

# MUDBOUND

Based on the international bestselling novel  
by Hillary Jordan

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OVER BLACK we hear the distant rumble of THUNDER.

FADE IN:

TIGHT ON THE FACE OF JAMIE MCALLAN (Caucasian, 20's)

Black eye. Cut lip. He looks like a beaten prize fighter who is dripping in sweat and mud. WIDEN TO REVEAL we are...

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - IN A HOLE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The ash colored storm clouds make it look like night. Jamie scrapes the muck off his shovel blade and resumes. The mud is so thick it's like digging into raw meat.

A distant lightning flash accompanied by THUNDER. Jamie ups his urgency as he chops at the wet earth. An upside down face appears in the hole's opening. It's HENRY MCALLAN (Caucasian, late 40's), Jamie's salt-of-the-earth, older brother. Henry is a man of few words who rarely smiles. They speak with the lilting garble of the Mississippi Delta.

HENRY

My turn. Take a break.

JAMIE

We ain't gonna make it.

HENRY

We will. We have to.

Henry extends his hand and helps Jamie out of the hole. Then, as Henry maneuvers his way into the hole we see that he moves with a noticeable limp. Jamie pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes mud from his face and hands. As he watches Henry dig we hear Jamie's VOICE OVER:

JAMIE (V.O.)

We will. We have to. That was my brother, Henry: absolutely certain whatever he wanted to happen would. The weather would dry out in time to resow the cotton. Next year would be a better year. We would get this hole dug before the storm hit.

(beat)

And his little brother would never betray him.

LIGHTNING and THUNDER. Jamie looks up and sees angry, black clouds eating up the sky. Then from inside the hole we hear a CLANG as Henry's shovel hits something hard.

HENRY

Dammit.

JAMIE

What is it?

HENRY

Piece of rock, I think.

Henry shoves his hand into the mud to pull out the rock. But what he retrieves is actually a human skull missing a big chunk in the back. They trade a look. Henry keeps digging, alternating between shovel and bare hands as he discovers the rest of the skeleton. A collarbone, scapula and ribs.

HENRY (CONT'D)

No, no, no. Oh Lord... It ain't right. This just ain't right.

Henry digs out the pelvis and leg bones. We hear a metallic CLINK. Henry unearths the tibia and sees a crude, rusted iron shackle with a broken chain dangling from it.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Jesus. This is a slave's grave.

JAMIE

You don't know that.

HENRY

See here? Shot in the head.  
Must've been a runaway.  
(extending a grimy hand)  
That settles it. Help me out.

JAMIE

Settles what?

HENRY

I won't bury our father in a  
slave's grave. There's nothing he  
would've hated more.

JAMIE

We don't have a choice.

More LIGHTNING and THUNDER.

The brothers hold a look. Henry knows Jamie is right.

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - THE HOLE - DAY - LATER

The hole has grown longer and deeper and is now a foot over Jamie's head - a proper grave. Henry's face appears in the opening of the hole:

HENRY

Yep, that should do it.

Jamie hands the shovel up. But then, when Henry tries to help Jamie out, it's no use. The hole is too deep, their hands are too wet and the walls are too slick.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I'll fetch the ladder.

Jamie nods and Henry moves off. As the squelch of Henry's boots steadily grows quiet we see the pain and worry in Jamie's eyes. All around him is oozing mud. And overhead is a crude rectangle of darkening gray.

Then we hear the staccato pitter-patter of RAIN DROPS. Jamie looks up and they begin to hit his face. At first just a few, but then they come faster. Jamie tries to climb out again. But he slips back in. Another try and this time he almost makes it before sliding back down.

Jamie's panic rises as he tries to claw out of the hole. But it's futile as his fingers cut through the mud like butter.

JAMIE

Henry! HENRY!!

The rain falls harder as the storm hits it's stride. And the hole is already starting to fill with water. Jamie's eyes grow wild as he suddenly throws himself against the walls like a trapped animal.

ON HENRY

As he limps back towards the hole with the ladder, he hears Jamie screaming.

JAMIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

HENRY!!

Henry hustles back to the hole but Jamie is too frantic to notice.

HENRY

Jamie!! Jamie, I'm here!!

Jamie snaps out of it as Henry lowers the ladder. Jamie scrambles up and promptly doubles over trying to quell the panic.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
You alright?

JAMIE  
I thought maybe you decided to leave me down there.

HENRY  
Why would I do that?

Jamie glances up. Henry's looking at him like he's crazy. Jamie hauls up the ladder and moves off:

JAMIE  
Come on. Let's get this over with.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LEAN TO - DAY

ON PAPPY MCALLAN (60'S), eyes closed, his expression tranquil. He is dressed as we will see him throughout, in his Sunday best. WIDEN TO REVEAL Jamie and Henry standing over him. Henry pulls a sheet over Pappy's face then regards the ramshackle coffin made of mismatched scrap wood.

HENRY  
I wish to hell we'd been able to get to town.

Jamie moves to Pappy's feet and Henry to his head as they get to putting the body in the coffin. As they lift:

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Gently now.

JAMIE  
Right, wouldn't want to hurt him.

HENRY  
(sharp)  
That's not the point.

JAMIE  
Sorry, brother. I'm just tired.

With ludicrous care they lower the corpse into the box. Henry reaches for the lid and starts to put it on:

HENRY  
Go on. I'll finish up here.

Jamie nods and throws a last look at the corpse. We STAY WITH him as he drifts outside to the porch. A HAMMER STRIKING A NAIL gives him pause. He produces an almost empty bottle of bourbon from his back pocket. He downs it.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - DAY

The rain and wind have slowed down. ON A PAIR OF BOOTS as they trudge through thick, ankle-deep mud. WIDEN TO REVEAL that the boots belong to LAURA MCALLAN (Caucasian, 30's). She follows Jamie and Henry who carry the coffin. Laura is more plain than pretty and there's a tired strength in her eyes. She stumbles in the muck and we hear her VOICE OVER:

LAURA (V.O.)

When I think of the farm I think of  
mud. Encrusting knees and hair.  
Marching in boot shaped patches  
across the floor. I dreamed in  
brown.

The procession arrives at the grave. Henry and Jamie set the coffin down and work ropes underneath it as Laura looks on. The ropes slip, the coffin tumbles to the ground. Wood GROANS and there's a loud CRACK from inside.

HENRY

Dammit.

JAMIE

What if we stand at either end and  
run the ropes lengthwise?

HENRY

Coffin's too narrow. It falls  
again it could break open.

Jamie shrugs, "so what?"

HENRY (CONT'D)

No.

Laura reacts to a mule pulled wagon she sees approaching.

LAURA

The Jacksons.

As the wagon gets closer we see the JACKSONS: HAP and FLORENCE ride up front with their youngest RUEL (10). Behind them their children, MARLON (15) and LILLY MAY (12). Henry moves towards them:

LAURA (CONT'D)

Henry, don't.

HENRY  
S'not my fault what happened.

LAURA  
Just let them go.

HENRY  
Leaving us in the middle of the  
season? Least they can do is lend  
a hand.

Laura and Jamie trade a look as Henry waves the wagon down. Hap's eyes are tight and cold as he clucks the horses to a stop. Laura ventures a nod at Florence, Florence ignores her.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Can you help us out here?

Hap considers Jamie. The cracked coffin sinking into the mud.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
Hap?

Florence puts a hand on Hap's hand. They look to each other for an answer that isn't there. Laura shifts her weight, looks away from Henry.

LAURA (V.O.)  
I was a thirty one year old virgin  
when I met Henry McAllan in the  
Spring of 1939.

INT. LAURA'S MEMPHIS HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

ON LAURA, mud-free and squeaky clean. She is smiling coyly and we WIDEN TO REVEAL that she's sitting across from Henry who is quiet and inscrutable throughout. The other guests at the dinner table: Laura's brother, TEDDY (late 20's) and her MOTHER and FATHER (50's). This place is a sharp contrast to the farm. It's light and pristine with clean napkins and crisp, white shirts. Laura's V.O.:

LAURA (V.O.)  
I lived with my parents in the  
house I grew up in. My world was  
small and he was my rescuer from a  
life in the margins.

Laura's mother has sniffed out the sparks between Laura and Henry. Mom gives Henry the hard sell with a smile as Laura squirms in the spotlight.

LAURA'S MOTHER

Oh, an engineering degree from Ole Miss? Laura's a college graduate, got her teaching certificate from West Tennessee State.

TEDDY

Oh, my dear sister's the smartest one in the family. Made better grades than I ever did.

(winking to Henry)

Never heard the end of it.

LAURA'S MOTHER

Laura, why don't you play some piano after dinner.

(to Henry re: Laura)

You really must hear her sing.

(to Laura)

You should play something for Mr. McAllan later.

LAURA

Momma.

LAURA'S MOTHER

How about that hymn y'all did at service last Sunday? Or Ave Maria, that's beautiful.

LAURA

Momma.

LAURA'S MOTHER

What?

LAURA

I'm quite sure that Teddy did not bring his new boss, Mr. McAllan, over to hear hymns.

LAURA'S MOTHER

Well, let's ask him then. Mr. McAllan, would you like to hear some music later?

Eyes turn to Henry as he finishes a bite of food and wipes his mouth.

HENRY

I like hymns.

Laura, de-centered.

INT./EXT. LAURA'S MEMPHIS HOME - NIGHT

Laura opens the door to REVEAL Henry with a bouquet of flowers. She smiles, surprised.

LAURA (V.O.)

I was unused to male admiration and knew only that I wanted more. It was at least a reprieve from the sincere pity and insincere kindness directed at *old maids*.

OMITTED

INT. MOVIE THEATER

Laura and Henry gazing at the big screen. She steals a glance at him.

LAURA (V.O.)

He didn't feel the need to fill the air with words like I did. He had the self confidence I lacked. He was, after all, a veteran of the Great War.

EXT. OVERTON PARK - DAY

Henry and Laura walk hand in hand. The dogwood trees are blooming and flurries of white petals flit on gentle breezes. Henry picks a petal out of Laura's hair and they hold a look.

LAURA (V.O.)

Though he never spoke of it, his limp was a constant reminder of his brave sacrifice. I can't say that I was truly in love with him, but I was so grateful to him it dwarfed everything else...

Henry takes her face in his hands, grinds a kiss onto her mouth. Laura recovers, tries a smile, waits for some tenderness, a grand romantic declaration--

HENRY

My brother, Jamie's coming up from Oxford in a few weeks. I'd like for him to meet you.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Laura and Henry in the center of the BUZZING terminal. Laura is dressed for the occasion. Henry paces, excited. A LOUDSPEAKER announces the train's arrival.

HENRY  
(checking his watch)  
Right on time. That's rare for  
Jamie.

Henry scans the crowd, smiles.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
There.

Henry points. Jamie strides through the crowd. He is fresh, clean, beautiful. Henry moves to him as fast as limp will permit. A warm, rocking hug. They step back and study each other's faces.

JAMIE  
You look good, brother.

HENRY  
Likewise.

JAMIE  
The air up here in Memphis agrees  
with you.  
(looking at Laura)  
Or is it something else?

Jamie throws Laura a movie star smile. And she is immediately taken by his charm.

HENRY  
This is Miss Chappell.  
(to Laura)  
My brother, Jamie.

LAURA  
Pleased to meet you.

JAMIE  
The pleasure is all mine.

With exaggerated gallantry, Jamie takes Laura's offered hand and kisses it.

HENRY  
He thinks he's a character in one  
of his plays.

LAURA  
Henry tells me you're studying  
theater at Ole Miss.

JAMIE  
 (forefinger in the air)  
 Ah, but which play, dear brother?  
 Hamlet? Faust? Prince Hal?

HENRY  
 Hopefully one of them fellas can  
 earn you a decent wage someday.

JAMIE  
 What do you think, Miss Chappell?

LAURA  
 I think you're more of a Puck.

Jamie is impressed and the dazzle in his smile shows it.

JAMIE  
 Dear lady, thou speakest right. I  
 am that merry wanderer of the  
 night.

HENRY  
 Who's Puck?

JAMIE  
 (mock despair)  
 Lord what fools these mortals be.

Despite being older, Henry has always been in Jamie's shadow.

LAURA  
 Puck's a kind of mischievous  
 sprite.

JAMIE  
 A hobgoblin. Forgive me, I'm only  
 trying to impress her.

HENRY  
 Laura's not the impressionable  
 type.

JAMIE  
 Good for her.

Jamie smiles and winks at Laura.

INT. MANSION PARLOR - NIGHT

WELL-HEELED GUESTS lounging on Queen Anne couches. BLACK  
 SERVANTS buzz about with trays. A BLACK BIG BAND plays  
 something watered-down swing.

Laura, Henry and Jamie giggling in a lush nook. Jamie is mid-story. Laura is rapt. Henry's heard it.

JAMIE

Next thing I knew I was sucked under, concussed and bleeding, I was as good as gone. Another victim of the great flood of twenty-seven.

LAURA

I can't believe you never told me this.

(to Jamie)

Then what happened?

JAMIE

I saw a glimmering light. Like a fallen star.

(wiggling his fingers)

And a great big hand reached out of it. Thought it was God himself come to take me. But it wasn't. It was my dear big brother, Henry.

LAURA

(smiling to Henry)

You saved his life. You're a hero.

JAMIE

He is indeed.

HENRY

What else was I supposed to do? Let him drown?

It's not a pleasant memory for Henry. As he shrugs it off a SERVANT refreshes their champagne.

HENRY (CONT'D)

That'll do--

JAMIE

We've barely had any. Don't worry Henry, I've got more stamina than you--

Jamie tips the servant's hands, extends the pour.

HENRY

What, from modeling clothes? Don't know how you do that. Seems so undignified for a man.

JAMIE

We'll have plenty of time later for you to evaluate my life choices, brother. Tonight, we celebrate.

(raising his glass)

Here's to the future. Whatever it may hold. May you be blessed with happiness, health, prosperity and...

(to Henry re: Laura)

...if she'll have you, maybe even a house full of children. My love to you both.

Said genuinely. Laura is touched. Despite himself, Henry is too. They clink glasses and drink.

LAURA

Ooh, bubbly.

Just then the band switches the beat and ups volume. It's time to dance. As couples start to move to the dance floor Jamie looks to Henry:

JAMIE

Would you mind terribly if I had a dance with your girl?

(off Henry's shrug)

Miss Chappell? Care to take a spin?

Laura looks to Henry, Henry nods.

ON THE DANCE FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie and Laura whirl. Jamie's got Fred Astaire moves. But this is new to Laura and she's awkward. Jamie patiently leads and soon Laura's swept off her feet. For a while it feels like it's just the two of them out there.

LAURA (V.O.)

Jamie saw in a different way. When his eyes were on me, I felt like I was no longer invisible.

Laura and Jamie lock eyes and the connection is overwhelming. The envious eyes of other women in the room. Laura shrugs off Henry's questioning gaze. The song ends. Laura is breathless.

BACK AT THE TABLE - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie escorts Laura back to the table. She's flushed. Henry notices it.

JAMIE

Excuse me. I'll be back.

Jamie moves off and Henry looks to Laura.

HENRY

You look especially pretty tonight.

LAURA

Thank you.

HENRY

Jamie has that effect on girls.

They sparkle for him.

(beat)

He likes you. I can tell.

LAURA

I'm sure he doesn't dislike anyone.

HENRY

At least not anyone in a skirt.

(re: the dance floor)

See what I mean?

Laura looks and sees Jamie on the dance floor with a PRETTY GIRL. The girl effortlessly follows Jamie through a series of turns and dips. Laura suddenly feels foolish and tries to cover it as she sips her champagne glass empty. Henry refills it.

LAURA (V.O.)

Henry's marriage proposal didn't play out like I'd pictured it would. He wasn't kneeling and the question actually came out as more of a statement. Henry wasn't a romantic. He was made of sturdier stuff. But he was a good, hard working man. And he loved me. And I knew that he would provide, be true, and give me children. And for that, I could certainly love him in return.

Laura steals glances at Jamie dancing and smiling.

OMITTED

INT. HENRY/LAURA'S MEMPHIS HOUSE - DAY

Henry carries Laura over the threshold.

LAURA (V.O.)  
I loved domestic life.

Then, in a MONTAGE we see Laura around the house cooking, ironing, cleaning and being domestic.

LAURA (V.O.)  
Yielding to Henry and waiting for him to come home to me was what I'd been put on earth to do.

CUT TO: Laura holding INFANT AMANDA LEIGH as they finish dinner . Henry insists that she stay seated as he cleans up the dishes.

LAURA (V.O.)  
And when Amanda Leigh was born I became hers completely.

Another CUT and Laura plays blocks on the floor with now ONE-YEAR-OLD AMANDA LEIGH while Henry tunes the radio.

LAURA (V.O.)  
But then came the day that changed everything. Forever...

We PUSH IN on the radio as we hear Franklin Delano Roosevelt:

FDR (ON THE RADIO)  
Mister Vice President, Mister Speaker, members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives. Yesterday, December 7th, 1941, a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

EXT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAY

RONSEL (V.O.)  
Daddy borrowed Mister Robert's and 'nems truck to take me. That's what I remember most. The first things and the last things stick the hardest.

A gathering of NEIGHBORS in the tidy yard. Ronsel in crisp TRAVELING CLOTHES, his sister, Lilly May, hanging on his neck.

LILLY MAY  
Don't forget about us.

RONSEL  
You know I won't.

Marlon steps forward with a brave face, pumps his brother's hand, claps his back. Little brother Ruel follows suit.

MARLON  
Take care Ron.

RONSEL  
Y'all don't be quarreling. Pitch in good, help Mama 'nem.

MARLON  
We will.

RONSEL  
And keep them no 'count boys away from Lilly May. Don't let her turn *fast*.

