

"BLACK SNAKE MOAN"

an original screenplay
by
Craig Brewer

Only one kind of blues...
And that consists between male and female.
- Son House

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - EARLY DAWN

RAE is naked.

Wrapped around her shoulders is a loose-knit spread that conceals her slender form. She is in her 20's: a strawberry blond, with cinnamon freckles spotted across her pale skin. She is beautiful without trying.

She stares at the distant trees. This is the South; the small town of FISHERVILLE, TENNESSEE.

Soon Rae will be alone.

CUT TO:

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - EARLY MORNING

RONNIE is 25 years old. His hair is cropped in a military issue buzz.

Rae's face is wet with tears as Ronnie gently makes love to her. She touches his face and sobs like a child.

CUT TO:

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - LATER THAT MORNING

RONNIE is dressed in his National Guard fatigues, packing up his gear.

Rae is now wearing a short jeans skirt and a T-shirt with a gray wolf print ironed on the front. There is a knock at the door. Rae flinches. Ronnie opens the door revealing GILL MORTON, Ronnie's buddy from high school.

GILL

Still need a lift?

RONNIE

Yeah. Transmission's shot.

Gill and Rae's eyes meet. Gill sees that Rae is crying.

GILL

Gonna have a smoke.

Ronnie shuts the door and feels a wave of sudden nausea. He rushes past Rae.

RONNIE

Shit...

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - BATHROOM - MORNING

Ronnie is vomiting into the toilet as Rae rubs his head. Each painful dry heave makes Rae comfort him more.

RAE

Baby...

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - MORNING

Ronnie places his duffle bag in Gill's truck. Rae begins to cough.

GILL
You sick?

Rae doesn't answer.

Gill backs away, allowing Ronnie and Rae some privacy. The two lovers stare into each others eyes and then embrace.

Rae peeks over Ronnie's shoulder at Gill with an expression of dread. Anger seizes her.

RAE
This ain't gonna work.

RONNIE
Rae...

RAE
I don't see why we gotta lie 'bout
it when you and I know this ain't
gonna work.

RONNIE
(holds her face in
his hands)
Rae don't do this now...

RAE
It's stupid... It's so fucking stupid!

RONNIE
Rae!

Silence. Rae melts. Tears stream down her face.

RONNIE
(reaches in his pocket)
Look it. I got somethin' for us.
This is gonna help, okay.

GILL

You gonna miss your bus.

Ronnie removes a small digital watch and fastens it around her wrist.

RONNIE

This watch here is gonna beep at midnight. Every night. That's when it comes up on you the hardest, right?

Ronnie holds out his own wrist to show her his identical watch.

RONNIE

And wherever I'm at, my watch'll beep, too. We'll be thinkin' bout each other at the same time. Wherever we are.

Rae is shaking. He grips her by the back of her neck and pushes their faces inches away. Eye to eye.

RONNIE

I gotta believe we can do this or I ain't gonna make it, Rae.

Rae sees the fear in his eyes. She swallows her own anxiety and nods.

RAE

Okay... Okay.

They kiss passionately.

RONNIE

I love you.

Afraid of his swelling emotion, Ronnie quickly breaks away from her.

Rae watches as her love leaves in Gill's pick-up. Compelled to follow, she absently walks after the truck, down the gravel drive.

She stops. Silence. She is alone.

An intense wave of sorrow hits, like a kick to her gut. She gasps for breath as she struggles to hold back the flood of her tears.

Rae drops to her knees, right there in the gravel drive. Her hair falls in front of her face, masking her grief.

Her shoulders shudder.

Her middle finger begins to scratch at her thigh repeatedly – a nervous habit that has always accompanied this burning sensation that consumes her.

RAE

Shit.

Tears come to her. She's not going to be able to stop it.

RAE

Goddammit, Ronnie...

(shouting in
frustration)

GODDAMMIT!

Rae is gripping the watch around her wrist for comfort. Her breathing is already out of her control. The dizziness is already upon her. The familiar burning.

She inhales in gasps, rocking back and forth on her knees. The late morning cicadas chirp in an undulating frenzy.

RAE

(shaking her head)

Mm-mm

(meaning "no")

Mm-mm... Mm-mm...

The scratching at her leg leaves a red mark. She is dizzy with anxiety. Her teeth are clenched, her face is flush.

RAE

MM-MM! MM-MM! MMMMMMMMMMMMMM!

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - AFTERNOON

TEHRONNE is fucking Rae from behind.

Tehronne is a muscular, dark-skinned, black male in his late twenties.

Rae's face is crammed up against the mirror in the small bathroom. Tehronne gets faster and pushes harder – a stark contrast to her lovemaking with Ronnie.

Rae comes. A severe coughing fit hits her. She pushes him away with her ass.

RAE

We're done, right?

CUT TO:

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - AFTERNOON

Walking with his hands shoved deep into his pockets, wearing his only suit and tie, is LAZARUS WOODS (LAZ). He is in his late fifties, black, a strong face under his old fedora. He stares across the street into Dunn's Cafe.

ROSE WOODS, black, early forties, stands in the cafe. She looks confident and resolute in her new green skirt.

A brown Delta Olds pulls up into a parking space in front of Laz. Stepping out is REVEREND R.L., Laz's longtime friend. He is also black and in his late fifties.

R.L.

You ain't gonna make a fuss, are you?

(no answer)

Nothing a man can do when a woman make up her mind.

LAZARUS

I never laid a hand on her in anger.

Not a day. Not even when I's drinkin'.
But this business got me wonderin'
what a good shake and slap would do
for her.

R.L.

That kind of talk is between us.
Don't you go in there with that shit
on your tongue.

LAZARUS

I didn't start this, R.L.

Laz tries to stop his lip from quivering: the man is hurting.

R.L.

You wanna pray with me 'fore you go
in? Laz?

(R.L. touches Laz's
arm and bows his
head)

Heavenly Father...

CUT TO:

INT. DUNN'S CAFE - AFTERNOON

R.L.'s prayer is heard as Laz opens the front door to the
cafe. He looks ill. Each step is painful.

R.L. (V.O.)

We do not question your divine plan
for us, Oh God. But in these times,
when our spirit lies in shadow. When
we are lost.

Laz crosses to Rose's booth – the distance seems to stretch
out into eternity.

R.L. (V.O.)

We ask that you give us strength.
Give us strength that surpasses all
understanding. In your name we pray.
Amen.

Laz sits across from his wife.

ROSE

Can't remember the last time I saw you in that suit.

LAZARUS

Your mother's funeral. I's a pallbearer, remember?

The waitress is kind and twangy as she asks for their order.

WAITRESS

Can I start you both off with some coffee 'fore I take your order?

ROSE

We won't be stayin' long. Coffee'll be fine.

The waitress leaves. The sounds of the cafe fill the silence.

ROSE

We leavin' this weekend. Deke got a friend in Mobile gonna get him a job at the water company...

LAZARUS

(interrupting)

If you come to talk about that muthafucka, I'm gonna get up and leave you sittin' pretty in that new suit he bought'cha.

ROSE

Think this about money still, ya old fool?

LAZARUS

Say what you gotta say, but I ain't gonna hear you speak his name to me. Not never. You hear?

ROSE

How many times we been over this,

Laz? How many times?

The waitress places the coffee between them and leaves.

ROSE

Thought we was gonna be friendly about this.

LAZARUS

Carryin' on behind my back. Make me out to look like a fool to all our people. Tell me, what's friendly about that?

ROSE

I'm not ready to grow old, Laz. Livin' with you. I feel it. Like I'm one foot in the dirt. Saw it happen to my mamma. And that's not gonna happen to me. I got living to do.

LAZARUS

And you gonna live it with him?

Rose doesn't answer. Lazarus softens, touching her hand.

LAZARUS

Rose. Folks get sick. But you do what you can to get on the mend. Our marriage... it just got sick. That's all.

ROSE

Talk to me about sick. Ain't been right since I moved into that drafty house.

LAZARUS

I keep the heat on.

ROSE

That damned, rusty, radiator, bout burned the skin off my legs each time I passed.

LAZARUS

Kept us warm for twelve years.

It's over. Laz has lost her for good.

ROSE

I deserve better than this.

LAZARUS

Better'n me?

ROSE

Better than what you give.

LAZARUS

Rose... please...

ROSE

Laz... You can't say nothin'...

LAZARUS

If we get with a counselor. At the church, maybe they's...

ROSE

(the final interruption)

I don't love ya no more.

The words are daggers. Laz is wounded beyond concealment. Rose picks up her purse, preparing to leave.

ROSE

I'm sorry you hurtin'. But, like I say, this the only life I got.

(waits for him to respond)

I said my piece.

She stands and attempts to walk away. Laz grips her tightly by the wrist.

LAZARUS

God forgive you, for how you done me...

ROSE

Let go...

LAZARUS

My Daddy told me that a younger woman would bleed me dry. And that's what you did. Ya bled me.

ROSE

Let go of my arm...

LAZARUS

Would'a chopped my arm off if you asked. And this how you do me!

ROSE

LAZ, I said let...!

LAZARUS

You better pray, gal. You better pray...

ROSE

(yanks free)

Don't you lay a CURSE ON ME!

The whole cafe is silent. All eyes are on Rose.

ROSE

(to customers)

Yeah, go'on! Look! See if I give a shit about any of you people!

And she's gone, right out the front door.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - AFTERNOON

Tehronne is taking his time hanging his ice around his neck and wrists as he stands shirtless before the mirror. Rae is lying on the bed.

RAE

You got any money?

TEHRONNE

Thought you had a man for that.

RAE

(a heavy cough)

I said we wasn't gonna talk about him.

TEHRONNE

What we just did, you askin' for money, make a man stop. I ain't callin' you no ho. But I ain't gonna be played like no trick, neither. Remember... you called me.

RAE

Save that hustle talk to them field ballers you sell crack to.

TEHRONNE

What'd I tell you?

(kicks the bed)

I don't do none of that shit no more. I'm in communications now.

RAE

Stolen phone cards and two-ways is what you sayin'.

Rae starts coughing.

TEHRONNE

Mobile technology is the new fix for these niggaz, I'm tellin' you. I'm just lookin' ahead.

(takes out his wallet)

Anyways, ain't no money in drugs no more with these rednecks popping cough pills like they's Skittles.

Hey, that's what you need, girl. Get you some cough medicine. What, you sick?

RAE

Just a cough. Sugar and a spoonful
of Jack'll do it.

TEHRONNE
(takes out money)
Alright. How much you need, ho?

RAE
The hell you call me?

TEHRONNE
Eh, if the bootie fits...

Tehronne catches Rae's wrist as she goes to slap. He quickly yanks her arm behind her back and bends her backwards, shoving his face close to her own. He grips the money in a fist and cocks it to punch – all in jest.

TEHRONNE
You gonna get rough? Is that what
you doin'?

Rae's chest begins to heave with deep breaths. Tehronne looks down at her legs as she anxiously rubs them together.

TEHRONNE
(shakes his head)
I swear, I seen some buck-wild bitches
in my time, but you the illest I
ever seen.

Rae gets control of the burning. She takes the money.

RAE
Just got a cough.

CUT TO:

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - DAY

Rae is prancing up the walkway on the square. Two young men dressed for construction pass Rae.

MAN
It's already noon, Rae. You think

that skirt should still be on?

RAE

(flips them off)

If it weren't you could kiss my rebel
cootch, ya faggot.

The men keep walking as Rae coughs. She turns toward the Fisherville Grocery.

SANDY

Cough drops or condoms?

Rae stops in her tracks, looking up at her estranged mother, SANDY, smoking a cigarette outside the grocery store. Sandy has bleached hair with dark roots. She is in her late-forties: once a sexy girl, now she's lost all her tread.

RAE

(surprised to see her)

Didn't know you was workin' here
now?

SANDY

I just like dressin' up in these
goddamn blue vests.

(takes a drag)

Your money ticket get shipped today?

Rae walks away – deeply affected by Sandy's presence.

SANDY

(calling after her)

You let me know if I can be of any
assistance.

CUT TO:

EXT. MELVIN'S FEED STORE - DAY

Laz drives an old green Ford pick-up. He pulls the truck up to the front of the feed store and kills the engine.

LINCOLN, a 13-year-old black boy, comes out of the open loading door.

LINCOLN

You won't at the square this mornin'.

LAZARUS

Get me ten bags of mulch.

LINCOLN

Yes'sir.

Lincoln runs off. Laz yanks off his black tie.

EXT. MELVIN'S FEED STORE - LATER

Lincoln slaps the last bag of mulch into the bed of Laz's truck. Laz hands Lincoln a twenty.

LAZARUS

Keep the change on that.

LINCOLN

Naw... I got it, Mr. Lazarus.

(makes change)

You wanna tip me, best do it in butter beans. Momma say she need a bag 'a yours, none of that store-bought junk. That's what she said.

Laz smiles. He takes the change. Climbs in his truck.

LAZARUS

Alright, Lincoln. You come on by, I'll load you up.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS'S BARN - LATE DAY

Lazarus steers his tractor toward his small home in a sea of lush green kudzu. He kills the engine and looks beyond the nose of his tractor. He lights a cigarette. Below the nose is the head of a rose garden with a painted sign under it: Rose's Roses.

Laz inhales smoke and exhales hate. The tractor lunges

forward, trampling the garden, ripping the flowers to shreds.

CUT TO:

INT. BOJO'S - EARLY EVENING

MAYELLA is a heavy, forty-year-old black woman. Her blue neon tube top matches her short pants stretched across her healthy ass. She is flipping through the juke box selection.

MAYELLA

You gonna put some Luther Vandross
in here? Shit, he black ain't he?

BOJO is reading a paper behind the bar. He's short and stout, looking like a sad bull dog.

BOJO

He black alright, he just ain't blue.

MAYELLA

Why you stop havin' dancin' on
Saturday? Used to have bands... all
kind's live shit. Like a wake up in
here, now.

BOJO

Folks can dance when they want. Didn't
buy that mirror ball for nothin'.

MAYELLA

You seen my snake-skin shoes?

Mayella lifts up her leg and stretches it over the bar with a provocative flourish. Her shoe is bright blue.

MAYELLA

They're from New York. My niece gets
'em on the computer.

LAZARUS

They got blue snakes up north?

Mayella turns to Laz sipping a beer at the end of the bar.

MAYELLA

Naw. They got some blue dye, though.
You think them boots you got on come
from a black cow?

BOJO

Wanna get on somebody 'bout live
music, get on ol' Laz, there. He the
one got this place shakin' back in
the day.

MAYELLA

Don't gotta tell me. Me and my
girlfriends use-ta talk 'bout them
hard fingertips he got pickin' that
guitar.

LAZARUS

Got'em pickin' peas, not strings.

Mayella moves in close, with the tips of her tits touching
his arm.

MAYELLA

They still hard?

LAZARUS

Mayella. It ain't happened yet. Ain't
happenin' tonight.

MAYELLA

(retreating with a
glare)

I know you hurtin', Laz. I got ears,
you know. But you should know more'n
me... ain't no better cure for them
blues than some good pussy.

Mayella saunters over to the pool table with the others.

BOJO

Whole lotta woman, right there.

LAZARUS

She can still spread it around.

The door opens behind Laz. Bojo sees the man entering.

BOJO

Laz. We friends and all but... promise me you'll keep yo cool in my joint.

Laz turns to see the door shut behind his brother, DEKE WOODS. He is younger than Laz and a bit smaller. Laz turns to Bojo.

LAZARUS

I'm gonna finish my beer.

Deke slowly approaches Laz at the bar.

DEKE

Mind if I sit?

(no answer)

Rose said... it didn't go too well this afternoon. See, that's not how we wanted this to go down. I told her, I said, Rose, we ain't leavin' till we make peace with Laz. And that's God's truth. I laid it down.

LAZARUS

You laid it down.

DEKE

I did.

LAZARUS

Funny. Layin' it down... for my wife.

DEKE

We're not gonna get through this clean. But it don't need to get dirty. All this... it just come together unexpected. You think I want to hurt you? I... I'd take a bullet for you, Laz.

The dry look on Laz's face could cool the sun.

LAZARUS

You wanna give that a try?

(to Bojo)

Bo. You still got that .22 behind the tap? My little brother say he'd take a bullet for me.

(into Deke's eyes)

You come here to ease your heart.

Well, I ain't gonna give it to you.

You took her into your bed, now you gotta lie in it.

