

THE PROMISED LAND

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Kaplan Stahler
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Inspired by true events.

EXT. HURTSBORO TOWN CENTER - DAY

The daytime hustle of main street in a small Alabama town.
General stores, simple businesses, diners.

Over this, TITLE CARDS RISE --

1933 - Hurtsboro, Alabama

In a BURGER SHOP window, a SIGN reads: "*Dishwasher wanted.*"

A LINE OF DESPERATE MEN snakes around the block. Most are
White. Some are Black. They all look worse-for-wear.

TITLE CARDS CONTINUE --

Peak of the great depression.

The national unemployment rate is 25%

TITLE CARDS FADE -- one last CARD RISES --

For African-Americans, it's 50%.

As that CARD FADES, move down the line, until we find him,
queued up with the other men, SAMUEL "SAM" PARKER, late 20s.

Upstanding and diligent. In any other era Sam Parker would be
Rotary president. *But this is 1930s Jim Crow South.*

Here, Sam is first-and-foremost... Black.

Sam's craning his neck. Peering down the line. When he hears
the LOW rumble of CHANTING. It grows louder. Louder still.
Until Sam can finally make out the words --

MOB (O.S.)

No jobs for niggers! No jobs for
niggers!

Then a MOB of WHITE ROUGHNECKS storms the street. Clutching
SIGNS reading: "*No jobs for niggers until every white man has*
a job." Every Black man in line grows wary.

Sam eyes a couple of WHITE PEDESTRIANS hurrying past. If they
disapprove of the ruckus, they don't intend to do anything
about it. The MOB stops before the burger shop. Chanting --

MOB

No jobs for niggers! No jobs for
niggers!

Then, a WAITER inside the Burger Shop darts over. Slaps a
SIGN next to "*Dishwasher wanted*" -- "WHITES ONLY".

And the MOB breaks into CHEERS. All the BLACK MEN peel off the line. And as Sam slinks away, head hung low, the horde HISS and JEER at him as he goes --

CUT TO TITLE:

T H E P R O M I S E D L A N D

EXT. ALABAMA FIELD - NEXT MORNING

The blistering summer sun beats down on a patchy field of grass. Sam's voice drifts in over it --

SAM (O.S.)
Yeah, it's hotter than the Devil's
armpit, but that's no excuse for
lookin' shabby like you do.

Track across the field to find --

EXT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A rickety wooden HOME. Hardly more than a shack. Sam's at the open window, addressing a WILTING LILY in the flower-box.

SAM
And if you don't perk up, my only
recourse'll be to move ya.

He grabs a WATERING CAN from inside, douses the lily. A beat as Sam reflects on the lackluster plant before him.

SAM
You and me. Time we get it together.

RUTH (O.S.)
Samuel. What're you doin' to that
poor lily?

INT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam turns to face his wife RUTH PARKER, 26, Black, who's putting the final touches on the hem of a dress.

Generous and sensible, but with the flicker of a defiant side, Ruth's hands are never idle.

SAM
Just givin' it a talkin' to.

RUTH
If it knows what's best for it,
it'll do whatever you say. Where
you headed to this mornin'?

Sam's not keen to talk about it. Grabs his shoe. Only to discover a hole in the sole. As he plugs it with paper --

SAM

Back to town. Heard a shop might be
hirin'.

RUTH

Sounds promisin'.

When Sam shrugs, Ruth crosses the room. Wraps her arms around him. Vigorously optimistic.

RUTH

Today's the day, Samuel. I can feel
it in my bones.

SAM

Said that yesterday. And the day
before.

RUTH

Well one of these days I'm gonna be
right.

Encouraged, he pulls his wife in for a leisurely kiss.

INT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The Evans family matriarch simply known as MAMA, 50s, but seems older, doles out bowls of GRITS from a steaming pot.

Ruth's siblings -- TROY, 20s, brash, JOYCE, 16, bright, LAWRENCE, 13, fidgety -- sit at the shabby kitchen table.

LAWRENCE

Grits again?

JOYCE

Grits is all we got, Lawrence,
that's why grits is all we eat.

TROY

Joyce, you soundin' more like Mama
every day.

MAMA

And what's so wrong with that?

Troy squirms. Until--

SAM (O.S.)

Mornin', everyone.

Sam and Ruth enter. Ruth carrying the newly-hemmed dress. She hands it to a grateful Joyce.

RUTH

Let it out best I could. But if you
get any taller...

JOYCE

I'll try my hardest not to.

Ruth squeezes Joyce's hand lovingly. Then joins Mama at the stove. Mama shuffles aside with a limp. Keeping her family afloat has clearly taken its toll.

MAMA

Last of the grits. Don't suspect we
can put off goin' to the store
another day.

RUTH

That washin' I took in last week?

Mama reaches for a METAL CANISTER on the shelf. Empties it on the kitchen counter. Only a COUPLE OF COINS shake loose.

Troy pointedly looks to Sam. And embarrassed he has nothing to contribute, Sam silently drops into a chair.

TROY

Well if no-one else can...

He reaches into his pocket. Slides three DOLLARS onto the table. Mama's reticent. But Ruth and the others are amazed.

LAWRENCE

Damn, Troy!

MAMA

Watch your mouth, Lawrence.

RUTH

Where'd you get all that?

TROY

Earned it.

SAM

Earned it how?

Troy shoots Sam a look. *Back off.*

TROY

Doin' this and that.

JOYCE

Since when does doin' this and that
earn three whole dollars?

TROY

Look, if ya'll don't want my help--

He reaches to take the money back. Ruth quickly stops him.

RUTH

Course we do.

Troy smugly leans back in his chair. And no longer able to
stomach it, Sam climbs to his feet.

RUTH

Leavin' already?

SAM

Wanna get to town. Get a jump on
it.

TROY

Jump all you want. No jobs in town.
Around town. Anywhere near town.

Ruth frowns at Troy. He relents.

TROY

But what do I know? 'Sides...
(a la Ruth)
"Today's the day."

Ruth flushes. Privacy doesn't exist here. Sam hurries out--

EXT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

And hustles down the road. Passing rows of dingy SHEDS and
patchwork TENTS. A full-blown SQUATTER'S CAMP.

Men and women sit idle. Nothing to do. Nowhere to go.

Sam picks up his step. Not happy to be reminded how close
they are to joining these people.

EXT. HURTSBORO TOWN CENTER - DAY

The MOB OF ROUGHNECKS is on the street again. But the summer
heat's brought their boil down to a simmer. As they mill
about, signs in hand --

Sam scans the shops. No help wanted signs in sight. He flags
a YOUNG BLACK MAN walking by.

SAM
You hear 'bout someone hirin'?

YOUNG BLACK MAN
Man, ain't *no-one* hirin'.

The Young Man moves off. Leaving Sam adrift. Until he spots a well-dressed Black man ahead, MR. DAVIS, 50s. Sam runs over.

SAM
Mornin', Mr. Davis! How's the farm?
You in need of a hand?

MR. DAVIS
'Fraid my answer's the same today
as every other day you've asked.
Got nothin' for you. Why, things
keep going the way they are... I'll
have to start lettin' folks go.

SAM
Why? What's goin' on?

MR. DAVIS
Locusts, Sam. They've descended on
my land.

SAM
Pardon me, Mr. Davis, but the
locusts' place is in the bible, not
Alabama.

MR. DAVIS
Tell that to my chewed up cotton.

SAM
I'd bet my hat it's some other
vermin. Could take a look if ya
like.

When Mr. Davis hesitates, Sam sweetens the deal --

SAM
Free of charge, of course.

MR. DAVIS
(conceding)
You drive a hard bargain. Come on.

They head for his glistening 1932 CHEVROLET 6 SERIES SEDAN.
Five WHITE ROUGHNECKS loiter in front of the pristine car.

MR. DAVIS
Excuse me, Gentlemen.

The Roughnecks look them up and down. Then reluctantly move.

ROUGHNECK #1

(sotto)

Nigger with a fancy car is still
just a nigger.

Sam tenses. Ready to defend Mr. Davis. But Mr. Davis ignores the slight. Instead, holds out his keys.

MR. DAVIS

Would you like to drive, Sam?

SAM

Ain't ever driven anything so nice.

Mr. Davis addresses Sam, but this is meant for the other men.

MR. DAVIS

Well it's high time we change that.
See, it's a new day in our nation
for the Negro man. A new day
indeed.

In response, the Roughneck SPITS chew at Mr. Davis' feet. Mr. Davis simply climbs into the car. He and Sam speed off.

INT. HURTSBORO GROCERY STORE - DAY

Mama trails Ruth down a shop aisle. Shaking her head as Ruth wishfully eyes the too-pricey food.

MAMA

Highway robbery. Askin' seven cents
for a head of lettuce I can grow in
my own yard for free.

RUTH

You aren't payin' for the lettuce,
Mama. You're payin' not to do the
work of growin' it.

They join the meat counter line, where a WOMAN IN A GREEN DRESS, 30s, Black, orders from the surly BUTCHER, 50s, White.

BUTCHER

Best cut of steak runs sixteen
cents. Each.

The Woman sets the requisite change on the counter.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS

There's thirty-two cents.

Skeptical, the Butcher counts the change in front of her. It's painfully awkward. Ruth tries to break the tension.

RUTH
Special occasion?

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
(grateful for the nicety)
My husband's birthday.

MAMA
And you're serving sixteen cent
steak? Must love him awful fierce.

The Butcher drops the Woman's package onto the counter. When she reaches for it, her face contorts.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
This is s'posed to be your best cut.

BUTCHER
And it is.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
Beg your pardon, sir. But from what
I'm smellin', it certainly is not.

Ruth and Mama start to grow nervous.

BUTCHER
You don't like it, then perhaps you
should be shopping somewhere else.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
Next nearest butcher shop's ten
miles away.

BUTCHER
Then I suggest you take your steaks
and move along.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
I'm not moving from here until you
give me what I've paid for.

The Butcher's eyes narrow. He calls out --

BUTCHER
Arthur!

A BURLY EMPLOYEE (ARTHUR) runs over from the front.

BUTCHER
Get her out of here.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
For refusin' to accept your rotten
meat? You got some nerve, Mister.

Arthur advances toward the Woman. Ruth's in his path.

ARTHUR
Move.

Some part of Ruth wants to resist. But with this large White man looming, Ruth wilts. Steps aside. Arthur reaches to grab the Woman by the arm.

WOMAN IN GREEN DRESS
Don't you put your hands on me!

She slaps at his hand. Arthur reacts. Grabs her by the nape of her dress and SOCKS her in the stomach. Ruth and Mama GASP.

As Arthur hauls the poor Woman out of the shop, a couple of WHITE CUSTOMERS look away.

The Butcher turns back to an ashen Ruth and Mama --

BUTCHER
So. What're you having?

EXT. MR. DAVIS' FARM - DAY

A COTTON PLANT peppered with tiny holes commands Sam's attention. He leans over to talk to the plant.

SAM
Okay, tell me who did this to ya.

An older, cantankerous Black man, JEBEDIAH, 60s, scoffs as he stands next to Mr. Davis.

JEBEDIAH
You gonna take that thing out for a
burger and a malt? Mr. Davis, this
is a waste of time.

MR. DAVIS
I'm not so sure it is, Jebediah.
Sam here went to Tuskegee.

JEBEDIAH
And never finished.

Sam reacts. Sensitive to that fact. Mr. Davis moves past it.

MR. DAVIS
Just tell me what it is.

SAM

See those flecks of orange and yellow? Boll weevil droppings.

MR. DAVIS

Christ. Anything we can do?

SAM

After harvest you need to burn and plow under the stalks. These bastards will hibernate all winter and then come back twice as strong.

JEBEDIAH

You know how much work that'll be?

MR. DAVIS

Work, Jebediah, is a good thing. Gives me a reason to pay you.

(to Sam)

This harvest. Can we save it?

Sam takes out a gnawed through pencil. Scratches some instructions on a crumpled piece of paper.

SAM

You'll need these supplies. The Calcium's key. Helps the insecticide stick to the plant.

Jebediah takes the paper from Sam. Heads off toward the stately DAVIS HOUSE up ahead.

MR. DAVIS

Ya done good, Sam. I know you said this was free of charge, but...

Mr. Davis tries to hand Sam some money. Sam waves it off.

SAM

Thank you, sir. But what I *really* need is a job. At Tuskegee, I took a whole course on eradicatin' boll weevil and other pests. I could be of use to you.

MR. DAVIS

Look I know you've got the greenest thumb this side of the Mississippi...

Mr. Davis looks across the fields. His mostly older FIELD HANDS sing a SPIRITUAL as they work.

MR. DAVIS

But if I hire you, I gotta let one of them go. Besides, you should be running a farm, not working as a hired hand on one.

Mr. Davis pushes the cash into Sam's hand.

MR. DAVIS

Take it. You earned it.

Sam reluctantly accepts the money.

SAM

Thank you, Mr. Davis. And if something changes. Or if you hear of work... I'll do anything.

His words ring with desperation. It gives Mr. Davis pause.

MR. DAVIS

When you say *anything*...?

SAM

That's exactly what I mean.

MR. DAVIS

(beat, then)

I might've heard of something. Be at Buster's by 7. And Sam? Bring an open mind.

Sam nods. There's some pep in his step. Finally, hope.

INT. RUTH'S HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP. Ruth beats a hunk of DOUGH on the counter into submission. The earlier incident still on her mind. THUMP, THUMP -- Mama lays a calming hand on Ruth's.

But Ruth can't help it. Her frustrations bubble up --

RUTH

They drug that woman out like a pig to the slaughter. And just like them White folks, I didn't do a damn thing.

MAMA

There ain't nothing you *coulda* done, baby. World just is. Nothing we can do to change it.

RUTH
It's not right, Mama.

Suddenly, the kitchen door flies open as Sam bursts in.

MAMA
This look like a saloon to you?

SAM
No, ma'am. Sorry, ma'am. Just real
eager to speak with my wife, ma'am.

RUTH
What happened?

Sam proudly slaps down the money Mr. Davis gave him.

RUTH
Well that is gonna require an
explanation.

MAMA
It's green and it pays the milkman.
It don't need no explainin'.

SAM
Earned it today helpin' Mr. Davis.
And there's more to come. 'Cause he
knows where I can get a job.

RUTH
A job? Doin' what? Where?

SAM
About to go find out.

Sam starts to leave, when Ruth intercepts him. Kisses him
fondly. This is a much needed win for *both of them*.

RUTH
Told you today was the day.

Sam grins and hurries off.

INT. BUSTER'S BILLIARDS - NIGHT

The smoky hall's home to a handful of POOL TABLES, a BAR and
a small STAGE. A dozen BLACK MEN mill about nervously. Sam
makes it in a few steps when he's intercepted by Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS
Right on time. I don't know too
much about any of this, but let me
introduce you to who does.

Mr. Davis guides Sam to an older BLACK MAN in a simple suit, GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, 60s. Yes... *that* George Washington Carver. Sam lights up with recognition.

MR. DAVIS

Mr. Carver, you said you were looking for talented men. That search begins and ends with Sam Parker.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Sam Parker? Name rings a bell.

SAM

Yes, sir. I took your agricultural science class at Tuskegee.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Memory serves, you passed with flying colors.

SAM

Yes, sir. It sure is good to see you again, sir. But I gotta ask, what exactly is this opportunity?

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Take a seat and you'll find out.

With a pat on the back, Mr. Davis leaves Sam to claim a chair. Then, Carver climbs the stage. The room grows quiet. Eager to hear from this esteemed Black leader.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Thank you all for coming out. For those who don't know me, my name is George Washington Carver.

A MAN IN THE CROWD can't help himself --

MAN IN THE CROWD

The peanut man!

Everyone laughs. Including Carver.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

You aren't the first to call me that. In fact, yesterday a White woman on the bus hollered it at me from the front row. Think about that for a sec. When she saw me, what'd she see? The shade of my skin? Or the glow of my accomplishments?

(MORE)

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER (CONT'D)
Remember that as you listen to my
friend and colleague, Mr. Oliver
Golden.

Polite APPLAUSE as a flashy Black man, OLIVER GOLDEN, 40s, a
preacher minus the religion, bounds onto the stage.

OLIVER GOLDEN
America the beautiful. America the
land of opportunity. America the
country where dreams come true.
(beat, then)
Raise your hand if you think that's
some bullshit!

Many hands immediately go up. But Sam hesitates.

OLIVER GOLDEN
What's beautiful about starving
men, women and children? What
opportunity exists when you're not
even invited to walk through the
door? And under the boot of Jim
Crow, how many of your dreams have
come true?

The crowd HOOTS in agreement.

OLIVER GOLDEN
But I'm here to declare such a land
does exist. A place where equal
means equal. Negro. White. Man.
Woman. In this place, it makes no
difference if you come from the
mountaintop or the muddy ravine --
all can rise above their station.

More APPLAUSE. People are eager and intrigued.

MAN IN THE CROWD
Where is this place?

OLIVER GOLDEN
I'm glad you asked, my brother. The
place I'm talking about is the
great U.S.S.R.

