

HONEYDRIPPER

Written by
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We hear a strange, single, BENT NOTE.

1 EXT. SHARECROPPER SHACK - ECU FINGERS - LATE AFTERNOON 1
We follow a small boy's FINGERS on a strange contraption-

WIDER

SCRATCH, 10 years old, has a `DIDDLEY BOW', a piece of baling wire nailed to the side of the unpainted shack so it is stretched taut. He moves an old corn cob under it as a fret and makes TWANGY, pitch-shifting NOTES as he plucks the wire.

His friend LONNIE stands moving his fingers over a BOARD he has laid on the side of the porch floor. A few scrawny CHICKENS run around in the yard behind them-

LONNIE

Leave off with that, Scratch.

SCRATCH

Aint bothering you.

LONNIE

Yes it is. That aint no kind of music.

We see that the board has PIANO KEYS drawn across it and that Lonnie is pretending to play a song on it-

SCRATCH

Least I make a sound.

LONNIE

Yeah and it's a nasty one.

Lonnie looks at the sky-

SCRATCH

You want to try again tonight?

Lonnie sits on the edge of the porch, gauging the time from the setting sun-

LONNIE

Might as well.

2 EXT. 1ST COTTON FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON 2

SLIDE GUITAR plays. A tuft of RAW COTTON bobs on the stem and we begin to scroll OPENING CREDITS-

2.

We TILT and RACK to look over a FIELD OF COTTON, the bolls plumped out and ready for picking, blowing in the breeze.

A HARVEST HAND steps into the shot, looks toward the setting sun, wipes his face with a bandanna then stoops to pick the row in front of him. We PULL BACK to see other PICKERS, men and women in denim coveralls, old gingham dresses and hard work shoes, wearing straw hats against the sun and trailing LONG WHITE SACKS between their legs and behind them.

The boys walk down between them in the opposite direction-

3 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - PINEY WOODS - LATE AFTERNOON 3

MUSIC CONTINUES. We see the boys walking on a PATH through the PINES-

4 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, RAILROAD TRACKS - AERIAL SHOT - LATE AFTERNOON 4

MUSIC CONTINUES. We float over RAILROAD TRACKS cutting through flat, piney woods, catching up the boys, who walk on the ties-

5 EXT. ARMY BARRACKS - EARLY EVENING 5

MUSIC CONTINUES. The boys stroll past white buildings of an ARMY BARRACKS. SOLDIERS, black and white, DRILL on the grounds-

6 EXT. RAILROAD BRIDGE, RIVER - EARLY EVENING 6

The river rolls past us in the FG as the boys cross a

RAILROAD BRIDGE. We SUPERIMPOSE-

ALABAMA - 1950

OPENING CREDITS END

7 EXT. HONEYDRIPPER LOUNGE - NIGHT **7**
We hear PIANO MUSIC as we CRANE DOWN toward the HONEYDRIPPER LOUNGE, a ramshackle wooden roadhouse at a rural crossroads.
3.

BLUE-colored light bulbs (a few broken) FLICK ON and OFF erratically around the HONEYDRIPPER SIGN as we TRACK toward and then THROUGH it on the way to the entrance, catching up with Lonnie and Scratch.

The boys step under the door-light, frantic with insects, and go up on their toes to peek in through a window-

8 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - NIGHT **8**
An OVERHEAD ANGLE of long fingers on piano keys-

SINGER

A woman in her late 50's, early 60's, BERTHA MAE SPIVEY, leans into a MICROPHONE from where she sits on a stool on a little makeshift stage, a glass of whiskey in hand, and SINGS-

BERTHA MAE

I know a gal name of Betty Sue
Shook it so much
She got the German flu
No matter how she done it
No matter how she done it
No matter how she done it
She done it just the same

As she sings we PAN and TRACK, moving through the large, near-empty COUNTRY ROADHOUSE-

BERTHA MAE

You women don't worry
About your life
She made Jack the Ripper
Throw away his knife-

Only a few die-hard REGULARS are scattered at the tables and bar stools. A pretty young woman in her late teens, CHINA DOLL, is behind the bar, head held in her hands, listening aimlessly.

BERTHA MAE

No matter how she done it
No matter how she done it
No matter how she done it
She done it just the same

Lonnie and Scratch step in, cautiously looking around, hoping that nobody will notice and tell them to leave.

4.

They plant themselves next to the piano, Lonnie intently watching the long fingers work the keys- we TILT to see TYRONE `Pinetop' Purvis, proprietor and piano player, in his 50's. He acts as if the boys aren't there, concentrating on the music. We SHIFT to include Bertha Mae as she wraps up the song-

BERTHA MAE

A copper brought her in
She didn't need no bail
She shook it for the judge
He threw the cop in jail
No matter how she done it
No matter how she done it
No matter how she done it
She done it just the same

SLICK, a pretty, sharply-dressed man in his late 40's at the bar, and MACEO, who sits at a table near the bandstand smiling throughout, APPLAUD. The sound makes the room seem more empty.

Ty stands, nods to METALMOUTH SIMS, a slight, worried-looking harmonica player who sits behind Bertha Mae-

TY

You take it for a while.

As Ty crosses to the bar we hear RECORDED MUSIC booming from outside-

BERTHA MAE

They makin all that racket again at
Toussaint's.

TY

Yeah. And all them people over there buying drinks and throwing their money after them dice and whatnot. Lucky we got none a that here.

Metalmouth launches into a HARMONICA INTRO. Ty pauses at the counter next to Slick, who is attentively watching Bertha Mae-

BERTHA MAE

You can drink your liquor
You can drink your cold can beer-

SLICK

She sounding good, huh?

TY

Sounds fine. Always has.

5.

BERTHA MAE

You can drink your good whiskey
You can drink your cold can beer-

SLICK

Not much of a crowd.

TY

Not a crowd at all. Just some stiffes who want to drink theirselves to sleep without the music wakin em up.

SLICK

You ought to advertise. Got an attraction like Bertha Mae-

BERTHA MAE

You can lay up with your sweet gal
But Poppa don't you leave me here

TY

Singin is one thing, Slick.
Whether people want to look at you while you do it is another.

SLICK

(defensive) You saying something

about-

Maceo arrives to join them, interrupting-

MACEO

Got quite a number over to
Toussaint's place tonight.

TY

Sounds like it.

MACEO

Lots of young folks. Come to
listen to that box of his.

China Doll brings Ty a glass of whiskey. He gives her a sad
smile-

TY

Thanks, China Doll.

We FOLLOW as Ty crosses to the door-

6.

MACEO (O.S.)

Don't see why we don't just turn
our box on and let folks feed it
nickels like they do.

SLICK (O.S.)

The lady is singing.

MACEO (O.S.)

But didn't nobody come to listen to
her, Slick.

Ty looks out the door at-

POV - EXT. ACE OF SPADES CLUB

-the RED-lit ACE OF SPADES CLUB across the road, PEOPLE
hanging out in front, LAUGHTER heard from within-

HONEYDRIPPER

Ty reacts. Behind him, Maceo indicates the near-empty room-

MACEO

Like the man say, you can't argue
with failure.

STOKELY, a bitter drunk who holds on to the end of the bar,
calls out to them-

STOKELY

You know why Slick here is like a
preacher?

Slick tenses, used to this-

STOKELY

Cause he does all his best work on
his knees.

Stokely almost chokes with laughter-

MACEO

Never mind him, he just a drunk-

STOKELY

I hear she put a ring through it
and use it to yank him around the
house.

Slick starts to rise but Maceo puts a hand on his arm-

7.

MACEO

You know Tyrone don't allow no
scufflin here, Slick.

