

"NORMA RAE"

by  
Irving Ravetch  
and  
Harriet Frank, Jr.

REVISED  
March 13, 1978

"NORMA RAE"

FADE IN

UNDER TITLES:

SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1

They succeed one another with the SOUND of a CAMERA CLICKING sharply.

This is a composite of NORMA RAE WEBSTER's life, glimpses of her early days, a burgeoning and a metamorphosis:

She is seen as an infant, sitting in her bath in a galvanized tub, hair twisted into a kewpie-doll peak, beribboned.

Norma at seven, front tooth out, a large grin splitting her face.

At twelve in a bathing suit, a pigeon-toed stance, arms folded self-consciously across her chest.

At fifteen, facing front, arrogant now, breasts jutting out, hip cocked.

At eighteen, her arm around a sailor's shoulder, wearing his hat at a rakish angle.

At twenty on a front porch with a cluster of girls, Norma at the center, mouth black with too much lipstick, holding a ukulele.

At twenty-two, holding a bridal bouquet, wearing a floppy hat, perplexed, faintly forlorn, on the edge of the unknown.

At twenty-four, defiant, thumbing her nose at a sign reading "Simpson's Secretarial School."

At twenty-six, sitting with her back against a tree, two young children tumbled in her lap, looking fond and frazzled.

At twenty-eight, in a monkey-pert waitress' outfit, balancing a tray, ground lost.

At thirty, a photographer's formal portrait, unguarded, beautiful, unfathomable.

At thirty-two, mature, strong, with humor, without illusion.

NORMA

2

She moves -- and the photograph becomes film.

CAMERA PULLS BACK. In the noise, amid the flying lint, she is in an aisle tight with machines, monitoring looms.

## THE MILL

3

The place bursts on the SCREEN like a battlefield, full of a jolting, nerve-shattering din. In the enormous space, rows and rows of old WOODEN LOOMS ROAR like waterfalls and shake the floors with ceaseless trembling vibrations. The sound is deafening, the constant punishing, racketing motion disorienting. There are no windows, no sunlight, only blank, brick walls; it is a seasonless, timeless world in which men and women cannot hear themselves think, do not think. They are bound and shackled to the work.

Steam vents spew mist into every corner to keep the yarn hot and wet. Mosquito netting rises from the floor and disappears overhead in the high dark reaches toward the ceiling. There is a permanent haze everywhere made by lint coming off the rolls of terry cloth, rolls as high as a man.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

4

The work begins in "the raw" where the cotton bales are brought in and men with surgical masks covering their noses and mouths rip apart the bales of cotton, feeding them into the mouths of hoppers that shred the cotton fibers and rip them apart.

Cotton dust and lint fill the air like snow, coating everyone from head to toe.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

5

Carders are next on the line, then spinners and doffers. Almost all the work can be seen in this vast room, the size of an enormous pasture, without interior walls. The rolls of terry cloth slowly unwind behind the backs of the side hemmers, passing yard by yard through the women's sewing machines.

## LEONA WITCHARD

6

grey-streaked, traces of beauty still visible. She works with her face close to a spider web of threads, her hands rapidly guiding them. It is work of intense concentration, demanding, exhausting.

## VERNON WITCHARD

7

Norma's father, a large, handsome man, fractious, expansive, stands at a row of bobbins, doing back-breaking stoop labor.

Cont.

A shrill WHISTLE SOUNDS. It is the break for lunch.

Vernon Witchard straightens, clutching his back, punished by the morning's work.

INT. LUNCHROOM

8

A narrow space with a long window looking out on the work floor. Signs are posted: "Give your chair to a spinner; they only have 15 minutes." The mill hands make quick work of their meal. There is little conversation; they are already too tired to talk.

Norma munches on an apple. BONNIE MAE, a cheerful sparrow of a woman from the folding tables, speaks to her.

BONNIE MAE

You just eating an apple for lunch?

NORMA

I'm dieting.

BONNIE MAE

Well, I gotta keep my strength up.

(eats heartily,  
biting into a thick  
sandwich)

I put this jelly up myself. On Sunday, Roscoe and I put up over sixty quarts of peaches. What'd you do over the weekend, Norma?

NORMA

Soaked my feet.

BONNIE MAE

Saw you downtown. Your friend drives a big car.

NORMA

If you'd looked on the motel register, you'd a seen my name there, too.

BONNIE MAE

It's none of my business...

Norma turns to look at her mother beside her. The woman's eyes are closed, her head rests back against the tile.

Cont.

NORMA

Momma, you haven't opened your sack.

Leona remains motionless.

NORMA

Momma, don't you want your lunch?

Still the woman doesn't answer.

NORMA

Momma!

Still Leona remains with her eyes closed. Alarmed, Norma shakes her and Leona finally opens her eyes, looking at her daughter blankly.

NORMA

What is it, Momma? Don't you feel good?

LEONA

What?

NORMA

Don't you hear me? Momma!  
(bends close to  
her, bawling)  
Momma, Momma, Momma!

Leona doesn't respond. Norma is on her feet instantly. She hauls her mother up, grabs her by the arm, and, pulling after her, she runs.

THE WEAVING ROOM

9

It is a headlong race across the length of the mill, Norma ahead and frantic, her mother in tow.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE

10

DR. WATSON is confronted by an agitated, flaring Norma, while Leona sits with her hands calmly folded in her lap.

NORMA

She didn't hear me! She didn't hear one word I said! She doesn't hear you now!

DR. WATSON

You know this happens, Norma Rae. It happens all the time.

NORMA  
Well, not to my momma!

DR. WATSON  
It'll pass off. It's just temporary.

NORMA  
That makes it all right, huh?  
She's only deaf for an hour,  
she's only deaf for two hours,  
she's only deaf all day!

DR. WATSON  
(mildly)  
She can get herself another job.

NORMA  
What other job in this town?  
This is the only job.

DR. WATSON  
I'll give her a note. They'll send her home.

NORMA  
(bitterly)  
Come on, Momma. You're nothing to any of 'em.

She takes her mother's arm and shepherds her out.

EXT. THE YARD OF THE WITCHARD HOUSE 11

The back of the shotgun house sits in an almost grassless plot. In one corner of the yard a shade tree struggles to live. It is still daylight, and underneath, on a straight-backed kitchen chair, Leona Witchard sits quietly. She sits very still, her face tilted toward the meager green above her; she is in a reverie, on the wings of a dream.

INT. KITCHEN 12

Norma is at the sink, washing the dishes, her father Vernon, towel in hand, dries. Norma, as she works, watches her mother through the open window. She finally calls out to her.

NORMA  
You all right out there?

Without turning, Leona responds in her quiet, patient voice.

Cont.

LEONA  
Yes. I'm all right.

NORMA  
You'll get all bitten up.

LEONA  
I'm coming in soon.

Norma returns to the job at hand. She suddenly wipes her hands briskly on a towel.

NORMA  
I'm gonna let this pot soak.

VERNON  
(mildly)  
There's one soaking from breakfast.

NORMA  
Well, now it's got company.

She goes out.

INT. LIVING ROOM

13

In the sparsely furnished room, two children, CRAIG and MILLIE, sit raptly watching TELEVISION. Norma enters.

NORMA  
Ten more minutes of that junk and then you do your homework.

CRAIG  
I did it.

NORMA  
'C' in writing, 'C' in spelling, 'D' in reading -- you haven't been doing too much homework.

MILLIE  
Sssshh. I wanna hear.

NORMA  
I'll ssshhh you.

She goes into her bedroom, strips off her blouse, sniffs the armpits, grimaces and tosses it aside. She takes one from the closet and puts it on.

WIDER ANGLE

14

as Vernon looms in the doorway.

VERNON

What're you getting fixed up for?

NORMA

I'm going into town.

VERNON

What do you need in town?

NORMA

Things.

VERNON

Well...I'll drive you in.

NORMA

You got 'Bonanza' on next.

VERNON

I'll miss it. Same every week anyhow.

NORMA

I'm going to J.C. Penney's to buy myself some panties and a white cotton brassiere, size 32C. You wanna come sit on a little stool outside the dressing room and have all the ladies look at you, come on.

VERNON

Well, I don't think I care to do that...

(then)

...You comin' straight back?

NORMA

No. Next I'm going to the drugstore to buy myself some Kotex pads and a Cosmopolitan magazine.

VERNON

Well...then you coming home?

NORMA

Yeah. By then I'll be so tired out from all the excitement, I'll be coming home.

The front DOORBELL RINGS. Vernon goes to answer it.



## THE FRONT DOOR

REUBEN WARSHOVSKY stands on the stoop.

He has two large suitcases and is dressed in tennis shoes, blue jeans and a T-shirt. Reuben is lean, sharp, full of nervous and intellectual energy; his view of life wavers between the jaundiced and the merry. He is a master of finagle and accommodation; he is purposeful and principled. He is fully mobilized always, however calm and easy his manner may be.

REUBEN

Mr. Witchard?

VERNON

That's right. Vernon Witchard.  
Who're you?

REUBEN

My name is Reuben Warshovsky.

VERNON

Warshovsky? What kind of name is that?

REUBEN

It's the kind you have to spell for telephone operators and headwaiters.

VERNON

What do you want?

REUBEN

I'd like to get me a room with a mill family.

VERNON

What for? We got a hotel with 12 rooms and a motel with 24 rooms.

REUBEN

I want to get to know some mill hands. Close up.

VERNON

Why is that?

Cont.

REUBEN

Mr. Witchard...I got into town about an hour ago, parked my rented car, got out, and, before I could adjust my crotch, the Chief of Police was on me, saying 'Who are you, I don't know you' and 'what the hell are you doing here?' I told him I was a labor organizer, come to put a union in the O.P. Henley textile mill, and he said, 'The fuck you are!' gave me a ticket and told me to get my ass elsewhere right quick.

Norma has appeared behind her father and listens curiously.

VERNON

He's dead right. As far as I'm concerned, you're all Communists or agitators or crooks or Jews or all four together. Any town you show up, folks get thrown out of work and get their heads busted.

REUBEN

What do you make an hour, Mr. Witchard?

VERNON

Two dollars and eighteen cents!

REUBEN

When did you have your last cost-of-living raise?

VERNON

I never had that.

REUBEN

With all due respect, Mr. Witchard, with today's inflation, that makes you a shlemiel.

VERNON

You calling me some kind of name or other?!

REUBEN

You're underpaid. You're overworked. They're shafting you, right up to your tonsils. You need me.

VERNON

If you hurry, you can get to the  
fence before my dog bites you.

NORMA

What're you telling him that for?  
We don't have a dog.

REUBEN

(looking at her  
father)

You don't need one.

He hefts the heavy suitcases, turns and goes.

INT. GOLDEN CHERRY MOTEL

16

The place has never seen better days. It was always none  
too clean, familiar with the hot-pillow trade and other  
transients. The rooms have a view of a blacktop parking  
area and a scummy swimming pool.

Norma sits in the small lobby, flipping through the pages  
of a magazine, ignored by ALSTON PURVIS, the desk clerk.  
She looks up with some surprise as Reuben enters, by now  
footsore and weary. He recognizes her.

REUBEN

This is one friendly little town  
you got here. I've been told to  
shove off, to piss off, and to  
git off.

NORMA

(mildly)

This place is okay. Just make  
sure they spray the room for  
roaches.

REUBEN

I'm familiar with roaches.

(goes to the  
desk)

I'd like a room with a view.

ALSTON

You got the back alley or the  
parking lot. Which?

Cont.

NORMA

(intervening)

Give him 207, Alston. You  
can't hear the drunks in  
there.

GEORGE BENSON enters. He is a large man, floridly handsome, commanding, with an edge of violence just concealed. He walks straight past Norma for the stairs, making only a peremptory beckoning gesture. She tosses aside the magazine and rises to follow.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

17

The SHOWER is HEARD RUNNING from the open bathroom. Norma sits on the edge of the torn-apart bed, fastening her bra; she gets up and pulls on her jeans. Her face is impassive; whatever has transpired in the past hour has left her unmoved.

George comes in, a towel wrapped around his middle, his hair still streaming. He combs his hair at the mirror, drops of water spraying.

GEORGE

I'll be back this way next  
Wednesday. After dinner. I'm  
having dinner with my wife's  
folks.

NORMA

Tonight was the last time,  
George.

He doesn't turn. The comb simply moves a little more slowly.

GEORGE

You don't say, Norma Rae. Isn't  
that a surprising turn.

NORMA

No. It's been coming for some  
time.

GEORGE

Well, isn't that funny, I didn't  
notice it. Didn't you get your  
steak dinner? Didn't you get  
your box of pralines? Didn't  
you get your French red wine?  
Didn't you come three times in  
a row in that bed over there?

NORMA

I wasn't counting.

GEORGE

(now turns to  
face her)

Looks like I don't know what  
it takes to satisfy you these  
days.

NORMA

It just doesn't sit well with  
me anymore, George. You got  
your wife, you got your two  
kids in high school, there's a  
lot of gossip, I got my two  
kids...

(shrugs)

...I don't know...it just  
doesn't make me feel good.

GEORGE

(flatly)

You're here to make me feel  
good.

He advances on her.

NORMA

I'm not trotting down here  
anymore.

GEORGE

Why, you hick. You got dirt  
under your fingernails, you  
leave hair in the sink, you  
pick your teeth with a matchbook  
-- I've seen you! Why, shit,  
what are you good for -- to come  
out of the factory, wash under  
your armpits, spread your legs  
for a poke and go home. And  
you're dumping me!

He hits her hard across the mouth; the impact sends her  
hurtling across the room, slamming against the opposite  
wall.

Cont.

She ends up crumpled on the floor, wiping her bloody nose with the back of her hand, pausing to look at it. Then she gets up. She reaches for her bag.

NORMA  
(at the door)  
You know something? You're  
absolutely right about me.

She goes out.

WALKWAY

18

She stumbles once or twice in the walkway, pauses to shove her blouse inside her pants.

Reuben is standing at the open door to his room as she passes it. He speaks coolly.

REUBEN  
I heard a hell of a thump.

NORMA  
That was me, getting thrown  
across the room.

REUBEN  
You better come in.

She follows him into his room.

INT. REUBEN'S ROOM

19

He goes into the bathroom, returns with a washcloth, dumps ice cubes out of his Coke, hands her the icepack. She puts it gingerly against her face.

REUBEN  
Sit down. You look a little  
shaken up.

She sits. He notes the condition she's in.

REUBEN  
I thought everyone down South  
was Ashley Wilkes.

Cont.

NORMA

You lie down with dogs, you get fleas.

(removes rag and shows him her nose)

Does this look like it's broken to you?

REUBEN

No, I don't think so. Want an aspirin?

NORMA

No, thanks.

REUBEN

Band-Aid?

NORMA

No.

REUBEN

Valium.

NORMA

You're a whole drugstore.

REUBEN

Mild hypochondriac. Keep the ice on it.

NORMA

Me and men. I ought to learn to say no from the start. But if it wasn't men, I don't know what it would be.

ANOTHER ANGLE

20

She gets up and begins to wander around. He has already established himself; books are stacked and piled everywhere. papers litter the desk, clothes are dumped on the bed and hang from the backs of chairs.

NORMA

You got a lot of books.

