

GEORGIA SKIES

by

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EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

SUPER: "NORTH SHELBYVILLE - 1885"

Moonlight filters through a thick forest. Hear --

-- vigorous panting, movement over twigs and dry leaves.  
Someone's coming. It's --

-- JOHNNY RAY, a white man in his early 20's. He's on the move, with a double barrel shotgun in his hand. He's fast, so fast, that he whips past trees at a dizzying speed.

INT. MILLER HOUSE - BATHING ROOM - SAME NIGHT

BILLY, 20, pale, and thin, is covered with BLOOD and looks like a roughed-up Bounty Hunter in a slouch hat and trench-coat.

Billy smears the blood off his face with a towel, tosses it in a tin bathing tub, moves to --

INT. MILLER HOUSE - HALLWAY (CONTINUOUS)

Where Billy's mother MARGARET, a tall, elegant woman, in a flowing night-gown, lingers by a dim lit kerosene lamp.

Margaret sees BLOOD ON BILLY'S SHIRT, cautions forward a few steps, stops. She calls his name in a soft Southern tone.

MARGARET

Billy?

Billy stiffens, looks caught off guard.

MARGARET

You all right?

EXT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - SAME TIME

Fog drifts over a creek. This place looks eerie.

Someone's personal belongings are strewn about a leafy path: a sack, boots, handkerchief, and books.

Johnny Ray hurries along the creek, simmers at the books.

Up ahead --

A FIGURE. Someone else is here.

Johnny Ray draws his double barrel shotgun, fingers the trigger, creeps forward, ready to kill.

A moment.

Now he sees the figure clearer. He pauses, lowers the gun.

Suddenly, a horrified look on his face. He doubles over like he's been gutted. His knees buckle, and sends him to the ground. He sees a DRAGONFLY CHARM in the dirt, and howls a harrowing cry from the pit of his stomach.

JOHNNY RAY

No!

INT. MARSHALL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

SUPER: "SUMMER - 1875"

Pots and pans sprawled everywhere, cupboard doors open, broken plates scattered over the floor. Looks like someone's ransacked this place.

On the table, a chocolate cake and a warm loaf of homemade bread.

A DARK HAND snatches the loaf of bread, stuffs it in an old beat-up sack.

The hand belongs to --

JESSIE LEE, a lanky Colored man in his 30's, who looks like he's past due for a bath.

EXT. MARSHALL'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

MARSHALL, a 40 years-old shady looking White man, moves toward the house on horseback. He's got on a dusty brim, and totes a rifle.

Marshall gets off the horse, moves up the stairs, enters.

INT. MARSHALL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jessie Lee claws his dirty fingers into the chocolate cake, rips off a chunk, stuffs it in his mouth.

A RIFLE COCKS

CLICK

MARSHALL (O.S.)

What in hell's name is you doin',  
boy?

Jessie Lee spins around, sees Marshall and his rifle pointed at his head. He bolts towards Marshall, knocks him against the wall, and bursts out the door.

Marshall gathers himself, hurries after Jessie Lee.

EXT. MARSHALL'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jessie Lee's on the run, beat-up sack clutched in his hand, chocolate cake smeared on his month.

Marshall's fast behind Jessie Lee with his rifle drawn.

MARSHALL

I'll get your ass! You Black son-of-a-bitch!

Marshall fires a shot from the rifle.

POW!

The bullet skims past Jessie Lee, misses him by a hair.

Marshall fires another shot.

POW!

Damn. Missed again.

Jessie Lee makes a swift right, vanishes into the woods.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - DAY

Two White boys hover over a dead Coonhound on the side of the road.

The boys are --

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY, 10, curious and attentive. He's a skinny boy, in side-button boots, and his hair is tousled, but that's okay, it's always like this.

YOUNG BILLY is 10. He's a fearless know-it-all kid with a big ego, and everything about him says trouble.

Billy hacks up a chunk of mucus, spits it in the dead dog's eye, waits.

Nothing.

YOUNG BILLY

Yup, he's dead all right. Got hold to some of them poison berries.

Johnny Ray tilts his head, views the hound at an angle.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Wonder if he knows it?

Billy jabs the dog in the side with a stick.

YOUNG BILLY  
 He don't know nothin'. He just a  
 stupid ole hound. See?

He hands the stick over to Johnny Ray.

Johnny Ray taps the dog's nose with it.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
 Maybe he just dreamin'.

YOUNG BILLY  
 Nah, he ain't dreamin', he's in  
 heaven, dog heaven, not where real  
 folks go. They got nothin' to do  
 there 'cept chase rabbits and coons.  
 They don't eat'em, just chase'em.

Johnny Ray raises a brow.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
 Then what they eat?

Billy thinks about it.

YOUNG BILLY  
 (beat)  
 Chickens.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
 Chickens?

Billy nods.

YOUNG BILLY  
 They got lots of'em up there.  
 Everybody knows that.

They give the stiff hound a last look.

YOUNG BILLY  
 Come on.

The boys move off the road and duck inside the forest.

EXT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - DAY

A Southern paradise among a canopy of pines, evergreens, and  
 thick ferns.

An ancient looking moss-draped OAK TREE sets near the creek.

Johnny Ray catapults a rock from his slingshot at the bank  
 of the creek. He watches it sail 50 feet over the water  
 until it drops. PLOP!

He looks accomplished, turns to Billy.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
See that Billy?

Billy's not paying attention, he's too busy with a piece of twine and a small makeshift DOLL.

The doll is black-faced, with round white eyes, and wears rags for clothes.

Johnny Ray steals a look over Billy's shoulder.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
What you doin'?

Billy effortlessly curls the twine around the doll's neck, one, two, three times, then folds the bottom up, and over into a loop.

YOUNG BILLY  
Gonna do a hangin'.

Billy scales up the oak tree, flings the doll over a branch. Johnny Ray watches from below.

Billy beams down at him as the doll dangles in mid air.

YOUNG BILLY  
He's a dead Nigger now, ain't he?

Johnny Ray's not impressed, looks bored with Billy's antics.

Suddenly, thick grey clouds roll over the Sun, dims the day.

THUNDER

A light drizzling rain falls from the sky.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Come on down Billy, we best be gettin'  
home.

Billy smears rain from his forehead.

YOUNG BILLY  
You ain't afraid of a little rain is  
you?

THUNDER

HARD RAIN.

Finally, Billy slides down the tree, frowns up at the doll, nods.

YOUNG BILLY

Yup, that's one dead Nigger all right.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The boys spring from the trees, Billy's a few yards ahead.

Johnny Ray pauses, looks undecided.

Billy stops, turns to him, motions.

YOUNG BILLY

Come on!

He waits.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

I forgot somethin'.

Fine. No questions asked. Billy takes off down the road without him.

EXT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - MOMENTS LATER

AT THE OAK TREE --

Johnny Ray flicks open a JACKKNIFE, climbs up the tree, slices the noose from the black doll's neck.

AT THE CREEK --

Johnny Ray tosses the doll in the water, watches with apologetic eyes as the rain bobs it down stream.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - DAY

A dowel rail fence circles a beautiful Farmhouse nestled amidst the countryside.

There's a cypress swing on the porch, roses in full bloom in a garden, and a stable near the back of the house just big enough to house two horses.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

A young Colored girl with doe eyes and pigtails, moves down the hall with a bucket of water and a duster. She stops at a table decorated with elegant figurines, and feathers the duster over them.

This is GEORGIA BELLE, 10.

Down the hall, a door to a room is slightly open.

Georgia Belle turns her attention to the room, creeps down the hall toward it.

At the door, she peeks inside --

GEORGIA BELLE'S POV - INSIDE THE ROOM

BOOKS, hundreds of them, lined inside bookshelves in every corner of the room.

BACK TO SCENE

Georgia Belle cranes her neck, her eyes search the hall to make sure no one's watching.

She slips inside the room, disappears.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

A trail of small muddy shoe prints lead to --

INT. TURNER HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

More enchanting figurines on a fireplace mantel -- Angels, Ballerinas, and Swans.

A TINTYPE PHOTO on the wall, in it, an even younger Johnny Ray on the lap of a beautiful woman, whose face looks as fragile as the figurines on the mantle. At her side is a good looking Soldier.

More muddy shoe prints to --

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN (CONTINUOUS)

Where RHOEDY, a Colored woman of about 30, stands at a table peeling apples, and humming an old Negro Spiritual. She wears a head scarf and an apron.

Out of nowhere --

-- JOHNNY RAY blasts in, rams head first into Rhoedy's stomach, damn near knocks wind out of her.

He throws his lanky arms around her waist, embraces her with all his might.

Rhoedy laughs, peels him off her, steps back.

RHOEDY

Let's have a look atcha.

She looks him over, sees he's soggy with globs of mud on his side-button boots.



RHOEDY

You the feline outta water, ain't  
you?

Johnny Ray nods, smiles big, all teeth.

Rhoedy takes a towel from her apron, scrubs dirt from his  
cheeks.

Johnny Ray attempts to nab an apple from the table, but  
Rhoedy's fast, she slaps the back of his hand. Oh no you  
don't.

He draws his hand back quickly. Ouch!

Rhoedy looks him over again.

RHOEDY

Peel the skin clean off you, tryin'  
to shine you up.

Johnny Ray digs in his pocket.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Sure is pourin' somethin' mean out  
there, Aunt Rhoedy...

He brings forth a fist, opens it, reveals a slimy TREE FROG.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

But he don't mind none.

Rhoedy eyes the frog, humors Johnny Ray.

RHOEDY

Well, will ya look at that. Done  
found yoself the best padda yet.

She moves to the cupboard, brings down a mason jar.

RHOEDY

Chuck'im in here. This way, you can  
keep a good eye on'im.

Johnny Ray dumps the frog in the jar.

RHOEDY

Miss Caroline's bout on her way.  
Best be gettin' you like new.  
(calling)  
Georgy!

INT. TURNER HOUSE - STUDY - SAME TIME

RHOEDY (O.S.)

Georgy!

There's a gaping hole between two books on the shelf in the north corner of the room.

A pail of water, and feather duster on the floor next to a pedestal desk.

UNDER THE DESK --

Georgia Belle, legs folded, Indian style, reads OLIVER TWIST. Captivated, she doesn't answer.

RHOEDY (O.S.)

Georgy!

Finally, she turns her attention to Rhoedy's call, and crawls from under the desk.

She moves to the north corner bookshelf, slides Oliver Twist inside the gapping hole, and exits.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Georgia Belle enters.

RHOEDY

You done?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Yes'am.

Rhoedy hands her a stack of towels.

RHOEDY

See to Mista Johnny Ray. Child done made hisself a good mess. Miss Caroline's due for supper, and she'll be comin' 'round no time soon.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Yes'am.

EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - DAY

A cedar-wood shop with windows on either side, and a white awning over the porch with black words that read: Turner General Store.

Nothing else is here for a mile along North Shelbyville Road.



YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
Where'd he come from?

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Out from one of them trees down by  
the creek.

Johnny Ray marvels at the frog, taps the side of the jar  
with his knuckle. BINK BINK BINK.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
He's an amphibian, better give him  
some spiders, in case he gets hunger  
in there.

Johnny Ray smiles at her, as if to say, not bad for a girl.  
He fingers the small Dragonfly Charm.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Ever seen one of these?

Georgia Belle shakes her head no.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Here, you can have it. Best for a  
girl anyhow. Ain't too much a boy  
can do with it.

He hands over the charm.

RHOEDY (O.S.)  
Georgy!

Georgia Belle has a look at Johnny Ray's muddy boots,  
remembers.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
Mama says be gettin' cleaned up,  
'fore Miss Caroline come 'round.

She hurries to the door, pauses, tucks the Dragonfly Charm  
down in her boot, exits.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - DAY

A DOOR CLOSES.

The sound of FOOT STEPS near.

Caroline enters, drenched with rain. In her hands, two sticks  
of sugar cane and a wet envelope.

CAROLINE  
Aunt Rhoedy? Children?

Rhoedy enters.

CAROLINE  
Oh, Aunt Rhoedy dear, there you are.  
Where're the children?

Rhoedy slips off Caroline's shawl.

RHOEDY  
Round about. Ain't no tellin'.

Caroline COUGHS.

RHOEDY  
Best be gettin' you some more of  
that onion juice 'fore that ole cough  
get the best of you.

Caroline waves it off, hands Rhoedy the envelope.

CAROLINE  
Sold every single one of 'em. Folks  
can't get enough.

RHOEDY  
All six?

CAROLINE  
All six.

Rhoedy opens the envelope.

Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle move into the room, gather around  
Caroline. Everything is lively.

CAROLINE  
Evenin' children.

Johnny Ray holds up the jarred frog, shows it to Caroline.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
It's an amphibian.

He looks to Georgia Belle, they smile at each other.

CAROLINE  
And a fine one he is.

Caroline hands over the sticks of sugar cane, one to Johnny  
Ray, the other to Georgia Belle.

CAROLINE  
Don't have it all at once.

Rhoedy extends the envelope to Caroline.

RHOEDY

You keep it.

CAROLINE

(insulted)

Nonsense. I'll do no such thing.  
Your hands made those pies, not mine.  
Go on now, put that away.

Rhoedy hesitates, then tucks the envelope inside her apron's pocket.

CAROLINE

There now, all done.  
(beat)  
Got some of that tea ready?

RHOEDY

Fresh in the kettle.

Caroline looks to Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle, smiles, takes them by the hand.

CAROLINE

Come along children, I want to hear  
all about your day.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - DAY

As the sun sets, Rhoedy and Georgia Belle head South.

Georgia Belle limps a few feet behind.

Rhoedy turns to her, impatient.

RHOEDY

What's ailin' you child? Got yoself  
a peg leg?

Marshall, on a horse drawn wagon, comes down the road toward Rhoedy and Georgia Belle. He brings the horse to a stop when he reaches them.

MARSHALL

Y'all seen that Colored boy Jessie  
Lee?

RHOEDY

No'sah, Mista Marshall.

MARSHALL

He your neighbor ain't he?

RHOEDY

Yesah, but I ain't seen'im nowhere  
'round here.

MARSHALL

Where y'all headed?

RHOEDY

Day's done at Miss Caroline's. We  
on our way home now.

Marshall turns his attention to Georgia Belle, immoral intent  
in his eyes.

Rhoedy makes a connection, grabs Georgia Belle's hand, pulls  
her near.

A moment, while Marshall keeps his eyes on Georgia Belle.

MARSHALL

All right. Get on, before dark hits  
you, and tell that boy I'm lookin'  
for'im.

EXT. MILLER SAW MILL - DAY

COLORED LABORERS exit and move away from the Mill, each  
carrying tin lunch pails. Amongst them are COLE, EDDIE, and  
SAMSON, all around 30.

The tall, brawny fellow, with the pipe in his mouth is CALEB  
SKIES, Georgia Belle's father, 30's.

BOBBY MILLER, Billy's father, a serious looking White man,  
with a snow white beard and mustache, exits the Mill, moves  
to a horse drawn wagon.

Marshall moves past the Colored Laborers, looks them over as  
if in search of Jessie Lee.

He comes to Bobby.

MARSHALL

You still got that boy, Jessie Lee  
workin' here?

BOBBY

Turned him loose some time ago.  
What's your business with'im?

MARSHALL

He come on my property again. This  
time, helped hisself in my back door.

(MORE)

MARSHALL (CONT'D)

Caught that thievin' son-of-a-bitch red handed. He bust outta there like a wild bull when I aimed to put a bullet in his head.

BOBBY

They like oil when you don't keep your eyes on'em. Boy's got a reputation for takin' all his pockets can hold. You take it up with Tom?

MARSHALL

He's a lazy, no count Sheriff if I ever seen one. Doin' a fine job snorin' while them darkies runnin' rampant cross that creek. We cain't trust'im to keep the Law round here. Now, you gave your word you'd keep control of them Niggers.

BOBBY

(beat)

I'll see to it.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - NIGHT

A quiet village, shaped like a horseshoe, just outside of the forest. Log cabin homes, a small church, a peach orchard, and a corn field are all that's here.

INT. SKIES CABIN - VARIOUS ROOMS - NIGHT

An old butcher block table, three chairs, a cabinet, and a cast iron stove in the KITCHEN. A window over looks the front yard.

Two rustic rockers by a fire place in the SITTING ROOM. Curtains, that look like sheets, drape the windows.

INT. GEORGIA BELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Not much here except a rustic log bed, and books on the floor in a corner.

Georgia Belle takes off her boots, slides them under the bed.

Rhoedy stays at the doorway.

RHOEDY

How bout that leg, Georgy?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

It's all right.



RHOEDY

Good thing, cause I could use the help at Miss Caroline's again tomorrow.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

I don't mind. I like it there. You like it there too, Mama?

