad now. This is
where it count.

EUGENE

I thought I wasn't supposed to go
down to the crossroads, Willie.

WILLIE

We ain't here for you, we're here for me.

Eugene will humor him. He kicks back and plays some more.

An old pick-up goes by, several children in back. A little
girl leans out and calls to Willie...

GIRL

What you waitin' for? Huh? What
you waitin' for four-eyes?

Willie pays her no mind, his eyes fixed down the road. The
girl waits for an answer that never comes. She gives up and
the truck continues on.

201 EUGENE

201

He stops stroking the strings of his guitar and takes in the
old man across the road.

Willie continues, looking far down the stretch.

Eugene has had it. He starts across the road, guitar in tow.

EUGENE

Looks like a no-show, Willie.

Willie ignores him.

EUGENE

Hey, Willie. Listen, I'm sorry
but I've gotta lay some cards
on the table...

He speaks to him softly, choosing his words carefully.

EUGENE

You mean a lot to me...and I
respect everything you stand for,
all the places you've been...but
you're hanging onto some ideas that
should really be put away. We're so
close to your old home now...

WILLIE

What you talkin' 'bout? Get back
over there an' play some.

(CONTINUED)

201 CONTINUED:

201

EUGENE

This crossroads stuff. This sell
your soul to the devil business...

WILLIE

It's the blues.

EUGENE

It's the bull, Willie. It's a part
of the lore and everything, but it's
just superstition. Come on, let's
get you home...

Willie doesn't respond. He is staring in the direction of a
loud, RACING ENGINE.

WILLIE

Oh, Lord...

Eugene wheels to see--

A BLACK TRANS-AM coming into view at high speed from the East
road. It gains on us in a matter of seconds.

WILLIE

Here we go.

Willie grips Eugene's pant leg and pulls at him.

WILLIE

Stand over there and play a piece.

Eugene begins picking. The Trans Am guns past them, screeches
to a halt, then races back toward them in reverse.

The driver is the BLACK DUDE--the devil's assistant--seen in
Willie's tortured nightmares. He gazes out at Willie and
Eugene, still picking electric guitar at roadside.
("LANDSLIDE"--VERSION #2) Sitting close to him is an out-
rageously BEAUTIFUL BLACK GIRL, giggling uncontrollably as
she sips beer from a can. *

WILLIE

(whispering)

That's his assistant, boy. He come to
talk business.

BLACK DUDE

Y'all need a ride?

Pause.

BEAUTIFUL BLACK GIRL

What you waitin' for? Huh?

(CONTINUED)

201 CONTINUED: (2)

201

Eugene nods...

EUGENE

Let's get to Fulton's Point, Willie.

Willie approaches the driver's side window cautiously, peering into the car. The girl waves and giggles.

WILLIE

What time he come 'round?

BLACK DUDE

What time who come 'round?

WILLIE

You don't be foolin' with me. I'm talkin' about Legba.

BLACK DUDE

Legba? Where you been at, Slick? He change his name to Scratch.

WILLIE

Where he be?

BLACK DUDE

Where you want him to be?

WILLIE

I don't want none of your sass. I got business with the man.

BLACK DUDE

Mean old bastard, ain't you? Sure you don't need a ride?

BEAUTIFUL BLACK GIRL

Forget it, honey. He's crazy.

*

WILLIE

Ain't gonna ride with the likes of you, smart ass or your bitch, neither.

*

BLACK DUDE

Suit yourself, old man.

The Trans Am PEELS OUT, leaving the crossroads behind.

Willie starts back to Eugene, who appears a bit mystified at the conversation he has just witnessed.

VOICE

You lookin' for me, Willie Brown?

Eugene and Willie turn...

202 OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD

SCRATCH, an elderly, very friendly-looking Black Man, smiling nearby...

SCRATCH

Been a long time, hasn't it, Willie?

WILLIE

Yes. Yes it has.

EUGENE

Hey, wait a minute. What's goin' on here? *

SCRATCH

(ignoring Eugene) *

Yes sir, been a long time. You were about seventeen last time you and I saw each other--one night on the old crossroad, wasn't it? What can I do for you, Willie Brown?

WILLIE

I come to see you. Tell you the deal's off.

Scratch produces an old contract.