Lilly May smiles through her sniffles, pops Ronsel on the shoulder as she steps back. Marlon does a little salute. Hap looks on from the driver's seat of his rough-idling truck, pride and doubt competing for his eyes.

Ronsel slings his pack over his shoulder, ambles over to where Florence holds herself against the cab. She puts her hand on his forehead, cups his face, holds her hand over his beating heart. Bomp. Bomp. Bomp. He's alive. Ronsel holds Florence's hand over his heartbeat.

FLORENCE  
You just come back.

RONSEL  
I will Mama.

FLORENCE  
You come all the way back.

Ronsel kisses her hand. Florence pats his chest and peels herself away. Neighbors and family surge forward as Hap eases the truck away, spill into the dirt road waving and whistling. But Florence doesn't look back.

FLORENCE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
I can't look back. I didn't look back. It's bad luck to watch somebody leave.

INT. JACKSON CABIN - DAY

Florence opening the windows, chasing out dust. Exorcising fear from the corners of the cabin with her broom.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

I held his heartbeat in my hand. I remember every beat. He was warm and alive. I know every place in him.

Florence throws open the back door. Beyond a small green garden, COTTON FIELDS stretch infinitely from her yard post. Hap and Marlon are slow-moving specks on the horizon. Florence raises her hand in a wave.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

And it was all I could do to not look back.

One of the specks waves back.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

No, I don't have favorites.

INT. HAP'S CHURCH - DAY

Hap in the pulpit, sweating and quaking and exalting. Swaying trees visible through the missing boards behind him. A breeze blowing in through an empty window pane. Florence in the front row, flanked by her children, duly listening. Her eyes closed.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

I love them all equally. Every mother does. But during all those four years, all that time he was gone...

Florence's eyes open.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

I only prayed for him.

Hap catches Florence's eye, shoots her a smile.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

God'll forgive me.

HAP

John 14:1-3  
"In my Father's house,  
are many mansions.

(MORE)

HAP (CONT'D)

If it were not so I  
would have told you.  
I go to prepare a place for  
you... that's where I  
am, ye may be also."  
(beat) I know that brings me  
comfort. It brings me  
comfort that  
One Morning  
My getting up is gonna be just  
a little bit easier than the day  
before. One  
Morning  
My children are not gonna wake up  
in this place, they're gonna open  
they eyes on a new sky.  
One Morning  
We gonna knock the boot from off  
our neck, we gonna shake the chains  
from round our feet.  
Oh Yes  
One morning!  
And I'm not talking about the  
hereafter. I'm talking about the  
Right Now! Oh One  
Morning!  
I said One morning Soon... (song)

Hap, head hung low, is silent. Speechless, searching for words.

CONGREGATION

That's all right, sir. Take your  
time!

Hap lifts his heartbroken eyes to the congregation. He scans the crowd, looking for a reason. His eyes catch on Florence. The words still don't come.

HAP

Church...Beloved.  
I don't know I just don't know.  
(beat) You see how they done him?  
Y'all seen how they done him.

Father I Stretch My Hand To Thee

OMITTED

OMITTED

OMITTED

EXT. HIGH AND WIDE OVER A FIELD OF COTTON - DAY

The shadow of a biplane crop duster BUZZES across fields.

HENRY (V.O.)

The army made Jamie a bomber pilot.  
But it's my fault he's up there.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S CAR (MOVING) - DAY - SIMULATANEOUS

Henry drives on the road adjacent to the cotton field. As the plane roars past his VOICE OVER continues:

HENRY (V.O.)

When Jamie was a boy he had questions about my time in the Great War. How many Huns did I kill? How had I been injured? Why did they call it great? And all I could do was make him promise that if he ever had to be a soldier he would get up to the sky. They say battle is cleaner in the sky.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE ON EVERGREEN STREET - DAY

Henry, Laura, 2 YEAR OLD AMANDA LEIGH, and INFANT ISABELLE, finish breakfast. Henry kisses all his girls good-bye. He rolls a sheath of BLUEPRINTS, stuffs them in a tube stamped ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS. Grabs a construction helmet.

OMITTED

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

A pair of TODDLERS ride the long tail their MOTHER'S COTTON SACK. The mother picks and steps, picks and steps in automated drudgery. SHIFF SHIFF SHIFF. The babies gliding backwards on their mother's effort. Other PICKERS in weary synchrony in the rows alongside her.

HENRY (V.O.)

Work kept me from my family. But the army needed bases and airfields and I was happy to oblige. My great-great grand daddy and his slaves built the farm I grew up on.

Henry leans next to his idling car, a worn NO TRESPASSING sign hangs limp from a tree. Henry eyes a string of distant SHARECROPPERS. He reaches down and grabs a handful of earth.

HENRY (V.O.)

One time Granddaddy told me to go grab up a handful of dirt from the yard, and I did. He asks me *"What are you holding?"* I said *"Dirt"*. He says *"that's right now give it to me."* So I do and he says *"Now what's this I've got in my hand?"* *"Dirt"*, I says. Then he says *"Naw boy, this is LAND I've got. Do you know why?"*

Henry sniffs the dirt in his hands, tastes it, spits it out.

HENRY (V.O.)

And he says *"because I OWN it. It's mine. And one day it'll be yours. But in the meantime, to you and every other person who doesn't own it, it's just dirt."*

Henry tosses the dirt away.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Sunlight beams through stained glass and a preacher resides over a small congregation. Henry, Laura, Amanda Leigh (4) and Isabelle (2), walk down the aisle followed by Pappy. HENRY'S MOTHER lies in repose. Laura moves past the casket quickly with the children in tow.

HENRY (V.O.)

Except that land never became mine. Pappy sold it after the flood. He told people that the river wiped him out. But that was a lie.

Pappy stops and takes a long look down at the body. Henry lays a flower in the casket. Pappy sobs heavily as he wrings the hat he holds in his hands. Henry starts to reach for his father's shoulder, hesitates, clasps his hands behind him instead.

HENRY (V.O.)

He walked away from that land gladly.

Another PARISHIONER drapes a comforting arm around Pappy.

HENRY (V.O.)  
 And when mama died, he sold my  
 dreams as payment for his grief.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE ON EVERGREEN STREET - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Where Henry and Laura make love. Henry climaxes, then slowly rolls off of her. They both catch their breath and stare at the ceiling for several post-coital beats, then:

HENRY  
 Honey, by the way. I bought a farm  
 in Mississippi.

Laura's head snaps towards him, her face smeared with shock. But Henry continues like it's great news:

HENRY (CONT'D)  
 It's 40 miles south of Greenville  
 near a town called Marietta. We'll  
 be moving in three weeks time.

LAURA  
 When did you do this?

HENRY  
 Just recently. I rented us a house  
 in town. It's a gorgeous with a  
 big old porch, an oak tree, four  
 bedrooms. You and the girls will  
 love it.

LAURA  
 But we love this house.

HENRY  
 They each get their own room and  
 Pappy can have his own space.

LAURA  
 Pappy?

HENRY  
 Of course. Now that momma's gone  
 someone's got to look after him.  
 (then)  
 Wait 'til you see it. It's got a  
 modern electric stove. And it's  
 only 3 blocks from the elementary  
 school. And it's only about a half  
 hour drive out to the farm.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Bought it from a couple who lost their son in the war. Felt bad taking it at such a low price, but they wanted out.

(then)

I'll have Pappy drive the truck up next week.

LAURA

What truck?

HENRY

The pick up I bought to use on the farm. Got a tractor too. John Deere Model B. Helluva machine. I'll be able to farm a hundred acres by myself. Imagine that.

Henry realizes Laura has been looking at him, agape.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You're mighty quiet.

LAURA

I'm mighty surprised.

HENRY

But you knew I always intended to have my own farm someday. I'm sure I mentioned it.

LAURA

No, Henry. I had no idea. I would've remembered that.

HENRY

Well. I'm telling you now. We've got ourselves two hundred acres of fertile land. And with that tractor I don't need a bunch of sharecroppers, I can do most of the work myself.

LAURA

What about my family?

HENRY

Me and the girls are your family.

LAURA

I mean my mother and father.

HENRY

They can visit. You can too.

LAURA

But...three weeks?

HENRY

Laura, honey, in a year's time I'll turn enough profit to buy us another hundred acres. Man up the road is itching to sell. Lot better living than I'm making now.

(then)

You're going to love it. I know you will. You'll see.

EXT. MEMPHIS STREET - DAY

We find the McAllan convoy leaving town. Laura drives the DeSoto sedan with Isabelle and Amanda Leigh. Henry and Pappy are in a pick-up truck packed full of belongings including Laura's piano.

EXT. A COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

As the two-car McAllan convoy rolls by. It's much more rural out here and a world away from Memphis.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ANTEBELLUM HOUSE - DAY

It's even more charming than Henry described. The procession unfolds from the caravan.

Henry watches Laura as she takes it in. She looks at Henry and softens, the house is lovely. He moves to her and takes her hand as they walk towards their new home.

AMANDA LEIGH

Mommy flowers!

LAURA

I see, honey.

(to Henry)

You didn't tell me we had azaleas.

HENRY

So we do.

Isabelle coughs as she curls deeper into mommy.

LAURA

She's done in. Let's get inside.

HENRY

Key should be under the mat.

Just then the the front door opens to REVEAL a big, bear of a man, ORRIS STOKES (Caucasian, 30's). He's not friendly.

STOKES

Who the hell are you?

HENRY

We're the McAllans. The new tenants of this house. Who are you?

STOKES

Orris Stokes. The new owner of this house.

HENRY

I rented this place from George Suddeth just three weeks ago.

STOKES

Suddeth sold me the house last week. And he didn't say nothing 'bout no renters.

HENRY

Is that a fact? I guess I need to refresh his memory.

STOKES

He left town three days ago.

HENRY

I gave him a hundred dollar deposit.

PAPPY

You get anything in writing?

HENRY

We shook on the deal.

Pappy spits on the ground, shakes his head in disgust.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I paid him a hundred dollars cash right there in the living room. I had dinner with him and his wife.

STOKES

You best be getting on.

Orris shuts the door behind him.

PAPPY

You got swindled, boy. Damn fool.

Henry is crestfallen. Another cough from Isabelle. Off the whole group looking to Henry.

HENRY

Then we'll have to stay on the farm. There's a house. We can make it work.

PAPPY

You mean out there with the niggers and the farm hands?

HENRY

It's the only place big enough for all of us. There's nothing else in town. Believe me, I looked.

EXT. A RUTTED ROAD - DAY

The McAllan's two-car convoy rocks and bumps their way down the road. The land is flat and mostly featureless. African American men, women and children dot the fields, tilling the earth with mule drawn plows.

Eventually they pass run down sharecropper's shacks with dirt yards. African American women hang clothes on lines as children play or watch the procession from porches.

EXT. JACKSON CABIN - SUNSET

Hap surveys his land. Ruel and Marlon toil shoulder to shoulder in the fading light. Florence and Lily May chip away at the day's chores.

HAP (V.O.)

What good is a deed? My grandfathers and great-uncles, grandmothers and grand-aunts, father and mother--broke, tilled, toiled, planted, plucked, razed, burned, broke again. Worked this land all their lives. This land that would never be theirs. They worked until they sweated. They sweated until they bled. They bled until they died. Died with the dirt of this same 200 acres underneath they fingernails. Died, clawing at the hard brown back that would never be theirs. All they deeds undone.

(MORE)

HAP (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

Yet this man, this place, this law,  
say you need a deed. All the blood  
and sweat and dying with dirt under  
your fingernails don't count.  
Doesn't make it yours. Say you need  
a deed, not *Deeds*. So what good is  
a deed? A deed is a piece of paper.  
One of my great-uncles, Uncle  
William, got ahold of a piece of  
land during reconstruction. A good  
piece of land right next to the  
river. He had a deed. Had his piece  
of paper and all. Four white men  
rode up on horses one day, aimed  
they pistols, said it was theirs.  
My uncle's good deed torn into  
forty pieces and thrown to the  
wind. It was too good, you see? The  
land he had claimed. And so I ask:  
what good is a deed?

EXT. RICKETY BRIDGE - DAY

The bridge spans a small river. As the two-car convoy drives  
over the creaky structure Henry leans his head out the window  
and shouts back to Laura in the DeSoto.

HENRY

This is it! We're on our land now!

OMITTED

EXT. THE JACKSON'S SHED- DAY

HAP (V.O.)

Pride goeth before destruction and  
a haughty spirit before a fall.

Hap leads his MULE into the stall, gives its mane a good comb  
before tying a feed bag on.

HAP (V.O.)

That mule made me a share tenant,  
not a share cropper. And it had me  
dreaming about having my own piece  
of land. Maybe that's where the  
problem started.

Hap saunters back to his cabin, luxuriates in the calm of a  
completed day's work.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - SUNSET

Hap and his family shoulder to shoulder around an overflowing  
dinner table. Cabbage and onions from Florence's garden. A  
cast iron skillet with rabbit in heavy brown gravy. A plate  
of sliced tomatoes goes around. A SURVEYOR'S MAP with  
outlined parcels is pinned to the wall. A pencil on a string  
hangs from a nail next to it. Hap stares at it as he eats.  
Hap leaps up, napkin still tucked around his neck to redraw a  
boundary, scribble notes.

FLORENCE

If only fences could be put up with  
lead.

HAP

The get taken down with lead all  
the time.

Hap winks at Florence, Florence blushes.

MARLON

Won't be too much longer, Papa will  
it? This time next year I'ma have  
about fifty acres of cotton, fifty  
acres of oats, fifty acres of rice--

LILLY MAY

Fool, rice don't grow here.

HAP

Never call your brother a fool.

MARLON

Well I'ma grow it anyway.

LILLY MAY

That's why I'm not gon' be no  
farmer, I'ma be a stenographer.

MARLON

A ste- what?

FLORENCE  
It's kinda like a typist.

MARLON  
They don't allow no colored typists.

HAP  
Your sister will be the first.

MARLON  
And? You'll be buying all your food from us. We gon' get all your typist money.

LILLY MAY  
Nuh -unh. 'Cause I'ma be in California or Chi-cago where all the good jobs at.

MARLON  
War gonna be over by then.

LILLY MAY  
No it won't--

Sudden silence settles over the group.

LILLY MAY (CONT'D)  
I mean...but Ronsel, he--he'll probably be home Mama.

FLORENCE  
I don't want him back early. Early means--

Hap massages Florence's shoulders, kisses her temple.

HAP  
He's not coming back *early*. Y'all finish up. Get these dishes rinsed off before bed--

BANG BANG BANG from the door at the far side of the cabin. All eyes on Hap. The dividing wall between what was a two-family unit has been cut and framed with a door that extends the Jacksons cozy living space. BANG BANG BANG. Marlon starts to rise, Hap motions him to sit. Hap palms a MACHETE that leans just inside the door, holds it close behind his leg before cracking opening it.

Henry, fist still raised in a knock squinting back at his ragtag caravan.

HAP (CONT'D)  
Evening, Mister.

Henry swivels back around.

HENRY  
Henry McAllen. You Hap?

HAP  
Yes Sir?

HENRY  
We just rolled in, I'ma need you to  
unload.

Hap taking in the scene, catching up.

HAP  
You're the new owner. Thought you  
all wasn't coming until next week.

HENRY  
I wanna get unloaded and the fire  
going before dark.

Henry strides off to the car, doesn't wait for a response he  
doesn't need. Hap looks at Florence, knowing glances.

EXT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

PAPPY  
Then let him walk.

Lilly May and Marlon lingering in the doorway. Hap at the  
truck pretending not to hear.

HENRY  
It's too far and we don't have  
time. It'll be night soon.

PAPPY  
I ain't movin' for no nigger.

HENRY  
He can't ride alone with Laura and  
the girls. And there's no room in  
the back of the truck.  
(off Pappy)  
Pappy. Please.

As Pappy gets out of the truck he eyes Hap. Hap lowers his  
gaze. Off Laura and the girls watching the scene...

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Hap bounces uncomfortably between Henry and Pappy. Hap looks down and sees that his hand is ever so close to Pappy's. Hap shifts and we hear his VOICE OVER:

HAP (V.O.)

Mist McAllan was from Memphis and my guess was he didn't know the eating end of a mule from the crapping end. Told me he intends to bring in one of them infernal tractors. Imagine that, using a machine to work his land instead of the hands the Lord gave him. This man put three families off on account of that damn tractor. But I thank God we wasn't one of them. Most times a landlord puts the colored families off first.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - EVENING

The house is a large rickety shack with a deserted air. It has a warped tin roof and shuttered windows with neither glass nor screens. A porch runs the length of the house and connects it to a small lean-to. There is a dirt yard with a pump. A barn, pig wallow, chicken coop and a pasture.

The two car convoy rolls to a ragged stop. Henry, Laura, Pappy, Hap, Amanda Leigh and Isabelle pile out. Laura is mortified. So is Pappy. Amanda Leigh goes running.

AMANDA LEIGH

Will we have chickens, daddy?

HENRY

You bet. Pigs too.

A recent rain has turned the ground to muck. Laura steps into an ankle-deep mud puddle and loses her footing. She sucks her foot out, her nice shoes are ruined.

HAP

You alright, Ms. McAllan?

LAURA

I'm fine, thank you.

Henry swoops Amanda Leigh into his arms and continues, though it's more for Laura's benefit:

HENRY

You know what else, jitter bug?  
That river we crossed over? I bet  
it's full of catfish and crawdads.

PAPPY

Better git 'im to replace them  
shutters or we might freeze to  
death.

HAP

I thought you was planning to live  
in town, suh.

HENRY

Plans changed.

AMANDA LEIGH

Momma, I have to tinkle.

LAURA

Okay, sweetheart, come on.

