

**THE LINE**

"Pilot"

Written by

Francesca Butler

**ECHO LAKE**  
ENTERTAINMENT

**Echo Lake Management**  
9696 Wilshire Blvd.  
Beverly Hills, CA 90212  
310-789-4790

OVER BLACK:

ADA (V.O.)  
I've known rivers.

**EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY**

*Mertonville, Alabama. 1922.*

OPEN on a deep, muddy river, winding through a field of cotton. PAN UP to see across the field -- a dark shape swings from a tree.

A BODY.

ADA (V.O.)  
I've known rivers ancient as the  
world and older than the flow of  
human blood in human veins.

CLOSE ON the body. A black man, grotesque in death. Beaten, bloody, eyes bulged out, skin hanging off in strips.

ADA (V.O.)  
My soul has grown deep like the  
rivers.

TWO MEN (black, strong, mid-20s), reverently lift the body down from the tree and into the back of a hand-drawn cart, cover it with a sheet.

ADA (V.O.)  
I bathed in the Euphrates when  
dawns were young --

**EXT. CARRIE ANN'S HOUSE - DAY**

CARRIE ANN  
What's the Euphrates?

A small vegetable garden outside a worn, beat-down shotgun shack. CARRIE ANN MOSLEY (17, black, clever, not to be trifled with) and ADA FRAZIER (17, black, smart, kind-hearted) pick pole beans as Ada recites.

ADA  
It's a river --

CARRIE ANN  
I knew that. I meant where is it?  
What river?

ADA  
It's where the Garden of Eden was.

CARRIE ANN

If this fella found the Garden of Eden, what's he doing writing poems for the *Defender*?

ADA

I don't know if he really bathed in the Euphrates. It's about the imagery. It sounds pretty.

CARRIE ANN

You can keep the poetry. That what you plan on studying at Tuskegee?

ADA

You say that like I have Tuskegee money. Naw, I just wanted to read about colored folks doin' something besides picking cotton.

CARRIE ANN

White folks 'round here will have your neck.

ADA

Not if they don't find out.

The rickety CREAK of un-oiled wheels sounds across the way. The girls look up.

The two men from earlier pull the cart down the road. The sheet's bloody and filthy now, the shape of a body clear beneath it.

ADA (CONT'D)

Oh, God.

CARRIE ANN

Who do you think -- ?

The color drains from Ada's face. Carrie Ann sees, reaches out.

CARRIE ANN (CONT'D)

I'm sure it ain't --

Ada doesn't let her finish. She spins away and RUNS towards the woods.

**EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS**

On Ada's FEET as they pound the forest floor.

On her panicked FACE as she runs, as she pants, as she prays.

Ada breaks through the woods to a row of houses, a little bigger, a little nicer than Carrie Ann's. She doesn't stop running, heads straight for a back door --

**INT. FRAZIER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

-- and slams into the kitchen, dirty and panting. Her mother, SARAH FRAZIER (late 30s, no-nonsense), startles. Drops the tin plate she's washing in the sink.

SARAH  
Ada, what on Earth -- ?

ADA  
Where's Vernon?

SARAH  
"Where's Vernon?" Tell me why  
you're tracking mud all over my  
clean floors and I'll tell you --

As Sarah talks, Ada storms through the house's tiny front room and onto --

**EXT. FRAZIER HOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS**

-- where she sees her brother VERNON FRAZIER (21, hot-headed), whittling and talking with their father, JOHN FRAZIER (late 30s, quiet, calm).

Like her strings have been cut, Ada slumps against the rail.

ADA  
Oh, thank you, Jesus.

John jumps out of his rocking chair and to her side.

JOHN  
Ada, what's wrong?

Sarah, following Ada onto the porch, continues her scolding.

SARAH  
I know you didn't just walk away  
from me, child, what has gotten  
into you?

The CREAK of wagon wheels sounds. The family looks up, goes silent as the one-cart funeral procession passes by.

The blood's matted to the sheet, making the shape of the body clear.

The Fraziers watch, sorrowful, but not shocked.

VERNON  
You thought that might've been me?

ADA  
Thought it could be.

Ada catches Vernon's eye. He quickly looks away.

SARAH  
(suspicious)  
Vernon knows better than to give  
them folks a reason --

JOHN  
They don't need a reason.

A beat as the weight of that simple truth sinks in.

VERNON  
Who was it, you think?

**EXT. TOWN - DAY**

A small Southern town, the dirty, segregated side of  
Mayberry. Storefronts that haven't been updated in years and  
a dusty gravel road.

Well-dressed white passersby gossip as they stroll on the  
sidewalks, skirting the poorer, barefoot whites with grimaces  
and judging glances. Black townfolk of all classes walk in  
the street.

Ada and Carrie Ann carry armloads of groceries as they talk.

ADA  
Poor Lil George.

CARRIE ANN  
They're saying he stole from Mr.  
Dobson's place.  
(off Ada's "you're fucking  
kidding me" look)  
Hogs probably got into the field  
and Dobson needed someone to blame.

ADA  
And now...

CARRIE ANN  
And now.

They walk in silence a moment.

ADA  
How's his mama?

CARRIE ANN  
How d'you think she is? All this --  
(motions with groceries)  
-- the cooking, the service. It  
ain't gonna bring her boy back.

ADA  
What else are we supposed to do?

CARRIE ANN  
Hell if I know. It just ain't  
right.

A WOLF WHISTLE cuts through the air.

EARL RAY (O.S.)  
Hot damn!

Ada turns to see EARL RAY BENTLEY (20, white, the most punchable face you've ever seen in your life) sidling towards them from across the road.

Carrie Ann nudges Ada, and she quickly whips her head away.

CARRIE ANN  
(whispering)  
Keep your head down!

ADA  
(whispering)  
I know!

Earl Ray catches up with them, walks apace.

EARL RAY  
Carrie Ann.

CARRIE ANN  
(subdued)  
Mr. Earl Ray.

EARL RAY  
Why don't you introduce me to your  
little friend here?

CARRIE ANN  
Her name's Ada, sir.

EARL RAY

Well, Ada, what're two pretty  
little nigger gals like you doin'  
out here all by your lonesome?

Ada doesn't answer, continues walking in nervous silence.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

What, cat got your tongues? You  
can't answer me?

Still silence. Earl Ray slaps a hand on Ada's back, stopping  
her.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

I'm starting to feel a mite  
disrespected.

ADA

(head down)

No disrespect, sir. We're just in a  
hurry.

EARL RAY

With those heavy bags? You ought to  
let me walk with you. Help you out.

As he speaks, he slides his hand down to Ada's backside and  
squeezes. She freezes, tense.

On the street around them, white passersby watch, amused.  
Black passerby speed up, ignoring the scene.

CARRIE ANN

That's awful kind, but we couldn't  
ask you to do that. After all,  
don't you run errands for your  
Daddy on Saturdays? I'd hate for  
him to get upset with you on our  
account.

Earl Ray releases Ada's rear end, turns a hard stare on  
Carrie Ann.

CARRIE ANN (CONT'D)

I seen how he can get when things  
are behind schedule. He's  
particular like that.

EARL RAY

(chuckles)

You're right about that.

(to Ada)

(MORE)

EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
 Carrie Ann here knows, a Bentley  
 man don't stand for no disrespect.

