

# THE PIANO LESSON

Screenplay by

Virgil Williams & Malcolm Washington

Based on the play by August Wilson

REVISED:

2/16/2024 COLLATED

12/15/2023 WHITE AP DRAFT

4/15/2023 BLUE PRODUCTION DRAFT

3/18/2023 WHITE PRODUCTION DRAFT



Later, with the piano loaded, Young Doaker snaps the reins and the wagon lurches forward. Boy Charles places his hat on 6-year-old Boy Willie's head. He turns around to see his father standing still, alone, as the wagon pulls away. They exchange looks as the land seems to grow around his father - a final goodbye as the FIREWORKS FINALE begins.



Boy Charles peers through the slats and recoils when one of the bottles full of whiskey SMASHES near his face.

More FIRELIGHT as the torches get close. And soon...WHOOSH, FLAMES grow. Boy Charles tries to escape. But the door is locked tight.

9 **EXT. YELLOW BOXCAR - SIMULTANEOUS**

9

Sutter's face glows as he watches the boxcar burn. SCREAMS from inside. Over the boxcar in flames...

TITLE CARD: THE PIANO LESSON

Follow the smoke up into the sky until the FRAME TURNS BLACK.

10 **EXT. ROAD/INT. TRUCK - DAY**

10

CLOSE ON BOY WILLIE, in his father's hat, chest heaving and catching his breath. Black and in his 30's, he has an infectious grin and a boyishness that is apt for his name. He is brash and impulsive, talkative and somewhat crude. And right now he's too stubborn to let exhaustion win.

CHYRON: 1936

WIDEN as Boy Willie pushes a beat-up, circa-1930's pick-up truck on a stretch of road in Sunflower, Mississippi. CAMERA GLIDES alongside the truck, past a huge pile of WATERMELONS stacked high in the pick-up bed.

CAMERA LANDS INSIDE THE TRUCK where LYMON, also Black and in his 30's, is behind the wheel. He talks little and then with a straightforwardness that is often disarming. And as with most things, he's unsure if this will work.

The truck starts to roll. Boy Willie WHISTLES and shouts from outside:

BOY WILLIE (O.S.)  
Start it, nigger!

Lymon puts it in gear, tries but the engine just coughs. Another try and it rumbles to life. Boy Willie runs up to the passenger door and jumps in. Lymon is shocked it worked. Boy Willie never had a doubt.

11 **EXT. MISSISSIPPI ROAD - MAGIC HOUR**

11

High and wide. A road snakes through the landscape. CAMERA FINDS the truck heading towards the horizon.





DOAKER

What you doing up here? I thought you was still down in Mississippi.

BOY WILLIE

Me and Lymon selling watermelons. We got a truck out there. Got a whole truckload of watermelons. We brought them up here to sell. Where's Berniece?  
(calls)  
Hey, Berniece!

DOAKER

Berniece up there sleep.

BOY WILLIE

Well, let her get up. Hey, Berniece!

DOAKER

She got to go to work this morning.

BOY WILLIE

Well, she can get up and say hi. It's been three years since I seen her.  
(calls)  
Hey, Berniece! It's me...Boy Willie.

DOAKER

Berniece don't like all that hollering now. She got to work.

BOY WILLIE

Me and Lymon been riding two days in that truck...the least she can do is get up and say hi.

DOAKER

Where you all get that truck from?

Doaker crosses to the kitchen. Boy Willie and Lymon follow.

BOY WILLIE

It's Lymon's. I told him let's get a load of watermelons and bring them up here.

LYMON

Boy Willie say he's going back, but I'm gonna stay. See what it's like up here.



BOY WILLIE

You gonna carry me down there first.

LYMON

I told you I ain't going back down there and take a chance on that truck breaking down again. You can take the train. After we sell them watermelons you have enough money you can buy a whole railroad car.

DOAKER

You got all them watermelons stacked up there no wonder the truck broke down.

LYMON

It got a hole in the radiator but it runs pretty good. You have to pump the brakes sometimes before they catch. Boy Willie leave his door open and be ready to jump when that happens.

BOY WILLIE

Lymon think that's funny. I told the nigger I give him ten dollars to get the brakes fixed. But he thinks that funny.

LYMON

They don't need fixing. All you got to do is pump till they catch.

BERNIECE, wearing a nightgown, enters. Thirty-five years old, she is still in mourning for her husband after three years.

BERNIECE

What you doing all that hollering for?

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Berniece. Doaker said you was sleep. I said at least you could get up and say hi.

BERNIECE

It's five o'clock in the morning and you come in here with all this noise. You can't come like normal folks. You got to bring all that noise with you.

BOY WILLIE

Hell, I ain't done nothing but come in and say hi. I ain't got in the house good. I come eighteen hundred miles to see my sister I figure she might want to get up and say hi. What you got, Doaker? Where your bottle? Me and Lymon want a drink.

(to Berniece)

This is Lymon. You remember Lymon Jackson from down home.

LYMON

How you doing, Berniece. You look just like I thought you looked.

His eyes linger on her. Boy Willie clocks it.

BERNIECE

Why you all got to come in hollering and carrying on? Waking the neighbors with all that noise.

BOY WILLIE

They can come over and join the party. We fixing to have a party. Doaker, where your bottle? Me and Lymon celebrating. The Ghosts of the Yellow Dog got Sutter.

BERNIECE

Say what?

BOY WILLIE

Ask Lymon, they found him the next morning. Say he drowned in his well.

DOAKER

When this happen, Boy Willie?

BOY WILLIE

About three weeks ago. Me and Lymon was over in Stoner County when we heard about it. We laughed. We thought it was funny. A great big old three-hundred-and-forty-pound man gonna fall down his well.

LYMON

It remind me of Humpty Dumpty.

BOY WILLIE

Everybody say the Ghosts of the  
Yellow Dog pushed him.

BERNIECE

I don't want to hear that nonsense.  
Somebody down there pushing them  
people in their wells.

DOAKER

What was you and Lymon doing over  
in Stoner County?

BOY WILLIE

We was down there working. Lymon  
got some people down there.

LYMON

My cousin got some land down there.  
We was helping him.

BOY WILLIE

Got near about a hundred acres. He  
got it set up real nice.

(to Berniece)

Me and Lymon got a truckload of  
watermelons out there.

BERNIECE

Where you all get that truck from?

BOY WILLIE

I told you it's Lymon's. Doaker,  
where your bottle? I know you got  
a bottle stuck up in your room.  
Come on, me and Lymon want a drink.

Doaker exits into his room.

BERNIECE

Where you get that truck from,  
Lymon?

LYMON

I bought it.

BERNIECE

Where he get that truck from, Boy  
Willie?

BOY WILLIE

He told you he bought it. Bought it  
for a hundred and twenty dollars.

(MORE)

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

I can't say where he got that  
hundred and twenty dollars from...  
(to Lymon)

Where you get that hundred and  
twenty dollars from, nigger?

LYMON

I got it like you get yours. I  
know how to take care of money.

Doaker brings a bottle and sets it on the dining table.

BOY WILLIE

Aw hell, Doaker got some of that  
good whiskey. Don't give Lymon  
none of that. He ain't used to  
good whiskey. He liable to get  
sick.

LYMON

I done had good whiskey before.

BOY WILLIE

Lymon bought that truck so he have  
him a place to sleep. Sheriff  
looking for him. Got Stovall  
looking for him too. He down there  
sleeping in that truck ducking and  
dodging both of them. I told him  
come on let's go up and see my  
sister.

BERNIECE

What the sheriff looking for you  
for, Lymon?

BOY WILLIE

The man don't want you to know all  
his business. He's my company. He  
ain't asking you no questions.

LYMON

It wasn't nothing. It was just a  
misunderstanding.

BERNIECE

He in my house. You say the  
sheriff looking for him, I wanna  
know what he looking for him for.  
Otherwise you all can go back out  
there and be where nobody don't  
have to ask you nothing.

LYMON

It was just a misunderstanding. Sometimes me and the sheriff we don't think alike. So we just got crossed on each other.

BERNIECE

Might be looking for him about that truck. He might have stole that truck.

BOY WILLIE

We ain't stole no truck, woman. I told you Lymon bought it.

DOAKER

Boy Willie and Lymon got more sense than to ride all the way up here in a stolen truck with a load of watermelons. Now they might have stole them watermelons, but I don't believe they stole that truck.

BOY WILLIE

You don't even know the man good and you calling him a thief. And we ain't stole them watermelons either. Them old man Pibterford's watermelons. He gave me and Lymon all we could load for ten dollars.

DOAKER

No wonder you got them stacked up out there. You must have five hundred watermelons stacked up out there.

BERNIECE

Boy Willie, when you and Lymon planning on going back?

BOY WILLIE

Lymon say he staying. As soon as we sell them watermelons I'm going back.

BERNIECE

(exiting up the stairs)  
That's what you need to do. And you need to do it quick. Come in here disrupting the house. I don't want all that loud carrying on around here. I'm surprised you ain't woke Maretha up.

BOY WILLIE  
 I was fixing to get her now.  
 (calls)  
 Hey, Maretha! Maretha!

BERNIECE  
 Don't you wake that child up!

BOY WILLIE  
 You going up there...wake her up  
 and tell her her uncle's here. I  
 ain't seen her in three years.

BERNIECE  
 I ain't wakin' that child up...and  
 don't you be making all that noise.  
 You and Lymon need to sell them  
 watermelons and go on back.

STAY WITH Berniece as she exits up the stairs and moves to...

15 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/BERNIECE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS** 15

Where her 11-year-old daughter, MARETHA, sleeps. Berniece closes the door quietly and stares at the child as she mindlessly fiddles with the golden crucifix hanging from her neck.

16 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - DAWN** 16

Boy Willie and Lymon drink. Doaker returns his shaving blade and bowl to his bedroom.

BOY WILLIE  
 I see Berniece still try to be  
 stuck up.

DOAKER  
 Berniece alright. She don't want  
 you making all that noise. Maretha  
 up there sleep.

BOY WILLIE  
 I ain't thinking about Berniece.  
 You hear from Wining Boy? You know  
 Cleotha died?

DOAKER  
 Yeah, I heard that. He come by  
 here about a year ago. Had a whole  
 sack of money. He stayed here  
 about two weeks. Ain't offered  
 nothing.

(MORE)

DOAKER (CONT'D)

Berniece asked him for three dollars to buy some food and he got mad and left.

Doaker sits at the dining table with Boy Willie and Lymon.

LYMON

Who's Wining Boy?

BOY WILLIE

That's my uncle. That's Doaker's brother. He play piano. He done made some records and everything. He still doing that, Doaker?

DOAKER

He made one or two records a long time ago. If you let him tell it he a big recording star.

LYMON

Is that the piano?

Boy Willie and Lymon cross to the piano.

BOY WILLIE

Yeah...look here, Lymon. See how it got all those carvings on it. See, that's what I was talking about. See how it's carved up real nice and polished and everything? You never find you another piano like that.

LYMON

Yeah, that look real nice.

BOY WILLIE

I told you. My mama used to polish it every day. See all them pictures carved on it? That's what I was talking about. You can get a nice price for that piano.

LYMON

That's all Boy Willie talked about the whole trip up here. I got tired of hearing him talk about the piano.

BOY WILLIE

All you want to talk about is women. You ought to hear this nigger, Doaker.

(MORE)

## BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Talking about all the women he  
gonna get when he get up here. He  
ain't had none down there but he  
gonna get a hundred when he get up  
here.



DOAKER

How your people doing down there,  
Lymon?

LYMON

They alright. They still there. I  
come up here to see what it's like  
up here. Boy Willie trying to get  
me to go back and farm with him.

BOY WILLIE

Sutter's brother selling the land.  
He say he gonna sell it to me.  
That's why I come up here. I got  
one part of it. Sell them  
watermelons and get me another  
part. Get Berniece to sell that  
piano and I'll have the third part.

DOAKER

Berniece ain't gonna sell that  
piano.

BOY WILLIE

I'm gonna talk to her. When she  
see I got a chance to get Sutter's  
land she'll come around.

DOAKER

You can put that thought out your  
mind. Berniece ain't gonna sell  
that piano.

BOY WILLIE

I'm gonna talk to her. She been  
playing on it?

DOAKER

You know she won't touch that  
piano. I ain't never known her to  
touch it since Mama Ola died. She  
say it got blood on it. She got  
Maretha playing on it though. Say  
Maretha can go on and do everything  
she can't do. Got her in an extra  
school down at the Irene Kaufman  
Settlement House. She want Maretha  
to grow up and be a school teacher.  
Say she good enough she can teach  
on the piano.

BOY WILLIE

Maretha don't need to be playing on no piano. She can play on the guitar.

DOAKER

How much land Sutter got left?

BOY WILLIE

Got a hundred acres. Good land. He done sold it piece by piece, he kept the good part for himself. Now he got to give that up. His brother come down from Chicago, he anxious to sell the land, Doaker. He don't want to be bothered with it. He called me to him and said 'cause of how long our families done known each other and how we been good friends and all, say he wanted to sell the land to me. Say he'd rather see me with it than Jim Stovall. Told me he'd let me have it for two thousand dollars cash money. He don't know I found out the most Stovall would give him for it was fifteen hundred dollars. He trying to get that extra five hundred out of me telling me he doing me a favor. I thanked him just as nice. Told him what a good man Sutter was and how he had my sympathy and all. Told him to give me two weeks. He said he'd wait on me. That's why I come up here. Sell them watermelons. Get Berniece to sell that piano. Put them two parts with the part I done saved. Walk in there. Tip my hat. Lay my money down on the table. Get my deed and walk on out. This time I get to keep all the cotton. Hire me some men to work it for me. Gin my cotton. Get my seed. And I'll see you again next year. Might even plant some tobacco or some oats.

DOAKER

You gonna have a hard time trying to get Berniece to sell that piano. You know Avery Brown from down there don't you? He up here now.

(MORE)

DOAKER (CONT'D)

He followed Berniece up here trying to get her to marry him after Crawley got killed. He been up here about two years. He call himself a preacher now.

BOY WILLIE

I know Avery.

Boy Willie goes to the kitchen and picks bacon out of Doaker's pan.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

I know him from when he used to work on the Willshaw place. Lymon knew him too.

DOAKER

He after Berniece to marry him. She keep telling him no but he won't give up. He keep pressing her on it.

BOY WILLIE

Avery think all white men is big shots. He don't know there some white men ain't got as much as he got.

DOAKER

He supposed to come past here this morning. Berniece going down to the bank with him to see if he can get a loan to start his church. That's why I know Berniece ain't gonna sell that piano. He tried to get her to sell it to help him start his church. Sent the man around and everything.

Boy Willie comes back to the dining table.

BOY WILLIE

What man?

DOAKER

Some white fellow was going around to all the colored people's houses looking to buy up musical instruments. He'd buy anything. Drums. Guitars. Harmonicas. Pianos. Avery sent him past here. He looked at the piano and got excited. Offered her a nice price.

(MORE)

DOAKER (CONT'D)

She turned him down and got on  
Avery for sending him past.

BOY WILLIE

How much he offer her for it?

DOAKER

Now you know me. She didn't say  
and I didn't ask. I just know it  
was a nice price.

LYMON

All you got to do is find out who  
he is and tell him somebody else  
wanna buy it from you. If he like  
Doaker say, he'll give you anything  
you want for it.

BOY WILLIE

That's what I'm gonna do. I'm  
gonna find out from Avery.

DOAKER

It ain't gonna do you no good.  
Berniece ain't gonna sell that  
piano.

BOY WILLIE

She ain't got to sell it. I'm  
gonna sell it. I own just as much  
of it as she does.

Boy Willie looks at the piano like chattel.

17

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/BERNIECE'S BEDROOM - DAY**

17

Berniece, now dressed for the day, puts her nightgown into a basket. Then she straightens up and gathers other pieces of clothing and puts those in the basket.

Maretha stirs as Berniece quietly exits into the dark, windowless HALLWAY and closes the door behind her. She moves to the BATHROOM, grabs some towels and adds them to the basket.

Then, when she heads back into the hallway, she steps in something WET -- a small, footprint-shaped puddle. Then she reacts to a whisper:

SUTTER (O.S.)

Boy Willie...

Her eyes turn to the sound and follow wet footprints down the hallway...where they end at the SHADOW OF A LARGE MAN with his HAND ON TOP OF HIS HEAD.

Berniece wonders if her eyes are deceiving her. Then she moves to the switch and TURNS THE LIGHTS ON. And both the shadow and the footprints disappear.

She TURNS THE LIGHTS OFF and the SHADOW REAPPEARS. Berniece drops the basket and takes off, hollering:

BERNIECE

Doaker!

18      **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**      18

Doaker, Boy Willie and Lymon run to the stairs. Berniece flies downstairs, terrified.

DOAKER

Berniece, what's the matter? You alright? What's the matter?

Berniece tries to catch her breath. She is unable to speak.

DOAKER (CONT'D)

That's alright. Take your time. You alright. What's the matter?

BERNIECE

Sutter...Sutter's standing up in the hall.

Boy Willie runs up the stairs.

DOAKER

Hey, Boy Willie?