RHOEDY

I knowed them Turner's a good while. Ain't never been able to find nothin' not to like bout'em. Sho is hard to come cross folks like that now-a-days.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Sure is, Mama.

They share a smile.

RHOEDY

All right then, off you go.

Rhoedy exits the doorway.

Georgia Belle listens to the sound of RHOEDY'S FOOT STEPS until they fade away. Then --

--she digs in her sock, pulls out the Dragonfly Charm, and stashes it under her pillow.

EXT. SKIES CABIN - NIGHT

Caleb walks away from a well with a bucket of water, moves to the cabin.

Rhoedy sits on the porch in a rocker, mends a pair of trousers.

The sound of WAGON WHEELS over dirt.

Caleb looks over the road.

ON ROAD

Bobby creeps down the road on a horse drawn wagon.

BACK TO SCENE

CALEB

Never seen Mista round here this late in the evenin'.

Caleb and Rhoedy look on as Bobby rides through the village.

ON BOBBY

Bobby stops at a cabin, gets off the wagon, walks up to the door, knocks.

Moments later, Jessie Lee opens the door.

Bobby mouths something to him.

Jessie Lee nods, steps out of the cabin, follows Bobby to the wagon, gets in the back.

BACK TO SCENE

CALEB

That boy done gone, and got hisself  
in trouble again.

RHOEDY

Hope not, but if he did, that suits  
Mista just fine. He like fixin'  
trouble...give him somethin' to do.  
White folks been lookin' for'im.  
Mista Marshall wanna know if I  
seen'im, but that boy's hard to keep  
up with once he get cross that creek.  
No tellin' what he gettin' into.

CALEB

Stealin'. Takin' what don't belong  
to'im.

RHOEDY

I ain't never seen'im take nothin'  
from nobody.

CALEB

Don't mean he ain't.

RHOEDY

What we gone say if Mista come back  
askin' what we know?

Caleb moves up the steps, opens the door, turns to Rhoedy.

CALEB

Well Miss Rhoedy, if that boy's takin'  
anything from them White folks, you  
ain't gotta worry bout Mista comin'  
back round here tonight.

(beat)

And that boy either.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - STUDY - DAY

A pail of water, and feather duster on the floor by the pedestal desk. Oliver Twist is missing from the bookshelf.

UNDER THE DESK --

Georgia Belle, legs folded, Indian style, reads Oliver Twist.

Johnny Ray enters, moves to the desk, helps himself to a spice drop from a tin container.

Georgia Belle holds her breath, attempts to go unnoticed.

After a long pause --

Georgia Belle GASPS for air.

The sound grabs Johnny Ray's attention. He looks under the desk, discovers Georgia Belle. Their gaze lock.

Johnny Ray smiles at her.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Howdy Miss Georgia Belle. What you doin' down there?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

(whispering)

Nothin'.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

You got some readin' to do? What's it about?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

A little boy.

Johnny Ray slides under the desk, sits next to her, sneaks a peek at the book.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

What boy?

Georgia Belle's eyes widen, she responds as if she's letting him in on a big secret.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Oliver...Oliver Twist.

Her reaction lures Johnny Ray in.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

What happened to'im?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
Some bad folks came and took him  
away.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
What they do that for?

Georgia Belle thinks about it, smiles. She's got a better way to explain it all. She closes the book, reopens it to the beginning, and reads to him.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - DAY

The remains of a Sunday meal on the table. Fried catfish, collard greens, corn cakes, and sweet potatoes.

Three seated at the table: Georgia Belle, Caleb, and REVEREND JONAH, a Colored man of 60.

Rhoedy stands by Reverend Jonah, pours coffee in his tin cup, while he scoffs down the last bite of apple pie on his plate.

REVEREND JONAH  
Miss Rhoedy, I believe you just might  
be the finest cook in all of  
Shelbyville -- North and South.  
(to Caleb)  
Got yoself a fine woman.

Caleb reaches inside his shirt pocket, pulls out his pipe, slides it between his cheek, strikes fire to it.

CALEB  
Tried my best.

RHOEDY  
(of the pipe)  
Out with that Caleb.

Caleb removes the pipe from his mouth, stands.

CALEB  
(to Reverend Jonah)  
But she sho is paticler.

Reverend Jonah rises from the table, exits to the porch with Caleb.

Georgia Belle helps Rhoedy clear the table.

RHOEDY  
You got nothin' better to do? Ain't  
seen that ole nosey Willa round here  
lately.

Rhoedy gives Georgia Belle a tin of left over apple pie.

RHOEDY

Go on down and see bout her, and  
take this here to Aunt Lou.

EXT. WILLA'S CABIN - DAY

A chunky woman on the porch skins potatoes. This is GIN,  
30.

A mangy German Shepherd steals an afternoon snooze at Gin's  
feet.

Georgia Belle arrives at the porch, uncovered tin of left-  
over pie in hand.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Willa here?

Gin beckons Willa who's somewhere inside the cabin.

GIN

Willa, Georgia Belle's come to see  
bout you!

Her call jolts the mutt from his nap.

Gin eyes the pie.

GIN

What you got there?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Some of Mama's pie for Aunt Lou.

GIN

That's all she got?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Yes'am. Mista Reverend eat two shares  
of it.

Gin huffs, jealous.

GIN

Well tell your Mama, Miss Gin like  
pie too.

WILLA, a short plump girl, 10, steps out of the cabin.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Hey Willa, I'm goin' down by the Big  
House, you comin'?

Willa looks to Gin for approval.

Gin nods okay.

GIN

Don't y'all stray too far. And don't  
be carryin' on in them woods.

Willa comes down from the porch, walks away from the cabin with Georgia Belle.

EXT. AUNT LOU'S BIG HOUSE - DAY

A Log Cabin Inn, two stories with a balcony, and a bed of Azaleas on either side of the porch.

TWO DRIFTERS exit, all they own stuffed in potato sacks slung over their shoulders.

Willa and Georgia Belle spot them as they approach the Inn.

YOUNG WILLA

Aunt Lou's got new Travelin' Men.

The girls arrive at the Inn. Willa starts an inquisition straightaway.

YOUNG WILLA

Hey Mista, where y'all from?

DRIFTER 1 beams down at Willa.

DRIFTER 1

Marengo County. Long way from here.

YOUNG WILLA

How long?

DRIFTER 1

Oh, I reckon bout three days on foot.  
Yeah, that sounds bout right. Three  
days.

He takes a scroll from his potato sack, unrolls it, reveals a map, shows it to Willa and Georgia Belle.

DRIFTER 1

(pointing on map)  
Marengo County, right here...

He notes another place with his finger.

DRIFTER 1

...and we standin' right here.

Willa and Georgia Belle look over the map.

YOUNG WILLA  
Where y'all headed?

Drifter 1 slides his finger up the map.

DRIFTER 1  
Way up there. Take more than three  
days though.

Willa has a look at his worn boots.

YOUNG WILLA  
Them feets of yours sho gone be tired,  
Mista.

DRIFTER 1  
(laughing)  
Yeah, that's bout right too.

AUNT LOU, the village matriarch, moves onto the porch from inside the Inn. She's a strikingly beautiful Colored woman with long silver hair and doesn't look a day over 70, even though she is.

AUNT LOU  
Willa, you at my visitas again?

YOUNG WILLA  
(brutally honest)  
Yes'am. You got any youngens in  
there today?

AUNT LOU  
Ain't no youngens come round this  
week, but I reckon when they do,  
you'll have first hand at knowin',  
won't you?

Aunt Lou looks to Georgia Belle.

AUNT LOU  
That mine?

Georgia Belle moves up the stairs, hands the pie over to Aunt Lou.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
Reverend eat most of it, my share  
too. Don't think the wind blew no  
dirt in it long the way.

AUNT LOU

Don't matter none, it'll all go down  
just the same. I got somethin' for  
you.

Aunt Lou disappears inside the Inn, returns moments later  
with a weathered book, gives it to Georgia Belle.

AUNT LOU

Had a fella come through here some  
time ago, headin' north. Said he  
was behind brick walls pretty near  
five years, down in Florida, and had  
nothin' else to do but read this  
here. He took off without it, and  
never came at it. Reckon he figured  
he done did all the readin' a man  
can do, all that time straight.

Georgia Belle flips through a few pages, looks up at Aunt  
Lou, smiles.

AUNT LOU

Seems you might wanna be a Teacher  
on of these days. Make sure and  
tell them youngens bout all them  
places them words done took you.

Aunt Lou turns her attention to --

SARAH, Jessie Lee's wife, 20, who comes to the porch, and  
give Aunt Lou a troubled look.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - DAY

Early morning. Rhoedy sets a plate of corn cakes on the  
table.

Georgia Belle enters from her bedroom, sluggish, and sleepy  
eyed.

RHOEDY

Mornin'.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Mornin' Mama.

Caleb enters from outside, sets a bucket of fresh water on  
the table.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Mornin' Daddy.

Caleb rubs Georgia Belle's head, gives her a wink, smiles.



CALEB

Mornin' to you too, Miss Georgy.

A DOG BARKS outside.

Rhoedy goes to the window, looks out.

RHOEDY

Here come nosey Willa with that ole mangy dog.

Rhoedy sticks her head out the window.

EXT. SKIES CABIN - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Willa's crippled German Shepherd hobbles behind her as she moves onto the yard.

RHOEDY

Where you headed this early in the mornin'?

YOUNG WILLA

Come to tell you Miss Sarah's Jessie Lee ain't been home in two days.

RHOEDY

What you know bout Miss Sarah's business? She told you?

YOUNG WILLA

No Ma'am. Heard her tellin' Aunt Lou. Said Mista come in the night, and took off with'im. Ain't seen'im since.

RHOEDY

You sho hear a lot about what's goin' on round here. Gin know you snoopin'?

YOUNG WILLA

I ain't been snoopin' Miss Rhoedy. Seems like folks be talkin' loud 'nuff for me to hear, is all.

Rhoedy eyes Willa, unconvinced.

RHOEDY

Well, come on in, get yoself some of these cakes. Stand out there much longer, you bound to hear somethin' else you ain't 'spose to.

(beat)

And leave that ole scabby mutt outside.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

SHERIFF TOM, a lazy, pot-gut White man, with Bull Dog cheeks, leans back in a chair, with his dusty boots cocked up on a desk as he reads a newspaper.

Cole, Eddy, and Samson enter.

Sheriff Tom peeks over the newspaper, then goes back to reading.

SHERIFF TOM (V.O.)

What can I do you boys for?

Samson steps forward, removes his hat.

SAMSON

We come to talk to you bout Jessie Lee, Sir.

SHERIFF TOM (V.O.)

What about 'im?

SAMSON

Ain't seen him for a spell, and wanna know if you'd put out a search for 'im.

SHERIFF TOM (V.O.)

What you call a spell?

SAMSON

Two, maybe three days --

Eddy nods.

EDDY

Two guaranteed.

Tom lowers the paper, waves it off.

SHERIFF TOM

Maybe he found hisself a pretty little Colored girl, and run off with her.

COLE

Wouldn't be in his nature to do such a thing, Mista Sheriff.

Tom moves his feet off the desk, lays down the paper, leans forward, smirks.

SHERIFF TOM

I wouldn't be too hasty to say what is, or isn't in a man's nature, when it comes to a woman.

SAMSON

His Miss Sarah say he never come  
back once he took off with Mista  
Bobby.

Sheriff Tom raises a brow.

SHERIFF TOM

Bobby Miller?

Samson eyes Cole with a seized expression. Too late to take  
it back.

Sheriff Tom stands, moves from behind the desk, stands face  
to face with Samson.

SHERIFF TOM

(intimidating)

Sounds like you tellin' me Bobby's  
got somethin' to do with your  
neighbor's predicament. Is that  
right?

Tom waits for Samson to confirm.

Samson doesn't respond.

Tom returns to the desk, sits, flips open the paper,  
disappears behind it.

SHERIFF TOM (V.O.)

Well now, see? It's all a  
misunderstandin'. Nothin' to worry  
about. Y'all go on back home, tell  
everybody Jessie Lee'll turn up soon  
enough.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Cole, Eddy, and Samson comb the woods in search of Jessie  
Lee, each with flickering lanterns that look like glowing  
fireflies in the dark.

They call out for him, one after the other.

COLE

Jessie!

EDDY

Jessie Lee!

SAMSON

Jessie!

INT. MILLER HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Bobby pours whiskey in a tumbler, hands it over to Sheriff Tom.

Sheriff Tom throws back the liquor in one gulp, hands the empty glass back to Bobby.

SHERIFF TOM

Them Colored boys come over from South Shelby wantin' a searchin' party put out on Jessie Lee. Said he come up missin' three days ago.

BOBBY

Most of 'em seem to be headin' north these days -- New York, that's the talk.

SHERIFF TOM

Would of been neighborly of him to make mention of it, you reckon?

There's a 12 GUN CABINET RACK next to a liquor cart across the room. Inside, an assortment of firearms, 11 total.

Sheriff Tom motions toward the cabinet.

SHERIFF TOM

Got yourself a good lookin' collection. One of the finest I've seen in a long time.

He moves to the cabinet, marvels at an ancient musket.

SHERIFF TOM

Charleville --

BOBBY

Seventeen sixty-three. The great American Outlaw.

SHERIFF TOM

Made way for the Springfield.

BOBBY

(beat)  
Springfield.

Sheriff Tom turns to Bobby, smiles, then goes back to marveling at the musket.

SHERIFF TOM

Gotta admire a man who knows his history.

His eyes move to the BARE RACK.

SHERIFF TOM  
You do any huntin'?

BOBBY  
Turks mostly. Can't get the wife to  
enjoy a little wild hog, no matter  
how we get Annie to cook'em up.

SHERIFF TOM  
You fool around with any of'em lately?  
I see you got one missin' here.

He turns to Bobby, waits.

BOBBY  
Damn thing keeps lockin' up on me.  
Got it in the shed. You wanna come  
have a look at it?

Tom thinks about it.

SHERIFF TOM  
I'd be obliged to, but I've gotta  
get goin'. Meetin' some friends in  
town for a round or two of Loo.  
Perhaps some other time.

He moves to the doorway, Bobby follows.

Sheriff Tom pauses, turns to Bobby.

SHERIFF TOM  
I know sometimes folks over South  
like to run loose every now and then,  
but I'm the Law round here, and I  
don't need a stock of Niggras gettin'  
riled up, figurin' somethin's happened  
to one of their own. Now, if you  
know anything about that boy's  
whereabouts Bobby, you best be makin'  
it real clear.

Bobby stares Tom square in the eyes.

BOBBY  
(beat)  
Ain't seen him.

INT. MILLER SHED - NIGHT

All types of firearms mounted on the wall, musket rifles,  
double barrel shotguns, pistols. Thick ropes and chains  
hang from the ceiling.

Johnny Ray stays next to Billy, who holds up a burning lantern.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Maybe we should turn'im loose, and send him back where he come from.

YOUNG BILLY

Ain't nobody never told you they eat folks? We do that, he'll have us for supper.

Billy searches the floor, uses the burning lantern to see his way.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

What you lookin' for?

Billy picks up a rock, pelts it at --

-- Jessie Lee, who's crouched in a corner, hands and feet bound, filthy rag stuffed in his mouth. Blood streams from a hole in his head, and his eyes are nearly swollen shut.

Bobby enters, noose in one hand, a rifle in the other, perhaps the one missing from his rifle cabinet. He moves to Billy, hands him the noose.

Billy looks up at Bobby, excited.

YOUNG BILLY

We gonna hang'im now, Daddy?

Bobby moves to Jessie Lee with the rifle, strikes him over the head with it, one, two, three. Blood splatters on the wall after each blow.

Johnny Ray looks sea sick, doubles over, pukes on his boots.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Georgia Belle polishes silverware by the window. She glances out every now and then, to get a glimpse of Johnny Ray as he pelts rocks at sparrows with a slingshot.

Rhoedy mumbles something unintelligible as she rolls dough for biscuits at the table nearby.

RHOEDY

...be flat as a hoecake. Lordy mercy.  
(to Georgia Belle)  
You hear me child?

Georgia Belle doesn't answer, the sight of Johnny Ray on the other side of the window consumes everything around her.

RHOEDY

Georgy?

Georgia Belle finally turns her attention to Rhoedy.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Yes'am?

RHOEDY

Go down and see Miss Caroline. Tell her to send some flour, else she'll be eatin' stone cobbler come supper.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - DAY

Georgia Belle walks away from the house toward the road. Johnny Ray's on her heels.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Where you goin'?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

To see Miss Caroline.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

I know a secret way. Want me to show you?