EUGENE

Somebody want to tell me what's going on? *

SCRATCH

Accordin' to this piece of paper, the deal's still on.

WILLIE

You can tear that up. Gimme some peace.

SCRATCH

Why on earth would I want to do that?

EUGENE

Okay, everybody just don't pay any attention to anything I say. *

WILLIE

I got my rights. You sloughed up on your end of things--I didn't end up where I wanted. Didn't end up with nothin'. Didn't get nothin'.

SCRATCH

You got what you wanted, bluesman. Nothin's ever as good as you think it is, or hope it will be. But that ain't no reason to break a deal... 'Course if you had somethin' to offer me...

(CONTINUED)

202 CONTINUED:

203

WILLIE

I got couple of hundred dollars...

SCRATCH

Ain't interested in your money. You know that.

Looks over at Eugene.

SCRATCH

How about cuttin' heads?

Keeps looking at Eugene.

EUGENE

Oh, I get it. you're setting a trap for me. Sure. Great.

*

(CONTINUED)

202 CONTINUED: (2)

203

SCRATCH

You're a real smart boy, ain't ya?
Well, smart boy, I got a big white
fella from Memphis that made a deal
with me, few years back. Real good
guitar player. Name of Jack Butler.
Cuts heads every Friday night. Yes
sir, he discourages a lot of up
and comin' boys--which, of course, is
real good for my business...

EUGENE

Willie doesn't play the guitar.

SCRATCH

Oh yeah. I forgot that. Ain't that
too bad. Guess there's no hope at all
for Willie Brown...unless you might want
to stand in for him? Huh, smart boy?

WILLIE

Don't do it.

EUGENE

Sure. He's my friend. And I don't
believe any of this shit.

WILLIE

i said don't do it, Lightnin'.

SCRATCH

You win, I tear up Willie's contract. But
what happens if my man Jack Butler wins?

WILLIE

You get me.

Scratch turns and looks at Willie.

SCRATCH

I already got you.

Long moment.

EUGENE

You get me, too.

WILLIE

You shut up, you hear me! I don't
want you makin' no deals.

(CONTINUED)

202 CONTINUED: (3)

202

EUGENE

Take it easy, Willie, I'll just call
his bluff, then we can get on to
Fulton's Point.

*

Turns back to Scratch.

EUGENE

Where and when?

SCRATCH

Oh, I can get you there real quick.
Jack Butler's gonna like you.

Smiles again.

202A THRU 204 OMIT

202A THRU 204

205 INT. ARENA

205

Black and white monochromatic colors, everything is angular,
high-vaulted dome...One hundred people sit at high-backed
pew, eyes glued to...

206 THE STAGE

206

where something bizarre is taking place. At one end of the
stage, JACK BUTLER is standing. He is a handsome man, tall,
lean, well-built. His outfit consists of a severe dark
suit--he performs a burning ELECTRIC GUITAR SOLO. In the red
glow of the stage lighting, there is a diabolical aura about
him. The Black Dude is also onstage, acting as a kind of
Master of Ceremonies. Keyboard and drums also play backup to
Butler's bright red Telecaster. The Beautiful Black Girl
is present, laughing and dancing to the music.

Standing opposite is a BLACK TEENAGER, a guitar held ready.
When Butler ENDS THE SOLO, the Challenger plays back the
notes with fierce determination. It is a contest--an all
comers night.

207 ON THE FLOOR

207

Eugene and Willie stand near the back, watching the spectacle.
Eugene stares, bewildered, while the old man nudges him.

(CONTINUED)

207 CONTINUED:

207

EUGENE

Holy shit! I don't believe it...

*

WILLIE

You better believe it. These boys
play for keeps.

*

EUGENE

You better clue me in, Willie. I got
no idea what I talked myself into.

*

WILLIE

The young up n'comin's try to challenge
him, try to outplay him. This is real
head cuttin', the way it used to be. That
boy's gonna find out who the big rooster
is.

208 ON STAGE

208

Butler is answering back the young Challenger's counter-riff
with an unbelievable display of slide work in the high
register.

(CONTINUED)

208 CONTINUED:

208

The Challenger comes in, trying the same run...He cannot keep up. He cannot contend. The CROWD BOOS.

Butler completes his show of musicianship and moves around the stage, prancing and bowing. He lifts a bottle of red wine from an amplifier and slugs from it.