REUBEN

Yeah, I'm afraid I'll wake up in a motel room someday with nothing to read but the phone book.

Cont.

She stops at the picture of a girl that has been propped up on the bureau. She studies it.

NORMA

She's got big eyes.

REUBEN

She's also got a big brain.

NORMA

What's her name?

REUBEN

Dorothy Finkelstein. She's a hotshot labor lawyer out of Harvard.

NORMA

She must be your girl friend if you haul her picture around with you.

REUBEN

Well, we sleep together on Sunday mornings and then we read the New York Times. I guess that makes her my girl friend.

NORMA

(holds out her hand)

I'm Norma Rae Wilson.

REUBEN

(shaking)

Reuben Warshovsky.

NORMA

Pleased to meet you.

REUBEN

My pleasure.

NORMA

(pauses)

I'm sorry about my daddy. He's got a short fuse.

REUBEN

My credentials keep me out of a lot of places. But every once in a while, somebody'll open a door and put me in the best bedroom and treat me like I was a cousin.



NORMA  
That wouldn't be my daddy.  
(then,  
abruptly)  
You a Jew?

REUBEN  
Born and bred.

NORMA  
I never met a Jew before. I  
heard they had horns.

He pushes his hair back to show her.

REUBEN  
Circumcised, yes. Horns,  
no.

NORMA  
Far as I can see, you don't  
look any different from us.

REUBEN  
We are.

NORMA  
Yeah? What makes you different?

REUBEN  
History.

NORMA  
HMMMMMM...

She looks at him thoughtfully a moment. He is a strange  
bird.

NORMA  
Well, thanks for the ice.

She hands back the washcloth.

REUBEN  
Any time.

NORMA  
Christ, I hope not.

She goes out.

IN FRONT OF THE MOTEL

21

Vernon sits parked at the wheel of his battered blue Dodge. As Norma comes out into the night, he waves his hand and calls to her.

VERNON

Over here, honey.

She stops short on the pavement, turns and stares a moment, exasperation visible. Then she comes to him.

VERNON

Thought I'd come down and give you a ride home.

She merely looks at him.

VERNON

(slyly)  
You ain't got any packages.

NORMA

(flatly)  
I ain't got any explanations, either.

VERNON

Come on, sweetheart. Get in.

INT. THE CAR

22

She slides in beside him, but she is angry and shows him a stony profile.

VERNON

You want a strawberry ice cream cone?

It is useless to hold out against him.

NORMA

Sure. You treat me like I'm twelve anyhow. Why not?

VERNON

That's my girl.

Beaming, he pulls away and drives off.

EXT. MILL

23

Norma and her parents and a throng of mill workers surge through the chain link fence toward the looming, dirt-streaked, windowless red brick building which will swallow them all for the day. It is a spiritless mass of people, silently set for their labor, carrying with them the weariness of season after season. There are no swapped greetings; this work exacts a toll in mind and muscle.

NORMA AND REUBEN

24

As she goes through the fence, she comes face to face with Reuben again; his energy is up. He thrusts a leaflet from a large stack under his arm at each man and woman who pass. Suddenly, he finds he is handing one to Norma. She scans it quickly.

NORMA

There's too many big words in here. If I don't understand it, they ain't gonna understand it.

She shoves it back at him and is immediately lost in the crowd. He stops his activity and stands there in some puzzlement, reading his own flyer once again.

NORMA

25

A bossman, JIMMY JEROME DAVIS, stands in front of her as she is about to enter the building.

NORMA

Morning, Jimmy Jerome.

The man gestures back toward the fence with his head.

JIMMY

That fellow a friend of yours, Norma?

NORMA

(shrugging)

Looks like he's getting to be.

JIMMY

Better hotfoot it or you'll be late.

NORMA

I don't care if I don't get there 'til tomorrow.

But she goes in.

## AT THE FENCE

The last of the mill hands has entered. Reuben is finally alone and prepares to go. But as he turns, he finds Jimmy Jerome in his path.

JIMMY

Well...one of you guys shows up about every four years -- about the same time we get the locusts.

REUBEN

(flat)

What's your name?

JIMMY

My name? My name's Jimmy Jerome Davis.

REUBEN

Well, Jimmy Jerome, we already got six of you bossmen in civil contempt. Maybe we can make it seven.

JIMMY

(genial)

Why, hell, we plaster the toilet with them things.

He turns and goes. The gate in the fence closes and Reuben is on the outside.

NORMA

In the weaving room, the back of her shirt already wet.

TEDDY BOB KEELER, a fellow worker, taps her on the shoulder; she looks around; he indicates a BOSSMAN beckoning to her from his office.

NORMA

I already told him I wouldn't go out to dinner with him. What's he want now?

TEDDY BOB

Maybe he wants to make it breakfast, Norma Rae.

She makes a deprecating gesture and marches off to the summons.

INT. OFFICE

It is quiet in here behind the large plateglass window through which the entire activity in the weaving room can

be surveyed. TOMMY GARDNER waits for Norma behind a desk. He has the hard look of a hard-living man, used to dealing with hunting dogs and menials. Norma enters and goes on the attack.

NORMA

Whatever it is, I didn't do it.

GARDNER

Norma, you got the biggest mouth in this mill. Give us longer breaks, give us more smoking time, give us a Kotex machine --

NORMA

Do it and I'll shut up.

GARDNER

Well, we're gonna do better'n that. We figure the only way to close that mouth is to hand you a promotion. You're rising in the world, honey.

NORMA

Yeah? How far and for how much?

GARDNER

We're gonna put you on as a spot-checker.

NORMA

It ain't gonna make me any friends.

GARDNER

It's gonna make you another dollar and a half an hour.

She chews it over. It seems hard to digest.

NORMA

29

She is on the floor, clipboard in one hand, stopwatch in the other. She has paused behind LUCIUS WHITE, a black man, and is timing him as he rethreads a loom. When he finishes, she clicks her watch, enters a notation on the board, moves on.

ANOTHER ANGLE

30

She is behind GEORGE HUBBARD, watches as he unstops a spindle. Again, she clicks her watch, marks his time.

ANOTHER ANGLE

31

She times RAY BUCK completing a run of towels, records his speed.

ANOTHER ANGLE

32

Finally, she stands behind her father. Vernon works at the bobbins, doing the job he has done all his life. He pauses only an instant to rub the back of his neck, hurries to recover the tempo. He grins at his daughter over his shoulder.

Norma is troubled and unhappy.

VERNON

How'm I doin' little girl?

NORMA

You better speed it up, Daddy -- if you can.

VERNON

(protesting)

I'm goin' as fast as I can.

NORMA

They're watching me and they're watching you...

The old man grimly bends forward and his hands fly as he pulls bobbins and threads them.

EXT. VERNON'S YARD

33

Craig and Millie in the b.g., climb in and out of a battered cardboard carton, which for them is a train; the SOUNDS of their shouting and laughing rise in the early evening air.

VERNON

34

He stands on the open back porch at a galvanized tub, scrubbing his hands and face. As he dries off, he uses the towel to whack some of the clinging lint from his shirt and his pants.

Norma comes out on the porch; she goes to brush the lint which mats his hair, making him look like a white-haired man of eighty. Vernon stiffly pulls away from her.

NORMA

Well, I suppose you're sore at me.

VERNON

I don't think you should push your own daddy.

NORMA

(wrestles  
with it)

It's more money. I need it for  
my kids.

VERNON

Well, I don't need it from  
my kid.

And he walks into the house, his back stiff.

Norma stands troubled. She calls out to her children, almost  
absently.

NORMA

Craig...Millie...get out of  
Grandma's marigolds.

She sits on the top step, hugs her knees, broods.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

35

A game is in progress on the pokey little baseball diamond  
with weak night lights and a splintered, faded green  
two-tiered set of bleachers. Bugs wheel endlessly around  
the lights, tree FROGS CROAK, there is nothing so grand as  
uniforms -- the two teams play in their work clothes. The  
scoreboard, broken and sagging, reads: MILLAGEVILLE 15,  
PISTON 12.

There is a sudden thunderclap of wild excitement, bringing  
everyone to their feet, as the batter powers one far into  
the darkness of right field, bringing in the two men  
already on base and tying the score.

IN THE STANDS

36

Norma Rae and Bonnie Mae sit down again with flushed faces.

NORMA

Want something?

BONNIE MAE

Bring me a hot dog, lotsa relish.

Norma climbs over some people and goes down the steps.

BEHIND THE STANDS

37

A hot dog wagon steams; the bugs have concentrated here as  
well. Norma runs into Reuben at the counter, slathering  
mustard and relish on his dog.

Cont.

NORMA  
 (to the vendor)  
 Two dogs, lotsa relish and  
 no relish.

She turns to Reuben.

NORMA  
 Enjoying the game?

REUBEN  
 I like that shortstop. He goes  
 into the hole.

NORMA  
 That's J.C. McAllister. Scouts've  
 been looking at him.

Reuben takes a first big bite out of his hot dog and  
 instantly spits it out, spraying dog and bun everywhere.

NORMA  
 What's the matter? Don't you  
 like it?

REUBEN  
 Well, it's not Nathan's. In fact,  
 I'm not even sure it's a hot dog.  
 (chucks the  
 remainder away in  
 a trash barrel)  
 What do they put in these things?

NORMA  
 A lot of red dye -- and other  
 things you don't want to know  
 about.

The CROWD YELLS. Apparently, something interesting has  
 happened.

ANOTHER ANGLE

38

ELLIS HARPER comes up to the wagon. He is tall, good-  
 looking, fine-boned, educated. When he sees Norma, he  
 stops; there is a sense of constraint between them.

ELLIS  
 Hello, Norma.

NORMA  
 Hello, Ellis.

ELLIS  
 You're looking fine.



NORMA

I'm always fine. I'm a horse.

ELLIS

You changed your hair.

NORMA

I let it grow.

ELLIS

(after a moment's  
silence)

How's Craig?

NORMA

Lost his front teeth...

(voice flattens)

...It wouldn't hurt if you came  
by to see him once in a while.

ELLIS

I don't think I should do that,  
Norma.

NORMA

Suit yourself -- you always have.

The man stands uncomfortably a moment, then quickly turns  
and walks away.

Reuben plunks down a quarter on the counter.

REUBEN

I'll have an RC Cola.

(then to her)

Want one?

NORMA

Yeah.

REUBEN

(with another coin)

Make it two.

MOVING SHOT

39

Drinks in hand, they wander around the perimeter of the ball  
field. Cars are parked facing the game, spectators sitting  
in them, drinking beer; kids sit or lie atop sedans, watching  
the action.

Young kids on bikes stand, one foot on the pedal, one on  
the ground. A few young couples sit in the grass, infants  
crawling not too far from them.

As usual, Norma says what she is thinking, without preamble, out loud, directly.

NORMA

I climbed in the backseat of his Cadillac on a rainy night six years ago, stuck my feet out the window, and got me my little Craig off that Southern gentleman.

(dismissively)

He's never done anything worthwhile since.

REUBEN

Were you married?

NORMA

He didn't bother and I didn't bother.

REUBEN

My first affair, as I recollect it, was with my Hungarian piano teacher. I was playing Smetana and she put her head in my lap. I played the hell out of it. We ended up in the bedroom under a Russian icon, and her husband came home and found us and burst into tears. I went and put my arms around him and said 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' and then we all went into the kitchen and had a glass of tea.

She looks at him oddly.

NORMA

Seems like every time you run into me, I'm hassling with some other guy.

REUBEN

That's what it seems like.

NORMA

What do you think of me, I wonder?

REUBEN

I think you're too smart for what's happening to you.

He lets her think that over -- and she does. They keep walking in silence.

INT. THE ROVING ROOM

40

Norma, with clipboard and stopwatch, makes her rounds. She stops to time SONNY WEBSTER, an intense, hidden, unfathomable young man; the surface is calm but frustration is just beneath it. As she clicks her watch to start, he does an extraordinary thing -- he leaps away from the loom, runs to another, starts it, calls to her over his shoulder, taunting her:

SONNY

Come on, lady! I'm over here now!

MOVING SHOT

41

She starts to follow him, bewildered; he darts to a third loom.

SONNY

I'm right over here now! I got the jump on you now!

He weaves in and out among the looms, calling, mocking her with a crazy challenge.

SONNY

I'm behind you now. Yoo-hoo, lady! Why don't you clock me over here? I'm over here now!

ANOTHER ANGLE

42

She pelts after him at a dead run, finally grabbing him by the arm, stopping him.

NORMA

You damn fool, you better cut this out! The faster you work, the more work they'll put on you!

SONNY

What do I care? All I got to do is work!

He pulls free and rushes to yet another loom and gets in going. Norma stops, throwing up her hands.

INT. WITCHARD LIVING ROOM

43

Vernon has the children on his lap, watching the TELEVISION screen. Leona is across from him in a splint chair, a photo album in her lap. From a cardboard box she selects snapshots and slides them into place.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

Cont.

NORMA

I'll get it.

She goes through the room toward the door.

AT THE DOOR

44

Sonny Webster is there when she opens it. She closes it in his face immediately. Then, bethinking herself, she slowly opens it again.

Sonny is quite different now, subdued, chastened.

SONNY

I won't trouble you. I just came to apologize. I know I could've lost you your job today.

NORMA

You sure went crazy on me.

SONNY

I know. I got handed divorce papers this morning. I guess I went off my head.

NORMA

Things can get to you.

SONNY

Would you come and have a drink with me, to make up for the ruckus and all the bother I put you to?

She hesitates a moment, considering it.

SONNY

I'm Sonny Webster. You used to come in my momma's bakery.

NORMA

Yeah, I remember you now, on the cash register after school. You never made the right change.

SONNY

I never did too good in math.

NORMA

(ruminating)  
Sonny Webster...

SONNY

How about that drink?

NORMA

Okay. Wait here.

## IN THE HALL

She closes the door on him, goes to get her purse and a sweater off a hook in the hall. Her father is right at her heels.

VERNON

Who's that? I heard a man's voice.

NORMA

Yeah, you did, and I'm going out with him.

VERNON

Where'd you meet him?

NORMA

Just now on the front porch!

VERNON

Some Tom, Dick or Harry comes to the door and you got your hat on? No, sir!

NORMA

I'm over twenty-one -- way over.

VERNON

Lemme say some names to you, Norma. Buddy Wilson, Ellis Harper, George Benson, a U.S. sailor, a Trailways bus driver -- none of which is lookin' after you, as far as I can see. I got that spot. It's my food, it's my roof.

NORMA

There's something wrong with all this. Something wrong with the way you try to keep men off me.

VERNON

There is nothing wrong with a daddy's love for his little girl. You oughta accept your daddy's love, you oughta rest in it, you oughta shelter in it, you oughta be grateful for it.

NORMA

You're loving me to death.

She slams out of the house.

INT. LIVING ROOM

46

Vernon charges in, stands looking blinded, like an enraged bull. He goes suddenly to grab the snapshots from his wife's hands; wildly he begins to rip them in half, one after another, flinging them into the air, two jagged halves of Norma's face as a teenager, pieces of Norma on the back of a pony.

LEONA

(in horror)

Daddy, those are our precious family pictures...

VERNON

They're just scraps now!

The children are wide-eyed.