INT. WOODS - DAY

Georgia Belle follows Johnny Ray down a leafy path.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

I know lots of secret places in this forest. We'll come out the back way when we get to Mama. Ain't easy to get lost in here, if you try it a few times.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

You ever come cross any bears?

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Ain't never seen no bears here, but they're deer runnin' round here all the time. They ain't lookin' to eat nobody, think they just wanna get to the other side -- like where you from.

Johnny Ray disappears into an underbrush.

Georgia Belle is suddenly alone on the path, her eyes search for Johnny Ray among the trees.

Moments later Johnny Ray reemerges, extends his hand to her.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Come on.

Georgia Belle puts her hands in his, and he guides her into the underbrush.

EXT. SOUTH END OF THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle come out from the underbrush.

A DEER bolts from a foliage of ferns, dashes down a path, disappears beyond the trees. Johnny Ray gives Georgia Belle an I Told You, look.

EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - DAY

CHILDREN play tag and marbles in front of the shop.

Georgia Belle exits with a small sack of flour, Johnny Ray's behind her.

TOBY, a mean looking White kid, 10, eyes Georgia Belle and Johnny Ray.

TOBY

That your Nigger Keeper Johnny Ray?

Johnny Ray ignores Toby, moves past him.

Toby sticks out his foot, trips Georgia Belle, sends her to the ground. The sack of flour lands at Johnny Ray's feet, he picks it up.

Just as Georgia Belle moves to lift herself off the ground, Toby kicks dirt in her face.

He employs the other children.

TOBY

Hey look, here's Johnny Ray's Nigger Keeper.

Georgia Belle comes to her feet, wipes dirt from her eyes.

The children laugh, circle her, chant:

CHILDREN

Nigger Keeper, Nigger Keeper, Nigger Keeper.

Johnny Ray looks on. He could defend her, but he won't, even though it looks like he wants to.



INT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - SAME TIME

As Caroline stocks marmalade on a shelf --

CHILDREN (O.S.)  
Nigger Keeper, Nigger Keeper, Nigger  
Keeper.

She turns her attention to the sound of children outside.  
Curious, she goes to the window, looks out.

EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Caroline exits, hurries off the porch, breaks up the ruckus.

CAROLINE  
(stunned)  
Children, children, what is this?

Silence falls upon the children, no one answers.

CAROLINE  
Where're your manners?

She looks them over.

CAROLINE  
Go on now, each of you. Go on home  
and tell your folks how you misbehaved  
down by Miss Caroline's store today.

CHILDREN  
Yes'am.

The children hang their heads in shame as they move away  
from the shop.

TOBY throws Johnny Ray a dirty look that says I'm Gonna Kick  
Your Ass, as he moves away from the shop with the children.

INT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - BACK ROOM - DAY

Caroline wipes dirt from Georgia Belle's face with a wet  
cloth. Johnny Ray watches.

Caroline extends Georgia Belle's hands.

CAROLINE  
You see these hands Georgia Belle?

Georgia Belle examines her hands, not sure what to look for.

CAROLINE  
Do you?

Georgia Belle nods yes.

CAROLINE

(stern)

Listen to me. It don't make no difference. No matter what anybody tells you, you belong right here where the good Lord put you. Whatever folks say, it don't mean nothin', you hear?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Yes'am.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Caleb looks down the barrel of a hunting rifle, aims at an unsuspecting raccoon in a bush. He fires, misses, the coon scurries off, lives another day.

Caleb moves down a slop.

LEAVES RUSTLING.

He stops, listens, waits.

Nothing.

He picks up his pace again, hears more STIRRING, lifts the rifle, aims in the direction of the sound.

MOVEMENT BEHIND A BUSH.

Caleb creeps toward the bush, fingers the trigger.

AT THE BUSH --

He smooths out the branches with the barrel of the rifle, sees --

-- A BUZZARD, feasting on --

-- Jessie Lee, who's on the ground, noose around his neck, beaten beyond recognition.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - CHURCH - NIGHT

Cole, Samson, and Eddy head toward the woods with burning lanterns. Caleb meets them as he comes out from the trees.

Caleb looks hopeless, shakes his head, points to a wooded pathway.

Sarah moves in them, looks to Caleb.

Caleb mouths, I'm Sorry, to Sarah.

Sarah shakes her head, throws her hands over her ears, falls to the ground.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Tom steals a nap. He's got his dusty boots kicked up on the desk, head leaned back, mouth wide open.

Caleb, Cole, Samsom, and Eddy enter. Grief stricken Sarah with them.

Tom comes to, sluggish, peeks out of one eye.

SHERIFF TOM  
What can I do y'all for?

COLE  
We found Jessie Lee, Sir.

SHERIFF TOM  
Good, told you he'd turn up. They always do.

CALEB  
I come up on him, North -- tail end of the woods.

Sheriff Tom sits up, attentive now.

SHERIFF TOM  
That there's private property. Belongs to the Miller's. What's he doin' over there?

Cole motions toward Sarah.

COLE  
This here be his Miss Sarah.

Clearly distraught, Sarah can hardly speak.

SARAH  
You...you gonna find who killed my Jessie Lee?

SHERIFF TOM  
(on his feet, defensive)  
Killed him? Hold on, nobody said nothin' 'bout that boy being killed --

EDDY  
Well, weez tellin' you now.

CALEB

Ain't never no possibility a man  
splittin' his own head in two --

SHERIFF TOM

Now wait a goddamn minute --

Bobby enters from outside, closes the door behind him. A  
speak of the devil moment as all cast a knowing look upon  
him.

SHERIFF TOM

Bobby, we got ourselves a situation.

INT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CHURCH - DAY

Hysteria in this place.

An angry mob of COLORED MEN, pump their fists, and hold up  
shotguns.

Seething voices on top of each other.

Reverend Jonah stands before them at a podium.

REVEREND JONAH

Now we cain't just take matters into  
our own hands. Think about what you  
aimin' to do.

COLE

"An eye for an eye." Ain't that  
what the Good Book say?

The statement causes and uproar. All agree, save for --

REVEREND JONAH

Wait...wait. Mista gave his word.  
Said he'd find who did this to Jessie  
Lee, so I say we go back home, and  
wait to see what he comes up with.

Cole turns to the Colored Men, mockery in his tone.

COLE

That's right, let's get on, leave it  
be, and wait for Mista to turn hisself  
over to the law.

(to Reverend Jonah)

If you believe Mista and the words  
outta his mouth, you a fool ole man.

REVEREND JONAH

Everybody knows that boy was a thief --

EDDY

That don't make it right.

SAMSON

You sayin' he got what was comin'  
to'im?

REVEREND JONAH

God in Heaven said it hisself, "Thou shall not steal." Now, what we need to do is pray 'bout this. Don't you see this is God testin' us? If we go cross that creek makin' trouble, we good as failed. Where's your faith?

Cole holds up a shotgun.

COLE

Right here!

Another UPROAR.

REVEREND JONAH

Caleb...Caleb, you a sound man,  
tell'em it ain't right to take one  
man's life for another.

All eyes on Caleb.

CALEB

(beat)

I reckon that might be Reverend, but  
Mista ain't no man, he the Devil  
walkin'.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CHURCH - SAME TIME

Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle on top of wooden crates at the window. With their chins barely touching the ledge, they spy on the rally inside.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

They sure look good and sore in there.

A penny size HOLE in a plank of wood beneath the window. Georgia Belle puts her ear to it, listens.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

What they sayin'?

INT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CHURCH - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

COLE

Times-a-wastin' Reverend. Won't be long before Mista make up his mind to come at another one of us. Now either we gonna keep standin' here talkin' or move out and get-ta fightin'

REVEREND JONAH

We don't know for sho he did it. Ain't no proof.

COLE

Caleb found him graveyard dead on Miller's property. Ain't that proof?

Cole turns to the others.

COLE

Now listen here, them White folks cross that creek ain't no friends of mine, and they ain't to none of you either...

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CHURCH - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Georgia Belle with her ear to the hole in the plank of wood hears...

COLE (V.O.)

...they never was and ain't never gone be.

Johnny Ray presses his ear to the wood, attempts to make out Cole's muffled voice.

An OLD COLORED MAN, with one eye and a limp, appears from behind the church, catches Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle eavesdropping.

OLD COLORED MAN

Hey, what y'all churin doin'? Get on from round here. Get!

In an instant, Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle leap off the wooden crates, take off running from the site and into the --

CORNFIELD

-- where they race down an aisle of tall corn stalks.

Johnny Ray stops, catches his breath, too winded to go any further.

Georgia Belle stops alongside him, not because she's tired too, but out of courtesy.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
You sure is fast for a girl.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
Don't matter nohow. Most everybody's faster than that Jasper. He's only got one leg.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
What happened to the other one?

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE  
His Daddy came down on it with an ax when he was a baby. Said God told him to do it. But I think sometimes folks think about doin' the Devil's work in their heads anyway.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Maybe the Devil's back yonder, got all them folks hitchin' up they guns. Who they lookin' to fetch?

YOUNG GEORGA BELLE  
They think some White folks cross the creek killed Miss Sarah's Jessie Lee.

A moment while Johnny Ray looks like he's harboring secrets.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Maybe he did somethin' real bad, and they didn't want to be his friends no more.

YOUNG GEORGA BELLE  
Mista Cole says there's no such thing as Coloreds and Whites being friends.

Johnny Ray thinks it over.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
You reckon that's true?

Georgia Belle looks undecided.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
Well...you and me, we friends, ain't we?

Georgia Belle takes a moment, then smiles, nods yes.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Well then, I 'spose Mista Cole just  
wrong bout all that.

EXT. SKIES SHED - NIGHT

Caleb exits the shed.

Cole tramples near on horseback. He's got a leather sack  
strapped across his shoulder, with, what looks like, a  
makeshift rod, sticking out of it.

He passes Caleb, they eye each other, intense and knowingly.

Cole nods at Caleb.

Caleb nods back.

EXT. LUMBER YARD - NIGHT

A furious fire. Hell on earth. Every inch of this wooden  
structure engulfed in flames.

Marshall, with Five White Men, work vigorously to contain  
the blaze. They pass buckets of water down a line to each  
other, douse the flames, yell profanities.

Sheriff Tom and Bobby look on from a distance.

SHERIFF TOM

Bobby, I think you got yourself a  
war.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - DAY

Total pandemonium.

Bobby, Marshall, Sheriff Tom, and Three White Men with  
shotguns on horseback, escort a band of Colored Laborers  
down the road, like a herd of cattle.

On one side of the road, a parade of WHITE SPECTATORS. On  
the other side, COLOREDS.

White Spectators heckle racial slurs, obscenities, and throw  
stones at the Colored Laborers, as they move down the road.

Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle, on respective ends, look on  
amidst the convoy.

They catch a glimpse of each other as they shuffle through  
the chaos. The sense of imposed separation when their eyes  
meet.

Marshall, on Eddy's heels, shoves him in the back.



MARSHALL

Move it, boy.

Eddy stumbles, falls to the ground. Marshall snatches him up by the collar, thrusts him forward.

EXT. NORTH AND SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CROSSROADS - MOMENTS LATER

The mass exodus comes to a halt where North Shelbyville Road turns into South Shelbyville Road.

Sheriff Tom moves to a tree, motions to Caleb.

Marshall clutches the back of Caleb's neck, guilds him to Tom.

Tom hands Caleb a hammer and a SIGN.

SHERIFF TOM

Hang it.

Caleb doesn't move, only stands there, looks harassed.

SHERIFF TOM

You hear me, boy?

Caleb, lips tight, jaw stiff, eyes Tom.

Tom looks to Marshall.

Marshall pulls a pistol, points it at Caleb's head, cocks it's. CLICK.

SHERIFF TOM

Coloreds settin' fires to property  
that don't belong to'em, is punishable  
by hangin'. You gonna tell me which  
one of your friends here burn down  
that lumber yard?

Caleb turns to the Colored Laborers. His eyes move over --

EDDY, then --

SAMSON, then --

COLE

BACK TO SCENE

Caleb turns back to Tom. No answer.

SHERIFF TOM

I didn't think you would.  
(MORE)

SHERIFF TOM (CONT'D)

Now if you want to be makin' it real  
easy on yourself, and the rest of  
these Niggras, hang it.

A moment as Caleb looks over the Colored Onlookers. Amongst  
them he sees --

-- Georgia Belle, who gazes up at him, disheartened.

Humiliation in Caleb's expression, as though he's been reduced  
to a fraction of a man.

Reluctant, Caleb nails the sign to the tree.

ON SIGN

NO COLOREDS AFTER SUNDOWN

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - DAY

Rhoedy sets a pitcher of tea outside on the window ledge  
from inside the kitchen.

Caroline takes sheets from a clothesline, folds them, puts  
them in a basket.

RHOEDY

(to herself)

Dag nabbit her hide. That woman's  
got a head like a sack of bricks.

She rebukes Caroline, bellows out the window.

RHOEDY

Lordy mercy. Miss Caroline, get on  
in this house. What business you  
got out there?

Caroline looks ghost white. She wipes sweat from her brow  
with the back of her hand, COUGHS, forces a smile.

CAROLINE

Got some of that tea ready, Aunt  
Rhoedy?

RHOEDY

Aunt Rhoedy got all the tea you want,  
but you won't be tastin' any, less  
you get on in here.

Caroline tucks a sheet under her arm, takes a couple of steps  
toward the house, wobbles.

RHOEDY  
 (worried)  
 Miss Caroline?

Johnny Ray skips past Caroline, aims a stick at a phantom thief, pretends to pull a trigger.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
 Pow! Pow!

Georgia Belle plucks thorny roses in a garden nearby, all the while keeping her eyes on Caroline.

So much going on at once now.

RHOEDY  
 Miss Caroline? You hear me?

Rhoedy accidentally tips over the jar of tea, sends it slamming to the ground from the window ledge. Glass and tea shatters everywhere.

Johnny Ray bustles past Caroline again, aims the makeshift pistol at his imaginary enemy.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY  
 Pow! Pow!

Georgia Belle grabs the stem of a rose, pricks her finger on a thorn, still, she keeps her eyes on Caroline, doesn't realize BLOOD is on her finger tip.

Caroline staggers toward the house, pauses, coughs up BLOOD.

Everything is spinning until --

Caroline falls to the ground, unconscious.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - CAROLINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Caroline reads a letter as Rhoedy rambles and adjusts a pillow under her head.

RHOEDY  
 Doctor Monroe says you need to stay put. No more round about, and carryin' on. You got them Coal Miners lungs. Lordy mercy, ain't never heard such a thing. Reckon that'd be just fine if you was one of them fellas.

Caroline's eyes on the letter, responds to Rhoedy.

CAROLINE

Stranger things have happened, but  
the God Lord ain't ready to call me  
home just yet.

RHOEDY

That's right. Cause Heaven's a  
restin' place. Ain't no busyin'  
round up there, and you sho is  
somethin' busy.

Caroline eyes move over the letter.

CAROLINE

Aunt Rhoedy, prepare the guest room.  
Gracie's comin'.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - DAY

GRACE, Caroline's sister, who's wearing a peacock looking  
hat, prances down the walkway. She's dressed in the latest  
fashion, and has a presence that demands attention.

WILLIAM, Grace's husband, can barely keep up with her. He  
trails behind, hauls three suitcases, one under his arm, the  
others in each hand.

GRACE

(with authority)  
Come along Will.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Caroline, Johnny Ray, and Grace finishing supper.

Grace pats the side of her mouth with a napkin, and does so  
with an elegance that says she's of a higher class than her  
widowed sister.

GRACE

My, what a wonderful meal. I'd have  
seconds, if I thought I could eat  
another bite.

CAROLINE

But you must have some of Aunt  
Rhoedy's apple pie. She's made quite  
a name for herself, with her special  
recipe. Folks come for all over  
just to get their fair share.

GRACE

Sounds delightful. She'll have to  
make one for my trip home.

Grace looks to Johnny Ray, flashes a smile.

GRACE

You're comin' up like weeds Johnny Ray. Such a big boy now, aren't you?

Johnny Ray's eyes light up.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

Just like my daddy. Mama says I'll be as tall as him one day.

Grace slides a book across the table to Johnny Ray.

GRACE

A present for you. The Adventures Of James Hannah. He wrote these stories when he was a young boy -- not much older than yourself.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

I know him. Miss Georgia Belle reads his stories to me all the time.

Grace suddenly looks bewildered.

GRACE

Is that so?

Johnny Ray nods, no big deal.

YOUNG JOHNNY RAY

She's gonna be a Teacher when she grows up.

GRACE

Why, that's simply unheard of. A little Niggra girl readin' to a White child, and certainly not acceptable -- to say the least.