And... silence. All enthusiasm is sucked out of the room.

MAN IN THE CROWD
As in the god damned Soviet Union?

OLIVER GOLDEN

Exactly! Just hear me out. The Soviet's a growing land fresh from revolution. The days of being ruled by a monarch are over. Now, the people are in charge. And they need men. Men with technical skills in farming, mechanics, and industry.

Sam's crestfallen. He watches as a few men start to walk out. Golden calls after them.

OLIVER GOLDEN

You wanna leave? Leave. But where are you going to? Not to a job.

Some of the fleeing men pause. Oliver knows he's hooked them.

OLIVER GOLDEN

And let's say you are fortunate enough to find work. Think money will buy you equality? Please. There's not enough dollars in the world to make a man with bigotry in his heart see a Negro as his equal.

(then)

This is your chance to be treated as you are: a human being brimming with potential. What I'm offering is the one thing this country has never given us -- dignity.

Sam's somewhere between devastated and intrigued.

EXT. BUSTER'S BILLIARDS - LATER

Mind spinning, Sam's slumped against a wall. Carver sidles up.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Not what you had in mind?

SAM

Furthest thing from it. What am I gonna tell my wife? She was as bright as a firework when I walked out that door.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Tell her the truth. That you have a real opportunity.

SAM

Still not sure that's what this is.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER
Look, Golden's a full blown
Communist. He believes you boys
will move across the world to join
a movement. I am a realist. So let
me be real. You sign a three year
contract and these reds will pay
you six hundred dollars.

SAM
A year?

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER
No, Sam. A *month*. Plus, you'll get
a home of your own. Tell me, what
chance do you have of finding any
of that here?

As Sam thinks it over, seriously tempted...

RUTH (PRELAP)
Not a slim chance in hell.

INT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sam and Ruth are in the midst of a heated debate.

SAM
It pays *six-hundred-dollars a*
month. I'm just sayin' it's
something we should consider.

RUTH
When you're talkin' about moving us
halfway across the world, there
ain't nothing to consider.

SAM
I'll admit it's not a perfect job.
But when you look past the distance
and some of the other things--

RUTH
The other things? You mean leavin'
my family for three whole years!

A BANG on the wall cuts them short. They lower their voices.

SAM
Think of the money we could send
them. Right now, we're just two
extra mouths in need of feedin'.

RUTH
You could find a job tomorrow--

SAM
Could. Ruth, my life's been *full of coulds*. Coulda finished Tuskegee, if my ma hadn't gotten sick. Coulda built us a home of our own, if I ever had a dime to my name. Frankly, I'm sick of bein' Sam Parker, the man who could.

Ruth goes quiet. Doesn't have the words to reassure him.

RUTH
I know you wanted this to be the answer, Samuel. I did, too. But this just isn't it.

She heads for bed. Sam simply stands there. Dejected.

EXT. HURTSBORO TOWN CENTER - NEXT DAY

Sam's wandering through town. Another fruitless search for work. Stops in his tracks when he spots --

TROY, conspiring with a GROUP OF BLACK MEN, led by a shifty older man, DEE.

When two POLICE OFFICERS turn onto the corner, the group immediately scatters. As Troy peels off, Sam intercepts him.

SAM
You been workin' with Dee Rogers.
That's how you came by that money?

TROY
Yeah. And he's how I'm gonna come by some more.

Troy can tell Sam's repulsed by this. But also envious.

TROY
Y'know, nothin's stoppin' you from doin' the same. Dee's always lookin' for good men.

SAM
Good men don't do what he does.

Troy's done with Sam. Draws himself up. Defiant.

TROY

And they end up eatin' nothin' but
grits and livin' in tents on the
side of the road. You want more
than that? This is what it costs.

With that, he bails. Leaving Sam wondering if Troy's right.

INT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight trickles over Ruth, asleep. Sam stares at the
ceiling. Suddenly, a furious KNOCKING jolts Ruth awake.

LAWRENCE (O.S.)

Sam! Sam!

RUTH

It's late, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE (O.S.)

You gotta come quick!

Sam and Ruth exchange a look -- *something's not right*. Sam
jumps up. Flings the door open. Lawrence is terrified.

SAM

What happened?

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. MR. DAVIS' FARM - NIGHT

A massive BLAZE illuminates the night. The FIELDS burning as
far as the eye can see.

RUTH (O.S.)

My god...

REVERSE ON Troy, Ruth and Sam racing up. Buckets in hand.
Troy moves towards the fields. Sam stops him.

SAM

It's scorched earth now.

JEBEDIAH (O.S.)

Come on!

Jebediah runs by. They hurry after him into a clearing --

EXT. DAVIS FAMILY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Where the DAVIS HOUSE burns. Consumed by howling FLAMES.

Mr. Davis and neighbors heave BUCKETS OF WATER at the fire. To little avail. Sam dunks his into a water trough.

RUTH

Samuel, you and your banged up
bucket ain't no match for that. We
need to call the fire truck.

SAM

You can see that blaze for miles.
No help's comin', Ruth. Not for us.

A sober beat. Then Ruth accepts that he's right. Sam races for the house. Just as, CRACK!! *It buckles under the flames.*

EXT. MR. DAVIS' HOUSE - LATER

Smoke drifts off the burnt remains of the Davis House. Sam, Ruth, Troy and neighbors stand by. A helpless vigil.

Mr. Davis holds MRS. DAVIS while she sobs. Their DAUGHTERS (11 and 7) stand shell-shocked at their side.

MR. DAVIS

Shh. I got you.

TROY

Sam...

Troy cocks his head at FIVE MEN on HORSES on the horizon. Their faces shrouded by WHITE HOODS.

One of the men hoists his hood up to SPIT some chew. REVEAL the same ROUGHNECK Sam and Mr. Davis encountered in town.

EXT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Sam sits on the porch. Ruth starts to wipe the ash from his face with a wash cloth. It's tender. Intimate. Until Sam lifts a hand to stop her.

SAM

Mr. Davis. He's a good man. He did
everythin' right.

RUTH

I know.

SAM

And still.

RUTH

...I know.

SAM

They ain't ever gonna let us get
ahead here.

It pains Ruth to hear him cynical like this. She goes to
place a hand on his cheek. But Sam turns away.

INT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

A different energy in the morning routine. Ruth and Mama clear
the table. Sam sits, sullen and silent. Troy stands to leave.

TROY

I'm headin' out. You comin'?

He locks eyes with Sam. Who doesn't react. Unreadable. So
Troy leaves. Then, Sam gets up. Slinks out after him. No
goodbye. Ruth tries to shrug it off.

RUTH

Guess Troy's helpin' Sam find work.

MAMA

Yeah? And what kinda work you think
Troy's gonna help him find?

The implication hangs in the air. Ruth picks up on it.

RUTH

Mama. Sam wouldn't.

MAMA

I thought the same about your
Daddy. And then I watched this
bigoted too small town turn him
into a man I didn't recognize
anymore. Ruth-Anne, Sam's been
given a chance to make an honest
livin'.

Ruth's clearly surprised Mama knows about that.

MAMA

Thin as these walls are, ain't
nothin' gets past my ears.

RUTH

The whole thing's crazy.

MAMA

It's crazy, alright. And, trust me,
I'm all kinds of uneasy with the
idea of sendin' my oldest to a
place I can't point to on a map.

(MORE)

MAMA (CONT'D)
But if this far off land's gonna
let you two be more than Hurtsboro
ever would, then go. Go now.

Realizing Mama means now, Ruth runs out.

EXT. ROAD TO TOWN - MOMENTS LATER

A CLOUD OF DUST kicks up as Ruth barrels down the dirt road.
She comes to a sudden halt when she sees Sam ahead. Standing
frozen on the edge of the squatter's camp.

RUTH
Where you headed, Samuel?

He turns to face her. Lost. Torn up.

SAM
I don't know.

RUTH
Well, I do.

One look and Sam knows exactly what she means.

EXT. RUTH'S FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

Sam and Troy load suitcases into a waiting car. While Ruth
tries to hold it together as she says good-bye to Lawrence.

LAWRENCE
Troy's been sayin' he's takin' your
room. I was hopin' he'd share it.

RUTH
I have a feeling he will. Once I
put in a word with Mama.

Lawrence lights up. And Ruth moves on to Joyce. Tears already
stream down her sister's face. Ruth brushes them away.

RUTH
That yellow sweater you're always
swipin'? I left it for you.
(tearing up herself)
But I'll expect it when I get back.

This only makes Joyce cry harder. She hugs Ruth then darts
inside. Ruth collects herself as she goes to Mama.

RUTH
Now, Mama, there's no reason Troy
shouldn't share that room with
Lawrence.

(MORE)

RUTH (CONT'D)

It's too big for one person. And
Joyce is smart. Don't let her quit
her schoolin'--

MAMA

Girl, I been motherin' so long I
don't know any other name but Mama.
I can handle these slap-happies.

RUTH

And don't you worry about takin' in
extra washin'. We'll be sendin'
money every month.

Mama can see Ruth's stalling. Can't bring herself to leave
them. She puts her hands on her daughter's shoulders.

MAMA

Ruth-Anne, when that man married
you, he promised you a life of milk
and honey. He never once said where
that'd be.

Ruth nods. And steeling herself, she joins Sam in the car. As
it winds down the dusty road, Ruth can't help but look back.

EXT. DOCKS - DAY

It's a mad scramble. SAILORS tow cargo up wooden planks.
PASSENGERS trade teary goodbyes.

Then, there's the towering FREIGHTER. A bewildered Ruth and
Sam head for it. Wide-eyed and disoriented. They're certainly
not in rural Alabama anymore. Ruth rifles through her handbag.

SAM

Thought you had the tickets..

RUTH

Thought I did, too. You even know
where we're supposed to be walkin'?

He doesn't. Finally, a lifeline's thrown their way. George
Washington Carver slices through the crowd.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Sam! Sam Parker! Over here.

Relieved, Sam beelines it his way. Ruth clings to his arm.
They manage to find a pocket of space.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

You two alright? Boat hasn't left
and you're already lookin' seasick.

SAM

We're fine. It's just--

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

A lot. I know. See that plank there. Just walk on up it and give that man with the funny hat at the top your tickets.

Speaking of, Ruth pats down her coat. Breathes a sigh of relief when she finds the TICKETS in her pocket. Sam relaxes.

SAM

I think we can manage it from here.

Carver nods. Then takes in the FREIGHTER. Growing wistful.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Part of me wishes I was gettin' on that boat with you.

RUTH

Why don'tcha?

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Oliver Golden and I have more work to do. Searching for other good men and women to send in your wake.

Sam reaches out to shake Carver's hand.

SAM

Thank you again for this. Wish I could return the favor.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

It isn't owed to me. I've done what I can to help the man farthest down. I'm sure one day you'll do the same. But you can't do for others until you can do for yourself. So you go get yours, Sam Parker.

Carver smiles and leaves. It's just Sam and Ruth now. They hesitate. Then he takes her by hand. They head up the plank.

EXT. BOAT - DECK - DAY

The boat glides away from the harbor. America receding into the horizon. Sam and Ruth watch the only home they've ever known get smaller... and smaller... and smaller.

INT. BOAT - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Sam eagerly weaves through the cramped hallway. Looks behind him. Ruth trails, fussing with her plain dress.

RUTH

Maybe we call it an early night.
It's been an awful long day.

SAM

They're havin' a reception in our
honor, Ruth. Ain't no way we're
missin' that.

Ruth glances down at her dress. Hesitates. Sam goes to her.

SAM

Hey, don't you worry none. You'd
turn heads wearin' a potato sack.
And I promise you, soon as we're
settled, I'm gonna buy you every
dress you could ever want.

Still not fully convinced, she smooths her dress one last time. Follows Sam out onto --

EXT. BOAT - DECK - CONTINUOUS

A gathering in full swing. Lively JAZZ MUSIC serenades a group of Black passengers drinking and cutting loose.

Sam and Ruth move to the bar. Sam grabs the attention of the BLACK MAN in front of them.

SAM

Pardon, you know what they're
askin' for a drink?

The man, EUGENE WRIGHT, late 30s, turns to them. Despite his limited means, Eugene's stylishly dressed. A charming and modern urbanite.

EUGENE

Free of charge. Can you believe
they're giving this stuff away?

The BARTENDER slides two glasses of champagne to Sam and Ruth. Tickled, Sam hands one to Ruth.

SAM

Told you there was no way we were
missin' this party.
(to Eugene)
Sam Parker. My wife, Ruth.

EUGENE

Eugene Wright. I'd introduce you to my wife Devra, but she hasn't made it out of our cabin yet.

RUTH

Poor thing seasick?

EUGENE

Oh no. Just can't land on what to wear. Last I checked, she narrowed her options down to seven.

RUTH

(self-conscious)

That's some wardrobe.

EUGENE

Devra says fashion is the only thing worth spending money on.

DEVRA (O.S.)

Fashion, liquor and records. My holy trinity.

DEVRA WRIGHT, early 30s, glides over. Gives Eugene a playful kiss. Sam and Ruth are taken aback. Why? Because Devra is a chic, libertine, white woman.

Devra catches Ruth's shock. Smiles with nonchalant grace.

EUGENE

You just missed the introductions. This is Sam and Ruth Parker.

DEVRA

Let me guess, you were recruited by Oliver Golden-Tongue as well?

Ruth, still caught off guard, doesn't respond. Sam covers.

SAM

Yes, ma'am. Leavin' 'Bama for Yangiyul to farm some cotton.

DEVRA

Us too! That'll make us neighbors.

SAM

No offense, but you two don't look much like cotton growers to me.

EUGENE

I'm a Harlem man now. But I was a Tuskegee one before. Class of '17.

SAM

Ya don't say? Was at Tuskegee for a stretch myself.

EUGENE

That there is cause for another drink. Good thing they're free.

The men instantly hit it off. Head back to the bar. The women... *not so much*. They just stand there. Awkward.

EXT. BOAT - DECK - LATER THAT NIGHT

Alone by the railing, Eugene and Sam share a smoke.

EUGENE

We're just the first bunch. Golden plans on recruiting a hundred or more men by year's end. You hear what the crew's calling us? *The Specialists*.

SAM

Has a nice ring to it.

Eugene nods to various Black men around the deck.

EUGENE

Robert over there is a machinist from Detroit. He's going to work in the Leningrad factories. Alan, the tall one, is helping to expand their postal service.

SAM

They need help deliverin' the mail? What kind of country is this?

EUGENE

One with jobs that pay. Devra and I plan to save a truckload, then be on the first boat home.

Sam hands back the cigarette. Reflective.

SAM

Money's nice. But it ain't everything.

EUGENE

Name one thing that's worth more
than money.

SAM

Purpose.

Sam's sincerity is foreign to Eugene. He laughs it off --

EUGENE

Finally. Something we disagree on.

ANGLE ON Ruth and Devra across the deck. Suffering in an
awkward silence. Until --

DEVRA

You much for music?

RUTH

I only really know what they play
at church.

Devra nods politely. Their mute purgatory returns. Then Ruth
sets her jaw.

RUTH

Look, Devra, I'm not aimin' to be
impolite. It's just that I've never
seen a couple like you and Eugene
before. It ain't allowed in Alabama.

DEVRA

Oh, honey, we may be allowed in New
York, but they whisper behind our
backs all the same.

RUTH

That's awful to hear.

With a droll smirk, Devra turns to look over the railing.

DEVRA

Fortunately for us, we're all the
way over here. And they're all the
way over there.

Devra CHUCKS her glass overboard. Ruth's aghast and
delighted. Warming up to Devra. Sam and Eugene approach.

EUGENE

What are you ladies up to?

DEVRA

Causing some trouble. Care to join?

Not waiting for his answer, Devra ushers Eugene onto the dance floor. And Ruth makes eyes at Sam. He smiles back.

RUTH (PRELAP)
Dohb-rey-ah. Oo-trah.

INT. BOAT - CABIN - LATER

Rambunctious voices in the hall. Followed by the fumble of keys. Ruth and Sam wobble in. They're playful. Giddy. Drunk.

RUTH
 See? I'm nearly fluent!

SAM
Nearly.

RUTH
 Think you can do better?

Sam steadies himself. Stares her down. And --

SAM
 Dob-roy-e oo-trough.

He waits for Ruth's reaction. She playfully cringes.

RUTH
 Oh, that was *awful*.

SAM
 I said it how you said it!

RUTH
 You said it how I said it. But drunk.

SAM
 Drunk. I'm drunk? *You're drunk.*

Ruth stumbles into his arms. She sure as hell is. Sam holds her up. Can't help but kiss her. And they eagerly fall into the bed. As the clothes come off...

EXT. BOAT - RUSSIAN COASTLINE - DAY

A foghorn bellows. Sam and Ruth race to the railing. The outline of the coast can be seen on the horizon. Land-ho!

EXT. LENINGRAD DOCKS - MORNING

PHOTOGRAPHERS and official COMMUNIST REPRESENTATIVES huddle under a massive banner reading: "Workers of the World Unite."

