

WATERPROOF

by

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Revised First Draft (C)

FADE IN ON:

HIGH CONTRAST BLACK AND WHITE FILM - GRAINY, GRAVELLY IMAGES - SLOWLY MELTING CLOSEUPS OF:

OLD WORK SHOES

-- dug purposefully into sweet, loamy soil.

A HAND-FORGED SCYTHE

-- chopping at greenery, INSECTS rising into the air like a plume of smoke.

DARK, SCARRED FINGERS

-- stripping a bowl of BLOOMED COTTON from the stalk of a plant.

A BURLAP SACK

-- filled with the white, fluffy bounty.

THE SUN

-- piercing the FRAME. Blinding to some, blissful to others.

A MAN'S FOREHEAD

-- dark as mule's hide, beaded and glistening with perspiration. As a lone BEAD of sweat breaks from its tribe, COLOR begins to bleed into the picture. We FOLLOW the bead of sweat as it scurries along the ridge of an EYEBROW, turns south and journeys ambitiously down a dark brown CHEEK. As it meets the corner of the mouth, out shoots a TONGUE, capturing the salty bead, and we --

CUT TO:

EXT. WIDE ANGLE - THE COTTON FIELDS - DAY

-- and an explosion of COLOR. Hundreds of acres of rich, green fields are draped in white cotton, and peppered with the stooped figures of the cotton pickers: all black, all ages, men, women and children.

Rain clouds bear witness in the sky and there is a sudden clap of THUNDER.

EXT. THE COTTON FIELD - LATER IN THE DAY

A slow, steady rain nourishes the land. The people are gone. And accompanying the rain's hushed blanket of SOUND are the whistles, warbles and trills of a MOCKINGBIRD.

The bird sits perched on a branch of a cypress tree shrouded with spanish moss, singing to the mist.

And a little black girl, six years old, is laying on the ground, hands clasped behind her head, gazing up into the tree and listening to the bird. Her name is TYREE, and her black-rimmed eyeglasses are puddled with rain.

Behind her, we see several brown, tattered SHACKS spaced evenly on the horizon of the cotton field.

After a moment, a man in denim overalls appears standing over the little girl, rainwater dripping from the bill of his red work cap. This is SUGAR, Tyree's grandfather, 70 years old, tall and strong and gentle as lace.

TYREE

Hey, Shug.

SUGAR

Come on, Tyree. You gonna catch cold for everybody in the world you keep layin' in the rain.

TYREE

But that little bird looks in good enough health and he's spendin' all his time in the rain.

SUGAR

Yeah, well, that's 'cause God give him an invisible slicker.

TYREE

So how come He don't give me one?

SUGAR

'Cause He give you the wisdom to come inside. Now let's go, your mama's waitin' supper --

TYREE

Wait, Sugar -- please. Stay a minute and listen to him sing. The music makes you feel like you can do no wrong. . . .

Sugar holds a look on Tyree, then glances over his shoulder toward the shack-lined horizon. After a beat, he crawls to his knees and lays next to his granddaughter on the moistened earth. The two lay silent and smiling, hands clasped behind their heads, looking up into the tree and listening to the birdsong.

We MOVE IN and HOLD CLOSE on Tyree's blessedly contented face. Her eyeglasses are glazed with rain. . . .

DISSOLVE TO:

ANOTHER PAIR OF EYEGLASSES

-- but now with two ADULT EYES behind them. And instead of a mockingbird, we hear the SOUNDS of the city. We PULL BACK to find that we are in --

INT. A MOVING TAXICAB - DAY

-- and that the eyeglasses dress the willful and wrought iron face of the cab driver: the grown up little girl from the previous scene. Now in her early thirties, TYREE BATTLE is a savvy, tenacious woman with blistering eyes that could burn a hole right through you, and an alluring, almost blinding smile that could warm you to your toes. So beware: get too close and you'll either fall in love or get your throat slit. A cab driver of journeywoman status, Tyree is cruising through --

AN INNER CITY WAR ZONE

The bruised concrete -- the decaying row houses -- the masses of UNEMPLOYED and BROKEN SOULS -- the angry and disturbed graffitti which screams from nearly every facade.

Then, rising in the distance, backdropping the grim sights, we see the United States Capitol Building.

CUT TO:

A FRESHLY OPENED CAN OF MAXWELL HOUSE COFFEE

A measuring scoop burrows into the brown, fragrant grounds.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. A SMALL DELI-MARKET - DAY

The owner, A FRUMPY WHITE MAN in his early seventies, is behind the counter, brewing a percolator pot of coffee. His scoops-to-water measurements are precise to the granule.

Through the front window of the store we see Tyree park her cab at the curb. As she enters the shop, we might note that she's wearing a faded, probably meaningless New Orleans Saints sweat-shirt. She moves to the cash register, pulling her cabbie's wad of crumpled bills from her jeans pocket.

TYREE

Pack of Kools.

FRUMPY WHITE MAN

(with a slightly Yiddish
accent)

It's an awful habit, young lady.

(indicating a jar on
the counter)

Have a pickled egg.

TYREE

Man, you try to push them eggs on me everytime I come in here. Now gimme my sticks -- I'm in a hurry.

CUT TO:

A SMOKE RING

It travels through FRAME and leads us to the face of an officious, middle aged black man. He is the PRINCIPAL of an inner city public school. We hear Tyree's voice OFFSCREEN.

TYREE (o.s.)

Look, you ain't kickin' my boy outta this school, you hear me?

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

The principal is seated behind his desk. A prim SCHOOLTEACHER is also present, listening in as Tyree continues to blow her thick, defiant circles of smoke.

PRINCIPAL

I hope that won't be necessary, Ms. Battle. But you must appreciate the gravity of the situation. Marvin is an angry child --

TYREE

Man, what do you know about it?

PRINCIPAL

Excuse me?

TYREE

You got any kids of your own?

PRINCIPAL

That is hardly the point --

TYREE

Yeah, well, I think it is --

PRINCIPAL

No, the point is that Marvin has been skipping school. And if you can't bring some discipline to bear on the matter, then I'm left left with no choice but to report him to the authorities --

TYREE

Man, you kill me. Marvin's a good
(MORE)

TYREE (cont'd)
 boy, understand? Not that you'd
 know a good boy if he came up and
 slapped you in the head.
 (looks at her watch)
 Now I got me a job to do. I ain't
 got time for no more foolishness.

As Tyree rises from her chair, she notices the schoolteacher holding her with a hard, disapproving gaze.

TYREE (cont'd)
 Don't be makin' eyes at me, woman.

CUT TO:

EXT. NORTHEAST D.C. - EVENING

Tyree's cab takes a hard turn off of North Capitol Street and squeals into --

INT. TAXI GARAGE - EVENING

Tyree turns her clipboard in to the DISPATCHER.

DISPATCHER
 Got an opening on the night shift.
 Interested?

TYREE
 No, thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

It's a small place with peeling paint, frayed furnishings and bad news carpeting. Tyree comes in the front door, calling --

TYREE
 Marvin, I wanna talk to you, boy!

Tyree throws open the door to --

MARVIN'S BEDROOM

-- where posters of the modern-day sports heroes cover the walls: MICHAEL JORDAN, CHARLES BARKLEY, and the entire squad of WASHINGTON REDSKINS. Marvin, however, is nowhere to be found. With no one to turn to, Tyree holds a look on the posters.

TYREE
 I thought you were supposed to be
 a good influence on kids?

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

Seated among the burned-out walls and strewn rubbish is MARVIN BATTLE, Tyree's eleven year-old son. Wearing a black fishnet shirt and slack-laced Nike high-tops, Marvin is hanging out with THREE OTHER KIDS: gang members.

GANG LEADER

Okay, Marvin, you in or ain't you?

Nervous, Marvin glances at each of the boys.

MARVIN

What if I say no?

GANG MEMBER

Then we bleed your chump ass.

MARVIN

And what if I say yes?

GANG LEADER

Then you come back tomorrow night
and we make us some cash money.

We HOLD on Marvin's fearful yet half-tempted little face.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE REAR OF TYREE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Marvin zooms up on his bicycle, parks it against the building, then climbs up the bricks toward an upper story window.

INT. MARVIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

As Marvin wriggles in his bedroom window --

-- Tyree's hands clamp down on his unsuspecting little wrists.

MARVIN

Get off me!

She pulls Marvin inside and slams shut the window.

TYREE

Like spots on dice I'll get off
you! Now where you been -- and
don't tell me nowhere!

MARVIN

Nowhere.

Tyree grabs hold of Marvin's nose. Marvin yelps. She leads him to his bed and sits him down.

TYREE

You better come clean with me,
boy, before you make me guilty of
some serious child abuse. Now why
wasn't you in school today?

MARVIN

I was!

TYREE

Quit your lyin'! I was called in
to talk to your principal!

Again, Tyree reaches for Marvin's nose. But this time Marvin
covers it with his hand.

TYREE (cont'd)

Gimme your nose!

MARVIN

Unh-unh, it's my nose!

TYREE

Yeah, well, I gave birth to that
nose, so give it here!

Marvin pauses, then holds his face toward his mother, eyes
closed and cringing, in anticipation of The Grab.

But Tyree doesn't grab. Instead, she holds a look on Marvin's
seemingly innocent and wincing face. She softens a notch, drops
her shoulders and releases a breath.

TYREE

Damn, baby, how many times do I
gotta tell you that I want you
goin' to school.

MARVIN

(chastened)

I didn't do nothin' wrong, mama.
I was just ridin' my bike. I'll
go to class tomorrow -- I swear.

TYREE

You bet you will -- 'cause I'm
drivin' you there. And you'll do
no more bike ridin' for a week.
I don't know what that'll teach
you, but we'll hope for somethin'.
Now come get you some supper.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE INNER CITY - MORNING

A new day has dawned in the nation's capitol -- where the grisly statistics are being racked up as we speak.

Tyree's cab comes down the street and stops in front of a PUBLIC SCHOOL. Through the windshield we see Marvin in the passenger seat. As he starts to climb out of the cab --

TYREE

Hold on. Where's my three-pointer?

Marvin turns to Tyree and gives her three quick kisses: one on each cheek and one on the forehead.

CUT TO:

INT. MARVIN'S SCHOOL - MORNING

Marvin enters, walks down the hall . . . and exits the other door at the far end of the corridor. As he does --

-- the PRINCIPAL we met earlier turns a corner and sees Marvin scampering away. Too late to chase him, the principal holds a grave look.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - DAY

Tyree glides past the LINCOLN MEMORIAL. In the back seat sits the quintessential TOURIST FAMILY -- a husband, a wife, and two well-mannered children. The husband leans forward and knocks cheerily on Tyree's bullet-proof partition.

HUSBAND

Excuse me, miss, but would you
know the best place for seafood?
Perhaps one that serves a nice,
eastern boulliabaisse?

Tyree gives the guy a stiff glance in her rear view mirror. Her sarcasm can't help but seep out.

TYREE

Well, there's a place in my neigh-
borhood for catfish-on-a-stick.
How's that sound?

CUT TO:

EXT. TYREE'S NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

Tyree is walking home from work. As she approaches her degenerated apartment building, two PLAINCLOTHES DETECTIVES get out of a car and produce I.D.

DETECTIVE #1
Ms. Battle? Metropolitan Police
Department, Juvenile Bureau. We've
had a report from Marvin's school
and would like a word with him.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

The detectives are seated on the couch, glancing about the
living room.

IN MARVIN'S BEDROOM

Tyree is leaning out of the open window, looking down to the
ground where Marvin's bike should be parked. But neither Marvin
nor his bike are anywhere in sight.

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM

Tyree drops into a chair. There is a moment of silence as her
anger, sadness and fear congeal. Then --

DETECTIVE #1
Can you tell us, ma'am, where he's
likely to be? Where he tends to
spend his time?

Tyree is silent, head down.

DETECTIVE #2
How about friends? Who are --?

TYREE
(softly)
I don't know -- they come and go.

The detectives hold a look on her, then rise.

DETECTIVE #1
Okay, well . . . we'll check out
the neighborhood and be in touch.

CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING - EVENING

Again, Marvin is with the three gang members. The leader hands
Marvin a small pistol.

MARVIN
Man, are you crazy? I can't shoot
nobody --

GANG LEADER

The white man act a lot faster
when you holdin' a bone.

MARVIN

But --

GANG LEADER

(grabs Marvin by the collar)
But what?

MARVIN

(terrified)
N-nothin'. . . .

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Tyree is seated at the table, picking through a dinner of catfish-on-a-stick from a styrofoam take-out box. An empty chair stares at her from across the table, as does another box of catfish, opened and getting cold.

The NIGHTSOUNDS of the city are coming in the window. Deep in the nightmare of single parenthood, Tyree holds a long look on Marvin's empty chair . . . then jumps to her feet.

CUT TO:

EXT. TYREE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

An early autumn wind is kicking up. Tyree bolts out the front door and runs down the street.

INT. TAXI GARAGE - NIGHT

Tyree enters and moves to the DISPATCHER.

TYREE

Need another driver tonight?

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Marvin and the gang members are standing across the street from the same deli-market where, earlier, Tyree bought her cigarettes. The sign in the store's front window reads "CLOSED," and through the window we see the FRUMPY OLD MAN sweeping up.

GANG LEADER

Okay, Marvin, do the deed. . . .

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DELI-MARKET - NIGHT

Marvin knocks on the deli's front door. The three gang members are huddled around the corner, just out of the old man's view.

The old man looks up at Marvin and waves him away. But Marvin motions that he's got to use the phone. He mouths, "Please."

There is a pause. Then the old man puts down his broom, moves to the door. Lips dry, Marvin watches the old man approach.

GANG LEADER (o.s.)
Okay, everybody be cool now. . . .

The old man opens the door and sees only Marvin standing there.

OLD MAN
A youngster like you should be
home in bed. It's a school night.

And just as Marvin steps inside, the other boys rush in behind him and slam the door.

CUT TO:

INT. THE DELI-MARKET - MOMENTS LATER

While the gang leader rifles through the cash register, Marvin has the gun trained on the old man. And Marvin is nervous. Real nervous.

The old man watches Marvin tremble. Then, sensing that Marvin is really too frightened to shoot, the old man reaches to the nearest shelf, picks up a can of Raid Ant and Roach Spray and points it at Marvin.

OLD MAN
Drop the gun or I'll spray.

MARVIN
What?!

OLD MAN
(stepping toward him)
I'm warning you -- I'm a licensed marksman.

MARVIN
Stay back, mook!

GANG LEADER
Shoot him, Marvin!

MARVIN
(panicking)
I can't!

But the old man can. He sprays a cloud of Raid. The gang leader jumps on Marvin and tries to wrest the gun from him.

As they tussle, the OTHER TWO BOYS run out of the store.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - NIGHT

Tyree cruises the streets, on the lookout for Marvin. Suddenly, she sees the two gang members running out of the deli-market.

Then she hears the flat, ugly POP! of a gunshot.

She squeals her cab to the curb and jumps out -- just as the gang leader now runs out of the store and down the street.

TYREE
(calling)

Hey!

But the kid disappears around a corner.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE DELI-MARKET - NIGHT

-- where the old man has been shot just below the shoulder. With one hand clasped to his bleeding arm, his other hand is still spraying the Raid wildly around the room. Marvin is running, cutting, ducking and dodging the mist.

MARVIN
Come on, man, quit it!

Just then, Tyree rushes in. Marvin sees her and freezes.

MARVIN (cont'd)
Mama!

And with that -- PSHHHHK! The old man sprays Marvin square in the face.

MARVIN
(choking)
Hchech -- gleg --

TYREE
ARE YOU FUCKIN' CRAZY?! YOU
SPRAYED MY BOY!

OLD MAN
That's because he tried to murder
me!!!

Tyree sees the gun on the floor. And her anger suddenly vanishes -- replaced with an immediate loss of blood to the face and a near-crippling weakness of the knees.

MARVIN

No one meant to shoot him, mama!
The bone just went off!

While Tyree picks up the gun, the old man rushes to the phone and starts to dial 9-1-1. Tyree lunges to the phone and slaps her hand on it, cutting off his call.

TYREE

Don't. I'll take you for help.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE DELI-MARKET - NIGHT

Tyree comes out of the store with Marvin in one hand and the old man in the other. She throws Marvin into the back seat of the cab and the old man into the passenger seat.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S TAXICAB - NIGHT

Utter chaos. Never more angry, fearful or desperate, Tyree speeds through the streets, reading Marvin the riot act. The old man, meantime, has his hand clamped to his wounded arm, yelling --

OLD MAN

Dr. Arthur Ostrow -- G.W. Medical
Center -- The Henry Kissinger Wing!

TYREE

Goddamnit, Marvin -- you best
start talkin' and now! Who are
those kids you been hangin' with!?

MARVIN

I don't know!

TYREE

Don't push me, boy!

OLD MAN

He's just now starting to push
you?!?

MARVIN

I don't know who they were, mama
-- I swear! They wouldn't tell
me their names till I joined!

OLD MAN

Look at this pain and blood I'm
oozing here! My whole miserable
life is flashing before my eyes!

Marvin slaps the old man in the back of the head.

MARVIN

Yo, mook, chill out.

OLD MAN

(to Tyree; indignant)
First he shoots me, now he hits
me??? What kind of child have you
raised here?!

MARVIN

Hey, it's your fault! Quaker Oats
like you got no business hangin'
in the brothers' neighborhood!

OLD MAN

Oh, and who're you, Marvin X, Jr?!

TYREE

ALL RIGHT -- NOW EVERYONE SHUT THE
HELL UP BEFORE YOU TURN ME INTO A
VIOLENT WOMAN!

Tyree turns a corner and sees --

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

Up ahead, the TWO DETECTIVES we met earlier are coming out of
Tyree's apartment building.

BACK IN THE CAB

TYREE

Shit!

MARVIN

Who're them?!

TYREE

The police!

OLD MAN

Thank God --!

MARVIN

Am I going to jail, mama?!

TYREE

If you live that long! Get down!

Marvin throws himself onto the floor of the back seat and curls into a ball. The old man stays seated upright.

OLD MAN
Look -- this is fine -- drop me
here and we'll call it even --

TYREE
I said, get down!

Tyree grabs the old man's head and thrusts it downward, pasting his cheek to the vinyl front seat. She holds his head in place as he squirms to get up.

OLD MAN
Release my head -- I'll pull a
muscle in my neck!

She sticks her finger -- her long fingernail -- in his ear.

TYREE
Shut up, man, before I stab you in
the brain.

The old man silences and Tyree slowly drives past --

HER APARTMENT BUILDING

-- where the cops are on the sidewalk, looking about, lighting cigarettes and figuring out what to do next.

BACK IN THE CAB

Keeping cool, Tyree turns her face away from the cops, glides past them, then turns off her street and floors it. Meantime --

THE OLD MAN

-- with his cheek still pasted to the front seat of the cab, is staring directly at TYREE'S CABBIE'S SHIELD -- her face and name. Tyree releases his head and he sits up, triumphant.