19      **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS**      19

Boy Willie flicks on the light switch. Nothing there.

BOY WILLIE

Ain't nobody up here.

20      **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**      20

DOAKER

Boy Willie!

Doaker ushers Berniece to the couch. Boy Willie enters from the stairs.

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Doaker, what's wrong with her? Berniece, what's wrong?

DOAKER

She say she seen Sutter's ghost.

BOY WILLIE

She ain't seen no Sutter.

BERNIECE

He was standing right there.

BOY WILLIE

That's all in Berniece's head.  
Ain't nobody up there. Go on up  
there, Doaker.

DOAKER

I'll take your word for it.  
Berniece talking about what she  
seen. She say Sutter's ghost  
standing up there. She ain't just  
make all that up.

BOY WILLIE

She up there dreaming. She ain't  
seen no ghost.

LYMON

You want a glass of water,  
Berniece?

BOY WILLIE

She don't need no water. She ain't  
seen nothing.

DOAKER

Let Berniece tell it.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't stopping her from telling  
it.

DOAKER

What happened, Berniece?

BERNIECE

I come out my room to come back  
down here and Sutter was standing  
there in the hall.

BOY WILLIE

What he look like?

BERNIECE

He look like Sutter. He look like  
he always look.

BOY WILLIE

Sutter couldn't find his way from  
Big Sandy to Little Sandy. How he  
gonna find his way all the way up  
here to Pittsburgh? Sutter ain't  
never even heard of Pittsburgh.



DOAKER

Go on, Berniece.

BERNIECE

Just standing there with a blue suit on.

BOY WILLIE

That man ain't never left Marlin County when he was living...and he's gonna come all the way up here now that he's dead?

DOAKER

Let her finish. I want to hear what she got to say.

BOY WILLIE

I'll tell you this. If Berniece had seen him like she think she seen him she'd still be running.

DOAKER

Go on, Berniece. Don't pay Boy Willie no mind.

BERNIECE

He was standing there...had his hand on top of his head. Look like he might have thought if he took his hand down his head might have fallen off.

LYMON

Did he have on a hat?

BERNIECE

Just had on that blue suit...he just stood there looking at me...calling Boy Willie's name.

BOY WILLIE

What he calling my name for?

BERNIECE

I believe you pushed him in the well.

BOY WILLIE

Now what kind of sense that make? You telling me I'm gonna go out there and hide in the weeds with all them dogs...



LYMON (V.O.)

They found him in his well and all  
the people say it must be the  
Ghosts of the Yellow Dog. Just  
like all them other men.

BACK TO:

25

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - DAY

25

BOY WILLIE

Come talking about he looking for  
me. What he come all the way up  
here for? If he looking for me all  
he got to do is wait. He could  
have saved himself a trip if he  
looking for me. That ain't nothing  
but in Berniece's head. Ain't no  
telling what she liable to come up  
with next.

Berniece stands up to confront Boy Willie.

BERNIECE

Boy Willie, I want you and Lymon to  
go ahead and leave my house. Just  
go on somewhere. You don't do  
nothing but bring trouble with you  
everywhere you go. If it wasn't  
for you Crawley would still be  
alive.

BOY WILLIE

Crawley what? I ain't had nothing  
to do with Crawley getting killed.  
Crawley three time seven. He had  
his own mind.

BERNIECE

Just go on and leave. Let Sutter  
go somewhere else looking for you.

BOY WILLIE

I'm leaving. Soon as we sell them  
watermelons. Other than that I  
ain't going nowhere. Hell, I just  
got here. Talking about Sutter  
looking for me. Sutter was looking  
for that piano. That's what he was  
looking for. He had to die to find  
out where that piano was at... If I  
was you I'd get rid of it.

(MORE)

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

That's the way to get rid of  
Sutter's ghost. Get rid of that  
piano.

BERNIECE

I want you and Lymon to go on and  
take all this confusion out of my  
house!

BOY WILLIE

Hey tell her, Doaker. What kind of  
sense that make? I told you,  
Lymon, as soon as Berniece see me  
she was gonna start something.  
Didn't I tell you that? Now she  
done made up that story about  
Sutter just so she could tell me to  
leave her house. Well, hell, I  
ain't going nowhere till I sell  
them watermelons.

BERNIECE

Well why don't you go out there and  
sell them! Sell them and go on  
back!

BOY WILLIE

We waiting till the people get up!

LYMON

Boy Willie say if you get out there  
too early and wake the people up  
they get mad at you and won't buy  
nothing from you.

DOAKER

You won't be waiting long. You  
done let the sun catch up with you.  
This the time everybody be getting  
up around here.

BERNIECE

Come on, Doaker, walk up here with  
me. Let me get Maretha up and get  
her started. I got to get ready  
myself. Boy Willie, just go on out  
there and sell them watermelons and  
you and Lymon leave my house.

Berniece and Doaker exit up the stairs. Boy Willie calls  
after them:

BOY WILLIE

If you see Sutter up there...tell  
him I'm down here waiting on him.

26

**EXT. CHARLES HOUSE/PORCH - DAY**

26

Morning activity on the street. Move past the truck stacked high with WATERMELONS. Boy Willie and Lymon collect their bags from the bed of the truck.

LYMON

What if she see him again?

BOY WILLIE

That's all in her head. There  
ain't no ghost up there.

LYMON

I'm glad he didn't say he was  
looking for me.

BOY WILLIE

I wish I would see Sutter's ghost  
give me a chance to put a whopping  
on him.

LYMON

You ought to stay up here with me.  
You be down there working his  
land...he might come looking for  
you all the time.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't thinking about Sutter. And  
I ain't thinking about staying up  
here. You stay up here. I'm going  
back and get Sutter's land. You  
think you ain't got to work up  
here. You think this the land of  
milk and honey. But I ain't scared  
of work. I'm going back and farm  
every acre of that land.

27

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - CONTINUOUS**

27

Maretha eats cereal, Doaker cleans the dishes in the sink.  
Boy Willie and Lymon enter from the back door.

BOY WILLIE

Hey, sugar. Come here and give me  
a hug. Come on give Uncle Boy  
Willie a hug. Don't be shy. Look  
at her, Doaker. She done got  
bigger. Ain't she got big?

DOAKER

Yeah, she getting up there.

BOY WILLIE

How you doing, sugar?

MARETHA

Fine.

BOY WILLIE

You was just a little old thing last time I seen you. You remember me, don't you? This your Uncle Boy Willie from down South. That there's Lymon. He my friend. We come up here to sell watermelons. You like watermelons?

(Maretha nods)

We got a whole truckload out front. You can have as many as you want. What you been doing?

MARETHA

Nothing.

BOY WILLIE

Don't be shy now. Look at you getting all big. How old is you?

MARETHA

Eleven. I'm gonna be twelve soon.

BOY WILLIE

You like it up here? You like the North?

MARETHA

It's alright.

LYMON

You look just like your mama. I remember you when you was wearing diapers.

BOY WILLIE

You gonna come down South and see me? Uncle Boy Willie gonna get him a farm. Gonna get a great big old farm. Come down there and I'll teach you how to ride a mule. Teach you how to kill a chicken, too.

MARETHA

I seen my mama do that.

BOY WILLIE

Ain't nothing to it. You just grab him by his neck and twist it. Get you a real good grip and then you just wring his neck and throw him in the pot. Cook him up. Then you got some good eating. What you like to eat? What kind of food you like?

MARETHA

I like everything...except I don't like no black-eyed peas.

BOY WILLIE

Uncle Doaker tell me your mama got you playing that piano. Come on play something for me.

Boy Willie crosses to the piano followed by Maretha.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Show me what you can do. Come on now. Here...Uncle Boy Willie give you a dime...show me what you can do. Don't be bashful now. That dime say you can't be bashful.

Boy Willie puts the dime on the piano. Maretha plays. It is something any beginner first learns.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Here, let me show you something.

Boy Willie sits and plays a simple boogie-woogie.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

See that? See what I'm doing? That's what you call the boogie-woogie. See now...you can get up and dance to that. That's how good it sound. It sound like you wanna dance. You can dance to that. It'll hold you up. Whatever kind of dance you wanna do you can dance to that right there. See that? See how it go? Ain't nothing to it. Go on you do it.

MARETHA

I got to read it on the paper.

BOY WILLIE

You don't need no paper. Go on.  
Do just like that there.

BERNIECE (O.S.)

Maretha! You get up here and get  
ready to go so you be on time.  
Ain't no need you trying to take  
advantage of company.

MARETHA

I got to go.

BOY WILLIE

Uncle Boy Willie gonna get you a  
guitar. Let Uncle Doaker teach you  
how to play that. You don't need  
to read no paper to play the  
guitar. Your mama told you about  
the piano? You know how them  
pictures got on there?

MARETHA

She say it just always been like  
that since she got it.

BOY WILLIE

You hear that, Doaker? And you  
sitting up here in the house with  
Berniece.

DOAKER

I ain't got nothing to do with  
that. I don't get in the way of  
Berniece's raising her.

BOY WILLIE

You tell your mama to tell you  
about that piano. You ask her how  
them pictures got on there. If she  
don't tell you I'll tell you.

BERNIECE (O.S.)

Maretha!

MARETHA

I got to get ready to go.

Boy Willie nods to the dime and Maretha grabs it and exits up  
the stairs.

BOY WILLIE

She getting big, Doaker. You  
remember her, Lymon?



LYMON

She used to be real little.

28 **EXT. CHARLES HOUSE - DAY**

28

CLOSE ON A GOLD CRUCIFIX, glinting in the sunlight. WIDEN TO REVEAL AVERY walking to the front door. Black and thirty-eight years old, Avery is honest and ambitious. He is dressed in a suit and tie with a gold cross around his neck. He carries a small Bible.

He KNOCKS. Doaker answers and lets him in.

DOAKER

Hey, Avery, come on in.

29 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - CONTINUOUS**

29

Avery takes a seat on the couch.

DOAKER

Berniece be ready in a minute.

Avery looks up to see Boy Willie and Lymon smiling at him from the Kitchen.

BOY WILLIE

Look at him... look at him... he don't know what to say. He wasn't expecting to see me.

Avery stands.

AVERY

Hey, Boy Willie. What you doing up here?

BOY WILLIE

Look at him, Lymon.

AVERY

Is that Lymon? Lymon Jackson?

BOY WILLIE

Yeah, you know Lymon.

DOAKER

Berniece be ready in a minute, Avery.

BOY WILLIE

Doaker say you a preacher now. What...we supposed to call you Reverend?

(MORE)

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

You used to be plain old Avery.  
When you get to be a preacher,  
nigger?

LYMON

Avery say he gonna be a preacher so  
he don't have to work.

BOY WILLIE

I remember when you was down there  
on the Wilshaw place planting  
cotton. You wasn't thinking about  
no Reverend then.

AVERY

That must be your truck out there.  
I saw that truck with them  
watermelons, I was trying to figure  
out what it was doing in front of  
the house.

BOY WILLIE

Yeah, me and Lymon selling  
watermelons. That's Lymon's truck.

DOAKER

(to Avery)

Berniece say you all going down to  
the bank.

AVERY

Yeah, they give me a half day off  
work. I got an appointment to talk  
to the bank about getting a loan to  
start my church.

BOY WILLIE

Lymon say preachers don't have to  
work. Where you working at,  
nigger?

DOAKER

Avery got him one of them good  
jobs. He working at one of them  
skyscrapers downtown.

AVERY

I'm working down there at the Gulf  
Building running an elevator.

DING.

30

**INT. GULF BUILDING - DAY**

30

Golden doors SLIDE OPEN TO REVEAL Avery, smiling and  
surrounded by white people.

BACK TO:

AVERY

Got a pension and everything. They even give you a turkey on Thanksgiving.

LYMON

How you know the rope ain't gonna break? Ain't you scared the rope's gonna break?

AVERY

That's steel. They got steel cables hold it up. It take a whole lot of breaking to break that steel. Naw, I ain't worried about nothing like that. Now, I wouldn't get in none of them airplanes. You couldn't pay me to do nothing like that.

LYMON

That be fun. I'd rather do that than ride in one of them elevators.

BOY WILLIE

How many of them watermelons you wanna buy?

AVERY

I thought you was gonna give me one seeing as how you got a whole truck full.

BOY WILLIE

You can get one, get two. I'll give you two for a dollar.

AVERY

I can't eat but one. How much are they?

BOY WILLIE

Aw, nigger, you know I'll give you a watermelon. Go on, take as many as you want. Just leave some for me and Lymon to sell.

AVERY

I don't want but one.

BOY WILLIE

How you get to be a preacher,  
Avery? I might want to be a  
preacher one day. Have everybody  
call me Reverend Boy Willie.

AVERY

It come to me in a dream. God  
called me and told me he wanted me  
to be a shepherd for his flock.  
That's what I'm gonna call my  
church...The Good Shepherd Church  
of God and Christ.

DOAKER

Tell him what you told me. Tell  
him about the three hobos.

AVERY

Boy Willie don't want to hear all  
that.

LYMON

I do. Lots of people say your  
dreams can come true.

AVERY

Naw. You don't want to hear all  
that.

DOAKER

Go on. I told him you was a  
preacher. He didn't want to  
believe me. Tell him about the  
three hobos.

AVERY

Well, it come to me in a dream.  
See...I was sitting out in this  
railroad yard watching the trains  
go by. The train stopped and these  
three hobos got off.

32

**EXT. TRAIN DEPOT - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)**

32

Trains cross TO REVEAL Avery, lit by a WHITE HOT SPOTLIGHT FROM HEAVEN. He is unshaven, haggard and dressed in work clothes. A train stops and THREE HOBOS get off, the same hobos who were in the boxcar at the beginning of our story.

AVERY (V.O.)

They told me they had come from  
Nazareth. And was on their way to  
Jerusalem.

Each of their faces is bathed in WARM GOLDEN LIGHT coming from the small FLAMES that dance on each of their CANDLES.

AVERY (V.O.)

They had three candles. They gave me one and told me to light it... But to be careful that it didn't go out.

The hobos encircle Avery and give him an unlit candle. Another offers flame off of which to light it.

Avery lights his candle and it flickers in the wind. He cups his hand around it.

33      **EXT. MODEST HOUSE - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)**      33

Avery stands out front with his candle.

AVERY (V.O.)

Next thing I knew I was standing in front of this house. Something told me to go knock on the door.

An OLD BLACK WOMAN answers the door. Though slight, her presence is so immense it makes Avery shrink.

AVERY (V.O.)

This old woman opened the door and said they had been waiting on me. Then she led me to this room.

34      **INT. HALLWAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)**      34

Total darkness except for the orb of golden light from Avery's candle as he follows the Old Woman down the hall. She OPENS A DOOR to DAYLIGHT as they emerge into...

35      **INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)**      35

SHAFTS OF GOLDEN SUNLIGHT through windows. The room is huge and does not match the size of the modest house.

Avery moves to a small hole in the wall with a ray of light shining through it. He crouches down and peers through.

AVERY (V.O.)

It was a big room and it was full of all kinds of different people. They looked like anybody else...

Through the hole he sees a congregation, dressed in their Sunday best, but he can only see from their waist down.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 ...except they all had sheep heads  
 and was all making noise like sheep  
 make.

A large sheep's eye meets him on the other side of the wall.  
 He now sees that all the bodies have sheep heads.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 I heard somebody call my name.

WOMAN'S VOICE  
 Avery...

Avery turns his head, his gaze lands on the HOBOS who no  
 longer hold candles.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 I looked around and there was these  
 same three hobos.

36 **INT. BATHROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)**

36

Spacious, sterile and white.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 They washed my feet and combed my  
 hair.

Water runs off Avery's feet. A comb pulls through thick  
 hair.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 They told me to take off my clothes  
 and give me a blue robe with gold  
 thread.

The GOLD THREAD glistens. And we REVEAL Avery, now clean  
 shaven with a fresh haircut.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 Then they showed me these three  
 doors and told me to pick one.

37 **INT. ROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)**

37

Avery enters an empty room.

AVERY (V.O.)  
 I went through one of them doors  
 and that flame leapt off that  
 candle and it seemed like my whole  
 head caught fire.

The flame jumps to Avery's head and lights it on fire.

BACK TO:

38      INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - DAY      38

Lymon is rapt. Boy Willie thinks Avery is full of shit. And Doaker's already heard it.

AVERY

I looked around and there was four or five other men standing there with these same blue robes on. Then we heard a voice tell us to look out across this valley. We looked out and saw the valley was full of wolves. The voice told us that these sheep people that I had seen in the other room had to go over to the other side of this valley and somebody had to take them. Then I heard another voice say...

39      INT. ROOM - DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE)      39

Avery stands in his blue robe. Now surrounded by a herd of live sheep.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Who shall I send?

AVERY

Here I am. Send me.

AVERY (V.O.)

That's when I met Jesus.

We don't see Jesus, but Avery's face glows brighter as the son of God approaches.

AVERY (V.O.)

He say "If you go, I'll go with you." Something told me to say, "Come on. Let's go."

BACK TO:

40      INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - DAY      40

Avery finishes his story for Doaker, Boy Willie and Lymon.