Laz turns back to the bar. Deke begins to turn but stops.

DEKE

I'll always love you, Laz. Till the end of my...

In one quick movement, Laz grips Deke by the throat and smashes the bottom of his bottle into jagged shards.

BOJO

LAZ!

Laz pushes Deke back through the joint and slams him onto the pool table. He grips Deke's throat and holds the broken bottle up to his face.

LAZARUS

Cain slew Able. Slew him out of envy.
And God put his mark on Cain for his sin. You want that mark, Deke? Give you that peace you come here for?
I'll give it to you, just say that shit again. Say you love me. Go'on!
Say YOU LOVE ME, NIGGA!

Lazarus slams the bottle down on the pool table, shattering it. Laz lifts his hand. His own blood leaks from between his fingers.

He wipes the blood across Deke's face.

LAZARUS

I'm through wit'cha both.

Laz releases Deke and exits. Deke calls after him.

DEKE

What'chu gonna do? Nothin'. YOU AIN'T
GONNA DO NOTHIN'!

Laz slams the door behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. FISHERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - FOOTBALL FIELD - NIGHT

The bleachers are packed with three generations of fans and family cheering their boys on the high school football field.

Rae is sitting with her two girlfriends, JESSE and KELL – two girls who graduated five years ago.

JESSE

(hands Rae a beer)
Ronnie ship out this mornin'?

RAE

It's so stupid. Says to me that he don't want nothin' to do with no military career. Says he wants to move. Open up an auto shop with his uncle up in Knoxville. I said, okay. How about now? Let's go.

KELL

He'd be good for that. Shit, Ronnie knows cars.

RAE

He get stubborn. Starts talkin' 'bout obligation and duty and all that... Shit. I just want him to come home... I swear, if somethin' happens to him...

KELL

He fixed up that Buick for my uncle Dale. He say it purrs like a kitten every morning.

JESSE

Nothing's gonna happen. Not like everybody over there is in the line of fire with them Arabs blowin' themselves up.

RAE

Can't be thinkin' bout him every second of my day. I'll go outta my gourd.

JESSE

Why should you waste your life waitin' and wonderin'. Not like you're married.

RAE

(takes a healthy swig)

I begged him not to go. And he did.

KELL

(screaming at the field)

PUNT YOU FUCKERS!

CUT TO:

EXT. CONNER'S HOUSE - THE KEGGER - NIGHT

Dirty South rap pounds the ears from a hoopty Olds with a backseat full of bass. Rae, Kell, and Jesse are walking up to the rowdy party through the variety of parked cars.

A girl rushes past the trio, vomiting on herself as a friend comes to her aid.

JESSE

These baby chicks just can't hold their Jello shots. I'm tellin' ya.

CUT TO:

INT. CONNER'S HOUSE - THE KEGGER - NIGHT

CONNER is one of the linebackers for the Fisherville Dusters.
A wasted girl sits on his lap as Kell rolls a joint.

CONNER

Tennessee Vols gotta practice indoors
just so those Florida State sons-a-
bitches don't spy on their plays
with satellites and shit.

KELL

Satellites... You mean in space?

CONNER

Uh-huh.

KELL

Good thing you can block, Conner,
cuz you're dumb as a sack of shit.

Jesse notices Rae coughing. She pulls her aside as Conner
rambles.

JESSE

You wanna go home?

RAE

It gets worse there. Leavin' me to
my own mind. That's just not good.

JESSE

(pours a shot of vodka)

Here. Pound this and I'll join you.

Rae and Jesse take a strong shot. It burns.

JESSE

One more. Fuck the chaser.

As they pound one more, Rae notices Gill, Ronnie's friend,
staring at her from across the room.

JESSE

Better?

RAE

Yeah.

BATSON and MARK approach Jesse and Rae. They are both sophomores, both skinny and harmless.

BATSON

Hey, Jess.

JESSE

Boys.

BATSON

You robotrippin' tonight?

JESSE

I'm just gonna smoke.

Rae peeks at Gill maneuvering through the room.

BATSON

(rummages in his
pockets)

Got eight packs of DXM. Oxycontin.
Got a shit load of Coricidin if you
want to get out-a-body, n'all.

JESSE

You just trying to get me outta my
clothes.

RAE

Be right back.

Rae pushes through the crowd of drunken kids to get to Gill.

RAE

It's not like I can't go out and
have fun with my friends.

GILL

You think I'm Ronnie's spy or
somethin'? Come tomorrow that dumb-
ass gonna be halfway round the world
tryin' to keep his head on his
shoulders. You think he's gonna be

thinkin' about you?

RAE

You go to hell.

Rae pushes through the crowd, back toward the others.

RAE

(to Batson)

How many to fuck me up?

QUICK CUTS of: Batson popping out five red cough pills. Rae swallowing all five and chasing them with vodka. Conner's girl falls off his lap. Kell laughs. The laughter echoes and grows as we:

CUT TO:

EXT. CONNER'S HOUSE - THE KEGGER - HIS PARENT'S WATERBED -

NIGHT

CLOSE ANGLES: We never quite see the whole of what is implied. Rae's eyes, Jesse's mouth, a boy's shoulder.

The room is packed with bodies. Rae laughs with pleasure as her eyes attempt to focus. The kid on top of her finishes and rolls off.

JESSE

What's so funny?

Jesse is straddling a guy in an arm chair, Chinese-eyed and bouncing. Rae tries to respond coherently as another football player rolls her over on all fours and takes her from behind.

RAE

(laughing)

Oh... I'm just on a water bed... And it's just... so... Goddamn... funny!

A few coughs. Rae focuses to see a younger guy sitting at her eye level.

RAE

Hi.

BRYAN

Hey.

RAE

You ain't the kicker, are you?

BRYAN

No, ma'am.

RAE

Cuz let me tell you, you boys gotta run the ball more. You get into a kicking game, ya'll gonna lose.

BRYAN

Can I put it in your mouth?

RAE

Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laz kills the rest of his whiskey. He squeezes his eyes closed as the liquor burns his throat. He tosses the bottle into a trash bag he is holding.

Laz continues throwing out all of Rose's make-up and hair products. With one broad sweep, he cleans off her vanity.

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - NIGHT

Laz opens the front door and tosses the two bags outside. Stumbling, he kneels next to the coiled radiator against the wall opposite the door. He talks to it like an old friend.

LAZARUS

Seem like you and me... we drove her away. That's what we did. Now we...

(singing softly)

Drinkin' muddy water... a'sleep in a hollow log...

A thought.

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laz pulls out a guitar case from under the bed. He wipes a layer of dust off and opens it.

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

He gently cradles the guitar in his big hands and sits at his kitchen table. Tunes the strings. He closes his eyes, swimming in drunken sorrow.

LAZARUS

You gonna do this?

Laz plays the blues, Mississippi, Bentonian style: one guitar, one voice, a mess of pain.

LAZARUS

(singing, his eyes
closed)

Just like a bird without a feather,
you know

I'm lost without your love.

Just like a bird without a feather,
you know

I'm lost without your love.

You know I need your love just like
the angels need heaven above.

The music continues as we:

CUT TO:

EXT. CONNER'S HOUSE - THE KEGGER - THE WOODS OUT BACK -
NIGHT

Lazarus's blues is all we hear as four guys chase Rae through the woods. She is in her shirt and panties, wearing football shoulder pads.

She is completely wasted. Lost. The ground rocks back and forth with each step. Trees pass in a slow-motion haze.

LAZARUS

(singing)

Well I sure did shot my baby, but I
did it because she did me wrong.
Well I sure did shot my baby, but I
did it because she did me wrong.
You know the judge called it murder
now the penitentiary is my home.

Rae grips a tree to steady herself, but a team member tackles her. The woods spin and distort as someone mounts her with ease.

LAZARUS

(singing)

I loved that woman, she said she
didn't love no one but me.
I loved that woman, she said she
didn't love no one but me.

Rae smiles as she lifts her hand up to the stars, passing the writhing back of the guy on top of her. If she could just grab a star she would feel safe again.

She tries to snatch one. She can't. Her hand drops as the boy stands and takes off after his friends tossing the football.

Rae lies motionless on the ground.

LAZARUS

(singing)

Yeah but I caught my baby cheating.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

A tear rolls down Laz's cheek.

LAZARUS

(singing)

Now my home ain't where it used to
be.

His guitar groans its last for the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONNER'S HOUSE - THE KEGGER - FRONT YARD -
LATER THAT
NIGHT

Rae is wasted. She is still wearing her shirt, panties and shoulder pads as she steps over passed-out teenagers.

RAE
Jes? Jesse?
(trips over a sprinkler)
Oh shit... Wait... Wait... STOP!

GILL
Stop what?

Rae doesn't look up. The Coricidin is tripping her out.

RAE
(coughing)
The ground is... turnin' upside down.
I'm gonna...
(coughing)
I'm gonna fall off...

Gill reaches down and pulls off the shoulder pads. The coughing fit passes.

RAE
Oh. That feels so much better.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Gill's truck flies down the dark road.

INT. GILL'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Rae is looking out the window, drifting in and out.

GILL

Thought you had a skirt earlier.

RAE

I got others.

Gill pulls to the side of the road and kills the engine. He watches Rae tilt her head from side to side.

GILL

This thing you got... I've heard people say, you'd fuck a tree if it was handy. I can see that.

(shakes his head)

But that nigger Tehronne. Thinks he's some player cuz he hustles dope and stolen hubcaps. I mean, I can see a tree. But that piece of shit?

RAE

(lost in hazy sorrow)

I begged him. Don't see why he had to go...

GILL

I bet you did. Just had to get that black cock up in you. I swear to God. What Ronnie sees... you disgust me.

Gill grabs her legs and spreads them with no resistance. Her head rolls from side to side on the truck seat as Gill unzips his pants.

Rae starts giggling.

GILL

The fuck you laughin' at?

RAE

(giggling)

You don't got half what Tehronne got.

Gill flinches upright. A rage builds in his eyes.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

From outside the steamed truck window, we see Gill beat Rae repeatedly.

Silence.

GILL
(muffled from the
inside)
Get up! I ain't playin'! OPEN YOUR
GODDAMN EYES!

Silence.

He opens the truck door, fear in his eyes. Rae isn't moving. Blood is on her face.

GILL
Oh, Jesus...

A hasty idea. He pushes her out of the truck. She falls to the dark pavement in a tangle of her own limbs.

The door slams. Gill floors the gas. Rae lies motionless alone under the stars.

Her watch alarm goes off: Beep-beep. Beep-beep. Beep-beep.

CUT TO:

INT. A BUS - NIGHT

Ronnie is asleep on the bus, unaware that his watch alarm in beeping at him.

A Guardsman sitting next to him shakes Ronnie awake.

GUARDSMAN
Hey.

Ronnie silences the alarm. He regards the watch with sadness and affection.

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

The bus roars past. The red brake lights fade into night.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Lazarus has fallen asleep sitting at his kitchen table. His eyes open. Standing is difficult. The guitar falls to the floor.

The phone rings. Dizziness hits, but he manages to pick up the receiver.

LAZARUS

Huh?

INT. CHURCH OF GOD / LAZARUS'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

R.L. is on his cell phone. He is placing hymnals in the back racks of the church pews.

R.L.

Bojo called. Said you got to see your brother at the long end of a broken bottle.

LAZARUS

You gonna preach 'bout turnin' the other cheek?

R.L.

I think you did alright by God under the circumstances.

(R.L. pauses)

Your people are here for you, Laz. This is your home. No shame in showing your face.

LAZARUS

Don't know if God wanna see me.

R.L.

He knows where ya at. Just answer

the door if he come knockin'.

Laz hangs up the phone.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS'S HOME - LATE MORNING

Lazarus steps out onto his porch. He picks up the trash bags full of Rose's things and walks down the gravel drive to the road.

LATE
EXT. LAZARUS'S HOME - WHERE THE DRIVE MEETS THE ROAD -
MORNING

Laz tosses the bags inside his trash cans.

He's really hung over this morning. His eyes squeeze shut, he grips his neck in pain.

LAZARUS

Mmmmmmmmmmm... Mm!

His eyes open. They remain fixed beyond us. The pain in his face is replaced with grave confusion.

Rae lies on the side of the road.

Her T-shirt and panties are damp from the early morning mist, her face caked with dried blood. Her skin is deathly white, her mouth open, her eyes shut and swollen.

Lazarus carefully steps toward her. He leans down over her face.

LAZARUS

Sweet... Jesus...

Rae coughs. Laz flinches.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - LATE MORNING

The door slams against the wall as it swings open. Laz is carrying Rae, unconscious and limp, in his arms.

He lays her down on the couch by the radiator. He pulls a quilt over her cold skin. With a twist of the valve the radiator moans to life.

Laz takes out his bandana and cleans her face. He tries to wake her.

LAZARUS

Little lady? Miss? You need to open your eyes for me. Could ya do that?

Her eyes open slightly – just slits of white.

LAZARUS

There we go. There we go. Just like you doin'. Go'on.

She whispers as she touches her fingers to his cheek.

RAE

(a raspy inhale)
Teh... Tehronne?

LAZARUS

Tehronne? Tehronne done this?

A labored breath followed by the most pitiful cough fit. Laz tries to calm her as her lungs fight for oxygen. Laz looks scared as the coughing stops in a desperate wheeze followed by silence.

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

Laz pulls the phone off its cradle on the wall and flips through the phone book.

His fingers scan down the listings and stops on POLICE DEPARTMENT. He dials and listens.

OPERATOR

(a recorded voice)
You've reached the Fisherville Police

Department. Your call will be answered
in the order it was received. If
this is an emergency, please, hang
up and dial 9-1-...

Slam! Fingers hit the phone cradle. Lazarus dials 911.

As soon as he places the phone to his ear, he looks over at
Rae sprawled out on his couch. Her bare legs can be seen
peeking out from under the quilt.

Fear hits him. He slams the phone down again.

Laz crosses to the couch and gently touches her head.

LAZARUS

(softly)

I'm'a go into town. Get you some
medicine to fix you up. You just
rest, okay, gal? You just sleep. Get
that chill out'cha.

Laz touches the radiator. It burns him.

LAZARUS

God... damn...

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

Laz's Ford roars down the shaded street towards town.

CUT TO:

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - MACON DRUGS - AFTERNOON

Laz parks his truck in front of MACON DRUGS and heads inside.

An old black man named RED sits on a bench next to an older
white man in his early eighties holding a cane. RED is the
paid caretaker of MELVIN.

MELVIN

How's the squash this year?

LAZARUS

It's good, Mister Melvin. I'll bring ya some.

Laz rushes inside.

INT. MACON DRUGS - AFTERNOON

The variety of cough medicine confuses Laz as he examines them.

ANGELA approaches Laz. She is dressed in a floral print dress with a white lab coat. Angela has a few extra pounds on her but she wears it well with her caring face and sweet manner.

ANGELA
Lazarus?

LAZARUS
(startled)
Oh! Gave me a start.

ANGELA
I'm sorry. It's these soft shoes I wear for my back.

LAZARUS
You hurt it?

ANGELA
I'm standing most of my day. They're for support.
(a smile)
Didn't see you in church this mornin'.

LAZARUS
(tries to lie)
Been on the crop. May need to get some extra hands if I don't want to work on Sundays.

ANGELA
Well. It's good to see you.

Angela wants the conversation to continue but Laz remains silent. She smiles awkwardly.

LAZARUS
Angela?

ANGELA
Yes?

LAZARUS
I need to uh...

ANGELA
Go on, Laz. You can talk to me.

LAZARUS
My little niece... she got this deep
cough.

ANGELA
You take her to a doctor?

LAZARUS
(struggles to lie)
No. No, she can't go. Mean to say...
they's just no money fo'a doctor.
Her daddy left for a job, and uh...
give her to me to look on. I just...
(a pitiful pause)
I don't know what to do.

Angela thinks for a moment.

ANGELA
You wait right here.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - DAY

Snot and spittle has run down the side of Rae's face – her eyelids stick together as she tries to open them.

There is a creak, followed by another. Rae has become aware that someone is slowly walking up the front porch.

The door opens. Silhouetted in the day's blinding light is a

white man in his 40's. His face is indistinguishable to Rae's affected gaze.

Is this a dream?

He stands above her and lights a cigarette. The Zippo lighter clasps shut. The man lowers it to his side where Rae can see it clearly. A bald eagle is printed on the side, a sight that makes Rae's eyes open wide in horror.