OLD MAN
Ah-ha! I know who you are, Battle,
Tyree! And if I know who you are,
then so will the police!
(drilling the informa-
tion into his brain)
Battle, Tyree -- Battle, Tyree.
She shops in my store -- she shops
in my store --

TYREE
Man, will you quit your stupid
babblin' and lemme see your arm!

Tyree reaches for his arm, but he pulls it away.

OLD MAN
Don't you touch me!

TYREE
I'm tryin' to help!

OLD MAN
So take me to the emergency room!

Tyree grabs his arm. He screams to high heaven.

TYREE
Marvin, take off your pants and
lean on up here.

MARVIN
Shee-it --

Tyree whips around and gives him a look. The whites of her eyes shine on him like searchlights in a prison yard. Marvin, knowing this look from his mother, instantly strips to his shorts.

TYREE
Now tie the pants legs right here
-- right on the wound.

Marvin ties his jeans around the old man's arm, making a denim tourniquet. Tyree picks up the handset on her radio.

TYREE (cont'd)
(into the handset)
Yeah, this is 26. I just picked
up a fare at the Four Seasons and
he wants me to drive him to --
(improvising anything)
-- Montreal, Canada. I told him
I'd take him to the airport, but
he won't fly. He's just sittin'
here, wavin' hundred dollar bills
at me. What you want me to do?

DISPATCHER'S VOICE
Tell him you'll drive him for two
grand. That'll make him fly.

Suddenly, the old man leans forward and yells into the face of the radio as if it were a human being.

OLD MAN
Help! This is Eli Zeal! I've
been attacked by monsters and shot
with a pistol!

But Tyree has released the "speak" button on her handset, so the old man's reverberating plea has gone unheard by the dispatcher. She slams a menacing look on the man we will now know as ELI ZEAL.

TYREE

Man, did you buy your brains over the phone or somethin'? Now keep your mook-ass mouth shut!

MARVIN

(laughing)

Mook-ass mouth -- that's pretty good, mama --

TYREE

You, too, boy, or you'll find yourself wishin' you was an orphan.

(back into the handset)

We got a deal on the two bills. I'll call from the road and let you know when I'll be back.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE 14TH STREET BRIDGE - NIGHT

As Tyree's cab crosses from the District of Columbia into the state of Virginia and merges onto Interstate 95 South, we hear --

ELI'S VOICE

Wait, you can't kidnap me! I got a store to run! Plus I hate Canada!

CUT TO:

EXT. A VIRGINIA SUBURB - NIGHT

Tyree's cab comes off an exit of the highway -- where right nearby is a MOTEL 6. Tyree bums into the parking lot and drives under the entrance canopy.

INT. THE CAB - NIGHT

Tyree cuts the ignition and palms the keys. She rubs her forehead and takes a breath, clearly on overload, scared to death, and improvising to save her life. Meantime --

ELI

What's this, a motel?! In the middle of everything, you feel like room service?!

TYREE

Look, if you want your arm fixed,
you best keep quiet as church
mouse!

ELI

You, of all people, have no right
to use the word "church." "Mouse,"
yes, "church," no.

TYREE

Keep him quiet for me, Marvin.

As Tyree climbs out of the cab, Marvin slaps Eli in the back of
the head.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL 6 LOBBY - NIGHT

The NIGHT MANAGER stands by as Tyree fills out the registration
card for a room. She coolly fakes the make and license number of
the cab, then pulls crumpled bills from her pocket.

TYREE

Oh, yeah, one more thing. You got
a first-aid kit? My kid scratched
his knee. I'll bring it back in
the morning.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Tyree enters and flicks on the light. Marvin escorts Eli
inside. With his jeans still wrapped around Eli's arm, Marvin
is in just his underwear -- and real embarrassed about it.

INT. MOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Pale and shaking, Eli sits on the closed toilet seat. Marvin
watches as Tyree unties the jeans from Eli's arm, then slips off
Eli's shirt and tosses both pieces of clothing into the bathtub.

TYREE

(to Marvin)

Grab one of them soaps. Start
washin' out the blood.

While Marvin reluctantly obeys, Tyree examines Eli's wound. The
blood has stopped oozing, slowed to a trickle. Tyree breathes a
small sigh of relief.

TYREE

Stopped bleedin' at least.

ELI
 (whimpering)
 Where is it? -- is it in there? --
 get it out -- it hurts -- the
 bullet -- it hurts. . . .

She examines the underside of the arm, finds a tiny exit wound.

TYREE
 Looks like it went clean through.
 I guess that's good, hunh?

ELI
 Whattaya mean, you guess?! This
 isn't "Jeopardy" -- this is my
life here! I need a doctor -- not
 a criminal! I need major surgery!
 X-rays! A CAT scan!

Tyree slaps her hand over his mouth, her eyes biting into him.

TYREE
 Jesus, man, does your mouth run
 on batteries or something? Now
 you're not goin' to no hospital,
 understand? Gunshot wounds gotta
 be reported to the police and
 they're already comin' around to
 my house! So you're comin' with
 us.

MARVIN
 Where we goin'?

TYREE
 I don't know!

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DEEP IN THE A.M.

Both beds are occupied and emanating with the SOUNDS of sleep.
 Eli's shirt and Marvin's pants, washed of the blood, are draped
 over the radiator, drying.

And Tyree is flopped in a chair, the telephone pulled to her
 lap, keeping a stoic, silent guard. The red coal of her ciga-
 rette illuminates her face as she takes a deep, worried drag.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOTEL 6 - MORNING

The sun rises on the soon-to-be golden leaves of Virginia's oak
 trees.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Using the antiseptic, salve and gauze from the motel's first-aid kit, Tyree applies a fresh dressing to Eli's arm. The wound is painful, his movement greatly impaired, but, under the circumstances, things could be much worse.

Marvin, meantime, is trying to squeeze himself into his still damp jeans. He gives up and throws himself into a chair.

MARVIN

I ain't wearing no wet pants.

TYREE

Hush yourself and get dressed.

Marvin kicks the floor in a pout. Eli gives him a wry glance.

ELI

I know how you feel.

While Tyree ties together a couple of towels and fits Eli with a makeshift sling, he holds her with a look of utter indignation.

ELI (cont'd)

I have just two words for you,
young lady. Coffee and Tylenol.

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSTATE 95 - MORNING

The cab rolls south toward Richmond. Marvin's pants are clamped in the rolled-up back window, flapping in the wind, drying.

INT. TYREE'S CAB - MORNING

While Tyree drives, Marvin is in the back, sucking on a Yoo-Hoo. Eli is in the passenger seat, wearing his sling of motel towels. A newspaper rests on his lap as he takes two Tylenol with coffee from a styrofoam cup. He cringes at the taste.

ELI

Uch, where's Maxwell House when
you need it?

TYREE

Man, why you gotta be so cranky?

ELI

Fine. Lemme shoot and kidnap you
and see how good-natured you stay.

(a beat, then --)

You'll never get away with this,
y'know.

TYREE

Jesus, you sound like something
out of a bad movie.

ELI

(defensive)

Cornell Wilde never made a bad
movie in his life!

Looking for anything to shut him up, Tyree snaps on the radio.
She spins the dial and settles on a RAP SONG.

RAP SONG

Used to be slaves,
Southern man was a chicken,
Now the white man's white ass
Is what we'll be kickin'.

Eli stares at the radio, unable to believe his ears.

ELI

You call that entertainment?

TYREE

It's a good song.

ELI

It causes riots.

TYREE

It speaks the truth!

ELI

The truth is that I am a dying,
human person! Look, I got news
for you, young lady. My son's an
attorney -- a very well-known and
highly-thought-of attorney -- who
just so happens to be very chummy
with the entire Metropolitan police
force! In fact, they're playing
canasta tomorrow night. And when
I don't show up, he'll have you
arrested and incarcerated for In-
tercontinental Theft And Trans-
portation Of His Only father.

TYREE

Look, do you think I want you
coming with us? I'd love to drop
your ass right here! But you've
seen us -- you know us -- and you
can't keep your face shut!

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION IN THE MIDDLE OF VIRGINIA - DAY

Tyree parks at a pay phone, hops out, drops in change and dials.

ANGLE IN THE CAB

Marvin is glaring at the back of Eli's head. Eli, feeling the gaze, turns around.

MARVIN

You ain't never knowin' how I
feel, mook.

OUTSIDE THE CAB - ANGLE ON THE PAY PHONE

Tyree is on the phone, lying through her teeth.

TYREE

Yeah, I'm on the New Jersey Turn-
pike --

She glances at her cab and sees Marvin now trying to reclaim his pants, which are still clamped in the back window. As he rolls down the window, the pants fall to the pavement outside.

Simultaneously, Marvin and Tyree lunge for the pants: Marvin is crawling out of the window while Tyree is stretching from the end of her telephone line. Tyree wins, and Marvin retreats back into the cab, embarrassed at being seen in just his BVDs.

TYREE

(back into phone)
I'll call you again tomorrow.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CAB - AFTERNOON

Tyree drives and holds tight to Marvin's pants. Marvin, reduced again to just his skivvies, is asleep in the back seat. Eli, wearing a look of total disgust, is staring at the crossword puzzle in his newspaper.

A road sign sails past the window: WELCOME TO NORTH CAROLINA.

ELI

(nose in his newspaper)
What's a three-letter word for
"utter torment?"

TYREE

What?

ELI

Y-o-u.

Eli glances at Tyree for a response to his stupid joke, but she remains stone-faced.

ELI (cont'd)
You didn't find that clever?

TYREE
No.

ELI
(insulted)
Fine.
(looks out the window,
then turns back to Tyree)
Listen, lemme ask you something --
just for the record. You don't
mind if I use the word "record,"
do you?

TYREE
Why would I mind that?

ELI
(with a hateful gaze)
Because you probably have one.

TYREE
Look, man, you don't know a god-
damn thing about me, understand?
I have a job -- I have done the
best I could to raise my son alone
-- and I have never committed a
crime in my --

ELI
Oh, yeah? Don't you think depriv-
ing your son of his trousers is a
crime?

TYREE
It's for his own good! He'll run
off otherwise. He can run faster
scared than I can mad.

ELI
See, that's your problem. You're
mad -- angry -- you're a negative
thinker. If you bothered to be
gentler with him and tried to com-
municate, then maybe --

TYREE
Man, where do you get that shit?

ELI
It's common knowledge. Plus I saw
it on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SETTING SUN - DUSK

Another day slips below the horizon.

INT. TYREE'S CAB - DUSK

Marvin, still in the back seat, is tearing into a fast-food taco. Eli is looking haggard now -- it's been a long day. His head is back, his eyes are closed, and his lips are parched.

MARVIN
(to Tyree)
Figured out where we're goin' yet?

TYREE
Not yet; keep eatin'.
(rustles the bag of
tacos toward Eli)
C'mon, man, get a taco.

ELI
(weakly)
I can't. I need rest. Please. . . .

Tyree looks at him. He's in bad shape. And getting worse.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEAP MOTEL IN SOUTH CAROLINA - NIGHT

Tyree pulls into the lot.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

It's dark. It's late. Marvin is asleep in one of the beds.

Eli is in the other bed. But he's not asleep. He's perspiring and swallowing hard. He wears his life, his history, on his face: in certain wrinkles are his childhood, in others his adulthood, and in his forlorn, beaten eyes, his twilight.

Tyree has pulled a chair next to his bed and is wiping his forehead with a damp washcloth.

After a moment, with his good arm, Eli weakly reaches out to her -- in need of any form of human contact.

Tyree holds a look on Eli's beckoning hand. Then, despite herself, she takes hold of it . . . and even manages to speak in a gentle, comforting tone.

TYREE

Look, I'm . . . I'm sorry this happened to you.

ELI

(a labored swallow)

No . . . I deserved it. I deserve to die. I've wasted my life.

TYREE

That's not true.

ELI

Yes, it is.

(another swallow)

See, I lied. I have no family. No son. No one.

TYREE

Look . . . everybody lies sometimes. And you'll be all right -- I promise. We'll get you back home as soon as we can.

ELI

. . . home. . . .

Eli quiets . . . and slips into sleep. Then, from outside the room, comes a SOUND. It's a MOCKINGBIRD bird, singing in the night.

CLOSE ON TYREE

The birdsong ricochets throughout her brain. She turns away from the sound and sees --

A TELEPHONE

-- sitting on the table between the two beds.

BACK ON TYREE

Her eyes are locked on the phone. She takes a shallow breath. It's decision time. After a moment, she reaches for the phone -- as if reaching for the fires of hell.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL BATHROOM - NIGHT

The phone has been pulled into the room. In a cold sweat, Tyree

is seated on the linoleum floor, making the toughest phone call of her life.

CUT TO:

INT. A DARKENED BEDROOM - NIGHT

As we hear a PHONE RING, the CAMERA PANS the walls. We see aged, inexpensive panelling, unglued in places . . . a window fan blowing inward against yellowed curtains . . . a framed Psalm 23 . . . and a simple painting of Jesus Christ.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(answering the phone)

Hello.

CUT BACK TO:

TYREE - EXTREME CLOSEUP

She can't yet speak. In a torturous moment, she searches for words not spoken in a long, long time. Finally, she says --

TYREE

Hi, mama. . . .

We hear the WOMAN on the other end of the line sputter as if a bullet had been put into her brain. And if Tyree found her first words difficult to say, the next are nearly impossible:

TYREE (cont'd)

. . . I'm comin' home. . . .

And as soon as the words are out, Tyree hangs up. She sits there with her heart beating in her throat. Fight as she might, tears begin to balance in her eyes. As the dam threatens to break, we --

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER - DAY

The rich, brown water flows solid minerals. The CAMERA CRANES UP and we see --

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BRIDGE

The D.C. cab zooms over the bridge, exiting Vicksburg, Mississippi, and entering the state of Louisiana.

ELI'S VOICE

Why do I sense we're not in to Canada?

TYREE'S VOICE

Man, will you forget Canada?

MARVIN'S VOICE

Then where are we goin'?

TYREE'S VOICE

The only place I know to keep you
outta trouble -- Waterproof.

ELI'S VOICE

Water-what?

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUISIANA RURAL ROUTE 65 - DAY

What surrounds us is the bluest sky you've ever seen. And clouds so full, so billowy, that if they could talk they'd recite pure fairy tales.

The cab whizzes past a rickety road sign: ENTER TENSAS PARISH.

And there is a swamp, where algae, soft as a putting green, floats on the surface . . . where cypress trees, shrouded in spanish moss, grow out of the water . . . and where the WHITE CRANES fly.

On both sides of the road, as far as the eye can see, are thou-
sands of acres of cotton fields. And because it's the season of "High Cotton," the fields -- the plantations, rather -- seem as if they're covered with snow.

A WHITE CRANE swoops through the sky and perches atop an old wood sign announcing the entrance to the town of WATERPROOF.

Tyree's cab takes a left in front of the sign, crosses over a set of old, rusty railroad tracks, and drives into --

EXT. WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA - DAY

It's a town of narrow streets and no sidewalks, where most of the houses are rectangular wooden shacks -- shotgun houses. And there's a RED one, a BLUE one, YELLOW, GREEN and ORANGE -- all with porches frail as toothpicks, clothes drying on lines, and small gardens of collards, mustards and peppers.

INT. THE CAB - DAY

Tyree digests the sights. Or tries to. She thought she'd never see this place again.

Eli is still weak. He's had a partial night's sleep, at best.

Marvin, meantime, has been reunited with his jeans. And his curiosity has got the best of him. He peers out of his window, watching --

THE PEOPLE OF WATERPROOF

ADULTS pass the heat and humidity on the porch. KIDS, out of school for the day, roam the neighborhood with bikes and fishing poles and basketballs.

And since an unfamiliar car -- especially a Washington, D.C. taxicab -- is rare in these parts, everyone watches Tyree cruise by. And everyone, more curious than suspicious, waves.

BACK IN THE CAB

MARVIN

How long since you been back?

TYREE

(a beat)

Fifteen years.

MARVIN

And everyone still remembers you?

TYREE

I doubt it. Waving's just what they do.

MARVIN

How come?

CUT TO:

INT. A SMALL LIVING ROOM - DAY

It's cramped and thick with heat. The furniture is in grave disrepair. The coffee table is home to countless framed pictures of what are no doubt family members, distant and close.

Seated on the couch is an OLD MAN -- very old -- wearing overalls, a red work cap, and dozing in front of the television. As the CAMERA PUSHES CLOSER to the dozing old man --

-- a paisley house dress rips through FRAME, as does a telephone cord stretching after it. And along with the phone cord we hear --

WOMAN'S VOICE

Yeah, she's comin'! I talked to her last night, sure as I breathe!

Then, as the CAMERA lands into a CLOSEUP of the old man, we hear the SOUND of a car pulling into the front yard. The old man snaps awake like a bloodhound on alert -- and we should recognize him as our old friend SUGAR, Tyree's grandfather from the opening scene -- now 99 years old.

Again, the paisley dress and phone cord blow through FRAME,
accompanied by --

WOMAN'S VOICE (o.s.)
Lord have mercy! She's arrived!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FAMILY'S LIME GREEN SHOTGUN HOUSE - DAY

As Tyree's cab bumps to a stop in the front yard, Tyree's mother bursts through the screen door of the house and lopes toward the cab. This is VIOLA BATTLE, a sturdy, attractive woman of sixty, thin and nimble as a coat hanger.

Tyree, Marvin and Eli are sitting, mouths agape, eyes glued to Viola through the windshield.

Unable to contain her excitement, Viola tugs on Tyree's arm through the open driver's side window.

VIOLA
Lemme see you, girl! Come out
that thing!

Meantime, Old Sugar comes out of the house and stands quietly on the front porch, watching the activity.

The instant Tyree is out of the cab, Viola locks her arms around Tyree's neck and jumps up and down. Tyree extricates herself and holds her mother by the shoulders. She won't be swept up.

TYREE
Mama, don't get all excited --
I ain't stayin' long.

VIOLA
What you mean you ain't --?

TYREE
(over her shoulder)
Marvin, come out here.

ANGLE IN THE CAB

Nervous as can be, Marvin has no one to look to. Except Eli. Eli glances back at him and shrugs.

ELI
So you'll think of it as a
learning experience.

BACK IN THE YARD

Marvin crawls out of the cab, keeping his eyes glued to the

rich, clay soil. Tyree takes a deep breath, nervous to make the introduction.

TYREE

Mama . . . this is Marvin. My son.

VIOLA

(a beat)

You have a son?

MARVIN

(to Tyree)

You have a mother?

Marvin stares at Viola. Viola returns the favor. After a substantial moment --

VIOLA

Well, ain't you gonna greet your grandmaw?

MARVIN

(a cautious beat,
then --)

Yo.

Viola bursts into tears and pulls Marvin to her breast. In a heartbeat, Viola can go from being the family's iron fist to someone soft and runny as warm molasses.

