

IN OTTIE'S WORLD

Screenplay

By

David John Preece

From the book, **Growing Up in Ottie's World**, by Fred Epeley

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FADE IN. AERIAL SHOT - MORNING

From high above, we see rural Rutherford County, North Carolina, green and gray, early spring, traces of snow on the top of mountains, trees still barren, grassy knobs, laced by black and brown winding roads, blue rivers and ponds, valleys, hollers, and small farm.

FRED (V.O.)

This valley is my valley. Its hills and hollows are part of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Appalachia...and part of my life. The people of my valley are good people and they are my people.

(beat)

Ottie had come from a poor family of eight children who survived as dirt farmers and descended from German immigrants.

EXT. AERIAL SHOT - MORNING

Early spring, 1988. Traveling up Highway 64 toward Burke County, North Carolina, we see smaller towns with scattered developments, larger poultry farms, the city of Morganton with its textile mills, the Courthouse and downtown, Broughton state hospital, and then finally the amoeba-shaped Freedom High school.

The camera zooms in and we see close-up some of the surrounding trees and landscape.

CUT TO:

EXT. FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL - EARLY SPRING - 1988 - MORNING

A few tardy students rush toward a modern, windowless high school.

INT. FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Students and staff hurry through the large, open classroom floor plan of the school amoeba.

FLORA DANIELS, the assistant principal in her fifties, urgently walks through the center of one of its large pseudopodia, with classes in session and activities on both sides.

She motions to one of the teachers, GERTIE, late 40s, to follow her. Concerned, Gertie relays her teaching responsibilities onto her ASSISTANT and walks quickly after Daniels.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

FRED EPELEY, an austere-looking man in his mid-forties, stands in front a blackboard, with the words, FIND A WAY OR MAKE ONE, written on it.

FRED

Wer hat die Olympischen Spiele letzte Nacht gesehen?

Fred looks out at a group of high school students, who sit behind desks, looking around, hesitant.

FRED
(continuing)
Komm schon, Klasse. Ich weiß,
dass einige von Ihnen fernsehen.

One of the students raises his hand.

STUDENT
I did.

FRED
Auf Deutsch.

STUDENT
Ich versuche.

FRED
Hast du den Eiskunstlaufwettbewerb
gesehen?

STUDENT
Ja.

FRED
Und wer hat gewonnen?

STUDENT
Brian Boitano gewinnt olympische
Goldmedaille.

FRED
Wissen Sie etwas über Brian
Boitano?

STUDENT
Nein.

FRED
Irgendjemand?

Fred looks around the class and sees Daniels and Gertie, watching him at the side of the classroom.

Daniels motions to Fred that she needs to talk with him. Gertie stands behind Daniels, confused.

Fred turns back to his students.

FRED
(continuing)
Brian Boitano wurde 1963 in
Sunnyvale, Kalifornien, geboren.
Mit acht Jahren verliebte er sich
in Eislaufen, nachdem er Ice
Follies gesehen hatte, und er war
entschlossen, der beste
Eiskunstläufer der Welt zu sein.
(Pause)
Nun, wenn Sie mich für einen
Moment entschuldigen.

Fred leaves his class and walks toward Daniels and Gertie. The students watch as the three adults huddle.

Daniels whispers to both Fred and Gertie that an urgent call is waiting for them in the office. Fred and Gertie walk quickly away as Daniels walks towards the classroom and resumes teaching the students.

INT. FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Fred hurries through the center of the school building, passing classes of students and teachers, followed by Gertie.

INT. ADMINISTRATION OFFICE - HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Somewhat out of breath, Fred and Gertie enter the high school administration office. One of the SECRETARIES points to the desk in the Assistant Principal's empty office.

FRED AND GERTIE'S P.O.V. - ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL'S DESK

On the telephone, a line blinks ominously.

RETURN TO SCENE

SECRETARY

You can take the call in Mrs. Daniels's office.

EXT. FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Fred and Gertie leave the high school with coats and belongings. They hurry to the parking area.

EXT. FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL PARKING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Fred and Gertie climb into his older Volkswagen station wagon, throwing their coats and belongings into the back seat.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred backs the car out of the parking space and then stops...paralyzed with fear and unable to move on.

FRED

Why are we doing this, Gertie?

GERTIE

Because she's our mother...and she's dying.

FRED

I don't think I want to see her again.

GERTIE

Don't think. There's a lot of things that I don't want to do, but I do them anyway.

(beat)

This is one of them, little brother.

Gertie reaches across the seat and takes his hand.

GERTIE

(continuing)

Fred...we've always had it rough. No one in this school can possibly imagine what we went through as kids living with her.

FRED

But I don't...

GERTIE

You need to do this.

EXT. FREEDOM HIGH SCHOOL PARKING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car drives away.

EXT. HIGHWAY 64 - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car drives down Highway 64.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

In a tense silence, Fred drives along with Gertie. He looks over and sees some billboards.

FRED'S P.O.V. - BILLBOARDS

One of the billboards shows an image of a loving mother from the forties, spooning out some food to her smiling children, with the words, HOMEMADE GRITS - THE WAY MOM USED TO MAKE THEM.

RETURN TO SCENE

As he passes by, Fred stares at the billboard.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - LATE SEPTEMBER - 1949 -
AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

YOUNG FRED, a puny, seven-year-old blond-haired boy, who looks like no one has fed him in a week, bathed him in two or washed his ragged overalls since his brothers all outgrew them, looks around the shack.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - INTERIOR OF THE LITTLE OLD HOUSE

Feed sackcloth hung on baling wire to divide the interior into four rooms: a kitchen with a potbelly stove, living area with stone fireplace, and two sleeping areas. Feed-sackcloth-made curtains hang over the three windows.

RETURN TO SCENE

Coming into the house, YOUNG GERTIE, a twelve-year-old, and her sister, JUSTINE, a small five-year-old girl, carry a bucket of water and several sweet potatoes.

Young Fred looks out the window.

YOUNG GERTIE (O.S.)
Come help us with supper, Fred.

EXT. RURAL NORTH CAROLINA - OLD SAWMILL - CONTINUOUS

Closing time. Men leave a rural SAWMILL after a long, hard day's work. Among the departing workers are JUNE SR., a troll-looking, short, white man in his late forties with black hair and a prominent Hapsburg lip. Embarrassed, CURTIS, a sixteen year-old boy, reluctantly follows June Sr.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

June Sr., trailed by Curtis, pass BEULAH'S HOUSE, one-story white-painted house with laundry hanging on a clothesline.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BEULAH, a recent widow in her early fifties, watches June Sr. through her window.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As June Sr. passes by, Beulah steps outside of her kitchen door, carrying a clothes basket. While taking laundry off the clothesline, Beulah notices the acrid odor in the air. She drops her laundry in the basket and hurries back inside her kitchen.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah hurries into her living room and sits down at the gossip bench where the telephone is located. Urgently, she takes the phone book out from the shelf underneath the phone, quickly looks up a number, and dials it.

 DAWSON (O.S.)
Sheriff Dawson here.

 BEULAH
 (Into the phone)
This is Beulah Meddler on Devil's
Creek Road. I suspect somethin'
is goin' on at the Grant
homestead. You better call the
Revenuers.

Beulah hangs up the phone, stands up defiantly, and walks over to the window to look out. She cranes her neck to see if she can still see June Sr.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Still craning her neck to look up the dirt road, Beulah steps down from her kitchen door and continues to take down her laundry and smiles righteously to herself.

EXT. ELI'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Without any acknowledgment, June Sr. trudges up the road and passes WILLARD WORTH, a fifteen-year-old boy, who is herding cows back to the barn for their evening milking. Curtis stops to help Willard.

 WILLARD
What's wrong with him today?

 CURTIS
Why ask me? He's your father,
too, ain't he?

 WILLARD
That's what Oattie said, anyway.

 CURTIS
And ya believe her?

 WILLARD
She's our ma, ain't she? Ya think
she'd know.

 CURTIS
Ya think?

Curtis and Willard look at each other, not knowing what to say, and watch June Sr. trudge up the road toward Eli's farmhouse in the distance.

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

June Sr. ambles up the dirt road, past Eli's farmhouse: a two-story, log house, splashed with white paint.

Next to the house, he sees GUMTOOTH, a tall, rough toothless woman in her late thirties but looks like decades older, as she picks vegetables from an overgrown garden. They glower at each other for a moment. Suddenly, June Sr. takes a whiff of the air and gazes up the house.

JUNE SR.'S P.O.V. - FARMHOUSE'S CHIMNEY

The smoke comes out of the farmhouse's chimney.

RETURN TO SCENE

June Sr. looks back at Gumtooth and continues walking. She watches him for a moment and resumes her picking.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

June Sr. walks past the farmhouse to an older log cabin with a tin roof porch and worn front steps. Red tinted tar paper wrapped around the four outer walls. He walks up to the wooden steps of the porch, passing JUNE JR., a fourteen-year-old boy. Without looking out, June Jr. sits on the porch, bored, whittling some wood. June Sr. stops and leers down at his son with scorn.

JUNE SR.
How come ya ain't out helpin' your
brothers?

June Jr. looks up his father, says nothing, and continues his whittling.

June Sr. turns, spits in disgust on the ground, and walks into the dilapidated house.

After his father goes into the shack, June Jr. spits on the ground with contempt.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

June Sr. looks at the bare table and then sees three small children - Young Gertie, Young Fred and Justine in the kitchen area. Dirty, unfed, and shoeless, the children huddle together as they peel sweet potatoes, very wary of their father.

June Sr. stands over the children in a threatening way.

JUNE SR.
Gertie, where's your ma at?

Gertie holds back, afraid to speak.

JUNE SR.
(continuing;
threatening)
I'm talkin' to ya, girl.

Gertie stands up.

YOUNG GERTIE
I think she's over at Eli's.

JUNE SR.
What's she doin' over there?

Young Gertie looks down, not knowing what to say.

JUNE SR.
(continuing)
Well?

YOUNG GERTIE

Don't know.

Just as June Sr. walks forward to hit Young Gertie, Young Fred quickly stands up to defend his sister.

YOUNG FRED

Maybe she makin' some grits?

JUNE SR.

Yeah, I bet she is.

Disgusted, June Sr. storms out of the house.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As June Sr. stomps down the porch's steps, he slaps June Jr. hard in the back of his head. Resentful, June Jr. scurries away from the house as June Sr. walks down the hill toward Eli's house.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred sneaks after him.

YOUNG GERTIE

Fred...Fred, where are ya goin'?

Young Gertie and Justine run after their brother.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie and Justine follow Fred down the steps.

YOUNG GERTIE

Don't go!

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

SHERIFF DAWSON, a tall, slim, athletic white man in his late thirties, and two white male REVENUERS walk out of the Sheriff's office, carrying guns and axes, and climb into the Sheriff's battered, old truck.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson starts the engine and pulls away from the Sheriff's office in a cloud of dust.

EXT. ELI'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Cautiously, Young Fred runs down the hill to Eli's farmhouse, stops and watches June Sr.

June Sr. walks towards the chicken coop with a trap door next to it. He hurls the trap door open and walks down the step ladder.

YOUNG GERTIE (O.S.)

Fred...Fred.

Young Fred turns around, allowing Young Gertie and Justine to catch up with him. Young Gertie reaches out and grabs his arm.

YOUNG GERTIE

Don't go down there, Fred. You'll be sorry.

Young Fred pulls away from Gertie.

YOUNG FRED
I wanna know what's gonna on.

Young Fred breaks away and runs toward the chicken coop.

Fearing for her brother's safety, Young Gertie and Justine watch Young Fred run away.

EXT. TRAP DOOR - CHICKEN COOP - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred reaches the opened trap door. He looks back at Young Gertie and Justine, and then down at the darkness of the trap door.

Apprehensive but determined, Young Fred climbs down the trap door's ladder into the tunnel's darkness.

INT. PRIMITIVE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

June Sr. walks through a dark tunnel until he reaches the cellar of the farmhouse.

JUNE SR.'S P.O.V. - OTTIE

OTTIE, a petite, hard-looking woman in her mid-forties, makes moonshine at a primitive still. Wearing an old, worn jumper and apron to cover her pregnancy, Ottie looks like a wizard as she moves among the bubbling cauldrons of hot steam.

RETURN TO SCENE

INT. FARMHOUSE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Ottie looks over and sees June Sr. at the entranceway.

OTTIE
What do ya want?

JUNE SR.
A wife.

OTTIE
Can't ya see I'm busy?
(Continues her work)
Now get the hell out of here.

June Sr. grabs her hair and smacks across her face.

JUNE SR.
Don't ya talk to me like that, ya whorin' bitch.

Ottie falls backward, knocking over a case of moonshine.

INT. PRIMITIVE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred inches through the dark tunnel, not knowing where he is going. Suddenly, he hears voices and smashing of glass. Petrified in fear, Young Fred stops, hesitates, and then continues until he gets to the entrance. Fred stands in the tunnel's shadows, and sees.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - JUNE SR. AND OTTIE

June Sr. stands over a bleeding Ottie on the floor, surrounded by broken glass and liquid.

RETURN TO SCENE

INT. FARMHOUSE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Ottie pulls herself to her knees. She wipes off the blood from her nose and mouth, stands up and lunges forward, and hits June Sr. in his gut, knocking him against one of the barrels of mash. June Sr. grabs a long birch stick used for stirring the mash and swings wildly at Ottie's head. Ottie grabs June Sr. by his neck in an arm lock and pulls him over, smashing his head into the wall.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson's truck roars down the Country Highway.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson turns onto a dirt country road.

INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

ELI, an attractive, dark blond, short, medium-built man in his late fifties with strong arms and legs, sits at the kitchen table, as his wife, Gumtooth, serves him dinner. He hears the commotion in the cellar.

ELI
What the hell?

He stands up and walks over to the stove. He then lifts the trap door behind the stove and runs down the steps into the dark cellar.

INT. FARMHOUSE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred hides in the shadows as Eli comes down the stairs and sees the partially wrecked still, broken glass, liquid, and blood on the floor. Eli sees Ottie as she holds June Sr. in an arm lock around his neck.

ELI
Let him go. Ya gonna kill the bastard.

Eli forces Ottie to let go June Sr. As June Sr. regains his consciousness, Eli helps Ottie to a small wooden stool.

JUNE SR.
(Looks up at Eli)
Ya fuck my wife, and then ya expect me to take care of your bastards, do you?

June Sr. stands up, pulling a rusty switchblade from his pocket, and thrusts the knife toward Eli.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In nervous anticipation, Beulah stands on her porch and waits for the Sheriff.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson's truck rumbles down the dirt road toward Beulah's house.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah runs over to meet Sheriff Dawson's truck.

INT. FARMHOUSE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Eli kicks the knife out of June Sr.'s hand and knocks June Sr. hard across his face.

June Sr. howls in pain as he flies across the room. June Sr. looks over at Ottie.

JUNE SR.
Ya sinful bitch. Have ya no shame? Ya birth one bastard after another, not carin' who the father is.

OTTIE
(Laughs to herself and then to Eli)
He's not as stupid as I thought he was.

ELI
He's an idiot.

OTTIE
I wouldn't talk if I was ya.

JUNE SR.
Ya whore around with this man who would fuck a snake if he could and ya do it in front of my eyes and with his wife sittin' upstairs. What kinda woman are ya?

Ottie stands up and faces him.

OTTIE
I'm a woman who knows love...something you'll never know. I know what's right for me, and ya don't tell me what it is.

June Sr. faces at Eli, as he sheepishly turns away.

INT. PRIMITIVE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Puzzled, Young Fred starts to realize the harsh truth about his parents as he watches from the shadows of the tunnel.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

After chatting with the Sheriff, Beulah steps away and watches the truck disappear down the dusty, rural road.

INT. FARMHOUSE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

As June Sr. stands up, Ottie confronts him.

OTTIE
Those bastards...as ya call them...I had with Eli, and they're a product of the love I have for him.

JUNE SR.
Ya supposed to be my wife.

OTTIE
Your what? Wife?
(Laughs to herself)
I rather be married to one of the cattle in the field than you.

June Sr. strikes Ottie across the face and she falls to the ground. As Eli goes over to help Ottie, June Sr. grabs Eli by the hair and strikes Eli in the face. Eli flies across the room and falls against the barrel full of corn mash, knocking it off its foundation.

Ottie stands up and leaps on June Sr.'s back, beating him with her fists.

June Sr. throws her off his back and stumbles to the tunnel's entrance.

INT. PRIMITIVE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

June Sr. stalks away. Fred hides in the shadows as June Sr. passes.

JUNE SR.
I've had it. Ya can take care of
your own bastards.

Ottie looks as June Sr. leaves.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff's truck races toward the farmhouse.

INT. ELI'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Gumtooth hears the approaching vehicle and runs out to see who it is.

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Seeing its the sheriff, Gumtooth runs frantically back into the house to warn Eli.

GUMTOOTH
Sheriff Dawson is comin'.

INT. FARMHOUSE CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Eli knocks over the fire onto the spilled moonshine and sets in on fire.

OTTIE
What are ya doin'?

ELI
I ain't goin' to prison for ya
again.

The flames of the fire leap up as Eli hurries up the cellar stairs.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

As Sheriff Dawson and the Revenuers approach Eli's house, they notice a beaten-up June Sr., as he limps down the hill, carrying a burlap sack on this shoulders.

Sheriff Dawson looks up and sees the farmhouse on fire.

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson and the Revenuers jump out of the Sheriff's truck and watch the farmhouse in flames.

INT. PRIMITIVE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Terrified, Young Fred hides in the shadows.

A defeated and battered Ottie watches as the flames engulf the moonshine still and cellar. As she turns and hurries out of the cellar, Ottie bumps into Fred.

OTTIE
What are ya doin' here? Get out
of my way.

Ottie pushes Young Fred to the wall and starts to leave when she remembers something. She turns and sees a ragged, old Indian blanket lying on the floor.

Ottie battles her way back into the flames, retrieves the blanket, and then hurries past Young Fred.

Stopping half-way through the tunnel, Ottie comes back, grabs Young Fred by the hand, and drags him out of the burning inferno.

INT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Eli pulls Gumtooth out of the house as the flames rapidly consume the kitchen.

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred climbs out of the tunnel and looks around.

He sees a beaten up Ottie. She stands alone and watches as Eli's house...and her livelihood goes up in flames.

As Ottie turns to walk the hill to her house, she turns and sees Eli comforting his wife, Gumtooth. Ottie watches them for a moment and then realizes something else is happening. She looks down between her legs and sees in horror that her water has broken. She then starts to feel the pain of contractions.

Ottie glances around and sees Young Fred watching her. Turning away from him, Ottie spots Young Gertie and Justine.

OTTIE
(Yells in pain)
Go get Miss Robenson...hurry!!!

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred and Justine run urgently down the rural roads and paths and through the farm fields.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie lies on her bed, screaming in great pain as an anxious young Gertie tries to comfort and nurse her mother.

INT. ROBENSON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Exhausted, Young Fred and Justine run to Robenson's house, an old, dilapidated farmhouse, and knock frantically at its front door.

The door suddenly opens. MANDY ROBENSON, a worn, elderly woman in her sixties, appears at the door, wiping her hands with her apron.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Desperately needing help, a frightened young Gertie tries to calm Ottie who is delirious in pain.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Night is approaching. Young Fred and Justine pull a winded Robenson, who clutches her heart and carries a bag as they hurry through the open fields and rural roads and pathways.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hearing Ottie's screams of pain, Curtis, Willard and June Jr. loiter around the porch, not knowing what to do as they watch young Fred and Justine pull Robenson up the stairs to the house.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

With the help of young Gertie, Robenson delivers a small, fragile baby from a despondent Ottie.

Nervously, Fred stands with Justine and watches in the corner of the room.

Alarmed, Robenson notices that the small baby isn't breathing. She puts her lips to the baby's lips and blows gentle air into the baby...and then she listens to see if there is any life. Wiping her forehead with her arm, she repeats again until there is life.

Robenson hands the small baby to Gertie as Robenson tends to the Ottie's care.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Later at night. Robenson sits and waits anxiously by Ottie, checking her breathing and pulse as Gertie sits next to her, caring for the baby. Robenson glances around at the deplorable living conditions and the number of hungry children in the room.

As she continues to nurse Ottie, Robenson bows her head and says a quiet prayer to herself.

ROBENSON
Please God. Spare this woman's
life.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Early in the morning. As Young Fred escorts a weary Robenson out of the house, Robenson turns to Gertie, still holding the small baby, with Justine by her side.

ROBENSON
If your mother and baby sister get
any worse, you come and get me.
You hear?

Gertie nods to her.

ROBENSON
(continuing)
Your mother can pay me with some
produce when she feels better.
(to Justine)
And you help your
sister...understand?

Justine nods.

ROBENSON
(continuing; to Fred)
Come on...I've got cows to milk.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dawn. Curtis, Willard and June Jr. sleep on the porch as Roberson and Fred walk down the stairs and away from the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRED'S CAR - MORNING (BACK TO PRESENT)

With the skies clouding up and darkening, Fred's car drives along the highway into the approaching storm.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Deep in thought, Fred and Gertie drive along the highway in silence. Hesitantly, Gertie turns and tries to make conversation with Fred.

GERTIE
Do you -

FRED
What?

GERTIE
Do you think we're ever going to see the sun?

FRED
Don't know.

Fred and Gertie glance out the window and notice an old, abandoned share-cropper cabin in a field.

GERTIE (O.S.)
That old house has seen its better days.

Fred turns and looks back at the road.

FRED
I wonder if there were any better days.

GERTIE
Of course there were.

It starts to rain and Fred switches on the windshield wipers. Fred stares out the window, Gertie turns to look at him and sees his pain. She wants to comfort him but doesn't know how.

EXT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

As it rains, Fred's car passes a small, Pentecostal church.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred glances at the church.

FRED'S P.O.V. - SMALL, PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

A small, Pentecostal church with a roadway sign, "Jesus, Won't you please help me?"

DISSOLVED TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - DAWN (FLASHBACK)

A cold, rainy morning. The camera pans the children's bedroom, where it seems that everyone is asleep.

Young Fred sleeps next to an June Jr., who lies awake on his back, horny. June Jr. rises up to see if anyone can see him, and then quickly climbs on the back of Young Fred.

With one of his hands, June Jr. gags a frighten Young Fred, so his young brother doesn't scream. June Jr. uses his other hand to quickly pull down Young Fred's pants and then he spits into his hand. Using his saliva as a lubricant, June Jr. forcefully penetrates his young brother.