STOKELY

I oughta get me a old woman too,
take care of the groceries. Just
got to sweet-talk her some, give
her a good poke now and then-

MACEO

You gonna drink, Stokely, or you
gonna lay out back recoverin from
that busted head you about to get?

DELILAH

Gentlemen-

They all turn to see DELILAH, Ty's wife, coming out from the
back of the club. She is dressed for church-

SLICK

(doffs his hat) Miss Delilah-

DELILAH

Let's behave ourselves. (sees)
What are you boys doing in here?
Out!

Lonnie and Scratch, busted, hurry out. Delilah turns her attention to China Doll-

DELILAH

And what are you doing behind that bar?

CHINA DOLL

It's just for a minute.

DELILAH

That's sixty seconds too long.
Maceo, you get back there and take that child's place.

China Doll mopes as she steps out from behind-

DELILAH

You bring people their food. Don't you be messing with their liquor.

CHINA DOLL

Nobody's eating.

8.

DELILAH

That's cause nobody's here but these couple lost souls, haven't had an appetite since they give over to the devil.

Maceo gets behind the counter as Delilah heads for Ty at the door-

BERTHA MAE

At Pinetop's Honeydripper
That's where I get my cold can beer
At Pinetop's Honeydripper
That's where I get my cold can beer-

Maceo reluctantly moves down to take the order of NADINE, a large, handsome woman with a prominent gold tooth who has

just stepped in-

NADINE

Evenin, Maceo. You lookin good tonight.

MACEO

Likewise, Miss Nadine. What can I do for you?

NADINE

(flirting) You know what you can do for me, sweet man.

Maceo tries to slip the hook and be polite at the same time-

MACEO

What would you like to drink?

DOORWAY

Ty watches the CROWD in front of the Ace of Spades. Delilah comes up to join him, indicates his drink-

DELILAH

How many is that tonight?

TY

Don't dog me about that, baby. Not tonight.

DELILAH

I don't want China Doll behind that bar.

9.

TY

She got to help out.

DELILAH

Not there she doesn't. You know she's not sposed to get excited-

TY

Not much chance of that in here. (wistful) Harvest hands all been crowdin into Toussaint's place. The young ones.

DELILAH

You'll get some of them.

TY

They stick their noses in here, get one little sniff of the music, and they gone.

DELILAH

(joking) Maybe that's the wages of sin.

TY

(bitter) Aint no sin happenin here tonight, baby, and there sure as hell aint no wages. Your God wants to chastise some sinners He best move on over to Toussaint's, got a whole barroom crowded with em.

DELILAH

He isn't `my God'. He's everybody's God.

He looks at his wife-

TY

How that tent meeting went tonight?

DELILAH

Viola Underwood found the Lord.

TY

I thought she found Him last year when they come through.

10.

DELILAH

(smiles) Well, she must have lost Him again between then and now, cause she come down that aisle tonight hollering in tongues.

TY

The Spirit didn't move you, though?

DELILAH

(thoughtful) Not yet. Might be too late for me.

Delilah surveys the room-

DELILAH

I can't believe you're serving
Alton Stokely.

STOKELY

Stokely has to use two hands to keep his glass steady as he
drinks-

DELILAH (O.S.)

That poor man-

TY (O.S.)

Toussaint cut his credit off.
Either he gets it here-

TY AND DELILAH

TY

-or he drinks that paint-peeler
Willie Pettigrew cooks up back in
the swamp.

DELILAH

He's gonna drink himself to death
in here.

TY

Least he won't go blind first.

Delilah shakes her head and heads out the door-

DELILAH

Imonna go home and say a prayer for
that man.

11.

TY

(calling after) Say one for me
too, baby.

STAGE

Bertha Mae is singing straight to Slick now, as Metalmouth

backs her up on the harmonica-

BERTHA MAE

Come here sweet Poppa
Let me whisper in your ear
Come here sweet Poppa
Let me whisper in your ear
Go back to Alabama
But don't you leave your Momma here

Only Slick applauds-

SLICK

That was outstandin, baby. You
still got the voice.

Bertha Mae, a little unsteady, holds onto Slick's arm as he helps her off the stage-

BERTHA MAE

You think so?

SLICK

Sent a chill down my spine to hear
you.

Bertha Mae looks to Ty as he steps back in-

BERTHA MAE

I might be a little late Saturday,
Tyrone.

TY

(mutters, embarrassed) Don't need
to come in if you don't want to.

She stops dead. Stares at him till he has to let it out-

TY

I've made other arrangements.

BERTHA MAE

Other arrangements-

12.

TY

Try something new in here.

SLICK

You can't do that!

BERTHA MAE

It's his place, darlin, he can do whatever he want.

Bertha Mae nods to Ty, holding onto her dignity for all it's worth-

BERTHA MAE

You know where to find me if you need me.

Bertha Mae pulls Slick out the door. China Doll watches after them, troubled, while Ty pours himself another drink-

MACEO

(softly) I put the box on now, Ty?

TY

Yeah. Put the box on.

MACEO

Imonna crank it up some, see if we can draw a little life in here-

Maceo crosses and plugs an ancient-looking tabletop JUKEBOX in.

The jukebox sputters to life, LIGHTS FLASHING ON and MUSIC BLARING for a moment, then the LIGHTS FLICKER and all the POWER in the club goes OFF!

9 EXT. HONEYDRIPPER - NIGHT

9

The Honeydripper SIGN is the last to FLICKER and DIE.

Lonnie and Scratch watch from under the streetlight-

LONNIE

There it go again.

SCRATCH

Lectricity don't like that jukebox.

13.

**10 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - NIGHT
DARKNESS.**

10

MACEO

Damn.

TY

China Doll?

A MATCH is struck, FLARES as China Doll lights a KEROSENE LAMP she's pulled from under the bar-

CHINA DOLL

Got to get the power company in here-

TY

No you don't. They turned my juice off last month- don't want them sniffin around that splice job Maceo done.

MACEO

Must be a short circuit in the juke here-

He yanks the plug out of the wall as Ty steps up to reassure the few patrons-

TY

Don't worry folks, bar's still open.

NADINE

It's nice like this. Kind of romantic.

MACEO

Imonna have to go out back, wiggle some things around.

NADINE

Don't be wigglin nothin round less I'm there to see it.

Maceo rolls his eyes as he passes Ty on the way out with a FLASHLIGHT. He freezes in his tracks as the FLASHLIGHT BEAM hits a FIGURE standing in the doorway-

It is SHERIFF HIRAM PUGH, large and in charge. Pugh strolls into the club as if he owns it.

SHERIFF PUGH

Evenin, folks.

TY

Evenin, Sheriff.

Sheriff Pugh looks around the near-empty club-

SHERIFF PUGH

Your lights gone out.

TY

Looks like it.

SHERIFF PUGH

Don't know but that be a vilation
of somethin or other.

Ty has played this game before, trying to hold his ground
without pissing off the white man with the badge-

TY

We just about to close up here.

Pugh sniffs the air-

SHERIFF PUGH

Your wife been cookin?

TY

Not tonight. Went to the revival
tent.

SHERIFF PUGH

(grins) I stood by there a while.
Them nigras was singin up a storm.

Ty doesn't respond. Sheriff Pugh stops right next to
Stokely, giving him a dead-pan stare as he speaks. Stokely
won't meet his eyes-

SHERIFF PUGH

I just come out here to look in on
Toussaint- had that shooting two
nights ago.

TY

Lot's of fighting in there.

SHERIFF PUGH

There is that. But me and Old
Toussaint got us a greement.

(MORE)

15.

SHERIFF PUGH(cont'd)

You get these field hands suckin
down that whiskey, hop em all up
with music, there's gonna be some
razors drawn. He only call me if
it's a fatality.

MACEO

Never been a killin in here. Them
youngbloods know better-

SHERIFF PUGH

-than to mess with Tyrone Purvis.