He slaps Ada's ass. She jumps.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)  
 Guess I'll have to walk you home  
 another time. I'll see y'all  
 around.

Earl Ray heads back towards the center of town. The girls  
 continue heading home at a measured pace.

ADA  
 Is he gone?

CARRIE ANN  
 (turns to check)  
 Yep.

The girls speed up.

CARRIE ANN (CONT'D)  
 I hate that old peckerwood.

ADA  
 Best keep your mouth shut; don't  
 want none of the other peckerwoods  
 'round here to hear you.

They laugh.

CARRIE ANN  
 You alright?

ADA  
 Yeah. Guess it was just my turn. I  
 don't know how the hell you keep  
 him away from you.

CARRIE ANN  
 His mama told him the help's off  
 limits. "I spent too long training  
 that girl up for you to go and  
 chase her off." Thank the Lord.

ADA  
 He just likes colored girls 'cause  
 we can't fight back.

CARRIE ANN  
 You're right about that. You be  
 careful, now.

ADA

I've never been anything but.

**EXT. GOSBELL CABIN - NIGHT**

Lil George's wake. Food and moonshine and way too many people, all black, spilling out of a rundown shack. The whole Frazier family's there, as well as Carrie Ann.

Out in the yard, Ada plays an old guitar, surrounded by other musicians of varying ages. Their music's a little blues, a little gospel, and full of sorrow.

On the porch, surrounded by mourners, sits a crying SUE BELLE GOSBELL, Lil George's mother.

SARAH

Go on and let it out, Sue Belle.

SUE BELLE

It just ain't right.

FEMALE MOURNER

No, it ain't. But he's with the Lord now.

Across the yard, the men drink. Vernon sits with his friends LONNIE and CECIL (both early 20s).

VERNON

This is bullshit.

LONNIE

'Course it is. What else is new?

CECIL

I'm just glad it wasn't one of us.

Lonnie shoots him an incredulous look.

LONNIE

That ain't right, man. He's barely buried.

CECIL

Please, like you weren't thinking it, too. They wanted to tree somebody, and they could've caught any of us walking down that road. I'm just thankful to Lil George for giving his life to the cause.

Cecil raises his cup, takes a swig. Disgusted, Vernon walks away.

As he makes it to the edge of the yard, he crosses with John.

JOHN  
Where you headed?

VERNON  
Anywhere but here.

John studies him a moment.

JOHN  
I get the feeling you ain't just  
talking about the wake.

VERNON  
How can you stand it? Never knowing  
who's next? When it's going to be  
you, when it's going to be me?

JOHN  
Don't say that --

VERNON  
Why not? It's true.  
(beat)  
I don't know how to be a man in  
this place.

JOHN  
Same way you be a man in any other.  
Take care of your family. Pay your  
debts. Do good.

VERNON  
You know what I mean, Daddy. I  
don't know that I can stay here.

JOHN  
(hurt)  
Well, it sounds like you've made up  
your mind.

John turns back to the gathering.

VERNON  
Daddy --

John doesn't stop. Frustrated, Vernon storms off into the night.

Across the yard, the lineup of the musicians is changing -- they launch into another song as Ada packs up her guitar. Carrie Ann moves to her.

CARRIE ANN

Leaving?

ADA

Yeah. I gotta play at church in the morning.

CARRIE ANN

I'll should head on, too, check on Mama.

They move to the still-sobbing Sue Belle, hug her. She barely acknowledges them, lost in her grief.

They exit the yard together.

CARRIE ANN (CONT'D)

You want to stay with us tonight?

ADA

No. If your mama wasn't doing well enough to make it out tonight, I'm sure she's not well enough for company.

CARRIE ANN

You think you company now, huh?

ADA

Oh, hush. I'll make it on my own. G'night.

CARRIE ANN

G'night.

The girls part ways.

**EXT. ROAD - LATER**

Ada walks down the road with her guitar, studying the stars.

She sees a silhouette ahead -- a white man, stumbling down the road towards her.

Ada slinks towards the woods at the roadside.

EARL RAY

Hey! Gal!

Shit! Ada freezes as the man -- Earl Ray -- approaches.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

It is you!

He falls over her, breathes in her face, clearly three sheets to the wind. Ada flinches back.

ADA

Me?

EARL RAY

From earlier. Guess I'll get to walk you home, after all.

ADA

I really don't think that's necessary.

Earl Ray grabs her close to him.

EARL RAY

C'mon, now. I insist.

He strokes her arm, down to where she's carrying her guitar.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

Maybe you can even play a little something for me when we get there.

He kisses her. She goes still, unresponsive.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

C'mon. I know you can be friendly. Don't you want to be friendly to me?

His hand slides down her back, pressing her into him, groping her.

He kisses her again. Ada wrenches away from him, backs away slowly.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

Oh, that's how you wanna be?

ADA

It's late, Mr. Earl Ray. Don't you wanna get on home?

EARL RAY

Nah. Think we got something more fun to do.

He grabs at her. Terrified, Ada spins and runs into the woods, dropping the guitar. Earl Ray gives chase.

**EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS**

Ada fucking *books* it. But Earl Ray's right behind her. Ada runs into a place where the brush grows dense, zags to get around a tree and --

FUCK! Earl Ray grabs her. She trips and falls -- he follows her down.

EARL RAY

So eager to lay down for me.

Ada struggles, crawling away as he lifts up her dress.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

Knew you'd have a sweet little ass.

He pins her with one arm, undoing his pants with the other.

Ada scrabbles for purchase, trying to pull herself away. Grabs a rock.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

Don't know why you're fighting --

He pulls her to her knees. Ada braces herself with one hand, rock in the other.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

All you nigger gals love a good --

Ada pushes herself up and swings, scratching Earl Ray's face with a rock. He rears back in pain.

EARL RAY (CONT'D)

FUCK!

Ada swings again -- catches him in the temple. He falls to the ground, moaning.

Shaking and frantic, she swings again. And again. And again.

She stops, arm covered in blood, Earl Ray dead on the ground beneath her.

**INT. CARRIE ANN'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

*TAP TAP TAP*

Carrie Ann sits in a corner, hemming a dress by candlelight.

*TAP TAP TAP*

She looks up to see bloody, shaking Ada tapping at the window. She rushes to --

**EXT. CARRIE ANN'S PORCH - CONTINUOUS**

-- closing the door behind her.

ADA  
I need your help.

**EXT. WOODS - NIGHT**

CLOSE ON two pairs of legs, their owners dragging Earl Ray's body through the woods on a burlap sack.

**EXT. RIVER - NIGHT**

Ada and Carrie Ann stuff rocks into the sack, tie it to Earl Ray's leg. They drag the body and sack out into the water, then shove it away from them.

They watch as the body sinks, swallowed by the river until they can't see anything there at all. Then they swim back to shore.

Wet and shivering, Ada and Carrie Ann help each other out of the river.

**EXT. WOODS - NIGHT**

The girls trudge back to the road, shell-shocked. Ada wanders away from Carrie Ann, bends to pick something up.

It's her guitar case. She opens it -- a couple strings popped in the fall. She slams it closed.

**INT. FRAZIER HOUSE - DAWN**

Sarah's lighting the stove under the coffee percolator when Ada walks in. Ada's dress is still damp and torn. Her face and arms are still bruised.