CAROLINE

The girl is smart beyond her years --

GRACE

(outraged)

Impossible.

(to Johnny Ray)

And you mustn't ever tell anyone that again.

A moment while Grace collects her thoughts. She smiles. This woman's emotions are unpredictable.

GRACE

What the boy needs is a proper education -- the best money can buy. Had I children of my own, that's what I'd do.

She reaches across the table, pats Johnny Ray on the hand.

Johnny Ray doesn't understand any of it.

GRACE

(on her feet)

I'll be turning down now, and seeing to William. He's still quite tired from our trip.

Grace moves to the stair case.

GRACE

(to Caroline, moving up the stairs)

Oh, is the Niggra still here? Have her fetch me some sweet tea.

CAROLINE

She's gone for the evenin'. No Coloreds in town after sunset.

Grace pauses, thinks it over.

GRACE

Rightfully so. One can never be too safe. Good night.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - YARD - DAY

Johnny Ray holds a suitcase that looks too heavy for his small frame.

Caroline kneels, smooths out his collar.

CAROLINE

Mind your Aunt Gracie. Get yourself some good schoolin', and study hard.

Rhoedy, Georgia Belle, Billy, and Grace look on. William stays by a horse drawn carriage.

Billy steps to Johnny Ray, hands him a small sack of marbles.

YOUNG BILLY

Most of'em I got just the same. I couldn't figure which one's to keep, so you take'em -- just in case you loose yours on the way.

Grace takes Johnny Ray's hand.

GRACE  
(to Caroline)  
I'll take care of him, as if he were  
my own.

Caroline tries to smile, its a weak one, with a hint of regret.

GRACE  
Come along Johnny Ray.

Grace leads him down the walkway toward William and the carriage.

Johnny Ray looks over his shoulder, as though to have a last look at his loved ones.

Suddenly, he drops the suitcase, yanks his hand from Grace, escapes to Rhoedy. He throws his arms around her waist, embraces her with all his might.

Rhoedy tries to keep the tears from coming. She's all choked up.

A moment while they embrace.

Johnny Ray releases Rhoedy, follows Grace to the carriage, climbs inside.

As the carriage takes off --

-- Georgia Belle follows, first walking, then picking up speed.

Johnny Ray's melancholy eyes meets hers, as he watches from the carriage.

Dust rises everywhere, engulfs Georgia Belle as the carriage moves down the road.

Johnny Ray can barely see Georgia Belle through the debris. His eyes search for her. Soon, she becomes nothing more than a figure in the distance. This is goodbye.

INT. SKIES CABIN - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhoedy sits in a rocker by the fireplace, hems a dress.

Georgia Belle's at the threshold, lingers quietly.

RHOEDY

What you doin' round about this late  
in the evenin'? Cain't sleep?

(beat)

Well, come on in. Sit yoself down.  
I could use the company.

Georgia Belle moves into the room, sits at Rhoedy's feet.

RHOEDY

Nearly done with this here dress of  
yours. You'll be needin' another  
one soon, cause you just growin' up  
so fast.

Georgia Belle hums a soothing melody.

Rhoedy smiles.

RHOEDY

You always did like that one. I  
used to sing it to you, and Mista  
Johnny Ray when y'all didn't even  
knowed you was in the world. Lil-  
bitty things. Sweet as the Lords  
Angels -- that's what Miss Caroline  
used to say y'all was. Ain't never  
had no trouble lookin' afta both of  
you. Reckon the good Lord say he  
gone spare me from havin' to bring  
up some wretched youngens, who don't  
mind nobody.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

Mama? You think he ever comin' back?

RHOEDY

Mista Johnny Ray? Hope so. Sho  
would miss him if he didn't. Miss  
Caroline say since he been gone,  
it's mighty quiet round there. I  
reckon it ain't nothin' she use to.  
No more of him runnin' round with  
them critters he done scouted from  
them woods. I 'spose a woman would  
miss all that, if that's all she  
ever knowed.

YOUNG GEORGIA BELLE

How long it take to forget somebody  
after they go away?

RHOEDY

Depends.

(MORE)



RHOEDY (CONT'D)

One thing's for sho, if you carry  
that person round, close to your  
heart, you'll never forget'em.

INT. GEORGIA BELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Georgia Belle lays in bed, fist balled tight to her chest. Her eyelids grow heavy, too heavy for her to stay awake. She drifts off to sleep. Her fist relaxes, unfolds, and exposes the --

DRAGONFLY CHARM.

EXT. CHATHAM COUNTY - DAY

A breathtaking backdrop of the country. Wet-lands, vibrant grass fields, and radiant green forests for miles and miles.

EXT. GRACE'S PLANTATION - DAY

An aisle of moss draped oak trees, shade a walkway to --

EXT. GRACE'S - MANSION - DAY

A meticulous manicured lawn, half an acre in size.

On this lawn, a Royal Chateau, brilliant white, with stone columns, and oval windows. There's a COLORED WOMAN, dressed in a head scarf and apron, watering a potted plant on the porch, while a COLORED MAN trims hedges along the house.

INT. GRACE'S PLANTATION - STABLE - NIGHT

Dark, and desolate, hay straw all over the place. Everything here reeks of horse shit.

Johnny Ray lays on a bed of hay, dirt's smeared on his face, and he's shivering from the night's cool breeze.

Grace enters, looks wicked, flings a pair of filthy beat-up overalls to him.

GRACE

There's plenty to be done around  
here. You'll tend to the cotton  
field with the Sharecroppers come  
sun up.

She turns on her heels, exits.

EXT. AUNT LOU'S BIG HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "1885"

WOOD, 30, a good looking Colored man, who's well built, removes furrowed logs from the Inn's structure and replaces them with new ones.

FOUR COLORED WOMEN, with sandwiches, and cold lemonade, vie for Wood's attention, as he works in the scorching sun. They look on him with flirtatious eyes as they offer him food and drink.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - DAY

WILLA, now 20, and still chubby, enters from outside. She fans herself with a scarf, sits down at the table.

WILLA

Been livin' here all my life. You'd think I'd be used to all this heat by now.

GEORGIA BELLE, whose blossomed into a beautiful woman, pulls a money filled mason jar from the cupboard, puts two bills inside, replaces it.

GEORGIA BELLE

See you gettin' your complainin' in early Willa. Not waitin' till noon?

Georgia Belle moves to the table, wraps a scarf around her head, adjusts a DRAGONFLY CHARM around her neck.

WILLA

Think I'll marry myself one of them boys from up north. Take me to Chicago come Winter.  
(teasing)  
I'll write and tell you all about it.

GEORGIA BELLE

Uh uh, I know. You'll get there and complain about the cold. You won't be satisfied.

Willa eyes a BLACK BOOK on the table, thumbs through the pages.

WILLA

They got schools up there -- big ones. You should see bout gettin' yoself one of them teachin' jobs.

Georgia Belle sits, strings on boots.

GEORGIA BELLE

Folks movin' round like ants up there,  
got no time for nobody but themselves.  
No thanks, I'll stay put.

WILLA

Texas might be nice, cept it's hot  
there too. Aunt Lou's got a Travelin'  
Man over there now. Says he's goin'  
to get hisself some land over there.  
(smiling)  
He sho is fine.

GEORGIA BELLE

You been stickin' your nose in that  
man's business? How you know what  
he got?

WILLA

It ain't nothin' he ain't done already  
told Aunt Lou. She told me, so now  
I'm tellin' you.

Georgia Belle takes the book from Willa, shakes her head at her.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - DAY

Lots going on in the village today. Colored folks gardening,  
grooming horses, washing clothes.

Georgia Belle and Willa walk through the village, wave and  
greet neighbors as they pass.

Sarah sits on the porch, rocks back and forth, talks to  
herself, looks delirious.

Georgia Belle waves to her.

GEORGIA BELLE

Afternoon Miss Sarah.

Sarah rambles something unintelligible.

WILLA

Woman ain't been right in the head  
since her Jessie Lee gone. Reckon  
she just sit there all day, waitin'  
to see how long it's gone be, till  
somebody have pity on her, and put  
her out of her misery too.

They move past Sarah's cabin, walk toward --

EXT. AUNT LOU'S BIG HOUSE - DAY

Where the Four Colored Women linger around Wood, flash, and bat flirtation eyes at him.

Aunt Lou steps out of the Inn onto the porch as --

Georgia Belle and Willa arrive.

Wood turns his attention to Georgia Belle as she moves up the stairs.

She hands Aunt Lou the black book.

AUNT LOU  
You finish already?

GEORGIA BELLE  
Couldn't put it down. I stayed up  
all night with it.

Georgia Belle catches a glimpse of Wood. He throws her a soft smile. She looks away, uninterested.

AUNT LOU  
Got one more for you.

Aunt Lou disappears inside the Inn, Georgia Belle waits, Wood keeps his eyes on her.

Moments later, Aunt Lou returns, hands Georgia Belle a book.

AUNT LOU  
Ain't too many left you ain't done  
already read. You still thinkin'  
bout buildin' that school you been  
talkin' bout?

GEORGIA BELLE  
Feel like I'll burst wide open if I  
don't. I've been savin' what Miss  
Caroline pays me for three days work  
every week. Come Fall, think I'll  
have just enough.

Wood's still gawking at Georgia Belle as the Four Colored Women make a fuss over him.

AUNT LOU  
I always said you'd be the first one  
to do somethin' good round here.  
You sho gone make your Mama and Daddy  
proud.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 (of the book)  
 I'll have it back to you in no time  
 soon.

Aunt Lou eyes the Four Colored Women gathered around Wood.

AUNT LOU  
 Keep it. Got enough goin' on round  
 here to keep me entertained.

As Georgia Belle moves off the porch, and away from the Inn with Willa, she glances over her shoulder, and meets Wood's gaze. She turns away, indifferent.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - DAY

Georgia Belle walks this road heading North.

Wood trails behind her on a horse drawn wagon. She turns, sees him, but keeps moving.

Now alongside Georgia Belle --

WOOD  
 Afternoon Ma'am.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 (eyes off him)  
 Afternoon.

WOOD  
 Where you headed? I'd be glad to  
 carry you along.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 I'll be making it just fine. Thanks  
 all the same.

WOOD  
 A pretty little lady like yourself  
 shouldn't be walkin' these roads  
 alone. Your Mista don't mind?

GEORGIA BELLE  
 There's no Mista to mind when, or  
 how I come and go.

Wood smiles, likes her arrogance.

WOOD  
 Name's Wood, passing through at Miss  
 Lou's place. You Miss Georgia Belle.  
 That right?

GEORGIA BELLE  
That's right.

WOOD  
You sure you won't be needin' a ride?  
Won't be no trouble --

GEORGIA BELLE  
Afternoon Mista Wood.

Georgia Belle makes a quick pivot right, disappears inside the woods.

EXT. TURNER ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Caroline on her knees, snips roses, hands them to Georgia Belle who stays next to her with a basket.

CAROLINE  
You got those papers signed?

GEORGIA BELLE  
Went yesterday to see'im about it,  
but he said he'd have to take it up  
with the County.

CAROLINE  
That's what he told you last month.  
How many this time?

GEORGIA BELLE  
Two.

CAROLINE  
Nonsense.

Caroline stands, COUGHS, moves out of the garden.

CAROLINE  
Come with me.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - FILE ROOM - DAY

Sheriff Tom, behind a desk, shakes his head at Caroline, who gives him a piece of paper.

CAROLINE  
All I'm askin' you to do, is sign  
it.

SHERIFF TOM  
Miss Caroline, you know I cain't do  
that. The law makes itself clear.  
"Two schools for every county --"

CAROLINE

"Not to be five miles within each other." I know what the law says, and I also know you have a seat on the County Board.

SHERIFF TOM

Even if I sign this here permit, the girl still cain't build that school in South Shelbyville.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - FRONT ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

Georgia Belle sits in a chair adjacent to the the file room, hears all that's being said between Caroline and Sheriff Tom.

NOISE from outside grabs Georgia Belle's attention. She goes to the window, looks out.

GEORGIA BELLE'S POV - OUTSIDE SHERIFF'S OFFICE

BILLY, JEREMIAH, AND BANKS, each in their 20's, and dressed like Bounty Hunters, refuse to let a COLORED MAN pass by them.

Billy mouths something to the Colored Man, and points in the opposite direction.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - FILE ROOM (CONTINUOUS)

CAROLINE

Shelby County is the only County where Coloreds are allowed to vote. You been Sheriff a long time, thanks to that. I'm sure there's a lot of things you'd like to get done round here before next election.

Sheriff Tom waves the paper at Caroline.

SHERIFF TOM

Two recommendation from the Board, you see that don't you?

Caroline's eyes searches the desk. She picks up a pen, takes the paper from Sheriff Tom, signs her name on it.

CAROLINE

There. You got yourself a new member.

Caroline hand the pen and permit to Sheriff Tom.

Sheriff Tom looks like he's just been duped.

CAROLINE

If you'll just sign right there,  
we'll be on our way.

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY

Georgia Belle trails behind Caleb as he gathers corn from stalks.

She tries to show him her County Permit, but he's not interested.

GEORGIA BELLE

Nearly got enough saved --

CALEB

No means no. Ain't no matter nohow.  
Coloreds gotta pay three times much  
for lumber. Take you a lifetime to  
save up that much.

GEORGIA BELLE

Then I'll ask Miss Caroline for more  
workin' days.

Caleb realizes Georgia Belle won't let up. He pauses from his task, turns to her.

CALEB

Me and your Mama, weez old. We done  
did all there is to livin'. Ain't  
nowhere for us to go. But you? You  
still got time to get yoself outta  
here. Find yoself a good husband,  
get a place of your own, and stop  
all that talk about buildin' up  
schools and whatnot.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - DAY

Georgia Belle stomps out from the cornfield, livid. She collides with --

-- Wood, who catches her in his arms.

Their eyes meet, Wood smiles, he approves of this sudden circumstance.

Wood has a look at the Dragonfly Charm chained around Georgia Belle's neck, and moves to touch it, but --

Georgia Belle jerks herself out of his arms, gives him a dirty look.



She throws her hand over the Charm, covers it, and marches away from him.

EXT. CROSSROADS - DAY

An UNKNOWN WHITE MAN, on horseback, with a brim pulled over his brow, and a leather canvas bag strapped across his shoulder, stops at two signs carved into arrows. One points East, the other, West.

The sign pointing West reads: SHELBYVILLE.

The Unknown White Man steers the horse West, moves down the road.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - PEACH ORCHARD - DAY

Rows and rows of trees laden with fruit. Georgia Belle plucks peaches off leaves, loads them in a basket.

Wood strides down a row, moves in on her.

WOOD

Figured you'd be hidin' somewhere in them woods.

He trails behind her as she moves from tree to tree, pulls a peach off a leaf, rubs it on his shirt --

WOOD

You mind?

-- and takes a big bite out of it.

WOOD

This here just might be the sweetest thing I've ever tasted.

Is he flirting with her?

Georgia Belle doesn't care.

WOOD

You ain't scared of me, is you?

GEORGIA BELLE

No Mista Wood, don't nothin' scare me, not even you.

WOOD

Everybody's scared of somethin'.

GEORGIA BELLE

(sarcastic)

Yeah? What you scared of?

Wood thinks about it.

WOOD

Guess I might be scared to leave  
this world not havin' myself a wife  
and some youngens.

GEORGIA BELLE

Seem to me, if you dead that won't  
matter much, will it?

Georgia Belle continues down the aisle with Wood on her heels.

WOOD

You just like dynamite, ain't you?  
I like that bout a woman --

Georgia Belle whips around, irritated.

GEORGIA BELLE

You come out here looking for some  
of these peaches, or find yourself  
that wife?

WOOD

(beat)  
Maybe I come for both.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - DAY

While Caroline pins sheets on a clothesline, she spots Georgia Belle moving up the stairs with a basket.

CAROLINE

Those mine?

GEORGIA BELLE

(nodding)  
Got some good ones for you. How  
long you been out here?

CAROLINE

Since sun up. Feel like I'm missin'  
somethin' if I sit around all day.  
Might as well make use of myself.

Caroline COUGHS.

Georgia Belle shakes her head. This woman's hopeless.

GEORGIA BELLE

Come on in. We better get started.

CAROLINE

Be there in a minute.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Mason jars and peaches on the table, a pot of boiling water on the stove.

Georgia Belle halves peaches into a porcelain bowl by the window. As she lifts the bowl to move to the stove, she glance out of the window.

She sees something that takes her breath away. She GASPS. The bowl slides from her hands, crashes to the floor, shattered porcelain's at her feet.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - SAME TIME

A SHADOW behind the sheets at the clothesline.

CAROLINE

(to the shadow)

I know. I promise this time, another minute. Almost done.

