

THE DOLLMAKER

a screenplay

by

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From the novel by Harriette Arnow

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FADE IN:

1. EXT: WOODED HILLSIDE, FALL - TWILIGHT

Pine trees; a mist of rain. GERTIE, with a blanket-wrapped child in her arms, is riding a mule along a mountain track through the trees. Silence except for the mule's feet and a strange stertorous breathing. It's coming from the child. The mule scrambles up a steep slope. Above their heads, where a highway curves along the ridge, the headlights of a passing car describe a long slow arc. After the credits, superimpose the legend: BALLEW, KENTUCKY, 1944.

GERTIE looks down in concern at the child. Faintly we hear another car. GERTIE urges the mule on to the road and deliberately plants it in the middle. The car noise grows; lights approach fast; a horn blares; the car screeches to a stop, slewing sideways. An ARMY OFFICER sticks his head out of the back window, yelling furiously.

OFFICER

What the hell d'you think you're doing?

GERTIE dismounts, slaps the mule; it runs off. She approaches the car. A SOLDIER gets out of the driver's seat.

OFFICER

You know you could have killed us? If you can't control your horse keep the goddam thing off the road. Get back in, Hatcher.

GERTIE opens his door; puts one foot in the car.

GERTIE

It's my youngun. I gotta get him t'a doctor, quick.

OFFICER

This car is on urgent Army business - get out, or I'll have you arrested.

GERTIE

It's twenty mile on -y're goin' through.

OFFICER (pulling his door shut)

Hatcher - drive on!

The SOLDIER is gazing at the gasping child, appalled.

SOLDIER
He's turnin' blue!

GERTIE
Dear Lord.....Amos? Amos honey-

OFFICER (livid)
Hatcher!

GERTIE
He's chokin' t' death. Ain't no time f'r doctors now. Here-

She moves into the light of the headlamps, beckoning the soldier. The ground is muddy. Pinned to a tree beside her is a poster: "Uncle Sam needs YOU at Willow Run! Work for the War Effort!" GERTIE rips it down, spreads it on the ground, puts AMOS on it and unwraps him. The choking, clogged breaths are dreadful, inescapable.

GERTIE
Gimme that stone.

He hands her a flat rock; she puts it under AMOS' head.

Now hold his head an' his hands. He cain't fight - he's past feelin' nothin' -

The SOLDIER does as she instructs; the OFFICER gets fuming out of the car just in time to see GERTIE take out a knife and cut a slit in AMOS' windpipe. Working fast, she puts her mouth to the child's neck, spits out blood and goop, takes a hairpin from her hair and puts it in the slit.

SOLDIER (horrified and admiring)
Jesus!

The OFFICER slumps to the ground in a faint. AMOS' breathing changes; a whistling sound, but clearer.

GERTIE
Hold this. Keep it open.

She gets up, goes to the trees, cuts a small branch.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands whittling out a section of soft-centred twig into a tube, deft and fast. She replaces the hairpin in AMOS' neck with the tube. The SOLDIER helps the OFFICER to his feet.

OFFICER'S POV:

The ripped poster lies on the muddy ground.

DISSOLVE TO:

2. INT: MOVING CAR- TWILIGHT

GERTIE sits beside the OFFICER, AMOS on her lap. She watches his neck carefully.

OFFICER

How did you know what to do?

GERTIE

Diphthery. I seen my Daddy do it once.

OFFICER'S POV:

Trees flash by outside, with more Willow Run posters.

OFFICER

You destroyed government property. Don't you know there's a war on?

GERTIE

I know my brother Henley was kilt in action jus' two days ago. An' my man's bin called f'r his Army test. You bin t' the war?

OFFICER

Uh - no.

OFFICER'S POV:

Outside the window, a lonely farm, windows patched with cardboard; fields of dead corn-stalks.

OFFICER (crossly)

What do they grow around here?

GERTIE

Younguns. F'r the army, an' them factories.

OFFICER

You have a farm?

GERTIE

We're rentin'. But I'm savin' real hard. We'll have our own place some day.

The windows blur as the rain comes down harder. We hear AMOS' whistling breathing. Then through the blurred windows come the lights of a town.

3. EXT: CAR IN STREET - NIGHT, RAIN

The SOLDIER opens the car door for GERTIE. She fumbles in her pocket and holds out a bill to the OFFICER.

GERTIE

Five dollars - it's all I got.

OFFICER

That isn't necessary. Keep your money.

He checks himself.

Well - I'll take a dollar.

He takes her bill, gives her four from his wallet in change. The SOLDIER takes her across the street to where a battered notice - CLINIC - swings in the wind. GERTIE is apprehensive.

GERTIE

I ain't never bin t'a doctor before.

SOLDIER (staring)

Lady, you cain't be afraid a' nothin'. Jus' walk in.

4. INT: DOCTOR'S WAITING-ROOM -- NIGHT

Noise suddenly: banging doors, phones ringing, a muffled cry somewhere; voices which still at the sight of GERTIE and AMOS. Faces stare: old men and women, mothers with crying babies, a teenage boy with a bloodstained bandage round his head. GERTIE marches through the room. A NURSE bars her way.

NURSE (cold)

You'll have to wait your turn.

She suddenly sees AMOS' neck, and at once takes GERTIE through the inner door.

5. INT: DOCTOR'S CONSULTING-ROOM -- NIGHT

The DOCTOR (gentle, weary, in his sixties) is working on AMOS, lying stripped now and sleeping. During the following dialogue he tapes an IV tube to AMOS' arm, pulls an oxygen tent round him. The NURSE is helping, GERTIE standing nervously by. There's a glass tube in AMOS' neck now.

GERTIE

Did I do wrong? I couldn't jus' stand an' watch him-

DOCTOR (softly)

I believe you've done all right.

NURSE (as they work)

They want you six miles west of Sweet Gum. Old man - pneumonia, they think. Bloody vomit, pain, fever. I told the boy you can't come, but he won't go away.

DOCTOR (sighs)

I'll talk to him.; How's the Osgood woman?

NURSE

They've called twice.

DOCTOR

That baby's been dead so long - I didn't like her blood pressure.

NURSE

No convulsions yet.

DOCTOR (to GERTIE)

Tired?

GERTIE shakes her head.

You'll have to sit up all night and watch that tube - if it clogs, he'll choke. I'll look in again around midnight.

He goes out with the NURSE, pressing GERTIE's shoulder as he passes.

Watching AMOS, GERTIE finds the OFFICER's money still clenched in her hand. She smoothes out the bills; then stares. They are four tens. There's a knock at the door; hastily she shoves the money far down into her coat pocket, down into the lining.

Her husband CLOVIS looks round the door, comes nervously in. They speak in whispers.

GERTIE

He's gonna be all right.

CLOVIS

I knowed he was bad or y' wouldn't ha' gone off, with y'r ma needin' you so.

He looks at AMOS' neck, and flinches.

Hope y' didn't have t' watch him cut.

GERTIE

No.

CLOVIS

I didn't have the heart t' tell y'r ma. She's so low. Jus' lays there with the telegram in her hand. We all had t' beg her t' eat - she cleaned up her plate pretty good though.

GERTIE

She ain't so bad off then.

CLOVIS

Now Gert, y' know how weakly she is - she was wonderin' when y', c'd get over t' do the washin'.

GERTIE

How's Pa?

CLOVIS

She jus' cain't get reconciled t' Henley goin' without salvation. Wants t' get the preacher in t' pray t' give her peace. She cain't never meet Henley in Heaven if he ain't bin saved.

GERTIE

Ma c'd backslide an' go t' Hell if she's so sure Henley'll be there.

CLOVIS

Gert! You're so troubled up y' don't know what y're sayin'!

GERTIE

Henley ain't damned jus' 'cause he went square-dancin' with Pa an' me - fifteen year ago.

CLOVIS shrugs.

Sides - you was there too.

CLOVIS (grins)

We-ell.....Why don't I go get you some good hot coffee? An' a hamburger - y' ain't never had a hamburger in y'r life.

GERTIE

Don't you be wastin' good money.

CLOVIS

I'll be on Uncle Sam's payroll in a few weeks - y'll have money reg'lar every month. More'n I ever earned around here.

GERTIE

I dunno why they're callin' a man your age. How's this settlement gonna get by without y'r tinkerin'?

CLOVIS (stung)

I wish t' goodness y' wouldn't call it tinkerin'! People that can fix machines as good as me makes good money in them war jobs. If we was in Willer Run or Detroit, they'd a bin an ambulance t' take him t' hospital.

He looks at AMOS.

GERTIE

Y' won't forget t' feed the pig?

CLOVIS

Reuben won't forget.

GERTIE crosses to a crate holding an empty distilled-water bottle; takes out her knife.

GERTIE
D'y' reckon the doctor'd miss a board or two
from this? I c'd make Cassie a jumpin'-jack doll
- it'd pass the time.

CLOVIS
Jumpin'-jacks! - why'n't y' make somethin' a
body c'n use?

GERTIE
This wood's only fitten f'r dolls.

CLOVIS (hovering uncertainly)
I better get back t' the kids.

He half-raises a hand; goes out; then at once puts his
head round the door again.

You need cash?

GERTIE
I got some.

CLOVIS goes.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE starting to carve.

CLOSE-UP of AMOS in the oxygen tent.

GERTIE is completing the carved doll. Gathering up her skirt,
she tiptoes past AMOS to empty the shavings from her lap
into a medical pail. Listens at the door; tips a chair under
the handle; takes off her coat, sits on the floor and rummages
deep through its pocket into the lining. She produces a handful
of crumpled, grimy bills and drops them between her out-
stretched legs; then more and more - a fortune.

GERTIE (whispering)
Amos. Look.

CLOSE-UP of AMOS: GERTIE'S voice over.

You ain't gonna work y'r life away plowin'
another man's land. That's the molasses money;
eggs I sold t' Samuels; them two shoats we
butchered last fall --

Back to GERTIE.

Three hundred an' ten dollars! Soon's y'r poor
Daddy gets in th'Army, we're buyin' us a place
of our own.

CUT TO:

6. INT: KITCHEN OF THE NEVELS FARM - DAY

Pale but healthy, a small dressing on his neck, AMOS is
sitting listening to his brothers and sisters reciting the
Ten Commandments to GERTIE, who sits with a big Bible on
her knee. CLOVIS is in the background dressing. REUBEN
(14, big for his age) is whittling an axe handle with his
knife, letting the shavings fall into the wood box.

CASSIE (6) is sitting on a block of cherrywood about three feet high. Her legs dangle over a flat side of the block; the rest has been partly carved so that the upper half of a human figure is gradually emerging from it; there's the shape of a faceless head, and the hint of outstretched hands below. CLYTIE (14) and ENOCH (11) sit alongside.

CLYTIE

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

ENOCH

Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

REUBEN

Thou shalt not kill....But they killed Uncle Henley.

GERTIE

Yes, they did, honey. But that don't change the rules.

CASSIE suddenly kicks the cherrywood block hard; then shakes an admonishing finger at an imaginary figure beside her.

CASSIE

Now stop that, you bad youngun! It wasn't me, Mom, it was Cally Lou.

CLYTIE

Make her behave, Mom! She won't never pay no mind when she's got that Cally Lou in her head.

GERTIE

Cassie --

CASSIE is leaning over the block, stroking the half-carved face.

CASSIE

When y' gonna let him out, Mom?

GERTIE (smiling)

He's comin', Cassie-Marie. He's gonna burst out rejoicin' one a' these days. C'mon now, you all got lessons t' do. Clytie, you hear Enoch. Reuben?

REUBEN

I got copyin'.

He takes out a slate. ENOCH starts reading to CLYTIE.

GERTIE ;

Cassie-Marie, where's y'r primer?

CASSIE comes to her reluctantly with a book; GERTIE puts an arm round her, pushes the hair out of her eyes, points to a word. CASSIE bends close to look, then way back.

GERTIE
Don't get s' far away, honey - y' cain't see.

CASSIE (sing-song)
"Here, Bobby. You can play. You can play with my kitten. Look Bobby, look. Come here, Bobby--"

GERTIE
That'll do. Now what's this word?

CASSIE (doubtfully)
Ball?

GERTIE
No, honey, that's "play". This one?

CASSIE (after a pause)
Come?

GERTIE
Oh Cassie - y' got the whole primer by heart. That's "can".

ENOCH
That's easy.

CASSIE (upset)
I'm never gonna learn --

GERTIE (troubled)
Don't fret, now - y're little yet....

CLOVIS comes forward, ready now.

CLOVIS
We gotta load that truck, Gert. Old John'll be waitin'.

The children jump up, ENOCH taking CLOVIS' hand, and they flock out..

7. EXT: NEVELS FARMYARD, BARN, TRUCK - MORNING

It's a very battered truck, much repaired. Together, cheerful, the family load it with sacks from the barn. REUBEN is working with CLOVIS.

REUBEN
Sorghum was real good this year, Pop - that's the biggest crop we ever had.

CLOVIS
You done that.

REUBEN
An' Ma.

CLOVIS sighs, looks across at GERTIE.

CLOVIS
Yeah...I never wanted y'r Ma breakin' her back
in a field.

REUBEN (surprised)
But she likes it, Pa.

CLOVIS
All her life she's had her hands in the dirt -
an' always half the crop t'old John Ballew. Y'
know what I'd get paid in one a' them big city
war plants? - y'r ma c'd jus' mind house.

REUBEN
She likes her hands in the dirt.

But CLOVIS is busy slinging up the last sack. REUBEN looks
at him for a moment, puzzled, then goes to GERTIE.

Mom - c'n I go huntin'? I done all my chores.

GERTIE looks at CLOVIS, who's fiddling under the hood.

CLOVIS
Let him go. He's worked hard all fall. You
takin' Cassie t' see y'r Mom?

GERTIE nods. CLYTIE, ENOCH and AMOS pile into the truck
with CLOVIS, and with much spluttering and banging they
drive off.

GERTIE
Don't be a-shootin' me an' Cassie, son. Recollect
we'll be goin' down past th'old Tipton Place.

8 EXT: TRACK THROUGH ROLLING FARMLAND -- DAY

GERTIE and CASSIE walk past fields and trees, with the
wooded ridges rolling blue-misted into the distance.
CASSIE runs ahead with her imaginary friend; disappears round
a bend; then as GERTIE looks round for her, calls down from
a tree, laughing. She scrambles down, showing bright red
leaves tucked in her boots (clunky too-large boots
inherited from ENOCH.)

CASSIE
Look Mom, Cally Lou bought me red shoes - forty
dollars in the Ward catalog.

GERTIE

Lord - where'd she get all that money?

She crouches to re-tie CASSIE's shoelaces.

CASSIE

Cally Lou's man, he's gone away t' the wars,
an' he makes good moneys.

GERTIE looks up at her quickly, but sees no guile; she pushes the hair out of CASSIE's eyes.

I c'n see two little girls in your eyes, Mom.

GERTIE (laughs)

That's you, honey.

CASSIE

Me an' Cally Lou.

She darts off again and disappears over a rise. We follow.

9

EXT: HILLSIDE ABOVE THE TIPTON PLACE - DAY

CASSIE is poised waiting for GERTIE. Below her in a hollow lies the Tipton Place, an old log farmhouse with a great stone chimney, idyllic in the golden light. It's GERTIE's dream and it looks like one.

CASSIE

Why's no-one live in the Tipton Place, Mom?

GERTIE

The people moved. Sold it t'old John Ballew.

CASSIE grabs her hand and tugs her running down the slope.

10

EXT: THE TIPTON PLACE - DAY

They run into the yard of the Tipton Place, CASSIE grabbing a pear from a tree as she passes. The gate is swinging loose on a broken catch, and the walk is straggly with run-wild yellow chrysanthemums. CASSIE pauses by a small tree.

CASSIE

Mom, make me a hickory-sprout doll?

GERTIE cuts a twig from the tree. They sit on the steps of the boarded-up farmhouse.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands magically carving a figure from the twig: the top-shoot its head, side-shoots its arms, bark frayed to make a skirt. Suddenly there's the sound of shots, and a dog barking.

THEIR POV:

Out of the woods REUBEN comes running, with GYP the dog.

REUBEN

Mom! I seen a bear!

GERTIE

A bear? You sure?

REUBEN

Biggest ol' thing y'ever did see! I shot at him, but he was too far off.

GERTIE

I ain't seen a bear in these parts since I c'n remember. Mebbe he was fishin'. If we lived here we'd get a lotta fish outa that river.

CLOSE-UP of REUBEN, listening, wondering.

Y' know, once on a time y'r great-great-granpa Kendrick owned all this land. My granpa sold it t' the Tiptons. I used t' come here when I was Cassie's size. Behind in the hillside they's a real deep cellar, an'nothin' ever froze in that cellar - nor spoiled in summer neither.

CASSIE

An' if we lived here we'd put them apples an' pears in our cellar, wouldn't we?

REUBEN takes out his knife and cuts a piece of wood to fit the broken catch on the gate.

GERTIE

An' we'd pick blackberries, our own blackberries in our own fields.

REUBEN (casual)

They's a heap a' good manure round back.

GERTIE (smiling)

You bin studyin' it?

REUBEN (whittling)

Jus' passin' by.

GERTIE

They's a good garden place too.

She takes a deep breath, gives CASSIE her finished doll, stands up.

Let's go t' Granma's, Cassie-Marie.

CLOSE-UP of REUBEN, watching her in hope and disbelief.

REUBEN

Pop'll never let you. He'll be heedin' a new truck or somethin', like allus. Like he sold the cow last spring, t' get them new tires.

GERTIE

He won't need nothin' in the Army. He'll want us t' have a place of our own.

She turns and follows CASSIE, skipping ahead down the track, then looks back as if to wave.

GERTIE's POV:

REUBEN fits his whittled piece of wood into the gate catch, and carefully shuts the gate.

GERTIE smiles; turns to go on.

11 INT: KENDRICK'S FARM - DAY

GERTIE and CASSIE come in the door; MRS KENDRICK's wailing voice swamps everything. She droops into GERTIE's arms: a pale, weeping, blackmailing hypochondriac who will outlive them all.

MRS KENDRICK

Oh Gertie, Gertie...y'r own born brother dead in a foreign land, and never once do you come to comfort your poor dyin' mother a-weepin' her heart away....An' your sister Mag has writ me so many letters, so good an' kind.

GERTIE

I'm sorry, Mom - Amos was sick.

MRS KENDRICK (sharp)

I bin sick too.

She turns abruptly away toward her parlour.

12 INT: KENDRICKS' PARLOUR - DAY

CASSIE fidgets on a stool; GERTIE sits in the claustrophobic room among sad potted plants, bits of crochet, rugs over carpets over linoleum, old calendars advertising patent medicines, Henley's photograph wrapped in black crepe, umpteen religious texts, and a great dreadful framed drawing of an eye with the legend THOU GOD SEEST ME.

MRS KENDRICK

Oh Gertie, Gertie, I cain't bear t' think on it - Henley my onliest son, a-flamin' there in Hell. He coulda bin saved if only you an' your father had set him a good example. How could God do this to me?

GERTIE
It was Henley he done it to, Mom. An' he broke
none a' the Ten Commandments.

CASSIE gets up gingerly and begins creeping to the door.

MRS KENDRICK
What're we gonna do without him? Y'r pa's so
mule-minded -- we sh'd sell this place an' go
live with Mag.

GERTIE (shocked)
Pa couldn't live in town --

MRS KENDRICK droops as if fainting, but has a beady eye
on CASSIE.

MRS KENDRICK
Oh Gertie, Gertie -- Cassie-Marie, git my
smellin' salts.

They dive for the little bottle lying conveniently on her
lap. GERTIE waves it under her nose; MRS KENDRICK weakly
revives.

An' I'm mighty bad constipated, mighty bad --

GERTIE
You jus' rest, Mom. I'll make y' a cup of tea.

13 EXT: KENDRICKS YARD - DAY

GERTIE and CASSIE, conspiratorial, creep out of the
kitchen door. They cross the yard to an outbuilding like
a small barn.

14 INT: MR KENDRICK'S WORKSHOP

MR KENDRICK is standing at a workbench, carving a piece of
wood with a knife. He turns as GERTIE comes in, and they
hold one another. CASSIE stands, clutching her doll.

GERTIE
Pop - oh Pop -

The two of them have always been close. She smiles as he
bends to hug CASSIE.

MR KENDRICK
How's Amos? I wanted t' ride over an' see him,
but y'r mom's been s' bad I couldn't leave.

GERTIE
He's fine. How's y'r leg - an' y'r rheumatism?

MR KENDRICK
Nothin' t' speak of.

GERTIE (looking round)
It's so cold f'r you out here.

MR KENDRICK
Well, y' know how it is. The mess a' my whittlin'
allus aggravated y'r poor mother -- an' seems like
right now, I got t' be whittlin'.....

CASSIE holds up the fiddle-head he has been carving.

CASSIE
What's this, Granpa?

GERTIE takes it, her fingers carressing the wood.

GERTIE
Oh Pop, that's real pretty.

MR KENDRICK
I ain't made a fiddle in fifteen years. Minded
me a' Henley, I guess. An' out here - it don't
do no harm.

GERTIE
I wish I was closer. Mebbe when Clovis's Army
money is comin' in reg'lar - mebbe I c'n move.

MR KENDRICK (eagerly)
The Tipton Place?

GERTIE nods. MR KENDRICK (he has a bad limp) reaches to a
shelf, pulls down a cigar-box and takes a fat envelope out.

Henley wrote I sh'd give y' this. It's his
cattle money - three hundred dollars. He wanted
you t' have it if he - didn't get back.

GERTIE is caught off-balance by emotion. She stands there
holding the envelope, trying to fight off gut-deep sobs.
From outside, MRS KENDRICK's whining call approaches.

MRS KENDRICK (off)
Gertie? Gertie!

CLOSE-UP MR KENDRICK
He slips the fiddle-head under cover.

MRS KENDRICK comes in; stares at GERTIE.

MRS KENDRICK
Why you cryin'?

MR KENDRICK indicates the money.

MR KENDRICK
Henley.

MRS KENDRICK (sharply)
You give her it?

MR KENDRICK
It's what he wanted.

CASSIE is frightened, tugging at her mother's apron.

CASSIE
Mommie?

MRS KENDRICK, feeling herself upstaged, bursts into loud dramatic tears and collapses on to her husband.

MRS KENDRICK
Gertie, Gertie, think a' me --

GERTIE turns suddenly and rushes out, CASSIE following.

15 EXT: FIELDS - SUNLIGHT

GERTIE running blindly, CASSIE running after her.

CASSIE
Mommie - Mommie -

GERTIE slows, stops, wiping her face on her sleeve.
CASSIE catches up and clutches her; GERTIE picks her up.

Don't cry, Mommie. Don't cry.

GERTIE
I'm all right, honey - 'less you choke me
t' death with huggin'. "Miss Cassie hugged
her Mommie t' death" - there's a pretty piece
f'r the paper.

CASSIE
Mom - was you cryin' 'cause Granma says
Uncle Henley cain't never go t' Jesus?

GERTIE
Stuff. A body don't have t' go t' Him. He's
right here all the time.

CASSIE
Have you seen Him?

GERTIE puts her down, begins to walk.

GERTIE
Well - kinda like you seein', Cally Lou.

CASSIE
Did He look like a preacher in suit clothes?

GERTIE

No - seemed he wore overalls. He made things, like y'r Granpa. I ain't never seen His face, but seems t' me it be allus laughin', like Uncle Henley.

CUT TO:

16 INT: NEVELS FARM KITCHEN - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP of the cherrywood block: GERTIE's hands and knife carving a hint of the face. She is humming "Beulah Land."

The kitchen is lit by a lamp and a flickering candle; outside the windows the sky is still dark. On the ceiling and walls are red squares of light thrown up from the stove, where a coffee-pot steams. GERTIE gets up, breaks ice in a bucket, fills a pot with water and puts it on the stove. Takes the candle and crosses to a ladder.