AVERY

That's when I woke up. My head still felt like it was on fire...but I had a peace about myself that was hard to explain. I knew right then that I had been filled with the Holy Ghost and called to be a servant of the Lord. It took me a while before I could accept that.

LYMON

I see why you gonna call it the Good Shepherd Church. You dreaming about them sheep people. I can see that easy.

BOY WILLIE

Doaker say you sent some white man past the house to look at that piano. Say he was going around to all the colored people's houses looking to buy up musical instruments.

AVERY

Yeah, but Berniece didn't want to sell that piano. After she told me about it...I could see why she didn't want to sell it.

BOY WILLIE

What's the man's name?

AVERY

Oh, that's a while back now. I done forgot his name. He gave Berniece a card with his name and telephone number on it, but I believe she threw it away.

Berniece and Maretha enter from the stairs, dressed for the day. Lymon looks at Berniece and likes what he sees.

BERNIECE

Maretha, run back upstairs and get my pocketbook. And wipe that hair grease off your forehead. Go ahead, hurry up.

Maretha exits up the stairs. Lymon's eyes stay on Berniece as she tolerates a hug from Avery.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)

How you doing, Avery? You done got all dressed up. You look nice. Boy Willie, I thought you and Lymon was going to sell them watermelons.

BOY WILLIE

Lymon done got sleepy. We liable to get some sleep first.

LYMON

I ain't sleepy.

DOAKER

As many watermelons as you got stacked up on that truck out there, you ought to have been gone.

BOY WILLIE

We gonna go in a minute. We going.

BERNIECE

Doaker. I'm gonna stop down there on Logan Street. You want anything?

DOAKER

You can pick up some ham hocks if you going down there.

Doaker gets up and fishes his wallet out of his side table.

DOAKER (CONT'D)

Don't get the short ones lessen they smoked. If you got to get the fresh ones make sure that they the long ones. If they ain't got them smoked then go ahead and get the short ones.

Maretha enters from the stairs.

MARETHA

We gonna take the street car?

BERNIECE

Me and Avery gonna drop you off at the settlement house. You mind them people down there. Don't be going down there showing your color. Boy Willie, I done told you what to do. I'll see you later, Doaker.

AVERY

I'll be seeing you again, Boy  
Willie.

On their way out the door...

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Berniece...what's the name of that man Avery sent past say he want to buy the piano?

BERNIECE

I knew it. I knew it when I first seen you. I knew you was up to something.

BOY WILLIE

Sutter's brother say he selling the land to me. He waiting on me now. Told me he'd give me two weeks. I got one part. Sell them watermelons get me another part. Then we can sell that piano and I'll have the third part.

BERNIECE

I ain't selling that piano, Boy Willie. If that's why you come up here you can forget about it.

(to Doaker)

Doaker, I'll see you later. Boy Willie ain't nothing but a whole lot of mouth. I ain't paying him no mind. If he come up here thinking he gonna sell that piano then he done come up here for nothing.

Berniece, Avery and Maretha exit out the front door.

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Lymon! You ready to go sell these watermelons.

Boy Willie and Lymon start to exit. At the door Boy Willie turns to Doaker.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, Doaker...if Berniece don't want to sell that piano...I'm gonna cut it in half and go on and sell my half.

Boy Willie and Lymon exit. Somewhere a Piano PLAYS a rendition of "Arkansas" by: Henry Thomas.



Wining Boy nurses a pint bottle as Doaker lends an ear.

WINING BOY

I'll tell you outright...if I see  
Sutter's ghost I'll be on the first  
thing I find that got wheels on it.

(then)

Other than seeing Sutter's ghost  
how's she doing?

DOAKER

She doing alright. She still got  
Crawley on her mind. He been dead  
three years but she still holding  
on to him. She need to go out here  
and let one of these fellows grab a  
whole handful of whatever she got.  
She act like it done got precious.

WINING BOY

They always told me any fish will  
bite if you got good bait.

DOAKER

She stuck up on it. She think it's  
better than she is. I believe she  
messaging around with Avery. They  
got something going. He a preacher  
now. If you let him tell it the  
Holy Ghost sat on his head and  
heaven opened up with thunder and  
lightning and God was calling his  
name. Told him to go out and  
preach and tend to his flock.  
That's what he gonna call his  
church. The Good Shepherd Church.

WINING BOY

They had that joker down in Spear  
walking around talking about he  
Jesus Christ. He gonna live the  
life of Christ. Went through the  
last supper and everything. Rented  
him a mule on Palm Sunday and rode  
through the town. Did  
everything...talking about he  
Christ.

45

**EXT. "CALVARY" - DAY**

45

LOW ANGLE looking up at BLACK JESUS hanging on the cross  
framed by heavenly clouds. STRINGS SWELL as he takes his  
last breath and his head drops. Suddenly the MUSIC STOPS and  
we WIDEN as...Black Jesus steps down off a small crate.

BACK TO:

46

**EXT. CHARLES HOUSE/YARD - NIGHT**

46

WINING BOY

He did everything until they got up  
to that crucifixion part. Got up  
to that part and told everybody to  
go home and quit pretending.

(MORE)

## WINING BOY (CONT'D)

He got up to the whole crucifixion part and changed his mind. Had a whole bunch of folks come down there to see him get nailed to the cross. I don't know who's the worse fool. Him or them. Had all them folks come down there...even carried the cross up this little hill. People standing around waiting to see him get nailed to the cross and he stop everything and preach a little sermon and told everybody to go home. Had the nerve to tell them to come to church on Easter Sunday to celebrate his resurrection.

## DOAKER

I'm surprised Avery ain't thought about that. He trying every little thing to get him a congregation together. They meeting over at his house till he get him a church.

## WINING BOY

Ain't nothing wrong with being a preacher. You got the preacher on one hand and the gambler on the other. Sometimes there ain't too much difference in them.

(finishes his whiskey)

What you got? Give me a little nip. I know you got something stuck up in your room.

## DOAKER

I ain't seen you walk in here and put nothing on the table. You done sat there and drank up your whiskey. Now you talking about what you got.

## WINING BOY

I got plenty money. Give me a little nip.

47

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT**

47

ON A GLASS as it is filled. WIDEN as Doaker grabs it and sets it on the table where Wining Boy sits.

## WINING BOY

You know Cleotha died.



DOAKER

Yeah, I heard that last time I was down there. I was sorry to hear that.

Wining Boy pulls the letter from his pocket.

WINING BOY

One of her friends wrote and told me. I got the letter right here. I was down in Kansas City and she wrote and told me Cleotha had died. Name of Willa Bryant. They was nailing her coffin shut by the time I heard about it. I never knew she was sick. I believe it was that yellow jaundice. That's what killed her mama.

DOAKER

Cleotha wasn't but forty-some.

WINING BOY

She was forty-six. You remember I used to run around there. Couldn't nothing keep me still. Much as I loved Cleotha I loved to ramble. Couldn't nothing keep me still. We got married and we used to fight about it all the time. Then one day she asked me to leave. Told me she loved me before I left. Told me, Wining Boy, you got a home as long as I got mine. And I believe in my heart I always felt that and that kept me safe.

DOAKER

Cleotha always did have a nice way about her.

WINING BOY

Man, that woman was something. I used to thank the Lord. Many a night I sat up and looked out over my life. Said, well, I had Cleotha. When it didn't look like there was nothing else for me, I said, thank God, at least I had that. If I ever go anywhere in this life I done known a good woman. And that used to hold me till the next morning.

Wining Boy downs his whiskey. Then the front door opens and Boy Willie and Lymon enter.

BOY WILLIE

Aw hell...look here! We was just talking about you. Doaker say you left out of here with a whole sack of money. I told him we wasn't going see you till you got broke.

WINING BOY

What you mean broke? I got a whole pocketful of money.

BOY WILLIE

Doaker say Berniece asked you for three dollars and you got mad and left.

WINING BOY

Berniece try and rule over you too much for me. That's why I left. It wasn't about no three dollars.

DOAKER

Did you all get that truck fixed?

BOY WILLIE

We got it running and got halfway out there on Centre and it broke down again. Lymon went out there and messed it up some more. Fellow told us we got to wait till tomorrow to get it fixed. Say he have it running like new. Lymon going back down there and sleep in the truck so people don't take the watermelons.

LYMON

Lymon nothing. You go down there and sleep in it. I ain't sleeping in no truck.

BOY WILLIE

They can take all the watermelons. I don't care. Wining Boy where you coming from? Where you been?

WINING BOY

I been down in Kansas City.

BOY WILLIE

You remember Lymon? Lymon Jackson.

WINING BOY

Yeah, I used to know his daddy.

BOY WILLIE

Where you getting all these sacks of money from? I need to be with you...turn some of it loose.

WINING BOY

I was just fixing to ask you for five dollars.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't got no money. I'm trying to get some. Doaker tell you about Sutter? The Ghosts of the Yellow Dog got him about three weeks ago. Berniece done seen his ghost and everything. He right upstairs.

(calls)

Hey Sutter! Wining Boy is here. Come on, get a drink!

WINING BOY

How many that make the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog done got?

BOY WILLIE

Must be about nine or ten, eleven or twelve. I don't know. Berniece say she don't believe all that about the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog.

WINING BOY

She ain't got to believe. You go ask them white folks in Sunflower County if they believe. You go ask Sutter if he believe. I don't care if Berniece believe or not. I done been to where the Southern cross the Yellow Dog and called out their names. They talk back to you, too.

LYMON

What they sound like? The wind or something?

BOY WILLIE

You done been there for real, Wining Boy?

WINING BOY

Nineteen thirty. July of nineteen  
thirty I stood right there on that  
spot.

48

**EXT. TRAIN CROSSING - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

48

Train tracks and the crunch of gravel underfoot takes us to  
Wining Boy, drunk and weaving.

WINING BOY (V.O.)

It didn't look like nothing was  
going right in my life. I said  
everything can't go wrong all the  
time...let me go down there and  
call on the Ghosts of the Yellow  
Dog, see if they can help me.

He finishes his whiskey and throws the bottle.

WINING BOY (V.O.)

I went down there and right there  
where them two railroads cross each  
other...I stood right there on that  
spot and called out their names.

Wining Boy stands at the intersection of two railroad tracks.  
He shouts their names but we don't hear it.

BACK TO:

49

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT**

49

WINING BOY

They talk back to you, too.

LYMON

People say you can ask them  
questions. They talk to you like  
that?

WINING BOY

A lot of things you got to find out  
on your own. I can't say how they  
talk to nobody else. But to me it  
just filled me up in a strange sort  
of way to be standing there on that  
spot.

50

**EXT. TRAIN CROSSING - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

50

Wining Boy stands on the tracks.

WINING BOY (V.O.)  
 I didn't want to leave. It felt  
 like the longer I stood there the  
 bigger I got.

Then the tracks rumble beneath Wining Boy's feet.

WINING BOY (V.O.)  
 I seen the train coming and it seem  
 like I was bigger than the train.

The light from an oncoming train rapidly grows. Wining Boy  
 holds his ground.

WINING BOY (V.O.)  
 I started not to move. But  
 something told me to go ahead and  
 get on out the way.

BACK TO:

51

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

51

WINING BOY  
 The train passed and I started to  
 go back up there and stand some  
 more. But something told me not to  
 do it. I walked away from there  
 feeling like a king. Went on and  
 had a stroke of luck that run on  
 for three years. So I don't care  
 if Berniece believe or not.  
 Berniece ain't got to believe. I  
 know 'cause I been there. Now  
 Doaker'll tell you about the Ghosts  
 of the Yellow Dog.

DOAKER  
 I don't try and talk that stuff  
 with Berniece. Avery got her all  
 tied up in that church. She just  
 think it's a whole lot of nonsense.

BOY WILLIE  
 Berniece don't believe in nothing.  
 She just think she believe. She  
 believe in anything if it's  
 convenient for her to believe. But  
 when that convenience run out then  
 she ain't got nothing to stand on.

WINING BOY

Let's not get on Berniece now.  
Doaker tell me you talking about  
selling that piano.

BOY WILLIE

Yeah...hey Doaker, I got the name  
of that man Avery was talking  
about. The man what's fixing the  
truck gave me his name. I got his  
name and his telephone number. Hey  
Wining Boy, Sutter's brother say he  
selling the land to me. I got one  
part. Sell them watermelons get me  
the second part. Then...soon as I  
get them watermelons out that truck  
I'm gonna take and sell that piano  
and get the third part.

DOAKER

That land ain't worth nothing no  
more. The smart white man's up  
here in these cities. He cut the  
land loose and step back and watch  
you and the dumb white man argue  
over it.

BOY WILLIE

(after a beat)

Hey Doaker...give me a drink. I  
see Wining Boy got his glass.

Doaker exits the room.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Wining Boy what you doing in Kansas  
City? What they got down there?

LYMON

I hear they got some nice-looking  
women in Kansas City. I sure like  
to go down there and find out.

WINING BOY

Man, the women down there is  
something else.

Doaker enters with a bottle of whiskey. He sets it on the  
table with some glasses.

DOAKER

You wanna sit up here and drink up  
my whiskey, leave a dollar on the  
table when you get up.

BOY WILLIE

You ain't doing nothing but showing your hospitality. I know we ain't got to pay for your hospitality.

WINING BOY

Doaker say they had you and Lymon down on the Parchman Farm. Had you on my old stomping grounds.

BOY WILLIE

Me and Lymon was down there hauling wood for Jim Miller and keeping us a little bit to sell.

52      **INT./EXT. TRUCK/CRAWLEY'S HOUSE - DUSK (FLASHBACK)**      52

Boy Willie drives and Lymon rides shotgun. They pull up to CRAWLEY'S HOUSE and CRAWLEY (30's, handsome) hops in the pick-up bed. They pull away and we see Berniece with 8-YEAR-OLD MARETHA. Berniece has a bad feeling as she watches them drive off.

53      **EXT. WOODS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**      53

The headlights from Jim Miller's truck illuminate Boy Willie, Lymon and Crawley as they load freshly chopped wood into the truck in the RAIN.

Then Lymon reacts to the distant sound of an engine approaching. The HEADLIGHTS of TWO TRUCKS flick on. The men squint against the brightness. They're surrounded.

Then a group of white men emerge from the trucks. They all have guns.

BACK TO:

54      **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT**      54

LYMON

They ambushed us right there. Me and Boy Willie got away but the sheriff got us later. Say we was stealing wood. They shot me in my stomach.

BOY WILLIE

They looking for Lymon down there now. They rounded him up and put him in jail for not working.

LYMON

Fined me a hundred dollars. Mr. Stovall come and paid my hundred dollars and the judge say I got to work for him to pay him back his hundred dollars. I told them I'd rather take my thirty days but they wouldn't let me do that.

BOY WILLIE

As soon as Stovall turned his back, Lymon was gone. He down there living in that truck dodging the sheriff and Stovall. So I brought him up here.

LYMON

I told Boy Willie I'm gonna stay up here. I ain't going back with him.

BOY WILLIE

Ain't nobody twisting your arm to make you go back. You can do what you want to do.

WINING BOY

I'll go back with you. I'm on my way down there. You gonna take the train? I'm gonna take the train.

LYMON

They treat you better up here.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't worried about nobody mistreating me. They treat you like you let them treat you. They mistreat me I mistreat them right back. Ain't no difference in me and the white man.

WINING BOY

Ain't no difference as far as how somebody supposed to treat you. I agree with that. But I'll tell you the difference between the colored man and the white man. The colored man can't fix nothing with the law.

BOY WILLIE

I don't go by what the law say. The law's liable to say anything. I go by if it's right or not. I take and look at it for myself.



LYMON

That's why you gonna end up back  
down there on the Parchman Farm.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't thinking about no Parchman  
Farm. You liable to go back before  
me.

LYMON

They work you too hard down there.  
All that weeding and hoeing and  
chopping down trees. I didn't like  
all that.

WINING BOY

You ain't got to like your job on  
Parchman. Hey, tell him, Doaker,  
the only one got to like his job is  
the water boy.

DOAKER

If he don't like his job he need to  
set that bucket down.

BOY WILLIE

That's what they told Lymon. They  
had Lymon on water and everybody  
got mad at him 'cause he was lazy.

LYMON

That water was heavy.

BOY WILLIE

They had Lymon down there singing.  
*(singing)*  
O Lord Berta Berta O Lord gal oh-ah  
O Lord Berta Berta O Lord gal well

LYMON/WINING BOY

*(joining in)*  
Go 'head marry don't you wait on me  
oh-ah/Go 'head marry don't you wait  
on me well/Might not want you when  
I go free oh-ah/Might not want you  
when I go free well

BOY WILLIE

Come on, Doaker. Doaker know this  
one.

As Doaker joins in the men stamp and clap to keep time. They  
sing in harmony with great fervor and style.

ALL OF THEM  
 (singing)  
 O Lord Berta Berta O Lord gal oh-ah  
 O Lord Berta Berta O Lord gal well

55

**INTERCUT HISTORICAL BLACK AND WHITE IMAGES**

55

THEIR SONG CONTINUES as we see photos and moving images of Black men in striped uniforms at work.