Caroline removes a sheet from the line, reveals --

-- JOHNNY RAY, with a brim pulled over his brow, and leather canvas bag strapped across his shoulder.

A moment while Caroline and Johnny Ray take in each other's presence.

Johnny Ray takes off his brim. His hair is tousled, but he's a man now, boyishly handsome, and doesn't even know it.

Caroline's awed. She steps to Johnny Ray, moves her fingers over his face, examines his brow, lips, and jaw. Her eyes well.

JOHNNY RAY

(mildly)

Mama.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Georgia Belle picks up chips of porcelain off the floor, looks up as Caroline enters --

CAROLINE

He's home.

INT. JOHNNY RAY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nothing much has changed here. His old pair of muddy side-button boots by his bed -- much too small for him to fit these days. A sling shot on a chest of drawers, and a few marbles, balls, and paper airplanes in a corner.

Johnny Ray fingers the marbles. Looks like he's having bittersweet memories.

Georgia Belle enters, he turns to her, and --

For the first time in years, their eyes meet. The sight of Georgia Belle is riveting.

A moment.

GEORGIA BELLE

I brought clean towels.

Johnny Ray moves to her, slowly, unable to take his beautiful intense eyes off her.

The boldness of his stare causes Georgia Belle to stumble over her words.

GEORGIA BELLE

There's a bath...soap -- not hot.

She tries to look away, but can't.

GEORGIA BELLE

You might not remember...we were just children when --

He eyes the DRAGONFLY CHARM chained around her neck, smiles. Of course he remembers.

JOHNNY RAY

Miss Georgia Belle.

His gaze is too intense, she moves her eyes off him, as he takes the towels from her hands.

GEORGIA BELLE

I'll have supper ready soon.

A long beat while they linger. This moment is awkward, they look like they don't know what to say to each other. Then --

-- Georgia Belle moves to the door, exits.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - DINNING ROOM - DAY

Caroline and Johnny Ray enjoy supper at the table, while Georgia Belle fills their glasses with iced tea.

Johnny Ray studies Georgia Belle's every move. He's taken by how beautiful a woman she's become.

Caroline puts her hand over Johnny Ray's.

CAROLINE

It's good to have you home. I hoped you'd write to me yourself, but your Aunt Gracie said you were busy with your studies.

Johnny Ray forces a smile. It's all lies.

CAROLINE

I want to hear all about it.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The sound of silverware to plates as Georgia Belle, Rhoedy, and Caleb eat supper.

GEORGIA BELLE

Mista Johnny Ray came home today.

RHOEDY

Lord be praised. Bet he's a good lookin' man, all growed up, and smart as a whip. He tall?

Georgia Belle eyes Caleb, who doesn't join in Rhoedy's excitement.

GEORGIA BELLE

About as tall as Daddy -- not so big though. Don't look like he did much eatin'.

RHOEDY

Lordy mercy. Ain't nothin' worse than a knobby man. Take care to see 'bout that, Georgy. Fatten him up a bit --

CALEB

Ain't no need for the girl to take up time over there no more. That boy can tend to his own Mama now.

GEORGIA BELLE

Miss Caroline likes havin' me there Daddy, and she's never no trouble.

CALEB

Mista Billy and his boys make it hard for Colored folks to work cross that creek. That's the trouble you need to be worried about.

GEORGIA BELLE

When I get that school built up --

CALEB

Ain't gone be no more talk about  
that school, you here?

Georgia Belle looks to Rhoedy, she needs help convincing  
him.

RHOEDY

You gotta be one special somebody to  
have your own school. I think we  
should hear what she got to say.

Rhoedy passes a smile to Georgia Belle. Caleb waits.

GEORGIA BELLE

Well...

(to Rhoedy)

I know you and Daddy's been here all  
your lives -- like most everybody  
else, and maybe it's not as good as  
some places, but if we build our own  
school, teach other Colored folks to  
read and write, soon enough they  
won't have to work across that creek,  
shop at the stores in town...

(to Caleb)

...or pay three times more for things  
they need.

Rhoedy nods, beams at the idea.

RHOEDY

Big dreams. That's what I always  
say. If you gonna have'em, make'em  
real big. Real big dreams.

(to caleb)

Right?

Caleb throws his pipe in mouth, comes to his feet. Rhoedy  
and Georgia Belle keep their eyes on him.

A moment while Caleb gives Georgia Belle and Rhoedy a  
coldhearted stare.

Finally, he exits to the porch, letting the screen door SLAM  
behind him.

INT. JOHNNY RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Looks like no one ever stepped foot in here. There's fresh  
towels, and newly pressed sheets folded on the bed, right  
where Georgia Belle left them for Johnny Ray days ago.

INT. CAROLINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Caroline stands at the window, looks down over the courtyard,  
sees --

CAROLINE'S POV - OVER THE COURTYARD

-- Johnny Ray enters the stable with sheets and pillows.

BACK TO SCENE

Caroline looks disenchanted, moves from the window to the  
vanity, where Georgia Belle waits for her, hairbrush in hand.

Caroline sits, Georgia Belle smooths the brush over her hair.

CAROLINE

My sissy's the Queen Of Cotton down  
in Chatham, you know?

Georgia Belle listens.

CAROLINE

All that money can buy. Go where  
she wants, do as she pleases -- she's  
made a good life for herself.

(saddened with  
realization)

But she wasn't good to my boy.

EXT. TURNER STABLE - NIGHT

Johnny Ray takes a bale of hay and a rake inside, exits moment  
later, meets Georgia Belle.

JOHNNY RAY

Evenin'

GEORGIA BELLE

Evenin'.

GEORGIA BELLE

Miss Caroline turned down early.  
There's stew left over from supper  
if you get hungry again.

JOHNNY RAY

I'll bring the wagon around.

GEORGIA BELLE

The walk don't bother me none. I'm  
fine by it.

Georgia Belle catches a glimpse inside the stable, sees sheets  
and pillows on a makeshift bed of hay.

She gives Johnny Ray a questionable look.

It's all too complicated and embarrassing. He's not going to give her an explanation for what she sees. Instead --

JOHNNY RAY

How's Aunt Rhoedy comin' long?

GEORGIA BELLE

All right. She comes to see about things around here every now and then. Her and Miss Caroline sit there on that swing not talkin' about much -- just enjoying the day.

JOHNNY RAY

They been friends a long time.

Johnny Ray eyes the Dragonfly Charm around Georgia Belle's neck. She fingers it as if she can feel his stare.

They share a smile, a sense of mutual admiration.

GEORGIA BELLE

It's late. I'll be gettin' home now. 'Night.

She extends a hand to him.

A moment as it seems as if Johnny Ray would rather embrace her instead.

JOHNNY RAY

'Night.

He finally shakes her hand.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - NIGHT

BILLY, JEREMIAH, BANKS, and MARSHALL, with rifles, on horseback. Each one suited in black hats, and trench coats. They trample away from the crossroad where an old dirty SIGN on a tree reads: NO COLOREDS AFTER SUNDOWN.

Georgia Belle walks towards the crossroads. Billy steers his horse in her path.

BILLY

You let sun down catch you again.  
Where you comin' from?

Georgia Belle's not intimidated, even though Banks looks like he'll blast her to hell on command.



GEORGIA BELLE

Same as yesterday, and the day before.

BILLY

I cain't keep trustin' you to do right by us. You puttin' me in the way of things round here, Georgia Belle.

GEORGIA BELLE

If this matter troubles you Billy, do what you see fit.

Banks pulls his rifle. Billy motions to him. Wait.

He eyes the sign on the tree, then Georgia Belle.

BILLY

You temptin' the hands of the law?

GEORGIA BELLE

There's no law against me puttin' in a days work.

BILLY

You know, I might not be the one on this road next time. That'll be a problem, won't it?

Georgia Belle looks up at Marshall.

Marshall's got an expression on his face that says he's thinking lewd and ungodly thoughts.

GEORGIA BELLE

(to Billy)

You gonna gun me down or leave me be?

She waits.

Billy steers the horse from her path.

BILLY

Get on, 'for somebody else sees you.

EXT. SKIES CABIN - NIGHT

Georgia Belle comes to the cabin where Caleb and Wood share a few laughs on the porch.

Wood gives Georgia Belle a smile as she moves up the stairs, but she doesn't return the gesture, instead looks on him with suspicion.

CALEB  
 (to Wood)  
 This here's my daughter, Georgy.

Wood extends a hand to Georgia Belle.

WOOD  
 Name's Wood. Pleasure's all mine,  
 Ma'am.

This man is crafty.

Georgia Belle won't shake on it, but rather looks on him  
 with despise.

CALEB  
 Mr. Wood here's on his way to Texas.  
 Aimin' to buy hisself a heap of land.  
 Gone go into business for hisself.

WOOD  
 Man's gotta have somethin' to take  
 care of a family.

CALEB  
 And that's the truth if I ever heard  
 it.

Georgia Belle won't stick around to listen to anymore of  
 Woods sly talking. She kisses Caleb on the cheek.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 'Night Daddy.

Wood and Georgia Belle share a knowing look as she makes her  
 way inside the cabin.

EXT. LUMBER YARD - DAY

Men everywhere, tow planks of wood to and from carts and  
 wagons.

Johnny Ray loads a slab of wood in his wagon when --

A VOICE from behind --

VOICE (O.S.)  
 Great day in the mornin'. If it  
 ain't Johnny Ray Turner.

Johnny Ray turns, sees --

-- Billy, with his bounty hunter looking posse, Jeremiah and  
 Banks.

JOHNNY RAY

Billy?

BILLY

Flesh and bone.

They share a quick embrace, look each other over.

JOHNNY RAY

Been a long time. Thought it be  
hard to recognize you by now.

Billy smiles, shakes his head at the sight of Johnny Ray's  
tousled hair.

BILLY

See you ain't changed much yourself.  
How long you been home?

JOHNNY RAY

Couple days. Still settlin' in.

BILLY

(to Jeremiah and Banks)

This here's Johnny Ray -- good ole  
country boy. The son my Mama and  
Daddy wished they had.

Johnny Ray extends his hand to Jeremiah and Banks. They  
shake on it.

BILLY

Heard you might come back some kind  
of Doctor or Lawyer even. That's  
what you been doin' all this time?  
Savin' folks lives, keepin' em out of  
jail?

Johnny Ray smirks, nervously rakes his fingers over his hair,  
and moves his eyes off Billy.

JOHNNY RAY

Nah, nothin' like that. You been  
doin' all right?

BILLY

I been around. Been runnin' my  
Daddy's Mill since he died last  
summer. I got work if you needin'  
some.

JOHNNY RAY

I'll be fixin' up the old shop, see  
if there's still some money in it.  
But I'll let you know.

Billy reaches in his pocket, pulls out a sheet a paper, unfolds it, hands it over to Johnny Ray.

BILLY

We get a couple of boys together on  
Friday nights down by the Mill.  
Talk about how we can help out Tom.  
If you not busy, come on down. I'll  
introduce you to everybody.

Johnny Ray looks over the paper.

ON PAPER

NORTH SHELBYVILLE RIFLEMEN - FRIDAYS AT SUNDOWN - MILLER SAW  
MILL

BACK TO SCENE

Johnny Ray nods.

JOHNNY RAY

All right. See you Friday.

EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - DAY

A rickety old place, shabby, and abandoned. Broken windows,  
holes in the steps, wild weeds strangled by cracks in the  
ground. It looks like no one's been here in years.

INT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - DAY

Johnny Ray's got his sleeves rolled up, and a bucket of water  
in his hand. The floor boards squeak beneath his feet as he  
moves to the counter where --

Thick dust, and empty candy jars are turned over, and there's  
dried up fruits and lintels sprawled about the floor.

INT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - DAY

Another day.

A total transformation. Everything is clean and in it's  
place.

As Johnny Ray comes out to the counter from the back room --

-- Georgia Belle enters from outside with a small paper bag.  
She looks the shop over.

GEORGIA BELLE

Almost like new.

Johnny Ray goes to Georgia Belle, stands beside her.

JOHNNY RAY

It'll take more than a day to get her like she used to be. 'Spose it'll do for now.

GEORGIA BELLE

Seems like a lot of work for one man.

A moment.

To be this close to each other is overwhelming. Georgia Belle moves her eyes off him.

GEORGIA BELLE

You missed supper.

She hands over the paper bag.

EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - LATER

Georgia Belle starts toward the road. Johnny Ray sits on the steps, eats a sandwich from the paper bag, watches her.

There's something about this moment that says he doesn't want her to go.

JOHNNY RAY

I'll be done here soon. I could give you a ride back if you don't mind waitin'.

Georgia Belle considers it, then heads back toward him.

Moments later, as they sit on the steps beside each other --

GEORGIA BELLE

Miss Caroline let this place go not long after you left. Seem like all she wanted to do was stay in that house, waitin' to see when you'd come home.

(beat)

What's it like down in Chatham?

JOHNNY RAY

Don't quite know. Didn't see much of it. Just Aunt Gracie's place, mostly.

GEORGIA BELLE

Mama said all the good Teachers down there come from all over, places like New York, Chicago -- even France. You liked any of 'em?

EXT. GRACE'S PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAY (1875)

FLASHBACK

Colored Sharecroppers pick and load cotton in baskets. They turn their attention to --

-- Grace who moves onto the field with --

-- Young Johnny Ray, dressed in dirty, beat-up overalls.

Grace pulls Johnny Ray by the arm, hands him a basket, points to a boll of cotton, mouths something to him.

Johnny Ray plucks a boll of cotton from a stem, puts it in the basket.

The Colored Sharecroppers eye each other, shakes their heads with sympathy.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

JOHNNY RAY

Ain't seen much of them either.

Georgia Belle thinks about it.

GEORGIA BELLE

Then what kind of learnin' you come by all that time you been gone?

Johnny Ray takes a bite of his sandwich.

JOHNNY RAY

I can figure numbers, and make just about anything with my hands. Ain't learned nothin' much more than that.

Georgia Belle thinks it over some more.

GEORGIA BELLE

Readin' and writin'?

Johnny Ray says nothing, only looks on her, but there's the sense Georgia Belle knows his answer is no.

EXT. MILLER SAW MILL - NIGHT

On the hem of a wooded area near a stream, The SHELBYVILLE RIFLEMEN gather around --

-- Billy, who looks like a Ring Master stationed on top of a wooden box, as he delivers a speech.

BILLY

...and my Daddy fought in the war against the North, so a day like today would never come. My Grandpappy built this town, now it belongs to us...

Johnny Ray arrives late, stands in the background, listens.

BILLY

Brother's, it's our civil duty to protect every man, woman, and child, from the savages that come into this town. If we don't stop'em, it'll only be a matter of time before they come together and take everything that belongs to us.

LATER

Billy, Johnny Ray, Marshall, Banks, and Jeremiah sit around a camp fire.

Billy drinks from a jug, passes it to Johnny Ray.

Johnny Ray takes a sniff from the jug, shakes his head, looks like the smell burns his nostrils, gives it back to Billy.

BILLY

It's better'n that bottle of hot piss, Marshall calls whiskey, he hide under his bed.

All have a laugh at Marshall's expense.

MARSHALL

Hell, that's your Pappy's recipe. Gave it to me when you were too young to wipe your own ass. That's the good stuff.

JOHNNY RAY

(to Billy)

What happened to'im? Your Daddy, how'd he die?

BILLY

Heart bust on'im. Mamma turned over in the middle of the night, said he was stiff as nails.

JEREMIAH

Best way to go, if you ask me.

Banks nods.

BANKS

Close your eyes, fall asleep, wake  
up in Heaven.

Billy takes a swig from the jug, wipes his mouth off with  
the back of his hand.

BILLY

Would'of been nice for'im to see you  
come back around. He would'of wanted  
you to join us.

BANKS

Tom needs all the help he can get.

JOHNNY RAY

Like Deputies?

BILLY

You could say that. Difference is,  
ain't no pay.

JEREMIAH

But there's plenty pussy to make up  
for it.

INT. BAWDY HOUSE - NIGHT

Pipe and cigar smoke cascading in the air. A THREE MAN BAND  
plays folk music in a corner. Sleazy looking WHITE MEN dance  
with each other, while a pair of DRUNKEN MEN cheer them on.

There's a FAT WOMAN wearing ruby red lipstick on Marshall's  
lap. He whispers something in her ear, she laughs, kisses  
him on the cheek.

Billy, Johnny Ray, Banks, and Jeremiah sit at a table by the  
entrance.

Billy throws back a shot of whiskey, slams the glass on the  
table. He eyes PEARL, ANN, and, ALICE across the room, three  
beautiful White women, dressed like whores.

BILLY

(to Johnny Ray)

Any one of'em. Take your pick.

