

# THE STORM

By

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EXT. WOODED AREA NEAR THE MOBLEY PLACE, RURAL LOUISIANA, 1933  
- DUSK

A stalker crawls through undergrowth toward a dim light in the distance. Through his POV we see brush as he pushes it aside.

We hear his GRUNTS, the SOUND of dry branches breaking, the NIGHT SOUNDS of North Western Louisiana and rolls of DISTANT THUNDER as he advances.

As a dilapidated bungalow with a dirt yard comes into view, the speed of the stalker's advance slows. The stalker quietly PANTS.

EXT. THE PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

We see the home of ELLERT and EUNA MOBLEY.

Not far from the house is a small grave; mosses have grown over the grave and its small headstone. Next to the older grave, another small grave has just been dug.

CYE and EMMA STEWART, Euna's parents, stand near the open grave. A few feet from Cy and Emma is the fidgeting twelve year old ETOILE MOBLEY (mispronounced, 'ee-toil), Euna and Ellert's daughter.

On the porch, near a water well, Ellert, tall and muscular, attempts to construct a small coffin. His SAWING and HAMMERING create a counterpoint to the cadence of the scene.

The stalker continues to move slowly and observes the following:

EMMA  
(fanning with her  
handkerchief)  
Papa, did he dig it out deep  
enough? It doesn't look hardly deep  
enough t'me. Etoile? Hun, you  
doin' all right in school?

ETOILE  
Yessum.

EMMA  
School out for the summer?

ETOILE  
Not yet.

EMMA

You still keepin' up with ya'  
music?

Etoile sighs, must she answer yet another needless question?

The stalker, still unseen, moves carefully through the brush around the edge of the dirt yard to be closer to Ellert, who takes an occasional swig from a pint whisky bottle. Ellert senses something beyond the yard in the darkness.

ETOILE

Yessum.

EMMA

Well, I wouldn't know lest I asked  
seein' how you never come up t'play  
the piano for me anymore.

Through the stalker's POV we now see Euna through the screened front door.

Euna Mobley is in her mid-to-late forties; she might have been beautiful once, but her fair skin is tanned, her face gaunt from poverty and hard physical labor. Euna holds an infant wrapped in a thin blanket.

Beyond Euna, J.T. STAGNER, a doctor, completes paperwork at a small wooded table in the "parlor." He removes his glasses and wearily rubs his eyes.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I swan, ta' lose two babies an'  
both of'um boys.

CYE

Hush.

Ellert delivers a loud frustrated blow to the casket.

EMMA

Papa, why don't you help Ellert out  
with that little casket. No  
tellin' what manner'a box he'll  
piece together an' that grave don't  
look hardly deeper'n two foot.

CYE

Hush.

ETOILE

I'm gunna go see if Mama needs any  
help.

CYE

Ya' Mama's been ready a long time.  
 (directed to Ellert)  
 We're waitin' on the coffin.

EMMA

I tried to help'er dress'im, but  
 she brushed my hand away like it  
 was a fly.

Etoile moves away from her grandparents to a rope swing hanging from the limb of an Oak at the edge of the yard. She is very close to the unseen observer.

As he pulls back a bit into the brush, the stalker watches as Emma's relentless drivel continues:

EMMA (CONT'D)

I never see my grandchildren. I'd  
 walk up here, but I'm old, an' you  
 used to come see me, didn't you?

Euna appears at the screened front door of the house. Etoile swings. She has stopped listening.

CYE

Answer your Grandmother.

ETOILE

Yessum?

Euna holds her baby, and through the screen door she observes Ellert's futile attempt to build a coffin.

EMMA

I wonder why she isn't here?

ETOILE

Who?

EMMA

Ya'sister. Verna.

ETOILE

(impatiently)

I reckon she doesn't know about it.

The noise of J.T.'s CHAIR SCOOTING on the floor inside the house causes Euna to withdraw into the house.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

J.T. rises from the table and gathers his things. The talking outside continues:

EMMA (O.S.)

It isn't more than a mile an' a  
half'a road between our places, but  
my hip is weak an' goes to hurtin'  
an' --

J.T.

(to Euna)

I'll file these papers at the  
courthouse in the mornin'.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

J.T. moves out onto the porch. Euna remains inside, but stands at the screen door staring out as if she is might be somewhere else.

EMMA

You don't take me anywhere in the  
Ford. Why don't you ever ride me in  
the Ford?

CYE

Shut up.

EMMA

(to J.T.)

You goin' now?

J.T.

Yep.

EMMA

We thank you for comin' out.

J.T.

Euna, I'll be droppin' back by  
t'check on'ya is a few days.

He observes Ellert; to Cy:

J.T. (CONT'D)

Can you see to the rest of it?

CYE

I reckon so.

J.T. walks across the yard to a path leading to his car.

EMMA  
Who was that?

CYE  
That's J.T. You know J.T.

EMMA  
J.T.?

CYE  
Emmitt Stagner's boy -- ya'  
known'im all'is life!

EXT. CLEARING NEAR THE PATH TO THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The clearing is adjacent to a cattle gap which bridges the Mobley place over a deep ditch to Highway 6.

J.T. approaches his 1930 Greater Eight Hudson. Emma can be heard.

EMMA (O.S.)  
I want you to take me somewhere in  
the Ford. Over to Robeline in the  
Ford, Cyrus.

CYE (O.S.)  
Shut up woman!

J.T. turns as though he might go back, then after a moment, opens the door to his car, tosses his bag in and then unable to contain his frustration, BANGS loudly once on its roof.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

EMMA  
I thought I felt a drop. Did you  
feel a drop? Papa, I thought I --  
better hurry, Ellert --

ETOILE  
-- I reckon he's doin' his best.

CYE  
Do ya' now?

EMMA  
(indicating the older  
grave)  
That one lyin' there . . . We all  
knew he was goin' t'die.  
(MORE)

EMMA (CONT'D)

Now this baby, goin' on a week old  
an' struck down.

CYE

Emma . . .

There is a moment of complete silence except for a distant  
THUNDER ROLL.

They hear J.T.'s car door SLAM shut and the Hudson PULL AWAY.

EMMA

I can smell it now. It's goin'  
t'pour down on us like beasts in  
the jungle.

CYE

It ain't rainin'!

Cye checks his pocket watch. Ellert breaks a board.

CYE (CONT'D)

Damn, he's drunk.

EMMA

Yes, the sins of the father visited  
down on the sons -- It's the Bible  
truth!

ETOILE

Mama.

EMMA

Leave'er be --

CYE

-- Ellert! You goin' t'finish that  
thing today or tomorrow?!

Ellert in a fit of frustration, smashes the coffin with a  
terrific blow of his hammer.

Euna comes out on the porch still holding the infant. She  
stops for a moment, then moves to the open grave.

Ellert, drunk and humiliated, leaves by way of a path at the  
side of the house.

From the stalker's POV, we see Elert as the stalker follows.

Euna inspects the grave, hands the baby to Etoile, picks up  
the spade and begins to dig.

EMMA

Oh, my Lord. I told ya' it wasn't dug out deep enough. Cyrus, you dig that out for'er. Go on.

Cye reaches for the spade, but Euna recoils. She continues to dig.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Euna, what's the matter with you?

CYE

Best we go up to the house. Euna girl, we'll see ya' inside.

Cye and Emma move to the porch. Etoile eases close to her Mother.

ETOILE

I wish they'd go home.

Cye enters the parlor; Emma stops at the doorway to call to Etoile.

EMMA

Etoile, hun, you come on in. Come on.

There is no response; Emma goes in.

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

EMMA (CONT'D)

The wrath'a God's what it is. The sins of the father visited down on the house'a the sons.

Cye rolls a cigarette. The house is quite dark now.

EMMA (CONT'D)

(looking around)

Papa, this old place is just'a rottin' in. Just'a rottin' in. My own daughter livin' like white trash. I swan.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Euna lowers the body of her child into the grave using the blanket as a sling. She begins to fill the grave.



ETOILE  
 (fighting tears)  
 Where'd Daddy go off to?

Etoile cannot bear to watch and breaks for the porch. Emma addresses her through the screen door.

EMMA  
 Etoile, you ever been to Robeline?

ETOILE  
 Yessum. School's there.

EMMA  
 (opens the screen door)  
 You are not stayin' out there any longer, girl, you come on in here an' talk to ya' grandmother.

Etoile reluctantly submits.

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

EMMA  
 If standin' didn't go so bad on my hip bone, I'd a'stayed out there with'er an' mourned for a while, but shoot. Where does ya' mama keep'er oil? This lamp's 'bout dry.

ETOILE  
 I don't know. I'm not sure we have any more.

EMMA  
 You don't see any do ya' Papa -- no, you're not lookin'. Maybe it's in the back somewhere.

Emma chatters as she moves down the hall to the back of the house.

Etoile stands uncomfortably, unable to relax in Cye's presence.

EMMA (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Etoile, you still playin' piano for church?

ETOILE  
 Sometimes.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Emma fumbles through an old cabinet in the hall.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile and Cye stare at each other. An uncomfortable silence is broken by Emma's return.

EMMA

Where'd you say you keep the oil?

ETOILE

There's no tellin'. Mama changes things around so much -- I always did hate'er rearrangin' moods.

EMMA

Well, I'll take a look-see.

Emma goes into the back again, stumbling into furniture as she goes.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Cye smokes and glares at Etoile, who tries to ease the tension:

ETOILE

Even when Verna was home, Mama'd have us workin' our tails off at least once a month switchin' the place of this and that, and movin' this old furniture around, and the place never did look any better. That is, of course, my opinion.

She pauses and clears her throat; Emma joins them. She has found matches. When she remembers, she continues to search.

ETOILE (CONT'D)

Ha! I remember one night Daddy came in real late and we'd spent the day cleanin' an' rearrangin'. He fell over that ole pouf we used to have. Scared us t'death. But, it was real funny now when I think back on it.

CYE

Nothin' funny about a drunkard.

EMMA

Junk's junk no matter which way ya'  
turn it. Found some oil.

CYE

Better sniff it.

EMMA

It's oil. Not much left.

ETOILE

Daddy never hid'is liquor in  
anything but the bottle it came in.

EMMA

So dark I can't hardly see t'pour.

CYE

(checking the time) )  
Goin' on seven-thirty.

He moves to the screen and peers out into the darkness. He fans himself with his hat.

CYE (CONT'D)

Unnatural dark for this time  
a'year. Unnatural dry, too. Rain  
threatens, but won't come.

Emma lights the lamp. She places it on the piano.

EMMA

Etoile, honey, play something for  
us.

ETOILE

Now?

EMMA

Somethin' sweet.

Emma guides Etoile to the piano. Etoile opens the keyboard and begins to play from memory, Erik Satie's "Gymnopedie No. 1" as softly as she can on the poorly tuned old piano.

We slowly pull away, out of the house past Euna, who is almost finished filling the grave. Without hesitating, we float along with the fading strains of Satie through dense woods, along dark pathways leading from the Mobley place, slowing and then stopping at an open field.

EXT. A FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert, drunk and winded runs across a field. He has a limb in his hand. He stops and swings the limb in all directions fending off invisible forces. He drops to his knees, takes a pint bottle from his pocket and drinks.

A form emerges from the darkness at the end of the field.

ELLERT  
(barely audible)  
No.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile closes the keyboard.

EMMA  
I remember ya'mama used to play for me. She play anymore?

ETOILE  
No. I wish Daddy'd come back -- I hope he won't lay out all night.

CYE  
Hell, when ya Daddy's full'a liquor he don't know night from day.

Etoile manages to hold her tongue. Cye stares at her, daring her.

CYE (CONT'D)  
I told ya'Mama she'd better get shed'a Ellert Mobley. She didn't listen to me one iota. Got herself in a fine mess.

ETOILE  
(quietly, but distinctly)  
Toot. Toot. Just listen to 'im toot.

EMMA  
What she say?

ETOILE  
If my Mama's in a mess, you put her there. Everybody knows you threw her out. Shoot, she had to marry somebody.

CYE

That's a damn lie. Hell, I didn't want my own kin marryin' up with a drunken half-breed.

ETOILE

He didn't drink back then an' you know it!

CYE

Well, he surely does now -- an' you raise ya'voice ta'me again an' I --

ETOILE

-- Go to the Devil!