17 INT: SLEEPING LOFT - NIGHT

SHE comes up the ladder into the loft, where CLOVIS is in bed, and shakes him.

GERTIE

Time t' get up.

CLOVIS groans, and buries his head in the pillow.

It's y'r Army examin'in' day, honey.

CLOVIS groans again. GERTIE goes back down the ladder. The moment she is out of sight, he hops out of bed in his long johns, whips a battered ready-packed suitcase from under the bed. Looks down the ladder, sees GERTIE, leaves the case near the edge of the opening, pulling the bedclothes over it as camouflage. Then goes down.

18 INT: NEVELS FARM KITCHEN - LAMPLIT

GERTIE is mixing biscuit batter.

GERTIE

They's coffee on the stove, an' water warmin'. You better hurry.

CLOVIS

Oh law, my old woman wantin' t' be shed a' me.

He hugs her from behind, and she spills the milk she's pouring into the batter.

GERTIE

Now look at that y' git on.

CLOVIS stands still, his chin resting on her shoulder.

CLOVIS
Oh Gert, lotsa times I think you don't love
me nary a bit.

GERTIE
Me! If you had t' choose atween me an' that truck,
I'd lose.

CLOSE-UP: Her hands briskly mixing the batter.

FADE TO:

CLOSE-UP: A tray of fresh biscuits coming out of the oven.

CLOVIS is in undershirt and pants, wiping his face after shaving. GERTIE puts the biscuits on the table and turns back to the stove, where bacon is sizzling in a skillet; she breaks two eggs in. Pulling on his shirt, CLOVIS makes for the back room.

GERTIE
Dont go wakin' the younguns.

CLOVIS
But I want t' tell 'em good-bye.

GERTIE
Y'll be back t'night after the test. I
cleaned y'r boots.

CLOVIS rubs his chin critically,. peering into a small cracked mirror. Pulls on his boots as he talks.

CLOVIS
I look like I bin shaved with a crosscut saw.
Wish we had electric, an' runnin' water, like Mag.

GERTIE (at the stove)
Electric light don't fill empty bellies.

CLOVIS
Y'r sister's got it easier'n you - an' her
younguns has got good schools.

GERTIE puts a plate of eggs and bacon on the table.

GERTIE
Our younguns is learnin'.

CLOVIS (obstinately)
I want you t' have things better.

While she's taking biscuits off the baking sheet he slips his razor into his pocket; reaches for the strop hanging on the wall, but jerks his hand back as she turns round. He goes for his grubby jacket hanging by the door.

GERTIE
Ain't you gonna eat?

CLOVIS
I ain't hungry.

GERTIE
You comin' down with somethin'?

CLOVIS
Woman, a body don't go off t' th'Army every day. I wish y'd got the younguns up.

-- GERTIE
But it ain't like you was goin' f'r true.

CLOVIS puts his finger in the water warming on the stove.

CLOVIS
Here- put this in the radiator for me. But don't you be fiddlin' round t' start her, now - I'm allus tellin' you, that ain't woman's work.

GERTIE
I c'd drive a tractor when I wa'n't no older'n Cassie.

But she goes outdoors with the water. CLOVIS hastily pockets the razor strop. Climbs the ladder, reaches for the suitcase, brings it down. Puts it by the door and goes into the back room, taking the candle.

19 INT: CHILDREN'S BEDROOM - CANDLELIGHT

The girls are entwined in one bed; the three boys lying like spoons in the other. Holding up the candle, CLOVIS looks at them for a long moment; smooths CLYTIE's hair.

CUT TO:

20 EXT: NEVELS FARMYARD AND TRUCK- DAWN

Some stars are still bright; dawn is only beginning. GERTIE, a flashlight between her teeth, is pouring water into the truck radiator. CLOVIS stands by the kitchen door watching her. She drops the flashlight, and as she bends to pick it up he runs out with his suitcase and drops it in the back of the truck, pulling a sack over it. Comes round to the front and gives GERTIE a quick goodbye hug. His kiss misses her mouth as she turns to look for the radiator cap.

CLOVIS jumps in, twists the ignition wires. GERTIE pulls rocks away from the wheels and pushes; the truck begins rolling down the slope; the engine catches.

GERTIE'S POV:

The engine noise echoes round the silent hills. In the grey dawn, the glow of the headlights goes down the slope, up the next ridge, along it for a moment; then vanishes. The sound dies. CUT TO:

21 INT: NEVELS FARM KITCHEN - MORNING

The children are round the breakfast table; we pan along the faces as they eat, ending with GERTIE happily serving about biscuits, bacon, eggs, gravy, grits, cornpone, butter-milk. It's an image of homegrown plenty. The dog GYP sits hopefully in the open kitchen door.

CASSIE spills her milk. CLYTIE jumps up and runs for a dishrag, scolding.

CLYTIE

Cassie! Cain't you look what y're doin'?
You're so messy - y're half pig.

The milk is running down the oilcloth to the woden floor; GERTIE pushes the rest of the puddle after it with a knife and calls the dog, who trots happily in and laps it up.

CASSIE

I didn't mean to.

ENOCH

Y're allus spillin' somethin'.

GERTIE

Leave her be.

CLYTIE (wiping up)

You are the gommeniest youngun --

CASSIE

I ain't!

ENOCH (whispering, needling)

Piggy - pig - pig

CASSIE

I AIN'T!

GERTIE

Enoch - one more word an' I'll git y'r Daddy's razor strop.

CASSIE

Y' cain't do that, Mom - it ain't there no more.

GERTIE looks puzzled.

Cally Lou was so mean this mornin', I said,
I'll show you what y'll git if y' go on this way
- an' I took her t' see the strop an' it weren't
there. Pop's took it clean away.

GERTIE goes to the wall and sees just a faint strip of
darker colour where the strop had hung.

ENOCH

Ain't Pop comin' back t'night?

CLYTIE (upset)

You let him go without wakin' us.

CASSIE

Has Pop gone t' the war?

CLYTIE

He's gone, an' we ain't never gonna see
him no more --

REUBEN

He'd go t' one a them factories, where they
make bombs an' stuff.

GERTIE (slow, troubled)

I guess - he'll write us a letter tellin'
where he's gone....

22 EXT: HULL'S GENERAL STORE - AFTERNOON

Bright fall sunshine. GERTIE and CABSIE are walking towards
a faded storefront: SAMUE L HULL: GENERAL STORE AND POST
OFFICE. On the opposite side of the road is a vegetable
patch: potatoes, corn, squash. Children play in the dust
outside. On the porch a woman in her late forties is
sitting, very pregnant, with a small child at her knee, and
beside her a small old woman, CLOVIS' mother, KATE NEVELS.
CASSIE runs and hugs her.

CASSIE

Granma Nevels!

GERTIE bends down and kisses her.

MRS NEVELS

Hallo, Gert. We'll have news a' Clovis today,
don't you fret.

GERTIE smiles; gives a shrug that says "Maybe"; hands the pregnant woman MRS HULL the basket of eggs she's carrying.

GERTIE

Miz Hull.....Three dozen. They're layin' right well.

MRS HULL

It's the first few days is the worst. That, an' allus thinkin' a man'll come along when they's no man t' come.

CASSIE jumps down from the porch and runs to meet MAMIE CHILDERS, a weary young woman coming up the road with a baby on one arm, a basket of eggs on the other. One small child is tugging at her skirt, another staggering behind with an oilcan almost as big as himself.

MAMIE (calling to GERTIE)

Where's Clovis? Ain't the mail in yet?

GERTIE

Clovis ain't drivin' no more - he's gone.

MAMIE collapses on to the steps.

MAMIE

Gone? What'll I do when I run outa coal?
I cain't cut logs t' do no good.

CASSIE (to the small CHILDERS boy)

My Daddie's gone to the war.

CHILDERS BOY (superior)

My Daddie flies in airplanes. Up in the sky.

CASSIE

My Daddie's gonna make bombs.

CHILDERS BOY

My Daddie drops bombs. POW!

He plays aeroplane-dropping-bomb and knocks his small sister into the mud. She howls. The baby howls. MAMIE fusses ineffectually to quiet them.

GERTIE (over the noise)

I'll send Reuben over t' cut y' some wood.

She stands up, fidgetty.

Miz Hull - I jus' cain't stand waitin' - y' got somethin' I c;d do?

LONG SHOT of the road, women gathering from all directions, hopeful, anxious. Some stand round a tattered map of the world pinned on the store's porch wall. An old man sits coughing on a bench; a younger man wanders vacant-faced at the fringe, one sleeve empty - otherwise this is a settlement only of women now.

MED SHOT: GERTIE is digging potatoes in the Hulls' vegetable patch.

LONG SHOT: OLD JOHN BALLEW comes down the street into the crowd. They part for him, greeting him with obvious respect. He looks about him; crosses to GERTIE and stands watching her, ruminatively chewing.

OLD JOHN
Gertie, y're about the best tater-diggin'
hand I ever seen.

GERTIE
I've had plenty practice.

OLD JOHN spits tobacco juice deliberately at a rock.

OLD JOHN
They's a little piece a business you an'
me oughta go into.

GERTIE leans on the spade handle; nervous, excited, trying to seem cool.

GERTIE
Y' mean y're wantin' me t' move, an' shamed
t' say so.

OLD JOHN (shaking his head)
You know you're one a' the best renters
I ever had. But - if you an' me c'd do a
little tradin' your rentin' days'd be over.

GERTIE starts to dig again.

GERTIE
Don't seem like the time t' talk a' tradin'.
Didn't you know they've took Clovis?

OLD JOHN spits again.

OLD JOHN
Now Gert - you ain't no Mamie Childers, lost
'thout a man. Clovis knows tinkerin' - none
better - but he ain't bin worth a continental t'
you in the crop-makin'. You're might' near as
good a hand at firmin' as I am.

GERTIE (blandly)
Them Army wages comes in mighty steady. I c'n
rent pretty near any place I choose.

OLD JOHN
That why I see you lookin' over the Tipton
Place - knowin' it's f'r sale?

GERTIE fishes up some more potatoes.

GERTIE
Law, Uncle John, I ain't hardly give it a
thought. But how much'll y' give me t' take
it off y'r hands?

OLD JOHN waits, making her look at him, and then suddenly he's
no longer playing the sparring game.

OLD JOHN
Gertie, I've knowed your ol' pop f'r fifty
years. Henley was his onliest boy. Y'r pop'd
give his good leg t' know you was allus gonna be
close by. That place is yours, girl, f'r what I
paid f'r it -- five hundred. Whatever y' want
down, the rest later.

GERTIE doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

GERTIE
I c'n pay it, Uncle John -- near all of it --

As she speaks, a child shouts "Listen!".

LONG SHOT of the road; the women falling silent, turning.
Far off there's the sound of a car.

GERTIE drops her spade; moves to the road, where MRS NEVELS
is standing.

MRS NEVELS
Was a car brought the news about Henley. A
Red Cross lady in a curly black coat.

Down the road a car comes into sight.

CHILD (shouting)
It's the same one!

The car stops; a large woman in a Persian lamb coat gets
out. She wears a Red Cross armband. She takes a yellow
envelope from her bag. OLD JOHN steps forward.

OLD JOHN
Evenin', ma'am. You've brung us word?

RED CROSS WOMAN
I have a message for Iva Dean Golson.

CLOSE-UP of a girl's face: taut, apprehensive.

The RED CROSS WOMAN comes to her with the telegram.

RED CROSS WOMAN

Your husband is a prisoner of war in Italy.

Relief, a buzz of voices. The women close round IVA DEAN.
The RED CROSS WOMAN fishes a mailbag out of the car.

And I brought you your mail. Now if you'll all
pay attention, I'll call the names--

MRS HULL (softly)

Thank you, ma'am, but I'm the postmistress. I
give out the mail here.

The RED CROSS WOMAN retreats to IVA DEAN, taking her to
the map on the wall, and MRS HULL begins calling names and
handing out envelopes. Eventually:

Gertrude Nevels.

GERTIE blinks at the 'Gertrude'; reaches out.

Here - it's postmarked Detroit.

GERTIE opens the letter. Takes out some money; stares at it.

MRS NEVELS

Is he all right? They didn't get him in the
Army?

GERTIE starts guiltily, then reads aloud to MRS NEVELS.

GERTIE (reading)

"Well, Gertie, I passed the Army. But they
said I would not be called for a right good
spell. So I went to a factory like I should of
done a long time back. I got a job that suits
me. It pays good. I sold the truck and it brang
more than I paid, it was them good new tires.
Now I am getting a place so you and the children
can come here to Detroit.

GERTIE stops suddenly, looks up. Her eyes meet MRS NEVELS'.
No expression. She goes back to reading.

I am sending some money. I will send more when
I have a pay day. You and the children needs
clothes. I want you not to have it so hard.
Write to me. Clovis."

GERTIE sits stunned for a moment. MRS NEVELS reaches for her hand.

MRS NEVELS
Don't go, Gert. He'll never come back if you do.

GERTIE (firmly)
Now you know I'd never go up there.

She folds the letter.

I'll save jus' about everythin' he sends, so's he c'n buy him another truck when he gets back home.

23 EXT: TRACK THROUGH FIELDS - SUNSET

CASSIE and GERTIE are walking home, under a wonderful sunset sky with the evening star already bright.

CASSIE (sleepy)
Mom - them men that rides airplanes like Joey Childers' Pa - do they ever hit the stars?

GERTIE
Nobody c'n hurt the stars, honey. They jus' sit up there sayin': Look at us - nothin's gonna make us change - no wars or nothin'.

CASSIE
Is that what they say?

GERTIE
Sure. An' they say: The heavens declare the glory a' God, an' the firmament showeth his handiwork. They say: Cassie-Marie, if y' lost all y'r friends an' y'r kin, you'd still have us, an' the sun an' the moon.

The golden sky where the sun has gone down is behind them. CASSIE turns without stopping, so that she's walking backwards, and calls out:

CASSIE
Goodnight, sun, goodnight. I'll see you in the mornin'. Sleep warm, sun.

GERTIE laughs, picks her up and carries her.

24 EXT: THE NEVELS FARM - TWILIGHT

LONG SHOT: A huge full moon is rising in the still-light sky. GERTIE carries CASSIE into the house, where two downstairs windows are lighted.

25 EXT: NIGHT SKY - THE MOON, FULL, RIDING THROUGH CLOUDS

26 EXT: NEVELS FARM- NIGHT

One window lighted now; through it we see GERTIE, alone, candle-lit, carving the cherrywood block and humming "Beulah Land."

27 INT: CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands, carving.

28 EXT: NEVELS FARMYARD - DAY

Early morning sunshine.

CLOSE-UP of CLYTIE's finger pointing to pictures of curtains in a Montgomery Ward catalog. Over, CLYTIE's voice excited, pleading.

CLYTIE (V.O.)

Mom, real winder curtains, white, four sets, f'r that big front room - couldn't we?

CLYTIE is sitting on the porch steps; GERTIE below her cutting shingles with a froe. She smiles at CLYTIE. REUBEN is stacking the shingles.

REUBEN

We'll need seed first. Y' cain't put up curtains till after we've moved in; but I c'n get the hayfield sowed.

GERTIE looks at them. She's glowing; happy with her children, with the thought of her dream house.

GERTIE

Y' c'n have seed an' curtains - I'm aimin' t' sell our old heatin' stove. Won't need it at the Tipton Place.

She straightens up.

These'll do, I reckon. Let's git over there an' fix that roof. Y'll have t' get Enoch an'--

Suddenly from across the yard comes a high familiar wail. They all freeze.

MRS KENDRICK (V.O.)

Gertie! Gertie!

GERTIE'S POV:

An old white mule is approaching, bearing the bundled-up figure of MRS KENDRICK. They stare for a moment while she comes close; then REUBEN moves to the mule's head and MRS KENDRICK gets off. ENOCH and AMOS run out of the house, AMOS barefoot and wearing only underpants. MRS KENDRICK is sobbing noisily. She totters to the porch post and leans against it.

ENOCH

Granma - is Granpa dead?

MRS KENDRICK

No honey, y'r granpa ain't dead - but he'd be better dead, poor old crippled soul. With his own flesh an' blood bringin' disgrace t' his old grey head.

GERTIE (astonished)

What's Mag done?

MRS KENDRICK (sharp)

Mag ain't done nothin'. Mag's a decent woman. She ain't a-sneakin' an' connivin' t' leave her man an' make her children fatherless.

She darts a vicious glance at GERTIE and looks round sorrowfully at the children.

Saint Paul said, Wives be in subjection to your husbands -- but what does your mammy do, when y'r poor daddy's alone in a strange place workin' t' put bread in y'r mouths?

REUBEN, having tethered the mule, is standing next to GERTIE, very still.

REUBEN

She bought us a place of our own.

MRS KENDRICK (teary)

Oh Lord, she's turned her own children against their father!

CLYTIE moves to her, puzzled, clutching her catalog.

CLYTIE

But granma, we ain't done nothin' wrong - we're jus' movin' t' the Tipton Place.

MRS KENDRICK points at her dramatically; at the muddy skirt and dishevelled hair.

MRS KENDRICK

Look at her, growing up like a heathen. She wouldn't a bin goin' t' ruin if Clovis was around.

GERTIE is picking up her froe, wiping off the blade.

GERTIE

You sound like she was comin' up with a bastard. She's jus' bin cleanin' out the trough.

MRS KENDRICK (wailing)
Oh Lord, that I sh'd hear such vile talk
from m' own daughter!

She turns a sharp eye on CLYTIE's catalog.

What you a-fixin' t' order, girl?

CLYTIE (happily)
Curtains. White curtains with blue bands,
f'r our new front room.

MRS KENDRICK
Child, you don't need curtains, not till you
get t' Dee-troit.

ENOCH (puzzled)
Dee-troit?

MRS KENDRICK
Yes honey, Dee-troit. Yöur papa wants you all
with him - he's huntin' you a place --

REUBEN (almost a shout)
Mom!

He's gazing at GERTIE in agonized appeal. GERTIE seems
paralysed, gazing at her mother like a rabbit at a snake.
MRS KENDRICK goes on implacably, as if REUBEN hadn't spoken.

MRS KENDRICK
-- an' y'r mamma's gonna do her duty an'
take you there.

AMOS (happily parroting)
Dee-troit, Dee-troit.

MRS KENDRICK --
Poor litle feller, he needs someone t' take
care a' him. Runnin' round bare-footed - he'll
be gettin' that ol' croup again.

She takes AMOS' hand and shoos him up the steps to the
house.

REUBEN
He never got up till you come an' waked him.

MRS KENDRICK glares at him over her shoulder, and goes in.
CASSIE tugs anxiously at GERTIE's arm.

CASSIE
Mom, c'n Gyp go t' Dee-troit too? An' can we
take Miz Cally Lou?

GERTIE moves as if waking up.

GERTIE

We ain't gone yet, honey.

But there's dread in her voice. She puts down the froe.

Clytie honey, go fix y'r granma a cup a' coffee.

CLYTIE looks down at her catalog, puts it on the steps;
takes ENOCH and CASSIE by the hand and they go in.
REUBEN looks beseechingly at GERTIE.

REUBEN

Mom - don't let her --

GERTIE doesn't answer; she begins blindly walking away
from the house. REUBEN follows her.

29

HIGH-ANGLE SHOT: fade long views in and out:

GERTIE, followed at a little distance by REUBEN, walking away
from the Nevels farmhouse.

Walking along a track .

Walking down the slope to the Tipton Place. There's a
dilapidated car parked outside.

30

EXT: TIPTON PLACE - DAY

GERTIE stops outside the porch and stands looking.
REUBEN and Gyp come up beside her. OLD JOHN BALLEW comes
out of the front door; turns and closes it, putting on a
padlock. He speaks over his shoulder as he does so.

OLD JOHN

Y'r ma sent f'r me - the way she talks, a body'd
think I was makin' a mint sellin' you this
place. Twict I thought she was goin' t' faint
dead away. We both gotta do our duty, Gert.

The padlock snaps shut. He turns to her.

I cain't let a piece a' land come atween a
woman an' her man an' her people.

REUBEN (anguished)

But Ma bought it. She give you the money.

OLD JOHN (ignoring him)

Y'll have t' give me back the key.

He pulls out a leather money-bag and takes chunks of
folded bills from it.

OLD JOHN (contd)
The right's on her side, Gert. If Clovis is
earnin' a livin', y' gotta go t' him - if he
wants it thataway.

GERTIE
Suppose - I don't want it thataway?

OLD JOHN (simply)
You're his wedded wife.
He hands her the money. Reluctantly she gives him the key.

I'm sorry, girl.

He turns, gets into the car, starts it.

CLOSE-UP of REUBEN, furious in misery. He pulls out his
knife and throws it at the porch of the Tipton Place, as
OLD JOHN drives off. The knife sticks quivering in the centre
of one of the porch supports.

CUT TO:

31. INT: RAILROAD STATION - DAY

Sudden overwhelming noise and chaos: trains, smoke, steam,
shoving crowds. A great booming unintelligible voice from a
loudspeaker. A sign: DETROIT CENTRAL.

GERTIE is struggling through the crowd with AMOS on one
arm, two split baskets looped over the other; CASSIE
clinging, crying. The children wear unfamiliar new clothes
- too thin for a Detroit winter. GERTIE has on her old
battered coat with a crocheted baby-blanket tucked in the
neck as a scarf.

GERTIE (calling, anxious)
Clytie! Reuben!
She's so busy looking that she collides with a redcap.

REDCAP
Look where y're goin', lady.

GERTIE cannons off him into two women, one of whom drops
a parcel and glares.

WOMAN
Goddam hillbillies!

CLYTIE (V.O.)
Mom! Over here!

Beyond the trains, near the station entrance, CLYTIE,
REUBEN and ENOCH are standing on a bench, safe out of the
main flow, waving over the heads of the crowd: all much
more cool and cheerful than GERTIE. She makes her way up
to them.

CLYTIE
Sit down, Mom, you look peaked.

GERTIE collapses; REUBEN takes her baskets.

ENOCH (bubbling)
It's snowin' out there, Mom, like you never
seed! An' it don't fall down, it goes crosswise.

REUBEN
They's a place you get drinks - y' want some
good hot coffee, Mom?

ENOCH
C'n I have a Coke?

GERTIE
We gotta wait f'r y'r Pop.

-- The loudspeaker booms suddenly. AMOS shrieks and buries
his head in her lap.

Hush now, honey, don't be feared. Y'r Pop'll
be comin' soon t' take us t' our pretty new home.

CLYTIE
Pop didn't sounds prime sure he'd meet us -
he said t' take a cab.

ENOCH
Gimme the tickets f'r the baggage, Mom. Reuben
an' me'll get them. I seen where.

A man standing nearby has a puppy in a travelling-case;
REUBEN and CASSIE are crouched talking to it.

CLYTIE
Lemme go, Mom - I'm the oldest.

GERTIE
Y' cain't manage that cherrywood block - none
of y'.

CLYTIE (knowing)
Pa sent it separate - that an' the big trunk.

GERTIE
Railway Express, he said.

CLYTIE
Railway Express is different. It comes later.

GERTIE (troubled)
I hope they treat it right. We shoul'da wrapped it..

ENOCH
The tickets, Mom.

GERTIE fumbles with her coat pocket; she has the baggage checks pinned inside it with a safety-pin. CLYTIE looks round for possible watchers, embarrassed.

CLYTIE (scolding)
Y' oughta used y'r new purse, Mom.

ENOCH (giggling)
Mom, y' look like a body outa the funny papers- y'r hat's all crooked.

CLYTIE reaches to straighten GERTIE's hat. GERTIE shakes her off; gives them the tickets.