Laura starts heading towards the house but Henry stops her:

HENRY

Uh, honey, it's around back.

LAURA

Around back?

HENRY

It's an outhouse. There's  
no...indoor plumbing.

Henry points to a water pump not far off. Laura is  
incredulous. Henry's eyes urge her to make the best of it.  
Hap's presence makes Henry squirm even more. Thunder rumbles  
in the distance.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

The roof leaks in several spots. Henry and Hap back in with  
Laura's piano. Pappy sits on a rocking chair, smoking as he  
watches.

HENRY

Relax yourself Pappy. We got it.

Laura bustles out of one of the bedrooms. She rifles through  
a box.

LAURA

The girls are done in. I need their blankets.

As Laura tries to get to a particular chest she accidentally knocks over a box of books and they go tumbling out. Hap rushes over and helps pick the books up.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Just stack them in the corner.

HAP

Yes, ma'am.

(then reading the titles)

A Tale of Two Cities. Wuthering Heights.

LAURA

You can read?

HAP

My son, Ronsel, taught me. He over there fighting under General Patton.

PAPPY

You mean diggin' ditches and peelin' potatoes.

HAP

No, suh, he a tank commander.

PAPPY

Ain't no way the Army would turn a tank worth thousands of dollars over to a nigger. Now my son, Jamie, there's a fightin' man. He's flying *bombers*.

HAP

My son's a sergeant. 761st battalion. Calls 'em the black panthers.

PAPPY

Hey, hey boy! You know this one! Whaddya you call a nigger with stripes?

(beat)

A ra-COON! Hahahaha!

Pappy enjoys his joke. Hap lowers his eyes and keeps packing up the books.

HENRY

Where you want this piano?

LAURA

Let me get the girls to bed first--

PAPPY

Ain't no room for that piano. The hell am I gonna sleep?

LAURA

Guess we'll have to put you in the lean-to?

PAPPY

I ain't sleeping out there, it don't even have a floor.

Laura turns her back on Pappy and softens her voice.

LAURA

Henry, please--

HENRY

There's no room in the house.

PAPPY

If you got rid of that piano we could put a bed right there.

HENRY

True. We could.

LAURA

We. Need. The. Piano.

PAPPY

We could rig a curtain around it.

HENRY

There's an idea --

LAURA

I don't want a *bedroom* in the middle of the *living* room.

PAPPY

So you just puttin' me out?

HENRY

We're not putting you out.

(to Laura)

Now, honey --

LAURA

When you told me you were bringing to this Godforsaken place, I barely said a word. When you informed me that *he* was coming to live with us, I went along.

HENRY

Laura--

LAURA

And when Orris Stokes told you you'd been fleeced by that man you rented the house from, I kept my mouth shut. But I am telling you now, we are not getting rid of that piano. It's the one civilized thing in this place. So your father can either sleep in the lean-to or he can sleep in the bed with you, because I am not staying here without my piano.

A silent showdown with Henry and Laura.

HENRY

You're overtired.

LAURA

No. I'm not.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LEAN TO - MOMENTS LATER

Pappy unrolling his bed.

PAPPY

God-DAMMIT.

EXT. EUROPEAN VILLAGE - DAY

RONSEL

*"Dear family. I'm writing to you from a village in Belgium called... (pronouncing phonetically) ...Tillet. Belgium is a country just north of France and it's beautiful. Daddy you would like it here. There are lots of farms..."*

The sun is high and warm. WEARY SOLDIERS and the ravages of war are everywhere. RONSEL sits atop his tank, writing a letter. His tank is dirty and as beat up as he is.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 I've been keeping busy, mostly  
 training and looking for Germans.  
 Luckily we haven't seen too many.

That's clearly a lie as Ronsel eyes a red-crossed ambulance full of wounded soldiers driving by. He continues writing:

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 Of course, by the time you get  
 this, I'll probably be long gone  
 from here. We seem to always be on  
 the move.

A gruff SERGEANT (Caucasian) comes marching down the line:

SERGEANT  
 Man all guns! Let's move!

Ronsel pockets his pencil and letter then bangs on the hatch. A head pops out, this is WEEKS (African American, 20's).

RONSEL  
 C'mon.

CUT TO:

EXT. EUROPEAN VILLAGE - DAY

As soldiers march along, a column of tanks rolls by. Ronsel rides, his top half up outside the hatch. A DRONING BUZZ catches his ear and he looks up and spots a formation of B-25 bombers flying high above. Then Ronsel reacts to a Caucasian SOLDIER who marches past:

SOLDIER  
 Hey, jig. Wha'ch you doing up in  
 that tank, boy? Be careful, might  
 hurt yourself!

Ronsel eyes him as he rolls on, eventually passing a sign that points towards: MUNICH 10 km.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 But when we do get a chance to set  
 for a spell, the locals treat us  
 real nice. They're not like white  
 folks back home.

EXT. A MODEST GERMAN HOUSE - NIGHT

With a bouquet of flowers, a cleaned up Ronsel knocks on the door and waits.

Then a pretty German girl (RESL, 20's) answers and smiles, she's been expecting him. He presents the flowers and she hugs him. The hug turns into a kiss.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
I'm mighty grateful for that. I  
get homesick, and they do what they  
can to make us feel right at home.

As Ronsel and Resl kiss we PRELAP the sounds of BATTLE.

INT. RONSEL'S TANK - DAY

We hear the PINGS and PANGS of bullets ricocheting off the armor. It's claustrophobic and hot in here as Ronsel and the 4 other African-American crew members operate like fingers on a hand. Ronsel is the commander, CLEVE is the driver and Weeks is the gunner.

RONSEL  
Panzer, one o'clock!

WEEKS  
Identified! I got him!

RONSEL  
Fire!

The shell is loaded and BOOM. From Ronsel's POV through the view finder, we see the German tank get hit and blow up.

RONSEL (CONT'D)  
Woo! Nice shot!

Weeks smiles for a moment, then contorts his face as he RIPS A LONG FART. The guys in the tank react.

CLEVE  
Goddamn, Weeks.

WEEKS  
It's them C-rations. Franks and  
beans.

RONSEL  
We should load you in the gun and  
fire you at the Jerries, they'd  
surrender quick.

The whole crew busts up laughing. But the laughter is cut short by a VIOLENT BLAST. Shrapnel flies and metal twists. Weeks absorbs the blow and gets most of his head blown off. Ronsel gets knocked back and splattered by blood and brains.

Then there is RINGING and BLURRED FOCUS as Ronsel gets his bearings. Soon he comes to and sees a FIRE in the tank.

RONSEL (CONT'D)  
Get outta the tank! Get out!

EXT. THE TANK - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Machine gun fire. Ronsel, Cleve and the other two tankers scramble out of the burning tank into a raging battle. They slide out and hunker down against the tank for cover, pinned. Ronsel checks and cocks his .45. As bullets thud and whiz by Ronsel looks to the sky. He sees a lone B-25 bomber trailing thick, black smoke as it limps home.

CUT TO:

INT. B-25 BOMBER (MOVING) - DAY - SIMULTANEOUS

On Jamie, blind-flying, cold wind whistling in through the window, snot and tears drying backwards over his face. Desperate as he struggles with the throttle of the shuddering bomber, Jamie is splattered in blood and some of the cockpit windows have been shot out. Jamie looks over at his CO-PILOT who is slumped, dead and bloody.

His eyes are drawn out the window, PARACHUTISTS escaping another plane. Jamie rolls his plane away from the sound of gunfire. The parachutists are shot limp, dead men floating gently on full sails.

Jamie's eyes brush a blood splattered picture of a pin-up girl stuck to the co-pilot's side of the dashboard. It's a pretty red-head and there are handwritten words that read: 'LADY LUCK'. Off Jamie's hand wrestling with the shaking throttle...

OMITTED

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Jamie stares at the co-pilot's empty bunk across from him. The bed is neatly made. There's a black and white photo of a woman holding an infant among other personal effects. Laughter and carousing from OTHER SOLDIERS outside the thin walls. Jamie pours himself a drink with a shaking hand, a lonely toast to surviving. Jamie is red-eyed, fights tears as we PRELAP the GROWL OF AN ENGINE...

CUT TO:

OMITTED

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - DAY

HENRY'S TRACTOR GROWLING across an empty, ready to be planted field. There's satisfaction and hope in his eyes as he surveys the expanse of his land.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

Hap hoes at the earth with Sisyphean determination. He stops to wipe sweat from his brow and sees Marlon shirtless chopping alongside him, straining to keep up. Then he sees Florence in the distance hanging laundry on a line. Lily May feeding the chickens in the coop. Hap resumes his assault on the earth.

OMITTED

EXT. THE ATWOOD CABIN - DAY

Where CARL ATWOOD (Caucasian, 30's) leans against a tree sipping from a flask. He grunts at his very pregnant wife, VERA (Caucasian, 30's) as she carries a heavy pail of water.

ATWOOD

You better go slop them hogs.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

As Henry glides by and sees Atwood sitting as Vera carries her bucket. Atwood trots out to the road, Henry slows the car to a polite roll but doesn't stop.

CARL ATWOOD

You the new bossman hunh? Carl.  
Name's Carl Atwood.

Carl juts a dirty, nail-bitten hand into the cab. Henry holds his breath as he shakes it.

CARL ATWOOD (CONT'D)

Well you need anything you call me.  
I'm yer number one man, you hear  
what I'm saying? Can't depend on a  
nigger to do a white man's job. Me  
and my wife--that's Vera back 'ere--  
we been here for awhile. We'll  
gitcha acquainted. And listen I  
know now's not the right time, but  
whenever you get settled in I do  
needa talk t'you 'bout a new  
contract. 'Bout a raise? Last owner  
said--

HENRY

I'll catch you later Carl.

Henry speeds away, leaves Carl in the dust. Carl waves after the truck.

CARL ATWOOD

'Salright I know yer busy! Nice speaking witcha Henry!

Carl's smile drains as soon as Henry's truck disappears over the hill. He spits in the tire track.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - DAY

A mass of dark rain clouds in the distance. A distant BOLT OF LIGHTNING cracks the sky. A few beats later, THUNDER RUMBLES. Then slowly, rain starts to fall. A drizzle at first, then heavier and heavier.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM - BARN - DAY

Henry Hammers repairs. Outside it's raining sheets. Then, through the open doors, we see Pappy, shoulders hunched against the elements, as he hurries toward the barn. Pappy arrives and shouts over the steady bang of Henry's hammer:

PAPPY

Henry! Your wife wants you.  
Isabel's worse and the other one's  
comin' down with it too.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - GIRLS ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Where Henry busts in to find Laura tending to Amanda Leigh and Isabelle. Isabelle is lethargic, sweaty and wheezing and her lips are blue. Amanda Leigh is more alert but coughing badly. Laura is frantic:

LAURA

It's whooping cough. Go bring the  
doctor. And tell your father to  
put water on to boil.  
(off Henry's pause)  
Go!

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Pouring rain as Henry runs out of the house and into the truck. He pulls out, tires spinning in the mud.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Where Henry drives, concern all over his face. Then he reacts to something he sees through the windshield.

EXT. RICKETY BRIDGE - SIMULATANEOUS

Henry pulls up. The river ROARS and is completely flooded. The bridge is two feet underwater. Henry gets out of the truck and walks closer to get a look. No way across. Off Henry, wheels turning, panic rising...

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - NIGHT

Hard rain outside with occasional flashes of lightning accompanied by rumbling THUNDER. Florence, Marlon and Lilly May, all rapt, sit around the table listening to Hap read a letter from Ronsel.

HAP

*"I wish you all were there to see it. Her dress was so glittery it looked like it was made of stars. Even the white GI's couldn't take their eyes off her. But tell Lilly May, even the great Lena Horne hasn't got half the voice she does. And please tell Marlon I tried to save him some snow, but it melted. So I'll be bringing him a glass of water instead. Ha ha."*

Smiles are exchanged. It's like Ronsel is right there with them.

HAP (CONT'D)

*"And please let momma know that I--"*

BANGING at the door. Florence drops out of her reverie. More BANGING. Hap answers the door-- Henry soaked and desperate.

HAP (CONT'D)

Mist McAllan.

HENRY

I need Florence. My little girls have taken sick with whooping cough. I can't get to town because the bridge is washed out. And I remember you saying she was a midwife.

HAP

My wife ain't a doctor.

HENRY

I realize that. But my wife...

FLORENCE

When they start the whooping?

HENRY

Isabelle's been sick for a couple days now. Amanda Leigh's cough started up this afternoon.

FLORENCE

They still catching.

HAP

She can give you some remedies to take but she can't go with you.

HENRY

I'll pay you.

FLORENCE

I wouldn't be able to come home for three or four days. Who gon' look after my own family?

HENRY

Please. My wife is afraid.

Florence and Hap consider Henry. Henry's pride and upbringing won't allow him to beg any further.

FLORENCE

Let me get my things. I'll meet you outside.

Florence moves to Marlon and Lily May and hugs them both.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

Be good for your father.

CUT TO:

INT HENRY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Pounding Rain. Henry watches as Florence lifts a flapping chicken out of the coop, shoves it in a burlap sack in one easy swoop. Florence strides gracefully to the truck, doesn't miss a beat. Henry's confusion apparent.

FLORENCE

Girls gon' need broth.

HENRY

Oh.

FLORENCE

And you all don't have chickens  
yet.

EXT. RUTTED ROAD - NIGHT

Henry sluices through the rain, Florence watches him from the  
side of her eyes. \*  
\*

FLORENCE (V.O.)

I didn't have the luxury of only  
loving my own children. My own  
mother, I remember being blue. Blue  
from the dark of the morning, when  
the moon would still be up. She:  
kissing me and my sister, Us:  
pretending to be sleep. Us: not yet  
awake. My mother blue in the  
twilight, the sun not yet risen.  
She: going off to work to wake and  
kiss some other woman's children in  
the sunlight.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT

Henry drives and Florence rides, both silent. The road is  
bumpy and the rain makes the visibility minimal.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

My mother, blue again from the dark  
of the evening, well after sunset.  
After we had eaten the cold suppers  
she had prepared and left for us.  
After we had gone to bed and tried  
to stay awake to see her, when she  
had been late preparing some other  
woman's children hot supper. When I  
was a little girl, how I hated  
those other children. The ones that  
never saw my mother blue. How they  
never ate the cold. I swore that my  
children would have all of me.  
Would see me in the daylight. But  
now I know what my mother must have  
known. That if something had ever  
happened to that other woman's  
children, that would have been the  
end of us. Now I know that she left  
us not out of duty, but out of  
love.

(MORE)

FLORENCE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

Now I know...that love is a kind of survival.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Henry and Florence darting to the house.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

And Laura McAllan? Thought the Delta would turn her into nothing but grudge and bone. I didn't have the luxury of thinking only on my own family.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Henry and Florence rush in, Laura looks up and glares daggers. Amanda Leigh is bent over a steaming pot of water. Pappy sits off to the side, smoking.

LAURA

Who's this, Henry? Where's the doctor?

HENRY

This is Florence Jackson. She's a midwife.

LAURA

Do you see anybody giving birth here?

HENRY

The bridge is washed out. I couldn't get to town. I thought she might be able to help.

Isabelle COUGHS and HACKS from the other room, Florence shoulders past Henry toward the sound. Abandons the couple in their bickering.

LAURA

These children need a doctor, not some granny with a bag of potions.

HENRY

The damn bridge is flooded -- what do you want me to do?

Isabelle starts gagging. Laura rushes to the girls' room...

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE/GIRLS' ROOM - CONTINUOUS

...where Florence turns Isabelle onto her side. Yellow PHLEGM and BILE bubble from the child's mouth, Florence wipes it away. Laura kneels across from Florence.

FLORENCE

I seen this with my own children. We need to get liquid down 'em. But first we got to clear some of that phlegm out.

LAURA

How?

FLORENCE

Make 'em some horehound tea. That was real good, you making the steam for 'em. We'll keep after 'em with it. Mist McAllan, would you kindly please boil more water, suh?

Henry nods and moves off.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

That tea'll draw the phlegm right out.

(MORE)

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

Once they get to breathing better,  
we'll make 'em chicken broth and  
put ground-up willow bark in it for  
the fever.

LAURA

I should have taken them to the  
doctor as soon as they started  
coughing. If anything happens...

FLORENCE

Your girls are gonna be just fine.  
God is watching over 'em and so am  
I. And neither one of us going  
nowhere till they feeling better.

Laura nods her appreciation. For an instant, they are simply  
two mothers tending a sick child.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Candle and lantern light. The rain has stopped and Florence  
is cutting up onions and carrots. Pappy sits in the corner,  
cigarette smoke curling around him. Florence has her back to  
him but she feels his eyes on her. She ignores it until:

PAPPY

I'm thirsty. Run out to the pump  
and fetch me some water.

FLORENCE

I got to finish this broth for the  
children.

PAPPY

That broth can do without you for a  
few minutes.

(off Florence ignoring)

Did you hear me, gal? I want some  
damn water.

Laura enters from the girls' bedroom:

LAURA

There's drinking water in the pail  
by the sink.

(then to Florence)

The girls are finally sleeping.  
After you finish the broth you  
should go on home, Florence.

FLORENCE

Yes'm, but like I told your husband, that whooping cough is catching. If I went home I could pass it to my own children.

LAURA

We'll make room for you here.

PAPPY

Ain't sleeping under the same roof as a nigger.

LAURA

Florence, why don't you go check on the girls?

Florence moves into the GIRLS' BEDROOM.

LAURA (CONT'D)

We can't send her home to infect her own family.

HENRY

How the girls doing?

LAURA

They're asleep. And now your father is proposing we send Florence home.

HENRY

She'll infect her own family.