Cye slaps Etoile hard across the mouth. She stiffens with resolve to appear unaffected.

Emma speaks to Etoile with a gracious smile which had not made an appearance until now, a smile which quickly deteriorates.

EMMA

Well, Etoile girl, it was so lovely t'visit with ya'. We best be goin' now.

(urgently)

I wanna go home, Cyrus. I wanna go home.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Cye moves onto the porch. He is followed by Emma and Etoile, who brings the lantern.

CYE

Euna? You gonna' stay out here all night? Euna!

EMMA

Lord'a mercy, Euna. Your Papa is talkin' to you.

ETOILE

I reckon she'll stay out 'til you go home.

EMMA

(to Etoile)

You come see us, hun.

They start for the path leading to the road. Emma follows Cye.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
 Why didn't you bring us in the  
 Ford, Papa?

CYE  
 Hush.

They are gone. Euna stares into space and Etoile studies her mother until Ellert's COUGH signals that he has entered through the rear of the house.

Etoile peers into the house through the screen.

ETOILE  
 Daddy?

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ellert goes into the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellert stumbles onto the bed without removing his clothes.

Etoile, lantern in hand, appears in the doorway to the bedroom.

ETOILE  
 Daddy?

Etoile's eyes fill with tears as she watches her father who stares at the ceiling, determinedly unaware of her.

EXT. PORCH AND FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

The baby is buried. Euna kneels by the grave in silence.

Suddenly there is a loud and forceful THRASHING in the bushes near the path at the side of the house.

Euna rises and peers into the darkness, but is unable to see anything.

Fearing a predator might try to dig up her child, she places a wheelbarrow upside down over the small grave.

Through the stalker's POV through thick brush we see Euna move to the porch stop and turn to again peer into the darkness. We hear him panting.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile prepares a scrub bath for her mother, consisting of a shallow basin, liquid soap in a canning jar, washcloth and towel.

Euna enters from the porch.

ETOILE  
Mama, you want the water heated?

Euna shakes her head "no". Etoile pours water from a bucket into the basin.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
There's wood back there. I don't mind.

Euna shakes her head impatiently.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
All right. Good night.

EUNA  
You didn't practice today.

ETOILE  
No ma'am.

EUNA  
Tomorrow. You'll practice tomorrow.

ETOILE  
Yessum. Night.

Etoile moves to her door. Euna stops her.

EUNA  
I heard you talking to your Grandparents.

ETOILE  
Yessum?

EUNA  
You sounded like a low country girl.

ETOILE  
Sorry, Mama. I'll do better.

Etoile goes to her room.

Euna, slowly as in a ritual and still without expression, strips to her slip and bathes.

Ellert, who has come to the bedroom doorway, watches her bathe.

When she is finished, Euna moves past him, taking the lamp with her.

Ellert follows.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Euna turns the wick down and blows. The house is in darkness. She undresses her husband. They retire.

The NOISES OF THE NIGHT grow louder.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

A dark figure moves in the grave area. It is the stalker, BEAU RAY CLOUD.

He is a small man with dark hair, thick brows and a heavy beard which has gone unshaven for days. He's filthy.

He wears oversized overalls and no shirt. The galluses of his overalls slip easily off his naked shoulders.

He moves quietly across the yard and crouches by the edge of the porch. He listens for a moment, then slides onto the porch and lies on his back.

His heavy BREATHING becomes audible. He crawls close to the screen door and curls up like a cat going to sleep.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING (A WEEK LATER)

Ellert lies in bed. He can hear Euna PREPARING BREAKFAST in the parlor, which is also the kitchen and dining room of the small house. A rooster CROWS.

Ellert pulls on his overalls as he listens to the SOUNDS of his wife and daughter.



EUNA (O.S.)  
Etoile? Etoile, are you up?

ETOILE (O.S.)  
No.

EUNA (O.S.)  
Well, get up.  
Etoile--

ETOILE (O.S.)  
I am, I am!

EUNA (O.S.)  
It's a little early to be getting  
smart, young lady.

Trying to get a response from her father, Etoile sticks her head in her parents' bedroom and crosses her eyes.

ETOILE  
Good lord, Mama, this early I can't  
think at all.

Euna appears behind Etoile and smacks her on the behind. Then to Ellert:

EUNA  
Good morning.

ETOILE  
How come you smacked me so hard?

The two move away from the doorway back into the parlor.

INT. THE PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

EUNA  
Why did I smack you so hard, not  
"how come."

ETOILE  
(whispers)  
Daddy was smilin'!  
(correcting herself)  
Smiling.

EUNA  
I noticed. Go draw up the milk.

As Etoile moves to the screen door:

ETOILE  
Etoile do this, Etoile do that. . .

EUNA  
Don't slam the --

Etoile exits allowing the door to slam.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Etoile struggles to draw the milk up from the well. (The milk is in a quart jar sitting in a water bucket.)

ETOILE  
(yawning)  
Good grief, when are we ever gunna'  
have ice again?  
(under her breath)  
When hell freezes over.

INT. PARLOR - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Ellert enters the parlor then immediately exits down the hall leading to the back door of the house.

EUNA  
Well, is he off already? Ellert?

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Euna finds the back door open. The back entrance has a screen as well. Euna looks out and then, angrily closes the screen and shouts.

EUNA  
I need that milk!

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Etoile struggles with a large bucket full of water as she takes a jar of milk from it.

ETOILE  
Yessum. I'm doin' it right now!

EUNA (O.S.)  
What!?

ETOILE  
I'm doing! Doing it. Uh!

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna wipes tears from her face hurriedly as she continues to prepare breakfast.

Etoile enters the parlor.

ETOILE

Pooh! This milk smells like clabber.

The screen almost slams, but she catches it in time.

EUNA

Did you see which way your Daddy went?

ETOILE

Nope. Mama, the milk stinks.

EUNA

Did you hear him mention having chores somewhere this morning early?

Etoile beats a biscuit with her fist.

ETOILE

No. He never talks to me.

EUNA

What are you doing?

ETOILE

I'm experiment-ing on this biscuit to see if it can be broken with the human hand, 'cause I'm sure not gunna' eat it if I can't break it.

EUNA

I saved those stale biscuits for the chickens! When did I ever serve you anything like that? --

ETOILE

-- My God, Mama, you're liable to kill our chickens. You making pancakes?

EUNA

They're faster than biscuits. It's late -- look at the clock.

EXT. TOOL SHED - CONTINUOUS

Ellert makes his way from the tool shed behind the house to the side of the house carrying a hoe and a rake.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert clears the area around the graves of weeds and dead branches.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile bounces a biscuit off the table. She hears the sound of Ellert's raking.

                          ETOILE  
                  What's that?

She hurries to the screen door. Euna follows.

                          ETOILE (CONT'D)  
                  What's he doing?

                          EUNA  
                  Shush.

They watch him in silence for a moment through the screen.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert pulls weeds from the older grave, and tidies the new one.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

                          EUNA  
                  He was home all night, and when I  
                  woke up this morning he was holding  
                  my hand.

                          ETOILE  
                  That's sweet, Mama.

                          EUNA  
                  You'd never know he'd ever mourned  
                  them.

Etoile puts her arm around her mother and cuddles into her. Euna briskly moves Etoile's arm and opens the screen.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Honey, why don't you go out there  
 an' keep your Daddy company.

Etoile looks at her mother incredulously.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Just until breakfast.

Euna stamps her foot, and Etoile scoots.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Etoile goes out into the yard, but stops at a distance from Ellert.

ETOILE  
 Hi.

There is no response.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 Mama told me to keep you company.

Ellert works silently.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 Did ya' know I was watchin' you?

He appears to be ignoring her, and attempts to pull a sturdy young plant up by the roots.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 The reason I asked is 'cause ya'  
 never seem to notice me, an' how's  
 a girl to know if she's bein'  
 ignored or just goin' undetected?

She waits for a reply, but gets none.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 Why don't you cut that thing down?  
 You're gunna' strain a gut tuggin'  
 on it like that.

He looks at her at last, then resumes his business. She persists.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 I don't think I have ever heard you  
 say my name.

He stops his business, but does not look her way.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 (pronounced correctly)  
 It's Etoile. Ms. Jenkins at  
 school taught me that. Means star.  
 In French. Mama says my music will  
 get me a scholarship to college. If  
 I get to college, I won't let  
 anyone there mispronounce ma'damn  
 name.

He stares at her for a moment, then looks away again.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 Would you stay sober if I was to  
 die?

Ellert tosses the rake to one side and looks at her again,  
 then throws a handful of soil at her.

They are still for a moment, then without breaking her stare,  
 she slowly gathers up a handful of soil of her own.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 I can cuss better than Verna. You  
 want'a hear me?

Euna appears at the screen door.

EUNA  
 That's enough. Etoile, wash up.

ETOILE  
 Yessum.

She moves to the porch, stops and turns to her father.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
 Daddy. If you're drunk when Mama  
 buries me, I'll come back an' haunt  
 you.

With a squeal, she flings the handful of soil at Ellert and  
 runs to the house.

Euna comes out onto the porch as her daughter passes. She  
 and Ellert stand for a moment looking at each other.

ETOILE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
 Ya'll come on, I'm starved an' I'm  
 going to be late.

Euna holds the door open for him.

EUNA  
You better wash too.

He enters the house. Euna gives a last look to the graves and follows.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

ETOILE  
Can I feed the chickens?

EUNA  
Yes, if there's time -- hand that towel to ya' Daddy.

ETOILE  
Good, 'cause I know they'll go straight into conniptions an' I don't want to miss it.

All three are seated.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Seems funny all of us eatin', eating at the same time.

There is a brief silence.

Etoile rises on impulse, gives her father a quick hug then re-seats herself and continues as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
I think it's horrible an' tacky of Verna not to ever come home. I'm in a talking mood. Yep, tacky, tacky, tacky.

EUNA  
Hush and say the blessing.

ETOILE  
Yessum -- Daddy, you should'a told Verna she couldn't marry that squirt, Harley Fauchier. You know what I told her the night she ran off with him? I told her she wouldn't be caught dead doing it except her brains weren't developed yet. An' you want to know what she said to me?

EUNA  
Etoile.

ETOILE  
Oh.

EUNA  
Chatter. Chatter.

ETOILE  
(a fast rattle)  
Oh dear Lord and sweet Jesus thy  
son an' precious savior thank you  
for this food and thank you for  
leadin' my Daddy home sober to  
breakfast and forgive Verna for  
what she said to me for thine is  
the kingdom, Amen -- You want to  
know what she said?

EUNA  
I don't --

ETOILE  
-- She said I was a slut an' the  
yard dog knows it --

EUNA  
-- Etoile Mobley, you shut your  
filthy mouth --

Ellert slaps the table top freezing both wife and daughter.  
After a pause, daring her Father:

ETOILE  
She was the one who said it.

Ellert gives her a look which ends all conversation for a  
moment longer.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Oh, Mama, did you hear all that  
carryin' on last night?

EUNA  
What carrying on -- pass the honey.

ETOILE  
Scared me to death but I forgot all  
about it 'til I said the blessing  
an' then I remembered 'cause I got  
so scared I prayed 'til I fell  
asleep.



EUNA

Put that knife on the side of your  
plate--

ETOILE

-- Yessum -- well it sounded like a  
bobcat at first. Sort'a sounded  
like, well . . . it sounded like  
crying.

Euna senses a tenseness in Ellert, attempts to change the  
subject.

EUNA

(to Etoile)

I ordered a new piano series for  
you from the Cincinnati  
Conservatory.

ETOILE

Mama, I haven't finished the last  
one yet, an' you said I could take  
'til August on it.

EUNA

You'll start it when it comes.

(to Ellert)

Something wrong with your  
breakfast?

ETOILE

Heard it three or four times.

EUNA

What?

ETOILE

The crying or whatever it was.  
Sounded like it was out on the  
porch, then it moved to right  
outside my window -- that's when I  
started praying.

EUNA

(to Ellert)

What's the matter?

ETOILE

Oh, Mama, let me finish! Then after  
that, I could hear footsteps  
runnin' an runnin' round the house.

(MORE)

ETOILE (CONT'D)

Sounded human to me and I heard the same thing a week or so ago only without the cryin'.

Ellert bolts up and out of the house through the back door.

EUNA

Ellert? Why can't you keep your busy mouth shut!