Her breath grows deeper – a girlish plea. This is no dream – it's a nightmare.

RAE

Mm-mm... Mm-mm...

A massive hand slaps down over her mouth. Her crusted eyes peer above the hairy knuckles. He sucks on the cigarette. A red cherry blazes at the end. The man pushes the blanket off of her and grips her panties.

Rae's eyes close. She knows what is next. In his clenched fist, the panties are ripped off.

RAE

NOOOOO!

Rae flinches awake from the fever-induced nightmare and falls to the wooden floor, drenched in sweat. Weakened and shaking, she scampers away, finally collapsing in the kitchen. Her hand reaches out and lands on the strings of Laz's guitar on the floor. She grips the steel strings with her trembling fingers.

A single bass note twangs as she passes out.

CUT TO:

INT. MACON DRUGS - AFTERNOON

Angela stands between the aisles, motioning Laz to approach, away from the girl at the counter.

ANGELA

Is your niece older than 12?

LAZARUS

Oh, she older than that.

She hands him a white box with cough syrup inside.

ANGELA

My sister got a bad cough with her pneumonia. I just copied her prescription. You don't need to pay anything... just take it. But if she gets worse, you give me a call. I wrote my number on the box.

LAZARUS

This gonna get you in trouble?

ANGELA

Not if no one finds out.

Laz doesn't know what to say. He puts the box in his pocket.

LAZARUS

Thank you.

(suddenly awkward)

Oh. My wife. She had a card here for her migraine pills. She ain't gonna be around no more... So if you...

ANGELA

I already tossed that out.

(takes a step closer)

Somethin' you should'a done to that woman long ago... how she treated you. Of course, that's none of my business.

LAZARUS

(smiles)

Don't make it less true.

Angela returns the smile.

EXT. MACON DRUGS - AFTERNOON

Laz opens his truck door and stops. At the pool-hall across the square, Laz sees a green Cutlass with chrome rims.

CUT TO:

INT. POOL HALL - AFTERNOON

Laz enters the empty pool hall. Tehronne is playing a game with a skinny playa-wanna-be dressed in flea-market Fubu.

CHARLIE, the owner, approaches Laz from the bar.

CHARLIE

Hey, Lazarus. We closed up on Sunday.

LAZARUS

Need a word with Tehronne.

CHARLIE

(calling to the back)

Yo, T! Laz wanna holla at cha.

TEHRONNE

Come on back, Cuz.

Charlie nods Laz on. He crosses to the back pool table as Tehronne sinks the 8. Tehronne looks at his friend.

TEHRONNE

Do you call it a game when only one man win each time? I think you call it a damn shame.

LAZARUS

Word wit'cha. In private.

Tehronne hands his friend the pool cue. The two take a few steps away to talk.

TEHRONNE

You need some weed?

LAZARUS

Been years since I fooled with that.
(tries to find the

words)
You know a white girl? Dirty blond
hair, split down the middle like?

TEHRONNE

(smiles)

That ain't up to me to hook you up.
Naw what I mean? She her own, you
know?

LAZARUS

Huh?

TEHRONNE

I don't pimp that.

(silence)

You talkin' about who I think you
talkin' about, you mean Rae. Rae
Doole. Sexy little split tail, like
you say. I can't hook you up with
that. I got two girls. One ain't in
town, the other one pregnant. So...
you on your own.

LAZARUS

This Rae... you get with her?

TEHRONNE

Shit. Who hasn't?

LAZARUS

Why you say that?

TEHRONNE

She got a spare minute she'll snatch
up anyone... but me, I'm different.
Sometimes she need the real deal, so
she call me up. Girl got an itch.
You know... what's a nigga to do?

LAZARUS

She like it rough? You like beatin'
on her?

TEHRONNE

That ain't my scene. If that's
somethin' you into...

LAZARUS

Now, hold up.

TEHRONNE

See, that girl is in my favor. You
heard me, nigga? You fuck with her
rough, and you got me to fuck wit.

LAZARUS

You collar that dog, boy. I ain't
gonna hurt nobody. Just wanted to
know who she was.

TEHRONNE

Like I say, you wanna hook that up...
I ain't in ya way. That switch of
hers been all over this town. Got
that sickness, you know.

LAZARUS

What'chu sayin'?

TEHRONNE

She a freak. Got what you call a
sexual addiction.

Lazarus looks at him with a furrowed brow. Confused.

LAZARUS

What'chu sayin'?

TEHRONNE

What I'm tellin' you. Girl gotta get
dick or she go crazy.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - DAY

Laz opens his own door with caution. He turns to see Rae
sprawled in his kitchen in her panties and T-shirt. He rushes
to her side.

LAZARUS

Gal? Miss Rae? Rae, you hear me?

Lazarus lifts her sweaty body off the floor and moves her back to the couch.

Consciousness briefly returns to Rae in her feverish haze.

FLASH TO:

CLOSE UP - FLASHBACK

The white-knuckled hand clutched around her mouth.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - DAY

Rae flinches and flails. She falls to the floor.

LAZARUS

Hold on, now. Hold on!

Rae's eyes are open and filled with fear. She struggles to flee as Laz holds her in place, trying to reassure her.

LAZARUS

Now, I ain't gonna hurt'cha. Calm down, Miss.

(she fights, coughs)

Listen... Listen... LISTEN NOW, GAL!

(Rae settles in his grip)

I ain't gonna hurt ya, hear? Gotta get you well. Now, look me... HEY! Look me in the eye.

Rae is too weak to talk or move. Laz clutches her small face in his dark hands.

LAZARUS

Open your eyes. Go'on, now. You need to see, ain't no harm here. Ain't no harm.

(Rae calms)
My name is Lazarus Woods. And I ain't
gonna let you die.

Rae's eyes roll back.

Lazarus looks terrified as she cranes her head back and
forward. Her mouth opens.

In her sickened state, with the force of something evil and
deep inside, Rae clasps her open mouth over Laz's. A shriek
sounds in his brain as he holds her tighter, allowing the
kiss to grow in intensity. Rae falls to her stomach as Laz
abruptly stands and stumbles across the room. What he sees
chills him to the bone.

Rae is writhing on the floor as if she is possessed – a
rant of raspy words pour from her mouth.

RAE
...you don't... touch me... s'no...
NO! Mm-mm... Mm-MMMMMMMMMMMMMM! N-
N'you FUCK!

Lazarus gets spooked by what he is seeing. He looks to the
mantle. His weathered Bible lies in a coat of dust. He picks
it up as a wave of the burning hits Rae.

She clutches her breast and crotch, rolling from side to
side.

RAE
Mm-mm... mm-mm... Ma-muh... Ma-MUH!
(sudden anger, shouting)
See... S... See if I GIVE... GIVE'A...
SHIT...

FLASH TO:

INT. DUNN'S CAFE - MORNING - FLASHBACK

Rose is shouting at the customers in the cafe. Her eyes are
white like Rae's. Her voice is not her own but that of Rae.

ROSE/RAE

(screaming)
'BOUT ANY OF YOU PEOPLE!

FLASH BACK TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - DAY

Laz runs out of his own home, not even shutting the door behind him. He gets half way down his drive, the Bible still clutched in his hand. He stops.

In a panic, Laz opens his Bible, places it down on the drive, face up, creating a barrier to evil. He hears a choking cough inside the house. Rae is fighting for breath beyond the dark door.

Silence. Laz reaches down and picks up his Bible.

A passage catches his eye. As he reads, the fear vanishes from his face. His back straightens. His jaw tightens. He looks back at his house, his faith is renewed.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - THE BATHROOM - DAY

The Bible is slammed down on top of the toilet tank. The bathtub faucet coughs as Laz twists the cold water knob.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

The freezer door opens. He snatches four trays of ice.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BATHROOM - DAY

The trays crack. The ice cubes bounce into the tub.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - DAY

Rae's lips are dried and split as she pants, lost in dizzying fever. Laz lifts her.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BATHROOM - DAY

Laz kneels on one knee to put her into the tub.

A horrible cry from Rae as Laz wrestles with her, keeping her submerged in the ice cold water.

LAZARUS

I know, child, I know. Gotta break that fever now.

(Rae sobs, struggles)

Don't mean to hurt'chu. But I ain't lettin' you die.

(holding her down)

I AIN'T LETTIN' YOU DIE!

Rae is motionless. Exhausted. Her eyes are open but blind. Her lip trembles. Her body shakes from the freezing water.

Laz rubs the hair from her face gently. He reaches over to the Bible on the toilet and opens it to read.

LAZARUS

Put fear of the Devil in me, gal. Got me spooked like I's a kid, I tell you.

(flips through the pages)

But the good Lord, He showed me what to do. He come knockin' like my man R.L. say... listen here...

(Rae sobs like a child)

This here Matthew. He talkin' on how Jesus was healin' the sick. And a man come up to the disciples and he say...

(reads deliberately)

Have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed...

(to Rae)

He got the devil in his mind and sores on his skin.

(reads)

And he brought the boy to the disciples, but they could NOT cure him.

Rae's shivering is abating. Her eyes fight to stay open. Laz

touches her forehead to test her temperature.

LAZARUS

(reading)

Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation... how long shall I suffer you? Bring the boy hither to me. And Jesus rebuked the devil.

(to Rae)

You hear that?

(reads)

Then the disciples say... Why could not we cast the devil out? And Jesus said unto them...

Rae's eyes begin to close. Laz gently touches her head to rile her awake.

LAZARUS

Listen now... This what he sayin' to us. He say...

(reads)

If ye have faith... if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto a mountain, remove hence... and it... shall... move. And nothin'... nothin' shall be impossible to you.

(to Rae)

You hear that? You just need a bit of faith. You just gotta believe you gonna get well, like I do.

He touches her forehead again. Her eyes close.

LAZARUS

That's better. You coolin' down. Okay. You rest. Okay. You rest.

Laz leans against the wall, spent.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - SUNSET

The cicadas sing in a rising chorus as the clouds above fade

from copper to crimson.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

The faint echo of Rae's fevered panting.

She lies on the couch wrapped in a quilt, shivering. Her eyes remain closed, her face drenched with sweat. Laz has cleaned her facial wounds, using a few Band-Aids.

BOOM!

An explosion ignites the windows surrounding the cabin. Rae jolts awake, terror pervades her as she gasps at the fire ball outside the window.

She struggles to her feet and listens. A faint sound can be heard through the roar of the flames. beep beep... beep beep... beep beep... beep beep...

RAE
(a whisper)
Ronnie...

Rae stumbles to the door, weak and dizzy. She grips the door knob and pulls the door open.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

Rae races outside, tripping down the front porch steps. She looks off at the blaze in the squash field. She frantically races toward the fire, the beeping increases.

RAE
Ronnie... RONNIE!

BEEP BEEP... BEEP BEEP... BEEP BEEP... BEEP BEEP...

At the center of the blaze is an upside down Humvee. To the left of the vehicle, a few soldier's bodies lay scattered. Rae's legs lose all strength, she collapses and crawls across the squash plants.

A far away voice is heard over the roaring flames.

LAZARUS

Gal? Gal?

Rae crawls across a fallen soldier, following the sound of Ronnie's alarm. She struggles to breathe, she almost faints.

She finds a soldier face down. With all her strength she turns him over. It is Ronnie, wide-eyed and lifeless.

An awful groan comes out of Rae – crippling sorrow. She pulls on his vest trying to wake him.

RAE

(sobbing)

Nn-nn... Nn-nn... no... N'RONNIE!

LAZARUS

GAL! YOU HEARIN' MY VOICE?

Rae looks up. The flaming humvee is gone. She is not pulling on Ronnie's vest, but the tangled vines of a squash plant.

Laz stands at a safe distance, silhouetted in moonlight.

LAZARUS

You travelin' right now, gal. You asleep and you don't even know it.

(extends his hand)

Now... come on inside with me.

Rae looks like a terrified child. Her eyes well with tears as she shakes her head. Laz takes a step toward her.

RAE

Mm-mm... Mm-mm...

LAZARUS

Come on, gal...

She turns and runs away as best she can. Laz chases after her. He's much older than her and a bit slower, but her balance betrays her.

Laz wraps his arms around her. Rae screams to the sky.

RAE
NO! NOOO! NOOOOOOOOOOO!

And then, stillness. Rae lies limp in Laz's arms, unconscious.

He reaches down and lifts her wrist to his face. The green screen of the digital watch pulsates with the alarm.

He pushes the side button. The beeping stops. Silence.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Laz lays Rae back onto his couch. Her eyes open into slits. She can see Laz's form over her like the man in her nightmare.

Rae grabs Laz's wrist. He flinches with her force.

RAE
(the whisper of a
child)
Is'okay... Is'okay...

Struggling with exhaustion, Rae moves Laz's hand to her bare stomach. She rubs it slowly up and down her form, suggestively.

Laz slips his hand away and claps it tight over her eyes. Rae holds her breath, waiting to be molested, her lip quivering.

LAZARUS
(singing deep and
soft)
Goin' over that hill. Goin' over
that hill. Well, I ain't gonna stop
until I reach my God's top. I'm goin'
over the hill. Well I went to the
valley, I didn't go to stay. Soul
got happy, I stayed all day. I'm
goin' over that hill.

Rae relaxes and falls into a deep sleep.

Laz backs away from her, a touch of fear in his heart. The voice of Tehronne is heard from earlier in the day.

TEHRONNE (V.O.)

She a freak. Got what you call a sexual addiction.

LAZARUS (V.O.)

What'chu sayin'?

TEHRONNE (V.O.)

What I'm tellin' you. Girl gotta get dick or she go crazy.

FLASH TO:

INT. POOL HALL - EARLIER THAT DAY - FLASHBACK

Lazarus looks at Tehronne with a furrowed brow, confused.

TEHRONNE

First hooked up with that bitch when she was 16. Girl was fuckin' the principal and two of her teachers. You know coach Reynolds?

LAZARUS

Uh-huh.

TEHRONNE

He tapped that.

LAZARUS

Naw!

TEHRONNE

Go ask him.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Lazarus opens his barn, slicing through the darkness with

his flashlight.

TEHRONNE (V.O.)

She been bumpin' around all her life,
hookin' up with whoever keep her fed
and fucked.

He crosses to the other side, pulls on a beaded chain turning
on the single bulb above his work table.

TEHRONNE (V.O.)

I seen her give it up on park benches,
back of trucks, hoopty hoods, you
name it.

Laz opens an old wooden box on his work table. He looks
inside.

FLASH TO:

INT. POOL HALL - MORNING - FLASHBACK

Laz looks ill. Tehronne checks his pager briefly.

TEHRONNE

You ever seen a train run on a woman?

LAZARUS

Nuh-uh.

TEHRONNE

Meanin' like a team of fellas go to
work on her and she don't even break
a sweat.

(puts his pager away)

She into football, you know. You got
a letter on your jacket you get that
pussy in ya lap. I ain't playin'.

Tehronne's friend breaks on the pool table with a sharp crack.
Lazarus is genuinely disturbed.

LAZARUS

How a girl get like that?

TEHRONNE
Like I told you.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S BARN - NIGHT

Lazarus reaches inside the box and pulls out the end of an old chain.

TEHRONNE (V.O.)
Girl got a sickness.

The chain rattles as Laz walks backwards, pulling the long chain from the box. The shouting of his brother can be heard.

DEKE (V.O.)
What'chu gonna do? Huh? Nothin'. YOU
AIN'T GONNA DO NOTHIN'! NOTHIN'!

The end of the chain snags, yanking the box over.

CRASH!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE VEGETABLE GARDEN - LATE MORNING

Lazarus is bent over, harvesting his tomatoes.

LAZARUS
(singing to himself)
Tell me who's that writin'? John the
Revelator. Wrote the book of the
seven seals.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

Laz enters his home. He crosses to the kitchen and pours himself a glass of water.

Dripping with sweat, he steps back into the room, downing the last of his water. He lowers the glass, noticing Rae

looking at him.

LAZARUS

Hey.

Rae lifts her head off the pillow. Laz comes to her side and helps her sit up.

LAZARUS

Take it easy now. Don't rush it.

RAE

(a scratchy whisper)

How long... how long I been out?

LAZARUS

You been in and out goin' on two...
maybe two days.

RAE

(can't believe it)

Two days?

LAZARUS

After your fever broke, you'd wake
up in spells... long enough to get
that medicine in ya.

Rae sits up on the couch, the quilt wrapped around her waist. She looks at the cough syrup bottle on the side table.