YOUNG FRED
(muffled scream of
pain)
No...no.

As June Jr. pierces Young Fred, an arm forcibly grabs June Jr.'s shoulder.

CURTIS (O.S.)
Get off of him, you little son-of-a-bitch.

Suddenly, Curtis flings June Jr. off of Young Fred. Curtis and June Jr. start to fight, crashing into furniture. A horrified Young Fred scrambles into a corner to hide his humiliation and then he quickly clothes himself and wipes his blood on his torn overalls. Young Gertie and Justine run over to console a scared Fred as Ottie comes into the room, carrying a small baby.

OTTIE
What in the hell is goin' on
around here?

Ottie sees Curtis and June Jr.'s bloody fight, quickly hands the baby to Justine, and tries to pull apart the tangled knot the bodies have formed.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Stop it! Stop this fightin', do
ya hear me.

Wiping the blood off his face, Curtis breaks loose, grabs the shotgun from its rack above the fireplace, loads a couple of bullets into the gun, and fires at June Jr. but misses.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Oh! Lordy, Lordy! They're gonna
kill each other.

June Jr. brutally fights with Curtis to get hold of the gun as Ottie struggles to break-up the fight. The gun is fired again.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Kids, run get Sheriff Dawson
before all of us get killed.

Young Gertie quickly dresses and then leaps out of the front door into a rainy morning. Young Fred runs after her. Both are shoeless.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A dark, cold, and rainy morning. Bare-footed, young Gertie and Fred run down the muddy roadway. They pass the burnt remains of Eli's farmhouse and their brother, Willard comes out of the barn from milking the cows.

WILLARD
 (Yells at Young
 Gertie and Fred)
 Where are ya goin'?

GERTIE
 (Hollers back)
 To get the Sheriff. They're
 tryin' to kill each other again.

EXT. FARM FIELDS AND CREEK - CONTINUOUS

Drenched and covered with mud, Young Gertie and Fred run through fields toward a rapidly-running creek. Gertie lifts Fred on her back and together, they ford to the other side of the stream.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The rain comes down harder. Miserably cold...lungs aching, young Gertie and Fred run down a muddy dirt road. Gertie takes Fred by the hand and leads him forward.

YOUNG GERTIE
 (Through her panting
 breath)
 I can see the sheriff's house.
 We're almost there...come on.

EXT. SHERIFF DAWSON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie and Fred reach Sheriff Dawson's house and climb the kitchen porch...hair and clothes soaked by the rain, covered in mud. Gertie stands outside the door, too ashamed to knock on the door. She starts to cry.

INT. SHERIFF DAWSON'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

MRS. DAWSON, a plain woman in her mid-thirties, is preparing breakfast for her two daughters. Hearing children weeping outside, Mrs. Dawson quickly walks over, and opens the door. She sees young Gertie and Fred standing outside, drenched, shriveling with cold, with their heads bowed down and crying with shame.

Shocked by what she sees, Mrs. Dawson opens the door wide and brings young Gertie and Fred into the kitchen.

MRS. DAWSON
 (To young Gertie and
 Fred)
 Come on in.
 (Hollers)
 Sheriff!

DAWSON (O.S.)
 What is it?

MRS. DAWSON
 Ya got some visitors. It's
 Ottie's children.
 (To young Gertie and
 Fred.)
 Don't be shy now...come on into
 the kitchen and warm yourselves
 up. I'll go and get some towels to
 dry you off.

As Mrs. Dawson hurries to get some towels, Young Fred glances around the warm, glowing kitchen, with freshly baked biscuits on top of the wood-burning stove along with coffee perking and bacon frying.

Across the room, sitting at the kitchen table are two wide-eyed young girls, DAWSON'S DAUGHTERS, eating their breakfast.

Mrs. Dawson kneels down to dry off and comforts young Gertie and Fred.

MRS. DAWSON
(continuing)
There now...don't cry. Everythin'
is gonna be okay.

Sheriff Dawson stumbles into the kitchen, pulling up his suspenders over a half-buttoned shirt.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Are you kids, alright?

GERTIE
(Ashamed)
Curtis and June Jr. are tryin' to
kill each other.

SHERIFF DAWSON
They are, are they?

Sensing the urgency, the sheriff takes a swig of coffee and grabs a biscuit as he buckles his pistol and holster around his flat waist and throws on his coat, hat, and gloves. At the same time, Mrs. Dawson hurries over to the stove and wraps some warm biscuits in wax paper and hands them to young Gertie and Fred.

MRS. DAWSON
Here. Have some breakfast, kids.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(To young Gertie and
Fred)
Let's go.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The old Sheriff's truck coughs and sputters as it goes up the dirt road.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson stretches his long arm across young Fred and Gertie's backs, pretending to lock Gertie's door. He lets his big, calloused hand fall on Gertie's shoulder and then pulls the two of them closer to him in one gigantic hug.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Come on.

Sensing young Gertie and Fred's shame and fear, the Sheriff glances over to them.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(continuing; Whispers)
It will be okay.

The Sheriff looks back at the road. His eyes swell, and big tears fall down on the steering wheel.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff's truck pulls up to and parks by the gnarled apple tree.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson wipes the fog from the glass and looks out the window.

SHERIFF DAWSON P.O.V. - LITTLE OLD HOUSE

The dilapidated, little old house stands eerily calm as if all life and activity have abandoned it.

RETURN TO SCENE

SHERIFF DAWSON
You kids stay here where it's warm.

Sheriff Dawson climbs out of the truck and closes the door.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson cautiously walks over to the house.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred stares out the front window, watching the Sheriff.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - SHERIFF DAWSON

Sheriff Dawson carefully ascends the front steps, creeps along the porch and disappears into the front door of the house.

RETURN TO SCENE

Young Fred flings open the driver's door and slides over.

YOUNG GERTIE
Where ya goin'?

Holding his precious biscuit, Young Fred jumps out of the truck.

EXT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred jumps into the cold mud and runs toward the distant mountains.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred runs across the cow pasture and through a small creek toward the mountains.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred climbs the path up the mountainside, through clumps of laurel bushes, his bare feet digging foothold in the wet, rotting leaves. He stumbles across a rocky outcrop, which forms a dry shelter on the mountainside.

EXT. ROCK OUTCROP SHELTER - CONTINUOUS

Exhausted, Young Fred lies down on the dry leaves and rubs his cold, hurting bare feet. He looks around.

The rain gushes in the rivulets from the overhanging rocks and flows down the hillside. The wind moans in the pines.

Alone and afraid, Young Fred starts to cry.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - ACORN

An acorn falls on Young Fred's lap.

RETURN TO SCENE

Young Fred picks up and studies it. Another acorn thumps his head.

Young Fred glances up and sees a figure of a tall man standing quietly among the laurels.

Sheriff Dawson stands like a strong oak among the laurels and watches Young Fred. His arms crossed as rains drips down his face. He lifts his hand and throws another acorn over to Young Fred.

Embarrassed, Young Fred pretends not to see the Sheriff as he walks across the wet forest floor to the rock outcrop.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Is this seat taken?

Young Fred shakes his head, and the Sheriff sits down. Listening to rain, wind and distant farmhouse sounds, Sheriff Dawson picks up an acorn and flips it out into the elements. Young Fred watches and copies him.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(continuing)
It's cold up here. Come closer
and sit next to me. Ya must be
freezing.

Sheriff Dawson opens his heavy, wool jacket with its tin badge shaped like a star, and gently tries to pull a resistant Young Fred over to him.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(continuing)
Quit bein' so stubborn. Ya gonna
catch your death of cold.

Reluctantly, Young Fred slides over as the Sheriff shields the boy with his warm coat.

Sheriff Dawson and Young Fred sit quietly and watch the rain.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FRED'S CAR - MORNING (BACK TO PRESENT)

Remembering the past, Fred's eyes well up with tears as he continues to drive through the rain. Gertie turns and sees him.

GERTIE
Are you okay?

Fred wipes his eyes with the back of his hand.

FRED
Yeah. Just allergies.

GERTIE (O.S.)
They're bad this year.

Fred nods and looks out the window.

FRED'S P.O.V. - OLD SCHOOLHOUSE

An old two-room schoolhouse abandoned in the fields.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - DAWN (FLASHBACK)

Early November 1949. Young Gertie wakes up, looks out the window, and climbs out of her bed. She quickly dresses in the cold dark. She quietly walks over to the fireplace and starts a fire. The firelight dances across the room.

Young Gertie then walks over to the kitchen and picks up the water bucket and then goes outside.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the cold, dark morning, Young Gertie carries the bucket and pumps water in it.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie washes quickly and then walks over and wakes her brothers.

YOUNG GERTIE
Come on, boys. It's time to get
up.

Half-asleep, Curtis and Willard Worth grumble as they get up and throw on their clothes as they warm themselves by the fire.

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing)
You, too, June Jr.

June Jr. turns away from her

JUNE JR.
Go to hell.

Young Gertie shakes her head in disgust and prods Young Fred.

YOUNG GERTIE
Come on, Fred. We're gonna be
late for school.

Young Fred stirs and stands up.

As her brothers are dressing, Gertie wakes her sister, Justine.

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing; Gently
kisses her)
Wake up, sweetheart.

As Justine rises, Young Gertie tiptoes into the bedroom.

Ottie sleeps in the bed with a strange man. Next to the bed, a young baby lies awake in a make-shift bed basket and a mason jar with some remnants of moonshine in it.

Young Gertie reaches down and carefully picks up the baby, then the mason jar. With the baby in arms, Young Gertie sniffs the jar's pungent smell and quietly leaves the room.

Young Gertie gently hands the baby to Justine and walks over to the front door.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Opening the door, Young Gertie throws out the remaining liquor.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie washes Young Fred and Justine's faces with a cold, wet rag and combs their hair.

YOUNG FRED
Gertie...I'm hungry.

Reassuring them, Young Gertie helps her younger siblings dress in their patched overalls, a sweater with holes, and tattered shoes.

YOUNG GERTIE
I know ya are...but how would ya like it if I made some pinto beans with sweet potatoes and a pan of corn bread for you tonight? Would that do?

YOUNG FRED
I guess I can wait.

YOUNG GERTIE
Okay. We gotta go now, or we'll miss the bus.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - DAWN

Young Gertie and Young Fred leave the house. As they walk down the path, Willard Worth comes out of the barn.

WILLARD
I wish I was gonna with ya, Clods.

Willard kneels to Young Fred and gives him a hug.

WILLARD
(continuing)
Learn as much as ya can...and for me, too. Will ya do that for me?

Young Fred nods.

YOUNG GERTIE (O.S.)
We gotta go, Fred.

Willard stands up and watches his young sister and brother walk down the path.

EXT. FARM FIELDS AND CREEK - CONTINUOUS

Braving a cold wind, Young Gertie and Young Fred scurry along the frozen path toward the highway, breaking the ground ice as they go.

YOUNG GERTIE
Hurry up, Fred. It won't be long now.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Cleaning up her kitchen, Beulah glances out her window.

BEULAH'S P.O.V. - YOUNG GERTIE AND FRED

Young Gertie and Young Fred shivering from the harsh cold weather, as they wait for the school bus, trying to warm their frozen hands and ears.

RETURN TO SCENE

Wiping her hands, Beulah hurries, opens her kitchen door, hollers out to the children.

BEULAH
You kids come in here and wait
inside for the bus. Come on,
before your fingers drop off.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie and Fred hasten over to Beulah's house.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah ushers Young Gertie and Young Fred into her house.

BEULAH
Come on in and warm yourselves by
the wood heater.

Young Fred starts to cry from the ache in his fingers and face. He covers his eyes with his hands, trying to conceal his hurting. Beulah kneels down to him.

BEULAH
(continuing)
What's the problem, Fred?

She comforts him and blows her breath, warming his hands in hers.

BEULAH
(continuing)
There...there. It's gonna be okay.

YOUNG GERTIE (O.S.)
The bus is here.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie and Young Fred run toward the approaching SCHOOL BUS. Beulah stands in her doorway and waves them good-bye.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie and Young Fred board the school bus and take seats where they can find them. Young Fred sits down with PHYLLIS, a young girl about the same age as Fred. She notices his shivering and wraps her heavy coat around him.

PHYLLIS
Here...move closer to me.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - CONTINUOUS

As the school bus pulls into a barren, impoverished SCHOOL YARD, MISS LUCY, a tall, slightly over-weight, homely-looking, old-maid school teacher in her early forties, with thick glasses and her dark hair pulled back into a bun, comes outside and down the steps of the old, two-room SCHOOLHOUSE. She wears a cardigan sweater over her fitted dress.

As the school bus stops and opens its door, little children run over to Miss Lucy.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy greets the children as they run up the steps of the schoolhouse.

MISS LUCY
 Good mornin' Thomas. Hello
 Marybelle. Don't push, Jared.
 Mornin' Phyllis.

As the children hurry up the steps, Miss Lucy sees Fred and his tattered clothes and shoes with their flapping sole and torn tongue.

MISS LUCY
 (continuing)
 Are those the only shoes you
 have...and where's your coat and
 hat, Fred? You're gonna catch
 your death of cold.

Ashamed, Young Fred looks down and starts to cry. Suddenly realizing the painful truth, Miss Lucy quickly kneels down and comforts him.

MISS LUCY
 (continuing)
 Child, this school is a place of
 happiness. There is no need for
 tears here.
 (Takes a handkerchief
 from her sleeve)
 Here...blow your nose now.

Miss Lucy stands up and puts her hand on Fred's shoulder.

MISS LUCY
 (continuing)
 Should we go in and learn?

Young Fred nods and together they climb the wooden stairs and enter the school.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy and Young Fred enter the classroom with scores of children hanging their coats and quickly taking their places at one of the seven huge tables, each seating six students. Surrounded by blackboards and tall over-sized windows, a potbellied coal-burning stove on tall metal legs sits at one corner with a stove pipe running up to and through the ceiling in one corner, eight large electric lamps hang overhead. Next to the main blackboard hang poster copies of Norman Rockwell paintings.

Miss Lucy walks to the front of the class and starts her morning lecture.

MISS LUCY
 Good morning, children. We will
 start off on our civics lesson
 today with a discussion on the
 United Nations. Who can remember
 when the United Nations was
 founded?
 (Looks around)
 Yes, Caroline.

CAROLINE
 1945?

MISS LUCY

That's right, Caroline. You probably don't remember this because you weren't born yet, but President Roosevelt gave a speech in 1941 where he said that all Americans are guaranteed four freedoms. Does anyone want to guess what those four freedoms are?

(Looks around)

Come on now, children. No one wants to take a guess?

(Points to someone)

How about you, John Daniels?

JOHN DANIEL

(Hesitant)

I dunno know. Maybe speech?

MISS LUCY

Good guess, John Daniels.

(Points to one of the Norman Rockwell posters)

Freedom of speech is one of them. The others are Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Fear, and Freedom of Want. Together, they became part of the United Nations charter.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NOON

Later that day. Young Fred sits and watches his classmates eat their lunches. He glances over to Rockwell's poster, Freedom of Want.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - ROCKWELL'S POSTER

Fred stares at the Freedom of Want poster, depicting a Thanksgiving meal with a grandmother holding a gigantic roasted turkey on a platter, surrounded by a bounty of foods.

RETURNS TO SCENE

Young Fred holds his aching stomach. MICHAEL, a little boy who sits next to Young Fred, notices that Young Fred doesn't have any lunch.

MISS LUCY

Children, when you are through with your lunch, you may go outside for some fresh air before we start our afternoon lessons.

Excited, the students quickly put away their lunches and leave their tables for the schoolyard.

MISS LUCY

(continuing)

Make sure you put on your coats and hats.

Young Fred watches as one of his classmates throws a half-eaten sandwich out an open window.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - CONTINUOUS

The children run out through the front doors and down the wooden steps to the play field.

Young Fred comes out and passes the half-eaten sandwich on his way to the field. Looking around to see if anyone is watching him, Young Fred quickly snatches the sandwich and gobbles it down. Unbeknownst to Young Fred, Michael watches Young Fred from the field.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

After the recess, Miss Lucy stands by the door and watches the children as they file back into the room, chattering away as they hang up their coats, and take their seats at the tables.

As Young Fred sits down, Michael passes him a note.

MICHAEL
(Whispers)
Put your hand in the hole under
the table.

Young Fred hesitates.

MICHAEL
(continuing; Smiles
and whispers again)
Go ahead...put your hand in the
hole.

As Young Fred places his hand in the hole, Michael puts some peanut butter crackers and an apple in Young Fred's hand.

MICHAEL
(continuing; Placing
his index finger to
his lips and
whispers)
Shhhhh.

Miss Lucy and other children observe Michael's act of kindness.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Next day. Miss Lucy stands at the door and watches the children run in the classroom after their noontime recess. Taking his seat at the table, Young Fred sees a veritable smorgasbord awaiting him.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - SMORGASBORD

Young Fred sees a half banana sandwich, a half of homemade biscuit with ham, an apple, six potato chips, and a snippet of sweet potato pie.

RETURNS TO SCENE

Overcome with emotion, Young Fred looks around him. None of his classmates looks over his way. Even Miss Lucy pretends not to notice.

CUT TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Young Gertie and Young Fred enter the dark and cold house. Justine sits on the floor, caring for the baby.

YOUNG GERTIE
Where's mom?

Justine points to the bedroom. Young Gertie goes over and sees.

Ottie lies in bed, inebriated with a quart of moonshine by her side.

Gertie steps softly over to Ottie, pulls a blanket over her, and retreats back to the main room, where she is greeted by a hungry Willard and Curtis returning from their chores and work.

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing)
Fred, go gather some wood.

Young Fred runs out.

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing)
Justine, put the baby in the basket and then pull a couple of buckets of water.

Justine carefully lays the baby in the basket and hurries out.

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing)
Thatta girl.
(Turns to Willard)
Could you go up to cold spring and bring back some milk?

WILLARD
Sure, Gertie.

As Willard leaves, Young Gertie goes over and starts the fire in the fireplace.

YOUNG GERTIE
Curtis, go to out to the barn or the cold cellar and see if we have any cornmeal, sweet potatoes, onions...or anything else we can eat.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Later that week. As the students work intently on their assignment, Miss Lucy patiently sits and tutors Young Fred.

YOUNG FRED
(Struggles with the words as he reads)
"Come here, Dick. Come see Puff play. See Puff jump. Puff can jump and play."
(Turns the page)
"Oh, M..."

MISS LUCY
(Helps him with the word)
Mother.

YOUNG FRED
(With difficulty)
Mother.
(Continues to read)
"Oh, Mother, Mother."

Overcome by emotion, Young Fred, unable to continue reading, pushes the book away.

YOUNG FRED
(continuing)
I can't do this.

Puzzled, Miss Lucy looks at him for a moment and then she reaches over and pushes the book back to Young Fred.

MISS LUCY
Of course, you can.
(Beat)
Find a way, child, or make one.

Young Fred looks up at Miss Lucy, wipes away his tears and picks up the book and begins to read again.

YOUNG FRED
"Oh, Mom, mom. Come and look.
See Puff jump and play."

As young Fred smiles and turns the page, Miss Lucy reaches over and gently hugs him.

CUT TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Later that night. Lighted by kerosene lamp, Young Gertie helps Young Fred with his homework by the fireplace. Young Fred practices writing his "f" and "r" with a piece of black charcoal from the fireplace.

YOUNG GERTIE
Let me show ya again. Gimme the
charcoal, Fred.

Taking the charcoal, Young Gertie shows Young Fred how to write the letters on the hearth.

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing)
See.
(beat)
Now ya do it.

Fred takes the charcoal and writes again as Young Gertie looks on.

Young Fred swirled the letters on the hearth: "Fred."

YOUNG GERTIE
(continuing)
See. I told ya could do it.

Suddenly, the baby cries. As Young Gertie stands up to care for the baby, Young Fred writes the word, "Mom" on the hearth.

CUT TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - DAWN

Next day. With the Indian blanket draped around her, Ottie wanders out of her bedroom and hands the small baby to Justine. On the way to the kitchen, she kicks June Jr. in the butt as he lounges in his bed, trying to ignore her.

OTTIE
Get up and do somethin'.

In disgust, Ottie glances around at her deplorable living conditions and the lack of food in the house and then glances out the window.

OTTIE'S P.O.V. - YOUNG GERTIE AND YOUNG FRED

A bright, cold morning. Young Gertie and Young Fred walk down the path for school.

RETURN TO SCENE

The baby starts to cry. Ottie turns to glower at Justine holding the baby, and then at June Jr., still lying in his bed and watching her with contempt. She turns back and stares out the window.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy greets the children as they scramble up the steps of the school.

MISS LUCY
Good mornin'. Hello there.
Good to see you.

When Young Gertie and Young Fred approach, Miss Lucy eyes their tattered clothes, their heavily-patched, light-weight jackets, and their worn shoes, making a flapping sound when they walk.

MISS LUCY
(continuing)
Are those the only shoes you have?

Flushed with embarrassment, Young Gertie and Young Fred look at each other.

YOUNG GERTIE
(Nods)
Yes.

MISS LUCY
(Kneels down)
Are these the only clothes you have?

YOUNG GERTIE
We have a few others.

MISS LUCY
Fred, do you have a winter coat?

Young Fred stares down at the ground and refuses to answer.

MISS LUCY
(continuing; Standing up)
I see.
(beat)
Well...we better scurry in before we all freeze here.

Together, Miss Lucy, Young Gertie, and Young Fred climb the steps to the schoolhouse.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie staggers back to the bedroom and hits WILLIAM, a sleepy man in his late thirties, on his butt.

OTTIE
Come on...get up. I've got a life
to live.

William reluctantly fetches his clothes from the floor,
throws them on, and hurries out of the house.

Ottie looks out the window.

OTTIE'S P.O.V. - WILLIAM

Ottie watches William as he hoofs it down the path, passing
Willard as he leads the horse to the field.

RETURN TO SCENE

With determination, Ottie turns around and starts to dress -
squeezing into a pair of overalls, tucking in man's shirt,
fastening her suspenders over both shoulders, and slipping
into a pair of rough plow shoes. As she puts on her straw
hat, Ottie walks over to the front door, passing Justine, who
sits on the floor, cradling the small baby.

OTTIE
(continuing)
If she gives ya any trouble, come
and get me.