Sam, Ruth, Devra and Eugene, luggage in hand, take two steps off the boat when -- FLASH! FLASH! FLASH! -- they're swarmed by PHOTOGRAPHERS.

RUTH
All these people here for us?

SAM
Seems so.

DEVRA
Had I known it was gonna be this kind of affair, I would've worn something with a bit of sparkle.

FLASH! FLASH! Devra poses with Eugene, soaking in the spotlight. While Sam and Ruth try to move through the crowd.

ANATOLI (O.C.)
Comrade Parker!

Sam turns to find ANATOLI MIKHAILOV, 40s, pushing his way up to them. He's a large man with an even larger personality.

SAM
Yeah...?

ANATOLI
I am Anatoli Mikhailov!
(off their blank stares)
Liaison from Tashkent Communist Office. I am here to guide you and Comrade Wright to Yangiyul.

RUTH
Oh! Nice to meet you! I mean,
"*Priyatno poznamomit'sya*". Was that close?

ANATOLI
Not at all. It is okay though! I speak English very well indeed.

SAM
That's a relief.

RUTH
May I ask, how long to Yangiyul?
After all those months on a boat, my body's achin' to stand still.

ANATOLI
Do not worry. It is just short train ride. Not long at all.

RUTH (PRELAP)
Six days?!

INT. TRAIN - HALLWAY - LATER

Sam and Ruth scoot down the narrow hall, while Anatoli shows Eugene and Devra to their cabin.

RUTH
What happened to "not long at all?"

SAM
Maybe it got lost in translation.

They arrive at their cabin. Slide the door open to REVEAL an AMERICAN WOMAN, 30s, White. She sits up, startled. Just then, Anatoli walks up, motions for Sam and Ruth to step in.

AMERICAN WOMAN
This cabin is reserved.

ANATOLI
You are American! She is American.
Like you.

SAM
Yeah, we gathered...

ANATOLI
(to Woman, re: tickets)
See ticket? We all sit together.

AMERICAN WOMAN
That can't be right. I need to
speak to the conductor.

ANATOLI
Why? What is problem?

Sam and Ruth shrink a bit. Well aware of the problem.

AMERICAN WOMAN
I can't share a cabin with *these*
people.
(hushed, to Anatoli)
They're Negroes.

ANATOLI
Yes! Isn't it great?!

Seeing the commotion, a TRAIN ATTENDANT approaches. He and Anatoli speak quickly IN RUSSIAN. Until --

ANATOLI

Okay. Not a problem. We have private space. All for you.

The American Woman is relieved. Her crisis averted.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - LUGGAGE CAR - DAY

The American Woman, beyond miserable, sits on top of her own suitcase in the packed luggage car. The train swerves harshly. As luggage falls onto her head --

INT. TRAIN - CABIN - DAY

BACK WITH Sam, Ruth and Anatoli. Sam's pleased to see the smile on Ruth's face. He settles back, stares out the window. Enjoying the vistas of the Soviet countryside.

EXT. U.S.S.R. LANDSCAPE - DAY - MONTAGE

- The lush fields of the Black Earth region pass by.
- A prism of colors reflects off the Volga river at sunset.
- A makeshift market at the Ural train stop boasts exotic livestock and cultural oddities.
- Native peasants usher camels through the Kazakhstan desert.

INT./EXT. TRAIN - TASHKENT - DAY

When he sees it up ahead, Sam leans against the window to admire -- The City of Tashkent. Perfect blend of old and new.

Street markets from a by-gone era are surrounded by modern, industrial buildings. A STATUE of VLADIMIR LENIN towers over it all. Anatoli explains to Sam --

ANATOLI

This is Tashkent. Yangiyul will be just ahead.

EXT. YANGIYUL - VILLAGE - DAY

Primarily populated with native UZBEKI VILLAGERS in brightly colored garb. Their Eastern-Asian skin darkly hued.

Among them we see the occasional RUSSIAN BOLSHEVIK, fairer, but in similar worn work clothes.

Sam, Ruth, Eugene and Devra take this all in from the back of a wagon being pulled by a horse. Anatoli at the lead.

ANATOLI
 People of Yangiyul have grown
 cotton for generations. They call
 it, "*beloye zoloto*." White gold.

As they continue through the village, they pass a RED-STARRED TRUCK loaded with FOOD RATIONS. A LINE of VILLAGERS stand waiting in front of it.

ANATOLI
 People of Yangiyul deliver White
 Gold to State. And State delivers
 food to people of Yanyigul.

Seeing Ruth scrutinizing the long line, Anatoli adds --

ANATOLI
 Motherland must feed many mouths.

He clucks his tongue and the wagon moves along. Passing HUTS made from mud, manure and grass. Devra's eyes widen.

DEVRA
 Don't these look... cozy. Which one
 is ours?

ANATOLI
 Oh no. This not where you live.

EXT. YANGIYUL ROADSIDE - LATER

To the four Americans' delight, the wagon stops at a modern, European-style HOUSE, surrounded by picturesque FIELDS.

ANATOLI
 Sam and Ruth Parker, this will be
 your home.

Sam and Ruth are jaw-dropped. It dwarfs their Alabama shack.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

They gingerly step inside. Awed by a staircase leading to bedrooms upstairs. A tastefully decorated SITTING ROOM. And above the mantle, a majestic PORTRAIT of --

ANATOLI (O.S.)
 Our esteemed Comrade Stalin.

Anatoli sets down their luggage. Then offers the painting a patriotic salute. Sam and Ruth aren't sure how to respond.

RUTH
 Is he always... up there?

ANATOLI

Oh yes. Face of Comrade Stalin
graces all homes in motherland.

Sam isn't going to look this gift horse in the mouth.

SAM

Well we're real grateful to him,
and to you, for this lovely home
and this wonderful opportunity.

ANATOLI

Good. Good. Tomorrow we start
growing much cotton.
(then, formal)
Comrades.

Anatoli about-faces and leaves. Just like that, this
beautiful house has become *theirs*. They're euphoric. Sam
sweeps Ruth up, plants a long kiss on her.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

Ruth peeks outside while Sam frantically gathers his things.

RUTH

I think that sorry lookin' horse
and buggy is your ride.

SAM

Where'd you put my other boot?

RUTH

Next to the one in your hand.

Sam gets it together. Pulls on his boots. Kisses his wife.

SAM

You sure you're gonna be fine here
on your own?

RUTH

By the time I wipe this place down
and rearrange things, you'll be
walkin' back in that door again.

Sam smiles, heads out. And Ruth props her hands on her hips.
Considers the Stalin painting. Sam dips back in --

SAM

Ruth. Don't you think about movin'
that painting.

She scowls. Sam chuckles as he leaves.

Then, a THUNK, THUNK, from the back of the house. Ruth tentatively wanders into --

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A sturdy bubushka of a woman, ZARINA STEPANOV, 50s, Bolshevik, moves dexterously around the kitchen.

RUTH
Beg your pardon, but... What are
you doin' in my kitchen?

The Woman examines Ruth like a squash at the market. Then, with a curt nod, speaks in halting English --

ZARINA
You are Ruth Parker. I am Zarina
Stepanov. I am working here.

RUTH
Pardon?

ZARINA
I am working here. In house.
(off Ruth's confusion)
I am doing cleaning. I am sent by
Anatoli Mikhailov.

RUTH
A maid? For me? To clean my house?

ZARINA
Dah. I am here.

Zarina tackles the sink of dishes. Ruth's self-conscious.

RUTH
Really. You don't have to--

ZARINA
I clean. You go. Rest.

With that, Zarina shoos Ruth out of the kitchen.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELD - DAY

Endless ROWS OF COTTON FIELDS. Workers -- Uzbeki and Bolshevik alike -- toil the land together. Sam's impressed. Eugene points as he questions Anatoli --

EUGENE
All that there? And over there. And
that, too?

ANATOLI

Yes, yes. It is all one field.

Suddenly, VROOOM! -- a MILITARY CONVOY TRUCK rumbles down the dirt path. Comes to a stop. Sam and Eugene recoil when dozens of ARMED SOLDIERS pour out. Line up IN FORMATION.

ANATOLI

Ah, he has arrived.

The SOLDIERS part. REVEALING an austere Bolshevik in a pristine uniform -- SECRETARY RUSLAN YAKOV, 50s.

ANATOLI

Comrades, Secretary of Central
Committee of Communist Party of
Uzbekistan -- Ruslan Yakov.

Yakov offers them a firm, matter-of-fact, handshake.

YAKOV

Comrade Parker. Comrade Wright. I
hope your journey was swift and
without incident.

Yakov's English is perfect. Manners impeccable. But there's a clinical quality to his interactions.

SAM

It was, sir. Thank you, sir. I
mean... Comrade.

YAKOV

Have you formed an opinion of our
lands yet?

EUGENE

It's certainly the biggest cotton
farm I've ever seen.

YAKOV

These were once many farms owned by
many individuals. But after the
revolution, General Secretary
Stalin collectivized the lands.
Productivity has increased. And now
all share in the rewards.

A SOLDIER blows a PIERCING WHISTLE. The WORKERS quickly come to attention. Anatoli translates as Yakov speaks in RUSSIAN --

ANATOLI

"Comrades, I ask you to welcome new
American Specialists.

(MORE)

ANATOLI (CONT'D)
Men highly trained in technical
production of cotton. Together, we
usher in bold, new chapter for our
young country."

Yakov raises a FIST. As do the workers. Sam and Eugene are
uneasy with this militaristic gesture. Yakov turns to them.

YAKOV
You have been brought here at
considerable expense. I have no
doubt, however, you will prove it
to be a wise investment.

SAM
Yes, sir-- Comrade. We will.

A curt nod and they watch as Yakov heads for the truck.

EUGENE
No pressure, huh?

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - LATER

Anatoli leads Sam and Eugene over to a squat field hand with
a fiery temper, MAKSIM STEPANOV, 60s, Bolshevik.

ANATOLI
Comrades, this is Maksim Stepanov.
Captain of the field.

SAM
Lookin' forward to workin' with
you, Maksim.

Sam extends a hand. Maksim raises an eyebrow. Wary of these
foreign interlopers. Anatoli covers.

ANATOLI
Maksim understands some English,
but speaks very little.

EUGENE
That true for everyone here?

ANATOLI
Dah. Except for me, of course. I
speak wonderful English indeed!

Sam scans the verdant fields.

SAM

Forgive me, Anatoli, but these fields are growin' just fine. What exactly are we here to do?

ANATOLI

Of course fields are fine! But, there are quotas. Always quotas. All of motherland relies on us for cotton. So... We must grow more.

SAM

How much more?

ANATOLI

Twenty percent.

EUGENE

Doesn't sound too crazy.

SAM

Got any land sittin' fallow?

Maksim looks to Anatoli, who hesitates. Then, nods.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - HILLSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

This hillside land is barren. Filled with half-buried BOULDERS and rotting STUMPS. Anatoli and Maksim shake their heads as Sam and Eugene stare, daunted.

ANATOLI

This is only land that remains.

Eugene scowls at a handful of arid dirt.

EUGENE

You have any idea what it'd take to grow something here?

ANATOLI

Yes. A specialist.

Neither Sam nor Eugene are prepared to give up that title.

SAM

Alright, if this is what we have to work with, so be it.

Anatoli addresses Maksim in RUSSIAN. The stoic man CHUCKLES

EUGENE

What's his deal?

ANATOLI

I tell him how you make this place
flush with cotton.

(laughing continues)

He very much believes in you.

Sam takes one last look around, unsure where to start.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Zarina's dusting when Ruth tries to tiptoe into the kitchen.

ZARINA

Where you go?

Ruth halts in her tracks.

RUTH

I'm a bit peckish. Figured I'd fix
up some lunch.

ZARINA

I do already.

Zarina leaves. Returns with a pot of CHUNKY RED SOUP. It's
unpleasantly foreign to Ruth. But we recognize it as --

ZARINA

Borscht.

RUTH

You didn't have to. Really.

Ruth's plotting her escape when Zarina plops down at the
table. Motions for her to join.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ruth sits, struggling to write a letter. The page simply
reads: "Dear Mama". Then, the door swings as Sam comes home.

RUTH

How was it?

He wants to confess he's in over his head. But a hint of
skepticism on Ruth's face makes him think better of it.

SAM

Definitely got a lot work on my
hands, but nothing I can't handle.

He leans over to kiss her. Then takes in the house.

SAM
You were hard at work. Room
practically sparkles.

RUTH
Don't thank me. Thank Zarina. Our
maid. Guess she comes with the
house.

SAM
A maid? For us?
(then, the kicker)
She white?

RUTH
Yeah, she's white.

Sam grins. Pleased as punch. And Ruth lightens up.

SAM
We got anything to eat?

RUTH
Uh huh. Let me introduce you to a
Russian dish called "borscht".

Sam's unsure of what to make of her wry smirk.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - HILLSIDE - THE NEXT DAY

Eugene, Anatoli and Maksim arrive to find Sam pacing the
untamed field. Mind racing. He mumbles to himself.

EUGENE
When did you get here?

Sam's all business. There's no time to waste.

SAM
Sunrise. Now, we get ourselves a
tractor and a few mules, we can
clear all the debris. But the
dirt's drier than the back of an
Alabama gecko...

Then, Sam hikes halfway down the hill. The others follow.

Sam stops. Points to a fertile valley sprouted around a
FLOWING CREEK in the near distance.

SAM
From what I can tell that is the
closest water supply.

Maksim nods in confirmation.

EUGENE

That creek's at least a mile from here. You'd have to transport it all that way. Up hill.

SAM

Anatoli, we have access to a hydraulic pump?

ANATOLI

We do not.

SAM

An electrical one then?

ANATOLI

Also, no. But we have many buckets and mules.

Sam and Eugene trade an incredulous look. *That's their best option?* They fall silent. Stuck. When... Sam lights up.

SAM

Ram pump.

EUGENE

(weighs the idea)

Ram pump...

ANATOLI

This is device made of animal?

SAM

It's a piping system. Uses the water's own momentum to run uphill.

Maksim lets out a bitter retort in RUSSIAN. Anatoli snaps back at him. Maksim stalks off.

SAM

It's just a suggestion. Maksim's captain here. If he doesn't think it's a good idea--

ANATOLI

You are specialist. We listen to you.

OFF Sam, an unfamiliar weight settling on his shoulders.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - BY THE CREEK - DAYS LATER

WORKERS sludge through mud and ankle-deep water, shoveling earth out of a massive PIT.

Sam's nearby carving a crude pump out of wood. A curious Anatoli watches him closely.

SAM

When the water fills up the pressure chamber, there's nowhere to go. So gravity pushes it back down and up the hill.

EUGENE (O.C.)

Anatoli! Anatoli!

Sam and Anatoli each sigh.

SAM

The tractor?

ANATOLI

The tractor.

They hike up the hill. Passing Maksim who oversees workers burying WOODEN PIPES into the ground. Sam stops one of them.

SAM

You gotta clear any large rocks or the mainline's gonna get blocked.

The Worker wavers. Looks to Maksim. Only after Maksim nods does the Worker do as he's told. It's clear who's in charge.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - HILLSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

An exasperated Eugene leans against a dingy tractor. Next to him is NIKOLAI, a towering redhead with a thick beard.

When Sam and Anatoli walk up --

EUGENE

Damn thing's broken again. Doesn't help that Nikolai's got a foot made of lead.

Nikolai rants in RUSSIAN. Then KICKS DIRT at the TRACTOR.

ANATOLI

Let us have a look.

As Anatoli guides Nikolai to the smoking engine --

EUGENE

Funny how shit stops working once a few Negroes start telling a bunch of white men what to do.

SAM

Ain't no one's fault. Thing's older than the dirt it's tryin' to move.

EUGENE

Yeah, sure that's it.

Eugene gives him a pointed look. And Sam finds himself instinctively glancing down the hill at Maksim.

INT. RUTH AND SAM'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

KNOCK. KNOCK. Ruth swings open the door. REVEAL Devra, holding a picnic basket.

DEVRA

I'm in need of a distraction. How about a picnic?

Ruth peeks inside the basket.

RUTH

Devra, there's only gin in here.

DEVRA

It's a Gin Rickey picnic! My favorite kind.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Where the ladies enjoy their drinks.

DEVRA

Honey, let me tell you. Latia's a dream. Having someone waiting on you hand and foot... The perks of this place are simply divine.

Ruth's not so certain. She gulps her drink. Devra continues.

DEVRA

Frankly, I'm happy to have the time to myself. The moment Eugene walks through the door-- That man cannot keep his hands to himself. I'm sure it's the same with you and Sam.

It's definitely not. Ruth downs the rest of her cocktail.

DEVRA
Well that's the spirit!

As Devra refills her empty glass, Ruth notices some GARMENTS flapping on the CLOTHES LINE outside. Zarina enters with an empty basket of laundry. Ruth jumps up. Realizing --

RUTH
Are those my underthings??

ZARINA
I find in closet.

RUTH
I put 'em there 'cause I wanted to wash 'em myself.