He turns his attention to Tyrone-

SHERIFF PUGH

You got quite the reputation round
here, Tyrone. Say you put some
poor black boy in the grave.

It gets very quiet, the HISS of the KEROSENE LANTERN growing
tense and insistent.

China Doll looks from Sheriff Pugh to Ty's face, searching
for a flicker of evidence. Ty stays deadpan-

TY

Just people talkin.

The Sheriff steps to put his face very close to Ty's, an edge
of menace in his voice when he speaks softly-

SHERIFF PUGH

You remember that this is my
county, Tyrone. What goes on goes
on cause I let it. Don't want to
get too big for your britches out
here.

Ty holds Pugh's eyes for an agonizingly long moment, then the
sheriff turns and heads for the door-

SHERIFF PUGH

You folks have a pleasant evening,
now.

They all wait for him to clear the door before they exhale.

STOKELY

A nigger aint shit in this world.

Maceo snatches the whiskey bottle from Stokely-

16.

MACEO

Speakin for yourself.

STOKELY

You didn't have this club, Tyrone,
what you think you be?

We TIGHTEN on Ty's face. He has been thinking about this
very thing-

STOKELY (O.S.)

Wouldn't be nothin. And if that
aint true then grits aint
groceries.

A long TRAIN WHISTLE echoes outside-

11 **EXT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - NIGHT**

11

Bertha Mae pauses as she climbs the FRONT PORCH of her two-
story wooden HOUSE, the nicest in the neighborhood, listening
to the TRAIN WHISTLE with a troubled look on her face. Slick
waits for her with the door open-

BERTHA MAE

That is a terrible noise.

SLICK

Just the northbound from Talledega.
Sounds like it always does.

BERTHA MAE

Like a soul bein carried away from
this life.

ANOTHER WHISTLE-

SLICK

Come on in, darlin. You catch your
death out here.

12 **EXT. RAILROAD STATION - NIGHT**

12

We hear the TRAIN WHISTLE again as the WHEELS ROLL and the
TRAIN strobes past us, picking up speed as it pulls out from

the yard-

When it clears we see a LONE FIGURE standing across the tracks. He steps forward and catches a bit of light--

17.

SONNY BLAKE, 20's, rumped from hard travelling. He carries a GUITAR CASE and something bulky in a SACK-

SHACK THOMAS, an older man in a PULLMAN PORTER'S UNIFORM stands under the moth-addled light on the tiny STATION PLATFORM, watching Sonny-

SHACK THOMAS

Lucky the high-sheriff aint here to see you crawl outta that boxcar.

SONNY

He come round here much?

SHACK THOMAS

Only when he's bored.

Sonny reaches Shack at the platform-

SONNY

You working that train?

SHACK THOMAS

Kansas City to New Orleans.

SONNY

What you get off here for?

SHACK THOMAS

I growed up here. Still got people. How bout you?

SONNY

(shrugs) Got tired of sleepin in a boxcar. Listen, is there a place to-

SHACK THOMAS

(points) Switchman's shed, right over there, has got a cot. Don't mind the rats none, less you got food on you- and I can see you and a good meal has been strangers for some time.

Sonny looks at the shed, unenthusiastic-

SHACK THOMAS

You get into town tomorrow an need
somethin, tell em Shack Thomas sent
you. They know who you talkin
about.

18.

SONNY

Thanks. Hey, what's the name of
this town?

Shack points to the SIGN hanging down from the lip of the
platform roof-

SIGN

HARMONY

The sign reads-

SONNY (O.S.)

Name like that, must be a good
place for musicians.

PLATFORM

Shack laughs as he heads away-

SHACK THOMAS

Only night I ever spent in jail was
a town called Liberty. Sun comes
up, you'll see where you landed.
And you best be out of that shed by
first light.

13 **INT. HONEYDRIPPER - LATE NIGHT - CU MONEY**

13

A few wet, crumpled BILLS and dirty COINS are spread out on
the bartop-

MACEO (O.S.)

It's just a weekday night-

WIDER

Still operating by LANTERN LIGHT, Ty and Maceo look at the night's dismal take, as China Doll lays chairs on top of tables-

TY

I owe the chicken man, I owe the ice man, I owe the liquor man-

MACEO

Least you don't owe the electric company.

19.

TY

(indicates the dark room) Yeah, that's a big relief.

MACEO

(worried) You thinkin bout closing down?

Ty frowns, reaches under the counter and brings up a POSTER. He spreads it out on the counter top. It reads-

SPECIAL ATTRACTION

New Orleans Singing Sensation

`GUITAR' SAM

TY

What you think?

MACEO

Biggest act in New Orleans, got him a hit on the radio-

TY

He's playing here Saturday night. Figured I'd wait till Bertha Mae was gone to put this up.

Ty turns to look for the right spot to fix the poster-

MACEO

Here? You mean like in this room here?

TY

You know the Tomcat Club in
Texarkana?

MACEO

Big Jim Jamison's place-

TY

Just went out of business.

MACEO

Damn-

TY

And since Sam is giggin his way
over to Tulsa, that means he got
the date open-

20.

MACEO

But you aint never had a guitar pl-

Ty gives Maceo a warning look, which China Doll notes-

TY

I'm having one now.

MACEO

What you gonna pay the man with?

Ty glances at China Doll, uneasy-

TY

You just worry about gettin these
hung up everywhere in the county
tomorrow. Payday come Saturday, he
gonna draw alla them cotton pickers
and soldiers boys in here, get us
back in the black.

Ty looks around at the empty club-

TY

They gonna take me down, it won't
be without a fight.

Maceo holds the poster up to the lamplight, warming to the
idea-

MACEO

Guitar Sam at the Honeydripper.

Man, this joint is going to jump!

14 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/1ST COTTON FIELD - EARLY MORNING 14

SUNRISE. An OLD MAN in coveralls leads a MULE along the side of the road.

A TRUCK carrying two dozen PICKERS in its open bed approaches-

TRUCK

One of the pickers, DEX, turns to look back at the man and mule-

DEX

Aint seen no mule in a long time.

The other pickers, men and women, don't look interested or even fully awake yet-

21.

DEX

I knew this was Alabama, but that's the Stone Ages, man.

One of the other men, HAM, looks him over. Dex is little and combative and has a nasty-looking SCAR on his face. Ham is big and morose, with a deep, grumpy voice-

HAM

Where you from, boy?

DEX

Memphis.

HAM

Down on you vacation?

A few snickers-

DEX

Got in a piece of trouble up there with the white folks, need to bide my time for a spell.

JUNEBUG, a local man with a nervous air, jumps in-

JUNEBUG

You bide any time in these fields,

bossman gonna fire your ass for
takin up space.

DEX

Aint no worry bout that. I'm a
cotton-pickin fool.

HAM

You a fool, all right.

More snickers and the truck stops at the side of a COTTON
FIELD. Somebody lets the tailgate down and they begin to
climb off-

DEX

And where you from, Brother Bear?

HAM

Missippi.

DEX

Then this a real step up for you.
Folks round here has discovered
fire and whatnot-

22.

HAM

That trouble you in have anything
to do with runnin your mouth?

The pickers unroll the sacks they pick up from the pile
that's been left and begin to spread out at the base of the
unpicked rows-

DEX

Had to do with somebody get on my
nerves and I had to deal with him.

HAM

Must of been somebody kind of puny.

Dex turns to face the much larger Ham-

DEX

As I recall he just about your
size.

The two men stare at each other for a long moment. Way too
early to fight. Dex breaks eye contact and moves toward a
row-

DEX

What's this place we at?

JUNEBUG

Nearest town is Harmony. This Mr.
Silas Tugwell's place.

He nods toward Dex's row-

JUNEBUG

You better get pickin.