Ottie opens the door and walks out.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Later that day. The class is busy with their studies. Young
Fred diligently works on his assignment.

MISS LUCY (O.S.)
Fred Epeley.

Young Fred looks up from his writing and raises his hand.

MISS LUCY
Could I see you in the hallway for
a moment?

Young Fred wonders what he has done wrong as he stands up
from his chair and walks over to Miss Lucy, standing by the
open door.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As Miss Lucy closes the door, Fred sees Young Gertie.

MISS LUCY
There's a clothing store in Forest
City which is donating clothes to
needy children. And I have
selected the two of you to be
"needy" children.

Young Gertie and Young Fred look at each other, not knowing
what to say.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

GENTRY'S TRUCK rambles up the river road. Ottie and Willard
watch the beat-up truck from the field as it comes into view.
GENTRY, a handsome man in his late forties, waves at her from
a distance. Ottie and Willard look at each other.

OTTIE
I wonder what those hound dogs
want now.

Carrying her hoe in her right hand and wiping the perspiration from her forehead with the back of her left hand, she walks over the furrowed field toward him. Four of his Saw Mill Work Crew, white men in their late thirties and forties, jump out from the back of the truck and greet Ottie.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Afternoon Gentry...gentlemen.
What can I do you for?

GENTRY
Well ma'am...when my men and I
first came to this valley, you
welcomed us with a quart of your
moonshine.

Apprehensive, Ottie scrutinizes Gentry and the other men.

GENTRY
(continuing)
Your moonshine has quenched our
thirst and healed sick people for
many years.

OTTIE
But you all know that the still
was destroyed.

GENTRY
Yes...we know that.
(beat)
Well...the people in the valley
don't want to lose their
moonshine. Many of them
contributed money for the purchase
of this brand new cooker and coils.

OTTIE
What?!

Ottie lumbers over to the back of the truck and surveys the equipment.

GENTRY
We want to help you resurrect your
moonshine business.

Speechless and trying not to show how touched she is by their kindness, Ottie turns and squints at the sky.

GENTRY
(continuing)
What are ya lookin' for?

GERTIE
To see if pigs are flyin'.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Still holding her hoe in hand, Ottie leads the parade of Gentry and his men, carrying pieces of the moonshine still equipment and bags of cornmeal and sugar up the mountainside of Oaky Knob, hiking over rocks and dead trees.

With patches of blue sky above and giant spruce trees about her, Ottie gazes down the mountain to her tiny farm below and to the fresh mountain stream, emerging from a cluster of rocks.

Ottie turns to Gentry and men.

OTTIE
Leave me for a moment, will ya?

As the men back away, Ottie saunters ahead, looking at the mountains and patches of blue sky, and smelling the moss and the fresh water. She touches the branches of the dead oak tree but notices new life on the tree.

OTTIE
(continuing; To herself)
I'm not defeated and I will live for and through my children. I won't live in Eli's or any other man's shadow. My heart and my life are mine. That's all I have and I'll be damned if I give them away.

The winds rise, sighing through the rocks and trees. Thunder rolls across the distant mountains.

DISSOLVED TO:

INT. FRED'S CAR - MORNING (BACK TO PRESENT)

Deep in thought, Fred drives through Forest City, a small city, struggling to survive the current economic recession.

Gertie glances out the window and observes.

GERTIE
So much has changed.

FRED
I can't remember the last time I was here.

As the car drives through the commercial heart of the city, Fred notices an abandoned store.

FRED'S P.O.V. - TUTTLE'S CLOTHIER

A small boarded up store with a "For Sale" sign attached to it.

RETURN TO SCENE

Both Fred and Gertie look over as they drive slowly towards the abandoned store.

FRED
(continuing)
When did Tuttle's close?

GERTIE
It's been years...ever since that big box store opened in the next town.

DISSOLVED TO:

EXT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Late November 1949. Miss Lucy drives her old Nineteen-Thirties Ford automobile down a country road.

INT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy drives along carefully. Next to her, an apprehensive Young Gertie and Young Fred sit and take in the sights of Forest City. Even though it's a small town, Young Gertie and Young Fred are agog with wonder. To them, it is New York City, with red traffic lights, paved streets, beautiful houses, restaurants, and businesses.

EXT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy parks her car on the street, in front of a clothing store.

INT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy opens her door, grabs her purse, and starts to climb out.

MISS LUCY
We're here.

Apprehensive, Young Fred glances out the window.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - TUTTLE'S CLOTHIER

Fred sees a store with giant windows, stenciled in Old English letters, "Tuttle's Clothier, Best Selections in the Country," filled with the latest caps, shirts, pants, dresses, and shoes.

RETURN TO SCENE

Young Fred glances over at an equally frightened Young Gertie, for help.

YOUNG GERTIE
Just stay close to me, Fred.

EXT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy shuts the door and walks around the car to the passenger side as Young Gertie and Young Fred fumble, trying to open the door.

Miss Lucy opens the passenger car door.

MISS LUCY
Come on, children. Don't dawdle around...we don't have all day.

Young Gertie and Young Fred scramble out of the car and scamper after Miss Lucy as she marches toward the clothing store.

INT. TUTTLE'S CLOTHIER - CONTINUOUS

The shopkeeper's bell rings as Miss Lucy enters the clothing store, ushering in Young Gertie and Young Fred.

Young Fred'S P.O.V. - TUTTLE'S CLOTHIER

Young Fred stares at the rows and rows of coats, pants, shirts, and dresses. Tom Tuttle, a distinguished-looking man in his fifties, wearing a dark suit and tie, hurries toward them.

RETURN TO SCENE

TUTTLE
Good afternoon. May I...I help
you?

MISS LUCY
Yes. Are you still donating
clothes to needy children? Is that
true?

TUTTLE
Yes...we do.

MISS LUCY
How much are you offering them, a
lot or a little?

Taken off guard, Tuttle glares back at Miss Lucy and looks
down at Young Gertie and Young Fred with distaste.

TUTTLE
Well...I...

TUTTLE'S P.O.V. - YOUNG GERTIE AND YOUNG FRED

Tuttle stares at the tattered clothes and shoes of Young
Gertie and Young Fred, both look at each other, stripped away
of their dignity.

RETURN TO SCENE

The storekeeper's bell rings again.

RUFUS, a tall black man in his forties, and a couple of BLACK
FIELD HANDS enter the store.

Tuttle sees Rufus and the field hands.

TUTTLE
(continuing;
Perturbed; to Miss
Lucy)
Excuse me.

Tuttle scurries down the aisle.

TUTTLE
(continuing; To Rufus)
Can't you read the sign?
(Points to a small
window sign)
"No Colored Allowed."

RUFUS
But I...

Ashamed at Tuttle's behavior, Miss Lucy gathers Young Gertie
and Young Fred close to her.

MISS LUCY
There's nothing to be afraid of.

Rufus glances back and sees Young Fred.

Puzzled, Young Fred looks up at Miss Lucy and stares back at
Rufus.

TUTTLE

But nothing. You know the law...and besides, you're supposed to be gone out of our valley by sundown.

(Starts to show Rufus and the other field hands out)

Now...go on now.

Tuttle closes the door and returns to Miss Lucy.

TUTTLE

(continuing)

I swear. Now, where were we?

Young Fred looks up Miss Lucy, who glowers at Tuttle with silent indignation.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Later that afternoon. Dressed in field overalls with a shotgun tucked under her left arm, Ottie carries two buckets of corn up the mountainside to a medium-size moonshine still, hidden in the laurel thickets. Setting down the buckets and gun, she feeds wood kindling to the still's fire.

Ottie hears the sound of an oncoming car and quickly looks down at the valley below.

Ottie sees a distant car, driving toward her farmhouse.

Alarmed, Ottie grabs her gun and starts down the mountainside.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy's car travels slowly toward the old house.

INT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - DUSK

Behind her steering wheel, Miss Lucy stares out the window.

MISS LUCY'S P.O.V. - LITTLE OLD HOUSE

In disbelief, Miss Lucy stares at the impoverished conditions of the house and farm. She sees Curtis lumbering home from a long day's work at the sawmills, then Willard exiting the barn, and June Jr. slinking out of the house.

RETURN TO SCENE

YOUNG GERTIE (O.S.)

That's home.

Shocked, Miss Lucy turns and glances down at Young Gertie and Young Fred, ashamed of their living conditions, and then reluctantly opens her door and climbs out.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Curious, Justine comes out of the house with the baby in her arms.

Closing her car door, Miss Lucy quickly walks around the car and opens the door for Young Gertie and Young Fred while Curtis and Willard approach the vehicle.

MISS LUCY

Hello Curtis...Willard.

Miss Lucy smells the cooking of corn.

MISS LUCY
(continuing)
Is your mother around?

Just then, Ottie appears around the corner of the house, carrying her shotgun. Startled, Miss Lucy embraces Young Gertie and Young Fred.

MISS LUCY
(continuing)
Why...I...I didn't see you.

OTTIE
You weren't lookin'.

Ottie walks over to Miss Lucy.

OTTIE
(continuing)
What brings ya up to the hollow?
Are my kids causin' ya any trouble?

MISS LUCY
Oh, no. They're fine.

OTTIE
So why are ya here?

MISS LUCY
You see...your children were selected to get some new shoes and clothing from Tuttle's Clothier...and they declined the generous offer.

OTTIE
They did what?!

MISS LUCY
Gertie and Fred would not accept the clothes.

OTTIE
(to Young Fred)
Why did you do somethin' stupid like that?

Afraid, Young Fred exchange looks Young Gertie and bows his head in shame.

OTTIE
(continuing;
demanding an answer)
Well?

MISS LUCY
I guess they're too proud to accept charity.

OTTIE
(disbelief)
What in the Sam Hill?

MISS LUCY
(taken back)
Well...I should known better.
(beat)
See you two in the morning.

Young Fred walks over to Miss Lucy.

YOUNG FRED
Thank you, Miss Lucy, for tryin'.

Shaken up, Miss Lucy walks around and climbs into her old car.

INT. MISS LUCY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy starts up the sputtering engine, turns on her lights, and backs the car up. As she drives away, Miss Lucy glances over and then waves at Young Gertie and Young Fred.

MISS LUCY'S P.O.V. - YOUNG GERTIE AND YOUNG FRED

Miss Lucy catches the expressions of Young Gertie and Young Fred as she leaves.

RETURN TO SCENE

Fighting hard to hold back her tears, Miss Lucy looks straight ahead at the road and drives on.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Clinging to Young Gertie, Young Fred sadly waves as he watches the departure of Miss Lucy's car as it sputters down the dirt road and disappears into the night.

Ottie slaps Young Gertie and Young Fred in the head. Young Fred starts to cry and runs to Curtis for protection.

OTTIE
(irate)
Givin' back that clothin'. What's wrong with ya? Are ya that stupid? I could have sold them at the Boneyard.

YOUNG GERTIE
We couldn't do it.

OTTIE
Don't talk back to me.

Handing the gun to June Jr., Ottie walks over to one of the peach trees in the yard, breaks off a small limb from the tree, and starts beating Young Gertie until welts appear on her legs. Young Gertie cries in pain as she tries to protect herself from Ottie's blows.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Don't ya ever talk to me like that! Do ya hear?

YOUNG GERTIE
(cries)
Yes...yes.

OTTIE
Now go get supper ready. I don't have all night.

Young Gertie runs into the house. Young Fred breaks away from Curtis and hurries after Young Gertie into the house.

Scared, Justine and the baby follow Young Fred.

Curtis looks over at his mother and shakes his head in disbelief.

CURTIS
The kids have nothin' else.

OTTIE
Who asked you?

Ottie grabs her gun and walks up to the mountainside. With Willard, Curtis watches Ottie for a moment, and then he walks toward the house.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

With her legs bloody and stinging, Young Gertie sits on the floor, shivering from the trauma of the beating. Holding the baby, Justine stands close by with Young Fred comforting Young Gertie.

YOUNG FRED
Don't Gertie....please. I'll turn
her legs red like yours if she
hits you again. I promise I will.

Curtis stands by the door and watches Young Fred and Justine consoling Young Gertie.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. FRED'S CAR - NOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Fred glances over at the abandoned store.

Fred turns and sees Gertie who is fighting back her tears as she looks out the window at the store.

With his right arm, Fred reaches over and touches Gertie's shoulder. She turns and kisses his hand as he wipes away one of her tears.

EXT. FOREST CITY - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car drives slowly down the main street of Forest City.

Some of the past Christmas decorations still hang on the street lights.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - DAWN (FLASHBACK)

Early, cold Saturday morning. December 1949. In her bed, Ottie snores away as she sleeps with another, unseen man. In the basket, next to the bed, the baby fusses. Justine quickly tiptoes in, picks up the baby, and carries her out of the room.

In the larger room next to the fireplace, Young Gertie helps dress Young Fred in a shirt and bib overalls as Curtis and Willard watch.

CURTIS
(To Gertie)
Make sure he wears somethin' warm.
We have miles to walk to get to
the highway.

WILLARD
He needs somethin' more to wear.

Willard reaches under his bed, pulls out a box, opens it, and takes out a white sweater with red letters printed on the front that spelled out, "Hi-Ho Silver."

WILLARD
 (continuing; Gives to
 Young Fred)
 Here Clods...put this on.

YOUNG FRED
 But...

WILLARD
 But nothin'...I want to make sure
 you're warm. Now put it on.

Young Fred pulls the sweater over his head.

YOUNG FRED
 But this is your prized sweater.

WILLARD
 I know. But ya my prized
 brother...sorry Curtis.

CURTIS
 You...

Curtis smiles and laughs as he gives Willard a bear hug.

GERTIE
 (Quietly)
 Shhhhhh...boys. Ya wake mom up.

CURTIS
 And we don't want that, do we?

Curtis grabs winter coats and hats and throws them to Young Fred.

CURTIS
 (continuing; to Young
 Fred)
 Let's go.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Misty, cold morning. Curtis and Young Fred hoof down the stairs and the dirt path. Young Fred turns around and beams.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - WILLARD, YOUNG GERTIE, AND JUSTINE WITH A BABY IN HER ARMS, STANDING AT THE DOORWAY

RETURN TO SCENE

Young Fred waves good-bye.

EXT. FARM FIELDS AND CREEK - CONTINUOUS

Curtis and Young Fred trod along the path, through fields, streams, and mountains to the Highway 64.

EXT. HIGHWAY 64 - CONTINUOUS

Trying to stay warm, Curtis and Young Fred stand by the side of the road, watching the early morning cars and trucks travel by.

Finally, Curtis sees something coming down the highway.

A LARGE BUS roars from the east.

Curtis waves the large, approaching bus over.

In awe, Young Fred stares as the bus pulls over and stops.

Young Fred sees the image of a large Greyhound dog extended in full flight on the side of the bus. He smells the burned gas and hears the roar of its engine.

The bus's doors open and Curtis jumps in. Young Fred looks up into the bus to observe Curtis.

Curtis purchases two tickets for the bus.

With the tickets in hand, Curtis leaps off the bus and lifts Young Fred over the bus's steps.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - CONTINUOUS

As the bus starts to move, Curtis escorts Young Fred down the aisle of the bus, looking for an empty seat.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - PASSENGERS OF THE BUS

The PASSENGERS eyeball and judge Curtis and Young Fred as they pass by.

RETURN TO SCENE

Finding none, Curtis grabs onto a pole with one hand and places Young Fred between his two feet to keep him from falling.

One of the passengers, an older, overly made-up WOMAN PASSENGER, leers at Curtis and Young Fred.

WOMAN PASSENGER
(to her fellow
passenger)
These hillbillies should not be
allowed to ride the Greyhound bus.

Overhearing the comment, Young Fred turns and inquires to Curtis.

YOUNG FRED
What's a hillbilly?

Curtis glowers back at the Woman Passenger.

CURTIS
(To Young Fred)
It's a woman who wears too much
rouge and lipstick and can't keep
her big mouth shut.

Embarrassed, the Woman Passenger buries her nose in a magazine.

EXT. HIGHWAY 64 - CONTINUOUS

As morning approaches, the Greyhound bus travels on down the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY 64 - CONTINUOUS

Later that morning. On the edge of the town. The Greyhound Bus pulls over to the side of the road, next to a SERVICE STATION.

As the bus door opens, Curtis and Young Fred step off the bus. The bus drives away, leaving Curtis and Young Fred in a cloud of diesel smoke. Young Fred looks around and then down the road toward the town.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - TOWN IN THE FAR DISTANCE

The town seems like an oasis, far away.

RETURN TO SCENE

Curtis reaches down and grabs Young Fred's hand, and together, they walk toward the town.

EXT. FOREST CITY - CONTINUOUS

Later in the morning, Curtis and Young Fred finally enter Forest city and notice the throngs of holiday shoppers. Young Fred looks up and around him, in awe.

Beaming, Young Fred stares in wonderment at the colorful and festive decorations, and the blinking lights hung from the trees and lampposts, giving one the holiday spirit. He looks at the decorated Christmas trees and animated displays in the stores' windows, hearing Christmas carols sung.

Curtis looks down and smiles at Young Fred's excitement and joy.

INT. HOLIDAY SHOPS - CONTINUOUS

Curtis and Young Fred wander through a holiday-decorated store and stare at overflowing beautiful merchandise.

Suddenly, Young Fred hears music coming from somewhere in the store. He looks around and finally sees the small radio.

Curiously, Young Fred walks over to the radio and looks at with wonderment.

The radio is playing a country rendition of "Santa Claus is comin' to Town."

Turning around, Curtis sees Young Fred and walks over to him.

Standing for a moment, Curtis watches Young Fred's merriment and then gently nudges his young brother.

CURTIS
Come on, Fred. We've got some
presents to buy.

Young Fred follows Curtis as he buys some presents.

EXT. CHOO-CHOO DINER - CONTINUOUS

Afternoon. Carrying their holiday bundles, Curtis and Young Fred approach the Choo-Choo Diner, former railroad car, with its blinking lights and holiday-decorated windows. Curtis quickly opens the door for a departing customer and escorts Young Fred into the restaurant.

INT. CHOO-CHOO DINER - CONTINUOUS

Curtis and Young Fred sit at circular stools at the counter. Having a joyous time, Young Fred swings his legs underneath the counter.

Amused, Curtis looks over at Young Fred, who's having the time of his life, eating his first hotdog with mustard, chili, and french fries.

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Later, Curtis and Young Fred stroll down the sidewalk toward the movie theatre, where "Red Rider with Gene Autry" is displayed on the theatre's large marquee. Curtis buys two tickets at the box office and shows Young Fred into the movie theatre.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

In the dark theatre, Curtis and Young Fred intently watch the movie, eating their popcorn and drinking their Royal Crown soft drink.

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Later that night, Curtis and Young Fred exit the movie theatre to the dark winter wonderland of multicolored lights and holiday decorations, clutching their packages. Young Fred stands in awe of the spectacular show of lights.

EXT. FOREST CITY - CONTINUOUS

Through the throngs of joyful shoppers, Curtis and Young Fred saunter down the Main Street, basking in the glow of the holiday lights and decorations. Curtis looks at his watch and walks quickly over to a parked TAXICAB.

As Young Fred takes in the sights, Curtis opens the cab door and negotiates with the cab driver. After a couple of moments, Curtis opens the back seat door and hails to Young Fred to get in.

Hesitant, Young Fred climbs in, followed by Curtis, closing the door behind him. The taxi cab drives away from the curb and down the Main Street, through the holiday lights.

INT. TAXICAB - CONTINUOUS

Through the cab window, Young Fred glows with excitement as he watches the passing lights. He turns around and looks out the back window as the cab drives away from the magical Christmas town.

As the cab drives away, the blight lit town becomes smaller and smaller.

Sad, Young Fred turns around. Curtis looks down and smiles at Young Fred and then puts his arm around him as to comfort him.

EXT. HIGHWAY 64 - CONTINUOUS

The taxi cab drives down a dark highway, away from the bright lights of the town.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Later, the taxi cab pulls into the dark schoolhouse yard and stops.

INT. TAXICAB - CONTINUOUS

With a sleepy Young Fred sitting next to him, Curtis pulls out his wallet and pays the cab driver for the ride. He opens the back door.

EXT SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

With a full moon and the dark sky lit up with bright stars, Curtis climbs out of the cab and then reaches in and helps Young Fred. Thanking the cab driver, Curtis closes the door. As the taxi cab drives away, Curtis and Young Fred clutch their purchases and walk home.

EXT. FARM FIELDS AND CREEK - CONTINUOUS

With only the illumination from the moon and stars, Curtis and Young Fred hike through the fields and streams.

At one point, Young Fred's shoes get wet crossing a murky creek. Curtis hoists Young Fred up on his shoulders and continues their journey home.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - NIGHT

Weeks later. Cold Christmas Eve. Snow dances around.

The light coming from the windows of the small Pentecostal church guides the late-arriving families as they hurry into the church.

As they get closer and enter into the church, the families hear children singing, *Silent Night*.

CHILDREN CHOIR (O.S.)
(Singing)
Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, All is bright.

INT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

In front of the church, Young Fred and the other children, with their homemade costumes, joyously sing along with two mid-west missionary spinsters, BERTHA and BESS, sisters in their forties. Bertha leads the singing and directs the children while Bess plays the piano.

The latecomers pause briefly at the doorway and take in the festive decorations of the running cedar, sweetgum and sycamore balls lining the area around the pulpit and the burning candles in each window.

CHILDREN CHOIR
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild

Miss Lucy and her widowed mother, PEARL, an older woman in her early sixties, greet the latecomers as they busy themselves bagging treats, comprised of oranges, apples, cinnamon candies, and raisins. The women carry the bags of treats and place them under the bare, spindly Christmas tree.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Sleep in heavenly peace Sleep in
heavenly peace

Walking down the center aisle and looking for empty seats, the latecomers squeeze into a pew next to Beulah, who looks up and smiles at them, as she slides over.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight

Among the children singing, Young Fred stands with Young Gertie and Justine, as they participate in a Christmas pageant at their small church. Dressed as shepherds and angels with their makeshift costumes of patched bathrobes, torn sheets and bath towels on their heads, they sing heavenly with all of their hearts.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing 'Alleluia!