ZARINA
I find. So I do.

Not one to mince words, Zarina exits. Leaving Ruth upset.

RUTH
I swear, there isn't one thing I can do for myself in my own house. Not even wash my delicates.

DEVRA
I say let them handle the boring stuff. And you and I stay focused on the important matters.

And with that, Devra hands Ruth a fresh cocktail. Without hesitating, Ruth takes a big gulp.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - BY THE CREEK - A FEW DAYS LATER

A rope's slung around Sam's waist. Maksim pulls it tight. As a line of WORKERS take hold, ready to lower Sam down, Eugene hands him the wooden ram pump. Anatoli smiles encouragingly.

ANATOLI
Do not worry, Sam Parker. We will not leave you down there.

SAM
That ain't what I'm worried about.

The workers lower Sam into the pit. Maksim's disapproving scowl is the last thing he sees.

Once down, Sam fastens the ram pump to the connecting pipes. Then, waits. The CHUG of WATER pressure building sends a smile across Sam's face.

SAM
It's in the pressure chamber!

ANGLE ON Anatoli and Eugene, pleased. Until --

KA-KUNG. KA-KUNG. An unnatural howl echoes out and the pump starts to CONVULSE. Knowing what's next, Sam backs away.

SAM
Pull me up!

Maksim and the workers scramble with the rope. Hoisting Sam upwards just as --

BOOM! The pump explodes. Wood SPLINTERS soar through the air.

And Sam flops onto the ground, caked in mud. When he finally looks up, Sam finds every worker staring at him.

Maksim doesn't say a word. Doesn't have to. He hikes back down the hill. And en masse, the other workers follow.

Sam flings the mud off him. Disgusted with himself.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - LATER THAT EVENING

The patter of horse hooves. As Sam rides home with Maksim in a wagon. Each stare straight ahead.

SAM
Y'know, I never asked. Your wife
Zarina. She like workin' with Ruth?

The crusty Bolshevik remains silent. Sam covers --

SAM
Yeah. I think Ruth's been enjoyin'
spendin' time with her, too.

Maksim clicks his tongue and the wagon stops outside of --

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

But Sam lingers in the wagon.

SAM
About what happened earlier... I'm
gonna make it work, Maksim.

Finally, Maksim musters a response --

MAKSIM
Waste time.

Discouraged, Sam hops out of the wagon. The front door opens and Zarina passes Sam with a curt nod.

She climbs in next to Maksim. And reading his mood, gives him a pat on the hand. Maksim accepts this with a nod. Then cracks the reigns.

Sam steels himself before heading inside.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He enters to find Ruth at the small desk. Her hands cling to some papers with handwriting scribbled across them.

When she spots Sam, Ruth dashes away her tears.

SAM

Ruth, what's wrong?

RUTH

I'm just tired. Gonna turn in early.

She sets the paper onto a stack of others. Heads upstairs. Sam looks to see what she was reading.

When he spots: "Love, Mama" scrawled at the bottom of the stack of letters, Sam lets out a heavy sigh. Then, he reaches for a pencil and fresh paper. And gets back to work.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

CREAK! Ruth startles awake in bed. Only to find herself alone. On edge, she SNATCHES a CAST-IRON CANDLESTICK off the dresser.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth creeps into the room. Armed with the candlestick. Until she finds Sam at the desk, stewing over a RAM PUMP sketch.

She lowers the candlestick with a scowl.

RUTH

You got some nerve. Givin' me such a fright at this hour.

SAM

Can't sleep until I fix this.

(re: sketch, sotto)

It's too much pressure. It's only gonna explode in my face again.

RUTH

Samuel, I didn't leave my family
and travel halfway 'cross the world
to sleep alone in an empty bed.

SAM

I don't figure this out, Ruth, we
ain't gonna have a bed to sleep in!

He turns back to the sketch. And peeved, Ruth PLANTS the
candlestick on the desk before him. Storms off.

A beat as Sam glumly stares at the cast-iron candlestick.
Then, he leans in closer... And closer.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - BY THE CREEK - DAY

ON a brand-new CAST-IRON RAMP PUMP, clutched in Sam's hands.
As he, Eugene and Anatoli hover over the pit --

SAM

Where is everyone?

ANATOLI

Better we not bother. Maksim has
threatened to make report to
Secretary Yakov.

This makes everyone uncomfortable. Sam reaches for the rope
and Eugene helps tie it around his waist.

EUGENE

You sure about this? With all that
iron in that pump, if it explodes...
It'll take your head off.

Hearing those words, Anatoli takes a giant step backwards.

SAM

Just lower me down.

Eugene and Anatoli take hold of the rope. Lowering him. And
once again, Sam connects the ram pump to the inlet and
delivery pipe.

CHUG. CHUG. CHUG. Water fills the pressure chamber. And the
pump GROANS as it starts to shake. Sam holds his breath...

But this time, *the pump doesn't explode.*

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - HILLSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Sam sprints along the pipeline. Calling out to Maksim and the
workers in the fields below.

SAM

Come quick! Everybody come on!

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - TOP OF THE HILL - MOMENTS LATER

A crude PIPE sticks out of the ground. Bone dry.

Sam stares at it, willing water to appear. Anatoli, Maksim, Eugene and a crowd of WORKERS behind him.

A skeptical Maksim grumbles in RUSSIAN.

SAM

Any second now.

ANATOLI

It has been many seconds...

Sam stays fixated on the pipe. Maksim's had enough. He signals to the workers. *Time to leave.* When --

DROP. DROP. SPLLLASSSSHHH. A cascade of water FLOWS out of the pipe. And Sam and Eugene jump for joy. While Maksim stares dumbfounded at the water.

EUGENE

Never doubt a Tuskegee man!

An eager Anatoli slaps Maksim on the back.

ANATOLI

Water runs up hill. Very special!
Very special indeed.

And for the first time, Maksim gives Sam an approving nod.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - HILLSIDE - WEEKS LATER

Rows of GREEN SPROUTS now cover the once barren hill. Sam and a couple workers haul sacks of heavy rocks.

Exhausted, Sam stops to catch his breath. Then, a CANTEEN is extended to him. He looks up. Surprised to see Maksim offering it. Sam hesitates. A nearby Anatoli notices.

ANATOLI

Something is wrong?

SAM

Nah, it's just... where I'm from,
people like Maksim don't drink from
the same glass as people like me.

Maksim pushes the canteen into Sam's hand. Insisting. And Sam takes a swig. Hands it back. Grateful.

ANATOLI

That's the problem with you
Americans, you rise by stepping on
each other's backs. Here, as a
Bolshevik climbs, he pulls his
brothers and sisters up with him.
We rise together. We fall together.

SAM

I like the sound of that.

Maksim spits a bevy of RUSSIAN at Anatoli, who brightens.

ANATOLI

Maksim and I would very much like to
take you somewhere tonight. You
come, yes? Bring Comrade Wright.

Anatoli looks to Eugene, who's yet again arguing with Nikolai over the broken-down tractor.

ANATOLI

He could use break.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

Papers are sent flying as Ruth rummages through the desk.
Looking for something she can't seem to find.

RUTH

Zarina?

Zarina enters from the kitchen --

RUTH

Have you seen my letters? They were
stacked here on the desk.

ZARINA

Papers? I throw out.

RUTH

You did *what??*

ZARINA

They look like trash. I throw out.

Ruth starts to choke up. Darts out of the house.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The household trash is heaped into a COMPOST PILE. Ruth frantically digs through the sludge. Flinging aside gunk.

Until she PULLS OUT the letters from home. They drip with goo. Then her only connection to home crumbles in her hands.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Joseph Stalin's eyes bore down on Ruth from the painting above the fireplace as she paces before it, waiting for Sam. When he rushes in, Ruth heads right for him.

RUTH

Mmm, Samuel, the day I've had...

SAM

Baby, I wanna hear all about it.
But Anatoli's gonna be here any
minute. He's taking me and Eugene
somewhere tonight.

RUTH

Where?

SAM

Wouldn't say, but it sounded like a
big deal.

Then, BEEEEP! BEEEEP! And Sam rushes upstairs. Ruth looks out the window. Sees Anatoli step out of a truck.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Anatoli smokes a cigarette while leaning against his battered 1926 RENAULT PICK-UP TRUCK. When Ruth marches up, he quickly dashes out the cigarette.

RUTH

Anatoli, there's somethin' I wanna
talk to you about.

ANATOLI

If you have concerns about this
evening--

RUTH

No, it's about my maid. Zarina.

Her tone makes Anatoli's face scrunch in recognition.

ANATOLI

You are unhappy. Comrade Parker has never told me so.

RUTH

You know Sam. He's so focused on the fields. Which is as it should be. I didn't want to bother him.

ANATOLI

Yes, yes. I see. If Zarina is displeasing to you--

RUTH

That's not the problem.

ANATOLI

Then what is problem?

That's what Ruth's been asking herself. She struggles to put her feelings into words.

RUTH

Back home, I looked after my whole family. I did my own cookin' and my own cleanin'. It's what I'm used to. I just don't need a maid.

ANATOLI

Yes, yes. I understand. But Zarina must stay.

RUTH

Excuse me?

ANATOLI

Forgive me, Ruth Parker, but you too must understand. Cleaning, cooking, this is how Zarina Stepanov serves Motherland.

RUTH

I'm not lookin' to deprive her of her civic duty or anything--

ANATOLI

Then we agree. Zarina will stay.
(reassuring)

And in time, you too will find way to contribute.

Before Ruth can argue, Sam jogs up. Kisses Ruth goodbye.

SAM
See you later tonight.

Sam and Anatoli climb into the car. Leaving Ruth in front of the house, arms crossed in frustration.

EXT. CITY OF TASHKENT - NIGHT

Anatoli's truck chugs through the city center. Turns a corner where a CLAMORING CROWD's assembled before an OLD CHURCH. They CHEER as two BOLSHEVIKS hand crank a winch. Until --

CRASH! *The church's IRON BELL topples to the ground.* Sam and Eugene are taken aback.

SAM
What's all that about?

ANATOLI
That church very old. Very corrupt.

Sam can't shake the image of the crowd tearing down the church. But Anatoli's already moved on. Points to a MODERN HALL with LARGE DOORS ahead.

ANATOLI
This is where we go.

INT. TASHKENT COMMUNIST MEETING HALL - NIGHT

The two LARGE DOORS swing open, revealing a room packed with DIGNITARIES and RABBLE-ROUSERS. Anatoli snakes through the crowd. Sam and Eugene at his heels.

SAM
What's all this?

ANATOLI
Tashkent chapter of Communist Party.

And Eugene freezes. Sam pauses alongside him.

EUGENE
Sam, I signed up to farm. Not to become a Commie.

SAM
You don't know that's why they invited us. They're bein' welcomin'. Let's not be rude.

Sam pushes him to join Anatoli. Eugene reluctantly complies and Anatoli proudly introduces them to a string of men.

ANATOLI

Comrades Galygin and Zhigunov.
 (re: three other men)
 Comrade Kuzmich and his brother
 Comrade Kuzmich. Also, their cousin
 Comrade Kuzmich.

No one hesitates to shake their hands. This isn't lost on Sam. The POUNDING of a gavel brings the men to their seats. Maksim waves. They head for three empty seats at his side.

Once seated, a BALD MAN with a goatee stands and argues fiercely in RUSSIAN. Anatoli offers a hushed play-by-play.

ANATOLI

That is Larionov. Party chairman.
 He admonishes other man, Aziz, for
 refusing to hand over his lands for
 collectivization.

Aziz, an UZBEKI MAN in robes and a turban, interrupts.

ANATOLI

Aziz resist, says lands have been
 in family for generations.

EUGENE

Can't blame him. Never heard of
 someone willingly handing over
 their land to the government.

ANATOLI

Your way, American way, land only
 provides for you. Soviet way is to
 collectivize -- land provides for all.

Just when it seems the fierce debate is on the edge of trading words for fists, Larionov makes one last impassioned plea. The room breaks into rousing APPLAUSE.

Aziz admits defeat. Offers his hand to Larionov.

ANATOLI

Ha! He agrees.

SAM

It always get this heated?

ANATOLI

Usually more punches thrown.

As Larionov and Aziz step aside, Anatoli jumps to his feet.

ANATOLI
 (in Russian)
*Comrades! Comrades! I am pleased to
 introduce the American specialists.
 Comrade Wright and Comrade Parker.*

Wild cheers. Larionov approaches Sam and Eugene. Addresses them and the room in impassioned Russian. Anatoli translates.

ANATOLI
 "For your industriousness and
 dedication to Motherland, we honor
 you with invitation to join
 Communist Party of Tashkent."

Another round of applause. Sam's speechless. Eugene's just ready to go home. Mutters to Sam --

EUGENE
 What I tell you?

Anatoli presents them each with a SMALL BOX. Sam looks inside to find a COMMUNIST PARTY PIN.

SAM
 That's a... big decision.

ANATOLI
 Oh, yes. But know, should you
 choose to join, then rest of days,
 you look out for us, and we look
 out for you.

Sam feels the full weight of the tiny pin in his hands.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING

Where we find Sam, still considering the pin.

RUTH (O.S.)
 Whatcha got there?

SNAP -- he closes the box shut as Ruth walks in.

SAM
 Nothin'.

Ruth shrugs. *Alright.* Sets the kettle on the stove.

SAM
 Last night you said there was
 somethin' you wanted to get off
 your chest...?

Now it's Ruth who clams up.

RUTH
It's nothin'.

Sam shrugs. *Alright.* Leaves a quiet Ruth to her tea.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - DAY

Sam's breath forms clouds in the cool air as he treks with Anatoli through the fields. Moves towards the WORKERS ahead.

SAM
Mornin'. Mornin' everybody.

The workers turn in unison. Their apprehensive faces set off Sam's warning bells. He looks to Maksim.

SAM
What is it?

Maksim signals for the workers to clear a path. And Sam approaches the nearest plant. It's covered in frost. Shit.

MAKSIM
(in Russian)
This is not good.

ANATOLI
He said--

SAM
Yeah. I know what he said.

EST. CITY OF TASHKENT - DAY

The city's barely visible through the wall of falling snow.

INT. TASHKENT COMMUNIST OFFICES - HALLWAY - DAY

Sam, Anatoli and Eugene sit bundled in jackets in the cold hallway. Like children called to the principal's office.

A door opens and a GUARD escorts out a SOBBING WOMAN. Sam and Eugene nervously look to Anatoli. His eyes stay glued to the floor. Then, Secretary Yakov steps into the hall --

YAKOV
This way.

INT. YAKOV'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Trinkets from around the globe line the walls. Eugene's surprised to hear a familiar tune playing -- Bessie Smith's *Devil's Gonna Get You*.

EUGENE
That Bessie Smith?

YAKOV
You are familiar with this artist?

EUGENE
Bessie's more bruiser than artist.
She'd bust your choppers loose with
one crack if it tickled her.

ANATOLI
This is my kind of woman.

Yakov nods to the empty chairs. A non-verbal command to sit. Anatoli, Sam and Eugene do so.

YAKOV
I admire many Negro musicians. Of course they cannot compare to our Stravinsky or Balakirev. But there is a similar pain in their work. In fact, I believe there are many similarities between my people and the American Negroes. That is why I urged Comrade Stalin to recruit undervalued men such as yourself.

SAM
And we're appreciative of that.

YAKOV
Are you?

The implication lingers.

ANATOLI
Comrade Yakov, if I may--

YAKOV
You may not.

Anatoli sits back and Sam addresses Yakov.

SAM
I know we haven't exactly come through on the quota you set--

YAKOV

No. You have not.

SAM

The new land... Had to move heaven and earth to get anything to grow from it. Then the frost came on us earlier than expected.

YAKOV

Weather does not stop a specialist.

EUGENE

Really? You been outside lately?

Yakov stares a beat and Eugene backpedals.

EUGENE

We were batting from behind from the get-go. All that business with the tractor...

ANATOLI

It broke down. Many, many times.

EUGENE

"Broke down" is one way to put it.

YAKOV

You are suggesting it was sabotage.

SAM

(taken aback)

No. That's not what he's sayin'.

Eugene raises an eyebrow. *That's exactly what he's saying.*
Yakov makes note of this.

SAM

Look, we won't hide behind excuses. It was our responsibility to grow that cotton and we let you down. Give us another chance and I promise -- we will hit your quota.

A painfully long silence. Then Yakov acquiesces.

YAKOV

I intend to hold you to your word. I have been informed the State requires an additional fifteen percent next season.

EUGENE

That's thirty-five percent more.
Time it'd take to till more land...

SAM

Cotton doesn't grow that fast.

YAKOV

You will find a way. Or your
contracts will be revoked. And you
will return to whatever life you left
in America and its depression.

(then)

We promised opportunity. We have
delivered. Now, it is your turn.

INT. EUGENE AND DEVRA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The wind howls. Slamming the shutters against the windows.
Inside, it's even more volatile. Devra paces as she flings
questions at Sam and Eugene. Ruth sits quietly.

DEVRA

Did you tell him about the tractor?
And about that red-bearded fellow?