ALL OF THEM  
 Raise them up higher, let them drop  
 on down oh-ah/Raise them up higher,  
 let them drop on down well/Don't  
 know the difference when the sun go  
 down oh-ah/Don't know the  
 difference when the sun go down  
 well/Berta in Meridian and she  
 living at ease oh-ah/Berta in  
 Meridian and she living at ease  
 well/I'm on old Parchman, got to  
 work or leave oh-ah/I'm on old  
 Parchman, got to work or leave  
 well/O Alberta, Berta, O Lord gal  
 oh-ah/O Alberta, Berta, O Lord gal  
 well/When you marry, don't marry no  
 farming man oh-ah/When you marry,  
 don't marry no farming man  
 well/Every Monday, hoe handle in  
 your hand oh-ah/Every Monday, hoe  
 handle in your hand well/When you  
 marry, marry a railroad man, oh-  
 ah/When you marry, marry a railroad  
 man, well

BACK TO:

56

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT**

56

ALL OF THEM  
 Everyday Sunday, dollar in your  
 hand oh-ah/Everyday Sunday, dollar  
 in your hand well/O Alberta, Berta,  
 O Lord gal oh-ah/O Alberta, Berta,  
 O Lord gal well

BOY WILLIE  
 Doaker like that part. He like  
 that railroad part.

LYMON  
 Doaker sound like Tangleye. He  
 can't sing a lick.

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Doaker, they still talk about you down on Parchman. They ask me, "You Doaker Boy's nephew?" I say, "Yeah, me and him is family." They treated me alright soon as I told them that. Say, "Yeah, he my uncle."

DOAKER

I don't never want to see none of them niggers no more.

BOY WILLIE

I don't want to see them either.

(beat)

Hey, Wining Boy, come on play some piano. You a piano player, play some piano. Lymon wanna hear you.

WINING BOY

I give that piano up. That was the best thing that ever happened to me, getting rid of that piano. That piano got so big and I'm carrying it around on my back. I don't wish that on nobody. See, you think it's all fun being a recording star. Got to carrying that piano around and man did I get slow. Got just like molasses. The world just slipping by me and I'm walking around with that piano. Now, the first three or four years of that is fun. You can't get enough whiskey and you can't get enough women and you don't never get tired of playing that piano. But that only last so long. You look up one day and you hate the whiskey, and you hate the women, and you hate the piano. But that's all you got. You can't do nothing else. All you know how to do is play that piano. Now, who am I? Am I me? Or am I the piano player? Sometime it seem like the only thing to do is shoot the piano player 'cause he the cause of all the trouble I'm having.

DOAKER

What you gonna do when your troubles get like mine?

LYMON

If I knew how to play it, I'd play it. That's a nice piano.

BOY WILLIE

Whoever playing better play quick. Sutter's brother say he waiting on me. I sell them watermelons. Get Berniece to sell that piano. Put them two parts with the part I done saved...

WINING BOY

Berniece ain't gonna sell that piano. I don't see why you don't know that.

BOY WILLIE

What she gonna do with it? She ain't doing nothing but letting it sit up there and rot. That piano ain't doing nobody no good.

LYMON

That's a nice piano. If I had it I'd sell it. Unless I knew how to play like Wining Boy. You can get a nice price for that piano.

DOAKER

Now I'm gonna tell you something, Lymon don't know this...but I'm gonna tell you why me and Wining Boy say Berniece ain't gonna sell that piano.

BOY WILLIE

She ain't got to sell it! I'm gonna sell it! Berniece ain't got no more rights to that piano than I do.

DOAKER

I'm talking to the man...let me talk to the man. See, now...to understand why we say that...to understand about that piano...you got to go back to slavery time. See, our family was owned by a fellow named Robert Sutter. That was Sutter's grandfather. Alright. The piano was owned by a fellow named Joel Nolander. He was one of the Nolander brothers from down in Georgia.

(MORE)

DOAKER (CONT'D)

It was coming up on Sutter's wedding anniversary and he was looking to buy his wife...Miss Ophelia was her name...he was looking to buy her an anniversary present. Only thing with him...he ain't had no money. But he had some niggers. So he asked Mr. Nolander to see if maybe he could trade off some of his niggers for that piano. Told him he would give him one and a half niggers for it. That's the way he told him. Say he could have one full grown and one half grown. Mr. Nolander agreed only he say he had to pick them. He didn't want Sutter to give him just any old nigger. He say he wanted to have the pick of the litter.

57

**EXT. SUTTER'S HOUSE - DAY (1856) (FLASHBACK)**

57

It's hot as NOLANDER (40's) inspects a line up of slaves. ROBERT SUTTER (40's) sweats under the sun. In the distance, MISS OPHELIA (40's) watches the transaction.

Nolander eyes WILLIE BOY (30's). Nolander shoves his fingers into Willie Boy's mouth and checks his teeth.

DOAKER (V.O.)

So Sutter lined up his niggers and Mr. Nolander looked them over and out of the whole bunch he picked my grandmother...

Willie Boy is relieved when Nolander moves on down the line. But he's terrified when Nolander stops at MAMA BERNIECE (30's). Nolander looks down at 9-year-old PAPA BOY WALTER.

DOAKER (V.O.)

...her name was Berniece...same like Berniece...and he picked my daddy when he wasn't nothing but a little boy nine years old.

58

**EXT. SUTTER'S HOUSE - DAY (1856) (FLASHBACK)**

58

Mama Berniece screams, arms outstretched, as she and Papa Boy Walter are driven away on the back of Nolander's wagon. In Mama Berniece's POV, Willie Boy shrinks and the plantation seems to grow around him as they pull farther away.

59      INT. SUTTER'S HOUSE - DAY (1856) (FLASHBACK)

59

Miss Ophelia, in her Sunday best, plays the carving-free-piano with more verve than skill.

DOAKER (V.O.)

They made the trade off and Miss Ophelia was so happy with that piano that it got to be just about all she would do was play on that piano.

BACK TO:

60      INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

60

WINING BOY

Just get up in the morning, get all dressed up and sit down and play that piano.

DOAKER

Alright. Time go along. Time go along. Miss Ophelia got to missing my grandmother...the way she would cook and clean the house and talk to her and what not. And she missed having my daddy around the house to fetch things for her. So she asked to see if maybe she could trade back that piano and get her niggers back. Mr. Nolander said no. Said a deal was a deal. Him and Sutter had a big falling out about it and Miss Ophelia took sick to the bed. Wouldn't get out of the bed in the morning. She just lay there. The doctor said she was wasting away.

WINING BOY

That's when Sutter called our granddaddy up to the house.

DOAKER

Now, our granddaddy's name was Boy Willie. That's who Boy Willie's named after...only they called him Willie Boy.

61      INT. WORKSHOP - DAY (1856) (FLASHBACK)

61

On Willie Boy as he runs his hand across the surface of a piece of wood.

DOAKER (V.O.)

Now, he was a worker of wood. He could make you anything you wanted out of wood.

Later, he pushes a wood-planer across the surface.

DOAKER (V.O.)

Them white fellows around there used to come up to Mr. Sutter and get him to make all kinds of things.

On an array of chisels, hammers and saws.

DOAKER (V.O.)

Then they'd pay Mr. Sutter a nice price. See, everything my granddaddy made Mr. Sutter owned 'cause he owned him.

CLOSE ON A HAMMER TAPPING ON A CHISEL.

DOAKER (V.O.)

That's why when Mr. Nolander offered to buy him to keep the family together Mr. Sutter wouldn't sell him.

WOOD SHAVINGS fall to the ground.

DOAKER (V.O.)

Told Mr. Nolander he didn't have enough money to buy him.

Willie Boy meticulously sands down a crevice.

DOAKER (V.O.)

Now...am I telling it right, Wining Boy?

WINING BOY (V.O.)

You telling it.

DOAKER (V.O.)

Sutter called him up to the house and told him to carve my grandmother and my daddy's picture on the piano for Miss Ophelia. And he took and carved this.

Willie Boy blows shavings away to REVEAL A FRESH CARVING OF MAMA BERNIECE, arms outstretched. Willie Boy stares at it, missing his wife.

BACK TO:

62

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

62

CLOSE ON THE CARVING MAMA BERNIECE, arms outstretched. WIDEN to see Doaker pointing out the carving.

DOAKER

See that right there? That's my grandmother, Berniece. She looked just like that. And he put a picture of my daddy when he wasn't nothing but a little boy the way he remembered him.

CLOSE ON a carving of PAPA BOY WALTER.

DOAKER (CONT'D)

He made them up out of his memory. Only thing...he didn't stop there. He carved all this. He got a picture of his mama...Mama Ester...and his daddy, Boy Charles.

CLOSE ON a carving of PAPA BOY CHARLES.

WINING BOY

That was the first Boy Charles.

DOAKER

Then he put on the side here all kinds of things. See that? That's when him and Mama Berniece got married. They called it jumping the broom. That's how you got married in them days.

CLOSE ON a carving of a couple jumping the broom.

DOAKER (CONT'D)

Then he got here when my daddy was born...and here he got Mama Ester's funeral...and down here he got Mr. Nolander taking Mama Berniece and my daddy away down to his place in Georgia.

CLOSE ON the carving of Mama Berniece.



DOAKER (CONT'D)

He got all kinds of things what happened with our family. When Mr. Sutter seen the piano with all them carvings on it he got mad. He didn't ask for all that. But see...there wasn't nothing he could do about it. When Miss Ophelia seen it...she got excited. Now she had her piano and her niggers too. She took back to playing it and played on it right up to the day she died. Alright...now see, our brother Boy Charles...that's Berniece and Boy Willie's daddy...he was the oldest of us three boys. He's dead now. He used to talk about that piano all the time. He never could get it off his mind. Two or three months go by and he be talking about it again. He be talking about taking it out of Sutter's house. Say it was the story of our whole family and as long as Sutter had it...he had us. Say we was still in slavery. Me and Wining Boy tried to talk him out of it but it wouldn't do any good. Soon as he quiet down about it he'd start up again. We seen where he wasn't gonna get it off his mind...so, on the Fourth of July, 1911...

\*

We hear the CRACK, WHISTLE and POP of FIREWORKS.

63

**INT. SUTTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (1911)(FLASHBACK)**

63

Boy Charles moves to the piano driven by obsession. But Young Doaker and Young Wining Boy are reluctant.

DOAKER (V.O.)

...when Sutter was at the picnic what the county give every year...me and Wining Boy went on down there with him and took that piano out of Sutter's house.

64

**EXT. SUTTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT (1911)(FLASHBACK)**

64

Later, with the piano loaded, the FIREWORKS FINALE begins. Young Wining Boy snaps the reins and the wagon lurches forward. Doaker looks at 6-year-old Boy Willie as the boy stares back at his father.

DOAKER (V.O.)

We put it on a wagon and me and Wining Boy carried it over into the next county with Mama Ola's people. Boy Willie wasn't more than six-years-old...

BACK TO:

65

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

65

DOAKER

His daddy decided to stay around there and wait until Sutter got home to make it look like business as usual. Now, I don't know what happened when Sutter came home and found that piano gone. But somebody went up to Boy Charles's house and set it on fire. But he wasn't in there. He must have seen them coming 'cause he went down and caught the 3:57 Yellow Dog. He didn't know they was gonna come down and stop the train. Stopped the train and found Boy Charles in the boxcar with three of them hobos. Must have got mad when they couldn't find the piano 'cause they set the boxcar afire and killed everybody. Now, nobody know who done that. Some people say it was Sutter 'cause it was his piano. Some people say it was Sheriff Carter. Some people say it was Robert Smith and Ed Saunders. But don't nobody know for sure. It was about two months after that that Ed Saunders fell down his well. Just upped and fell down his well for no reason. People say it was the ghost of them men who burned up in the boxcar that pushed him in his well. They started calling them the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog. Now that's how all that got started and that why we say Berniece ain't gonna sell that piano. 'Cause her daddy died over it.

BOY WILLIE

All that's in the past. If my daddy had seen where he could have traded that piano in for some land of his own, it wouldn't be sitting up here now. He spent his whole life farming on somebody else's land. I ain't gonna do that. See, he couldn't do no better. When he come along he ain't had nothing he could build on. His daddy ain't had nothing to give him. The only thing my daddy had to give me was that piano. And he died over giving me that. I ain't gonna let it sit up there and rot without trying to do something with it. If Berniece can't see that, then I'm gonna go ahead and sell my half. And you and Wining Boy know I'm right.

DOAKER

Ain't nobody said nothing about who's right and who's wrong. I was just telling the man about the piano. I was telling him why we say Berniece ain't gonna sell it.

LYMON

Yeah, I can see why you say that now. I told Boy Willie he ought to stay up here with me.

BOY WILLIE

You stay! I'm going back! That's what I'm gonna do with my life! Why I got to come up here and learn to do something I don't know how to do when I already know how to farm? You stay up here and make your own way if that's what you want to do. I'm going back and live my life the way I want to live it.

A65

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - NIGHT

A65

CLOSE ON THE RADIO DIAL. THE NEEDLE MOVES, SETTLING ON A STATION.

Berniece and Maretha enter.

BERNIECE

Is that...Lord, I know that ain't  
Wining Boy sitting there.

WINING BOY

Hey, Berniece.

BERNIECE

You all had this planned. You and Boy Willie had this planned.

WINING BOY

I didn't know he was gonna be here. I'm on my way down home. I stopped by to see you and Doaker first.

DOAKER

I told the nigger he left out of here with that sack of money, we thought we might never see him again. Boy Willie say he wasn't gonna see him till he got broke. I looked up and seen him sitting on the doorstep asking for two dollars. Look at him laughing. He know it's the truth.

BERNIECE

Boy Willie, I didn't see that truck out there. I thought you was out selling watermelons.

BOY WILLIE

We done sold them all. Sold the truck too.

BERNIECE

I don't want to go through none of your stuff. I done told you to go back where you belong.

BOY WILLIE

I was just teasing you, woman. You can't take no teasing?

BERNIECE

Wining Boy, when you get here?

WINING BOY

A little while ago. I took the train from Kansas City.

BERNIECE

Let me go upstairs and change and then I'll cook you something to eat.

BOY WILLIE

You ain't cooked me nothing when I come.

BERNIECE

Boy Willie, go on and leave me alone. Come on, Maretha, get up here and change your clothes before you get them dirty.

Maretha follows Berniece up the stairs.

WINING BOY

Maretha sure getting big, ain't she, Doaker. And just as pretty as she want to be. I didn't know Crawley had it in him.

Boy Willie crosses to the piano.

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Lymon...get up on the other side of this piano and let me see something.

WINING BOY

Boy Willie, what is you doing?

BOY WILLIE

I'm seeing how heavy this piano is. Get up over there, Lymon.

WINING BOY

Go on and leave that piano alone. You ain't taking that piano out of here and selling it.

BOY WILLIE

Just as soon as I get them watermelons out that truck.

WINING BOY

Well, I got something to say about that.

BOY WILLIE

This my daddy's piano.

WINING BOY

He ain't took it by himself. Me and Doaker helped him.

BOY WILLIE

He died by himself. Where was you and Doaker at then? Don't come telling me nothing about this piano. This is me and Berniece's piano. Am I right, Doaker?

DOAKER  
Yeah, you right.

BOY WILLIE  
Let's see if we can lift it up,  
Lymon. Get a good grip on it and  
pick it up on your end. Ready?  
Lift!

With difficulty Boy Willie and Lymon move the piano a bit.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)  
What you think?

LYMON  
It's heavy...but you can move it.  
Only it ain't gonna be easy.

BOY WILLIE  
It wasn't that heavy to me. Okay  
let's put it back.

As they start to move the piano, Doaker hears a FLOORBOARD  
CREAK behind him. He turns. Nothing there.

As they move it back they all react when they hear an out of  
tune chord, like someone just BANGED ON THE KEYS. Then a  
loud SLAM when the PIANO'S FALL BOARD SLAMS SHUT.

B65

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE / UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT**

B65

Berniece, changing out of her work clothes, hears the piano  
commotion downstairs - she stops.

CLOSE ON THE RADIO NEEDLE: The needle goes haywire, Sutter's  
ghost embodies it for a brief moment.

Berniece enters on the stairs:

BERNIECE  
Boy Willie...you gonna play around  
with me one too many times. And  
then God's gonna bless you and West  
is gonna dress you. Now set that  
piano back over there.

BOY WILLIE  
I'm trying to get me some land,  
woman. I need that piano to get me  
some money so I can buy Sutter's  
land.

## BERNIECE

Money can't buy what that piano  
cost. You can't sell your soul for  
money. It won't go with the buyer.  
It'll shrivel and shrink to know  
that you ain't taken on to it. But  
it won't go with the buyer.



## BOY WILLIE

I ain't talking about selling my soul, woman. I'm talking about trading that piece of wood for some land. Land the only thing God ain't making no more of. You can always get you another piano. I'm talking about some land. What you get something out the ground from. You can't do nothing with that piano but sit up there and look at it.

## BERNIECE

That's just what I'm gonna do. Wining Boy, you want me to fry you some pork chops?