She sweeps Marvin onto the porch, past Sugar, and into the house. Sugar, though, just stands quietly by, holding open the screen door and watching --

TYREE

-- as she helps Eli out of the cab. Legs wobbly, he leans against Tyree's shoulder for support. She puts her arm around his waist and walks him to the porch. As she steps up, she locks eyes with --

SUGAR

-- who's got two front teeth, spaced apart like spires of a goalpost, and a million smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

There are two twin beds. Eli is in one of them, flat on his back, within an inch of consciousness. Marvin and Sugar stand back while Viola places a cool washcloth on Eli's forehead, and Tyree removes his arm dressing.

VIOLA

Who is this man, Tyree? What happened to him?

TYREE

He's, uh . . . just a friend. Got into a mix up.

Then we hear FOOTSTEPS. And Tyree turns to find --

NATTY BATTLE

-- standing in the doorway. Natty is Tyree's younger brother, a tall, sweet-faced man of about thirty. And though his eyes may look straight at you, they're never quite focused.

Tyree is overwhelmed to see him. For the first time in our acquaintance with her, she is speechless.

NATTY

Who this, mama?

VIOLA

That's Tyree, son. Your sister.

TYREE

(after a pause; spellbound)

. . . Hi, Natty.

NATTY

Ma'am.

Tyree pries her eyes off Natty and puts a hand on Marvin's shoulder. She fights against the welling in her throat.

TYREE

Marvin . . . I want you to meet your uncle Natty.

CUT TO:

A PIECE OF CORNBREAD - THICK AND MOIST

Long, strong, crooked FINGERS dig off a piece of the bread.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Seated at the supper table, Sugar dips his cornbread into a plate of honey and plunges it into his mouth.

Also at the table are Natty, who shovels beef stew nonstop, and Marvin, who just stares at him, ignoring the food on his plate.

Tyree, meantime, is nervously pacing the floor, trying to explain to her mother the situation with Marvin -- minus the Eli

details. She criss-crosses paths with Viola, who moves like a pinball between the rumbling, worn metal pots on the stove and the supper table. Thrilled to simply lay eyes on Tyree, Viola hardly lets her get a word in edgewise.

VIOLA

Lord, girl, you could've at least called us once in a while -- phones are commonplace things nowadays --

TYREE

I know, mama, I just --

VIOLA

Why, I coulda thought you was dead! How am I to know you wasn't dead?

TYREE

Mama, I'm not dead, okay?

VIOLA

'Course you're not -- and thank the Lord for it -- but fifteen years is a long time not to be pickin' up a phone! . . . So where'd you go once you left -- once you run outta here?

TYREE

North. As far as my money would take me. Ended up in Washington.

VIOLA

D.C.?! Lord have mercy -- you took yourself all the way to Washington, D.C.?! Y'ever visit the President?

TYREE

Come on, mama, a person don't just walk up and visit the President.

VIOLA

Why not? If I lived in the same city he did, I'd go visit. . . . So tell me now -- who's Marvin's daddy? We ever gonna meet the man?

TYREE

No, he's long gone. He was nothin' serious. Now listen --

VIOLA

Natty! You leave that boy's supper alone, y'hear?

Natty has been stabbing at the chunks of meat on Marvin's plate. Viola pries him away from Marvin's food, as if separating two entangled prizefighters.

MARVIN

That's okay, he can have it.

VIOLA

His is his and yours is yours.
Plenty 'nough to go 'round.

(back to Natty)

You keep your own food now, understand? And don't be drawin' pictures with the gravy.

TYREE

Mama, would you listen to me! I'm tryin' to tell you somethin'! I need you to help Marvin with a new place to stay!

Viola stops and turns a look on her.

MARVIN

I don't need no new place to stay!

Sugar's huge paw lands on top of Marvin's head. Marvin freezes. Sugar honeys up some cornbread and puts it on Marvin's plate.

VIOLA

(to Tyree)

Well, I 'spect you would need a place to put Marvin -- what with all I see on the tee-vee about them ugly and unholy cities.

(pointing to the bedroom)

But what about the man? Who is he now? Lord deliver us if he's Marvin's daddy.

TYREE

Mama, I told you -- he's no one of any concern. And that's all you wanna know -- I promise.

VIOLA

He's hurt, Tyree -- you don't just bring some injured man into this house and pretend like it ain't no one's business. People gonna wonder why he ain't in no hospital.

TYREE

No one's gotta wonder nothin'.
(MORE)

TYREE (cont'd)
It's just for one night. Sugar'll
patch him up so we can get back on
the road tomorrow.

VIOLA
Tomorrow!? But you just got here!

TYREE
(pointedly)
I gotta get my cab returned.

Tyree's tone puts a period on the conversation. Viola presses
no further.

Sugar, meantime, is just sitting there, beaming at Tyree. A
once strapping figure, whose bones have since settled into for-
ever, he speaks in very heavy dialect.

SUGAR
I 'members when me 'n you watched
the mockin'birds. I 'members that.

Sugar is all smiles. And Tyree can't help but hold a look on
him. Then, from out in the yard, we hear --

MAN'S VOICE
Shit, I know ain't no one in this
house called for a taxicab. . . .

The screen door bursts open and BROTHER BIG bulls inside. He
is Tyree's older brother, an enormous, ever-scowling man in his
mid thirties. His shirt is stained with perspiration, wisps of
fresh cotton are velcroed to his head and cheeks, and he carries
a pint bottle of HOT DAMN: a cheap, candy-sweet cinnamon
schnappes.

He sees Tyree and stops short. There is silence as the two hold
a look on one another. It's a rocky moment.

TYREE
Brother Big.

BROTHER BIG
(eyes of ice)
God in heaven. What're you doin'
here?

VIOLA
Don't be takin' the Lord's name
while you got drink on your lips!

BROTHER BIG
I ain't got no drink on my lips.

Viola growls and angrily swats her dishtowel at a passing FLY.

Brother Big, meantime, lands a stiff look on Marvin. Eyes locked with the big man, Marvin sinks a few inches in his chair.

BROTHER BIG
Who you belong to, boy?

MARVIN
Me?

BROTHER BIG
Yeah, you.

TYREE
His name is Marvin. He's my son.

BROTHER BIG
(a beat)
Your son.

TYREE
That's right.

BROTHER BIG
Your boy.

TYREE
That's right.

BROTHER BIG
You got a kid.

TYREE
Yes, I do.

Brother Big glares at Marvin, then turns back to Tyree.

BROTHER BIG
Then that must mean you come back
'cause you want somethin'.

Tyree looks off. Brother Big laughs, knowing he's touched the truth in her. Tyree storms out of the room.

VIOLA
(to Brother Big)
Boy, you are dumb as a stump,
makin' her run outta here!

BROTHER BIG
I didn't make her do nothin'!
That's all she know how to do!

Brother swigs from his bottle of Hot Damn. Viola's eyes ignite.

VIOLA

Take that bottle out this house!
The Lord hisself wouldn't have the
right to drink that poison under
my roof!

BROTHER BIG

Well, I hope you and the Lord has
yourselves a real sweet time!

Brother Big kicks open the screen door and blows out of the house. Marvin, watching it all, turns to Sugar with a fearful swallow.

MARVIN

(re: Brother Big)
He my uncle, too?

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTER SUPPER - DUSK

Marvin sits dwarfed and scrunched on the couch between Sugar and Natty, watching "Family Feud." In the B.G. we see Viola in the kitchen, washing dishes.

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - DUSK

The sky is cobalt blue. The SOUNDS of CRICKETS and FROGS fill the air at astounding decibels. And fluffs of what looks like cotton snow through the air: the shedding cottonwood trees.

Tyree is sitting on the stoop, smoking a cigarette and emptying the remaining bullets from the handgun that did the damage to Eli's arm. She throws the bullets one by one into the woods across the street. NOTE: Tyree has an arm like a whip; the bullets sail far and away, disappearing into the trees.

Her attention is then taken by a SOUND. She looks up into --
THE NEAREST TREE

-- where a MOCKINGBIRD is making a little night music.

BACK ON TYREE

She holds a look on the bird, then lifts the empty handgun to it. She lines up the sight and --

TYREE

Shoo!

The bird flies away and Tyree pockets the gun. Just then, a car drives into the yard and a middle-aged HUSBAND and WIFE climb out, all smiles.

HUSBAND AND WIFE

Tyree, is that you!? Well, snag
my stockin's on a barbed wire
fence!

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a party. JAY "HOOTIE" MCSHANN'S "The Jumpin' Blues" snaps, crackles and pops from an old Victrola. About twenty PEOPLE, all relatives of one form or another, are crammed into the tiny house, jawwing, dancing and laughing.

Viola, with her arm around Marvin, is pushing him through the crowd, introducing him to his new planet of acquaintances.

VIOLA

Marvin, this here's your great
aunt Lucy and uncle Freddie Mac.

GREAT AUNT LUCY

Well, ain't you just a little
spitter of a man!

UNCLE FREDDIE MAC

Pleased to meet you, son. I sell
burial insurance myself. It's a
field with a future.

Marvin has the fear of a hostage in his eyes. Viola continues making the rounds, introducing him to his uncles THOMAS, RUPERT, ACE and MOTORCAR; aunts SALLY, VALERIE, LAVENDER and DELICIOUS.

Finally, there's someone whom Marvin recognizes: Tyree. But she, too, is being devoured by curious and enthusiastic RELATIVES. Marvin reaches for his mother's shirt, but he misses it, and Viola plants him in front of GRACIE, a little girl about his age.

VIOLA

Greet little Gracie like you mean
it.

Gracie is adorable and full of zip. Both kids hold a look, then --

MARVIN

Yo.

GRACIE

Yo.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The CAMERA is CLOSE on Eli. The bedcovers are pulled to his chin. His eyes are bolted open. He's terrified, staring at something. But it's only --

SUGAR

-- who's seated in a chair by the bed, quietly smiling at Eli. Behind Sugar, enshrined on the wall, are old postcards and newspaper clippings of Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy and Jesus Christ.

SUGAR

You's a scrape injured, y'ax me.
(Eli just blinks,
dumbfounded)
My daddy know'd how to fix most
any injurement, an' I's say the
same for me.

ELI

Excuse me, but . . . who are you?

SUGAR

Well, sir, name's Sugar.

ELI

As in . . . cubes?

SUGAR

Tha's right. An' we's gonna hafta
takes care a that arm. . . .

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - A BIT LATER

Sugar pulls several dusty BOTTLES from the back of a cabinet.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

The party is over, and Tyree is seated on the couch, beat tired, operating on a couple of sleepless nights. Natty is seated next to her, hands on his knees, staring absently at --

THE COFFEE TABLE

-- which is full of framed photographs. There are, however, TWO PHOTOS which should stand out: 1) a portrait of Tyree as a YOUNG GIRL, wearing a white cotton baptismal gown and matching cloth headband, and 2) a group shot of FOUR KIDS, happy kids, friends, ages six to ten: Young Tyree, Young Natty, Young Brother Big and a YOUNG WHITE BOY.

BACK ON TYREE AND NATTY

Next to the photos rests a bowl of bedragled party snacks. Tyree picks up the bowl and offers them to Natty.

TYREE
Pretzel?

NATTY
(looking into the bowl)
Most is broke.

Tyree digs through the bowl and produces the last intact pretzel for Natty.

Marvin, meantime, has found safe harbor: the television set. He sits on the floor, two inches from the screen, flipping the channels. Just as he lands on the face of ARSENIO HALL --

-- Viola swoops into FRAME and clicks off the television.

VIOLA
Come on, get you some bedclothes.

MARVIN
Aw, man, you turned off the "A."
It's too early to go to sleep --

Viola grabs Marvin by the nose and pulls him to his feet.

MARVIN (cont'd)
Ow -- ow --

VIOLA
I'll teach you 'bout early. Now
come on.

Viola and Marvin exit.

And only Tyree and Natty remain. We should now be certain that something about Natty is off. Though an uncommonly gentle man, he is what you might call simple-minded.

NATTY
(to Tyree; after a
thick silence)
Have I made your acquaintance,
miss?

CUT TO:

AN OLD FRAMED PAINTING HANGING ON A WALL

-- of Jesus Christ.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. VIOLA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marvin sits on the edge of the bed, glancing at the painting. And it seems to be glancing at him, as well.

Viola, meantime, is digging through a dresser drawer. She comes out with an enormous red undershirt and tosses it to Marvin.

VIOLA

Wear this. It was your grand-daddy's.

MARVIN

Why I ain't got no granddaddy, but I got his shirt?

VIOLA

He passed on a long time ago, when your mama was just a little girl. I keep his shirt for memories.

Marvin stares at the shirt, then pulls it to his face for a sniff. Then he looks up and points at the PAINTING OF JESUS on the wall.

MARVIN

Who's the white dude?

VIOLA

(a beat; incredulous)
You don't know who Jesus is?

MARVIN

Looks like he plays in a band with that long hair.

CUT TO:

INT. SUGAR'S AND NATTY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Natty is in bed, staring flatly at Eli, who is still under the covers of the other bed, watching in abject terror as Sugar mixes the contents of his dusty bottles into a bowl.

ELI

What, uh . . . what're you doing?

SUGAR

Well, sir . . . time was, back in 1914, I gots myself pun'tured with a pitchfoke. And they was nothin' I could do but stop workin' and heal. So my daddy, he makes me this mixture, and he say to me,
(MORE)

SUGAR (cont'd)

"Take this, Shug -- three time a day. And then --- most important -- sits yourself in front of nine sunrises. Only nine -- only sunrise -- from sunbreak to when the sun be 'bout so high in the sky. You be feelin' on the mend soon enough, but lets the sun rise on you nine full times. . . ."

ELI

Wait a while -- you want me to sit in front of a sunrise for nine days in a row?

SUGAR

Tha's right.

ELI

Well, you don't know me very well, do you, mister?

SUGAR

No, sir. But after nine days I oughtta have me a clue.

Tyree enters with Marvin. Marvin's red undershirt comes all the way down to the floor. Tyree carries a bowl of warm water, a washcloth, antiseptic and gauze.

TYREE

(to Marvin)

Pick a bed.

He has two choices: to sleep with either Natty or Eli. Marvin looks to Natty, who stares at him with blank eyes. Spooked, Marvin crawls under the covers next to Eli -- a known quantity, at least.

Tyree bends to inspect Eli's wound.

ELI

(through clenched teeth)

Get me a doctor!

TYREE

(indicating Sugar)

You're lookin' at him.

ELI

Not a witch doctor! Doesn't the word "internist" ring a bell with you?!

TYREE

Do what Sugar tells you or I'll have him add some pecan sap to the mixture.

SUGAR

(with a laugh)

Ooooh, pecan sap do the damage good.

ELI

Look, I got news for you, young lady. I will get to a phone. I will call for help! I don't care if all they have down here is a cup and a string!

TYREE

Man, I am too tired for your noise. Now take your medicine.

Sugar hands the bowl of "medicine" to Tyree. She takes a spoonful and moves it to Eli's mouth -- which he clamps shut. And he's not opening for anyone.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tyree takes the phone from the sideboard and pulls it to the couch, where Viola is laying down a sheet and blanket for Tyree.

VIOLA

Crime you can't stay beyond tomorrow.

TYREE

Yeah, well . . . I told you, I just come to drop Marvin off.
(self-deprecatingly)
Like Brother Big said.

VIOLA

Ah, don't go listenin' to him. Once ornery, twice with the devil. Spends more nights drinkin' than he do at home. Lord knows he's on the prowl somewhere right now.

TYREE

Least he's workin', ain't he?

VIOLA

Keeps a job out at Cypress Keys. Thank God for that, too, otherwise this family wouldn't have two stone nickles t'rub together.

TYREE

And you?

VIOLA

Aw, I still cook n' clean for the Crinkles two days a week, but that don't bring much.

TYREE

(a beat)

Which Crinkle?

VIOLA

Tom.

(with great pride)

Grown up to be quite a man, too. Married hisself a nice girl from college and made two pretty young chil'ren. He runs the plantation now, took it over from his daddy. Weren't for him, none of us be workin'. . . . Bed's ready.

Tyree pulls off her glasses and drops down on her made bed. She keeps the phone with her under the blanket.

VIOLA (cont'd)

'Spectin' a phone call?

TYREE

Uh . . . I don't know.

There is a pause as Tyree watches Viola clear the last few dishes from the party. Then --

TYREE

(with difficulty)

So Natty never . . . Natty never got any better?

VIOLA

Naw, Sugar still tries to heal him, though. Sits him on the lip of the porch every mornin' for sunrise. But ever since Brother Big made him that whoopin', the doctor say to me, "Viola, the poor boy gone simple. Simple as that."

Viola releases an absent, pass-the-time-of-day chuckle. Tyree, clearly, has a hard time with the Natty information.

TYREE

How can you take it so lightly, mama?

VIOLA

Lord gimme a laugh, who'm I to
take it away?

TYREE

Man, you kill me with that stuff.

VIOLA

(reacting in a flash)
I'll pin your ears back you tell
me you gone 'n lost your belief!
I don't care what kinda life you
been livin' up north, but you best
not be turnin' against --

TYREE

Slow down, mama -- I can't help
what I don't believe.

Pause. Thick silence. Then --

VIOLA

It's revival week over at Seven
Sun. I don't s'pose Marvin ever
set foot in no church?

TYREE

No. Never.

CUT TO:

INT. SUGAR'S AND NATTY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The CAMERA PANS the room. Sugar is asleep in a bedroll on the
floor. Natty is in his bed, face down in his pillow, sleeping
fitfully. And --

MARVIN AND ELI

-- are laying in bed together, four eyes sprung wide open. Out-
side the window we hear the CRICKETS and FROGS performing their
all-night symphony.

ELI

Too noisy to sleep, wouldn't you
agree?

MARVIN

Definitely, man.

Just then, Natty sits bolt upright from his churning sleep.

Marvin and Eli reflexively snap their eyes shut, pretending to
be asleep.

NATTY

-- holds a look on the bedroom window . . . which is wide open.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE NEARLY FULL MOON - NIGHT

And over it we hear the SOUNDS of splashing water.

Then, in QUICK CUTS, we see: an ARM slap into the water -- the BACK OF A HEAD hit the surface and plunge under -- a KNEE kick up and splash back down. The pictures are eerie, lit by the moon, and the PERSON involved remains unidentified.

The CAMERA then TILTS AROUND and we see --

BROTHER BIG

-- seated in a grove of trees, sipping his Hot Damn and keeping a silent, secret vigil over the activity in the water. As the SOUNDS of splashing continue, we --

SLOWLY DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WATERPROOF - DAWN

The first hint of light appears in the eastern sky.

INT. SUGAR'S AND NATTY'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Eli and Marvin are asleep, legs intertwined in the sheets. Sugar's massive HAND lands on Eli's shoulder.

EXT. THE BACK PORCH - DAWN

Dressed in his overalls and ready for the day, Sugar leads a half-asleep Eli onto the porch. Natty is already seated on the lip, facing east. Sugar places Eli next to Natty, then takes a seat in his rocking chair.

There is a long silence filled only with the metronomic creaks of Sugar's rocking chair.

Eli yawns and chews the sleep from his mouth. Finally --

ELI

So, uh . . . you lived around here very long?

(Sugar just smiles)

Is that an answer?