Sarah turns as Ada closes the door behind her.

SARAH  
Ada Marie Frazier, you'd better  
have a damn good reason for staying  
out all --

She trails as she registers Ada's appearance.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
(grabbing Ada's arms)  
What happened to you?  
(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)  
 (registers the dress)  
 And what happened to your dress?  
 Please tell me... Ada, no --

ADA  
 Mama, what --

SARAH  
 Tell me you've got a damn good  
 reason for being out all night that  
 didn't involve some *man* --

ADA  
 No, Mama. It didn't get that far.  
 (somewhat hysterical)  
 And I don't think he'll be  
 bothering me again.

SARAH  
 Who was it?

Ada doesn't answer, in her own world.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
 (grabs Ada again)  
 Ada, who?!

ADA  
 Earl Ray Bentley.

SARAH  
 Goddamn it.

Sarah gives Ada a hard look. Ada stands stock-still in the middle of the kitchen, awaiting her mother's judgement.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
 How sure are you he won't be  
 bothering you again?

ADA  
 I'm sure.

Sarah takes a step away from Ada, looks her over head-to-toe.

Her eye catches on a red stain on Ada's sleeve.

Ada follows her mother's line of sight. *Oh shit.*

ADA (CONT'D)  
 Mama --

Sarah holds up her hand -- Ada halts.

SARAH  
You'd best tell me everything.

**EXT. FRAZIER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Looking in through the kitchen window as Ada nods. She sinks into a chair, a bit zombie-like, clearly not over her ordeal.

Sarah sits down to face her, and Ada begins to speak, MOS. As she talks, Sara slams her hand over her own mouth, fighting not to break down

We hold on her them a long moment, see their devastation as Sarah reaches out and gathers Ada into her arms.

**EXT. CARRIE ANN'S HOUSE - MORNING**

Carrie Ann sits on the porch, scrubs mud from her boots. Her dress from the night before dries on a clothesline in the background. A weak, sickly VOICE calls from inside:

MRS. MOSLEY (O.S.)  
Carrie Ann?

CARRIE ANN  
Coming, Mama.

**INT. FRAZIER HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING**

John and Sarah sit at the table in silence. John shakes with rage.

JOHN  
That sonofabitch --

SARAH  
It's done, John. We've got to figure out where to go from here.

JOHN  
We gotta get her out.

SARAH  
I still know folks up at Tuskegee, maybe I can --

JOHN  
No. It's too close. We'll send her to Hazel.

Sara recoils.

SARAH

Hazel. No. No, John. I am not  
sending my baby girl --

JOHN

To a place where she'll be safe?  
Where she'll be with family? She's  
too close in Tuskegee. She'll be  
out of reach in New York.

SARAH

I don't like it, John.

JOHN

Neither do I. But what else can we  
do?

John stands with an air of terrible resignation.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'll send that telegram.

He starts for the door -- Sarah catches his hand.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's gotta be done, Sarah.

SARAH

(releases him, defeated)  
I know.

John shrugs into his jacket and walks out.

**INT. FRAZIER HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Ada, stares at the ceiling. We hear the door shut behind  
John. Ada keeps staring.

**INT. BENTLEY HOUSE - MORNING**

A solid, bright, well-kept country home. RAY BENTLEY (late  
40s, imposing Good Ole Boy), lumbers up the stairs.

MR. BENTLEY

Earl Ray! Get on up, now; you got  
chores need doin'.

He reaches the top of the stairs and opens a door into --

**INT. BENTLEY HOUSE - EARL RAY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The bed is empty, still perfectly made.

Ray looks around a moment, as if his son could be hiding behind the door.

RAY

Idiot's probably drunk in a hayloft somewhere.

**INT. GRACE BIBLE CHURCH - MORNING**

The congregation sings "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" loud and full -- the very definition of a joyful noise.

CONGREGATION

*Through this world of toil and  
snares,  
If I falter, Lord, who cares?  
Who with me my burden shares?  
None but Thee, dear Lord, none but  
Thee.*

Light streams through the windows onto the simple white walls, shining onto the people in the packed pews. They're every shade of brown, all dressed in their Sunday best, singing and clapping in praise.

All sing except for Ada. She stands with her family, staring straight ahead.

A concerned Vernon nudges her. She startles out of it, begins to sing with the rest.

**EXT. GRACE BIBLE CHURCH - LATER**

The congregation mills about post-service, exchanging greetings and gossip, invitations to dinner and the like. Cecil (one of Vernon's friends from the wake), pulls Vernon aside.

CECIL

Hey man, you got a minute?

John fixes Vernon with a stare, Vernon meets it.

VERNON

Sure, man.  
(to John)  
I'll see you at home.

He follows Cecil off.

As the rest of the Fraziers make their way through the crowd, ETHEL SMITH (50s, big and brash) hustles over to them.

ETHEL

Ada! I was so disappointed you couldn't play for the choir this morning.

ADA

I'm sorry, Miz Ethel. I wasn't feeling --

ETHEL

And what's this I hear about you leaving town?

JOHN

And good morning to you, too, Ethel.

ETHEL

You keep your good mornings, John Frazier. I just heard the news from Ora --

In the background, ORA (40s, meek) catches Sarah's eye, apologetic.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

-- and I just couldn't believe it.

SARAH

A woman I know up near Franklin is looking for a bookkeeper --

ADA

-- and with it being so close to Tuskegee, I just couldn't pass up the opportunity.

Ada sounds strained, distant; just reciting a line. Ethel blusters on through.

ETHEL

You're leaving your whole family for that?

ADA

I can save up for classes at the Institute.

SARAH

It's an excellent opportunity. Now, if you'll excuse us, Ethel, we've gotta get Ada packed.

ETHEL

Let me get one good hug in, then.  
 (embracing Ada)  
 Take care of yourself. We'll miss  
 you, child.

ADA

(blinking back tears)  
 I'll miss everyone here, too.

The family nods good-byes as they hustle off.

**INT. FRAZIER HOUSE - BEDROOM - AFTERNOON**

Ada sits on the bed, placing a Bible onto the top of the  
 items in her suitcase, latching it shut as Carrie Ann comes  
 in.

ADA

Shouldn't you be with your mama?

CARRIE ANN

I got Miz Ora to come sit with her  
 awhile. Figured I'd say good-bye  
 before you got to the station.

ADA

I never had to say "good-bye"  
 before. Not like this.

Ada starts crying, Carrie Ann rushes forward to embrace her.

CARRIE ANN

Hey, none of that, now.

ADA

I didn't want to kill him.

Carrie Ann pulls away sharply.

CARRIE ANN

Hush.

ADA

But I *didn't* --

CARRIE ANN

You didn't do anything. You're  
 leaving because you always wanted  
 to see New York -- I mean *Tuskegee*.  
 That's it.

ADA

I don't know if I can do this  
without you.

CARRIE ANN

You can. I know you can, because  
you have to.

ADA

You've never been particularly good  
at being comforting.

CARRIE ANN

I never had to be. That was your  
job.

(hands Ada a box)

Here, I got this for you. It was  
s'posed to be your birthday  
present, but now...

She shrugs. Ada opens the box -- it holds guitar strings.

