

BROWN WATER

by

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ESTABLISHING SHOT: AERIAL OF SWAMP. MOSSY CYPRESS TREES.

TADPOLE (V.O.)

Mama always said, even the brown water of the bayous could wash away all that was evil. But I had a thing about water an I wassant goin' near it.

FADE IN:

INT. SHANTY - KITCHEN - MORNING

Smoke fills the kitchen. Bacon sizzles burning charcoal black in a frying pan on a stove unattended.

CATFISH, 30, African American, tall as a tree and just as slender, beard stubble, runs in. Jerks the pan off the stove tossing it in the sink.

TADPOLE, 8, African American girl, nappy hair, watches from the doorway.

EXT. DIRT PATH - MOMENTS LATER

Tadpole's feet hit the mud so fast, no time for the suction.

She stops near the path's end. Doubles over to catch her breath. And then stands up slowly.

Through the mist she can see MAMA, 28, African American, long braids, in nightgown, wading into the swamp.

TADPOLE

Mama!

Mama continues, the water line rising to her chest.

Tadpole steps into the water. Following Mama.

Knee deep she looks down at the water with fear.

Mama takes two more steps. Water covers her head.

TADPOLE

Ma-ma!! I'm coming!

Deeper, Tadpole thrashes around. Cannot swim. The brown water stains her white t-shirt rust brown.

She swallows water. Chokes. Fights for her footing.

Mama floats atop the water like a fishing cork.

A loud KNOCK. Tadpole springs up.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

Tadpole wipes sleep from her eyes and sweat from her brow.

The door opens. Catfish peers in extending mud-soaked shoes.

CATFISH

Wanna explain why I found these in
the trash?

Tadpole shrugs.

TADPOLE

They got all wet with that brown
water. They ruined, Papa.

CATFISH

Nuttin' a little soap powder can't
handle. You gotta get over that
water thing ya got.

TADPOLE

They ruined, I'm tellin ya. Make
squish squash creepin' sounds.

A clump of swamp mud falls off one and splatters on the
wooden floor. He shakes his head.

CATFISH

If ya Ma was live, she'd skin your
hide. Ya lucky she in heaven.

Catfish hesitates.

CATFISH

Speakin' of heaven, I need ya to
run that goat milk up to the
parish.

Tadpole rolls her eyes. Huffs.

CATFISH

Why you always look that way when I
bring up the priest? He's one of
our best customers.

He drops the shoes.

CATFISH

And put these on ya feet or in the wash. Ain't got money to be wasted.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

A kitchen lacking a woman's touch.

Tadpole walks in, drops the shoes in the trash bin.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Barefooted, Tadpole rides an old rusty bike, a bottle of milk in her front basket.

TADPOLE (V.O.)

Mama always said you shouldn't hate nobody but I hated that man and I wassant gone let nobody baptize me.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The bike comes to a stop outside a small church.

Tadpole jumps off, sets the kick stand. Takes the milk.

She walks up to the doors. Hesitates.

TADPOLE (V.O.)

And I's warned about churches. Hypocrites and such. This was the first time I guess I'd see inside.

INT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

The door opens. Sunlight cuts through darkness. Dust dances in the beam of light.

Tadpole stands in awe. Stares down a narrowing aisle leading to Jesus on a cross just behind the pulpit.

TADPOLE (V.O.)

It was right scary. But not as scary as water. Specially that brown water.

Tadpole walks down the aisle.

TADPOLE (V.O.)

Never understood how it could wash sin away but Mama thought it could. I can remember her last day on Earth. Said she was gonna get the sin washed right off'er. Mama wassant afraid of the water. Told me about a voo doo spell old Julie Brown put on it round here. A protection for those that were good an death to those that were evil.

Tadpole stops at a door marked: CLERGY OFFICE. Knocks.

The door opens up.

Tadpole drops the milk. Glass shatters, milk seeping out.

FATHER JIMMY, 50's, stands in the door. His belly protrudes over his belt. His hair greasy.

FATHER JIMMY

Now what do you think the Lord, our Father, would say about that?