DEX

Cotton aint goin nowhere.

JUNEBUG

More you get first thing when the
dew still on it, the more it weighs
when it tip that scale.

Dex's gaze falls upon a tall, strong-looking young woman
starting down the row next to his-

DEX

You live here too?

She gives him a weary look-

23.

DEX

(shakes his head) You got my
sympathies.

15 **EXT. TOWN - TRAIN TRACKS - EARLY MORNING**

15

A WIDE SHOT of the TRACKS that cut the town in two.

CLOSER

Sonny stands on the tracks just as the SUN RISES, pondering-
which side of the tracks is for white people, which for the
colored.

He hears GUITAR MUSIC to one side, steps cautiously toward it-

16 **EXT. MAIN STREET - GENERAL STORE - EARLY MORNING**

16

Sonny wanders down the street lugging his sack and case,

moving toward the sound of a SLIDE GUITAR being played expertly-

An irate-looking WHITE LADY glares at Sonny as she picks up the milk bottles from her stoop, steps inside and slams the door. Sonny moves ahead, uneasy-

We TIGHTEN on his face as he stops to listen, the MUSIC ECHOING, seeming to come from here, then from there, then suddenly from right behind him-

He turns-

POSSUM, blind, with his chair tilted back against the not-yet-open GENERAL STORE, PLAYS expertly on a beat-up old GUITAR. Sonny lays his case down to listen for a moment, watching the man's fingers-

Possum gets a whiff of him. He keeps playing as he speaks-

POSSUM

Somebody slept in the railroad yard.

Sonny watches the blind man's fingers move on the strings-

SONNY

Yall can play that thing.

POSSUM

Been doin it near forever.

24.

SONNY

(looking around) Listen, which side of the tracks am I-

POSSUM

The wrong side for you.

SONNY

What you doing here then?

POSSUM

White folks look right through me. How much mischief an old blind spook like me gonna get up to anyhow?

Sonny surveys the street-

SONNY

Where our people go for music
around here?

POSSUM

There's a couple places just a
little bit out of town. At the
crossroads.

SONNY

Long walk?

POSSUM

You in a hurry?

Possum finishes his song-

SONNY

How old is that box you playin,
Pops?

POSSUM

(smiles) Second one that ever was-
an the devil's got the first. How
bout yours?

Possum gently nudges Sonny's case with his toe. Sonny is
surprised at the blind man's perception-

SONNY

Brand new. Made it myself.

POSSUM

(whistles) Made it hisself-

25.

SONNY

That's right. So these clubs-

POSSUM

Old Toussaint, owns the Ace of
Spades, don't feature live music.
And Pinetop Purvis, owns the
Honeydripper Lounge? He don't care
bout no guitar. Won't have one
under his roof.

SONNY

That don't make sense.

Possum scratches his head-

POSSUM

Yeah- when a musician put his hand
to murder, nine times outa ten it's
a drummer done it. But Pinetop a
piano man-

SONNY

He killed somebody?

POSSUM

That's the story. Might be true,
and it might not.

17 EXT. HONEYDRIPPER - MORNING - TY 17

Ty is tacking one of the Guitar Sam POSTERS on the front of
the building.

POSSUM (V.O.)

But if you meet the man, you damn
well don't be askin him about it.

A CRACKLE and a curse from the side of the roadhouse-

MACEO (O.S.)

Damn!

Ty looks up-

TY

What's the matter?

MACEO (O.S.)

I got a shock.

26.

TY

Thought you used to work for the
power company.

SIDE OF ROADHOUSE, MACEO

Maceo wrestles with the jury-rigged WIRES that run out from
the battered, rusting POWER BOX-

MACEO

I drove a supply truck.

TY (O.S.)

Guitar Sam aint gonna play by no candlelight.

MACEO

(sniffs) I smell bacon.

TY (O.S.)

You must of burnt your porky ass with that lectricity.

CHINA DOLL (O.S.)

Breakfast ready!

FRONT OF ROADHOUSE

China Doll has stepped out from the club-

TY

Where's your mama?

CHINA DOLL

Already over to the Mayor's. She told me to come here and make sure you eat something fore you start runnin around.

Maceo comes around from the side-

MACEO

That is a sweet woman you got.

CHINA DOLL

You got one waitin for you if you want her.

Maceo makes a face-

27.

MACEO

You mean Nadine?

18 **INT. HONEYDRIPPER - MORNING**

18

They step into the club. Plates of bacon, eggs and biscuits sit on one of the tables-

CHINA DOLL

(teasing) Come in here every night
makin them cow-eyes at you-

Ty and Maceo sit-

MACEO

She seems like the kind could
smother a man-

CHINA DOLL

She makes all her own clothes.

TY

(smiles) Darlin, that's not the
kind of thing a man cares about
from a woman.

The LIGHTS that went out last night suddenly FLICKER ON-

MACEO

Hey, I fixed it!

TY

You didn't do no such thing. It
just decided to come back on.

MACEO

Decided.

TY

Just like it decided to switch off
last night. You not even in the
conversation.

CHINA DOLL

Miss Nadine makes some good money
too, sewing for people.

MACEO

That woman scares me. Last ole boy
that give her a tumble, Nappy
Carpenter?

(MORE)

28.

MACEO (cont'd)

She cook for him, fixed him up all
kinds of nice new clothes, kept him
in gin and poker chips-

CHINA DOLL

Don't see no problem with that.

MACEO

Well, come four, five months, a man starts to- sorry, China Doll, but this just the way it is- a man gots needs.

TY

Nadine look like she can take care of those, too-

MACEO

You eat chicken every morning, noon and night for five months, you get a taste for some different kind of meat, right? (looks to China Doll) Maybe I shouldn't be-

CHINA DOLL

Aint gonna tell me something I haven't heard worse.

MACEO

Well, Nappy goes out and has him a- a porkchop or two, let's say- and he comes back from Toussaint's one night feeling no pain, smelling like- like porkchops- the way a man will- and he falls out on Nadine's couch and commences to snore. Wake up the next mornin, finds she had took all his clothes off without him knowin it-

TY

Man was dog drunk-

MACEO

Miss Nadine come in with a skillet in her hand, hot grits bubbling in it, says "Baby, I got your breakfast." "Not this morning, Nadine," he says, sittin up, "don't think I could eat a thing." "Well then," she says, "we can't let this go to waste, can we?" and she dump that whole hot bubblin mess right in the man's lap.

TY

(wincing) Owwww!

MACEO

Then she got busy with that hot iron on his head. Screams didn't bring the neighbors in, she would of killed that man.

They are all quiet for a moment, contemplating-

TY

You got to admit it, though- woman is an artist with that Singer machine.

SONNY (O.S.)

Scuse me?

They turn to see Sonny standing in the doorway-

SONNY

Which one of you is Mr. Pinetop?

Ty's eyes fix on Sonny's face for a moment- something familiar there- then go down to the guitar case at his feet-

TY

We aint hirin.

SONNY

I can play anything-

Ty indicates the Guitar Sam POSTER hanging behind the bar-

TY

Already got me a professional.

Sonny looks a little shaky-

SONNY

Guitar Sam really coming all the way out here?

TY

That so surprising?

SONNY

No, no-- uhm, Mr. Shack Thomas said that if I was to-

TY

You know Shack?

30.

SONNY

We uh- we travelled together-

Ty gives him a once-over-

TY

When's the last time you ate solid
food, young man?

Sonny has to think-

TY

(to China Doll) Take him back and
fix him somethin, China Doll.
Standin there all hungry-eyed, puts
me off my breakfast.

SONNY

That's real kind of you-

Sonny pulls his hat off as he follows China Doll, who is
suddenly quiet and self-conscious, back to the kitchen-

MACEO

Must of come in on the northbound
last night.