ETOILE

What'd I do? What'd I do? I didn't do anything. What'd I do --

EUNA

-- Hush and get up from there. That school bus won't wait on you and as soon as you get home this afternoon, you'll put on your work clothes! Weeds are taking over the garden --

Etoile rushes from the table to her room

INT. ETOILE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Etoile shouts as she looks for something to wear.

ETOILE

-- Am I being punished?! Shoot, I hate being a country hick.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As Etoile complains, Euna goes to the back door with a basin of dirty water.

ETOILE (O.S.)

I'll never be a lady! You never saw a lady with her butt stuck up in the air pullin' weeds!

EXT. REAR OF THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Euna looks for Ellert, as she tosses the water to the base of a tree. She reenters the house.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna gathers the stale biscuits and breakfast leftovers.

ETOILE(O.S.)  
 Heck fire, my butt's been stuck up  
 in the air half my natural life! I  
 can't find my grammar book!

EUNA  
 On the piano.

Euna Exits onto the porch, looks for Ellert.

EXT. SIDE OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Euna walks around the house beyond the wire-fenced chicken  
 yard which also encloses their outhouse and a chicken coup.

She throws the stale biscuits and leftovers to the chickens.

As she approaches the house, Euna spies footprints on the  
 loose dirt under Etoile's window.

EXT. ROUTE 6 BETWEEN ROBELINE AND MANY - CONTINUOUS

J.T.'s Hudson slows and drives over the cattle gap to the  
 Mobley place.

EXT. CLEARING NEAR THE PATH TO THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

J.T. parks.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna enters from the porch. Etoile is still in her room.

ETOILE (O.S)  
 That the school bus?

EUNA  
 Could be.

Euna winds the clock. Etoile darts in from her room.

ETOILE  
 Mama, I'm wearing that dirty  
 blouse.

EUNA  
 No you're not.

ETOILE  
 I don't have anything else.

INT. J.T.'S HUDSON - CONTINUOUS

J.T. refreshes his breath with cinnamon oil, then tosses the bottle back into his medical bag and leaves the car.

EXT. CLEARING NEAR THE PATH TO THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

J.T. checks his teeth in his side-view mirror, then moves to the path leading to the house.

J.T.

Euna!

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

Oh, Lord! It's J.T.

ETOILE

Who?!

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Euna goes out on the porch as J.T. enters the yard.

EUNA

Good morning, J.T.

J.T.

How ya'doin', lady?

EUNA

I'm all right.

Etoile exits the house in a dead run, slamming the screen behind her.

ETOILE

Mornin' Doc Stagner, I thought you were the school bus.

EUNA

Your hair's a mess.

ETOILE

I know. I've got my hairbrush in my purse.

(to J.T. as she exits)

I'm distracted this mornin'.

As Etoile disappears down the path to the highway:

EUNA

Etoile, I forgot to make your  
lunch.

Euna becomes suddenly aware of how she must look; she attempts a quick repair, then gives up.

EUNA (CONT'D)

I guess I'm distracted this  
morning, too. J.T., sit yourself  
down, and I'll get some coffee.

EXT. ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

Etoile runs across the cattle gap and flags the approaching school bus. It stops and she gets on.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - CONTINUOUS

Etoile makes her way to a seat. The noise of laughter and chatter stops. As the bus lurches forward, she almost falls. As she passes RITA LYNN TARPLEY and the GIRL with whom she shares a seat, the silence on the bus is broken by Rita and her friend laughing.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

J.T. sits on the edge of the porch and fans himself with his hat. Euna speaks through the screen door.

EUNA

I owe you for the other evening.  
You like fig preserves as I recall.

J.T.

You are not pay'n me off with figs.  
Again.

He studies the sky.

J.T. (CONT'D)

Those storm clouds are lookin'  
mighty angry -- you reckon we'll  
finally see rain?

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna quickly stirs the coals in the wood stove, adds a small piece of wood.

She puts three pints of canned figs in a burlap bag.

EUNA  
It's figs or nothing.

She exits the house onto the porch.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

EUNA  
If a storm is brewing, it's taking  
its sweet time.  
(handing him the bag)  
Many thanks for your help, J.T.

J.T.  
Oh, I'd do anything for another  
pint of figs.  
(pause)  
Euna?

EUNA  
Yes?

J.T.  
You are way past due for a thorough  
examination.

EUNA  
Am I? You shouldn't say a thing  
like that with a smile on your  
face!

J.T.  
Hold on --

She goes back to the screen and opens it.

EUNA  
-- I'm listening.

She enters the house to get the coffee.

He follows to the screen door and addresses her there.

J.T.  
I'm serious. If you can't come into  
town for a checkup, I figure here's  
as good a place as any. Can I come  
in?

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

No. Ellert's not home.

Euna pours coffee. She carries the coffee to the door, J.T. opens it for her.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

The last time you examined me you cut the fool so, I was embarrassed.

He takes his coffee.

J.T.

Hell, how in the world can a woman be embarrassed to get dressed before the man who's just given her an examination?

She laughs.

EUNA

You're a rascal Doctor J.T. Stagner. Why'd a doctor want to watch a woman get dressed anyhow?

J.T.

Different folks do it different ways. Might say I make a study of it.

EUNA

I remember when we were children, before your family moved over to Robeline, how you pestered me to play doctor with you. I never dreamed you go and get a license permitting you to do it.

J.T. almost gags, then spits out a mouthful of coffee.

J.T.

That's not coffee!

Euna laughs.

J.T. (CONT'D)

What the hell is that? Tastes like burnt corn!

Euna continues to laugh.

EUNA

It's got a little coffee in it.  
Drink it, you'll get used to it.

He takes another sip. Shakes his head, becomes serious.

J.T.

Euna?

EUNA

J.T?

J.T.

I told you after that other boy was born you weren't healthy enough to bear more children, and I made it damn clear to you how it can be prevented.

EUNA

I didn't intend to have another.

J.T.

If the good Lord loved ya' he'd have put ya' through the change by now.

There is a difficult silence.

J.T. (CONT'D)

I know it can't be easy for ya' living with a man like Ellert --

EUNA

-- don't start that.

J.T.

If even one tenth'a what I've heard about that man is fact, Christ. You are not makin' the first lick'sense stayin' out here with'im in the middle of nowhere.

There's pause. He proceeds gently.

J.T. (CONT'D)

You ever gunna' tell me what actually happened between him and that man, Beau Ray Cloud?



INT. BACK OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ellert enters through the back door of the house.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

He hears Euna speaking with J.T.

EUNA (O.S)

I don't see any point in going into all that.

J.T. (O.S.)

Well, do you know what happened?

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

All they could prove was that he drank with that man, an' you know it!

J.T.

That's not what I asked you. What kind of man cavorts around with an ungodly aberration like that Cloud fella'?! Assaultin' a boy no more than fourteen--

EUNA

You're assigning guilt by association, the same sin ignorant and mean hearted people committed on Ellert! Shame on you.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ellert moves closer in order to better hear.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

J.T.

Have you ever put it to him, Euna? Have you ever just out and asked him?

EUNA

He never uttered a word in his own defense to me or anybody as far as I know. I think he was just too hurt by it all . . .

J.T.

Or ashamed.

EUNA

My God, J.T., look at what the man endured. Without any proof at all, he was locked up for almost a week and then fired from his job at the saw mill. Someone shot his mule and he had to walk ten miles home covered in hot tar and chicken feathers. And then his own daughter, Verna -- so unforgiving and cruel.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Elert drops his head as he listens.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

J.T. takes his hat off and fans himself, and in doing so crashes his hat into a wind chime hanging from the eave of the porch overhang.

The chime made of heavy metal scrap pieces and old farming articles including a plowshare and a shovel.

J.T.

What the hell is this thing anyway?

EUNA

My wind chime. Ellert made it for me not long after he brought me here.

FLASH BACK - EXT. ROUTE 6 BETWEEN ROBELINE AND MANY

We see what Euna describes in series of flashbacks.

FLASHBACK

EUNA (O.S.)

I was sixteen. He found me walking down the old El Camino Real to Robeline with my little suitcase in my hand. He put me on a white mule he had back then and brought me here. I was fascinated by that beautiful green eyed half-Cherokee man nobody knew the first thing about. He was like a wild animal, so unpredictable, so free . . . . When we first came here, he'd bathe in the creek after working all day at the saw mill . . . he'd wash his work clothes out in the creek too, and bring them home to me all squeezed out and rolled in a ball. He'd walk home stark naked through the woods. Walk into the house like that, and smile. . . Then he'd chase me, chase me down and love me wherever he caught me.

BACK TO SCENE

Ellert quietly moves to the back of the house.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Euna touches the chime. Then she pushes it hard. It CLANGS.

EUNA

You have to punch it to get a sound out of it. It makes pretty music I think, but the only time I hear that music is when there's a storm.

She eyes the sky, lost for the moment in a world from which J.T. is excluded. After a moment, unable to mask his sadness:

J.T.

Will you heed one bit of advice, professional advice?

EUNA

I'll try.

J.T.

You're not well. You have a real physical problem, an' you've got to do somethin' about it.

EUNA

I will.

J.T. heads toward the path with the preserves without saying another word.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Goodbye, J.T.

After a moment he speaks, tipping his hat.

J.T.

Miz Mobley.

He is gone.

Euna looks after him for a moment, then turns her gaze toward the graves. She gathers the coffee cups, and waters the potted violets on the porch with what's left in the cups.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna puts the coffee cups in a dish pan and then tentatively approaches the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Euna picks up her pillow, buries her face in it.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

She holds her pillow in her arms, then places it on a cot located near the front door. She draws an uneasy breath.

After a moment, she goes to the piano, opens it and sits.

She looks at her hands. They are rough and stiff. She flexes and massages them, then places them at the keys, poised to play. Instead, she closes the keyboard carefully.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Euna washes clothes with a scrub board in a large metal tub.

Euna picks what's left of purple hull peas. The plants are yellow and dying from heat and lack of water.

Euna gathers eggs and swats at an attacking rooster with a branch.

She hauls a bucket of water to a trough.

Euna milks a cow. The cow is skinny. The milk is scarce.

She chops wood with an axe.

INT. PARLOR - LATER

Euna enters from the hallway carrying an armful of wood. She dumps the wood near the kindling box, and wipes sweat from her face.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert steps into the yard. His clothes are wet and squeezed into a ball. He is sober, handsome with his wet hair smoothed back. He is naked. His body glistens.

He steps onto the porch.

In his free hand he carries a bouquet of Black-Eyed Susans.

Euna appears at the screen door. He opens the screen and gives the wet clothes to her.

Ellert moves to the graves, places the flowers on the fresh grave. Euna steps out onto the porch.

ELLERT

What happened to 'im?

Euna comes out onto the porch.

EUNA

He was born too early.

He looks to her with a pained expression.

EUNA (CONT'D)

He passed in his sleep, peacefully.  
Didn't even cry. You were working.

He looks to her for assurance.

EUNA (CONT'D)

You were.

His need and vulnerability are palpable.

Euna becomes self-conscious. She wipes her face with her hands and smooths her disheveled hair back.

Ellert rises. After a pause, he touches her face and looks at her in silence. Then he speaks softly.

ELLERT  
You still want me, girl?

He waits for an answer.

ELLERT (CONT'D)  
I'm makin' an effort, Euna.

EUNA  
I know.

Euna hangs his overalls on the porch clothes line. Distant thunder rolls. He stands close behind her.

ELLERT  
You still want me?

One of his socks falls to the porch floor. Euna kneels at his feet to retrieve it. The late afternoon sun casts a shadow of his manhood across her face. After a long silence:

EUNA  
I have to sleep alone for a while.  
I mustn't have another baby.

Ellert is downcast, and now humiliated by his nakedness.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
Better find some clothes . . .  
Etoile. She should have been back  
from school already.

Ellert goes into the house. After a moment, Euna rises unsteadily.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ellert sees Euna's pillow on the cot. He stares at it for a moment, then goes into the bedroom.

EXT. THE CATTLE GAP AND ROUTE 6 - DUSK

It's almost evening. Euna nervously waits for Etoile to return home from school.

She stands on the shoulder of Rural Route 6 near the cattle gap. A horse fly torments her.

She sees Etoile far up the road.