209 OMIT

209

210 OMIT

210

211 AT THE BACK

211

Eugene watches the scene.

EUGENE

Shit, Willie. This is crazy! I'm not in this guy's league...

*

WILLIE

It's crazy but it's where we are. We are in it ass deep. You got to go up there and beat his ass. You win, be just like nothin' ever happened...

*

The old man reaches out and takes his arm. Willie comes up with a small, red flannel bag. As he raises it slowly with a magical aura.

WILLIE

Do you know what I got here? This is...the Mojo Hand.

Eugene looks at him closely...

WILLIE

The Louisiana voodoo charm. The winnin' boy's magic. They say there's only one, last, true Mojo left in the world n'they say it belong to a boy from pains and plantations; a sick chil' half-blind who walked through the front door of hard luck name of Willie Brown--came out the back door, Blind Dog Eulion; Came out the back door ready to play. Take it, Lightnin'. Take it an' go do your stuff. I'm givin' you all the magic I got.

He gives the Mojo to Eugene--Eugene looks into the old man's eyes. Then past him to where Jabk Butler and his band stand waiting.

WILLIE

You gotta go up there and win, Lightnin' Boy.

212 MOVING DOWN THE FLOOR

212

Eugene walks slowly, hesitantly through the crowd entranced by another challenge. Our boy looks scared, rightfully so, as he works his way toward a dark corner at the foot of the stage.

213 ON STAGE

213

the young, just beaten, Challenger falls out of the race and hurries to the steps as VICIOUS HECKLING rises from the crowd.

He passes Eugene and looks at him with distant, teary eyes. They lock a gaze for a moment.

The Black Dude steps forward.

BLACK DUDE (O.S.)

Who's next out there? Hmmm?
Who's comin' on up? Who's
gonna get their head cut?

A long moment. Eugene steps out of the shadows and walks toward the stage. There is a GREAT COMMOTION in the crowd when they spot the new player.

214 ON STAGE

214

Eugene takes each step slowly, guitar in tow. Butler stares at the next challenger with hostility. The Black Dude walks up to him and manufactures a handsome, intimidating grin. Eugene pays no attention to him, keeping his eyes riveted on Butler.

BLACK DUDE

Who send you here?

Eugene ignores the question and goes to the challenger's side of the stage. Nervous, he plugs into a huge amp, then looks across at his opponent--swallows deep as the CROWD LAUGHS AND JEERS.

BLACK DUDE

Can't talk, little man? Bet you
can't play none too. Jest come on
up to surrender it--

Eugene has his slide ready, he hits his ax--interrupting the Black Dude. A TRAIN WHISTLE comes out of Eugene's amp. A perfect train whistle.

EUGENE

Willie Brown sent me.

215 THE CROWD

215

APPLAUDS the fine display of musicianship. Willie, standing alone, nods in approval.

216 ON STAGE

216

Butler smiles and does his own slide whistle, indistinguishable from the real McCoy. He then goes one step better and performs a chugging and track-clacking on the body of his guitar. *

Eugene waits politely for his opponent to end his train song. When he does, the young challenger breaks into a chugging rhythm also.

Butler laughs at the challenger's chugging and breaks into an incredible run of notes up and down the neck of the guitar. He stops and awaits the response. *

Eugene freezes. He looks down at his instrument and concentrates. Butler continues to smile mockingly and this jars Eugene from his trance. Eugene performs the run of notes to perfection then adds a blues bend which he exaggerates by shaking his ax up and down. *

217 IN THE CROWD - WILLIE

217

heads up for the stage.

218 ON STAGE

218*

Butler lifts his ax into an upright position and creates a storm of jazz-blues scales that sound like a dozen fingers at work. *

When Butler completes the run, Eugene crouches over his guitar--dueling back the notes, just as fast, just as hot. *

Butler's smile fades. He turns on the steam. At the end of a blazing scale he and his backup men begin a scorching roll of notes. *

219 WILLIE

219

now onstage--he moves to the center... *

WILLIE
C'mon, Lightnin'. You need a
little backup, too.