INT. A TAVERN

47

Men lined at the bar still grimy from the job, getting the taste of work out of their mouths; drink ends almost every day and it is not boisterous -- it is serious and dogged, an anodyne.

At the back, Norma and Sonny sit in a wooden booth, marked with cigarette burns. Soft drinks, a bucket of ice, and a bottle of bourbon in a brown paper bag stand on the scarred linoleum-topped table; they have made considerable inroads in the liquor.

A Dolly Parton RECORD IS PLAYING on the JUKEBOX.

NORMA

That woman sure can sing...and those words are true, too.

SONNY

I liked Elvis, myself...

NORMA

(high)

I'd like to get rich by just opening my mouth and wailing...

SONNY

It don't necessarily make them happy.

NORMA

(the philosopher)

What does, what does, what does?

Cont.

SONNY

A man and a woman is about your best chance.

NORMA

You're a fine one to talk. Didn't you tell me you took a gun, went slinking along on your belly in the bushes, drew a bead on your wife, aiming to blow her head off?

SONNY

Yeah, I was gonna burn 'em both down...her and her boyfriend... but I couldn't...

(pauses)

She was a good person when we went together in school and all. She was a real nice person... but the change that come about in her...it still really amazes me...

NORMA

Listen, I'm different than what I was, too. You go through things.

She tips herself another consoling glassful. In the process, she looks up and sees someone.

REUBEN

48

He is at the bar, turned on the stool face to face with ORA PURSLEY, in close conference, exhorting him, proselytizing.

ANOTHER ANGLE

49

Norma waves at him from the booth.

NORMA

Hey! You! New York!

Reuben, a bit startled, turns and sees her.

NORMA

(gesture is expansive)

Come on over. Sit with us.

Cont.

SONNY  
(thwarted)  
Do we need anybody else?

NORMA  
(high)  
The more the merrier.

AT THE BOOTH

50

as Reuben approaches and stands at the booth.

NORMA  
Reuben, this is Sonny. Sonny,  
that's Reuben.

The two men shake hands.

NORMA  
Get off your feet. What are  
you doing here?

REUBEN  
Working.

NORMA  
This is a drinking place.

REUBEN  
Drunk or sober, I want 'em.

SONNY  
Can I pour you out one?

He brandishes the paper bag.

REUBEN  
I'll have some plain seltzer.

SONNY  
You just drinking soda water?

REUBEN  
That's all.

Sonny pours him a glass.

SONNY  
You'll feel better'n I will  
tomorrow morning.

Cont.



NORMA

Reuben's a union man. Thinks  
he can put a union in the mill.

SONNY

Ain't ever been one.

REUBEN

Then its hour's come, hasn't it?

SONNY

There better be more'n one of you.  
'Cause there's more'n one of them.

REUBEN

There will be.

SONNY

These big companies get everything  
they want. Everything goes to the  
rich man.

REUBEN

Getting tired of it?

SONNY

When I do, I just wash it down  
with beer...

He drinks. A boozy melancholy enfolds them, heightened by  
a ballad sung by Johnny Cash on the JUKEBOX. It plunges  
Norma into deeper gloom.

NORMA

That record was playing on the  
record player the night they  
called me up to tell me my  
husband was killed in a fight  
in a beer joint.

SONNY

I knew Buddy Wilson in high  
school. We had wood shop  
together.

NORMA

He got drunk and broke a beer  
bottle and got into a fight.  
Somebody else had a broken beer  
bottle, too...I remember going  
to the funeral home. This man  
comes to the door. I wanted  
to go in and see Buddy but he  
said he didn't have him prepared,  
and he didn't think it would be  
a good idea for me to see him.

NORMA (Cont.)  
 I really wanted to see him, but  
 Daddy wouldn't let me go in...  
 (shrugs)  
 And that was the end of Buddy,  
 as far as that goes...

Each, in his own way, sits quietly considering mortality.

ON THE STREET

51

The three have come out on the deserted sidewalk. The tavern lights go off behind them. Norma and Sonny are carrying a full load.

NORMA  
 I'm gonna drive.

SONNY  
 No, I'll drive.

NORMA  
 You're drunk.

SONNY  
 So're you.

REUBEN  
 I'll drive.

He herds them toward his car.

MOVING SHOT - CAR

52

Reuben is at the wheel, Norma in the middle, Sonny on the side.

NORMA  
 Well, I went out with one man  
 and I'm coming home with two.  
 That oughta surprise my daddy  
 some.

SONNY  
 He sure watches you close.

NORMA  
 We are close. Lots of times when  
 I was a kid, he'd give in an  
 excuse at the mill so he could  
 stay home and play with me in the  
 snow. He used to drive 250 miles  
 to Crescent Beach to buy me a  
 chicken dinner, take me swimming,  
 tell me jokes. We'd sleep in the  
 back of the car parked on the  
 beach and walk on the sand in the  
 morning.

NORMA (Cont.)

(waggles her  
fingers)

He bought me this ring on my  
finger...

She suddenly turns to address Reuben politely.

NORMA

Could you stop the car? I'm  
gonna be sick.

Reuben pulls over and stops instantly, getting out and helping  
her out the door.

SONNY

(apologetically,  
helpless)

I can't help, Norma, or I'd  
give it up, too.

BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

53

Norma is crouched in the bushes, Reuben bent over her, holding  
her waist with one hand, her forehead with the other.

She straightens at last, wan but recovered.

NORMA

Well, that's real ladylike of me...

REUBEN

Don't worry. I did bedpans one  
summer at Stuyvesant Hospital.

NORMA

One of these days I'm gonna put  
myself all together.

REUBEN

Make it soon. Because one of  
these days, I'm going to start  
in on you.

Her look says it can't be now. He helps her back to the car.

FRONT OF THE MILL

54

Another work day, the mill hands streaming through the gate.  
Reuben is once again stationed at his post, handing out  
leaflets.

Cont.

Norma falls behind her father and mother to take one from him. She reads it.

REUBEN

I took your advice. I'm down to two syllables.

NORMA

One's better.

She hands it back to him and goes jauntily into the mill.

ON THE FLOOR

55

As she enters the tremendous weaving room floor, stopwatch and clipboard at the ready, she comes face to face with MAVIS PRUITT and gives her a cheery greeting.

NORMA

Hi, Mavis.

Mavis gives her a long, cold look, then deliberately turns her back. Norma stares after her, surprised; then turns and goes on.

ANOTHER ANGLE

56

LINETTE ODUM is heading for the looms. Norma hails her.

NORMA

'Morning, Linette.

The woman deliberately stops, looks her up and down, from head to toe, and then without a word moves to her place.

ANOTHER ANGLE

57

Norma, disturbed now, goes up to BILLY STETTIN, taking his place at a loom, and taps him on the shoulder.

NORMA

Hiya, Billy.

The man doesn't answer.

NORMA

Hey, Billy!

He busies himself with the spindle, his face grim.

NORMA

What is this! What the hell is this!

Cont.

NORMA (Cont.)

(grabs him by  
the shirt)

Billy! Billy! I'm talking to  
you.

Billy turns to her, flinging her hand off his shirt, and spits  
out one word.

BILLY

Fink!

He turns away from her. She stands slone, in a steaming rage.

NORMA

Well, shit!

And without a pause she wheels around and marches toward  
Tommy Gardner's office.

OFFICE

58

She bangs open the door and, without ceremony, bursts in.  
Gardner looks up from his desk.

NORMA

Nobody out there's talking to me!

GARDNER

Less talk, more work.

NORMA

They're my friends and they're  
gonna stay my friends! I'm  
quitting! I'm quitting right  
here, I'm quitting right now.  
You're speeding 'em up and then  
you're gonna weed 'em out!

GARDNER

You knew all that.

NORMA

Well, I was greedy and I was  
dumb and now I'm sorry. You  
can fire me!

GARDNER

No, we won't do that. We'll  
just put you back in the  
weaving room, Norma. Your  
family's been in this mill for  
a long time.

Cont.

She plunks the instruments of her now-hated trade down on his desk, turns and leaves.

ANOTHER ANGLE

59

as Norma comes to take a spot beside her friend Bonnie Mae Buffum on the shuddering floor.

The inexorable work goes on, without end, without pause.

EXT. WITCHARD HOUSE

60

Sonny drives up in his old Ford and gives one discreet beep on his horn. Norma emerges on the front steps; holding each hand are Millie and Craig. She marches them down to the car.

NORMA

(firmly)

We're all ready.

SONNY

(it's a bit more  
than he bargained  
for)

All of you?

NORMA

All three of us.

SONNY

(with good grace)

Well, then, everybody hop in.

MOVING SHOT - SONNY'S CAR

61

NORMA

Roll the window down if you're hot.

MILLIE

I wanna sit up front.

NORMA

Well, you can't.

CRAIG

Are we there yet?

NORMA

No, we just started off.

(to Sonny)

I thought we were going to the beach.

SONNY

We are. I gotta make a stop first.

EXT. BUNGALOW

62

Sonny's car is at the curb in front of another house, Norma and her children waiting impatiently.

After a moment, Sonny emerges, a small girl's hand in his. He introduces her.

SONNY

This is Alice. She's mine.

NORMA

(laughs)

Like I always say -- the more  
the merrier.

Alice hops into the back with the boy and the girl. Off they go.

EXT. RIVERBANK

63

The kids play along the bank, clambering over a tree that spans the water. Norma and Sonny sit on a blanket, remnants of their picnic before them, hugging their knees, at ease with each other.

SONNY

You're real easy with your kids.

NORMA

Oh...I yell. I swat 'em.

SONNY

You're a pretty woman.

NORMA

I wasn't bad at eighteen. But  
things have slid and slipped...

SONNY

You look fine to me.

NORMA

Keep the lights low and I'm  
all right.

SONNY

Well. I'll take you where it's  
dark.

NORMA

(makes a weary wave  
with her hand)

I've been there.

Cont.

Sonny is silent a moment.

SONNY

I don't owe a nickel in this town. I'll eat anything that's put down in front of me. I can fix anything electrical. I'm all right after I've had my first cup of coffee -- I want that bad, though. I got me a new job at the gas station. I'd turn over my paycheck the minute I got it -- that's Friday noon. And I come straight home from work and stay there.

(finally turns  
to look at her)

I got me Alice and I'm alone. You got two kids and you're alone. If you could help me maybe I could help you.

She stares out at the bright setting sun, debating it. After a moment, she says:

NORMA

...It's been a long time between offers.

She turns and looks at him for the first time.

NORMA

Well, kiss me. And, if that's all right, the rest'll be.

He takes her in his arms.

WEAVING ROOM

64

Norma and Bonnie work side by side in the hellish din.

Bonnie passes her a flyer. Norma unfolds it and reads it:

TWUA MEETING TONIGHT, CHOCKOYOTTE  
BAPTIST CHURCH. IN YOUR INTEREST,  
COME HEAR: REUBEN WARSHOVSKY,  
SPEAKER

Norma shoves the flyer in her pocket and continues working.

BONNIE

Roscoe says I shouldn't go --  
but I'm going.

NORMA

I'm not asking anybody.



EXT. CHOCKOYOTTE CHURCH

65

as Norma and Bonnie walk up the rickety wooden steps and enter.

INT. THE CHURCH

66

There are plain wooden walls, plain wooden pews, and a totally black assembly. As the only white people, they are at first a little tentative, as if they were intruding, and they halt in the entrance. A large, impressive man, JAMES BROWN, waves them on in with his straw hat. They walk all the way down to the front and sit in front of the altar, with its cross, a brightly colored picture of Jesus, a jelly glass filled with wild flowers. The people wait in silence, patiently.

MOVING SHOT - CAR

67

Reuben drives down a winding dirt country road, past dry pine forests, fields of tobacco plants, row after row of cotton. Now and again there is a bleached wooden shack with a tin roof off which the sun glints. It is a dry, somnolent, empty landscape, hard to unlock, hard to invade.

A turn in the road shows Reuben the church up ahead -- and, at that instant, his car goes out of control.

THE CAR

68

He spins the wheel, which is suddenly loose in his hands, slams his foot against the brake again and again, but the car is out of control and hurtles wildly in a careening slide, leaving the road, bumping across a field, while he continues vainly fighting the steering wheel. The car crashes into a pine tree, bursting into flames.

THE CAR

69

The door is jammed and, as he scuttles across to the other side, the windshield heats and cracks and EXPLODES. Reuben hauls himself through the open window, falling to the ground, rising quickly and backing away from the heat.

Figures come running from the church in the distance.

NEAR THE CAR

70

Reuben leans panting against a tree as some of the blacks approach. For a moment, everyone stands silently watching the car burn with great gouts of black smoke.

REUBEN

(to the men)

The steering wheel went. The  
brakes went. Everything went.

JAMES

Looks like they're startin' in  
on you.

Cont.

REUBEN

It's either them or General Motors.

INT. CHURCH

71

As Reuben steps up to the altar to deliver his speech, he glances at Norma and Bonnie just beneath him. If he is surprised, he makes no sign.

REUBEN

72

He stands in front of the quiet, hopeful, needful people who have risked something to be here. He speaks very simply.

REUBEN

On October 4, 1970, my grandfather, Isaac Abraham Warshovsky, aged 87, died in his sleep in New York City. On the following Friday morning, his funeral was held. My mother and father attended, my two uncles from Brooklyn attended, my Aunt Minnie came up from Florida. Also present were 862 members of The Amalgamated Clothing Workers and The Cloth, Hat and Cap Makers' Union. Also members of his family. In death as in life, they stood at his side. They had fought battles with him, bound the wounds of battle with him, had earned bread together and had broken it together. When they spoke, they spoke in one voice, and they were heard. They were black, they were white, they were Irish, they were Polish, they were Catholic, they were Jews, they were one. That's what a union is: one.

(pauses)

Ladies and gentlemen, the textile industry, in which you are spending your lives and your substance, and in which your children and their children will spend their lives and substance, is the only industry in the whole length and breadth of the United States of America that is not unionized. Therefore, they are free to exploit you, to cheat you, to lie to you, and to take away what is rightfully yours --

Cont.

REUBEN (Cont.)

your health, a decent wage, a fit place to work. I would urge you to stop them by coming down to room 207 at the Golden Cherry Motel, to pick up a union card and sign it.

(pauses again)

It comes from the Bible -- according to the tribes of your fathers, ye shall inherit. It comes from Reuben Warshovsky -- not unless you make it happen.

He stops talking. The people have listened.

IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH

73

People are coming up to Reuben to shake his hand, to murmur words of appreciation. Bonnie Mae approaches.

BONNIE

Roscoe should've come. He should've heard you.

REUBEN

Bring him next time.

BONNIE

(agreeing)

If I have to drag him.

It is Norma's turn next. She stands in front of him with a slight grin.

NORMA

You preach pretty good.

REUBEN

When are you going to join up?

NORMA

Me? Who's got the time? I got my hands full as is.

REUBEN

(flat)

Make the time. Sleep less. If I don't get some help, it's kaput, finished, I'm out of town -- and you got nothing.

ANOTHER ANGLE

He turns away from her and shakes hands with James Brown.

REUBEN

I'd appreciate any help you can give me. That's licking stamps, stuffing envelopes, typing with two fingers -- anything.

JAMES

I'll show up.