Etoile arrives, carrying her school books. She attempts to cross the cattle gap without looking at her Mother.

Euna blocks her way.

EUNA  
Whoa. The school bus went by hours ago.

ETOILE  
I walked.

EUNA  
You miss the bus?

ETOILE  
No.

She attempts to break past Euna who stops her again.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Let me go -- I need the outhouse.

EUNA  
What is it?

ETOILE  
Will you just let me pee!?

Etoile runs past her down the path leading to the yard.

INT. THE PARLOR - LATER

An oil lamp on top of the piano lights the scene. Etoile plays Bach's Prelude No. 1 angrily from sheet music.

Euna takes Etoile's hands from the keys and plays a few measures of the treble line with her right hand.

EUNA  
Stress the down beat and, yes,  
stress the third too, but lightly.

Etoile plays again over-stressing the third beat.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
No pedal!

Etoile plays more angrily. Euna removes the sheet music. Etoile continues to play.

ETOILE  
I know it by heart.

Euna takes her hands from the keys and holds them.

EUNA  
Are you ill?

ETOILE  
No.

EUNA  
Then what? Somebody say something  
about your clothes -- is that it?

Etoile bangs on the keys.

ETOILE  
Just leave me alone!

EUNA  
Don't you ever mistreat my piano!  
Ever! Your Daddy worked hard to buy  
me this piano!

ETOILE  
It was used!

EUNA  
It was used well!

Etoile begins to cry.

ETOILE  
I'm sorry.  
(pause)  
Oh Mama, I hate 'um! God'a mighty I  
hate'um all!

EUNA  
Who? Who?

ETOILE  
Ole Alice Self an' Rita Lynn  
Tarpley -- rubbin' up to me in the  
hall, an' gigglin' an' snickerin'  
an' whisperin' behind my back. God  
I hate them!

EUNA  
What happened --!

ETOILE  
-- Everybody talkin' about it, an'  
laughin' and me not knowin' why and  
then that bitch Rita Lynn just out  
and tells me!



Euna shakes her.

EUNA

Tells you what? And speak proper English!

ETOILE

It started on the bus this morning and I thought it was my blouse! But then she said everybody in the school knows. Knows what, I said? An'then she . . . I'm not goin' back there — you can't make me, Mama, an' I don't want'a stay here either! I just want'a go away!

She attempts to break past Euna who is hurting her arms.

ETOILE (CONT'D)

Ouch, Mama!

Etoile breaks free, starts for the door, clutches her stomach then sinks to the floor at one end of the cot.

Ellert has emerged from their bedroom unseen by the women. He is freshly dressed. He looks quite smart, his hair combed, and he wears slacks with his shirt is tucked in.

ETOILE (CONT'D)

I don't believe it, Mama. I don't. I don't believe what she said. God I hate'er! My, my Daddy, he couldn't.

She grabs her stomach, and breaks for the front door.

ETOILE (CONT'D)

I'm sick!

EXT. PORCH, FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

What did the girl say?

ETOILE

I'm gunna puke.

Euna takes Etoile out onto the yard. She vomits.

EUNA

What did she say about your Daddy?

ETOILE

No.

EUNA  
I'm waiting.

ETOILE  
It's something terrible. You'll  
slap my mouth.

Euna places her hands behind her back and waits. After a moment, Etoile carefully proceeds.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Oh, Mama, she said he does . . .  
things.

EUNA  
Things?

Etoile is barely able to speak the words.

ETOILE  
Dirty things. Sex things . . .  
with, with some crazy fella' who  
worked over at Peason Mill.

EUNA  
Beau Ray Cloud.

Etoile cries softly, relieved that the admission is over.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ellert stands near the screen door. He has been listening.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ellert leaves the house, quietly closing the door and careful not to let the screen bang. He is shaking. He goes to the tool shed, closing the door behind him.

INT. TOOL SHED - CONTINUOUS

It's dark. Ellert strikes a match and lights a lamp hanging from the ceiling.

He searches for a bottle. He finds one under a pile of lumber covered by a tarpaulin. He quickly drinks half of it.

He spreads the tarp over the lumber again, and fashions a lounge.

A large chicken snake darts across the tarp as he prepares to lie down. He grabs the snake in a flash and chokes it to death as it thrashes about and coils around his arm.

He tosses the dead snake out of the shed, turns down the lamp and reclines.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Euna and Etoile sit on the edge of the porch.

ETOILE

Do I have to go back? Please, Mama,  
don't make me. Please. I just  
can't.

Euna is lost in thought.

EUNA

I don't know . . .

ETOILE

Please?

Etoile snuggles to her mother. Euna does not embrace her, then slowly withdraws.

ETOILE (CONT'D)

(incredulously) )  
You knew his name.

EUNA

You wait right here.

Euna goes in.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna looks through the bedroom door. Seeing Ellert has left, she rests her head against the door frame for a moment. She addresses Etoile through the screen.

EUNA

Come on inside. He's not here.

Etoile enters the house.

ETOILE

Mama, you weren't surprised.

EUNA

I'm so sorry, honey.

ETOILE  
It's not true?

                  EUNA  
I don't know.

                  ETOILE  
Don't know?

Etoile goes into her room. Euna follows.

INT. ETOILE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

                  EUNA  
I know Ellert drank some with this  
man, years ago. That's all I know.

Etoile is stunned and bewildered.

                  ETOILE  
How could you keep on bein' married  
to'im and not know about a thing  
like that?

They sit on the bed in silence for a moment.

                  ETOILE (CONT'D)  
You didn't answer my question.

                  EUNA  
I don't care what he may have done.  
He suffered terribly . . . He  
could have left, but he stayed with  
us.

                  ETOILE  
Suffered?

                  EUNA  
Ignorant people . . . cruel people  
tried him, found him guilty in  
their minds. One night a group of  
men came up to the house yelling  
filthy things and threatening. One  
even tried to set the porch on  
fire.

                  ETOILE  
Good Lord, Mama. When did that  
happen?

EUNA

You were a very little girl then.  
You stayed with my cousin, Merle,  
in Jonesville during the worst of  
it. Your grandparents drove you  
over there.

ETOILE

They did?

EUNA

Good Lord in heaven grant us mercy.  
The tired old stories still being  
passed around like a dirty book.

Euna rises, takes a deep breath. She moves into the parlor,  
and places sheet music on the piano.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

Start in.

Etoile stands in the doorway to her room.

ETOILE

Don't make me practice tonight. Not  
now.

Euna prepares to iron. She places the iron on the wood stove  
and spreads a towel on the table. She lights the lamp.

EUNA

You'll fall behind with that piece  
if you don't stay on it. Think of  
it as one long phrase, not a lot of  
short ones.

ETOILE

I don't understand you, Mama?! My  
whole life just fell apart!

EUNA

(almost breaking)  
You haven't lived your whole life!

No one breathes for a moment.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Now, put how you feel into the  
music.

ETOILE  
(softly)  
I hate Grieg.

The stare from her Mother is severe. Etoile finally relents and begins to struggle in earnest and angrily with Anitra's Dance Op. 46.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Cye approaches the porch with a small headstone under his arm. He pauses near the door.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile hears something and stops playing.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Cye KNOCKS.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

ETOILE  
Somebody's knocking.

Without waiting for a response, she goes to the door. Cye is visible through the screen.

CYE  
Could'a broke my neck on them  
steps.

ETOILE  
Good evening, Papa.

CYE  
Ya'Daddy ever gunna replace this  
front door?

ETOILE  
I reckon.

CYE  
Before winter? Where's ya' Mama?

ETOILE  
In here.

He kicks a loose board in the threshold as he enters.

CYE  
 (to Etoile)  
 Those steps need replacin' out  
 there.

ETOILE  
 I know.

CYE  
 You tell ya' Daddy 'bout this here,  
 too.

He indicates the threshold with his foot.

CYE (CONT'D)  
 A sober man could break his neck.

EUNA  
 Papa? What do you want?

ETOILE  
 Mama, you still want me to  
 practice?

EUNA  
 Go shell the rest of the peas --  
 they're in a basin out on the  
 porch.

ETOILE  
 I don't even like the horrible  
 things.

CYE  
 You want a lickin'?

ETOILE  
 Who from? You?

EUNA  
 Etoile.

ETOILE  
 Yessum. Mama, you won't talk  
 about . . .

Euna is tired and in no mood to argue. She gives Etoile a  
 withering look and stamps her foot.

Etoile exits slowly, casting a challenging look at Cye. She  
 lets the screen door shut with a BANG.

Euna spreads one of Etoile's worn-out dresses on the towel.

CYE

That girl's rotten. Ain't got no respect.

Euna gets the hot iron.

CYE (CONT'D)

Ain't you gonna' thank me for the stone?

EUNA

Thank you.

CYE

You don't have an ironin' board?

Euna ignores him.

CYE (CONT'D)

Ellert ain't bringin' in enough money for --

She slams the iron down.

EUNA

-- There are many things I need more than an ironin' board!

CYE

What you got, a case of the nerves?

EUNA

Yes. I get a case of the nerves every time you stomp in here and treat us like some of your tenant farmers.

CYE

You ain't got no respect. And, no respect for ya'self neither or you'd kick that man off the place!

Euna continues her work. After a pause:

CYE (CONT'D)

There's talk.

EUNA

Talk? What kind of talk?

CYE

Deputy Bryson stopped by the house. You remember Hap?

(MORE)



CYE (CONT'D)

Well, he's visited most folks scattered around between Robeline and Many.

Euna tries to iron, but she is shaking.

CYE (CONT'D)

Hap says Beau Ray Cloud had been been livin' with his people near New Orleans. They'd been hidin'im. Seems he got into some trouble with the law down there, too. There's still a warrant out for'im here for rapin' that boy nine years ago.

Euna knows there's more. Cy e struggles to find words.

EUNA

What?

CYE

Hunters found where he's been livin' in the woods just north'a here. I thought you'd want to know. He's back.

He waits for a response.

CYE (CONT'D)

I meant my comin' as a favor.

EUNA

Did you?

CYE

Hell, I don't know why I come. You never showed no regard for me, and that's a fact.

EUNA

No, Sir. That is not a fact.

There's a silence. Cy e softens.

CYE

I know I was strict, but when was I ever harsh with you that'ya didn't deserve it?

Cy e starts toward the door.

EUNA

Hold on. I am going to answer that question.

(MORE)

EUNA (CONT'D)

Remember that Christmas right after  
you sold your timber?

(pause)

I had just turned ten?

He starts for the door, shaking his head, no.

EUNA (CONT'D)

It'd been an unusually happy day  
somehow, I hadn't done anything  
wrong all morning -- you hadn't hit  
anybody or yelled at anyone. You  
smiled when you opened my gift to  
you. A pipe with a carved ivory  
bowl on a cherry stem.

Cye stops.

EUNA (CONT'D)

And you gave me that beautiful  
green velvet dress. Oh, I knew  
Mama'd got it for you, even signed  
your name to the card.

Cye opens the door to go. Euna approaches him. As she  
speaks, we see short burst of flashbacks.

EUNA (CONT'D)

After breakfast we went to church.  
Remember? We were the last ones in.  
Everyone turned to look at us, you  
in your good clothes and Mama, so  
pretty. I walked into the church  
right behind you. I tried to walk  
like you, and I set my mouth hard  
and at an angle like yours so  
everyone could see how much like my  
Papa I was.

Euna follows and continues to speak as he goes out on the  
porch, emotion building in her voice.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - COTINUOUS

They pass Etoile who sits on the edge of the porch shelling  
peas.

EUNA

You were strong an' proud and  
people respected you. I wanted to  
be like you, an' I wanted so badly  
for you to like me.

Euna follows him across the yard, talking faster and louder. Her attempt at refined speech falling away. She grasps his arm to stop him.

EUNA (CONT'D)

I wanted that more than anything.  
An' then as I sat on the pew beside  
my strong, proud Papa, you hit me  
on the back of my head, an' said  
"swallow it or spit it out!" I  
didn't know what you were talkin'  
about!

He pulls away, and continues to the path leading to the road.

EXT. THE PATH LEADING FROM THE YARD TO ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

She follows him down the path to the highway. She is becoming hysterical. Cye would run if he could.