SUGAR

My daddy was a slave down yon the Tensas River.

ELI
Slave? What do you mean slave?

SUGAR
(still smiling)
Jus' looks at the sun. . . .

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

While Tyree washes her face, Marvin is seated on the closed toilet seat, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

TYREE
Listen now, your grandmaw's gonna put you in school and that's the way it's gonna be. You'll make lots of new friends and --

MARVIN
(in a sulk)
I don't want no new friends. And I ain't staying here without you -- I hate this place!

TYREE
You'll get used to it -- it's a fine place!

MARVIN
Then why'd you leave?

TYREE
Hush up and wash your face.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN - MORNING

While Viola is at the stove, cooking up a batch of bacon and eggs, Sugar, Natty and Eli enter single file, fresh from bathing in the sunrise.

VIOLA
(to Eli)
How'd you sleep?

ELI
(shrugging)
Enh.

But then Eli sees something. He shuffles to the counter, bends and squints at --

A POUND CAN OF COFFEE

The coveted and magical Maxwell House.

BACK ON ELI AND VIOLA

ELI

Mind, uh -- mind if I have a cup?

VIOLA

'Course not. That's what it's
there for. Sit down, I'll pour
it for ya.

Eli joins Sugar and Natty at the table. Viola presents him with a steaming hot cup of coffee. As he sips and releases a deep, contented "Ahhhh," Tyree enters with Marvin.

ELI

(to Tyree; ironically)

I saw the sunrise this morning.

Sugar takes his bowl of homemade medicine from the counter, loads up a spoonful and holds it to Eli.

Eli stares at the substance, then stares into Sugar's eyes. As he accepts the spoon into his mouth, we --

CUT TO:

ANOTHER SPOON

-- going into another mouth.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. TYREE'S TAXI GARAGE - DAY

The GARAGE MANAGER is eating a cup of Dannon Banana-Flavored Yogurt while being questioned by the same two detectives who, earlier, spoke with Tyree in her apartment.

DETECTIVE #1

Montreal? Isn't it unusual for a
fare so go so far?

GARAGE MANAGER

It happens.

(the cops exchange a
glance)

Is something wrong? She's a good
driver, y'know -- a good worker.

DETECTIVE #2

Do you know if she took her son
with her?

CUT TO:

A FLATTENED HORSEFLY

-- squished against a pane of glass.

ANOTHER ANGLE - EXT. VIOLA'S HOUSE - DAY

Tyree is scraping the crusted insects from the cab's windshield. In the B.G., Sugar is seated on the porch, his ancient digits wrapped around the neck of an equally ancient guitar.

CLOSE ON TYREE

She listens to Sugar sing his song: an old LEADBELLY tune which calls back a long, long time.

SUGAR (o.s.)
Bring me little water, Sylvie.
Bring me little water now.
Bring me little water, Sylvie.
Every little once in a while.

After allowing herself to be momentarily taken by the music, Tyree shuts down and moves to --

THE PORCH

As she heads inside, Sugar takes her by the arm.

SUGAR
Where you goin'?

TYREE
Headin' back.

SUGAR
You know that man ain't well
enough to travel. He needs
hissself some strong rest.

TYREE
He can rest in the car.

SUGAR
When I take on mendin' a man, I
can't do with no interruptions.

TYREE
Sugar, please --

The CAMERA now DRIFTS into --

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

-- where Eli is sitting up in bed, listening to Tyree's and Sugar's VOICES coming from the porch.

SUGAR'S VOICE

Ain't no please about it -- he's stayin' put. Now you look me in the eye and say you know better'n me.

TYREE'S VOICE

I never said I know better than you, but --

SUGAR'S VOICE

Then that's all they is to it. Now you go on to town, set your boy in school and drive your mama to work.

Just then, we hear Viola call from the distance --

VIOLA (o.s.)

Tyree, come take a look at this boy -- all spit-shined n' ready to learn!

CUT TO:

TIGHT TWO-SHOT - TYREE AND MARVIN

Seated next to one another, both are in a funk, scowls on their brows, arms crossed over their respective chests. The CAMERA PULLS BACK to find that we are in --

INT. WATERPROOF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - OFFICE - DAY

-- where Viola and the ADMINISTRATOR are registering Marvin for classes.

MARVIN

(defiant)

When's recess in this hole?

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

The room is empty. The sun streams in through the break in the curtains. After a moment, Eli, wearing a bathrobe, enters and sneaks to the phone. As he is about to pick it up, Sugar breezes in.

SUGAR

Feelin' on the mend?

ELI

(snaps away from the phone)

Uh . . . well . . . yes, I believe I am. Now that you mention it.

SUGAR

Sunlight's a powerful blessin',
ain't it?

Sugar moves to the stove, pours two cups of coffee and hands one to Eli.

SUGAR (cont'd)

Good to the last drop. Come pull
yourself a chair.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - DAY

Tyree and Viola drive through Waterproof. WHITES and BLACKS are out and about, sharing the streets. The feeling of the town should not be that of an idyllic, fantasy-clean relationship between the races but rather that of an atmosphere of tolerance and peace -- peace by shared necessity.

Viola points through the windshield to a large, recently restored Victorian house painted pencil-eraser pink.

VIOLA

This is it. Pull in the driveway.

But Tyree doesn't. Instead, she stops at the curb. There is a pause as she waits for Viola to step out of the car. But Viola just looks at her.

VIOLA (cont'd)

Ain't you gonna come in to give
your greetin's?

TYREE

No.

VIOLA

Why not?

TYREE

Look, mama, do you want your
groceries or don't you?

CUT TO:

INT. A LARGE, MODERN KITCHEN - DAY

Viola is loading dishes into the dishwasher and talking with TOM CRINKLE, the man of the house. Crinkle, in his early thirties, is seated at the table, reading The Wall Street Journal. He wears a loose white shirt and khaki pants, and has a relaxed demeanor and a warm, Southern smile.

TOM CRINKLE
 Why didn't she come in, Viola?
 She can't be in that much of a
 hurry to make groceries.

VIOLA
 You know how she is -- always
 runnin' somewhere.

Then CRINKLE'S WIFE enters. She's a nice woman, a bit puffy
 around the edges perhaps, who wears too much make-up.

CRINKLE'S WIFE
 Viola, did I hear you say your
 daughter was in town?

VIOLA
 Yes'm.

CRINKLE'S WIFE
 Then get yourself home. You don't
 need to be workin' today.

VIOLA
 Naw, ma'am, that's okay --

TOM CRINKLE
 She's right, Viola. And you know
 what you always taught me: never
 cross the lady of the house.

CUT TO:

EXT. WATERPROOF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

It's recess. The schoolyard is filled with CHILDREN playing
 basketball, kickball and climbing on monkey bars.

Marvin, however, is sitting off by himself, against the side of
 the building, chewing on a toothpick and looking cool. In the
 B.G. the SCHOOLBELL sounds, summoning the kids back to class.

ANGLE ON A GROUP OF KIDS

-- filing into the schoolhouse. Among them is Gracie, the
 little girl we met at Viola's house party. As she heads into
 the building, she glances off and sees --

MARVIN

-- crawling on his stomach, under the school's chain-link fence,
 sneaking off the grounds.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. - ELI'S DELI-MARKET - DAY

A POLICE CAR is parked at the front curb.

INT. ELI'S DELI-MARKET - DAY

The floor is spotted with the dried blood from Eli's arm. TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS are looking around, accompanied by a LOCAL MERCHANT.

LOCAL MERCHANT

He's usually here everyday -- even Sundays.

One of the officers finds the half-empty can of Raid on the floor and turns to the merchant.

OFFICER

Do you know of any friends or relatives who might know of his whereabouts?

LOCAL MERCHANT

Never saw any. Seemed to keep mostly to himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT PORCH - DAY

Eli and Sugar are both in rocking chairs, creaking to and fro. Sugar is thumbing through The Bible -- not so much reading as simply passing the pages before his eyes. Eli is sipping coffee and glancing at the surrounding greenery. A warm breeze blows.

Just off the porch, Natty is digging in the front garden. He finds an earthworm and slowly, purposefully cuts it in half with his trowel.

NATTY

(to Sugar; in all innocence)
Uh-oh. I cut it.

SUGAR

'At's awright. They remake themselves.

Eli takes a deep breath. His lungs fill with the sweet, moist air.

ELI

Y'know, I lived in the same neighborhood all my life, too. Even after my wife died, I stayed in town.

SUGAR
When'd she pass?

ELI
Eight years ago, January.

SUGAR
Winter.

ELI
Yeah.

SUGAR
Cold.

ELI
Like you wouldn't believe.

SUGAR
Place yourself in the comp'ny of
family, warm you up.

ELI
Yeah, well, I don't really have
any family. All I got is Harry
Gesoff, a former furrier friend
and rotten canasta partner. He
keeps trying to get me to come
live with him in the suburbs. In
one of those retirement villages.
Can you imagine moving somewhere
you never lived just to get ready
to die? Seems ridiculous, doesn't
it?

SUGAR
Sure do.

ELI
But people do it. Go figure.

There is a long pause as both men continue to rock and creak.
Then --

ELI (cont'd)
Was your father really a . . . you
know . . . what you said . . . a
slave?

SUGAR
Lotsa people was.

ELI
Well, did he ever . . . did he
ever tell you anything about it?

SUGAR
Like what?

ELI
(shrugging)
I don't know.

SUGAR
(with a chuckle)
The Lord sets you your burdens and
you press on with your function.

ELI
(a beat; impressed)
Is that a saying you made up or'd
you read it in your Bible there?

SUGAR
Oh, no, sir, I can'ts read me none.

CUT TO:

EXT. WATERPROOF - DAY

Marvin walks along a gully-lined street. He beats a stick against the roadside brush, scaring up the strange and numerous INSECTS from their home.

He comes across a neighborhood house -- where a kid's BICYCLE lays in the yard.

CUT TO:

EXT. A LONG, TWO-LANE ROAD - DAY

Marvin joyrides on the absconded bike, flanked by the neverending rows of ripe cotton -- 10,000 acres of God's sweetest land.

He pays no attention to a weatherbeaten wood sign with carved-out words that read: CYPRESS KEYS PLANTATION - THE CRINKLES. Instead, he's looking out over --

THE COTTON FIELDS

-- where the harvest is in progress. But now, instead of people doing the picking -- as we saw in our introduction to these fields in the very first scene -- machines rule the day. The slow-moving cotton pickers, tractor-like monstrosities, roll over the breast-high plants.

What is, however, still intact from the first scene are the TATTERED SHACKS that are spaced evenly across the horizon. Long abandoned, their tin roofs are overgrown with vines.

The CAMERA MOVES CLOSER to the harvest, where we find --

BROTHER BIG

-- hard at work. He's a cotton tromper. He stands at the bottom of a boxcar-size storage bin as a pickerful of cotton releases its load overhead. The cotton avalanches down, covering Brother Big, who then swims out of it and begins tromping it flat -- as one might tromp grapes for wine. As he continues to tromp, he looks off and sees --

-- Marvin ducked below a cotton plant, the top of his head barely peeking up.

Brother Big stops tromping and holds a look on the youngster.

BROTHER BIG

Better watch it, junior, 'fore you
become a pair a underwear.

Caught, Marvin looks to his right and sees a cotton picker barelling toward him. He scurries out of the way.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - DAY

With a couple bags of groceries on the front seat, Tyree turns into Viola's front yard and parks. She gets out of the cab, heaves the groceries into her arm and moves to --

THE PORCH

-- where Sugar and Eli are still in their rocking chairs. Natty is seated on the steps now, hand full of halved earthworms, listening as Eli reads aloud to Sugar from The Bible.

The SKY above is clouding up, growing darker, rain on the way.

ELI

(reading)

"Better is a dinner of herbs where
love is, than a stalled ox and
hatred therewith."

SUGAR

Mm-hm.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Tyree is putting away the groceries. She pauses to take a look around the room -- it's her first quiet and personal moment in the place since her return.

After a moment, she reaches into her pocket and pulls out her diminishing wad of cabbie's cash. She peels off a few bills, puts them back in her pocket, takes the rest and moves to the cupboard. She opens the uppermost door and pulls out an old flour jar. Tyree opens it and finds Viola's personal and secret possessions, included among which are a few rainy-day dollars.

And there's something else: A FOLDED OLD PIECE OF PAPER. She removes it, unfolds it and reads.

ANGLE ON THE PIECE OF PAPER

It's a short letter, written in pencil. It reads:

Dear mama,
I'm going away. I don't know
where I'm going or for how long.
I can't even tell you why I'm
going, but may God heal all.

And it's signed: Tyree. Then, HOLDING on the note, we --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. A LARGE KITCHEN - DAY - MANY YEARS AGO

A 35-YEAR OLD VIOLA and a 7-YEAR OLD TYREE, both in maid's aprons, are scurrying about, preparing a family-size meal. They are partners, cohorts, friends. They know the kitchen as if it were their own. But in no way is it.

After a moment, a 5-year old black boy -- YOUNG NATTY -- and a 7-year old white boy --- YOUNG TOM CRINKLE -- race happily into the kitchen.

NOTE: we recognize this YOUNG TOM CRINKLE as the lone white person in the photograph of Tyree and her brothers that we saw earlier on Viola's coffee table.

Further, this YOUNG NATTY is far from simple-minded. He's happy, healthy and sparkling with promise.

Young Tom snatches a piece of Viola's fried chicken.

VIOLA

Thomas E. Crinkle, you put that
back before you find your fingers
in my pot.

YOUNG TOM CRINKLE

Aw, Viola --

VIOLA

Go on. You be eatin' soon enough.
You 'n Natty go play.

YOUNG TOM CRINKLE
Can Tyree come, too?

YOUNG TYREE
Yeah, mama, can I? I done my work.

VIOLA
(with a sigh)
Go on, child, get out my hair.

Thrilled, Young Tyree throws off her maid's apron. And as the kids start out of the room --

VIOLA (cont'd)
Not so fast. Where's my prize?

Viola bends down and the three kids gather around her like baby chicks around a mother hen. Young Tyree kisses one of Viola's cheeks, Young Tom Crinkle kisses the other, and Young Natty kisses her forehead.

As the kids run out of the kitchen, their laughter and scampering footsteps fading into the distance, we --

DISSOLVE BACK TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

Tyree holds a lingering look on the note. She considers throwing it away, but then returns it to the flour jar. Along with the note, for Viola's future discovery, Tyree adds the majority of her cabbie's cash. Then, from out in the yard we hear --

VIOLA'S VOICE
Tyree, come out here -- I want'cha
to see someone!

CUT TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT LAWN - DAY

Under the ever-darkening gathering of clouds, Viola and Tom Crinkle have just stepped out of Crinkle's late model Cutlass.

Eli and Sugar are still in their rocking chairs, and Natty is still on the steps, cradling his handful of halved worms, waiting for them to regenerate.

VIOLA (cont'd)
(calling again)
Girl, don't make me strain my
throat shoutin'! We got comp'ny!

Tyree steps from the house and stops dead at the sight of Tom Crinkle.

VIOLA (cont'd)

Surprise!

Tyree remains motionless, stunned to see Crinkle -- who is completely at ease, wearing a warm, quarter-moon smile.

TOM CRINKLE

Lord hit me with a horseshoe, I
can hardly believe my eyes. . . .
Tyree, I swear -- you haven't
changed a bit!

VIOLA

Thin as a string, y'ax me.

TOM CRINKLE

(with a laugh)

What mama in the world ain't gonna
say that.

VIOLA

(proudly, to Tyree)

Miz Crinkle gave me the rest of
the day off to spend at home.

TYREE

(stiffly)

Do tell.

TOM CRINKLE

So how are you, Tyree? How you
been? Your mama tells me you're
livin' in Washington and that
you're too stubborn to go visit
the President.

Crinkle chuckles. Viola gives him a playfully maternal whack on the arm.

VIOLA

Hush now. Man smart as you
oughtta know you don't just walk
up and visit the President.

TOM CRINKLE

(chewing back a smile)

You're right, Viola. Where's my
head?

(back to Tyree)

So how long you stayin'? You back
for a while, I hope?

TYREE

(still stiff)

Leavin' tomorrow.

TOM CRINKLE
Why so fast?

ELI
Yeah, what's the rush?

TYREE
(out of the corner of
her mouth)
Will you shut up.

VIOLA
(moving to the porch)
Lord, where's my manners -- Mr.
Crinkle, I'd like you to meet Mr.
Eli. He come along with Tyree to
see how the south makes friends
outta strangers.

TOM CRINKLE
Pleased to meet you, sir. First
time to Looz'iana, I take it?

ELI
Uh . . . yeah. I, uh, I almost
went to Florida once, but it was
such a schlep, I figured why go
all that way for sand and water?

TOM CRINKLE
I know what'cha mean. Listen, you
be sure to let us know if there's
anything we can do to make your
stay here more comfortable.

ELI
Thank you. I will.

Eli, while being polite, is keeping half an eye on Tyree, who
just refuses to soften up.

Meantime, an uncomfortable silence has fallen over the group.
Viola nervously breaks the silence with --

VIOLA
Get'cha some coffee, Mr. Crinkle?
Cinnamon sweet roll?

TOM CRINKLE
Oh, no, thanks, Viola, I best be off.
(to Tyree)
Listen, I'm runnin' the dogs out
at Cypress Keys tonight. So if
y'ain't doin' nothin', you're wel-
come to come listen to 'em sing.

ELI
(butting in; intrigued)
Singing dogs? What's that?

TYREE
Nothin' --

ELI
Wait a while -- the man says he
has singing dogs, I'm curious.

TOM CRINKLE
Well, it's not actual singin'.
It's more like pretty barkin'.

ELI
Ohhhhh, you mean like what they
used to have on The Ed Sullivan
Show?

TOM CRINKLE
(with a smile)
Somethin' like that. You're wel-
come to come listen, too, if you'd
like.

ELI
Well, thank you; maybe I --

TYREE
We can't make it.

ELI
(insulted)
Fine.

And now the rain begins to fall. The family is gathered on the porch, protected from the water. Crinkle isn't. Getting wet, he moves to his car.

TOM CRINKLE
Last thing the harvest needs is
this rain.

VIOLA
Thanks for the ride home. I'll
put in some extra hours next time.

TOM CRINKLE
No need, Viola. Y'all just have a
fine rest of the day now.

TYREE
(a mock southern belle)
You do the same, suh.

Crinkle gets in his car, hits the ignition and backs out of the yard. The rain is coming in buckets now. As soon as Crinkle is gone, Viola grabs a firm hold of Tyree's arm.

VIOLA

Girl, what is wrong with you?
That man keeps this family in
work, so as long as you in this
house, you treat him with respect,
hear?

TYREE

You treat him with respect.

As Tyree turns and goes into the house, Natty holds his palm of chopped worms toward Sugar.

NATTY

Ain't grown back yet.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ROAD LEADING FROM CYPRESS KEYS PLANTATION - DAY

Work halted due to the storm, Brother Big and Marvin are walking in the pouring rain. Marvin pushes his stolen bicycle while swigging from Brother Big's bottle of Hot Damn. He is clearly affected by the drink.