EUGENE

Nikolai.

DEVRA

Did you tell him?

SAM

(not pleased)
Yeah. He told him.

EUGENE

Open your eyes, Sam. You don't
think there are one or two of them
that don't want us to succeed?

SAM

That busted tractor didn't bring
the frost, Eugene. These people see
we've got somethin' to offer. Why
else invite us to join their party?

RUTH

Maybe this is God's way of tellin'
us somethin'.

DEVRA

And what exactly is that?

Their expressions make it clear they don't share Ruth's doubts. She vaguely shrugs. Dropping the subject. And Devra re-focuses her frustrations on Sam and Eugene.

DEVRA

Look, whatever you have to do, you boys are going to get these people their cotton.

EUGENE

It's not that simple, Devra. What they're asking for is impossible.

SAM

There's not enough time to get the land ready and for the cotton to mature before the frost comes on.

DEVRA

Then I suggest you boys get creative. Because going back right now is not an option.

RUTH

What do you mean?

EUGENE

(to Devra)

Maybe now's not the time...

DEVRA

Eugene, secrets give me indigestion. Sam, Ruth -- we're having a baby.

The briefest flicker of envy. Then Ruth embraces Devra.

RUTH

Oh, Devra, that's fantastic!

SAM

Ain't that just a hell of a thing.

They break into smiles. Only, there's a tinge of remorse in Ruth's. Sam clocks it.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Pitch black and silent. Sam and Ruth are fast asleep. Until a RATTLE pierces the silence and the room begins to ROIL. A MASSIVE EARTHQUAKE. Sam and Ruth jerk awake.

RUTH

Samuel!

He pulls her close. While -- BANG, SLAM -- pictures plunge from the walls. A water glass shatters to the floor. And just like that... the shaking stops.

SAM

We're fine. It's done now.

But Ruth's still gasping for air. She takes a deep breath. Then, exhales. But what comes out is an intense SCREAM. Sam's taken aback. A long beat as Ruth gathers herself. Then --

RUTH

I can't live like this for another
two and a half years.

And there it is...

SAM

You've got a fine house. Your own
servant. And more money than you've
ever had. What more do you need?

She looks away. He knows exactly what she's thinking.

SAM

Ruth, I know you miss your family.
But I'm your family, too. And I'm
right here with you.

RUTH

Are you?

And Ruth turns away from Sam. Leaving him at a loss.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - WEEKS LATER

Their home is blanketed in mounds of snow.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Sporting a thick beard, Sam's lost in work at his desk.
Agricultural BOOKS and NOTES sprawled around him.

Ruth, glass of water in hand, enters.

RUTH

Goin' to bed. You comin' this time?

SAM

(barely looks up)
Can't.

RUTH

Thought you said that article Mr.
Carver sent had some promise.

SAM

I thought wrong.

Ruth knows it's no use. He's too much in his own world. She
leaves him to it. Sam pulls another book off the stack.

His eyes flick to the COMMUNIST PIN on his desk. Silently
judging him. Until, he slams the box shut. Gets back to work.

INT. GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

ON a LETTER resting on the counter. The last page reads:

*"I'm lost. If there's anything else you can think of...
please send it our way. - Your friend Sam"*

PAN OFF the letter to FIND George Washington Carver grabbing
two mugs of coffee.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

And what did you find in your
travels, Langston?

He sets them on the kitchen table. And we REVEAL the
impassioned BLACK MAN seated there -- renowned author and
poet LANGSTON HUGHES (34).

LANGSTON

Hardly any liberty. Barely any
freedom. And democracy?
(shakes his head, wry)
Not for the Negro man. Not in
America. Here's hoping my search
fares better in the East.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

You've accepted the Communists'
invitation?

LANGSTON

I'm Moscow-bound this week.

Carver turns to the counter where Sam's letter sits.

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Well, since you're headed that
way... I'd be remiss if I didn't
direct you to pay a call on some
friends of mine.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

Ruth's nearly finished knitting a blanket when Sam enters with a LETTER. A BOOK tucked under his arm. Sam takes a turn around the room. Then another. Until --

RUTH

Go on then. You clearly wanna tell me somethin'

SAM

You know how I've been writin' to George?

RUTH

Yeah...

SAM

And you know how he's been sendin' all those books and things back?

Sam hands Ruth his book. She turns it in her hands: The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations by Langston Hughes.

RUTH

Mister Carver know you don't like poetry?

SAM

Nope. And I don't plan to tell him. 'Cause George didn't just send us the book... He sent us the author.

RUTH

Langston Hughes?
(off his nod)
Langston Hughes is comin' here?

Sam nods again. And realizing he's dead serious, Ruth leaps up. Ready to do everything and anything. All at once.

SAM

What're you doin'?

RUTH

Samuel, Langston Hughes is comin' to our house. What am I not doin'?

She hurries out. Reinvigorated. And Sam's heart warms. That's the Ruth he's been missing.

EXT. MAKSIM AND ZARINA'S HUT - DAY

A bundled-up Maksim carries firewood. His eyes widen when he recognizes Ruth at his YELLOW FRONT DOOR.

INT. MAKSIM AND ZARINA'S HUT - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth looks around the bare hut. Self-conscious about how sparse Maksim and Zarina's home is in comparison to her own.

RUTH

I won't be stayin' long. Just came
to speak with Zarina.

Maksim gives the two women space. Ruth fidgets as she talks --

RUTH

I came by because... Well, y'see,
we're gonna be havin' an important
visitor. And I noticed at Devra's
house... Well, they don't always
eat the same food we do.

(real quick)

Not that there's anything wrong
with borscht. But sometimes Latia
cooks different kinds of meals.
Like the ones from back home.

ZARINA

Dah.

RUTH

It got me thinkin'. They're gettin'
those groceries from somewhere.

ZARINA

Dah. Store in Tashkent has these
things. Only for specialists.

RUTH

(floored)

You've known all about this? Why
didn't you say so before?

ZARINA

You do not ask. So I do not say.
Tomorrow... We go.

Ruth does her best not to shake her head in disbelief.
Nothing comes easy in this place.

INT. FOREIGN SPECIALIST GROCERY STORE - DAY

PAN DOWN a fully stocked AISLE of packaged American food -- peanut butter, corn flakes, coffee -- to FIND Ruth eagerly filling her basket as Zarina trails her.

RUTH
Just need a bit of shortenin' and--
Zarina?

As she turns around, Ruth spots Zarina paused, staring with great desire at a JAR OF APPLESAUCE.

RUTH
Zarina? Everythin' alright?

ZARINA
Dah.

RUTH
That wasn't convincin' one bit. You
can be honest with me.

ZARINA
I do not see so much food in very
long time.

For the first time, Ruth sees a hint of vulnerability in her.

RUTH
When I came by your house yesterday,
I couldn't help but notice... Are
you and Maksim doin' okay?

ZARINA
It has been hard. But we make do.

Ruth's been there. All her protective instincts kick in.

RUTH
We're gonna need another basket.
(off Zarina's confusion)
We're gettin' two of everything.
One for me. One for you.

INT. FOREIGN SPECIALIST GROCERY STORE - LATER

Unlike in the village, no-one waits in line for food here. The GROCER bags two of every item for Ruth and Zarina. Then--

GROCER
Twenty American.

Ruth reacts to the steep price. Zarina clocks this.

ZARINA
This is not right price?

RUTH
It ain't a big deal... What's the
point of Sam having this fine job
if we can't enjoy some nice things?

ZARINA
No, Ruth Parker. It is not right.

Zarina shoots the Grocer her most intimidating stare.

ZARINA
(in Russian)
*You'll give her the fair price. Or
Secretary Yakov will hear of it.*

The Grocer considers her threat. Then caves.

GROCER
Twelve American.

Ruth pays and the women grab the groceries. As they walk --

RUTH
Thank you...

ZARINA
We have saying here -- "Bush with
thorns does not get trampled."

Ruth chuckles. But the deeper meaning isn't lost on her.

INT./EXT. TRAIN - YANGIYUL - DAY

CLOSE ON Langston Hughes -- a fearful look on his face.

REVERSE to see why -- a RAILROAD WORKER holds the carriage
door open while the train's still moving.

LANGSTON HUGHES
Where's the station...?

RAILROAD WORKER
No station. Train slows. You jump.

LANGSTON
Like hell I will.

RAILROAD WORKER
You jump. Or miss stop.

LANGSTON
I assure you there is no way I'm
leaping off this damn train!

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. YANGIYUL - RAIL TRACKS - DAY

With a great tumble, Langston hits the cold earth. His
suitcase follows, nearly taking off his head.

SAM (O.S.)
Mr. Hughes?

Langston looks up to FIND Sam, in a massive winter coat, at
the helm of a horse and wagon. Langston shivers --

LANGSTON
Saaaammmmm Parrrrrrkkkker?

SAM
That I am.
(aware of the irony)
Welcome to Yangiyul.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Sam, Eugene and a pregnant Devra hover over Langston, who sits
shivering by the fire.

LANGSTON
This place is a cold I've never
known. How do ya'll manage?

DEVRA
Try this. Locals swear by it.

Devra hands him a glass. Langston takes a gulp. Chokes.

LANGSTON
It's vodka.

EUGENE
Exactly.

Eugene and Sam raise their own glasses of vodka.

SAM
See, Mr. Hughes. Ain't no-one goin'
cold tonight.

The sound of PANS RATTLING in the kitchen. Sam calls out.

SAM
You okay, Ruth?

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

The kitchen's a mess. Ruth and Zarina scurry about. Ruth peeks into the oven.

RUTH
I've been the worst host. And this spoonbread needs another fifteen.

ZARINA
You go. I finish.
(when Ruth balks)
My job here. You go. I finish.

A beat. Then, for the first time, Ruth gladly relents. The iceberg between these two finally melting.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER

Dinner's winding down. The group genially chats while finishing off a bottle of wine.

LANGSTON
They made her sit in the luggage car?!

SAM
Surprised the hell out of us too.

LANGSTON
What I'd give to have seen the look on that woman's face.

RUTH
Won't lie, it was a sight.

LANGSTON
Sounds like these communists have won you over. Do you intend to join their ranks?

DEVRA
They're very lovely people, but we didn't come here for politics.

EUGENE
Except for the politics of my paycheck. And, Mr. Hughes, those politics are damn good.

Sam's noticeably thoughtful. Langston looks to him.

SAM

All I'll say is, unlike back home, here it feels like you're buildin' something together.

RUTH

Speakin' of home, I'm starved for news.

EUGENE

Soviet papers only write about the depression.

LANGSTON

Unfortunately, I don't have much good to report. It's why I made this trip out east. After what happened, just needed to be anywhere else.

SAM

What happened?

LANGSTON

Well, it started with an accident. A Negro teacher named Julliette Derricotte... She was driving home with three students, when her car flipped over in a ditch. Everybody was badly injured. Fortunately, a passing motorist stopped to help. Took them to the nearest hospital.

(pointed)

A white hospital. And the white doctors there, who all took an oath to do no harm, refused to treat Miss Derricotte and her students.

EUGENE

Because they were Negro.

LANGSTON

Exactly. Eventually they were taken to a nearby colored home. And an ambulance was called from a not-so-nearby colored hospital. But by the time they were admitted, Miss Derricotte had already passed. Hard as it is to believe, what happened next is what shook me to my core...

The room is silent. Everyone hanging on Langston's words.

LANGSTON

See I was lecturing at Hampton Institute. And after hearing of Miss Dericotte's fate, the students wished to protest and began planning to do so. Only, when word spread, the president, who's a Negro man himself, *dissuaded them*. He not only warned them not to stand up -- he threatened to expel any who did.

The dinner guests shake their heads at this. Just then, Zarina enters with dessert. Lingers in the doorway.

LANGSTON

It's my personal belief that there's no greater threat to the Negro community than our own silence. We must raise our voices and let it be known that freedom for some means freedom for none.

His words strike a deep chord in Ruth.

RUTH

I couldn't agree more. As they say around here -- a bush with thorns never gets trampled.

Ruth and Zarina trade a warm look. Zarina sets down the pie.

RUTH

Thank you, Zarina.

Zarina goes. And Ruth cuts the pie. Devra inhales deeply.

DEVRA

I must be mistaken. That can't be--

RUTH

My Mama's sweet potato pie. Though we did face a bit of a challenge without any nutmeg.

EUGENE

Sweet potato pie without nutmeg?

RUTH

I thought the same. Until I blended in this local spice. Garam Masala.

LANGSTON
(takes a bite, savoring)
I might have to take this recipe
home to *my* mama.

RUTH
You're too kind. Won't lie, I was
worried, bakes faster with masala.
Completely threw off my timing.

And something in her words registers with Sam.

SAM
A bit of ours, a bit of theirs...
Ruth, you angel!

He leaps up from the table. Plants a massive kiss on Ruth
before racing out. The dinner party's left baffled.

LANGSTON
Your husband really likes your pie.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - ANOTHER DAY

Now over-taken by AGRICULTURAL BOOKS, FARMING TOOLS and ROWS
of SEEDLINGS in canisters. While Sam collects POLLEN from one
plant, dabs it on another, Anatoli enters with a BAG of SEED.

ANATOLI
As requested, cotton seed from Seed
Selection Center.

Anatoli puts the bag down. But doesn't leave.

SAM
Need something else?

ANATOLI
Secretary Yakov has requested
report.

Sam sighs. Breezes through his answer while still working --

SAM
You can tell him I'm workin' on a
faster growin' cotton. Usin' a
technique called hybridization.
Basically, mixin' your high-yield
native seeds with a special strand
from the Sea Islands, which matures
faster. Hopefully that'll mean we
can grow more. Faster.

ANATOLI

Ah! So you make plant baby?

An oversimplified answer, but it works. Sam shrugs. *Sure.*

ANATOLI

Have you done before?

SAM

No.

ANATOLI

Have you seen someone do before?

SAM

No.

ANATOLI

Has anyone done before?

SAM

Not with these breeds.

Anatoli searches for something, *anything*, positive to report.

ANATOLI

Would you say our chances of
success are very, very, very good?

SAM

I might not use that many verys.

ANATOLI

(beat, then)

I will not put this last part in
report.

Sam nods. Smart move. And the two men look at the plants for what they are -- a Hail Mary.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

A bright yellow sun beams down. Thawing icicles. Patches of green peek out from melted snow. Spring's on the horizon.

FIND Sam, eagerly poking his head out the bedroom window.

RUTH (O.S.)

Samuel Parker, you're gonna give us
both a cold.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sam shuts the window. Turns to Ruth, who's still in bed, wrapped in the sheets. When she tries to lure him back --

SAM

Sun's out. Snow's clearin'. Warmish breeze in the air. Today's the day.

Hearing those familiar words, Ruth decisively hops out of bed.

RUTH

I'm comin' with you.

SAM

To the fields? I don't think--

RUTH

Samuel. Isn't this the land where men and women work as equals?

SAM

Yeah, but--

RUTH

And do you think I'm capable of diggin' holes in the ground and ploppin' lil seeds in 'em?

SAM

I certainly do.

RUTH

Then here's my way to contribute. I'm comin' with you. Today. Tomorrow. And as long as I have to, until we get ours, Sam Parker.

Sam's heart swells with admiration for his wife.

SAM

Can't argue with that.

RUTH

I wouldn't. Now, unless they work buck naked in these fields, I suggest you put some pants on.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - DAY

Snow has given way to mushy dirt and flattened grass. Ruth mingles with the VILLAGE WORKERS while Sam, Eugene, Anatoli and Maksim discuss their plan of attack.

SAM
Eugene'll furrow along the contours
and we'll start planting beds in
this first acre.

(then)
If that's alright with you, Maksim.

Maksim nods. Gestures for Sam to lead. He does just that.

SAM
Let's get that old tractor rollin'.
Nikolai? Where's Nikolai?

EUGENE
Haven't seen him.

ANATOLI
(off-hand)
Nikolai has been reassigned.

Sam's unsure of what that means. Anatoli brushes it off.

ANATOLI
Egor will drive the tractor, right
Egor?

A barrel-chested fellow, EGOR, 40s, runs up. He speaks in very broken english.

EGOR
Yes. I drive.

EUGENE
Look out, we just might get some
work done.

Eugene pats Egor on the back as they head for the tractor. Maksim signals to some MEN. They start handing out SEED BAGS and MEASURING STICKS to the workers.

Sam addresses them. Anatoli translates into RUSSIAN.

SAM
You're gonna sow four seeds per
hole. 'Bout two inches deep.
Fourteen inches between holes.
Don't take to guessin'.
(re: measuring stick)
That's what these are for.
Comrades, how 'bout we get to
workin' our land?

The workers crack smiles. Feeling the spirit. Then spread through the fields. Ruth stays behind a beat to tell Sam --

RUTH
I like seein' you like this.

SAM
Like what?

RUTH
In your element. Takin' charge.
Bossin' around a buncha white
folks.