CARRIE ANN (CONT'D)

Figured you'd need new ones,  
anyway.

ADA

But these cost --

CARRIE ANN

I know what they cost. You needed  
them.

ADA

(hugs Carrie Ann)

Thank you. Oh!

She spins, grabs a book from a shelf, hands it to Carrie Ann.

ADA (CONT'D)

I was gonna give you this.

Carrie Ann flips through it. It's hand-bound, poems pulled  
from newspapers, from other books, notes scribbled in the  
margins.

CARRIE ANN

But these are all your favorites.

ADA

I've half-memorized them all by  
now. I know you think poetry's  
silly, but I figured you might want  
this. To remember me by.

CARRIE ANN  
Please, you're unforgettable.

They embrace. Carrie Ann swiftly wipes a tear from her eye.

ADA  
Are you crying?

CARRIE ANN  
Of course not.

She hugs Ada tighter.

**EXT. TRAIN STATION - AFTERNOON**

The Fraziers stand at the platform, sending Ada off. Ada and Vernon stand a ways off from their parents.

VERNON  
Just tell me what's going on.

ADA  
Mama told you --

VERNON  
Mama told me crap and you know it.  
(off Ada's silence)  
Ada. What's wrong? Are you in some  
kinda trouble?  
(voice drops)  
You knocked up or something?

ADA  
No!

VERNON  
Then what the hell is it?! I  
thought I'd be the one getting run  
out of town on a rail.

ADA  
You still might.

VERNON  
What's that supposed to mean?

ADA  
I know what you've been doing.

VERNON  
I do a lot of things.

ADA  
And one of them is recruiting for  
factories up north.

VERNON  
It's a job.

ADA  
It's illegal.

VERNON  
Shouldn't be illegal to help a man  
find opportunity --

ADA  
Lots of things "shouldn't be." They  
still is. And this is one of them.  
You know if the sheriff finds out  
you're trying to help colored folk  
get out, you'll be on the chain  
gang -- or worse.

VERNON  
I'm not gonna sit here watching  
folks work their fingers to the  
bone, getting cheated out of their  
wages, and knowing there's good  
jobs up north. And who are you to  
tell me I shouldn't? You're  
leaving.

ADA  
I have to.

VERNON  
Yeah? And why's that?

ADA  
(beat)  
Just don't do anything stupid. With  
me gone, you're all Mama and Daddy  
have. Be careful.

VERNON  
You do the same, Little Bit.

As they hug, John and Sarah move over.

JOHN  
Best get going, baby girl.

Ada hugs him -- there are tears in his eyes when she pulls  
back.

ADA  
Daddy...

JOHN  
Take care of yourself, you hear?

ADA  
I will.

She moves to Sarah, who presses a large brown paper bag into her hand.

SARAH  
There's food enough in here to last you until you get to New York, and a few slices of pound cake, too. Your Aunt Hazel should be waiting for you when you get off the train in New York, alright?

ADA  
Alright.

SARAH  
(hugs her tight)  
I love you, Ada.

ADA  
I love you too, Mama.

Ada takes one last look at her family before boarding the train.

**INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS**

Ada boards one of the colored cars. She makes her way through the passengers. Some, like her, dressed in poor, country clothes and clutching their belongings for dear life. Others, in more stylish, modern, Northern fashions, sit much more comfortably, almost bored.

Ada finds a seat near the back of the car -- presses herself to the window and watches her family as the train pulls away.

ADA'S POV: Her family fades into nonexistence as the train moves on, the station and town becoming a blur as she watches them through her tears. As she closes her eyes, we go to BLACK.

**INT. TRAIN - MORNING**

*SHRIEEEEEEEEKKKKK!*

Ada rouses as the train pulls into a new station. She looks

out the window -- the station name reads "CAIRO, ILLINOIS."

A PORTER walks through the train, removing the "Colored" signs that hang in each car.

As people disembark, some black passengers -- the better dressed, confident ones -- gather their belongings and move further up the train. We see them enter what was previously the "Whites Only" compartment.

Out the window, Ada sees the people on the platform. It's not fully integrated, but white passengers and black passengers do intermingle amid the hustle and bustle of the station.

RACK TO Ada's face in the window as she studies this strange new world.

PORTER (O.S.)

You can move, you know.

Ada starts, turns to see a black PORTER at her seat.

ADA

Excuse me?

PORTER

You can move up front. If you want to. Seemed like you might not know.

ADA

I'm fine here. But thank you.

The porter nods and moves on down the train. Ada looks suspiciously at the integrated car ahead of her. Then she looks back at the other black Southern passengers in her car. Hunkers lower in her seat.

**INT. BENTLEY HOUSE - MORNING**

Carrie Ann slips into the house through the empty kitchen -- it's all tile and porcelain, very bright and very 1920s-modern.

Carrie Ann moves to the sink full of dirty dishes, starts to wash them.

A CLACK CLACK CLACK of heels on wooden floors. LAURA BENTLEY (early 40s, delicate, high-strung) spins into the room. Carrie Ann startles.

MRS. BENTLEY

Have you seen Earl Ray this morning?

Carrie Ann freezes.

CARRIE ANN  
Good morning, Mrs. Bentley.

MRS. BENTLEY  
Yes, yes. Have you seen Earl Ray?

CARRIE ANN  
Nn-no, ma'am. I just got here.

MRS. BENTLEY  
That's well over a day now that I  
haven't seen him. I just don't know  
where --

She's cut off by the door opening. Mr. Bentley comes in,  
tracks mud all over the floor.

MRS. BENTLEY (CONT'D)  
(to Mr. Bentley)  
Have you seen our son?

MR. BENTLEY  
Don't know what you think's changed  
since you asked me half an hour  
ago.

MRS. BENTLEY  
You could show a little concern,  
Ray -- our son is missing.

Carrie Ann turns silently back to the sink, starts washing  
dishes as quietly as possible, tense.

MR. BENTLEY  
He's not "missing." Probably found  
some bathtub hooch somewhere and is  
still sleeping it off. Either that  
or hunkered down with some pretty  
young thing, hiding from her  
daddy's gun.

MRS. BENTLEY  
Ray!

MR. BENTLEY  
What? It's how we ended up married.

He goes to her, moves to kiss her -- she pushes him away.

MRS. BENTLEY

I'm worried. Earl Ray's gotten into his share of trouble -- I'll never deny that. But this isn't like him.

MR. BENTLEY

Mark my words, he'll drag his ass in a few hours from now, beggin' your gal here for kitchen scraps and somethin' to make his head stop spinning. And when he does, I'll tan his hide for making you worry.

Mr. Bentley exits. Mrs. Bentley turn to Carrie Ann.

MRS. BENTLEY

Carrie Ann, I know Earl Ray sometimes spends time on, well, on y'all's side of town. If you see him, you'll send him on home, won't you?

Carrie Ann slowly turns from the sink, face blank.

CARRIE ANN

Of course, Mrs. Bentley. If I see him.

MRS. BENTLEY

Thank you.  
(turns to leave, stops)  
And make sure you're extra-careful dusting the sitting room today. You left smudges last time.

CARRIE ANN

Yes, ma'am.

Mrs. Bentley exits. Carrie Ann turns back to the dishes, her hands shaking.

**INT. TRAIN - AFTERNOON**

PORTER

Grand Central Station! Final stop!