EUNA

There was nothin' in my mouth! I  
looked up at you for an answer, an'  
you, you hit me again, this time so  
hard, my face hit the pew in front  
of us. My nose started bleedin'! I  
sat there with blood runnin'  
through my hands an' onto my new  
dress 'til the service was over  
tryin' to figure out what I had  
done wrong!

EXT. ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

They cross the cattle gap and Cye walks down Route 6 toward his place, head held high. He does not look back.

Euna follows screaming at the top of her voice.

EUNA

No one tried to help me, they just  
looked away. It was then that I  
realized people didn't respect you,  
they were afraid of you! It was  
that day, that Christmas Day in  
church that I knew you would never  
love me, or like me, and that I no  
longer cared! You walk into my  
house with a tombstone for a dead  
baby boy, a thing as cold an' hard  
as that, to try in your pitiful way  
to what?!

Euna falls behind -- She sinks to her knees, but continues the shrill tirade.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Show kindness? It's too late! I  
 don't forgive you. You can take your  
 sins with you straight into hell  
 for all I care!

She weeps.

Etoile appears behind her mother and attempts to embrace her, but Euna pushes her away.

They watch Cye's rigid figure become smaller in the distance.

EXT. REAR OF HOUSE - LATER

Euna exits the house via the back door with a lantern.

There's a distant lightning strike and a low rumble of THUNDER.

She walks to the tool shed.

INT. THE TOOL SHED - CONTINUOUS

Euna opens the door of the tool shed. She holds her lantern out to light the room.

Ellert is passed out on the tarp.

EUNA  
 Ellert, wake up.

Ellert does not move. She sits beside him and brushes his hair out of his face.

He is startled, and rises defensively, then looks around to see where he is.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 You heard what Etoile said? I'm  
 sorry.

Ellert turns to face her. Distant THUNDER rumbles.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 That man is back. I don't know what  
 to think?

Ellert bolts up.

EXT. REAR OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ellert leaves the shed followed by Euna. Beau Ray Cloud hides against the shed in shadows.

Ellert tosses his almost empty liquor bottle away, then walks toward a path leading away from the house.

EUNA

Ellert, don't lay out tonight. I need to talk with you. It's important. Please.

(pause)

Etoile's asleep.

He stops. Then goes to the back door, opens it. Euna enters; he follows.

Once they are inside and the back door is closed, Beau Ray Cloud picks up the whisky bottle, drains what's left.

He lies in the dirt near the snake, and like a cat, rubs his back on the ground in a slow undulating motion.

An owl glides down, takes the snake and flies away. ALL NIGHT SOUNDS STOP. It is quiet.

Beau Ray imitates the owl, spreads his arms and glides to the back door of the house and clutches at the screen.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ellert sits at the table. Euna serves him a plate of cold leftovers.

EUNA

You told me Mr. Shockley's supposed to pay you for clearing that pasture end of the month -- I hope you did it. Did you do it? Did you clear Mr. Shockley's pasture?

ELLERT

He said it was good.

EUNA

He still owes you for mending that sprocket wheel? Ask him for it, please. When he pays you for clearing the pasture.

Ne nods in agreement.

EUNA (CONT'D)

I think I should send Etoile to go stay with Merle, for a while.

Ellert stops eating.

EUNA (CONT'D)

She doesn't want to go back to school here. I'm hoping Merle will take her in again, and I'm asking you please don't drink that money up. Try to remember it has a purpose. We'll have to put Etoile on a bus an' I can't send her to Merle's without a cent in her purse. Do you understand what I'm saying?

ELLERT

I do.

He starts to go.

EUNA

Wait. I'm not finished.

He waits, his back to her. She finally says:

EUNA (CONT'D)

I don't know how to say this kindly, but if you want to, I give you my blessin' to leave, and I mean for good.

Ellert becomes downcast.

EUNA (CONT'D)

I'd rather you take up with another woman, even — yes, you'd have my blessing on that, too — anything, anything except what happened the last time I moved out of your bed.

Ellert turns to look at her. His expression is one of shock and accusation.

He goes to the bedroom, deliberately knocking his chair over on the way.

Euna turns down the lantern. The house is dark.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Beau Ray Cloud appears out of the shadows at the far end of the porch. He moves silently to the screen door.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna walks through the parlor to the screen door.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

As she approaches, Beau Ray quickly and silently moves back into the shadows at the far end of the porch.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna locks the latch hook and lies down on the cot. Tears fill her eyes as she stares into the darkness. NIGHT SOUNDS fill the air.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Beau Ray moves along the edge of the porch in the pale night light. He moves, listens, then moves again until he is at the door.

He quietly tries the door. He runs his fingers between the door and the door facing, attempting to flip the latch. This makes a slight sound, and he quickly withdraws his hand.

He stretches his arms out over the screen to their fullest extension; then in the manner of a cat, holds his finger nails very close to the screen and "scratches" with a single, silent downward motion.

As he does this he breathes urgent, short BREATHS. Distant THUNDER ROLLS.

In an instant, he hides to the side of the door as Euna appears at the screen. She stares out into the darkness. After a long moment, the scene dissolves to BLACK.

INT. EUNA'S HOME - EARLY EVENING A WEEK LATER

Etoile plays "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" angrily at the piano. Euna clears the table of food, dishes, etc., slamming items about.

EUNA

That's supposed to be pretty, and  
it would be if you'd check the key  
signature.

ETOILE

I always do that.

EUNA

No you don't.

Etoile speaks under her breath:

ETOILE

Well, I guess I'm wrong 'cause you  
know everything.

Euna hears this, but chooses to ignore it.

EUNA

Have you seen your Daddy today?

ETOILE

Course not. He hides from me.

EUNA

You haven't spoken to him at all?

ETOILE

No! I haven't.

A short, tense silence.

EUNA

Play it over again.

ETOILE

No.

Euna slams a pot down hard on the wood stove.

Pause. It's a stand-off. Neither of them dare to breathe.

ETOILE (CONT'D)

I'm not goin' up to that snotty  
church tonight.

EUNA

You promised Brother Bush, didn't  
you? Every fourth Sunday?!

ETOILE

But that was before --



EUNA

-- Then you'll do it. It's your turn and he's depending on you.

ETOILE

It's too hot to walk so far.

EUNA

You'll go!

ETOILE

Half the school'll be there. I'll be sittin' up in the front an' they'll be out there whisperin' an' laughin' at me.

Euna takes a moment to control herself, tries a new approach.

EUNA

Honey, seems like we have done nothing but fuss for so long.

ETOILE

Seems that way 'cause it's true.

EUNA

Can't you just say "yes, Mother," isn't it in you?

Etoile hugs her Mother. Euna submits, but doesn't hug back.

ETOILE

Mama, will'ya come with me?

There is no response; Euna frees herself. Distant THUNDER ROLLS.

EUNA

You've been slipping more and more into country speech lately.

ETOILE

You slip, too.

EUNA

I know, but you will leave here. I won't.

After a moment:

ETOILE

Mama, you never go anywhere. Are you ashamed?

EUNA

I have work to do here and your  
Daddy might take a notion to come  
home.

ETOILE

Mama. Mama, please come with me?

She waits for a reply, then with finality:

ETOILE (CONT'D)

Then I ain't goin'.

EUNA

Go get the hairbrush!

ETOILE

How can you expect me to do what  
you're too ashamed to? That isn't  
fair.

EUNA

I didn't promise the preacher I'd  
be there, you did! Now you march in  
there --

ETOILE

-- You want the hairbrush? You get  
it!

Euna roughly drags Etoile into her bedroom.

EXT. THE SHOCKLEY FARM - REAR OF THE MAIN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ellert walks from the fields up to the house. He wears  
overalls.

He pauses at the back door, combs his hair with his hand and  
then knocks.

BRENDA SHOCKLEY opens the door.

BRENDA

What do you want?

ELLERT

Mr. Shockley.

BRENDA

What you want with'im?

ELLERT

Ms. Shockley, I need to get paid  
for the work I done. For your  
husband.

She shouts back into the house.

BRENDA

Henry! You owe Ellert Mobley any  
thang?!

HENRY (O.S.)

Reckon I do!

BRENDA

Well, come pay'im an'git him off  
our place!

She glares at Ellert and leaves the doorway.

HENRY SHOCKLEY comes out of the house and shuts the door. He  
carries two pints of whiskey.

HENRY

Here's a dollar for the sprocket.  
You take some whisky for the field?

ELLERT

Mr. Shockley, I need money for both  
jobs.

Henry starts to make an issue of Ellert's request, but digs  
in a pocket for cash.

HENRY

Elert, you're a good worker, but I  
don't want'a see you back here.  
Understand?

ELERT

Yessir. You said three dollars for  
clearin' the field.

Henry gives him a five.

HENRY

Don't be tellin' anybody you worked  
for me. Now git.

INT. PARLOR - LATER

Etoile plays "The Old Rugged Cross" -- angrily. Her face  
stained with tears. The hairbrush is on the piano.

Euna sits in a rocker nearby, mending Ellert's socks. As Etoile stops playing.

ETOILE

You know, Mama, nearly every Sunday for as long as I can remember some ole lady has asked me how come my poor mother ain't at the church today or how's your poor mother doin'? When I was little I used to wonder how they knew we were poor, but I know now why they always called you poor. I think you're too ashamed on account's Daddy to go to church or anywhere else.

(pause)

Mama, you cryin'?

EUNA

Yes.

ETOILE

I'm sorry I said it. Forgive me?

EUNA

Yes.

ETOILE

You don't sound like it.

EUNA

Well, I do -- now will you shut up about it!

After a pause, Etoile again plays the hymn. Then mid-phrase, she stops.

ETOILE

Ms. Fedders said you used to play every Sunday, both services. Why'd you quit?!

Euna picks up the hair brush and jerks Etoile from the piano stool.

EXT. A DIRT ROAD NEAR THE MOBLEY PLACE - CONTINUOUS

Ellert walks home from the Shockley farm.

A car passes him. The car backs up and stops just ahead of him. There are three young men in the car. They are drinking.

The DRIVER gets out. YOUTH #1 and YOUTH #2 hang out of the windows.

DRIVER  
You Ellert Mobley ain't ya'?

Ellert just keeps walking.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
I believe you are! Where you goin'?

YOUTH #1  
I bet he's prowlin' for some corn  
hole!

YOUTH # 2  
Better hide ya' red-eyes, boys!

The Driver unhitches his pants.

DRIVER  
I got a big'un -- you wanna see it?

Ellert walks away.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
Don't walk away from me when I'm  
talkin' to you, you Goddamned  
pansy! You gunna suck me real good.

Ellert continues to walk away. The Driver hits him hard in the back.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
On your knees!

Ellert swings on the Driver, knocking him down. His friends jump out of the car and all three pummel Ellert. Leaving him lying in the dirt road.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
Awe, fuck this fruit.

He spits on Ellert.

DRIVER (CONT'D)  
Let's go.

The boys get back in their car. It pulls away, then turns around and speeds directly at Ellert, who jumps onto the soft shoulder of the road.

The car slows and Youth #2 hurls a beer bottle at Ellert, hitting him on the side of his head.

The boys accelerate away shouting and laughing. Youth #1 moons through the back window.

INT. PARLOR - EVENING

Etoile plays "Nearer My God to Thee." Euna sits at the table, the hair brush still in her hand.

EUNA  
(interrupting)  
I got a letter from my cousin,  
Merle, yesterday.

ETOILE  
I know -- brought it up from the  
mail box.

EUNA  
Come on over here. You have a little  
time left before you have to leave  
for the church. I need to tell you  
something.

Etoile doesn't move.

ETOILE  
What?

EUNA  
I wrote to Merle and asked her if  
she'd take you.

ETOILE  
Take me?

EUNA  
Let me finish --

ETOILE  
-- When?

EUNA  
Right away.

ETOILE  
No!

EUNA  
Listen to me --

ETOILE  
-- For how long?

EUNA

I don't know.

ETOILE

I won't do it!

EUNA

You will! You won't go to school here so you have to go somewhere. You can't drop out of school forever.

ETOILE

School's almost out for the summer! I don't see why --

EUNA

-- Hush. Merle wrote me right back. She's happy to have you. Yes, honey you will go to Jonesville to stay with Merle.

Etoile contemplates the situation. There is a long silence.

EUNA (CONT'D)

She's a kind woman . . . no children of her own. She took care of you that time . . . that time when you were little. She'll dote on you. You'll like that. She has a fine piano and says she'll get a good teacher for you. You won't be stuck out here in the country -- Jonesville is a real town.