GERTIE
Git it!

32 EXT: -STATION ENTRANCE AND STREET. WIND AND SNOW - DAY

HIGH-ANGLE SHOT: In a little procession the family makes its way to the cab queue on the station sidewalk: REUBEN with a round-topped tin trunk on his shoulder, ENOCH staggering with a big old split suitcase tied with fishline, CLYTIE with two roped cardboard boxes, GERTIE with a roped orange crate and her baskets, and the little ones hanging on to her coattails. The noise is intense but different now: shouts, car engines, horns.

33 EXT: CAB QUEUE, STREET - DAY

The Nevells and other emigres stand surrounded by their homemade baggage, shivering in the blowing snow. In front of GERTIE a conventional business man (Homburg, silk muffler, briefcase) turns to scrutinize them; shakes his head in resignation over such trash. Directly behind GERTIE, a BLACK GIRL is clutching her baby vainly for warmth under a skimpy coat.

BLACK GIRL (very Southern)
Who'd a thought it'd be s' cold in the Fall thisaway?

GERTIE
Here- f'r the youngun --

She pulls off her blanket-scarf and gives it to the girl, who flashes a quick desperate smile of thanks.

BLACK GIRL
God bless y'.

34 INT: TAXI - DAY

The taxi door slams and the outside noise level is muted; they're all piled inside. REUBEN and ENOCH are up front with the driver. In the back, GERTIE with CASSIE on her knee, and CLYTIE with AMOS on hers. The driver is a little wizened man with dark eyes that have seen everything and forgotten nothing. He's unscrewing the top from a Thermos. Starts his meter.

DRIVER
Where to, lady?

GERTIE reaches for the pins in her pocket again, but CLYTIE answers for her.

CLYTIE
Eighteen - nine - eleven Merry Hill.

ENOCH
It's close t' where my Pop works, at the Flint plant.

DRIVER
Which one? Old man Flint owns half a' Detroit.

ENOCH (proudly)
My Pop's helpin' make stuff f'r the war.

DRIVER
Beats fightin' it.

He takes a swig from the Thermos top. ENOCH is bouncing, peering at the dashboard.

ENOCH
How fast can y' go? - - - - -

DRIVER (protesting)
I gotta drink my coffee.

ENOCH
It don't smell like coffee.

DRIVER
The smell froze.

He knocks back the capful and puts the Thermos away.

Now where the hell's Merry Hill? - housing project, I guess.

CLYTIE (confident)
I reckon it's a great big place three, four stories high, an' we'll ride the elevator.

Starting his engine, the DRIVER looks for her in the mirror but sees GERTIE.

DRIVER
Not like Kentucky, huh?

ENOCH
How'd you know where we was from?

The eyes in the mirror stay on GERTIE.

DRIVER
I've met youse atta station through two world wars. An' I bet youse goin' back pretty soon with money saved t' buy a farm, right? One a' them big bluegrass farms.

He laughs derisively. In the mirror, GERTIE looks unsmiling away.

35 GERTIE'S POV: STREET

Moving past the window is a great blur of traffic: red lights, yellow lights, big trucks, buses, tall buildings. The urban world: a total contrast to Kentucky.

36 INT: CAB:

All the heads are turned, looking out in wonder.

37 EXT: STREET

A train rumbles across the street ahead of them; the cab has stopped at a level-crossing. The flatbeds are loaded with guns, trucks, tanks. Snow whirls across the window; then it and the inside of the cab are lit by a sudden reddish glow.

38 INT: CAB

ENOCH
They's a fire!

DRIVER
That's melted steel, bub - they're makin' a pour. Get used t'it - that steel plant'll be y'r nextdoor neighbour at Merry Hill.

The cab moves off again.

ENOCH
Is it a high hill?

DRIVER (laughs)
Oh, it'll be a mountain - covered in cat-tails an' weepin' willers.

ENOCH
Weepin' willers don't grow on hills.

DRIVER

Detroit willers grows on Detroit hills.

Suddenly from the red-glowing world outside there's a terrible threatening roar - a plane flying low over the road. CASSIE ducks into GERTIE's shoulder, whimpering.

DRIVER (shouting over)

Boy - if one a' them planes ever drops, it's goodbye Merry Hill and all a' you with it.

GERTIE (incredulous)

This is it?

DRIVER

This is it, lady.

39 EXT: MERRY HILL HOUSING PROJECT - GREY DAYLIGHT

A housing project with rows and rows of tacky prefab houses. The cab turns into a dirty littered alley and we pan along identical house-fronts in a row, each with a glassed-in front door, two little windows, a small coalshed on the strip of grubby snow in front. Each numbered: 18908, 18909, 18910 -- 18911. Their house. It's second from the end. Beyond the end house is a high board fence and what looks like an empty overgrown field.

They climb out of the cab and stare in silence. All at once there's a huge rushing noise, and beyond the board fence, very close, an express train hurtles by.

40 INT: THE NEVELS KITCHEN - DAY

The front door leads directly into it. With all their baggage piled inside, it seems small as a closet. GERTIE feels like a trapped animal. Chatter and bangings are heard off, as the children explore. CLYTIE and REUBEN come in from a back room, CLYTIE close to tears.

CLYTIE

Mom - it's so little--

GERTIE holds out her arms and they stand for a moment together. REUBEN, stoical, hoists the trunk and takes it into the back room; then calls.

REUBEN (V.O.)

Mom - come look!

CLOSE-UP: A FROSTED WINDOW

REUBEN's hand is rubbing a gap in the frost. Through smoke and mist there's a humped shape over beyond the fence.

REUBEN (V.O. - excited)

There is a hill!

CLOSE-UP: GERTIE looks out with him.

CLOSE-UP: WINDOW:
The smoke clears, and the 'hill' is clearly visible as
a huge pile of coal.

REUBEN (defeated)
No there ain't.

GERTIE (gently)
We ain't here f'r long, honey.

Shrieks come from the other room, and she goes back through
the doorway to the kitchen.
AMOS, dripping wet, runs wailing to her, with ENOCH
following helpless with laughter.

ENOCH
He clumb into this box, Mom, an' pressed a
switch, an' water squirted all over --

GERTIE
Oh honey --

She pulls off AMOS' wet jacket.

ENOCH
It's freezin', Mom - light the stove.

GERTIE surveys the gas stove. For once she is totally
at a loss.

GERTIE
I dunno how.

ENOCH (confident)
's easy. Look - "On".

He turns on a gas tap; hands GERTIE a box of matches from
the stove top. Gingerly she strikes a match and then opens
the oven. Gas has built up inside; there's a bang, and she
jumps back. CLYTIE turns off the tap. REUBEN is investigating
a small iron heating stove against a wall.

REUBEN
They's coal here, but no kindlin'.

CASSIE comes in from one of the bedrooms .

CASSIE
Mom, Miz Cally Lou don't like it here.

AMOS
Mommie, I'm co-old....

GERTIE

C'mon, jump around a bit - it'll warm y' up.

She starts them jumping, and they begin to laugh; but suddenly a banging comes from the side wall, and a muffled booming voice.

VOICE (VICTOR)

Shut the racket, kids - I gotta sleep!

Everyone freezes.

ENOCH (whispering)

Why's he sleepin' in the daytime?

CLYTIE

Ssh - maybe he's sick.

AMOS lets out a wail of fright; CASSIE follows suit. More banging.

VICTOR (louder)

Can it, willya! I calla cops -- I gotta sleep!

GERTIE (yelling back desperately)

They's afeared an' they's cold!

VICTOR

So build 'em a fire!

GERTIE

I cain't find no kinlin'.

VICTOR (an exasperated growl)

They's wood in my shed. But y' gotta split it.

GERTIE

Much obliged.

41 EXT: VICTOR'S WOODSHED - DAY

Out in the grimy snow, GERTIE reaches into the shed, finds chunks of wood and an old hatchet. The wood is clean maple; for a moment she smells a chunk, feels it, like a sculptor handling a piece of stone. Then she starts splitting it. She doesn't notice the small red-headed boy FRANKIE DALY watching her, standing drinking a Coke, until he speaks.

FRANKIE DALY

You took that outa Victor's shed - he'll getcha.

GERTIE

He knows. I gotta get my younguns warm.

FRANKIE

Ma keeps th'oven on when her's got no coal.

He smashes his Coke bottle deliberately on the sidewalk.

That wood's wet. Y're a hillbilly, ain'tcha?

42 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - DAY

CLYTIE and CASSIE and AMOS are sitting layered like a sandwich with their three sets of feet in the oven, eating slices of bread. ENOCH beams at GERTIE as she comes back in.

ENOCH (proud)

I lit it, Mom. An' we found some stuff
Pop left.

He is pouring milk from a bottle into a row of mugs on the counter. CASSIE reaches for one and drinks. REUBEN has his knife out; he takes the kindling sticks from GERTIE and begins slicing them smaller.

CASSIE

Tastes funny.

CLYTIE

It's pasteurized, silly. Like the schoolbook said.

GERTIE

They's a cow behind it somewheres. Drink it.

There's a knock at the door and SOPHRONIE MEANWELL comes in. She's a startling sight: blonde curls, sleazy pink nightie, blue nylon robe embroidered with peacocks, toeless gold slippers, red toenails. Cigarette dangling from mouth; a pan of cornbread in one hand and a covered pot in the other. With her (opening and closing the door) is a small skinny blonde 7-year-old, WHEATEYE.

SOPHRONIE (nonstop)

The beans ain't much - I didn't have no pork an' CLOVIS don't have ration points yet. Hadda use a bit a' bacon grease. I'm plum ashamed a myself - told Clovis I'd start you'ns a fire when I got up 's mornin' t' git the boys off t' school - an' then I fell right back asleep agin till Wheateye come yellin' you'd come.

WHEATEYE

Y' said y'd knock my head off if I woke y' up agin.

SOPHRONIE, having put the pan and pot on the table while prattling, wallops her amiably.

GERTIE

It sure is good a' you t' go to all this trouble.

SOPHRONIE

Well, li e I said t' Whit last night, a body's gotta have somethin' t' make 'em think a' home when they find theirselves in this dump.

ENOCH (indicating the wall)

You live with that man that yells?

SOPHRONIE

Oh, that's Victor - he's on nights at the steel plant. Don't you pay him no mind - he's all bark. We live that side. My man works with y'r Daddie. I'm Sophronie Meanwell. You'uns dig in now 'fore this all gits cold.

CLOSE-UP of her hands as she takes the lid off a full, steaming pot of beans.

CLOSE-UP of the same pot almost empty, and the pan of cornbread with one slice left in it.

GERTIE is rinsing plates at the sink; REUBEN putting coal on the stove, which now glows.

CLYTIE

Wasn't she dressed pretty, Mom?

GERTIE (thoughtful)

Mebbe I did oughta be here with y'r Daddie.

CLYTIE

Why?

GERTIE

It's gettin' awful stuffy in here.

REUBEN

The winders don't open - I tried.

Shrieks suddenly from the bathroom. GERTIE drops a pot and bolts.

43 INT: BATHROOM

AMOS, pants round his ankles, is standing in front of the toilet clutching his crotch and howling. ENOCH is at the basin running both taps. GERTIE appears in the doorway.

ENOCH (matter -of-fact)

The seat fell back on 'm.

GERTIE

Here, honey, lemme look.

She sits on the toilet facing AMOS. There's a sudden blast of idiot radio jungle from Off. ENOCH dives for the door.

44 INT: A BEDROOM

CASSIE has discovered the radio. She stands awestruck before it. ENOCH and REUBEN appear behind her.

ENOCH

I know how it works.

He turns a knob and the volume increases. Again there's a desperate banging on the wall.

VICTOR'S VOICE

Shut the racket -- I calla cops!

45 INT: BATHROOM

GERTIE (shouting)

Turn that thing off!

(Then to AMOS)

You ain't hurt, honey - jus' scared. Pull y'r pants up.

Leaving him, she collides with CLYTIE in the passage. The radio switches off. A door slams.

CLOVIS (V.O.)

Anybody home?

CLYTIE squeals and runs; the kids come piling out of bedroom and bathroom, barging past GERTIE.

46 INT: KITCHEN

CLOVIS is swinging CLYTIE round in a circle, feet off the ground - "How's my girl?" The other children mob him. He grins at GERTIE.

CLOVIS

Hi Gert - supper ready?

FADE TO:

CLOVIS at the table. Children round him, the mood sombre. He pushes his plate aside without enthusiasm; it has rubbery whites of fried egg left on it. GERTIE eyes him from the sink, where she's standing (there being no space at the table) eating beans and a fried egg on a plate.

GERTIE ;

Y' done real well, Clovis - t' buy s' much stuff, an' send us the truck money besides.

CLOVIS
Law, woman, y' surel;y don't think I paid
f'r all this?

GERTIE stops eating.

GERTIE
How much we owe?

CLOVIS
Now come on, Gert. I'm makin' big money.
Y' know what my pay check'll be this week?
Better'n a hundred dollars.

CLYTIE (gasps)
Pop - we're rich!

ENOCH
A hundred dollars? --

CLOVIS
Well, recollect I don't make that every week -
an' that's afore union dues, an' taxes an'
all. It ain't no fortune. Took real savin'
t' git a down payment on all this and on a car.

He beams as the children hoot with delight.

GERTIE stands appalled. Her fried egg slides unnoticed
from the plate into the sink.

48 INT: CLOVIS AND GERTIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOVIS is in bed, GERTIE taking off her underwear with
modest wriggles under her nightdress. They speak in
whispers. GERTIE climbs into bed.

GERTIE
Clovis - you got all these debts afore
we even come - how you gonna manage with
me an' the younguns here?

CLOVIS
Ah Gert - I missed you.

He reaches for her, begins to make love to her.
Suddenly a train roars by, thunderous, shaking the
house. They both jump.
Pause.

They turn to one another - and in the other bedrooms
AMOS and CASSIE begin to wail.

CLOVIS ;
Shit.

GERTIE pushes back her side of the covers.

49 INT: BACK ROOM

AMOS is on a cot. GERTIE tucks him in; turns to leave.

50 INT: CLOVIS AND GERTIE BEDROOM

GERTIE's getting back into bed.

GERTIE (hissing)
Clovis, they ain't room t' breathe in
this place!

He doesn't answer; reaches for her again. All at once there's a sound of muffled pounding from somewhere, and through the wall from the house nextdoor, sounding about three inches from their heads, they hear WHIT MEANWELL's voice.

WHIT (V.O.)) --
For Chrissake - what y' doin' in there?

There's an inaudible murmur of reply.

: What?

Mumble mumble.

Not now, Sophronie, not now--

GERTIE and CLOVIS, frozen, look at one another wide-eyed. Then they begin to laugh. He buries his face in her neck; she strokes the back of his head, but her own face is disturbed, no longer laughing.

FADE TO:

50 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

The kitchen looks lived-in now. The children and GERTIE are in a flurry of dressing for the first day of school, in new snowpants, boots etc. CLYTIE and ENOCH are excited, CASSIE apprehensive, REUBEN silent. ENOCH is hovering by the glassed front door.

ENOCH
Mom, the Daly kids is leavin' - we'll be late!

GERTIE
But Sophronie said eight-thirty - it's only
just past eight --

She's too late; ENOCH has run outside. Looking through the window she sees a dumbshow.

52 EXT: THE ALLEY GERTIE'S POV

ENOCH bounces up to the red-head FRANKIE DALY and his six brothers and sisters; three of the boys confront him, hostile, jeering. One boy trips him; his new cap falls off; another boy throws it in a trash can.

GERTIE opens the door and hears the voices.

FRANKIE DALY

-- cause you ain't Cath'lic, that's why!

JIMMIE DALY

Go t' y'r public school, hillbilly, with the niggers an' the Jews!

ENOCH rescues his cap as they leave, and stands there bewildered.

53 INT: KITCHEN

GERTIE turns back to the room, sees that CLYTIE has zippered the last child; takes her split basket.

CLYTIE

Mom, I don't think people up here carries baskets.

GERTIE

I do.

There's the sound of a train rushing by.

54 EXT : THE ALLEY

ENOCH stands watching the train disappear; then turns as GILBERT and CLAUDE-JEAN MEANWELL, both tow-heads, pile out of their house and towards the other end of the alley.

CLAUDE-JEAN

C'mon, kids, ain'tcha comin' t' school?

ENOCH's face lights up and he runs after them; so does CLYTIE. REUBEN goes more slowly. GERTIE passes the MEANWELL door with AMOS and CASSIE clinging to her. SOPHRONIE puts her head out, cigarette dangling, bathrobe drooping.

SOPHRONIE

Here Gert - y' don' wanna drag him all that way. C'mon Amos honey - come play with Wheateye.

GERTIE

Ain't Wheateye goin' t' school?

SOPHRONIE

Second shift. They got more kids than space. Amos? Wanna cookie?

Amos trots to her, beaming.

55 EXT: STREET - DAY

Along a street roaring with cars, buses, trucks, (two juggernaut trailer trucks labelled DANGER,) GERTIE walks CASSIE in a river of scurrying children. They stop at a crossing, controlled by older boys and girls with armbands and STOP signs.

CASSIE (sniffling)
Mommie, I wanna go home.

GERTIE
Law, honey, school is the prettiest place.
You'll see - they'll be a big yard t' play
games, an' a big fine lunch room, an' a
room with nothin' but books.....

The surrounding children are listening; some snigger.
Beside GERTIE is a boy about ENOCH's age with a smaller
brother in tow; competent, serious.

BOY
Y' oughtn't t' tell her such big lies, lady.
He pulls a couple of strips of bubble-gum from his pocket,
gives them to CASSIE.

Here kid. Don't be scared -- kinnergarten's nice.
He takes her other hand as the crossing-guards shout and the
crowd moves off.

56 EXT: BLUE SKY: THE STARS AND STRIPES FLYING PROUDLY
FROM A FLAGPOLE

But from it we pan slowly down across a huge awful grimy
building like a penitentiary, behind a high wire fence.
Children are filing in through the gate, across a playground
almost filled with ramshackle "temporary classrooms".
GERTIE stands beside the gate looking at it, with CASSIE,
the BUBBLE-GUM boy and his brother.

BUBBLE GUM BOY
C'mon -- kinnergarten's this way.

57 INT: SCHOOL CLASSROOM

GERTIE and CASSIE come hesitantly through the door of a
room filled with more than fifty noisy five-year-olds, of
widely assorted races. GERTIE blinks at the sight of the
teacher; MISS VASHINSKI: young, high-piled curls, heavy
make-up, swinging ear-rings. She is crouched beside a
little dark-eyed boy.

MISS VASHINSKI
Garcia? Is that how to say it -- Garcia?

Silence. GARCIA gazes deadpan, mute.

SMALL GIRL
He don't know English, Miss. I seen him
on our street -- he won't play or nothin'.

SMALL BOY
He's dumb -- he's a dummy!

MISS VASHINSKI
Michael -- stop that! Garcia is going to
be our friend.

She catches GERTIE's eye, smiles, stands up, with a
protective hand still on GARCIA's shoulder.

It takes a while when they don't understand
a word.
(Smiling at CASSIE)
Have you come to join us?

GERTIE
This is Cassie. Keziah Marie.

MISS VASHINSKI
Hallo, Cassie. I'm going to tell'a story in
a minute -- you're just in time.

CASSIE shrinks back against GERTIE. GERTIE has that taut,
guilty look of all mothers about to leave a child alone at
school for the first time. MISS VASHINSKI has seen it a
thousand times before. She spots the gum in CASSIE's
mittened fingers.

And on your first day, we let you chew your
gum. Look -- you can unwrap it easier if you
take off your mittens.

CASSIE is handing the gum to GERTIE while she takes off
her mittens, when a small voice comes from the statue-like
unsmiling GARCIA.

GARCIA
Chicle?

MISS VASHINSKI (genuine pleasure)
Garcia spoke to us!

GERTIE
Give 'm a piece, Cassie.

Mittens off, CASSIE hands GARCIA a piece of gum.

MISS VASHINSKI
Thank you, Garcia. (Slowly) Thank - you.

GARCIA (a smile breaking)
Thank - you.

The two of them stand together unwrapping their gum.
MISS VASHINSKI, taking off CASSIE's coat, smiles and nods
her head at GERTIE. Reluctantly GERTIE turns to go.

GERTIE
G'bye, Cassie-Marie.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE leaving, half-pleased, half-worried.
She looks back.

CASSIE and GARCIA together: GARCIA blowing a huge expert
bubble with his gum; CASSIE big-eyed, with hers on her lips,
trying unsuccessfully to do the same.

58 INT: SCHOOL CORRIDOR
GERTIE walks down a crowded corridor; asks someone the way;
they point.

59 INT: SCHOOL OFFICE

GERTIE hovers by the door. Two 17-year-old girls are
answering telephones. A small bespectacled man is standing
beside their desk, waiting, a sheaf of papers in his hand.
He's MR SKYROS.

GIRL (into telephone)
But the principal isn't here right now
.....Mrs Zigorski, talk slower....
(to the other girl)
Hey Suse, y'unnerstand Hungarian? Gotta be
Hungarian - it ain't Polish, ain't Ukrainian.

SUSE
Greek maybe?

SKYROS (to GERTIE)
Can I be of help?

GERTIE
I gotta sign my kids up.

SUSE
Name?

GERTIE
Nevels.

SUSE begins looking through file cards. MR SKYROS is gazing
admiringly at the basket on GERTIE's arm.

SKYROS
Tell me. is that Polish?

GERTIE (shakes her head)
I'm from Kentucky.

SKYROS
It's beautiful - those are strips of wood?

GERTIE (handing it over)
White oak splints. Y' know - y' split 'em like
house shakes, only finer- way finer.

CLOSE-UP of SKYROS' fingers on the basket; they find a
small detailed carving of acorns and oak leaf on the handle.

SKYROS
You carve?

GERTIE
Y'- mean whittle? Axe handles an' such - an'
foolishness like a doll f'r a youngun.

SUSE hands her some forms, and a pen.

SUSE
Fill these out, Miz Nevels?

GERTIE
What time'll they git home?

SUSE
They'll be home around noon f'r lunch.

GERTIE
Y' mean they ain't no school lunch?

SUSE
Ain't no place t' eat. An' the little 'uns don't
come but half a day nohow. (She sighs) This school
ain't got nothin' but teachers an' kids.

SKYROS
Too few of one and too many of the other. Mrs
Nevels - my name's Skyros. Arts and Crafts. I
wonder - might I borrow your basket for a few days
- to show the children?

GERTIE is filling out the forms, tongue between teeth.

GERTIE
I've left four younguns here - guess I c'n
leave an ol' split basket.

SKYROS
The children will be all right. They will -
adjust.

GERTIE
Adjust?

SKYROS
Learn to get along - be like the others.

GERTIE
Oh. I want 'em t' be happy, but I don't know
as I want 'em to.....leastways not too much.

SKYROS
Don't worry. They'll adjust - better than
their mother, perhaps.

Watching her write, he adds suddenly:

You have good hands.

GERTIE (laughs)
Good f'r workin'.

SKYROS
Strong. An artist's hands. I should like to
see one of your dolls.
Leaving the room he holds up the basket.
Thank you for the basket.

GERTIE looks at her hands.

60 MONTAGE of the hands, taking us through days of life in
the Alley.
Hands with a knife, whittling a piece of VICTOR's kindling
into a rounded shape.
Scrubbing the kitchen floor.
Wringing out a wet sheet at the sink.
Holding a comb, parting CLYTIE's hair.
Tucking in CASSIE at night.
Peeling a potato - then very fast carving it into a
Hallowe'en face - then cutting it into four.
Pulling up a quilt round CLOVIS' sleeping shoulders.
Whittling again - the piece of wood has become a
beautifully detailed chickadee.
The hands whittle more slowly, the knife falls.
The hands at rest, lying on GERTIE's lap.