In the congregation, Ottie watches the pageant with indifference with her three older sons and infant daughter in tow. She breaks up a fight between Curtis and June Jr. As she stands up to sit in between them, Ottie then turns around and looks back.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Christ the Savior is born
Christ the Savior is born

Ottie notices Eli sitting with his wife, Gumtooth, in the back of the church. Not wanting to be there, Eli acknowledges Ottie's glances and smiles back. Gumtooth notices Eli's exchange with Ottie and elbows him.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light

Sitting with his wife, Sheriff Dawson catches the back and forth exchange between Ottie and Eli. Sheriff Dawson smiles to himself as he shakes his head in disbelief. He turns and watches his daughters, dressed as angels for the children's pageant.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace

Ablaze with the spirit of Christmas, Young Fred and the other children sing.

Through out the song, Bertha and Bess watch Young Fred and Justine sing their heart out.

CHILDREN CHOIR
(continuing)
Jesus Lord, at thy birth
Jesus Lord, at thy birth

Bertha and Bess look at each and smile.

INT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Later, after the Christmas service is over. A COUNTRY FIDDLER, a man in his fifties and a PIANO PLAYER, a woman in her forties, step up to play and entertain the congregation with a lively rendition of the song, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*.

Still wearing their pageant costumes, the children hurry to their families.

BERTHA
Parents, if you haven't done so
already, please bring up your
presents to the Christmas tree.

Some parents bustle down the aisle with their presents, confronting excited children.

BERTHA
(continuing)
That's right.
(beat)
Thank you.

Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine make their way to Ottie and their brothers. Distracted, Ottie hands over the infant to Young Gertie.

OTTIE
Here. You take care of her now.
I'm tired of holdin' her.

Ottie turns and spots Eli, standing at the doorway.

Eli winks and smiles at Ottie.

Ottie looks around to see if there is another woman behind her. Seeing none, she turns and smiles back at Eli.

Eli then motions to her to come outside with him.

Ottie reflects for a moment of all the pain that he has put her through.

BERTHA
Now children, remember, Christmas
is the season of giving and
forgiving...and for love.

With hopeful anticipation, Young Fred stares at the presents under the Christmas tree.

BERTHA
(continuing)
I think it's time to show the
meaning of Christmas and exchange
presents.

Children rush down the aisle and gather around the tree.

BESS
Children, it's the season of
Christmas, not pushing.

The children crowd around the tree, looking for their presents.

Ottie contemplates, glances around the room and then sneaks out of the church, after Eli.

Noticing Ottie's departure, Curtis and Willard look at each other and shake their heads in disgust. They turn and watch June Jr. as he rummages through other people's purses and coats for money.

June Jr. gets a slap on the head by Curtis as he tries to steal money.

Among the other children, Young Fred and Justine search for their presents while Young Gertie holds her baby sister.

MISS LUCY
Be careful now...don't take
someone else's present.

Young Fred finally spots Ottie's presents.

YOUNG FRED
Here they are.

Young Fred hands the presents to Justine and Young Gertie.

Young Fred quickly unwraps his present.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - SMALL CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Unwrapped present reveals a comb.

RETURN TO SCENE

Young Fred glances over to Justine.

YOUNG FRED
(continuing)
What's ya get?

JUSTINE
A comb.

Young Fred and Justine look up at Young Gertie and the baby. With her free hand, Young Gertie holds up her present - a pair of socks.

Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine glance around the church and notice the other children's gifts.

EXT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Ottie walks around the church and sees Eli waiting for her.

ELI
What are ya lookin' for?

OTTIE
Some mistletoe?

Eli smiles and swaggers toward her.

ELI
Is that all?

INT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The Fiddler and Piano Player continue to play their holiday music.

Curtis and Willard look over and see the disappointment in the faces of Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine.

Curtis walks over his younger sisters and brother and kneels down.

CURTIS
I know that Santa Claus has
somethin' for you.

YOUNG FRED
I bet.
(beat)
We live too far back in the hills
that he always run out of
everything nice when he gets to
our house.

CURTIS
Maybe it will be different this
time.

YOUNG FRED
I ain't gonna hold my breath
'cause of it.

Young Fred searches the room for Ottie. He sees Gumtooth, sitting alone.

Gumtooth glances over and sees Young Fred looking at her. She suddenly realizes that Eli has been gone for a while and looks around for him. She stands up to leave and bumps into Beulah.

GUMTOOTH
(to Beulah)
Have you seen my husband?

BEULAH
Can't say that I have. Maybe
Ottie-

Beulah catches herself as Gumtooth suddenly realizes the truth and hurries away.

Beulah catches the eye of the Sheriff and glances back empathetically as Gumtooth inquires around the whereabouts of Eli.

Bertha and Bess notice Young Fred and Justine, looking anxiously for their mother.

BERTHA
Those poor Epeley children.

BESS
They deserve a better home.

As Bertha and Bess look at each other, June Jr. overhears their conversation and looks over at Young Fred and then back at the Missionary women.

Justine starts to cry for her mother, and Young Fred puts his arm around her and tries to comfort his sister.

YOUNG FRED
Don't worry. She'll be back.

Bertha comes over and kneels to Young Fred and Justine.

BERTHA
Would you two like to come over to our house next week? My sister, Bess, and I are going to give a little party for the children who sang so heavenly tonight...and we want you to be there.

YOUNG FRED
I don't know if we can.

BERTHA
You can do anything...if you want to.

EXT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

In the cold darkness, Ottie and Eli engage in passionate sex while standing against the backside of the church.

OTTIE
(moans)
Oh sweet Jesus....

INT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

Noticing Young Fred and Justine with their measly gifts, Miss Lucy quickly reaches down and grabs a couple of bags of treats and hands them to Young Fred and Justine.

MISS LUCY
You forgot these.

Young Fred and Justine humbly accept the bags.

YOUNG FRED
Thank you, Miss Lucy.

Miss Lucy reaches down for another bag and hands it to Young Gertie.

MISS LUCY
And there's one here for you,
Gertie. Merry Christmas.

YOUNG GERTIE
(Overwhelmed)
Merry Christmas, Miss Lucy.

Curtis and Willard come over to their sisters and brother.

CURTIS
We've saved our money and have
something for you kids, too.

Willard reaches into his pockets and pulls some packages and gives them to Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine.

WILLARD
We didn't have time to get any
fancy wrappin' but Merry Christmas
anyway.

Surprised Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine quickly unwrap their little presents and then look up, beaming at Willard and Curtis.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL PENTECOSTAL CHURCH - NIGHT

The Church service is over. Families leave the church with the Christmas spirit.

Worried, Gumtooth stands alone and looks out into the darkness for Eli.

Young Gertie, carrying the baby, Justine, Curtis, and Willard file out of the church. Young Fred searches the crowd for Ottie.

Sheepishly, Eli comes around the building and Gumtooth spots him.

GUMTOOTH
Where have ya been?

Suddenly, Gumtooth sees Ottie coming around the building, adjusting her dress and hair.

Ottie looks up and sees Gumtooth, then her family, and others from the congregation with gifts...all watching her.

OTTIE
Well...it looks like everyone got
what they wanted for Christmas.

Gumtooth lunges at Ottie, but Eli pulls her off and away.

Bertha and Bess catch Young Fred's look of humiliation as he walks away with Ottie and his family.

BESS
 Something is got to be done to
 save those poor, precious children.

Bertha reaches out to Oattie.

BERTHA
 Mrs. Epeley.

Oattie turns around.

OTTIE
 Yeah.

BERTHA
 Did you get my message about that
 the job opening at the textile
 mill?

OTTIE
 Yeah, I got it.

BERTHA
 What do you think? It's a good,
 respectful job with a steady
 income.

OTTIE
 I don't have any way to get to
 that job. And besides, I like
 what I'm doin' now...respectful or
 not.

(beat)
 Merry Christmas to you, too.

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - MORNING

A Pontiac Sedan rambles along the dirt road towards the
 little old house.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Stirring the corn mash at the moonshine still, Oattie hears
 the approaching car.

INT. PONTIAC SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Bertha drives with Bess in the front passenger seat, holding
 a covered basket. Both stare out of the window in disbelief
 at the surrounding poverty.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Oattie sees the approaching car, grabs her gun, and hurries
 down the mountainside to investigate.

INT. PONTIAC SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

As Bertha parks the car, Bess turns and sees Curtis and
 Willard walking toward the car. Apprehensive, Bess turns to
 Bertha.

BESS
 Oh dear. Bertha, are you sure
 about this?

BERTHA
 We're doing God's work.

Determined, Bertha opens the car door and climbs out.

BERTHA
(continuing)
Come on, now...for hell's sake.

BESS
All right then.

Bess opens her door and climbs out with the basket in her hands, straightening her dress as she goes.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Bertha and Bess get out of the car, they notice a curious, but sad Young Fred and Justine come out of the front porch followed by Young Gertie, carrying the baby.

Bertha and Bess turn and catch June Jr. as he sneaks away from behind the house and then sees Curtis and Willard walking behind them.

OTTIE (O.S.)
Can we help ya?

Startled, Bertha and Bess turn around and see Ottie walking toward them, carrying a gun.

BERTHA
Well...we've come to bring you
something special for your
Christmas breakfast.

Bertha and Bess walk cautiously toward Ottie.

BESS
(showing the muffins
in the basket)
Yes...muffins and homemade jam.

OTTIE
(looks at the muffins
and takes the basket
away)
Isn't that nice....but we have
already eaten. Gertie made some
biscuits this morning.

BERTHA
(tries to take the
basket away)
Oh, I see.

OTTIE
(resists and holds on
to the basket)
But we'll have these muffins
another time. Thank ya so much.

BERTHA
It's our pleasure.
(beat)
Oh, I almost forgot.
(reaches in her
pocket for an
invitation card and
hands it to Ottie)
Bess and I would like to invite
your little ones over for a
children's new year's eve party at
our house.

OTTIE
(takes the card)
How sweet of ya.

BERTHA
There will be ice cream and cake.

BESS
Other children from the valley
will be there, too.

OTTIE
Ya don't say.

BERTHA
Can we count on having your
children attend the festivities?

OTTIE
Well...the boys and I have to
work, and Gertie will have to take
care of the baby...

Ottie turns and looks at Fred and Justine on the porch.
Young Fred looks back at Ottie, wanting to go.

OTTIE
(continuing)
...but I don't see why "little
ones" can't attend your party.

Young Fred brightens up.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Ya did say that there will be free
food for them.

BESS
Oh, yes...plenty. There will be
games, too.

OTTIE
I don't care about the games as
long as they fed.

BERTHA
Well then...I'll take that as a
'yes.'

OTTIE
Ya can take that any way ya want.

BERTHA
Good.
(beat)
We'll see Fred and Justine at the
party...and Merry Christmas to all
of you.

OTTIE
And to ya, too.
(mumbles "assholes"
under her breath)

Bertha and Bess scurry into their car.

INT. PONTIAC SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

Bertha quickly starts the engine and backs up the car.

Bertha and Bess wave at Ottie and her family as they make their get-away.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hopefully, Fred waves back at the car.

Ottie and her children watch the car drive away.

With contempt, Ottie grabs one of the muffins out of the basket and stuffs in her mouth.

INT. PONTIAC SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

As they drive away, Bertha and Bess notice Eli walking up the road toward Ottie's house.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Eli scopes out Bertha and Bess as the car passes him.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie spots Eli, hiking up the road toward her.

When Eli gets closer, Ottie hollers at him.

OTTIE

What are ya doin' here...hopin' to spread some more holiday cheer?

ELI

Always in the Christmas mood, ya know that.

OTTIE

Yes...well...ya know ya can always fill my stockin' when I'm not workin.'

ELI

I do...but I was at the farm and notice the 'good' missionary ladies' car and was wonderin' what were they doin' here.

(beat)

Ya haven't repented or anythin' stupid like that, have ya?

OTTIE

Hell no. Too far gone for them.

ELI

Ya know they're dating my two brothers.

OTTIE

Ya mean Moose and Marvin?

ELI

Those are the two.

OTTIE

Your brothers are both so dull they couldn't cut hot butter with a knife.

ELI

Well...they both got somethin' for those two women to be hangin' around, especially Moose.

OTTIE
Ya don't say. I guess it runs in
the family.

ELI
Apparently, it does, and there
have been no complaints.

OTTIE
None from me...but yet, I'm not
particular.

ELI
(beat)
What did the 'good' missionary
ladies want?

OTTIE
Nothin'. They just brought over
some muffins...
(beat)
..and invited the children for a
little party they havin'.

ELI
They're real good Christians,
ain't they?

OTTIE
They're somethin' else.

ELI
(looks down the road)
I wonder what they want.

Puzzled, Ottie looks at the muffins and back at Eli.

June Jr. stands close and overhears the conversation. He
glances over at Fred and Justine.

Eli sees Willard and hollers at him.

ELI
(continuing)
Hey, worthless.

Willard turns around and walks back to Eli.

WILLARD
My name is Willard Worth.

ELI
Is it? You're worthless to me.
How come ya haven't fixed the gate
by the barn, like I told ya to
last week.

WILLARD
I've been busy with other things.

ELI
Like what? Yankin' yourself off
in the barn with the pigs.

WILLARD
I don't do that.

ELI
That's not what the pigs say.

Angry, Willard starts to leave.

Eli smacks him on the head.

ELI
(continuing)
Don't walk away when I speakin' to
ya, boy. Remember, 'worthless,' ya
workin' for me on this farm.

Willard turns to face Eli. Curtis steps forward to defend Willard.

Sensing trouble, Ottie breaks up the confrontation.

OTTIE
Knock it off. It's Christmas, for
Christ's sake.

Ottie hands the basket of muffins to Gertie.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Here. We'll have these with some
buttermilk for lunch.

GERTIE
Is that going to be enough?

Ottie takes the baby from her.

OTTIE
Make it enough.

As she climbs the porch stairs, she turns to Young Fred.

OTTIE
(continuing)
And you and your sister ain't
goin' to any party or have nothin'
to do with those rich missionary
ladies.

YOUNG FRED
But...

OTTIE
(threatens Young Fred)
But nothin'.

YOUNG FRED
You told 'em that we could.

OTTIE
So I lied.
(beat)
Now go help your sister with food
and don't give me any lip...or
I'll go get a limb from that peach
tree.

Curtis and Willard look at each other and then around them to see if anyone watching as they sneak away.

CUT TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Later that day. Ottie sits in her rocker and peels off the bark from a Wild Cherry tree branch, occasionally looking up and watching her children. Young Gertie and Young Fred sweep the floor while Justine sits on the floor, rocking her baby sister in her crib.

Suddenly, the noise of an approaching vehicle is heard.
Annoyed, Ottie stands up.

OTTIE
Who in the Sam Hill is comin' now?

The baby starts to cry.

JUSTINE
Maybe it's Santa Claus.

The sounds of sleigh bells are heard.

Ottie walks over and looks out of the window, followed by Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Gentry drives his old truck up to the shack with Curtis and Willard standing in the back, ringin' the sleigh bells.

Cautiously, Ottie steps out on the porch with Young Gertie and Young Fred, following her. Justine comes out of the shack, holding the crying baby.

The truck stops, and Curtis jumps down.

June Jr. sits on the steps, watching his brothers with contempt. Ottie kicks June Jr. as she walks down the steps.

OTTIE
Where have ya two been? Supper was
an hour ago.

As Willard lifts a large, heavy battery down to Curtis.

CURTIS
We heard that Santa's sleigh had
broken down in Forest City and so
we went over to see if we could
help out.

Willard jumps off of the truck and takes the battery

OTTIE
I'm in no mood for bullshit so
what's that and what's going on?

Gentry hands a gift wrapped box to Curtis whereby Curtis presents it to Ottie. Curious and excited, Young Gertie, Young Fred, and Justine with the baby creeps up to Ottie to look at the package.

CURTIS
Santa asks us if we could help out
and delivery this to our family.

OTTIE
I don't believe a word ya sayin'.

Ottie takes the package, sits down on the steps and starts to unwrap the present, with her curious and excited children looking on.

It's the same radio that Young Fred saw in the store.

OTTIE
(continuing)
A radio?!

CURTIS
Merry Christmas.

Young Gertie, now holding the baby, along with Young Fred and Justine are besides themselves with excitement.

OTTIE
Where did ya get the money to buy
this foolish thing. You know the
rules of the house...

CURTIS
Willard and I earned extra money
from doin' odd jobs around the
holler...and you're welcome, Oattie.
(to Willard)
And Willard and June Jr...let's
get this radio hooked up and get
Christmas music goin'.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Gertie reads the instructions, Curtis, Willard and June Jr. construct a large wooden pole next to the house with a wire running from its top into one of the windows of the shack.

Young Fred and Justine jump around with anticipation.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Suspicious and annoyed, Oattie sits and rocks in her rocking chair and watches her children.

With Young Fred and Justine standing behind and trying to see, Young Gertie reads the final instructions to Curtis as he connects the wire to the radio and then he turns to Young Fred.

CURTIS
Fred...ya can turn it on now.

Speechless and honored, Young Fred walks over and turns on the radio.

Nothing but static comes out of the radio.

OTTIE
(smiles to herself)
I told ya so...spending money on
this foolish...

Young Gertie looks at the instructions and walks to the radio and turns the dial carefully until she finds a station and country music is heard.

With awe, Oattie and family listen to music tentatively.

The music moves Oattie to a point that she gets up and starts to dance to it and then stops.

Oattie's eyes glisten with tears as she remembers the past.

Oattie's children watches her.

Oattie quickly wipes the tears away and regains her composure and sits down and resumes her peeling the bark away from a branch.

EXT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - AFTERNOON

One week later. A dark, winter afternoon. A big, white house sits on the small hill, dressed up holiday lights and decorations. Distant sounds of children laughing and music permeate the cold evening air.

Bundled-up in their ragged winter coats, Young Fred and Justine cross the bridge over a small creek.

Passing a corn crib, Young Fred and Justine walk hesitantly up toward the house.

They climb up the front porch and knock timidly on the door.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

With the baby in the basket next to her, Young Gertie peels sweet potatoes and onions. June Jr. lies on his bed, watching her work.

Ottie and Eli come into the house after working at the still all day and take off their coats.

As she places the rifle back above the fireplace, Ottie scans the house.

OTTIE

Where is everyone?

YOUNG GERTIE

Ya mean, Fred and Justine?

OTTIE

Yeah, those two...unless there other bastards in this family I don't know about.

YOUNG GERTIE

They went over to the missionary ladies' house for the party.

OTTIE

I told 'em they couldn't go.

YOUNG GERTIE

They wanted to go real bad...and they've been lookin' forward to it.

OTTIE

I don't care what they want. I told Fred to forget all about the nonsense of the party and that he and his sister couldn't go.

JUNE JR.

(smiles knowingly
under his breath)

But he did.

(beat)

Nothin' and nobody were gonna stop him.

OTTIE

You say somethin', Junior?

JUNE JR.

Nothin'...cept that I did overhear them missionary ladies talkin' last week at the Christmas Pageant about wantin' to give Fred and Justine a better life...a new home.

OTTIE

What? They can't do that.

JUNE JR.

But they're tryin'.

(beat)

Wait till Fred and Justine see the Missionary ladies' new home and a taste of what better life is all about...they ain't ever gonna come back here to this hell hole again.

ELI

I told ya they're nothin' but trouble.

Ottie grabs her jacket, the rifle, and storms out of the house.

INT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bess, carrying a plate of cookies, hears a soft knock on the front door. She quickly opens the door and sees Young Fred and Justine.

BESS

Well...there you are. Come on in before you catch a cold.

Young Fred and Justine come into the house and stand in awe of what they see...the electric lights...holiday decorations...other children enjoying themselves at the dining table with plates of ham, chicken, green beans, biscuits, mashed potatoes, chocolate cakes, and pies.

BESS

(continuing)

I didn't think you were ever going to come. You look like little icicles standing there. Heaven's sake, did you walk over here?

YOUNG FRED

Yes, ma'am.

BESS

Lordy, no wonder you're late. Here...let me take your coats and hats.

The other children stop and stare at Young Fred and Justine.

BERTHA

Come on in and make yourself at home.

EXT. ELI'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Ottie leaves the barn, carrying a can of gasoline, the rifle, and a mason jar of moonshine. She takes a swig of moonshine and puts the jar into her coat pocket, and then stomps down the road. She passes Willard who is herding a couple of cows to the barn.

WILLARD

Where ya goin' with the gasoline can?

OTTIE

To get back what belongs to me.

INT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bertha gives a little tour to Young Fred and Justine of her beautiful house.

BERTHA
If you have to use the bathroom,
come in here.

Puzzled, Young Fred looks at Justine.

BERTHA
(continuing)
We have indoor plumbing.

Bertha turns the water faucet on and off.

BERTHA
(continuing)
See.
(beat)
And this is the toilet.

Young Fred and Justine stand and watch in wonderment as Bertha flushes the toilet.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Determined, Oattie marches down the road with the gas can.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah looks out the window and sees Oattie.

BEULAH
(to herself)
Where is she goin' with that gas
can?
(suddenly realizes)
Oh dear me.

She walks over to the telephone and quickly dials it.

BEULAH
(continuing)
Hello, Sheriff. It's Beulah. I
just seen Oattie comin' down the
road. Looks like trouble's a
brewing.
(beat)
Yes...thought you should know.

INT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred and Justine sit with the other children, enjoying themselves and eating a feast of delicious foods.

BERTHA
Now save some room for home-made
ice cream and chocolate cake.

The children jump up and down in delight.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson drives his truck slowly down the highway when he spots Oattie walking with the gas can. He pulls over and rolls down the car's window.

SHERIFF DAWSON
 (hollows out)
 Where are you goin', Ottie...in
 such a hurry?

OTTIE
 (without stopping)
 To a baptism of fire.

Puzzled, Sheriff Dawson scratches his head as he watches
 Ottie storm on down the road.

INT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Later. As the children play games with Bertha, Bess takes
 Young Fred and Justine's hands and gives them the rest of the
 house tour.

She turns the light on in one of the bedrooms...bright,
 clean, with children books and toys.

BESS
 This bedroom would be for a little
 boy...like you, Fred.

Young Fred stands and looks speechless around the room.

Bess opens the closet door and shows Young Fred the new
 clothes, hanging up.

BESS
 (continuing)
 And these clothes would be for you.

Suddenly, a gunshot and then screams of "fire" are heard.

EXT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Horrified, Bertha and some of the children stand on the
 porch, watching the corn crib on fire.

INT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bess hurries down the hall with Young Fred and Justine just
 as Ottie kicks down the kitchen door.

Ottie grabs the ice cream churn, crams a handful of ice cream
 in her mouth, and then smashes the churn against the kitchen
 floor.