## BOY WILLIE

Now, I'm gonna tell you the way I see it. The only thing that make that piano worth something is them carvings Papa Boy Willie put on there. That's what make it worth something. That was my great-granddaddy. Papa Boy Charles brought that piano into the house. Now, I'm supposed to build on what they left me. You can't do nothing with that piano sitting up here in the house. That's just like if I let them watermelons sit out there and rot. I'd be a fool. Alright now, if you say to me, Boy Willie, I'm using that piano. I give out lessons on it and that help me make my rent or whatever then that be something else I'd have to go on and say, well, Berniece using that piano. She building on it. Let her go on and use it. But Doaker say you ain't touched that piano the whole time it's been up here. So why you wanna stand in my way? See, you just looking at the sentimental value. That's good. But I ain't gonna be no fool about no sentimental value. You can sit up here and look at the piano for the next hundred years and it's just gonna be a piano. I get Sutter's land and I can go down and cash in the crop and get my seed.

(MORE)

## BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

As long as I got the land and the seed then I'm alright. 'Cause that land give back to you. But that piano don't put out nothing else. You ain't got nothing working for you. Now, the kind of man my daddy was he would have understood that. I'm sorry you can't see it that way. But that's why I'm gonna take that piano out of here and sell it.

## BERNIECE

(crosses to the piano)

Look at this piano. Look at it. Mama Ola polished this piano with her tears for seventeen years. For seventeen years she rubbed on it till her hands bled. Then she rubbed the blood in...mixed it up with the rest of the blood on it. Every day that God breathed life into her body she rubbed and cleaned and polished and prayed over it. "Play something for me, Berniece. Play something for me, Berniece." Every day. "I cleaned it up for you, play something for me, Berniece." You always talking about your daddy but you ain't never stopped to look at what his foolishness cost your mama. Seventeen years' worth of cold nights and an empty bed. For what? For a piano? For a piece of wood? To get even with somebody? I look at you and you're all the same. You, Papa Boy Charles, Wining Boy, Doaker, Crawley...you're all alike. All this thieving and killing and thieving and killing. And what it ever lead to? More killing and more thieving. I ain't never seen it come to nothing. People getting burned up. People getting shot. People falling down their wells. It don't never stop.

## DOAKER

Come on now, Berniece, ain't no need in getting upset.

BOY WILLIE

I done a little bit of stealing here and there, but I ain't never killed nobody. I can't be speaking for nobody else. You all got to speak for yourself, but I ain't never killed nobody.

BERNIECE

You killed Crawley just as sure as if you pulled the trigger.

BOY WILLIE

See, that's ignorant. That's downright foolish for you to say something like that. You ain't doing nothing but showing your ignorance. If the nigger was here I'd whup his ass for getting me and Lymon shot at.

BERNIECE

Crawley ain't knew about the wood.

BOY WILLIE

We told the man about the wood. Ask Lymon. He knew all about the wood. He seen we was sneaking it. Why else we gonna be out there at night? Don't come telling me Crawley ain't knew about the wood. Them fellows come up on us and Crawley tried to bully them. Me and Lymon seen the sheriff with them and give in. Wasn't no sense in getting killed over fifty dollars' worth of wood.

BERNIECE

Crawley ain't knew you stole that wood.

BOY WILLIE

We ain't stole no wood. Me and Lymon was hauling wood and keeping us a little bit on the side. We dumped our little bit down there by the creek till we had enough to make a load. Some fellows seen us and we figured we better get it before they did. We come up there and got Crawley to help us load it. Figured we'd cut him in.

(MORE)

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 Crawley trying to keep the wolf  
 from his door...we was trying to  
 help him.

LYMON  
 Me and Boy Willie told him about  
 the wood. We told him some fellows  
 might be trying to beat us to it.  
 He say let me go back and get my  
 thirty-eight. That's what caused  
 all the trouble.

66 **EXT. WOODS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

66

By the bend in the creek, Boy Willie, Lymon and Crawley  
 squint against the brightness of headlights.

Then a group of white men emerge from two trucks. They all  
 have guns.

Crawley pulls a shiny nickel-plated .38 from the waistband of  
 his pants.

BACK TO:

67 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT**

67

BOY WILLIE  
 If Crawley ain't had that gun he'd  
 be alive today.

LYMON  
 We had it about half loaded when  
 they come up on us. We seen the  
 sheriff with them and we tried to  
 get away. We ducked around near  
 the bend in the creek...but they  
 was down there too. Boy Willie say  
 let's give in. But Crawley pulled  
 out his gun and started shooting.  
 That's when they started shooting  
 back.

68 **EXT. WOODS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

68

On a tree line. GUNFIRE wakes a flock of sleeping birds and  
 scatter into the night sky.

BACK TO:

69

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

69

BERNIECE

All I know is Crawley would be  
alive if you hadn't come up there  
and got him.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't had nothing to do with  
Crawley getting killed. That was  
his own fault.

BERNIECE

Crawley's dead and in the ground  
and you still walking around here  
eating. That's all I know. He  
went off to load some wood with you  
and ain't never come back.

BOY WILLIE

I told you, woman...I had nothing  
to do with...

BERNIECE

He ain't here, is he? He ain't  
here!

Berniece hits Boy Willie.

MATCH CUT TO:

70

EXT. CRAWLEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

70

Berniece hits Boy Willie who tries to console her. Lymon  
looks on from Jim Miller's truck as he puts pressure on his  
bloody stomach wound.

BACK TO:

71

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

71

BERNIECE

I said he ain't here. Is he?

Berniece continues to hit Boy Willie who doesn't move to  
defend himself, other than backing up and turning his head so  
that most of the blows fall on his chest and arms.

72

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

72

Dressed in her PJ's and washing her face, Maretha reacts to  
the argument downstairs, worried.

73

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS

73

Doaker grabs Berniece.

DOAKER

Come on, Berniece...let it go, it ain't his fault.

BERNIECE

He ain't here, is he? Is he?

BOY WILLIE

I told you I ain't responsible for Crawley.

BERNIECE

He ain't here.

BOY WILLIE

Come on now, Berniece...don't do this now. Doaker, get her.

74

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/UPSTAIRS BATHROOM/HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS 4

Maretha moves into the hallway so she can hear better.

BOY WILLIE (O.S.)

I ain't had nothing to do with Crawley...

BERNIECE (O.S.)

You come up there and got him!

Maretha steps in a wet footprint. Then a LARGE SHADOW CROSSES FRAME BEHIND HER. She senses it.

75

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR/HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

75

BOY WILLIE

I done told you now. Doaker, get her. I ain't playing.

DOAKER

Come on. Berniece.

As Doaker pulls Berniece off Boy Willie, Maretha is heard SCREAMING upstairs. It is a scream of stark terror.

MARETHA (O.S.)

Mama!...Mama!

STAY WITH Berniece as she takes off upstairs. She reaches the top and Maretha flies into her arms, terrified.

BERNIECE

Mama's here, baby. What happened?

Maretha can't talk. The men arrive upstairs. Off the family surrounding Maretha.

76

**EXT. CHARLES HOUSE/PORCH - DAY**

76

Doaker sings "I'm Going to Memphis" quietly to himself as he rolls a cigarette. Wining Boy walks up carrying a suit.

DOAKER

I thought you took that suit to the pawn shop?

WINING BOY

I went down there and the man tell me the suit is too old. Look at this suit. This is one hundred per cent silk! How a silk suit gonna get too old? Best he wanna give me is three dollars. I figure a silk suit is worth five dollars all over the world. I wasn't gonna part with it for no three dollars so I brought it back.

DOAKER

They got another pawn shop on Wylie.

WINING BOY

I carried it up there. He say he don't take no clothes. Only thing he take is guns and radios. Where is Berniece?

DOAKER

Berniece still at work. Boy Willie went down there to meet Lymon this morning. I guess they got that truck fixed, they been out there all day and ain't come back yet. Maretha scared to sleep upstairs now. Berniece don't know, but I seen Sutter before she did.

WINING BOY

Say what?

DOAKER

About three weeks ago. I had just come back from down there.

(MORE)

DOAKER (CONT'D)

Sutter couldn't have been dead more than three days. He was sitting in there at the piano. I come out to go to work...and he was sitting right there. Had his hand on top of his head just like Berniece said. I believe he broke his neck when he fell in the well. I kept quiet about it. I didn't see no reason to upset Berniece.

WINING BOY

Did he say anything? Did he say he was looking for Boy Willie?

DOAKER

He was just sitting there. He ain't said nothing. I went on out the door and left him sitting there. I figure as long as he was on the other side of the room everything be alright. I don't know what I would have done if he had started walking toward me.

WINING BOY

Berniece say he was calling Boy Willie's name.

DOAKER

I ain't heard him say nothing. He was just sitting there when I seen him. But I don't believe Boy Willie pushed him in the well. Sutter here 'cause of that piano. Berniece need to go on and get rid of it. It ain't done nothing but cause trouble.

WINING BOY

I agree with Berniece. Boy Charles ain't took it to give it back. He took it 'cause he figure he had more right to it than Sutter did. If Sutter can't understand that...then that's just the way that go. Sutter dead and in the ground...don't care where his ghost is. He can hover around and play on the piano all he want. I want to see him carry it out the house. That's what I want to see. What time Berniece get home?

(MORE)



WINING BOY (CONT'D)

I don't see how I let her get away from me this morning.

DOAKER

What kind of business you got with Berniece?

WINING BOY

My business. I ain't asked you what kind of business you got.

DOAKER

Berniece ain't got no money. If that's why you was trying to catch her. She having a hard enough time trying to get by as it is.

WINING BOY

Well let me have five dollars.

DOAKER

I just give you a dollar before you left out of here. You ain't gonna take my five dollars out there and gamble and drink it up.

WINING BOY

Aw, nigger, give me five dollars. I'll give it back to you.

DOAKER

You wasn't looking to give me five dollars when you had that sack of money. You wasn't looking to throw nothing my way. Now you wanna come over here and borrow five dollars. If you going back with Boy Willie you need to be trying to figure out how you gonna get train fare.

WINING BOY

That's why I need the five dollars. If I had five dollars I could get me some money.

Doaker goes into his pocket.

WINING BOY (CONT'D)

Make it seven.

DOAKER

You take this five dollars...and you bring my money back here too.

77

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET/WHITE TOWN - DAY

77

ON A WHITE BOY (10) as he runs to a group of white adults who surround Boy Willie, Lymon and their watermelon truck. There's a frenzied, stock exchange feel as...

WHITE MAN

I'll take five.

BOY WILLIE

(whispering to Lymon)

Charge them a quarter more.

WHITE WOMAN

Are they sweet?

BOY WILLIE

Lady, where we grow these watermelons we put sugar in the ground with the seed.

WHITE WOMAN

(believing him)

Really? I've never heard of that. I'll have to try it.

Lymon laughs. PRELAP:

LYMON (V.O.)

I ain't never seen nobody snatch a dollar fast as Boy Willie.

Boy Willie snatches the dollar she offers.

BOY WILLIE (V.O.)

Them white folks is something else...ain't they, Lymon?

LYMON (V.O.)

Soon as you holler watermelon they come right out their door. Then they go and get their neighbors.

78

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - DAY

78

Wining Boy watches Boy Willie and Lymon count money while Doaker irons the pants to his uniform. Doaker has a pot cooking on the stove at the same time.

LYMON

Look like they having a contest to see who can buy the most.

WINING BOY

I got something for Lymon.

Wining Boy leaves to gets his suit.

BOY WILLIE

(to Lymon)

I know you got more than that. You ain't sold all them watermelons for that little bit of money.

LYMON

I'm still looking. That ain't all you got either. Where's all them quarters?

BOY WILLIE

You let me worry about the quarters. Just put the money on the table.

Wining Boy enters with his suit.

WINING BOY

Look here, Lymon...see this? Look at his eyes getting big. He ain't never seen a suit like this. This is one hundred per cent silk. Go ahead...put it on. See if it fit you.

Lymon tries the suit coat on.

WINING BOY (CONT'D)

Look at that. Feel it. That's one hundred per cent genuine silk. I got that in Chicago. You can't get clothes like that nowhere but New York and Chicago. You can't get clothes like that in Pittsburgh. These folks in Pittsburgh ain't never seen clothes like that.

LYMON

This is nice, feel real nice and smooth.

WINING BOY

That's a fifty-five-dollar suit. That's the kind of suit the big shots wear. You need a pistol and a pocketful of money to wear that suit. I'll let you have it for three dollars.

(MORE)

## WINING BOY (CONT'D)

The women will fall out their windows they see you in a suit like that. Give me three dollars and go on and wear it down the street and get you a woman.

## BOY WILLIE

That looks nice, Lymon. Put the pants on. Let me see it with the pants.

Lymon begins to try on the pants.

## WINING BOY

Look at that...see how it fits you? Give me three dollars and go on and take it. Look at that, Doaker...don't he look nice?

## DOAKER

Yeah...that's a nice suit.

## WINING BOY

Got a shirt to go with it. Cost you an extra dollar. Four dollars you got the whole deal.

## LYMON

How this look, Boy Willie?

## BOY WILLIE

That look nice...if you like that kind of thing. I don't like them dress up kind of clothes. If you like it, look real nice.

## WINING BOY

That's the kind of suit you need for up here in the North.

## LYMON

Four dollars for everything? The suit and the shirt?

## WINING BOY

That's cheap. I should be charging you twenty dollars. I give you a break 'cause you a homeboy. That's the only way I let you have it for four dollars.

## LYMON

(going into his pocket)  
Okay...here go the four dollars.

WINING BOY

You got some shoes? What size you wear?

LYMON

Size nine.

WINING BOY

That's what size I got! Size nine. I let you have them for three dollars.

LYMON

Where they at? Let me see them.

WINING BOY

They real nice shoes, too. Got a nice tip to them. Got pointy toe just like you want.

Wining Boy goes to get his shoes.

LYMON

Come on, Boy Willie, let's go out tonight. I wanna see what it looks like up here. Maybe we go to a picture show. Hey, Doaker, they got picture shows up here?

DOAKER

The Rhumba Theater. Right down there on Fullerton Street. Can't miss it. Got the speakers outside on the sidewalk. You can hear it a block away. Boy Willie know where it's at.

Doaker exits into his room.

LYMON

Let's go to the picture show, Boy Willie. Let's go find some women.

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Lymon, how many of them watermelons would you say we got left? We got just under a half a load...right?

LYMON

About that much. Maybe a little more.

BOY WILLIE

You think that piano will fit up in there?

LYMON

If we stack them watermelons you can sit it up in the front there.

BOY WILLIE

I'm gonna call that man tomorrow.

Wining Boy returns with the shoes.

WINING BOY

Here you go...size nine. Put them on. Cost you three dollars. That's a Florsheim shoe. That's the kind Stagger Lee wore.

LYMON

(trying on the shoes)  
You sure these size nine?

WINING BOY

You can look at my feet and see we wear the same size. Man, you put on that suit and them shoes and you got something there. You ready for whatever's out there. But is they ready for you? With them shoes on you be the King of the Walk. Have everybody stop to look at your shoes. Wishing they had a pair. I'll give you a break. Go on and take them for two dollars.

Lymon pays Wining Boy two dollars.

LYMON

Come on, Boy Willie...let's go find some women. I'm gonna go upstairs and get ready. I'll be ready to go in a minute. Ain't you gonna get dressed?

BOY WILLIE

I'm gonna wear what I got on. I ain't dressing up for these city niggers.

Lymon exits up the stairs.

## BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

That's all Lymon think about is women.

## WINING BOY

His daddy was the same way. I used to run around with him. I know his mama too. Two strokes back and I would have been his daddy! His daddy's dead now...but I got the nigger out of jail one time. They was fixing to name him Daniel and walk him through the Lion's Den. That's how the whole thing come about between me and Lymon's mama. She know me and his daddy used to run together. He got in jail and she come there and got me where I was playing at this saloon... said she had all but fifty dollars to get him out. Ask if I could help. Now the way I figured it... without that fifty dollars the sheriff was gonna turn him over to Parchman. Now I'm gonna say it right... I will give anybody fifty dollars to keep them out of jail. I give her fifty dollars and she told me to come over to his house. I ain't asked her. I ain't had to say a word.

78A

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SIMULTANEOUS**

78A

CLOSE ON Lymon as he buttons the shirt. CLOSE ON the shoes as Lymon ties them. CLOSE ON Lymon as he slides on the jacket. He looks in the mirror and smiles.

BACK TO:

78B

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**

78B

Wining boy continues his story.

## WINING BOY

I went on down there and sat about three hours. Started to leave and changed my mind. She grabbed hold to me and say, "Baby, it's a long night." That was one of the shortest nights I have ever spent on this earth! Lymon's daddy didn't even say nothing to me when he got out. He just looked at me funny.

(MORE)

## WINING BOY (CONT'D)

He had a good notion something had happened between me an' her. L.D. Jackson. That was one bad-luck nigger. Got killed at some dance. Fellow walked in and shot him thinking he was somebody else.

Doaker enters from his room in his uniform.

## WINING BOY (CONT'D)

Hey, Doaker, you remember L.D. Jackson?

## DOAKER

That's Lymon's daddy. That was one bad luck nigger.

## BOY WILLIE

Look like you ready to railroad some.

## DOAKER

Yeah, I got to make that run.