CUT TO:

61 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN
GERTIE in that position, sitting asleep, hands and chickadee
on lap. Suddenly she jerks awake as sounds come from the
girls' bedroom. It's a girl's voice: muffled sobbing.

62 INT: BEDROOM

GERTIE goes quickly and silently into the bedroom, but both children are fast asleep; the sobbing is coming through the wall. She turns to go, but can't bear it; turns again and taps softly on the wall.

GERTIE (low)

C'n I help?

It's MAX DUBOWSKI crying. GERTIE hasn't met her yet.

Pause.

MAX (V.O.)

Nobody c'n help.

GERTIE

Mebbe y'll get t' go home soon. Mebbe we all will. The war won't last forever.

MAX

This one will.

GERTIE thinks for a moment, looking at her children. Then she quotes; unpretentiously, but like a benediction.

GERTIE

"The Lord bless thee and keep thee--the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and give thee peace."

MAX

You a Cath'lic?

GERTIE (smiling)

No, I ain't. Try t' sleep.

— MAX (like a child)

I need a dream. What d'y' dream about?

GERTIE

Green leaves. Spring.

MAX

Spring. I like that. Thanks.

GERTIE sits silent for a moment, gazing unseeing at the wall.

63 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

The light is dim and grey outside the windows. Quick and practised now, the children are getting ready for school. CLYTIE is pulling on CASSIE's boots, GERTIE filling CLOVIS' lunchbox. CLOVIS at the table finishing breakfast.

ENOCH

CASSIE needs milk money today.

CLYTIE

It's the Christmas basket drive this week, Mom -
me an' Reuben should take somethin'.

GERTIE opens a drawer and gives CASSIE money; reaches to
a shelf and gives CLYTIE a can of beans, REUBEN a can of
tomatoes.

ENOCH

An' we gotta have money f'r TB seals, Mom -
a dime each at least.

GERTIE

Y' think we're made a' money?

CLOVIS (standing)

C'mon now, Gert - if spendin' a nickel's gonna
be like losin' a drop a' blood, y'll be bled
dry in no time.

REUBEN and ENOCH kiss her and leave; GERTIE gives CASSIE
her mittens and the whittled chickadee.

GERTIE

Here - you take that to the Christmas
basket drive.

CLYTIE

Oh Mom - they won't want that.

But CASSIE carries it proudly off. WHIT MEANWELL puts his
head in the door as they leave.

WHIT

Cloviv? Mornin', Gert.

GERTIE

He's comin'. How's Sophronie?

WHIT

Banged herself up at the plant yesterday -
she's okay though. Y'r man'll be late tonight,
Gert - we got a union meetin'.

CLOVIS (proudly, leaving)

Bender's gonna be there.

GERTIE

Who's Bender?

WHIT

Mister Union.

As GERTIE is leaving the house with AMOS, basket on arm, MAX DUBOWSKI comes down her steps nextdoor: dark, elfin, about 19 years old. GERTIE avoids her eye, embarrassed, but MAX catches up to her.

MAX (cheerful)

That was a good dream.

GERTIE nods awkwardly!

I'm Max Dubowski - you're Gertie Nevels, ain'tcha?
I got some stuff Railway Express left for y'
yesterday. This y'r youngest?

GERTIE

Amos.

MAX

He's cute. Hi, Amos.

65 EXT: JOE'S VEGETABLE TRUCK, IN THE ALLEY

At the end of the alley (away from the trains) they reach the truck of JOE the vegetable man, with women round it buying: MRS DALY, small, feisty, red-headed; large dark MRS BOMMARITA; small silent MRS SAITO, very Japanese, and SOPHRONIE, barely recognisable in boots and blue jeans but with a bandaged forehead.

MAX

Whatcha do t' y'r head?

SOPHRONIE

Fell off that damn merrygoround.

GERTIE

What's a merrygoround?

MAX (grins)

Thing that goes round an' round -- what else?
Joe, I want green beans - two pounds. An' a
cauliflower, an' two acorn squash. Oh an' oranges,
a dozen.

SOPHRONIE

It's in the factory. Like assembly, only it goes
round - y' walk with it. I got dizzy.

Behind her back, MAX lifts an imaginary glass to GERTIE.

MAX

A body c'd drop dead one end a' old man Flint's
assembly line an' walk right out a-shovellin' coal
in Hell at th'other. Y' c'n keep that job. Only
danger waitressin' is a blue ass, from the pinchin'.
Hey - whatcha dream about last night?

SOPHRONIE
Clark Gable.

MAX gives her a look that says "Come off it."

MAX
He ain't in my book.

She's taking vegetables as JOE hands them to her.

SOPHRONIE
Max plays the numbers. Gets 'em out of some
crazy dream book. She's gonna make her fortune
- hah! Ain'tcha gonna ask Gert f'r one?

MAX (smiles at GERTIE)
I already did. She's gonna be lucky f'r me.

AMOS comes tugging at GERTIE's arm, infected by the small
DALY children around him gobbling fruit.

AMOS
Grapes, Mommie, I want grapes - buy some
grapes, Mom!

JOE (to GERTIE. Very Italian)
You want?

GERTIE shakes her head. PATRICK DALY, about 5, red-headed,
comes to AMOS with his hands full of grapes.

PATRICK
Here kid - have some.
AMOS takes a fistful before GERTIE notices, and stuffs
his mouth full.

JOE
Missus?

GERTIE
Two cabbages. An' potatoes.

JOE
How many pound?

GERTIE
How many in a pound?

Heads turn in amusement. JOE raises his eyebrows, picks up
a large potato and weighs it with elaborate care; holds it
up to GERTIE.

GERTIE (apologetically)
Ten pound. I never bought 'em before - we
grew everythin'.

As he begins weighing potatoes, JOE reaches below the scale, brings out a package and hands it to MAX.

JOE
Four ninety-three.

MAX
You put 'em up on me agin. Y're a reg'lar Flint.

JOE (shrugs)
No want, no buy.

MAX
Oh, I'll take 'em. What's a nickel, what's a dollar, what's a million dollars? Flint makes that every day, don't he, Joe? Like my Pa used t' say, blood's the cheapest thing on earth, but they's money in it.

JOE
What number y' want?

MAX
I wanta winner, Joe - y' never gimme one.

She gives him a slip of paper. GERTIE looks at the package.

GERTIE (to SOPHRONIE)
What is it?

SOPHRONIE
Cigarettes. Black market.

GERTIE watches MAX paying her bill, collecting armfuls of vegetables and fruit.

GERTIE (in wonder)
How c'n she spend all that?

SOPHRONIE
That dumb Polack she's married to weighs two-fifty at least. Y' feed 'em or y' lose 'em. Here Max, wanna hand?

She and MAX go up the alley, laden. GERTIE tugs AMOS out of their way; he's been running round with the small DALYS making car noises.

AMOS
Grapes, Mom - buy grapes!

GERTIE hushes him, pays her bill. JOE is alone now; she looks at him hesitantly.

GERTIE
They's somethin' I wanted t' ask you.

JOE (curt)
Cigarettes all gone.

GERTIE
No - I wondered - I jus' got here. Did it take you long t' - well, t' like it, this country?

JOE smiles without mirth, bangs up the tailgate.

JOE
I did not come to like.

66 EXT: THE ALLEY - MAX'S STEPS - DAY

GERTIE and AMOS are walking home. MAX waves from her door.

MAX
Gertie!. Come on in!

67 INT: DUBOWSKIS KITCHEN

MAX's kitchen is far better furnished than GERTIE's: good chairs, pretty tablecloth, icons and crucifixes and religious pictures all round the walls - a more exotic version of MRS KENDRICK's sanctuary. SOPHRONIE is drinking coffee at the table. WHEATEYE scrambles up from the floor and drags AMOS off to play in ano her room. On the floor are a big battered tin trunk and the cherrywood block, with luggage labels pasted all over its faceless head.

MAX
Want some coffee?

GERTIE
No thanks.

She puts down her basket and makes a beeline for the block; touching it, feeling it, peeling off the labels.

SOPHRONIE
Seems like all he has t' do is raise his head an' there he'd be.

MAX
Ain't it somethin'? Gives me the willies.

SOPHRONIE (to GERTIE)
You make that?

GERTIE nods, still down communing with the block.

GERTIE
I want him laughin'.

MAX looks round at the crucifixes on the walls.

MAX
Not like this bunch. It's a bloody morgue.

SOPHRONIE (quietly)
You got a good steady man.

WHEATEYE appears in the bedroom doorway with AMOS, a rosary dangling from her fingers.

WHEATEYE
Ma, lookit the pretty necklace.

MAX (laconic)
That's one a' Victor's rosaries.

SOPHRONIE
F'r God's sake, Wheateye --

She dives at WHEATEYE and they disappear. MAX begins pouring herself more coffee, lighting a cigarette.

MAX
He's got dozens of 'em.

GERTIE
Your husband?

MAX
Depends who y're listenin' to. Not if y' talk t' his mother.

GERTIE (baffled)
Why?

MAX
'Cause we wasn't married Cath'lic. We was in a hurry. I was pregnant.

GERTIE
Oh.

MAX
My baby lived threee days. Victor's Mom said it was a judgement. I ain't goin' near her goddam church.

SOPHRONIE comes back in over the last words.

SOPHRONIE
Wouldn't do no harm.

MAX
We was married legal! Victor knows that - he could shut her up. But he jus' lets the old witch jabber on 'bout me in Polish, Momma's boy - he ain't no man!

The kitchen door opens suddenly and there's VICTOR, immense and grimy, carrying his lunchpail in one hand and a wrapped plant in the other. Silence for a moment.

MAX
You're early.

VICTOR
Ten hours. Enough.
Smiling at her, he puts the plant on the table and pulls off the paper, revealing a poinsettia.

GERTIE
That's pretty.

MAX
Victor, y' wanna give Gertie here a hand with this stuff come f'r her?

68 CLOSE-UP of the cherrywood block, swaying as VICTOR walks with it on his shoulder.

69 INT: THE NEVELS KITCHEN

VICTOR stands surveying the block on the floor.

VICTOR
Allatime she want a genuine hand-carved crucifix.

GERTIE (blank)
Who?

VICTOR
My Mom. You make one?

GERTIE
I don't know nothin' 'bout such.

VICTOR
You carve good - I pay good. Fifteen, maybe twenty dollar. Make it that big.

He shows her, hands apart. ;

GERTIE
Well -- if it ain't no good you don't hafta take it.

VICTOR
It'll be good.

He pulls out his wallet and gives her a ten-dollar bill.

Down payment.

GERTIE stares at the money as he leaves; then pushes it deep into her coat pocket, pushing the lining beneath flat just as she did in Kentucky. She crouches for a moment beside the cherrywood block, staring at its faceless head as if looking for somethin g, peeling off the last of the labels.

70 FADE TO:
INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - DAY

GERTIE in different clothes is working on the block, carving the beginning of the chin line. Sunlight streaming in. The table is set for supper; pots simmer on the stove.

SPLAT! A snowball flattens against the window.

GERTIE gets up and crosses to look out.

71 EXT: THE ALLEY
GERTIE's POV:

The alley is full of shouting, running children, flying snowballs. The bigger DALY and BOMMARITA boys are fleeing up the alley pursued by yells and snowballs from ENOCH, GILBERT and CLAUDE-JEAN and the BUBBLE-GUM BOY. WHEATEYE is up on her coalshed roof, yelling down at PATRICK and FRANKIE DALY, who are flingin g handfuls of snow at her-but desist as SOPHRONIE comes out on to her top step with a coat over her bathrobe.

WHEATEYE
Yah, mother-suckers - my brothers licked
your brothers -

FRANKIE (retreating)
You jus' wait, hillbilly! Hillbilly,
hillbilly - y'r ma ain't got no shoes --

GERTIE comes out of her front door. SOPHRONIE waves to her.

SOPHRONIE
Looks like our kids cleaned up on the
Dalys f'r once!

ENOCH and his group dance about in triumph. But suddenly from behind the end unit, the big DALY and BOMMARITA boys come running, laden with chunks of ice, brushing past REUBEN, who is coming down the alley from school. They let fly; ENOCH gets a hard icy ball full in the face and stumbles; the BUBBLE-GUM BOY pauses to help. The attackers rush them: arms and legs whirl, snow flies. CHRISTOPHER DALY, snarling, crouching over ENOCH, raises a hand with a lump of coal in it.

CLOSE-UP OF REUBEN, seeing.

REUBEN runs, dropping his school bag; dives into the writhing heap and pulls CHRISTOPHER off ENOCH, pinning his arm behind his back. The DALY door opens and PATRICK and FRANKIS rush out with MR DALY, in shirtsleeves and suspenders: fat, furious, half-drunk. He grabs REUBEN.

MR DALY

Leggo, you hillbilly bastard -- beatin' up on a little kid half y'r size --

CLOSE-UP of CHRISTOPHER's hand quietly dropping the lump of coal.

CHRISTOPHER (whining)

Pa, he hurt me, Pa --

MR DALY hits REUBEN across the face.

GERTIE starts forward to cross the street. SOPHRONIE hurries across and grabs her arm.

SOPHRONIE

Don't go a-mixin' in it, now - he'll call the cops.

Little MRS DALY has appeared at her door. She tries to draw her husband back; he flails at her, knocking her aside, and shakes his fist under REUBEN's nose.

MR DALY

Youse is in Detroit now, kid, y' gotta mind the law - we got rules f'r garbage like you --

REUBEN's stoicism suddenly cracks and he wrenches himself away and jumps back, angry, dangerous.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE, alarmed.

CLOSE-UP of REUBEN's hand going to his pocket for his knife.

GERTIE rushes across and grabs his arm.

GERTIE
No, Reuben!

She pulls him towards the house; resisting, he yells over his shoulder at DALY.

REUBEN
I didn't hit y'r youngun - they ganged up on my brother - they had a lump a' coal --

MR DALY
Y're lyin!

GERTIE
No he ain't - I seen it.

MR DALY
You call me a liar, y' hillbilly bitch, an' I'll have y' run in - the cops listen t' Joseph Daly, see --

A soft dirty snowball splatters his cheek; he whirls furiously.

Who threw that?

WHEATEYE yells from her coalshed roof.

WHEATEYE
I did, Mr Daly, gee I'm sorry, I didn't mean t' hitcha - 's agin the law t' throw snowballs?

MR DALY
Y' little bitch--

ENOCH
She's just a little girl - she cain't throw straight --

WHEATEYE
I can too!

FRANKIE DALY
Cops! Here's the cops!

Amongst children further up the alley a police cruiser has stopped; a policeman is leaning out asking questions.

MR DALY (yelling at GERTIE)
See - now y'll get a ride!

BUBBLE-GUM BOY (beside GERTIE)
Cops don't gitcha f'r little old fusses.

Children are running to and fro.

GERTIE (calling, defiant)
If it's me they're a-huntin', tell 'em I'm
right here.

BUBBLE-GUM BOY
They ain't f'r you, lady.
(He shouts)
Whatta they want?

CLAUDE-JEAN
They're lookin' f'r fifteen-oh-ten Merry Hill.

BUBBLE-GUM BOY
That's my house!

He runs off in panic.

SOPHRONIE
Hope it ain't bad news. His pa's off fightin'
the Japs. I know her - she's on the shift
after mine. Runs a press.

She shakes her head. GERTIE looks round for REUBEN. He's
gone.

77 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

As GERTIE comes in from outside, REUBEN comes flinging across
the room, still in his jacket; nearly collides with her.

REUBEN (cold)
I didn't do nothin'.

His face crumples.

You grabbin' me like a little kid, in
front a' everyone--

GERTIE
Honey, he'd bin drinkin'. An' - this is Detroit.
Y're gonna have t' quit carryin' a knife.

REUBEN (furious)
I ain't a-quittin' nothin'! I ain't makin'
myself over f'r Detroit - standin' takin'
people's lies - like you done!

He whirls out of the street door, brushing past ENOCH as
he comes in.

ENOCH
Pop's home, Pop's home!

GERTIE is surprised. CLOVIS comes in, CASSIE and CLYTIE at his heels. CASSIE is carrying REUBEN's school bag.

GERTIE
You sick?

CLOVIS bangs down his lunchbox.

CLOVIS
Do I look sick? There was a walk-out.

GERTIE gets busy at the stove. CLYTIE is hanging up coats.

GERTIE
What's that - a walk-out?

CLOVIS
F'r God's sake, Gert - everyone walks off the job. It was protest. Some woman got caught in her press.

CLYTIE
Was she hurt bad?

CLOVIS
Kilt.

ENOCH
We had a big snowfight, Pop, an' Mr Daly yelled at Reuben.

CLOVIS
Reuben better watch his manners.

ENOCH
Ma - you know that chickadee you give Cassie f'r the basket sale? Mr Skyros paid three dollars f'r it.

GERTIE (astounded)
Three dollars?

CASSIE
An' he says will you make him a jumpin' jack like mine.

GERTIE
We c'n use the money.
She puts a plate in front of CLOVIS.
Y'r pa's hungry - I'll feed you all in a little while.

CLOVIS
What's this?

GERTIE
Fish. Only thing wasn't sky-high at the market.

She opens his lunchbox, saving the leftovers.

Clovis - when them others walked off, couldn't you ha' stayed?

CLOVIS
Y' want me t' come home with a busted nose? When the union says walk, y' gotta walk.
He spits out a mouthful, throws down his fork.

This grub ain't fittin' fer a dawg - what's got into y'r cookin'? Y' got plenty t' spend, an' all our rations --

GERTIE
I spent twenty-five dollars f'r food this week, not countin' the milk.

CLOVIS
Twenty-five dollars? Y' cain't feed seven good eaters on that!

As their voices rise, the children begin to melt away into their bedrooms.

GERTIE
What's the use a' livin' like this if a body cain't save somethin'? When we go back home--

CLOVIS (angry)
Save! That's all I've heared since we bin married! Millions a' people don't never save! They buy on time - they ain't allus starvin' their younguns.

GERTIE looks round, but the children have all gone.

GERTIE
I ain't a-starvin' nobody.

CLOVIS
You bin buyin' the cheapest grub y' could. An' look at this place! Cain't y' cover the floor?

GERTIE
I bought curtains.

CLOVIS

Gert - how much you saved outa the money I bin givin' you?

GERTIE (hesitant)

About - about fifty dollars.

CLOVIS jumps up, sending his chair flying, and tips his plate into the sink.

CLOVIS

An' you bin givin' us grub like this - an' lettin' the house go like a pigpen - Gert, all our life I wanted you an' the kids t' have things nice. I bet I'm makin' twice what any man makes back home. Spend it, f'r Chrⁱst's sake! That cookware - look at it! That's the same beat-up ol' pan my mom give us when we was married, t' make do till we got our own!

He seizes the pan on the stove, leaps furiously across the room and hurls it out of the front door.

73 EXT: NEVELS STEPS AND ALLEY - HALF-LIGHT

GERTIE, crying, trying not to, is halfway down her steps in pursuit of the pan. She looks up. A small audience stands there, drawn by their fight: MRS SAITO, MRS BOMMARITA, MRS DALY and assorted kids, VICTOR with a coal bucket in his hand. There's a moment of frozen mutual embarrassment. MRS SAITO picks up the pan from the snow and hands it to GERTIE with a little bow.

GERTIE

Thank you.

CLOSE-UP: Their two hands on the pan in the moment of exchange; then a third hand - small, wrinkled with work - takes it. It's MRS DALY.

MRS DALY

Lemme keep it a bit. When they've had a drop too much, it's not good t' bring the thing back in --not too soon.

She pats GERTIE's arm.

Don't cry - it makes 'em worse. I know.

GERTIE

He ain't drinkin'. He jus' wants - some new pans.....

74 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - DAY

A big white refrigerator looms in the tiny kitchen, its door inscribed in red wax crayon MERRY CHRISTMAS GERT. CLOVIS lies on the floor groping behind it, ENOCH handing him tools. GERTIE is peeling potatoes. On the radio Bing Crosby is singing "White Christmas."

ENOCH

It's a 1942 Icy Heart, Mom - nine an' a half cubic feet!

CLOVIS (muffled)

He give it me real cheap - an' on time too.

His head comes out from behind the monster.

Ain't y' pleased?

GERTIE (trying hard)

It was real sweet a' you, Clovis. I've jus' -' lived a long time without such.

Edging her way past, she opens the little oven and bastes a turkey which only just fits. There's a bang at the door; she goes to open it.

75 EXT: THE ALLEY
GERTIE's POV

The alley is full of children with new toys, showing them off to each other. Sleds, bicycles, guns etc. WHEATEYE waves, pushing a new baby carriage.

WHEATEYE

Lookit my new dress, Miz Nevels!

She opens her coat to show what looks like a pink tutu. MIKE BONMARITA falls through the door, wearing skates.

MIKE

Miz Nevels, can Reuben come skate with me?

76 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

ENOCH

Reuben didn't get his skates, but we gotta wagon--

He seizes a bright red wagon from AMOS and pulls it to the door. AMOS squalls. CASSIE waves a toy boat (carved by GERTIE) in front of him and takes his hand.

CASSIE

C'mon, take Miz Cally Lou sailin' in y'r new boat.

Flinching at all the noise, GERTIE turns off the radio.

ENOCH

Ma, you gotta make her quit that Cally Lou stuff. Some a' the kids is sayin' she's cuckoo.

CLOVIS pulls his head out from behind the Icy Heart.

GERTIE (to ENOCH)

Put y'r coat on if y're goin' out.

77 INT: BOYS BEDROOM

GERTIE comes in; REUBEN is gazing out of the window, a Meccano set lying unopened on his bed.

GERTIE

Mike come f'r y' -- y' wanna go out?

No answer.

Y' c'd show him y'r buildin' set.

REUBEN

Kids' stuff.

GERTIE looks out of the window, following his gaze, and sees a freight train shunting beyond the fence, with two coal cars stencilled KENTUCKY EGG. She turns her head as more noise comes from the other room.

78 INT: KITCHEN

CLYTIE, red with outrage, is holding a new doll and a piece of shiny blue rayon. The doll is wearing a blue dress which has clearly lost its skirt.

CLYTIE

Pop, look what that mean Cassie done! She cut the dress off that fine new doll you give her, an' put it on this ol' thing!

GERTIE sees that 'this ol' thing', under the blue rayon, is the hickory-sprout doll she made for CASSIE at the Tipton Place. CASSIE grabs the doll and runs. CLYTIE goes after her. CLOVIS straightens up, looking after them unhappily, wiping his hands on a rag.

CLOVIS

It's workin'. Y' got an icebox, old woman.

GERTIE goes over and kisses him. Holding her, CLOVIS sighs.

I allus wanted Clytie t' have a nice store-bought doll, but she's too old now. The money I've spent That Cassie, an' Reuben - what did they want?

GERTIE
Maybe they don't want things, Clovis.

He shakes his head; goes over and switches on the radio.
Mr Crosby sings:

"May your hearts be mer-ry and bright
And may all your Christmasses be white....."

FADE TO:

&(INT: KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

GERTIE is putting a demolished turkey carcass into the new refrigerator. The house is quiet, the daylight fading. Christmas music plays softly from the radio still; children's voices faint from one of the bedrooms, playing a game. Through the bedroom door there's a glimpse of CLOVIS, lying fully-dressed on his bed, snoring gently.

GERTIE takes out her knife and a half-finished crucifix, sits at the kitchen table. A train thunders by; she winces, but nobody stirs. She turns on a light. As she does so, she hears a voice raised out in the alley.

SOPHRONIE (off)
Wheateye! Wheateye!

GERTIE looks out.

80 EXT: THE ALLEY - SUNSET LIGHT

GERTIE'S 'POV

WHEATEYE is running from her house, crying. She looks extraordinary: her white hair is half purple, half red, and there are red-purple streaks down her new pink dress. She pauses, looking up and down.