Norma stands to the side, a little baffled, frustrated, uncertain.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Belonging to the Justice of the Peace, stuffed with battered mohair furniture and family pictures. The wedding in progress is not overly festive: Norma holds a rather bedraggled little bouquet, but she is still a bird of plumage in her bright print dress. Once her mind is made up, she sweeps everything before her. The others, Sonny beside her, Bonnie Mae and Roscoe as witnesses, are slightly uncomfortable in unaccustomed finery.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

...and, with the powers that the State of Georgia vests in me, I now pronounce you man and wife. And mother over there has a glass of homemade wine for us -- picked the berries myself last summer.

ANOTHER ANGLE

They all turn to the little table on which his WIFE has prepared six tumblers and a bottle of red wine. Sonny raises his glass in a toast.

SONNY

To my wife, Norma -- and I sure hope I can keep up with her.

Roscoe laughs loudly and claps him on the back.

PITCHER

The wedding bouquet has been stuck in a pitcher standing on a bureau.

INT. BEDROOM - SONNY'S HOUSE

Sonny sits on the edge of the bed in his pajama bottoms, removing the price tag from the top. He then pulls it over his head, smooths back his hair, sits waiting. Norma emerges from the bathroom in a nightgown.

NORMA

Hot water tap's leaking  
in there.

SONNY

Needs a washer.

(then)

That sure is a pretty nightgown.

NORMA

Look at it quick, 'cause I'm  
going to take it off.

She comes and sits beside him on the bed.

NORMA

You happy?

SONNY

Well, I got another chance  
to be.

They are interrupted by a hideous SOUND, the LOUD BLASTING of a CAR HORN. It is no mere tapping of a horn; it is a continuous, insistent, nerve-scraping blare, beginning very close, as though the car were right under their window, then gradually receding as the car drives away; finally ceasing altogether.

ANOTHER ANGLE

as Norma leans to her husband. They go into each other's arms for a long embrace.

The RACKET RESUMES, more emphatic than before, severing the intimacy. The CAR HORN is a raucous, jarring howl, continuing for a long, long moment directly under their window. Norma sits back tensely, alerted. Again, the assault begins to DIMINISH, as the car cruises slowly away. It becomes a WAIL in the distance and again DISAPPEARS.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Sonny draws her fiercely into his arms, pulls her down onto the bed, throws the covers over them.

Cont.

They begin to make love.

The HORN STARTS AGAIN. The maniacal shivaree fills the night; it is a relentless intrusion, a relentless invasion.

Norma suddenly flings back the covers, snatches up a robe, flings it around her and runs out.

EXT. THE STREET

81

She stands on the porch, yelling at the top of her voice at the car that is slowly cruising away, HORN STILL BLATANT.

NORMA

Daddy, I know it's you!  
I know it's you! Quit it!  
Leave me alone! Quit  
messing with me! Go home!  
There's only room for two  
in that bed in there!

The car goes around a corner and the SOUND of the HORN EBBS. The street is suddenly very quiet.

INT. BEDROOM

82

Norma returns to Sonny, throwing the robe aside. She is defiant, angry, agitated. She snaps off the light, gets back into bed. But they lie still, tense, waiting for the inexorable return. The moments pass. The night is peaceful. Slowly Norma relaxes.

NORMA

It's all right now.

She turns to her husband, goes into his arms. A long moment passes, then the light goes on. Sonny sits up in bed, defeated.

SONNY

I'm sorry, honey, I can't do  
nothing.

Norma turns out the light again. In the dark, her VOICE is HEARD, determined.

NORMA

Yes, you can!

The other presence in the room is to be fended off.

## THREE BOSSMEN

Three very grim, hard-faced men stand at the gate as the morning shift passes them: RICK LUJAN, DAN PETERS, WOODROW BOWZER. The mood is one of confrontation, testy, edgy, muscular.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

They don't have long to wait. Reuben appears, dressed in tennis shoes, jeans and a golf slicker, a large TWUA button on his chest. He is gulping his breakfast en route, a doughnut and a paper cup of coffee.

He steps up to the three men with a manner that is cool, firm, and peremptory.

REUBEN

Okay, I'm here, and I'm ready to look at your plant.

The three men just stand immobile, presenting a formidable barrier.

REUBEN

The federal government of the United States, brothers, in Federal Court Order Number 7778, states the following: the union has the right to inspect every bulletin board in the mills at least once a week, to verify in person that its notices are not being stripped off.

He is finished with the coffee and looks around.

REUBEN

You got a trash can?

Bowzer indicates one nearby with his granite jaw. Reuben tosses the empty cup into it.

REUBEN

Keep America beautiful.

They flank him and escort him inside.

## IN THE MILL

The DIN is at full pitch, as always. LEROY MASON is waiting for them. He dispenses with greetings and hands Reuben a pair of earmuffs.

Cont.

Reuben looks around, notes that they are not standard issue, hands them back.

REUBEN

I think I'll just keep my ears open, friend.

It is necessary for voices to be raised in order to be heard above the NOISE; Mason hears him. He turns abruptly and begins the progress. They march, prison-style, Mason in front, Reuben in the center, the three bossmen bringing up the rear.

MOVING SHOT

86

Mason goes at quick-step, taking off like a striped ape. Reuben lets him go. After fifty feet, a hundred, Mason stops, turns, sees that Reuben is not with him, and storms back.

MASON

Am I going too quick for you or something?

REUBEN

Look, man, I don't do high port. I did my running when I was in the Marine Corps. I'm not in the Marine Corps now.

MASON

Well, if you're not in shape, we'll slow down...

REUBEN

Yeah. I'd appreciate that. Let's just saunter.

ANOTHER ANGLE

87

The line of march begins again and Reuben swerves right out of it. He approaches JED BUFFUM at a loom, taking a pad and pencil out of his shirt pocket.

REUBEN

Good morning. I'm Reuben Warshovsky of the Textile Workers' Union of America. What's your name, brother?

Cont.



BUFFUM  
                  (uneasily)

Buffum.

                  REUBEN  
How long you worked here,  
Mr. Buffum?

                  BUFFUM  
Twelve years.

                  REUBEN  
Like your job?

                  BUFFUM  
Like to keep it.

ANOTHER ANGLE

88

The cohort of bossmen surrounds him again.

                  BOWZER  
Warshovsky, you're interfering  
with the work, and the court  
order says you can't do that.

                  REUBEN  
Well, then, brother, let's  
both keep to the letter of  
the law.

                  BOWZER  
                  (mildly)  
I don't have no kike brother.

                  REUBEN  
I don't think you meant to  
use that word.

                  BOWZER  
Yeah, I did.

                  REUBEN  
Shit, now I gotta stop and  
get into a fight.

Mason steps between them.

                  MASON  
The bulletin board is right  
over there.

The words separate the two antagonists. Reuben turns and  
strides directly to it.

## AT THE BULLETIN BOARD

He stands with his hands in his back pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels, looking at the board. The others come up behind him.

REUBEN

Somebody's looking to get into a carpool...somebody wants to sell a basset pup ...and you can pick pecans at forty cents a bushel at Selma Landing...

(pauses)

Only thing missing is my notice.

LUJAN

It's there.

REUBEN

I don't see it.

The man points up high, to the very top of the board. Reuben's eyes follow his gesture.

REUBEN

Wilt Chamberlain on stilts could read it, maybe.

(voice hardens)

Put it at eye level, fuckers, where everybody can read it.

One or two of the bossmen bridle at the epithet but Mason maintains order.

MASON

We'll take note of your request.

REUBEN

(spreads his hands)

Why do you guys try this horseshit? Now I got to go to the phone and call my lawyers and get 'em on your ass. It's childish.

(turns to them)

Where's the pay phone and who's got two nickels?

Cont.

MASON  
 (to the others,  
 quietly)  
 Bring it down.

ANOTHER ANGLE

90

as Lujan scrapes a chair over, heaves his bulk up on it, pries out the thumbtacks while the other men stand watching, and puts it in a lower and more prominent position.

Reuben steps forward to read the notice carefully.

ANOTHER ANGLE

91

SAM BOLEN hurries over, wheezing hard and full of self-importance.

BOLEN  
 You're not supposed to read  
 the damn thing!

REUBEN  
 No union organizer, not even  
 a known union member, has been  
 inside the fences or walls of  
 this factory in more than ten  
 years. I'm reading it.

BOLEN  
 Read fast.

REUBEN  
 While I'm reading this, tell  
 you what -- you go read the  
 court order that says any  
 agent of this company can be  
 held in contempt. You're  
 messing with a contempt  
 citation, and if you're hot  
 for jail just keep it up.

BOLEN  
 (backing off)  
 I don't violate no laws.

REUBEN  
 Baby, you're violating the  
 law now.

MASON  
 Can we finish this?

Cont.

REUBEN

Where's the other board?

MASON

At the other entrance.

REUBEN

Show me.

MOVING SHOT

92

The contingent turns and marches across the length of the weaving room, over the bucking floor, through the snowstorm of lint, past workers who are alerted to his presence there, who turn over their shoulders to watch him, who exchange a furtive word. Reuben takes it all in; more than that, he draws attention to himself:

REUBEN

Hello, there...how are you this morning?...Warshovsky of the TWUA...morning, ma'am, Reuben Warshovsky, TWUA... hello there, sir. I'm a union organizer, Dixie Motel downtown, door's always open...

NORMA

93

Among those he passes is Norma. They exchange an especially significant look.

THE MARCH

94

The company phalanx grows larger as they go, with each addition taller and broader than Reuben.

SECOND BULLETIN BOARD

95

There are boxes and bolts of cloth arranged and stacked in such a way as to completely block the board.

Confronted with the contempt the company has for its work force, the obvious manipulation he sees, he stands thoughtfully a moment. It is beyond anger or outburst.

REUBEN

You know, gentlemen, your average working man isn't stupid -- he just gets tired.

(pauses)

Move that shit out of there.

Cont.

No one speaks. The bossmen form a semicircle behind Reuben. He is backed up to the bulletin board.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

96

James Brown and TWO OTHER BLACK MILL HANDS walk out between the row of boxes. They stop and look. Mason looks at the black men, then at his assistants.

MASON

Move the stuff.

The black men wrestle the boxes and bolts away, clearing the board.

NORMA

97

watching. Interested, engrossed, making up her mind.

REUBEN'S MOTEL ROOM

98

It is a shambles of abandoned meals, cartons, filing cabinets, empty Coke bottles, dirty towels, shucked clothes, union applications, battered typewriter, just-washed T-shirts hanging, dripping, on the floor from chairs and light fixtures. Reuben is forking cole slaw out of a carton as he studies a brief. There is a KNOCK.

He opens the door to Norma.

NORMA

You busy?

REUBEN

Eating my dinner.

NORMA

Can I come in?

REUBEN

Come on.

IN THE ROOM

99

She makes a slow turn, taking in the disorder.

NORMA

Don't they ever clean up in here?

Cont.

REUBEN  
(impatiently)  
I don't want 'em messing  
with my papers. I know  
where everything is.

She seems unready to state her purpose. She ambles around the room, coming to rest before Dorothy again.

NORMA  
You heard from Dorothy Finkelstein?

REUBEN  
Yeah. She sent me a box of  
onion bagels. They're in a  
drawer somewhere.

NORMA  
I smell 'em.

She picks up the picture idly, turns it this way and that.

NORMA  
I went to beauty school once.  
I could fix that hair for her.

REUBEN  
She's got it under a babushka  
most of the time.

NORMA  
(musing)  
I could sit on my hair when  
I was fifteen.

REUBEN  
(pointedly)  
Now you sit on your hands.

She gives him a long, level look.

NORMA  
If I joined up with you,  
would I lose my job?

REUBEN  
No way! You can wear a union  
button as big as a frisbee when  
you go to work. You can talk  
union to any mill hand who wants  
to listen, as long as it's during  
a break. You can take union  
pamphlets to the mill and pass 'em  
along -- and there's not a goddam  
thing they can do to touch you.

NORMA

Well...I was never even in  
the Girl Scouts -- but I'll  
go along with you.

REUBEN

(pleased)

You're the fish I wanted  
to hook.

NORMA

(pauses)

Well...now you got me, what're  
you gonna do with me?

He is busy at the desk, scrabbling for application papers.

REUBEN

Make a mensch out of you.

NORMA

There's that lingo again.

REUBEN

It means somebody who goes  
to visit the Old People's Home  
instead of playing golf on  
Saturday morning. Somebody  
who pays the rent for a widow.  
Somebody who puts a dollar in  
a blind man's cup for a pencil.

NORMA

(confident of  
her worth)

I'd do that.

REUBEN

But would you take the pencil?

NORMA

Sure! I paid for it, didn't I?

He waggles his fingers.

REUBEN

Between logic and charity falls  
a shadow. We could debate it  
all night.

(shoves a blue  
card toward her)

Sign.

Cont.

She signs her name with a flourish. He picks up the card and studies it.

REUBEN

Norma Rae Webster. Why does everybody around here have three names?

He puts her card on top of the pile.

FRONT HALL

100

Norma enters, burdened with two large bags of groceries and, as she wrestles with the bags at the door and tries to get the door shut with her foot, one splits and potatoes tumble out and roll across the floor.

NORMA

Damn! I told 'em to double bag it!

ANOTHER ANGLE

101

As she is on the floor, trying to retrieve the spilled groceries, Sonny comes hastily to kneel beside her; over his shoulder, in the living room, she sees a strange woman.

NORMA

Who's that?

SONNY

(in a whisper)  
Just listen. If you didn't make the bed this morning, go do it!

He pushes the bag back in her arms and returns to the living room. Norma starts for the kitchen, can't contain herself, follows him into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

102

She plunks down the bags and faces the lady firmly.

NORMA

Sonny can't say no. I don't want no Tupperware, no magazine subscriptions, no calf-bound Bible!

Cont.



SONNY

This is Missus Johnson.

MRS. JOHNSON

How do you do, Mrs. Webster.  
I'm from the state adoption agency.

NORMA

(in alarm)

I got no kids up for adoption here!

MRS. JOHNSON

No, no, no. Mr. Webster has  
petitioned to adopt your son, Craig.

ANOTHER ANGLE

103

Norma sinks back into a chair. She is moved.

NORMA

You sure kept it to yourself.

SONNY

I was gonna surprise you.

NORMA

Well, I am.

She is astonished into quiet and sits listening to the other two.

MRS. JOHNSON

Shall we go on? You have a  
child of your own?

SONNY

Yes, that's Alice.

MRS. JOHNSON

Do you feel you'd be closer  
to your own child than to  
Craig?

SONNY

No, ma'am, I don't. They'd  
be treated the same in  
everything.

MRS. JOHNSON

Do you think that you might  
at any time come to resent the  
fact that the boy is illegitimate.

SONNY

No, I wouldn't.

MRS. JOHNSON

Why do you want to do this,  
Mr. Webster?

Sonny thinks about it a moment. Words don't come easily to him, but he knows why he wants to do it.

SONNY

If I'm gonna pay for the boy's education, and feed him and buy him his clothes, I'm gonna have a say-so in what he does. I want better for my kids than what I had.

He suddenly raises his head and sniffs the air. Then he leaps up and out of his chair and bolts from the room.