PAPPY

Then she can sleep out in the barn.

LAURA

How could you suggest such a thing in this cold?

PAPPY

Niggers need to know their place.

LAURA

For the last few hours her place has been by your granddaughters' bedside. Which is more than I can say for you. She sleeps here.

Amanda Leigh starts coughing. Laura goes to her. Pappy glowers.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE/GIRLS' ROOM - DAY

The room is dark until Florence opens a shutter and sunlight breaks through. Amanda Leigh and Isabelle are sleeping comfortably in their beds. As Florence tidies up, Amanda Leigh's eyes flutter open and squint against the daylight.

AMANDA LEIGH

Momma?

Florence checks Amanda Leigh's forehead for fever and then smiles because it has broken. She checks Isabelle's she is fine too.

FLORENCE

Morning. Glad to see you feeling better.

(beat)

I'll go fetch your momma.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - DAY

Where Florence quickly packs her things, anxious to get home. Laura and Henry are in the kitchen area talking quietly. Pappy is sitting by a table, smoking.

FLORENCE

'Scuse me, Mist McAllan? I'm ready.

LAURA

We can't thank you enough for your help, Florence.

FLORENCE

You're welcome. Just keep after 'em with the tea. They'll be fine now.

LAURA

We have some good news for you.

(off Florence)

We'd like to offer you a job. Working here. For me. I'll need help with the girls, cooking, cleaning, that sort of thing.

Florence flicks a look to Pappy, reeling at the prospect of dealing with him every day.

LAURA (CONT'D)

It means extra money for you and your family.

Laura smiles, waiting for Florence to leap at the opportunity. Off Florence, not leaping...

CUT TO:

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - NIGHT

The kids are asleep. Hap and Florence whisper by lantern light.

FLORENCE  
How can we say no?

HAP  
We don't belong to them. We pay rent, work our own crops for us. That's it. They can't just pick us up, set us down like we tools.

FLORENCE  
You're the one always talking about saving. How owning our own parcel the only way to get out from under their foot. We're almost there.

HAP  
I don't want you working for them.

FLORENCE  
I wouldn't be working for them. I'd be working for us.  
(beat)  
I already said yes.

Hap pulls away from her.

HAP  
(quoting scripture)  
"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church."

FLORENCE  
"An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain..."

Hap warms.

HAP  
All those Sundays you really are listening, huh?

Florence kisses him, strokes his beard.

FLORENCE

And now you need to listen to me.

OMITTED

OMITTED

OMITTED

EXT. JACKSON SHED - DAY

Florence watches as Hap inspects their prone, panting MULE. Laying on his side, he foams at the mouth, limbs paralyzed. Hap drops his head, looks up at Florence. PRELAP the sound of a GUNSHOT...

INT. HAP'S CHURCH - DAY

Hap is a bullet across the pulpit. He transmutes despair into belief behind his own eyes. He rallies, forces himself to clap and sing. The church falls in with him. Florence tries to sing along but looks exhausted behind her eyes.

EXT. HAP'S CHURCH - DAY

Hap still in his Sunday clothes high up on a ladder. He hammers a mismatched length of siding into place. Another DEACON patches shingles on the roof. Hap stops, takes in the sunset behind him. Marlon sprinting back up the road with building supplies. Hap puffs at the sight of his son.

HAP (V.O.)

Pride goeth before a fall. But I was just looking at God's own creation. Is that pride? Is that a sin? Why?

Hap's hammer slips from his grip, he clutches after it, the ladder tumbles sideways. Hap falling in slow motion.

HAP (V.O.)

I can't answer my children when they ask me.

Hap now paralyzed on the ground, stiff and sputtering like the mule. Marlon and other Deacons gathering around him. Hap's eyes wide in surprise. Hap blacks out.

OMITTED

INT. JACKSON CABIN - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS: HAP'S FAILED CONVALESCENCE

-- Florence cleans Hap's leg, a river of bloody puss runs from broken skin. Hap doesn't cry out. His leg is discolored and misshapen. Florence wraps clean bandages around it

-- Hap pushes open his bedroom window, sees FLORENCE and MARLON working the field on their own. Florence coaches the boy along, they work well past dark, invisible except for their bobbing lanterns and the percussion of seed bags bouncing against their legs

-- Lilly May changes Hap's bedpan, Hap holds himself up one trembling elbow, keeps his face craned toward the wall. Shame pools in the corner of his eyes

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

Florence and Marlon's hard labor apparent in symmetrical rows of furrowed new earth. A RAIN DROP kisses the ground. Then another. Another.

HAP (V.O.)  
 The rain came that next day, a big  
 hard rain that packed the fields  
 down tight as wax.

INT. JACKSON CABIN - DAY

Florence and children quiet against the windows as they watch  
 nature undo weeks of work.

HAP (V.O.)  
 Nothing we could do set there and  
 watch it and fret for two days  
 until it finally cleared up.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAWN

Hap watches his family out the window as they hoist their  
 hoes and water buckets out to the mud-slicked mess to begin  
 again. Lilly Mae in an oversized hat has joined them this  
 time and jogs to keep up. Four lanterns bobbing against cold  
 daybreak.

HAP (V.O.)  
 Lingered along, lingered along.  
 Laid in that bed knowing my wife  
 was out doing my work for me.  
 Florence's hands all blistered up  
 and I seen her rubbing her back  
 when she thought I wasn't looking.

Hap picks up a BIRCH BASKET he's been working on, resumes  
 weaving. The racket of Henry's tractor crashes the peace.

HENRY (O.S.)  
 Hap!

HAP  
 In here.

Henry McAllan appears in the window, inventories the room.

HENRY  
 How're you feeling?

HAP  
 Better by the day.

HENRY  
 I expect you are.

Henry lights a cigarette.

HENRY (CONT'D)

How much longer you gonna be laid up?

HAP

Doc Turpin said six weeks, it's been four already. I bet I'll be out there by Monday.

HENRY

Welp. I don't think you gon' have enough time to get everything in the ground. You're skinning it close.

HAP

Florence and the boys are working double time sir. Plus you know fields gotta be rebroke because of that rain.

HENRY

Can't control the rain.

(beat)

But y'all ought be well into planting by now and you haven't even gotten your fields laid by. I can't afford to wait any longer, you're a farmer you understand that.

HAP

Yessir.

HENRY

As it stands, it'll be the end of the week 'fore they even start fertilizing. Now if they had a mule, they'd be done in no time.

HAP

We lost our mule to lockjaw sir. Florence and the boys are--

HENRY

You're gonna have to rent one of my mules. You'll go back on half shares to pay it off.

The verdict sticks in Hap's throat. Henry already ambling back to his tractor.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Send one a your boys to come fetch  
that mule after dinner.

HAP

Yessir.

The blare of Henry's tractor engine. Hap throws off the bed covers. Drenched in sweat, he snatches down a pair of workpants. He lifts his bad leg into the trouser hole and shimmies his pants over his waist. He shifts his weight onto his good leg and levers himself upright on one leg. He takes a fortifying breath, slowly eases his bad foot to the ground--

HAP (CONT'D)

AGH!!!!

A horrible CRUNCHING sound as Hap falls in a heap to the floor. Hap lets a SOB escape for the first time.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

LAURA

What do you mean Florence isn't  
coming back?

HENRY

It's only till July, she's got to  
get that crop in the ground.

LAURA

Where's Hap?

HENRY

His leg is broke. I told you that.

LAURA

No you didn't. Henry? I need help  
with the girls. Can't you lend them  
a mule?

HENRY

No we can't *lend* them a mule, it's  
just like with the Atwoods if they  
can't get the work done on time,  
the have to rent one of ours and  
pay us half of the crop for it.  
Tough for them, good for us. Are  
you for us?

LAURA

Hap hurt himself working for us--

HENRY

Hap hurt himself working for Hap!!

Laura recoils, Henry catches himself.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Farming is a business Laura. And like any business it carries risks.

LAURA

I just think--

HENRY

I sank everything into this farm. Everything. We need to make some money this year. If we don't, *our* family's in trouble. Now. Do you understand that?

Laura holds her tongue, lifts her chin .

LAURA (V.O.)

He kept the money in a strongbox under the floorboards of our bedroom.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM BEDROOM - DAY

LAURA (V.O.)

Eight. Thirty. Sixty Two. The date the Confederate forces crushed the Union Army in the Battle of Richmond.

Laura's fingers spin the dial and open the box. A stack of wrinkled cash.

LAURA (V.O.)

I don't think he knew that I knew the combination.

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - EVENING

DOCTOR PEARLMAN

Hello Mrs. Jackson?

Florence surprised at the unaccustomed respect. The thick German accent.

FLORENCE

Yes?

DOCTOR PEARLMAN

I'm Doctor Pearlman. I'm here to  
treat your husband.

FLORENCE

Oh... Thank you.

Florence steps aside, waves the doctor in. Florence spots  
Laura idling in the truck. Laura waves from the driver's  
seat. Florence waves back as she pulls away.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

If you'da asked me before then,  
I'da told you all white folks was  
the same.

DOCTOR PEARLMAN (O.S.)

Whoever did this is not a doctor.

Florence follows the Doctor's voice into the bedroom, lingers  
in the doorway.

DOCTOR PEARLMAN (CONT'D)

It's badly infected and I'm going  
to have to re-set the bone.

Hap motions for a bottle of WHISKEY. Florence reaches for it,  
Doctor Pearlman unearths an ANESTHETIC MASK, and a vial of  
CHLOROFORM.

DOCTOR PEARLMAN (CONT'D)

No, no that won't be necessary, of  
course I'm going to administer an  
anesthetic.

Hap and Florence embarrassed. Doctor Pearlman favors Florence  
with a smile.

DOCTOR PEARLMAN (CONT'D)

But a little whiskey never hurt.

OMITTED

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura lying on her back, her gown below her knees

LAURA (V.O.)

Henry stayed mad at me. And he showed it by ignoring me in our bed.

Henry clomps in, pretends not to see her. Laura hoists her gown up to her thighs.

LAURA (V.O.)

I hadn't always enjoyed Henry's lovemaking, but it made me feel like a true wife. He liked to do it at night with one candle. That was his signal, the rasp of match against the striker.

Henry blows out the candle. Gives her his back. Laura caresses Henry's back. He ignores her.

LAURA (V.O.)

I never thought of refusing him. How could he refuse me? No it wasn't fulfilling. But it was at least a kind of sweet intimacy.

Laura reaches over, gropes between Henry's legs. Henry picks her hand up, places it back on her side of the bed.

LAURA (V.O.)

I never realized how much I needed that until he turned away from me.

INT. A MODEST GERMAN HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Sunlight fills the room where Ronsel and Resl sleep peacefully entwined. We notice a delicate gold necklace with a crucifix hanging from Resl's neck. A few quiet beats, then a cacophony of HORN HONKS and JEEP ENGINES crescendos. Ronsel wakes quickly but Resl snoozes on. Then, outside, he hears HOOTS and HOLLERS.

Ronsel extracts himself from Resl's sleepy embrace and moves to the window. There he sees a procession of American soldiers hanging off jeeps and trucks, waving American flags.

SOLDIERS OUTSIDE

War's over! Hitler's dead! The war's over!

Ronsel watches them wondering if it's true. Resl joins him at the window as the impromptu victory parade rolls by.

They look at each other, both knowing what it means: he's going home soon. A melancholy embrace. Ronsel closes his eyes.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BUS - DAY

As Ronsel is suddenly woken up by the CONDUCTOR (White, 40's) who moves down the aisle from the loose White section to the over-packed Colored section.

CONDUCTOR  
Tupelo! Next stop! Tupelo!

Ronsel is in his dress uniform, adorned with medals. He shakes off his sleep, looks out the window.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
Home again, home again. Jiggety -  
jig. Coon, spade, darky, nigger.  
Went off to fight for my country  
and came back to find it hadn't  
changed a bit.

Ronsel reaches into his pocket and pulls out Resl's gold necklace and crucifix - a keepsake. Ronsel notices a LITTLE BOY staring at him. Ronsel winks. The Little Boy salutes. Ronsel returns the salute.

OMITTED

EXT. TRICKLEBANK'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

Ronsel hops off the bus, pack slung, medals twinkling. He takes his time surveying the stark town strip, a few loitering WHITE TOWNSMEN eye him as he passes.

OMITTED

INT. TRICKLEBANK'S GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

Ronsel enters and finds Laura chatting with store owner, ROSE TRICKLEBANK (Caucasian, female, 30's). Rose is back-country-tough and wears a bandana to pull back her hair.

RONSEL  
Howdy, Miz Tricklebank.

TRICKLEBANK  
Ronsel, is that you?

RONSEL

Yes, ma'am, last time I looked.

TRICKLEBANK

Well, I declare. Aren't you grown up. How are you?

RONSEL

Can't complain. How you been?

TRICKLEBANK

Getting along fine. You seen your folks yet?

As Ronsel grabs canned goods, sugar, and candy:

RONSEL

No, I just got in. I wanted to stop and buy a few things for 'em first.

LAURA

Hello, Ronsel. I'm Mrs. McAllan. Your parents work on our farm.

RONSEL

How do, ma'am?

LAURA

Do Hap and Florence know you're coming home?

RONSEL

No, I wanted to surprise 'em.

LAURA

Your mother talks about you all the time. I know they'll be mighty glad to see you.

RONSEL

Likewise.

TRICKLEBANK

(re: Ronsel's purchases)  
That everything?

RONSEL

Yes, ma'am.

TRICKLEBANK

Sugar and candy too?

RONSEL

Sugar's for my momma. Candy's for Marlon and Lilly May. Figured I'd spoil 'em a little.

(MORE)

RONSEL (CONT'D)  
 (smiling re: his stripes)  
 Sergeant's pay.

TRICKLEBANK  
 I'm sure they'll appreciate that.

LAURA  
 My brother served in the Pacific.  
 And my husband's brother was a  
 bomber pilot. Both of them fine,  
 thank God. Nice to see you boys  
 finally coming home.

TRICKLEBANK  
 Comes to four dollars even.

As Rose puts Ronsel's things into a sack, Orris Stokes enters the store. He's so big he takes up the entire doorway.

STOKES  
 Well looky what we got here. A jig  
 in a uniform.

Ronsel ignores the comment and pays Rose:

RONSEL  
 Thank you, Miz Tricklebank.

ROSE  
 Sure thing.

Just then Henry and Pappy enter the store with ANOTHER MAN. Ronsel grabs his things and tries to step around Stokes so he can exit. But Stokes moves in front of him.

STOKES  
 Where you think you're going, boy?

RONSEL  
 Beg pardon, suh. Just trying to  
 get home to see my folks.

STOKES  
 Not that way you ain't.

LAURA  
 Henry, this is Hap and Florence's  
 son, Ronsel. He just returned from  
 overseas.

PAPPY  
 Well, that explains why you're  
 trying to leave by the front door.  
 (MORE)

PAPPY (CONT'D)

You must be confused as to your whereabouts.

RONSEL

I ain't confused at all, suh.

PAPPY

Oh, I think you are, boy. I don't know what they let you do over there, but you're in Mississippi now, nigger. You use the back door.

HENRY

Go on now. We don't want any trouble. Go on.

Fists clench as the air thickens with hostility. Ronsel is anchored where he stands, head high and defiant as he squarely meets the gaze of each man in the room. Laura's eyes plead with him to just go. Then Ronsel looks to Pappy:

RONSEL

You know, suh, you're right. We didn't go in the back over there. General Patton put us right up on the front lines. Yessuh, he took us when nobody else thought we were worth a damn. And you know we did? We kicked the hell outta Hitler and them Jerries. All while every one of you was back here safe and sound at home. No need to thank me.

(then)

Miz Tricklebank. Miz McAllan.

The white men are agape as Ronsel grabs his things and strides out the back door. Angles toward the long dusty road out of town.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - NIGHT

HAP (V.O.)

Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord and savior.

Hap, Florence, Marlon, Ruel and Lilly May, all with their eyes closed, mid-prayer:

HAP (O.S.)

And, Lord, thank you for the sun  
you been sending to make the cotton  
grow and for the health of all here  
present. And, Lord Jesus, please  
watch over my boy, Ronsel, wherever  
in creation he may be.

RONSEL (O.S.)

Amen.

Heads snap to the doorway where Ronsel is standing. The  
Jacksons are collectively frozen.

RONSEL (CONT'D)

Well, ain't nobody gonna offer me  
some supper?

LILLY MAY

Ronsel!

And Lilly May is up like a flash and in Ronsel's arms.  
Florence is immediately driven to tears as she wraps her arms  
around Ronsel and covers him with kisses.

FLORENCE

My baby...

RONSEL

Hi, mamma.

FLORENCE

So grown.

LILLY MAY

Handsome too.

Marlon works his way in and hugs Ronsel tightly.

RONSEL

Marlon here's catching up with me!  
How tall are you?

MARLON

Wha'd you get all them medals for?

LILLY MAY

How was the trip home?

MARLON

You get 'em for killing  
Germans?

FLORENCE

Why didn't you write to tell  
us you was coming?

HAP

Quit fussing over him now and let  
him say hello to his father.

They part so Hap can take a look at Ronsel. Then Ronsel  
rushes up and hugs him. Hap holds his son, tears welling.

HAP (CONT'D)

I knew you'd come. I prayed for it.

EXT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - NIGHT

It's a warm night and a blanket of stars covers the sky.  
Cigarette smoke curls up into it and we find Ronsel on the  
porch of the shack, smoking as he stares at the heavens. He  
reacts when Hap and Florence come out.

HAP

I've never known you to smoke, son.

RONSEL

A lot's changed.

FLORENCE

You sure you get enough to eat?

RONSEL

I'm stuffed. Used to dream about  
them biscuits, Momma.