SOPHRONIE comes stumbling down her steps. She has wildly blurred make-up, and a Band-Aid on her forehead; she wears nothing but a pair of red toeless slippers and a flimsy black nightgown torn halfway up the front. She's very drunk.

At the sight of their mother, GILBERT and CLAUDE-JEAN break off a hockey game with the two oldest DALY boys, JOSEPH and CHRISTOPHER, and run to her, GILBERT tottering desperately on his new skates.

SOPHRONIE
Come back, honey! I ain't finished y'r hair!

Getting down the steps, brushing the boys aside, she doesn't see WHEATEYE streak off round the corner.

81 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

GERTIE dives for the door, finds she is barefoot, looks round for her shoes.

82 EXT: ALLEY

SOPHRONIE, still calling for WHEATEYE, is across the alley.

82 EXT: THE ALLEY

SOPHRONIE, still calling for WHEATEYE, has crossed the alley. She wavers up MRS BOMMARITA's steps and bangs on her door. MRS BOMMARITA opens it; goggles.

SOPHRONIE

Miz Bommarita, y' got my Wheateye in there?
Y' see her pretty hair?

MRS BOMMARITA (appalled)

She ain't here.

She slams the door.

83 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

GERTIE is hastily pulling on her boots.

84 EXT: ALLEY

SOPHRONIE slips on the icy steps, stumbling over the nightgown.

SOPHRONIE

Damn.

CLAUDE-JEAN

Mom, please come home.

SOPHRONIE ignores the boys. Treading on the trailing edge, she wriggles deliberately out of her nightgown, until she's wearing nothing but the slippers. GILBERT scrambles up the BOMMARITA steps, bangs on the door.

GILBERT

Please let my mom in. She don't know what she'
doin'.

Suddenly he begins to cry, like a very small child. MRS BOMMARITA opens the door a crack.

MRS BOMMARITA (yelling)

If youse hillbillies don't git away I'll
call the cops!

SOPHRONIE

Who wants in a damn wop's house nohow?

GERTIE comes running across the alley carrying an overcoat; tries to put it round SOPHRONIE, who shrugs it off.

I don't need a coat this time a' day--

She recognises GERTIE; beams.

Merry Chrishmas, Gert!

GILBERT (tearful, pleading)
Oh Miz Nevels--

GERTIE is trying to catch SOPHRONIE in the overcoat, like a matador making passes. The DALY boys are hovering, unhappy, concerned, trying not to look.

CHRISTOPHER DALY
Take her into our house. Our Mom's home.

SOPHRONIE (happily)
Y'r Mom's home?

She blunders to the next door and opens it, calling.

Merry Chrishmas, Mrs Daly!

MRS DALY comes to the door.

MRS DALY
Jesus, Mary and Joseph!

GERTIE
Take her in, quick,

85 INT: THE DALY HOUSE

Inside the house, music is playing on the radio. Humming to it, SOPHRONIE blunders through into the room with the radio, where FRANKIE and two small DALY girls are playing with toys on the floor. She reaches for FRANKIE'S hand.

SOPHRONIE
C'mon Frankie, let's dance--
She stands swaying, singing. FRANKIE looks at her impassively for a moment.

FARNKIE (calling)
Mom, Miz Meanwell's in here with no clothes on.
GERTIE and MRS DALY are in the doorway. SOPHRONIE moves round, trying to dance, but in a step or two it becomes a walk and she's suddenly not laughing.

SOPHRONIE
This damn merrygoround. Round an' round -
y' cain't stop or y'll fall --
She staggers; puts a hand out to GERTIE.
Y' c'n punch y'r eyes out, fallin' - but
I didn't. Gotta keep goin', n' matter what--
She fingers the Band-Aid on her forehead.

GERTIE
Why'n't y' lay down an' rest f'r a moment?

SOPHRONIE
I dasn't - my relief ain't come.

GERTIE pushes MRS DALY forward.

GERTIE
Y'r relief's here - see? C'mon now, lay down,
so's y' c'n get back t' work.

SOPHORNIE stops, leans on GERTIE as she puts the coat
round her. She sags.

SOPHRONIE
Better lay down.....But I didn't fall, did
I? I didn't fall.....

86 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - NIGHT

GERTIE pushes the door open wearily and comes in, putting
down the overcoat. Looks round, taking a deep breath;
picks up a cloth and wipes the red MERRY CHRISTMAS GERT
off the door of the refrigerator.

87 EXT: STREET, BUSY WITH TRAFFIC - DAY

GERTIE, CLYTIE and CASSIE are walking along a crowded
sidewalk. Horns honking; a police car siren. They dodge
hurrying passers-by. GERTIE clutches her coat to her neck.

GERTIE
Clytie, y'll freeze -- y' shoul'da worn
y'r snowpants.

CLYTIE
Oh Mom - only place y' need pants is in the
movies - so's the fellers cain't get their hands
up y'r skirt.

GERTIE (shocked)
Honey --

She looks to see if CASSIE heard, but CASSIE is peering
ahead across the street.

CASSIE
Look Mom, there's a parade.

CLYTIE
That's where Pop works.

88

EXT: FLINT PLANT

THEIR POV, GRADUALLY APPROACHING

The factory gates are locked. Outside are union pickets carrying signs protesting inadequate safety regulations ("ONE WOMAN DIED - HOW MANY MORE?") On an upturned box near the gate, BENDER, the union leader, is haranguing a crowd. His speech is impassioned, the response fierce, but we hear none of the words; only a blur of traffic sound. A few policemen are standing near the edge of the crowd, keeping it from overflowing into the busy street.

Suddenly inside the factory gates four or five cars roar up and stop, and an assortment of grim-faced goons pile

out, some carrying axe handles. The gates swing open and they rush out and begin smashing signs and roughing up the pickets, making for BENDER.

The violence is shocking and abrupt; people scatter; police sirens wail. BENDER disappears into a sea of heaving bodies.

89

EXT: STREET

On the opposite side of the street GERTIE is hurrying the girls along the sidewalk when the door of a parked car swings open and a man tries to jump out, fighting off the restraining hand of the man in the driver's seat.

DRIVER

Not now -- no --

The first man breaks loose, and cannons into GERTIE. It's CLOVIS. He gapes at them.

DRIVER (shouting)

Clovis no -- he'll be okay --

CLOVIS

What you doin' here? Get in, quick.

90

INT: CAR

He bundles them into the back of the car; gets in again beside the driver.

CLYTIE (scared)

We're goin' t' school, Pop -- it's
Open House --

The driver is peering across at the melee, visible now through the windshield. A car screeches off away from it.

DRIVER

Bender's all right- they got him away.

CLOVIS

Thank Christ f'r that.

To GERTIE, he gesticulates at the DRIVER, who is still intent on watching the crowd.

This here's Tom Cooper - friend a' mine.

COOPER

We better git t' headquarters.

He drives off.

CASSIE

Pa, why are those men hitting each other?

CLOVIS

Go by the school, willya? Erie Street.

He turns over his shoulder.

They're bullies, Cassie-Marie. The others is fightin' back.

COOPER

You can't bust a union by busting heads.

CASSIE

What's a union?

CLOVIS

Kinda like a fam'ly - workin' together.

GERTIE looks at him; then back through the car window at — the crowd still fighting outside the Flint Plant.

91

INT: SCHOOL ART ROOM

CLOSE-UP of a table, part of a general display of school art work, where a small array is labelled THE NEVELS FAMILY. Each item is named: a clay dog made by REUBEN, a picture painted by CASSIE of a black tree on a green hill - and three of GERTIE's pieces: the chickadee, a jumping-jack doll, and the borrowed split basket.

GERTIE stares at it all, astonished.

MR SKYROS (V.O.)

We shall return your basket this afternoon.
You see why I kept it so long.

GERTIE looks at him, then at the display.

GERTIE
It's jus' whittlin' foolishness.

SKYROD
The children tell me you're working on
something larger now.

GERTIE
What?

SKYROS
I have no idea. They mentioned cherrywood,
I believe.

GERTIE
Oh - yes.

SKYROS
How big a piece is it?

GERTIE (indicating)
Stands about so. But it ain't near finished.

SKYROS
Might I come and see it one day?

GERTIE
Why - yes, I guess.

MISS VASHINSKI, the kindergarten teacher, has come up
behind him.

MISS VASHINSKI
In Merry Hill. We have the number.
She smiles at GERTIE.

You know Cassie was the only child to paint
a tree?

GERTIE (apologetically)
I guess her readin' ain't too good.

MISS VASHINSKI
Maybe there's a reason for that. The school
doctor's coming on Tuesday morning - could
you be here?

GERTIE (puzzled)
She sick?

MISS VASHINSKI (laughs)
Not a bit. He just checks their eyes.

GERTIE
I gotta see Reuben's teacher. Mrs Stringer.

MR SKYROS
That's number fouteen - end of the corridor,
turn right.

92 INT: SCHOOL: MRS STRINGER'S ROOM

As GERTIE goes into the room another mother is just coming out. It's empty but for MRS STRINGER, a tight-lipped permanent-waved middle-aged woman taking her purse from a drawer. She glances up, goes deliberately to a closet, opens the door and examines her make-up -- and GERTIE -- in a mirror hangin'g inside.

GERTIE
Er -- Miz Stringer?

The woman takes out a coat, carefully picks off some lint, puts it on.

I come t' see you about my youngun -- boy.

MRS STRINGER
You'll have to hurry - I've been talking to mothers all afternoon.

She takes a hat out of a paper bag, puts it on, begins using lipstick - her back still to GERTIE.

The child's name?

GERTIE
Reuben Nevels.

MRS STRINGER deliberately finishes her lipsticking.

MRS STRINGER
Well - what's the matter?

GERTIE
He -- jus' don't seem happy.

MRS STRINGER sighs heavily; turns round.

MRS STRINGER
You hill -- you southern people who come up here, don't you realise it will be a great change for your children? Reuben has not accepted the change. I'm giving him a 'U' in conduct. He just won't get along with other children.

GERTIE

He weren't never bad t' fight.

MRS STRINGER

Last week, Mrs Nevels, a small boy with a toy gun was teasing Reuben - just poking at him in fun - and Reuben completely lost his temper. Then he bragged about having a real gun of his own, and shooting at a bear! The boy of course called him a liar, and Reuben slapped him down. I sent Reuben to the principal and he was punished. I will not have lying and arrogance in my class.

She turns and locks the cupboard door.

GERTIE

Reuben weren't lyin'. He's had a rifle since he were ten year old. An' all my younguns was taught never t' point toy guns - 'case one day they might fergit an' use a real gun that way.

MRS STRINGER turns back, jingling her car keys impatiently.

MRS STRINGER

That's very interesting. But I see no point in continuing this discussion. Reuben is in Detroit now. He will have to adjust to his surroundings. That's the most important thing in life.

GERTIE

That's what you're teachin' my younguns?

MRS STRINGER

Of course.

GERTIE

So's if they went t' Germany they c'd adjust - git along with them Nazis an' Hitler?

MRS STRINGER

How dare you twist my words that way!

GERTIE (leaving)

I'm obliged to y' f'r y'r time, ma'am. But y' cain't roll out people like biscuit dough.

93 INT: OPHTHALMOLOGIST'S OFFICE

A back-lit chart fills the screen, a huge 'Z' at the top; below it, in descending sizes, rows of letters. The second row reads QRTPN.

DOCTOR'S VOICE (over)
What's that first letter, Cassie?

CASSIE is in the patient's chair, just visible in the dim-lit room. She squints.

CASSIE
Z.

DOCTOR'S VOICE
Good. Now the next line.

CASSIE (tentatively)
O?

Reveal the DOCTOR, white coat and glasses. He's an oldish man, and kind. He sits straddling a wheeled stool.

DOCTOR
Not quite. It's got a tail. What's an O with a tail? Like a piglet.

CASSIE (instantly)
Q.

GERTIE is sitting forward on her chair watching, knuckles white over the handle of her basket.

Back to the chart. Voices over.

DOCTOR
H'm. And the letter next to it?

CASSIE (hoping)
P?

It isn't; it's an R.

The DOCTOR moves forward on his stool, holding a heavy pair of metal eyeglass frames, and gently slips them on to CASSIE's nose.

DOCTOR
Well now, let's try a little magic.
He selects two lenses from a drawer beside him, and has no sooner dropped one of them into the frame when CASSIE speaks.

CASSIE
It's a Q. Then an R, then a T, and a P and an N.

DOCTOR
Very good. Nothing wrong with that eye.

He clicks the shade over the first eye, drops in the other lens. CASSIE rattles off the letters.

CASSIE
X,M,F,A,K,L.

DOCTOR
You certainly know your letters. Can you read?

CASSIE looks imploringly at GERTIE.

GERTIE
Some. If the print's big.

CASSIE
Cally Lou cain't neither.

DOCTOR
Oh? Well, you send her to me and we'll show
her the magic.

CASSIE
She's right here.

The DOCTOR hesitates for only a moment; no change of tone.

DOCTOR
Of course. It's so dark in here. It's nice to
have a friend.

The letter chart flicks away and reveals a reading card.
He points to a line halfway down it.

Now, try this.

CASSIE (reading)
The Lord is my --

GERTIE
Shepherd.

CASSIE
-- I shall not want. He leadeth me.....

GERTIE, a smile breaking.

94 EXT: NEVELS STEPS - AFTERNOON

GERTIE is two steps down, scrubbing, when REUBEN comes
rushing past her and in through the dor without a word.
She sits back on her heels, astonished. CLYTIE comes
running up the alley, with CASSIE -- now wearing glasses.

CLYTIE
Oh Mom, he's in trouble! Y' know we ain't
s'posed t' walk anywhere there ain't patrols?
Reuben jus' took off on his own, crossed all
kindsa streets he shouldn't've, an' cut across
that land by the railroad--

GERTIE gathers up her bucket and brush and goes indoors,
CLYTIE following with CASSIE.

95 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

GERTIE (coming in)
Don't sound so terrible t' me.

CLYTIE
But Miz Stringer seen him - an' we ain't
s'posed t' walk by the railroad tracks.

GERTIE
Reckon he misses the fields, an' the woods.
She kisses CASSIE and straightens the glasses on her nose.
How'd you do t'day, Cassie-Marie?

CASSIE (beaming)
Miss Vashinski had me read in front a' the
whole class.

ENOCH comes bursting in, shouting.

ENOCH
Mom, Mom, Reuben's gonna get a lickin' --

GERTIE
Hush now, y'll wake y'r father.

Too late. From the bedroom CLOVIS calls sleepily.

CLOVIS
What's the racket?

ENOCH goes bounding in and we hear his voice indistinctly
pouring out the news.

ENOCH (voice under GERTIE and CASSIE)
Reuben come home over the field by the
railroad tracks, Pop, where we ain't 'lowed t'
walk, an' the teachers all seen him go an' they
yelled an' he didn't pay no mind, an' he's
gonna get called t' the principal's office
an' get a lickin'--

GERTIE is takin g CASSIE's coat and mittens.

CASSIE
She was real pleased, Mom - an' she gimme a
story-book t' bring home -- look! I'm gonna
read it t' Cally Lou.

CLOVIS (off; loud)

Reuben!

GERTIE looks apprehensively at Reuben's closed bedroom door. There's a silence. She goes into the bedroom where CLOVIS is now sitting irritably on the bed, lighting a cigarette, wearing long johns.

96 INT: BEDROOM

GERTIE

Clovis--

He ignores her.

CLOVIS (angry, shouting)

Reuben! Come here!

Slow footsteps. REUBEN appears, sullen. CLOVIS tries to contain his irritation.

What's goin' on? Y' know y' gotta walk the way they tell y'. It's for y'r own safety.

REUBEN looks resentfully at ENOCH and CLYTIE.

REUBEN

The way y're all carryin' on, a body'd think I killed a man. All I done was walk a path.

CLOVIS

Y' gotta walk where they tell y' t' walk. What's the matter with you, boy? Y're allus in trouble .

REUBEN erupts, his voice cracking.

REUBEN

It ain't my fault. The young'uns don't like me -- Miz Stringer she hates me.

He turns on GERTIE.

Now she hates me worse'n ever, 'cause you come bawlin' her out sayin' I wasn't happy. She made fun a' me in front a' everyone. Things was bad enough 'fore you come stickin' y'r big nose in--

CLOVIS slaps him hard across the face. GERTIE cries out.

GERTIE

Clovis - don't --

CLOVIS

You git back in that room till you c'n come out an' tell y'r mom y're sorry.

REUBEN flees, choking.

CLOVIS (contd)

The rest a' you younguns clear out. Clytie, turn the radio on good an' loud - give Reuben somethin' t' listen to in his room.

The children leave, but he holds GERTIE back and pushes the door closed, speaking in a fierce whisper as the radio begins loud dance music in the kitchen.

I ain't gonna have him a-talkin' t' you that way. Why'd you want t' go raisin' a racket with that teacher? You don't know nothin' 'bout schools. Th'other kids is doin' okay. You've set Reuben agin Detroit so's he hates school an' everythin' else. It's you that's as much wrong with him as anythin'.

CLOSE-UP GERTIE, listening, tight-lipped.

97 INT: BOYS BEDROOM - NIGHT

GERTIE opens the door so that light comes in with her from the kitchen. ENOCH is snoring a little, REUBEN is a still heap of bedclothes. She puts a hand on his head; whispers.

GERTIE

Reuben?

He shakes off her hand.

REUBEN

Git away. Y'll be a-wakin' Enoch.

GERTIE

Honey - try harder t' be like the rest. It's easier, an' y'll be happier in the end - I guess. Jus' - act so's they don't know y' feel different inside.

Her shadow dances on the wall; a steel pour is lightening the sky outside. REUBEN buries his head in the bedclothes.

98 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

GERTIE is standing at the door watching the homecoming children come up the alley.

99 EXT: THE ALLEY - HER POV

We focus on one REUBEN-sized boy, then another, but the faces are unfamiliar.

100

INT: KITCHEN

GERTIE turns away from the door. CLOVIS is sitting at the table, where he has been eating. ENOCH, AMOS and CASSIE are reaching into a bag of bananas.

CLOVIS

He ain't never been this late.

CASSIE

Clytie an' me ain't seen him all day.
Mom, this'n's all black an' squishy.

ENOCH is unpeeling a banana. It's black inside.

ENOCH

Yuk! Mom's tryin' t' feed us rotten bananas.

GERTIE

Try another one.

That's bad, too.

ENOCH

They're allus makin' a fast buck off you, Mom.

CLOVIS

Y'r Ma ain't used t' buyin'. Get rid a' that
an' go do y'r homework.

He eyes GERTIE compassionately as they leave the room.

Gert, I think we better tell the police.

GERTIE

No! He'll come - I know he'll come. He's jus'
waitin' somewhere afeared t' come home.

CLOVIS

Well - I gotta get t'work. But if he ain't here
when I get back, I'm callin' the cops.

101 EXT: GERTIE'S POV: THE ALLEY, DARK, EMPTY.

102 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - NIGHT

GERTIE turns back from the window. Looks at the clock. Goes back to the window. Tries to force herself away from it; picks up a basket of mending; takes out a sock with a hole in it; puts it back. Glances at the window. Then goes for her knife, as the only possible comfort; looks at the cherry-woos block, but instead takes the half-finished crucifix from a shelf and sits down with it at the table.

CLOSE-UP of her hands, carving. The clock ticks.

A cat squalls. GERTIE gets up and goes to the window. Sees only the alley with all the other houses dark.

She drops the curtain; walks out of shot. We stay on the curtain. It shakes as a train goes by. The clock ticks.

103

INT: KITCHEN

GERTIE is asleep with her head on the table, wearing nightgown and overcoat. The door opens and closes (sound over). She jerks awake and looks up from the table, which is covered in shavings. Her knife lies there with the finished crucifix. CLOVIS is in the room, smiling.

CLOVIS

Gert, we're awful fools. Reuben's all right. He holds up a crumpled piece of paper; reads from it.

"Dear Pop, I took twenty dollars to pay my way back. I hope it don't run you short on the car payments. I don't steal. I will pay it back. Back home I can work and trap for Granpa. I can't stay here no more. Your ever loving son Reuben."

GERTIE says nothing. She looks down at the crucifix. The Christ has a tortured, furrowed face. CLOVIS hands her the letter, begins pulling off his jacket.

CLOVIS (contd)

I found it in my wallet at work. "You go home an' tell y'r woman", the foreman says t' me. Who's a thought a foreman w'd have s' much heart?

GERTIE's hands hold the letter, smoothing it and smoothing it.

CLOVIS comes to the table and picks up the crucifix.

Aw Gert, y' sat up all night workin' on this thing? All whittled outa one piece - y' coulda made a flat cross in half the time, with a flat Christ glued on it. You've give away fifty dollars worth a' work. A jig saw, that's what you need. They'll cut out anythin' by the dozen - Christs, jumpin'-jacks, it's all the same t'a jigsaw.

He drops the crucifix among the shavings.

104 EXT: THE ALLEY

It's Spring. Over what follows, we hear small girls' voices chanting:

A leansy, a clapsy,
A whirl around to bapsy,
I touch my knee, I touch my toe
And round and round I go.

In a puddle there's the reflection of a kite.

CUT TO real kites in the sky, yellow and green and gold against the blue, flying over the alley. We come down the string of one of them, past the dingy roofs, and find a small boy peeing one-handed against a wall.

Clean sheets billow in the wind; a child runs muddy into the middle of one of them, leaving hand-prints.

We come to the small girls who are chanting; they're jumping rope. Two are jumping, each to her own rope; a third calls: "I'm comin' under!". She ducks under one of the ropes and jumps with its owner.

CASSIE is standing by, moving her head as if waiting for the moment to duck under a rope too - but the rope she is watching is invisible.

CASSIE

Comin' under, Cally Lou!

She runs to the imaginary rope, ducks under and jumps with the imaginary Cally Lou. In the same frame we see two small girls jumping to one rope, and CASSIE jumping to no rope at all.

SMALL GIRL (jeering)

Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

VICTOR comes down the sidewalk and sweeps CASSIE up on to his shoulder; heads for the Nevels' house. CASSIE squeals with delight; beckons Cally Lou to follow.

105 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

GERTIE hums as she sits in the sunlight working on the emerging head of the cherrywood block. VICTOR swings CASSIE in through the door, laughing. GERTIE gets up and takes the crucifix from a shelf; hands it to him.

GERTIE

It's finished.

CASSIE

Lemme see....He looks so sad, Mom.

She pats the cherrywood block, pulls VICTOR's sleeve.

This one's gonna be laughin'.

GERTIE
I dunno, Cassie-Marie. Mebbe he will.

ENOCH bursts in, drops an armful of pussy-willows in GERTIE's lap.

ENOCH
Mom, c'n I have a nickel f'r a popsicle? We're th'onliest kids in the Alley hasn't got none.

VICTOR looms menacingly towards him, so that ENOCH is suddenly muted; then he leans forward and produces a nickel from ENOCH's ear and solemnly hands it to him. ENOCH blinks.

CASSIE
Me too, me too!

GERTIE (protesting)
Cassie--

VICTOR produces a nickel from the mitten dangling from CASSIE's sleeve; after a baffled moment the children run gleefully out. GERTIE wants to disapprove, but she's laughing.

GERTIE
Where'd you learn t' do that?

VICTOR
My old man, he knew lotsa tricks. Little man - quick. I was big like an ox, so he jus' learned me the one.

He produces a ten-dollar bill from GERTIE's hair, and she laughs in a carefree, open way we've never seen before. VICTOR takes the crucifix and holds out the bill.

Here, Gert - buy y'self some pretty shoes.
Max, she's crazy 'bout shoes.

GERTIE puts the money in her apron, shakes her head.

GERTIE
Ten dollars'll near pay f'r a pig.