Ada hunkers close to the window, letting the other passengers exit ahead of her in a rush. As she finally stands, clutching her suitcase to her, the porter approaches.

PORTER (CONT'D)

First time in New York?

ADA  
That obvious?

PORTER  
No more'n anyone else. You looked scared, is all. Keep your head up and your eyes open, you'll be alright.

ADA  
Thank you.

She nods in gratitude and exits the train.

**INT. GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL - AFTERNOON**

Sunlight streams through windows, highlighting masonry and steel and majesty and more people than Ada's ever seen in her life.

As with the integrated platform in Illinois, it's mixed but not. The white folk going briskly about their business, the black folk doing the same -- while being exceedingly careful not to step in the white folks' way.

Ada stumbles through the crowd, wide-eyed and clutching her suitcase, until she sees a sign with her name on it, held high above the crowd.

As she draws closer, she sees the sign is being held by a slick, well-dressed young black man of 20, trying way too hard to be suave, EDDIE.

EDDIE  
You Ada Frazier?

ADA  
I am. Who are you?

EDDIE  
I'm Eddie. I work for Hazel. That all you got?

He reaches for her suitcase & guitar -- backs off when she flinches back.

EDDIE (CONT'D)  
Easy, easy. Just trying to be a gentleman.

ADA  
I doubt that. I thought Aunt Hazel was gonna come get me.

EDDIE

Hazel's a busy lady, gal. I'm what  
you got. You ready to go?

Ada braces herself.

ADA

Fine, let's go.

He reaches for her suitcase again. She snatches it back,  
holds it close as they head out to Harlem.

**EXT. HAZEL'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON**

Harlem. Busy and bustling and black folk everywhere. Some  
folks dressed to impress, some decidedly less so, all going  
about their day.

Eddie and Ada come to a stop next in front of a tall  
brownstone.

EDDIE

This is as far as I can take you.

He opens a side door, revealing a narrow staircase.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

Hazel's apartment 4B, top floor.  
I'd offer to carry your suitcase  
for you, but seeing as you still  
think I'm like to run off with it --  
(he shrugs)  
I'm not too eager to see Hazel in  
one of her moods, no way.

ADA

What do you mean, one of her moods?

EDDIE

You'll find out soon enough. Be  
seein' you, Miss Ada.

With that, he dips forward in an exaggerated bow and jogs off  
down the street. Ada turns to --

**INT. HAZEL'S APARTMENT - STAIRCASE - AFTERNOON**

And trudges up the stairs.

And more stairs.

And more stairs.

Finally, huffing and puffing, Ada reaches the top floor, finds the door marked 4B. She knocks.

HAZEL (O.S.)  
Who the hell is it?

ADA  
It's me.

HAZEL (O.S.)  
Who the hell is me?

ADA  
It's Ada, Aunt Hazel.

The sound of shuffling, a clank, a crash, more shuffling. The door swings open to reveal HAZEL. 30-something, drop-dead gorgeous, and hungover as *hell*.

HAZEL  
Well don't just stand there, child.  
Come in.

**INT. HAZEL'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Ada follows Hazel in. It's... kind of a mess. Furniture a mish-mash of new and hand-me-downs, well-built and falling apart. Half-empty glasses and ashtrays litter every flat surface -- somebody had a grand old time last night.

HAZEL  
Eddie get you here okay?

ADA  
Yes, ma'am.

HAZEL  
None of that "Yes, ma'am" shit with me, makes me feel old.  
(motions to Ada's guitar)  
You play that thing? Or just being sentimental.

ADA  
Yes ma'a -- Aunt Hazel. Daddy taught me.

HAZEL  
You got some of John's skill, you might be able to make yourself useful.  
(throws open a door)  
Your room's here.

Ada steps in -- it's tiny and threadbare. No windows, barely more than a closet.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

I'd been renting it out, but I kicked the girl out when I heard you were coming. Family's family, and all that. We share a bathroom with the rest of the floor -- you're gonna want to get cleaned up and get some rest before your shift tonight.

ADA

Shift?

HAZEL

Yeah, shift. You'll be working at my place -- gotta pay me rent somehow.

Hazel exits. Off Ada, not sure what she's gotten herself into.

**EXT. FRAZIER FARM - AFTERNOON**

Sun high in the sky over row upon row of greenery -- a hot Southern day.

Vernon, Lonnie and Cecil kneel in the dirt, picking turnips. They're sweaty and dirt-smudged; they've been at this awhile.

CECIL

So what's the story with Ada?

VERNON

What d'you mean?

CECIL

I mean where is she, really?

VERNON

She's up in Franklin, working.

CECIL

Like hell she is.

VERNON

You calling me a liar?

LONNIE

Ain't nobody saying that. It's just strange is all.

VERNON  
Strange, how?

CECIL  
Man, Ada's the biggest homebody I ever met. She ever even been out Mertonville before? And you're telling me she just hopped a train to Franklin to take a job? Just like that? Seriously, where is she?

VERNON  
(steely)  
In Franklin. Like I said.

LONNIE  
(voice lowered)  
She ain't... run off with somebody, did she?

VERNON  
What the hell?!

LONNIE  
Sorry! Just, most gals disappear like that... they ain't exactly going to school.

CECIL  
He didn't deny it. What, she mess around and run off with that Bentley bastard? Wouldn't be the first colored gal he bent over --

SMACK! Quick as lighting, Vernon lunges across and PUNCHES Cecil right in the jaw, laying him out flat on the ground.

CECIL (CONT'D)  
The hell you do that for?

VERNON  
You don't get to come on my family's property and talk about my sister that way.

LONNIE  
C'mon, Cecil was only messing.

VERNON  
Yeah? Well maybe y'all need to mess somewhere else.

Lonnie helps Cecil scramble up and the two head off.

Vernon turns back to the turnips for a moment. His hands shake.

Nah. Fuck this. He gathers up his bushel and marches back toward the house.

**EXT. MERTONVILLE MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON**

An afternoon hustle and bustle. Two WHITE WOMEN gossip outside a shop.

WHITE WOMAN #1

Laura says he didn't come home last night.

WHITE WOMAN #2

I'm sure he didn't.  
 (as Carrie Ann passes)  
 There's their maid; have they checked under her bed?

The women giggle. Carrie Ann, looking as respectable as she can in her threadbare work dress, keeps her head down as she walks past them.

A few shops down, Vernon emerges from a hardware store, followed by the owner.

OWNER

You hear anything 'bout that Earl Ray?

VERNON

All due respect sir, I wouldn't be too surprised if he found himself a still somewhere and is holing up 'til the moonshine runs out.

OWNER

(chuckles)  
 Don't let anyone else hear you say that. Folks love that drunk idiot, heaven knows why.

The owner retreats back into the store. Vernon meets Carrie Ann in the street.

CARRIE ANN

(furious whisper)  
 What the hell was that?

VERNON

Hello to you, too, Carrie Ann.

CARRIE ANN  
You can't talk to them people like  
that.

VERNON  
I know where the line is.

CARRIE ANN  
Do you?

VERNON  
Ada ain't been gone 24 hours and I  
already got a new little sister, is  
that it?

Carrie Ann rolls her eyes, starts to walk away.