OTTIE
 Come on, kids, we're goin' home.

Ottie yanks Young Fred and Justine from Bess and starts to
 drag her children out of the house.

Young Fred resists her by fighting back and kicking.

YOUNG FRED
 I don't wanna go with ya. I wanna
 stay here.

OTTIE
 Ya have nothin' to say in the
 matter.

YOUNG FRED
 I won't go with ya.

Ottie turns around and smacks Young Fred in the head. Young
 Fred starts to cry.

YOUNG FRED
(continuing)
Let me go.

OTTIE
Ya goin' home with me.

Ottie drags Young Fred and Justine, screaming and kicking through the house.

BESS
What are you doing?

OTTIE
Takin' what's mine.

Bertha tries to prevent Ottie from taking the children.

BERTHA
You can't do that. Your children need a home.

Ottie pushes Bertha away.

OTTIE
They have a home...now get out of my way.

EXT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie drags Young Fred and Justine down the front steps and starts walking past the burning corn crib. A dozen or so of the valley people gather, watching the corn crib fire.

Bess and Bertha stand on the porch with the other children.

BESS
We were trying to help you and your family.

Ottie reaches in her pocket and pulls out the jar of moonshine and takes a swig of it, and turns around to face the missionary ladies.

OTTIE
If ya wanted to help, why didn't you bring us some food? I needed help with hoein' and pickin' the cotton. My cows have to be milked twice a day. There's plowin' to be done.

BERTHA
We don't know how to do those jobs.

OTTIE
Damn right ya don't. You missionaries aren't worth your salt. Ya can drone on and on about God and the Bible, but ya can't even milk a damn cow. Ya both useless. What makes ya think ya can raise my children better than I can?

Ottie turns and starts to drag Young Fred and Justine away.

BERTHA
We only wanted to give your children a better life...more than you can.

Ottie turns around.

OTTIE
Why don't ya get married and have
your own children?

BESS
Because we haven't found the right
person yet.

OTTIE
No man would have either one of
ya, that's why. If ya would put
out a little more than that holier
than thou shit, men might be
interested in you.

BESS
My sister and I don't care to
sleep with all of the men in the
valley like you do.

OTTIE
I've got more to offer between my
legs than ya do in ya whole
wretched missionary existence.
And ya don't have to wait to go to
heaven to get at it either.

Suddenly, Sheriff Dawson's truck rambles up the road.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Serious, Sheriff Dawson drives his truck with a concerned
Young Gertie, holding her baby sister, staring out of the
window.

YOUNG GERTIE
There she is.

EXT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson climbs out of his truck and walks over to
Ottie, grabbing both of her arms behind her. Ottie thrashes
and kicks.

OTTIE
Whatcha doin? I ain't done
nothin' wrong except for takin' my
children back.

Alarmed, Young Gertie, still holding the baby, gets out of
the truck. She stands away from the truck and watches as
Sheriff Dawson places handcuffs on Ottie.

SHERIFF DAWSON
I'm taking you in for public
drunkenness and disorder.

Sheriff Dawson starts to drags Ottie back to the truck but
she continues to thrash and kick.

OTTIE
Sheriff, I was just protectin' my
family.

Young Gertie walks over and comforts Young Fred and Justine.

Young Fred watches Ottie as she's taken away.

Sheriff Dawson opens the passenger side door. Ottie pleads
with him.

OTTIE
 (continuing)
 Don't I get any special
 consideration for bein' a mother?

SHERIFF DAWSON
 Get in.

Reluctantly, Ottie climbs in.

Young Fred watches as the Sheriff's truck slowly heads down the road. He runs after the truck.

YOUNG FRED
 (crying)
 Ottie...Ottie.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Ottie turns and see Young Fred running besides the truck, and then turns back and faces the front.

EXT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred stops and watches the truck proceed down the road.

EXT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

On the porch, Bess gathers up the other children and leads them back into the house.

BESS
 Come on, children. Let's go in the
 house and pray for Ottie.

Bertha comes running out the house with Young Fred and Justine's coats and hats.

Bertha hands the coats over to Young Fred and Justine...and looks over at Gertie with the baby.

BERTHA
 It's too cold and dark for you to
 walk home.
 (beat)
 Let me go get the car and give you
 four a ride home.

YOUNG FRED
 We can't.

Bertha reaches out to Young Fred.

BERTHA
 Yes, you can...if you want to.

Young Fred looks at Bertha and then back at her house.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Ottie turns and looks back at her children.

OTTIE'S P.O.V. - OTTIE'S CHILDREN

Young Gertie holding her baby sister, Justine, and Young Fred standing in the cold together, watching the Sheriff's truck.

RETURN TO SCENE

Turning around, Ottie catches a reflection of herself in the passenger window. Her eyes glisten with tears.

EXT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred turns and looks over at Young Gertie, Justine, and the baby.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Brushing the tears aside, Ottie turns around and stares out the front window.

EXT. MISSIONARY LADIES HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred watches the Sheriff's truck ramble down the road.

BERTHA (O.S.)
What do you want to do, Fred?

Young Fred looks up at Bertha and then over to Young Gertie and Justine.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - MORNING

A couple of days after. Sheriff Dawson's truck rambles up the road.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah looks out the window to see who is coming up the road and sees the Sheriff's truck.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The truck pulls up and parks in front of the house.

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson climbs out of the truck as Ottie looks out at the house.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

SHERIFF DAWSON
Okay now, get out, Ottie.

As Sheriff Dawson looks on, Ottie gets out of the truck.

Curious, Curtis, Willard, Young Gertie, Young Fred, Justine, holding the baby come out to see what's going on.

June Jr. looks out the window and then runs out the backdoor of the house to hide from the Sheriff.

Ottie looks at her children.

Suddenly, Gentry's truck comes down the dirt road and stops.

Curtis and Willard climb in the back of Gentry's truck with the other paper mill workers.

Without a word said, Ottie watches Curtis and Willard leave.

As Gentry's truck leaves, Curtis and Willard look back at Ottie for a moment and then away.

Young Gertie and Young Fred walk down the road for school.

OTTIE
Where you two goin'?

YOUNG FRED
School.

 OTTIE
Are ya learnin' anythin'?

 YOUNG GERTIE
We are.

Young Gertie and Young Fred look straight ahead and continue to walk away.

Ottie turns and looks at Justine, as she stands on the porch, with the baby in her arms.

Justine turns around and goes back into the house.

Shunned by her own children, Ottie stands alone and contemplates for a moment.

Sherrif Dawson watches the whole scene between Ottie and her children and then climbs back into his truck.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson's truck follows slowly in the distance behind Young Gertie and Young Fred as they walk down the road.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah looks out the window at Young Gertie and Young Fred wait for the school bus.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson's truck pulls up to Young Gertie and Young Fred.

EXT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson rolls down his window and calls over to Young Gertie and Fred.

 SHERIFF DAWSON
What are you two doing next
Saturday?

 YOUNG GERTIE
We're busy with the family's
washin' and cleanin' and other
chores.

Young Gertie looks over at Young Fred.

 YOUNG GERTIE
 (continuing)
But if Fred gets his chores done
in the morning...

Young Fred smiles back at Young Gertie.

 SHERIFF DAWSON
Well then...I'll pick ya up for
lunch...only if ya mind your
sister and get your work done. Is
that a deal?

Young Fred nods his head.

 SHERIFF DAWSON
 (continuing)
Okay, then.

Sheriff Dawson drives away.

Young Fred watches the Sheriff's truck ramble down the road.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRED'S CAR - AFTERNOON

Looking through the rain drizzled windows, Fred sees the old bridge and then the old Missionary Ladies' house with a "For Sale" sign in front of it as he drives down the road.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

As Fred drives, Gertie glances at the house and looks back at her brother for a moment.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Through the rain, Fred's car approaches a bridge over the Broad River.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

As he drives over the bridge, Fred looks for something from the past.

FRED
I thought Stan's store was around here...

GERTIE
The store...or what's left of it's still here...somewhere.

Gertie sees and points to it.

GERTIE
(continuing)
There it is...see.

EXT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car slows down and pulls over to an abandoned, small building, in a clearing near the banks of the river.

EXT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Gertie rolls down her window, letting Fred lean over and take a better look at the dilapidated, old store.

FRED'S P.O.V. - STAN'S COUNTRY STORE

The abandoned and boarded-up building with a porch is seen. Two sturdy posts holds up a shed and covers two empty gasoline pumps, shaped like human beings.

RETURN TO SCENE

EXT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Fred gets out of his car and walks over and looks into vacant building.

Fred turns away from the building and remembers something from the past.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

February 1950. Cold winter day, early afternoon. Bundled up, Young Fred looks out the Sheriff truck's window at Stan's Country Store.

YOUNG FRED'S P.O.V. - STAN'S COUNTRY STORE

Several men stand or sit on benches in front of the store, trying to stay warm while they smoke and pass around Oattie's moonshine from mason jar. He sees June Jr. among the men. When the men see the Sheriff's truck, they quickly hide the jar.

RETURN TO SCENE

Sheriff Dawson climbs out of his truck.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Come on, Fred.

Young Fred opens the passenger door and climbs out of the truck.

EXT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson stands and waits for Young Fred to catch up with him. The Sheriff puts his hand on Young Fred's shoulder, and together, they walk toward the store.

Sheriff Dawson acknowledges the men as he climbs up the steps to the store.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Good afternoon, Gentlemen.
(beat)
Hope you're not doin' anythin'
you'll be sorry for.

Sheriff Dawson sees June Jr. slinking away.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(continuing)
I've been lookin' for you, June Jr.

Caught, June Jr. stops and turns around.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(continuing; beat)
Don't go too far away now...ya
hear me.

June Jr. watches with contempt as Young Fred enters the store.

INT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred stands in the doorway of the country store and takes in the smells and sights of fresh coffee, Nehi soft drinks, popcorn, and peppermint candy. He looks around the store and sees the valley people, who come to buy their supplies, food, and lunch sandwiches.

Young Fred surveys the men around the room and at the potbelly stove, warming their hands and bodies. One of the men turns around, and it is Eli.

Eli sees Young Fred with the Sheriff, and turns away from them in disgust.

Rejected, Young Fred looks down, and then he feels the Sheriff Dawson's hand on his shoulder.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Come on, Fred...let's get some
lunch.

Young Fred glances up and smiles at Sheriff Dawson as they walk over to STAN, a short man in his fifties behind the counter.

STAN
Hello Sheriff...what will ya have?
My specialty?

Sheriff Dawson looks down at Young Fred.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Well, Fred...you're my guest.

Young Fred peers through the glass display case at all of the sandwich meats, slices of bread, and condiments, and then looks back at Sheriff Dawson.

YOUNG FRED
What's a specialty?

Stan smiles and laughs to himself.

STAN
Why...it's an RC with a fresh
baloney sandwich and a moon pie
for dessert.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(to Young Fred)
Would ya like that?

Young Fred nods his head enthusiastically.

STAN
Okay. One specialty comin' up.

Stan takes and opens a Royal Crown (RC) soda and hands the bottle, bubbling and fizzing, to Young Fred.

As Young Fred drinks his soda, he watches Stan make the baloney sandwich.

Stan takes two slices of thick bread, piles on the Duke's Mayonnaise, cuts a thick slice of baloney from a foot long roll, and then places it on the bread. After a generous sprinkling of black pepper, Stan cuts the sandwich in two, wraps it up in wax paper, and puts it into a small paper bag with a moon pie.

As Stan hands the bag to the Sheriff, a beat-up truck pulls in front of the store.

Young Fred looks out and sees TWO WHITE FARMERS climb out of the truck and walk towards the store. Young Fred then notices several black men, huddling together in the open truck bed, trying to stay warm.

Sheriff Dawson pays Stan for Young Fred's lunch as Eli watches them.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(to Stan)
There's a little extra for you.

Sheriff Dawson turns and sees Eli, watching them.

Eli looks over as the two white farmers enter the store and walk over to Stan's counter.

STAN
Hello gentlemen. What can we do
for ya?

SHERIFF DAWSON
(to Young Fred)
Let's come over here and get out
of the way.

Young Fred hands his RC soda bottle to Sheriff Dawson and takes a big bite of his baloney sandwich while looking back at the two white farmers as he walks along with the Sheriff.

TOM, one of the white farmers looks over and points at Young Fred's lunch.

TOM
That looks pretty good. We'll have
what that young man is havin'.

Sheriff Dawson guides Young Fred to the side of the store.

STAN
(to the white men)
Two specials comin' up.

As he eats his lunch and guzzles his RC soda, Young Fred studies the two white farmers and then looks out of the store to the black field hands in the back of the farmers' truck.

EXT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Rufus and the other field hands huddle together, as they try to stay warm.

INT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Stan hands the sandwiches over to Tom.

TOM
Do ya mind puttin' this on our
bill until next Saturday?

STAN
Not a problem.

Tom turns back to Stan.

TOM
Do ya mind if our field niggers
can come in and get some lunch?

Stan looks over at Sheriff Dawson.

Sheriff Dawson looks at the two farmers and then outside to black field hands in the truck.

SHERIFF DAWSON
They're hard workers, aren't they,
Tom?

Tom glances around to the other white men in the store.

Curious, June Jr. sticks his head in the store.

Tom looks back at the Sheriff and nods in agreement.

TOM
They work harder than most.

June Jr. slinks back outside.

EXT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Rufus and the other field hands look over toward the store.

INT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Dawson looks over to Stan.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Stan, what do you think?

The other men look at Stan.

Stan glances at some hostile stares of the men, and then looks back the Sheriff. and nods in agreement.

STAN
I ain't got any problems with 'em.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Me, neither. Some people forget
they're human beings, too, and
deserve respect like everyone else.
(beat)
Go ahead, Tom, and tell 'em to
come right in.

Tom starts to walk back to the truck and turns back at Sheriff Dawson.

TOM
Should I have 'em use the back
door?

SHERIFF DAWSON
Why? We didn't have to.

Tom goes out to the truck and tells the black field workers to come into the store.

Rufus and other black field workers walk dejectedly toward the store and receive menacing looks from June Jr. and some of the other men loitering outside of the store.

Rufus walks into the store first and spots Young Fred and then the Sheriff.

Frightened, Young Fred wraps his arms around Sheriff Dawson's leg.

Eli and some of the other men glower at the black field hands.

Rufus and the other black field workers order their lunch from Stan.

The Sheriff reassures Young Fred that everything is okay.

As Rufus pays for his lunch, he looks over at Young Fred and then asks for four peppermint candies from a big glass jar on the counter.

Rufus then walks over and crouches down to Young Fred, smiles a big smile, and hands him one of the peppermint candies.

The store becomes tense and quiet.

Hesitant, Young Fred looks up to Sheriff Dawson.

Sheriff Dawson looks down and smiles at Young Fred.

SHERIFF DAWSON
 (continuing)
 Go on, Fred. It's alright.

Young Fred looks back, extends his hand, and touches Rufus.

YOUNG FRED
 Thank you, Rufus.

Rufus nods and acknowledges the thanks. He then stands up and walks out in a dignified manner out of the store with the other black field hands.

Young Fred watches Rufus and the other black field hands climb into the back of the truck.

EXT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

As the truck's engine starts, Rufus turns and looks at Young Fred, and waves.

INT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred waves back as he watches the truck leave.

Sheriff Dawson catches Young Fred's wave, smiles to himself, and then pats Young Fred on the shoulder.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STAN'S COUNTRY STORE - AFTERNOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Fred looks at the dilapidated, old store, and then walks back to the car.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred leans back.

FRED
 Is there a restaurant around here?

GERTIE
 I believe there's one up the road a little bit. Why...are you hungry?

FRED
 Suddenly, I've a craving for a baloney sandwich and a RC.

GERTIE
 And a moonpie?

FRED
 You, too, huh?

Gertie nods and laughs as Fred glances around the car and then drives on.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - AFTERNOON

Fred's car is parked in front of a local, unassuming roadside restaurant.

INT. ROADSIDE DINER - CONTINUOUS

Fred and Gertie sit at a table, finishing their late lunch.

Gertie casually glances out the window and becomes concerned as she notices the change in weather.

GERTIE
We better get going.

Alarmed, Fred looks out of the window.

FRED
Something is about to happen all
right.
(to the Waitress)
Check, please.

EXT. ROADSIDE DINER - CONTINUOUS

Fred and Gertie look around at the darkening skies as they climb into Fred's vehicle.

A sheriff vehicle races down the road with its lights and siren on

Fred and Gertie look at each other.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car passes the deserted and boarded up Sheriff's office.

DISSOLVED TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NOON (FLASHBACK)

March, 1950. The phone rings.

Sheriff Dawson reaches over and picks it up.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Sheriff Dawson, here.
(beats)
Yes, Clark. How's everything
goin' in Chesnee?
(beat; becomes
alarmed)
You don't say. Thanks for the
warning.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Sheriff rushes to his truck.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Eli and his crew of several men repair a roadside culvert as the Sheriff's truck passes them and races down the road.

Eli and the other men follow the truck down, curious about what's going on.

Eli looks up and sees the darkening skies and looks over at the mountainside, where Ottie and her moonshine still are located.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie carries two buckets of corn up the mountainside to her still. She notices the darkening of the skies and looks down at the valley.

OTTIE
Dammit.

She spits out some tobacco and continues her climb to the still.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Rufus and some black men plow the fields with a mule. Rufus stops, wipes off his brow, and notices the finger-shaped clouds floating northward in the darkening skies.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff's truck pulls over next to the school, and Sheriff Dawson jumps out.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

In front of her classroom, Miss Lucy teaches a room full of young children.

Apprehensively, Young Fred catches a quick look out the window at the dark skies. He turns and looks at Gertie.

Miss Lucy point to her blackboard, where the words, "Cirrus, Cumulus, Stratus, and Nimbus" are listed.

MISS LUCY
Can someone tell me what a nimbus
cloud is?
(beat)
Come on now, one of you must know.

Suddenly, there is a knock on the door.

Miss Lucy walks over and opens the door to find Sheriff Dawson.

MISS LUCY
(continuing; startled)
Why Sheriff Dawson? Is everything
okay?

SHERIFF DAWSON
Sorry, Miss Lucy, to disturb you
and your class, but I wanted to
alert you that there's threatening
weather moving northward toward us.

MISS LUCY
(glances out the
window)
I can see that.

SHERIFF DAWSON
If skies start to turn greenish-
yellow or if you hear a roaring
sound like a train--

MISS LUCY
(cuts him off)
Thank you for coming out here,
Sheriff, but I rode that train
before and I know what to do for
my children.

Sheriff Dawson tips his hat as she closes the door.

Miss Lucy glances back at the windows and calmly walks back to the front of the class.

MISS LUCY
 (continuing)
 Now, where was I? Oh yes, nimbus
 clouds.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The winds blow against the old house and the trees.

Justine stares out of the window and watches as the wind picks up and howls toward the threatening sky.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A frightened baby cries.

Justine turns away from the window and hurries toward her baby sister. She kneels down on the floor and picks up the crying baby and cradles her.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As June Jr. runs down the road, he stops and notices Beulah letting her chickens go free, and then hurries to her storm cellar.

June Jr. watches as Beulah climbs down the cellar steps and closes the doors behind her.

He runs over and kicks in Beulah's front door and breaks into her house.

EXT. BONEYARD - CONTINUOUS

The fierce wind blows paper and debris about the Boneyard, a community eyesore/public marketplace, consisting of a wide, open block, scattered with merchandise tables and makeshift, primitive huts and storage units, located behind the buildings of downtown Forest City.

As the storm approaches, the few merchants and their poor customers rush about the Boneyard. Gumtooth ties down her table with a rope, then hurriedly puts her farm produce and other merchandise inside of her hut, and bolts the door.

Suddenly, the wind dies down, and Gumtooth looks up to skies with apprehension.

Violent thunder sounds in the distance as an intense flash of lightning breaks across the sky.

Gumtooth runs for shelter at the Choo-Choo Diner.

EXT. RURAL NORTH CAROLINA - OLD SAWMILL - CONTINUOUS

Gentry watches the greenish-yellow sky from the sawmill in the woods. He shuts down the saw motor and blows a sharp whistle, calling back the loggers and woodcutters to the sawmill.

Curtis and Willard Worth run to the sawmill with the other men.

GENTRY
 Unhook the horses and let them
 walk or run on their own back
 home. They know where to go.
 Pack up the saws and axes in the
 truck, and then all of ya get in
 it. I don't want any man tryin'
 to outrun the storm on foot.

The men quickly load up the truck.

The truck's engine starts up, and the truck races down the road.

Loose workhorses run across the fields and in front of the truck.

INT. CHOO-CHOO DINER - CONTINUOUS

Gumtooth orders some coffee and sits on a swivel stool, watching the storm through the cafe's windows.

The waitress, an older woman in her fifties, brings the coffee over and then whispers to Gumtooth.

WAITRESS
It could get rough.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Gentry drops off Curtis and Willard Worth in front of the Little Old House.

Willard Worth looks down the road, toward the schoolhouse.

WILLARD
Why don't ya stay here with
Justine, and I'm goin' to make
sure Fred and Gertie are okay.

Willard Worth runs down the road.

CURTIS
(hollers at Willard)
Ya crazy like a run-over dog.

Willard Worth turns around.

WILLARD
Probably...we came from the same
litter.

The dark clouds start to rise, and hail begins to fall.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Large hailstones pelt Eli and other men on the road crew as they run for cover in the truck.

The road crew truck takes off down the road toward the schoolhouse.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Curtis runs into the house and finds Justine, huddling in one corner, cradling her frightened baby sister.

Listening to the wind's increasing roar, he looks around the primitive cabin with its makeshift walls.

CURTIS
Let's get out of this deathtrap.

Curtis quickly picks up Justine and the baby in his arms and runs outside for safety.

EXT. ROAD CREW TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Large hailstones pelt the truck cab and smash the windshield and the unprotected men in the back.

Eli and the other men try to protect themselves by throwing their folded arms over their heads.

INT. ROAD CREW TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The driver of the road crew truck pushes the pedal to the floor in an attempt to outrun the storm.

EXT. ROAD CREW TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

As the road crew truck races down the road, Eli looks back in horror and sees the ominous form of a funnel cloud, as it drops down and strikes the ground.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

A large hailstone hits Oattie on top of her head as she is stirring the corn mash.

Agitated, Oattie spits out another wad of chewing tobacco, stops stirring the mash and looks at the valley...at her house...and approaching storm.