The women flash smiles at Billy and the boys, and make their  
way toward them.

BILLY

Gentlemen, looks like we about to  
ourselves one hell of a night.



INT. BAWDY HOUSE - BLUE ROOM - NIGHT

Billy's in bed having raunchy sex with Pearl. She's on top of him, riding him like a pro Cowgirl. The bed squeaks as she bounces up and down on him, and he's enjoying every minute of it.

INT. BAWDY HOUSE - RED ROOM - SAME TIME

Johnny Ray sits on the edge of the bed, uncomfortable, and timid.

Alice stands in front of Johnny Ray, strips down to nothing, kneels at his lap, unbuttons his trousers.

A moment.

Alice looks up at Johnny Ray, baffled.

ALICE

What's wrong? Cain't get your Soldier to stand at attention?

Johnny Ray doesn't answer.

ALICE

Ain't never seen a man as handsome as you. You fancy pretty women don't you?

JOHNNY RAY

Yes Ma'am.

ALICE

(stunned)

Ma'am? I ain't hardly no Ma'am.  
(on her feet)

You ain't from round here, is you?

Alice gathers her clothes, puts them on.

ALICE

You gotta a name?

JOHNNY RAY

Johnny Ray...Turner

Alice smiles.

ALICE

Well Johnny Ray Turner, I'm figurin' since you got no troubles with pretty women, there must be one already got you in the clouds.

(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

You savin' yourself for her, ain't you? I can tell when a man ain't never been with a woman.

Alice sits next to Johnny Ray.

ALICE

"Whoever heart a woman holds in her hands, belongs to a man who would die for her." That you?

JOHNNY RAY

Yes.

Alice has a moment.

ALICE

Must be the real thing, cause that kind of woman only come round once in a fella's life time.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Wood, across from Georgia Belle at the table, looks up from his plate of beans and cornbread, throws her a flirtatious smile.

Georgia Belle looks annoyed.

CALEB

A hundred acres sho is a lot of land for only one somebody. What kind of croppin' you talkin' bout doin'?

WOOD

Everything. Whats'in ever folks need.

Caleb gives Georgia Belle a look, nods, smiles. He likes this guy.

RHOEDY

Got yoself a good head on them shoulders of yours, Mista Wood.

Georgia Belle's had enough of this. She rises, clears her setting, moves from the table.

Wood connects with her frustration, lays a napkin over his plate forces a smile.

WOOD

That was a fine meal, Miss Rhoedy.

RHOEDY

You welcome here any time. Ain't  
everyday we get a visita like yoself.  
Next time, I'll make somethin' real  
special for you.

Caleb takes his pipe from his shirt pocket, slips it in his  
mouth, strikes fire to it.

RHOEDY

Out with that Caleb.

EXT. SKIES CABIN - NIGHT

Caleb and Wood on the porch.

WOOD

Nice evenin' ain't it?

Caleb nods yes, blows smoke from his pipe.

WOOD

Got yourself two fine women in there.

CALEB

That's what folks tell me.

WOOD

Don't think your Georgia Belle take  
too kind to me though.

Caleb waves it off.

CALEB

Don't pay her no mind. She just  
high strung, like her Mama. Always  
wanna have her way 'bout things.

They share a light laugh.

WOOD

A man could get right lonely, with  
all that land, havin' nobody to share  
it with.

CALEB

I reckon you might be right about  
that.

WOOD

I'll be round another month or so.  
Promised Aunt Lou a bit more of my  
time, till I get them ole logs cleaned  
up the way she want'em.

(MORE)

WOOD (CONT'D)

Even after that, it's sho gone be  
hard leavin' here, not knowin' when  
I'll be seein' Georgia Belle again.

Caleb shoots Wood a look, blows smoke from his pipe.

CALEB

Them some mighty strong words you  
shellin' out.

WOOD

I'd take good care of her, and make  
sho she never want for nothin'.

CALEB

Sound like you askin' to marry my  
Georgy.

WOOD

Yes Sir, I reckon that's what I'm  
doin'.

Caleb thinks.

CALEB

Well Mista Wood, I gotta tell you,  
it'll take a special kinda man to  
handle that girl. She ain't like  
most of'em -- got a mind of her own,  
you know? Tell her to go left, she  
goes right. Tell her to sit, she  
stand -- all that's guaranteed. She  
just like one of them ole mules,  
always doin' things opposite.

Caleb takes more puffs of his pipe, nods.

CALEB

I'll talk to Miss Rhoedy, see what I  
can do for you.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

The sound of COUGHING as Georgia Belle moves down the hall,  
with an armful of sheets.

INT. CAROLINE'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Caroline clings on to a chest of drawers. She's pale white  
and exhausted. Looks like she's going to pass out.

GEORGIA BELLE

(from the threshold)

Miss Caroline?

Caroline COUGHS. BLOOD, trickles from her mouth onto the floor.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - DAY

Johnny Ray chops wood in the yard. There's a SCAR on his lower back that comes into view when he raises the ax.

Georgia Belle runs from the house toward him, alarmed.

GEORGIA BELLE

Come quick.

EXT. CAROLINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Johnny Ray paces up and down the hallway.

Doctor Monroe exits. Without hesitation, Johnny Ray moves to him.

JOHNNY RAY

She all right?

A somber expression over Doctor Monroe's face.

DOCTOR MONROE

No son. Not this time.

INT. CAROLINE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Johnny Ray sits at Caroline's bedside, his eyes filled with woe as he looks on her.

JOHNNY RAY

I'll take you to Dover County. If we leave now, we'll be there by sun up.

Caroline smiles beyond her sorrow.

CAROLINE

What can be done for me in Dover? These lungs have carried me as far as they can. It's all God's will.

JOHNNY RAY

To let you die?

CAROLINE

We got no right to ask why, Johnny Ray. Something's in this life, ain't meant for us to understand. Like, I'll never understand why my sissy did the things she did.

Johnny Ray takes his eyes off her, ashamed.

Caroline connects with his guilt.

CAROLINE

The fault's not yours to bare. I  
shouldn't have sent you away.

JOHNNY RAY

I'm all right now, Mama.

Caroline puts her hand over his.

CAROLINE

When I see your father, I'm gonna  
tell him you're just what he wanted  
you to be. A good man.

(beat)

Don't let nobody take that away from  
you.

EXT. GRAVE SITE - DAY

DAYS LATER.

100 yards from the Turner house, with two white headstones  
shaded by a moss draped oak tree.

Johnny Ray looks on the headstones. The expression on his  
face says he's pained, and heartbroken.

ON HEADSTONES

JONATHAN RAYMOND TURNER 1836-1878

CAROL ANN TURNER 1843-1885.

INT. JOHNNY RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johnny Ray stays at a window, stares out at the night, looks  
like his thoughts are in another place and time.

Georgia Belle's at the doorway.

GEORGIA BELLE

Everything's turned down. I'll be  
goin' now.

Johnny Ray stays fixed at the window, doesn't acknowledge  
Georgia Belle's presence.

GEORGIA BELLE

Left you some supper, in case you  
change your mind.

She moves to his bed.

GEORGIA BELLE

Miss Caroline sure was a fine woman...

Johnny Ray turns from the window. Now she's got his attention. He looks on her with tormented eye.

He sits down on the bed, shoulders slumped forward, looks an emotional wreck.

GEORGIA BELLE

If you remember all the good things,  
maybe it won't hurt so bad.

A moment.

Then --

Out of nowhere, Johnny Ray grabs Georgia Belle by the waist, pulls her in, buries his face in her lap. He sobs, loud and hard.

EXT. PEACH ORCHARD - DAY

Georgia Belle reads a book in a quiet shaded spot under a tree.

A pair of dusty boots appear at her side.

WOOD (O.S.)

You sho is a hard one to keep up  
with.

Wood sits down next to her.

WOOD

You cain't keep playin' hard to get  
too much longer. I'll be movin' on  
to Texas soon, and I'm takin' you  
with me.

Georgia Belle looks up from the book, insulted.

GEORGIA BELLE

That's what you been dreamin' about?

WOOD

I done already asked your Daddy for  
your hand.

GEORGIA BELLE

Is that right?

Wood nods yes.

WOOD

And he done takin' a likin' to me,  
so I reckon he'll be all right with  
it.

Georgia Belle slams the book shut, comes to her feet. Wood follows.

WOOD

Don't matter much though, 'cause I  
done made up my mind. I ain't leavin'  
without you.

GEORGIA BELLE

Well then, I suppose you better head  
back to Aunt Lou's.

WOOD

(confused)  
What for?

GEORGIA BELLE

Cause it looks like you gonna be  
here for a time.

Georgia Belle turns on her heels, disappears inside the orchard.

INT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - DAY

Business looks good today. Patrons in every corner of the store, up and down two narrow aisles.

Johnny Ray conducts a transaction with MOSES, a Colored man in his 30's, who has a speech impairment.

Moses smiles, shakes Johnny Ray's hand.

MOSES

(stuttering)  
Got this...this...this here place  
lookin' real nice, Mista  
John...John...Johnny Ray.

Johnny Ray returns the smile, listens with patience.

MOSES

I'll be, I'll be, com...com...comin'  
back real soon.

JOHNNY RAY

You're welcome here anytime Moses.



EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - MOMENTS LATER

A WHITE WOMAN exits with a paper bag filled to the brim.  
Moses exits behind her.

Billy, Banks, and Jeremiah linger at the corner of the store  
like guards on duty.

As White Woman moves down the steps, an ORANGE topples from  
the paper bag, hits the ground.

Moses picks up the orange, hands it over to her, smiles.

He moves away from the front of the store, nears the corner.  
Billy, Banks, and Jeremiah close in on him.

BILLY  
What you doin' boy?

Moses doesn't understand what's going on, so he doesn't  
answer.

BILLY  
You deaf?

Moses shakes his head.

MOSES  
No...no...no'sah.

BILLY  
Then answer me when I'm talkin' to  
you. Now, I asked you, what you  
doin'?

MOSES  
Noth..nothin'.

BILLY  
That didn't look like nothin' to me.  
You wink your eye at that White woman?

Moses looks stunned. He get's it now.

MOSES  
No...no...no'sah.

BILLY  
You callin' me a liar?

Billy turns to Jeremiah and Banks.

BILLY  
I believe this here Nigger's feedin'  
me a handful of cock shit.

Billy turns back to Moses, looks him over.

A moment.

Then --

Billy laughs.

BILLY  
Just havin' a little fun with you.  
Ain't gotta get all caught up about  
it.

Billy and his boys make way.

BILLY  
Go on, get on your way.

Moses hesitates.

BILLY  
Go on. Get.

MOSES  
Yesah. Tha...tha...thank you, Sir.

Moses moves past them, takes a cautious look over his  
shoulder, sees --

A wicked smile on Billy's face.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Georgia Belle washes dishes, glances out the window, spots  
Johnny Ray galloping away from the house on his mare. He's  
wearing a black slouch hat, and a trench coat.

INT. MOSES' HOUSE - NIGHT

A small two room shack. A table, a couple of chairs, a pair  
of dusty boots by the door.

Stiff silence.

Then --

BAM!

The front door breaks open.

Billy and Jeremiah rush in like barbarians.

Billy draws his rifle, Jeremiah totes an empty POTATO SACK.  
They move to --

MOSES' BEDROOM

Moses is asleep.

Billy stands over him, cocks the rifle.

CLICK

The sound wakes Moses.

All at once, Jeremiah slips the potato sack over Moses' head.

EXT. MILLER SAW MILL - NIGHT

Riflemen gather at a tree near the stream, cackle, and prod at someone.

Johnny Ray gallops to the site, leaps of his horse, moves to the squad.

The Riflemen speed out, make way for Johnny Ray, reveals Billy, Jeremiah, and --

Moses, bound to the tree, with a potato sack over his head.

JOHNNY RAY

(to Billy)

Who's this?

BILLY

Got ourselves a transgressor, Johnny Ray.

Billy snatches the potato sack off Moses' head.

Moses is in full panic mode.

MOSES

Mista...Mista Johnny Ray,  
ple...ple...please?

Jeremiah rams the barrel of a pistol into Moses' neck, chokes him.

JOHNNY RAY

What he do?

BILLY

This here Nigger was aimin' to force  
hisself on a White woman.

(to Moses)

Ain't that right, boy?

JOHNNY RAY

Billy, I know this man. Turn'em loose.

BILLY

Now see, I cain't do that. We got laws 'round here, and this boy done broke one of'em.

JOHNNY RAY

You said we was helpin' the Sheriff. This ain't what's goin' on here. If this man's dangerous to anybody -- White or Colored -- hand him over to the law.

Billy gives Johnny Ray a vile look.

BILLY

I AM the law.

Billy eyes Jeremiah, nods.

Jeremiah cocks the pistol. CLICK.

Johnny Ray starts toward Jeremiah.

JOHNNY RAY

Wait --

Moses closes his eyes.

Jeremiah snaps back the trigger.

POW!

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - NIGHT

Rain beats down on Johnny Ray as he staggers across the yard.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

A roaring fireplace.

Johnny Ray tosses his black slouch hat and trench coat into the fireplace, gazes at the flames as they char them. He's unaware that --

-- Georgia Belle looks on from the top of the stairs.

INT. JOHNNY RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johnny Ray unlatches button on his wet shirt, looks disheartened.

Georgia Belle stands at the threshold.

GEORGIA BELLE  
Don't seem like it's ever gonna stop  
rainin'.

Johnny Ray doesn't respond.

Georgia Belle moves into the room, stays behind him.

GEORGIA BELLE  
Better get you dried up.

She begins to slide his shirt from his shoulders.

Johnny Ray steps forward and away from her, as if to say  
DON'T.

A Moment, while Johnny Ray looks like he's remembering when --

INT. GRACE'S PLANTATION - STABLE - NIGHT (1975)

FLASHBACK

Young Johnny Ray lays on a bed of hay, filthy and isolated.

Grace enters, BULLWHIP in hand.

Young Johnny Ray cowers at the sight of her.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Georgia Belle steps forward, eases the wet shirt from Johnny  
Ray's shoulders, uncovers --

-- A staggering infestation of SCARS on Johnny Ray's back,  
crisscrossed and blistered.

Georgia Belle catches her breath, looks over the scars.  
There's to many to count.

She glides the tip of her index finger along one of the  
blisters.

Johnny Ray turns, faces her. They capture each other's gaze.  
Words aren't necessary for this moment. They share an  
unspoken understanding.

They linger, so close he can feel the warmth of her breath  
on his face.

He trails his thumb down her neck, fingers the Dragonfly  
Charm.

The promise of romance abounds, perhaps a soft kiss, the taste of her lips on his.

Johnny Ray leans in, slow. Their lips nearly touch.

He stops.

Georgia Belle is breathless, and woozy. She can hardly speak.

GEORGIA BELLE

I'll...bring some...towels...

She steps away from him, and moves out of the room.

EXT. TURNER STABLE - DAY

While Johnny grooms his mare --

BILLY

Ain't seen you around. Thought I'd stop by, see bout you. Where you been?

JOHNNY RAY

No place.

Johnny Ray keeps his eyes off Billy, it clear he doesn't want to be bothered.

BILLY

Just so you know, I meant what I said. We could use a man like you.

JOHNNY RAY

Looks like you and your boys done already decided how to run things 'round here. Y'all don't need no help from me.

BILLY

You know, we always was like night and day, but like brother too.

Billy sees Johnny Ray's not paying attention.

BILLY

You cain't save'em Johnny Ray. You cain't be the Colored Man's hero.  
(beat.)

Your Mama -- God rest her soul -- went to her grave tryin' to help them wretched Niggers, and none of'em gave a good goddamn about her.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

Now, us boys been doin' a lot of good for Shelbyville. Folks startin' to feel safe round here again. We gotta stick together, and keep them Niggers in their place.

Johnny Ray pauses from his task, glares at Billy.

JOHNNY RAY

What place is that? They got just as much right to be here as anybody else.

BILLY

They ain't like us -- you know that. It's the natural order of things, and ain't no good gonna come to you by tryin' to protect'em.

JOHNNY RAY

I don't want no parts of what you doin'.

BILLY

Since when you ain't been fine with it? Jessie Lee, remember him? You was there. He had it comin', just like the rest of'em.

Johnny Ray walks the mare to the stable, opens the door.

BILLY

Johnny Ray?

Johnny ray doesn't look back, moves into the stable with the mare.

EXT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - DAY

Georgia Belle sits on a log at the bank. She's got a fishing line in the water, waiting for a bite.

Johnny Ray emerges from the trees, sits down next to her. Strapped around his shoulder is a leather canvas bag. He takes an apple and paring knife out of it.