Lymon enters from the stairs. He is dressed in his new suit and shoes, each of which are far too small.

## LYMON

How I look?

## WINING BOY

You look like a million dollars. Don't he look good, Doaker? Come on, let's play some cards. You wanna play some cards?

## BOY WILLIE

We ain't gonna play no cards with you. Me and Lymon gonna find some women. Hey, Lymon, don't play no cards with Wining Boy. He'll take all your money.

## WINING BOY

(to Lymon)

You got a magic suit there. You can get you a woman easy with that suit...but you got to know the magic words. You know the magic words to get you a woman?

## LYMON

I just talk to them to see if I like them and they like me.



## WINING BOY

You just walk right up to them and say, "If you got the harbor I got the ship." If that don't work ask them if you can put them in your pocket. The first thing they gonna say is, "It's too small." That's when you look them dead in the eye and say, "Baby, ain't nothing small about me." If that don't work then you move on to another one. Am I telling him right, Doaker?

## DOAKER

That man don't need you to tell him nothing about no women. These women these days ain't gonna fall for that kind of stuff. You got to buy them a present. That's what they looking for these days.

## BOY WILLIE

Come on, I'm ready. You ready Lymon? Come on, let's go find some women.

## WINING BOY

Here, let me walk out with you. I wanna see the women fall out their window when they see Lymon.

Wining Boy holds the door open for Boy Willie and Lymon as they step out into golden, magic-hour light.

79

**INT. CRAWFORD GRILL - NIGHT**

79

ON THE GOLDEN GLEAM OF A ROW OF BRASS as the band belts out "Minnie the Moocher" by Cab Calloway. MOVE PAST the horns TO REVEAL the stunning lead singer, LUCILLE. This band is on fire.

Fast feet and twisting bodies on the dance floor. CAMERA FINDS Boy Willie, Lymon and Wining Boy as they enter the club, heads high, pockets full and ready to take on the world.

80

**INT. CRAWFORD GRILL - LATER**

80

The band has slowed it down as Lymon sits at the bar alone grooving to the music. Then he locks eyes with a pretty, young woman in a RED DRESS (GRACE) sitting by herself. Shy, he looks away. And when he looks back, she grins.



83        **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT**

83

STEAM as Berniece pours boiling water into a tin tub. Then in a voyeuristic POV we watch as she pulls off her robe, her nudity obscured by various objects in frame.

Suddenly, A CREAKY DOOR SHUTS ON IT'S OWN. She turns, fearful.

BERNIECE

Maretha...?

Nothing there. She gets in the tub, quick, almost like a child pulling the blankets over their head.

Several beats then she finally calms down, sinks into the warmth and closes her eyes.

84        **EXT. RIVER - MAGIC HOUR (FLASHBACK)**

84

Berniece stands alone in neck deep water. Then Crawley surfaces right in front of her.

His golden crucifix glistens. They lean in for a kiss and  
somewhere there is a KNOCK.

BACK TO:

Berniece opens her eyes and now we realize she's wearing Crawley's crucifix.

BERNIECE

Who is it?

AVERY (O.S.)

It's me, Avery.

Berniece deflates.

MOMENTS LATER, Berniece tightens her bathrobe and opens the front door.

BERNIECE

Avery, come on in. I was just taking my bath.

AVERY

Where Boy Willie? I see that truck out there almost empty. They done sold almost all them watermelons.

BERNIECE

They were gone when I come home. I don't know where they went off to. What Mr. Cohen say about letting you have the place?

AVERY

He say he'll let me have it for thirty dollars a month. I talked him out of thirty-five.

BERNIECE

That's a nice spot next to Benny Diamond's store.

AVERY

Berniece...I be at home and I get to thinking you up here an' I'm down there. I get to thinking how that look to have a preacher that ain't married. It makes for a better congregation if the preacher was settled down and married.

BERNIECE

Avery...not now.

AVERY

You know how I feel about you, Berniece. Now...I done got the place from Mr. Cohen. I get the money from the bank and I can fix it up real nice. They give me a ten-cents-a-hour raise down there on the job...now Berniece, I ain't got much in the way of comforts. I got a hole in my pockets near about as far as money is concerned. I ain't never found no way through life to a woman I care about like I care about you. I need that. I need somebody on my bond side. I need a woman that fits in my hand.

BERNIECE

Avery, I ain't ready to get married now.

AVERY

You too young a woman to close up, Berniece.

BERNIECE

I ain't said nothing about closing up. I got a lot of woman left in me.

AVERY

Where's it at? When's the last time you looked at it?

BERNIECE

(stunned by his remark)  
That's a nasty thing to say. And you call yourself a preacher.

AVERY

Any time I get anywhere near you...you push me away.

BERNIECE

I got enough on my hands with Maretha. I got enough people to love and take care of.

AVERY

Who you got to love you? Can't nobody get close enough to you. Doaker can't half say nothing to you. You jump all over Boy Willie. Who you got to love you, Berniece?

BERNIECE

You trying to tell me a woman can't be nothing without a man. But you alright, huh? You can just walk out of here without me - without a woman - and still be a man. That's alright. Ain't nobody gonna ask you, "Avery, who you got to love you?" That's alright for you. But everybody gonna be worried about Berniece. "How Berniece gonna take care of herself? How she gonna raise that child without a man? Wonder what she do with herself. How she gonna live like that?" Everybody got all kinds of questions for Berniece. Everybody telling me I can't be a woman unless I got a man. Well, you tell me, Avery - you know - how much woman am I?

AVERY

It wasn't me, Berniece. You can't blame me for nobody else.

BERNIECE

I ain't blaming nobody for nothing. I'm just stating the facts.

AVERY

(beat)

How long you gonna carry Crawley with you, Berniece? It's been over three years. At some point you got to let go and go on. Life's got all kinds of twists and turns. That don't mean you stop living. Crawley's been dead three years. Three years, Berniece.

BERNIECE

I know how long Crawley's been dead. You ain't got to tell me that. I just ain't ready to get married right now.

AVERY

What is you ready for, Berniece? You just gonna drift along from day to day. Life is more than making it from one day to another. You gonna look up one day and it's all gonna be past you.

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

I'm standing here now, Berniece -  
but I don't know how much longer  
I'm gonna be standing here waiting  
on you.

BERNIECE

Avery, I told you...when you get  
your church we'll sit down and talk  
about this. I got too many other  
things to deal with right now. Boy  
Willie and the piano...and Sutter's  
ghost. I thought I might have been  
seeing things, but Maretha done  
seen Sutter's ghost, too.

AVERY

When this happen, Berniece?

BERNIECE

Right after I came home yesterday.  
Maretha scared to sleep up there  
now. Maybe if you bless the house  
he'll go away.

AVERY

I don't know, Berniece. I don't  
know if I should fool around with  
something like that.

BERNIECE

I can't have Maretha scared to go  
to sleep up there. Seem like if  
you bless the house he would go  
away.

AVERY

You might have to be a special kind  
of preacher to do something like  
that.

BERNIECE

I keep telling myself when Boy  
Willie leave he'll go on and leave  
with him. I believe Boy Willie  
pushed him in the well.

AVERY

That's been going on down there for  
a long time. The Ghosts of the  
Yellow Dog been pushing people in  
their wells long before Boy Willie  
got grown.



BERNIECE

Somebody down there pushing them people in their wells. They ain't just upped and fell. Ain't no wind push nobody in their well.

AVERY

Oh, I don't know. God works in mysterious ways.

BERNIECE

He ain't pushed nobody in their wells.

AVERY

He caused it to happen. God is the Great Causer. He can do anything. He parted the Red Sea. He say, "I will smite my enemies." Reverend Thompson used to preach on the Ghosts of the Yellow Dog as the hand of God.

BERNIECE

I don't care who preached what. Somebody down there pushing them people in their wells. Somebody like Boy Willie. I believe he pushed Sutter so he could get his land.

AVERY

What Doaker say about Boy Willie selling the piano?

BERNIECE

Doaker don't want no part of that piano. He ain't never wanted no part of it. He blames himself for not staying behind with Papa Boy Charles. He washed his hands of that piano a long time ago. He didn't want me to bring it up here - but I wasn't gonna leave it down there.

AVERY

Well it seems to me somebody ought to be able to talk to Boy Willie.

BERNIECE

You can't talk to Boy Willie. He been that way all his life. He don't listen to nobody.

(MORE)

BERNIECE (CONT'D)

He just like my daddy. He get his mind fixed on something and can't nobody turn him from it.

AVERY

You ought to start a choir at the church. Maybe if he seen you was doing something with it - if you told him you was gonna put it in my church - maybe he'd see it different.

BERNIECE

I done told you I don't play on that piano. Ain't no need in you to keep talking this choir stuff. When my mama died I shut the top on that piano and I ain't never opened it since. I was only playing it for her...

A85

INT. MAMA OLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A85

1914, Mississippi. A small room with worn, sweating, white walls.

A series of vignettes, all in 36FPS:

- Raindrops congregate on a window sill.

- YOUNG BERNIECE (13) and MAMA OLA's hands hand in hand. YOUNG BOY WILLIE looks on.

BERNIECE (V.O.)

...When my daddy died seem like all her life went into that piano. She used to have me playing on it...say when I played it she could hear my daddy talking to her...

- Young Berniece lays in her mother's lap. MAMA OLA's hands touch her face. The lights dim, then come back on and suddenly it's 35-year-old Berniece on her mother's lap. Mama Ola's older hands now touching her face.

BERNIECE (V.O.)

I used to think them pictures come alive and walked through the house. Sometime late at night I could hear my mama talking to them. I said that wasn't gonna happen to me...

- Mama Ola stands by the Piano, her eyes pleading for Berniece to play. Berniece looks on.

B85

INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - NIGHT

B85

BACK TO:

BERNIECE

...I don't play that piano 'cause I don't want to wake them spirits. They never be walking around in this house.

AVERY

You got to put all of that behind you, Berniece. That's the same thing like Crawley. Everybody got stones in their passway. You got to step over them or walk around them. You picking them up and carrying them with you. All you got to do is set them down by the side of the road. You ain't got to carry them with you. You can walk over there right now and play that piano. You can walk over there right now and God will walk over there with you. Right now you can set that sack of stones down by the side of the road and walk away from it.

Avery crosses over to the piano and raises the fall board.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Come on, Berniece...set it down and walk away from it. Walk over here and claim it as an instrument of the Lord. You can walk over here right now and make it into a celebration.

BERNIECE

Avery...I done told you I don't want to play that piano. Now or no other time.

AVERY

The Bible say, "The Lord is my refuge...and my strength!" With the strength of God you can put the past behind you, Berniece. With the strength of God you can do anything! God don't ask what you done...God ask what you gonna do. All you got to do is walk over here and claim it.

BERNIECE

Avery, just go on and let me finish my bath. I'll see you tomorrow.

AVERY

Okay, Berniece. I'm gonna go home. I'm gonna go home and read up on my Bible. And tomorrow...if the good Lord give me strength tomorrow...I'm gonna come by and bless the house...and show you the power of the Lord.

86

**INT. CRAWFORD GRILL - NIGHT**

86

Sweat and sex ooze as Lucille sings a sultry song a la "Shave 'em Dry".

ON THE DANCE FLOOR Boy Willie holds Grace tight as he speaks into her ear:

BOY WILLIE

We don't need no room. My granddaddy used to take women on the backs of horses.

GRACE

You sure is country. I didn't know you was this country.

BOY WILLIE

There's a lot of things you don't know about me. Come on, let me show you what this country boy can do.

GRACE

Let's go to my place. I got a room with a bed if Leroy don't come back there.

BOY WILLIE

Who's Leroy? You ain't said nothing about no Leroy.

GRACE

He used to be my man. He ain't coming back.

BOY WILLIE

You let him have your key?

GRACE

He ain't coming back.

BOY WILLIE

Did you let him have your key?

GRACE

He got a key but he ain't coming back.

TUCKED AWAY IN A BOOTH, Lymon sits with Dolly but he's staring through the crowd at Boy Willie and Grace dancing. Dolly downs her whiskey, drunk. Then Lymon sees Boy Willie and Grace leaving. Dolly leans into Lymon with her glass:

DOLLY

I'm empty.

Lymon throws her a look. He's not into her or this place.

87

**EXT./INT. CHARLES HOUSE - NIGHT**

87

Lymon walks up to the house. He STOPS and looks in through a window where Berniece turns on a light and puts on the teakettle. He watches for a beat, then he moves to the door and KNOCKS.

Berniece opens the door. Lymon enters.

LYMON

How you doing, Berniece? I thought you'd be asleep. Boy Willie been back here?

BERNIECE

He just left out of here a minute ago.

LYMON

I went out to see a picture show and never got there. We always end up doing something else. I was with this woman she just wanted to drink up all my money. So I left her there and came back looking for Boy Willie.

BERNIECE

You just missed him.

LYMON

They got some nice-looking women in this city. I'm gonna like it up here real good. I like seeing them with their dresses on. Got them high heels. I like that. Make them look like they real precious. Boy Willie met a real nice one today. I wish I had met her before he did.

BERNIECE

He come by here with some woman a little while ago. I told him to go on and take all that out of my house.

LYMON

What she look like, the woman he was with? Was she a brown-skinned woman about this high? Nice and healthy? Got nice hips on her?

BERNIECE

She had on a red dress.

LYMON

That's her! That's Grace. She real nice. Laugh a lot. Some of these women act like they the Queen of Sheba. I don't like them kind. Grace ain't like that. She real nice with herself.

BERNIECE

I don't know what she was like. He come in here all drunk knocking over the lamp, and making all kind of noise. I can't really say what she was like.

LYMON

(after a beat)

Doaker gone, huh? He say he had to make a trip.

BERNIECE

Yeah, he gone on his trip. This is when I can usually get me some peace and quiet, Maretha asleep.

LYMON

She look just like you. Got them big eyes. I remember her when she was in diapers.

BERNIECE

Time just keep on. It go on with or without you. She going on twelve.

LYMON

She sure is pretty. I like kids.

BERNIECE

Boy Willie say you staying...what you gonna do up here in this big city? You thought about that?

LYMON

They never get me back down there. They gonna try and make me work for Stovall when he don't pay nothing. It ain't like that up here.

BERNIECE

This ain't a bad city once you get to know your way around.

LYMON

I figure I find me a job unloading boxcars or something. One fellow told me say he know a place.

BERNIECE

You shouldn't have too much trouble. It's all in how you present yourself.

(MORE)

## BERNIECE (CONT'D)

See now, Boy Willie couldn't get no job up here. Somebody hire him they got a pack of trouble on their hands. Soon as they find that out they fire him. He don't want to do nothing unless he do it his way.

## LYMON

I know. I told him let's go to the picture show first and see if there was any women down there. They might get tired of sitting at home and walk down to the picture show. He say he wanna look around first. We tried a couple of places and then we went to this saloon where he met Grace. We left Wining Boy sitting down there running his mouth. He told me if I wear this suit I'd find me a woman. He was almost right.

## BERNIECE

You don't need to be out there in them saloons. Ain't no telling what you liable to run into out there. This one liable to cut you as quick as that one shoot you. You don't need to be out there. You start out that fast life you can't keep it up. It makes you old quick. I don't know what them women out there be thinking about.

## LYMON

Mostly they be lonely and looking for somebody to spend the night with them. Sometimes it matters who it is and sometimes it don't. I used to be the same way. Now it got to matter. That's why I'm here now. I like women to be with me in a nice and easy way. That way we can both enjoy ourselves. The way I see it we the only two people like us in the world. We got to see how we fit together. A woman that don't want to take the time to do that I don't bother with. Used to. Used to bother with all of them. How come you ain't married? It seem like to me you would be married.

(MORE)



LYMON (CONT'D)

I remember Avery from down home. I used to call him plain old Avery. Now he Reverend Avery. That's kinda funny about him becoming a preacher. I like when he told about how that come to him in a dream about them sheep people and them hobos. Nothing ever came to me in a dream like that. I just dream about women. Can't never seem to find the right one.

BERNIECE

She out there somewhere. You just got to get yourself ready to meet her. That's what I'm trying to do. Avery's alright. I ain't really got nobody in mind.

LYMON

I get me a job and a little place and get set up to where I can make a woman comfortable I might get married. Avery's nice. You ought to go ahead and get married. You be a preacher's wife you won't have to work. I hate living by myself. I didn't want to be no strain on my mama so I left home when I was about sixteen. Everything I tried seem like it just didn't work out. Now I'm trying this.

BERNIECE

You keep trying it'll work out for you.

LYMON

It's getting kind of late. I don't know where Boy Willie went off to. He's liable not to come back. I'm gonna take off these shoes. My feet hurt. Was you in bed? I don't mean to be keeping you up.

BERNIECE

You ain't keeping me up. I couldn't sleep after that Boy Willie woke me up.

LYMON

You got on that nightgown. I likes women they wear them fancy nightclothes and all. It makes their skin look real pretty.

BERNIECE

I got this at the five-and-ten-cents store. It ain't so fancy.

LYMON

I don't too often get to see a woman dressed like that.

There is a long pause. Lymon takes off his suit coat.