Oattie picks up a bucket of water, drenches the fire, and starts to run down the mountainside.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Willard Worth looks back and sees the funnel in the distance and runs for his life toward the schoolhouse.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shielding Justine and the baby from the hailstones, Curtis runs away from the cabin and the farm buildings.

Curtis finds a deep ditch next to a stream. He climbs in the ditch and shields his sisters, Justine and the baby, with his body.

Large hailstones pummel Curtis's back and head.

CURTIS
(to Justine)
Are you okay?

Justine nods.

CURTIS
(continuing)
How's the baby doin'?

Justine and the baby look up at Curtis.

JUSTINE
She's fine.

The wind blows debris into the ditch.

Curtis looks up and sees entire trees fly over them.

Suddenly, the sounds of an approaching train pop Curtis and Justine's ears, and the pressure lifts Curtis's legs and feet into the air.

Holding tight on Justine and baby, Curtis grabs the earth in the ditch to prevent being lifted into the air.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The road crew truck careens to the schoolhouse's entrance. Eli and other crew rush into the building.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Frantic, Eli and the other men run down toward the classroom.

ELI'S CREW
(yelling)
Tornado coming.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Children begin to whimper and cry. Young Fred looks around and runs toward his sister, Gertie.

Miss Lucy stands at the door and orders the children.

MISS LUCY
Line up, children. Line up.

The children line up as Eli and other men gather at the classroom door.

ELI
Where do we go?

MISS LUCY
To the basement. Follow me.

Some of the men grab the children frozen with fear from their seats and carry them, and follow Miss Lucy and other children down the hall.

Rufus and the black field hands run inside the school.

Eli sees and confronts Rufus.

ELI
Niggers ain't allowed in this school.

MISS LUCY
(turns to Eli)
Excuse me. You don't tell anyone who and who is not allowed in this school. This is my school, and they are as welcome as you or anyone else.
(beat)
If you don't like that, there's the door. Now get out of our way.
(to Rufus and everyone else)
Come on everyone...let's go to the basement.

INT. SCHOOL BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy and the children, Eli and his road crew, and Rufus and the black field hands huddle against the basement wall, covering their heads with their arms.

Hail and high winds strike the upper floor, shattering the classroom windows.

Suddenly, a deafening roar is heard.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Miss Lucy's classroom explodes. Desks, chairs, and the potbelly stove are pulled skyward.

INT. SCHOOL BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Huddled in fear, the children and adults cry and pray as they hear the destruction occurring above them.

INT. CHOO-CHOO DINER - CONTINUOUS

Gumtooth slurps her coffee and watches the sky turn a sick green-yellow through the diner's windows.

Then Gumtooth glances down and notices the activity on Main Street.

GUMTOOTH'S P.O.V. - PEOPLE ON MAIN STREET

People scurry into buildings or run for their lives down Main Street.

Wind pummeles a line of trees to the ground.

Chairs, barrels, cars roll across the street under the power of the raging wind.

RETURN TO SCENE

Gumtooth stares out the window in horror.

WAITRESS (O.S.)

Ma'am.

Gumtooth turns around and sees the Waitress.

The waitress takes her by the hand.

WAITRESS

Come with me, honey. We gotta take cover.

The waitress leads Gumtooth and the other patrons and cafe staff to the freezer and opens the door.

INT. CHOO-CHOO DINER FREEZER - CONTINUOUS

After Gumtooth and others are in the freezer, the waitress quickly bolts the door.

Suddenly, the lights in the freezer go out.

INT. CHOO-CHOO DINER - CONTINUOUS

The windows shatter as the furniture, plates, and other items of the diner fly out of the windows.

INT. CHOO-CHOO DINER FREEZER - CONTINUOUS

Gumtooth and other patrons and staff scream as they watch in horror as the tremendous force tries to suck the freezer door open and the entire diner rocks.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Battered and bruised, Ottie limps down the hill. She finally sees her house, which is still standing, surrounded by scattered household debris and destruction.

She hurries toward the house and climbs the back steps.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Anxiously, Ottie looks around, sees the house and sees it is empty.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dazed, Ottie walks down the front steps of her house and desperately looks around.

Finally, Ottie sees figures of people in the distance.

From the fields, Curtis walks toward Ottie, carrying his baby sister and holding Justine's hand.

Willard Worth escorts Young Fred and Young Gertie up the road.

Sheepishly, June Jr. strolls back. He carries stolen items and a dead chicken.

Ottie walks down toward her children and takes the baby from Curtis, and then the dead chicken from June Jr.

She walks over and gives it to Gertie.

OTTIE

Boil some water and clean this bird. We're havin' chicken for supper.

(beat)

The rest of ya, clean up this mess.

Young Gertie and Justine walk away with the chicken. Ottie turns and looks at June Jr.

JUNE JR.

Why did ya do that for? I didn't steal anythin'

Ottie reaches over and takes the items from June Jr.

OTTIE

You're so crooked, ya could swaller nails an' spit out corkscrews.

As Ottie goes into the house, a rejected June Jr. slithers away.

Young Fred looks up to Willard, who watches Ottie and June Jr. and then shakes his head in disgust.

DISSOLVED TO:

INT. FRED'S CAR - AFTERNOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Deep in thought, Fred stares silently out of the window as he drives.

EXT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car travels along a country highway, surrounded by empty agricultural fields.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred glances out the side window and sees a lone farm tractor in the distance.

The worn-out tractor plows the soil for the spring plantings.

At a closer look, Fred sees a man in his twenties, driving the tractor while a young boy rides behind, holding onto the tractor and the man.

GERTIE (O.S.)
Have you heard from Willard lately?

FRED
Nope. Haven't heard from him in years.

GERTIE
You know his second son died.

FRED
I remember you telling me.

GERTIE
He's taking it pretty hard.

FRED
Oh.

GERTIE
He thinks God is taking his sons away in retribution for what happened.

FRED
That was years ago.

DISSOLVED TO:

EXT. FARM FIELDS - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Early April 1950. Young Fred walks ahead of Buck, their old horse, which pulls the plow. Young Fred picks up clods of dirt, which impedes the movement of the plow.

With the horse's reins around his neck, Willard holds the handles as he steers the plow.

EXT. FARM FIELDS AND CREEK - CONTINUOUS

Several hours of hard work. Exhausted, Young Fred slows down.

Willard sees Young Fred and pulls back the reins and stops the horse.

WILLARD
Hey...what's the problem now, Clods?

YOUNG FRED
My legs and feet are hurtin'.

WILLARD
Okay...come on up.

Willard reaches over, lifts up, and sits Young Fred on the cross plank of the plow.

WILLARD
(continuing)
Now hold on.

Willard loosens the horse's reins.

WILLARD
(continuing; to the horse)
Come on, Buck, giddyap.

The old horse starts to move forward, with Young Fred, riding in front of Willard, who steers the plow.

For several moments, Young Fred looks down and sees the plow turn the earth upward. He looks back at Willard and the fields around him.

Suddenly, Buck, the old horse, lifts up its tail and passes gas and drops clods of manure.

Young Fred reacts from the bad smell.

WILLARD
(continuing;
jokingly)
Hey Clods, jump down and pick that manure so I can do a better job plowin'.

YOUNG FRED
I ain't touchin' that horse shit.
Not even for ya.

WILLARD
What's the matter, Clods, don't ya like me anymore?

YOUNG FRED
(teases Willard back)
Who said anything about likin' ya in the first place?

WILLARD
Ya don't, huh?

Suddenly, Willard jerks on the horse reins, bringing the horse to an abrupt stop and tossing Young Fred off the crossbar onto the ground.

Covered with dirt and in fresh manure, Young Fred looks up Willard and breaks out with a laugh.

YOUNG FRED
See what ya did. I'm goin' to smell like a horse now.

Willard ties the horse reins on the plow and walks over to Young Fred.

Willard looks at Young Fred and shakes his head.

WILLARD
If ya ain't the sight for sore eyes.

Laughing, Willard kneels down on the ground and puts his arm around Young Fred.

The old horse glances over to see what's so funny.

Willard and Young Fred lay on the ground, laughing hysterically.

Still laughing, Willard gets up and picks Young Fred up by his right arm and carries him over to the nearby creek.

Willard holds Young Fred over the cold creek.

YOUNG FRED
Don't ya dare.

WILLARD
Answer me one question. Are ya goin' remember me when I'm gone?

YOUNG FRED
(laughing)
Are ya kiddin'?

Willard drops Young Fred into the cold creek.

WILLARD
Be that way. At least, ya don't
smell like a horse any more.

Suddenly, a shadow of another man falls over Young Fred.

ELI (O.S.)
What in the hell ya two doin'?

Shamed, Willard helps Young Fred out of the creek and then
turns around to face Eli.

WILLARD
We were just takin' a little break.

ELI
Ya worthless...ya plowed the rows
too deep or too shallow. Ya don't
wash or curry the horse right.
There are too many weeds left in
the corn. Can't ya do anything
right, Worthless?

WILLARD
My name isn't Worthless...and ya
can do the work yourself. Ya
don't pay me for doin' your farm
work anyway.

ELI
No, I don't...but ya work pays the
rent for ya, ya family, and ya
mother to live on my land.

WILLARD
And what does fuckin' my mother
every week pay for? Is that
dessert, a tip, or taxes?

Eli lunges at Willard.

ELI
Ya little bastard...I'm gonna kick
ya little smart-aleck ass.

Eli swings and hits Willard in the face.

Willard falls to the ground. Young Fred runs to Willard.

As blood trickles down his nose and mouth, Willard looks up
at Eli.

WILLARD
Ya not my dad...ya don't pay me,
support me, or love me. Ya not
going' to screw me like ya do my
mama.

Willard wipes the blood from his mouth as he stands back up
to face Eli.

WILLARD
(continuing)
Ya come to the farm and bitch
about what I do.
(more)

WILLARD (cont'd)
 Ya take what we raise on the
 place, and then ya have your wife
 sell it at the Boneyard...and we
 don't see a penny from it.

(beat)
 Then you hop on my mama like a
 fat, rutting hog until ya
 satisfied...and we don't see ya
 again until ya come back, ready
 for seconds.

ELI
 Why ya...

Eli attempts to hit Willard.

Young Fred tries to prevent Eli from hitting Willard, but
 gets struck instead.

Dazed, Young Fred falls to the ground.

Willard runs over and cares for Young Fred...and then looks
 at Eli.

WILLARD
 If ya ever lay a hand on me or any
 of my family, I'll shoot ya dead.

ELI
 (laughs at Willard)
 Ya totally worthless...all of ya.

Eli laughs to himself as he starts to walk away.

Willard stands up and calls out to him.

WILLARD
 Ya laugh now...but just remember,
 when ya sets foot around our
 house, know that I'm sittin' in
 the woods somewhere with my rifle
 aimed at your damned
 head...deciding whether to pull
 the trigger or not.

Eli keeps walking away.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

Willard and Young Fred walk Buck, the old horse, back to the
 barn after a long day of farming.

WILLARD
 Do you know somethin'?

YOUNG FRED
 What?

WILLARD
 I think the world of ya, Clods.

YOUNG FRED
 That goes for me, too, Worth.

Buck, the old horse, neighs.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SIDE - CONTINUOUS

Willard and Young Fred hike up halfway to the Grassy Knob
 summit. They stop and sit down at an ancient redbud tree.

Willard lowers his head and starts to cry.

Young Fred looks over and sees Willard.

YOUNG FRED
Why are ya sad, Worth.

WILLARD
'Cause...I want someone to
remember me. I want it to matter
that I lived here in this time and
place. I want someone to care.

YOUNG FRED
I care.

WILLARD
I know...but I want a grown-up
person to care.

YOUNG FRED
Like Ottie

Bowing his head, Willard chokes on the lump forming in his
throat and cries.

YOUNG FRED
(continuing; suggests)
What if we carved a giant heart in
this tree and put your name in it.

Willard looks up and wipes the tears from his eyes.

WILLARD
What?

YOUNG FRED
It will be there forever for
people to see and remember you by.

WILLARD
I'm no good writin' my name.

YOUNG FRED
Give me your knife, and I'll write
it.

Willard hands Young Fred his knife.

Young Fred kneels closer to the redbud tree and starts to
etch on the tree's bark.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SIDE - CONTINUOUS

Moments later. Under the redbud tree, Young Fred finishes
the etching.

YOUNG FRED
Well...how do ya like it?

Willard stretches over to see it.

WILLARD'S P.O.V. - ETCHING IN THE REDBUD

The words, "Remember me, Worth" are etched on the tree bark.

BACK TO THE SCENE

Willard looks proudly at the etching and then smiles at Young
Fred.

WILLARD
 (greatly touched)
 Thank you.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELI'S FARM - AFTERNOON

Next day. Willard and Young Fred come out of the barn after working a long day in the fields.

Eli stands and waits for them.

ELI
 What happened to my wagon?

WILLARD
 It hit a deep rut in the field and flipped over.

ELI
 Ya stupid son of a bitch.

Eli swings and strikes Willard hard in the head.

Willard goes flying onto the ground.

Young Fred watches in horror.

As Eli turns and walks to the barn, Young Fred runs over to care for Willard.

Willard rises slowly from the ground, rubbing the pain from his eye. Blood trickles from his nose.

Willard starts to walk back to the house.

Young Fred stays on the ground, and then he realizes the horrible consequence. He runs after Willard.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Willard takes the rifle down from the mantle.

Willard starts to leave the house as Young Fred enters and sees Willard with the rifle.

YOUNG FRED
 No...Worth. NO!!

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Willard walks pass Gertie and Justine as they wash clothes.

Gertie and Justine watch Willard walk up the mountainside, carrying the rifle.

Young Fred runs after Willard, crying and begging him to stop.

YOUNG FRED
 No, Worth....ya can't do it. It's not right.

WILLARD
 Get away from me.

Willard pushes Young Fred away him.

YOUNG FRED
 Don't do it.

Willard continues on and passes Ottie, as she walks from the mountainside, carrying some empty buckets. She sees the rifle in Willard's hand.

OTTIE
Whatcha doin'? Don't you play
with that gun. You'll kill
somebody.

WILLARD
That's what I'm hopin' to do.

Ottie turns and looks at Young Fred as he runs after Willard.

Ottie watches them for a moment, and then realizes that something horrible is going to happen.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Willard climbs toward some huge rocks on the side of the Oaky Knob. Young Fred frantically runs behind him.

YOUNG FRED
Don't do it, Worth.

EXT. ELI'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Eli comes out of the barn.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Willard looks down the barrel of the rifle on Eli's head.

WILLARD'S P.O.V. - RIFLE'S AIM

Eli struts around the barnyard.

BACK TO THE SCENE

Suddenly, Young Fred grabs Willard's arm as he tries to pull the rifle away.

Annoyed, Willard swats Young Fred to the ground.

Dazed, Young Fred looks up and pleads with Willard.

YOUNG FRED
Don't do it.

Willard aims the rifle on Eli and starts to squeeze the trigger.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie runs down from the mountainside, past the little old house. She glances back at the mountainside, and then turns and spots Eli in the distance.

OTTIE
(yells)
Eli!

Eli turns and sees Ottie running toward him.

Suddenly, a gunshot is heard.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Willard looks up from the rifle.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie drops the bucket and runs toward Eli as he falls to the ground.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

As he gets up slowly, Young Fred looks wary at Willard and then down the mountainside.

He sees Ottie on the ground, cradling Eli in her arms.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie cries as she holds Eli tight in her arms and then discovers that Eli has a shoulder wound.

OTTIE
 (looks up)
 Thank you, Jesus...I mean it, too.
 (hollers)
 Gertie...somebody...get me
 somethin'...anything to stop this
 bleedin'.

Eli looks up at Ottie and smiles.

Ottie looks down and wipes away her tears.

OTTIE
 (continuing)
 What are ya smilin' about? Ya
 scared the hell out of me.

ELI
 I guess I had that comin'.

OTTIE
 Ya did. That's what happens when
 ya mess with my kids.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Willard stands up and hides the rifle among the rocks.

YOUNG FRED
 What are ya gonna do?

WILLARD
 Can't stay here anymore.

Willard starts to leave, and he turns around to Young Fred.

WILLARD
 (continuing)
 Will ya remember me?

Sad, Young Fred nods his head as he watches Willard disappear in the darkness.

DISSOLVED TO:

INT. FRED'S CAR - AFTERNOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Fred stares silently out of the window as he drives into the hospital parking lot. He looks for a parking space.

FRED
 It was so unfair.

GERTIE
 A lot of things are unfair in life.

FRED
But Eli didn't die...not then.

GERTIE
I know...it takes some people
longer.

Gertie points to a vacant parking space.

GERTIE
(continuing)
There's one.

EXT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred's car pulls into the parking space.

INT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Fred turns off the engine.

FRED
What I don't understand is why he
didn't stay in touch with me. I
needed him. I felt like he
abandoned me.

GERTIE
You had me. I've always been
there for you.

Fred looks over at Gertie.

FRED
I know...and I appreciate it.
(beat)
Look...I don't think I can do this.

GERTIE
What can't you do?

Fred looks at the hospital.

FRED
Go in there.

GERTIE
We've been through worse times
together.

FRED
There was only one time in my life
that I felt any love for her.
(beat)
How can I forgive myself when I
can't even forgive my own mother.

GERTIE
I know you're in a lot of pain. If
you want to heal yourself, you
need to first forgive others.

Fred looks over at Gertie and nods. He then reaches in the
back seat and grabs an umbrella.

FRED
You're right....let's get this
over with.

Fred climbs out of the door as he opens the umbrella.

Gertie ties on her rain bonnet.

EXT. FRED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Raining hard. Fred walks around the car and opens the passenger door.

Gertie gets out and takes Fred's arm.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Together huddled under the umbrella, Fred and Gertie walk toward the hospital.

In the distance, an older man walks toward them.

Fred looks up and sees the man walking toward them, drenched with the rain.

The older man turns out to be WILLIAM, now in his eighties.

DISSOLVED TO:

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

May 1951. Raining. William, a man in mid-thirties, lumbers up the road toward the little old house.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie looks out the window and sees William walking toward the house.

Smiling to herself, Ottie wipes off her hands and goes out the front door to meet William.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie walks out of the door and sees June Jr., who lounges on the porch, whittling away his life.

As she passes June Jr. by, Ottie kicks him in the foot.

OTTIE
(Annoyed, to June Jr.)
You're a waste of good skin.

Ottie sees William and breaks into a smile.

OTTIE
(continuing; to
William)
Well, butter my butt and call me
a biscuit!

WILLIAM
Hello Ottie.

OTTIE
I was wonderin' when ya be comin'
back again.

Meanwhile, in the backyard, Young Fred carries buckets of water as Young Gertie and Justine wash clothes.

Curious, they hear strange voice and walk around the house to see who is talking to Ottie.

WILLIAM
Been workin' nights at the Carbon
Plant...that's why ya haven't seen
me.

OTTIE

I guess that's as good an excuse
as anythin'.

(beat)

What can I getcha?

WILLIAM

Well, ya see...I gotta work nights
and have to leave my elderly
mother and sister at home by
themselves. They're scared bein'
left alone.

OTTIE

Scared?! Why no one in their
right mind would touch 'em.

WILLIAM

I know. But another sister that
lives with us, too. She's bedfast
with tuberculosis and must have
constant care.

OTTIE

Oh hell, William...they've never
been able to do nothin' for
themselves.

WILLIAM

I know....that's why I'm lookin'
for a young person to come and
stay with us...someone who could
do chores around the house and run
for help if we get into trouble.
My womenfolk would all feel safer
if a healthy young man were livin'
with them.

OTTIE

What does it have to do with me?

WILLIAM

I know you've got a son named
Fred.

OTTIE

What about him?

Young Gertie and Justine look over at Fred.

WILLIAM

Would ya consider lettin' him come
to live with us?

(beat)

I would pay you twenty-five
dollars a month.

OTTIE

Twenty-five dollars?! That's a
lot of money.

Shocked at the discussion, Young Fred stares at Ottie in
disbelief.

OTTIE (O.S.)

Will he be comin' back home?

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Well...I don't work on
weekends...so I guess he could
come home on Saturday and
Sunday...if he wants to.

Ottie looks around and thinks to herself, weighing her decision and then...

OTTIE
(thinks for a moment)
All right...I agree.

Engulfed in fear and panic, Young Fred takes off and runs for the giant cedar trees that line the yard behind the house.

Ottie turns and sees Young Fred run away from the house.

OTTIE
(continuing; hollers
at Young Fred)
Fred, come back here.

Young Fred stops and turns around and confronts Ottie.

Annoyed, Ottie and William walk toward him.

Defiantly, Young Gertie and Justine run and form a wall of protection around Young Fred.

OTTIE
(continuing; to Young
Fred)
I think ya know William...he's
been around here a couple of times.

Young Fred looks at William with apprehension.

OTTIE
(continuing)
You're going to live with him and
his sisters for a while.

YOUNG FRED
No.

OTTIE
What did ya say?

YOUNG FRED
I said, "no."

Ottie slaps Young Fred across the face.

OTTIE
Don't ya ever talk to me that
like! Now go and get your things.

YOUNG GERTIE
We don't want him to go.

OTTIE
(to Young Gertie)
I didn't hear anyone ask ya for
your opinion.

YOUNG GERTIE
I'm givin' it anyway. It's not
fair. We need him here.

OTTIE
(very threatening)
Look...twenty-five dollars is more
important to this household than
what ya...
(turns to Young Fred)
..and he thinks.

Betrayed, Young Fred looks at Ottie, while rubbing his tearful face where Ottie slapped him.

OTTIE
(continuing; beat)
Now go get your things, Fred.

Fred looks at Ottie and then over at Gertie and Justine. He then meanders to the house.

Young Gertie starts running down the road, away from the house.

OTTIE
(continuing; hollers
at Young Gertie)
Where are ya goin'? Get back here.

EXT. ELI'S FARM - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie runs past Eli's barn and farmyard.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred turns to look at Ottie.

William hands Ottie the money, after which she stuffs the bills into her bra.

Justine runs to Young Fred as he enters the house.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

As Beulah takes laundry down from her clothesline, she looks over and sees Young Gertie runs urgently past her house.

Sensing something wrong, Beulah picks up her laundry basket and hurries in her house.

INT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah drops the basket in her kitchen and barrels towards the telephone in her living room, quickly dialing it.

Moments seem like lifetimes as Beulah waits for someone to pick up on the other line. Finally...