VICTOR (astounded)
A pig?

GERTIE (laughing)
Not here! I'm savin' f'r when we go back home.

The door opens and CLOVIS comes in, his face as dour and weary as theirs are cheerful. He nods, but does not smile. Sees the crucifix.

CLOVIS
She put a lotta work in that.

VICTOR
I know it. Y' heard from Reuben?

GERTIE
He's livin' with my folks. Helpin' on their farm.

VICTOR
It'll be better for 'm. They's some don't never do good outside their country. Like my Mom. Well - thanks, Gert.

He holds up the crucifix; then goes out, touching CLOVIS on the shoulder as he passes. CLOVIS flops into a chair.

CLOVIS
I wish Reuben'd gone t' my folks. Your mom'll work him like a mule, give him no schoolin' - like she done you.

GERTIE
It won't be forever. We'll be goin' back home pretty soon, once the war's over.
As always when he comes home from work, she goes automatically to the stove to get him food.

CLOVIS
Back home t' what? I c'n hear 'em all sayin' - specially y'r Mom - "Pore Gert, back agin with that tinkerin' Clovis, an' not a nickel t' his name." Tinkerin' -- I'll show 'em they's money in tinkerin'!

GERTIE stops still in dismay.

GERTIE
You want t' stay here?

CLOVIS (dodging)
You'd be best a-worryin' over Cassie, not goin' back home. She run by me jus' now like an idjit, a-jabberin' away t' thin air --

GERTIE
She's doin' real well at school, since she got them glasses. Y' cain't hardly stop her readin' now.

CLOVIS

Well, y' gotta stop that foolishness a' talkin' t' herself. Folks are thinkin' she's quair. If you don't make her quit, y'll have another Reuben - an she cain't run home.

CASSIE bursts in, laughing.

CASSIE

Oh Mom, y' know what that greedy Cally Lou done? She ate up all my popsicle!

CLOVIS (irritable)

Now that's enough a' that, Cassie-Marie. You quit playin' that silly game.

CASSIE (bewildered)

I ain't playin'.

CLOVIS

Don't you be a-sassin' me - you jus' quit! You know there ain't no Cally Lou!

CASSIE stares at him; then at GERTIE. CLOVIS gets up.

CLOVIS

You mind me, now.

He goes into the bathroom. CASSIE looks beseechingly at GERTIE.

GERTIE (with difficulty)

Honey - back home, you never did have nobody t' play with but Gyp - so y' thought up Cally Lou. But y're a big girl now. Y' cain't go round a-talkin' t' yourself.

CASSIE

Don't you like Cally Lou no more?

GERTIE (strained)

Go out an' play with the others. Y'r pa's right - there ain't no Cally Lou.

Head down, CASSIE goes slowly out of the house.

CLOVIS comes in from the bathroom, wearing only pants, drying his chest with a towel.

CLOVIS

Got a clean shirt there, old woman? Whit an' me's goin' t'a meetin'.

GERTIE unpins a shirt from the kitchen line, where ironed laundry is airing.

GERTIE
That union agin.

CLOVIS
Union means as much as the job, up here. You
jus' be glad I'm doin' good in it.

GERTIE puts a hand on the cherrywood block.

GERTIE
It ain't right.

CLOVIS (sighs)
Gert, y' don't know nothin' about it. Things
ain't like back home.

GERTIE
I don't mean y'r old union, I mean Cassie-
Marie. A body's got t' have somethin' a'
their own.

She stays by the block, her hand moving over it. CLOVIS
tucks in his shirt, picks up his jacket, goes over and
kisses her.

CLOVIS
I'll be back f'r supper.

106 EXT: THE ALLEY - LATE AFTERNOON

GERTIE comes down the steps; sees in the distance CLOVIS
and WHIT disappearing up the street. Reaching street
level, she looks in the opposite direction and sees CASSIE
standing by VICTOR's coalshed like a small flying buttress,
her forehead pressed against the siding, propping up the
wall. GERTIE goes to her; extricates the braids from under
CASSIE's coat, then squats to zipper it. No words.
GERTIE takes the mittens dangling on cords from CASSIE's
sleeves and fits them on.

CASSIE (finally)
Mom, why don't you like Cally Lou no more?
GERTIE rubs a tear-stain from CASSIE's cheek, then holds her
by the shoulders.

GERTIE
I'll bet you can see little girls in my eyes,
Cassie-Marie - it's still sunny.

CASSIE searches her mother's face; shakes her head; breaks
free and runs, runs, as if her life depended on it. She
reaches the railroad fence and stays there, peering through.
Slowly, GERTIE stands up. }

107 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - EARLY MORNIN G

CLOVIS, CLYTIE and ENOCH are eating breakfast. GERTIE appears with a string-tied brown paper parcel.

GERTIE (to CLOVIS)
Will you mail it?

He nods.

I couldn't find his knife. Where's Cassie?

ENOCH
It ain't in our room. He musta carried it.

CLYTIE
She run outside. Wouldn't eat nothin'.

GERTIE crosses to the window; looks out.
CASSIE is standing motionless looking through the railroad fence.

She'll make me late again.

GERTIE
I'll go get her.

She puts the parcel down beside CLOVIS. The careful large letters of the address read; REUBEN NEVELS, KENDRICKS FARM, BALLEW, KENTUCKY.

108 EXT: RAILROAD FENCE - DAY

GERTIE comes quietly up behind CASSIE, pauses when she realises that CASSIE, her face pressed to the railroad fence, is talking through it.

CASSIE
Don't cry, Cally Lou. Y're a big girl now.
Stay over there in them little trees crost
the tracks. I'll come see y; whenever I can....

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE, listening, torn.

109 INT: BACK ROOM OF NEVELS HOUSE - NIGHT

GERTIE is ironing. She looks up as she hears a sound from one of the children's bedrooms.

In the boys' room ENOCH and AMOS (in REUBEN's old bed) are fast asleep.

In the girls' room, CLYTIE sleeps, a copy of TRUE ROMANCES by her pillow. CASSIE lies on her back wide awake.
GERTIE bends over her.

GERTIE (whispering)
Why ain't you asleep?

There's no answer, but after a moment CASSIE's arms come up and hold GERTIE around the neck, very hard.

110 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands at the kitchen table making peanut-butter sandwiches, the peanut butter spread carefully thin. Crash of the outside door as ENOCH bounces in.

ENOCH
Mom, I'm starvin'!

He plunks down at the table and instantly turns on the radio. A voice is reading war news. GERTIE puts a sandwich in front of him and another in CASSIE's place; goes to fill two glasses of milk. ENOCH instantly begins eating; turns the radio to raucous music. GERTIE comes back with the milk and turns it off.

ENOCH
Aw, Mom --

GERTIE
A body cain't hear theirselves think.
She goes to the door; opens it; calls.
Cassie-Marie!

ENOCH reaches a hand cautiously to the radio, hesitates, brings it swiftly back again as she turns.

CASSIE appears in the doorway, in boots, skirt, snow-jacket and red headscarf. Her small bespectacled face looks pale and somehow pinched.

CASSIE
I ain't hungry, Mom. Cain't I jus' stay out an' play?

GERTIE kisses her, pulls off the headscarf and begins unzipping the jacket.

GERTIE
You eat somethin' first.

Suddenly CASSIE begins to cry, and bolts to her bedroom. GERTIE follows.
ENOCH happily turns on the radio, keeping the volume low.

111 INT: GIRLS BEDROOM

CASSIE is sobbing on her bed as GERTIE comes in, closing the door behind her.

GERTIE

What's the matter, honey?

She kneels down so that her face is close to CASSIE's.

CASSIE

Oh Mom, I wet on myself, right in the classroom, an' all the kids laughed at me.

GERTIE

Now that's nothin' - don't you fret....
...you want clean pants?

CASSIE (shaking her head)

Miss Vasinski washed 'em out for me an'
dried 'em in the teachers' room....

She begins to sob again.

Don't tell Clytie.

GERTIE sits on the bed, takes CASSIE on her lap and rocks her, singing "Beulah Land". CASSIE clings close.
ENOCH erupts through the bedroom door.

ENOCH

Mom, I cain't find my baseball mitt.

The mood broken, CASSIE scrambles down.

CASSIE

C'n I go out an' play?

GERTIE

I guess so, honey.

She watches through the bedroom door as CASSIE grabs up her headscarf and runs out.

ENOCH

Mom, where's my mitt?

112 INT: KITCHEN

Clearing the table, GERTIE catches sight of the cherrywood block, a ray of late sunshine glimmering on its face as if it were watching her. She takes the plate with CASSIE's uneaten sandwich. Looks at it. Back at the block. An idea has come into her mind which pleases her.

Swiftly she cuts the sandwich in half, wraps the two halves. Pauses, adds a cookie to each half, puts them in a brown paper bag. Pulls on her coat, humming "Beulah Land", and goes outside with the bag.

113 EXT: THE ALLEY - DAY

CASSIE, in jacket and red headscarf, is watching WHEATEYE (still with traces of colour in her white-blond hair) playing school with the small DALY children; using the MEANWELL coalshed as a blackboard and a stick as a pointer.

WHEATEYE

Now children, this word is 'skip'. Do what it tells you.

The children skip, giggling.

Jimmy Daly, what's this next word?

She points to an imaginary word on the wall.

JIMMY

Jump.

WHEATEYE whacks him with the stick.

WHEATEYE

You dumb kid, that says 'sit'. Cassie - what's this word?

CASSIE

I dunno.

WHEATEYE

C'mon - you see good with them specs on.

CASSIE gives the ghost of a smile.

CASSIE

I dunno.

WHEATEYE

All right, stupid, then ask Cally Lou.

CASSIE looks at the space beside her to which WHEATEYE is pointing, and through it sees GERTIE. The grin dies.

C'mon Cassie - what's she say?

CASSIE (low, guilty)

There ain't no Cally Lou.

She bolts across the alley and up to the railroad fence, and disappears round the corner of the end house. GERTIE goes after her, callin g.

GERTIE

Cassie! Cassie-Marie! I got a surprise f'r
you an' Cally Lou!

She reaches the corner. The fence stretches empty in both directions. No sign of CASSIE. GERTIE tries again, smiling in anticipation.

C'mon Cassie - come feed that hungry child
a' yours....

The fence between alley and railroad is solidly built but full of cracks just big enough to see through. GERTIE looks through a gap.

114 EXT: RAILROAD TRACKS

There are four tracks. Far up to the left are the level crossing gates where the main street crosses the railroad, and the steel works.

On the third track, stationary, a freight train stands opposite the alley, its engine hissing gently up near the level crossing.

Overhead a plane is circling, the sound low but growing.

On the railroad, the switch engine gives a small push, so that all the freight cars move a yard or so, clash-clash-clash.

The plane is coming in low, its engine louder.

GERTIE stiffens as she hears a soft voice, scarcely audible. CASSIE comes into sight, tightrope-walking along the second track. She giggles over her shoulder at Cally Lou; then turns and points, laughing.

CASSIE (very faint)

You fell, you fell! I didn't! C'mon--

She tugs Cally Lou's hand, pointing at the freight train - at a big boxcar whose door is standing open. Smiling, she is saying; "Let's go see what's inside that big car", but we can't hear her. The noise of the plane engine is now earsplitting.

GERTIE shouts through the noise.

GERTIE

Cassie, git away from there!

Chattering to Cally Lou, lost in her game, CASSIE crosses the track to the boxcar and stands on tiptoe to peep inside, hands on the great wheel beneath.

GERTIE (screaming)
Cassie, git back -- that train's gonna move!

The plane roars overhead; there's no hope of CASSIE hearing.

Desperately GERTIE looks up and down the fence for the place where CASSIE must have gone through; a few yards away she spots a broken board leaving a space just large enough for a crawling child. She rushes to it.

Her hands wrench at the wood; they are cut and bleeding, but she can't make the hole big enough to get through. She sticks her head through, scraping her cheek. Yells for CASSIE again, but now she's further away, and the plane noise still reverberates.

Away to the right, an express train whistle sounds.

CASSIE turns and looks down the track in alarm.

A signal slangs. A hundred yards up the track, the level crossing bell begins to ring.

In the distance, the steam and smoke of the express train are visible, coming closer. Its noise begins to grow, adding to the rumble of the plane and the sound of the bell. All through the sequence there is clearly too much noise for CASSIE to hear GERTIE.

CASSIE looks wildly up and down for a moment. Then we see her hugging the imaginary Cally Lou for comfort, and drawing her to sit underneath the stationary freight train as shelter from the approaching express. She fits herself in beside the great wheel, knees bent, legs across the track.

GERTIE
No, Cassie, no! Git between them!

She wrenches her head out. Looks frantically to the right: there's nothing but unbroken fence. She flings herself to the left, towards the level crossing - clearly her only hope of getting through to the tracks.

The running is an impressionistic blur of panic. She is gasping, aloud or in her mind: "I'm coming. Oh please God, please God. I'm coming." The boards of the fence flicker by her; then she's diving through traffic at the level crossing, cars hooting, men shouting.

GERTIE cannons off the bumper of a huge truck just coming to a stop. Beyond it, the express train hurtles past. Picking herself up, she ducks under the level crossing barrier and into the narrow roaring space - one track - between express train and fence.

The truck driver leaps out of his cab in pursuit. So do other drivers, and a policeman.

TRUCK DRIVER (yelling)
You outa your goddam mind, lady?

GERTIE runs.

Suddenly the express train is gone, and beyond it is the freight train -- slowly moving.

GERTIE gasps in terror, still running.

The freight train stops, each car crashing into the next. The driver and fireman of the switch engine leap down and begin to run.

GERTIE swoops down towards the side of the train and the running figures catch up with her and pause, as if stopped by a rope.

CLOSE-UP of the TRUCK DRIVER, looking down in horror.

TRUCK DRIVER
Jesus Christ!

115 EXT: THE ALLEY

Doors are open, voices calling, children and adults running from the Alley along the fence, drawn by the sounds of confusion on the railroad tracks. VICTOR, in t-shirt and pants, is running amongst them.

116 EXT: THE RAILROAD TRACK

Under the train CASSIE is white-faced, on her hands and knees, whimpering.

CASSIE
Mommie -- Mommie --

Pushing aside the hands trying to restrain her, GERTIE draws CASSIE out past the huge steel wheel.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE, seeing.

(NOTE: CASSIE's legs have been severed just above the ankles. We NEVER see the feet or the stumps on camera. This scene is quite awful enough without being totally graphic.)

CASSIE lies across GERTIE's lap, her head thrashing from side to side. GERTIE's hands are clenched on CASSIE's thighs.

CASSIE
It hurts, Mommie - oh Mommie!

GERTIE
Help me, somebody!

Her coat and hands are bright red with blood. She rocks CASSIE, cradled against her.

VICTOR elbows the crowd aside, crouches beside GERTIE: his big hands replace hers on CASSIE's thighs.

VICTOR
This way - quick!

CASSIE's glasses lie on the railroad track in a pool of blood.

Police sirens grow louder, closer.

117 EXT: RUNNING: GERTIE AND VICTOR'S POV

Jerkily, as seen through a hand-held camera, the freight cars flick past and a crowd looms ahead. Faces fill the frame, falling back to make way; men, women, young, old, gawking or weeping or horrified. Amongst a flash of children's faces there's ENOCH, wide-eyed.

The police siren is ear-splitting; a police car waits with its door open and policemen reaching out to help.

118 INT: POLICE CAR, MOVING

Siren wailing. One policeman drives, the other sits beside him looking back to where GERTIE is cradling CASSIE on her lap. VICTOR sits beside her, his hands clenched round CASSIE's upside down legs, which go out of frame.

GERTIE (babbling)
Y're gonna be all right, Cassie-Marie. It's all right. It's all right.

She looks up, anguished.

Oh faster, please go faster.

CASSIE is staring up at her, eyes wide.

CASSIE
I cain't see, Mommie - it's s' dark --

Bright light from outside beams across her as the car hurtles round bends, through traffic and stoplights.

GERTIE (desperate)
We'll be goin' home soon, honey - you an' Cally Lou -- an' y' c'n run with Gyp -- an' climb trees --

CASSIE smiles, very faintly; then the wide eyes are blank.

GERTIE

Cassie?

VICTOR's big hand comes away from CASSIE's leg and closes hard on GERTIE's hand, where's she's holding CASSIE's shoulder.

The policeman in the front passenger seat, looking back at them, takes off his cap.

119 INT: HOSPITAL

Camera on a plain white door. The police siren has cut to a blur of voices, moans, clatter of metal and glass, an indistinct PA system calling doctors' names.

We pull back: the white door swings open and a hospital gurney is pushed rapidly out by a black orderly. A very small mound on it is covered by a sheet. A DOCTOR and a NURSE come out after it.

GERTIE is standing in the entrance to the emergency ward with VICTOR and the two POLICEMAN. She dives to pull back the sheet; they restrain her. The orderly pauses.

NURSE

No - no -

In the world of white, GERTIE and VICTOR look startling: great gouts of blood (darker now) have soaked into her coat, his T-shirt and pants. Her face is scratched and cut by the fence; her hair wild. She jumps as a new police siren comes wailing outside. Ambulance men with a stretcher burst through the outside door. The DOCTOR and NURSE peel off to help. The gurney is blocking the way.

ORDERLY

We gotta move.

He takes off down the corridor, pushing the gurney fast.

GERTIE

Where you takin' her?

She runs after him. VICTOR and the POLICEMEN follow.

GERTIE'S POV:

The gurney goes down white corridors, through one, two swing doors; the progress is fast, nightmarish.

Ahead, coming down the corridor from another entrance, are CLOVIS and WHIT.

The orderly stops; rings a buzzer at a door on the left.

CLOVIS steps forward and puts his arms round GERTIE. She pulls back; she can't take her eyes off the sheet.

GERTIE

I wanna take her home.

CLOVIS shakes his head, unable to speak. The door opens. It's the morgue; inside, there are glimpses of other gurneys, other shrouded shapes. GERTIE clutches the gurney in horror.

GERTIE

No!

VICTOR

Gertie --

He touches her arm.

The ORDERLY lets the door swing closed again.

ORDERLY (gently)

Let go, lady. They keeps 'em free overnight.

WHIT

Leave her stay, Gert. Them undertakers murders y' -- it's money every minute.

GERTIE

Money?

She reaches hastily into her coat pocket, down into the lining.

I got money - I got money - c'n we take her if we pay?

She brings the money out in handfuls, heaping it on to the gurney; piles of crumpled bills spill over the edge.

One of the policemen, his eyes on the money, steps forward and begins whispering to CLOVIS; we hear only a word or two.

POLICEMAN

You wanna good funeral parlour, we c'n call one for y' --

GERTIE (to CLOVIS)

Ain't it enough? Cain't we take her home now?

CLOSE-UP: CLOVIS, tears in his eyes.

CLOVIS

Gertie - she s gone.

FADE TO:

A blurred, impressionistic sequence of images; things GERTIE lives through but only half-remembers afterwards:

120 EXT: THE ALLEY

Silence. GERTIE is walking towards us and her house through a still crowd of children and neighbors; CLOVIS, WHIT and VICTOR a pace or two behind her. She's bloodstained, tight-faced. As she turns into the house CLYTIL, ENOCH and AMOS, beside the steps, back involuntarily away from her. She seems not to see them.

121 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

The cherrywood block is on the floor. GERTIE crosses to it like a sleepwalker, takes out her knife and begins to carve. Deep, fierce strokes round the head. Suddenly a train passes outside. GERTIE drops the knife, claps her hands over her ears, drops forward over the block.

122 EXT: RAILROAD

Sound of express train over.

GERTIE's IMAGINATION:

CASSIE is sitting under the freight train in the flickering light from the passing express. Her legs are over the rail, her arm round Cally Lou. She becomes aware that the great wheel to her right is moving away from her. She watches bewildered for a moment; then turns to her left in sudden dreadful anticipation.

The sound of the train abruptly cuts.

123 INT: GERTIE'S POV:

CLOVIS, concern and fear on his face, reaches down, holding out a glass of pink liquid.

CLOVIS

Here, old woman - drink this.

124 INT: CHURCH

Children's voices singing "All Things Bright and Beautiful".

GERTIE's POV:

An unctuous, grave-faced undertaker beckons, shows CASSIE lying angelic and improbable in an open coffin; points the way to a place among pews full of Alley people, children, teachers.

125 EXT: CEMETERY

An open grave holding a small coffin, mounded above with fresh flowers. The first dirt lands on the coffin; then more and more, faster and faster.

DISSOLVE TO:

The grave again; it is a finished mound now, deserted, the flowers piled over it all dead.

126 INT: BEDROOM - BRIGHT ELECTRIC LIGHT

GERTIE's hands are working on the cherrywood block. The jawline of the head is more clearly defined, the hair detailed, but still there are no features. The hands drop the knife.

GERTIE stands, in her nightgown. The room is chaotic; there are shavings all over the floor. A naked light bulb hangs from a cord in the ceiling. Outside, a train rushes by.

127 EXT: THE ALLEY - NIGHT

GERTIE, a coat over her nightgown, is out in the moonlit street, calling.

GERTIE
Reuben - Cassie -

VICTOR is on his way home in work-clothes. He goes to her.

VICTOR
C'mon, Gert - nobody y' gotta hunt in th'alley
no more - y' gotta get some sleep.

128 GERTIE'S POV

CLOVIS leaning over again in the bright inside light, with a glass of the pink liquid.

CLOVIS
Gert - the doctor says y' gotta sleep --
sleep - sleep - sleep - sleep -

The voice blurs; the face blurs. There's only the light bulb hanging from its cord. That too blurs - then suddenly it's clear, and the line is that not of the light cord but of the part in CLYTIE's hair. She kneels with her back to the bed. SOPHRONIE is standing beside her, holding out a comb.

SOPHRONIE
Gertie? Gert!

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE

Our first clear sight of her since she came home from the hospital: gaunt, hollow-eyed, haunted.

SOPHRONIE

Here. I cain't never get it right. Y'll have t' sit up.

GERTIE struggles up. She takes the comb, parts CLYTIE's hair, then slowly begins braiding it. Then she stops.

GERTIE

Where's Amos?

CLYTIE

He's playin'.

GERTIE shouts, suddenly frantic.

GERTIE

Where is he? Amos!

CLYTIE gets up, alarmed.

SOPHRONIE

Gert - y' bin in here two weeks -

A frightened AMOS appears.

GERTIE

Don't you go outside!

SOPHRONIE takes AMOS by the hand.

SOPHRONIE

We're takin' him right nextdoor t' play with Wheateye.

CLYTIE smiles at GERTIE: not scared now but gentle, compassionate - an adult look.

CLYTIE

It's all right, Mom - we'll hold both his hands.

SOPHRONIE

You get up now, Gert - the kids needs you.

As they go out, MAX is in the bedroom doorway. She comes in and shuts the door behind her, smiling.

MAX

Gotta dream f'r me, kid? Jeeze, y' need some air in this room.

GERTIE looks round as if seeing the room for the first time: dirty, rumpled, floor littered with shavings, light bulb burning even though there's bright daylight round the edge of the window-shade. MAX crosses to the window, pulls up the shade, opens the window. GERTIE pulls the quilt over her head. MAX pulls it down again.

MAX

Listen. Y' gotta listen.

Through the window there's the sound of a chorus of innumerable frogs croaking, from the land around the railroad.

It's spring, kiddo. The war's about over.
Y' gotta get up. I need you - I need a dream.
Victor's aimin' t' buy a house, an' have his
Mom move in with us. I ain't gonna eat them
Polish dumplin's all the rest a' my life.

She picks up GERTIE's glass of pink medicine.

What's this they givin' you? Goof balls in
water.