Something TUGS at the line beneath the water. Georgia Belle jumps to her feet, pulls back on the rod, brings up the line.

Nothing.

Disappointed, she casts the line back into the water, sits.

Johnny Ray looks on with a grin.

JOHNNY RAY

Maybe you better at cookin'em, than catchin'em.

GEORGIA BELLE

I shouldn't be out here nohow. Billy don't like Colored folks carryin' on around here.

JOHNNY RAY

As I can recall, he ain't never been no count for catchin' them fish either.

They share a smile.

GEORGIA BELLE

Bet you missed that ole rotten Billy while you were gone, didn't you?

Johnny Ray nods.

JOHNNY RAY

Yeah, reckon I did.

Georgia Belle, looks on him, thinks a moment.

GEORGIA BELLE

How you come by those stripes behind you?

Johnny Ray answers, nonchalant, mouth full with apple.

JOHNNY RAY

Aunt Gracie give'em to me.

GEORGIA BELLE

How come?

EXT. GRACE'S PLANTATION - COTTON FIELD - DAY (1875)

FLASHBACK

Johnny Ray and a COLORED BOY, 10, play tag.

Grace storms onto the field like a tyrant, grabs Johnny Ray by the arm.

GRACE

I've told you, you aren't to play with the Niggras. Do you understand you'll have to be punished?



BACK TO SCENE

JOHNNY RAY

'Spose she saw fit for me to have'em.

GEORGIA BELLE

They hurt much?

JOHNNY RAY

Most times, but after long, I learned myself how to stop feelin' and start thinkin' 'bout other things, then I forget they there.

GEORGIA BELLE

(beat)

What kinds of things you think about?

He looks on her. They gaze at each other. Everything about his stare says his thoughts were of her.

Suddenly --

-- a JERK on the fishing line. Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle move their attention to the water.

Georgia Belle leaps to her feet, takes hold of the rod, struggles to bring up the line.

Johnny Ray comes to her aid, grabs her hands, helps her pull back on the rod. Together, they reel in a fat CATFISH.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

BEGIN MONTAGE - JOHNNY RAY AND GEORGIA BELLE FALLING IN LOVE

-- Georgia Belle teaches Johnny Ray how to read.

-- Johnny Ray bakes a cake. Flour's in his hair, sugar, and egg shells everywhere. Georgia Belle laughs at him.

-- Johnny Ray chases Georgia Belle down the hall with two sticks of licorice flapping from his nostrils.

-- Georgia Belle brushes Johnny Ray's hair. He looks in a mirror, doesn't like the style, ruffles it back to the tousled look.

-- Georgia Belle and Johnny Ray dance the Dosey Doe by a camp fire.

-- Johnny Ray reads to Georgia Belle from a book as they relax under a tree.

END MONTAGE

INT. TURNER HOUSE - DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Johnny Ray sits at the table, makes light taps on his plate with a fork, plays with his peas.

He glances up at two empty chairs, then into the adjoining sitting room. He focuses on his father in the family tintype photo, and Caroline's collection of figurines.

The CLATTER OF DISHES draws his attention to the kitchen doorway.

INT. TURNER HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Georgia Belle hums a soothing tune as she stacks dishes in the cupboard.

Johnny Ray steps into the doorway, plate and fork in hand. He watches Georgia Belle, admires how graceful she is; the way her hands move, the sway in her body as she reaches across the counter, the curve in her neck.

She catches a glimpse of him, turns a bit, smiles, then goes back to her task.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - DAY

COLORED MEN AND WOMEN gather near three wagons loaded with lumber. There's a pile of bricks, and ladders stationed at the site.

The sound of HAMMERS TO NAILS, while the Coloreds look on as --

-- JOHNNY RAY, AND THREE COLORED MEN, work on an UNFINISHED SCHOOL.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Willa stands at door, looks out, sees the Colored Men and Women gathered at the site of the unfinished school.

Willa turns to Georgia Belle.

WILLA

Looks like you gone get that school  
after all?

Georgia Belle moves to the door, has a look, sees Johnny Ray hauling a plank of wood to the unfinished structure.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Georgia Belle weaves through the Colored Men and Women, comes to Johnny Ray, who totes a plank of wood on his shoulder.

GEORGIA BELLE  
What are you doing?

Johnny Ray doesn't have time to talk, lots of work to be done around here. He takes a brief pause, only to say --

JOHNNY RAY  
That school ain't gonna build it's self.

He moves away from her, and continues with his mission.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Georgia Belle, Caleb and Rhoedy eat supper at the table.

CALEB  
Mista Wood come by today.

Rhoedy looks suspicious, steals a peripheral view of Georgia Belle.

CALEB  
Say he's ready to head on to Texas.  
Been here long enough.

Georgia Belle smiles.

GEORGIA BELLE  
What he do? Find himself a wife?

Caleb shares a knowing look with Rhoedy.

CALEB  
A man like that ain't got no business livin' all by hisself. He gone have plenty money to take care of you once he start croppin'.

GEORGIA BELLE  
What you sayin' Daddy?  
(to Rhoedy)  
What he sayin'?

Rhoedy doesn't answer, keeps eating.

GEORGIA BELLE  
Mama?

CALEB  
Your Mama's gone stitch you up a nice dress, so you can get yoself married.

Georgia Belle's stunned.

GEORGIA BELLE

What about my school? Mama, tell  
him about my school.

Caleb takes his pipe from his shirt pocket, slides it in his  
mouth, stands. He won't repeat himself. His word is law.

Caleb exits to another room.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Billy leans against a post on the porch, listens in on a  
conversation between Jeremiah, Marshall, and Banks.

JEREMIAH

Heard he's been over there buildin'  
them Coloreds a school.

MARSHALL

A Nigger Lover, that's what he is.

BANKS

We best put a stop to it. Don't,  
they'll turn'em against us.  
'Specially that Colored girl he  
keepin' round.

MARSHALL

(to Billy)

If your Pappy was livin', he wouldn't  
stand for it.

INT. TURNER STABLE - NIGHT

Johnny Ray layers hay on the floor with a pitchfork, covers  
it with a blanket, pillows on standby.

Georgia Belle stands by the door.

JOHNNY RAY

Was thinkin' maybe we could go down  
by the creek tomorrow, catch up on  
some fishin'.

He smiles, she doesn't, but he doesn't notice because he's  
too busy prepping his makeshift bed.

JOHNNY RAY

Season's good for Bass.

GEORGIA BELLE

I won't be comin' around no more.

Johnny Ray pauses.

JOHNNY RAY  
You goin' somewhere?

GEORGIA BELLE  
I'll be movin' on to Texas, come the  
first of the month.

JOHNNY RAY  
(confused.)  
Texas?

GEORGIA BELLE  
I'm gettin' married. Gonna start a  
family of my own.

Georgia Belle tries to sweeten the situation.

GEORGIA BELLE  
(forced smile)  
His name's Wood, and he's gonna get  
himself some land down by the  
countryside. Daddy says he's a good  
man.

JOHNNY RAY  
This the man you love?

GEORGIA BELLE  
He says he's gonna do some croppin'  
down there, and make a heap of money --

Johnny Ray moves to her.

JOHNNY RAY  
You love him?

Georgia Belle takes her eyes off him.

Johnny Ray closes the space between.

JOHNNY RAY  
Tell me you love him.

GEORGIA BELLE  
Mama's makin' a dress for me -- like  
the one she had when her and Daddy  
got married, and she's cookin' up a  
big supper afterwards.

JOHNNY RAY  
What about your school? Or is this  
what you want? To marry a man you  
cain't say you love?

GEORGIA BELLE

I'm a woman now, and a woman's place  
is to do what her husband says.

JOHNNY RAY

You don't mean that.

Georgia Belle turns for the door, it's over.

Then --

Johnny Ray grab Georgia Belle's arm, turns her around. His  
intense eyes are like magnets, as though his soul is looking  
straight at hers.

JOHNNY RAY

Tell'em you won't leave.

GEORGIA BELLE

I can't --

JOHNNY RAY

Tell'em you won't go away with him.

(beat)

That you won't leave me...because he  
doesn't love you...not like I do.

A moment as their gaze lock.

JOHNNY RAY

I ain't no educated man, and I don't  
know about a lot of thing, but I  
know love when I feel it.

Flames from a kerosene lamp dance shadows on the soft curves  
of Georgia Belle's face. Johnny Ray looks on her as though  
he's never seen anything or anyone more beautiful than she  
is right now.

He brings his hand to her face, brushes her lips with his  
fingertips. She takes in a breath of air.

Johnny Ray leans into her. Slow and gentle, he presses his  
lips against hers.

Anxiety builds.

Breath on breath, he tastes her lips again, and again, each  
time sweeter, and more passionate than the one before.

Georgia Belle melts under his embrace. She gives in to this  
moment. Fully. Hopelessly.

Johnny Ray lays Georgia Belle down on the bed of hay, unbuttons her dress, greets the curves of her breasts with his lips.

Georgia Belle shivers under the slightest touch of his mouth to her skin.

LOVE AND LUST ALL AT ONCE

Johnny Ray takes Georgia Belle.

Erogenous. Uninhibited pleasure. Both captives of ecstasy. A mutual dawning.

This is the pinnacle of passion.

INT. TURNER STABLE - DAY

Rays from the morning sun stream through cracks in the door, onto Georgia Belle's sleeping face.

Johnny Ray looks on her, traces the curves of her face with the tips of his finger. The look in his eyes says he's irrevocably in love.

A THUMP. Someone's outside.

EXT. TURNER STABLE - DAY

Billy guides his horse across the yard, moves toward the house.

Johnny Ray exits the stable, buttons his shirt.

BILLY

Mornin'.

JOHNNY RAY

Mornin'.

BILLY

Didn't catch you at a bad time did I? You up early.

JOHNNY RAY

You too.

BILLY

Figured since I was already on the road passin' through, I'd stop to see if we all right with each other. I'm a stiff son-of-a-bitch, I know, but ain't no reason why we can't be friends. Brother's, like old time, right?

Johnny Ray listens for a moment, strictly out of politeness, but it's clear he's bothered by Billy's company.

Billy catches a glimpse of Georgia Belle asleep in the stable.

Johnny Ray turns, starts toward the house, he's heard enough.

JOHNNY RAY

That all you want, or is there  
somethin' else I can do you for?

BILLY

(casually)

Yeah, how 'bout you bring your Niggra  
whore on out, and have her fetch me  
somethin' cold to drink.

Johnny Ray spins around. Did he hear him right?

JOHNNY RAY

What you say?

BILLY

(brave)

I said, bring your Niggra whore on  
out, and have her fetch me somethin'  
cold to drink.

Johnny Ray's jaw stiffens. He makes a hard FIST.

A moment. Then --

BAM!

Johnny Ray slugs Billy in the mouth, sends him stumbling  
backwards, and onto the ground.

Billy gets up, collects himself. Blood streams from his  
mouth. He spits some on the ground, rubs his jaw, smirks.

BILLY

Got yourself a fine swing there,  
Johnny Ray.

Billy dusts dirt off his hat, puts it on.

Johnny Ray moves to Billy, fist tight, ready to serve another  
punch.

Billy holds up his hand, motions.

BILLY

That won't be necessary. I'll be  
gettin' on my way.



Billy mounts himself on his horse, nods.

BILLY

Y'all have a nice day, now.

INT. TURNER STABLE - NIGHT

Johnny Ray and Georgia Belle lay in each other's arms.

Johnny Ray slides a corn straw down her nose, looks on her with deep affection.

JOHNNY RAY

Stay with me.

GEORGIA BELLE

We can't.

JOHNNY RAY

Then we'll go away.

Georgia Belle laughs, it's a ridiculous idea.

GEORGIA BELLE

Where to?

JOHNNY RAY

Any where -- any place away from here.

GEORGIA BELLE

There's no place for a White Man with a Colored Woman, less they lookin' for a hangin'.

JOHNNY RAY

Then we'll head north, keep goin', 'til we cross the ocean.

GEORGIA BELLE

And then what?

JOHNNY RAY

I'll build you a house in the mountains, and another school -- a bigger one, as big as you want.

He traces her lips with his finger tip, leans in, kisses her, long and sensuous.

JOHNNY RAY

Tell me what you want, and I'll do it.

EXT. WILLA'S CABIN - DAY

As Willa tills a small cabbage patch, Georgia Belle moves down an aisle toward her.

GEORGIA BELLE  
You workin' mighty hard this mornin',  
Miss Willa. Don't hear you  
complainin' about the heat.

Willa wipes sweat from her forehead with the back of her hand.

WILLA  
I got till noon, let you know how I  
feel by then.

Willa hands Georgia Belle a hoe.

WILLA  
Here, make use of yoself, take one  
of them rows over there.

Georgia Belle radiates with felicity as she distributes dirt along a row of cabbage.

Willa looks her over.

WILLA  
What got you all lighted up like  
that?

GEORGIA BELLE  
Like what?

WILLA  
Like you is now. Shinin' and carryin'  
on.

Georgia Belle smirks, waves it off.

WILLA  
You ain't gotta say nothin', I already  
know. Reverend done told everybody  
with ears. You and Wood gettin'  
married.

GEORGIA BELLE  
(insulted)  
I'm not thinkin' about that ole fool,  
or marryin' him either.

WILLA  
Then who's the fella? Gotta be one,  
got you like you is.

Georgia Belle goes back to tilling, doesn't answer.

WILLA  
Ain't like I'll be tellin' nobody.  
Well, it don't matter nohow. I'm  
happy for you either way.

Willa turns, moves down the aisle.

WILLA  
He sho must be somethin' special,  
whoever he is, got you all lighted.

GEORGIA BELLE  
It's Johnny Ray.

Willa turns back to Georgia Belle.

WILLA  
Who?

GEORGIA BELLE  
Johnny Ray.

WILLA  
Miss Caroline's boy?

Georgia Belle nods yes.

Willa's jolted.

WILLA  
Christ in heaven --

GEORGIA BELLE  
I told you, now leave it be.

WILLA  
What you doin' Georgia Belle?

GEORGIA BELLE  
You said it don't matter, and you  
happy for me either way.

WILLA  
That's before you started talkin',  
like you ain't got the sense the  
good Lord done give you. You lookin'  
for a hangin'?

GEORGIA BELLE  
He won't let nothin' happen to me.

WILLA

What he gone do, protect you with  
Billy's Rifle boys, and them ropes  
they carryin' 'round?

GEORGIA BELLE

He's not like them. He's different.  
I see it in him.

WILLA

Somethin's wrong with them eyes balls  
in your skull --

GEORGIA BELLE

He loves me.

Willa closes in on Georgia Belle, grabs hold of her arm.

WILLA

(firm)

Now you listen to me. That boy don't  
love you. You just some Nigger girl  
who cook for'im, and clean his house.  
He passin' time with you -- havin'  
hissself some fun. So forget about  
him, you hear? Forget about  
everything you thought, and all you  
stirrin' to do.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - NIGHT

Johnny Ray sits on the porch with a shotgun. He runs a rod  
through the barrel with a cloth, taps gun powder out.

Billy moves into the gate, comes down the walkway.

Johnny Ray is instantly defensive.

JOHNNY RAY

What you come here for, Billy?

BILLY

Need to talk to you.

JOHNNY RAY

We got nothin' to talk about.

BILLY

Now, I don't want no trouble Johnny  
Ray, just need you to listen, that's  
all.

Johnny Ray goes back to cleaning the shotgun.

BILLY

Them boys got it in for you. They think you against us. Now, I know you not, but how I'm 'spose to convince them you ain't, when you takin' sides with them Coloreds? I come to talk some sense into you.

JOHNNY RAY

Ain't nothin' wrong with my senses. They fine, just the way they is.

BILLY

You know, folks gonna start questionin' you messin' 'round with Georgia Belle. How you gonna 'esplain that?

JOHNNY RAY

Ain't nobody's business what a man do on his own property.

Billy snatches off his hat, flags it at Johnny Ray.

BILLY

Goddamned you Johnny Ray! Look here, I loves you like a brother -- hell, let you crack me in the face again, if you need to, but I cain't be responsible for what them boys might do. You and Georgia Belle dancin' on fire, you hear me? And ain't nothin' I can say to stop'em from comin' after you.

Johnny Ray comes to his feet, shotgun in hand, undaunted.

JOHNNY RAY

Tell'em I turn down at ten.

EXT. SKIES CABIN - DAY

Georgia Belle approaches the cabin just as Willa exits. They eye each other in passing.

Willa looks shady. Something's not right.

INT. SKIES CABIN - KITCHEN - DAY

Georgia Belle enters from outside.

Caleb pours a cup coffee at the stove.

Rhoedy enters from another room.