They share a charged smile before Ruth heads off. Then Sam opens his fist, revealing a few of his custom seeds. All their hopes rest in the palm of his hands.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - DAY - WEEKS LATER

Apprehensive workers wait in the fields. Ruth, Zarina and Devra with them. Devra cradles her new baby, FRANKLYN.

While the women chit-chat, their eyes stay glued to Sam, Eugene, Anatoli and Maksim in the distance. Who are giving Secretary Yakov a tour of the growing crops.

RUTH
You think baby Franklyn's first
words are gonna be in Russian?

DEVRA
Heavens no. This baby's first
language is gonna be jazz.

Ruth would smile, but she's too focused on Yakov. Hoping to spot any sign of approval.

Then, Yakov splits off to a military truck. And Sam and the others join the women. Serious expressions all around. Until Anatoli announces in RUSSIAN --

ANATOLI
*Secretary Yakov is very happy with
our progress!*

An eruption of CHEERS from the workers. And then, Egor, the new tractor driver, begins to sing in a deep baritone, the Russian folk song "Oy, To Ne Vecher."

RUTH
Take it that means it went well.

EUGENE
For a minute, I swear Yakov was
about to smile.

RUTH
(re: Egor singing)
That fellow there'd be right at
home in the Hurtsboro church choir.

Seeing he has an audience, Egor takes Ruth by the hand.

SAM
(jokingly)
Alright, Egor. That's my wife.
You've got one of your own.

Egor bows playfully. As the fields hum with music --

SAM
Almost feels like home.

Ruth glances at Zarina embracing Maksim, Devra and Eugene with Baby Franklyn, the buzzing fields. Surrounded by this new family, she can't help but smile.

RUTH
More than almost.

Sam's thrilled to hear her say that.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - MORNING - WEEKS LATER

The now chest-high cotton plants whip by as Sam pulls Ruth through the thriving fields.

SAM
Come on! Keep up now.

RUTH
What's with all the rush?

Suddenly, he halts. Points to a still-budding WHITE FLOWER on a stalk. And Ruth lights up. Delighted.

SAM
The cotton's bloomin'. A full month
early. We did it, Ruth. We made
this happen.

A long beat as Ruth carefully considers her next words.

RUTH
That ain't the only thing we made
happen...

She gives him the most loaded look a wife can give her husband. It takes a second for Sam to register her meaning. When he finally does, Sam sweeps Ruth up into a giddy kiss.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - MONTHS LATER

ON Sam, dressed to the nines, as he considers the communist pin box. Unsure about whether he should put it on, when --

CREAK. A very pregnant Ruth gingerly descends the staircase. Pauses at the bottom to show off her NEW DRESS. Sam beams.

SAM

Aren't you a vision. Today's supposed to be about me, but I reckon all eyes'll be on you.

RUTH

Oh stop. Still think it's crazy buyin' a new dress that won't fit in a few weeks when this one comes into the world.

SAM

As your husband, I reserve the right to buy you a new dress whenever I want. In fact, I intend to buy you a new dress every week from here on out.

When Ruth doesn't object, Sam carefully broaches a subject --

SAM

The other day, Eugene mentioned that when our contract's up at year's end, he and Devra are gonna sign up for three more years. Crazy, right?

RUTH

I've heard crazier ideas. You ready? We're gonna be late.

Encouraged by Ruth's response, Sam moves for the door. Then he doubles back. Decisively snatches the COMMUNIST PIN from its box. Sam affixes it to his lapel.

SAM

Now I'm ready.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - LATER THAT DAY

As Anatoli and a HIGH-RANKING SOLDIER finish weighing a BALE OF COTTON, soldiers hoist it onto an OFFICIAL STATE TRUCK.

Meanwhile -- POP! POP! POP! -- PHOTOGRAPHERS snap photos of Sam, Ruth, Eugene, Devra and Yakov standing in front of a truck loaded to the brim with BALES OF COTTON.

A CROWD OF DIGNITARIES is gathered to witness this ceremony. When Yakov steps forward with a letter, the crowd quiets.

YAKOV

I was given these words to share on this occasion.

(reading from letter)

"To any who doubt our great Soviet experiment, I point them to Comrades Parker and Wright. For this victory we celebrate today did not come at the command of a Tsar or an Emir. But at the hands of the worker. Due to their exemplary performance, we proudly bestow this token."

Yakov signals to a SOLDIER who presents Sam and Eugene each with a BRONZE MEDAL. They proudly accept.

YAKOV

This missive is signed by the General Secretary of the Central Committee himself -- Joseph Stalin.

Exclamations from the crowd at this rare accolade. Devra gawks at Eugene's medal.

DEVRA

Usually I'm a diamond girl, but I'm starting to come around on bronze.

YAKOV

Comrade Parker, Comrade Wright, shall we pose for a photo while the convoy finishes weighing?

SAM

Of course.

The women step aside and Sam and Eugene flank Yakov. As they smile for the cameras --

YAKOV

I never had any doubt that you were the right men for this task.

SAM

Thank you, Comrade. For givin' us the chance to prove that we were.

FLASH! FLASH! A seemingly endless amount of pictures. Until, Anatoli and a Soldier hurry over. From Anatoli's face, Sam can tell something's wrong.

YAKOV

Excuse me.

He goes to the Soldier, who whispers in his ear. Yakov coolly rejoins Sam and Eugene. Hyper-aware of the flashing cameras.

YAKOV

(in a low voice, composed)

You are fifty pounds under quota.

EUGENE

That's not possible.

SAM

We weighed it yesterday. Twice.

Yakov's eyes narrow slightly. Then, he signals to the crowd.

YAKOV

Comrades. Thank you for your attendance. Our foreign friends have made excellent progress. But if we are to become the next great agricultural nation, we must let them return to their work.

A round of APPLAUSE. Then Yakov cocks his head. And a handful of SOLDIERS step in to escort the photographers away.

Once out of earshot, Yakov barks orders in RUSSIAN. The convoy of trucks rev up. Yakov's on the move.

RUTH

What'd he say? Anatoli?

ANATOLI

He orders a sweep of the village to find this missing cotton. Do not worry. We will locate the thief.

Anatoli follows after the soldiers.

SAM

Thief? What's he talkin' about?

EUGENE

I told you, Sam. Not everyone wants us to succeed.

SAM

We should go see what's goin' on.

(to Ruth and Devra)

It could take a while...

DEVRA
Why don't we head home?

Before she goes, Ruth locks eyes with Sam. An unspoken wariness.

EXT. YANGIYUL VILLAGE - LATER

Hut by hut, VILLAGERS are marched out by soldiers who enter and search their homes. Sam and Eugene stand at a distance.

SAM
This really necessary?

EUGENE
They're doing what they have to do.
Not our place to judge.

But Sam isn't sure he agrees. He spots Anatoli trying to calm down Maksim and some other villagers. Sam approaches and Maksim rants at him in quick-fire RUSSIAN. Sam cuts him off.

SAM
You don't have to defend yourself. I know you didn't do anything wrong.
(to Anatoli)
This is nuts. I watched these people bust their backs to grow that cotton. Why would they steal it?

ANATOLI
There is a reason it is called white gold, Sam Parker. It is very valuable. And you know more than any, some only do what is right for themselves, not for greater good.

A COMMOTION draws their attention. Soldiers begin to corral the villagers. March them out back.

EXT. YANGIYUL VILLAGE - WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Fifty feet from a row of huts, two SOLDIERS pull up a PLANK covered in leaves and twigs.

Beneath the plank -- a MASSIVE DIRT PIT stuffed with COTTON.

Sam goes slack-jawed. *Boy, was he wrong...*

EXT. YANGIYUL - ROADSIDE - SAME TIME

Short of breath, Ruth trails Devra on their walk home.

RUTH
Don't remember this road bein' so long.

DEVRA
We can take a break.

RUTH
No, I'll be fine. What do you think happened back there?

DEVRA
(flip)
Oh who knows.

That's not a good enough answer for Ruth. She fires Devra a loaded look. Devra relents.

DEVRA
I'm not saying it wasn't strange. There are all sorts of strange things about this place. But I walked to the fields this morning with Franklyn and Eugene and no-one stared or sneered. So I'm willing to accept a little strange.

Ruth pauses to wipe away the sweat pouring down her face.

DEVRA
You need a break.

RUTH
No, I'm--

Ruth takes a couple steps and... COLLAPSES TO THE GROUND. Devra GASPS. Bolts to her side.

EXT. YANGIYUL VILLAGE - WOODS - DAY

BACK WITH a heated Anatoli and a shocked Sam. Anatoli addresses the solemn villagers.

ANATOLI
Who did this?

He repeats himself in RUSSIAN. No one speaks.

SAM
There's gotta be an explanation...

DEVRA (O.S.)
Sam! Sam!!

When Devra frantically sprints over, Sam's filled with dread.

INT. TASHKENT HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

A silent pall fills the room. Eugene, Devra, Sam and Anatoli sit with heads hung low. Then, a DOCTOR enters. Looks to Sam.

DOCTOR

You are husband, yes?

SAM

Yes. How's Ruth? The baby?

DOCTOR

Follow me.

INT. TASHKENT HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The Doctor pushes the door open. Sam nervously trails behind him. Looks to the bed. Sees Ruth cradling a wrinkly NEWBORN.

DOCTOR

Your wife. Your daughter.

Sam claps his hands over his mouth. Relieved and overjoyed.

RUTH

I was thinkin' "Gabrielle".

His eyes well up as he creeps closer. Admiring his baby girl.

SAM

(then, fiercely loving)

Don't you scare me like that again,
Ruth Parker.

Sam envelopes them in his arms. OFF the three Parkers...

INT. TASHKENT HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

The patient room door cracks open and Sam slips out. He's surprised to find Anatoli. Half-asleep in a chair.

SAM

What're you still doin' here?
Eugene and Devra left ages ago.
(then, remembering)
You find out who stole the cotton?

ANATOLI

No. Though we will. But that is
tomorrow's concern.

Then Anatoli draws two cigars from his breast pocket. Hands one to Sam, who takes a seat and the cigar.

ANATOLI

This very rare treasure. Finest tobacco. Only made in Cameroon. What you hold once belonged to Count Solsky himself.

SAM

Were you two close?

ANATOLI

No, no, no. He was nobleman. Dear friend of Romanovs. My father, my father's father, and so on, worked Solsky's land. All for a few rubles. It was very hard life.

SAM

Then how'd you come across these?

ANATOLI

Day after revolution, we workers claim riches from Solsky's manor. I take box of these cigars. I smoke one then. For it was special day. Today, too, is special day.

Anatoli draws a lighter. Sam leans in, grateful for the flame. As the men savor their puffs --

SAM

Still doesn't feel real. Me being a father.

ANATOLI

In time, you will come to wear fatherhood as if it were old hat.

There's a story here. Sam wants to ask, but isn't sure that he should. Anatoli offers --

ANATOLI

I had family once. They are angels of the revolution.

SAM

I'm so sorry to hear.

ANATOLI

No, Sam Parker. It is good to remember.

(re: cigar)

(MORE)

ANATOLI (CONT'D)
Why we fought. What we lost. And
all we have won.

Anatoli holds up his cigar. An honoring gesture.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - A FEW DAYS LATER

Baby Gabrielle coos as Sam fawns over her in Ruth's arms.

SAM
You're the prettiest lil' thing
I've ever seen.

RUTH
Samuel, think you'll hear any more
today about who stole that cotton?

SAM
Sure hope so. It's a damn shame
someone tryin' to steal like that
from their fellow workers.

This gets Ruth's mind turning.

RUTH
I never stand for stealin'. But it
seems to me that whatever the
State's givin' these people... it
ain't enough. You should've seen
Zarina at the grocery store.

SAM
I'm sure all that's gonna change
now that we hit our quota.

RUTH
How can you be so sure? I mean,
honestly, Samuel, what do we know
about this place? After all this
time, we haven't seen much outside
of our house, the village, and the
fields.

Not wanting to get into this, Sam checks the clock.

SAM
Shouldn't Zarina be here by now?

RUTH
She must be runnin' behind.

SAM
Well I don't wanna be doin' the
same. Better get goin'.

Before Ruth can protest, Sam kisses Gabrielle. Heads out. Once alone, Ruth checks the clock herself. *Where is Zarina?*

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - LATER THAT MORNING

Sam makes his way into the fields. But he's greeted by an unfamiliar sight. They're empty. No workers anywhere.

EUGENE (O.S.)
No-one showed.

Sam turns to find Eugene. Both men are uneasy about this.

SAM
What the hell's goin' on?

EXT. EDGE OF YANGIYUL VILLAGE - DAY

CLOSE ON a BLACK X taped across the DOOR of a hut. PULL BACK to FIND Ruth staring at it. Confused. Her baby in her arms.

SAM (O.S.)
Ruth?

REVERSE ON Sam and Eugene walking up to the village.

SAM
What're you...?

RUTH
Zarina never showed. Came to make sure everythin' was alright.

SAM
Nobody showed at the fields either.

Suddenly, ANGRY VOICES can be heard up ahead. Sam heads in that direction. Eugene balks.

EUGENE
I guarantee no good comes from getting involved with that.

SAM
Ain't gonna tell you which way to walk, Eugene.

Eugene turns back as Sam and Ruth head toward the commotion.

EXT. YANGIYUL VILLAGE - DAY

Helpless villagers stand by while SOLDIERS cart a handful of VILLAGE MEN into a waiting CONVOY TRUCK.

ANGLE ON TWO SOLDIERS dragging Egor away as his wife and children sob. Maksim tries to intervene.

MAKSIM

Niet, niet! Egor!

But the soldiers push Maksim out of the way. He's about to fight back. Anatoli stops him.

ANATOLI

(in Russian)

Comrade, you must calm down.

Despondent, Maksim watches as the soldiers haul off Egor. Sam and Ruth hurry over as a soldier tapes a BLACK X across Egor's door. It's one of many.

SAM

What's happenin' here?

ANATOLI

Secretary Yakov has had these men reassigned.

Zarina steps out from a circle of distraught women.

RUTH

There you are, Zarina.

ZARINA

Why do they take them? The men.

ANATOLI

We believe they are responsible for stolen cotton.

RUTH

A lot a people *believe* a lot of things... Doesn't make it true.

Sam goes to Maksim, who's still visibly agitated. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

SAM

Maksim, did Egor and those men do it? You can tell me if they did.

Maksim shakes his head. Zarina steps in to explain.

ZARINA

Whoever stole was wrong. But many in village struggle. Work more now, but earn less than ever.

ANATOLI
The state rewards loyalty.

Disgusted, Maksim gets in Anatoli's face.

MAKSIM
Traitor.

The crowd jeers as Maksim stomps off. Sam turns to Anatoli.

SAM
You want loyalty...
(points to a black X)
That ain't no way to get it.

ANATOLI
I am sorry, Sam Parker. It has been
decided.

Anatoli peels off. And Ruth anxiously wrings her hands.

SAM
You don't need to worry. I'm gonna
talk to Yakov. Smooth all this out.
My voice matters here. He'll listen.

INT. YAKOV'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Sam stands before Secretary Yakov, shrinking under his gaze.

YAKOV
Nothing can be done, Comrade
Parker. Accusations have been made.

SAM
By who?

YAKOV
That is not important.

SAM
So someone points a finger and
that's enough to get a man sent
away? I saw that kinda justice back
home. It led to a lotta innocent
folks gettin' lynched.

Yakov doesn't appreciate this comparison.

YAKOV
It sounds as if you believe we are
no better than the West.

SAM
I'm not sayin' that...

YAKOV
Besides, these men have not been
jailed. They have simply been
reassigned to a different post.

SAM
And taken from their families in
the process. I'm just tryin' to
look out for them. Just like
they've looked out for me.
(re: his communist pin)
That's what I thought this stood
for.

This gives Yakov pause.

YAKOV
Comrade Parker, there are those in
our party who believe our country's
future lies with industrialization.
I do not share their belief.
Agriculture is our future. And
Yangiyul is vital to that success.
That is why I reassigned those men.
We cannot allow even the hint of
avarice to derail our efforts.

SAM
This ain't about greed. These
people turned over their lands,
trustin' they'd be provided for.

YAKOV
Are they not? Yes, they may have
fewer rubles, but their children
have schools. Their women have the
same rights as their men. So many
who were once left behind, now have
purpose.

Sam wavers. Swayed by Yakov's argument.

YAKOV
That said, I believe this ugliness
could have been avoided with
stronger leadership in the fields.

SAM
Maksim's a fine captain.

YAKOV

We need more than fine. That is why
I am putting you in charge.

This catches Sam completely off guard. He balks.

SAM

Me? I couldn't--

YAKOV

Because you are unable to meet the
demands of this position?

Sam bristles. Draws himself up.

SAM

No, Comrade. I've been ready for
this my whole life.

YAKOV

Then it is decided. You begin your
new position next week. I know you
will not let the motherland down.

An overwhelmed Sam nods and leaves.

SAM (PRELAP)

Well that didn't go how I expected.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sam pours a drink. Offers it to Ruth, who's wearing another
new dress. She declines and he takes the drink for himself.

RUTH

Why? What'd he say?