EXT. YARD

104

Millie is doubled over in gleeful laughter as Craig runs from place to place in the yard, striking large kitchen matches and igniting the weeds. Already a patch or two are burning very nicely.

Sonny runs up to Craig, scoops him up and gives him a healthy whack across the buttocks. The child wails in outrage. Sonny raises his hand again -- and then holds it.

ANOTHER ANGLE

105

The two women have come out on the porch. Sonny shouts across the yard at Mrs. Johnson.

SONNY

You might as well see it, 'cause it's gonna happen when he deserves it! And he's got it coming, right this minute!

He gives the boy another whack, drops him, runs for the garden hose and begins to spray the flames.

LUNCHROOM

106

Norma, wearing a huge TWUA button, attempts to enlist WAYNE BILLINGS over their coffee break. Booze and extra poundage are fast blurring his boyish good looks.

NORMA

(holding a button  
out)

Come on, Wayne, lemme pin it on you. It'll cover that gravy spot on your shirt.

WAYNE

What do I get if I do?

Cont.

NORMA

You get nothing if you don't.  
Haven't you had enough of that?

WAYNE

You and me used to heat up that  
N.C.O. Club down at the base.  
Remember?

NORMA

Bygone days.

WAYNE

Well, pin it on me for bygone days,  
then.

NORMA

Stand still.

She pins the large button on him.

WAYNE

Think we'll ever see that club again,  
Norma, honey?

NORMA

Take your wife -- she doesn't get  
out much.

She walks out quickly.

ON THE FLOOR

107

Lujan, the bossman, bars her way.

LUJAN

Looks like you strayed off the  
reservation, Norma.

NORMA

Is that right?

LUJAN

You got your own coffee machine at  
your end.

NORMA

Yeah, but I ain't got a water  
fountain at my end, and I gotta  
cool my coffee down before I  
drink it.

LUJAN

(flatly)

You cool everything down.

She swings her hips as she walks away from him.

INT. CHURCH

108

The white church is a bit larger, in somewhat better repair than Chockoyotte. The REVEREND WAYNE HUBBARD, 'though minister to this flock, does its menial as well as its spiritual work, and with hammer and nails is busy mending the lectern as Norma comes in.

HUBBARD

You caught me in my shirtsleeves, Norma.

NORMA

Reverend.

HUBBARD

Maybe we could have some flowers out of your yard for Sunday, Norma. I got spider mite eating up everything. Can I help you with something?

NORMA

How long have I been coming to this church, Reverend?

HUBBARD

Since you were a little girl.

NORMA

That's right. I accepted Christ when I was six years old. Would you call me a good Christian?

HUBBARD

With a lapse or two, I'd say so.

NORMA

Would you call yourself a good Christian?

HUBBARD

That's for the Lord to say.

NORMA

I want this church for a union meeting next Saturday afternoon. That's blacks and whites, sitting together.

He stops his work and puts down his hammer.

HUBBARD

This is a house of God.

Cont.

NORMA

That's what I'm waiting to see  
-- if it is or it isn't.

HUBBARD

You're coming close to blasphemy,  
Norma.

NORMA

I've come here and I've said  
that I've sinned and I've done  
wrong and I'm sorry and I want  
God to forgive me. Now I want  
to see what this church stands  
for. I want to see if you'll  
stand up in that pulpit and say  
there should be justice, there  
should be union, if you're  
oppressed, fight back, if you're  
smitten, rise up -- and the Lord'll  
be on your side. If you don't do  
that, I say there's nothing in  
this church that's any good to  
me and I'll leave it flat.

HUBBARD

We'll miss your voice in the  
choir, Norma.

NORMA

You'll hear it raised up  
someplace else.

And she turns on her heel and walks out on him.

SONNY'S HOUSE

109

Norma pulls up to the curb behind Reuben's car, parks  
and gets out, four black men and one white emerging with  
her. She says to them:

NORMA

You all go in and sit down.  
I'll be right there.

Then she turns purposefully and walks directly across the  
street.

NORMA AND DAN PETERS

110

Peters stands on the walk to his house, making an elaborate  
ritual of filling a pipe, tamping it down, sucking on it,  
as he studies the activity in front of him.

Cont.

His small boy TYLER rocks on a swing on the porch behind him.

Norma comes up to the man.

NORMA

We're holding a meeting at my house, Dan. Union business and then lemonade and cookies. Gingersnaps. I'll roll up the front shade so you can see right in. Washed my windows Saturday so you shouldn't have any trouble.

Norma sails back across the street to her house.

AT HER DOOR

111

Sonny is waiting for her, perturbed.

SONNY

You're going too far now, Norma. This here is where we live.

NORMA

How'm I going too far?

SONNY

Bunch of black men in there... you're gonna get us in a lot of trouble.

NORMA

I never had any trouble with black men. Only trouble I ever had in my life was with white men.

She goes inside.

INT. LIVING ROOM

112

Reuben is already present, together with another handful of mill hands, black and white. Among those who have come are James Brown, Lucius White, Bonnie Mae and Roscoe, Mavis Pruitt.

They are seated on the sofa and on wooden chairs lined around in a circle. A few men stand against the wall, holding their caps in their hands.

Cont.

There is no sense of being ill at ease; only of gravity, fatigue, need. Reuben speaks.

REUBEN

I remember some of you from the Chockoyotte Church...I did all the talking that day. I'd like you to talk now.

There is silence for a moment. HENRY PROUTY, an old man, looks around the circle, clears his throat.

ABNER SACKS

A man's work should be a man's work -- not a term in jail.

WOODROW THOMPSON

I got a cousin on the chain gang, says I don't work as hard as you do.

A work-worn WOMAN smooths the folds in her lap, reluctant to speak. But she does so.

VELMA STACKHOUSE

Excuse me for saying this with men folks here, but if I get my menstrual cramps, which come pretty hard, they won't lemme sit down on my job.

LOUISE PICKENS

They say you gotta keep to your feet unless you bring a note from the doctor. We wouldn't say we was sick if we wasn't.

JAMES BROWN

I look at a brick wall all day. Used to be a window there but they come and bricked it up to give us the feeling we're shut in. We control your soul, brother and sister, for all this period -- and beware! That's what they're saying with that wall.

A COUCH SPRING TWANGS and a coil of wire pokes up, causing Louise Pickens to jump to her feet. Norma is apologetic.

Cont.

NORMA

The kids are jumping on it  
all the time.

(brings a chair)

Sit here.

RAY TOWNER

All through the mill they got  
this cotton dust and lint that  
fills up the air.

(pauses slightly)

I got brown lung. Cough all  
night and my wife doesn't sleep.

LINETTE ODUM

My husband Averill died of brown  
lung two months ago. His  
children're going to grow up  
without knowing him. I got all  
his clothes if someone could  
use 'em.

INT. KITCHEN

113

Later. Norma and Reuben are alone. She has brewed a pot  
of coffee. He is hunched over his cup, dissatisfied.

REUBEN

I'm not getting the message  
across. Fifteen people out  
of eleven hundred.

NORMA

You're an outsider. Down here  
things take time. This isn't  
no New York, where you grab a  
taxi and grab your hat --

ANOTHER ANGLE

114

They are interrupted by the appearance of a very sleepy  
Millie in the doorway.

MILLIE

Momma, Craig is wetting the bed.

NORMA

(as she goes)

I told him not to drink Coke  
before he goes to sleep.

Reuben sits a moment, then rises to follow her.



## HALLWAY

115

He wanders after her, still sipping from his cup. He continues talking to her through the open door to the bathroom, where she kneels and supports a still sleeping Craig on the toilet. A little TINKLING SOUND accompanies their talk.

REUBEN

We've got to get this thing moving. It's bogging down on me.

NORMA

Buy a jug of corn whiskey and pick me up on Saturday. We'll hit the back roads.  
(looks down)  
Finished, honey?

Craig nods once and his head falls to his chest. She hoists him off the toilet, pulls up his pajamas, lifts him in her arms.

## MONTAGE

116-  
120

## A. A COUNTRY STORE

on the outskirts of town. Saturday leisure for half a dozen men in work clothes from the mill consists of sitting or squatting on the gallery of the store with pocketknives and chunks of wood. Reuben puts his foot up on the porch while Norma takes an RC Cola out of the ice chest and cools down.

In a gesture calculated to make him one of them, Reuben takes out a penknife, pries open a blade and begins to whittle as he addresses the men in dumb-show. Chips fly off his stick as he becomes evermore impassioned. The men listen impassively. Before he knows it, he has whittled his stick down to a toothpick, which snaps in his hands.

Norma laughs.

## B. A CREEK

A baptism is taking place, people standing knee-high in a little creek. A virginal girl in a white robe, frightened and transported, is tipped backward and submerged. She is lifted, hair streaming, gasping, drenched. A hand reaches INTO the SHOT --

## C. ANOTHER ANGLE

-- As Norma leans forward to press a blue union card into the girl's outflung hand.

Cont.

## D. AN EATING STAND

A crude, misspelled, hand-lettered sign reads: "PIG PETE'S BAR-B-Q...PORK RIBS, PORK CHOPS, PIG'S NUCKLES, PIG'S FEET."

Reuben sets himself a little grimly, reaches around his neck to remove the chain with the large Mogen David on it, and tucks in manfully as Norma distributes leaflets to the men clustered around.

## E. A YARD

A mill worker keeps chickens in a roost and a single dairy cow. As Reuben stands in close and serious talk with the man, the cow wanders up. Reuben puts a hand on its rump and shoves it -- the cow bellows, wheels and shits as it lumbers away -- and Reuben is splattered from chin to boots. Norma offers a laconic comment.

NORMA

It's only grass and water,  
Reuben...

## AT A SWIMMING HOLE

121

A little river running through sand and clay, the grass spotted with blue and white daisies, sheltered by a row of sedge. The sun is high, the air still, and Reuben is in the water, rolling and snorting, naked, content.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

122

Norma is downstream a little on the bank, vigorously scrubbing his soiled clothes. She looks up at him.

NORMA

This is where we used to swim  
when we were kids. We'd hookey  
off from school, come down here,  
shuck our clothes and jump in.

REUBEN

The only water I ever saw when  
I was a kid was when we opened  
a fire hydrant on 110th Street  
with a monkey wrench.

He floats on his back, very much at peace with the world.

REUBEN

Ahh...this is the life.

Cont.

NORMA  
It's just a mudhole.

REUBEN  
It's cooling off my mosquito  
bites.

NORMA 123

She wrings out the wet jeans and then spreads them on a  
rock.

NORMA  
That's as clean as they're  
gonna get.

Then she leans back on her heels, wipes the sweat from her  
face.

NORMA  
God, it's hot...I'm coming in.

She gets up and begins to shed her clothes matter-of-factly.

REUBEN 124

He swims about lazily, enjoying himself. When he turns  
again, Norma is in the water near him.

REUBEN AND NORMA 125

They tread water in place, hardly rippling the surface,  
quiet, cooling down.

NORMA  
There used to be a farmer  
around here with a B-B gun.  
I hope he's moved.

REUBEN  
There's something flicking  
around my toes.

NORMA  
Minnows. They won't hurt you.  
(grins a little)  
You're sure a fish out of water  
down here, aren't you?

Cont.

REUBEN  
It's not exactly my native  
habitat.

NORMA  
What would you do at home on  
a day like this?

REUBEN  
Play handball at the YMHA. Go  
see Aida at the Met. Eat Chinese.  
Get in a poker game. Hit the  
sack.

NORMA  
I've been two places in my life.  
Millageville and Piston.

REUBEN  
New York's a great town. Got  
a great zoo, jazz joints, terrific  
food, theater, beautiful women...

NORMA  
You're homesick, Reuben.

REUBEN  
Yeah.  
(pauses)  
You get up on a fall morning,  
look out over the park, the  
tops of the trees are red. You  
see a pretty girl with a long  
scarf tied around her neck, long  
legs, long hair. You know before  
the day's over, you're going to  
meet that girl. About five o'clock,  
when everybody starts rushing for  
home, when the streets are jammed,  
you're turning into an Irish bar,  
and she'll be there. You'll sit  
at a little table with your knees  
touching, drinking an over-priced  
martini, loquacious, tumescent,  
terrific. Then you eat a garlicky  
Italian dinner, get hustled on  
Madison Avenue for a buck, kiss  
her good night and lose her phone  
number...New York. What a town...

Cont.

NORMA  
I'll never get there.

REUBEN  
Why not?

NORMA  
I was born poor, I'll stay  
poor, I'll probably die poor.

She submerges, reappears, her hair streaming; she brushes  
it back from her eyes.

NORMA  
You got a skinny build.

REUBEN  
Yeah.

NORMA  
Sonny works out with weights.

REUBEN  
I tried that. Dropped 'em and  
broke my foot.

NORMA  
Well, you don't have to worry.  
You got a head on you, and you  
use it.

She turns and climbs out of the water, picks up her shirt  
and begins toweling off. He follows. They stand side by  
side, naked, backs to the CAMERA, drying themselves.

INT. SONNY'S BEDROOM

126

Sonny, in bed, groans and wakes to the SOUND of his wife's  
VOICE, coming from the kitchen. He rears up on an elbow,  
squints with one eye at the bedside clock -- it is past  
eleven. He is irritated at not finding her beside him --  
suddenly he throws back the covers and heads for her.

INT. KITCHEN

127

Norma is at the phone, a long checklist of names on a pad  
beside, most of them already crossed off. She is wearing  
glasses, a baggy old sweater, a pencil in her disordered  
hair.

Cont.

NORMA

...Sure, I know why we got a bad connection -- they probably got a tap on my phone. Hey, you! You listening? This is Norma Rae Webster, talking union to Henry Willis.

Sonny, ruffled, aggrieved, wearing shorts, appears in the doorway and stands watching his wife.

NORMA

I'm on tonight and every night, no commercials, same old story, union, union, union. Tell your bossman to tape me and you can go on home to your wife and kids.

(then)

Henry, you still there?

The line BUZZES in her ear, the connection broken.

NORMA

Damn!

She hangs up angrily, sits fuming a moment, then yanks out the pencil, puts a question mark after Henry's name, finally becomes aware of her husband in the doorway.

ANOTHER ANGLE

128

as Sonny speaks shortly.

SONNY

You ain't getting any sleep and I ain't getting any sleep and we both gotta go to work in the morning.

NORMA

I got a hundred names to call here.

SONNY

That gonna go on our phone bill?

NORMA

It'll come out of my paycheck, how's that?

ANOTHER ANGLE

129

He doesn't answer, pads past her to the refrigerator, pours a glass of cold milk, takes a mouthful, makes a face, sloshes the rest into the sink.

SONNY

This milk's sour.

NORMA

I didn't get to the market.

SONNY

(goadng)

You didn't get to the market and you didn't get to the washing and you didn't get to the kids and you didn't get to me.

NORMA

(with icy calm)

Is that right?

SONNY

(raging on)

We're eating them frozen TV dinners, the kids are going around in dirty jeans, and I'm going without altogether!

ANOTHER ANGLE

130

Norma pushes back from the table, making a very large show of it.

NORMA

Okay. You want cooking?  
You got cooking.

There is a tremendous clatter as she yanks open cupboard doors and pots tumble out in every direction, strewn by the fury of her gesture. She slams one on the stove, grabs a hunk of meat and some cabbage from the refrigerator, throws the meat into the pot, adds water, whacks the cabbage in half, tosses that in as well, bangs the lid on top of it.