She goes to the window, empties it out. GERTIE blinks and sits up. MAX comes back; says gently:

Y' got a hole in y'r life, that ain't the way
t' fill it - not with liquor neither, like
Sophronie. Get up - or I'll send Victor's Mom
t' feed y' dumplin's -- ugh!

She grins; turns at the door.

I'll be back tomorrow an' help clean up y'r
room. Hey - what's the dream?

GERTIE

Same as yours - home.

FADE TO: the same room, the frogs still chirping through the open window. But the room is spotless now, tidy, bed made. GERTIE, neat, fully dressed, is looking back at it from the door.

129

INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

CLOVIS, CLYTIE, ENOCH and AMOS, sitting eating round the table, look up as the bedroom door opens and GERTIE comes out. Their faces light up; AMOS runs to hug her.

AMOS

Mommie!

ENOCH

Y' feelin' better, Mom?

CLYTIE slips out of GERTIE's place at the table and into her own; then on second thoughts gets up again and fetches another plate.

CLOVIS (quietly)
Hallo, old woman.

GERTIE sits down, reaches for a piece of bread. CLYTIE puts food on her plate.

CLYTIE
Enoch's plannin' a garden for y', Mom.

ENOCK (bubbling)
They's givin' out grass seed an' fertilizer at the project office!

GERTIE
A garden?

CLOVIS
That'll cost a heap.

Sudden ominous silence. CLYTIE breaks it, brightly.

CLYTIE
I got some money from baby-sittin'.

CLOVIS shakes his head. GERTIE looks at him in surprise.

GERTIE
You short on cash?

CLOVIS
We're on strike.

GERTIE stops eating.

Now it's all right -- we get strike pay. But there ain't much left over.

GERTIE gets up, crosses to the hooks by the door where the oats hang. Hers is not there. She turns to CLOVIS.

We hadda burn it.....but there weren't nothin' inside. They took it all, Gert. F'r Cassie. Them cops sent us t'a place that - wa'n't s' good.

GERTIE sits down again, stunned.

GERTIE
All of it? It's all gone?

ENOCK
Cain't we have a garden? I'll do all the diggin'.

CLOVIS

It won't last long, Gert. Cooper says they'll break soon. We jus' gotta hang on.

GERTIE

That union--

CLOVIS

It's like Tom says. Rabbits never make no sound till y' kill 'em, an' then it's jus' one little squeak. Y' wanna be a rabbit?

AMOS scrambles up into GERTIE's lap. She sits there holding him, looking at nothing.

130 EXT: NEVELS FRONT YARD - DAY

ENOCH is digging the tiny front strip of yard with a spade almost as big as himself; GERTIE raking. She picks up a handful of dark earth and smells it, crumbles it. CLYTIE comes up the alley with a bag.

CLYTIE

I got the grass seed -- an' they give me some flower seeds too.

GERTIE

What kind?

CLYTIE (grins)

I asked tha lady that, an' she looked at me like I was crazy an' said, flowers.

WHEATEYE is standing in the alley gazing solemnly at ENOCH, with a rag doll in her arms. She speaks to the doll.

WHEATEYE

Lookit the big strong man, Cally Lou.

GERTIE looks up sharply; then smiles slowly and goes back to work.

131 EXT: JOE'S VEGETABLE VAN - DAY

GERTIE is shopping. She looks worn.

GERTIE

How much f'r cabbage?

JOE

Fifteen.

GERTIE makes a face.

GERTIE
Turnips - with the tops?

JOE
Dime.

GERTIE
Six pound.

JOE weighs the turnips.

JOE
You no sick now.

GERTIE
I'm better.

He reaches into the van, holds up a box of marigold seedlings.

JOE
Flowers?

GERTIE
No money.

JOE puts the turnips into her basket, looks critically at the marigolds, puts them on top.

JOE
These ain't so hot. You take 'em. Turnips - sixty cents.

They look up suddenly as a chorus of automobile horns sounds from the street beyond the alley. It grows. Factory whistles blow; a church bell starts chiming. MRS DALY, approaching the truck, looks at her watch. Up and down the alley children stop playing; women come out, puzzled. From the railroad a train whistle joins in: long intermittent blasts.

FRANKIE DALY comes running from his house.

FRANKIE
Mom, Mom, the radio says we beat the Germans!

MAX and VICTOR appear from the street, MAX with an armful of lilacs. They gaze at the general jubilation.

MAX
What's the racket?

GERTIE
The war's over.

VICTOR hits JOE joyfully on the back.

VICTOR
Hot dog!

MAX

Victor found a house. Put a payment on it.
Got a big lilac bush in the yard.

VICTOR (happily)

My Mom, she come live with us now.

He peers at the vegetables in the truck. MAX looks at GERTIE as if she were about to cry; then turns and runs to her door.

132 INT: NEVELS BACK ROOM - DAY

A high-pitched buzzing sound: CLOVIS, ENOCH, AMOS and TOM COOPER are bent over a machine on the table in the back room. COOPER is talking. He breaks off as GERTIE, still in street-clothes and carrying her basket, appears in the doorway from the kitchen.

COOPER

An' it's gonna get rough - very rough --

CLOVIS (looking' up)

Look, old woman, I gotta present for y' -
Tom here helped me get the parts.

COOPER (bland)

We got nothing else to do.

ENOCH

It's a jigsaw, Mom! Watch!

He nudges his father, and CLOVIS runs a board through the saw, turning the wood as he talks.

CLOVIS

Y' c'n turn em out by the dozen now - jumpin' jacks, Christs, anythin' y' want. No need t' waste all that time whittlin'.

GERTIE turns expressionless into the kitchen and begins taking off her coat; she's still visible through the door.

You make a pattern - I'll cut the parts -
the kids c'n string 'em together.

GERTIE

I ain't got wood.

ENOCH

I'll take y' where we can get some, cheap!

CLOVIS

Gotta keep it quiet, though -we ain't supposed t' run power tools in the project.

GERTIE (from the kitchen)
 Enoch, get me some coal. C'm here, Amos.

She squats beside AMOS and wipes his nose. ENOCH goes reluctantly out to get coal from the shed. From the rumble of the men's voices in the back room a few words become audible. GERTIE is arrested, listening.

COOPER (off)
 The company know damn well their only chance is to hit Bender.

CLOVIS
 When d'y' want me an' Whit?

COOPER
 WE're coverin' him day an' night. The best would be if--

CLOVIS
 Wait a minute.

The back room door closes. The jigsaw whines from behind it. GERTIE still has the handkerchief held over AMOS' nose. He wriggles.

AMOS
 Mom, I cain't breathe--

133 EXT: SCRAPWOOD YARD - DAY

The jigsaw whine is suddenly a huge sound: a power saw, filling the air like a giant cicada. Everywhere there are mountains of empty packing cases, piles of splintered plywood, railroad ties; all kinds of scrap wood. In a hut in the midst of it all a sour-looking man in his sixties is running the power saw. GERTIE and ENOCH are peering at the wood, followed by AMOS tugging the Christmas-present wagon.

GERTIE
 It's all trash. Only fitten f'r kindlin'.

ENOCH
 Jus' look around.

He vanishes behind a wooden cliff. The scrapwood man looks suspiciously at GERTIE. ENOCH hisses at her, beckoning. He's found a heap of big wooden boxes like drawers.

I bet they's maple, ain't they? Ain't that good f'r jumpin' jacks?

GERTIE (examining the wood)
They'll do fine.

She turns. ENOCH slips hastily in front of her.

ENOCH
Don't let on y' want 'em --lemme do it.
Outside the hut, he beams ingratiatingly at the scrapwood man.

Mister, us Cub Scouts is buildin' a little den house - couldya gimme somethin' cheap? They's some ol' smashed-up boxes over there- no good f'r nothin'--

The scrapwood man inspects the boxes.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
Smart kid. Them's gov'ment grain bins - solid maple. Real good wood.

GERTIE
But y' jus' buy it f'r scrap, don't y'?

SCRAPWOOD MAN
I don't buy nothin'. lady. I get paid f'r haulin' it out. Fire laws.

He looks at their wagon.

Whatever y' can load in that - one dollar. An' I don't lend hammers 'r screwdrivers.

GERTIE takes out her knife and begins loosening the screws in each bin; the boys' busy fingers take over as each is loose. The SCRAPWOOD MAN stops smiling.

CUT TO:

The wagon full of dismantled pieces of wood. GERTIE hands over a dollar as ENOCH triumphantly pulls away the wagon, which he can only just move.

134 INT: THE NEVELS KITCHEN

The table is covered with ugly, rough-cut jumping-jack dolls -- and others which GERTIE has made magically real by whittling out hands, faces, feet. She sits there working at another while the jigsaw whines from the back room. There's a sound at the window. She looks up.

MAX is there. GERTIE goes to the door and lets her in. MAX stands by the door, tense, conspiratorial, a holdall in her hand. Hearing the jigsaw, she keeps an eye on the rear door in case it should open.

MAX (soft, excited)
 Gert, it come up, the number you gimme! Eight
 hundred dollars - I said you'd lucky f'r me! I'm
 takin' off, 'fore I get scared.

GERTIE
 But y' cain't just go! Where'll y' sleep
 tonight?

MAX
 In a bus headed f'r th'ocean. I grew up by th'
 ocean. Victor's Mom, she ain't never seen it --
 she ain't never bin outa Detroit. Wants t' stay
 stuck in this dump all her life. All her life....
 She pushes a \$20 bill into GERTIE's hand.

Buy flowers f'r the garden, willya? He's allus
 messin' in his Mom's yard.

GERTIE
 Honey - y're nineteen years old, y' need someone.
 Ain't y' got no people t' go to?

MAX
 I don't need nobody - I learned that in there.
 She jerks her head at the nextdoor wall.
 Victor's Mom c'n find him a nice Polish girl.
 She gives GERTIE a quick awkward kiss.
 I wish - you'd bin my people.

GERTIE
 Max - he's a good man --

MAX
 I'll write ya.
 The door swings shut; she's gone.

135 EXT: THE ALLEY - DAY

ENOCH is out in the alley with the wagon full of finished
 jumping-jack dolls; he pauses to hawk one (inaudibly) to
 MRS SAITO, showing her child how it dances.
 GERTIE is weeding the little garden in front of the house,
 where new grass and flowers are beginning to grow. The radio
 is playing indistinctly from VICTOR's window. Moving to work
 nearby, GERTIE sees in his garbage can the still-fresh lilacs
 -vase and all - MAX was carrying the last time she saw them
 together.
 FRANKIE DALY and JIMMY BOMMARITA are riding up and down on
 bicycles. WHEATEYE comes out of the MEANWELL house carrying
 a paper sack with great care; calls to FRANKIE.

WHEATEYE
Frances, honey, c'm here.

FRANKIE
Get stuffed.

He rides off. WHEATEYE tries JIMMY.

WHEATEYE
C'm here - I wanna show y' somethin'--

JIMMY sticks out his tongue, follows FRANKIE. WHEATEYE
climbs up on her coalshed roof. ENOCH passes it on his
way home.

ENOCH (calling)
Ma, I sold four of 'em!
WHEATEYE whistles; he looks up.

Whatcha doin'?

WHEATEYE (triumphant)
Bombin' the Japs!

She drops her paper sack - full of coloured water - on hias
head; scrambles down, escapes. ENOCH bellows.

ENOCH
Mom!

GERTIE
C'mon -- y'ain't killed. Go in an' change
y'r shirt.

ENOCH goes indoors, grumbling. VICTOR has appeared at his
window.

VICTOR (low)
Gert?

GERTIE straightens up, looks at him.
Where'd she go?

GERTIE
She talked about the sea.

VICTOR
What sea, for Chrissake? They's hundreds a' seas.

GERTIE
I don't know. She said she'd write.

VICTOR is having trouble getting the words out.

VICTOR
Y' know - why she went?

GERTIE

Maybe....because she didn't belong.

A car draws up. CLOVIS, in the passenger seat, is talking earnestly to the driver, TOM COOPER.

VICTOR

Cooper - you know much 'bout him?

GERTIE

Not a lot.

VICTOR

You tell Clovis t' keep his nose clean.

He disappears. CLOVIS gets out of the car and goes into the house. The car drives off.

136
121.

INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

CLOVIS is taking off his jacket as GERTIE comes in. He hands her his strike pay. ENOCH watches.

GERTIE

That's all?

CLOVIS

I hadda put money on the car. They's only two payments t' go.

ENOCH, in a dry shirt not yet buttoned, thrusts a handful of dollar bills hastily at GERTIE.

ENOCH

Mom, I sold four jumpin'-jacks! An' a cop took one - a cop in a squad car! He stopped an' asked what I was doin' - an' I said wouldn't he like a doll f'r his little girl. He said how'd I know he had a little girl - but he laughed an' he kept it.

GERTIE has been counting the money.

GERTIE

Y' done real well, honey - but they's only seven fifty here.

ENOCH

Well, I didn't ask him f'r no money.

CLOVIS

Y're learnin' good.

GERTIE

Cops earn more'n strikers.

ENOCH

I'll have a cop speakin' t' me personal now,
jus' like Mr Daly. Pop, c'n some a 'that help
pay f'r the car?

CLOVIS ruffles his hair.

CLOVIS

Y'r ma's gonna need all she c'n get.

137 INT: KITCHEN - DAY

GERTIE, in street clothes, basket over arm, takes money from a drawer. Counts out seven dollars; hesitates; puts two back.

138 INT: SUPERMARKET - DAY

GERTIE takes two quarter-pound sticks from a one-pound package of margarine, puts them in her basket. Picks up a carton of a dozen eggs; puts it down, takes half a dozen instead. Looks along the meat counter, passing up one thing after another as she sees the prices; finally takes soup bones.

139 INT: BEDROOM

A different day. GERTIE is sitting on the bed putting on her shoes. There is a hole in the bottom of one of them. She cuts a piece of cardboard to fit the shoe, puts it on.

140 EXT: HOUSING PROJECT, A DIFFERENT ALLEY - DAY

GERTIE, clearly hating the job, is trying to sell jumping-jack dolls from a basket on her arm. No sound. We see her knock at a door; a woman opens it; GERTIE speaks; the woman shakes her head and slams the door. Next house: a man in T-shirt and suspenders opens the door with a little girl in his arms. GERTIE makes her pitch, shows the doll dancing. The child is delighted; the man asks how much. GERTIE tells him. He shakes his head.

141 EXT: STREET

GERTIE trudging along with her basket: a forlorn, dejected figure.

142 INT: PROJECT OFFICE ;

GERTIE is facing a cold-eyed woman sitting behind a grilled window. She takes money from her purse and puts it on the counter.

WOMAN

This is the last late payment I can allow. You're still behind. There are plenty of families would be glad of these units, you know.

GERTIE

Yes'm. I know. Thank you.

She turns aside and another woman takes her place in line at the grille. GERTIE crosses to the project notice-board, where all manner of home-made notices are pinned up. She puts up a piece of paper reading: "WASHING - IRONING - CLEANING - Gertie Nevels, 18911 Merry Hill." Then her attention is caught by another notice nearby, lettered with immense care. It reads:

ANYTHING!-

BABY-SITTING - LAUNDRY - HEAVY WORK
WALL-WASHING - FLOOR-SCRUBBING - ANY
KIND OF HOUSEWORK — ANYTHING!

Clytie Nevels, 18911 Merry Hill.

GERTIE smiles, affectionately and unhappily; takes down her own notice and crumples it up.

143

INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - DAY

Tired and despondent, GERTIE closes the street door behind her, turns, and is faced by ENOCH holding up a jumping-jack and dancing it under her nose. It is not one of her finished dolls, but rough-cut, painted crudely in garish colours. From the back room comes the buzz of the jigsaw.

GERTIE

Oh honey, what y' done to it?

ENOCH

Pa done it. Don't you like it?

GERTIE

It's ugly.

She sees the kitchen table: covered in rough doll parts painted in glaring, random colours. Newspaper, brushes, small pots of red, yellow, blue, green paint. Colours and dolls look blatantly cheap and nasty.

The sound of the jigsaw breaks off; CLOVIS comes in, smiling.

GERTIE (abrupt)

We cain't afford foolishness like paints.

CLOVIS

Now don't you jump on me - that's t' help
with y'r dolls. I'll save y' a whole lot a'
time whittlin'.

GERTIE

Is time gonna buy groceries?

She drops two dollar bills and some change on the table.

That's all I got left after payin' last month's
rent - an' by rights this month's is due. How'm
I gonna buy food, Clovis?

CLOVIS

Get credit, like anyone else. You're so mule-
minded about that -- they'll give y' stuff on
account at the store.

GERTIE sits down wearily.

GERTIE

An' make y' pay back double - like they done
you at all th'other stores.

CLOVIS

We c'n pay it off, once the strike's over. Y're
real good with money. (Placatingly) Lord, think
how much y' saved - if that damn crooked funeral
parlour hadn't took it all. With Henley's money
it musta bin more'n six hundred dollars. Enough
f'r a piece a land. If I'd a knowed you had all
that, I'd a said buy a place an' wait f'r me.

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE, frozen: she can't believe what she's
hearing. This is the CLOVIS who was furious with her for
saving; who went secretly to Detroit; whose summons lost
her the Tipton Place.

CLOVIS smiles.

Then when the war was over, I'd a come rollin'
home an' we'd a bin all set....

GERTIE gets up. She backs away from him, staring.

GERTIE

You allus hated the farm. You'd a spent that
money f'r a truck - I knew y' would. You sold
the cow f'r tires--

CLOVIS

I jus' couldn't see you workin' an' workin'
an' allus givin' half away....(defensively)
I wanted you t' have what y' wanted, Gert.

GERTIE

But you sent f'r us -- an' Mom an' Old
John said it was m' duty. An' Cassie -- oh
God, oh God, she'd still be alive--

There are tears in her eyes; her face set tight. Instinct
sends her hand to her pocket for her only ultimate comfort,
the whittling knife. She sits down again blindly, reaches
for one of the jumping-jack dolls and begins whittling a face
on it.

CLOVIS has been momentarily stunned by her intensity, but
as he watches her whittle, disapproval takes over.

CLOVIS (irritable)

F'r God's sake, Gert - y' want 'em quick an'
cheap, y' don't waste time whittlin' on 'em.
Paint 'em!

It's the last straw. GERTIE leaps up, furious. She shouts at
him, all the pent-up frustration pouring out.

GERTIE

Don't tell me -- jus' don't tell me!
Sixteen year I dreamed of our own farm --
I worked an' saved - but you said come t'
Detroit an' I had t' come. You never cared
what I wanted! You never asked! It had t' be
towns, machines, that Icy Heart -- things you
wanted. An' we're stuck in this hole, owin'
money all round, you on strike with y'r
precious union -- an' Reuben gone, an'
Cassie-Marie--

She chokes, but won't stop.

You've gone y'r own road allus an' I had t'
go too - but I ain't doin' that no more!

She points to the dolls.

These are mine, an' they're all that's feedin'
our kids now - an' you ain't gonna stop me
doin' 'em right!

With one sweep of her arm she knocks all the paints on
to the floor, the bright colours spilling and running
into one anoter. ENOCH and CLOVIS stare at her as she
stands there flushed and glaring, knife in hand, looking
dangerous and slightly mad. Suddenly CLOVIS turns his
head to the door.

WHIT MEANWELL is standing there. He jerks his head.
Without a word CLOVIS gets up and goes out.

CLOSE-UP: AMOS is squatting on the floor, finger-painting
with the pool of spilled paints.

144 INT: BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A black shadow looms on a wall, leaning forward, ominous. We pull back and see that it's the cherrywood block; GERTIE, overcoat over nightdress, is sleepily working on it.

She gets up, goes to the boys' bedroom to check them. ENOCH stirs.

ENOCH

Is Pop home?

GERTIE

He won't be long. G'night, honey.

She looks in at the kitchen to see the clock. It's twelve-thirty. GERTIE is troubled. She goes into the back room and sits down to work again; then hears a faint tapping at the back window.

Hesitantly she goes to look. It's raining outside; the window is blurred. Then a disembodied hand reaches up to past the sill to tap again.

GERTIE gasps, but peers down, and can just see TOM COOPER looking up at her. She opens the window.

COOPER is crouched by the wall; the rain is washing away a smear of blood on his cheek. He hisses urgently at her.

COOPER

Turn out the light - and open the door!

GERTIE pulls the string of the ceiling light; opens the door, standing on the back step in the red glow from the steel mill. Coming towards her past the back of VICTOR's house she sees a strange dark shape: two men carrying another.

COOPER and WHIT carry CLOVIS into the room and dump him on the floor. WHIT pulls the shades and turns on the light. CLOVIS is unconscious, his face dark and sticky with blood.

GERTIE

We gotta git him t'a hospital!

COOPER

Keep y'r voice down!

WHIT

He ain't bad hurt. Newspapers, quick.

GERTIE grabs up some newspapers, thrusts them forward, then runs to the kitchen. They shove the papers under CLOVIS' head. He comes to, vomiting blood. GERTIE comes back from the kitchen with cloths and a bowl of water.

GERTIE

What happened?

COOPER

They jumped us. Outside Bender's house.

WHIT

They got him in the jaw. He's swallowed blood, that's all.

CLOVIS vomits again as she's cleaning him up.

CLOVIS (thickly)

Those bastards - where'd they come from?

COOPER

They were waiting.

GERTIE

Did you call the police?

WHIT

You kiddin'? Flint's got the cops in his pocket. This is Detroit, honey.

CLOVIS

I got that first'n anyway, didn't I? The one comin' after you. Got him good. Easy!

The last word is a yell - GERTIE is wiping his face.

WHIT

Maybe too good.

GERTIE

What d'y' mean?

No-one answers. CLOVIS is feeling his jaw.

CLOVIS

God damn ---

WHIT

Nothin' personal. They was hired t' beat up Bender, an' you got in their way.

From the kitchen there's a knock on the front door. They jump.

Cops?

COOPER

Cops don't knock that way.

GERTIE goes to open the door; SOPHRONIE comes in, wearing a raincoat.

SOPHRONIE
They back?

GERTIE
Clovis got hurt.

Coming into the back room, SOPHRONIE takes one look at
CLOVIS and puts her arm round GERTIE.

SOPHRONIE (bitterly)
Trouble -- you hunt it.

WHIT (cool)
I figger the unions worth a little trouble.

GERTIE and SOPHRONIE are facing them like Furies.

COOPER
It won't always be like this.

GERTIE
I bin sayin' that all m' life.

SOPHRONIE
Did they see y'r car?

COOPER
I don't know. It was Clovis' car.

CLOSE-UP of CLOVIS, feeling his jaw.

145 INT: NEVELES KITCHEN - DAY

GERTIE is at the stove putting on a pot of beans to boil.
There's nothing else on the stove.
CLYTIE and ENOCH come in from outside.

ENOCH
Joe's in the alley, Mom.

GERTIE
Not today.

She takes the last three potatoes from the vegetable bin.
ENOCH opens the refrigerator; there's nothing inside but
half a loaf of bread and a quart of milk. He reaches for
the bread. CLYTIE takes his hand away and closes the
fridge door.

CLYTIE
Where's Pop?

GERTIE
He's sick. Leave 'm be.

CLOVIS (from the bedroom)

Gert?

GERTIE pours a glass of water, takes it in to him, closing the door behind her. He's in bed; a mess.

GERTIE

Y' wanta a drink?

CLOVIS face is so swollen he can hardly drink or talk.

CLOVIS

I keep seein' that one I hit. He didn't get up.

GERTIE

Nothin' y' c'n do about it now.

CLOVIS drinks. He hands the glass back; hesitates; touches her hand. Groans and drops back on the pillow.

CLOVIS

I was gonna make things so good f'r you.
Comin' up here t' good money -an' gettin'
in with th' union--

GERTIE

You jus' -- don't look where y're goin'.

CLOVIS

Guess I never did think what you wanted.
Reuben said once - she likes her hands in
the dirt.