MARVIN

So what's wrong with your brother?
He crazy or somethin'?

BROTHER BIG

Crazy?

MARVIN

Yeah. You know . . . the way his
eyes are always starin' off at
your ears n' shit?

Brother Big grabs a sudden and violent hold of Marvin's bike and hurls it into the air.

CLOSE ON THE BIKE

It sails and sails, wheels over seat, and splashes down into a nearby swamp.

BACK ON MARVIN AND BROTHER BIG

MARVIN

Man, what you doin'?!

Fierce now, Brother Big grabs hold of Marvin.

BROTHER BIG
Your mama never told you nothin'
'bout your uncle Natty?

MARVIN
(squirming)
Get off me!

BROTHER BIG
(gripping tighter)
She never told you nothin'?!

MARVIN
No!

BROTHER BIG
Why'd she bring you down here, boy?

MARVIN
I don't know!

BROTHER BIG
Bullshit! Who's the white dude?

MARVIN
What white dude? You mean Jesus?

BROTHER BIG
No -- I mean the old dude!

MARVIN
Nobody! Just someone I shot!

Fists wrapped around Marvin's shirt, Brother Big lifts the boy to meet his eyes. Marvin's feet dangle above the asphalt.

BROTHER BIG
What you mean someone you shot?
You mean with a gun?

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Tyree is pacing the floor, talking on the phone. In the B.G., through the front screen door, we see Viola, Eli, Sugar and Natty seated on the front porch, enjoying a midday snack.

TYREE
(into phone)
Look, man, what can I do? He
wanted to stop at Niagra Falls
for some sightseein' -- and he's
payin' for it, ain't he? Now I'll
be back as soon as I can.

A burst of VIOLA'S LAUGHTER comes from the porch. Tyree cups the phone from the sound, then releases it, saying --

TYREE (cont'd)
 (into phone)
 The police?! Shit, what did --?
 (quickly covering her ass)
 Oh, I know what it was. My kid
 had some trouble at school and
 I forgot to tell them that he's
 stayin' at my sister's while I'm
 gone. Don't worry; I'll take care
 of it. I'll talk to you later.

Tyree hangs up, leans her head against the wall and releases a long, desperately weary breath.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - DAY

While the rain rolls in sheets off the front eave, the midday snack is still in progress, and Viola is being entertained by Eli's story.

ELI
 So I said to him, "In the first
 place, you can't expect me to sell
 a cantaloupe like this -- it
 tastes like sawdust. And in the
 second place, you're a putz."

VIOLA
 Told him off good, didn'tcha.

ELI
 I had to. Cantaloupe is the fruit
 of life as far as I'm concerned.

NATTY
 (a flat echo)
 Fruit of life.

Tyree now steps from the house. Eli turns to her.

ELI
 There you are. Sit down and have
 some of this --
 (to Viola)
 -- whattaya call this dish again?

VIOLA
 Pork rinds.

ELI
 Right. Excellent flavor.

Viola is flattered -- maybe even blushing. Tyree looks at her mother like she's lost her mind.

Just then Marvin comes running into the yard. He is huffing and puffing, soaked to the bone, frightened from his encounter with Brother Big, and as green around the gills as a child can get.

VIOLA

Boy, where your school books?

MARVIN

Uh . . .

And with that, Marvin's eyes roll back in his head, and WHOOMP! -- he falls to the ground, passed out cold.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Eli is back in bed, sitting up, the covers pulled to his waist. Marvin lays next to him, moaning off the Hot Damn.

Tyree enters, carrying a damp washcloth and Sugar's bowl of "medicine." Eli sees the medicine and instantly winces.

TYREE

Man, why you always gotta be makin' faces?

ELI

Have you ever tasted that stuff?

TYREE

Many times.

ELI

Oh, and you actually enjoy it?
You'd put it on a holiday menu?

TYREE

Shut up and open your mouth.

Eli does. And Tyree feeds him a spoonful of the medicine. Then she bends to Marvin and places the washcloth on his forehead.

TYREE

Don't worry, boy, you'll live.
(a beat)
And then I'm gonna kill you.

ELI

Oh, that's beautiful. That oughtta pep him right up. Y'ver think about a career at Hallmark?

TYREE

Look, man, when I ask for your comments, then --

ELI

Yeah, but you never ask. See, that's your problem --

TYREE

Would you shut the hell up and let me mother this child!

ELI

Be my guest.

TYREE

I am doin' the best I can!

ELI

Not true. You did better when I was dying in the motel room. You held my hand, remember? You talked nice to me. You could at least do the same for him.

Tyree releases an exasperated breath. She knows he's right. After a moment, she turns back to Marvin and speaks with whatever gentleness she can allow.

TYREE

You'll feel better soon.

ELI

Now tell him that you know how hard it must be for him to contemplate being left here all alone by his mother.

(she shoots him a look
of daggers)

So put it in your own words.

MARVIN

I wanna go home, mama. . . .

TYREE

Look . . . I can't take you home and let the police find you. I'll call for you some time, but for now, you gotta stay here. With your family. They can do more for you than I can, anyway.

MARVIN

They're your family, too. Why can't you stay with me?

TYREE
(a beat)
I just can't.

There is a pause. Marvin glances to Eli. We see that he appreciates Eli's efforts on his behalf.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN - EVENING

The family is gathered around a spaghetti supper.

Marvin, still wobbly from his drinking binge, has his head in his hand and is barely touching his food. Natty, though, is stabbing at the meatballs on Marvin's plate.

Eli and Sugar are seated together, eating their supper as if they were a duo of synchronised swimmers. They simultaneously dig their forks into their spaghetti, lean over their plates, insert their forks, chew the noodles partway into their mouths, bite off the rest, then lean back and continue chewing. They are unaware of the coincidence.

Marvin is now watching them.

MARVIN
(to Sugar)
Man, how can you chew when you
ain't got no teeth?

SUGAR
Got teef in my stomach. Like a
fish.

CUT TO:

INT. SUGAR'S AND NATTY'S (AND ELI'S) BEDROOM - EVENING

With the rest of the family at supper, Tyree is rummaging through the closet. She digs to the backmost corner and, beneath a pile of old blankets and forgotten clothing, comes up with a SMALL WOODEN BOX. She opens it and inside lays a ROCK -- a mean, ugly rock.

Next to the rock she places the gun that did the damage to Eli's arm. She closes the box and buries it back into the closet. She rises and turns to find --

-- Brother Big standing in the doorway, looking at her.

The two hold a look. In the B.G., we hear scattered VOICES coming from the kitchen. Brother Big then slowly raises his finger and points it at Tyree as if pointing a gun.

BROTHER BIG
 (softly)
 Bang, bang, little sister.

Tyree just stares at him, afraid to speak.

BROTHER BIG (cont'd)
 You best be gone from here fast as
 you came. Your very self sets to
 rainin' heartbreak on everyone you
 know.

And with that, Brother Big steps from the room, leaving Tyree
 just standing there. In the B.G. we hear VIOLA'S VOICE coming
 from the kitchen --

VIOLA'S VOICE (o.s.)
 Natty, I ain't tellin' you again
 to leave that boy's food alone!
 Now, Marvin, eat your supper; we
 can't be late.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Sugar is tying a necktie around Marvin's neck. Marvin notes the
 fact that the tie looks odd with his fishnet t-shirt.

MARVIN
 This don't match, do it?

SUGAR
 Lord ain't gonna object.

Then we hear raised VOICES coming from --

THE KITCHEN

-- where Viola and Tyree are in heated debate. Viola wears her
 best dress and pillbox hat. Tyree is still in her jeans.

TYREE
 I ain't goin', mama. I told you:
 I don't believe like you believe.

VIOLA
 Look, you wanna run outta here to-
 morrow, that's your business --
 but I want Marvin to see his mama
 set him one straight example! Now
 go get you into one of my dresses.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM - EVENING

Tyree enters, wearing one of her mother's paisley dresses. She tosses a large chequered sportcoat to Eli, who's sitting up in bed, thumbing through Sugar's Bible.

TYREE
Put this on.

ELI
I look horrible in plaid.

TYREE
Just put it on.

ELI
Why?

TYREE
'Cause you ain't stayin' here by yourself.

As Eli groans and closes The Bible, we --

CUT TO:

A FRAMED PORTRAIT OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

-- hanging on a wall, vibrating on its nail. And we hear MUSIC: a robust, driving beat.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. SEVEN SUN BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

It's a Baptist revival and the place is rocking. On a raised platform are TWO PIANO PLAYERS, middle-aged women, banging out the upbeat gospel\blues tune "Miracle Worker." A DEACON sings the lead, a SIX-MEMBER CHOIR wails the background praise to Jesus Christ, and wailing along with them is --

THE CONGREGATION

-- 120 PEOPLE, ten pews deep, swaying, sweating, singing to the ceiling and beyond. White palms on the ends of black arms reach and wave toward the heavens. Hand-held paper fans, adorned with the bust of Dr. King, flap like wild butterflies throughout the room.

AN ELDERLY DEACON

-- drops to his knees in a fit of grateful tears. ANOTHER DEACON helps him to his feet and escorts him out of the room.

ANGLE ON A PEW

The CAMERA PANS the sturdy wooden bench, where Viola is reeling,

the song being pulled out of her . . . where Sugar is humming and rocking slowly in his seat, eyes closed . . . where Natty is staring straight ahead, almost strangled by his tie . . . where Marvin is snoring softly, passed out from the Hot Damn . . . where Tyree is looking down, refusing to participate in the service . . .

. . . and where Eli is sticking out like a bright white thumb. He wears Sugar's chequered sportcoat and is craning his neck, looking around the room -- astounded.

ANGLE ON THE PULPIT

As the music comes to an end, the elderly and distinguished REV-EREND CARDELL W. GOODWINE steps up to address the congregation.

REV. GOODWINE

Praise Jesus for bringing us to this night's Revival. Now before we set to encouraging still more young people to step forward and accept the Lord Jesus Christ into they hearts, I want to recognize a visitor I see seated amongst us. Stand up, sir, and tell us about yourself.

The CAMERA SLAMS onto --

ELI

-- who's frozen in his seat. And the eyes of the congregation are on him. He takes a moment to glance around the room, as if at the Salem Witch Trials.

ELI

(to the reverend)

You're, uh . . . you're not talking to me by any slim chance, are you?

REV. GOODWINE

Yes, sir, I am.

Sugar leans over to Eli and raises his eyebrows. After a beat, Eli slowly rises to his feet and nods to the congregation.

ELI

. . . Hello there.

The CONGREGANTS return the greeting.

REV. GOODWINE

Tell us your name, sir, if you please.

ELI
 Uh . . . well . . . it's Eli.
 Zeal. Zeal, of course, being
 shortened from Zelacovsky, the
 "A" rearranged.

Tyree drops her head to her hand. She can't bear it.

REV. GOODWINE
 And what brings you to Tensas
 Parish, Mr. Zeal?

ELI
 Uh . . . well, I, uh . . . I took
 a cab. Actually, though, I'm, uh
 -- I'm visiting friends. . . .
 (sheepish)
 Listen, I hope it's all right
 that I came here tonight, seeing
 as I'm born Jewish and all --

TYREE
 (a sharp whisper)
 Will you sit down!

REV. GOODWINE
 We welcome one and all, Mr. Zeal,
 regardless of their denomination.

ELI
 Well, thank you. That's very kind
 of you. . . . And may I add that
 this is a very nice building you
 all have here.

CUT TO:

A STEEPLE - A WHITE CROSS AGAINST THE BLUE-BLACK SKY

The CAMERA CRANES DOWN and we see --

EXT. SEVEN SUN BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

The CHURCHGOERS pour out of the white clapboard, shoebox shaped
 building. Cars are parked at odd angles on the deep green turf.

While Tyree, Marvin, Sugar and Natty head to Tyree's taxicab --

-- Eli and Viola walk behind them. Despite the warm night, Eli
 is shivering -- shaken to his foundations by the revival exper-
 ience.

ELI
 Is this . . . is this like a
 regular part of your life?

VIOLA
 (with a chuckle)
 God know how to throw Hissself a
 time, don't he?

Then Little Gracie, dressed in her best, comes running up to Marvin.

GRACIE
 Yo, Marvin.

MARVIN
 S'up.

GRACIE
 You goin' to school on Monday or
 you gonna keep skippin'?

VIOLA
 Don't worry. He'll be there if I
 gotta deliver him in a box.

MARVIN
 (rolls his eyes, then
 turns to Gracie and plays
 it cool, referring to his
 tie and fishnet t-shirt)
 This is how we dress in D.C.

GRACIE
 Nice.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A lamp on the table burns a soft, yellow glow. Eli sits quietly in a chair while Viola tends to his arm with a fresh dressing.

VIOLA
 You're a quick healer.

ELI
 Nah, Sugar does it all. I just
 sit there and yawn.

While Viola continues to work on his arm, Eli holds a look on --

VIOLA'S HANDS

-- the leather-like skin, the lifelong scars.

BACK ON ELI AND VIOLA

Viola notices him watching her and releases her patented pass-the-time-of-day chuckle.

VIOLA
 They tell the story, don't they?
 These hands picked more cotton
 than the whole state of Looz'iana
 could ever wear on its back.

ELI
 You picked cotton?

VIOLA
 (proudly)
 Sure did.

ELI
 You mean like "cotton" cotton --
 like in a cotton field?

VIOLA
 Well, they wasn't always havin'
 machines, y'know. In my prime
 I'd pull as much as three hun'ret
 pounds a day. Tyree picked, too.
 So did Natty, Brother Big --

ELI
 (incredulous)
 Tyree picked cotton?!

VIOLA
 Raised on it. Good, hard work.

ELI
 (blown away)
 My God, who knew? I mean, she
 seems like such a . . . such a --

VIOLA
 Such a what?

ELI
 I don't know -- such a cab driver.

VIOLA
 Well, not always. We was all of
 us born out on Cypress Keys and
 lived there straight through till
 Tyree was 'bout ten. Then the
 fine and elder Mr. Crinkle helped
 us buy this house here in town.

Using her teeth, Viola tears a piece of adhesive tape from the
 roll and wraps it around Eli's arm.

Eli, moved by the ease and nobility of Viola's story, continues
 to watch as her hands work on his skin.

Then, after a very careful moment, Eli affectionately moves his hand to Viola's and places it on top. Viola's entire body goes stiff. There is a pause as their hands remain together. Then --

ELI

I, uh . . . I want to thank you
for everything. For letting me
stay here . . . for taking me to
church . . . for everything.

The two share a look. And a moment. A confused, impossible moment. Then --

VIOLA

I don't know who you are . . .
or why you're here . . . 'cept
to know that I shouldn't ask no
more about it.

Eli is silent. We MOVE IN on their joined hands and --

CUT TO:

TWO OTHER JOINED HANDS

-- Tyree's and Natty's.

ANOTHER ANGLE - EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Tyree and Natty are seated together on the steps. She holds his hand while he stares blankly into the night.

TYREE

Are you sure you don't remember
me, Natty?

NATTY

No, ma'am.

She pauses, takes a breath. Then --

TYREE

(with great difficulty)
Do you . . . do you remember when
you got hurt?

NATTY

I ain't hurt none, ma'am.

Tyree looks off. There is a long, quiet beat. Then Natty, almost accidentally, adds --

NATTY (cont'd)

Others is.

TYREE
 (turning back to him)
 What? What do you mean?

NATTY
 (shy)
 I 'own know.

TYREE
 (gently)
 Come on, Natty. What do you mean
 others are hurt? Who's hurt?

There is a pause as Natty struggles for the thought. Finally,
 all he can say is --

NATTY
 Worms.

Then Viola comes through the screen door with Eli trailing
 behind her.

VIOLA
 Let's go, Natty, time for bed, son.

Natty looks at his hand. Tyree releases it. He rises and goes
 inside. Viola gazes off into the night.

VIOLA
 Brother Big's off somewhere with
 his bottle, I s'pose. . . .

There is a pause. Eli stands quietly by the door. Viola turns
 to Tyree.

VIOLA (cont'd)
 Listen, I want you to know . . .
 for when you goes off tomorrow
 and don't come back . . . that me
 and Sugar, we'll take good care of
 Marvin. We'll see that he gets
 his education . . . and that he
 keeps off the hard stuff.

TYREE
 Thanks, mama.

VIOLA
 Okay, well . . . sleep tight, y'all.

Viola goes into the house, the screen door closing behind her.

And Tyree and Eli are alone. Tyree lights a cigarette and just
 stares into the night. Eli watches a MOTH square dance around
 the porch light. There is a long silence, until --

ELI
So tomorrow it is, hunh?

TYREE
Mm-hm.

ELI
(a beat)
What happens when we get back?

TYREE
I don't know.

ELI
The police'll probably wanna know
where I've been.

TYREE
Probably.

ELI
So what'll I tell them?

TYREE
(releasing a deep breath)
I guess you'll tell 'em whatever
you want. Lord knows ain't no one
can stop you from talkin'.

ELI
Didn't think about that when you
kidnapped me, did you?

TYREE
Can't think of everything. . . .

There is a pause. Eli takes a deep breath of the night and
releases a long, philosophical sigh.

ELI
I guess the Lord makes up all
kinds of burdens for us and then
we function any way we can in
order stave off the burdens that
are also functioning. . . .

Tyree just continues to gaze silently outward. Eli goes into
the house.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sugar is asleep on the floor, Natty is asleep in his bed --
again, fitfully -- and Marvin is in the other bed, awake and
staring upward. Eli enters and crawls into bed next to Marvin.

ELI
You brush your teeth?

MARVIN
Yeah.

ELI
Good. And I hope you used that
up and down motion we discussed
-- because side to side doesn't
dislodge the most vital, gumline
plaque.

Eli fluffs his pillow and nestles in. Then --

MARVIN
(gently)
Yo, mook?

ELI
What.

MARVIN
You goin' back tomorrow, too?

ELI
(a beat)
I got a store to run. . . .

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

-- where Tyree is still seated by herself. She crushes her
cigarette . . . and eyes her taxicab.

CUT TO:

EXT. A TWO-LANE ROAD - NIGHT

The full moon and galaxy of stars reflect off the rows upon rows
of ripe cotton. We recognize the road as the one that leads to
Cypress Keys Plantation.

Tyree's cab drives into FRAME and takes a turn in front of the
weatherbeaten wood sign that bears the Crinkle family name.

EXT. CYPRESS KEYS PLANTATION - NIGHT

Adjacent to the cotton fields, in a grove of ancient pecan
trees, is a two-story abandoned plantation house, circa 1860.
Near the house is a rickety barn, a tractor shed, and the
remains of a grass tennis court. One can almost imagine a
blazing afternoon in the 1920's when affluent plantation owners
passed the time with mint juleps and a little sport.

Tyree's cab rolls to a stop near the tractor shed -- where Crinkle's Cutlass is also parked. She steps out of the cab.

CLOSE ON TYREE

She looks around. A thousand emotions play across her face.