(brightly)

You'll be a city girl.

Etoile tries not to cry.

ETOILE

I changed my mind. I don't want to go away.

EUNA

You must -- honey, look at the state you're in. Try to stop crying, your eyes'll be red when you get to the church.

ETOILE

They all know my Daddy's crazy; they all know, Mama, so why the hell should I give a damn if my eyes are red?

EUNA  
What did you say?

ETOILE  
Hell and damn -- plain as day. Are  
you deaf!?

Euna slaps her mouth hard. Etoile suddenly stops crying; she musters great determination to control her anger.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert stands on the porch listening. He leans his head against the side of the house and bawls up a fist, as if to pound the wall in frustration.

Distant THUNDER ROLLS; there's a gust of wind forcing a slight SOUND from the wind chime.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna hands Etoile the hymnal.

EUNA  
I'll talk to you more about it  
tomorrow. You better be on your  
way. And, tell the preacher you  
won't be back -- he needs to know  
that.

Etoile walks slowly to the door.

ETOILE  
I hate you.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert slips off the porch and around back as Etoile walks out of the house. Euna follows her to the edge of the porch.

Etoile walks as slowly as she can. Distant THUNDER ROLLS.

EXT. WAGON PATH - A LITTLE LATER

Highway 6 far in the distance behind her, Etoile trudges up hill on a wagon path. Tall weeds grow up in the high ground between deep ruts cut by wagon wheels. She is sweating.



EXT. PATH IN THE WOODS.

Etoile squats to pee. She looks up at the gathering black clouds. THUNDER is closer now. She hears a truck slowly STRAINING up the rutted road beyond. She runs to the gravel road at the end of the path and waves the truck down.

The rusted 1827 Ford truck slows. The driver, JEDIDIAH SMITH, a burly farmer, waves permission to board. Crowded next to him in the cabin of the truck are his ancient little mother and his obese wife, LUCY, who fans with a Jesus paddle fan.

Etoile climbs into the bed while the truck continues to move. She shares the truck bed with five boys ages seven to sixteen, all scrubbed and in their Sunday best. The bed is also shared with hay, a variety of old tools and a dog.

JEDIDIAH  
(yelling out his open  
window)  
I knew you was a cowgirl, missy!

ETOILE  
Yes sir! Thank you!

The truck LURCHES AND HEAVES over the rough road. The boys stare at Etoile. She covers her breasts with the hymnal and looks away.

INT. TRUCK CAB - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Stewart looks back through the cab window.

LUCY  
Jedidiah, you know who that is?

JEDIDIAH  
I reckon I do!

Lucy turns away in a huff. Jedidiah hoots and hollers as the old truck NOISILY CLIMBS the rough hill.

INT. CENTRAL CHURCH - A LITTLE LATER

Etoile pounds out the hymn, WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER. The small congregation sings the final refrain, led by BROTHER BUSH, their short, red-faced and oily preacher.

Central church is a small wooden structure just large enough to accommodate eight rows of wooden pews separated by a center aisle.

A small platform at the front of church serves as an Alter from which Brother Bush leads the service. To his left is the piano.

As Etoile plays, she cuts her eyes to glance out. She sees her classmate, RITA LYNN TARPLEY, smiling and whispering to ANOTHER GIRL. They are on the back pew, sitting on the aisle.

The hymn ends.

BROTHER BUSH

I hope many of you fine  
Christians'll join us at the  
Shallows at Longville Lake next  
Sunday for baptisms. We got six  
who has pledged to give their lives  
to Jesus.

Rita Lynn purposefully drops a hymnal. The BANG causes everyone, including Etoile, to look her way. When Etoile makes eye contact, Rita Lynn flashes a smirking smile.

RITA LYNN

'Scuse me.

BROTHER BUSH

We gunna meet up here at noon and  
those got wagons an' cars'll  
provide rides. We gunna have dinner  
on the ground followin' so pray it  
cools off by then. Let us bow our  
heads in prayer!

Brother Bush prays. All except Etoile, Rita Lynn and her friend bow their heads and close their eyes.

BROTHER BUSH (CONT'D)

Oh, dear Lord, God almighty and  
precious savior, bless these good  
Christian people who bow in  
supplication to thine divine will  
and holy power! We grovel before  
you!

THUNDER ROLLS continuously now. WIND SINGS outside as it gusts against the church, and windows RATTLE. Etoile has not closed her eyes; she looks directly at Rita Lynn who smirks.

BROTHER BUSH (CONT'D)

Sinners all! Sinners bound for the  
flames of Hell but for your mercy!

JEDIDIAH

Amen!

As the others pray, Etoile leaves her hymnal on the piano and tries to sneak out unnoticed by the preacher and most of the others who have their eyes tightly closed in fervent prayer.

BROTHER BUSH

Hear, oh God Jehovah, our cries. On  
our knees we beg forgiveness for  
our lies! Our lustful ways!

LUCY

Yes, Lord!

BROTHER BUSH

There are those here who are  
gluttonous, those who covet, and  
some who spill their seed upon the  
ground! Forgive them, Lord!

As Etoile passes her, Rita Lynn smirks at her and laughs slightly. Etoile pauses for a moment at the door, then returns to Rita Lynn and loudly SLAPS the smirk off her face. Rita Lynn cries out just as Jedidiah and his sons say:

JEDIDIAH (AND OTHERS)

Amen, Lord!

The awkward silence which follows is broken only by wind GUSTS and the sound of RAIN beginning to thud on the tin roof. People stare at Etoile; a few stand angrily. Etoile is frozen for a moment, then runs to the church entrance. Wind blowing against the door is strong, and she is unable to control the door's flying open with a BANG!

Etoile looks back, and everyone glares at her. She rushes out.

EXT. CENTRAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Rain falls hitting old trucks and cars parked near the church with loud THUMPS. Etoile runs past a team of mules hitched to a flatbed wagon as Brother Bush watches, angry and confused, from the church entrance.

It is almost dark now. Lightning STRIKES in the distance. WIND GUSTS blow Etoile's hair as she flees through the church grave yard and into the woods.

EXT. CHICKEN YARD - CONTINUOUS

It's dark now. Lightning helps to illuminate the scene.

Euna clears away dried limbs which have fallen and blown against the wire fence of the chicken yard. She struggles against the wind as she drags the dead limbs to the wood line. Then she returns to repair the fence by straightening the wire with her hands. It begins to rain harder.

INT. THE PARLOR - MOMENTS LATER

Euna enters the house, pushing wet hair out of her face. She's out of breath.

Ellert stands in the parlor.

EUNA

I didn't know you were home.

Ellert stares at her. She lights a lantern.

EUNA (CONT'D)

What happened to you?

He continues to stare. She dries herself with a towel.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Sit down. I set a place for you just in case. Buttermilk?

She pours buttermilk into a glass.

Ellert takes cash from his pocket and carefully places it on the table, sits.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Euna pockets the money. She lights the lamp, and examines his head.

EUNA (CONT'D)

You're bleeding.

Ellert pushes her hand away and crumbles corn bread into the milk. He stares at the glass, still silent. She carefully places a spoon near his glass.

EUNA (CONT'D)

I wish you'd tell me what happened to you.

They sit in silence for a moment. Euna struggles to get a breath and attempts to fill the tense silence with words.

EUNA (CONT'D)

The air is so heavy -- can't get my  
breath.

(getting up)

There's peas. They're cold now, but  
I'll heat them if you want.

Ellert starts to eat a spoonful of milk bread, but forces the  
spoon back into the glass with a CLANG.

THUNDER. The storm grows closer, and the scene darkens.

The wind chime softly TOLLS. Euna carefully clears his plate  
and glass from the table.

She searches his face for a connection; he avoids her stare.

The storm that has been brewing for weeks is MOVING IN FAST.  
Euna goes to the screened door and looks out.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Distant lightning lights Euna's face as she stands at the  
screen door.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

EUNA

I guess it's finally here . . .

She looks to Ellert for a response. Again, he avoids her  
eyes.

Suddenly Ellert begins to beat the table with both fists  
repeatedly. Then he storms into the bedroom.

EUNA (CONT'D)

(more or less to herself)

I'd better bring in my violets  
before the wind blows them away.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

By now the scene is almost totally black.

As Euna reaches for the violets, there is a loud clap of  
THUNDER. A flash of lightning reveals Beau Ray standing at  
the edge of the porch.

Euna is frozen. Beau Ray, with an awful smile, moves along  
the edge of the porch toward her.

She leaves the violets and slowly withdraws to the door. Beau Ray rushes her; she quickly enters the house and latches the screen.

He grasps the door handle and fiercely shakes the door as if to show that he could rip it down if he wanted.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna gasps. Beau Ray jabs a fist through the center of the screen. He screeches a loud high-pitched laugh, then disappears.

EUNA

Ellert!

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellert sits quietly on the bed.

EUNA

Ellert, that man is here.

Ellert doesn't look at her. Rain is pouring outside now.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna takes the lantern to the front door and peers out into darkness.

A HOWL is heard from the back of the house.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Euna, carries the lantern with her to the back door.

As she is about to close the wooden door, there is a flash of lightning and Beau Ray leaps up on the screen with a horrible SCREAM. She slams the wooden door and locks it.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellert stands at the bedroom window looking out. Lightning flashes light his face. He drinks.

INT. ETOILE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Euna stands at the door with the lantern. She sees an open window, SLAMS it closed.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Euna enters her bedroom, breathless.

EUNA

What does he want?

Ellert seems not to hear her. He drinks and stares out the window.

She places the lantern on a table and turns him to her.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Ellert, what does he want?!

He lifts the bottle to his lips. She attempts to take the bottle. He pulls the bottle away and pushes her roughly on the bed.

EXT. CATTLE GAP - CONTINUOUS

Etoile, wet and winded, runs onto to the cattle gap. She slips and falls hard.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna enters the parlor with the lantern. She sits at the table, too stunned by the sequence of events to do anything more. The SOUND of heavy rain on the tin roof is deafening.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

The storm rages. Sheets of rain fall. Heavy winds bang out a MOURNFUL TOLLING from the wind chime.

Etoile runs across the yard. Beau Ray steps in front of her and grabs her. She is shocked at first and cannot move.

He touches her hair and extends his tongue. Etoile pushes against him and turns away, but Beau Ray grabs her again. He places a hand over her mouth masking a scream. She struggles, but he takes her down with him into the mud. Beau Ray laughs wildly as he rolls with her in his arms.

He releases her in the manner of a cat toying with a mouse. He moves behind her and waits, preparing to pounce. She looks about, but does not see him, then cautiously backs away. She backs into him. He laughs and grabs her again.

Beau Ray holds her by one arm allowing her an opportunity to free herself; she attempts to do so cautiously.

Etoile begins to cry. Beau Ray smiles and moans.

Beau Ray releases her for an instant, and she breaks for the porch. He overtakes her as she reaches the porch and throws her down. He scoots, belly down, between Etoile and the door, and writhes and growls, daring her to attempt a getaway.

Etoile gets up, and he is on top of her in a flash. Enjoying her struggle he swings her off the porch again.

She falls to the ground and rolls several feet in the mud, but before she can get up he is on top of her again. She struggles to get enough breath to scream. When she does, he pulls the skirt of her dress up over her head.

Now Etoile fights wildly. He wraps his arms around her trapping her arms to her sides and pulls her close to him shoving her skirt into her mouth. Etoile wiggles free just long enough to scream loudly:

ETOILE  
Mama!      Mama!

Beau Ray again forces her skirt into her mouth.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna hears the SCREAMS MUFFLED BY CONTINUOUS THUNDER, but she doesn't know what it is. She goes to the screened door to look out.

A lightning flash reveals Etoile and Beau Ray. Euna unlocks the screen and rushes out.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

EUNA  
Etoile!

She picks up the spade left near the graves and threatens Beau Ray.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
Let her go! Let her go!



Beau Ray draws Etoile closer to him. He smiles and grunts.

Etoile almost breaks free, and Euna swings the spade, hitting him in the head. Beau Ray releases Etoile and turns away.

Etoile runs toward the porch, tripping and falling in the mud.

Beau Ray suddenly turns and springs toward Euna. She swings at him again. As she swings he turns away, but she lands solid BLOW to the back.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Now git!