He takes out his harmonica, smiles over at Butler. *

WILLIE
Fair's fair, Mr. Butler. *

220 ON STAGE

220

Eugene and Willie join in with Butler so that they are all executing the searing riff in harmony. Butler suddenly breaks out of it and climbs to something more intense, more obscure. *

(CONTINUED)

220 CONTINUED:

220

The duel grows hotter and hotter; Butler pulling every rare and antiquated blues lick out of his hat, Eugene matching him. But now Butler plays the pieces faster, giving the challenger little time to contemplate the patterns. The struggle shows in Eugene's tense face.

Butler grins, turning on the steam. He introduces a sizzling lick, drawing a blank from Eugene. Butler turns to the audience and raises his guitar high in victory. But suddenly Eugene plays the complex riff back without missing a note--and adds a run of NOTES that are CLASSICAL--then turns them back into the blues.

Suddenly all is quiet.

The guitarists stare each other down.

After a moment, Butler tries to duplicate Eugene's pattern--and fails.

Again, it is so quiet you can hear a feather fall...

221 ON THE FLOOR

221

the crowd absolutely riveted--this isn't what they expected.

222 ON STAGE

222

Butler stares expressionless into the face of his challenger. He too is sweating now. But it does not take long for the smile to break across his face. He positions his instrument, whispers the tempo into his memory and plays.

He can't believe it. Eugene lets go again--blues riffs mixed with CLASSICAL RUNS. A dazzling display. Butler stares at him--then begins to play. He executes the complex chord changes with the touch of a master, picks out the delicate runs, makes the dramatic key jump, but then, in an attempt to match Eugene's CLASSICAL NOTES in the high register, he strikes a harsh, discordant tone.

His amp overloads--blows out in a rush of sparks that looks like St. Elmo's Fire. Disgusted, Butler breaks free of his guitar strap and turns away from the audience, cursing. He acknowledges his loss.

Eugene and Willie pick up where Butler left off, cranking up the volume and adding a ROCK N' ROLL touch to the chord progression.

223 WILLIE

223

the weight of the world lifted from his shoulders. A triumphant smile steals across his face.

224 EUGENE

224

pumping out the thirteen-bar blues. He brings it to a driving MINOR CHORD CLIMAX which thunders through the hall. He leaps into the air and lands off balance, ending the song dramatically. He looks across at Scratch, who has suddenly appeared and stands sullenly across the way.

EUGENE

Willie Brown sent me.

The Black Dude approaches--hands Eugene a fat fold of cash.

BLACK DUDE

Congratulations, Slick. But
it's only a temporary victory.
Know what I mean?

Eugene stuffs the wad in his jacket pocket, takes a look at the defeated ax master, then glances back across the way.

Scratch is tearing up a piece of paper--then walks off. A loud shattering guitar fuzz-tone a la Hendrix and the SCREEN BREAKS INTO A MILLION PIECES REVEALING:

225 & 226 OMIT

OMIT 225 & 226

227 EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY - MATCHING CUT TO SCN. 201

227

Eugene and Willie continue staring at the TRANS AM as it drives away. In their consciousness, the previous scenes with Scratch and Jack Butler didn't happen--but Willie is mysteriously relieved--a happy man.

EUGENE

Come on, Willie. Let's knock off
the crossroads crap and get you
home to Fulton's Point.

WILLIE

Somethin' I gotta tell you, Lightnin'.

Smiles.

WILLIE

I'm home.

EUGENE

I don't get it.

WILLIE

We been in Fulton's Point for
three-hundred an' seventy-five
mile now. The road's my home.
Always has been. Never knew any
other. One more thing as long
as I'm tellin' the truth all of
a sudden, I lied to you about

(MORE)

227 CONTINUED

227

WILLIE (CONT'D)
the girl. She didn't steal the
money, I give it to her.

Eugene stares at the old man as he digests this announce-
ment. His stunned expression slowly gives way to a sad smile.

Willie downs some mash, chuckles softly and slaps Eugene on
the back.

WILLIE
Come on, I'm sick of down home
Mississippi. Livin' up north
made a city boy out of me. I
hear Chicago callin'. B.B. King
and Johnny Shines sayin' "Where
the new kid in town?"

Eugene smoothes out a few dents in his fedora and fits it on
carefully.

WILLIE
You ready for the Windy City?

EUGENE
I was born ready. Let's go get 'em.

WILLIE
But after I show you Chicago, you on
your own, hear?

EUGENE
Aw, come on, why can't I hang with
you? After Chicago, we can move on
to L.A.