He motions at the milk on the floor. Tadpole's frozen solid.

FATHER JIMMY

He'd say if she's been baptized then she is forgiven. You need to quit refusing the gift of God and obey. I baptized your mother. She was very special. You could be special just like that, ya know.

FLASHBACK

EXT. BAYOU SWAMP - MORNING

Father Jimmy stands in the brown water dunking one SINNER at a time. Mama, a couple years younger, in pink dress, is last in line.

Everyone else is moved on. It's Mama's turn. Father Jimmy takes his time with her. Dunks her over and over.

TADPOLE (V.O.)

No way I was gettin' baptized like that. No way I was ever goin' in that water.

Looks like he's drowning her, leaving her down longer. And longer. But she comes up the last time gasping.

He leads her out of the swamp.

TADPOLE (V.O.)
I guess she thought he washed the
sin off her that day.

Their feet suck mud through the spongy path. The sound stops.

TADPOLE (V.O.)
All that dunkin', she musta had
some sin left, because what I saw
next I'd never forget.

Father Jimmy gropes Mama in the bushes. His hand runs down her wet shirt, squeezes her breast.

TADPOLE (O.S.)
Mama?

The fondling stops. Mama turns, locks eyes with a much younger Tadpole.

TADPOLE (V.O.)
She weren't never the same again.

EXT. SHANTY - NIGHT

Mama rocks on a rocking chair. Hums a tune over and over.

MAMA
Julie Brown Julie Brown what did
you see...When I die, I'm gonna
take da whole town with me.

Tadpole shakes Mama's shoulder.

TADPOLE
Mama? What you singin'?

MAMA
Tain't me no more Tadpole. I'm the
brown water. Like ole Julie Brown.

TADPOLE
But you said the water was good.
It'a take all the evil away.

Mama pets Tadpole on the head.

MAMA

It gonna get all the evil indeed.

Tadpole steps back. Stares as Mama starts rocking and humming the same tune again and again. Like a broken record.

END FLASHBACK

FATHER JIMMY

What's wrong child? You aren't afraid of a little water are you?

He reaches down and wipes a tear from her cheek.

FATHER JIMMY

You show up tomorrow afternoon at baptismal bank about three, and we'll take care of you so you don't have to worry about things like spilled milk. Whadda you say kiddo?

He nudges her cheek.

FATHER JIMMY

No need to be scared. It's just water. Be brave. Like your Mama.

He closes the door.

Tadpole, eyes down, hums the Julie Brown tune.

Over and over.

She stops. Knocks on the door again.

Father Jimmy opens it. She looks up at him.

TADPOLE

I changed my mind.

He leans out.

FATHER JIMMY

About?

TADPOLE

I want to be baptized. Like Mama.

His lips curl into a perverted smile.

FATHER JIMMY

Well, that's nice to hear.

EXT. BAYOU SWAMP - BAPTISMAL BANKS - THREE O'CLOCK

Father Jimmy walks out into the swamp. As the water covers his white robe, it turns a reddish-brown.

TADPOLE (V.O.)
Mama fought the sickness long as
she could. I wasn't gone catch it.

He smiles back, motions to Tadpole who stands a few feet from the water's edge.

FATHER JIMMY
Come on in, child.

Tadpole picks up her foot. Watches as the indentation fills rapidly with brown water.

She begins to hum Julie Brown's song as she steps forward. Ankle deep, she stops. Looks up. Stares through the priest.

TADPOLE (V.O.)
It wasn't the water I was afraid of
no more.

A swirl of water makes its way towards Father Jimmy.

TADPOLE (V.O.)
It was what was *in the water*.

The water swirls around creating a wake. Faster. Closer.

Father Jimmy unaware until he is yanked under.

Father Jimmy thrashes about. Arms reach one last time for the sky. **And then he's gone.**

TADPOLE
Sorry Mister. No, not sorry...

Tadpole stares out over the still, brown water.

TADPOLE
Rest in peace. That's what Mama
would say.

FADE OUT.