VERNON (CONT'D)  
Let me walk you home?

CARRIE ANN  
(calls over her shoulder)  
Fine, if you hurry up.

He jogs to catch up with her.

**EXT. CARRIE ANN'S HOUSE - LATER**

Carrie Ann and Vernon meander up the garden path, stop at the  
bottom of the porch. They're silent. Awkward.

CARRIE ANN  
Vernon, what the hell is going on  
with you? You've never been this  
quiet this long in your life.

VERNON  
I got a question for you, and I  
wanted to wait 'til we got here to  
ask.

CARRIE ANN  
Well, go on and ask, then.

VERNON  
What the hell happened to my little  
sister?

Vernon's no longer awkward, but rather visibly distraught.

CARRIE ANN  
What?

VERNON

You heard me. What happened to my sister?

CARRIE ANN

Nothing happened to Ada, she just --

VERNON

If you try to feed me that same bullshit lie Mama and Daddy are selling, I swear to God...

CARRIE ANN

What do you want me to say, then?

VERNON

The truth would be a pretty good start.

CARRIE ANN

Vernon...

VERNON

Just tell me. Is she sick? Is she pregnant --

CARRIE ANN

What?!

VERNON

I know I shouldn't even think it, but...

CARRIE ANN

You're right, you shouldn't. Please, when was the last time you even saw Ada look at one of the fool boys 'round here?

VERNON

What other explanation is there? Did someone hurt her?

He sees something in Carrie Ann's expression.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Someone did. Was it that Bentley son of a bitch?

CARRIE ANN

Ada's fine, Vernon. And you don't need to worry about Earl Ray.

VERNON  
The hell I don't --

Carrie Ann grabs his arm. Her eyes are steely, her voice sure.

CARRIE ANN  
I said, you don't need to worry about him.

VERNON  
(realization dawning)  
Where is he?

CARRIE ANN  
That's not something you need to know.

VERNON  
Who all *does* know?

CARRIE ANN  
There's nothing to know, Vernon. And if you don't want to end up like Lil George, you'd best remember it.

MRS. MOSLEY (O.S.)  
(faint)  
Arthur? That you?

Carrie Ann and Vernon turn towards the house, towards Mrs. Mosley's faint, reedy voice.

CARRIE ANN  
Dammit. Miz Ora must have left early.

VERNON  
Your mama having a lot of bad days, lately?

CARRIE ANN  
More bad than good.

VERNON  
Want me to keep her company while you fix supper?

Carrie whirls toward him, surprised.

CARRIE ANN  
That doesn't seem like your kind of thing.

VERNON

Maybe not. But this kind of thing  
was usually...

CARRIE ANN

Ada.

VERNON

Yeah. And since it seems like she's  
not coming back anytime soon, I  
might as well pick up the slack.

Carrie studies him, takes in this new attitude. She likes  
what she sees.

CARRIE ANN

Well, c'mon then.

They head up the front steps into --

**INT. CARRIE ANN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

-- where they greet MRS. MOSLEY, late thirties going on late  
sixties. She's neatly dressed and groomed, not a hair out of  
place. She sits in a rocking chair by the window, twisting a  
shawl in her hands and looking about fretfully, eyes not  
quite focusing.

MRS. MOSLEY

Arthur?

Vernon goes to her slowly, voice gentle. Carrie hovers near,  
ready to jump in.

VERNON

No, ma'am, Mrs. Mosley. It's just  
me, Vernon.

MRS. MOSLEY

Vernon?

VERNON

Yes, ma'am. Vernon Frazier. You  
remember me.

Mrs. Mosley looks at him, focusing, truly taking him in.

MRS. MOSLEY

Vernon Frazier! Goodness, you've  
gotten so grown. How long has it  
been?

VERNON

It's been a little while, Mrs. Mosley. How are you?

MRS. MOSLEY

I'm just fine and dandy. Lord, Arthur would love to see you -- I just don't know where he ran off to...

VERNON

Well, why don't I read you a book in the meantime? Would you like that?

MRS. MOSLEY

That would be just lovely.

Vernon pulls up a chair next to her, opens the book lying in it.

Carrie Ann catches his eye, smiles, grateful. Vernon nods, begins to read as Carrie Ann turns to the kitchen.

VERNON

Now, I know Miz Ora likes to do Bible study, but I seem to recall that you telling us about Sherlock Holmes...

**INT. HAZEL'S APARTMENT - ADA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Ada stands in front of a mirror, fidgets, examines herself.

She wears an ill-fitting dress, clearly a hand-me-down from Hazel. It's short and low-cut and Ada pulls and it awkwardly, trying to make it cover more of her chest. Or legs. Or anything, really.

The door slams open and Hazel marches in.

HAZEL

How does it look?

ADA

It's --

But Hazel's not listening, marching over to snatch Ada's hands away from the dress and tug it lower over her chest.

HAZEL

Stop covering up, child. It's bad for tips.

(studies Ada, considering)

(MORE)

HAZEL (CONT'D)

It's a little big in the hips, but safety pins'll fix that, you do 'em right.

ADA

It don't cover much.

HAZEL

It ain't s'posed to.

Hazel clocks the rising panic in Ada's face.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

Hey. It's just a uniform. Same as a maid or a police officer or a Pullman porter. It's skimpy 'cause it makes men spend money.

ADA

And if it makes 'em do other things?

HAZEL

Please you're a pretty girl, they'd do *those* if you were wearing a burlap sack.

(beat)

I figured a little of why you came up here, you know. Read between the lines.

ADA

Aunt Hazel --

Hazel cuts her off with a warning noise.

HAZEL

I don't want to know what it was or who it was or how you handled it. These things happen. And you need to know that. It may have been the first time, but it probably won't be the last. The only thing you can do is decide how you're going to handle it. And on your own time, you can be a shy little rabbit, scared of your own shadow. But on *my* time? You bat your eyes and sell 'em booze and pretend just looking at 'em doesn't make you need to take a bath, you hear me?

ADA

Yes, ma'am.

HAZEL

"Yes, Hazel." Like I said, none of that "ma'am" shit. Now pin that thing up and finish getting ready. I'll help you with your make-up.

Hazel swans out, and Ada turns back to the mirror, not liking what she sees.

**INT. THE TEA ROOM - NIGHT**

It's a speakeasy just barely open for the night, and it's less glamorous than you'd think. A windowless basement with tables upon tables, waiting for patrons to arrive.

Ada takes it in -- her eyes drawn to the stage at the front of the room, where a few musicians are tuning up.

ADA

Who all d'you get to perform here?

HAZEL

House band, mostly. Whoever I think's worth the money, when we've got it. And me, when I feel like it. Maggie!

MAGGIE (19, black) pops out of a back room. She's well-coiffed and sophisticated and wearing that dress like Ada never could.

MAGGIE

What d'ya need, Miss Hazel?

HAZEL

This is my niece, Ada. She'll be working here some nights. Show her the ropes.

MAGGIE

Not a problem.

Hazel goes to check on the musicians. Maggie strides over, firmly shakes Ada's hand.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Maggie Givens, pleased to meet you.

ADA

Ada Frazier, likewise.

MAGGIE

C'mon to the back, I'll show you where things are.

ADA  
I've never worked in a place like  
this before. Is it very difficult?