Cont.

She whirls on Sonny again.

NORMA

You want laundry? You got  
laundry.

ANOTHER ANGLE

131

She opens a bin stuffed to the brim with dirty clothes. She hauls out a huge armload, dumps it in the sink, runs the tap water, pours liquid soap over it. She faces Sonny once more.

NORMA

You want ironing? You got  
ironing!

She snatches up a shirt out of a basket of unironed clothes, pulls open a cupboard door, wrestles out the ironing board, kicks it vehemently into an upright position, grabs an iron, jams it into a plug. She spreads out the shirt, spits on her finger and tests the iron's heat, begins making furious swipes. Over her shoulder she hurls a final question at Sonny:

NORMA

You wanna make love? Get  
behind me and lift my skirt  
and we'll make love!

ANOTHER ANGLE

132

as Sonny stands looking at her, half-admiring, certainly defeated.

SONNY

Norma, Norma...

BOBBIN ROOM

133

During break time, Norma passes among the mill hands with a sheaf of leaflets, handing them out. She comes suddenly face-to-face with her father.

Cont.



VERNON  
Well, I don't bump into you  
much these days.

NORMA  
Are you all right, Daddy?

VERNON  
About the same.

NORMA  
You color's bad. Have you  
been drinking?

VERNON  
Oh, I take a thimbleful or so.

NORMA  
It's not good for you.

VERNON  
What's the difference, honey?  
I'm beginning to wonder when  
I lie down if I'm gonna get  
up.

NORMA  
Don't talk old to me. I don't  
like it.

She embraces him fiercely, touched by a strange foreboding.

VERNON  
One of these nights I'm gonna  
come by and take you to a  
grand dinner...

She nods and leaves him, weaving through the crowd of  
mill hands until she is out of sight.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

134

It is late. Reuben sits with his legs on the desk, studying briefs; Norma is at a typewriter at another desk, pecking away with two fingers. She pauses to erase, pecks again, makes another mistake, erases again, pulls the paper out, crumples it up and throws it down. She yawns widely.

REUBEN

(without looking  
up)

James.

NORMA

He went home an hour ago.

He grunts, goes back to his reading.

NORMA

I oughta be going home.

She gets up, rubs her back, goes to the open window, gets a deep breath of air.

ANOTHER ANGLE

135

As she turns back, she notes that a new picture of Dorothy Finkelstein has arrived. She goes to it idly.

NORMA

How's Dorothy?

REUBEN

(absorbed in his  
reading)

Fine.

NORMA

I see you got another picture.

REUBEN

My mother sent it.

NORMA

I bet she gets along with  
your mother.

He finally looks up.

REUBEN

Are you kidding? My mother  
loves her. She's a lawyer,  
she's Jewish, she's a lefto,  
and she's a great cook. What  
the hell else could she want?

Cont.

She puts the picture down, stares at it a moment longer. She seems a little wistful.

NORMA

How'd she get to be so smart?

REUBEN

Books.

X

He rummages in one of half a dozen brown paper bags, looking for food, comes up with a banana, peels it, eats it voraciously.

X

Another bag yields a final can of beer. He pulls the tab, holds it out while it foams, drinks deeply.

REUBEN

Dinner. A banana and beer.

(goes back to the  
subject)

Books! You read 'em under the covers with a flashlight, you read 'em down in the subway, you put 'em in your lunch pail, you take 'em to the bathroom and read 'em on the toilet. It's the only way up -- it's the only way out.

(burps and thumps  
his chest)

Excuse me.

ANOTHER ANGLE

136

She wanders past the row of books he has strewn about, picks one up at random.

NORMA

Who's Dylan Thomas?

REUBEN

A poet, a drunk, a genius.

Cont.

NORMA

What does he write about?

REUBEN

Love, sex, death, and other matters of consequence.

NORMA

Is he hard to read?

REUBEN

Yeah.

NORMA

Then why should I bother?

REUBEN

'Cause he's got something to say.

X

NORMA

I'll try him. Hell, there's nothing but reruns on television.

REUBEN

Don't eat while you read; I can't stand egg yolk on my books.

She stands riffling through the pages.

BOBBIN ROOM

137

In the thundering weave section, amidst the DIN and the flying lint, a spot-checker stops behind Vernon, working down a row of pumping bobbins. The man shakes his shoulder, shouts in his ear, indicating that he should speed up. Vernon's hands fly, he works at top speed; sweating with the exertion.

THE CHURCH

138

Reuben opens the door to the Chockoyotte Church and enters.

INT. CHURCH

139

It is empty. A kitten has gotten in and picks its way along the altar, pausing to lift its head and stare at the intruder.

Baffled, Reuben sits down in a pew at the back and waits. A cause, a man, and a cat.

## LATTING HOUSE

140

Reuben pulls up in front of a ramshackle home, its paint worn down to grey board, a step or two broken, the porch listing, an abandoned mattress falling apart in the yard. He knocks.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

141

as Warren Latting opens the door. The man is still work stained from his day at the mill, hollow-eyed, exhausted.

REUBEN

Nobody showed at the meeting today. What's going on?

WARREN

They got us on a stretch-out. Put us on a three-day week. Twice as much work and half the pay. On account of you. You just stand there a minute.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

142

He disappears, leaving Reuben to cool his heels on the porch. In a moment he is back with a steaming pot in his hand. He lifts the lid.

WARREN

There's six turnips and two quarts of water in there. Supper for seven people. Go sell your union someplace else.

He kicks the door shut in Reuben's face. Reuben explodes; the street fighter in him comes out. He pounds on the door with his fist until it threatens to give away on its rotting hinges and shouts at the top of his voice.

REUBEN

Goddamn it, Warren, don't slam the fucking door on me! I'm trying to get you power!

## ANOTHER ANGLE

143

In the house on either side, startled faces appear at the windows to glimpse the disturber of the peace.

## IN THE OFFICE

144

Reuben is pawing through a large stack of the blue cards so hard won. Norma, James Brown and Lucius White watch him. He is still on the nervous edge of energy, tense, temperish, combative.

REUBEN  
Somebody gets the measles,  
everybody gets the measles.

JAMES  
Maybe they was too tired to  
come. Everybody's pretty  
beat out, working so hard.

REUBEN  
You can include me!

LUCIUS  
While we been planning, they  
been planning. This stretch-  
out's just the first of what  
they can hit us with.

JAMES  
They got away from us, we  
gotta get 'em back. Walk in  
a bunch. Show 'em we're solid.  
(gently)  
Come on, Reuben.

But Reuben sits with his head in his hands. Norma needles  
him.

NORMA  
What's the matter, Reuben?  
You running out of gas?

REUBEN  
I need to go to a concert. I  
need an Italian movie. I need  
some chopped herring.

NORMA  
I could try making you some of  
that chicken soup and matza  
dumplings...

REUBEN  
(crossly)  
Balls! Balls!

ANOTHER ANGLE

145

He spreads the cards out.

REUBEN  
All right. Let's get a count  
on how many we got. Everybody  
grab a handful.

They each pick up a group of cards. Norma looks at the first one strangely.

NORMA

Who's this Billy Joe Hawkins?  
I never heard of him.

James has found one that puzzles him.

JAMES

I got Lindsay Perkins here.  
He died last year.

Lucius has discovered an odd one.

LUCIUS

Blayden. He moved his family  
to Jackson...

JAMES

Josh Little, Jr. There ain't  
no Josh Little, Jr. in that  
factory...

Reuben begins flipping cards, barking out names.

REUBEN

Ab Harris, Herman Burk,  
Ardean Miller, Frank Dorn,  
Dan Decker, Wiley Bains...

He looks up at the others. James Brown shakes his head emphatically.

JAMES

No, sir. Those fellows don't  
work at our plant.

NORMA

Those names are dummies.

(pauses)

Somebody wants you to think  
you got more members than you  
got.

ANOTHER ANGLE

146

A stressful moment follows, in which Reuben looks around thoughtfully at his three helpers. Now he has to face the possibility that he has been infiltrated.

Outside there is a SQUEAL of BRAKES, a car skidding to a halt.

IN FRONT OF THE MOTEL

147

Wayne Billings swings jauntily out of a station wagon that has been turned into a union float: it is plastered with banners and pennants, U.S. flags front and back and a large sign on top saying, "I'M FOR TWUA."

INT. MOTEL

148

As Wayne enters, he finds four impassive faces regarding him coolly. He drops an impressive-looking batch of cards down on the desk.

WAYNE

Here's some more bodies for you.

Reuben flips one over to James, who glances at it briefly.

JAMES

Bodies is right. This one's been in the boneyard for ten years.

ANOTHER ANGLE

149

Reuben rises. There is suddenly an impending sense of violence in the closely-packed little room.

REUBEN

I don't want to make a mess of you here, because I eat and sleep here.

He throws the false cards into his face. Wayne's mouth opens and closes, opens and closes again. He looks from one to the other; all four are clenched against him. He suddenly goes beserk. He stomps out.

EXT. MOTEL

150

He runs to the station wagon, a bull on a rampage, strips the huge sign off the top and starts tearing it violently to pieces. He rips off the banners, the pennants, the signs, the flags, flinging them onto the blacktop, stomping on them, grinding them under his heels, flailing the wooden poles that held them against the side of the car until they splinter.

Then he reaches through the window into the glove compartment, snatches up something, and comes running back.

ANOTHER ANGLE

151

Reuben and the others have stepped into the open doorway to watch him. Hysterical, the man charges up at him, scrabbles through a box of cartridges, grabs a bullet and rams it into Reuben's belly.



## ANOTHER ANGLE

152

Reuben looks down at the gleaming copper cartridge, then back up at Wayne's face, trembling with the ague of uncontrolled rage.

REUBEN

Man, you can't do it that way.  
What you've got to do is get  
a gun, put that thing in a  
chamber, point it at a guy,  
and pull the trigger. That's  
how you do it.

Wayne's head is shaking from side to side; otherwise, he seems paralyzed. Reuben takes the bullet from his hand, lifts the hand, opens the palm, holds the bullet suspended above it, then drops it in.

## BOBBIN ROOM

153

Vernon works at an accelerated clip, the bobbins reeling off yarn. He is like a man at stoop labor, bending, rising, bending, rising.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

154

He suddenly sits down on the floor, his eyes closed. The bobbins keep jerking up and down before him.

Jimmy Jerome Davis comes over, puts his face down close so he can hear.

VERNON

I don't feel too good. Like  
to go lie down.

JIMMY JEROME

You got a break coming up in  
fifteen minutes, Vernon.

VERNON

I need to go now.

JIMMY JEROME

You hold on, Vernon. Your  
break's coming up.

He pats Vernon on the back and walks on.

## VERNON

155

He tries to resume work and then falls into the bobbins. They continue to pump up and down around his inert body.

## GRAVEYARD

156

Like everything else in Millageville, the graveyard is hard, harsh, graves wrested out of rocky soil. People who have spent their lives in unremitting work come to a stony resting place here.

Norma, Leona, the children, Sonny, uncomfortable in a dark suit, stand by the open grave as the pine box is lowered. Reuben and a group of mill hands, friends of Vernon's, stand at a respectful distance.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

157

A truck lumbers past the mourners, backs up to the open grave. The grave diggers step out of the way. The tailgate drops down; white sand sifts down onto the pine box in a steady stream, slowly covering it. Norma turns to her mother.

NORMA

I just couldn't stand the thought of dirt going over him like that.

The white sand now completely covers the coffin.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

158

There is a sudden movement among the factory workers. As the grave is closed, a few of them move toward Norma. They pay their last respects to Vernon Witchard by placing in Norma's hand a signed blue union card.

NORMA

159

She holds three or four cards in her hand and turns to look at Reuben.

NORMA

(harshly)  
Somebody's gotta die to get 'em.

## INT. MOTEL

160

Two men enter the tiny lobby. AL LONDON and SAM DAKIN are both middle-aged, matter-of-fact, tough, seasoned. They go past the desk clerk without a word, turn down the hall.

## INT. HALL

161

They stride through the dark corridor, looking at room numbers. They find the number they want, knock. There is no answer. They throw the door open and move in.

INT. REUBEN'S OFFICE

162

It is late and Norma, exhausted, has thrown clutter off the bed, curled up on it and fallen into a deep sleep.

ANOTHER ANGLE

163

She awakens with a start to find two strangers standing in the doorway and looking down at her. Norma stands.

NORMA

Who are you looking for?

The two men are present on business and have no time for amenities.

LONDON

Warshovsky around?

NORMA

He's at the printer's.

LONDON

Pretty late for the printer's...

NORMA

Reuben keeps him working late.

DAKIN

We'll talk to you 'til he gets back. You're Norma Rae, aren't you?

NORMA

(sensing hostility)

I'm Missus Webster.

DAKIN

We're from the union. National headquarters.

(points to the other man)

Al London. And I'm Sam Dakin.

NORMA

As long as you're here, I'll give you my shopping list. We need envelopes, we need typing paper, we need stamps, we need a loudspeaker, we could use a couple more typewriters that don't stick.

Cont.

LONDON  
We're not in office supplies,  
Missus Webster.

NORMA  
You're not around much, either.

ANOTHER ANGLE

164

as Reuben walks in. If he is surprised to see the men, he doesn't show it. They shake hands all around.

REUBEN  
How are you, Sam? You've gotten  
fat.

DAKIN  
Yeah, I put on a couple of pounds.

REUBEN  
How are you, Al?

LONDON  
Lousy, I got a cold.

There is an awkward pause.

REUBEN  
What brings you?

LONDON  
You're not getting up much of  
a head of steam, Reuben.

REUBEN  
You've had my reports. You  
know what I'm up against.

DAKIN  
We're worried.

REUBEN  
That makes three of us.

DAKIN  
This is a small Baptist Southern  
town. We have to keep our noses  
very clean.

Cont.

REUBEN  
(reacting to the  
pressure)  
You see any snot on mine?

DAKIN  
Maybe Missus Webster would  
like to leave?

ANOTHER ANGLE

165

as Norma turns to go. Reuben raises a hand. She stops in  
her tracks.

REUBEN  
Why should she leave?

DAKIN  
This concerns her. I'm  
trying to make it easy for  
her.

REUBEN  
(irritably)  
Come on, come on, it's late.  
What is it?

DAKIN  
The company wants us to look  
bad. They're going to use  
everything they can to make  
us look bad. You know, these  
mill hands go to church every  
Sunday, and she's talking  
union to 'em.  
(pauses slightly)  
They say she was in a porno  
movie, with a member of the  
local police department.  
Very explicit.

REUBEN  
Show it to me. Run it for me.

DAKIN  
There doesn't have to be a  
movie if there's talk that  
there is one. This lady has  
had an illegitimate child.  
She's slept around. She takes  
naps on your bed late at night.

Cont.

REUBEN

What the fuck is this? Are we in the character assassination business or are we in the union business? All of a sudden, after I've put in an eighteen hour day, I got the legion of decency on my hands! She's been breaking her ass for this organization. She doesn't see her kids, she doesn't have time to take a bath! What the fuck do I care if she's got round heels? Is this the Catholic Church?...Are we going to canonize her? What the shit is this!