FLORENCE

I dreamt about you too.

RONSEL

What did you see?

Florence shakes her head and shivers at the thought. Then:

FLORENCE

You back with us now. Safe and  
sound.

HAP

Be nice to have another pair of  
hands. With you home we might can  
make up what we lost after my  
accident. Payoff the lien, get a  
new contract, go back to being  
tenants next year--

FLORENCE

Maybe he got plans of his own, Hap.  
Let him find his own mind.

RONSEL

Oh, no. Yeah. I mean, of course.  
I'll stay awhile. It'll give me  
time to figure things out. Put the  
war behind me.

Hap is excited by the prospect, leans against the post his  
crutches forgotten. But Ronsel is far away and is only  
feigning enthusiasm. HEADLIGHTS of a truck coming down the  
road. The truck pulls into the yard and Henry gets out.

FLORENCE

What's he want now?

Ronsel stiffens. Hap and Florence trade a look as Henry  
strides up to the porch.

HENRY

Evening, Hap. Florence.

HAP

Mist McAllan. This is our son,  
Ronsel, I told you about.

HENRY

We've met.  
(then)  
I'd better speak to you alone, Hap.

RONSEL

I ain't a child. Sir. You got  
something to say to my father, you  
can say it to me too.

HENRY

All right then. You're asking for  
a heap of trouble by acting like  
you did earlier at Tricklebank's.  
And I know you don't want trouble,  
least of all for your family here.

HAP

What'd you do?

FLORENCE

He couldn'ta done anything.

RONSEL

Just tried to walk out the door is  
all.

HENRY

The front door. And when my father  
corrected him he made a fine  
speech. Put us all in our place,  
didn't you?

HAP  
 Is that true?  
 (off Ronsel's nod)  
 Then I reckon you best apologize.

Henry waits and Ronsel glares. But Ronsel knows he has no choice and he forces the words out:

RONSEL  
 I'm mighty sorry, Mr. McAllan.

HENRY  
 My father'll wanna hear it too.

HAP  
 Ronsel will pay him a visit after church tomorrow. Won't you, son?

RONSEL  
 Yes.

Hap needles Ronsel out the side of his eye.

RONSEL (CONT'D)  
 Sir.

HENRY  
 Good. We'll be expecting you, boy.

Henry strolls back to his truck and pulls off. Hap sees the frustration in Ronsel's eyes.

HAP  
 No point in fighting 'em. They just gon' win every time.

RONSEL  
 Not used to walking away from fights, daddy. Not anymore.

Ronsel eases past his father. Florence catches Ronsel's hand at the door, squeezes. Ronsel kisses his mother's hand, pats it as he moves off. Hap and Florence exchange wordless worries in the dark.

X1000/A9EXT JACKSON CABIN - NIGHT

Ronsel & Florence lounge in their separate thoughts. Take in the sleeping silence. Ronsel materializes a Hershey Bar and lays it on her knee.

RONSEL  
 For you.

Florence stunned from her day dream.

FLORENCE

Oh. I -- no. This is so much. Your  
brothers and sister will love this.  
I'll save it --

Florence moves to take the bar in her apron. Ronsel puts his  
hands on hers.

RONSEL

No. It's for you.

FLORENCE

Oh baby, I can't.

RONSEL

Go head. I'ma watch you.

Florence giggles, backs in pampering. She ventures one modest \*  
square, pleasure washes over her face. Florence holds  
Ronsel's gaze stuffs down overflowing emotions.

FLORENCE

(Beat) Thank you.

RONSEL

I love you Ma.

OMITTED

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - DAY

Shouting from the barn. It's Henry arguing with Carl Atwood.  
Their discussion moves towards the porch:

HENRY

I don't give a damn! If you can't do your job, I can't keep you on. That's how it works.

ATWOOD

Henry, please, I got Vera and the girls and one on the way -- we don't got anyplace else to go.

HENRY

That's not my problem, Carl. And I got kids too. But I'm runnin' a farm here, not a charity.

ATWOOD

Please, sir.

HENRY

I'll give you to the end of the week. And then I want you gone.

Henry walks away. As he moves past Laura and into the house Carl stands there, shell-shocked. Then eventually, he moves off down the road.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LATER

Laura reading in a chair, rocking herself unconsciously. Vera Atwood waddling up the porch steps--pregnant belly, fresh black eye and split lip.

VERA

Howdy Miz McAllan!

Vera like a child, pressed against the screen door. Laura lowers her book, affixes pleasantness to her face.

LAURA

Hello. Miss--

VERA

Vera. You can call me Vera.

LAURA

Hello Vera.

VERA

This here is my youngest, Alma.

Vera's skinny daughter ALMA, recessive of chin and dull of eye lifts her gaze to Laura's.

VERA (CONT'D)  
We needa talk to you.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LATER

Vera crossing her dirty bare feet on Laura's rug. Laura tries not to notice. Her daughter Alma in the window picking at the ends of her hair.

VERA  
You cain't put us off.

LAURA  
Excuse me?

VERA  
We ain't got nowhere to go if you put us off. Nobody'll hire us this late in the season.

LAURA  
It's not up to me Vera, it's up to my husband.

Vera rubs her pregnant belly.

VERA  
I'm asking you to keep us on.

LAURA  
I'm telling you, it's not my decision.

VERA  
And if it was?

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

Laura hums as she churns butter on the porch while Henry reads the paper and Pappy smokes. Laura's churning is especially tense and Henry notices:

HENRY  
Alright then, what is it?

LAURA  
What?

HENRY  
You got something on your mind. I can tell.  
(off Laura)  
You sing when you're happy.  
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

And hum when you're not. C'mon now, out with it.

LAURA

Vera Atwood is eight and a half months pregnant. Where would they go? How would they survive?

PAPPY

Ain't this touching? Saint Laura, protector of women and children.

HENRY

Atwood is a lazy, stupid drunk. He's lucky I've kept him this long.

LAURA

Then make him work on half shares like Hap and his family.

HENRY

Why would I go through all that when I can just hire a new tenant?

LAURA

Because you are a Christian.

PAPPY

The Lord ain't the one putting food on our table.

LAURA

Didn't you tell me most farmers around here can't find enough help to make a crop?

(beat)

Call it a business decision. For the good of the farm.

Laura has a point.

HENRY

I'll have a word with Carl tomorrow morning. Just a word.

Laura rewards him with the tiniest smile, softens her churning. Henry basks in her quiet favor.

PAPPY

Next she'll be telling you what to plant.

EXT. MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - MORNING

Laura's hands red, raw, and forgotten between her knees. A washboard leans in a still steaming bucket of gray water. Laura stares at a dead mouse curled on the bottom step.

LAURA (V.O.)  
Violence is part and parcel of  
country life. You're forever being  
assailed by dead things.

Amanda Leigh accidentally bumps a pair of trousers off the clothesline. Amanda Leigh jumps back from the muddy heap, braces for her mother's censure. Laura just blinks. Amanda Leigh slings the pants back onto the line and scurries away.

LAURA (V.O.)  
Dead mice, dead rabbits, dead  
possums, dead birds.

EXT. MCALLAN FARM - BARN - DAY

A POSSUM CORPSE languishes beneath a tree. Ants march in and out of its pink mouth.

LAURA (V.O.)  
You find them in the yard. You  
smell them rotting under the house.

EXT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAY

A sharp flick of the wrist, Florence SNAPS a chicken's neck. The body flops and unspirals itself as she runs a boning knife across the jugular, spills hot blood onto the dirt.

LAURA (V.O.)  
And then there are the creatures  
you kill for food.

EXT. THE ATWOOD CABIN - DAY

Dirty CHILDREN straddle and climb the rickety porch railing. Vera Atwood nudges tight brown fur backward over limp squirrel haunches.

LAURA (V.O.)  
Chickens, hogs, deer, frogs,  
squirrels. Pluck, skin, disembowel,  
debone, fry.

Vera wipes her nose on her shoulder, wedges the too-dull pocketknife deeper under the skin.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM - NIGHT

LAURA (V.O.)  
Eat. Start again. Kill.

Laura runs a pipe cleaner down the barrel of a HUNTING RIFLE.

LAURA (V.O.)  
I learned how to stitch up a  
bleeding wound, load and fire a  
shotgun, reach into the womb of  
heaving sow to deliver a breech  
piglet. My hands did these things.

Laura snaps the barrel into place.

LAURA (V.O.)  
But I was never easy in my mind.

INT./EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Laura gnawing at the balls of her hands. Thick yellow  
callouses peel off between her teeth. She chews them  
thoughtfully. Stares out the window entranced.

AMANDA LEIGH  
Momma, somebody's coming!

A handsome soldier in aviator sunglasses carrying a suitcase.  
Laura looks and realizes:

AMANDA LEIGH (CONT'D)  
Uncle Jamie!!

Laura shoots to her feet, smooths her hands against her  
apron.

HENRY (O.S.)  
Jamie?!

Henry whoops and bolts off the porch, limp and all. Laura  
hangs back in the doorway. She straightens her dress and  
runs her fingers through her hair. She sights her dirty  
fingernails, clasps her hands behind her back.

Henry rocks Jamie in a tight embrace. They separate, look at  
each other. Grab each other again.

JAMIE  
You look good, brother.

HENRY  
You look like hell.

JAMIE

Don't sugarcoat it now.

Laura edges closer with Amanda Leigh and Isabelle, she holds out her hands for a squeeze. Jamie smiles, scoops her into a hug instead.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Laura. Sweet sister-in-law.

LAURA

Welcome home, Jamie.

JAMIE

How are you liking it here in Henry's version of paradise?

Laura starts to answer but is spared from having to lie by:

PAPPY

You'd think a son would see fit to greet his own father.

JAMIE

Dearest Pappy. I'd forgotten how much I missed you.

Said with a cut of sarcasm as Jamie shakes Pappy's hand.

HENRY

(to Jamie re: Pappy)

He's missed you too. He won't admit it but he has.

JAMIE

I bet. And he probably quit smoking and joined the NAACP too.

Laura laughs and Jamie winks at her. Pappy doesn't appreciate the joke. Then Jamie smiles at Amanda Leigh and Isabelle.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Well hello little ones. Give your uncle Jamie a hug.

The girls run and jump into his arms.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

The jitter of Jamie's hand as he cradles a lit cigarette. He pours a drink and finishes in a single draught. Pappy takes note, doesn't hide his disdain. Henry pretends not to see.

PAPPY

So what's it like being a big hero?

JAMIE

I wouldn't know.

PAPPY

Don't give me that. Army wrote me about your fancy medals. Said they was the highest honors an airman could receive.

JAMIE

I was lucky. Lotta guys weren't.

PAPPY

Bet you got plenty of tail out of it too.

HENRY

Jamie's never needed medals to get girls.

PAPPY

Damn right. Takes after me that way. Your momma was the prettiest girl in Greenville. And I had 'em all sniffing after me.

Pappy smiles with his yellow teeth. Jamie shifts in his chair and lights one cigarette with another.

PAPPY (CONT'D)

One thing's for sure. You must'a killed a whole lotta Krauts to get all them medals.

(beat)

Well, how many'd you take out?

JAMIE

I don't know.

PAPPY

Take a guess.

JAMIE

I don't know. Why's it matter?

PAPPY

A man ought to know how many men he's killed.

Henry returns with the bottle and a glass. Jamie quickly uncorks it and pours heavily. He gulps it down and refills. Henry is surprised.

JAMIE

I can tell you this.

(beat)

It was more than one.

HENRY

(under his breath)

Aw, shit.

Pappy's eyes narrow and he seethes for a beat, then smirks:

PAPPY

Well, at least I looked my one in the eye before I shot him. Not like dropping bombs from a mile up in the air.

Jamie throws back his drink and pours another. Then there is uncomfortable silence until Henry interrupts:

HENRY

Well, good time to hit the hay.

Got an early day tomorrow.

JAMIE

I'll just finish my drink.

Pappy absorbs this, grabs a lantern and shuffles out. Jamie slugs back his whiskey. His eyes flick back to the bottle. Henry grabs it and moves it out of range.

HENRY

What you need is a good night's sleep. Laura made a bed up for you.

Jamie stands and Henry gives him a hug.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Welcome home, little brother.

(beat)

Now, go on, get some sleep.

Henry starts to move off.

JAMIE

Actually it was more like four.

HENRY

What?

JAMIE

Miles up in the air. The altitude we dropped bombs from.

HENRY

How can you even see anything from that high up?

JAMIE

You'd be surprised. Roads, cities, factories. Just not people. From twenty thousand feet they're not even ants.

(beat)

Pappy's right. A man ought to know.

Jamie is haunted. Henry is concerned.

INT. TRICKLEBANK'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

Rose Tricklebank takes her time bagging groceries for Jamie. Jamie is polite, but curt as his eyes are on his freshly purchased bottle of bourbon.

TRICKLEBANK

How long you been back from overseas now?

JAMIE

Coupl'a weeks.

TRICKLEBANK

And how're you liking Marietta?

JAMIE

Lovely little town. Just lovely.

Tricklebank moves to bag the bourbon, but Jamie intervenes.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Oh, I got that one. Let's just put that right here.

Jamie puts the bottle in a convenient spot, hurriedly shoves in the remaining provisions.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

There we go. Much obliged, Miz Tricklebank. You have yourself a wonderful day.

Jamie smiles, grabs his stuff and heads out.

## TRICKLEBANK

Take care, now. Come back soon.

EXT. TRICKLEBANK'S GENERAL STORE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Jamie hustles past a handful of WHITE TOWNSMEN on the porch of the store. Among them is Orris Stokes. A passing car BACKFIRES. Jamie hits the ground and covers his head. Groceries spill everywhere. The townsmen murmur and stare.

RONSEL (O.S.)

It's alright. It was just a car.

A helping hand extended, Jamie follows it up to Ronsel.

RONSEL (CONT'D)

Backfired. Must have a stuck intake valve.

Jamie looks up at the porch and sees mean eyes staring from underneath hat brims. He ignores Ronsel's hand, gets up and retrieves his groceries. Ronsel helps. But when Jamie grabs the bourbon his hand shakes so badly he drops it. Thankfully it doesn't break.

JAMIE

Dammit.

RONSEL

They say it stops eventually.

Ronsel holds out his own hand and it shakes like Jamie's. They trade a look and despite being from different worlds, there's an instant kinship.

JAMIE

You're Ronsel, Hap's boy.  
(off Ronsel's nod)  
Jamie McAllan. Henry's brother.

Jamie offers a hand shake. Ronsel is surprised by the show of respect, but he obliges.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

You walk here?

RONSEL

Yessir.

JAMIE

I'll give you a lift.  
(off Ronsel's reluctance)  
C'mon.

RONSEL

Thank you.

Jamie and Ronsel move to the truck where Ronsel hops in the truck bed and Jamie hops in the driver's side. Both of them are aware of the men still watching from the porch.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

Jamie steals looks at Ronsel through the back window, squirms with guilt. Memories of the B25 echo in his ears. Ronsel oblivious to it, chasing his daydreams flitting across the landscape. Jamie pulls over.

JAMIE

Come on up front.

RONSEL

I'm doing just fine back here.

JAMIE

Get in soldier! That's an order!

A beat, then the truck rocks as Ronsel hops off and gets in the passenger side.

RONSEL

How do you know you outranked me?

JAMIE

I was a captain.

RONSEL

We had Negro captains. I served under plenty.

JAMIE

(shrugging)

You obeyed my order. Bet you were a sergeant.

RONSEL

761st tank battalion. "Come Out Fighting"! Spearheaded for Patton. You?

JAMIE

I flew B-25's.

Jamie reaches into the grocery bag between them and takes out the bourbon bottle. He uncorks it then takes a long, much needed swig and drives on.

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
So, sergeant, how do you like being  
back here in the Delta?

Ronsel doesn't answer, he just looks away.

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
Yeah, me too.  
(beat)  
Heard you and my Pappy had words.

RONSEL  
(stiffening)  
I apologized for that.

Then to Ronsel's surprise, Jamie toasts with the bottle.

JAMIE  
He's a disagreeable sonovabitch.  
I'm sure he had it coming.  
(offering the bourbon)  
Here's to you.

RONSEL  
No thanks.

JAMIE  
You always this stubborn? Or is it  
just around white people trying to  
be nice?

Ronsel eyes Jamie, then he grabs the bottle, takes a quick  
sip and tries to hand it back.

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
What kind of NCO are you?

Then Ronsel takes a big swig. So big it makes him choke and  
spill a little. Jamie laughs:

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
Don't waste it now. That's my  
medicine. I need every drop.

Ronsel admits a slight grin as he recovers and hands the  
bottle back. Jamie takes a pull, then:

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
Hey, you tanker boys ever piss in  
your helmets?

RONSEL  
Plenty of times.

JAMIE

We had relief tubes up in the cockpit but sometimes it was easier just to use our flak helmets. And at twenty thousand feet? That piss freezes solid in less than minute.

RONSEL

It's that cold up there?

JAMIE

I'm talking twenty, thirty below zero. And one time we were on this long haul and I went in my helmet and forgot all about it. Then when we got close to the target, I put the helmet back on. And we're doing our bombing run, dodging enemy flak and suddenly I feel something running down my face.

They both laugh as Jamie passes the bottle back to Ronsel.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

I smelled like a damn latrine.

RONSEL

You must'a caught hell back at the officer's club.

JAMIE

My buddies never let me hear the end of it.

(beat)

The ones that made it back anyway.

RONSEL

Yeah. Lost some friends myself.

They drive on in silence.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - LATER

Jamie and Ronsel pull up and stop at the Jackson's shack.

RONSEL

Thanks for the ride.

JAMIE

You're welcome.

EXT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAY - SIMULATANEOUS

Hap, having heard truck, comes out of the shack. Jamie rolls the window down and smiles drunkenly.