LAZARUS

Found you on the side of the road.
Someone took to beatin' on you pretty
bad. You know who done that to you?

Rae touches the cut over her eye. That evening is still a blur.

RAE

Where's Ronnie?

LAZARUS

Well I don't...

RAE
(remembering)
Wait. He left.

Rae lifts her head, revealing tears in her eyes. She gets mad at herself and wipes them away.

RAE
I don't got any money... for fixin'
me up and all.

LAZARUS
Don't need none.

RAE
Then I better be on my way. Don't
wanna put you out no more.

LAZARUS
Think it'd be best if you stayed put
while we talk.

RAE
Naw'sir... I gotta be on my way.

LAZARUS
Best try gettin' ya wits about you
'fore you try to...

Rae struggles for balance as she attempts to stand. The quilt falls away as a heavy chain slides off the couch and thuds on the floor by her feet.

Rae feels a tug.

She looks down to see a dark chain locked around her thin waist and coiled on the floor. The opposite end is locked around the side coil of the radiator.

She is chained to the house, a prisoner.

LAZARUS
Let me say somethin' first...

RAE

Why you got me chained?

LAZARUS

Way I see it, it's gonna take a while
for you to get right.

RAE

The fuck you been doin' to me?

LAZARUS

I ain't laid a hand on ya but to
ease yo fever... Remember like I
say, I found you in the road...

RAE

(yanks at the chain
around her waist)

Get this Goddamn thing off me!

Rae stumbles as she moves away from Laz. Laz tries to reassure her.

LAZARUS

Now, no harm's come to you... and I
aim to keep it that way. Ain't
gonna... gonna run a train over ya...
or however you call it... see... you
was runnin' wild on me... these fever
dreams you was havin'... these fits.
I'd be chasin' you all night.

RAE

Well I'm woke now... you can take
this off.

Rae waits.

LAZARUS

Gal, you ain't right yet.

RAE

I'm right enough to stand on my own
two feet. Now take this Goddamn chain
off...

LAZARUS

How you let men treat ya like they do?

RAE

What?

LAZARUS

These men you up under. How you let them do ya like that?

RAE

(grips the chain)

Do me? Do me like this, you mean? Like chainin' me up?

LAZARUS

You know what I'm talkin' about.

(beat)

All that mess with ya teachers and... boys in the backs of trucks.

RAE

(shocked)

The hell you know about me?! You got no right to talk to me about that shit! The hell you think you are?

LAZARUS

(interrupting)

I've saved ya life, gal. I can do and say whatever the fuck I want.

Rae begins to feel a pang of panic. She goes to the chain locked around the radiator. She yanks on it a few times.

LAZARUS

I give ya enough chain so's you can get about the house. Get you to the kitchen. You need the bathroom, it'll reach.

RAE

What do you want?

LAZARUS

We got everything we need. Plenty of food. Ya medicine still got a few good swallows in it...

RAE

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?!

(Laz can't answer)

WHATEVER YOU GONNA DO TO ME, JUST DO IT! AND LET ME GO!

LAZARUS

God saw to it to put you in my path. And I aim to cure ya of your wickedness.

This statement terrifies Rae. The fear can be seen in her eyes. She backs away – the chain scrapes across the floor.

RAE

You some kind'a pervert?

LAZARUS

No ma'am.

RAE

Some crazy Jesus freak, gonna fuck the spirit into me...

LAZARUS

In my house, you watch that lip...

RAE

(furious, near tears)

Look it, mister... you wanna have your way, you take it. I'll do whatever you want. But you gotta let me go. You can't do this! You can't **KEEP ME HERE!**

LAZARUS

You sick. You got a sickness... we broke that fever... we gonna break that hold the devil got on ya.

Rae pushes Laz back and bolts for the door. Laz falls back against the side table by the couch, toppling the lamp.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME / INT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

The door slams against the house as Rae rushes out in her wolf shirt and panties – the chain trailing behind her.

RAE
(screaming)
HELP!

Laz watches as the coil unravels and snaps taut, yanking on the old radiator.

Clank! The chain whips Rae down to the ground. Laz watches as dust flies off the radiator with each tug.

RAE
SOMEBODY!

CLANK!

The fear in Laz's face is replaced with a grin as he watches his radiator hold firm.

RAE
SOMEBODY HELP ME!

Outside, Rae bucks and screams, yanking on the chain like a wild mustang. Her bare feet and legs are soiled with fresh mud and grass as she claws at the ground.

Laz crosses to the radiator and pats it like a proud parent – his wedding ring clicks against the iron.

LAZARUS
(to the radiator)
Ain't gonna be moved.

He steps outside with resolve and strength. He picks up the chain and wraps it around his fist.

LAZARUS
GAL! I ain't gonna be moved on this!

Laz yanks her back, dragging her towards him. He grips the taut chain with his other hand and yanks her closer.

RAE
LET ME GO!

LAZARUS
You can holla y'self hoarse. Ain't gonna bend my will.
(pulls her closer)
Right or wrong, you gonna mind me.
(Pulls her again)
Gonna suffer you like Jesus say, to the FAITHLESS and the PERVERSE GENERATION.

Rae is spent. She turns to look at her captor as he wrangles her back to the porch.

LAZARUS
Now you get up! And you get in my house!

RAE
Or what?

Rae spits at Laz. Bad idea.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Rae is screaming and grunting as Laz, standing in his kitchen, tugs on the chain around the door-jam like he's drawing water from a well.

Outside Rae struggles to hold onto the porch post. Laz pulls hard, lifting her lower torso off the ground.

RAE
Stop it! Stop it! IT HURTS!

LAZARUS
Whose doin' is that?

Laz yanks. Rae loses her grip and slams onto the porch.

RAE

Okay... OKAY! I'M COMIN' IN! NOW
QUIT IT!

The pulling stops. Rae picks herself up. Her knees and hands are scraped and bleeding. The two stare at each other.

LAZARUS

Say we talk. Just take a seat on the
sofa. I'll get us somethin' cool to
drink.

Laz crosses to the kitchen. Rae sits down on the couch, noticing the fallen lamp on the floor.

LAZARUS

You may not remember. But you spent
a whole half day in my tub, tryin'
to cool down. Melted four ice trays.

He finishes preparing the two waters. He crosses into the front room. Rae is not there.

CRASH! Rae smashes the lamp on Laz's head. The water glasses shatter as Laz falls to the floor.

Rae picks up a wooden chair and breaks it over his back. Before she can do any more damage, Laz grabs her by the wrists and throws her to the couch.

Rae falls to the floor. Laz stumbles on his feet as he clutches his bleeding head. He loses his cool.

LAZARUS

Wicked little bitch... gonna cut
me...

RAE

You gonna get a lot more a'that, you
keep me locked up like this!

Rae freezes as she sees Laz undo his belt buckle. Her breath

starts to quiver as she deeply inhales and exhales.

LAZARUS

Think I'm gonna let you do me like
that...

Laz whips his belt off and wraps the buckle around his fist.

He stops in his tracks. Rae is panting and shaking. Her middle
finger is scratching at her own thigh.

LAZARUS

(regaining his cool)

Okay, now... I ain't gonna hit'cha.

(the burning is
starting)

Just lost my cool there.

(he throws the belt
away)

Now take that look out'cha eye.

Her anguished hum can be heard through her clenched teeth as
she rocks back and forth. Her hands wander down to her inner
thighs.

LAZARUS

No, ma'am. You stop that foolishness.

RAE

(shaking her head)

Hm-mm... Hm-mm...

LAZARUS

I said... STOP!

RAE

(on the verge of crying)

I CAN'T!

Rae gets dizzy. She rests the top of her head on the floor
and sways back and forth. Laz rushes out the front door.

As the wave hits, Rae twists and turns, wrapping the chain
around her. She grips the radiator with both hands and rests
her face against the side.

RAE

Hmmmmmm... Stop-it! ... STOP-IT!

The wave is about to build in to a powerful climax. Rae gasps for breath.

The door slams open. Laz drenches her with a gallon of cold well water from a tin bucket. Rae inhales and freezes. Laz waits and watches.

The burning is gone.

Laz kneels next to her and gently frees her bare ankle from the tangled chain.

LAZARUS

You hungry?

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - ON THE PORCH - LATER THAT DAY

They are both seated on the front porch with paper plates in their laps. Laz watches with amusement as Rae tears into her chicken and gobbles up the vegetables.

LAZARUS

I put some back ache into growin' them greens. You should slow down and see how they taste.

Rae remains under Lazarus' intense gaze as the cicadas sing.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE VEGETABLE GARDEN - SUNSET

Rae stares off at orange clouds and purple sky. She takes a step to her left, walking through the parallel rows of squash.

The chain gently rattles behind her. Laz has given her about 20 feet of slack. He holds the chain tight around his fist.

Rae grins, standing proud in her wolf shirt and panties.

RAE

You like this? Walkin' me through
this field like I's your mule?

LAZARUS

Can't sit all day on that sofa. Need
to get your legs strong.

RAE

(sassy)

If I break one you gonna shoot me?

Rae teases Laz by adjusting her panties. She turns back to
the sunset and stretches.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

Rae's smoldering eyes don't leave Laz as he chains her to
the radiator. Laz nervously preaches, trying to avoid the
sight of her bare legs curled up on his couch.

LAZARUS

My Daddy was one of the first mens
to organize soil conservation in
these parts. That's a group of
farmers, you know, each season they'd
rotate the crop. Know why it's best
to rotate em like that?

RAE

Uh-uh.

Laz moves in close and starts applying antibacterial cream
to the cut above Rae's eye.

LAZARUS

Cuz once in a while soil need a
change. Corn take up a lot of nitrate
in the fertilizer. So next crop what
ya do is plant ya some soy beans.
That give off a lot of nitrate. Change
keeps it all growin' and growin'

strong.
(regarding the eye)
Sting a bit?

RAE
Itches.

LAZARUS
Means ya healin'.
(a nod)
So all this farmin' make me think on
Matthew. Matthew 13. The parable of
the sower? Man toss seed on rock, on
the wayside, some fell in thorns...
you know the story?

RAE
Uh-uh.

Laz starts putting the cream on her scabbed knees. He rubs them gently.

LAZARUS
The seed that land on good soil is
for them who hear the word of God...
and understand the word of God. Not
enough for you to hear what I'm
sayin', you gotta understand.

RAE
I know. I get it. What's Matthew
doin'?

LAZARUS
Gal... Matthew ain't doin' shit...
this just a story...
(quelling his
frustration)
Look it. I've seen it in nature,
I've seen it in men. Ya got to change
up your crop. Cuz that seed ain't
gettin' in.
(Rae remains silent)
Ya gotta cut this shit out. Got no
cause to be up under these fools,

ruttin' on ya like you a bitch. Like
you somebody's dog. No woman... who
joins in union with Almighty God...
or man... in the sanctity of
marriage... should degrade herself...
and bend to ANOTHER MAN'S WILL!

Rae is aware that Laz is somewhere else, talking to someone else other than her. There is anger in his tone as he rubs ointment on her bare, scabbed knees.

LAZARUS

(shouting)

My God, gal, don't you got no SENSE?

I ain't sayin' I ain't weak? Shit.

Playin' guitar in the blood-bucket

jukes all ya life... a nigga learn

how to sin, let me tell you!

(grips her by the
legs)

I GOT SIN IN ME! I AIN'T GO'N LIE!

BUT I GOT RESPECT! AND ALL YOU GOT

IS BILE, GAL!

RAE

Let go of me...

LAZARUS

GIVIN' UP THAT SWITCH LIKE A TRAMP!

BEHIND MY BACK AND KILL MY BABY...!

Rae yanks free of Laz's grip, recoiling on the couch.

RAE

GET OFF ME!

Laz awakens from his rant. He blinks and stands. A sudden shame overtakes him. He crosses into the kitchen to hide by the sink.

He pours Rae a glass of water and returns to her side.

LAZARUS

(offering her the
glass)

Didn't mean to go off on a tear like
I did. I just got to thinkin' about
things...

Rae leans up into his face. The glass of water is touching
her chest. Laz remains hypnotized by her eyes.

RAE

Why is it you old men gotta talk so
much? Like little boys, gotta talk
yourself into fuckin' me.

(his knuckles touch
her skin)

We can take our time. I'm grown. I
get it.

(she leans even closer)

You wanna give me 'nother bath?

Laz stands and backs away. He quickly leaves the room.

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laz looks at himself in the reflection of Rose's vanity
mirror, listening to Rae stir in the next room.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

The cicadas are screaming outside. Rae is beginning to breathe
deep, the burning is coming on.

RAE

(under her breath)

Goddammit.

She folds her arms over her chest, her middle finger
scratching her elbow. The anxiety is too much. She rolls
over until the chain pulls taut against the radiator.

Rae has wrapped herself in a tangle of chain. Her breathing
relaxes. Her eyes close. She sleeps.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - EARLY DAWN

A train rumbles past in the blue hue of dawn.

Laz pulls his truck next to two other fruit and vegetable vendors: ARCHIE and GENE.

Archie is an old black man in his early seventies. Gene is a short white man closer to Laz's age.

GENE

There goes our fortune. We been doin' good for ourselves since you been away.

Laz sets up his folding table and uncovers his produce.

LAZARUS

Y'all know when Ella Mae's open up?

ARCHIE

You needin' to buy some pantyhose?

LAZARUS

Just some dresses.

Gene looks at Archie and shrugs.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - MORNING

Rae snaps awake. She is wet with sweat from the morning heat.

RAE

Hello? Hey!

Rae drags the chain behind her as she crosses to the front door and looks outside. No truck.

RAE

I don't believe this shit.

She folds her arms and looks into the kitchen. There on the table is a covered plate and a small bottle of milk. Rae reads a note on top of the plate: BE BACK FOR SUPPER.

She pulls off the top plate and finds sausage links, eggs, biscuits, sliced tomatoes, and sliced peaches.

RAE

Enough to choke a Goddamn horse.

She yanks her chain. It rattles across the floor as she sits.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLA MAE'S WOMEN'S CLOTHING - EARLY AFTERNOON

Laz looks out of place in his faded overalls surrounded by bright colors of Ella Mae's dress shop.

ELLA MAE is a wide woman with white hair in her late fifties.

LAZARUS

I'm needin' some women's clothes. A few dresses. Maybe some shoes. But they gotta be nice. They gotta be proper. Clothes a woman would want, where she could feel and look like a woman without... you know, lookin' like a tramp or a hussy or somethin'.

Ella Mae turns to her assistant, Rhonda. Rhonda is a 19-year-old black girl. She turns back to Laz, unsure how to proceed.

ELLA MAE

And, sir... do you have a size in mind for what you're lookin' for?

LAZARUS

(points to Rhonda)

That young lady's size, right'cher.

ELLA MAE

Well, that makes it easier.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Rae sits down in the tub, still wearing her T-shirt and

panties. Looking up at the shower head above she turns on the cold water and yanks up on the shower knob.

Cold water sprays down over her. She gasps and then relaxes, laying back in the tub.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLA MAE'S WOMEN'S CLOTHING - AFTERNOON

Laz is at the counter. Rhonda is putting the shoes and clothes in two shopping bags while Ella Mae rings him up.

ELLA MAE

Well... I hope these will work for your niece. She can always come back in and swap sizes.

Lazarus points to a small display of fine lotions.

LAZARUS

Mind I ask, what's all this business here?

ELLA MAE

These are whipped body creams. It's like a lotion.

LAZARUS

For your hands?

ELLA MAE

Some women prefer not to scent their bodies with perfume. So now they have scented creams. They help moisturize a woman's skin.

(unscrewing a jar)

This one's my favorite. It's called Ginger Souffle. I recommend... applying the cream while the skin is still damp. So... perhaps just after a shower.

LAZARUS

(likes what he smells)

I'll take a jar of that, too.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Rae rattles into the kitchen, her damp clothes clinging to her form. She picks up Laz's guitar off the table and places it in her lap.

She plucks a few random strings out of boredom and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. MACON DRUGS - AFTERNOON

The same apathetic girl is working the front counter as Laz enters the drug store with a basket of arranged vegetables.

LAZARUS

Lookin' for Miss Angela.

GIRL

She in the back.

Laz makes his way to the back of the store. He spies Angela in the back pharmacy, sorting pills for a pick-up. He watches her work for a moment until, finally, she sees him.

ANGELA

Wait right there.