TY

Look like he got cooties, too.
Straw in them boxcars is full of
em.

MACEO

Never cared to travel that way.

Ty grows somber, reminiscing-

TY

I was out there ridin them rails
between the wars. Seem like half
the country headin west rolled past
the other half comin back east.
(musing) Every one of us scrapin
for the next meal-

COOL BREEZE (O.S.)

This is the place.

They turn to see COOL BREEZE, a hard-looking, sharply-dressed character, leading the prosperous looking MR. SIMMONS into the club as if they aren't there-

31.

COOL BREEZE

Yall can tear things down, put things up- got a lot of potential.

MR. SIMMONS

Looks bigger in here than it does from the outside.

TY

I help you gentlemen?

COOL BREEZE

Just showing the man gonna run this place what he's got.

Ty stands-

TY

This is my place.

A frozen moment. Then Maceo stands as well, backing up his friend.

Cool Breeze puts one foot up on the chair next to Ty, licks a finger and dabs at his shoeshine with it-

COOL BREEZE

You the piano player, right?

TY

Name's Tyrone- call me Pinetop Purvis.

COOL BREEZE

Pinetop Purvis who owes two hundred dollars to Lucky Hardaway up in Little Rock-

TY

He's gonna get his-

COOL BREEZE

Pinetop who missed last month's rent-

TY

After this weekend-

COOL BREEZE

After this weekend you gonna be the same raggedy-ass piano player can't pay his debts off and Mr. Simmons here gonna be the new proprietor.

32.

TY

Lucky give me two weeks-

COOL BREEZE

Lucky got a better offer.

He nods toward Mr. Simmons-

TY

He can't do that.

Cool Breeze takes his foot down and gets up in Ty's face. He lets his jacket fall open so the butt of his .44 PISTOL is visible-

COOL BREEZE

You don't think so?

MACEO

(trying to defuse) What if we got our payment for him Monday?

Cool Breeze doesn't take his eyes off Ty's-

COOL BREEZE

Saturday night.

MACEO

We can do that-

COOL BREEZE

Not just a taste- the whole two hundred.

TY

And I throw in a twenny-five cent tip for his messenger boy.

COOL BREEZE

I'll be here.

TY

In the meantime, we not open yet.
Which means yall are trespassin.

Cool Breeze grins, still locking eyeballs with Ty-

COOL BREEZE

You seen enough, Mr. Simmons?

MR. SIMMONS

I believe I have.

33.

Cool Breeze breaks eye contact, strolls out, followed by Simmons-

COOL BREEZE

Yeah, somebody could make something
out of this place. Wouldn't take
much work at all.

Ty and Maceo wait till the men are gone before they speak-

TY

We cleared over two hundred that
one weekend-

MACEO

Couple years back-

TY

And we didn't have no Louisiana
guitar wizard playin neither.

MACEO

Yeah, they say he draws em like
flies.

TY

That's what they say.

An awkward pause. Both men are shaken. Ty sits back down to think-

MACEO

They say first thing he does is go
to the man that owns the joint,
sticks out his hand and wants that

cash money put in it.

TY

I already sent fifty to his manager.

MACEO

How much you payin him all out?

TY

Another hundred.

MACEO

We'd have to clear three hundred-

TY

I figure we charge folks two dollars to get in, then drinks-

34.

MACEO

(shakes his head) What I'm sayin is, less he sees the green up front the man won't get off the train.

A TRUCK HORN honks outside-

MACEO

What's that now?

Ty, mind working, looks desperate as Maceo exits to see who's honking-

19 **EXT. HONEYDRIPPER - MORNING**

19

A battered TRUCK sits in front of the club. ZEKE, a taciturn white man, and his black loader step out as Maceo approaches-

MACEO

(calls out) Bout time you fellas run by. We just about dry here.

The loader lets down the tailgate to reveal CASES OF BEER AND LIQUOR. He begins to pull them out and pile them on the ground-

ZEKE

Your boss in?

Maceo shouts back into the club-

MACEO

Tyrone! Whiskey wagon come by!

Ty steps out of the club carrying one of the Guitar Sam posters-

TY

Y'all a day late.

Ty nods at the Ace of Spades club across the way-

TY

Old Man Toussaint gonna chew you out.

ZEKE

Toussaint went over to another supplier upstate. We just got you, then we headin down to the army base, officers' club needs servicin. This fifty-six dollars-

35.

TY

(weak grin) My credit no good anymore?

Zeke only has to look at the loader, who starts to put the cases back onto the truck-

TY

Whoah, whoah- what's your hurry?

ZEKE

Nobody that's right in his head sell liquor on credit. Specially not to no darktown roadhouse.

TY

Well this is like a special case, see- we got the harvest coming in, soldiers at the base gonna be let out on leave- Saturday night. Aint enough hootch in this truck to satisfy what we gonna sell-

ZEKE

You pay as you go. That's bidness.

Zeke walks toward the cab of the truck, Ty following him, desperate, waving the poster-

TY

You can come by Monday, get paid
and take back every damn drop I
aint sold! We got Guitar Sam lined
up, you know what that means?!

Zeke steps in and slams the door, the loader doing the same
on the other side of him-

TY

I'll pay you extra- penny a bottle
on the beer and a nickel on the
whiskey!

The truck engine coughs-

TY

(desperate) What if I throw in
five dollars up front, just for you
fellas- ?

Zeke pulls away-

36.

TY

Come on, man, everybody give
credit, that's the American way!

But the truck is gone down the road. Maceo comes up beside
Ty, watching forlornly-

MACEO

Maybe we could buy some busthead
from Willie Pettigrew.

TY

With that sheriff sniffin around
every night? Land my black ass in
jail for good.

Another TRUCK pulls around the bend from the opposite
direction-

MACEO

Then what we gonna do?

The new truck slows to a stop by them. The DRIVER pokes his

head out-

DRIVER

Got a liquor delivery for a Mr.
Lucien Toussaint?

MACEO

That's-

TY

That would be me.

Maceo bites his tongue. Ty plays it through-

TY

I trust they got my check all
right?

DRIVER

Don't spose I'd be here if they
didn't.

Ty glances over to the Ace of Spades, then points behind the
Honeydripper-

TY

Pull it around to the back- we'll
help you unload.

37.

The driver nods and wheels the truck past them. Maceo's
smile fades and he looks to Ty-

MACEO

Man, this better be some Saturday
night.

20 **INT. HONEYDRIPPER - KITCHEN - MORNING**

20

A little kitchen built onto the back of the bar. Sonny sits
wolfing down eggs and toast as China Doll watches him from
the stove-

SONNY

Arkansas. How bout you?

CHINA DOLL

We come here just after Mama met my
step-daddy.

SONNY

Not much happenin, little town like this.

CHINA DOLL

(shrugs) They started up the training base again-

SONNY

That right?

CHINA DOLL

You been in the Army?

SONNY

Uh-huh.

CHINA DOLL

You shoot people?

SONNY

Fixed radios.

CHINA DOLL

They say this new war gonna be a short one.

SONNY

Might be, might not. I was to Japan.

38.

CHINA DOLL

Yeah? What's the people like there?

SONNY

Small.

CHINA DOLL

Yeah?

SONNY

(holds a hand up) Bout that high. And they speak Japanese.

CHINA DOLL

You been to California?

SONNY

(nods) Los Angeles.

CHINA DOLL

Where they make the movies.

SONNY

You go to the movies?

CHINA DOLL

I been once.

He sits back and looks her over-

SONNY

Fine-looking girl like you, ought
to been all kinds of places.

CHINA DOLL

I'm going to em. First I'm going
to beauty school when Mama saves up
the money and then I have a
portable skill-

SONNY

Like playin music.

CHINA DOLL

My step-Daddy says that aint a
skill-

TY (O.S.)