DAKIN

This is your show, Reuben...but maybe she ought to go.

REUBEN

Make it stick. If you can't, get out of here.

(throws open the door)

Get out of here anyway.

DAKIN

(to Norma)

I'm sorry about this, Mrs. Webster. It's part of my job -- but I could do without it.

He motions to London. The two men leave.

ANOTHER ANGLE

166

Norma and Reuben are alone in the room. She is grateful for his defense but aware of the gravity of the situation. Neither speaks a moment.

NORMA

I wouldn't hurt the union. If you want me to quit, I will.

REUBEN

(irritably)

How come you were sleeping? I asked you to type those letters.

She goes to the typewriter, rubbing a sore spot in her back. He jams a cigar in his mouth and goes back to his work.

EXT. WITCHARD HOUSE

167

Norma gets out of her car, hauling a bag of groceries with her. Her mother is in a chair on the front porch, solitary, motionless, the evening paper unread across her lap.

A garden hose drips water on her plants in coffee cans lining the porch. Norma hails her as she crosses the lawn.

NORMA

I brought you laundry soap, I brought you bread, I brought you some ground chuck -- it was on sale.

LEONA

Sit down, you look perspired.

With a groan, Norma puts the bag down, sits on the top step at her mother's feet.

NORMA

I don't know why those housewives have to shop just when we get off our shift.

LEONA

I've told you, you don't have to market for me. I can go over to the store after supper, when it's cool, and get my few little things.

NORMA

If I didn't market, you wouldn't eat anything. You'd eat crackers and drink coffee. Anyway -- it gives me a chance to come and sit down and talk to you.

(looks up at her)

Momma, you been crying?

LEONA

I was thinking of your daddy.

(pauses)

I was thinking how short a person's life is. You gotta hurry to catch your goals. Don't let the days pass...your daddy was a young man, then he was an old one. I wonder -- did he leave things undone? Did he leave things unsaid?

Cont.

LEONA (Cont.)  
(looks at her  
daughter)  
Child, if there's something  
you want, don't wait all the  
way down the line to get it.

NORMA  
Was there something you wanted  
you didn't get?

LEONA  
If there was, I've forgotten  
it.

NORMA  
Momma, wouldn't you like to  
come and stay with me? The  
kids are around, they make  
a lot of noise, it's cheerful.

LEONA  
I'm used to this house.

NORMA  
(worried)  
What if you fall down the steps?  
What if you fall in the bathtub?  
What if something happens to you?

LEONA  
Then it will.

Norma suddenly reaches for her mother's hand and kisses it.

LEONA  
Now what was that for?

NORMA  
For you -- and for me.  
(rises)  
I'm going in and boil you an  
egg.

LEONA  
No, let's just sit out here and  
rest a while.

Norma sits again, leaning back against her mother's knee.  
Leona strokes her hair.



INT. BATHROOM OF REUBEN'S MOTEL

168

Every inch of space is now in full use; even the bathtub is crammed with cartons and papers. PULL BACK. Somehow a card table has been wedged into the bathroom and two girls sit facing each other at typewriters, hard at it.

INT. MOTEL ROOM

169

A dozen people fill the single motel room, stuffing envelopes, addressing them, checking off lists, on the telephones.

PETER GALLAT comes through the door and Norma, looking up from her work table, attacks him immediately.

NORMA

You get off your shift at three, you're supposed to be here at three-fifteen, and it's four-fifteen! Where the hell you been? You working for this union or aren't you?

PETER

I was getting my tooth filled.

NORMA

You were getting your beer gut filled!

PETER

Chew your old man out at home and get off me, Norma.

NORMA

I'm just starting on you. I'm giving nine, ten, eleven, twelve hours. And that's every day! There's a pile of work around here. We're doing our piece of it, you do your piece of it -- or don't call yourself a union member!

ANOTHER ANGLE

170

Reuben unwinds himself from his crowded desk, rises slowly and walks over. Norma finds herself face to face with him.

REUBEN

(coldly)

Shut your cake-hole, Norma.

Her face mirrors her astonishment at his sudden, brusque attack.

REUBEN

In fact, get the hell out of the office.

NORMA

What did I do? I just said what was so.

From its cacophony of SOUND, the room has suddenly BECOME VERY STILL. Reuben shows her his thumb, jabbing it toward the door.

REUBEN

Out.

For a moment, she does nothing. Then, quite simply, she turns to look for her purse, picks it up and walks out. The silence in the room persists.

INT. COFFEE SHOP

171

In the shop attached to the motel, looking out on the scummy pool, Norma sits alone over a cup of coffee and a wedge of pie. But the food remains untouched before her. She is thinking.

The door swings open and Reuben enters, looking around. He sees her and ambles over, slides into the booth across from her. He looks at her for a long, level moment.

REUBEN

Mouth.

She says nothing. He takes her fork, samples her pie, likes it, pulls it toward him and begins to eat it.

REUBEN

You're too muscular. You can't come down that hard on a man and leave him his balls. Easy, Norma. Easy does it. Jesus. If you were in the State Department, we'd be at war.

NORMA

You're right. I got a big mouth.  
(pauses)

You know, cotton mill workers are known as trash by some, and I know this union is the only way we can have our own voice and make ourselves better. I guess that's why I push.

Cont.

REUBEN  
Our own Mother Jones.

NORMA  
Who's she?

REUBEN  
She was a considerable lady.  
She made it happen for coal  
miners in West Virginia.

NORMA  
Then you're not sore at me?

REUBEN  
If the situation called for a  
smart, loud, profane, sloppy,  
hard-working woman, I'd pick you  
every time out.

NORMA  
(after a  
moment)  
How come sloppy? Nobody wears  
a girdle anymore.

But she is pleased and placated.

ANOTHER ANGLE

172

The waitress is at their table, holding a check.

REUBEN  
(rising)  
Give it to her. I didn't order  
anything.

NORMA  
Well, hell, you ate it.

But he is already striding out the door, going back to work.  
Norma rummages in her purse for some change.

CLOSE SHOT

173

Jimmy Davis is tacking up a notice on the bulletin board in  
the weaving room. Very large black letters command the  
reader: ALL EMPLOYEES ATTENTION

PHONE BOOTH

174

An agitated Norma is on the phone, impatiently listening  
to the RINGS. At last the other end is picked up.

Cont.

NORMA

It's me, Norma. All right, it is I, Norma. Forget the grammar -- I gotta see you right away. Meet me on my break.

She hangs up, steps out, comes face to face with Tommy Gardner. She speaks to him airily.

NORMA

Calling my kids to see if they got home from school.

TOMMY

(nailing the lie)

Your kids are in the grocery store with my kids, buying candy. They do it every day.

NORMA

Maybe that's why my dentist's bills are busting me.

And she walks back to work.

A YARD

175

A fight breaks out, one of the white workers rounding on a black, sending him dazed to his knees with a violent blow. The black is up instantly and at the white: a close-in, savage fight. In the next moment, the confrontation expands; four whites join in, half a dozen blacks meet them, more whites advance. There is now a general melee in the yard. There is an uproar as each side champions its own.

Company men come on the run to quell it.

AT THE FENCE - MOVING SHOT

176

Norma and Reuben meet. They prowl the fence between them.

REUBEN

What started it?

NORMA

They put up a letter. They're telling the whites that the blacks are gonna run the union, take it over and push 'em around. You tell a white man that a black man is gonna sit on his head --

(gestures)

-- and this is what you get.

Cont.

REUBEN

I like it when those pricks get mean. We can take legal action. Get me the letter.

NORMA

I can't just waltz in and take it off the board. They're watching.

REUBEN

How good's your memory?

NORMA

Well -- I still don't know the whole salute to the flag.

REUBEN

Get somebody to help you. Learn a line at a time. Write it down.

NORMA

(hesitates a moment)

It reminds me of the time I pinched a lipstick out of the five and dime.

REUBEN

Did you get caught?

NORMA

No. I went back the next week for curlers.

REUBEN

Then you ought to know how.

They separate, each going quickly.

INT. SHEARING HALL

177

Sipping from a paper cup on her coffee break, Norma saunters toward the bulletin board and past it. She turns with elaborate nonchalance, comes back and stops in front of it. She reads quickly, then shuts her eyes tight, her mouth moving. She hits her head with the palm of her hand, as if to drive the information home. Then she hurries to the ladies room.

ANOTHER ANGLE

178

as Bonnie ambles by the bulletin board, pauses, looks at it intently for a long moment, then hurries after Norma.

INT. LADIES' ROOM

179

as Bonnie enters. Norma is busy leaning on the sink, writing on a piece of toilet paper with an eyebrow pencil.

Cont.

NORMA

(muttering)

'...you black employees are being told that by going into the union in mass you can dominate it and control it in this plant as you may see fit. If now...'

(hesitates)

...'If now...'

(lost it)

Damn! What's next? I can't remember.

ANOTHER ANGLE

180

Bonnie has in the meantime gotten pencil and paper ready, has licked the point of the pencil, but has drawn a total blank.

BONNIE

(wailing)

Norma, I can't remember the first word. My God, I forgot it from out there to in here.

NORMA

Think of it like a song. If it was a Dolly Parton song, you'd remember it. Sing it if you gotta.

BONNIE

Did you get some?

NORMA

I got a piece of it.

She folds the toilet paper and puts it down her bra.

Bonnie now views it as a conspiratorial romp.

BONNIE

Hey, Norma. Do you suppose they got a microphone in here. X

Norma is overcome with the same giddy mood.

NORMA

I wouldn't put it past 'em. X

She tiptoes to the towel dispenser and whispers:

NORMA

Am I talking loud enough? Are you listening, O.P.? X

Bonnie goes to the mirror and waggles her hand at it, as if it concealed a viewer on the other side.

BONNIE

Yoo-hoo. Yoo-hoo.

Norma goes to the trash can and bends over to it.

NORMA

Hey! This is me. Correction.  
It is I.

Both women break up in gales of laughter.

CLOSE SHOT

181

A long strip of toilet paper with a black scrawl from one end to the other.

PULL BACK. It is night. Reuben is holding Norma's transcription at arm's length, reading it. He puts it down and turns to her.

REUBEN

Where's the rest?

NORMA

That's the most I could get.

REUBEN

Mata Hari.

NORMA

They were watching us every minute.

He sees the futility of it and his voice hardens.

REUBEN

It's the best chance we've got to nail these bastards, to get 'em with their pants down. They got their butts in an icy wind this time. Don't tell me you can't remember it, you can't get it. Walk up to it, stand there, copy it down, word for word, line for line. Get the date, get the signature, get it all -- and get it back to me!

NORMA

I'll get fired.

Cont.

REUBEN

I'll run you a benefit.

She gives him an odd look. She has had a hard line from men before.

NORMA

Thanks a lot.

He is excited, goaded, tired, tense. Things are coming to a head.

REUBEN

If you want to get massaged, go to a massage parlor. You either get licked or you don't get licked.

NORMA

Listen. I got three kids. I got a drawer full of bills. I got a husband doesn't like what I'm doing. I'll do it. But I don't need your boot on my backside, Mister Warshovsky.

ANOTHER ANGLE

182

He pours himself a cup of coffee from the plug-in coffee maker, stands looking down into it.

REUBEN

Goddamn sludge has been standing here for three days...

There is a silence. She looks at him calmly, coolly.

NORMA

I'm going to tell you something, Reuben.

REUBEN

What are you going to tell me, Norma?

NORMA

You been away from home a long time. You been all business. You're getting crabby. You need a woman.

REUBEN

Funny you should mention it. Tonight's the night.



He puts down the cup, yanks his jacket off the back of a chair, struggles into it. He starts for the door.

She can't resist a parting shot.

NORMA

I wonder what Dorothy'd say.

REUBEN

Wear a rubber.

He slams out.

NORMA

183

Clipboard in hand, she goes straight to the bulletin board. She writes briskly, snatching a phrase off the letter with a glance, then looking down as her hand scrawls quickly. In order to transcribe accurately, she pronounces each phrase aloud.

NORMA

(quoting)

'...that where unions are strikes occur. Strikes mean loss of work, loss of pay, and often loss of jobs...Strike and trouble, which often end up in serious violence...'

ANOTHER ANGLE

184

Rick Lujan is beside her. He means business.

LUJAN

You can't take down that letter.

X

NORMA

It's up here on the bulletin board -- and I'm gonna copy it.

X

Dan Peters joins them.

PETERS

Norma, you better not.

X

NORMA

(dogged)

Dan, I'm gonna take down every word of this letter. It's my break time, and I'm gonna take down every word of this letter.

X

He reaches out as if to take her arm and stop her, but she pulls away fiercely.

NORMA

Just keep out of my way! I'm  
gonna take down this letter!

Now Leroy Mason approaches.

MASON

Hello, Norma.

NORMA

Why, Mr. Mason, you know who  
I am.

MASON

Norma, you just put your pencil  
and paper away.

She ignores him and continues to write as rapidly as she can.

MASON

You just stop what you're doing  
-- right now -- 'cause you're  
about to leave.

She whirls around.

NORMA

You better not put a hand on me.

ANOTHER ANGLE

185

as the three men take a step back, two of them looking at  
Mason to see what to do next.

MASON

The law's coming and it's gonna  
take you right out of this plant.

NORMA

Mr. Mason, I started this and  
-- I'm gonna finish this --

The three men are stunned into silence and inactivity. She  
turns back to the board and calmly finishes her task. Then  
she folds her notes, shoves them in her pocket.

ANOTHER ANGLE

186

PETERS

Let's go to the office, Norma.

She goes with the two men, back across the long hall, people  
turning to watch.

INT. MASON'S OFFICE

A number of men are arrayed in force against her: Lujan, Peters, Moody, Alston, Mason. Mason descends on her sternly.

MASON

Why did you make personal phone calls on company time?

By way of reply she suddenly whips out pencil and paper.

NORMA

I'd like you to spell out your name for me.

MASON

(interrupting)

Now you're being foolish, Norma Rae.

She drops the pencil and paper in her lap, puts her hands over her ears and closes her eyes, embattled.

NORMA

Look, Mr. Mason, nobody's on my side around here, and I'm not gonna leave until I set down all your names on this piece of paper.

MASON

(exploding)

I don't want you on the premises. You make a phone call to your husband and tell him to come fetch you. I want you out of here right quick.

She stays planted in her chair, eyes closed, hands over her ears. She is beginning to show the strain.

NORMA

You're gonna have to call the law to get rid of me. And you better make it the Sheriff, too. It better be Sheriff Lamar Miller to come get me, it better be him, it better not be any policeman, 'cause he was a friend of my daddy's. I got a jealous husband and he knows Lamar and I won't just go with anybody. Lamar Miller's the Sheriff of Millageville so he better be the one.

She gets up without another word and walks out of the office.

ON THE FLOOR

188

She goes back to the looms but she does no work! She merely stands there. Everyone on the floor stands in silence, attentive. The room is charged with tension.

ANOTHER ANGLE

189

A PINKERTON MAN in uniform comes toward her. When he is about ten feet away, she raises her hand. He stops.

NORMA

(singing it out)

Forget it. I'm staying put --  
right where I am.

X

The man shrugs, turns and leaves. She looks around the floor. All eyes are on her. She stands rigid.