MAGGIE  
Not really. Just keep smiling,  
listen close, and for the love of  
God, don't drop anything.

**LATER:**

It's late and the joint is jumping. Folks in every shade of brown (and a few of white) dressed to impress. The band is playing a hot jazz number, a few couples are on the dance floor showing off their best moves and next to the bar --

CRASH!

-- Ada spins around with a full tray, directly into Eddie (the young man from the train station), who's moving to get back behind the bar.

The tray tilts, but doesn't fall. Two drinks spill, though, one directly on to Eddie.

EDDIE  
Dammit, girl!

ADA  
I am so, so sorry!

Maggie rushes around from the other side of the bar, tossing Eddie a bar towel.

MAGGIE  
It's fine, it happens. What drinks  
did you have?

ADA  
I think a gin and tonic and a...  
Tim Collins?

MAGGIE  
(chuckles)  
You mean a Tom Collins?

ADA  
Yeah, I think. That.

MAGGIE  
You heard the girl, Eddie.

EDDIE  
And what about me?

He motions at his wet, booze-soaked shirt, still angry.

MAGGIE

What about you? It ain't like it'll  
be the first time you leave this  
place smelling like gin.

(nods toward the bar)

Now get to work.

Eddie shoots Ada a death glare as he moves behind the bar to re-mix Ada's drinks. Ada turns to Maggie.

ADA

God, if Hazel finds out --

MAGGIE

She'll yell and you'll deal with  
it. Stop shaking like a damn  
rabbit.

Maggie reaches out, chucks Ada's chin.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

Head up. Back straight. And throw a  
little sway in them hips.

Eddie shoves the freshly made drinks at her.

EDDIE

Try not to drop 'em this time, lil  
Hayseed.

Ada crosses the bar with her tray, absolutely no sway at all in them hips.

She hands a glass to a patron.

PATRON

This ain't what I asked for.

ADA

Oh! I'm so sorry, of course.

She puts the whiskey back on the tray, hands him a Gin and Tonic instead.

PATRON

(ogling her backside)

Thank you.

As Ada distributes drinks to the next table, she overhears him speak to his companion.

PATRON (CONT'D)

She may be a dumb hick, but she  
ain't bad to look at.

Ada grits her teeth as Hazel takes the stage to much  
applause.

HAZEL

Thank y'all. I'd ask what the hell  
you're doing in here on a Monday,  
but I think you know that every  
night is a Saturday night here.

The crowd cheers.

HAZEL (CONT'D)

So let's get on with it!  
(turns to the pianist)  
What d'you think, Jack? Should we  
give 'em something they can really  
dance to?

The PIANO PLAYER plays a jazzy little trill in response.  
Hazel laughs, and the band launches into something jazzy and  
fast and fun.

Then Hazel begins to sing and *damn*. Ada stands for a moment,  
transfixed.

WOMAN

Girl! I need another drink.

Ada snaps out of her haze.

ADA

Of course.

From the bar, Eddie watches Ada, bitter.

Ada returns to the bar, Eddie helps her refill her tray with  
drinks. The tray overbalances -- she stumbles.

EDDIE

Here, let me help you.

He steps in close to her to steady the tray -- Ada lurches  
back, startled. As she takes another step to steady herself,  
she loses her footing and trips.

Ada drops a tray for the second time tonight -- this time all  
over the back of an elegantly dressed black woman.

The woman SHRIEKS in surprise.

WOMAN  
You stupid bitch!

Eddie rushes forward, all manners and charm.

EDDIE  
I am so sorry, ma'am. She's new --  
just off the train this morning.

WOMAN  
And be back on it again by next  
week, I expect.

ADA  
I am so --

WOMAN  
Shut up.

She snatches a towel from Eddie and starts to pat herself dry, as Maggie sweeps in to steer Ada away from the chaos.

MAGGIE  
C'mon. Let's find you something to  
do. Away from people.

Maggie leads Ada out of the bar, up a set of stairs and into--

**INT. SAUL'S - CONTINUOUS**

The back room of a closed tailor shop. The doorman, IKE (black, 20s), sits by the door reading a newspaper by the light of the dim bulb. He looks up as the women enter.

IKE  
It's a bit early for me to be  
switching out.

MAGGIE  
Eddie's still downstairs, new girl  
just needed a break.

IKE  
Hazel giving out breaks now?

MAGGIE  
Hazel's on stage; she can be mad at  
me when she's done.

A KNOCK on the door. Then another.

TAP. TAP TAP TAP. TAP TAP.

SAM (O.S.)  
Sassafras and cream.

Ike opens the door to admit SAM (early 20s, white, with the kind of smile that makes you want to smile back).

SAM (CONT'D)  
Evening Ike, Maggie.  
(nods at Ada)  
New girl. Who's up tonight?

MAGGIE  
Hazel. Still begging her to let you play?

SAM  
She'll give in eventually.

MAGGIE  
Ha! Good luck with that.

Sam tips his hat at the ladies and heads off down the stairs.

ADA  
Who was that?

MAGGIE  
Just another musician trying to get on Hazel's stage -- you'll meet plenty if you're here long enough. Ike, who's on lookout tonight?

IKE  
Billy, why?

MAGGIE  
Bring him in, put him on the door. I'm gonna need you downstairs.  
(grabs a threadbare coat,  
hands it to Ada)  
Here, put this on.

As Ada shrugs into the coat, Maggie searches the shelves, finds a shabby woman's hat.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)  
This, too.

ADA  
What's going on?

MAGGIE

I'm trying to make you look less like you've spent all night at a speakeasy. C'mon.

She drags Ada out the door.

**EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS**

Maggie marches Ada down to one end of the alley.

MAGGIE

Hazel showed you the back way in when she brought you in this morning, yeah?

(Ada nods)

Good. Hang out here. You see the police knocking on the door, you come 'round the back way and warn us.

ADA

Police?

MAGGIE

Yeah. You wouldn't want us to get raided, would you?

ADA

I don't know if I can do this.

MAGGIE

All you have to do is stand here --

ADA

Not lookout. All of this. The club and the clothes and the -- this ain't me. I'm good at books -- I was going to go to college.

MAGGIE

And why ain't you?

Ada clamps up. Maggie studies her a moment.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)

I get it. It ain't easy. You just got here and we threw you right into it. But you came up here for a reason, whatever it was. So why not take the opportunity to be someone different?

Just as Ada opens her mouth to respond, the girls hear VOICES.

Maggie ducks her head around the corner -- two white COPS.

COP #1

Lee said it was around here.

COP #2

You taking tips from drunks?

COP #1

You know a better way to find gin joints?

Ada looks at Maggie -- clearly dressed for a night out.

ADA

(whispers)

Run back inside.

MAGGIE

What about you?

ADA

Trying something different.

Ada shoves Maggie towards the speakeasy door, then slips out the alley.

ADA (CONT'D)

Excuse me? Officers? I'm so sorry to bother y'all, but can y'all tell me which way to get to 138th street?

Ada's head is down, deferential, her accent thicker than we've ever heard it.

COP #1

And what would you be looking for on 138th street?

ADA

I don't rightly know, sir. I just met some folks today, told me 'bout a welcome party on 138th.

COP #2

I'm sure there is.

(he looks her up and down)

You'd best head on home; I doubt it's the kind of party you should be going to.