-it's an affliction.

Ty sticks his head in, Maceo behind him with a case of liquor
in his arms-

39.

TY

Come on, China Doll. Got some
bidness in town you gonna help me
with.

Ty gives Sonny a distrustful look-

TY

And you, young man, want to point
yourself west down that highway.
Bout three miles you see a mess of
people working in the fields- it's
harvest time. If you can stoop and

pull, they got a job for you.

He steps out the back door-

TY

And wash up them dishes before you
go.

21 INT. MAYOR WINSHIP'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

21

Delilah is washing breakfast dishes, SINGING a gospel song as
she works-

DELILAH

I see four and twenty elders
Down on their knees
I see four and twenty elders
Down on their knees
Well they all turn together
Standing to greet the rising sun
I see four and twenty elders
Down on their knees

AMANDA WINSHIP, the mayor's pretty, high-strung wife, enters
and hovers uneasily-

AMANDA

Your biscuits were wonderful this
morning, Delilah.

DELILAH

Thank you.

AMANDA

Of course, they always are. I
don't know how you do it.

DELILAH

Just cook em.

40.

AMANDA

When I married Floyd I swear I
couldn't even boil water. Might be
why he insisted I needed help
around the house. He used to come
to the dinner table with a sense of
dread.

DELILAH

Anybody can learn to cook. Just have to put your mind to it.

AMANDA

Maybe you could show me some of your secrets some time.

DELILAH

No secrets to it. Imonna fix some ham with yams and greens today, you want to learn how.

Amanda thinks about it, smiling all the while, sighs-

AMANDA

Maybe some other day.

Delilah isn't surprised by the response-

DELILAH

You just say the word, Miss Amanda, I have you cookin in no time.

Amanda nods, uncomfortable but not leaving. She can't exactly offer to help with the dishes-

AMANDA

I just don't know what I'd do without you.

22 EXT. MAIN STREET - GENERAL STORE - MORNING

Ty, Maceo and China Doll approach the general store. COUPLE enter from the front-

22

A WHITE

TY

What I need is for you to go get friendly with Luther, then I just happen in-

CHINA DOLL

We can't just ask Mr. Skinner?

41.

TY

Mr. Skinner don't want nothin from colored folks but they buy his goods and shine his shoes. You go on ahead, now-

Maceo and China Doll cut around toward the back of the store.
We TIGHTEN on Ty as he unrolls the posters he carries, looks
across the street for another likely place to hang one-

POSSUM (O.S.)

It was early
Friday evenin
Hounds began to bark

Ty turns- how did Possum get there, chair and all?

POSSUM

Stackolee an Billy Lyons
Was squabblin
In the dark

Ty frowns at the lyrics-

POSSUM

Stackolee said
To Billy Lyons
"What you think bout that?
First you takes all my money
Then you spits in
My Stetson hat."

TY

I hate that damn song.

Possum keeps playing but stops singing-

POSSUM

How you keepin, Tyrone?

TY

(wary) Just tryin to hold it
together.

POSSUM

Got your beautiful young daughter
with you this mornin-

TY

Don't you be studyin her.

42.

POSSUM

Heard you gone put on a guitar man
out your place.

TY

Where you hear that?

POSSUM

(grins) Oh- the breeze.

TY

Well this time the breeze know what it's blowin about.

POSSUM

Better be careful, Tyrone. You know what them guitar players are like.

Ty glares at Possum-

TY

Be careful yourself.

Ty stalks away around toward the back of the store. Possum grins and sings again-

POSSUM

Well he shot him
Three times in the shoulder
Three times in the side
That was the last time he shot him
Cause Poor Billy
Up and died

23 EXT. REAR OF GENERAL STORE - MORNING

23

A quartet of WORKMEN and DELIVERYMEN lounge on piled up shipping crates as Shack Thomas stands addressing them-

SHACK THOMAS

The time is ripe and the bill is past due. Roosevelt would of done it already, only he died and they don't listen to Miss Eleanor no more. But Mr. Truman startin to bend, specially now that we got a war heatin up. As Brother Randolph says-

TY (O.S.)

Here it comes-

43.

Shack looks to see Ty joining the others-

TY

-the gospel accordin to A. Phillip
Randolph.

SHACK THOMAS

(pleased) Tyrone! How you doing,
man?

TY

Got my nose above the waterline.

SHACK THOMAS

And here's my baby- how's your mama
doing, China Doll?

He gives China Doll a hug and kiss-

CHINA DOLL

She's doin fine, Uncle Shack.

SHACK THOMAS

Just tellin the boys here how
Brother Randolph pushin through
this deal where our boys gonna be a
full part of services- already got
the Navy and the Air Force, and the
Army is-

TY

I carried a rifle in the Great War,
Shack. Boys get in the middle of
this Korea mess they aint gonna
thank you for your efforts.

SHACK THOMAS

We want our due in this country, we
got to go whole hog-

TY

Black folks shooting yellow folks
to keep the white folks happy?

SHACK THOMAS

It's time to move on from that kind
of thinkin.

Ty starts in through the back entrance of the store-

TY

You go ahead and move right on,
Shack. Then come back and tell the
rest of us how it is.

He steps in. Shack turns to China Doll-

SHACK THOMAS

That is a hard-headed man.

24 INT. GENERAL STORE - MORNING

24

LUTHER, the head clerk, arranges boxes on the back wall and
shoots a nervous look up front-

LUTHER

I'd have to ask Mr. Skinner.

TY

Of course you would. While you at
it, remind him how one of the
reasons colored folks come in here
is to get the lowdown on what's
happening in--

Luther brightens as China Doll steps in-

LUTHER

China Doll!

Luther is clearly smitten-

CHINA DOLL

You gonna let us put these posters
up, aint you Luther?

LUTHER

Oh-- I don't think that be any
problem at all.

CHINA DOLL

(beaming a smile) That's awful
nice of you, Luther.

LUTHER

You lookin special today.

CHINA DOLL

That's sweet of you to say.

45.

TY

Maceo, go on with the man and he
show you where you can put em up.
Come on, darlin, we got more stops
to make-

China Doll spreads a parting bit of sunshine-

CHINA DOLL

Nice to see you, Luther.

Luther smiles and waves as Maceo hooks his arm and pulls him
back into the store-

25 EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS/RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING 25

Ty and China Doll hurry down the tracks and cross to the
black side of town-

TY

You got that boy eatin out of your
hand.

CHINA DOLL

Luther's the only one didn't pull
my hair when he sit behind me at
Sunday school.

TY

Well I hope you got a little that
sugar left, cause we got to spread
some on Miss Bertha Mae Spivey-

CHINA DOLL

You gone ask her to come sing
again?

TY

Imonna ask her for money. Word is
she got a whole pile of it
squirreled away.

China Doll stops, breathing heavily, bends to put her hands
on her knees-

CHINA DOLL

Daddy-

TY

Come on, girl, we in a rush here-

CHINA DOLL

I got to rest.

Ty softens, walks back to stand beside her-

TY

I'm sorry, baby. You catch your breath.

China Doll smiles weakly-

CHINA DOLL

So- why Miss Spivey gonna give you money, you don't let her sing at the club any more?

TY

Gonna make her a partner.

CHINA DOLL

Partner in what?

TY

In the Honeydripper.

CHINA DOLL

But all you ever say it's just a hole you pour good money into-

TY

That don't matter. Imonna make her a proprietor.

CHINA DOLL

`tress'. Like waiter and waitress.

TY

Proprietress. She got to like the sound of that.

26 **EXT. MAIN STREET - GENERAL STORE - WINDOW, POSTER**

26

One of the GUITAR SAM POSTERS appears in the front window as Maceo tapes it up-

A trio on teenage girls stop to look at it as they pass (Possum is nowhere to be seen)-

Maceo steps out to join them, eager to close the deal-

47.