BEULAH
Sheriff!

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Tearful, Justine watches Young Fred blindly put his meager amount of clothes into a brown paper sack.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Angry, Sheriff Dawson starts his truck and guns his engine.

The Sheriff's truck rambles away in a cloud of dust.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - CONTINUOUS

Young Gertie runs past to the school toward Miss Lucy's house.

EXT. MISS LUCY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Afraid and crying, Young Gertie knocks on the front door.

YOUNG GERTIE
Miss Lucy...Miss Lucy!!!!

Wiping her hands with a dishcloth, Miss Lucy opens the front door and sees an emotional Young Gertie.

MISS LUCY
Lord in heaven, child...what's the matter.

YOUNG GERTIE
It's Fred. He's...

Miss Lucy kneels down and tries to comfort Young Gertie.

MISS LUCY
He's what?

Miss Lucy reaches in her pocket and pulls out a handkerchief and hands it to Young Gertie.

MISS LUCY
(continuing)
Here. Wipe your tears and blow your nose.
(beat)
What's happen to Fred?

GERTIE
Ottie's sellin' him.

MISS LUCY
She's what?

Sensing that something terrible has happened, Miss Lucy reaches inside and grabs her purse, and quickly closes the door.

MISS LUCY
(continuing)
Come on, child.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Justine escorts Young Fred down the steps of the house.

Young Fred turns around and glances back at the house.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Emotionless, Ottie watches Young Fred from the window.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Young Fred walks over to William.

WILLIAM
Let's go, son.

Justine follows William and Young Fred as they walk down the road.

EXT. BEULAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Beulah takes her washing off the clothesline as the Sheriff's truck barrels up the road, followed by Miss Lucy's car.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ottie watches Young Fred leave.

Ottie then looks up and sees the Sheriff's truck and Miss Lucy's car charging toward the house.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff's truck stops in front of William and young Fred. As the Sheriff climbs out of his truck, Miss Lucy's car pulls up behind him.

Miss Lucy and Gertie get out of the car quickly and hurry toward Young Fred.

SHERIFF DAWSON
(to William)
Where do you think you're going
with this boy?

WILLIAM
I'm takin' him home.

MISS LUCY
His home is here.

OTTIE (O.S.)
Not anymore.

Ottie walks toward them, carrying a rifle.

OTTIE
We've made a deal already. He gets
the boy, and I get twenty-five
dollars a month.

MISS LUCY
(to Ottie)
You can't do this.

OTTIE
Says who?

MISS LUCY
(to the Sheriff)
Correct me if I'm wrong, Sheriff,
but didn't they pass a law
prohibiting slavery?

SHERIFF DAWSON
That's right, they did.
(beat)
One thing you know is American
history, Miss Lucy.
(to Ottie)
You can't sell your
children...especially Fred.

OTTIE
Who said anything about sellin'?
I'm just rentin' the bastard out.

MISS LUCY
You can't do that.

OTTIE
Don't tell me what I can and can
not do with my children.

MISS LUCY
This is not right. The child is
only seven.

OTTIE
The sooner he learns about life,
the better he'll be.

MISS LUCY
What about his education? He's
doing so well in school.

OTTIE
I don't care how well he's doin'.
I did just fine without it. I need
the money to feed my family.

MISS LUCY
But...

OTTIE
No more buts.
(to William)
Now take the boy away.

William puts his arm around Young Fred.

WILLIAM
Come on son. Let's go.

Wiping his tears away, Young Fred looks up at William and then over at Ottie, Sheriff Dawson, Miss Lucy, and then over to Young Gertie and Justine.

Ottie watches William and Young Fred walk away for a moment and then saunters back to the house.

Miss Lucy notices Ottie's distant departure and runs after William and Young Fred. Young Gertie and Justine follow her.

MISS LUCY
(to William)
This boy has a future ahead of him.

William glances back at Ottie and then looks at Miss Lucy, with tears running down her face.

WILLIAM
Don't worry, Miss Lucy. We'll
make sure he goes to school each
day.

Somewhat reassured, Miss Lucy smiles, takes out a handkerchief, and wipes her tears.

MISS LUCY
Thank you.

Miss Lucy then kneels down, wipes Young Fred's tears away, and comforts him.

MISS LUCY
(continuing)
We'll see you on Monday morning.

YOUNG FRED
I promise I won't be late.

MISS LUCY
You do that now.

As William and Young Fred walk down the road, Miss Lucy goes over and stands with Young Gertie and Justine.

Young Gertie and Justine shade their eyes with their hands to keep Young Fred in view as long as possible.

Young Fred turns his head back and sees Young Gertie and Justine sadly standing together with their hands upraised, waving goodbye. Young Fred glances up at William.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Fred stops and stares at William as he walks away. Fred turns to look at Gertie, huddling next to him under the umbrella.

Fred looks up and notices a refined woman, in her early forties, standing at the entrance of the hospital.

The young woman is JUSTINE. She sees Fred and Gertie and waves at them.

EXT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

As Fred and Gertie approach the hospital, Justine runs through the rain and embraces Fred and Gertie under the umbrella.

JUSTINE
I didn't think you two would ever
get here.

GERTIE
I had my doubts, too.

FRED
I still do.

Gertie senses something is wrong with Fred and turns to Justine.

GERTIE
How's she doing?

JUSTINE
She's still unconscious.

GERTIE
Have you reached Baby?

JUSTINE
Callie? Yes, I called her. She's
got to take care of her children
but she will be here.

GERTIE
What about the others?

JUSTINE
Left a message for Worth...no word
from him.

(beat)
Curtis and June Jr. are up there
now with her. June Jr. isn't
taking it well.

GERTIE
What is he doing?

JUSTINE
Crying like a baby...and hoping
that she wakes up and tells him
how much she's loved him.

FRED
That's not going to happen.
(beat)
Look...why don't you two go? I
don't think I can face her.

GERTIE
What?! But you come all this way...

FRED
I know...but..

GERTIE
(to Justine)
Why don't you go up and we'll be
up there shortly? There's
something I need to tell Fred.

Puzzled, Justine looks at Gertie and then at Fred.

JUSTINE
Okay...but at least, get out of
the rain.

GERTIE
(looking at Fred)
I think we can do that.

With a steady rain, Gertie, Justine, and Fred hustle into the hospital entrance under the umbrella.

INT. HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

As Fred shakes off the rain from the umbrella, Gertie embraces Justine.

JUSTINE
(as she walks away)
Don't be too long. She's on the
Cardiac Intensive Care
unit...third floor.

Using her hand, Gertie bushes off any rain from her hair and clothes.

GERTIE
We'll be up there shortly.

Fred looks at Gertie and shakes his head.

FRED
What are you going to tell me that
I don't already know?

GERTIE
There's a lot you don't know.

Gertie looks around and sees the sign for the cafeteria.

GERTIE
(continuing)
I'll buy you a coffee.
(beat)
Come on now.

Gertie takes Fred's arm and leads him down the corridor to the cafeteria.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Gertie and Fred find an empty table in the sparsely occupied cafeteria, carrying their cups of coffees.

FRED
So what is it that I don't already
know about Ottie?

GERTIE
Plenty.

FRED
Like what?

GERTIE
Like the world that she grew up in.

The CAMERA MOVES into a CLOSE SHOT of Gertie and Fred.

GERTIE
(continuing)
Remember that weekend that Ottie
had her first stoke?

FRED
You mean that weekend I went away
to see friends in Atlanta.

GERTIE
Yes...that's the one.

FRED
(beat)
You're not going to blame me for
not being home with her, are you?

GERTIE
No one is blaming anyone, Fred.

FRED
When Ottie needed a place to live,
I was the one who took her in
because no one else would put up
with her.

GERTIE
We all know that...and appreciate
it.

(beat)
Even Ottie was grateful for
you...in her own way.

FRED
Tell me another one.

GERTIE
Well...I was there with her when
she regained consciousness. She
told me things that I never heard
before.

FRED
And you believed her?

GERTIE
Yes...I do.
(beat)
You know...there comes a time when
you have to just let go of the
past and forgive.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RURAL FARM FIELDS - 1910 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

After a hard day's work in the fields, a YOUNG FARMER leads a tired horse down the road. A happy but ragged and barefoot LITTLE GIRL runs to meet him. He picks her up and joyfully swings her around.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie worshiped her father...and
 out of all the eight children, he
 loved her the most.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1912 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Years later, the farmer, who is OTTIE'S FATHER, shows the young girl, who is Ottie, how moonshine is made with a primitive still.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 He was the one who taught her how
 to make moonshine...and at the age
 fourteen, she was selling it at
 Peddler's stump on CCC road.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEDDLER'S STUMP - CCC ROAD - 1917 -
 AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

A pretty, fourteen-year old Ottie sets out her quarts of crystal clear moonshine along the back of the stump and then covers the containers with a white cloth. On the stump, she places apples, pears, and jars of jelly. She sits down in the grass and waits for customers.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 With the war raging on in Europe,
 all the young men had gone away to
 the army, leaving only old and
 discarded men behind.

A road maintenance truck rambles around a corner and stops suddenly. Thirteen men pile off the truck, and rush over to the stump to buy the produce. The last man to jump off the truck is ELI, a twenty-five-year blond, handsome man, medium built with strong arms and legs. Ottie smiles as she takes in the cash from selling her produce. The men gasp when Ottie removes the cloth from the jars with moonshine. She opens one of the jars, pushes her index finger down into the liquid, and then tantalizingly waves it under the men's noses. As the men start to dig in their pockets to buy quarts of moonshine, the ROAD CREW FOREMAN, a no-nonsense burly Scot-Irish man in his late forties intervenes.

ROAD CREW FOREMAN
 (bellows)
 Layoff the moonshine. I'm not
 going to deal with any drunken
 road crew.

As the foreman walks back to his truck, Ottie grabs an apple, pours a cup of moonshine, and hurries after him. She places the apple and the cup on the truck engine, and leans low so that her breasts are slightly visible to the foreman.

OTTIE
 Do ya have any problems if the men
 can buy their booze now?
 (more)

OTTIE (cont'd)
I'll keep the booze here with me
until they get through with their
work.

(beat)
There will be a free quart for you
if you let them buy it now.

The foreman looks over Ottie as he takes a swig from the cup,
and jolts back. He shakes his head, wipes his mouth, and then
smiles at her.

ROAD CREW FOREMAN
That's mighty good.

OTTIE
(smiling back)
Glad ya like it...or them.

She turns and yells at his crew.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Okay, boys...line up.

The men line up and pay for their own quart. Ottie writes
down a number on each jar to designate its owner. When Eli's
turn comes, Ottie looks him over and smiles.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Well...hello there.

Eli smiles and hands her a twenty-dollar bill.

Ottie stares at the money.

OTTIE
(continuing)
The booze is only eight dollars.

Eli nods.

She takes his money and writes down a number on the jar.

ELI
What's my number? I can't count.

OTTIE
Number nine.

Ottie looks at Eli and gives him back ten-dollars in
one-dollar bills.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Here's your change.

Eli looks at the money.

ELI
I can't count.

OTTIE
I know...you told me already.
Here.

Eli takes his money and looks at her and smiles.

ELI
Well...I best be gonna. See you
later?

Eli starts to walk away, and Ottie calls after him.

OTTIE
Say...booze isn't all that I'm
peddlin'.

Eli turns around.

ELI
Oh? Ya don't say. Well, what's
else ya got that I might be
interested in?

OTTIE
It depends what ya lookin' for.

ELI
More than what ya can give me.

Eli starts to walk away.

OTTIE
How do ya know without seeing my
wares?

Eli turns around.

ELI
I don't know.

OTTIE
Say, why don't ya meet me at the
general store on Saturday after
work and find out. There's gonna
be some fiddlers from Asheville
there.

ELI
We'll see.

Ottie smiles as she watches Eli walk back to the truck.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Ottie didn't think Saturday would
ever come...but it did.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD FARMHOUSE - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Ottie runs out of the house with great anticipation. She passes her father, a tall but beaten-down man in his forties as he walks home from the fields with OTTIE'S MOTHER, a worn-looking woman in her late thirties.

OTTIE'S FATHER
Where in the hell is she goin'?

OTTIE'S MOTHER
Don't know.
(beat)
Hopefully not into trouble.

Ottie's parents turn and watch their daughter run down the road.

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

A crowd of town people stands around and listens to the old-time music performed by a TRIO OF MUSICIANS, a fiddle, banjo, and guitar players on the steps of the COUNTRY STORE, a dilapidated old building, directly off the highway.

Below the music players, Ottie joyously flatfoot dances to Mississippi Sawyer music along with a dozen other people.

Eli walks over and makes his way through the crowd. He looks around and then finally sees Ottie dancing by herself. He watches Ottie for a while and smiles to himself.

Ottie looks over and sees him. She waves and tries to coax him over to dance with her.

Bashfully, Eli smiles and shakes his head.

The song ends, and Ottie walks to Eli.

OTTIE
I was hopin' you turn up.

ELI
You were?

The musicians start to play a slower dance song, similar to Ashokan Farewell.

OTTIE
This is where a gentleman would ask me to dance.

ELI
Well, I ain't no gentleman, and I can't dance.

OTTIE
Why not?

ELI
Can't count.

Ottie takes Eli's hand and tries to lead him to the dance area.

OTTIE
Come on.

Eli becomes self-conscious and resists.

ELI
I told ya I can't.

OTTIE
Don't be a stupid jackass...I'll show you.
(beat)
Now give me your other hand.

Eli and Ottie start to dance awkwardly together.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Well...
(beat)
Ya right...ya not good dancer but ya not bad, either.

Eli grabs Ottie closer to him.

ELI
Ya know...I've been told that I'm good doin' other things.

OTTIE
 Yeah?
 (beat)
 Like what?

Eli smiles at Ottie.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 It didn't take long until they
 found their way to the "forget me
 not" tree.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

Later that day, Eli finishes making love to Ottie under a
 LARGE REDBUD TREE.

As they start to get dress, Ottie looks up at him.

OTTIE
 When will I see ya again?

Eli looks down at her and smiles.

ELI
 When the sourwood is in bloom.

OTTIE
 I'll be waitin'.

Eli kisses Ottie.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 A month later, the sourwood trees
 were in bloom.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEDDLER'S STUMP - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

The redbud and sourwood trees are in bloom.

Ottie waits for Eli at the Peddler's Stump and watches
 vehicles go by.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie waited for days for Eli to
 come back. Later she found out
 that he had gone home and married
 his childhood sweetheart.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM FIELDS - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Along with her family, Ottie picks cotton in the farm fields.
 Suddenly, she realizes that something is not quite right with
 her and passes out.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 She also found out that she was
 pregnant.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD FARMHOUSE - 1918 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Trying to stay warm, Ottie sits on the porch in the cold
 weather and nurses her baby.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie had disgraced her family and
 was treated like a dog...only
 getting remaining scraps of food
 and sleeping in the barn with the
 other animals.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM FIELDS - 1919 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

With her BABY cradled a blanket nearby on the ground, Ottie
 labors hard in fields.

GENTRY (V.O.)
 Ottie's father would often take
 his anger and frustration out on
 her.

Ottie's father walks over and berates Ottie for something she
 didn't do.

Ottie tries to explain, but her father starts to hit her
 repeatedly.

Sensing that something is wrong, the baby starts to cry as
 Ottie tries to shield herself from her father's rage.

CUT TO:

INT. LITTLE OLD CHURCH - 1919 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie suffered daily humiliation
 not only by her family but also by
 the people in the valley.

Ottie's parents and her seven brothers and sisters file into
 the small old church and take a pew close to the front. With
 her battered face and holding her baby, Ottie comes into the
 church and is greeted by the gawking and judgemental
 congregation.

Ottie tries to sit down in a couple of empty seats but is
 forbidden by the other parishioners. She finally finds one
 at the back of the church.

CUT TO:

EXT. PEDDLER'S STUMP - 1920 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Sporting a black-eye and swollen lip, Ottie sits near the
 stump and sells her homemade wares and moonshine.

In the distance, she sees an approaching horse-drawn wagon.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie knew that she had to do
 something...

The horse-drawn wagon stops, and JUNE SR. climbs down and
 rambles toward Ottie.

Ottie looks at June Sr. in disgust.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 ...and get away from her family.

June Sr. glances at Ottie's beaten-up face and then down at
 Ottie's partly covered naked breast.

Ottie follows June Sr.'s stares and then looks back at his dirty and loathsome appearance.

OTTIE
I know that the merchandise has
seen better days, but can I
interest ya in anythin'?

June Sr. glares back at Ottie.

Ottie looks back at him.

OTTIE
(continuing)
That's what I thought.

GERTIE (V.O.)
...even it meant marrying someone
she didn't love.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1937 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

June Sr. plodded up the road toward the ELI'S farmhouse.

GERTIE (V.O.)
June Sr. now had a wife and three
children. The depression had hit
him hard, and he needed a place to
live. Even though he worked at
the sawmill, the work wasn't
steady, and the money wasn't
enough.

June Sr. climbs up the front porch and knocks on the door and waits.

The door opens.

June Sr. takes off his dirty, worn hat as he talks to the unseen person.

JUNE SR.
I heard that ya lookin' to rent a
house in exchange for some farm
work.

ELI (O.S.)
You heard right.

JUNE SR.
Look no more. Me and my family
need a home and some land to feed
us.

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1937 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

A week later. Two BOYS, aged five and seven, shoeless and ragged overalls, play outside of a sharecropper shack.

GERTIE (V.O.)
June Sr.'s family moved in the
next week.

The boys look down the road and see a stranger walking toward them.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1937 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Ottie leans over a cardboard box and pulls out some of her meager kitchen utensils. The dilapidated shack is in disarray with stacks of clothing, pots and pans, cheap, broken furniture strewn about. A LITTLE BOY runs about the room.

Suddenly, there is a knock at the door. Ottie looks up at the door and then at the boy.

ELI (O.S.)
I'm your landlord. I came to meet
ya.

Ottie opens the door and looks directly at Eli's blue eyes.

OTTIE
Yes.

Suddenly, Ottie is flooded with mixed emotions...happy to see him again and wants to embrace him but, at the same time, angry at his rejection and wants to strike him.

Pretending not to know Eli, Ottie steps backward and regains her composure. She then sees PET, a young man in his late teens, standing behind Eli.

ELI
Don't ya remember me? I'm Eli.
(beat)
I met ya at the Peddler's Stump on
the CCC road. I bought some liquor
from ya.

OTTIE
Oh? Your memory is better than
mine.
(beat)
There's once was a man which I met
on the CCC road who promised to
come back for me when the sourwood
was in bloom...but he never did.

Embarrassed, Eli looks down.

OTTIE
(beat)
I don't remember his name.
Besides, ya don't look like him at
all. That man was handsome and
sweet and intelligent.
(beat)
He couldn't count or dance to save
his life...but he could do other
things.

ELI
Like?

OTTIE
Like makin' love as if ya felt ya
were sent to the moon and back.
(refers to Pet)
Who's this?

ELI
(proudly)
This is my son, Pet.
(beat)
He'll be gonna to the Army when he
gets old enough.

OTTIE
 My daughter...would have been his
 age.
 (starts to be tearful)
 She died the first year.
 (beat)
 But that was many years ago.
 (beat)
 No...ya not at all like him.
 (beat)
 So...I assume my husband made all
 the arrangements with you.

ELI
 Your husband? That man is your
 husband.

OTTIE
 Beggars can't be
 choosers...especially if ya been
 jilted.
 (beat)
 I met him at the Peddler's Stump,
 too, when the sourwood was in
 bloom. He's not much to look at,
 but he doesn't lie to me. He came
 back and married me.

Eli looks rejected at Ottie.

OTTIE
 (continuing)
 I have three boys. Handsome,
 aren't they?
 (beat)
 Now...who did ya say ya are?

ELI
 Eli.

Ottie starts to close the door and stops.

OTTIE
 I don't know anyone by that name.
 Ottie glances back at Eli as if her heart is breaking again.

OTTIE
 (continuing)
 I never did.

CUR TO:

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1937 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie and June Sr. and their sons
 had a lot of work to do on the
 house and the farm around it.

Ottie sweeps dust and dirt out of the doorway into the yard.
 June Sr. nails the shingles back on the roof.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1937 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Their work stretched from dawn to
 sunset every day.

Ottie hangs curtains made from feed sackcloth over the windows as June Sr. rakes the yard outside with the two oldest boys.

The youngest boy runs around the room as Ottie surveys the large open area in the house and strings bailing wire across the shack and then hangs more feed sackcloth to create rooms.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - 1937 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Besides milking the cows and
 feeding the animals twice daily,
 there was also planting and hoeing
 that needed to be done.

June Sr. plows the fields as Ottie and her sons hoe the cotton and corn by hand.

Ottie looks up and sees Eli and his son, Pet, as they walk to fish in the nearby stream.

Eli has his hand on Pet's shoulder and turns to look at Ottie.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1938 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Returning home after a long day working in the fields, Ottie and her boys walk up the road, past Eli's farmhouse.

Ottie stops and glances over at the farmhouse. Ottie sees LILY, Eli's wife, Pet, and Eli's four younger daughters, between five and ten years, working in the garden.

Seeing them, Lily straightens up and waves at them.

LILY
 Hello there.

Ottie ignores Lily and looks straight ahead and trudges up the path to her shack.

CUT TO:

INT. FARM FIELDS - 1937 - NOON (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie had not spoken to Eli since
 they moved in and one day in
 midsummer as June Sr. and the boys
 hoed cotton in the lower fields...

As the sun beats down, Ottie works by herself, hoeing and weeding the cornfield. Glancing up, Ottie sees June Sr. and her sons working in the distance.

Suddenly, Ottie sees the shadow of a man behind her and turns quickly around.

Eli stands there, holding a bucket of water in one hand and something wrapped in a white cloth in the other.

Ottie turns back around and continues to hoe.

Eli hesitantly walks over to the Ottie and takes a dipper of water from the bucket and offers it to Ottie.

Ottie stares at the dipper and then back at him.

Eli gently pushes the dipper to Ottie's mouth.

Ottie slowly takes the dipper in her hand and lifts it to her lips to drink.

Eli takes the dipper from Ottie and offers her the white cloth.

Ottie unwraps it and finds some corn bread.

As she eats the corn bread, Ottie looks down, ashamed with tears in her eyes.

OTTIE
(mumbles under breath)
You son-of-a-bitch.

Ottie looks at Eli and wipes the tears from her face.