GEORGIA BELLE

(smiling)

What Willa want? She come 'round  
here gossipin' again?

No one answers.

Georgia Belle moves to Caleb.

GEORGIA BELLE

Daddy?

Out of nowhere --

Caleb spins around, SLAPS Georgia Belle across the face.

Rhoedy gasps, throws her hand over her mouth.

RHOEDY

Caleb?

Caleb moves away from the stove, eyes Rhoedy accusingly.

CALEB

You shouldn't of never let her come  
up with that boy.

Caleb shoves his pipe in his mouth, exits to the porch with  
his coffee, the door slams behind him.

INT. SKIES CABIN - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhoedy in a rocking chair, strokes Georgia Belle's hair as  
she weeps in her lap.

RHOEDY

That's right child, let it all out.

Georgia Belle looks up at Rhoedy with aching eyes.

GEORGIA BELLE

He loves me, Mama.

RHOEDY

Yes, I know Georgy. I know. Ever  
since the two of you come in this  
world together, I knowed it be hard  
to separate you.

Rhoedy wipes tears from Georgia Belle's eyes.

RHOEDY

Sometimes everything happens so fast,  
we don't get a chance to choose who  
(MORE)

RHOEDY (CONT'D)  
 we give our hearts to, by then it's  
 too late to take all that love back.

Rhoedy looks on Georgia Belle as if to understand her pain.

RHOEDY  
 I can see him in your eyes child.  
 All over your face. But it can never  
 be, you and him.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 Why?

RHOEDY  
 Cause this world ain't big enough  
 for the two of you.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - DAY

COLOREDS stare at Georgia Belle with condemning eyes as she  
 walks through the village.

Two Colored Women, ANNIE MAE, and EUELLA JEAN, whisper to  
 each other as Georgia Belle passes.

ANNIE MAE  
 She think she somethin' special.  
 Layin' up with a White Man.

EUELLA JEAN  
 Ain't nothin' special 'bout bein'  
 Masta's bed warmer.

EXT. PEACH ORCHARD - DAY

As Georgia Belle bags fruit --

Wood leans on a tree, looks her over.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 You got somethin' you thinkin' bout  
 sayin' to me? Say it.

Wood grins.

WOOD  
 Seems a woman like yourself wouldn't  
 go round lookin' for trouble, but, I  
 'spose that'd be too much like right--  
 seeing you the kind ain't 'fraid of  
 nothin'.

GEORGIA BELLE  
 You done here?

WOOD

Gave your Daddy my word. Only thing is, I didn't know I was settin' out to marry myself the White Man's Whore. Reckon I'll just have to find another use for you. Hell, ain't nobody else gone want you, and with all that land I'll come by in Texas, I'll be needin' myself a good field hand. 'Spose you gone have to do.

INT. GEORGIA BELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Georgia Belle gathers her belongings, stuffs them in a sack.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - SAME TIME

Johnny Ray loads a wagon with fire wood, blankets, and water.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - NIGHT

Billy, Jeremiah, and Banks patrol the road on horseback, each armed with a rifle.

BILLY

Y'all head on back.

BANKS

Where's Marshall?

BILLY

Ain't seen him. Go on over to the brothel. Make sure he ain't gettin' hisself in no trouble.

BANKS

He been livin' long enough to take care of hisself --

BILLY

Just do it.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - NIGHT

Wood's out on a night stroll, walks toward the Skies Cabin, sees --

EXT. SKIES CABIN - NIGHT

-- Georgia Belle creeps away from the house hugging a bulky sack against her chest. She ducks out of sight into the dark woods.



INT. JOHNNY RAY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johnny Ray dumps an armful of clothes in a suitcase, sloppy, and chaotic -- no time to be meticulous.

INT. WOODS - NIGHT

Georgia Belle's on the move, feet over twigs, dry leaves, and stones. She stumbles a few times, but presses on.

EXT. BAWDY-HOUSE - NIGHT

The sound of MUSIC from inside.

A moment, while Banks looks like he's trying to decide if he should go inside.

Fuck it. He won't bother. He rides away from the site.

EXT. NORTH AND SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CROSSROADS - NIGHT

Billy looks over the area, eyes the No Coloreds After Sundown sign, then steers his horse into the woods.

INT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - NIGHT

Georgia Belle runs along the creek. Exhausted, she stops to catch her breath.

A HORSE NEIGHS.

Georgia Belle turns her attention to the sound, sees SOMEONE galloping toward her on the horse. She makes a break for it.

EXT. TURNER HOUSE - NIGHT

Johnny Ray throws a blanket over fire wood in the wagon, pauses, smiles, as if to be thinking of his Georgia Belle.

Then out of nowhere --

POW!

A GUNSHOT rings out from somewhere inside the woods.

Johnny Ray cowers at the sound, looks toward the woods.

A moment.

Panic builds in his expression. He hustles to the house --

INT. TURNER HOUSE - FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

-- and snatches a DOUBLE BARREL SHOTGUN from behind the door.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Johnny Ray's on the move, double barrel shotgun in hand, whips past trees at a dizzying speed.

INT. MILLER HOUSE - BATHING ROOM - NIGHT

Billy looks roughed up with BLOOD all over him.

He smears blood off his face with a towel, tosses it in a tin bathing tub, moves into --

INT. MILLER HOUSE - HALLWAY (CONTINUOUS)

-- where Margaret, in a flowing night-gown, lingers by a dim lit kerosene lamp. She sees --

BLOOD ON BILLY'S SHIRT.

BACK TO SCENE

MARGARET

Billy?

Billy stiffens, caught off guard.

Margaret takes a step toward him.

MARGARET

You all right?

EXT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - NIGHT

Georgia Belle's belongings strewed over a leafy path: A sack, boots, handkerchief, and books.

Johnny Ray races along the creek, simmers at the boots.

A FIGURE up ahead.

Johnny Ray draws the shotgun, fingers the trigger, creeps forward.

A moment.

He stops, see's the figure clearer, lowers the gun.

Suddenly, a horrified look on his face.

Johnny Ray doubles over like he's been gutted. His knees buckle, sends him to the ground. He sees a DRAGONFLY CHARM in the dirt, and howls a harrowing cry from the pit of his stomach.

JOHNNY RAY

No!

ON GEORGIA BELLE --

--Who dangles from an oak tree. Her dress is torn to rags, noose around her neck, and a HOLE the size of two fists in her stomach.

MOMENTS LATER

Johnny Ray sits under the oak tree, rocks Georgia Belle's limp body in his arms. He wipes blood from her face, sobs like his heart's been severed from his chest.

EXT. SKIES CABIN - DAY

Just as day breaks.

Aunt Lou, Reverend Jonah, Caleb, and Rhoedy, gather at a well.

Aunt Lou consoles a distraught Rhoedy.

AUNT LOU

Girl got cold feet, that's all. Run off to take some time for herself. She'll be headin' back this way soon.

Wood comes to the site on his wagon with all his belongings packed in sacks.

REVEREND JONAH

Where you off to?

WOOD

Headin' on, Reverend. I done been here long enough.

AUNT LOU

It's all gone be all right, she --

WOOD

She where she wanna be.

Wood looks to Caleb and Rhoedy.

WOOD

I appreciate the hospitality.

Reverend Jonah looks toward the road.

REVEREND JONAH

Who's that?

ON ROAD

Johnny Ray staggers toward them with a dead Georgia Belle slung over his arms.

BACK TO SCENE

Shock on awe over everyone.

Rhoedy looks faint.

RHOEDY

Georgy?

Johnny Ray comes to the well, stands before them with Georgia Belle's lifeless body. He's speechless.

Rhoedy, grabs hold of Caleb, her knees are weak, she slithers to the ground, crawls to Johnny Ray.

Rhoedy WAILS desperately, scratches at Johnny Rays leg, struggles to pull herself up.

Johnny Ray's face is flooded with tears, it's evident his pain is deep, and his soul is bleeding.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE CHURCH - DAY

A congregation on the courtyard fraternize after Sunday service.

Children play nearby.

Everyone here is struck to see --

-- Johnny Ray, as he struts toward the church like a one man army, shotgun drawn, aimed at --

-- Billy, who's under a tree, flirting with a nice looking woman in a red dress. He's caught off guard when --

-- Johnny Ray rams the barrel of the shotgun into his neck, pins him against the tree.

JOHNNY RAY

(mad as hell)

This what you do Billy? The Devils  
hand at night? The Lords work on  
Sunday?

Billy's oddly content with this moment. Is that a smirk on his face?

JOHNNY RAY

Maybe I should blast a hole in you,  
big as big as the one you put in  
Miss Georgia Belle.

Margaret moves across the courtyard to Johnny Ray and Billy.

MARGARET

Jesus, Johnny Ray, what in God's  
name --

REVEREND WHITNEY, a balding White man in his 50's, attempts  
to defuse the situation.

REVEREND WHITNEY

(to Johnny Ray)

What ever happened son, you gotta  
leave it in God's hands.

JOHNNY RAY

God ain't got nothin' to do with  
this Reverend, so leave'im out of  
it.

(to Billy)

You like killin'? She's gone, I  
reckon you feel like a man now.

Billy doesn't give a damn.

BILLY

I told you Johnny Ray, you cain't  
save'em.

Johnny Ray fingers the trigger, looks down the barrel.

Margaret takes a step toward Johnny Ray, pleads.

MARGARET

Johnny Ray...

Billy motions to Margaret, don't move.

BILLY

He won't do it. I know'im. He ain't  
no killer. Wouldn't pluck a wing  
off a dead fly. Would you Johnny  
Ray? Besides, we like brothers.

Then --

RAIN falls hard from the sky, but no one here tries to escape.

A moment as the rain beats down on Johnny Ray's face,  
disillusion rises in his expression.

JOHNNY RAY  
I ain't your brother.

Johnny Ray lowers the gun, turns from Billy, and wanders off the courtyard a broken man.

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - NIGHT

COLORED MEN prepare for war, load up on horses, rifles, and flaming torches.

Wood, on his wagon, moves past them, comes to Reverend Jonah.

REVEREND JONAH  
All I can do now is pray. You a  
fightin' man?

Wood looks over the Colored Men, shakes his head.

WOOD  
That girl done put y'all in one bad  
fix. Naw Reverend, this here ain't  
my war.

Cole raises a flaming torch. Colored Men wait for his instructions.

COLE  
Burn it down!

EXT. NORTH AND SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CROSSROADS - NIGHT

Colored Men gallop past this road with a vengeance, ignoring the --

No Coloreds Allowed After Sundown, sign

EXT. LUMBER YARD - NIGHT

THREE COLORED MEN strike fire to this place and everything around it.

EXT. MILLER SAW MILL - NIGHT

Samson kicks open the door, Cole and Eddy rush in with fiery torches.

EXT. TURNER GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Black smoke rises. This place is engulfed in flames.

Colored Men gallop away from the site.

EXT. MILLER HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeremiah and Banks, on horseback, come to Billy on the yard.

JEREMIAH

(to Billy)

Saddle up. Got Niggers on a rampage.  
Everything in town's ablaze.

BILLY

(to Banks)

You find Marshall?

BANKS

Ain't had time --

BILLY

Goddamnit!

INT. MILLER HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Billy loads a rifle, Margaret closes in behind him, grabs his arm, spins him around.

MARGARET

I saw it -- the blood. That girl's  
dead. What did you do?

EXT. NORTH AND SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CROSSROADS - NIGHT

FLASHBACK

Billy steers his horse off the road and into the woods.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Billy hops off the horse, pulls down his trousers, takes a piss. Then --

POW!

A GUNSHOT rings out from inside the woods.

Billy frantically pulls up his trousers, hops on his horse, gallops toward the creek.

INT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - NIGHT

Billy pulls back on the reins, brings the stallion to a trot, moves to the oak tree by the creek where --

-- Georgia Belle hangs, noose around her neck, gaping hole in her stomach, dress torn to rags.

She desperately pulls at the noose, gasps for air, reaches out to Billy, pulls him in.

Billy fights her grip, backs his horse away. Her blood's all over him. He watches her struggle, he's not going to help her.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Margaret searches Billy's face for an answer.

MARGARET

Billy?

Billy yanks his arm from under Margaret's grip.

BILLY

(indignant)

What's it matter? She's just another dead Nigger.

EXT. MILLER SAW MILL - NIGHT

Samson, Cole, and Eddy rush out from an inferno, meets --

-- Billy, with his rifle pointed in their direction. He blasts all three of them in one swift move.

POW! POW! POW!

EXT. SOUTH SHELBYVILLE - NIGHT

Riflemen gallop into the village, ready to retaliate.

Caleb and a band of Colored Men wait with guns drawn as Billy and his posse move in.

Billy comes to Caleb.

BILLY

You think you can stop us from comin' through here ole man?

Caleb keeps his rifle steady.

CALEB

Yes Sir, That's what I'm aimin' to do.

BILLY

Three of your men already dead.



CALEB

That's all right, got myself a few spares.

BILLY

You do realize, if you shoot me, these here boys will kill all of you. Blast every single one of you to Kingdom Come.

CALEB

If we ain't knowed that, reckon we wouldn't be standin' here, would we?

Billy thinks it over.

BILLY

You tellin' me, you, and these here men ready to die?

CALEB

Yes Sir, that's what I'm tellin' you.

Billy laughs, looks to his posse, then back to Caleb.

BILLY

Well, y'all must be some of the craziest goddamn Niggers this side of Shelbyville.

The Colored Men take a few steps forward, guns aimed at Billy.

CALEB

Yes Sir, we is.

Billy jumps off his horse, frustrated.

BILLY

Tell these men to make way.

Billy attempts to move past, Caleb cocks his rifle.

CALEB

Mista Billy, if you make another move, I'm afraid I'm gonna have to kill you.

A moment.

BILLY

(to the Riflemen)  
Gun'em down. All of'em.

Instant mayhem. Shots fired. White and Colored Men go down. Everyone's a cold blooded murderer in this fight.

Gun smoke every where. This looks like the second coming of the Civil War.

Colored Women scamper out of harms way with children.

BABIES CRYING, CABINS BURNING, THE UNFINISHED SCHOOL GOES UP IN FLAMES.

Through the gun smoke, Billy targets Caleb as he brawls with a Rifleman. He gets a firm grip on his rifle's trigger --

POW!

Billy's shot. Someone's fired a bullet in his back. He falls to the ground, reveals --

-- Johnny Ray, behind him with a smoking shotgun.

Then out of nowhere --

-- Jeremiah and Banks fire shots into Johnny Ray.

Johnny Ray's down, but the war goes on around him.

LATER

In the clearing of gun smoke, Johnny Ray stumbles to his feet, his hands clutched at two bleeding holes in his stomach. He staggers down the road. Caleb, Reverend Jonah, and a couple of Colored Men follow him.

EXT. NORTH AND SOUTH SHELBYVILLE CROSSROADS - MOMENTS LATER

Johnny Ray limps toward a tree. As he passes the tree he musters all the strength in his body and --

-- pulls down the No Coloreds Allowed After Sundown, sign.

EXT. NORTH SHELBYVILLE ROAD - DAY

Johnny Ray staggers down the road, looks like hell.

Marshall, on horseback, moves toward him. There's a nasty looking BRUISE on the side of his face.

Johnny Ray looks relieved as if help has arrived.

MARSHALL LOOKS WICKED

EXT. WOODS - MILLER'S CREEK - NIGHT

FLASHBACK

Georgia Belle runs along the creek. Exhausted, she stops to catch her breath.

A HORSE NEIGHS.

She turns her attention to the sound, sees --

--Marshall galloping toward her on the horse. She makes a break for it.

Too late, Marshall slams the butt of his rifle over Georgia Belle's head.

Georgia Belle falls to the ground, dazed and disoriented. She crawls, her fingernails scrap the dirt, she's desperate to get away.

Marshall's behind her. He grabs her legs, drags her back.

Georgia Belle kicks and wails like she's fighting for her life.

Marshall rips the Dragonfly Charm from around her neck. He covers her mouth with one hand, unbuttons his trousers with the other.

A SEXUAL ASSAULT. BRUTAL. HARROWING.

Georgia Belle is helpless, her screams are muffled by the leaves beneath her. She eyes a ROCK, the size of a softball, reaches for it.

Marshall's had his fill of Georgia Belle, comes to his feet, button's his trousers, smiles an evil smile.

As he leans to pick up his rifle --

-- Georgia Belle WHACKS him in the face with the rock.

Marshall's furious, grabs the rifle, fires a shot into Georgia Belle's stomach.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO SCENE

Marshall looks on Johnny Ray, villainous, and full of hate.

Johnny Ray reaches out to him.

Marshall shows no mercy, pulls a pistol, fires a bullet into Johnny Ray's head.

POW!

<END>