CUT TO:

A BEAGLE

-- running full speed, chasing a rabbit from the cotton, HOWLING as he goes.

ANOTHER ANGLE - EXT. THE REAR OF THE PLANTATION HOUSE - NIGHT

Crinkle stands on a ridge overlooking the cotton field. In the distance we hear the dogs SINGING in the night. Suddenly, he senses something and turns to find --

TYREE

-- standing twenty feet behind him.

ANOTHER ANGLE - ON TYREE AND CRINKLE

TOM CRINKLE

Tyree -- my God, you 'bout scared me to death. You're the last one I expected to see.

TYREE

And who did you expect to see?

TOM CRINKLE

Uh . . . well, no one. It was just a figure of speech. But I'm glad you came. I mean, the way you wouldn't even talk to me this afternoon, I don't know what.

Tyree pauses, then steps to the ridge and surveys the cotton.

TYREE

This all yours now?

TOM CRINKLE

Nah, I just run it for my folks. They've taken to travel the last coupla years, so they leave me with all the work.

TYREE

But you will own it all one day, ain't that right?

TOM CRINKLE
 (shrugging)
 Yeah, I guess.

TYREE
 So for now, you just own my mama
 and Brother Big.

TOM CRINKLE
 (a beat; truly confused)
 What?

TYREE
 (with quiet fire)
 You keep away from my family,
 understand?

TOM CRINKLE
 Tyree, what the hell're you
 talkin' about -- ?

TYREE
 They don't need your money!

TOM CRINKLE
 They need jobs, for Christ's sake,
 and they got 'em!

TYREE
 Well, they quit their jobs!

TOM CRINKLE
 (with a laugh)
 Oh, bullshit -- y'all've worked
 for my family forever.

And with that, Tyree lunges at him, fists flying. He blocks her assault and grabs her by the shoulders.

TYREE
 Get your hands off me!

TOM CRINKLE
 Tyree --!

TYREE
 You already put the hurt on us!

TOM CRINKLE
 (shaking her)
 You don't mean that!

CLOSE ON TYREE

She doesn't know what she means. Crinkle stops shaking her,

and, oddly enough, she makes no further attempt to escape his grasp. She just stands there, looking into his eyes, full of rage . . . and fear . . . and something else: strange as it might seem, perhaps even love.

CLOSE ON CRINKLE

He holds his look on her, then softly, genuinely, he says --

TOM CRINKLE
I wish things coulda been dif-
ferent, Tyree. . . .

Tyree holds a dazed look on him, her throat gripping against itself. As the CAMERA CLOSES IN on her, we --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY - MANY YEARS AGO

In this flash from the past, YOUNG TYREE and YOUNG TOM CRINKLE, both 16 years old, are running gaily through the field, toward one of the OLD TATTERED SHACKS on the horizon. These shacks are the old tenant farmhouses.

INT. TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

This one-room shell of a former home was once home to an entire family: Tyree's. Abandoned now, weeds grow up through the floorboards, and only a few decrepit furnishings remain.

Young Tyree and Young Crinkle enter. They're alone in the darkened confines -- the perfect place for clandestine lovers. They fall instantly into each other's arms, speaking breathlessly through their kisses.

YOUNG TYREE
I love you, Tom Crinkle.

YOUNG TOM CRINKLE
And I --
(strong kisses)
-- I love you, Tyree.

We HOLD on them a moment, then --

CUT BACK TO:

THE PRESENT - EXT. THE REAR OF THE PLANTATION HOUSE - NIGHT
-- where Crinkle is still holding Tyree by the shoulders.

Suddenly, WHAM! Tyree's hand flies across his face, leaving fingernail scratches and thin trails of blood on his cheek.

Tyree takes off running. And Crinkle just watches her go.

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE PLANTATION HOUSE - NIGHT

Tyree jumps into her cab, hits the ignition and the headlights, whips a wide U-turn and drives the dirt road off the property.

CUT TO:

INT. NATTY'S AND SUGAR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sugar and Eli are asleep amidst a duet of SNORES. But Marvin is awake -- and he's watching Natty stir in his sleep.

Suddenly, Natty sits bolt upright. Then slowly and quietly he rises from bed.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SIDE OF VIOLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Natty climbs out of the window and pads off into the night. After a moment, Marvin's face pops up in the window.

CUT TO:

EXT. A WATERPROOF STREET - NIGHT

Natty walks down the street. As he moves out of FRAME, the CAMERA ADJUSTS to find Marvin quietly following him.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANOTHER WATERPROOF STREET - NIGHT

Natty keeps moving forward, as if pulled by a chain around his chest -- going where the muse forces.

Marvin follows a safe distance behind.

Natty then turns off the street and climbs THE LEVEE, the lush, green-grassed, twenty-five foot rise of land that separates the town from --

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BEDS

At certain times of the year, the river is flowing. But now, the tide is low, having left behind various inlets and ponds.

Natty marches down the hill to the water's edge.

MARVIN

-- crawls on his belly to the top of the levee and watches --

NATTY

. . . descend into the water.

CUT TO:

SHARP ANGLES IN THE WATER

Natty is splashing about. These SHOTS are clearly reminiscent of the earlier pictures of the unidentified man in the water.

And it's not for pleasure that Natty comes to the river. He seems to be dunking himself -- as if trying to exorcise some demon -- or trying to comprehend some demon. It's his own, quiet, personal baptism.

The CAMERA then TURNS from the water and finds --

A NEARBY GROVE OF TREES

-- where Brother Big, seen earlier in this spot, is seated on a downed tree limb, slugging his Hot Damn and keeping his silent, secret watch over his brother.

ANGLE ON THE WATER

Unaware of Brother Big's proximity, Marvin, mesmerized and drawing quietly closer to the shore, watches Natty splash about. Suddenly --

-- Natty stops splashing and stands upright in the waist-high pond. He turns to look at Marvin.

They stand in silence, staring at one another. Marvin is five feet from the shore. Natty is ten feet into the water.

MARVIN

(after a beat)

Man, what you doin'?

Instead of answering, Natty wades through the water toward Marvin.

ANGLE ON BROTHER BIG

Alerted now to Marvin's presence, he's on his feet, hidden behind a tree, watching it all.

BACK ON MARVIN AND NATTY

Natty extends his hand for Marvin to take. Marvin looks at him like he's nuts.

MARVIN

Unh-unh -- no, thanks.

Natty's hand is still out, his face blank.

MARVIN (cont'd)
 Man, don't you speak English?
 I said no.

And with that, Natty's hand lands on Marvin's shoulder. Marvin tries to run, but Natty's large arms scoop him up.

MARVIN
 (kicking, squirming)
 Get off me!

While Natty carries him to the water, Marvin is wriggling and screaming and trying to escape.

MARVIN (cont'd)
 I can't swim!

NATTY
 (softly, to himself)
 Ain't no swimmin'.

And with that -- POW! Natty plunges Marvin under the water.

ANGLE ON BROTHER BIG

He's still standing behind the tree -- but now a look of concern is ground into his face.

BACK ON NATTY AND MARVIN

Marvin is still under the water. As Natty brings him up, Marvin, panicked, gulping for air and swallowing water, struggles for dear life against the bigger man's stoic strength.

Then, just as Natty plunges him under again --

-- Brother Big grabs Natty from behind, pinning his arms to his side.

BROTHER BIG
 Stop it!

Wrapped in Brother Big's arms, Natty bucks and brays like a trapped animal. While Brother Big rides Natty's back, Marvin, freed now, is fighting for his sea legs.

BROTHER BIG (cont'd)
 (to Marvin)
 Get outta here, boy! Go on!
 (Natty continues to
 buck)
 Stop it, goddamnit!

Finally, Marvin gets his footing -- and he's clutching a BROKEN BOARD -- an old 2-by-4 that he's picked up from the bottom of the pond.

Face painted with tears, Marvin takes a wild swing at Brother Big and Natty, who are still clamped together. Brother Big ducks, taking Natty with him.

BROTHER BIG
Quit it, goddamnit!

But Marvin swings again. And the Battle Brothers duck again.

Marvin takes yet another swing -- a fierce, aimed swing. If he were swinging at a baseball, he'd have a solid line drive.

But, this time, Brother Big sees the board coming. Reacting in an instant, he throws Natty into the water and reaches out with --

HIS HAND

-- and catches the board. The wood SMACKS! into his palm. It's a painful, grisly sound.

PROFILE SHOT - ON BROTHER BIG AND MARVIN

They stand staring at one another, each holding onto one end of the board. There is a beat of stillness -- of life suspended.

Then, suddenly, with all his might, Brother Big YANKS the board from Marvin's hands. The force of the pull propels the board out of control. It whips 180 degrees around and --

IN SLOW MOTION

-- Natty is climbing to his feet from being thrown into the water. And the board CRACKS him in the head.

RESUME FULL SPEED

As Natty falls face down into the water, Brother Big stands frozen, shock and guilt flooding his face.

Marvin, meantime, scurries to the shore and takes off running.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - NIGHT

Tyree is driving the road along the levee. Suddenly --

MARVIN

-- darts in front of the cab, through the headlights.

TYREE

-- hits the brakes.

MARVIN

-- stops in his tracks. The cab grinds to a stop, two feet from his knees.

And before Tyree, whose heart is pounding, can manage a sound, Marvin, terrified and dripping wet, cries out --

MARVIN

Your crazy brother tried to kill
me!

Tyree looks to her right, sees the levee and knows the river is on the other side.

Marvin starts to run. Tyree jumps out of her cab.

TYREE

Marvin! WAIT!

VARIOUS ANGLES

Marvin runs around a tree -- Tyree follows -- Marvin shoots through a neighboring yard -- Tyree follows.

CLOSE ON TYREE

Running . . . running . . . she reaches out a hand and . . . snatches Marvin's collar.

ANGLE ON THE GROUND

Tyree and Marvin hit the turf and roll on the ground, wrestling.

TYREE

What happened?! Are you okay?!

But Marvin squirms from her grasp, gets to his feet and stands over her, screaming with every ounce of his little soul --

MARVIN

How can you leave me here, mama!?
Do you want to get rid of me that
bad!?

The words hit her right between the eyes. And she just holds a look on Marvin as he runs off into the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LEVEE - NIGHT

Tyree climbs to the top of the hill. All is quiet in the river beds, no trace of either Brother Big or Natty.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marvin slams into the darkened house, where all are asleep.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON VIOLA'S SLEEPING FACE

Her eyes are closed, her breathing steady. Then, in the B.G., we hear the booming voice of ARSENIO HALL. Viola's eyes pop open.

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Viola enters in her robe. The only light is the harsh, metallic shimmer of the television screen. Viola finds Marvin seated on the couch, remote control in hand, staring blankly at the grinning face and blaring VOICE of Arsenio Hall.

VIOLA
(yelling over the sound)
Boy, what in the Lord's name are
you doin'?!

Marvin keeps his eyes fixed straight ahead on the television screen.

Viola scoots to the set and snaps it off. As soon as the screen goes dark -- click! -- Arsenio roars back to life.

VIOLA
Don't you be foolin' with me.
It's far too late at night!

Again, Viola turns off the T.V. And now Eli and Sugar enter the room to see what's going on.

VIOLA
(still to Marvin)
Lord have mercy, boy, what you
think you're doin', wakin' up this
entire household?
(no response)
Don't make me raise my hand to
you!

Marvin is silent and solemn and looking at no one.

And Viola takes off toward him, hand raised, about to slap him to Kingdomcome. Just as she's about to lower the boom --

ELI

Stop!

And she does. She stands there, hand raised over Marvin who seems willing to simply take the abuse.

Viola turns to look at Eli. His one word was enough. Viola lowers her hand to her side. Then Marvin looks up at her and --

MARVIN

(softly, simply)

I shot him with a gun. That's why we come down here. Not 'cause no one knows to love no one else.

There is dead silence. Unable to believe her ears, Viola looks at Eli, searching his face for the truth.

Eli releases a breath and looks to the floor.

Marvin tosses the remote on the table -- it knocks into a few of the framed photographs. He rises and goes into the bedroom.

Viola and Eli and Sugar are left standing in silence. Then Eli, head down, moves off toward the bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marvin is seated on his bed, cold and shaking, scared and empty.

Eli enters, holds a look on him, then moves to the closet. He opens the door and roots around for an extra blanket. As he pulls it out, he discovers --

-- Tyree's secret wooden box. Eli holds a look on the box, then picks it up and opens it. Inside lays the ROCK we saw earlier, as well as the gun that did the damage to his arm.

Eli holds a curious look on the rock and the gun, then closes the box and keeps it with him. He moves to Marvin, wraps the blanket around the boy's shoulders and sits down next to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE COTTON FIELD - NIGHT

Lit by the moon, Brother Big, carrying a whimpering Natty in his arms, walks over the soon-to-be-harvested crops, toward one of the abandoned tenant farmhouses.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Viola and Sugar are seated in silence at the table. Sugar nurses a glass of milk, while Viola stares into an untouched cup of tea.

After a moment, we hear Tyree's cab pull into the front yard and the driver's side door open and close.

Tyree comes through the front screen door and steps into the kitchen. She stands in the doorway and looks at her mother.

Viola keeps her eyes in her teacup. She seems oddly subdued and disconnected. There is a silence, then --

VIOLA
(with no eye contact)
Natty ain't in his bed.

Pause. Tyree is silent.

VIOLA (cont'd)
Any notion where he went?

TYREE
Uh . . . I don't know . . . maybe
he's out with Brother Big -- I
don't know.

Viola rises and clears her teacup from the table. She chuckles softly to herself, a chuckle laced with pain.

VIOLA
So I guess guns'll teach you 'bout
raisin' a child in the city.

Tyree closes her eyes. For the longest moment she says nothing. Because nothing will do. Finally --

TYREE
It was an accident, mama.

VIOLA
(a beat)
Yeah, well . . . no bother. I
learn't a long time ago, ain't no
way to protect a child who's gonna
get hurt. . . .

Viola sets her teacup in the sink and turns on the water.

Tyree looks to Sugar. He sits in silence, stirring a table-spoon of sugar into his milk.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

With Marvin asleep, Eli is seated on the edge of the bed, softly stroking the boy's shoulder.

Tyree enters and moves directly to the closet. Despite the increasing levels of emotion, Tyree and Eli speak in whispers,

TYREE

Come on. We're gettin' outta here.

ELI

But Marvin's asleep.

TYREE

Let him stay that way. Let's go.

ELI

What about my sunrises?

TYREE

The sun rises the same here as
anywhere!

Tyree opens the closet door and begins digging around. Eli glances at Marvin, then turns back to Tyree.

ELI

Have you thought about what you're
gonna do when you get back to D.C.
and have to come up with the two
thousand dollars for this little
cab ride I'm supposed to've hired
you for?

TYREE

What do you care?!

ELI

I'm curious.

TYREE

Jesus, why couldn't Marvin have
shot a normal person?! You're
supposed to want to go back! You
been kidnapped, remember?!

She continues to dig through the closet, ripping it apart, unable to find what she wants. Eli sits there watching her a moment, then --

ELI

Suit yourself. But as soon as
we get back, I'm gonna call the
(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)
 police. And I'm gonna tell them
 what happened. And I'm gonna tell
 them exactly where Marvin is. And
 I'm gonna press charges.

Tyree stops digging and looks at him. He's finally got her
 attention.

TYREE
 You piece of shit.

ELI
 What did you expect, that I was
 gonna forget everything?

TYREE
 But your arm's okay -- there's no
 harm done!

Eli begins to smile and shake his head.

TYREE (cont'd)
 What the hell's so funny?!

ELI
 Come on, Tyree . . . level with
 me, hunh? what's the real reason
 you came back here?

TYREE
 (a beat, taken aback)
 What?

ELI
 You heard me. Why'd you come back
 here?

TYREE
 I told you why -- because I
 thought it was safe for him!

ELI
 I don't buy it.

TYREE
 Well, I ain't sellin' it!

ELI
 You want to know what I think your
 reason was?

TYREE
 No, I do not.

ELI

See, I think the reason you came back was because of something inside of you. You've obviously got something to settle, and, whatever it is, it's the thing that keeps you running away all the time.

TYREE

Man, will you shut the fuck up and put your shoes on!

As Tyree turns again to the closet, Eli produces her secret wooden box.

ELI

Looking for this?

Tyree turns and looks at the box. There is a silence, then --

ELI (cont'd)

Go ahead, take it. Seems like there might be something pretty important in there.

But Tyree just stares at it. And she's weary -- weary of it all. And like a balloon losing its air, Tyree loses her fight. It's just plain gone.

Ever so slowly, she takes the box from Eli and stands holding it. She opens it like a lost little girl, revealing the rock and the handgun. Then, as if the very words were poison --

TYREE

(ever so softly)

It was my fault. . . .

ELI

What was?

TYREE

(silence, then --)

. . . I hurt Natty.

ELI

(a stunned beat; then gently)

How?

TYREE

(almost inaudibly)

By falling in love . . .

(a difficult pause)

. . . with Tom Crinkle.

We HOLD CLOSE on Tyree, then --

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE IN THE MIDDLE OF COTTON FIELD - NIGHT

The moonlight soaks into the old wood planks of the porch. As the CAMERA begins to PUSH SLOWLY CLOSER to the front door, we hear TYREE'S VOICEOVER.

TYREE'S V.O.
We grew up together. We knew all
there was to know about each
other. . . .

With the CAMERA still approaching the front door, the scene now DISSOLVES to --

EXT. THE SAME HOUSE - DAYTIME - MANY YEARS AGO

-- the CAMERA continuing to MOVE IN on the front door.

TYREE'S V.O. (cont'd)
We even loved each other. . . .
(a beat)
But the love was wrong.

The CAMERA now goes --

INSIDE THE HOUSE

-- where YOUNG TYREE and YOUNG TOM CRINKLE, both 16 years old, are wrapped together, kissing, in each other's arms. This is the continuation of the first FLASHBACK we saw earlier.

TYREE'S V.O. (cont'd)
And we didn't know how wrong the
love was until Brother Big found
us.

YOUNG BROTHER BIG, about twenty years old, enters the house. He sees Tyree and Crinkle embracing one another and barrels toward Tyree. He grabs her and whips her around to face him.

YOUNG BROTHER BIG
Are you crazy!!!

YOUNG TOM CRINKLE
Big --!

Brother Big backhands Tyree in the face. She flies to the floor. He picks her up. She struggles in his grasp.

YOUNG TOM CRINKLE
Leave her alone!

But Brother Big hits her again -- this time, flat on the cheek with a closed fist.

As Tyree goes down, Crinkle jumps on Brother Big's back. But Big just throws Crinkle off and goes after Tyree again.

YOUNG BROTHER BIG
I'monna kill you 'fore mama does!

And just as he is about to grab Tyree --

-- Crinkle picks up an old, dusty soda bottle and smacks Brother Big in the back. The glass shatters and cuts through Big's shirt and his skin. The blood flows.

Brother Big turns to Crinkle and, like a skewered bull, takes off after him.

YOUNG TYREE
(still on the floor)
Stop it, Big! He didn't mean nothin'!