She swings at him again. He dodges.

EUNA (CONT'D)

Git!

Beau Ray disappears into the darkness.

Euna picks Etoile up from the mud. They are breathless and stunned. Euna pushes Etoile behind her as if to shield her, expecting him to return. Etoile rests her head against her mother's back and weeps.

ETOILE

Thank you! Thank you, Mama.

Euna guides Etoile back to the porch.

EUNA

What did he do to you?

ETOILE

Mama, is he the one?

EUNA

I reckon he is. Did he hurt you?

ETOILE

I don't know.

EUNA

Come.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile tries to hug her mother, but Euna turns her around to examine her.

ETOILE  
Mama, I was so scared.

Euna gives Etoile a towel, and dries herself with another.

EUNA  
Go to your room and shut the door.

ETOILE  
Why?

Euna stamps her foot.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
What if he comes back --

EUNA  
-- Obey me!

Euna turns her toward her door.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
Just do it!

Etoile goes to her room and shuts the door.

INT. ETOILE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She snuggles close to the door, still terrified.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The STORM is very loud now, almost drowning out Euna's shouting.

EUNA  
Ellert! Could you not hear that! He  
went after your daughter!

Ellert repeatedly bangs his head against the wall.

Euna finds a box of shells under the bed and loads the shotgun, then puts it on the bed and takes Ellert's bottle from him.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
He went after Etoile and you hide  
in here drinkin'?!

Ellert grabs her roughly and pulls at her clothes. He kisses her neck and back. Euna fights him. He shoves her across the room knocking her down as he leaves the bedroom.

INT. ETOILE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Etoile opens her door just enough to look out. She observes the following: Ellert ransacks the parlor searching for another bottle. When Euna follows and attempts to control him, Ellert throws her to the floor and continues to wreck the place.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna tries again to physically stop him. But Ellert's frustration has peaked.

EUNA  
It's all gone!

He grabs her roughly and tears her blouse open. Euna strikes him in the face. In return he hits her hard causing her to fall back over the table. He hits her again, almost knocking her unconscious.

Etoile now stands in the parlor, observing the violence.

Euna attempts to roll off the table, and Ellert strikes her in the ribs. He kisses her roughly and tears her clothes, ripping them away from her body.

Etoile, unable to bear this sight and the sound of her mother's SCREAMS rushes to him.

ETOILE  
Daddy, stop! Stop it, Daddy!

When he sees his daughter, he stops and rushes out of the house onto the porch.

Etoile goes to her mother. Euna pushes her away, and collapses onto the floor.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Mama!?

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

A double flash of lightening reveals Beau Ray, whisky bottle in hand resting by the graves licking rain from his lips.

Ellert freezes.

Beau Ray growls hoarsely, extending the vowels, as he shames Ellert with a wagging finger.

BEAU RAY  
Elleeeeeerrrt, Elleeeeeerrrt.

Ellert gestures for Beau Ray to go away, but Beau Ray smiles and tempts Ellert with the bottle.

Ellert grabs a porch chair to use as a weapon. Beau slides onto the porch, daring him.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Etoile takes a pillow from the cot and puts it under her mother's head.

ETOILE  
Mama, wake up. I don't know what to do.

Etoile runs to the screen and sees her Father with Beau Ray.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Daddy!!

Ellert doesn't respond; she rushes to the kitchen and gets a basin of water. She splashes it in Euna's face to no effect.

ETOILE (CONT'D)  
Wake up! Mama, wake up!

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellert tries to hit Beau Ray with the chair but misses and smashes it against the porch floor.

Beau Ray climbs on Ellert's back. Ellert throws Beau Ray off his back, then picks him up and tosses him through the air into the yard.

ETOILE  
(exiting the house)  
Mama's hurt real bad! I don't know what to do!

Ellert turns to Etoile and motions for her to go inside. She backs away to the door and stops there.

Beau Ray flops about releasing a long trailing laugh. Then, after lying still for a moment Beau Ray begins slow, undulating, seductive movements. His sounds are low and moaning.

Ellert picks up a leg of the broken chair. He swings and swings again at his tempter, but Beau adroitly dodges each attempted blow with mocking laughter.

Ellert lunges for Beau Ray, who makes no attempt to avoid his grasp. Beau Ray wraps his legs around Ellert and forces his fingers into Ellert's mouth.

Etoile cannot watch. She turns away toward the screen and sees her mother motionless on the floor inside and then runs past the men through the rain to the path leading to Route 6.

Ellert, nearing exhaustion, throws Beau Ray to the ground and chokes him.

Beau Ray breaks free. His laughter is deeper and more sinister than before. There is something painful in the dark sound of it — a suffering which has not been hinted at before.

Beau Ray holds his bottle out to Ellert, then opens it and drinks himself. Beau Ray pours whisky over his face and chest then sinks to the ground and wallows slowly in the mud.

Ellert falls to his knees. Beau Ray offers the bottle to Ellert who takes it and drinks.

Beau Ray snatches it back and begins to scoot away along the ground. As he does so, he begins to shed his over-sized overalls.

Ellert follows. Beau Ray then moans a low pitch and begins a series of exotic slow lilted and twisting moves which carry him along the ground.

Ellert picks up the chair leg, but follows like an obedient child.

EXT. ROUTE 6 - LATER

The storm continues to rage. Lightning flashes provide the only light on the dark two-lane blacktop as Etoile runs toward Robeline.

Etoile's shoe comes apart. She stops, throws her shoes away and continues to run.

A car approaches. Etoile stands in the road so winded she can't stand up straight. The car stops. Its headlights reveal Etoile's bleeding feet. GLADYS HUMPHREY rolls her window down.

GLADYS  
Is that you, Etoile Mobley?

ETOILE  
Yessum. Please help me!

GALDYS  
What on earth?!

ETOILE  
I got to get Doc Stagner over at  
Robeline.

GALDYS  
It's not far, Honey -- only 'bout  
another mile up the road.

Gladys rolls up her window and drives away. Etoile, almost completely spent, continues.

INT. J.T. STAGNER'S HOME - A LITTLE LATER

J.T. opens his front door to find Etoile. She is so out of breath she can't speak.

J.T.  
What the hell . . .?

ETOILE  
Mama's hurt.

Etoile falls. J.T. Catches her.

EXT. A WOODED AREA - LATER

The storm is active. Ellert is exhausted. He slowly beats Beau Ray with the chair leg. Beau Ray is naked, covered with blood and mud, and lies still in the leaves.

ELLERT  
I got ta'be shed'a you.

Ellert can no longer stand. He plops to the ground, tosses the chair leg aside and lies down.

After a moment, Beau Ray rises. He reaches for the chair leg and then strikes Ellert who immediately takes the chair leg from him.

Beau Ray screams and runs as best he can. Ellert follows, staggering.

ELLERT (CONT'D)  
I got ta'be shed'a you!

EXT. THE HATCHER PLACE - CONTINUOUS

Beau Ray stumbles up to the Hatcher's house. He turns to see Ellert approaching.

The house is dark. Beau Ray raises a window and attempts to crawl in.

A female SCREAMS. Lamp light comes on in the house.

Beau Ray falls back to the ground, then runs. Ellert pursues.

Ole man Hatcher comes out of the house in his underwear with a shotgun. He FIRES.

INT. PARLOR - LATER

The storm is still active.

Euna lies on the cot. J.T. comes from Etoile's room with his medical bag.

J.T.  
She's still pretty high strung, but I gave her somethin' that'll put'er to sleep sure enough. Thought for certain her Mama was dyin'.

EUNA  
Is she hurt?

J.T.  
Scrapes and bruises. Her feet are a mess.

Euna sits up. He looks closely at her eyes.

J.T. (CONT'D)  
Look at me. Euna. I'm so sure about you, or I'd knock you out same as Etoile.

She rises, moves to the door and looks out.

J.T. (CONT'D)  
Where are you off to? You need to lie down.

EUNA  
Don't baby me, J.T.

J.T.  
You got a broken rib or two.

EUNA  
He's out there in the dark. . .  
He's in trouble, J.T., I can feel  
it.

She looks out into the night for a moment, then goes to Etoile's room.

INT. ETOILE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Euna stands beside Etoile's bed and watches her sleep. Etoile's breathing is deep and irregular. Euna touches her.

INT. PARLOR - A LITTLE LATER

Euna and J.T. drink coffee. He pours a little whisky in his. She moves to the screen door, looks out and waits.

J.T.  
Won't you let me take you an'  
Etoile to the hospital in  
Natchitoches?

Still looking out.

EUNA  
No.

J.T.  
Then come to my house in Robeline  
so I can look after you there.

Maintaining her vigil.

EUNA  
Go home J.T.

They are quiet for a moment. He cannot reach her.

J.T.  
When you were a girl everyone just  
assumed you'd amount to somethin'.  
You were smart and beautiful and  
such a fine musician. And here you  
are standin' in this shack waitin'  
for that man --



EUNA

-- you think I've amounted to  
nothin'?

She turns to look at him. He can't take back his words, and won't lie.

EUNA (CONT'D)

You've done what you can for us. Go  
on home.

She again peers out into the darkness.

J.T. gathers his things. After a moment, unable to hold his tongue any longer:

J.T.

You are the most stubborn person I  
ever knew.

Euna isn't sure what he said -- she continues to stare out.

EUNA

What?

J.T.

Course it doesn't matter what  
happens to that child in there,  
does it? Put her through all this  
and then send her off -- yeah, she  
told me about that. You have  
parental responsibilities to that  
girl and you don't act like she  
counts for nothin'.

Euna continues to stare out into the darkness, refusing to respond.

J.T. (CONT'D)

Damn your pride!

He has touched a nerve, but she maintains her vigil.

EUNA

She'll find her way in Jonesville.  
She's ready. I have done right by  
her. I'm gettin' her out.

J.T.

Well, you shouldn't keep'er out  
here, I'll grant you that, but you  
can't send her off without you --  
she's too young. Euna, I can make a  
life for the both of you.

He pauses and speaks quietly:

J.T. (CONT'D)

I have loved you my whole life.  
 Nearly killed me when I got back  
 from boardin' school, and found  
 you'd taken up with Ellert Mobley.  
 I'm so sorry I wasn't here when you  
 needed me.

EUNA

You presume that given a choice I  
 would have chosen you?

J.T.

I do.

They hear the sound of MEN AND HOUNDS.

EUNA

Oh, Lord . . .

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

The glow of torches illuminates the entrance of a group of  
 men led by HAP BRYSON.

The men begin to congregate on the porch and in the yard.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

J.T.

I'll see what they want.

Hap appears at the screen and KNOCKS loudly. THUNDER echoes  
 the knock.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Hap addresses the men who are noisily gathering.

HAP

Ya'll quiet down out'ere!

He shouts into the house.

HAP (CONT'D)

Ellert Mobley!

HENRY

Go on in, Hap, he's probably hidin'  
in'ere.

HAP

Miz Euna?

Doc opens the screen door.

J.T.

Hap, what do you men want?

HAP

Doc Stagner, what'you doin' here?

J.T.

Workin'. What the hell are you doin'  
here?

HAP

Lookin' for Ellert Mobley. He  
in'ere?

J.T.

It's the middle of the night, Hap,  
can't this wait 'til mornin'?

HAP

'fraid not.

Euna comes to the door.

EUNA

Mr. Bryson, what is it you and  
these men want with my husband?

She and J.T. exit the house onto the porch.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

HAP

Miz Euna, I'd rather not speak of  
it to'ya.

EUNA

You come with torches to my door at  
this hour asking for my husband and  
it won't do to tell me why? You'd  
better be on your way then.

VIRGIL

She ain't runnin' us off this time!

HORACE  
He's in'ere!

OTHERS  
Yeah!

Hap addresses the men who have become loud.

HAP  
Shut up! --

EUNA  
-- I have a shotgun in my bedroom.  
I used it the last time men came on  
our place in the middle of the  
night!

J.T.  
Now stay calm, Euna --

HAP  
-- Miz Euna, please don't do  
nothin' like that -- Henry!  
Tell'em ta'shut up out'ere, I can't  
hear myself talk! Don't do nothin'  
like that Miz Euna, most all these  
men includin' myself is deputized,  
so you can be damn sure we got a  
good reason for bein' here.

J.T. attempts to steer Euna into the house.