In the lower fields, June Sr. glances up and sees Ottie and Eli together talking.

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1937 - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

Later in the day, Ottie pumps water from the well.

Eli stands in the shadows and watches Ottie for a moment and then cautiously walks over to her.

Ottie hears someone approaching and turns around and sees Eli.

OTTIE
Oh, it's ya. Why don't ya leave me
alone? You're worse than a rash.

Ottie starts to leave, but Eli reaches out and grabs her arm.

Ottie starts to resist.

ELI
I wanna talk to ya.

OTTIE
There's nothin' more to talk about.

ELI
I'm really sorry about not comin'
back to ya when the sourwood was
in bloom.

OTTIE
Keep your apologies for someone
else. I'm not interested.

ELI
Ya don't understand. After Daisy
died...

OTTIE
Daisy? Who in the hell is Daisy?

ELI
My first wife. She died.

OTTIE
So who's this one?

ELI
Lily's my second wife.

OTTIE

I've gotta say that for a man who
can't count, ya doin' pretty well.

ELI

My family pressured me into
marrying Lily. My son, Pet,
needed a mother.

(beat)

I didn't love her then...and I
still don't.

OTTIE

But what about all of those
daughters ya fathered with her?

ELI

I had to do somethin' at nights.

(beat)

It was you, Ottie, I wanted to
marry.

GERTIE (V.O.)

Ottie knew Eli was lyin' as he
always did and always would.

Ottie looks at him skeptically for a moment and starts to
laugh.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1937 - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

June Sr. watches Ottie and Eli from the window.

GERTIE (V.O.)

But she promised to meet him in
the barn that night.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - 1937 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Ottie hurries down the rutted road toward the barn.

She passes Eli's house.

LILY (O.S.)

Ya working late on the farm?

Startled, Ottie looks over and sees Lily.

OTTIE

Gonna give the cows some more
fodder.

LILY

Eli went out a while ago. He'll
be out there.

(beat)

No need to be afraid.

With resolve, Ottie turns and walks away.

OTTIE

Who said anythin' about bein'
afraid?

EXT. ELI'S BARN - 1937 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

With great apprehension, Ottie approaches Eli's barn.

GERTIE (V.O.)

But Ottie was more afraid now than at any time in her life. She didn't trust Eli as far she could throw him. Ottie knew that she would be sacrificing her life and all by going into the barn.

(beat)

Ottie loved Eli from the first meeting at the Peddler's stump. She missed him and wanted him back again.

With resolve, Ottie walks confidently through the barn doors.

INT. ELI'S BARN - 1937 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

As Ottie enters the barn, she and Eli passionately kiss and touch each other as they frantically take each other's clothing off.

INT. ELI'S BARN - 1937 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Moments after their lovemaking, Eli quickly dresses and exits the barn without saying anything to her.

With a mixture of contempt and yearning, Ottie watches him leave as she dresses.

OTTIE

While I breathe, there's hope.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM FIELDS - 1937 - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Ottie and her sons pick cotton in the farm fields.

GERTIE (V.O.)

Ottie and Eli hid their relationship as best they could. Since Eli went to work with the state road crew at five a.m., they devised a plan to meet in the morning at the barn.

(beat)

Then on a hot day in November... when Ottie and her sons were out picking cotton, something happened.

Ottie becomes faint and collapses to the ground, clutching her stomach and moaning in pain.

Ottie's sons run to her and then carry Ottie to the shade of an Oak tree.

Ottie turns and vomits...and suddenly realizes what's going on with her.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELI'S BARN - 1937 - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)

Later that night, Ottie waited for him in the barn.

Eli comes into the barn and finds Ottie.

OTTIE
 (pleads)
 We have a problem.
 (beat)
 I'm pregnant.

Eli looks at her for a moment.

ELI
 No, Ottie. You're the one who is
 pregnant, and it's ya
 problem...not mine.
 (beat)
 I've got my own damn kids to take
 care of.

As Eli walks away, Ottie looks at him with contempt.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1938 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Following spring. Eli's old jalopy Model-T bumps and sputters along the gravel road.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Ottie did not care about the past
 or the future. It was only the
 "now time" that mattered...and at
 the present moment, Eli belonged
 to her.

INT. ELI'S OLD JALOPY MODEL-T - 1938 -
 AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

With her pregnant belly protruding to the dashboard, Ottie sits uncomfortably next to Eli on the front seat of the car.

OTTIE
 I didn't think ya had a driver's
 license.

ELI
 I don't.

OTTIE
 That's reassurin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY STORE - 1938 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli's old jalopy Model-T rambles on and then stop in front of the Country Store.

Eli gets out of the car, slams the door and walks toward the store.

Ottie squeezes out of her seat and eases down to the ground. She straightens out her sackcloth dress as best she could and then waddles into the store.

INT. COUNTRY STORE - 1938 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Inside the store, Ottie waddles through the rows of groceries, saddles and farming supplies, and parts for Model-T cars. She smells the aroma of cinnamon and cloves and eyes the chocolate, cream-filled moon pies.

Unknown to Ottie, BEULAH stands behind one of the partitions and discreetly watches Ottie's every move.

Beulah then glances outside and sees Eli as he works with the STORE OWNER, stacking bags of sugar and cases of mason jars into the back seat of the model car.

BEULAH
(under her breath)
My...someone has a sweet tooth.

Eli walks back into the store with the owner and takes out a roll of cash from his bib overalls and hands it to Ottie.

OTTIE
(to Eli)
Can I have a moon pie?

ELI
Ya fat enough.

Shamed, Ottie turns to the Store Owner.

OTTIE
How much do we own ya?

STORE OWNER
Thirty-nine dollars and thirteen cents.

Ottie then counts out the money for the supplies and quickly steals a twenty-dollar bill for herself.

Beulah comes out of her hiding place and walks to the door, watching Eli and Ottie leave.

STORE OWNER (O.S.)
Did ya find what you need, Beulah?

BEULAH
I think so.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - 1938 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Beulah's Model-T car pulls up in front of the Sheriff's Office, and Beulah gets out of her car and walks into the office.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Beulah headed straight to the Sheriff Dawson's office in Forest City and reported that she suspected Eli and Ottie were making moonshine in Devil's Creek Fork.

(beat)
The next day, the Sheriff decided to act on Beulah's complaint.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1938 - NOON (FLASHBACK)

The fire roars under the cooker as the mash bubbles inside, and steam rises up through the laurels.

Ottie places a small bone in the spout of the coiled copper tube and watches fresh moonshine flow into mason jars. She then quickly caps the quart jars with a metal lid and stacks them into a cardboard box.

Eli gathers large pieces of wood for the cooker.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1938 - NOON (FLASHBACK)

The Sheriff's truck comes rumbles over the large ruts in the road toward Eli's house.

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE 1938 - NOON (FLASHBACK)

Lily goes out to the road to find out who was approaching. She sees the Sheriff's truck coming and runs to the barn to get Pet to warn Eli and Oattie.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1938 - NOON (FLASHBACK)

Pet runs for his life up the Fork, picks up a piece of wood, and knocks it against a tree three times.

PET
(shouts)
REVENUERS!

Oattie hears the warning sound and waddles over to take a look.

Seeing the Sheriff's Truck, Oattie toddles over, grabs a bucket of water, and then throws it on the fire. She then carries two finished cases of moonshine into the laurel and covers them securely with branches and leaves.

Grabbing her pregnant stomach, she then picks up her shotgun and waddles down the hill.

Eli comes back and lingers around the still, not hearing the warning sound.

The Sheriff and his deputies run up the hillside toward the still.

Oattie crouches in the laurel and fires two shots over the heads of the Sheriff and his deputies.

Eli hears the gunfire and runs in the wrong direction, directly into the arms of the two deputies.

Pet, Lily, and her daughters run up the mountain.

Hiding in the laurels, Oattie then hurries down the mountainside toward her house.

Thinking that Eli was the one who fired upon them, the deputies drag Eli, kicking and resisting with all of his might down the hill.

Pet tries to intervene in his father's arrest, but is prevented by Lily.

SHERIFF DAWSON
Take him over to Devil's creek and
cool him off.

The deputies drag Eli and dunk his head in the cold water, almost drowning him.

The Sheriff cuffs Eli's arms behind him, and the deputies lead Eli back to the Sheriff's truck.

On her front porch of her house, Oattie watches Eli get arrested and driven away in the Sheriff's truck.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Oattie was not going to jail to
save Eli...and she didn't.
(more)

GERTIE (cont'd; V.O.)
 She could never forgive him for
 getting her pregnant and not even
 buying her a moon pie.

Ottie looks down and sees that her water has broken and runs
 down her leg.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 And that afternoon, I was born.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1938 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Two months later. Deep in thought, Ottie trudges home after
 working in the fields, carrying her baby in one arm and a hoe
 in the other.

As she passes Eli's farmhouse, she looks over at the house.

She notices Lily in the yard, taking down her laundry.

Lily turns and sees Ottie.

OTTIE
 (yells)
 Any word on Eli?

LILY
 The jury found him guilty for
 making moonshine and shooting at
 a law enforcement officer.
 (beat)
 A judge sentenced him to five
 years of hard labor at the federal
 penitentiary in Chillicothe, Ohio.

OTTIE
 Five years, huh?

LILY
 If ya asked me, they got the wrong
 person.

Suddenly, the baby starts to cry. Ottie turns around, whips
 out one of her breasts for the baby, and continues to trudge
 home.

OTTIE
 (under her breath)
 Now he'll know what it was like
 waitin' for him at the Peddler's
 Stump all of those years.

With contempt, Lily watches Ottie walk away.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHILLICOTHE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY - 1942 - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Early fall. The large metal prison door clangs loudly as it
 swings shut behind Eli.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Eli got out early for good
 behavior. He was issued a new
 suit of clothes and a twenty
 dollar bill from the government to
 start a new life.

Eli stands alone in front of the prison doors, clutching an envelope with his release papers.

GERTIE (V.O.)
(continuing)
No one was there to meet him.

He looks around and then walks away.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1942 - MORNING

Walking down the road, Eli looks over his shoulder and sees the grey prison walls with its razor wire along the top.

GERTIE (V.O.)
The nearest town was a mile away.
He remembered the loneliness and
boredom of his prison stay...all
because he fell in love with the
wrong person.

EXT. SMALL TOWN BUS STATION - 1942 - MORNING

Several people wait for the bus, including a couple of young uniformed servicemen.

With sadness, Eli watches the young men for a moment.

GERTIE (V.O.)
During his stay, he found out that
his only son, Pet, had died.

Embarrassed, he quickly wipes his tears with the back of his hand.

TICKET AGENT (O.S.)
Next.

Eli walks up to the counter.

ELI
One way ticket to Forest City,
North Carolina.

TICKET AGENT (V.O.)
That will be seven dollars.

Eli hands him the twenty-dollar bill and waits for the ticket and his change.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - 1942 - NOON (FLASHBACK)

As Eli walks down the aisle of the bus and looks for an empty seat, he is greeted by suspicious looks from the other passengers.

Eli finds a seat in the back and quickly takes it.

Eli glances out the window and sees the young servicemen again.

One of the young servicemen sees Eli staring at him and waves at him.

Embarrassed, Eli turns away the window.

EXT. RURAL GREYHOUND BUS STATION - 1942 -
MORNING

The Greyhound bus pulls over and stops. The bus doors open and some of the passengers get off.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 After three hours, Eli changed
 buses outside of Knoxville.

As Eli steps off the bus, he notices a junky-looking souvenir shack next to the bus station, with a "CHEROKEE" sign over it.
 Eli looks around.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 There were no teepees...no wild
 west...and a very few Indians
 around.

A ratty old man in a headdress stands in front of the shack and charges tourists money to have their picture taken with him.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 Eli had some time to kill, and so
 he decided to explore.

Eli walks over to shack.

INT. CHEROKEE GIFT STORE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli walks into the store and sees the displays of junky-looking gifts purported to made by "real" Native Americans.

Eli sees the CASHIER, a fat, dumpy white woman, dressed in buckskins wearing a headband with a feather sticking up.

Looking at merchandise, he reacts with disdain until he notices a stack of blankets marked GENUINE and MADE BY CHEROKEE.

He picks through blankets and finds one that he likes.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Eli thought he would give the
 blanket to his wife, Lily, as a
 peace offering for being gone so
 long.

He walks up to the cashier to pay for the blanket.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli sits, holding his blanket in a brown paper bag and stares out the window at the countryside with apprehension.

Eli looks down at the blanket and notices the attached tag,
 "MADE IN JAPAN."

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST CITY BUS STOP - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

The Greyhound Bus pulls in front of the gas station and stops.

The doors open, and Eli steps off the bus.

Disappointed, Eli looks around and sees no family members are there to meet him.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 Eli was free, but he wasn't home.
 (beat)
 Home was another twenty miles east
 and no buses went there.

Eli starts walking down the two-lane highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY 64 - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

GERTIE (V.O.)
 He reached the little town of
 Bostic seven miles away. Bostic
 had one road running through it
 with a railroad crossing. Near
 the tracks stood a small diner
 made from a cast-off railway car.

After several hours of walking, Eli comes to a SMALL DINER.

Above the door, a neon sign flashes, EATS.

Eli checks his money and walks toward the diner.

GERTIE (V.O.)
 (continuing)
 Eli had not eaten since his
 release in Ohio.

INT. SMALL DINER - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli sits at the counter, eating alone.

A tall, burly, rough-hewn MAN IN HIS FIFTIES, sporting a dead-head tattoo on his left arm, comes into the diner.

Suspiciously, the man looks around the diner, sees Eli, and sits down close to him.

MAN
 I'll have a cup of coffee and one
 of your donuts.

The Waitress brings the man a cup of coffee and a donut.

As the man eats, he looks over at Eli and his new clothes.

MAN
 (continuing; to Eli)
 Where'd ya get those new clothes?

Caught off guard and embarrassed, Eli looks down at his cup of coffee and doesn't reply.

MAN
 (continuing)
 I had a new suit of clothes once
 when I got out of the Correction
 Prison in Raleigh.

ELI
 (mumbles softly under
 his breath)
 Chillicothe, Ohio.

The man gets up and pays for his food.

As he leaves, the man taps Eli on the shoulder.

MAN
 Come on, partner, I'll drive you
 home.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

A battered PICK-UP TRUCK rambles down the road toward Miss Lucy's schoolhouse.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Eli and the man rode in silence
toward the valley. Each was
thinking about the time he spent
in jail.

The truck pulls over by the school.

INT. TRUCK - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Smoking a cigarette, the man stops the truck and turns to Eli.

MAN
I'll let ya off here.

Eli takes his money out of his pocket.

ELI
How much do I owe ya?

The man looks at Eli and the small amount remaining money Eli has.

MAN
Nothing. We've both already paid
our debts.
(beat)
Ya take care now.

Eli puts the money away and climbs out the truck.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli stands and watches as the pick-up truck rambles away.

After a couple of moments, Eli continues his walk home.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Late afternoon. Eli walks along the road, deep in thought. Hearing an approaching vehicle, he turns and sees a old truck with a farmer and his teenage son, which tiggers a memory.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Eli remembered his son.

INT. ELI'S OLD JALOPY MODEL-T - 1938 -
AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

As he drives the old vehicle, Eli laughs along with Pet.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Suddenly, Eli is overcome with emotion and begins to weep.

GERTIE (V.O.)
No one could ever replace Pet in
his heart...not even another son.

Eli wipes his tears away and looks up and pleads.

ELI
Please, God. Don't you ever send
me another son. My heart couldn't
bear it.

Eli collects himself and continues his journey.

EXT. FARM FIELDS - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Ottie works in the field, hoeing corn with her sons and daughter.

Wiping the perspiration from her head with her arm, Ottie looks up and sees a lone figure walking down the road.

Ottie realizes that it is Eli.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Ottie wanted to run to him and
embrace him...but she couldn't

Eli looks over and sees Ottie. He stops but refuses to acknowledge her.

GERTIE (V.O.)
(continuing)
Even though Eli would always be
angry at Ottie for letting him
take the rap, he still loved her.

Looking straight ahead, Eli continues his walk up the road to his house.

After looking at Eli for a while, Ottie notices that her young daughter, Gertie, has been watching her.

OTTIE
What are ya starin' at?

YOUNG GERTIE
Nothin'.

Ottie starts hoeing the corn again.

OTTIE
Get busy. We have two more rows
to hoe before dinner.

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

As Eli approaches his house, he turns around and looks back at the farm fields where Ottie was working. He turns back around and sees Lily and his daughters staring down at him from the porch with contempt.

LILY
I heard ya would be comin' home
soon.
(beat)
Ya better wash up before you come
in the house.

As he ambles toward the house as if it was a firing squad, Eli ditches the paper bag with the Indian blanket near the water well.

GERTIE (V.O.)
Eli thought that time would heal
the wounds, but with Lily, they
only got worse.
(beat)
A week after his return, Eli
decided to pay a visit to Ottie.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli looks around and walks up to Ottie's shack. He retrieves the paper bag with the Indian blanket.

Curious, Lily watches him from one of the farmhouse's windows.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli climbs the porch's steps and knocks on the door.

Ottie opens the door.

INT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Eli hands her the blanket.

ELI
That's an authentic Cherokee
blanket.

Ottie smiles and takes the blanket and wraps it around her shoulders.

Ottie then passionately embraces Eli.

Just then, Young Gertie, age three, walks out and watches her mother with Eli in bewilderment. She starts to cry.

Eli stops and looks at Gertie.

ELI
(continuing)
Who's that?

GERTIE
Your daughter.

ELI
Thank God it wasn't a boy.

Ottie pushes Eli out of the house.

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Together, Eli and Ottie hurry away from the house.

INT. ELI'S FARMHOUSE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Lily watches the scene from her window

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1942 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Hand in hand, Eli and Ottie scurry up the mountainside toward the Redbud Tree.

Ottie spreads the blanket on the ground and lies down on it, pulling Eli down.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CAFETERIA - AFTERNOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Gertie stirs her coffee as she finishes her story.

GERTIE
Eli and Ottie made up for the
three-year absence...and nine
months later, you were born.
(more)

GERTIE (cont'd)

(beat)

Lily died soon after and instead of asking Ottie to marry him, he went to Boneyard and brought home Gumtooth.

(beat)

You probably don't know this, but you reminded Ottie of Eli.

FRED

(suddenly realizes)

So that's why Ottie always took her anger out on me.

GERTIE

Sounds like something that she would do.

FRED

Ottie would always tell anyone who would listen that I was "her consolation prize for taking a chance on that damn Indian blanket." Until now, I never knew what she was talking about.

GERTIE

Now you know.

Justine looks around the cafeteria for Fred and Gertie and then hurries over to them.

JUSTINE

Sorry to interrupt, but Ottie is getting worse.

Fred looks over to Gertie, and they get up and hurry away with Justine.

INT. HOSPITAL MEDICAL DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Justine hurries with Fred and Gertie down the medical corridor, past the nurses' station.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Connected to various machines, Ottie lies in bed unconscious.

Sitting in a chair next to the bed is June Jr., visually distraught. Curtis stands behind his brother, watching Ottie.

Justine, Gertie, and Fred enter the room. They walk to Ottie's bed.

JUNE JR.

She won't even recognize me.

Gertie exchanges looks with Curtis and then puts her arm around June Jr.

Fred looks at Ottie for a moment. As he holds one of her hands, Fred then leans over to her face.

FRED

(whispers)

It's okay. We're here.

Ottie tries to speak but can't.

FRED
 (continuing)
 I want you to know...that I
 forgive you...and hope you will
 forgive me...
 (beat)
 And that I love you, mother.

Ottie's eyes start to tear up.

Ottie then struggles for a moment and then
 dies...peaceful...as if a huge burden was lifted from her.

Wiping the tears from Ottie eyes, Fred then kisses her cheek.

Fred straightens up and embraces his sisters, Gertie and
 Justine, crying among themselves.

June Jr. looks up at them, not knowing what to do. He then
 starts to leave the room...but Gertie reaches over and pulls
 him into the group.

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE OLD HOUSE - 1988 - AFTERNOON

The rain has finally stopped. Fred's car drives slowly up to
 the house, and Fred and Gertie get out.

The house is even more dilapidated than it was forty years
 ago.

Justine drives up in her car.

Justine gets out of her car and carries a large brown paper
 bag with a large item in it. She walks over to Gertie and
 Fred.

JUSTINE
 When the medics came, they found
 her holding this bag.
 (beat)
 She had written something on it.
 I can't decipher her writing.

On the bag, there is a writing by a first-grade student.

GERTIE
 Let me see.
 (reads it)
 "Give to Fred."

Gertie hands over to Fred, who quickly unwraps it.

It is the ratty looking Indian blanket.

Fred holds the blanket close to him and looks over to Gertie.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1988 - CONTINUOUS

The sun is out, and there is a burst of spring color in the
 hills and hollows.

The big Redbud tree is seen as Gertie, Justine, and Fred walk
 toward it.

Fred walks over to the tree and sees a heart carved in the
 tree, "Remember me, Worth."

Fred remembers an earlier time.

DISSOLVES TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1950 - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Beautiful spring day. As young Gertie and Justine pick wildflowers and chase butterflies, Ottie sits on the indian blanket under the Redbud tree with Fred and baby. Ottie packs up the basket of the picnic food and looks over and smiles at Fred.

OTTIE
Ya know...this tree is very
special. Ya can take some of its
magic with ya.

Ottie reaches above her head and breaks off a small branch of the Redbud tree.

Ottie places it over lovingly in young Fred's hand.

OTTIE
(continuing)
Here.
(beat)
Forget-me-not.

DISSOLVES TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - 1988 - AFTERNOON (BACK TO PRESENT)

Fred looks for a moment at the big Redbud tree.

FRED (V.O.)
The tree was special...it brought
people together. It helped them to
deal with grief, guilt, sorrow,
broken relationships, and
unrequited love. It spread its
limbs outward in a universal
embrace of suffering mankind. It
makes forgiving easy.

As he turns away from the tree and looks down at the valley, Fred wipes a tear from his eye.

FRED (V.O.)
(continuing)
This valley was Ottie's
world...but it's also my valley,
my world. And it's filled with
good people whom I have loved...
(beat)
and who helped me to forgive
myself.

Fred takes a deep breath...and then releases it, letting go of the years' pain, self-doubt, and anger.

Fred walks over and puts his arms around Gertie and Justine as they walk back down the mountainside together.

THE END