Crinkle runs for his life.

EXT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Crinkle blows out of the house and into the cotton field.

Brother Big, blood pouring from his back, comes out of the house and gives chase. And if he catches Crinkle, he'll kill him. Nearby, however --

-- YOUNG NATTY is working in the field.

YOUNG BROTHER BIG
(calling)
Get 'im, Natty!

Natty, spirited and healthy, responds to his brother's call and takes off toward Brother Big and Crinkle. Meantime --

YOUNG TYREE

-- comes out onto the porch. She looks to the floor and sees a ROCK. Running on adrenaline, she picks up the rock and flings it in the direction of Brother Big and Crinkle.

The rock is thrown at no one in particular -- just at the situation. And it's not meant to cause harm, it's only meant to stop it all. But --

THE ROCK

-- flies through the air and catches --

YOUNG NATTY

-- in the back of the head. Natty goes down, stunned and silent.

WIDE ANGLE - ON THE COTTON FIELD

Brother Big stops in his tracks -- then runs to Natty.

Crinkle just hightails it away.

And Tyree tears off the porch to join Brother Big, who, bleeding from the back, is bending down over the motionless Natty.

As we HOLD on this tableau, TYREE'S VOICEOVER returns.

TYREE'S VOICE (cont'd)
Big decided to tell mama that he
did it -- that he got wild and
whooped Natty's brains out. He
wouldn't let me tell her the
truth. If she found out about me
and Crinkle, he said, then there
wouldn't be any way to live. . . .

The scene now DISSOLVES SLOWLY back to:

EXT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - NIGHT - THE PRESENT

With the CAMERA still PUSHING IN on the front door, we go --

INSIDE THE TENANT FARMHOUSE

-- where Brother Big and Natty are seated on the floor. Brother Big is barechested, shaking almost out of control, cradling Natty and wrapping his shirt around Natty's injured head.

TYREE'S VOICE (cont'd)
So he's been swallowin' the lie
and takin' the blame from mama
ever since. . . .

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tyree, having finished her story, stands holding the rock in her hand. Marvin continues to sleep soundly in the bed.

ELI
(after a beat)
And so you left home.

TYREE
You bet your ass, I did.

ELI

But . . . My God, Tyree . . . you
can't blame yourself for falling
in love. Loving someone is the
best thing a person can do.

TYREE

He was white!

ELI

So what?

TYREE

Man, ain't you learned nothin'
since bein' down here?!

ELI

Plenty. Why?

TYREE

JESUS CHRIST, I THREW THE ROCK,
DIDN'T I!?

ELI

So what? David flung a rock, too.
He just had a more specific Goliath.

TYREE

Man, that is such bullshit! All
them stories are bullshit! I will
never believe in God again -- be-
cause, no matter how hard you
believe, people still get hurt!

ELI

Yeah, well, maybe that's the point.
Maybe you gotta hurt before you
can heal.

TYREE

Man, you sound like one of them
slick-haired, lyin' motherfuckers,
sellin' God on T.V.! You don't
know a goddamn thing about what
you're sayin'!

ELI

(angry now)

You listen to me, you foul-mouthed,
bitter creature! I, frankly, don't
care whether you live or die --
but I do care about your mother
and Sugar! They have treated me
better than I've ever been treated
in my entire life! And --

TYREE

Man, you are a fool! They treat you good 'cause they're scared of you. 'Cause you're white!

ELI

(with all his power)

YOU ARE WRONG -- DEAD WRONG! You may need to fill your head with lies like that so you can keep running away -- but your mother deserves to know the truth about what happened to Natty! And --
(pointing to Marvin)
-- he deserves to know, too!

Marvin, through all of this, remains sleeping like the child he is.

ELI (cont'd)

(trembling; near tears)

He deserves to know that love -- as wrong as you might think it is -- is at least possible! And that it doesn't always cause harm! He didn't want to shoot me -- I saw it in his eyes! He doesn't want to do a lot of the things he does! But if he's gonna straighten up, he's gonna need your guidance! And he'll never get it as long as you keep turning from the truth! So for his sake, you better make peace with someone before you leave here! Because tucking away all your pain into a little wooden box isn't gonna solve anything!

TYREE

Shit, what do you know about pain! You grew up white!

ELI

Yeah, white and Jewish! Black people don't have the corner on the world's problems -- read your goddamn history!

Eli is shaking. He's probably just cursed for the first time in his life. His hand flies to his face to wipe the tears before they start to run.

Tyree, unmoved, blasts out of the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Sugar is seated in his rocking chair, gazing at the night and rambling to himself.

SUGAR

. . . Then all of a sudden, I looks up an' seen him standin' there, plain as could be -- the devil hisself. An' he say to me, "You seems frightened to see me, Sugar." An' I say, "Yessir, I am."

Tyree storms out of the house and heads directly to her cab.

SUGAR (cont'd)

Then, 'fore I knew what else, he takes his big red eyes an' sharp, whittled mouth, an' he looks at me an' he say, "What you gonna do, Shug?" An' I say, kindly as I could, "Well, sir, I s'pose I'm just gonna hafta take you out."

Tyree's cab roars to a start and drives off.

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSTATE 20 IN LOUISIANA - HIGH ANGLE - NIGHT

Eight lanes of interstate truckers make their nighttime runs. After a moment, we see Tyree's cab join them, heading east.

INT. TYREE'S CAB - NIGHT

Tyree drives toward the Mississippi River Bridge -- heading for the state of Mississippi . . . back toward D.C.

CLOSE ON TYREE

The approaching bridge shines in her eyes. She clicks on her radio, hoping for distraction. But GOSPEL MUSIC blares and she shuts it off.

The silence is excruciating. Finally, she POUNDS her fist on the steering wheel and --

EXT. ANGLE ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BRIDGE - NIGHT

Tyree slows down before the bridge, makes a U-turn over the highway's median strip and heads back toward Waterproof.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sugar is gone from the porch. The house is dark. Tyree's cab pulls into the yard. The engine shuts off, the headlights go black, and Tyree just sits there.

And sits there. . . .

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WATERPROOF - DAWN

A WHITE CRANE skims the surface of a lake and divebombs for its breakfast.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT YARD - DAWN

Tyree is asleep in the front seat of the cab, where's she's been all night.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BACK PORCH - DAWN

Sugar is in his rocking chair. Eli is seated on the lip of the porch, facing east. Natty, for the first time, is not there.

After a moment, Marvin steps onto the porch, rubbing his fists in his eyes. He sits down next to Eli.

MARVIN

Man, I had some crazy dreams last night.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAWN

Viola, after a troubled night's sleep, is on the phone, pacing and worried.

VIOLA

(into phone)

Yessir, he could be with his brother, 'ceptin' I don't know where his brother goes.

CUT TO:

EXT. CYPRESS KEYS PLANTATION - DAWN

The workday is gearing up. WORKERS man their harvesters.

Crinkle, with Tyree's fingernail scratches on his cheek from the night before, is talking with his FOREMAN.

TOM CRINKLE
Well, then get someone else. We
can't be waitin' around for no
goddamn cotton tromper.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANGLE IN THE COTTON FIELD - MORNING

Crinkle, in his Cutlass, drives the narrow travelway through the rows of cotton.

He looks out of his window and sees several DOWNED COTTON PLANTS. A path, it seems, has been tromped from the road to the old tenant farmhouse.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE OLD TENANT FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Crinkle pulls up in front and gets out of his car.

INT. THE OLD TENANT FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Brother Big is seated on the floor, barechested and glistening with sweat. His breathing his hard, his eyes are shining white; he's been awake all night.

Natty is curled in the corner, asleep. Brother Big's shirt is wrapped around his head.

Crinkle enters the house and stops in his tracks, surprised to see the Battle Brothers.

TOM CRINKLE
Big. What're you doin'?

Brother Big says nothing. Crinkle looks to Natty, then turns back to Brother Big.

TOM CRINKLE (cont'd)
What the hell's goin' on? Is he
all right?

Brother Big continues to stare flatly ahead.

Natty now stirs in his sleep. Crinkle sees the blood that has seeped through Natty's makeshift turban.

TOM CRINKLE (cont'd)
(moving to Natty)
Christ, what the hell happened?!

BROTHER BIG
 (scurrying across the
 floor like an animal)
 Move away!

Crinkle steps back, on guard.

TOM CRINKLE
 He's hurt, goddamnit -- ain't you
 gonna take care of it?

BROTHER BIG
 (eyes of ice)
 I am takin' care of it.

Crinkle holds a look on Brother Big, whose perspiration is now falling from his body, and who is clearly not to be further riled.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Eli, Marvin and Sugar are seated at the table. Breakfast is served, but Eli isn't eating. He just watches Viola from the corner of his eye as she keeps herself busy at the stove and at the sink.

After a moment, Tyree comes in the front screen door, ragged from a hard night's sleep behind the wheel.

TYREE
 Natty come home yet?

VIOLA
 (no eye contact)
 No. I called the police to find
 him.

Tyree takes Marvin by the hand and pulls him with her.

MARVIN
 Ow! Man, you're breakin' my arm!

CUT TO:

INT. THE BATHROOM - MORNING

Tyree enters with Marvin. She closes the door, sits him down on the closed toilet seat, and turns on the water in the shower to cover their voices.

TYREE
 Okay, boy, now you better tell me
 (MORE)

TYREE (cont'd)
what happened last night. And if
you think I'm in the mood to be
lied to, then just look into these
eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT YARD - MORNING

Crinkle's Cutlass turns into the yard and comes to a stop on the
grass.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE BATHROOM - MORNING

-- where Tyree is listening intently as Marvin finishes up the
story of last night.

MARVIN
. . . And then I ran as fast as
I could! I never saw where they
went, mama -- and I didn't hit him
-- I swear -- Brother Big did!

There is a pause. Tyree releases a long, sorrowful breath.

MARVIN (cont'd)
You believe me, don'tcha?

TYREE
Yeah, I believe you. . . .

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S HALLWAY - MORNING

Crinkle knocks on the screen door. Viola, from the kitchen,
runs to answer it.

VIOLA
Oh. Mr. Crinkle. I thought you
was gonna be the police. They
lookin' for Natty. I --

TOM CRINKLE
(coming in)
Yeah, yeah, it's okay, Viola.

VIOLA
What -- you seen him? Where is
he?

Just then, Tyree and Marvin come from the bathroom. Tyree stops

cold at the sight of Crinkle. He glances at her, then goes back to Viola, doing his best to act naturally -- even going so far as to lie.

TOM CRINKLE

He's okay, Viola -- He's out at Cypress Keys with Brother Big.

VIOLA

He's what?

TOM CRINKLE

(working to put it on)
Yeah, can ya believe it? Big's teachin' him to tromp.

(forcing a chuckle)
Doin' pretty good, too. Seems to like it.

Crinkle glances at Tyree. Tyree holds stone still. Viola, relieved and proud, turns to Tyree.

VIOLA

Natty's becomin' a tromper!

TYREE

(faking an upbeat tone)
Great. Yeah -- great.

VIOLA

(back to Crinkle)
Come on -- drive me out to see him! I'll take him a bag lunch --

TOM CRINKLE

No, no, Viola. I, uh . . . I think he might get nervous if he thought his mama was out there checkin' on him. Let him get good at it first, then come.

VIOLA

You're right. I'll leave him be. I'll call and tell the police.
(taking Marvin's hand)
Come on, little one. You got eggs need eatin'.

As Viola and Marvin go into the kitchen, Crinkle and Tyree are left alone in the hallway. After a beat --

TOM CRINKLE

(stiffly)
Can I talk to you a minute?

CUT TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT YARD - MORNING

Crinkle and Tyree come out of the house. Tyree is on guard the whole way.

TYREE

Man, what kinda lies you tellin'
my mama?

TOM CRINKLE

Necessary ones. Brother Big's got
Natty out at your old house. And
he's asked me to come get you. So
you best find it in your heart to
come on.

CUT TO:

EXT. WASHINGTON, D.C. POLICE STATION - DAY

The two detectives we saw earlier in Eli's store get out of
their car with two of Marvin's GANG FRIENDS in tow.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

The kids are seated in chairs. One of them is talking.

GANG MEMBER

I ain't lyin', man, all I know is
I seen this kid Marvin shoot him.
Lives over on "T" Street.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Crinkle's Cutlass pulls up in front. Tyree's cab pulls up
behind it. Tyree gets out. Crinkle stays behind his wheel.

TOM CRINKLE

I'll wait here. I believe he'd
rather talk to you by himself.

Tyree holds a look on Crinkle, then steps to the porch of the
house.

INT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Tyree enters and sees --

-- Brother Big and Natty seated together on the floor.

TYREE

(stomach dropping)
Jesus Christ. . . .

As Brother Big rises and moves to her, we --

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Viola does the breakfast dishes. Her back is to Eli as he is seated alone at the table, running his finger around the rim of his coffee cup.

ELI
(after a long silence)
Listen . . . I'm sorry I didn't
tell you earlier about . . . you
know . . . about the shooting.

VIOLA
(cold)
Pay it no mind.

ELI
No, I shoulda --

VIOLA
(emphatic)
Pay it no mind, I said.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON TYREE

WHAM! Brother Big's hand flies into frame and bangs across her face.

ANOTHER ANGLE - INT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Natty is sitting on the floor, watching his brother take his sister apart.

And Tyree just absorbs the blows -- not crying, not fighting back. As she crawls to her feet --

-- WHAM! She goes down again.

BROTHER BIG
Now I want you to tell 'im what
happened! Tell him who hurt him!
Least he's gonna know about it!

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Crinkle is still in his car, listening to what he can only imagine is going on. As we hear the WHOOMP! of Tyree hitting the floor, Crinkle sits frozen -- frozen with his own rush of memory -- and pain -- of what occurred long ago.

Behind Crinkle, a cotton picker rolls over a row of cotton.

BACK IN THE TENANT FARMHOUSE

Severely bloodied, Tyree is still on the floor, still not crying and still not fighting back. Natty is watching, wide-eyed, as Brother Big stands towering over their sister.

BROTHER BIG

Tell him, goddamnit! And tell him
that as long as you was gone you
could forget about us!

TYREE

(pleading)

I never forgot about you! Maybe I
tried -- but I never did!

BROTHER BIG

(kick her in the ribs)

Tell him!

TYREE

Ow!

(crawls to Natty)

I did it, Natty -- I hurt you.

NATTY

(terrified)

I ain't hurt none, ma'am --

BROTHER BIG

Tell him again!

TYREE

HE DOESN'T FUCKING REMEMBER!

BROTHER BIG

Well, then you best do somethin'
so he does remember, else you
ain't gettin' outta here alive!

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S APARTMENT - DAY

The two detectives we saw grilling Marvin's gang friends are
searching the place. One of them goes into --

TYREE'S BEDROOM

-- and pulls open a few dresser drawers. He digs around and in
one of them he finds --

AN OLD WALLET

From one of the folds, the cop's HAND pulls out an old, expired LOUISIANA DRIVER'S LICENSE. It's got Tyree's picture on it and, of course, an address.

BACK ON THE COP

COP
(calls to the living room)
Here's something.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FRONT OF THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Tyree, bloodied and swollen, stumbles on the porch and goes to her cab.

Crinkle jumps out of his car, shocked by the sight of her.

TOM CRINKLE
Tyree --

TYREE
It's okay --

TOM CRINKLE
The hell it is! Look at you!

Tyree reaches into --

THE FRONT SEAT OF HER CAB

She grabs her secret wooden box, opens it and takes out the rock.

ANGLE ON TYREE AND CRINKLE

Rock in hand, Tyree turns to him.

TYREE
(weak as a pup)
Will you help me, Tom?

CUT TO:

INT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Crinkle, desperately uncomfortable and scared to death, stands close to Tyree in the middle of the floor. They are in a position reminiscent of their childhood embrace. Tyree holds the rock in her hand.

Brother Big stands back glaring, chest heaving.

Natty is on his feet now, watching as Tyree attempts to re-create the scene that caused his injury.

TYREE
 Okay, Natty, now listen. Me and Tom were standin' here like this.
 (Natty looks at Crinkle, trying to recognize him)
 And then Brother Big walked in the door and saw us. And he got mad, real mad. And then he started chasin' after Tom.
 (to Crinkle)
 Walk slow, but act like you're bein' chased.

Crinkle starts to walk out of the house.

TYREE (cont'd)
 (to Brother Big)
 Follow him.
 (Brother Big stands stiff)
 Follow him, goddamnit!

EXT. THE TENANT FARMHOUSE - DAY

Crinkle and Brother Big, attempting their re-enactment, come onto the porch. Tyree follows them out, the rock in one hand, Natty in the other.

TYREE
 Okay, now stop.

Crinkle and Brother Big freeze.

Tyree pulls Natty off the porch and walks him into the cotton field -- right to the spot where he was working lo those many years ago. She positions him by a cotton plant.

TYREE (cont'd)
 Now you were here, Natty -- pickin' cotton -- this was fifteen years ago, so think hard. You were workin' here and then you heard --

Tyree turns a look to Brother Big on the porch. He stands there with the spotlight on him. After a beat, he remembers his exact words from the incident.

BROTHER BIG
 "Get 'im, Natty!"

TYREE
 (right back to Natty)
 So you looked up and started
 runnin'.
 (to Crinkle and
 Brother Big)
 Go!

Crinkle and Brother Big run off the porch, Crinkle in the lead,
 Brother Big giving chase.

TYREE (cont'd)
 (pulling Natty toward them)
 -- And just as you were runnin'
 toward Brother Big -- EVERYONE
 STOP!

And they do. The positioning of Crinkle, Brother Big and Natty
 is, eerily, exactly as it was fifteen years ago.

The three stay frozen as Tyree moves alone back to the porch of
 the tenant farmhouse and acts out her part, narrating as she
 goes.

TYREE (cont'd)
 Then I came out, Natty -- and I
 was hurtin' -- and I didn't know
 what I was doin' -- so I picked up
 this rock --
 (displays the rock)
 -- and I threw it! And it came
 like this --

Rock palmed, Tyree runs from the porch, right toward Natty,
 simulating the rock's flight path.

TYREE (cont'd)
 And it hit you -- right here!

She touches the rock lightly to the back of his head.

NATTY
 (upset)
 Stop!

TYREE
 But that's how you got hurt!
 Don't you remember?!

There is not so much as a spark of remembrance in Natty's eyes.

Brother Big runs to him and starts to shake him.

BROTHER BIG
 Remember, goddamnit! Remember!

Tyree pulls Brother Big off of Natty.

TYREE

Leave him be! He can't remember!

Natty remains silent. Brother Big stands looking at him.

With her last drop of strength, Tyree hurls the rock into the distance. It's gone. Forever. Face swollen, blood dried, a broken woman, she turns to Brother Big.

TYREE

(drained)

When should I tell mama you'll be home?

BROTHER BIG

Soon as you're gone.

CUT TO:

INT. THE TENSAS PARISH POLICE DEPARTMENT - DAY

A nice-looking, deer-hunting COP is on the phone, jotting down information.