J.T.  
You'd better rest --

She slaps his hand away, and moves out to the edge of the  
porch; the men back off a little.

EUNA  
Ellert is not here.

J.T.  
Hap, for Chrissake, what's  
happened?

HAP  
That crazy Beau Ray Cloud's been  
killed. Beat ta'death.

EUNA  
What has that got to do with Ellert  
Mobley?

HAP  
Well, Miz Euna, three different  
folks seen Ellert with'im tonight.

EUNA  
What of it?

VIRGIL  
They was fightin' an' actin' . . .  
crazy.

MALCOLM  
I seen'um, Miz Euna.

HAP  
Ed Waters seen Ellert beatin' on'im  
on the road to Robeline, an' . . .

EUNA  
Yes?

Silence. Euna stares at them, then moves back into the house.

J.T.  
He ain't here, boys. Leave this  
woman alone.

HAP  
Sorry, Doc Stagner, but we got  
instructions to search this place.  
Mac, you an' Dewey take a look  
'round back.

Two men circle around the corner of the house.

Hap enters the house followed by a few others and J.T.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna tries to stop a man headed for Etoile's room.

EUNA  
Don't go in there, my daughter's  
sleeping.

HAP  
He'll be quiet, Miz Euna.

J.T. attempts to comfort Euna.

J.T.  
I'm sorry it's come to this.

EUNA

Are you?

EXT. WOODS ALONG A LAKE - CONTINUOUS

Ellert is exhausted and winded, but runs along a path at the edge of a lake.

A SHOT is fired at him from a distance. He drops and rolls.

The sound of TRACKING DOGS grows closer. He takes his shirt off and rubs it around the base of a tree and then tosses the shirt up into the tree branches.

Ellert dives into the lake and swims.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

CHARLEY runs into the yard and up to the porch.

CHARLEY

Hap! Hap, you in'ere?

Hap opens the screen.

HAP

Yo!

CHARLEY

Got here as soon as I could -- hear  
it's gunna'be a reg'ler turkey  
shoot!

BENSON (O.S.)

Yoo -- Hoo!!

CHARLEY

Benson!

BENSON runs on with two rifles. Charley jumps down off the porch to get a weapon.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

J.T.

Hap, what's gunna' happen when you  
find'im?

HAP  
 He'll be held at Robeline 'til'iz  
 judgment, I reckon, but I gotta'  
 tell ya', we got orders to shoot'im  
 if we have to.

J.T.  
 Is that so? Well, you better sit on  
 those knuckle heads out there!

The men have completed their search.

HORACE  
 He ain't in here, Hap.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

As he steps out onto the porch:

HORACE  
 Hey! Boy's he ain't in there. Any  
 luck out there?

EXT. TOOL SHED - CONTINUOUS

Dewey leaving the tool shed.

DEWEY  
 Hap, he ain't out here neither!

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Horace yells through the screen.

HORACE  
 Hap, ain't no sign of'im out back--

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

HAP  
 (also yelling)  
 -- I heard'im, no need ta'yell  
 ya'damn head off, Horace!  
 Sorry we had to do this, Miz Euna.  
 You got any idea where he might be?

Euna walks away. An excited voice is heard in the distance.

BART (O.S.)  
 Hap! Hap!

Hap hurries out of the parlor and on to the porch.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Hap meets BART in the yard. Euna and J.T. observe from the front door.

BART

Hap! He's down by the lake! Ole man Self caught'im crawlin' in the kitchen winder an'took a shot at'im!

Leading the men off:

HAP

Hit'im?

BART

Don't know. Wiley Pritchard reckons he migh'a been after old man Self's boy. Wiley an about four others is trackin' im. I reckon he's still down by the lake somewheres.

The VOICES trail off. The men are gone. There is a loud CLAP of thunder.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS ACTION

EUNA

They're goin' t'kill him. They'll shoot him down like a mad dog, with no more thought than that.

Euna moves about with quick nervous steps; her breathing becomes short. She is suddenly still.

J.T.

Euna?

EUNA

(an accusation)  
What?

J.T.

I'll drive down to Sweeny's -- might be needed.

He stops at the door. After a moment:



J.T. (CONT'D)

They'll have him makin' for every man and boy in Sabine Parish before the night's over. They're ignorant men, Euna. He'd be better off dead than left to answer to all they'll put to him.

J.T. leaves.

Euna remains very still. Listening.

RUMBLES OF THUNDER roll in from the distance. The storm has moved on, but is active nearby. She listens intently to every sound.

The wind chime TOLLS. She hears J.T.'s car door SLAM, and his CAR DRIVE AWAY.

Euna waits.

INT. PARLOR - LATER

Euna continues to wait. She hears the BACK DOOR OPEN AND SHUT.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ellert is wet, exhausted, tormented, but no longer drunk. He pauses to look at Euna, then goes into the bedroom.

Euna follows him with the lantern.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He studies her face for a moment, then moves aimlessly into the parlor again.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

ELLERT continues to move about tentatively. Euna dries him with a towel.

He touches Euna's face and then her body carefully, regretting every blow. He sinks to his knees and cries softly into her belly.

EUNA

I'm all right.

She kneels and holds the lantern near his face.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
Do you know what's happening?

He looks at her, nods yes, then no.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
Men will be coming for you.

He resumes the aimless movement.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
What are you looking for? Are you  
looking for something?

ELLERT  
. . . lost . . .

She puts the lantern down and holds him.

EUNA  
How'd you get so lost, honey?

He mutters something.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
What?

He is almost inaudible.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
What? Sorry?

Ellert nods, yes. The nod becomes pathetic, continuous up and down movement of his head; it seems he cannot stop. Euna stills him by taking his face in her hands. She kisses him.

They hear sound of DISTANT VOICES and TRACKING HOUNDS. Ellert goes to the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellert stands quite still for a moment, then sits on the bed. Euna brings the lantern into the bedroom. She frantically takes a dry change of clothing from the wardrobe.

EUNA  
Hurry, get dressed.

He does not move.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 They're coming back. You need to  
 get out'a here. Why are you just  
 sittin' there?

Ellert holds the shotgun out to her. After a moment she takes  
 it, and he turns away.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Oh, dear Lord. No. No. I won't.  
 Just go. They'll be here soon. Go.  
 Ellert, please!

He shakes his head "no". She puts the gun on the bed, then  
 shakes him.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Ellert! Run. Now. Do this one thing  
 for me! Get up an' go!

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Ellert! You don't ever have to come  
 back -- you could go to your Indian  
 people in the Carolina's -- no one  
 would look for you there. Please,  
 get up! Go! Ellert! Please!

Ellert drops his head. He is going nowhere. She embraces him,  
 weeping. He gently pushes her away and holds her at an arm's  
 length.

The SOUND of the men and dogs draws close.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 I can't. Please don't ask this of  
 me.

The VOICES GROW CLOSER. Euna falls to her knees, crying.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 I can't. I won't!

The SOUNDS of men and dogs are very close. She realizes what  
 she must do. She turns down the wick of the lamp until they  
 are barely visible.

The VOICES ARE LOUDER.

Euna looks toward heaven.

EUNA (CONT'D)  
 Damn you. Damn you for expecting  
 this of me!

Ellert turns to her. He is lit briefly by the soft glow of distant lightning. His face is peaceful.

EXT. REAR OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The men swarm in at the rear of the house. They are boisterous and celebratory. The hounds bark incessantly now, as they close in on their prey.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellert turns away again; he waits. Euna takes aim.

The scene is lit by a series of distant lightning flashes. As this happens, we see Euna place the barrel against Ellert's back.

The shotgun BLAST is echoed by soundless lightning flashes.

Euna tries to scream, but no sound will come.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

The men are frozen; they point their weapons in all directions. Hap signals for them to stay back and puts a finger to his lips, demanding quiet.

His back to the wall, Hap inches toward the screened door. Euna comes out of the house. All guns point to her.

She holds the screen open for Hap. He tentatively enters.

While Hap is in the house, Euna stares at each man, one at a time. They divert their eyes and weapons.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - TWO DAYS LATER

The storm has past. Ellert's grave lies next to those of his sons'. Near the grave stand Emma, Cye, Euna and Etoile.

EMMA

Don't let it go so hard on'ya  
daughter, he's not worth it. Papa?  
What was it you were gunna ask'er?  
Ask'er, Papa.

EUNA

Honey, go in the house and get your  
suitcase. That bus will pass right  
by if you're not out by the road.

ETOILE

Yessum.

She limps slightly as she goes. Bandages on her feet peak up over her socks.

EMMA

Don't seem hardly right her goin' off today.

(nudging Cye)

Papa.

CYE

Euna, ya' Mama an' me . . . we want you to come home.

EMMA

This ole place has been nothin' but a heart ache for ya', an' now you got no reason to stay.

CYE

If you was to fetch Etoile back from Merle's we'd make a place for her, too.

They wait for a reply. There is none.

CYE (CONT'D)

I ain't askin' again.

EMMA

Don't go ta' bein' hurt, Papa. Euna needs some time to think on it.

Without looking at them.

EUNA

Thank you, but this is my home.

Etoile comes out of the house with her purse and suitcase. She waits on the porch.

CYE

We'll be goin' now. Etoile, I hope you'll behave over in Jonesville.

Etoile stares at Cye, but says nothing. Emma and Cye cross the yard and exit down the path to Route 6.

ETOILE

I'd better get down there.

Euna nods agreement. Etoile does not move. After a moment:

EUNA  
Got your money?

ETOILE  
Yessum.  
(pause)  
Packed my music. I don't think I  
forgot anything.

Etoile approaches Euna and stands very close to her. Euna doesn't look at her. Instead, she stamps her foot.

Etoile gets her things, crosses the yard, and heads down the path to Route 6.

After a moment, Euna goes into the house; She picks up her pillow from the cot and walks into the bedroom.

EXT. CATTLE GAP AND ROUT 6 - CONTINUOUS

Etoile stands by the road with her suitcase. She turns back, hoping to find her Mother.

She sees her grandparents, up the road, two small old figures -- the heat rising off the road making them look like specters as they fade in the distance.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Euna places her pillow on the bed next to Ellert's. When she hears the BUS APPROACHING, she breaks into tears and runs out of the room.

EXT. CATTLE GAP AND ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

The bus approaches. Etoile waves it down.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Euna runs from the house across the yard to the path leading to the highway.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Etoile pays the driver, and finds a seat. The bus pulls away.

EXT. CATTLE GAP AND ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

Euna runs into the road.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Etoile begins to cry. She glances back and sees her Mother near the cattle gap. Etoile rushes to the back of the bus.

EXT. CATTLE GAP AND ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

Euna see's Etoile and waves.

Etoile waves from the back of the bus. Euna watches the bus disappear.

Euna blows a kiss.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Etoile returns to her seat. She wipes away her tears, and tries to find interest in the world passing outside.

A girl, TRUDY, about Etoile's age speaks to her from her seat across the aisle.

TRUDY  
Where ya'headed?

ETOILE  
Jonesville.

TRUDY  
You live there?

After a moment.

ETOILE  
Yes. I do.

TRUDY  
I live in Many, but I'm goin' to Alexandria t'see my Granny. You change buses in Natchitoches?

ETOILE  
I think so.

TRUDY  
Me too. I'm Trudie. What's your name?

ETOILE  
(pronouncing it correctly)  
Etoile.

Etoile scoots closer to the window and watches the world pass. She is going to Jonesville.

EXT. CATTLE GAP AND ROUTE 6 - CONTINUOUS

Euna continues to stare off in the direction of the bus.

EXT. PATH LEADING BACK TO THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Euna moves listlessly back to the house.

EXT. PORCH AND YARD - CONTINUOUS

Euna stops at the edge of the yard. She looks at the dilapidated house, the graves, the hard dirt yard.

Euna slowly walks to the porch. She opens the screen door, pauses, and enters the house allowing the screen to slam behind her.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Euna stands near the door and searches for anything familiar. The house is QUIET.

Finally, she moves to the piano causing the floor boards to CREAK. Has she noticed this sound before? She sits, stretches her fingers and massages her hands.

She opens the keyboard, and stumbles through the first few measures of the "Reunion" prelude, Chopin, Op: 28, number 1. She stops, then dives in and plays it through, making many errors.

She laughs. She plays it again, joyfully and better.

End