MACEO

Lovely ladies out to make a purchase-

OPAL

That the same Guitar Sam is on the radio?

MACEO

The very one.

OPAL

What's he look like?

MACEO

Fine lookin man. Real lady killer from what I hear. Got that New Orleans style to him.

OPAL

You ought to have a picture up there.

MACEO

Oh, we'll be gettin some of those when he comes in on the train. The main thing is, the man is electrified- and you know what that means.

27 **EXT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE**

27

Formerly a fairly grand house, Bertha Mae's hasn't been painted for awhile and the yard could use some work. Ty coaches China Doll as they climb the stairs-

TY

We make like we just come by to see how she's keepin, and then I'll kind of mention how I been thinking of bringing her on as a partner-

CHINA DOLL

Left the door open.

China Doll pushes the front door all the way open. We can hear Bertha Mae's VOICE singing on a scratchy old RECORD.

China Doll peeks in to see-

48.

28 INT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - FRONT PARLOR

28

-Slick, sitting at the bottom of the STAIRS that lead to the second floor, looking lost and bewildered-

SLICK

She's gone.

TY

Oh.

Ty frowns. He was all geared up for the siege-

TY

When she gonna be back?

SLICK

She's just gone. Woke up beside her and--

He can't go on, tears forming in his eyes. China Doll and Ty trade a look-

29 INT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

29

We start on the RECORD PLAYER, needle down on the spinning song, then RACK to see Bertha Mae, laying DEAD in her bed.

TY

Aw, damn.

We RACK again as Ty and China Doll step in. Slick appears in the doorway behind them. He's been drinking-

SLICK

Fourteen years.

TY

China Doll, you go find your Mama. She know how to fix up the body.

SLICK

People make jokes and all, but I been with that woman fourteen

years. That's a good part of my
life.

TY

And stop by Beauchamp's and tell em
they got a customer.

49.

SLICK

She gimme the only home I ever had.

He looks at them, devastated-

SLICK

What I'm gonna do now?

30 **EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY**

30

Sonny walking along. He has left his guitar and sack back at
the club. He slows, seeing-

POV - SHERIFF'S CAR

The SHERIFF'S CAR is sitting at the side of the road, a
COUNTRY SONG playing on the radio-

SONNY

He decides to brave it, walks ahead with his eyes fixed
straight ahead. We he gets even with the car we see Sheriff
Pugh sitting in the driver's seat, watching him-

PUGH

In a hurry, boy?

Sonny stops, looks to the Sheriff-

SONNY

Naw, sir.

PUGH

Take your hat off.

Sonny takes his hat off. He meets the Sheriff's eyes, trying
to strike a balance between defiant and submissive-

PUGH

Where you headed?

SONNY

Lookin for work.

PUGH

You're not from here.

SONNY

Naw, sir.

50.

PUGH

Stranger wanderin around, no job-
that would make you a vagrant.

SONNY

But I'm lookin-

PUGH

I got a job for you. Get in the
back.

Sonny doesn't even think about running away.

31 EXT. 1ST COTTON FIELD - DAY - WORKERS

31

Black PRISON LABORERS pick cotton, watched over by an armed
DEPUTY-

GATLIN (O.S.)

I can always use another hand.

We SHIFT to see GATLIN, a white planter who chews and spits
tobacco, looking Sonny over as Sheriff Pugh stands by-

PUGH

Caught this young fella in flagrant
violation of the statutes. Gawkery
with intent to mope.

GATLIN

What's he gonna run me?

PUGH

Three dollars a day plus you feed
im lunch. Now the sentence- that
depends on how long you gonna need
the help.

Sonny decides to speak up-

SONNY

I don't get any trial?

SHERIFF PUGH

Sure you do, boy. And a speedy one, too. (points) Meet Judge Gatlin.

Gatlin spits-

GATLIN

Grab a sack.

51.

32 EXT. PINEY WOODS - CROSSROADS - AFTERNOON

32

Maceo nails a Guitar Sam POSTER to a tree, looks over his handiwork.

An ARMY PLATOON trudges into the crossroads, sweat-soaked and footsore-

Maceo watches, pleased, as the black soldiers check the poster out as they pass-

MACEO

Saturday night, fellas! Every fine-looking colored woman in the county gonna be there- don't want to miss it!

A white LIEUTENANT passes, giving Maceo a dark look. Maceo salutes-

MACEO

Afternoon, sir. Nice lookin bunch of soldiers.

33 INT. MAYOR WINFIELD'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

33

Delilah sits at the dining room table with a sandwich she's made herself. We hear PERRY COMO on a RECORD somewhere in the house. She hasn't gotten two bites down before Amanda wanders in, crossing to the liquor cabinet-

AMANDA

Oh dear, I believe it's about that time-

She pulls out a DECANTER OF WINE-

AMANDA

Would you care to join me?

DELILAH

No thank you.

Amanda pours herself a glass of wine-

AMANDA

Of course you won't join me, you don't partake. That was thoughtless of me.

52.

DELILAH

That's all right.

AMANDA

So you don't take spirits and- what else? In your church?

DELILAH

I'm sort of between churches right now. I been thinking about changing over to the Holiness, but I- I haven't been sanctified yet.

AMANDA

Ah-

DELILAH

There's been a minister in this week-

AMANDA

The tent out by the fairgrounds.

Delilah nods. Amanda takes a drink-

AMANDA

The church I grew up in- we were Pentacostals- they wouldn't have anything but the human voice inside the church. And dancing- any kind of dancing, music, card playing-- well, it was very strict. They took up serpents.

DELILAH

I've heard of that.

AMANDA

I tell Floyd these stories and he's horrified. They've always been Methodists, Floyd's family.

DELILAH

They're good people too.

AMANDA

When I married Floyd-- oh, it was quite a scandal among my relatives. As if I'd taken up with somebody in a cult.

53.

DELILAH

It can be a trial, married folks differ in their religion.

AMANDA

And your husband is a--- ?

DELILAH

Unaffiliated.

AMANDA

Unaffiliated. I see. He has his-- social club-

DELILAH

The Honeydripper.

AMANDA

Such a colorful name.

DELILAH

Yes.

AMANDA

He must devote a great deal of his energy to it.

DELILAH

It's just him and Maceo Green runs it, and then I go over and cook some when I get off here.

AMANDA

That's very- supportive of you.
Considering the sort of-
environment-

DELILAH

(defensive) I been in those
barrooms most of my life, Miss
Amanda.

Amanda realizes she has probed too deep, tries to back up-

AMANDA

I see-

DELILAH

I was a singer. I met Tyrone in
the Paradise, down in Shreveport,
China Doll was only two-

Delilah considers, struggling to express who Ty is-

54.

DELILAH

I was just kind of livin along, you
know, drinking more than I ought--
then Tyrone. It was like a light
come into my life.

Delilah turns away, embarrassed to have revealed so much-

DELILAH

People think things because he owns
the Lounge, but they don't know
him.

AMANDA

Small minds are never in short
supply.

She crosses to look out a window-

AMANDA

The people in this town---

She catches herself, smiles-

AMANDA

I suppose they expected that Floyd,
being from a prominent family- as

prominent as is possible here in
Harmony- would have chosen somebody
more--

She fades away again, empties her glass-

AMANDA

My people were very devout, but
they weren't- financially
successful.

DELILAH

No shame in that.

AMANDA

In school, if you didn't have shoes-

She frowns at the memory, sighs-

AMANDA

Oh, I forgot--

Amanda is up and out of the room. Delilah frowns at the
decanter, hurries to put it away.

Amanda comes back in holding a DRESS for a young girl-

55.