WILLIE
That ain' how the song go. You gotta
move on, take the music someplace
else...Cuz that's what we did.

The old man looks Eugene in the eye.

WILLIE
What you got in L.A.?

EUGENE
Somebody I'd like to try to
find there.

(CONTINUED)

227 CONTINUED: (2)

217

WILLIE

You got time for that. Every
bluesman knows there's lots of
women around. You play the music
and they'll show up...

Pause.

WILLIE

We got a deal, Lightnin'?

*

Eugene looks away from the dark, tired eyes and thinks for
a time. He meets Willie's gaze again before nodding. And
in the quiet of the countryside, they walk on--until they
become small figures on the landscape.

WILLIE

I'm tired of all this waitin'
an' hitchhiking. I want to
go up to Chicago in style.
Fly in a airplane.

*

228 INT. JACKSON AIR TERMINAL - DAY

228

Willie and Eugene locate an empty row of seats near a departure gate in the busy airport. Willie looks exhausted, depending on Eugene for support as they move toward the plastic chairs.

Once seated, Eugene pulls out some money.

WILLIE

Okay, you paid the ride from here to Memphis, I'll make it up to you from Memphis to Chicago.

EUGENE

No way. We tried that before. This time I'll just pay for the whole trip.

Willie laughs until a cough gets in his way. He hacks his way back into the gutsy chuckle then simmers a bit, distracted by a PASSING YOUNG WOMAN.

EUGENE

I'm gonna go grab the boarding passes, Willie, don't run off with any jelly-roll, eh?

WILLIE

No sir, plenty of that in Chicago. Now stop standin' 'round with your whip in your hand an' go do your business.

Eugene pushes Willie's hat down over his glasses then runs off toward the check-in station.

229

INT. DELTA COUNTER - TIME CUT

229

Eugene is standing in line, fidgeting from foot to foot as usual and shuffling the tickets. The FEMALE ATTENDANT up at the counter is ARGUING with a stubborn YOUNG MAN. Eugene's turn comes up.

*

*

FEMALE ATTENDANT

*

Can I help you, please?

EUGENE

*

Yeah. My friend and I just need our boarding passes for Chicago.

FEMALE ATTENDANT

*

Smoking or non-smoking?

EUGENE

*

Non-smoking.

She hands the passes across.

*

FEMALE ATTENDANT

*

There you go. Boarding begins in ten minutes.

EUGENE

*

Thanks.

Eugene looks out over the crowded terminal--the chair Willie had been sitting in cannot be seen due to the passengers starting to board the Chicago flight. Suddenly, a paramedic team pushing a gurney, and several security officers run by...

Eugene stares for a horrified second, then breaks out of line, racing across the floor. He trips up several travellers on his way.

230

EUGENE'S POV

MOVING IN on Willie's seat--a small gathering of onlookers obscuring it. A policeman is on the scene.

231

REVERSE ANGLE - EUGENE

slips through the crowd and stumbles to Willie. The old man sits slumped in the corner of the chair, his head resting on his shoulder. His glasses are at the end of his nose and his fedora is on the floor.

WOMAN

I don't know, he just slumped over--He just...died. It was just that sudden.

(CONTINUED)

231

CONTINUED:

231

Eugene slides to his knees beside the Paramedic, who is checking for a pulse. He takes Willie's other hand and grips it tightly, staring up at the peaceful face.

PARAMEDIC

He's gone.

Pause.

POLICEMAN

He with you, son?

Eugene can't get the words out. Without removing his eyes from Willie's lifeless form, he nods.

The Paramedics load Willie onto the gurney...Standing, Eugene picks up the fedora from the floor and gives it a quick dusting. He places the hat gently on the gurney. He stares at the body as it is covered with a blanket.

EUGENE

You're home, Willie Brown.

(CONTINUED)

231 CONTINUED:

231

He closes his eyes tightly but tears make a stubborn escape, streaking down his cheeks...Eugene moves with the gurney as it is pushed away--seen only in glimpses now, between a dense mass of passersby trying to make a departing plane.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

232 EXT. CROSSROADS - BLACK AND WHITE - DAY

232 *

Eugene and Willie walking together--moving away down the dirt road until they become small figures on the horizon.

END CREDITS

FADE OUT

THE END