HAP  
Everything alright Mist Jamie?

JAMIE  
Everything's fine. I just gave  
Ronsel here a lift from town.

Ronsel rounds the truck, makes his way up the porch stairs.

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
I'll be heading into town again  
next Saturday afternoon. I'll stop  
by, see if you want a ride.

RONSEL  
That'd be fine.

JAMIE  
(a nod)  
Hap.

Then Jamie pulls out and weaves off down the road. Off Hap, worried, as he looks at Ronsel...

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM OUTHOUSE- DAY

Laura sloshes through ankle deep mud, trudges to the leaning outhouse.

Laura opens the door to the BUZZING of flies. It's a hot day and the smell in here is oppressive. Breathing through her mouth, she lifts her skirt, squats and pees. She looks down at the mud caked onto her boots and the hem of her dress.

SERIES OF SHOTS: LAURA'S TORTUOUS BATHING RITUAL

LAURA (V.O.)  
Saturday was my favorite day of the  
week.

--LAURA pumping water in the yard, she hauls sloshing buckets to the stove

LAURA (V.O.)  
It was the only day I felt truly  
clean.

--LAURA hauling steaming water to a ZINC TUB in the yard, she bathes her muddy DAUGHTERS. The water turns brown.

--The girls clean-washed and napping on the porch. LAURA lowers herself into their cloudy lukewarm leftovers. Laura cups water over herself, squats in the fleeting privacy of a flapping sheet. PAPPY happens by, averts his eyes a little too slowly.

LAURA (V.O.)

The rest of the time, we stank.

--Laura dumps the dirty water. Henry pecks her on the cheek as he drags into the yard covered in mud.

OMITTED

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Where Laura looks at her expanding belly in a mirror. She turns profile and sighs with a grin. A beat, then Henry enters. Laura looks at him and smiles.

HENRY

What?

(off Laura)

What is it?

LAURA

I'm pregnant.

HENRY

Oh Lord, honey... Oh Lord!

(hugging and kissing her)

Woo!

LAURA

Shhh, you'll wake the girls.

Henry hugs her again and they are overjoyed.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - MAIN ROOM - DAY

Laura, with bleary eyes and a baby bump, shuffles into the room where Florence works in the kitchen.

LAURA

What time is it?

FLORENCE

Near to ten o'clock, Ms. Laura.

LAURA

Good heavens.

FLORENCE

Yes'm, you definitely carrying a  
boy. Ronsel and Marlon both,  
couldn't wake me for nothing.

(beat)

Something for you on the table.

Laura notices a pretty bunch of lavender wrapped up in a bouquet.

LAURA

Where are these from?

Then Laura notices a note next to the flowers.  
"Congratulations. Love, Jamie" Laura closes her eyes and  
draws in the scent of the flowers.

LAURA (CONT'D)

He remembered I like lavender. How  
sweet.

Then suddenly, she has to pee like a pregnant lady.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Ooh, excuse me. Nature calls.

EXT./INT. THE MCALLAN FARM outhouse - CONTINUOUS

As Laura hustles to the privy. Then she enters to find  
bouquets of lavender everywhere - in cans on the floor, in  
bunches nailed to the wall and hanging from the ceiling.  
Laura chuckles and smiles wide then takes a whiff. Not bad,  
it's working. Then she lifts her skirt, squats and pees.

OMITTED

EXT. SAW MILL - DAY

Jamie and Ronsel stumble from the truck to the dilapidated  
saw mill. Ronsel hesitates.

JAMIE

C'mon, now, we're clear of town,  
nobody's out here.

(with a bourbon bottle)

Don't make me drink alone. I will  
if I have to.

Ronsel prys at a loose board.

RONSEL

Hope this damn thing don't fall  
down on us.

INT. SAW MILL - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie and Ronsel shimmy in through a ragged gap. It's old, decrepit and laden with cobwebs. Shafts of sunlight jut in through the wooden slats.

RONSEL

Used to come here when I was a boy.  
Whenever I needed to be alone and  
think.

JAMIE

Well I love what you've done with  
the place.

Jamie offers Ronsel a smoke. Ronsel accepts and Jamie lights his own then tosses Ronsel the lighter. Ronsel lights up and tosses the lighter back.

RONSEL

Why you treating me so nice?

JAMIE

Because you look like you could use  
it.

RONSEL

Bullshit.

Jamie drags on his smoke and measures Ronsel with a drunken eye. Then:

JAMIE

We were somewhere over Austria and  
we made contact with a swarm of  
Messerschmitts. They were  
everywhere.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. B-25 BOMBER COCKPIT (MOVING) - DAY

It's bumpy as Jamie holds the plane on course. Suddenly bullets rip through the cockpit and the co-pilot gets shredded. Blood splatters on Jamie and on the "LADY LUCK" pin-up girl. Jamie is horrified and we hear his VOICE OVER:

JAMIE (V.O.)

Took out my tail gunner, side  
gunner...my co-pilot. Made a deal  
with God right there.

(MORE)

JAMIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Swore if he saved me I was gonna do  
something right. I didn't know  
what, but I promised anyway.

BACK TO:

INT. SAW MILL - DAY

JAMIE  
Next thing you know, whole bunch of  
P-38's show up. Just like the  
goddamn cavalry. They knocked  
those Germans right outta the sky.  
I swear they were angels sent by  
the Lord himself.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. B-25 BOMBER COCKPIT (MOVING) - DAY

Jamie holds the plane on it's shaky course. Then he looks  
out to his left and sees a U.S. fighter plane come close.

JAMIE (V.O.)  
Those P-38's, their tails were  
painted red. And one of 'em, he  
buzzed me after the fight. When I  
looked over I thought I was seeing  
things. But that fighter pilot?  
He was colored.

The fighter pilot looks at Jamie and salutes. Jamie returns  
the favor. Then the fighter plane rolls and peels off.

BACK TO:

INT. SAW MILL - DAY

JAMIE  
Then he saluted me. And I saluted  
back.  
(beat)  
Men who died that day... They were  
fathers. Husbands. Good men. Lot  
better than me.

Jamie steeps in his survivor guilt. Ronsel hands him the  
bottle and he drinks. They trade a look, a bond forming.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - DAY

LAURA (V.O.)

As usual, when anything bad happened, Henry was away. He And Pappy had gone to see about some hogs, so I was alone with the girls.

Amanda Leigh and Isabelle making mudpies by the water pump. Laura , PREGNANT, mending one of Henry's shirts. Vera Atwood, barefoot with a FILLETING KNIFE, unlatches the fence, saunters into the yard. Her sweaty dress clinging to her, her smile incongruous.

VERA

You need to take me to town. I'm gon' kill Carl.

Laura clocks Vera's knife. Checks the girls who are playing on, oblivious. Laura keep panic out of her voice.

LAURA

Come here Vera, come sit down and tell me what's--

VERA

I don't have *time* to sit down. He's with her *now*. He's started in on Alma, just like he did with Renie.

Amanda Leigh looking scared, she takes her sister's hand. Laura keeps panic out of her voice.

LAURA

Amanda Leigh take your sister into the house.

Vera directs her wild gaze on them, her knife winks in the light.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Go on around through the back. Go.

Vera rocking back and forth on the heels of her feet now. The knife swinging at her side.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Vera--

Vera levels the point of the knife at Laura's neck.

VERA

You got to take me to town now.

LAURA

Vera honestly, I--I don't have the keys.

VERA

I seen you driving before.

Laura grasps at a lie.

LAURA

And I got in trouble for it.

Vera blinking, coming back to herself.

LAURA (CONT'D)

My husband took the keys away.

Vera buries her face in her hands, lets out a feral howl. Laura hesitates, reaches for her. Vera steps backward out of her grasp. Wanders out of the yard and back down the street like a ghost.

LAURA (V.O.)

They found Carl's body lying in the road halfway to town.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING

Carl Atwood's twisted body, dirt blowing across his face. Just another dead thing.

LAURA (V.O.)

Vera had stabbed him seventeen times then gone on to Marietta and turned herself in to Sheriff Thacker.

MEN heft the Carl's corpse into a truckbed.

LAURA (V.O.)

Florence said she'd seen her walking down Main Street, covered in blood. She said it looked like she'd bathed in it.

INT. MCALLAN FARM HOUSE BEDROOM- DAY

LAURA (V.O.)

(beat)

But I didn't find those details until later. I was too lost in my own misery.

Laura stooped, rushing through her house. She draws her bloodied hand from between her legs. Doubles over on the bed.

AMANDA LEIGH  
What's wrong, momma?

She grunts and writhes, her hands pressed to her belly.

AMANDA LEIGH (CONT'D)  
Momma?

LAURA  
I need you to be a big girl and go  
fetch Florence from her house. Do  
you remember how to get there?

Amanda Leigh nods tightly. Another cramp hits and it hurts.

LAURA (CONT'D)  
Go. Run as fast as you can.

Amanda Leigh takes off and Laura goes to the ground. A growing blood stain forms around her crotch.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura lays in the bed alone staring at the ceiling. Her expression is stoic and empty. She does not react when Florence enters with food and drink.

FLORENCE  
How you feeling, Ms. McAllan?  
(off Laura's silence)  
Brought some tea to help with the  
cramps.

LAURA  
Thank you, Florence. For  
everything.

FLORENCE  
You know, I understand how you  
feeling right now, Ms. McAllan.  
Lost one of my babies once too.  
Samuel.

They trade a look, two women bound by the same tragedy.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)  
Might make you feel better to get  
out of this room.

LAURA  
Maybe tomorrow.

Florence lingers sits next to her. Then, after several beats, Laura's face twists in sorrow and she weeps. Florence holds her, lets the sobs ring out.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laura sits at the edge of the bed staring at the wall. Then Henry enters. He approaches and puts a hand on her shoulder. Laura lets it rest there for a beat, then she gently shrugs it off. Henry is concerned.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Laura lays in bed, curled up and depressed. She reacts when Amanda Leigh and Isabelle enter with wildflowers.

AMANDA LEIGH

We brought you flowers, momma.

LAURA

Thank you, sweetheart.

Then Isabelle holds up a molted rattlesnake skin.

ISABELLE

This is for you, momma. We found it in the yard.

Laura is repulsed but she feigns delight.

LAURA

Oh my, that's wonderful darling.  
I'll treasure it.

(then)

Go on back outside now and play.

The girls scamper out and, with two fingers, Laura puts the snake skin far away.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Laura lays there, catatonic. We hold on her stillness for a beat. Then the silence is broken by HAMMERING. Laura tries to ignore it, but it's loud and incessant.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie hoists Amanda Leigh high over a new wooden stall. There's a rope attached to a bucket and pulley contraption mounted up top.

JAMIE

Easy now.

Amanda Leigh drops lavender bunches into the bucket of water.

ISABELLE

Momma look! Uncle Jamie's building  
a shower!

JAMIE

(to the girls re: Laura)  
I thought y'all were supposed to  
keep a look out and tell me if she  
was coming.

(then to Laura)  
Surprise! Thought you might like a  
little privacy every now and then.  
Well, what do you think?

Laura stares at it, truly touched by the gesture.

LAURA

I think it's marvelous. Thank you.

Laura hugs Jamie. It feels good and she sinks into him. And there's a pin prick of light in the dark tunnel of her depression.

HENRY

What's this?

Jamie and Laura quickly break the hug when Henry walks up.

LAURA

Your brother built us a shower.

HENRY

You don't say.

Henry checks out the handy work and Laura and Jamie trade a quick glance.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - SHOWER - SUNSET

Laura enters with a towel. The deep thrum of insects and frogs mingles with the distant sound of Amanda Leigh practicing scales on the piano in the house.

As Laura gets undressed she looks up and notices large clouds stained with hues of pink and gold from the setting sun.

She pulls the rope and the bucket tilts and pours water into another bucket punctured with holes which creates a shower effect. Then she releases the rope and stops the water flow. Jamie was thoughtful enough to put in a soap dish. In it is a purple bar of soap. Laura puts the soap to her nose and draws in the scent. Lavender. She smiles and lathers up.

Then she pulls the rope all the way and the entire bucket starts pouring. The water is warm and it feels wonderful. It's been so long since she had a shower. She rinses and it feels so good it's almost sensual.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - DAY

Henry drives his tractor through thick mud. The crops have grown-in but the field is flooded and in bad shape. Then the tractor lurches and gets stuck. Henry puts it in reverse and the tires just spin and dig deeper. Henry puts it in drive and tries the other direction. To no avail.

HENRY

Dammit.

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

Still on one crutch, Hap works the wet, overgrown field. The mud makes the hard work even harder. He loses his footing and falls. He gets up, more covered in mud than he was before.

EXT. JACKSON CABIN - DAY

Lilly May and Marlon perched on barbed wire fence posts gunning down imaginary enemies. Lilly May wears Ronsel's helmet, Marlon wears Ronsel's boots.

LILLY MAY

BANG BANG! You dead Nazi cracka,  
you dead!

Marlon oversteers his "tank".

MARLON

GRRRRRR! Domp, domp domp domp. We  
runnin' 'em over! Watch your right  
gunner!

Lilly May swivels her imaginary gun over to the right. Just then a truck full of WHITE SHARECROPPERS rolls by. Lilly May lowers her "gun". A man tosses a soda bottle in their yard. The truck rattles past.

LILLY MAY

(whispers)  
Bang. You dead.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAY

Florence mends socks as she looks through a window watching Ronsel sit against a tree smoking a cigarette. He's got a thousand yard stare as he mindlessly drags and exhales.

Henry's truck pulls up, Jamie behind the wheel. Ronsel hops into the passenger side. Florence doesn't like what she sees. Then the truck pulls out and Florence watches it go.

EXT. JACKSON CABIN - DUSK

Florence leaning against the porch post, gazing into the distance. Hap hobbles out on his still-splinted leg. He leans his crutches against the house, puts his arms around her, inhales her neck. Florence cradles his head.

HAP  
You ain't tired?

FLORENCE  
We gotta let him go.

HAP  
We're not holding him.

FLORENCE  
We are. He's staying for us.

HAP  
Maybe he wants to stay. It's not always gonna be like this. Soon as I'm healed we'll move outta here. We'll be okay. He'll be okay once he has his own place--

Florence drops her head. Hap spins her around to him, pulls her into a clumsy one-legged two step. Hap hums some broken tune. Florence melts onto him.

HAP (CONT'D)  
Remember that?

FLORENCE  
You not supposed to be up on this broke leg, Hawthorne Jackson. You never let it heal, you never gon' walk.

HAP  
Why walk if I can't dance?

Hap and Florence swaying, hanging in each other's eyes, grasping for exhausted joy.

INT. SAW MILL - DAY

Jamie lights a cigarette and Ronsel sips from the bottle. They're both drunk. It's hot in here and the sunlit smoke hangs on the humid air.

RONSEL  
The silver star? Damn.

JAMIE  
Don't be impressed. I got it for  
being stupid.

RONSEL  
What?

JAMIE  
I almost drowned in a flood when I  
was a kid. Since then, baths,  
swimming pools, any kind of water I  
hate it. And this one mission I  
changed course so we wouldn't be  
over the water so long. And, as  
luck would have it, we ran smack  
dab into some enemy flak. A lot of  
it. But I managed to hit the  
target and bring us all back.

RONSEL  
You so scared of water you'd rather  
get shot at than fly over it?

JAMIE  
Damnedest thing, ain't it?

They share a laugh and a drink, then:

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
You ever miss it sometimes? Being  
over there? I don't mean getting  
shot at, but... I actually miss it.

RONSEL  
Me too. Over there I was a  
Liberator. Had folks lined up on  
the street cheering and throwing  
flowers. Back here, I'm just  
another nigger pushing a plow.

JAMIE  
Miss some of the guys too.

RONSEL  
Think about 'em every day.

JAMIE  
Seeing different parts of the  
world.

(smiling)

(MORE)

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
Italian girls. English girls.

Ronsel leaks a smile.

RONSEL  
It was different over there.

JAMIE  
(beat)  
You ever been with a white girl?

RONSEL  
A few.

JAMIE  
Well I'll be damned.

RONSEL  
Army gave us separate barracks,  
separate blood supply, separate  
latrines. But them European girls  
didn't mind us a bit.  
(then)  
When we were in Wimbourne, English  
gal I never laid eyes on patted me  
right on the butt. Told me she was  
checking for a tail because the  
white GI's was saying we were more  
monkey than human. So we made sure  
to show 'em just how human we were  
every opportunity we got.

JAMIE  
German girls too, huh?

RONSEL  
Yeah. Well...one in particular.

Ronsel drifts with the memory of Resl, wistful.

JAMIE  
Uh oh, I've seen that look before.  
She must'a been something special.

RONSEL  
Yeah. She was. But that was then.  
And this is now. I'm back home.  
Right where I belong.

Said with a cut of drunken sarcasm.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - NIGHT

Crickets outside as Ronsel lays in bed by candlelight, wide awake. He's gazing at Resl's gold necklace and crucifix. Then, with resolve, he stuffs it into a small tin box next to his bed and closes the lid shut. Then he blows out the candle, still wide awake as he tries to forget her.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM - HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry snores loudly. So loudly Laura is awake. She shakes him and he stops. Then Laura settles in and tries to get comfortable. But after a few moments, Henry starts snoring again. Finally, Laura succumbs to the futility and gets up.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Laura exits the house into the moonlight. She is startled when she nearly trips over Jamie, who is passed out with an empty bottle of bourbon. Fully clothed and breathing heavily from drink, he is peaceful and pitiful all at once.

JAMIE

Nonono, I can't swim! I can't swim!

Laura turns and sees Jamie writhing in his sleep:

JAMIE (CONT'D)

NO! AHHHH! AHHHHH!!!!