SAM

Craziest thing. Yakov wants me to
take over the fields.

(Ruth says nothing)

He put me in charge.

RUTH

In exchange for what?

Sam's flustered. Not how he expected Ruth to react.

SAM

It ain't like that...

RUTH

No? He gonna bring those men back?

SAM

Yakov wouldn't budge on that.
(quickly, defensive)
But it's not like they're in jail.
They were just reassigned.

RUTH

Yeah. Forcibly. By soldiers.

SAM

That's just how they do things
here.

RUTH

Would you hear yourself? You don't
sound like the Sam I know.

Stung, Sam snaps back --

SAM

I'm not the Sam you knew. I'm a
different man now. A better one. I
just got made captain of those
fields.

RUTH

Yeah, but at what cost?

Before he can counter -- KNOCK. KNOCK. Sam opens the door.
REVEAL two STERN MEN in short sleeve dress shirts and ties.

STERN MAN #1

Comrade Parker. We escort you and
your family.

SAM

Escort us where...?

STERN MAN #1

To *dacha*. For recreational
furlough.

RUTH

You're sendin' us away?

STERN MAN #1

Yes. In recognition of your new
position. By order of Secretary
Yakov.

SAM

I see... Well, we can start packin'
and be ready come mornin'.

STERN MAN 1
We leave tonight.

This is clearly non-negotiable. Making Sam and Ruth uneasy.

EXT. CRIMEA RESORT - NIGHT

As moonlight illuminates a picturesque lake, two BLACK SEDANS cling to a winding road.

They stop at a massive gate, manned by SECURITY GUARDS.

INT. BLACK SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Sam and Ruth sit apprehensive in the back-seat. The Stern Man at the wheel. Suddenly, a SECURITY GUARD shines a FLASHLIGHT into the back-seat. Ruth pulls Gabrielle a little tighter.

STERN MAN 1
They will hold your passports.

Sam hesitates. But complies. And the sedan drives through --

EXT. CRIMEA RESORT - MOMENTS LATER

Parks outside a luxurious LAKE HOUSE. The Stern Men unload the luggage. Carry it inside. Sam tries to reassure Ruth.

SAM
Some house, huh? Maybe a lil' time
away will do us good.

Then, Devra, carrying baby Franklyn, steps out of the house.

DEVRA
You made it. Isn't this a crazy
kind of surprise?

RUTH
Yeah... Crazy.

Ruth heads in and Devra raises an eyebrow. Sam waves it off.

EXT. CRIMEA RESORT - LAKESIDE - DAY

RESORT GUESTS sunbathe by a vibrant blue lake -- Sam, Ruth and baby Gabrielle, Eugene, and Devra among them.

DEVRA
Now there's a sight I never thought
I'd see...

Devra motions to Franklyn up ahead. He builds a sand castle with two other children. Both white.

EUGENE
(re: sand castle)
Structure looks sound. Takes after
his father.

SAM
I hope for his sake he's better at
fixin' tractors.

Everyone laughs. Except Ruth. Still on edge. Sam leans in --

SAM
You gotta relax, Ruth.

RUTH
They took our passports.

SAM
And said they'd return 'em before
we leave. Now I'm gonna take a
short walk. When I get back, how
'bout we go for a dip?

Ruth nods, easing up. And Sam hikes into the nearby woods.

EXT. CRIMEA RESORT - FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

Through a dense wall of trees, Sam finds a spot to relieve himself. But before he does -- CRACK! A branch breaks.

Sam cautiously moves towards the sound. Pushes through a thicket of trees, when--

CLICK! An ARMED SOLDIER swings his SVT-40 rifle around, aiming it right at Sam. Then, the Soldier lowers his gun.

ARMED SOLDIER
Comrade.

SAM
Comrade.

Nothing more to be said, Sam heads back the way he came. But a quick glance over his shoulder leaves him unsettled. The Soldier's gaze stays trained on him the whole way.

PRELAP: the sound of a child CRYING...

EXT. CRIMEA RESORT - LAKE HOUSE - A FEW DAYS LATER

CLOSE ON Franklyn, sobbing. Devra crouched in front of him.

DEVRA

I know you'd like to stay another week, honey, but it's time to go.

While Devra wipes away his tears, Sam, Eugene and the Stern Men load up their luggage in the two black sedans.

Ruth stands with Gabrielle. When the luggage is loaded, Ruth mouths to Sam: "Passports." Sam flags down the Stern Man.

SAM

Our passports, are they...?

STERN MAN 1

Sent to Secretary Yakov.

SAM

What?

STERN MAN 1

By his request.

Neither Ruth nor Sam feel comfortable with this. But Sam motions for her to let it go for now.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They stumble into the pitch black house. Barely make it inside, when the glow of a CIGARETTE brings them to a halt. The smoker takes another drag. And Ruth recognizes --

RUTH

Zarina?

Sam flicks the lights on. REVEALING Zarina, eyes red, cheeks tear-stained.

ZARINA

They took him. They took my Maksim.

RUTH

What? Why?

ZARINA

Maksim knew Egor took cotton. But he refuse to turn Egor in. Now, both are gone.

As this lands on Sam and Ruth --

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. MAKSIM AND ZARINA'S HUT - LATER

A massive black X is taped across the yellow door. PULL BACK to FIND Sam standing before it. His anger swelling.

EXT. ANATOLI'S HUT - MOMENTS LATER

BANG! BANG! BANG! Sam pounds on the door until Anatoli opens up. Flashes his usual jovial grin.

ANATOLI

Comrade Parker! How was Crimean
dascha? I have never been, but--

SAM

Where the hell's Maksim?

Anatoli's smile fades.

INT. ANATOLI'S HUT - MOMENTS LATER

Small and cramped. Only a Stalin painting, identical to Ruth and Sam's, hangs on the wall. Anatoli offers him a seat. Sam doesn't take it.

ANATOLI

You are very tense for one who just
had vacation.

SAM

Where's Maksim, Anatoli?

Seeing Sam won't stand for idle chit-chat, Anatoli admits --

ANATOLI

Secretary Yakov has had him
reassigned.

SAM

What?? Why?

ANATOLI

Maksim Stepanov's loyalty was put
into question.

SAM

By who? Cause I'll set that fool
straight real quick.

Anatoli straightens. Looks Sam square in the eye.

ANATOLI

I made report to Comrade Yakov.

Sam's floored. Then, pissed.

SAM

You son of a bitch. How could you do that to Maksim?

(realizing)

Those other reassignments --
Nikolai, Egor, the other men -- that
your doin', too?

ANATOLI

I only ever do what is best for
motherland.

SAM

There's no way gettin' rid of one
of the hardest workin' men in that
field is best for anyone. Tell me
where Maksim's been sent. I'll go
bring him back myself.

ANATOLI

I cannot do that, Comrade Parker.

SAM

Why not?

(reads Anatoli, then)

You don't know where he is.

ANATOLI

Maksim has been sent to post
Comrade Yakov deems appropriate.

SAM

Which is where?

Anatoli doesn't have an answer. Sam scoffs.

SAM

You call these men your comrades.
Then, have them sent lord knows
where. How can you condemn a man
without even knowin' what you're
condemnin' him to?

Sam slams the door behind him. Leaving Anatoli rattled.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

Ruth sets a breakfast plate in front of Zarina at the dining
room table. Zarina silently stares at it.

When Sam comes downstairs, his right hand clenched tight,
Ruth looks to him. Deeply worried.

SAM
I'll be back as soon I can.

As Sam turns to leave, he unclenches his hand. REVEAL the communist pin in his palm. He's visibly conflicted.

Then -- Sam drops the pin on the hallway table. Heads out.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - DAY

FIND the workers returned to the fields. They're already busy stacking BALES OF COTTON for delivery.

Sam arrives. Walks right past Eugene and a timid Anatoli.

EUGENE
Sam...?

Sam addresses the field of workers in broken RUSSIAN --

SAM
*Stop. All stop. No work until
comrades back.*

His words ripple through the field. Translated from RUSSIAN to UZBEKI. One by one, the workers halt. United behind Sam.

EUGENE
The trucks are on their way right
now. What the hell are you doing?

SAM
What needs doin'.
(to Anatoli, steadfast)
Not one strand of cotton leaves
this field until Maksim and the
other men are reassigned back here.

Sam stares Anatoli down. OFF this ultimatum...

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Zarina, still shell-shocked, stares off into the distance.
Ruth does her best to console her.

RUTH
You and Maksim, ya'll are family.
Sam's gonna get him back.

ZARINA
No, Ruth Parker. He will not.

RUTH

Zarina, you've gotta let your faith
be bigger than your fears.

Zarina looks to Ruth with dead eyes.

ZARINA

The village women, they have said
the men sent far away. To place
where no one return. This is where
my Maksim has gone.

This is unsettling to Ruth. She tries to shake it off.

RUTH

I'm sure it's just talk. Now you
barely touched your breakfast.
Lemme fix you up somethin', okay?

Ruth gives Zarina's hand a gentle squeeze. Heads inside.

ON Zarina, silent. Then, a RUMBLING, as a CONVOY of RED-
STARRED TRUCKS drive past. Zarina hones in on the trucks...

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - A LITTLE LATER

The work stoppage continues. Convoy trucks idle nearby.
Anatoli confers with the ARMED SOLDIERS while Eugene tries to
talk Sam down.

EUGENE

So what's the plan? Other than
pissing everyone off?

SAM

We're talkin' about Maksim, Eugene.
When's enough enough for you?

Anatoli approaches gently.

ANATOLI

These men wish to know cause of
delay. What am I to tell them?

SAM

You know what to say.

ANATOLI

Please, Sam Parker, Secretary Yakov
will be most displeased. May even
reconsider your captainship.

But Sam doesn't back down. They've reached an impasse. Then, everyone's eyes widen. As they register -- ZARINA, marching up to the bales of cotton. Makeshift TORCH in hand.

EUGENE

Whoa, whoa, whoa!

When Eugene steps forward, Zarina threatens the cotton with her torch. Sam tries to talk her down.

SAM

Zarina. Wait. I'm fixin' this. You gotta trust me.

The COMMUNIST SOLDIERS train their guns on Zarina.

SAM

Put those down.
(to Anatoli)
Tell 'em to put their guns down.

ANATOLI

I cannot. She threatens property of state.

Sam tries to appeal to Zarina again.

SAM

Zarina, please. I promise you I'll bring Maksim back.

ANATOLI

Listen to Sam Parker, Comrade.

ZARINA

(bitter)
Comrade...

The word leaves a sour taste in her mouth. With a glower, Zarina DROPS the torch. The cotton BLAZES.

BANG! A soldier fires at Zarina. And all hell breaks loose.

SCREAMS from the panicked crowd. The workers stampede through the fields. Zarina runs with them, clutching her shoulder.

As several soldiers race to put out the flames, one trains his gun on Zarina's back. Sam sees this, reacts --

SAM

No!

He SMACKS the barrel of the gun down. Furious, the Soldier turns his weapon on Sam. Anatoli intercedes.

ANATOLI
Stop! The specialist must not be
harmed.

Annoyed, the Soldier turns back for Zarina. But there's no sign of her. Just SMOKE billowing through the fields.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - LATER

Panicked KNOCKING at the front door. Ruth hurries over.

RUTH
Just one second.

She opens the door. And gasps. Zarina's hunched over on the doorstep. Bleeding from a gunshot to the shoulder.

RUTH
Good lord, Zarina...

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth tries to stymie Zarina's bleeding with a rag.

RUTH
What happened out there?

ZARINA
They took my Maksim. I could not
stand by.

BANGING at the front door startles them both.

ZARINA
I should not have come. I do not
wish to bring you harm.

RUTH
You're exactly where you're
supposed to be.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ruth composes herself. Then opens the front door to find two familiar Stern Men.

STERN MAN #1
We are here for Zarina Stepanov.

RUTH
I'm afraid she ain't here.

They eye the specks of blood on the doorstep.

STERN MAN #2
Step aside.

RUTH
I said she ain't here.

STERN MAN #2
Move. Now.

Just like the grocery store in Alabama, Ruth's faced with a choice. Despite the fear coursing through her yet again --

RUTH
No.

Ruth holds her ground.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - DAY

Anatoli's old truck comes to a stop. Sam leaps out of the car when he sees it --

A BLACK X taped across their front door.

Sam bolts for the house. The men follow on his heels.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The door bursts open. Sam races upstairs. Then back down.

SAM
Ruth! Gabrielle!
(to Anatoli)
They're not here!

EUGENE
Sam...

Eugene stares at something in the kitchen. Sam runs in --

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The bloody rags intensify Sam's panic. He GRABS Anatoli.

SAM
Where's my family?!?!

ANATOLI
Please, I am sure everything is
fine.

SAM
 (re: bloodied rags)
 Look! Look at this! Everything is
 not fine!

Just then, a horrible thought crosses Eugene's mind.

EUGENE
 Sam, you don't think Devra...?

SAM
 Go.

Eugene runs out. Anatoli breaks free from Sam's grasp.

ANATOLI
 Comrade Yakov will know where Ruth
 Parker is.

INT. TASHKENT COMMUNIST OFFICES - HALLWAY - DAY

Anatoli and Sam round the corner. And Sam's heart leaps out
 of his chest. Sitting in one of the chairs is a shaken Ruth.

Sam goes to her. Pulls her into a tight embrace. Then --

SAM
 Where's Gabrielle?

RUTH
 At Devra's. I'm sorry, Sam. I just
 couldn't stand by anymore.

Sam doesn't blame her. Holds her tight. Until Secretary Yakov
 steps into the hall. Sam scowls.

YAKOV
 We have much to discuss.

He gestures for them to enter his office. They reluctantly do
 so. Anatoli follows. But Yakov blocks his path.

YAKOV
 I will speak with them alone.

Yakov closes the door in his face. Anatoli's shut out.

INT. YAKOV'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Sam and Ruth sit across from Yakov. The tension's palpable.

YAKOV
 Comrades, I am disappointed by
 today's events.

SAM
You ain't the only one around here
disappointed.

RUTH
Is Zarina okay? Where is she?

YAKOV
Because of her actions, Comrade
Stepanov has been reassigned.

SAM
To where? Geographically.

Yakov's eyes narrow. He's offended by Sam's gall. But instead
of losing his composure, Yakov leans back in his chair.

YAKOV
I normally do not share such
specifics. But I see this matter is
of great concern to you... At this
moment, Comrade Stepanov is being
transported to a small farming
village by the name of Taliga. It
is quite a ways from here. But I
assure you she is in good hands.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - NIGHT

Soldiers drag Zarina off a truck. They march her out into --

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers push her deeper and deeper into the wilderness.

YAKOV (V.O.)
You see, Comrades, I am not an
unreasonable man. I recognize
individuals make mistakes...

They come to a stop at a clearing.

YAKOV (V.O.)
In time, I believe Zarina Stepanov
will see the error of her ways.

The soldiers turn Zarina around. She knows what's coming.

YAKOV (V.O.)
And I am confident she will find a
renewed connection to the
Motherland in her new position.

A GUNSHOT rings out. And a lone BULLET CASING falls to the mud. As does Zarina's motionless body.

INT. YAKOV'S OFFICE - NIGHT

BACK on Yakov, awaiting Sam and Ruth's reaction. They sit rigid. Then --

SAM

Well once she's settled, perhaps we could send her a letter.

YAKOV

I will see about arranging it.
There is one additional matter to discuss. Wait here.

Yakov rises and exits. Once alone --

RUTH

That man is lyin' through his teeth.

SAM

(well aware)
I know.

EXT. TASHKENT COMMUNIST OFFICES - NIGHT

Anatoli listlessly wanders to his car. As he's about to climb in, he spots the same STERN MEN who were at Ruth's door.

A flicker of recognition. He trails them down the street.

INT. TASHKENT HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Anatoli sidles up to the two Stern Men at the bar. Nods to them. They nod back. Anatoli leans over.

ANATOLI

(in Russian)
Comrades. Forgive me if I'm mistaken, but you two are NKVD?

The two men tense. Outed.

ANATOLI

Please. I am the father of discretion. And no one in this land is more grateful for your service.

Anatoli reaches into his coat pocket. Takes out two CIGARS.

ANATOLI

Exquisite, no? I acquired these the day after the revolution ended. There was so much hope then...

His thoughts drift for a moment. Then, Anatoli returns to the task at hand. Offers the men the cigars.

ANATOLI

Of course, for two fine gentlemen like yourselves, I would be happy to part with them. If you could help me with one simple question.

The Stern Men lean in. Intrigued.

INT. YAKOV'S OFFICE - NIGHT

When Yakov returns with two American passports in his hand -- *their passports* -- Sam and Ruth grow nervous.

YAKOV

If any other party member had conducted themselves as you did today, there would be grave consequences. However, I have spoken with General Secretary Stalin, and we have agreed to forget today's ugliness.

Finally, a moment of relief for Ruth and Sam.

YAKOV

We are willing to allow you to stay in your beautiful home. To allow you to continue to manage the Yangiyul cotton production. But in return, we insist on your loyalty. Your permanent loyalty.