Laz waits as Angela rounds the corner.

LAZARUS

I brung you a little basket of goodies. Fresh squash, tomatoes, some okra, butter beans.

ANGELA

(taking the basket)

You didn't have to do this.

LAZARUS

Just wanted to say how much I

appreciate you helping me the other day. My niece, she's cured up, and I got you to thank.

ANGELA

Well that's good. I'm happy to hear it.

Angela smiles. There is tension and attraction between the two.

LAZARUS

Look here. I got somethin' special for you.

Angela is flush as Laz moves closer than he has ever been before. He reaches in the basket for the jar of cream.

LAZARUS

This here is a whipped... body cream. And it's got a smell to it. Tell me what you think.

Laz holds the jar up to her nose. Angela closes her eyes and smells. Her expression says enough – she loves it.

LAZARUS

They call this Ginger Souffle. Best if it... if it go on your skin just after you been in a hot tub... or shower.

Angela takes the lotion from his hand. She is subtle and demure, but the woman is deeply affected. She smiles.

ANGELA

This was very sweet of you.

LAZARUS

Well. Hope you enjoy it.

Angela watches Laz as he walks out the door. The apathetic girl moves up behind Angela.

GIRL

Oooooo.

ANGELA

Hush up.

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - MACON DRUGS - AFTERNOON

Laz opens his truck and waves goodbye to Old Red. Melvin is holding a healthy squash.

RED

You gonna be on the square later on?

LAZARUS

Got all my honey-do's done with. I'm headin' home.

RED

Stay cool. It's a hot one.

Laz pulls away in his truck and rounds the corner just as R.L. crosses the street. He steps over to talk to Red.

R.L.

Hey, Red. Was that Laz just left?

RED

Yes'sir, Rev'rend.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS'S HOME - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Rae occasionally strums an awful chord as she sings playfully.

RAE

(trying to sing)

You are my sunshine. My only sunshine.
You make me happy when skies are
gray. You'll never know dear how
much I love you. Please don't take
my sunshine away. A voice from outside
spins her around. The guitar barks
as Rae slams it down on the table.

LINCOLN (O.S.)
Mister Lazarus?

Rae stays hidden as she peeks out the front window. Lincoln is standing before the house holding an old picnic basket. Rae's middle finger begins scraping against the wall.

LINCOLN
Mister Laz... I come for the butter
beans.

Rae fights her dizziness. She crawls to the radiator as she hears each creak of Lincoln crossing to the front door.

FLASH TO

QUICK CUTS

The Zippo with the bald eagle closes. A smoldering cigarette.

FLASH BACK TO:

Rae flinches and grits her teeth as Lincoln knocks on the door: Knock, knock.

LINCOLN
Ain't seen you on the square. Mister
Laz, can you hear me?

The burning has started: deep gasps, itching, anxiety.

LINCOLN
(worried now)
Mister Lazarus?

Rae watches the shadows of Lincoln's shoes under the door. They wait patiently and walk away.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

Lincoln walks down the porch steps and stops. Thinks.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

Rae inches upward, pulling herself up the radiator so she

can stand. Her panting has waned.

Suddenly the front door swings open.

LINCOLN

Mister Laz, I'm comin' inside...

Lincoln can't believe what he sees. Rae is chained around the waist, damp and barely clothed. Her eyes bore into Lincoln like an owl zeroing in on a helpless jackrabbit.

She rips her shirt off in one tug over her head.

Lincoln can't move. The picnic basket hits the floor. His mouth hangs open in shock as Rae steps towards him and lays her open mouth on the boy.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

SLAM! Rae shuts the door.

Laz steers his Ford truck up the drive and parks. He takes his time getting out and removing the shopping bags. He opens the door and goes inside.

His curses can be heard from outside.

LAZARUS

SHIT BOY! WHAT THE HELL YOU...!

Lincoln is tossed off the porch, clinging to his overalls.

LAZARUS

CAN'T LEAVE YOU ALONE FOR ONE...

Tears and fear come to Lincoln as Laz steps out onto the porch, fuming with rage.

Lincoln backs away expecting a good beating. He starts running up the drive but stops as R.L.'s Olds rolls up the drive.

LAZARUS

Lincoln, come on back.

Lincoln darts past Laz and runs into the barn, clutching his

overalls. R.L. stops the car halfway down the drive and steps out.

R.L.

Was that Lincoln James I seen run off?

LAZARUS

He's fine. Just had a bad fall.

R.L.

Why's his britches round his knees?

LAZARUS

R.L., you gonna have to get on. I can't have nobody round my place.

R.L. starts walking up the drive.

R.L.

You get a call from Rose?

LAZARUS

This ain't got nothin' to do with that woman. Just don't want nobody around me now.

R.L.

Somethin' wrong with ya phone? Been callin' the last few days.

R.L. stops in his tracks as Lazarus pulls out his hunting rifle from the rack behind his seat in his truck.

R.L.

Goin' dove huntin'?

LAZARUS

You gotta go, R.L.. I ain't foolin' this time.

R.L.

You sayin' that gun's for me if I don't?

(LAZ CAN'T ANSWER)

Spell it out, Laz. Man big enough to pull a gun best have a tongue in his mouth if he ain't got a brain in his head.

Laz is struggling. The rifle feels suddenly strange to him.

LAZARUS

You ain't gonna talk me outta shit no more. I got my mind made up and I ain't gonna be moved on this.

R.L.

(amused)

Ain't gonna be moved?

LAZARUS

Got no place for preachin' here. Not now. So you do as I say...

R.L.

(still stepping closer)

Or what?

LAZARUS

I told you to TURN BACK!

R.L. pushes his chest up against the rifle and shouts back.

R.L.

YOU GO'ON AND SHOOT ME, KILLA!

Laz's heart is breaking. He is pointing a gun at his only friend.

R.L. snatches the rifle out of Laz's hands.

R.L.

Ought'a stomp yo ass pointing this at me.

(unloads the rifle)

Always gotta bring up the preachin'. Like you just a sheep in my flock and all I'm good for is poundin' on

a pulpit.

(gets in Laz's face)

Dammit, Laz... we may not be blood.
But we sucked off the same old nurse
since the day we was slapped on the
ass. And you gonna point a gun at
me?

A tear rolls down Laz's cheek. The shame is unbearable.

R.L.

If you in some trouble, than WE gonna
figure somethin' out. You and me.

(hands him a bandana)

Wipe your face!

Laz takes the bandana and wipes the tears away.

R.L.

Now... this got anything to do with
Rose?

(Laz shakes his head)

Then what?

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

The door creaks open. R.L. carefully steps inside. Rae is
sitting on the couch, looking out the window.

RAE

(on the verge of tears)

I didn't want to.

Rae doesn't respond. R.L. quickly steps outside shutting the
door behind him.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

R.L. shakes his head as Laz follows him off the porch.

R.L.

Are you outta ya GODDAMN MIND?

LAZARUS

Man like you ought not take the Lord's name like you just done.

R.L.

A naked woman, chained in ya house?

LAZARUS

I'm tellin' you the truth, dammit. I found her beat. Left for dead. So I brung her home.

R.L.

Laz, I know about that girl.

(beat)

Good number of this town's sinners got my ear, you know.

(shakes his head)

Oh, Laz. She's had a mess of crabs and them STD's. What'chu thinking?

LAZARUS

I haven't laid a hand. On my life, R.L., my wick is dry on this.

R.L.

You say she was beat on. You call the sheriff on that?

LAZARUS

Put yo'self in my shoes. Say you out here, alone, with a beaten, half naked, white woman loves to fuck. I been toe to toe with the law in this town for no more than being black and nearby.

R.L.

What's that chain around her for?

Laz briefly looks off at the barn, knowing Lincoln is there.

LAZARUS

Why don't you go'on and ask her. She need to talk wit somebody with sense.

Folks been ruttin' and beatin' on
this gal all her days. And this is
how I'm handling it.

R.L.
THIS IS HOW YOU HANDLING IT? THIS IS
HOW YOU HANDLING IT?

Silence.

LAZARUS
Go in and talk to her. Please.

R.L. nods. Lazarus smiles.

LAZARUS
Good. Makin' steaks for supper. I
expect you to come.

R.L.
You mean with you and that woman
chained to ya radiator?

LAZARUS
You treat folks special when they
company. It's just supper, R.L.,
shit.

R.L.
One thing at a time, Laz.

Laz walks toward the barn and turns back to R.L..

LAZARUS
Watch y'self in there. That girl'll
jump on ya junk like a grasshopper.

EXT. LAZARUS' BARN - AFTERNOON

Laz opens the door to his barn wide, allowing the afternoon
light to find Lincoln sitting on an old tire, weeping.

LAZARUS
Did I hurt'chu?

Lincoln shakes his head. Laz carefully sits next to him.

LAZARUS

What happened in there... that won't
your fault. Ain't a young man alive
could keep they britches on with
that girl being in heat like she is.

LINCOLN

Why she got a chain on her?

LAZARUS

That's between her and me. It's
private. And I don't want you goin'
off and tellin' ya daddy.

LINCOLN

(in a panic)

Please don't tell my daddy.

LAZARUS

My mouth is shut, boy. And that's
how we gonna keep it. Don't go
braggin' to ya buddies, ya heard me?

Lincoln nods. Laz hands him the bandana R.L. gave him.

LAZARUS

So...

(a bonding smile)

That your first time?

LINCOLN

Yes'sir.

LAZARUS

You struck some gold, didn't ya?

Lincoln grins as he wipes the snot from his nose.

LAZARUS

Shit. My first time was with my second
cousin behind my uncle's barn. She
weighed two tons, if a pound. Could'a
done a lot better for myself. You

sho'nuf did.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - AFTERNOON

R.L. hands Rae a glass of water. She is seated on the sofa, wrapped in a quilt.

RAE

Thank you.

R.L.

(sits next to her)

I gotta ask you. Why do you think Laz is keepin' you chained like this?

RAE

(shrugs at first,
then:)

You know how, like they say, you save someone's life, you responsible for them. Guess he just don't think it's safe for me.

R.L.

So he got it into his head that the only thing gonna keep you from endin' up bleedin' on the side of the road again, without a stitch of clothing on is...

(R.L. yanks on the
chain)

You think he's crazy for thinkin' that?

Rae struggles to answer. Something is on her mind.

RAE

You a preacher?

R.L.

That's right.

RAE

Can I ask you a question?

(R.L. nods)

People always say, you gotta get good with Jesus, if you want not to go to hell. That you say sorry for all you done and... and Jesus would let you go on to heaven.

R.L.

You could put it that way.

RAE

But that's so fuckin' stupid.

(she catches herself)

I'm sorry. Didn't mean to curse.

R.L.

What's on your mind?

RAE

You can't hurt people... and then just say, I'm sorry, and then everything just gets washed away. Why would heaven want people like that. People who... do what they want and then... switch.

R.L.

I'm gonna tell you somethin', and it's just gonna be between you and me.

(Rae anxiously nods)

I think folks carry on about heaven too much. Like it's some all-you-can-eat buffet up in the clouds. And folks just gonna do as they're told so they can eat what they want behind some pearly gates. I can go to Shoney's for that.

Rae grins. R.L. leans closer.

R.L.

There's sin in my heart. There's evil in this world. But when I got no one... I talk to God. I ask for strength. I ask for forgiveness. Not

for peace at the end of my days when
there's no more life to live and no
more good to do, but today. Right
now.

Rae has never had anyone talk to her like this. She is
listening. She is understanding.

R.L.

What's your heaven? What gives you
peace?

Rae looks at her bare feet. She tries to respond but the
pain in her chokes back the words. Tears come to her.

RAE

(struggling to speak)

Ronnie.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - LATE AFTERNOON

A bus stops at the station. The doors swing open. A few
passengers exit the bus followed by Ronnie.

He is not wearing his uniform.

EXT. GREYHOUND BUS STATION - PHONE BOOTH -
LATE AFTERNOON

He drops his duffle bag and pops a few quarters in the phone.
He waits, allows the phone to ring.

RONNIE

(into the phone)

This is Ronnie again. Don't know if
you been gettin' my messages but...
I'm down at the bus station and...

(struggles)

I just need you come get me. You get
this message, I'm on the interstate
headin' downtown toward the square.

(sadness hits)

Rae. I really need you to... come

find me. Please.

Ronnie hangs up the phone. He remains motionless, fearful and alone.

He picks up his duffle and walks down the interstate.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - SUNSET

Lincoln stands over the barbecue spraying lighter fluid over the coals while R.L. peels back the corn husks.

LINCOLN

We gonna eat with her?

R.L.

That's what I was told.

LINCOLN

She still gonna have that chain on?

R.L.

Well... I'm working on that.

(trying to change the
subject)

So... what's goin' on in your life,
Lincoln?

LINCOLN

I ain't no virgin no more?

Lincoln tosses a match on the coals. They ignite with flame.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - SUNSET

Laz is humming to himself as he finishes chopping up the potatoes. He wipes his hands and catches Rae standing behind him.

She looks classic in the floral sundress. She folds her arms, feeling awkward under Laz's approving gaze.

LAZARUS

Now that's sharp. That is sharp.
Chain give you any trouble?

RAE

Uh-uh.

LAZARUS

Good. Now I got the steaks on,
potatoes at a boil, and biscuits
ready to pop in the oven. R.L. and
Lincoln out yonder grillin' up the
corn. What do you know how to make?

RAE

I don't fuckin' cook.

LAZARUS

(a look of
disappointment)

Gal, I been around hard-cursin' folk
all my life. And let me tell you...

RAE

Look it... I put the Goddamn dress
on, didn't I? I think I'm handlin'
myself with some... fuckin' restraint
here... how you got me locked up
like a dog on a...

LAZARUS

If all you got is filth comin' out'cha
mouth... people just gonna tune ya
out.

(interrupting her)

Rae. RAE! I'm not fightin' with ya.
I just know you got more in you than
junk.

(a breath)

Now, you sayin' you don't know how
to cook anything at all?

(Rae shrugs)

You know how to boil water?

RAE

I can handle that.

LAZARUS
(hands Rae a pot)
Well, get to it.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - AT THE TABLE - NIGHT

The four of them (Rae, Laz, Lincoln, and R.L.) are all seated at the kitchen table, holding hands as R.L. says grace.

Rae peeks at the others with their eyes closed tight. She follows their example.

R.L. We ask that you bless this meal put before us. May the food nourish our bodies and this fellowship nourish our spirit. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

LAZARUS & LINCOLN
Amen.

There is a sudden flurry of activity at the table as the four begin piling up their plates.

R.L.
Pass them potatoes, Lincoln.

LAZARUS
Y'all let me know if these steaks are too dry.

R.L.
This all looks wonderful.

LINCOLN
I skipped lunch.

LAZARUS
Well, dig in, son. Got plenty to eat.

Rae's eyes are fixed on R.L. as he picks up a devilled egg. She looks over at Laz who is aware of her anxiety. He gives her a wink.

R.L. bites into the egg and moans with delight.

R.L.

(to Laz)

Mm. MM. Now these eggs got some kick to it. What'chu got in this?

LAZARUS

(motions to Rae)

Ask the chef.

Everyone looks at Rae, surprised. She feels a sudden rush of fear as she struggles to answer R.L.'s question.

RAE

Cayenne pepper.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAMPLIGHTER BAR - NIGHT

Ronnie is walking by the bar along the interstate. He stops when he sees Gill's truck.

INT. LAMPLIGHTER BAR - NIGHT

Ronnie adjusts his duffle bag over his shoulder as he enters the mid-sized bar.

Gill is seated at the bar. He turns to Ronnie along with a few other locals, one being HERMAN, age 40.

GILL

(surprised)

Holy shit.

RONNIE

(understanding)

Yeah.

GILL

Sit down, man. Need a beer?

RONNIE

Sure.

GILL
(to the bartender)
Marv, let's get Ronnie set up here.

Ronnie sits next to Gill. Herman leans in wanting to be a part of the conversation.

RONNIE
Hey, Herman.

HERMAN
They buy you that big chicken dinner?

Ronnie stiffens. Gill is confused.

GILL
What?

HERMAN
They got little names for everything in the corps when they trying to get rid of ya. Don't know what it's like in the guard. There's what you call a bad conduct discharge, a BCD... we all called it the big chicken dinner. It ain't the brig but it'll fuck ya for life if you wantin' to work for the government.

RONNIE
That's not what this is about.

HERMAN
They got another little name called ad-sep. That sound about right?