LYMON (CONT'D)

Well, I'm gonna sleep here on the couch. I'm supposed to sleep on the floor but I don't reckon Boy Wille's coming back tonight. Wining Boy sold me this suit. Told me it was a magic suit. I'm gonna put it on again tomorrow. Maybe it bring me a woman like he say.

Lymon goes into his pocket and pulls out a small bottle of perfume.

LYMON (CONT'D)

I almost forgot I had this. Some man sold me this for a dollar. Say it come from Paris. This is the same kind of perfume the Queen of France wear. That's what he told me. I don't know if it's true or not. I smelled it. It smelled good to me. Here...smell it see if you like it.

BERNIECE

(takes the bottle)  
It smells nice.

LYMON

Go on, take it.

BERNIECE

I can't take it. Here...you keep it. You'll find somebody to give it to.

LYMON

I wanna give it to you. Make you  
smell nice.

Lymon puts perfume behind Berniece's ear.

LYMON (CONT'D)

They tell me you supposed to put it  
right here behind your ear. Say if  
you put it there you smell nice all  
day.

Berniece stiffens at his touch. He bends down to smell her.

LYMON (CONT'D)

There...you smell real good now.  
(kissing her neck)  
You smell real good for Lymon.

He kisses her again. Berniece returns the kiss, then breaks  
the embrace and crosses to the stairs. She turns and they  
look silently at each other. Lymon hands her the bottle of  
perfume. She thinks for a beat, then accepts. A promise of  
things to come? Then Berniece exits up the stairs.

Lymon picks up his suit coat and strokes it lovingly with the  
full knowledge that it is indeed a magic suit.

88 **EXT. BOY CHARLES' SHACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

88

As Boy Charles loosens his fist and lets dirt pour into 6-  
year-old Boy Willie's open palms.

BOY CHARLES

Know what that is?

6-YEAR-OLD BOY WILLIE

Dirt.

BOY CHARLES

No. That there is land.

89 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR/KITCHEN - DAY**

89

As Boy Willie bursts into the house and sees Lymon sound  
asleep. Boy Willie shakes him:

BOY WILLIE

Hey, Lymon! Lymon, come on, get  
up.

LYMON

Leave me alone.

BOY WILLIE  
Come on, get up, nigger!

LYMON  
What you want?

BOY WILLIE  
Come on, let's go. I done called  
the man about the piano.

Boy Willie dumps Lymon on the floor.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Come on, get up!

LYMON  
Why you leave last night, I looked  
around and you was gone.

BOY WILLIE  
I come back here with Grace, then I  
went looking for you.

LYMON  
I come back here looking for you!

BOY WILLIE  
Berniece got mad when we came here.  
I been up at Grace's house. Come  
on, I done called the man about the  
piano.

LYMON  
What he say?

BOY WILLIE  
He say to bring it on out.

LYMON  
Why didn't you tell him to come  
pick it up?

BOY WILLIE  
He want to charge twenty-five  
dollars to pick it up. Come on,  
let's get it loaded before Berniece  
come back.

Lymon gets up and follows Boy Willie to the piano.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Get that end over there. Get a  
real good grip on it now. Alright.  
You got it good?

LYMON  
Yeah, I got it.

BOY WILLIE  
Ready? Lift!

They strain to move the piano but it doesn't budge.

LYMON  
Man, this piano is heavy! It's gonna take more than me and you to move this piano.

BOY WILLIE  
We can do it. Come on - we did it before.

LYMON  
Nigger - you crazy! That piano weighs five hundred pounds!

BOY WILLIE  
I got three hundred pounds of it! I know you can carry two hundred pounds! You be lifting them cotton sacks! Come on lift this piano!

They heave. The WOOD GROANS, almost like a slave ship at sea. And the piano shifts a few inches only to be YANKED back into place -- like a tug-of-war with the spirit world. CLOSE ON THE CARVING of Mama Berniece, arms outstretched.

90     **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/DOAKER'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS**     90

As Doaker dresses he reacts to the commotion out in the parlor.

91     **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**     91

Boy Willie and Lymon struggle with the piano.

LYMON  
It's stuck. Something holding it.

BOY WILLIE  
How the piano gonna be stuck? We just moved it. Slide you' end out.

LYMON  
How this big old piano get in the house?

BOY WILLIE

I don't know how it got in the house. I know how it's going out though! You get on this end. I'll carry three hundred and fifty pounds of it. All you got to do is slide your end out. Ready?

They switch sides and try again without success. Doaker enters from his room.

DOAKER

Boy Willie, what you doing?

LYMON

Hey Doaker...how this piano get in the house?

BOY WILLIE

I'm carrying this piano out the house. What it look like I'm doing? Come on, Lymon, let's try again.

DOAKER

Go on let the piano sit there till Berniece come home.

BOY WILLIE

I done called that white man about the piano. You ain't got nothing to do with this, Doaker. This my business.

DOAKER

This is my house, nigger! I ain't gonna let you or nobody else carry nothing out of it. You ain't gonna carry nothing out of here without my permission!

BOY WILLIE

This is my piano. I don't need your permission to carry my belongings out of your house. This is mine.

DOAKER

I say leave it over there till Berniece come home. She got part of it too. Leave it set there till you see what she say.

BOY WILLIE

I don't care what Berniece say.  
Come on, Lymon. I got this side.

DOAKER

Go on and cut it half in two if you  
want to. Just leave Berniece's  
half sitting over there. I can't  
tell you what to do with your  
piano. But I can't let you take  
her half out of here.

BOY WILLIE

Go on, Doaker. You ain't got  
nothing to do with this. I don't  
want you starting nothing now.  
Just go on and leave me alone.  
Come on, Lymon. I got this end.

STAY WITH Doaker as he goes into his room, opens a drawer and  
pulls out a REVOLVER.

In the Parlor Boy Willie and Lymon prepare to move the piano.

LYMON

How we gonna get it in the truck?

BOY WILLIE

Don't worry about how we gonna get  
it on the truck. You got to get it  
out the house first.

LYMON

It's gonna take more than me and  
you to move this piano.

BOY WILLIE

Just lift up on that end, nigger!

Doaker comes to the doorway of his room and stands with the  
gun at his side.

DOAKER

(quietly with authority)  
Leave that piano set over there  
till Berniece come back. I don't  
care what you do with it then. But  
you gonna leave it sit over there  
right now.

BOY WILLIE

Alright...I'm gonna tell you this,  
Doaker.

(MORE)

## BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm going out of here...I'm gonna get me some rope...find me a plank and some wheels...and I'm coming back. Then I'm gonna carry that piano out of here...sell it and give Berniece half the money. See...now that's what I'm gonna do. And you...or nobody else is gonna stop me. Come on, Lymon...let's go get some rope and stuff. I'll be back, Doaker.

Boy Willie and Lymon exit.

92 **EXT. PITTSBURGH - DAY**

92

We ride in the back of the empty truck as it bounces on uneven road. We see the city alive -- a rare combination of urban sprawl and nature.

93 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - MAGIC HOUR/NIGHT**

93

CLOSE ON THE PIANO as SUNLIGHT moves across the ancestors.

MARETHA (O.S.)

Anybody ever see the Ghosts?

ON Maretha as she spins a CASTER. Boy Willie gently takes it from her and screws it into a wooden plank. The sun will set throughout the scene and eventually it turns to night.

BOY WILLIE

They like the wind. Can you see the wind?

MARETHA

No.

BOY WILLIE

You can't see them. But sometimes you be in trouble they might be around to help you. They say if you go where the Southern cross the Yellow Dog...you go where them two railroads cross each other...and call out their names...they say they talk back to you. I don't know, I ain't never done that. But Uncle Wining Boy he say he been down there and talked to them.

Maretha takes that in, spooked. Then she JUMPS when Berniece enters from the front door.



BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 You have to ask him about that  
 part.

BERNIECE  
 Maretha, you go on and get ready  
 for me to do your hair. Go on.

MARETHA  
 Mama, all the hair grease is gone.

Berniece gives her a dollar.

BERNIECE  
 Here...run across the street and  
 get another can. You come straight  
 back, too. Don't be playing around  
 out there. And watch the cars. Be  
 careful when you cross the street.

Maretha exits out the front door.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)  
 Boy Willie, I done told you to  
 leave my house.

BOY WILLIE  
 I ain't in you' house. I'm in  
 Doaker's house. If he ask me to  
 leave then I'll go on and leave.  
 But consider me done left your  
 part.

BERNIECE  
 Doaker, tell him to leave. Tell  
 him to go on.

DOAKER  
 Boy Willie ain't done nothing for  
 me to put him out of the house. I  
 told you if you can't get along  
 just go on and don't have nothing  
 to do with each other.

BOY WILLIE  
 I ain't thinking about Berniece.

Boy Willie draws a line across the floor with his foot.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 There! Now I'm out of your part of  
 the house. Consider me done left  
 your part.

(MORE)

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Soon as Lymon come back with that rope, I'm gonna take that piano out of here and sell it.

BERNIECE

You ain't gonna touch that piano.

BOY WILLIE

Carry it out of here just as big and bold. Do like my daddy would have done come time to get Sutter's land.

BERNIECE

I got something to make you leave it over there.

BOY WILLIE

It's got to come better than this thirty-two-twenty.

DOAKER

Why don't you stop all that! Boy Willie, go on and leave her alone. You know how Berniece get. Why you wanna sit there and pick with her?

BOY WILLIE

I ain't picking with her. I told her the truth. She the one talking about what she got. I just told her what she better have.

BERNIECE

That's alright, Doaker. Leave him alone.

BOY WILLIE

She trying to scare me. Hell, I ain't scared of dying. I look around and see people dying every day. You got to die to make room for somebody else. I had a dog that died. Wasn't nothing but a puppy. I picked it up and put it in a bag and carried it up there to Reverend C.L. Thompson's church. I carried it up there and prayed and asked Jesus to make it live like he did the man in the Bible. I prayed real hard. Knelt down and everything. Say ask in Jesus' name. Well, I must have called Jesus' name two hundred times.

(MORE)

## BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

I called his name till my mouth got sore. I got up and looked in the bag and the dog still dead. It ain't moved a muscle! I say, "Well, ain't nothing precious." And then I went out and killed me a cat. That's when I discovered the power of death. See, a nigger that ain't afraid to die is the worse kind of nigger for the white man. He can't hold that power over you. That's what I learned when I killed that cat. I got the power of death too. I can command him. I can call him up. The white man don't like to see that. He don't like for you to stand up and look him square in the eye and say, "I got it too." Then he got to deal with you square up.

## BERNIECE

That's why I don't talk to him, Doaker. You try and talk to him and that's the only kind of stuff that comes out his mouth.

## DOAKER

You say Avery went home to get his Bible?

## BOY WILLIE

What Avery gonna do? Avery can't do nothing with me. I wish Avery would say something to me about this piano.

## DOAKER

Berniece ain't said about that. He coming by to bless the house see if he can get rid of Sutter's ghost.

Maretha enters through the front door.

## BOY WILLIE

Ain't nothing but a house full of ghosts down there at the church. What Avery look like chasing away somebody's ghost?

## BERNIECE

(to Maretha)

Light that stove and set that comb over there to get hot.

(MORE)

BERNIECE (CONT'D)

Get something to put around your shoulders.

Maretha obliges.

BOY WILLIE

The Bible say an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. Tit for tat. But you and Avery don't want to believe that. You gonna pass up that part and pretend it ain't in there. Everything else you gonna agree with. But if you gonna agree with part of it you got to agree with all of it. You can't do nothing halfway. Ask Avery. He a preacher. He'll tell you it's in there. He the Good Shepherd. Unless he gonna shepherd you to heaven with half the Bible.

BERNIECE

Maretha, bring me that comb. Make sure it's hot.

The comb is smoking. Maretha brings it to her then sits at her feet.

BOY WILLIE

I will say this for Avery. He done figured out a path to go through life. I don't agree with it but he done fixed it so he can go right through it real smooth. Hell, he liable to end up with a million dollars that he done got from selling bread and wine.

Berniece roughly fingers through Maretha's tender head.

MARETHA

OWWWWWW!

BERNIECE

Be still, Maretha. If you was a boy I wouldn't be going through this.

BOY WILLIE

Don't you tell that girl that. Why you wanna tell her that?

BERNIECE

You ain't got nothing to do with  
this child.

BOY WILLIE

Telling her you wish she was a boy.  
How's that gonna make her feel?

BERNIECE

Boy Willie, go on and leave me  
alone.

DOAKER

Why don't you leave her alone?  
What you got to pick with her for?  
Why don't you go on out and see  
what's out there in the streets?  
Have something to tell the fellows  
down home.

BOY WILLIE

I'm waiting on Lymon to get back  
with that truck. Why don't you go  
out and see what's out there in the  
streets? You ain't got work  
tomorrow. Talking about me...

DOAKER

I got to stay around here and keep  
you all from killing one another.

BOY WILLIE

You ain't got to worry about me.  
You ought to be talking to  
Berniece. Sitting up there telling  
Maretha she wished she was a boy.  
What kind of thing is that to tell  
a child? If you want to tell her  
something tell her about that  
piano. You ain't even told her  
about that piano. Like that's  
something to be ashamed of.

BERNIECE

Let me take care of my child. When  
you get one of your own then you  
can teach it what you want to teach  
it.

Doaker exits into his room.

BOY WILLIE

What I want to bring a child into  
this world for?

(MORE)

## BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Why I wanna bring somebody else into all this for? I'll tell you this...if I was Rockefeller I'd have forty or fifty. I'd make one everyday. 'Cause they gonna start out in life with all the advantages. I ain't got no advantages to offer nobody. Many is the time I looked at my daddy and seen him staring off at his hands. I got a little older I know what he was thinking. He sitting there saying, "I got these big old hands but what I'm gonna do with them? Best I can do is make a fifty-acre crop for Mr. Stovall. Got these big old hands capable of doing anything. I can take and build something with these hands. But where's the tools? All I got is these hands. Unless I go out here and kill me somebody and take what they got...it's a long road to hoe for me to get something of my own. So what I'm gonna do with these big old hands? What would you do?" See now...if he had his own land he wouldn't have felt that way. If he had something under his feet that belong to him he could stand up taller. That's what I'm talking about. Ain't no mystery to life. You just got to go out and meet it square on. If you teach that girl that she living at the bottom of life, she's gonna grow up and hate you.

## BERNIECE

I'm gonna teach her the truth. That's just where she living. Only she ain't got to stay there.

(to Maretha)

Turn your head over to the other side.

## BOY WILLIE

This might be your bottom but it ain't mine. I'm living at the top of life. I ain't gonna just take my life and throw it away at the bottom. I'm in the world like everybody else.

(MORE)

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

The way I see it everybody else got to come up a little taste to be where I am.

BERNIECE

You right at the bottom with the rest of us.

BOY WILLIE

If you believe that's where you at then you gonna act that way. If you act that way then that's where you gonna be.

Doaker enters from his room.

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, Doaker...Berniece say the colored folks is living at the bottom of life. You think you living at the bottom of life? Is that how you see yourself?

DOAKER

I'm just living the best way I know how. I ain't thinking about no top or no bottom.

BOY WILLIE

That's what I tried to tell Berniece. I don't know where she got that from. That sound like something Avery would say. Avery think 'cause the white man give him a turkey for Thanksgiving that makes him better than everybody else. That's gonna raise him out of the bottom of life. I don't need nobody to give me a turkey. I can get my own turkey. All you have to do is get out my way. I'll get me two or three turkeys.

BERNIECE

You can't even get a chicken let alone two or three turkeys. Talking about get out your way. Ain't nobody in your way.

(to Maretha)

Straighten your head, Maretha! Don't be bending down like that. Hold your head up!

(to Boy Willie)

All you got going for you is talk.

(MORE)

## BERNIECE (CONT'D)

You' whole life that's all you ever had going for you.

## BOY WILLIE

See now...I'll tell you something about me. I done strung along and strung along. Going this way and that. Whatever way would lead me to a moment of peace. That's all I want. To be easy with everything. But I wasn't born to that. I was born to a time of fire. The world ain't wanted no part of me. I could see that since I was about seven. The world say it's better off without me. See, Berniece accept that. She trying to come up to where she can prove something to the world. Hell, the world a better place 'cause of me. I don't see it like Berniece. I got a heart that beats here and it beats just as loud as the next fellow's. Don't care if he black or white. Sometime it beats louder. When it beats louder, then everybody can hear it. Some people get scared of that. Like Berniece. Some people get scared to hear a nigger's heart beating. They think you ought to lay low with that heart. Make it beat quiet and go along with everything the way it is. But my mama ain't birthed me for nothing. So what I got to do? I got to mark my passing on the road. Just like you write on a tree, "Boy Willie was here." That's all I'm trying to do with that piano. Trying to put my mark on the road. Like my daddy done. My heart say for me to sell that piano and get me some land so I can make a life for myself to live in my own way. Other than that I ain't thinking about nothing Berniece got to say.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Boy Willie crosses to it and yanks it open thinking it is Lymon. Avery enters. He carries a Bible.



BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Where you been, nigger? Aw...I thought you was Lymon. Hey, Berniece, look who's here.

BERNIECE

Come on in, Avery. Don't you pay Boy Willie no mind.