ADA  
If you say so, Officer.

COP #1  
Check it out?

COP #2  
Better lead than the one you got.

They start off, back in the direction from which they came. COP #2 (early 30s, handsome, cunning), steps back towards Ada, voice low so his partner can't hear.

COP #2 (CONT'D)  
Good save, girl. But you'd best tell Hazel that Dinkins wants his package, you hear?

ADA  
I don't know any Hazel.

COP #2  
I'm sure you don't.

He turns back to his partner and moseys down the street.

**INT. THE TEA ROOM - NIGHT**

The band's stopped playing, Maggie whispering something urgently to Hazel. Ada runs up to them.

ADA  
They're gone.

Hazel turns to Ada, gaze shrewd.

HAZEL  
What do you mean they're gone?

ADA  
I mean I sent them on a wild goose chase.

HAZEL  
And they bought it?

ADA  
Who'd think a dumb hick like me had it in her to lie to the cops?

HAZEL  
(approving)  
Well done. You might not be completely useless after all.  
(MORE)

HAZEL (CONT'D)  
 (to Maggie)  
 Tell Ike to keep his eyes open,  
 just in case.

As Maggie moves off:

ADA  
 Something else.

HAZEL  
 Yes?

ADA  
 One of the officers. He said  
 "Dinkins wants his package."

Hazel closes off.

HAZEL  
 Did he?

ADA  
 Yes. Aunt Hazel, what -- ?

HAZEL  
 Don't worry about it. Run on  
 upstairs and get back on lookout.  
 (wry)  
 You cost me less money that way.

ADA  
 Yes, ma'am.

Ada heads back to the stairs, turns back for a last look at the crowd as the band starts up again, and Hazel launches into another song.

**EXT. MERTONVILLE - ESTABLISHING - DAY**

Establishing shot of the sleepy Southern town, folks going about their business.

**INT. BENTLEY HOUSE - HALL - DAY**

Carrie Ann sweeps the front hall as Mrs. Bentley wanders through, looking lost.

MRS. BENTLEY  
 You haven't seen Earl Ray yet this  
 morning, have you?

CARRIE ANN  
 No, ma'am.

MRS. BENTLEY

Mm. You wouldn't lie to me, would you, Carrie Ann?

CARRIE ANN

No, ma'am. Never.

MRS. BENTLEY

Good. I didn't mean to accuse, I'm just -- I'm worried about my boy.

CARRIE ANN

I understand, Mrs. Bentley.

Mrs. Bentley wanders back out. Carrie Ann returns to her sweeping, guilty.

**EXT. FRAZIER FARM - DAY**

Out by the fence, Vernon hands a small basket of turnips to MICKEY (black, 20s).

Mickey takes it, moves a few turnips aside. They're hiding PAPERS.

MICKEY

You sure 'bout this, Vernon?

VERNON

Damn sure. Got ten fellas from Prattville already up there. Just go to that address and ask for Mr. Reilly -- he'll set you up.

Mickey starts to say more, but clamps his mouth shut as he sees John walking up the path.

MICKEY

Morning, Mr. Frazier.

JOHN

Morning, Mickey. What brings you out here so early?

VERNON

His daddy's sick. Mama thought some turnip soup would help.

JOHN

You planning on making it yourself, Mickey.

MICKEY

No, sir. I just pick up the ingredients.

JOHN

You'd best hurry on home, then.

MICKEY

Yes, sir.

He nods at both men, giving Vernon a significant look before turning and jogging off down the path.

JOHN

Don't do that on my property.

VERNON

Do what?

JOHN

You know damn well what. I have asked you, *begged* you not to recruit for them damn Chicago factories --

VERNON

Colored men are dying down here -- if folks want a better life, it's the least I can do --

JOHN

I wish you'd worry a little less about other men and a little bit more about yourself.

A beat.

VERNON

That ain't the man you raised me to be.

JOHN

I was a dreaming fool when I was bringing you up. I thought things'd be different. Be better.

VERNON

I'm trying to make them better.

JOHN

I know that. But Ada's gone now. And I can't help but wondering... sending all these folks North. When are you planning on going?

VERNON

What are you saying, Daddy?

JOHN

I'm saying your mother and I can't do this on our own. We just lost one child to the North. I don't want to lose you, too. To the factories... or to some white man's rope.

A moment of realization for Vernon. He clasps his father's arm.

VERNON

I plan on staying right here.

JOHN

See that you do.

**INT. HAZEL'S APARTMENT - ADA'S ROOM - DAY**

Ada's shoebox of a room has taken on a bit of personality. Her books sit on the nightstand, a jewelry box sits on the dresser.

Ada sits on the bed, re-stringing her guitar. Next to her lies a sealed letter, addressed to Carrie Ann.

ADA (V.O.)

I already miss you terribly. All of you. I woke up this morning, and I was sick with it. With how this place doesn't sound right or smell right or *feel* right.

**INT. HAZEL'S APARTMENT - SITTING ROOM**

Hazel sits on the couch in a dressing gown, sipping her coffee.

On the coffee table in front of her sits a small stack of money, topped with a small vial.

ADA (V.O.)

Folks are nice enough. Hazel is a wonder. She scares me, just a little. But she took me in when she didn't have to, and I'll never be able to thank her enough for that.

**EXT. FRAZIER HOUSE - PORCH - DAY**

Sarah stands on the porch, looking out over the field where Vernon and John are working.

ADA (V.O.)

Still, I miss Mama and Daddy and Vernon. I nearly cried this morning when I thought of how long it'll be until I can see them again. I didn't, though. I'm learning to be strong. You'd be proud of me.

**INT. BENTLEY HOUSE - HALL**

Carrie Ann stands at the top of the stairs, polishing the bannister.

ADA (V.O.)

I hope your mama's doing well. I sent a picture-card I thought she'd like. And I hope you're okay. I miss you something awful, and I don't know what I'm supposed to do without you.

A loud KNOCK sounds on the door.

MRS. BENTLEY (O.S.)

Carrie Ann! Get that, would you?

Carrie Ann's already on her way down the stairs. She opens the door to MR. DOBSON and SHERIFF GAYLE (both 40s, white, stern), looking solemn.

SHERIFF GAYLE

Hey gal, is Mrs. Bentley home?

CARRIE ANN

Yes, sir.

She steps back to admit them.

CARRIE ANN (CONT'D)

Can I tell her why y'all've come?

SHERIFF GAYLE

It concerns her son.

ADA (V.O.)

You're the best there is at taking care of other people. Just remember to take care of yourself.

**EXT. RIVER - DAWN**

A group of WHITE MEN drag something out of the river.

CLOSE on the men to reveal them dragging Earl Ray's BLOATED CORPSE.

ADA (V.O.)  
I wish I hadn't had to leave you to  
handle everything all alone. Stay  
safe.

**INT. BENTLEY HOUSE - SITTING ROOM**

Gayle and Dobson stand in front of Mrs. Bentley.

SHERIFF GAYLE  
I'm so sorry, Laura.

Mrs. Bentley collapses to the ground, WAILING.

Carrie Ann stands frozen in the hallway, watching Mrs. Bentley dissolve in mourning.

CUT TO BLACK.

ADA (V.O.)  
All my love, Ada.

END OF EPISODE.