Ronnie looks away. He takes a sip of his beer.

HERMAN
Ad-sep. Administrative separation.

GILL
(to Ronnie)

How do you get one of those?

HERMAN

Blowin' boys in the head, for one.

Ronnie loses his cool. He lunges at Herman. Gill holds him back.

HERMAN

Whoa, son! I ain't sayin' shit about you. I'm just talkin'.

RONNIE

Well, you don't know what you're talking about so why don't you shut the fuck up?

GILL

Hey, it's alright, man. It's alright.
(to Herman)

Herman. Come on. He just got back.

Herman gets up to leave with his beer.

HERMAN

To get back ya had to've gone somewhere.

Ronnie glares at Herman as he moves to the other side of the bar. Gill moves closer to Ronnie to get the whole story.

GILL

What happened?

RONNIE

They been keepin' a folder on me cuz of my stomach. Like how it was just before we'd play ball back in school. Thought it was just some tic I got, or ulcers like my daddy had.

(takes a drink)

I can't... shoot. Target practice I'm a pro. I tag between the numbers each time but...

(feels a stomach cramp)

But when there's really loud noises around me... somethin' happens. I get shaky and... I lose my breath. They called it anxiety. Severe anxiety. It can be fixed and all... just not in time for....

(another drink)

It's a long process but... they sent me home.

GILL

I guess it could be worse. You could be comin' back in a body bag.

Gill doesn't know what to say next.

RONNIE

I can't get Rae on the phone. She's not at home... none of her friends seen her anywhere.

GILL

She's around. Always is.

RONNIE

I don't know. She's gettin' crazy, like she gets. Begged me not to go. Got real down. I just think somethin's happened. Like she run off with someone. You'd tell me if you knew somethin', right?

GILL

You been home yet?

RONNIE

Uh-uh. I's hitchin' up the interstate when I seen your truck outside.

GILL

You need a ride?

CUT TO:

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Gill's truck rounds the bend and up the gravel drive leading up to Ronnie's trailer.

The headlights scan across the porch as Gill parks.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Ronnie is the first through the door, calling out for Rae before he can turn on the lights.

RONNIE

Rae?

Gill enters. He sees that the trailer is the same as it was the day he picked up Ronnie, nothing is different.

RONNIE

This don't feel right. Kitchen looks just like I left it. I know, cuz I cleaned it.

GILL

She ever tell you she was thinkin' of taking off?

RONNIE

I just been so mixed up lately, Gill. And, you know, with her history, I can see how she could get scared...
(tears)
...and run.

Gill is disturbed by Ronnie's sudden flood of emotion and tears. He crosses to the pantry, already knowing which cupboard to pull the liquor out of.

He pours two drinks. He hands one to Ronnie.

GILL

Drink. Come on, drink some.

Ronnie manages a few swallows.

RONNIE

Her momma works down at the grocery,
down on the square. Maybe she seen
her.

Gill stands over Ronnie, looking down on his pitiful face.

GILL

Ronnie. You can't see cuz you're too
close to it.

(Ronnie waits)

These nervous spells you get. You
never had that shit back in school...

RONNIE

That's not right, really, cuz I...

GILL

(continuing)

You joined up in that monkey troop
cuz you had a plan for yourself.
Army'd pay for school. You were gonna
get a degree, maybe somethin' in
business or agriculture and you were
gonna make somethin' of yourself.

His words are painful to Ronnie. Gill doesn't hold back.

GILL

And then you had to fall in love
with the school slut.

RONNIE

Now wait...

GILL

(continuing)

With all she was doin'. With all the
shit she kept doing! You stayed stuck
to that bitch's ass and you wouldn't
let go.

RONNIE

I know about how she was like. But
we was different. I's the only person
she talked to about it. How she's

abused. Terrible things, Gill, just terrible...

Rage suddenly fills Gill. He grabs Ronnie and throws him against the wall.

GILL
YOU HAD A PLAN! YOU HAD A GODDAMN LIFE! AND SHE JUST FUCKED THE GUTS OUT OF YOU!

RONNIE
It's not her fault, Gill. She's had to take care of me all this time, cuz I'd just start throwin' up... choking. Just losin' my grip. And she listened. She listened to me.

(Gill releases Ronnie and walks away)

And... I got better. I don't get nervous like I used to. And since we been together... she been faithful to me. Put all that junk behind her...

GILL
The only thing that cunt's had behind her is me and half the town fuckin' her.

(Ronnie can't believe it)

Your first night away, I come over and drop off the spare keys like you wanted me to. You weren't gone two hours and she was aching to get me inside her. Like she was havin' some kind'a fit.

Ronnie can't respond. Tears roll down his face. Gill holds up the whiskey bottle.

GILL
(pours a drink)
Don't you think it's funny how I know where everything in your house is?

(moves in close)
I don't care if that hurts you or
not. Truth is I don't know who you
are anymore. So fuck it.

Gill turns away. Ronnie grips Gill around the neck from
behind. He bends him back painfully and throws his head up
against the wall.

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

The front door burst open as Gill goes flying down the front
porch. Ronnie cocks a .45 and shoves it into his belt.

Ronnie pins Gill's elbow behind his back and retrieves the
keys from his front pocket.

GILL
You gonna steal my truck?

RONNIE
Make yourself at home. You done it
already.

Gill watches Ronnie tear down the drive in his own truck.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - NEAR THE BARN - NIGHT

Laz and R.L. are smoking. Laz smiles as he watches Lincoln
and Rae through the kitchen window as they wash dishes and
talk about football.

R.L.
Gotta get that chain off her, Laz.
Somethin' like this gets out, you
could land in a heap of trouble.

LAZARUS
I'm dealin' with what God put before
me.

R.L.
You believe He wants this? A woman

chained to ya radiator?

LAZARUS

Not like that.

R.L.

Then what?

LAZARUS

She's tied to me, R.L.. We tied to each other.

Laz is silent.

R.L.

I can't leave unless I get your word.

Laz looks down at his shoes. He surrenders. He nods.

R.L.

Laz. I got some news you need to hear. It's about Rose and your brother.

(this is not easy for
R.L.)

She's pregnant. She gonna have a baby.

(silence)

Her sister told my wife. You know how them sewing circles go. Just a matter of time till you got word.

Thought that's why you been keepin' to yourself out here.

(Laz conceals his
pain)

I don't know how much of this is to make her happy or to hurt you. But it is what it is.

Laz struggles with his emotions. He turns to R.L. stone faced and cold.

LAZARUS

I'm through with them both.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Laz and Rae wave to Lincoln as he climbs into R.L.'s car. They pull away, up the drive, and disappear into the night.

The cicadas sing as the two stand in silence: Rae, at peace, feeling genuine contentment; while Laz looks lost in silent pain.

RAE

They sure liked them devilled eggs.

LAZARUS

You drink whiskey?

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

A bottle of whiskey is removed from a top cabinet above the refrigerator. Two small glasses each get a healthy swallow.

LAZARUS

You take it straight?

RAE

Sure.

He hands her a glass. Laz then looks at his as if he struggles with a decision.

LAZARUS

(holding up the glass)

To my baby brother. Gonna be a daddy.

Rae nods and downs the whiskey with Lazarus.

RAE

Well, that's good news. So you're gonna be someone's uncle.

Laz pours another swig for himself and downs it.

LAZARUS

Want another?

RAE

We drinkin' buddies now?

LAZARUS

(pours two more glass)

To freedom.

Laz pounds back his third shot.

RAE

Still makin' jokes?

LAZARUS

(pulls out his keys)

No joke.

Laz pulls Rae closer to him by the chain wrapped around her waist. He opens the old lock with a key.

LAZARUS

Not my place to change your mind, or anybody else's. People gonna do how they please. You only get one life... should be lived the way you wanna live it.

The chain falls to the floor with a hollow thud. Rae looks confused.

LAZARUS

If you want... I can take you back to town now.

RAE

I ain't in a hurry.

The two stare at each other in silence.

RAE

Could you do somethin' for me?

LAZARUS

Anything.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rae watches with intense curiosity as Laz tunes his guitar, sitting at the table.

LAZARUS

(takes another drink)

Ain't played 'fore nobody in years.

Laz slides his calloused fingers across the strings, spurring the old guitar into an impressive wail. Rae grips the chair.

LAZARUS

(plays as he remembers)

Funny how a sound just speak to ya heart.

A haunting slide guitar riff barks. Rae has a physical reaction to the music. She is fascinated and fearful.

LAZARUS

(thinks)

Wanted me some kids. A whole mess of 'em. But Rose, my wife... chil'ren was for another time.

(takes a drink)

They's this one spring... I saw a change in her. Her breasts start swellin' up. Come a few mornings I hear her heavin' in the bathroom. I seen it with women before. I knew.

Laz thinks for a moment. Continues playing.

LAZARUS

Come a day, Rose say she had to go visit her folks in Jackson. Didn't want me to come... so I stayed put.

(remembers)

When she come back...

(hesitates)

They talk about a woman havin' that
glow. Couldn't see it no more. She...
took it away. Cut it out.

The guitar's song turns dark. Laz slides his fingers up the
guitar strings, lingering on low growns.

LAZARUS

One night... While she sleepin'.
Held a pillow in my hands. I could
see myself killin' her. What evil in
my heart make me wanna kill her, I
don't know? It's that voice in me.
Each time I think it's gone, he come
howlin' back. Devil or no, I don't
know. But I am a haunted man.

Fear spreads across Rae's face. Laz is talking about something
all too familiar.

LAZARUS

Calls me when I'm ailing. When I
can't find my home, lost in the pines.
I calls it the Black Snake Moan.
(he closes his eyes
and sings)
Mm-mm... Got no momma now.Mm-mm...
Got no momma now.It's over late last
night, don't need no momma now.

Laz stops. He sways back and forth with his eyes closed. Rae
hears the swell of the cicadas. Her eyes dart to the front
door as the familiar creek of footsteps are heard.

RAE

Sing, Lazarus.
(kneels next to him
in fear)
Please keep singin'.

The door swings open. A white calloused hand appears around
Rae's mouth.

She gasps in terror, clutching Laz's leg. The white hand is
gone. Tears come to her. She trembles as Laz sings.

LAZARUS

(singing)

Mm-mm... Black snake crawlin' in my room. Mm-mm... Black snake crawlin' in my room. Some pretty momma better come and get this black snake soon.

Rae rests her head against his knee.

LAZARUS

(singing)

Black snake is evil, black snake is all I see. Black snake is evil, black snake is all I see. Woke up this mornin', black snake moved in on me.

Laz concludes the song. Rae raises up to her knees, facing Laz. Tears have run down his dried face. He opens his eyes.

LAZARUS

My life is gone. Only life I was livin'. And I lost it.

RAE

I'm here with you.

LAZARUS

I had love in my heart. And I gave it to one woman. And she gone now.

(his lip quivers)

Where am I gonna put all this love?

Rae gently touches his cheek. The wind picks up outside.

RAE

You can give it to me.

Rae kisses Laz. He is motionless at first, allowing it to happen. His hand moves from the neck of his guitar to the bend in her neck.

The passion intensifies as they squeeze the guitar between them.

Laz pulls his lips away and holds her head in his hands. They are so close, they are breathing into each other's mouths.

RAE

You can't start this and not finish.

Not with me.

(kisses him)

Please...

The guitar clangs to the floor as Laz lifts Rae in his arms. They kiss, ravenous for each other. He knocks up against the side table, causing his Bible to fall to the floor, face up and open. The wind pushes the front door open, slamming it hard against the wall.

They turn together, kissing, Laz slowly spinning with Rae in his arms. But Laz is soon distracted by the pages of his Bible fluttering on the floor. The wind is blowing the pages, turning them with an unseen hand.

LAZARUS

Wait... I gotta stop...

(Rae's kisses get more aggressive)

Rae stop...

(she can't hear, the burning has her)

Dammit, Rae... GET OFF!

It takes a considerable effort to pull Rae away. She falls to the floor, dizzy and sucking in air.

LAZARUS

This ain't the way for me. I'm sorry.

Rae is struggling for breath. She desperately grabs at Laz.

RAE

Not gonna lie to you, Laz...

(labored breath)

This one's a doozy. I don't think...

I don't think I can stop this.

Her eyes roll back briefly, almost losing consciousness. Laz

catches her and holds her tightly.

LAZARUS

Tell me what to do.

RAE

(Barely able to speak)

The... chain helps.

Laz grips the chain and wraps it around Rae.

As the burning increases. Laz holds Rae tight across his lap, his back up against the radiator.

RAE

I seen a man die. He couldn't breathe... his heart was... was givin' out.

LAZARUS

You just havin' a fit. You ain't goin' nowhere.

RAE

He told me... get help. I just stood there and watched him... I watched him die, Laz. Oh God! GODDAMMIT!

Her legs itch like they are covered in ants. The wave is hitting her hard. Laz holds her face up to him.

RAE

(like a little girl)

Oh, Laz... he hurt me. He... hurt me so many times.

LAZARUS

No one's gonna hurt you no more.

RAE

You think God forgives people like that?

(crying like a child)

You think God forgives people like me?

Suddenly aware of the rising burn, Rae grits her teeth.

RAE

Hold me. Oh God...

Rae turns away as Laz holds her head in his lap. She bites down on his middle finger as his hand moves over her mouth.

She is gasping, screaming into his hand.

It hits. Laz holds her.

Rae's open mouth quivers as the sensation peaks. Her shoulders slump, her chest vibrates. She is crying softly.

LAZARUS

We'll just stay here. Wait till it passes.

The pages of the Bible flip to the final pages in the wind.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - MORNING

Laz's truck pulls into his usual spot on the square. Rae is riding shotgun.

RAE

Where you gonna be?

LAZARUS

Right here. Be here all afternoon.

(waits)

You ready for this?

RAE

I'm gonna just get some girl stuff,
like make-up and... stuff.

Rae looks out the window, a touch of fear.

LAZARUS

This town ain't goin' nowhere. You

take the time you need.

They both step out of the truck. Gene and Archie watch Rae's ass as she walks by. They then look back at Laz, incredulous.

LAZARUS

Friend of mine.

CUT TO:

INT. FISHERVILLE GROCERY - MORNING

Rae enters the modest grocery store holding herself tight. A few harmless shoppers look at her making her feel even more uncomfortable.

CUT TO:

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - AFTERNOON

Laz is selling vegetables to a young woman. He is unaware that Angela has moved up behind him, grinning, carrying a small basket.

ANGELA

I bet you have loyal customers.

LAZARUS

(turns and grins)

You liked what I brung ya?

ANGELA

Been eatin' like a princess all week.
Even got enough for us to take a
picnic under the gazebo.

LAZARUS

That'd be nice.

ANGELA

I put on the lotion you got me. Can
you smell it?

Angela steps forward and pulls away her hair from her neck. She cranes, offering her neck for Laz to smell.

LAZARUS
(smells)
That's nice, too.

CUT TO:

INT. FISHERVILLE GROCERY - AFTERNOON

Rae is looking at herself in the provided makeup counter mirror. She looks at the compact in her hand and decides against the purchase.

She rounds the corner and stops. She sees Sandy on her knees in the center of the aisle, building a display of tuna cans.

Rae thinks to leave, but stops. She makes a decision to talk to her. She walks up the aisle and stands above her mother.

RAE
Hey.

Rae kneels down next to her. She's trying to make a connection.

SANDY
What happened to your face?

RAE
Got in a little accident.

SANDY
(not believing her)
Yeah.

Sandy stands and wipes her brow.

RAE
Since you workin' on the square now,
maybe we could get some coffee in
the morning, if you want.

SANDY
You need money again?

RAE

No. That's not why...

(a frustrated breath)

Why we always gotta do this? I mean, you and me been at each other as far back as I can remember. Wasn't no love between us. And I'm your daughter. I'm the only family you got.

SANDY

You never needed nobody. Always made that clear to me.

RAE

Yeah. I know I did. But...

(struggles with tears)

I'm tryin' to be dif'rent. I'm tryin' to... get some peace, you know?

SANDY

I'm workin' here, Rae. Can you see that?

RAE

I just wanted some make-up.

SANDY

All that shit's on aisle 5.

Rae starts walking away. She quickly turns.

RAE

I just think you should'a kept him off me, that's all.

SANDY

The hell are you talkin' about?

RAE

Now see? Don't do that. I'll go along with all you say about me. But that... you can't pretend no more on that. Cuz I was just a kid, Momma.
(a terrible silence)

I didn't know about any of that stuff
he was doin' to me.