COP

Sure, I know the family. . . .
Well, I heard there was a visitor,
but I never met 'im. I'll check
it out and call you back after I
make the arrest.

CUT TO:

INT. VIOLA'S BEDROOM - LATE DAY

Sugar ties another of his ties around Marvin's neck.

INT. NATTY'S, SUGAR'S AND ELI'S BEDROOM - LATE DAY

Eli sits on the edge of his bed, feeling alone and out of place and wearing Sugar's chequered sportcoat.

INT. THE KITCHEN - LATE DAY

Viola sits at the table, wearing her paisley church dress and pillbox hat.

After a moment, Tyree, beat to shit, comes in the door. She tries to hide her face from her mother, but you may as well try to hide a Buick in your living room.

We CAMERA MOVES with Tyree as she takes off down the hall, and as Viola follows.

VIOLA
What in the Lord's name happened
to you?!

TYREE
Fell.

VIOLA
Where'd you fall, offa Mount
Ev'rets?

TYREE
I was out at Cypress Keys and fell
into the cistern out back a the
big house!

VIOLA
The cistern!

TYREE
Look, just forget it, okay?
Brother Big told me to tell you
that him 'n Natty gotta work late.

With Viola nipping at her heels, Tyree turns into --

INT. NATTY'S, SUGAR'S AND ELI'S BEDROOM - LATE DAY

-- where Eli is still seated on the bed.

ELI
(seeing Tyree's face)
Oy vey-is-mir!

VIOLA
(calling off)
Sugar, get some ice!

TYREE
No!

ELI
Put her on the porch!

TYREE
No! Now, look --

VIOLA
(loudly)
No, you look! Now I don't know
what other things you been keepin'
from me, but all this nonsense is
gonna end right now, you under-
stand me?! And if it don't, then
(MORE)

VIOLA (cont'd)
 ain't nobody -- not even Marvin --
 gonna stay down here!
 (deadly)
 Now what happened to your face!

Tyree says nothing. She just looks her mother dead in the eye.

Eli glances briefly at the two women.

Marvin and Sugar now come into the room and watch.

All are standing there in silence. Finally, Viola just gives up.

VIOLA
 Lord help you, girl. Lord help
 you. . . . You drive us to
 church, then pack up. Alla ya.

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - EVENING

Tyree drives in silence. Marvin, Sugar, Eli and Viola are loaded into the cab. They drive through Waterproof, where the sun is setting, the shadows are long, and the light is golden.

CUT TO:

INT. PARADISE BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

It's the final night of the Revival. The pianos, choir and congregation are in full swing, testing the limits of the walls. Viola, Sugar, Eli and Marvin are seated in a pew.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Tyree leans against the clapboard, by a window, smoking a cigarette.

BACK IN THE CHURCH

As the music ends, tonight's preacher, different from last night's, steps up in front of the congregation. Strap yourself in and get ready for REVEREND ROGER "ROVERDOG" FARRELL. Round and bald, he lives on a steady diet of vinegar and lightning.

Seated in front of the pulpit are several CHILDREN, ages eight to ten, wearing strips of white cloth tied around their heads.

REVEREND FARRELL
 First, let me thank the Reverend
 Goodwine for last night's Revival.
 (MORE)

REVEREND FARRELL (cont'd)
 I'm sure the Lord had Hissself a
 good night's sleep because of it.
 Now I know I don't have to remind
 ever'one that t'morra is our All-
 Saints Baptismal down at the bap-
 tising hole. So let me ask --

(voice booming)

WHO ELSE! Who else will step for-
 ward and offer his soul to our
 Saviour, The Lord Jesus Christ!
 We's already gots these good young
 folk up here, but the Lord needs
 more. The Lord huuuuuuungry --
 the Lord starvin'! And we can't
 be lettin' the Lord have no empty
 stomach, now can we?

CONGREGATION

No, sir! Unh-unh!

REVEREND FARRELL

'Specially not after He gives us
 all He do! Why, He be givin' like
 it's Christmas mornin' everyday!

ANGLE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Tyree crushes her cigarette . . . and she can't help but hear
 the PREACHER'S VOICE boom through the window.

REVEREND FARRELL (o.s.)

And on Christmas mornin', what do
 we find when we goes to our tree?
 Well, Lord have mercy, looky here!
 I found me some presents! Yes,
 sir, I'm rippin' off the wrappin'
 paper and I sees me a gift of
 HOPE! And a gift of PEACE! And a
 big ol' gift of RAPTURE!

BACK IN THE CHURCH

The reverend's words are being chanted now rather than spoken --
 almost sung. He is sweating, belting it out and whipping the
 congregation into a frenzy of salvation.

REVEREND FARRELL (cont'd)

Now who can tell me why the Lord
 be givin' us these gifts? Why do
 the Lord be actin' this way? It
 ain't 'cause He no fool, is it?

CONGREGATION

No sir! Lord a smart man!

REVEREND FARRELL

That's right! The Lord is a smart
-- and patient man! And He be
waitin' for you to come and join
Him in His gloooooorious walk.

CONGREGATION

Save me, Jesus! I'm walkin' with
ya, baby!

REVEREND FARRELL

And once you join hands with the
Almighty Lord, then where He be
takin' you? You know He's takin'
you somewhere special --

CONGREGATION

Unh-hunh --

REVEREND FARRELL

You know he's takin' you somewhere
nice --

CONGREGATION

Yessir -- hallelujah --

REVEREND FARRELL

Why, He's takin' you to The Provin'
Ball! That's right! You be all
dressed up and got the Lord as
your escort! And once you at The
Provin' Ball, you gonna see the
Lord proooooove His power, proooooove
His love! Have MERcy! He's gonna
walk over to the punch bowl and
pour Hissself a tall glass of your
sins and mortal shortcomin's! And
He'll drink it in! He'll drink
you in! He'll smack His lips and
say, "Mmmmm-mm! Pour me more!
We's at The Provin' Ball!"

ANGLE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Tyree eyes are fixed on the ground. Despite herself, she's
listening.

REVEREND FARRELL (o.s.)

Now I know that some of you, at
one time or another, has thought
that the Lord has failed you! But
you was WRONG! The Lord has never
failed you! And that's what The
Provin' Ball is all about! It's a
(MORE)

REVEREND FARRELL (cont'd) (o.s.)
 chance for you to see it again --
 with your own two eyes -- that the
 Lord is by your side! But if you
 want the ears to hear the jukebox,
 the feet to dance the hardwood, the
 hands to accept the door prize --
 then you gots to buy your ticket!

CONGREGATION (o.s.)
 Amen! Stand in line!

The CAMERA begins to MOVE CLOSER to Tyree. CLOSER and CLOSER.

REVEREND FARRELL (o.s.)
 And if you gonna ask the Lord to
 take your burdens -- to take your
 sins -- to take your lies -- then
 you gots to PROVE somethin' to
 Him, too! You gots to pay your
 dues -- with dollars of the heart!

The CAMERA is still MOVING CLOSER to Tyree, the preacher's words
 burrowing into her brain.

REVEREND FARRELL (cont'd) (o.s.)
 And I promise you that if you
 RECTIFY your sins, RECTIFY your
 lies, then the Lord -- praise
 Jesus -- is gonna REWARD you!

Ever so CLOSE now -- MICRO-CLOSEUP.

REVEREND FARRELL (cont'd) (o.s.)
 And you can't escape it -- no mat-
 ter how hard you run! Because --
 (a full chant now)
 -- the Lord looks into your heart!
 The Lord knows how you sin! And
 the Lord --

TYREE
 (to herself; softly)
 -- loves you in spite of it all.

REVEREND FARRELL (o.s.)
 -- loves you in spite of it all!

Tyree is electrified. She didn't know he was going to say that.

BACK IN THE CHURCH

The place is wild. People are out of their minds, on their feet
 and on their knees.

REVEREND FARRELL (cont'd)
 So WHO ELSE! Who else is gonna
 step up to ask the sweet Lord's
 forgiveness!

As the pianos start to BANG a new tune, various PARENTS flock to the pulpit with their CHILDREN in tow.

ANGLE ON MARVIN

His mouth is hanging open. It's as if lightning were striking all around him.

As the MUSIC grows and OTHER CHILDREN rise from their seats to move toward the reverend --

THE BACK DOOR OF THE CHURCH OPENS

. . . and Tyree stands in the doorway.

MARVIN AND VIOLA

-- turn to look at her.

TYREE

-- stands a moment, looking at her son . . . then slowly comes down the aisle and takes Marvin's hand.

ANGLE ON VIOLA

Astonished. Period.

BACK ON TYREE AND MARVIN

They move slowly to the pulpit. Marvin looks to his mother. She keeps her eyes straight ahead. They step to one of the DEACONS who ties a white headband around Marvin's head. Then the deacon turns a look to Tyree.

She pauses . . . then nods.

And the deacon ties a white cloth around her head, as well.

We HOLD CLOSE on Tyree -- as, finally, a tear forms in her eye.

Then, as the MUSIC crescendos and the SINGERS scream out, we --

CUT TO:

INT. TYREE'S CAB - NIGHT

The family takes a slow drive home from church, drained and silent.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marvin climbs into bed, beat tired. Sugar and Viola together tuck him in. Once Marvin is under the covers he looks at Viola.

MARVIN

How come my mama wasn't baptised
when she was little?

VIOLA

She was.

MARVIN

Then why's she gonna do it again?

SUGAR

When your mama was young, she
usta lay in the rain and watch
the mockin'birds sing. Then she
stopped doin' it after goin' in
the baptisin' hole. Didn't take
to the water no mo'.

MARVIN

She got waterproofed.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tyree sits on the couch. Eli is in a chair. They are silent,
not looking at each other. Finally --

ELI

Listen . . . nothing personal . . .
but I promise to make your life
miserable if you don't tell your
mother the truth about Natty.

TYREE

(with a deep sigh)
You've made it miserable already.

ELI

Yeah, well . . . "You ain't seen
nothin' yet." -- Cornell Wilde.

Just then, there is a knock at the screen door.

VIOLA

-- comes down the hall to answer it. It's OFFICER VIZARD, the
nice-looking, deer-hunting cop we saw earlier in the Tensas
Parish Police station. Viola opens the screen door.

OFFICER VIZARD
 Evenin', Viola.
 (glances to the living
 room, sees Tyree and Eli)
 Uh . . . listen, I came by earlier,
 but --

VIOLA
 We was at church.

OFFICER VIZARD
 Right, uh . . . I've received an
 inquiry from the Washington, D.C.
 police about --

ANGLE ON TYREE AND ELI - INTERCUT CLOSEUPS

They speak very quickly, in hushed tones.

ELI
 I can press charges, y'know.

TYREE
 I know.

ELI
 And I will, too.

TYREE
 I know.

ELI
 Or you can tell her.

TYREE
 Now?!?

ELI
 Right now.

TYREE
 Man, I hate you.

ELI
 I'm flattered.
 (a beat)
 Do we have a deal?
 (a beat)
 Do we?

TYREE
 Yes, goddamnit!

ELI
 Good.

Just then, the CAMERA WIDENS to find Officer Vizard entering the living room. A worried Viola is right behind him.

OFFICER VIZARD

Excuse me, sir, are you Eli Zeal?

ELI

(feigning a hemorrhoid)

Oh, God, not you guys again.

OFFICER VIZARD

Excuse me?

ELI

Everytime I go on vacation, I get saddled with you fellas. Did everyone just graduate from the academy or something?

OFFICER VIZARD

Well, Mr. Zeal . . . there was a report that you were missing from your store.

ELI

So?

OFFICER VIZARD

So the police found blood on the floor --

ELI

A bug.

OFFICER VIZARD

A what?

ELI

A bug -- I killed a bug. They found a can of bug spray, too, didn't they?

OFFICER VIZARD

Uh . . . well, yes, they did.

ELI

Well??? I was spraying a cockroach -- an enormous cockroach the size of your face! And I got nervous and knocked myself in the nose with the can. I broke a capillary -- case closed.

OFFICER VIZARD

You mean you weren't shot?

ELI
 Who jumps to these conclusions?!
 Do I look like the kind of person
 who'd get shot and then take a
 trip? Tyree here -- who happens
 to shop in my store -- say hello
 to the nice officer, Tyree.

TYREE
 (with a big smile to
 Vizard)
 Yo, what's happenin', baby.

ELI
 Tyree always brings me down here
 -- I'm a long time friend of the
 family! Now get outta here so I
 can watch Ted Koppel!

Utterly confused, Officer Vizard looks at Viola. She shrugs sweetly.

VIOLA
 (shyly)
 Well, he is a friend of the
 family.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Tyree, Viola and Eli stand on the steps and watch Vizard's car drive away. After a silence, Eli turns to Tyree.

ELI
 Your turn.

She looks at him, frightened. He looks back at her, his gentle eyes like wool socks on a cold day.

ELI (cont'd)
 It's okay, Tyree . . . everybody
 lies sometimes. . . .

VIOLA
 What you all talkin' about?

Tyree takes a breath and turns to her mother. Despite all we've seen, this is the hardest moment of her life.

TYREE
 Mama . . . sit down a minute.

VIOLA
 Why?

TYREE

I need to tell you somethin'. . . .

Viola holds a look on Tyree and senses the seriousness. She sits down on the top step of the porch. Tyree sits next to her and takes her hand. Eli slips quietly into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marvin and Sugar are in bed together. Both are awake. Eli enters, sits on the edge of the bed and takes off his shoes.

ELI

(after a pause; with a
deep, regretful sigh)
It'll be winter in Washington
soon. God, I hate winter. . . .

Sugar looks at Eli. Eli looks back at him. Something plays in each of the men's eyes . . . until they smile.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. THE FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

A LONG SHOT gives us Tyree and Viola, small in the FRAME, seated on the porch steps, the lone light bulb rocking gently above their heads. Tyree is cradling a weeping Viola, whose face is buried in her daughter's neck. After a long pause --

TYREE

What do you say we ride out to
Cypress Keys and pick up Natty and
Brother Big. . . .

We hold a moment on the women, then --

VERY SLOWLY DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SEVEN SUN BAPTIST CHURCH - MORNING

120 people exit the church. All are dressed in white. They speak not a word as they walk single file across the dark green grass.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LEVEE - MORNING

The pilgrimage breaks over the crest of the hill. The silence has given way to HUMMING -- a natural, almost inadvertent, synchronicity of voices.

Leading the pack is Reverend Farrell and his 20 soon-to-be "New Souls," all of whom wear their white headbands to compliment their white gowns.

Included among the 20 are Marvin and Tyree.

The snake of white cotton proceeds down the backside of the levee to --

THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BEDS

-- also know as the baptising hole . . . and also the place where Natty has been known to dunk himself.

The processional stops at the edge of the water.

Radiant in white, Viola has her arms linked with Natty on one side of her and Brother Big on the other. We can see by their faces, by the tears threatening in their eyes, that the rapprochement -- the healing -- has begun.

Sugar and Eli are present, too, holding hands. Eli is the only white person in attendance, except for --

TOM CRINKLE

-- who stands a good distance back from the group, watching on.

ANGLE ON THE BAPTISING HOLE

The HUMMING grows louder, phrases of song are now being improvised.

Reverend Farrell steps to Tyree and takes her by the hand. As they walk toward the water, Tyree stops a moment, removes her glasses and hands them to Marvin, who is standing next to Gracie. She also wears a white headband.

The reverend takes Tyree waist deep into the water. He stands behind her and places a hand on each of her shoulders. Her arms are crossed over her breast and her eyes are closed. The MUSIC of the people never stops.

REVEREND FARRELL

Praise Jesus for the warm, sweet
water, with which our bodies are
one, and with which we baptise
Miss Tyree Battle. . . .

The reverend bends Tyree over backwards. As her shoulders break the surface of the water --

ANGLE UNDER WATER

Tyree plunges into FRAME. We HOLD on her face. Her eyes are

closed. She wears a smile. She is no longer waterproof. . . .

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VIOLA'S FRONT YARD - THAT AFTERNOON

CLOUDS are rolling in. It could rain any minute.

Tyree, Viola, Natty and Brother Big are gathered around Tyree's cab, saying their goodbyes.

VIOLA

You gonna be okay?

TYREE

(a small smile)

Fine.

VIOLA

You know, Marvin can stay here if he likes -- be glad to have him.

TYREE

Thanks, but . . . I think he needs to back to his own school. Learn his lessons there. . . . But we'll come visit, I promise.

(a beat)

Now that I know the right way to leave, I guess I'll know the right way to return.

A beat. The two women hold a look.

Meantime, away from the others, standing off by themselves --

MARVIN AND GRACIE

-- are also bidding farewell. Both are terribly awkward.

MARVIN

Yo, so . . .

GRACIE

Yeah.

MARVIN

Yeah.

GRACIE

Okay.

MARVIN

Cool.

The CAMERA now DRIFTS TO --

BROTHER BIG AND NATTY

-- as Tyree comes up to them. Natty just stares at her, eyes blinking. Brother Big doesn't know quite how to be warm, but at least he's working on it.

BROTHER BIG
Drive safe.

TYREE
I will.

There is a pause. Tyree and Brother Big touch fists. Then Tyree turns to Natty.

TYREE
Okay, Natty . . . I guess I'll
see ya.

NATTY
See ya, Tyree.

Pause. Tyree holds a look on him. He spoke her name. As she pulls him into a strong embrace --

ELI AND SUGAR

-- step from the house and stand on the porch. Both are wearing aprons, and Eli has a spatula in his hand.

ELI
Would you people please come into
this house before I burn my
latkes!

Tyree breaks her hug from Natty and turns to Eli.

TYREE
Don't you get into trouble down
here, understand.

ELI
Yeah, yeah, yeah -- don't you get
into trouble up there. . . . And
listen, once I get my accounts
shifted I'll send you a check for
the two thousand -- and I'll
expect it back with interest.
(to the family)
Now come on, willya, my applesauce
is getting cold!

As Eli and Sugar head back into the house, a GENTLE RAIN begins to drop. Tyree turns to hug her mother, and we --

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUISIANA RURAL ROUTE 65 - DAY

Tyree's cab sails through FRAME, heading north.

ANGLE IN THE CAB

As the rain sprinkles down, Tyree watches the world through her windshield wipers. Marvin is in the passenger seat, turning the dial on the radio.

After a moment, Tyree sees a CYPRESS TREE approaching on the left side of the road.

As Marvin settles on a radio station, Tyree pulls off the road and stops at the cypress tree.

MARVIN

Where we goin' now?

TYREE

I wanna show you somethin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CYPRESS TREE - DAY

Tyree's cab is parked on the grass, just off the road. The RADIO has been left on, tuned to a gospel station. THE MARTHA NORWOOD CHOIR is singing "Victory is Mine."

The rain continues to fall while Tyree and Marvin lay together on the ground, side by side, hands clasped behind her heads, gazing up into the tree and listening to a lone MOCKINGBIRD that sings to the mist.

As the MUSIC rises, we MOVE IN and HOLD CLOSE ON --

TYREE'S FACE

She wears a blessedly contented smile . . . and her eyeglasses are glazed with rain. . . .

THE END