LAURA

Jamie! Jamie wake up!

Laura shakes him hard. Jamie shoots to upright, eyes darting. Then he looks to Laura as the sense creeps back into him. A beat, then he starts crying. She pulls him to her and he sinks into her arms.

After a few moments, Henry appears in the doorway. Neither Laura nor Jamie notice him. Henry says nothing. He just stands there watching their embrace, jealousy in his eyes. Eventually, Henry moves back into the house.

Then Jamie rips himself away from Laura's embrace:

JAMIE (CONT'D)

I gotta get outta here.

LAURA

Jamie...

Jamie stumbles toward Henry's car, gets in and pulls away.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

As Henry's car goes blazing by, swerving.

INT. HENRY'S CAR (MOVING) - LATER

Jamie dozing at the wheel. He awakes and jerks the truck toward the side of the road. Overshoots, and slips into a ditch. Jamie squinting, flailing, cursing as he strips the gears trying to free the truck.

JAMIE

DAMN!!

Jamie shuts off the engine, slumps across the wheel crying, blubbering, incoherent. He falls asleep across the wheel. Headlights still on.

OMITTED

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING

Sheriff Thacker knocking on the truck window. Jamie, red-eyed, stubbled, haggard shoulders a line of drool away. He wakes slowly, drags his sodden gaze to the window. Henry frowns over the Sheriff's shoulder. Jamie shudders, struggles with the car door. Sheriff helps rip it open. Jamie stumbles into the light.

SHERIFF THACKER

We'll get it hauled out in the morning, Henry.

Jamie and Henry clamber out of the ditch in silence. Jamie is hungover and haggard.

JAMIE

I'm sorry.

Henry shakes his head in disgust.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM - BARN - DAY

Henry hammers repairs while Jamie finishes milking the cow. When Jamie stands he trips, falls and spills milk everywhere. Jamie laughs.

HENRY

You think it's funny spilling good milk?

JAMIE

(slurring)

Well you know what they say, no use crying over it.

HENRY

No, especially when it's somebody else's.

Jamie stops grinning and turns sarcastic as he reaches into his pocket and produces some coins and crumpled bills.

JAMIE

I see. What do I owe you, Henry? About a dollar and a half? Let's just say two to be safe.

Jamie pushes the money at him. Henry slaps his hand away and the money goes flying. A clumsy, half-hearted fist-fight.

HENRY

For Christ's sake, this ain't about the money.

JAMIE

Then what do you want from me?

HENRY

For you to be a man!

JAMIE

One pail of spilled milk and I'm not a man?

HENRY

You're sure not acting like one. Disappear for days at a time doing whatever you damn well please. And when you are here, you're drunk.

JAMIE

I don't answer to you.

HENRY

You do when you live in my house and work on my farm.

JAMIE

Oh, well I'm real sorry about that Mr. Boss man. But don't take it out on me because your little farmer dream ain't working. Ain't my fault your crops are getting flooded out.

HENRY

Well you sure as hell ain't helping matters. It's like having another goddamn child to look after.

JAMIE

You need to open your eyes, big brother. You're so busy walking around here like God almighty, so wrapped up in yourself and your damn farm you can't even see your own wife is miserable.

HENRY

Watch your mouth.

JAMIE

Or what?

Henry clenches his fists and squares up. Jamie stands his ground. But Henry restrains himself.

HENRY

Know what? You be whatever kind of man you want. Just go do it someplace else.

JAMIE

Fine, I'll go to town.

HENRY

I don't mean just for the night. In the morning I'm going to Greenville for a few days to see about some livestock. I'll expect you gone when I get back.

They hold a look, neither man seeing clearly through the fog of anger and pride. Then Henry leaves Jamie in his wake.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BARN - LATER

As Jamie packs his things, frustrated, angry. He reacts when Laura knocks at his open doorway.

LAURA

Hi there, will you be here for supper tonight?

JAMIE

Uh...no.

LAURA  
(re: the packed bags)  
Are you going someplace?

JAMIE  
Out west probably. Gotta buddy  
from the war who lives in Los  
Angeles.

LAURA  
Los Angeles? Jamie, what are you  
talking about?

JAMIE  
He didn't tell you?

LAURA  
Who didn't tell me what?

JAMIE  
Henry. He kicked me out.

LAURA  
What?

JAMIE  
He asked me to leave. I probably  
had it coming.

LAURA  
That can't be. He's just sore  
about the wreck. Let me talk to  
him.

JAMIE  
No, Laura. He's more than just  
sore. And it's probably for the  
best.

LAURA  
So just like that? You up and  
leave? Were you even planning on  
saying good-bye?

JAMIE  
Of course. First bus out doesn't  
leave 'til two.

LAURA  
What about the girls? This will  
break their little hearts.

JAMIE  
I'll talk to them.

Jamie keeps packing. The suddenness of this new reality is a bitter prospect for Laura.

LAURA  
Does your father know?

JAMIE  
I'll go down to the river and find the girls. And Pappy... I'll just leave him a note.

LAURA  
You don't need to go, Jamie. When Henry cools off he'll listen to me.

Jamie stops packing for a moment and stares at the floor. Then he looks at her, so much hurt in his eyes.

JAMIE  
Laura, I can't stay here. I feel like I'm suffocating. I can't explain it...

LAURA  
You don't need to.

Laura runs her hand along his suitcase and wishes she could run away with him. Jamie tamps his pain, tired of being pathetic. Laura moves to him, close. They gaze at each other for a very long beat, neither wanting to say goodbye.

Then with alarming swiftness, Laura grabs Jamie and kisses him. Deeply. Hungrily. Then suddenly he pushes her away. Both of them breathe heavily, their hearts racing. Then Jamie pulls her close and they kiss again. Clothes get torn off as they tumble onto the bed. Jamie and Laura devour each other.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAY

Florence, Hap, Marlon and Lilly May clean up after breakfast. Ronsel enters, haggard and sleepless.

HAP  
It's half past nine. You just now getting up?

Ronsel shrugs and nods.

HAP (CONT'D)  
You just gon' lay around all day? While your brothers and sisters work? What's wrong with you--

LILLY MAY  
You got a letter. Says it's all  
the way from Germany.

RONSEL  
What?

Hap hands over a worn envelope that's traveled a long way.  
Ronsel snatches it.

HAP  
Who's Resl Braun?

RONSEL  
Someone I knew.

And Ronsel heads out the front door.

HAP  
Where you going now? Ronsel!

RONSEL  
I'll be back.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI ROAD - DAY

The grey horizon hints at a coming storm. Ronsel walks along, a swirl of emotion, shaking his head in disbelief as he reads the letter.

Then he reacts to the rising sound of an APPROACHING TRUCK. He quickly shoves the letter into his pockets. The truck is moving fast. The glint from the windshield prevents us from seeing the driver. But we hear the engine rev higher as he steps on the gas.

Ronsel moves to the shoulder of the road. But the truck swerves in his direction and bears down on him. Ronsel runs and dives into a ditch just as the truck rumbles up and skids to a fast stop. Then, surprisingly, Jamie tumbles out, laughing and drunk. He's got a bottle of whiskey and he looks like absolute hell.

JAMIE  
You should'a seen the look on your  
face.

RONSEL  
It ain't funny.

JAMIE  
Actually, my friend, it was indeed.

Ronsel gets up and brushes himself off. Jamie is still smiling. Then soon, Ronsel can't help but smile too.

RONSEL

You're crazy you know that, right?

JAMIE

Can't argue with that. No, sir.

Jamie takes a pull from the bottle and plops to the ground, a mess. Ronsel sees the state he's in.

RONSEL

Hey. Is something the matter?

Jamie gets quiet and picks at the label on the bottle.

JAMIE

What's the worst thing you ever did?

RONSEL

(after a beat)

That lady I told you about. The one at the prison camp.

JAMIE

No, I mean something that hurt somebody real bad. And you knew it was gonna hurt 'em, but you did it anyway.

This time Ronsel gets quiet for a long beat. Then he pulls out the letter and a photo and hands it to Jamie.

RONSEL

Leaving her.

Jamie looks at the picture then reads the letter. Then he reacts and smiles:

JAMIE

Well, I'll be. Congratulations. You're a father.

RONSEL

His name's Franz.

JAMIE

Franz. That's a good name.

(then)

So that's the German girl.

Ronsel nods and we finally see the photo. It is of Resl holding a swaddled baby. Jamie hands the photo back to Ronsel and holds up the bottle:

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
Well this calls for a celebration.  
Here's to Franz.

Jamie takes a swig and hands Ronsel the bottle.

RONSEL  
To Franz.

Then Ronsel takes a drink and gives the bottle back to Jamie.

JAMIE  
So what the hell are you gonna do?

RONSEL  
I have no idea. She wants me to go  
to Germany.

JAMIE  
Long way off.

Ronsel nods, he knows. Jamie stares into the distance as Ronsel stares at Franz. Then:

RONSEL  
What about you? What's the worst  
thing you ever done?

Jamie looks at him, his mind on Laura and their tryst. But Jamie smiles and covers:

JAMIE  
Who me? I'm a saint.

RONSEL  
Oh yeah, I bet.

Then there's a distant THUNDER RUMBLE. The clouds on the horizon are getting darker. Jamie kills the whiskey bottle and tosses it into the ditch.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Jamie and Ronsel pass a new bottle and sing in unison:

JAMIE/RONSEL  
*It don't mean a thing if it ain't  
got that swing.*  
(MORE)

JAMIE/RONSEL (CONT'D)  
*Doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah, doo-ah. It don't mean a thing all you got --*

They both react to an approaching car and stop singing.

JAMIE  
 Oh shit, put your head down.

Ronsel ducks. The dust makes it hard to see but the road is narrow and soon they pass the oncoming car. Orris drives and Pappy rides shotgun. Jamie looks forward and Ronsel keeps his head low. Pappy and Orris crane their necks as the vehicles cross.

RONSEL  
 You think they saw us?

JAMIE  
 Don't know.

INT. HENRY'S PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Jamie and Ronsel pull up to the Jackson's shack, both drunk.

JAMIE  
 Here we are.  
 (beat)  
 I'll be leaving town soon and...  
 Well, good luck to you. You've been a friend. I want you to know that.

RONSEL  
 Yeah? Well I want you to know it too. You're one of the good ones.

Jamie hesitates to accept this truth. Ronsel extends a hand. Jamie grasps it, they shake hard.

JAMIE  
 Hope you find a way to your...to your boy...to your... family.

RONSEL  
 Take care of yourself.

JAMIE  
 You too.

They hold a look, friends. Jamie extends a hand. They shake.

INT. THE JACKSON'S CABIN - DAY

The RUMBLE OF DISTANT THUNDER. Florence flinches when Ronsel enters, wobbling and high.

RONSEL

Hi, Momma.

She watches him, wants to hug him, ask him where he's been. But what comes out is:

FLORENCE

You hungry?

RONSEL

No. Where is everybody?

FLORENCE

Went up to church. Late service.

Ronsel plops onto his cot. Florence wants to talk to him, help him, but he seems so unreachable.

Ronsel reaches into his pocket and pulls out the envelope from Resl. He reaches inside and finds nothing. Where's the letter and the photo? Brow furrowed, he stands and rifles through his other pockets. Not there. Oh shit. Rising panic. He lost it.

RONSEL

Goddammit... No, no, no.

FLORENCE

What is it son?

RONSEL

You seen a letter?

FLORENCE

The letter from Germany?

RONSEL

Yes.

FLORENCE

Oh God. Let's just wait. Don't fret. Wait till your father--

Ronsel busts out of the shack and back into the night.

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

Ronsel? Ronsel!

EXT. MISSISSIPPI ROAD - DAY

The threat of thunder has turned into reality of pounding rain. Ronsel runs to the spot where he told Jamie about the letter. He looks around desperately. He finds the empty whiskey bottle with the label Jamie picked off.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - DAY

Laura is in the kitchen. Amanda Leigh and Isabelle are on the floor playing with building blocks. Pappy lingers by the window, anxiously waiting.

PAPPY  
Goddammit, where is he?

LAURA  
(re: the girls)  
Mind your language, please.

PAPPY  
Just like him. Thinking only of  
himself.  
(then)  
There he is.

Outside the truck pulls up, weaving badly. Jamie gets out and stumbles to the house.

PAPPY (CONT'D)  
Drunk again.

Jamie enters, ruffled, wet and smiling.

JAMIE  
Well, hello, dear family.

AMANDA LEIGH/ISABELLE  
Uncle Jamie!

LAURA  
Let him dry off first.

PAPPY  
Who in the hell was that with you  
in the truck?

JAMIE  
Hello, son. I'm glad to see you.

PAPPY  
On the road. When I saw you  
driving. Who was that?

JAMIE

Ronsel Jackson. What's it to you?

PAPPY

You care to tell me why that nigger was sitting right next to you like you was two peas in a pod?

JAMIE

Because I was giving him a ride.

PAPPY

He can ride in the back.

JAMIE

He can ride wherever I say. Anything else?

PAPPY

Gimmie a cigarette. I'm out.

Jamie stares at him for a beat then pulls out an old pack of Lucky Strikes. Pappy snatches them. It's empty.

PAPPY (CONT'D)

You ain't worth a damn, you know that?

JAMIE

Yeah. I do.

Jamie wobbles.

PAPPY

Look at mister big war hero. Nothing but a drunk.

LAURA

Just go.

PAPPY

Want him all to yourself huh, gal? Too bad he's too liquored up to be any good to you.

LAURA

I beg your pardon.

PAPPY

I've seen the way you sniff after him --

JAMIE

Pappy.

PAPPY

Henry may be too thick to notice,  
but I ain't.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI ROAD - NIGHT

Rain as Ronsel trudges up the road. Then he reacts to the crescendo of approaching cars. He turns and sees two sets of headlights approaching fast.

Ronsel jumps down into the ditch. But instead of passing, the cars pull up and stop. Ronsel is a bit blinded by the headlights and the rain. But soon several figures in white sheets and hoods pile out of the cars and rush at him.

Ronsel runs but they are on him like a pack of dogs. He fights and struggles, landing several hard punches. But he's outnumbered.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LEAN TO - NIGHT

Rain beats on the roof as Jamie sleeps on his cot. A beat then he is poked awake by Pappy's cane. Jamie bolts up, startled to see Pappy. Orris Stokes and the Sheriff are behind him in white robes.

JAMIE

What the hell's going on?

PAPPY

Put your boots on and come with us.

EXT. SAW MILL - NIGHT

Hard rain. Orris Stokes' car pulls up and stops among some other parked cars. Jamie, Pappy, and Orris Stokes get out and move towards the saw mill. We can see torch lights coming from inside the mill. As they go, the Sheriff and Stokes don their white hoods. This gives Jamie pause and he stops. But Stokes shoves him along.

STOKES

Go on.

They open the door to the saw mill and enter.

INT. SAW MILL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Inside are a group of men in KKK garb. In the middle of the mill is Ronsel. He has a burlap sack over his head, a noose around his neck and his hands tied behind him. He's strung up from a rafter, his tip-toes barely touching the ground. One of the white hoods holds the other end of the rope. Another man (DEX) stands nearby with a shotgun.

JAMIE  
What's going on here, Pappy?

PAPPY  
Shut up.

SHERIFF THACKER  
(re: Ronsel)  
Take it off.

Dex moves to Ronsel and yanks the sack off his head. As his eyes adjust to the light we see that Ronsel has been beat up.

JAMIE  
Good Lord. Turn him loose.

PAPPY  
I said shut up.

JAMIE  
Like hell I will. Turn him loose,  
dammit.

Stokes pulls his pistol and levels it at Jamie:

STOKES  
You best listen, son.

JAMIE  
I ain't your son. And I suggest  
you either use that thing or point  
it elsewhere.

Jamie readies lunge at Stokes.

PAPPY  
Jamie!

SHERIFF THACKER  
Bring forth the evidence.

One of the white hoods moves forward and brings out the letter and the photograph from Resl. Both Jamie and Ronsel see it and sink. The white hood hands it to Pappy.

SHERIFF THACKER (CONT'D)  
You know why you're here, nigger?  
(off Ronsel's silence)  
I asked you a question.

Ronsel stays silent. Sheriff throws a nod to Orris who walks over to Ronsel and slugs him with a left and then a right to the ribs. The thuds from the blows force grunts from Ronsel.

Jamie winces. But Ronsel stays as cool. He will not show them his fear.

Pappy walks up to Ronsel and shows him the letter and the picture of Resl and Franz. Ronsel eyes the photo.

SHERIFF THACKER (CONT'D)

Did you rut with this woman?

PAPPY

We know you did it, nigger. We just want to hear you say it.

The white hood holding the rope jerks it.

STOKES

Go on! Say it!

JAMIE

What the hell do you fellows care about some Kraut whore?

STOKES

Shut your mouth, nigger lover.

PAPPY

You knew about it. Found the letter in the truck after you gave him a ride.

JAMIE

Those Fräulein cunts got a lot of our boys killed. If Ronsel here left her with a little half-breed bundle of joy to remind her of it, I call it justice.

Jamie's logic lands for a moment and there's hope.

SHERIFF THACKER

Oh you're good, pretty boy. Too bad you're full of shit.

JAMIE

How do you even know that Ronsel here, is the father?

PAPPY

Says so right there in the letter.

JAMIE

That doesn't mean a damn thing.

STOKES

Well, let's ask him, why don't we?  
 (to Ronsel re: the photo)  
 Are you the father of this, I won't  
 call it a child, this...  
 abomination?

SHERIFF THACKER

Answer him!

The noose tightens. Ronsel won't deny his own son and he  
 manages to choke out the word:

RONSEL

Yes...