(tears well up)

And you let him do it. Some big nobody
in your life... and you let him do
as he wanted... with the only **SOMEBODY**
you had.

It is clear from Sandy's reserved anguish that Rae is telling
the truth.

Sandy firmly grips her by the arm and walks her out. Rae
winces in pain like a toddler being led off to a car for a
good whipping.

RAE

I'm sorry... I didn't mean to shout...

SANDY

All my life I been puttin' out your
fires, with you givin' out your snatch
to every waggin' dick in this town.
And you gonna lay the blame at my
feet? Well, I ain't gonna take that.

RAE

But... Momma... just tell me... not
gonna be mad... we can just talk
about it... Be eye to eye on this...
You don't even got to say you're
sorry... Just say how you knew...

SANDY

Only thing I'm sorry for is listenin'
to my parents and having you instead
of doin' what I should'a done.

Sandy walks back up the aisle returning to her canned tuna.

And then the rage hits Rae.

With each breath Rae grits her teeth tighter. She grabs a
mop off the side aisle and turns around. Sandy is pricing
cans, down on her knees. She doesn't see Rae coming.

RAE

...tell me you don't know... goddamn
LIAR!

Rae clocks her over the head, sending Sandy into the display of cans. Rae hits her again with the mop. She is screaming in short anguished breaths.

Rae grabs everything she can and dumps them onto Sandy: Bags of flour, cans, entire shelves of ketchup.

RAE

SAY IT! JUST FUCKING SAY IT!

Mark comes running to the aisle followed by two other employees. Stunned customers watch in amazement.

MARK

Rae! Rae! What are you doin'?

RAE

(hysterically screaming
and thrashing the
mop)

GET OFF ME! GET OFF ME! GET...
HIM...OFF!

CUT TO:

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - AFTERNOON

Laz and Angela are seated next to each other under the gazebo.

ANGELA

I's thinkin' about singing in the
choir.

LAZARUS

At church?

ANGELA

Mm-hm. I don't know if I got a good
voice or not but... practice is only
on Mondays and Wednesdays, so...

LAZARUS
(grinning)
You gonna sing me somethin'?

ANGELA
When? Now? Oh. No.

LAZARUS
Come on, just a little somethin'.
Right here. Go'on now, don't be shy.

Angela blushes. She looks around and then leans in close to Laz. She sings softly, sweetly, with all her soul.

ANGELA
(singing)
There is a balm in Gilead to make
the wounded whole.

Laz is falling in love. She is so beautiful to him, he doesn't see the people running to the front of the grocery store.

ANGELA
(singing)
There is a balm in Gilead to save my
sick, sick soul.
(opens her eyes, speaks)
So. You think I should be in the
choir?

Laz is grinning from ear to ear. He is about to speak but the commotion outside the grocery catches his attention. His smile fades.

ANGELA
What? What is it?

Laz bolts toward the grocery as fast as he can.

INT. FISHERVILLE GROCERY - AFTERNOON

Laz rushes past the gawking customers at the end of the aisle. A few male workers, including Mark, stand at a distance watching Rae weep on the floor.

Sandy is being helped up by a co-worker – her head is bleeding.

Rae rocks back and forth, her face spotted with flour dust, the mop held tightly in her grip.

Mark tries to step closer but Rae cries out, thrashing with the mop handle. They retreat.

LAZARUS
RAE? GAL? YOU HEARIN' MY VOICE?

Rae lifts her eyes.

FLASH TO:

QUICK CUTS

The chain pulling around Rae's waist. The radiator clanking as it is pulled. Laz's hand holding her head to him as she cries.

FLASH BACK TO:

INT. FISHERVILLE GROCERY - AFTERNOON

Laz slowly crosses to Rae. She lifts her tear-soaked eyes to him. He kneels next to her.

LAZARUS
I'll take you home now.

He lifts her up in his arms. She sobs into his chest as he carries her through the onlookers.

Angela is there. She looks confused and shocked.

ANGELA
This your cousin?

Laz can't lie anymore. His gaze falls to the floor. He leaves the store without saying anything to Angela.

EXT. FISHERVILLE SQUARE - AFTERNOON

Ronnie has parked Gill's truck on the square. He starts walking up to the grocery store.

He sees Laz carrying Rae in his arms. She is sobbing into his chest, blind to all around her. Ronnie freezes in shock as Laz approaches.

LAZARUS

Move, son.

(Ronnie is unable to
move)

Goddammit, kid, get outta my way!

Laz pushes Ronnie causing him to fall backwards on to the pavement.

Ronnie watches Laz put Rae in his truck and drive away. A wave of nausea hits. He turns over and heaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - SUNSET

The wooden chimes are deathly still above the porch. The evening cicadas have begun their chorus.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BATHROOM - SUNSET

Rae is holding her knees to her chest in the tub. Laz sits next to her, dipping the sponge in the water, gently washing her back and shoulders.

Laz moves her head back into the palm of his hand to wash her hair. She stares into his eyes as he squeezes the sponge on her forehead.

RAE

You took care of your wife, like you
do me?

LAZARUS

I tried.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

Rae is wrapped in the quilt, laying on the couch. She is awake and motionless, helpless to her depression.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laz sits on the side of his bed. Something is on his mind.

We CUT TO him on his stomach searching for something under his bed.

Another old guitar case comes out, followed by another, then another. Finally, Laz stands, an old maroon case in his grip.

He opens the latches on the side and lifts the thin lid, revealing a gorgeous cream colored electric guitar.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

Rae has not fallen asleep yet. She turns to see Laz entering the dark room with the maroon guitar case.

LAZARUS

You and me, we night owls. No use
fightin' this shit.

(tosses her a dress)

Get up.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOJO'S - NIGHT

Laz's truck groans as it bounces into the crowded parking lot of Bojo's.

Rae steps out, looking beautiful in her sun dress. Laz slams the door to his truck, guitar case in hand.

They begin walking inside. Rae's watch goes off. She quickly turns it off. But a faint echo of the alarm can be heard behind her. She stops and turns toward the truck. The sound is gone.

LAZARUS

What is it?

RAE

Nothin'.

They go inside.

Ronnie's hand appears from under the blue tarp in the back of Laz's truck. He pulls himself out and looks around.

INT. BOJO'S - NIGHT

Laz and Rae stand like strangers by the door. The place is wall to wall – people at the bar, people playing pool.

Laz sees the culprit of this show. R.L. is gabbing with Bojo, a beer in his hand.

LAZARUS

Get'chu at that table up yonder.

RAE

By myself?

LAZARUS

You can handle it.

As Rae makes her way through the crowd of people, Laz marches over to R.L.

LAZARUS

The hell is this shit?

R.L.

What? I called Bojo, like you say.
Called up the fellas in the band...

LAZARUS

The fuck are all these people doin'
here? Been drinkin' in this shit
hole for years ain't seen this many
people since I don't know...

BOJO

Shit hole... Hey kiss my ass, Laz.

LAZARUS

Nigga, you go'on kiss my ass. Ya both called everybody, didn't ya?

Bojo turns away to another customer. R.L. grins as he removes a flask. He offers it to Laz. Laz snaps it away.

LAZARUS

There you go, preacher man. Get me drunk so I don't stick my foot up yo ass.

R.L.

I just know how you get. Good to know, them butterflies still in ya gut.

Laz and R.L. look over at Rae seated alone at a small table near the stage.

R.L.

Heard about this morning.

LAZARUS

We ain't here to talk about that shit.

Laz surprises R.L. by walking away and up onto the stage.

Rae watches as Laz, shakes hands with some of the band members. A few whistles from the crowd.

Laz sits down at a chair off to the right of a short mic stand.

He plugs in.

Rae watches curiously as Laz tunes his guitar – moans of electric distortion.

R.L. sits next to her.

R.L.

You in for it, now. He gonna nail it

to the wall tonight. I done pissed
him off.

The drummer kicks in. Laz tears into the strings. The entire
place begins to undulate and bounce as Laz returns to the
blues.

LAZARUS

(singing)

I don't know, but I been around,
tell me them women shake 'em on down.

Cheers. Rae watches in awe. She's never seen anything like
it. She is surrounded by couples dancing so close they might
as well be naked. But there is also a great sense of safety
as Laz controls the room with his music.

LAZARUS

(singing)

Yes, I'm goin' Georgia line.
See if them women sweet like mine.

HERSHEL, a black man in his 30's, asks Rae to dance.

HERSHEL

You wanna cut it up, baby?

RAE

(shrugging)

Well...

Rae looks up at Laz. Laz smiles and nods. Rae takes the man's
hand and moves out onto the dance floor. R.L. can't be seated
anymore. He stands and stomps his foot.

R.L.

(shouting at Laz)

Yeah, you know you home, old man.
You just walked through the door.

LAZARUS

(singing)

I don't know, but I been told, them
Georgia women sweet jelly roll.

Rae allows Laz's voice and guitar to take hold of her. Her face gets wet with sweat as she moves, making love to the current in the air.

Men are dancing all around her, but now she is in control. She turns to a young man and shakes, then an old man.

She is free, herself, and above all, safe.

Laz smiles, unaware of Ronnie watching from the window behind him. There is rage and confusion in his face as he watches Rae surrounded by dancing limbs.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Both Laz and Rae are drinking water from the sink in tall glasses like they've been stranded in a desert.

RAE

Are you drunk?

(Laz shrugs)

Keep drinkin' water and you won't get a headache in the mornin'.

LAZARUS

Yeah, gal I been here before.

RAE

(smiling)

I guess you have.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laz is taking off his shoes, getting ready to crash for the night. He sits down on the side of his bed and takes off his shirt, leaving his T-shirt on.

Rae is standing in his doorway.

RAE

Laz? Can I sleep with you tonight?

LAZARUS

Don't think that'd be wise.

RAE

I didn't mean it nothin' dirty.

LAZARUS

I know you didn't. But you a grown girl. You can handle it. I got to.

Rae understands. She crosses to Laz and kisses him on the cheek.

Rae then walks down the hall to her couch in the front room.

Laz turns off the light.

CUT TO BLACK:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Rae enters the dark bathroom and shuts the door behind her. Her hair is shorter, a shaggy bob, bleached platinum blond.

ARTY, always behind the door, attempts to enter, but Rae pushes the door closed and locks it.

ARTY

Baby, where you goin'?

RAE

I'm gonna pee. I gotta take a break and go pee.

ARTY

Now, this isn't fair. You said I could do it, too.

RAE

Eat shit and die, Arty. A girl can change her fuckin' mind.

Rae finds the light switch. She yelps upon seeing Ronnie crouched by the tub.

Suddenly feeling violated Rae yanks down on her shirt to

hide the fact that she's not wearing anything else.

RAE

Hey.

RONNIE

Hey.

RAE

You don't gotta get up but... I gotta go...

Ronnie attempts to get up but it's too late, Rae has already squatted on the commode, pinning Ronnie between her and the bathtub.

Rae is breathing heavy, her focus is scattered. She's coming up or coming down from a big burn.

RAE

(waiting for pee)

I think if I just piss... I'll be okay.

RONNIE

You feelin' sick?

RAE

I'm just in one of my moods. You know how I get.

RONNIE

Yeah, I know.

Ronnie tries to look away, trying to make an awkward moment less awkward. Rae's anxiety is hitting her.

RAE

I think it'd be better if you talk to me.

RONNIE

Yeah?

RAE

Just about anything, you know. It can be funny or... not. Just tell me somethin'.

Ronnie nervously considers this before agreeing to open his mouth. He points into the tub.

RONNIE

Well. That's my vomit. I came in here to get sick. I thought I'd make the toilet but... anyway, I got sick.

RAE

Are you wasted?

RONNIE

No. I just got a messed up stomach.

RAE

(remembering)

Holy shit!

RONNIE

What?

RAE

Holy shit, Ronnie!

(smacks him on the arm)

You're a fuckin' rock star.

RONNIE

I'm a what?

RAE

All them people shoutin' your name like they were doing tonight! Shit! That arm you got'll get'chu on a box of cereal...

Ronnie leans over and dry heaves into the tub. It is painful. Rae leans forward and touches his back, comforting him.

RAE

Hey? You okay, Ronnie?

Ronnie falls back, gripping his stomach, there are tears in his eyes from the dry heaving. Suddenly emotion hits him.

RONNIE

(through tears and
clenched teeth)

Box of cereal... well, Goddamn...

(looks at his trembling
fists)

Everybody keeps sayin' things to me
take make me feel great. But I don't
feel great at all. I feel like I'm
comin' outta my skin. Like I'm losin'
control of my mind.

(looks into Rae's
eyes)

I'm not like this. I'm not usually
so... afraid.

(really starts crying)

I don't know what's... wrong...

Rae pulls Ronnie to her. He cries into her shoulder. She gently rubs his wet face and sings her words of comfort.

RAE

Is'okay... Is'okay...

Ronnie begins to calm down. The sobbing abates.

The metal music from the party outside is muffled through the door. The two hold onto each other in silence.

Rae pees. They both giggle, a welcome release of tension.

RAE

I feel better. Do you?

RONNIE

Yeah, I do.

EXT. LAZARUS' BARN - NIGHT

Ronnie lifts his head from sleep - his memory of Rae has vanished.

He is leaning against the corner of the barn, his .45 in his grip. His gaze slowly turns toward Laz's darkened house.

His hand begins to shake.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. LAZARUS' HOME - EARLY MORNING

A crow squawks in the rows of corn. A bright morning is coming.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - THE BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Laz is still asleep. The sound of clumsy guitar playing, accompanied by a tiny voice, can be heard.

RAE

(plucking, trying to
find the right note)

You... are my... sunshine.

Laz opens his eyes.

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - EARLY MORNING

Laz quietly creeps into the doorway to watch Rae struggle with the guitar playing. He could stay there for hours watching this little girl play his guitar.

Rae looks up and sees Laz. She stops playing.

RAE

Sorry.

LAZARUS

Looks like you know a song.

RAE

Don't know where I learn't it, but...
it's there in my head.

Laz sits next to her and takes the guitar from her.

LAZARUS
(playing a tune)
How you feelin' today?

RAE
You know how you feel when you come
out of a bad hangover? Like your
eyes can open a little bit more.

LAZARUS
I know that.

RAE
Woke up real early. Sun was shining.
Just thought I'd mess around, try to
learn a song.

LAZARUS
Go'on and sing it, I'll play.

RAE
No, you do it. I can't sing.

LAZARUS
Stop that foolishness. Just do as I
say and close your eyes.
(Rae closes her eyes)
Close your eyes. And think about...
well, for a song like this, I'd say
you think about what you love.

RAE
What I love.

LAZARUS
Get a good picture in your mind.

Rae's playful smile turns serious. Laz continues playing.

LAZARUS
Think on that. And sing wit me.
(Laz comes in singing)
You are my sunshine. My only sunshine.

RAE & LAZARUS

You make me happy when skies are
gray.
You'll never know dear, how much I
love you.
Please don't take my sunshine away.

Rae opens her eyes with a delightful giggle. Laz continues playing.

LAZARUS

Good. I know another. It go like
this.

(sings)

Last night dear, as I lay sleeping.
I dreamed I held you in my arms.
When I awoke dear, I was mistaken.
So I hung my head and I cried.

(to Rae)

Close your eyes Rae... sing it.

Rae doesn't hesitate to obey. With her eyes closed and Laz playing, neither can see Ronnie creeping up from the kitchen with his gun.

RAE

(singing)

You are my sunshine. My only sunshine.
You make me happy when skies are
gray.

Ronnie looks sick with pain as he points the barrel at the back of Laz's head.

RAE

(singing)

You'll never know dear, how much I
love you.
Please don't take your sunshine away.

(opens her eyes)

RONNIE!

Laz spins around knocking away Ronnie's arm. BAM! The gun fires into the wall. The guitar cracks on the floor.

Rae screams.

RAE
RONNIE STOP! RONNIE!

Laz lunges at Ronnie but Ronnie is faster. He spins Laz around and slams him to the floor, pushing his gun into Laz's face.

RAE
NO!

Ronnie looks up at Rae, his eyes red with sorrow and rage. He pushes the gun to the side of Laz's head. Rae cries.

RONNIE
Ain't been a week and you already
some nigger's whore? Gill told me.
Told me how you and he... you and
everybody...

RAE
Ronnie. Please, baby...