ANOTHER ANGLE

190

There is a SOUND of a DOOR SLAMMING, a GREAT METALLIC CLANG. Now a CITY POLICEMAN is warily approaching her. She waits until he is close and then she shouts, so that the man is halted in his tracks.

NORMA

It's gonna take you and the  
police department and the fire  
department and the National Guard  
to get me out of here.

X

The Policeman hesitates, vacillates, then takes another rather uncertain step or two forward. Norma, concerned, backs away.

NORMA

I'm waiting on the Sheriff to  
come drive me home and I'm not  
budging until he arrives.

X

But the Policeman continues to shuffle toward her.

ANOTHER ANGLE

191

At bay, surrounded, alone, the pressure intense, she suddenly reaches around behind her and fumbles for a sheet of stiff cardboard. She grabs lipstick, and with one eye X on the Policeman, she strikes off some heavy block letters on the cardboard. Then with one thrust, she hoists herself up on top of a radiator and stands on it.

REVERSE SHOT

192

Everyone on the floor is watching her, Bonnie close to tears, Leona shaken and tense, James Brown, George Hubbard, Ray Buck, frustrated, immobilized, awaiting the outcome.

NORMA

193

She holds her sign high over her head with both hands and slowly turns in a circle so that everyone on the open floor, all focused entirely on her, can read what she has written:

"UNION"

THE MILL HANDS

194

It is as if her upraised sign is an igniting torch to the blaze that follows. The first hand to rise, signalling response, is her mother's. Slowly, the old woman's arm rises above her head and stays there. The man next to her follows suit. James Brown raises his. Lucius White is next. George Hubbard follows.

ANOTHER ANGLE

195

The mill hands follow suit; one by one they join.

Norma looks down to see the Pinkerton, the Policeman, and a forelady, AGNES ROY. The woman calls up to her:

AGNES ROY

Norma, just climb on down. It's  
no good your standing there.

X

ANOTHER ANGLE

196

Norma doesn't answer. She continues to turn slowly, showing the word. Each time she turns, another batch of hands shoot up, holding their arms in the air, black and white, responding to her exhortation. Finally, the entire floor is a forest of upraised hands, which seem to be buoying her up and carrying her with their silent support.

NORMA

197

Finished, she climbs down. Walking toward her is LAMAR MILLER, Chief of Police, unbuttoned coat showing his pistol.

MILLER

(reluctantly)

Come on, now, Norma. Come on.

NORMA

(fixing him)

Lamar, before I budge from here,  
you're gonna put into writing  
that Sheriff Lamar Miller, will  
take Norma Rae Webster straight  
home. You sign it and give me  
that piece of paper.

X

Cont.

The bossmen look on in amazement as Lamar begins to comply. Then he suddenly balls up the paper and flings it on the floor.

MILLER

Don't tell me what to do, young lady. You're not gonna get anything in writing off of me.

(turns to Mason)

You want her removed from the premises?

X

MASON

Get her out of here.

X

Miller turns back to Norma.

MILLER

I don't know that I want to get into that automobile with you and nobody else.

X

NORMA

(laughs)

Lamar, I'm not gonna bite you.

X

ANOTHER ANGLE

198

She turns to take her purse, puts it under her arm, and leads the way, Miller, the Policeman, and the Pinkerton in a line behind her.

EXT. MILL

199

as they emerge, Norma sees two cars in front of her, an unmarked car and a police car. She stops short.

NORMA

That's a police car! You're taking me to jail!

Behind her she hears the chain link fence beginning to close. She spins around, dropping the rug and the purse, and races for the fence, gripping the gate, hooking her fingers through the links, hanging on fiercely, swinging with it as it is banged shut and locked.

The Policeman and the Pinkerton are after her.

POLICEMAN

Now quit that scrapping. You're going where I take you -- and that's to jail.

X

Cont.

## MOVING SHOT

204

as she is led past the drunk tank, past a row of empty cells to her own. It is ten feet long, five feet wide, a dim light burning in it, bunk beds, a toilet, a wash basin.

## THE CELL

205

She steps inside.

## MATRON

You might as well sit down.

But she remains standing. Miller appears in the doorway.

## MILLER

You got one phone call, Norma.  
You better call Sonny.

## NORMA

I'm calling my union organizer.

## MILLER

Here's your dime.

He hands her a coin.

## INT. CAR - MOVING SHOT

206

Reuben is driving. No emotion is visible on Norma's face. She stares directly ahead of her. Reuben looks at her once or twice. They are silent. He speaks at last, gently.

## REUBEN

The first time you're in is bad.

The planes of her face begin to break up. She fights against it, succeeds for a moment, then gives way. She begins to weep, bitter tears -- she has been outraged and demeaned. Tears come hard to her and only an experience like this could bring them.

Reuben gives her time to release it all before he speaks.

## REUBEN

It comes with the job. I've seen a pregnant woman on a picket line hit in the stomach with a club. I've seen a boy of sixteen shot in the back. I've seen a man blown to hell and gone when he started his car one morning.

(quietly)

You just got your feet wet on this one.

She stops crying instantly.

They grab her arms, pry her fingers loose, wrench her away. Holding her by the arms they rush her to the police cruiser, shoving her head down, stuffing her into the backseat, slamming the door.

INT. CAR

200

She looks around, feeling trapped.

There are no door handles, no window cranks. A thick wire mesh separates her from the front seat.

Miller and the Policeman get in the front, the latter breathing heavily from his exertion. The car pulls away, the dark bulk of the mill looming behind them.

INT. JAIL

201

Norma goes straight to the magistrate's couch and lies down flat on it, disdainful and removing herself from the proceedings.

NORMA

202

Her face is impassive as she listens to Miller dictating the warrant for her arrest.

MILLER'S VOICE

(o.s.)

Webster, Norma Rae. 305 Jackson Street, Millageville. Female. White. Thirty-two. Occupation -- textile. Light complexion. Brown hair. Brown eyes. Arrest Number: 2416-J. Charge -- Disorderly Conduct.

X

INT. JAIL

203

A heavysset MATRON appears. Miller turns away from the desk SERGEANT to Norma.

MILLER

You go with her, Norma.

Wordlessly, she rises from the couch.



INT. HOUSE

207

Sonny gets up hurriedly as he hears them coming, concern on his face. Norma enters with Reuben behind her. Husband and wife are face to face.

SONNY

You all right, Norma?

She nods.

SONNY

I put the kids to bed.

She nods again, then goes past him into the other room.

INT. BEDROOM

208

In the darkened room, Norma goes to a shelf in the closet and hauls down a metal box. Then she goes from cot to cot and gently wakes the three children, all asleep in the same room.

NORMA

Craig, honey, wake up...Millie,  
honey, it's Momma, get up...  
Alice, sweetheart, come in the  
other room.

The children get up slowly, rubbing their eyes. She helps them out of bed, shepherds them with her back into the other room.

INT. LIVING ROOM

209

Norma sits with her children on either side of her, leaning against her, still half-asleep, Alice sprawled in her lap. The two men sit across the room and watch, not intruding.

NORMA

I love you children, that's first.  
And Sonny loves you. You got both  
of us. The second thing is, I'm a  
jailbird. You're gonna hear that  
and a lot of other things, but  
you're gonna hear 'em from me first.

The children look up at her, awake now, alert.

Cont.

## NORMA

Millie, your real daddy was named Buddy Wilson and he died four months after you were born. Craig, I never was married to your daddy, and your daddy was not Sonny and not Buddy, but another man. And there were some others in my life and they'll be telling you about them, too.

(reaches into  
the box, takes out  
papers and photographs)

I got pictures of Craig's father in here for him, and pictures of Millie's father for her. Craig, I got settlement papers in here made between me and your daddy; this is your stuff. It's not mine, it's yours. It's your life.

(puts the  
papers in  
his lap)

I want you to feel there's nothing you can't come to me and talk to me about. If you go into the mill, I want life to be better for you than it is for me; that's why I joined up with the union and got fired for it. I'm not making excuses for myself -- like everybody else, I'm not perfect and I made these mistakes. But I hope you'll learn from my experiences that life has a meaning; there is a moral reason for why you should do this and why you shouldn't do this.

(pauses)

Now you kids know that I've cleaned out my closet. You know what I am and you know that I believe in standing up for my rights.

She hugs them, each in turn, and they hug her back.

## NORMA

Go to the bathroom before you go back to bed.

Cont.

The children turn and go out of the room, holding their pictures and their papers carefully, as if they were things of value.

ANOTHER ANGLE

210

Norma rises.

NORMA

I'm gonna go take a bath now.  
They had lice in that jail.

She walks out of the room, leaving the two men alone. Sonny looks across the room at Reuben trying to assay what position he has in Norma's life.

SONNY

She had one call and she called you.

REUBEN

(shrugs)  
She knew I could make bail.

SONNY

You come in here, you mix her up, you turn her head all around. She's all changed. I didn't want her to be a front-runner -- I didn't want that. What's gonna happen to us now?

REUBEN

She stood up on a table. She's a free woman. Maybe you can live with it -- maybe you can't.

He turns and walks out of the house.

INT. BEDROOM

211

Norma is in bed, her hands behind her head, awake, silent, turned inward. Sonny enters from the bathroom, ready for bed. His shoes are in his way; he bends to pick them up and move them.

SONNY

Got a broken shoelace...

NORMA

There's another pair in the drawer.

Cont.

SONNY

Busted those last week.

He gets into bed with her. They lie side by side. There is something on his mind, hard to bring forth, hard to articulate. He finally does so, slowly.

SONNY

Did you ever sleep with him?

NORMA

No.

(pauses)  
But he's in my head.

Sonny is silent for a long moment.

SONNY

I'll see you through getting tired, getting sick, getting old. I'll see you through anything that comes up. 'Cause there's nobody else in my head. Just you.

He turns out the light, turns his back to her. She lies in the darkened room a moment, then places her hand on his back in a gesture of response.

EXT. STREET

212

Dense with a crowd of mill hands, a pervasive silence hanging over them as they throng the street from curb to curb, restless, charged, waiting, simmering in the heat of the late afternoon.

NORMA

213

She paces outside the gate, alone in the crowd, her hands thrust in her pockets, intent on the iron balcony high in the side of the plant, waiting to see a figure, to hear a sound, to receive word. This is the moment of promise, the moment of fulfillment.

INT. MILL

214

The place is jammed, men sweating in the close confines of the room. There are a dozen men with tags across their shirt fronts. A dozen newspaper and television reporters observe and record, flashbulbs going off now and then.

## AT THE LONG TABLE

215

The men here are divided into two groups, half of them BOSSMEN from the company, the other half UNION MEN. Huge stacks of paper ballots are being tabulated from the "NO" and "YES" piles.

The tension is palpable, each piece of paper a victory or a loss. Management is frozen-faced and silent. There are no smiles, no talk. Men stand up on chairs to crane and watch the count.

## ANOTHER ANGLE

216

James Brown hoists Bonnie up on his chair, shares it with her so that she too can see. They share hope as the ballots are shuffled, as the two piles diminish, as the silent marks are made, for and against.

## IN THE REAR

217

an OLD MAN, pressed against the wall by the crowd, begins to weep, unable any longer to withstand the suspense, is ashamed, reaches for a soiled handkerchief, surreptitiously wipes his eyes.

## LINETTE ODUM

218

mashed among the people, she holds a snapshot against her chest, turns it to look down at it -- it is the visage of a middle-aged man, gaunt, wasted.

She looks from the snapshot to the tabulators, back and forth, back and forth, waiting to be avenged.

## A YOUNG WOMAN

219

blonde, frail, in the stifling heat and the crush, she suddenly faints.

The pack is so great that she does not fall, is held up by the bodies around her, merely sags against a MAN beside her. He holds her, takes a knotted kerchief from his neck and mops her brow, looks around for a way to get her out. But there is no way, so he supports her in his arms.

## FULL SHOT

220

There is a stir, a final shuffling of feet, then absolute silence as a labor board AGENT raises his hand at the table.

Cont.

## AGENT

Ballots tabulated for the  
O.P. Henley Company against the  
Union -- one thousand four  
hundred and forty-eight votes.

(pauses, looks  
at another slip  
in his hand)

Ballots tabulated for the Union  
-- one thousand six hundred and  
eighty-five.

## IN THE HALL

221

There is a tumultuous, roaring shout from the assembled  
mill hands, a hosanna of triumph. The open-throated  
outcry goes on and on and on.

## REUBEN

222

at the back of the room, near the door, he spins on his  
heel and walks out.

## EXT. GATE - FULL SHOT

223

Norma, outside the gate, stops her pacing as Reuben emerges  
and stands a moment on the balcony. They stand motionless,  
looking at each other, across the distance that separates  
them.

Then he starts down toward her.

## NORMA AND REUBEN

224

as he comes up to her.

He says only one word.

## REUBEN

Done.

## NORMA

Did we trounce 'em?

## REUBEN

We did good enough.

They walk along together, pushing through the crowd.  
Behind them, up on the balcony, a MAN comes out and shouts  
to the crowd below:

Cont.

MAN

We beat 'em!

The roar goes up in the street, men and women clapping one another on the back, hugging one another, men hugging men, women, women.

MOVING SHOT - NORMA AND REUBEN

225

They turn a corner and are alone. They walk toward his car parked at the curb, front seat sagging under books, suitcases and cartons jammed in the back, obscuring the rear window.

NORMA

You gonna drive straight through?

REUBEN

Yeah.

NORMA

Better stop for coffee. Stay awake.

REUBEN

I got a thermos in the car.

NORMA

Well.

REUBEN

Well.

They have reached the car.

NORMA AND REUBEN

226

REUBEN

What are you going to do with yourself?

NORMA

Live. What else?

REUBEN

This town going to be big enough for you?

NORMA

If it isn't, I'll spread out.

REUBEN

Drop me a line once in awhile.

Cont.

NORMA  
Does anybody read your mail?

REUBEN  
Just my mother.

There is a pause.

REUBEN  
I'll send you a copy of  
Dylan Thomas.

NORMA  
I already bought one for myself.

REUBEN  
Nobody can do anything for you,  
huh?

NORMA  
You've done something for me.  
Lots.

REUBEN  
You did something for us. A  
mitzvah.

NORMA  
What's that?

REUBEN  
A good work.  
(pauses)  
I never say good-bye. I've been  
known to cry.

NORMA  
What do you say, then?

REUBEN  
Be well. Be happy.

NORMA  
You, too.

REUBEN  
Under the circumstances, best  
wishes hardly seem enough.  
Thanks are in order. Thank you  
for your companionship, for your  
stamina, your horse sense, and  
a hundred and one laughs. I also  
enjoyed looking at your shining  
hair and your shining face.



NORMA

Reuben, I think you like me.

REUBEN

I do.

NORMA

I was gonna get you a tie clip  
or some shaving lotion, but I  
didn't know what you'd like.

REUBEN

Norma, what I've had from you  
has been sumptuous.

He holds out his hand, she holds out hers, they shake.  
It is no mere ritual of farewell; the touch is held and  
held and held and held.

But it must end. They are comrades-in-arms, they are  
battle-weary, they are triumphant. Whatever else they  
might be remains unspoken.

ANOTHER ANGLE

227

as Reuben gets into his car and drives away. Norma stands  
there. She is all there.

FADE OUT

THE END