GERTIE

You gotta see a doctor.

CLOVIS

What'd we pay him with?

He turns his head away helplessly.

Oh God --

GERTIE

We'll manage.

146 INT: SUPERMARKET - DAY

Reaching a bag of flour from a shelf, GERTIE sees VICTOR clutching a list, looking lost. He grins at her, abashed.

VICTOR

Coffee?

GERTIE
Next aisle. That way.

He goes. Then re-appears at the end of her aisle.

VICTOR (calling)
Sugar?

GERTIE
Up here.
He trundles up with his cart; finds the sugar.

VICTOR
Steak?

GERTIE (wryly)
I dunno - I never bought it. Here - gimme that.

She takes his list; he follows her like a large obedient dog.

GERTIE, at the check-out counter, looks at the total on the cash register; it says \$8.50.

GERTIE
I guess I won't take those.
She sets two packages aside. The check-out girl shrugs, takes her money - GERTIE only has \$7.
GERTIE leaves, not seeing that VICTOR, behind her, picks up the packages and adds them to his own cart.

147 EXT: SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT

VICTOR catches up with GERTIE, drops the two packages into her basket.

VICTOR
You pay me back when the strike's over.
Clovis he seen a doctor?

GERTIE
He won't go.

VICTOR
Good, maybe.

GERTIE
Why?

VICTOR
They lookin'. Not jus' cops - them Flint goons. One of 'em got killed.

GERTIE (alarmed)
They know who done it?

VICTOR shrugs.

VICTOR
Clovis sh'd get outa town. You got
trouble, you let me know.

148 EXT: ALLEY - DAY

Hurrying anxiously to her door, GERTIE runs into children marching up and down outside the MEANWELLS house, supervised by WHEATEYE, carrying sticks with crudely lettered paper signs: "STRIKE!" "KEEP OUT!" ENOCH grins and waves.

WHEATEYE (calling)
Watch out, Miz Nevels - y' cain't cross our
picket line - y'll be a scab!

149 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

CLOVIS, very battered-looking, is sitting at the table tracing the pattern of a doll's leg over and over on a piece of wood. GERTIE clutches his arm.

GERTIE (urgent)

Clovis--

She breaks off as she sees that AMOS is playing on the floor.

AMOS

Mommy, I'm hungry.

GERTIE goes to inspect a pot of soup on the stove.

GERTIE

Where's Clytie?

CLOVIS

Baby-sittin'. She'll be back any minute.

GERTIE

Y' tell her --?

CLOVIS

Told 'em I'd bin in a car smash. Gert - Whit come by. They's a job -- friend a' his, got a place outside Detroit, wants a tractor rebuilt. But we'd be gone a week or more.

GERTIE ;

Thank God.

There's a knock at the door. They look at one another. CLOVIS goes silently into the bedroom and shuts the door behind him. GERTIE takes a breath, opens the door. MR SKYROS is standing there.

GERTIE (loud)

Oh - Mr Skyros - come in.

Behind the bedroom door, CLOVIS, crouched, holding a wrench, relaxes.

SKYROS

How are you, Mrs Nevels? I came--

He suddenly notices the cherrywood figure on the far side of the room, and falls silent. Crosses to it. An aeroplane comes in low, the noise making it impossible to speak.

CLOSE-UP of MR SKYROS, awed.

GERTIE

Someday he'll have a face, but - I cain't seem t' find it.

SKYROS (quiet)

It's there - waiting. Mrs Nevels -- you remember that beautiful little chickadee carving you sent to school? Do you make other figures that size - birds, animals?

AMOS

Mommy, I'm hungry!

GERTIE

Fetch me y'r toy box, Amos.
(to SKYROS) I done some.

SKYROS

I showed your chickadee, and the jumping jack doll, to a friend of mine who has a store downtown. He's an interior decorator - very talented - has even worked for Mrs Flint, I understand. He quite fell in love with your pieces. Wants to commission you to make some for him to sell.

AMOS comes in lugging a cardboard box. GERTIE takes from it several small carved animals and birds - shiny and dark from much handling - which are so enchanting that they make SKYROS exclaim aloud (and should do the same for the audience.)

GERTIE

These a' bin around a while. I guess I done most a' them f'r Clytie.

SKYROS

How long would it take you to make fifty of them?

GERTIE

Fifty!

SKYROS

My friend is convinced that he can sell a great many. He would pay you four-fifty apiece. (Apologetically) Far less than they're worth, of course--

GERTIE

I go pretty quick. When I got time.

SKYROS

You must work at your own speed. Ask the children to let me know when you have - maybe a dozen? Oh--

He produces an envelope, hands her it.

He sent you fifty dollars in advance, to buy the wood you'll need. I know these are difficult days for you.

He looks back at the cherrywood block.

You must promise me to finish that....
Well - I won't keep you. Amos is hungry.

At the door, he sees one of the painted jumping-jacks; picks it up, laughing.

I see Enoch is trying to follow in his mother's footsteps. He has a little way to go yet!

He drops the doll fastidiously. GERTIE opens the door.

GERTIE

Mr Skyros - thank you.

SKYROS

A privilege.

She closes the door slowly. CLOVIS comes out of the bedroom like a rocket.

CLOVIS

Is that ever a piece a' luck! Y' c'n do them real quick if y'--

Shrieks come from outside the door. GERTIE opens it again.

150 EXT: THE ALLEY

MR SKYROS is surrounded by children yelling: "Scab, scab!"

FRANKIE DALY

Cain't y' read the signs, dummy?
Y' crossed the picket line!

SKYROS (equably)

Oh I must apologise - I hadn't got my
gllasses on. Perhaps you'll show me where
I should go?

GERTIE comes out, prepared to rescue him. WHEATEYE
takes his hand.

WHEATEYE

I'll show y', Mr Skyros. We'll take care a' y'.

SKYROS

It's all right, Mrs Nevels - I'm being well
looked after!

GERTIE

Enoch! Supper in five minutes!

She raises a hand at MR SKYROS; goes indoors.

151 INT: KITCHEN

CLOVIS is scribbling on a piece of paper.

CLJVIS

Fifty at four-fifty is two-twenty-five
dollars. Less fifty for the wood, that's
a hundred an' seventy-five. I c'n cut 'em
out f'r y' on the jigsaw -- mebbe five
diff'rent critturs, ten of each --

GERTIE (urgent)

Clovis--

CLYTIE runs in before she can finish.

CLYTIE

Sorry, Mom - Mrs Saito was late.

She waves three dolar bills, smiles, puts them in the
drawer. AMOS comes to her, arms up.

GERTIE

Thanks, honey. Get him washed up, will y'?

CLYTIE takes AMOS to the bathroom. GERTIE is finally alone with CLOVIS.

GERTIE
Clovis-- y' cain't think about dolls! You
an' Whit has got t' get t' that job soon's
y' can -- they're lookin' for y'. That man
you hit--

She breaks off as CLYTIE comes back.

CLYTIE
He's in the bathroom. I'll set the table.

GERTIE
Where's Enoch?
She goes to the door, looks out.

152 -EXT: THE ALLEY
GERTIE'S POV:

At the end of the alley a police cruiser is standing; a policeman is makinbg his way through the crowd of children

FRANKIE DALY
Don't you cross our picket line, mister!

CJP (amiably)
Cops c'n cross picket lines.

He approaches MR DALY, who is standing on his steps.
DALY points towards the NEVELS house.

153 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - DAY

GERTIE shuts the door quickly.

GERTIE (to CLOVIS)
Git back in there an' lie down.

CLOVIS
What's up?

GERTIE
Cops.

CLOVIS
I gotta get outa here!

GERTIE
You do like I say! Right now! Close the door.

CLOVIS hesitates; then retreats in to the bedroom.
There's a loud knocking at the door; GERTIE open it.
The cop is there. He's looking at a piece of paper.

FIRST COP
Clovis Nevels?

GERTIE
He ain't home.

CLYTIE and AMOS are sitting bug-eyed at the table. AMOS, baffled, knowing his father is at home, opens his mouth - and CLYTIE shoves a piece of bread in it.

FIRST COP
You Mrs Nevels?

GERTIE nods.

You got a boy down in Kentucky?

GERTIE (startled)
Reuben.

FIRST COP
You hafta call him - we got a message.

GERTIE
What happened?

FIRST COP (shrugs)
The Kentucky officer said it was an emergency.
Y' c'n call from the station if y' like.

CLYTIE slips off her chair and goes to GERTIE, who's standing there irresolute.

CLYTIE
I'll come with y', Mom.

154 EXT: THE ALLEY - DAY

The police car moves off up the alley.

155 INT: KITCHEN - DAY

CLOVIS, holding the curtain, watches it go from the window.

156 INT: POLICE STATION - DAY

The DESK OFFICER sits behind the counter. GERTIE stands in front of it with the two COPS from the cruiser. All are watching CLYTIE, who stands with the telephone to her ear.

CLYTIE has the cop's piece of paper on the counter before her. She's speaking with quiet confidence to the operator.

CLYTIE

An' will you call me back after, with the charges?...Thank you....Hallo? I'm callin' Reuben Nevels.....Reuben? Here's Mom.

GERTIE takes the telephone; holds it gingerly to her ear. We hear what she hears. It's a bad line; REUBEN's voice comes small and tinny through clouds of static.

REUBEN (telephone V.O.)

That you, Mom?

GERTIE (loud)

Reuben? What's wrong? You all right?

REUBEN

Mom - Granpa died.

GERTIE stands very still.

Mom - you there?

GERTIE

When? When did he die?

REUBEN

Yesterday mornin'. I found him in his workshop.....

Static drowns his voice for a moment.

.....'n Auntie Mag's here. Granma's goin' back with her. Mom, did y' get my.....

His voice is lost in static again.

GERTIE

Reuben? Reuben honey, I cain't hear y'.

Bemused, she hands the phone to CLYTIE.

CLYTIE

Hallo? Hallo --

GERTIE stands limp while CLYTIE's voice goes on under. The FIRST COP takes her arm.

FIRST COP

Here - siddown.

He leads her to a bench beside the wall; she sits.

CLYTIE (into phone)
 We ain't had no letter.....no.....what'd
 it say? Reuben? Hallo?

She shakes her head, hangs up, comes to GERTIE. Sits down,
 hugging her, arms round her waist, head on her shoulder.

I'm sorry, Mom--

GERTIE, gazing into space, strokes her hair.
 The telephone rings. The DESK OFFICER picks it up.

DESK OFFICER
 Police. What?.....Oh okay - thanks.
 He puts down the phone; looks at GERTIE.
 Two fifty.

GERTIE looks at him blankly.

CLYTIE
 The call cost two fifty, Mom.

GERTIE
 Oh.....I ain't got money with me. I'll
 bring it to y'.

The SEuOND COP (the driver) from the squad car is leaning
 on the counter watching them.

SECOND COP
 You got a kid sells dolls?

GERTIE (nods)
 Enoch.

SECOND COP
 Yeah, Enoch. That's a smart kid. He gimme a
 doll - my kid got so mad, it was a sight. She
 tried right off t' take it apart, an' when she
 couldn't she throwed it at me. Cain't get it
 away from her now.

GERTIE smiles faintly; gets up like a very old lady.

GERTIE
 C'n we bring the money tomorrow?

SECOND COP
 Forget the money.

(to CLYTIE)

Get y'r ma on home; she's kinda tore up. An'
 don't you let y'r kid brother go sellin' after
 dark, or get into no car with no stranger.

CLYTIE shakes her head, wisely.

CLYTIE
We know 'bout that. We bin here a long time.

157 INT: BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

GERTIE is asleep, tossing, murmuring; she wakes suddenly. Hears CLOVIS moving in the kitchen. She jumps up, pulling on one of his shirts over her nightgown.

158 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

CLOVIS is simultaneously stuffing clothes into a bag and eating a piece of bread.

GERTIE
You shoulda got me up.

CLOVIS
You didn't sleep much.....We'll be gone a week or more. I'll write. It's a farm -mebbe I c'n bring some stuff back. I'm sorry about y'r Pa, Gert.

GERTIE turns to look out of the window. CLOVIS comes up behind her and takes her shoulders.

I wish y'd been there. Hell - I wish I'd never seen Detroit.

159 EXT: THE ALLEY - GERTIE's POV.

A car draws up outside, driven by WHIT. He honks.

160 INT: THE KITCHEN

CLOVIS holds GERTIE closer, bends his head to hers.

CLOVIS
Old woman--

GERTIE rests her cheek against one of the hands holding her shoulders.

GERTIE
You jus' take care.

ENOCH and AMOS, woken by the car horn, come wandering in wearing pyjamas; then CLYTIE. CLOVIS puts on his jacket, holds out his arms for each in turn to hug him. GERTIE stands where she is.

161 EXT: THE ALLEY

Out of the window she sees WHIT hail the mailman, who bends to yell something through the window of the car.

162 INT: KITCHEN

CLOVIS

Gert, our car's in the lot -move it someplace, will y'? Else they'll come repossess it. I cain't make a payment till I done this job.

GERTIE nods. Outside, the car honks again. Two letters come through the mail-slot in the door, landing on AMOS' head. CLYTIE picks them up.

CLYTIE

This one's from Reuben. That's what he musta meant--

CLOVIS

Open it.

As she does, he opens the door and yells to WHIT.

Be right there!

CLYTIE

It's to Mom.

GERTIE motions her to go ahead. CLYTIE reads.

"Dear Mom, I am writing for Granpa, he is very sick. All Granma does is cry and say you diserted them. She wants to sell the farm and go live with Auntie Mag. Granpa says if he dies the farm is yours and she must not sell it. But if you dont come she will sell it because she says what I do is not enough. I am writing because Granpa told me to. Your loving son Reuben."

AMOS (suddenly)

Gyp. Go see Gyp.

CLOVIS bangs his fist against the wall in frustration.

CLOVIS

Christ! I ain't got train fare f'r even one! Gert--

GERTIE seems not to have heard him; she is twiddling one of the buttons on the shirt she wears, gazing at it absently.

CLYTIE

Is Reuben there all alone?

GERTIE snaps into life suddenly, moving to give CLOVIS his bag.

GERTIE

Reuben's got sense. Don't fret.

CLOVIS (despairing)

You're gonna lose that place!

GERTIE kisses him.

GERTIE

We ain't got nothin' more t' lose,
Clovis. Go on now.

He leaves; they wave the car off from the door.

CLYTIE

I gotta dress - I'm baby-sittin'.

GERTIE

Take Amos with y'. I'll need Enoch t'
give me a hand.

163

EXT: CAR IN PARKING LOT - DAY

GERTIE is sitting in CLOVIS' car with ENOCH beside her. He watches dubiously as she starts the engine with more confidence than expertise.

GERTIE

Honey, you been t' the car lot with y'r Pop
t' make payments, ain'tcha?

ENOCH

Sure. Down past trhe mill - Josephsons.

GERTIE

You aim me there.

ENOCH

What for?

GERTIE

Jus' tell me the way.

164. EXT: USED CAR LOT - DAY

GERTIE is standing in the used car lot with the DEALER a small dark whippet-like man with sharp eyes and a humped shoulder. ENOCH is prowling round inspecting cars and trucks, stroking the shinier ones.

GERTIE

But they's only two t' go - it's near all paid.

DEALER

No way, lady. Cash on time, that's our rule. Y've got till Friday or we repossess.

ENOCH pulls at GERTIE's arm, points to a truck.

ENOCH

Lookit, Mom - it's jus' like Pa's truck, only newer.

DEALER

Not s' new as your car, sonny.

He looks at GERTIE.

You'll find some way to keep that, if you've got any sense.

GERTIE (thoughtfully)

If I raised the money an' paid off the car, w'd y' swap it f'r that truck?

ENOCH gazes at her, astounded.

DEALER

Lady, you're crazy.

GERTIE

Would y'?

DEALER

Sure I would.

GERTIE

I'd want t' have someone look it over firstst.

DEALER

We ain't got nothin' t' hide.

GERTIE

How much we owe?

The DEALER takes a battered little book from his pocket, pulls off the rubber band round it, flips through.

DEALER

Fifty-two bucks, with tax.

GERTIE takes out the envelope holding MR SKYROS's fifty dollars; gives it him; counts out a crumpled dollar bill and some change. ENOCH is aghast.

ENOCH

Mom!

GERTIE

Hush!

ENOCH looks at her, looks at the DEALER. His entrepreneurial instinct takes over.

ENOCH

Will y' throw in a spare tire?

The DEALER contemplates him, then the cash. He grins.

DEALER

Why not?

ENOCH

Tools? An' a jack?

DEALER

Don't push y'r luck, kid. I'll go make out the papers, lady - y' wanna come to the office?

GERTIE

Put in about havin' it looked over.

HE nods and leaves; they follow.

ENOCH

Mom - that was y'r money f'r wood. How you gonna make dolls?

GERTIE

We'll go see your scrapwood man.

ENOCH

He ain't got nothin'.

GERTIE

Won't hurt t' look.

She is euphoric; ENOCH finds it very puzzling.

ENOCH

Who y' gonna have 'check out the truck?

GERTIE

Victor. When he comes off shift.

165 EXT: CAR LOT - DAY

VICTOR's head emergesd from the engine of the truck.

VICTOR
Looks okay t' me. Holy Mother a' God,
Gert, why y' want a truck?

GERTIE
I'll tell y' tomorrow. Gotta get me some
wood.

VICTOR (baffled)
Wood?

GERTIE turns to face him squarely; puts her hands on
his upper arms.

GERTIE
Now you listen t' me. When Max was a youngun,
did she live 'near the sea?

VICTOR
Some place in Mississippi. Biloxi.

GERTIE
If you c'n leave y'r Mom, that's where
y'oughta look.

166 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Late sunlight slants in through the window, falls on
the cherrywood block. The house is full of the noise of
a train rushing by at the end of the alley. GERTIE is
combing AMOS' hair. He's neatly dressed; so is she.

AMOS
Where we goin', Mom? T' see Cassie-Marie?

GERTIE
We're jus' goin' out, while Clytie an' Enoch
are playin'. I'll need t' borrow y'r wagon.

AMOS
It's outside.

167 EXT: THE ALLEY - LATE AFTERNOON

AMOS fetches his wagon from the front yard, pulls it to
the steps.
On the steps of her house nextdoor SOPHRONIE is sitting
with WHEATEYE, who has her rag doll in her arms.

SOPHRONIE
Wanna cup a' coffee, Gert?

GERTIE
Later mebbe. I got an errand t' do.

SOPHRONIE
Heard from Clovis?

GERTIE
No. Y' heard from Whit?

SOPHRONIE shakes her head.

SOPHRONIE
They'll make out.

GERTIE
How's the merry-go-round?

SOPHRONIE
Still goin' round - an' me with it. At
least we got my money comin' in.

GERTIE
Hold the door f'r me, Amos.

168 INT: NEVELS KITCHEN

GERTIE goes back indoors; stands for a moment in front of the cherrywood block. Then she picks it up in both arms as if it were a heavy child; takes it out and puts it in the wagon..

169 EXT: THE ALLEY

SOPHRONIE
Looks like y' almost finished.

GERTIE
Not quite.

SOPHRONIE
WHere y' takin' it?

GERTIE
T' show a feller.

WHEATEYE'
C'n me an' Cally Lou come too?

GERTIE
Sure.

SOPHRONIE
You get a good price now.

GERTIE and AMOS walk down the alley with the carved figure in the wagon. Children drift over and walk with them, curious.

FIRST CHILD
Whassat?

SECOND CHILD
Where y' takin' him?

FRANKIE DALY trots alongside GERTIE.

FRANKIE
You make that?

GERTIE nods. FRANKIE prods the face. WHEATEYE slaps -- his hand away.

WHEATEYE
You leave 'm be.

FRANKIE
Ain't y' gonna give him no face? .

GERTIE
Mebbe it's there, if y' look real hard.

FRANKIE (peering)
What's it look like?

They pass MRS DALY, scrubbing her steps. She pushes the hair out of her eyes and watches as they go.

GERTIE
Mebbe like your Mom.

FRANKIE (incredulous)
My Mom?

GERTIE looks back down the alley.

170 GERTIE's POV:

The people of the Alley: MRS DALY scrubbing; SOPHRONIE sitting smoking on her steps; VICTOR coming out with his lunch pail; MRS BOMMARITA watching JOE's vegetable truck turn the corner beside the railroad fence.

GERTIE :
Or Wheateye's Mom. Or you, Frankie.
Like most anyone.

CLOSE-UP of the Christ figure with its almost-face, lurching along in the wagon.

171 EXT: THE SCRAPWOOD YARD - SUNSET

The shriek of the power saw fills the air from the SCRAPWOOD MAN's hut. He doesn't see GERTIE and her entourage until they are almost on top of him. He switches off the saw. Sudden huge silence. He looks at GERTIE; then at the carved figure.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
I don't buy nothin'.

GERTIE
I ain't sellin'.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
What y' got there?

GERTIE
Cherrywood.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
It's Christ, ain't it?

GERTIE
I'd like it sawed up f'r whittlin'. Small pieces. Fifty of 'em.

He looks at her incredulously; then back at the figure.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
When you was so near finishin'?

GERTIE
I'm jus' beginnin'. I'd like it sawed - now.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
Hafta be split first.

GERTIE nods. She takes the block from the wagon, finds a level piece of ground and puts it down. The SCRAPWOOD MAN takes an axe. He pauses; hands it to her.

Here. I ain't gonna do it.

GERTIE flinches, but she takes the axe. There's a stir amongst the watching children. GERTIE lifts the axe high; brings it down and hits the head. The axe bounces back, making hardly a mark. The children giggle nervously. The SCRAPWOOD MAN shakes his head.

SCRAPWOOD MAN
You'll hafta do better'n that, lady.
I'll getcha a wedge.

He goes to his hut. While he goes inside, and comes out with a sledgehammer and an iron wedge, GERTIE hits the cherrywood head again, and the axe bites in. The children give a small cheer.
GERTIE's lips are tight, her eyes full of tears.
WHEATEYE is wagging a finger at her rag doll.

WHEATEYE
Now you watch, you bad youngun - that's
jus' what I'm gonna do t' you if you
don't behave!

The children laugh.

GERTIE is pulling out the axehead. The SCRAPWOOD MAN gives her the wedge.

Playing to the gallery, WHEATEYE holds up her doll to face GERTIE.

WHEATEYE (contd)
C'mon, Miz Nevels - you show Cally Lou!

GERTIE glances up; smiles as she used to smile at CASSIE playing. The children cheer her on laughing, as she puts the wedge in the crack and takes the sledgehammer. She's laughing with them.

She swings the hammer high and brings it down on the wedge, the sky behind her lit by the late sun like the glow of a steel pour.

The block splits in two, the front half of the head falling forward to rest on the two outstretched carved hands.

FREEZE

Music up: "Beulah Land". Begin credits.

171

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands deftly carving a rabbit from a small block of wood.

172

CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands carving a chickadee.

173 CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands carving a mouse.

174 CLOSE-UP of GERTIE's hands giving a basket filled with small carved animals and birds to a man's hands. Taking from the man's hand, in return, a sheaf of bills.

175 EXT: COUNTRY ROAD- DAY

With flat Michigan farmland on all sides, GERTIE is driving the truck down a deserted highway. AMOS is beside her, ENOCH and CLYTIE in the back with a mountain of roped furniture and baggage.

In the distance a figure waits beside the road, with a bag. The truck approaches, slows, ENOCH and CLYTIE waving furiously. The figure is CLOVIS.

Grinning, he opens the near door, but GERTIE beckons him round to the driver's seat. She shifts over, taking AMOS on her knee. CLOVIS slings his bag up to ENOCH, crosses round and climbs in.

Hold on the disappearing truck as they drive off down the road, back to Kentucky and home.

END