RONNIE
(to Laz)
Did 'ya have fun with her? Sweet as
a peach, I bet. Huh? Huh?

Laz glares back, not saying a word.

RONNIE
Goddamn it, I ask you a question,
you better answer it, or I'm gonna
blast a hole in ya!

RAE
Ronnie...

Rae moves closer. Ronnie points his gun at her and screams.

RONNIE
YOU SHUT UP!

LAZARUS
Careful how you point that gun, boy.

RONNIE
(points gun back at
Laz)
Or what? OR WHAT?

LAZARUS
Boy? You here to make a point, or
you here to kill somebody?

RONNIE
Ain't gonna be callin' me boy when I
blow your face off.

LAZARUS
You sayin' you'll do what?

RONNIE
You heard me, mother-fucker. I'll
fuckin' kill..

LAZARUS
(cutting him off)
BOY! You so green you couldn't stomp
a baby duck.

Ronnie can't believe what was just said – mostly, because
it's true. The gun begins to shake in his hand.

RONNIE
You testing me? Huh? You testin' me,
old man?

LAZARUS
Test. Shit. What kind'a test you
thinkin'? You mean like, if you a
man or not? If you a killer? Only
one way to prove that. You just look
me in the eye, boy, and you squeeze
that trigger back.

Ronnie grips the shaking gun. A severe attack is on the rise
as he listens to Laz.

LAZARUS
Ain't that easy, is it? I been in

some scraps, son, I know. First there's that loud crack. Always louder than you think. Like it just come-up-a-cloud and clapped a mess thunder right in ya hand. BAM!

Ronnie flinches. He tries to control his breathing.

LAZARUS

White light. Smell of smoke. Taste of my blood and brains in your mouth, stingin' ya eyes.

Ronnie almost vomits, but he holds it back.

RAE

Oh, baby... just let me...

Rae moves closer to him, wanting to comfort him but she stops as Ronnie points the gun at her. His eyes pleading for her to stay back.

RONNIE

GODDAMMIT, RAE!

LAZARUS

BOY! YOU KEEP THAT GUN POINTED AT ME!

(Ronnie obeys)

You need to kill a man, all you gotta have is a good reason.

(watches Ronnie fight his attack)

You know she been here with me, don't cha? Been all over town, givin' up that switch you thought was your own.

RONNIE

SHUT UP! SHUT UP!

LAZARUS

Put all your love and dreams into one woman... she turn around and give it all to another man. That's a

good reason to paint the wall with me, kid. She'd fear ya then. Cuz there won't be no more question in her mind. She with a real man now. A real KILLER!

A flood of tears are streaming down Ronnie's face. The gun is shaking furiously in his hand.

RONNIE

Don't... don't say that to me...

LAZARUS

(getting fed up)

Son, I'm grown. Don't got patience to suffer you children and this monkey junk. I'm too old to play house...

(looks at Rae and then back at Ronnie)

...and cowboys. So let's have it. End me or get out of my face!

Ronnie looks like a scared five year old having an asthma attack. Laz barks at him one last time.

LAZARUS

Go'on. Do it.

(silence)

DO IT!

The last shout from Laz completely destroys Ronnie. His shoulders slump. The gun lowers in his grasp. A low sob is heard as he falls to his knees.

Laz snatches the gun from his hand and stands.

RAE

Ronnie?

Rae inches closer to Ronnie as he kneels over and weeps. She gently touches his shoulder. He turns his anguished face to her and tries to speak.

RONNIE

I can't stop... I can't stop... being

scared. What am I gonna do...

Ronnie hides his face in his hands. Rae throws her arms around him and holds him tight.

RAE

I got you, baby... I got you...

Laz removes the clip and crosses to the kitchen. He slams the gun on the sink, opens a drawer and removes the wall phone.

RAE

(seeing Laz plug the phone in)

What are you doing?

(Laz dials a number)

You gonna call the cops? You think they gonna help this? They ever help you, Laz? Huh?

(Laz listens on the phone)

DAMMIT LAZ PUT THE PHONE DOWN?

Laz looks at Rae. There is hurt in his eyes.

LAZARUS

Thought you knew me better, gal.

(into the phone)

I need you at my house... right now.

CUT TO:

INT. LAZARUS' HOME - NIGHT

R.L. crosses from the kitchen. He hands a glass of water to Rae seated on the couch. He hands another to Ronnie seated next to her. R.L. sits before them as Laz lingers in the doorway.

R.L.

(to Ronnie)

I imagine there's a lot of good between you two. But I want you to tell me what's bad. Go'on. And don't

hold back.

Ronnie is very uncomfortable. He looks at Rae seated next to him and then back at R.L..

RONNIE

I hate this town. You can't round the corner without bumping into someone who's got your number.

(a brief look at Rae)

We did a lot of dreamin', me and Rae. Makin' plans to get out. I'd do my tour and... we'd move outta here. Go to Chattanooga. And I'd work for my uncle.

(looks down, tears come to Ronnie)

But... when Rae gets like she does. And she does the things that she always done. Makes me feel like she loves this place more'n me.

Rae starts shaking her head, tears come to her eyes. R.L. raises a hand to silence her.

R.L.

Go on, Ronnie.

RONNIE

All my life people called me shit like, sissy and... nervous and... I got few things in my life that make me feel like... like...

LAZARUS

Like a man.

RONNIE

(surprised)

Yes. I mean that's it. I wanna feel like a man with her. I wanna feel like the only man with her.

Ronnie wipes the tears from his eyes with his shirt sleeve. R.L. turns to Rae.

R.L.

(looks at Rae)

Now, Rae, we're not here to fix you or judge you. Only you and the Almighty can do that. But I want you to tell me about these spells you get.

Rae takes a deep breath. She looks up at Laz. He encourages her with a nod.

RAE

It starts like this... fire... that spreads. Starts in my head. Then moves to my stomach. Then it goes lower. I can stop it sometimes but mostly I just jump on and ride it out... then everything'll go back to normal, you know. Only thing ever took that feeling away was... was... when I met Ronnie.

(the emotion really hits hard)

Cuz I love him so much. He's all I got in my life that's special. And I like taking care of him and helping him when he gets nervous. When I can do that for him... it's like I'm givin' somethin' of myself that I haven't givin' nobody else.

R.L.

Rae, look at Ronnie. And tell him how you feel.

Rae turns to Ronnie. Her nose is running as she wipes away her tears.

RAE

I think... I think we're fucked up. Both of us. I know I am. But... that don't mean what I feel ain't true. It don't mean I can't love. And I know, how I been is... is... REALLY

BAD! So if you want to quit on me...
I understand. But please... please...
don't.

Ronnie is very moved by Rae's plea. He touches her face and
wipes away a tear.

R.L.

So. What'chu two gonna do about this?

CUT TO:

EXT. ANGELA'S HOME - DAY

The door opens. Angela looks surprised to see Laz. She is
dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, wearing rubber gloves from
cleaning.

ANGELA

Hey.

LAZARUS

Hey. You wasn't at'cha work but that
nosey gal up at the counter give me
your home address. Hope you don't
mind me comin' over.

ANGELA

What do you need?

LAZARUS

I need ya help again.

Angela notices Rae and Ronnie seated in Laz's truck.

ANGELA

More cough syrup?

LAZARUS

Can I come in?

Angela takes a breath and opens the door wider.

INT. ANGELA'S HOME - DAY

It is a small house, but tidy. Angela motions for Laz to sit.

LAZARUS

I lied to you. It was wrong. But at the time... I didn't know what to do. Imagine you got an earful from folks about that gal I's carryin'...

ANGELA

Laz... you don't need to explain yourself to me...

LAZARUS

Yes, I do. Cuz I feel for you. Mean to say...

(long pause)

I got feelings for you. And I didn't want you to think... I didn't...

(how to say?)

I don't want you to go away. There's better ways to say what I'm trying to say, but... they it is. Don't go away.

Angela thinks on this. She rises out of her seat and crosses to Laz, sitting next to him on the love seat.

ANGELA

Laz. I'm gonna put my trust in you. I'm gonna do it knowin' all too well I can get hurt like this. And I have been hurt. Just like you.

(beat)

Woman like me, I got a lot of livin' to do. But my days are precious to me. They all I got left. Don't want no more fuss. I want love in my life. You understanding me, Laz?

LAZARUS

I do. God's truth. I do.

They stay locked in each others' sight.

Then, the slowest, most gentle kiss happens between them. When they separate, Laz is lost in her eyes.

ANGELA

Now what'chu need me to do? Cuz I'm gonna go do it.

CUT TO:

INT. POOL HALL - MORNING

Laz enters the pool hall and spots Tehronne. Tehronne motions him back. Next to Tehronne is an old black man named PINETOP.

TEHRONNE

Yo, this here Pinetop. I think he got what you lookin' for.

Pinetop grins and produces a black velvet cloth. He opens it gently and spreads it out, revealing a long, thin, gold chain.

Laz nods, approvingly.

LAZARUS

That'll do.

EXT. POOL HALL - BACK DOOR - MORNING

Tehronne leads Laz down the back steps.

They both round the corner, revealing an old Chevy Caprice. It is light brown except for one door that is gray, however the chrome rims on the car are impressive – worth more than the entire car by a long shot.

TEHRONNE

It got some miles on it, but my boys say she run good. Got fresh 22's on her. Ain't my doin'. That's just how it came to me. Don't worry. Nobody gonna come lookin' for it. I got the pinks... got no problem.

(hands Laz the keys)

Ain't gonna have my girl ridin' no bus.

LAZARUS

(moved, impressed)

Don't see generosity much these days.
Everything always got a catch. Guess
I'm tryin' to say... thank you.

TEHRONNE

Nobody ever asks me to do shit like
this for people. And you know what?
I'm good at it. Naw what I mean?

Tehronne walks back into the pool hall, leaving Laz alone.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLA MAE'S WOMEN'S CLOTHING - DAY

Rhonda has three white dresses over her arm as she hurries
past Ronnie, seated next to the back dressing rooms.

The door doesn't close all the way. He stands and moves in
for a peek. Angela pokes her head out and grins.

ANGELA

What are you doing?

RONNIE

(shrugs)

Just wanted to see.

ANGELA

You know the rules.

(vacant look from
Ronnie)

You do know the rules, don't you?

RONNIE

Yeah, I know.

ANGELA

Then start taking them seriously.

RONNIE

Yes, ma'am.

INT. ELLA MAE'S WOMEN'S CLOTHING - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Rae is standing in bra and panties up on a small platform in front of a tri-divided mirror. Ella Mae takes the dresses from Rhonda.

Angela sees that Rae is nervous.

ANGELA

It's okay to breathe, honey.

RAE

Yes, ma'am.

CUT TO:

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - LATE DAY

Ronnie is wearing a brown corduroy jacket. He is attempting to tie his neck tie in the side mirror of Laz's truck.

Lincoln, also wearing his Sunday best, steps up behind him.

LINCOLN

You Ronnie?

RONNIE

Yeah.

LINCOLN

I'm Lincoln. Guess I'm gonna be your best man.

RONNIE

(ultimately accepting)

Okay.

LINCOLN

You havin' trouble with that tie?
Cuz I'm pretty good at it.

Ronnie nods. Lincoln steps behind him to tie the tie.

LINCOLN

Gotta do it like this or I get all turned around.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - LATE DAY

Laz is wearing the same suit he wore at the cafe with Rose. He is seated in Ronnie's trailer, outside the back bedroom door.

Angela steps out from the bedroom with a grin.

ANGELA

She's ready for you.

INT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - BACK BEDROOM - LATE DAY

Laz opens the door, carefully looking around the doorjam. He sees her standing before the dresser mirror. She looks beautiful, simple, and elegant.

Rae desperately searches Laz's eyes for approval.

LAZARUS

Now that's sharp. That's real sharp. Miss Ella Mae set you up, didn't she? You like it?

RAE

I've had nice things before but I always ruined 'em somehow.

LAZARUS

Well, this one's yours now. You ready to take care of it?

Rae bows her head. She fights back tears.

RAE

I want to. More'n anything. But I...

Laz holds her face in his hands. He speaks softly.

LAZARUS

Now... let's stop that.
(smiles)

You and me... we can handle this.
You hear me, gal? We gonna be just
fine. Now live ya life. Pull your
shit together and live your life.

His words are piercing and true. Rae nods, decides.

RAE

Okay.

R.L.'s words are heard as Rae wraps her arms around Laz and
rests her head on his chest.

RAE

I don't want you to let go.

LAZARUS

Maybe I won't.

R.L. (V.O.)

When I was a child, I talked like a
child. I thought like a child, I
reasoned like a child.

CUT TO:

EXT. RONNIE'S TRAILER - LATE DAY

Ronnie turns toward the trailer. He is in his suit, standing
in his front yard – Lincoln at his side. R.L. stands to the
side with a Bible in his hands.

R.L. (V.O.)

When I became a man, I put childish
ways behind me.

Ronnie is amazed with what he sees. Laz leads beautiful Rae
down the steps as Angela tends to her side.

R.L. (V.O.)

Now we see but a poor reflection as
in the mirror; then we shall see
face to face. I know in part; then I
shall know fully, even as I am fully
known.

Rae holds firm to Laz's arm as they come together on the green grass to witness and perform this union.

R.L. (V.O.)

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

(Looks to Laz)

Who gives this girl in marriage?

LAZARUS

I do.

Lazarus takes a few steps with Rae, offering her arm to Ronnie. Ronnie and Laz stay locked in each other's gaze.

LAZARUS

You got her now?

Laz stands next to Angela as Ronnie and Rae face R.L. together.

R.L.

Ronnie. Rae. I want you to look at each other and listen to me carefully. Do you understand?

RAE & RONNIE

Yes. Yes, sir.

They both obey – each with a serious expression.

R.L.

I require and charge you both as you stand in the presence of God to remember that love and loyalty alone will avail as a foundation of a happy and enduring home.

(to Lincoln)

Go on, hand it to him.

Lincoln steps toward Ronnie and holds up the black velvet. Ronnie takes the gold chain and carefully wraps it around Rae's waist.

R.L.

No human ties are more tender. No
vows more sacred than those you now
assume.

Laz looks on – a conflicted emotion of joy and loss.

R.L.

If these solemn vows be kept
inviolable, the home which you are
establishing will abide in peace and
your life will be filled with joy.

Angela reaches over and takes Laz's hand in hers.

CUT TO:

EXT. FREEWAY / INT. RONNIE & RAE'S NEW CAR - DAY

Ronnie is at the wheel of the Chevy Caprice. Rae sits silently
next to him.

Rae looks out the window as a huge 18 wheeler rolls up on
her side. She tries to ignore it and the tension it brings.

She turns to see that Ronnie is sweating. Another truck is
on his side sandwiching them in. An attack is coming over
Ronnie.

His breath is short. His chest tightens. Rae reaches over
and gently strokes the back of his neck.

RONNIE

I gotta pull over.

He breaks. The two trucks zoom ahead as Ronnie breaks to the
side. Dust flies as the Chevy skids to a stop on the side of
the road.

Trucks zip by shaking the car, as Ronnie tries to get control
of his breathing.

Rae tries to stay calm, stroking the back of his neck as he
struggles for breath. He puts his forehead against the wheel

to stave off the building nausea.

RONNIE
(through clenched
teeth)
FUCK!

Fear comes to Rae's face as she notices her middle finger scratching at the back of Ronnie's neck. She pulls it away and shoves her hand between her thighs.

Her eyes close as the burning builds. She grips the gold chain around her waist.

FLASH TO

QUICK CUTS

The chain, tight around Rae as she struggles. Rae panting and sweating on Laz's floor. She reaches out. Her hand lands on the strings of his guitar. A single string is plucked.

FLASH BACK TO:

EXT. FREEWAY/ INT. RONNIE & RAE'S NEW CAR - DAY

Rae opens her eyes – the low note still sounding in her head. She places her hand back on his neck. And then, soft as a prayer:

RAE
(singing)
You are my sunshine. My only sunshine.
You make me happy, when times are
gray.

Ronnie slowly turns and looks at Rae, his head still resting on the steering wheel. The panting has slowed. Color starts returning to his cheeks.

RAE
(singing)
You'll never know dear, how much I
love you.
Please don't take, my sunshine away.

The anxiety is gone. Ronnie takes a breath and looks at Rae, humbled and thankful of her power to soothe him.

RAE
See. We're okay.

Rae is smiling.

CUT TO BLACK:

THE END