SHERIFF THACKER

Leviticus 19:19. "Ye shall keep my  
 statutes. Thou shalt not let thy  
 cattle gender with a diverse kind.  
 Thou shalt not sow thy field with  
*mingled seed.*" The penalty for  
 abomination is death.

JAMIE

Have you all lost your damn minds?!  
 Killing a decorated soldier over an  
 enemy whore?! The man fought for  
Patton for Godsakes --

STOKES

That's enough --

JAMIE

You turn him loose now and maybe I  
 won't go to the law. Otherwise, I  
 swear, you better kill us both.

Stokes can't believe the nerve of Jamie and he moves towards  
 him with the gun.

PAPPY

You gonna betray your own blood  
 over a nigger?!

Pappy tries to stand between Stokes and Jamie, but Jamie  
 shoves him out of the way. Stokes points the gun at Jamie.  
 Jamie steps up and puts the gun barrel to his own forehead.

JAMIE

Do it. Go on.

The entire room hangs on the tension for a long beat. Then, quick as a cat, Jamie swipes the gun with one hand and PUNCHES Stokes in the mouth with the other. Stokes's head snaps back and he stumbles backwards and falls. Jamie quickly turns to Dex who has the shotgun.

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
Drop it, Dex!

Dex hesitates and Jamie cocks the hammer.

JAMIE (CONT'D)  
DROP IT!

PAPPY  
He's bluffing. And half drunk  
besides.

JAMIE  
Shut up, old man.

PAPPY  
Point the gun at the nigger.

Pappy moves right into Jamie's eye line, blocking his shot.

PAPPY (CONT'D)  
He won't shoot. He don't have the  
balls to kill a man up close. Do  
you, son?

Dex points the shotgun at Ronsel. Pappy steps closer to  
Jamie.

JAMIE  
Stop right there. I'm warning you.

PAPPY  
You not gon' kill your Pappy.

Then one of the white hoods charges at Jamie. Jamie turns  
and shoots him in the leg. But that was enough to give the  
others a chance to rush in.

Jamie squeezes off another shot that misses before he gets  
tackled. In the subsequent melee, they somehow manage to  
wrest the gun from Jamie's hands.

But Jamie punches, kicks and gives everything he's got,  
fighting like a cornered animal. But soon, they overwhelm  
him. And they proceed to beat the shit out of him.

Jamie and Ronsel lock eyes for a moment during the beating.  
Then a kick to the head from Stokes.

CUT TO BLACK.

PAPPY'S VOICE FADES IN, echo-y and distant.

PAPPY (V.O.)  
Wake up! Jamie! Wake up dammit!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE SAW MILL - NIGHT

Jamie is awakened by a bucket of cold rain water. He is bruised, blurry and dazed. But as focus restores he sees a mass of white hoods staring down at him.

Among the hoods is Pappy's face. Jamie recoils and tries to push him away but his hands are tied behind his back. Pappy yanks him upright and props him against the wall. Jamie sees that Ronsel now hangs from a cross-beam, naked and bloodied.

PAPPY  
You make one more wrong move these boys are liable to kill you.

STOKES  
(re: Jamie)  
What do we do with him?

PAPPY  
I told you already. He won't talk. Ain't that right, son?

JAMIE  
(re: Ronsel)  
Just let him go.

STOKES  
You ain't exactly in a position to make demands.

PAPPY  
He won't go to the law. Not if we make him a part of it.

SHERIFF THACKER  
How?

PAPPY  
Nigger still needs to be punished. You let my son, there, decide how.

SHERIFF THACKER  
(after a beat)  
Alright then. What'll it be?

JAMIE  
I won't do it.

PAPPY  
 You don't want him killed? Then  
 decide his punishment.

JAMIE  
 No.

Stokes unsheathes a HUNTING KNIFE:

STOKES  
 You will. Or I will.

Dex moves to Ronsel and puts the shotgun to Ronsel's head.

SHERIFF THACKER  
 I'll give you a choice. His eyes.  
 His tongue. Or his balls. Choose.  
 (off Jamie's silence)  
 Choose godammit!

JAMIE  
 No...

STOKES  
 Dex --

JAMIE  
 Alright! Alright...

Jamie locks eyes with Ronsel. This is an impossible choice.

SHERIFF THACKER  
 Which is it, boy?

Jamie's head drops and he mumbles something.

DOC TURPIN  
 Speak up.

As Turpin leans in the RISING MUSIC and the SOUNDS OF THE  
 STORM OUTSIDE TAKE OVER.

Then in a SERIES OF FLASHES:

--Jamie says something to the Sheriff that we cannot hear.

--Stokes turns towards Ronsel with the knife.

--White hoods hold a struggling Ronsel.

--Stokes grabs Ronsel by the face and forces his mouth open.

--Jamie can't look and he averts his eyes.

--Ronsel's strange muffled screams

--Stokes slices and BLOOD spurts from Ronsel's mouth and stains some of the white robes around him.

SMASH TO BLACK.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - BARN - NIGHT

Jamie is thrown onto his bed, wet, beaten and unconscious. Pappy and Orris Stokes glower above him. Stokes drifts out.

Pappy frozen, staring at Jamie. He removes his son's boots. Throws a horse blanket over him. Jamie sputters in his sleep. A confusion of feelings mottle Pappy's face.

EXT. THE SAW MILL - SAME TIME INTERCUT

Hap, Marlon, Florence, and OTHER BLACK DEACONS push the door open and enter the scene of the crucifixion. Ronsel hangs bleeding from the crossbeam, the Black Messiah. Hap and Marlon immediately set to levering him down. Florence's hand goes to her mouth.

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LEAN TO - NIGHT - LATER

Driving rain and howling wind outside. Pappy sleeps peacefully, his breathing deep and steady. A LIGHTNING FLASH accompanied by THUNDER briefly ILLUMINATES the room.

Several beats, then more THUNDER and LIGHTNING and we see Jamie standing by Pappy's bedside. He stares at Pappy as he clinches the pillow in his hands. Then finally he shakes Pappy violently:

JAMIE

Wake up.

Pappy jerks awake and squints up at Jamie:

PAPPY

The hell are you doing, boy?

JAMIE

I wanted to make sure I looked you  
in the eye.

With that Jamie shoves the pillow onto Pappy's face. Pappy thrashes and claws. Jamie presses harder. Then soon the thrashing weakens. Pappy's leg kicks become twitches and his hands loose from Jamie's. And then Pappy is still. Jamie holds the pillow there for several more beats. Then, slowly he pulls it from Pappy's face. Pappy's eyes are wide and his mouth agape.

INT. SAW MILL - SAME TIME INTERCUT

FLORENCE

Oh Lord, no...

A river of blood pools from Ronsel's mouth as Hap lowers him to the floor. Florence wraps his nude body in her headscarf. Mary Magdalene. Marlon scoops up his brother's legs. Florence touches his chest, howls in sorrow. She cups her hand over his chest. Bomp Bomp Bomp.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

I held his heartbeat in my hand. I remember every beat. He was warm and alive...

Ronsel stirs and coughs.

OMITTED

INT. THE MCALLAN FARM HOUSE - LEAN TO - DAY

Where Laura KNOCKS on the door.

No answer. Perplexed, she pushes the door open and enters. She reacts when she sees Pappy eyes wide open, lifeless and frozen in shock. Then she reaches out, touches his skin and quickly recoils from the cold.

She scans Jamie's empty bed. Something on the floor catches her eye. She reaches down and picks it up. It's Pappy's white hood. Laura holds it up and sees the eye holes and realizes.

JAMIE (O.S.)

It's exactly what you think it is.

Laura sees Jamie sitting in the corner clutching the pillow he smothered Pappy with. She reacts to his beat up face:

LAURA

What happened to you?  
(off his desolate look)  
What happened, Jamie? Jamie.

Jamie reaches into a pocket and fishes out the crumpled photo of Resl and Ronsel's son. Laura looks at it, confused.

JAMIE

Thy got Ronsel. I tried to stop it... there were too many of them...

LAURA  
What happened Jamie? What did they  
do to him?

JAMIE  
They made me choose.

LAURA  
Choose what?

JAMIE  
I had to.

LAURA  
He's alive?

Jamie shakes his head, twists the pillow in his fists. Laura looks to Pappy, Jamie finally meets her gaze. Laura gently pries the pillow from Jamie's hands.

INT. JACKSON CABIN - DAWN

The hush of daybreak. Ronsel laid out on the kitchen table. Florence wipes dried blood from his swollen, bruised body. She dabs at the stillness of his face.

OMITTED

OMITTED

SCENE MOVED AND RE-NUMBERED TO SCENE 162

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - LATER

A truck drives up the road and stops. Henry gets out with a bag. He waves and nods to the driver. Laura and Jamie move out towards Henry.

Jamie has cleaned up and changed his clothes, but he's still beat up. Jamie and Laura approach Henry as he kneels at his crops. He flicks a glance at them, more concerned with the cotton.

HENRY  
Got back as soon as I could. If  
this keeps up we'll have to  
replant. Almanac predicted--

LAURA  
Henry.

HENRY  
 (re: Jamie's bruises)  
 What in the hell happened to you?

LAURA  
 Henry.

HENRY  
 What?

Laura looks to Jamie. But Jamie just shakes his head and stares at his shoes.

LAURA  
 It's your father. He died last night.

HENRY  
 What? How?

LAURA  
 In his sleep. Peacefully.

Henry drops his head as the news washes over him. Then Henry looks at Jamie and regrets their last exchange.

HENRY  
 You alright?  
 (off Jamie's nod)  
 I'm glad you're still here.

Jamie nods then Henry hugs him. Jamie, racked with guilt and pain, hugs back. PRELAP the RUMBLE of THUNDER and...

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - DAY

A LIGHTNING FLASH and we return to the beginning.

HENRY  
 Hap. Can you help us out here? We need to get this coffin in.

Hap pulls his arm away and steps down. Florence spits over the side of the wagon and glares at the McAllans.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
 Thank you for stopping.

Hap takes an end of the rope, Henry eyes Marlon.

HENRY (CONT'D)  
 Maybe he can help too?

HAP  
My son is not getting down outta  
that wagon.

Henry swallows this.

HENRY  
Okay.

Henry takes two end of the rope, Hap and Jamie each take one and they maneuver the coffin down into the hole. The coffin touches bottom and they pull the ropes back up. Henry stares down at the coffin for a beat then:

HENRY (CONT'D)  
We forgot to bring a bible.

Hap looks to the sky and cocks his head like he's listening to something. Then he bows it and pulls a small, tattered bible from inside his jacket.

HAP  
Done this plenty of times.

HENRY  
Thank you, Hap. But no.

LAURA  
If he's willing to we should allow  
it. He is a man of God.

JAMIE  
I say we let him.

HENRY  
(after a begrudging beat)  
Go on then.

Hap flips to a certain page as they all bow their heads. A beat, then Hap closes the Bible and quotes from memory. His voice is strong and ringing. He's not trying to comfort the bereaved. He's sending Pappy to Hell:

HAP  
Man who is born of a woman is of  
few days and full of trouble. He  
cometh forth like a flower, and is  
cut down: he fleeth as a shadow,  
and continueth not. And dost thou  
open thine eyes upon such a one,  
and bringest me into judgment with  
thee? Who can bring a clean thing  
out of an unclean? Not one.

Henry frowns, not appreciating the tone or content of the sermon. Laura holds his hand, Jamie looks up:

HAP (CONT'D)

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again. Through the scent of water it will bud like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away. As the waters fail from the sea and drieth up, so man lieth down, and riseth not. Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. Amen.

LAURA

Amen

JAMIE

Amen.

Henry is silent. His head still down, he starts shovelling angry mounds of dirt onto the grave. Hap tips his hat and makes for the wagon.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Hap, wait.

Jamie moves to where the tarp hangs. He can't see inside, but he knows who's in there:

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Give this to Ronsel? If you see him.

Jamie pulls out the photo of Resl and Franz. Florence reaches out and takes the photo. Jamie and Florence hold a long look. Jamie's eyes well up with guilt. Hap manages a forgiving nod then spurs the mule on. Off Jamie watching them go...he looks back at his brother shovelling dirt. Laura eyes plead with him. Jamie turns away and keeps on walking. A lone man on a muddy road.

FADE OUT:

OMITTED

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT./EXT. UNION STATION LOS ANGELES - DAY

Jamie, small pack slung over his shoulder walks through the grand lobby. He reaches into a pocket, pulls out a flask and takes a couple swigs.

JAMIE (V.O.)  
Whenever Ronsel enters my mind I  
hope that he is well.

We STAY WITH him as he moves outside to... Sunshine. Palm trees. A clear view of the mountains in the distance. Jamie squints. The dry heat feels good on his face. Then as he moves off:

JAMIE (V.O.)  
And I hope that my Pappy's untimely  
death brought the Jackson family  
some measure of peace. Though I  
must admit, it brings me none.

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. L.A. APARTMENT - NIGHT

JAMIE (V.O.)  
I just thank God I still have room  
in my heart for hope of any kind.

1940's LA noir style. As Jamie smokes a cigarette at an open window with a blinking sign out front. A PRETTY WOMAN pours bourbon. It's a hot night and she crosses naked to the bed with two sweating glasses. Jamie draws on his cigarette then follows her to the bed.

JAMIE (V.O.)  
But until then I am content to stay  
perpetually numb. All the while  
hoping that by some miracle my  
friend, Ronsel, found happiness.

Off Jamie drinking...and hoping.

EXT. THE MCALLAN FARM - DAY

As Henry drives his tractor through the field:

HENRY (V.O.)  
A few days after I lost my father,  
I lost my brother too. The girls  
took it hard. Frankly, so did I.  
But, Laura, she understood.  
(MORE)

HENRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She knew Jamie needed to leave this place. Just like I knew she needed to. My family's the only real thing that matters to me now.

EXT. SMALL HOUSE - DAY

On a block with other small houses. Amanda Leigh and Isabelle play in the front yard enclosed by a white picket fence.

HENRY

But I often miss my brother and find myself hoping he'll come home someday. I just pray he's not lost forever.

Laura waddles out onto the porch and we see that she is VERY PREGNANT. Henry pulls up in his truck and gets out. The girls see Henry and run to him.

LAURA (V.O.)

I would never tell Henry the truth about this child. Jamie's child. That would only serve to clear my conscience, not his. It's a small bit of dignity that I can give back to him. Though he has no idea I've taken it.

Henry moves up to the porch and gives Laura a hug and warm kiss on the lips. Then he bends and kisses her belly. And for the first time ever, we see Henry truly smile.

LAURA (V.O.)

I've learned that's what it is to truly love someone: to give whatever you can while taking what you must.

OMITTED

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY

Hap and Marlon hitch a NEW MULE to a NEW PLOW in a beautiful field.

HAP (V.O.)

This here is the loins of the land. Beautiful black soil made rich by two great rivers and the hand of the Lord himself.

(MORE)

HAP (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And now, with sweat, toil and the  
grace of God, we got ourselves a  
little piece of it. My children  
got something they can call they  
own. And can't nothing change that.  
Not ever.

Hap can see Florence and Lilly May over by a water pump. He waves. They wave back.

EXT. NEW JACKSON HOME - DAY

Florence works the water pump with Lilly May at her side.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

If you got children, you got dreams  
for 'em. You want 'em to live they  
life thinking they can do whatever  
it is they want to.

Florence fills the bucket, Lilly May tries to help but Florence shoos Lilly May towards their newer, nicer HOME. Daffodils ring the steps. Florence wipes her sweaty brow and watches as Lilly May perches on the porch, pulls out a notebook, pencils, books : US PERSONNEL OFFICE STENOGRAPHY GRADE AND EVALUATION GUIDE. Lilly May sinks into the pages.

FLORENCE (V.O.)

All three of my children a gift  
from God. Just let them keep  
shining, Lord. No matter how hard  
they try to dim that light, let it  
shine bright as the sun.

EXT. HAP'S WAGON - DAY

Ronsel's face through slotted wood as Hap's wagon lurches to a start. Household goods bump and rattle above him. Jamie's voice trailing away.

JAMIE (O.S.)

...give this to him...if you see  
him again?

Pooled rain drips down from a tarp, through the cracks onto Ronsel's closed eyes.

RONSEL (V.O.)

My nightmare is always the same.  
First I'm in a tank wearing a  
helmet. Then I'm in the back of a  
car with a burlap sack over my  
head.

(MORE)

RONSEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 I'm surrounded by enemies and the  
 stench of their hate is choking me.

EXT. BERLIN STREET - DAY

We FLOAT past the war torn Brandenburg Gate. A pair of  
 AMERICAN SOLDIERS amble past.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 I scream. My lips move and I can  
 feel the strain. But nothing is  
 coming out. Nothing.

EXT. BERLIN STREET - DAY

The bombed out spire of the Kaiser Wilhelm Church.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 But should my story end there?  
 Silenced and defeated? Oppression,  
 fear, deformity. It would take an  
 extraordinary man to beat all that.

EXT. BERLIN STREET - DAY

We float down a clean residential street.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 I would have had to wean myself off  
 laudanum and self-pity. Then I  
 would have had to work the fields  
 with my father while I gathered my  
 courage and saved my money. And  
 then I would have had to swallow my  
 pride and accept help from Army  
 buddies who had learned of my  
 plight. I would have had to take  
 the scholarship to Morehouse  
 College they arranged for me and  
 travel the four hundred miles to  
 Atlanta alone with a little card in  
 my shirt pocket that said 'mute'.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING STAIRWELL - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

A CRISP, SUITED MAN climbs the stairs, checks the addresses.  
 We can't see his face. Eventually he reaches a door and  
 stares at it for a long time.

RONSEL (V.O.)  
 And then finally, I would have had  
 cross the Atlantic yet again. This  
 time not for war. But for love.