BOY WILLIE

Hey...hey Avery...tell me this...can you get to heaven with half the Bible?

BERNIECE

Boy Willie...I done told you to leave me alone.

BOY WILLIE

I just ask the man a question. He can answer. He don't need you to speak for him. Avery...if you only believe on half the Bible and you don't want to accept the other half...you think God let you in heaven?

AVERY

You got to be born again. Jesus say "Unless a man be born again he cannot come unto the Father and who so ever heareth my words and believeth them not shall be cast into a fiery pit."

BOY WILLIE

That's what I was trying to tell Berniece. You got to believe in it all. You can't go at nothing halfway. She think she going to heaven with half the Bible.

(to Berniece)

You hear that...Jesus say you got to believe in it all.

BERNIECE

You keep messing with me.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't thinking about you.

DOAKER

Come on in, Avery, and have a seat.  
Don't pay neither one of them no  
mind. They been arguing all day.

BERNIECE

(to Maretha)

Here, set this comb back over there  
on that stove.

(to Avery)

Don't pay Boy Willie no mind. He  
been around here bothering me since  
I come home from work.

BOY WILLIE

Boy Willie ain't bothering you.  
Boy Willie ain't bothering nobody.  
I'm just waiting on Lymon to get  
back. I ain't thinking about you.

DOAKER

What they say down there at the  
bank, Avery?

AVERY

Oh, they talked to me real nice. I  
told Berniece...they say maybe they  
let me borrow the money. They done  
talked to my boss down at work and  
everything.

DOAKER

That's what I told Berniece. You  
working every day you ought to be  
able to borrow some money.

AVERY

I'm getting more people in my  
congregation every day. Berniece  
says she gonna be the Deaconess. I  
get me my church I can get married  
and settled down. That's what I  
told Berniece.

DOAKER

That be nice. You ought to go  
ahead and get married. Berniece  
don't need to be by herself. I  
tell her that all the time.

BERNIECE

I ain't said nothing about getting  
married. I said I was thinking  
about it.

DOAKER

Avery get him his church you all  
can make it nice.

(to Avery)

Berniece said you was coming by to  
bless the house.

AVERY

Yeah, I done read up on my Bible.  
She asked me to come by and see if  
I can get rid of Sutter's ghost.

BOY WILLIE

Ain't no ghost in this house.  
That's all in Berniece's head.

DOAKER

Well, let her find that out then.  
If Avery blessing the house is  
gonna make her feel better...what  
you got to do with it?

AVERY

Berniece say Maretha seen him too.  
I don't know, but I found a part in  
the Bible to bless the house. If  
he is here then that ought to make  
him go.

BOY WILLIE

You worse than Berniece believing  
all that stuff. Talking about...if  
he here. Go on up there and find  
out. I been up there I ain't seen  
him. If you reading from that  
Bible gonna make him leave out of  
Berniece imagination, well, you  
might be right. But if you talking  
about -

DOAKER

Boy Willie, why don't you just be  
quiet? Getting all up in the man's  
business. This ain't got nothing  
to do with you. Let him go ahead  
and do what he gonna do.

BOY WILLIE

I ain't stopping him. Avery ain't  
got no power to do nothing.

AVERY

Oh, I ain't got no power. God got  
the power!

(MORE)

## AVERY (CONT'D)

God got power over everything in his creation. God can do anything. God say, "As I commandeth so it shall be." God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. God's got a wonderful power. He got power over life and death. I ain't worried about him chasing away a little old ghost!

There is a KNOCK at the door. Boy Willie goes to answer it. Lymon enters carrying a coil of rope.

## BOY WILLIE

Where you been? I been waiting on you and you run off somewhere.

## LYMON

I ran into Grace. Hi, Berniece.

## BOY WILLIE

Give me that rope and get up on this side of the piano.

## DOAKER

Boy Willie, don't start nothing now. Leave the piano alone.

## BOY WILLIE

Get the board there, Lymon. Stay out of this, Doaker.

Berniece exits up the stairs.

## DOAKER

You just can't take the piano. How you gonna take the piano? Berniece ain't said nothing about selling that piano.

## BOY WILLIE

She ain't got to say nothing. Come on, Lymon. We got to lift one end at a time up on the board.

## LYMON

What we gonna do with the rope?

## BOY WILLIE

Let me worry about the rope. You just get up on this side over here with me.

Berniece enters from the stairs with Crawley's REVOLVER.

AVERY

Boy Willie...Berniece...why don't you all sit down and talk this out now?

BERNIECE

Ain't nothing to talk out.

BOY WILLIE

I'm through talking to Berniece. Get up on that side, Lymon.

LYMON

Wait a minute...wait a minute, Boy Willie. Berniece got to say. Hey, Berniece...did you tell Boy Willie he could take this piano?

BERNIECE

Boy Willie ain't taking nothing out of my house but himself. Now you let him go ahead and try.

BOY WILLIE

Come on, Lymon, get up on this side with me... Come on, nigger! What you standing there for?

LYMON

Maybe Berniece is right. Maybe you shouldn't sell it.

AVERY

You all ought to sit down and talk it out. See if you can come to an agreement.

DOAKER

That's what I been trying to tell them. Seem like one of them ought to respect the other one's wishes.

BERNIECE

I wish Boy Willie would go on and leave my house. That's what I wish. Now, he can respect that.  
(pointing the revolver)  
'Cause he's leaving one way or another.

BOY WILLIE

What you mean one way or another?  
What's that supposed to mean? I  
ain't scared of no gun.

DOAKER

Come on, Berniece, leave him alone  
with that.

BOY WILLIE

I don't care what Berniece say.  
I'm selling my half. I can't help  
it if her half got to go along with  
it. It ain't like I'm trying to  
cheat her out of her half. Come  
on, Lymon.

LYMON

Berniece...I got to do this...Boy  
Willie say he gonna give you half  
of the money.

BERNIECE

Go on, Lymon. Just go on...I done  
told Boy Willie what to do.

BOY WILLIE

Here, Lymon...put that rope up over  
there.

LYMON

You sure you want to do this? The  
way I figure it...I might be  
wrong...but I figure she gonna  
shoot you first.

BOY WILLIE

She just gonna have to shoot me.

BERNIECE

Maretha, get on out the way. Get  
her out the way, Doaker.

DOAKER

Go on, do what your mama told you.

Doaker ushers Maretha to his room and shuts the door. Boy  
Willie and Lymon try to lift the piano. The FRONT DOOR OPENS  
and Wining Boy enters. He has been drinking.

## WINING BOY

Man, these niggers around here! I stopped down there at Seefus...those folks jumping back and getting off the sidewalk talking about Patchneck Red is coming. Come to find out...you know who they was talking about? Old John D. From up around Tyler! He got everybody scared of him. Calling him Patchneck Red. They don't know I whupped the nigger's head in one time.

## BOY WILLIE

Just make sure that board don't slide, Lymon.

## WINING BOY

Hey, Boy Willie, what you got? I know you got a pint stuck up in your coat.

## BOY WILLIE

Wining Boy, get out the way!

## WINING BOY

Hey, Doaker. What you got? Gimme a drink. I want a drink.

## DOAKER

It look like you had enough of whatever it was. Come talking about, "What you got?" You ought to be trying to find somewhere to lay down.

## WINING BOY

I ain't worried about no place to lay down. I can always find me a place to lay down in Berniece's house. Ain't that right, Berniece?

## BERNIECE

Wining Boy, sit down somewhere. You been out there drinking all day. Come in here smelling like an old polecat.

## DOAKER

You know Berniece don't like all that drinking.

## WINING BOY

I ain't disrespecting Berniece.  
 Berniece, am I disrespecting you?  
 I'm just trying to be nice. I been  
 with strangers all day and they  
 treated me like family. I come in  
 here to family and you treat me  
 like a stranger. I don't need your  
 whiskey. I can buy my own. I  
 wanted your company, not your  
 whiskey.

## DOAKER

Nigger, why don't you go upstairs  
 and lay down?

## WINING BOY

I ain't thinking about no laying  
 down. Me and Boy Willie fixing to  
 party. Ain't that right, Boy  
 Willie? Tell him. I'm fixing to  
 play me some piano. Watch this.

Wining Boy sits down at the piano.

## BOY WILLIE

Come on, Wining Boy! Me and Lymon  
 fixing to move the piano.

## WINING BOY

Naw...naw...you ain't gonna move  
 this piano!

## BOY WILLIE

Get out the way, Wining Boy.

Wining Boy spreads his arms out over the piano.

## WINING BOY

You ain't taking this piano out the  
 house. You got to take me with it.

## BOY WILLIE

Get out the way, Wining Boy!  
 Doaker, get him!

## WINING BOY

Wait a minute...wait a minute.  
 This a song I wrote for Cleotha. I  
 wrote this song in her memory.

Wining Boy begins to play and sing.



WINING BOY (CONT'D)

*Hey little woman what's the matter  
with you now/Had a storm last night  
and blowed the line all down/Tell  
me how long/Is I got to wait/Can I  
get it now/Or must I hesitate*

PUSH IN on a carving of an ANCESTOR.

94

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/DOAKER'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS**

94

PUSH IN on Maretha as she gets a chill and looks over her shoulder -- she's not alone in here. We hear Wining Boy singing in the next room.

WINING BOY (O.S.)

*It takes a hesitating stocking in  
her hesitating shoe/It takes a  
hesitating woman wanna sing the  
blues/Tell me how long/Is I got to  
wait*

95

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**

95

WINING BOY

*Can I kiss you now/Or must I  
hesitate.*

Wining Boy STOPS when they all get a CHILL.

WINING BOY (CONT'D)

*Hey, Doaker, did you feel that?  
Hey, Berniece...did you get cold?  
Hey, Doaker...*

DOAKER

What you calling me for?

WINING BOY

I believe that's Sutter.

BERNIECE

Avery, go on and bless the house.

DOAKER

You need to bless that piano.  
That's what you need to bless. It  
ain't done nothing but cause  
trouble. If you gonna bless  
anything go on and bless that.

WINING BOY

Hey Doaker, if he gonna bless  
something let him bless everything.

(MORE)

## WINING BOY (CONT'D)

The kitchen...the upstairs. Go on  
and bless it all.

## BOY WILLIE

Ain't no ghost in this house. He  
need to bless Berniece's head.  
That's what he need to bless.

## AVERY

Seem like that piano's causing all  
the trouble. I can bless that.  
Berniece, put me some water in that  
bottle.

Avery takes a small bottle from his pocket and hands it to  
Berniece, who goes into the kitchen to get water. Avery  
takes a candle from his pocket and lights it. He gives it to  
Berniece as she gives him the water.

## AVERY (CONT'D)

Hold this candle. Whatever you do  
make sure it don't go out. O Holy  
Father we gather here this evening  
in the Holy Name to cast out the  
spirit of one James Sutter. May  
this vial of water be empowered  
with thy spirit. May each drop of  
it be a weapon and a shield against  
the presence of all evil and may it  
be a cleansing and blessing of this  
humble abode. Where there is Good  
so shall it cause Evil to scatter  
to the Four Winds. Get thee behind  
me, Satan! Get thee behind the  
face of Righteousness as we Glorify  
His Holy Name!

Avery throws water on the piano and the LIGHTS FLICKER.

96     **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/DOAKER'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS**     96

Maretha reacts to the flickering lights, scared.

97     **INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**     97

## AVERY

Get thee behind the Hammer of Truth  
that breaketh down the Wall of  
Falsehood! Father. Father.  
Praise. Praise. We ask in Jesus'  
name and call forth the power of  
the Holy Spirit as it is written...  
(reading from the Bible)

(MORE)

AVERY (CONT'D)

"I will sprinkle clean water upon thee and ye shall be clean."

BOY WILLIE

All this old preaching stuff.  
Hell, just tell him to leave.

Avery continues reading throughout Boy Willie's outburst.

AVERY

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean: from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

Boy Willie grabs a pot of water from the stove and flings it around the room. As he does, the LIGHTS TURN OFF AND ON.

BOY WILLIE

Hey Sutter! Sutter! Get your ass out this house! Come on and get some of this water! You done drowned in the well, come on and get you some more of this water!

Boy Willie works himself into a frenzy as he runs around throwing water and calling Sutter's name. Avery continues:

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Come on, Sutter! Get some water!

As Boy Willie moves up the stairs he is suddenly THROWN BACK by some powerful unseen force. He lands hard but gets right back up, a believer now. He heads back up the stairs:

BOY WILLIE (CONT'D)

Come on, Sutter!

98

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/DOAKER'S ROOM/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**

98

A lightbulb explodes. Maretha hustles to the door and opens it. Lymon sees her terror and scoops her up, protective.

AVERY

(reading the Bible)

"A new heart also will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgements, and do them."

99

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/BATHROOM - SIMULTANEOUS** 9

The lights continue to go on and off.

BOY WILLIE

Come on, Sutter! I'm right here.

Suddenly Boy Willie gets punched in the face and knocked to the ground. He wrestles with the invisible spirit. In the brief moments of darkness, when the lights GO OFF we MOMENTARILY SEE SUTTER in all his rotting, ghostly rage. When the lights GO BACK ON he is unseen again.

The struggle tumbles into the bathroom. Boy Willie throws punches at the air. Then he gets knocked down again. Suddenly, the faucet EXPLODES AND SPEWS WATER.

The struggle continues and Boy Willie gets drenched. Then suddenly Sutter drags him out of frame.

100

**INT. CHARLES HOUSE/KITCHEN/PARLOR - SIMULTANEOUS**

100

As the LIGHTS STROBE, we catch glimpses of Sutter dragging Boy Willie back down the stairs by his leg. Doaker and Wining Boy stare at each other in stunned disbelief. Berniece clutches the candle as Lymon comforts Maretha.

Boy Willie is lifted off the ground, slammed into a wall and pinned, his feet dangling. Sutter chokes him.

We see Sutter's decomposed hand wrapped around Boy Willie's throat. Boy Willie struggles for breath. A gust of wind BLOWS OUT BERNIECE'S CANDLE.

AVERY

Berniece, I can't do it.

Sutter's grip gets tighter. Boy Willie is on the brink of death. He looks to Berniece, his eyes pleading for help.

It is in this moment, from somewhere old, that Berniece realizes what she must do. She sets down her candle and crosses to the piano. She begins to play. The song is found piece by piece. With each repetition it gains in strength.

BERNIECE

*I want you to help me/I want you to  
help me/I want you to help me/Mama  
Berniece/I want you to help me*

We see the carving of MAMA BERNIECE, arms outstretched.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)  
*Mama Esther/I want you to help me*

We see the carving of MAMA ESTHER.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)  
*Papa Boy Charles/I want you to help me*

We see the carving of Papa Boy Charles.

BERNIECE (CONT'D)  
*Mama Ola/I want you to help me/I want you to help me*

The STROBE INTENSIFIES and we see the ANCESTORS APPEAR NEXT TO HER. They move to Boy Willie and Sutter weakens. The sound of a TRAIN APPROACHING IS HEARD. Wind blows. Plates fly out of the cupboard and shatter.

Suddenly, SUTTER'S HEAD CATCHES FIRE. The FLAME ON BERNIECE'S CANDLE RE-IGNITES. And Boy Willie is released and drops to the ground. And, just as quickly as it started, the tempest STOPS. Sutter and the Ancestors are gone.

BOY WILLIE  
 Come on, Sutter! Come back!

BERNIECE  
 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Boy Willie drags himself to his feet. Then:

BOY WILLIE  
 Wining Boy, you ready to go back down home?

DOAKER  
 You still got time to make the train.

Boy Willie looks to his sister, grateful. Then they move to each other and embrace.

BOY WILLIE  
 If you and Maretha don't keep playing on that piano...ain't no telling...me and Sutter both liable to be back.

BERNIECE  
 Thank you... Thank you...

101 **EXT. FIELD - DAY**

101

Birds chirp. Insects thrum. A long beat as CAMERA SETTLES ON Boy Willie, alone and staring out at... SUTTER'S HOUSE sitting on a wide expanse of SUTTER'S LAND.

Boy Willie ponders what could have been. He bends and grabs a handful of dirt. Then he loosens his fist and lets the dirt go. Then he turns, gets into a new (old) truck and drives off. SOMEWHERE A PIANO PLAYS. Something basic and littered with mistakes. We hear Berniece laughing and playful:

BERNIECE (V.O.)  
Girl, stop banging on that piano.

MARETHA (V.O.)  
I'm practicing.

102 **INT. CHARLES HOUSE PARLOR - DAY**

102

Berniece and Maretha sit side by side on piano. Smiling, laughing.

BERNIECE  
Well then play it. You got to feel it.

MARETHA  
Like this?

Maretha plays the BOOGIE WOOGIE Boy Willie showed her. Berniece is surprised.

BERNIECE  
Where you learn that?

Their laughter takes us to...

103 **INT. BOY WILLIE'S TRUCK - DAWN**

103

Boy Willie drives away with a newfound peace. He passes a FOR SALE sign and glances in the rear view mirror, one last look at Sutter's Land. It shrinks in the distance.

Off the truck driving towards the rising sun and a new day...

FADE OUT.