He sets down their passports. Then, takes out a LIGHTER. Places it before them.

YAKOV

Renounce your American citizenship. Become official members of the Soviet Union.

They're momentarily speechless.

SAM

How long do we have to decide?

YAKOV

I had hoped this decision would not require much discussion.

Oh, he wants an answer now.

YAKOV

Comrade Parker, join us, and you will be heralded as the shining example of Negro success in the Soviet Union. Within the year, I believe you could even rise to the position of head administrator of our Eastern agricultural division.

Yakov nudges the lighter towards Sam. Ruth looks to him. Pleading. Sam avoids her eye.

SAM

You're right, Comrade. There's nothin' here to discuss.

Sam grabs the lighter. To Yakov's delight and Ruth's dismay --

SCHOOM! Sam lights the passports. *They go up in flames.*

EXT. EUGENE AND DEVRA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A black CAR drops off Sam and Ruth. Once it disappears, Ruth begins to break down. Sam tries to comfort her, only she pushes him away. He holds her even tighter.

SAM

Listen. Listen to me! There was nothin' to discuss 'cause there's no way in hell we're stayin' here.

RUTH

Then why'd you burn our passports?!

SAM

What choice did I have? If I'd said no, who knows where Yakov would've sent us.

Finally understanding, Ruth sinks into his arms.

DEVRA (PRELAP)

What do you mean you're leaving?

INT. EUGENE AND DEVRA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Ruth and Sam stand before Eugene, while Devra paces with Franklyn in her arms. Gabrielle's in a bassinet.

RUTH

We can't stay. Not after what they've done to Zarina and Maksim.

EUGENE

You don't know that they've done anything more than reassign them.

SAM

Eugene, after what happened with Zarina in the fields, you honestly believe they're just reassignin' these people?

DEVRA

Yes. We do.

Eugene looks away. Can't bring himself to say he agrees.

EUGENE

Things are good for us here. More importantly, *Franklyn* can have whatever life he wants here.

DEVRA

You have to think about Gabrielle. What does her life look like back in Alabama?

RUTH

At least there she won't have to worry 'bout comin' home to find her parents missin' and a black X on her door.

EUGENE

That won't happen to us. We're too valuable to them.

SAM

And everyone else isn't. That's the problem.

RUTH

We stay... We're no better than the White folks who turned a blind eye to our sufferin' back home.

SAM

And like Langston said -- freedom for some is freedom for none.

This silences Eugene and Devra.

SAM
We're headed out in the mornin'.
Come with us.

Eugene and Devra share a pained look.

EUGENE
We can't. I'm sorry. But we just
can't.

Heart-broken, Ruth scoops up Gabrielle. One last glance at Eugene and Devra, then Sam and Ruth go.

INT. SAM AND RUTH'S HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Two suitcases stand by the door. Sam holds a sleeping Gabrielle. Ruth's at his side.

They take in their home. Knowing they'll never live anywhere as nice again. They head for the door. Until Ruth turns back.

SAM
What is it?

She goes to the Stalin painting. Takes it off the wall. Leans it face down against the fireplace.

RUTH
Now we can go.

EXT. YANGIYUL - TRAIN STATION - DAY

Sam and Ruth, holding Gabrielle, hurry for the train station. When TWO ARMED SOLDIERS march by on patrol. Sam quickly veers the family out of view.

RUTH
Since when do soldiers patrol here?

SAM
I dunno. But we're not gettin'
outta here by train.

EXT. ANATOLI'S HUT - NIGHT

ON Anatoli's TRUCK. Sam and Ruth tip-toe up to it. The doors are unlocked. They climb inside. Ruth settles Gabrielle in the seat while Sam searches for the keys.

No luck. He starts to fumble with the ignition wires, when--

ANATOLI (O.S.)
If this is how you steal truck,
Comrade, you do not do good job.

REVERSE on Anatoli, a revolver in hand. Sam releases the ignition wires.

SAM
Ain't ever done it before.

ANATOLI
First lesson, do not take truck
from man with gun.

RUTH
Anatoli, we didn't mean no harm.

ANATOLI
You only mean to run.

SAM
You gonna report us to Yakov? Like
you did everyone else.

The gun feels heavy in Anatoli's hand.

ANATOLI
You are right, Sam Parker. I have
condemned many men. Only now I know
where to.

SAM
What do you mean?

ANATOLI
Nikolai, Egor, Maksim. They were
not reassigned. They were sent to
Siberian *gulag*. They will work
there until they die.

RUTH
And Zarina?

ANATOLI
She is with my family...
(then, remorseful)
We were supposed to be better than
this.

SAM
So what now?

Anatoli wavers. Then lowers his pistol.

EXT. SEED SELECTION PLANT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Anatoli uses his thick COAT to raise enough of a gap in the
BARBED-WIRE FENCE for Sam, Ruth and Gabrielle to slip through.

ANATOLI
NKVD has orders to watch train and
main roads. My truck will also be
no good. But...

They arrive at a TRANSPORT TRUCK with a CANVAS CANOPY.

ANATOLI
This will do.

Unlike Sam, it takes Anatoli no time to hot-wire the vehicle.

SAM
You're a lot better at that than I
am.

Sam helps Ruth and Gabrielle into the bed of the truck.

SAM
Everything's gonna be okay. Just
stay outta sight.

Ruth gives a shaky nod. Ducks behind the BALES OF COTTON.

INT. TRANSPORT TRUCK - FRONT SEAT - NIGHT

The transport truck bounces on the unpaved road. Anatoli's
behind the wheel. Sam next to him.

ANATOLI
These roads very old. Not often in
use.

SAM
I can tell. What's that up ahead?

Sam points to a military CHECK POINT with ARMED GUARDS up
ahead. Anatoli scowls.

ANATOLI
I talk. Do as I do.

The truck rumbles to a stop in front of the barricade. Six
SOLDIERS armed with SVT-40 rifles encircle them.

The LEAD SOLDIER approaches. Anatoli speaks in RUSSIAN --

ANATOLI
*Good evening, Comrade! We are on
our way to Nazerbek.*

LEAD SOLDIER
It is late for a delivery.

ANATOLI

Oh, today, let me tell you, such a day. One thing after another went wrong. We're very far behind.

LEAD SOLDIER

What are you transporting?

ANATOLI

The white gold, Comrade.

That draws the Soldier's interest. He nods to two of his men. They encircle the truck.

INT. TRANSPORT TRUCK - BED - INTERCUT

ON Ruth, hunched down with Gabrielle. The soldiers shine flashlights over the various bales of cotton.

ANGLE ON SAM, his heart about to explode. Through the rearview, he watches the soldiers peering into the truck bed.

SAM

Anatoli...

Anatoli leans out of the window to address the soldiers.

ANATOLI

I'm sorry, Comrades, but we are in a hurry.

LEAD SOLDIER

You may go when our inspection is complete.

A SOLDIER climbs into the back of the truck. Stabs through a bale of cotton with his rifle's bayonet.

CLANG! The knife dents the truck's liner.

BACK ON Ruth, huddled fearfully. Gabrielle lets out a tiny CRY. Ruth blanches. *Did he hear...?*

He did. CLICK. The Soldier readies his rifle. Heads for Ruth.

ANGLE ON SAM, noticing something's amiss. He reaches for the door handle. Anatoli puts a hand on his arm.

ANATOLI

Comrade Parker. Allow me.

Anatoli jumps out of the truck. And to Sam's shock, he jams his pistol against the Lead Soldier's temple.

ANATOLI

Get your men out of the truck. Now!

The Lead Soldier signals and the others do as told. Their guns now trained on Anatoli.

ANATOLI

Go, Sam Parker.

SAM

What?? No. We ain't leavin' you.

ANATOLI

This is as far as I take you,
Comrade. Now, go!

Left with no choice, Sam takes the wheel. Pounds the gas.
BRRRRMMMM! The Transport Truck PLOWS through the barricade.

ON Anatoli, a devilish smile slides across his face. With his free hand, he takes out one of his cigars.

ANATOLI

*This is a very special cigar. And
it is my last one. Do you mind?*

He lights it up. Savors it as he watches Sam and Ruth making their escape.

EXT. LENINGRAD - AMERICAN EMBASSY - DAYS LATER

Sam and Ruth, holding Gabrielle, march toward the towering Embassy building when they're approached by a GATE ATTENDANT.

SAM

We're American citizens. We're in
need of safe passage.

ATTENDANT

I'll need to see your passports.

Sam and Ruth lock eyes. *Well... shit.*

DIPLOMATIC AIDE (PRELAP)

You burned your passports?

INT. AMERICAN EMBASSY - HOLDING ROOM - DAY

A straight-laced DIPLOMATIC AIDE drills them.

RUTH

Sir, please, we believed our lives
were in danger.

Suddenly, a blunt force of a man, AMBASSADOR TAYLOR, enters.

DIPLOMATIC AIDE
Ambassador Taylor. I was just--

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR
I'll take it from here.

Dismissed, the Aide leaves. And Ambassador Taylor slaps down a Soviet NEWSPAPER. On the cover, the press photo of Sam and Eugene posing with Secretary Yakov in front of the cotton.

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR
Mr. Parker. Mrs. Parker. I'm curious to know why're you in such a hurry to flee the Soviet. Looks to me like you're in pretty cozy with the Reds.

SAM
You gotta understand, Comrade--

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR
Boy, I'm nobody's comrade.

It's been a while since Sam's been spoken to like that.

SAM
And I'm not your boy.

Wrong answer. Taylor's eyes narrow.

AMBASSADOR TAYLOR
What do you expect is going to happen here? Because you're kidding yourselves if you think the U.S. Government will offer any help to a couple of Negro Communists.

Both Sam and Ruth's spirits fall. Then, Ruth considers the Soviet newspaper photo and something swells within her.

RUTH
Oh they're gonna.

AMBASSADOR
Excuse me?

RUTH
This man right here is *Samuel Parker*. Hero of Yangiyul. Winner of the Soviet Agricultural medal. Why Samuel was hand-picked by Joseph Stalin himself to come here.

Sam shoots her a look. She motions for him to go with it.

RUTH

How embarrassed do you think Mr. Stalin would be if he were to find out one of his prized propaganda pieces chose America over the Soviet? I imagine that'd be some win for ya'll. And how do you suppose the President would react if he found out you passed on that opportunity to put Stalin to shame?

The Ambassador sits back in his chair. Bested. Sam turns to admire his wife, who's brimming with newfound strength.

INT. YAKOV'S OFFICE - DAY

Two GUARDS march Anatoli up to Secretary Yakov. A tense beat. Then, Yakov yanks the COMMUNIST PIN off Anatoli's lapel.

ANATOLI

Let me guess. I am reassigned.

Yakov's cruel smile confirms Anatoli's fears.

INT. SIBERIAN TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

Hundreds of bruised and battered passengers are crammed inside. FIND Anatoli shoved near the back. Lost. Broken.

EXT. SIBERIAN GULAG - DAY

The prisoners from the train trudge through the icebound wasteland. Enter a CAMP enclosed by a barbed wire fence.

Inside, Anatoli passes one emaciated WORKER after another. Finally understanding what his beloved country has become.

EXT. RUNDOWN ALABAMA FARMLAND - DAY

A haggard piece of earth. To anyone else it would be a lost cause. But Ruth and Sam look upon it with a hopeful gaze.

SAM

It's gonna cost all we saved. No guarantee it'll even be worth it.

RUTH

It'll be ours won't it?
(when he nods)
Then it'll be worth it.

Bolstered by her words, Sam flags down the pragmatic LANDOWNER.

SAM
We'll take it.

LANDOWNER
You do realize nothing's gonna grow
on this sorry piece of dirt?

SAM
You'd be surprised. Been told I'm a
bit of a specialist when it comes
to this sorta thing.

The Landowner shrugs. And Sam and Ruth share a knowing smile.

EXT. HURTSBORO TOWN CENTER - DAY

Ruth's siblings, Joyce and Lawrence, weave through the
sidewalk foot-traffic. Ruth and Mama bring up the rear with
Gabrielle in a stroller.

RUTH
Sam thinks he can get a house
framed by the end of the month.

MAMA
Just got ya back and you're already
in a rush to move out.

RUTH
You know it ain't like that, Mama.
'Sides, you got your hands full.

She points at Lawrence and Joyce who are jostling and
heckling each other like teenage siblings do. They enter --

INT. HURTSBORO DINER - CONTINUOUS

Ruth instinctively sits in the closest open booth. Her family
stops in their tracks. A WAITER, white, hustles over to Ruth.

WAITER
You can't sit here.

RUTH
Pardon?

He points to a sign that reads: White Customers Only. And
Ruth remembers. *She's not in the Soviet anymore*. As Ruth
stands and heads for the back with her family --

MAMA
Don't worry, sugar, you'll get used
to it again.

RUTH
(resolved)
No, Mama. I don't think I will.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S FARM - DAY

A freshly erected HOUSE now stands at the far edge of the property. It isn't much, but it's theirs. Ruth chases Gabrielle through the yard. She stops to gaze out at --

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S FARM - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

A dozen men seed the land. Black, White, Latino -- they all work side-by-side under Sam's guidance. Ruth's brother Troy escorts a young black man, VALENTINE, 20s, towards Sam.

TROY
Sam, this is the fella I mentioned.

SAM
Thanks, Troy. Why don't you take over here.

As Troy does so, Sam and Valentine stroll through the fields.

VALENTINE
Real grateful, Mr. Parker. No one in town would hire me, and I got two little ones.

SAM
Been there myself. Now, it's hard work, but the pay's fair.

VALENTINE
Hard work don't scare me, sir.

Sam nods. Valentine lingers. A question on his mind.

VALENTINE
Mr. Parker? People in town been sayin'... Well, the word is that you're a red.

Sam holds out an arm for Valentine to inspect.

SAM
I look red to you?

VALENTINE
No, sir. But, they say you lived there. Knew Stalin himself. And...

SAM
You wanna know if I'm a Communist.

Valentine shrinks a little. Sam looks at the men before them.

SAM
I suppose I was a Communist. And
before that, I suppose I was a
Capitalist. I'll tell you this...
No ism's gonna make the world
right. Only the people can do that.

EXT. YANGIYUL FIELDS - DAY

The sun descends on Eugene and the Yangiyul workers,
collecting their latest harvest.

SAM (V.O.)
When I was over there, met a lotta
fine folks. They had this phrase
that stuck with me, "We rise
together, we fall together."

EXT. TASHKENT CITY CENTER - SIDEWALK - DAY

The street's full of life. Eugene, Devra and Franklyn hold
hands as they take a stroll. Devra's pregnant again.

SAM (V.O.)
Trouble is, that can be harder to
live by than you think.

Eugene and Devra spot a BLACK X across an apartment door.

SAM (V.O.)
And when good people turn their
backs on each other...

For a brief moment, a wave of guilt overtakes them. But they
push past it and continue their family walk.

SAM (V.O.)
Even if it is for the right
reasons...

EXT. SIBERIAN GULAG - DAY

Wilted, Anatoli hauls heavy rocks in the grueling camp.

SAM (V.O.)
The price for a decent life becomes
too high.

Anatoli suddenly stops. Locks eyes with an older, frail man.
It's Maksim. Neither speak. There's nothing much to say.

SAM (V.O.)
 That's true whether you're there...

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - A DIFFERENT DAY

Ruth enters. Rows of chairs are lined up. A group of well-dressed Black MEN and WOMEN are gathered.

SAM (V.O.)
 Or here.
 (then)
 But I don't think it has to stay
 that way. Change can happen.

She takes a seat. REVERSE ON a massive crest. The letters are familiar -- N.A.A.C.P.

SAM (V.O.)
 But only through challenge.

ON Ruth, filled with purpose and unwavering strength.

SAM (V.O.)
 And the world needs more
 challengers.

INT. HARLEM APARTMENT - DAY

A hip, bohemian studio. At a small desk FIND Langston Hughes pecking away at his typewriter.

SAM (V.O.)
 So that's what I aim to be. If
 there's a truth that needs sayin',
 you better believe you'll be
 hearin' it from me.

Langston's keys stamp the blank ink into the page, revealing the title -- "I Wonder as I Wander."

INT. TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY - CLASSROOM - DAY

George Washington Carver holds court in front of a classroom of eager Black students. They hang on his every word.

SAM (V.O.)
 I intend to push you to be the best
 version of yourself. And I expect
 you to do the same for me.

EXT. SAM AND RUTH'S FARM - DAY

BACK WITH Sam and Valentine --

SAM

Because in all my travels, what I learned, is the promised land ain't a place you find. It's a place you build. And I'm fixin' to build one right here.

Sam puts a hand on Valentine's shoulder.

SAM

Don't know about you, but I'm ready to get to work.

Valentine nods eagerly. Inspired by Sam's words. He moves into the fields, joining the other men.

Sam smiles to himself. Then, Gabrielle races over. Sam swoops her up into his arms. Ruth joins them.

And they walk hand-in-hand. This place may not be their promised land yet, but it's on its way.

FADE OUT.