AMANDA

I was going through Emily's old
things the other day, and I thought
this would look just darling on
your China Doll-

Delilah examines the dress, which is clearly for a little
girl-

DELILAH

Oh- I don't think it would near fit
her, Miss Amanda.

AMANDA

(disappointed) How old is she now?

DELILAH

Seventeen.

AMANDA

(shocked) Oh my- I must have lost
track somewhere along the line.

Seventeen.

She sits, still holding the dress, sneaks a look over to where the wine decanter was-

DELILAH

It was a very nice thought.

An awkward silence that Perry Como fills inadequately. A KNOCK at the back door, then China Doll steps in, not seeing Amanda right away-

CHINA DOLL

Mama? They need you at-

Delilah shifts her eyes to indicate-

CHINA DOLL

Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Amanda. I didn't know you was home.

AMANDA

(smiles) China Doll! We were just recalling- you used to play right here under this table.

56.

34 INT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

34

Ty sits staring, mind working overtime, staring at the dead woman on the bed. He barely hears Slick talking to the undertaker behind him, busy filling out forms-

SLICK

There isn't any cash money I know of. She sold a good deal of the furniture, but there's still a nice-lookin sofa in the parlor. Only thing she cared for anymore was singin out to Pinetop's place-

Ty looks at a large RING on Bertha's Mae's cold gray hand. He touches it with a finger-

SLICK

You welcome to look around the house- if there's anything your Missus might like-- long as it's not something personal to me and Bertha Mae-

Ty draws his finger away from the ring as if burnt-

SLICK

It's just- she got to go out in style, is what it is. The best you got, all the trimmins- lay it out for her. That's the way she lived it- that's the way she ought to leave it.

Ty closes his eyes and buries his head in his hands-

35 EXT. 1ST COTTON FIELD - AFTERNOON

35

Blazing hot. Cotton chaff in the air as the prison WORK GANG bend to their task, dragging long sacks behind them like snakes. Even the DEPUTIES are sweating rivulets as they stand by with their SHOTGUNS in hand.

Sonny is way behind the others, not dressed for the work, wincing as he pricks his fingers for the umpteenth time. NED, a little prisoner picking his way back in the opposite direction in a parallel row, takes pity on him-

NED

Y'all never done this job before.

57.

SONNY

Can't say I have.

NED

You want to set your pins out wide, bend over from the hip-

Sonny widens his stance-

NED

-and don't be bobbin up and down all the time. When you up, be up, but when you on the row, stay down.

Sonny digs in and keeps low-

NED

But most important, you got to get you a rhythm. Everything in this life got a rhythm to it- even pullin cotton off the plant.

SONNY

Lay it out for me.

NED

Not my rhythm- your rhythm. That's between you and the day and the work you got before you. Once you on it, don't let nothin and nobody push you off it.

SONNY

I'm going so slow.

NED

You gettin paid by the pound or by the hour?

SONNY

I'm not gettin paid at all. None of us are.

Ned cackles-

NED

Then I suggest you work that into your rhythm too.

A DEPUTY calls out-

58.

DEPUTY

Let's see more pickin and less talkin over there!

NED

Gettin right on it, Boss!

Ned picks his way behind Sonny. Sonny starts to rock slightly, looking for a rhythm of movement he can maintain-

36 **EXT. 1ST OPPOSITE COTTON FIELD**

36

The free pickers sit on and around the truck that brought them, eating lunch. Dex watches the prison laborers across the road as he SHUFFLES a battered DECK OF CARDS, sitting with a couple of the other men-

DEX

Them boys fryin over there.

JUNEBUG

That Judge Gatlin's gang- he work
them people from can until can't,
ever damn day, and when his fields
is picked he bid em out to the
neighbors. Harvest time comes
round here, you sign up with
somebody fast or you stay outa
sight.

Dex waves flies away from his face, spits-

DEX

Ate a peck of dust today.

JUNEBUG

Take some water.

DEX

Only thing wash the dust out is
whiskey.

JUNEBUG

(smiles) Aint enough whiskey in
this world wash out what I
swallowed in my life.

Dex riffles the cards-

JUNEBUG

What we playin for?

59.

DEX

Two bits a hand.

JUNEBUG

That's kind of steep-

Dex laughs and starts to deal a card at a time to the players-

DEX

Hell, I member playin this game one
night- Memphis is Boss Crump's
town, folks is gamblin before they
can walk- ten dollars a hand. I
caught a winnin streak that cleaned
out half the sportin men on Beale
Street. Got up from that table, my

money was as long as train smoke-

JUNEBUG

What happen to it?

Dex raises his voice so the woman he checked out in the morning can hear-

DEX

Spent it all on fine-lookin women.

He calls to where Ham stands in knee-high grass, a heavy stick in his hand, staring intently at the ground-

DEX

Yo, Mississippi-

JUNEBUG

His name Hamilton.

DEX

Hambone! You want in on this?

He raises a matchstick in his fingers-

DEX

Settle up on payday.

HAM

That your deck of cards?

DEX

What if it is?

HAM

I stay clear of it then.

60.

Dex stops dealing to stare at Ham, insulted-

DEX

You sinuatin?

HAM

Just sayin I don't want to play.

There is a sudden RUSTLING at Ham's feet and WHAP! he brings his stick down hard. He pulls up a RABBIT, dead, by its hind legs-

JUNEBUG

Looks like dinner.

DEX

Rabbit is a rodent. Man eat a
rabbit, might's well eat a rat.

Dex snorts, disgusted, then finishes dealing. He lays the
top card face up and slaps down the rest of the deck-

DEX

(mutters) Simple country nigger,
fraid to sit down an lose his
little handful of change--

JUNEBUG

He awful big to mess with.

DEX

Don't scare me none. I'm a steppin
razor, man, I'm trouble on two
legs.

We hear a CAR APPROACHING, SLOWING DOWN-

DEX

Your draw, Junebug. And don't be
drippin sweat on my cards.

MACEO (O.S.)

Excuse me, folks-

They turn to see Maceo leaning out of the window of Ty's old
Ford, a Guitar Slim POSTER taped to the side of it-

MACEO

Yall heard about the show we puttin
on at the Honeydripper Saturday
night?

61.

- 37 **EXT. PURVIS HOUSE - NIGHT** 37
A very modest wooden house with a porch. LIGHTS on inside-
- 38 **INT. PURVIS HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT** 38
Ty and China Doll sit as Delilah lays dinner on the table.
She is dressed to go out-

DELILAH

I expect there'll be a nice turnout
for Bertha Mae tomorrow.

TY

Folks who wouldn't have nothin to
do with her when she was alive.

DELILAH

Some of them, maybe. You still got
to pay your respects.

TY

Slick gonna have to find him a new
ride.

DELILAH

That's a terrible thing to say-

TY

That's how the man gets over, is
all, sugarin up to some woman got a
job or a bankroll-

DELILAH

It's no way to live.

TY

Just how it is out in the world,
baby- man got to walk through the
gates of Hell to get a piece of
cheese.

He stares moodily, unnoticing as she lays his plate in front
of him-

TY

You're not so young any more, lose
hold of what little you got-

He just shakes his head-

62.

DELILAH

If you lose the club I'm sure
you'll find something else.

TY

In this town? Like what?

Delilah proceeds cautiously-

DELILAH

You know anytime you want I could
get Miss Amanda to ask her husb-

TY

"Watch yo feet, Mr. Mayor, I done
just mopped the flo! "

Delilah tries to ignore this-

DELILAH

You work so hard at the Lounge, and
what it brings in-

TY

Isn't even as much as what you make
polishin that white lady's silver.
I know.

DELILAH

I didn't say that.

TY

You didn't have to.

Delilah gives up, knowing he's set on his mood-

DELILAH

It'll just have to work out, then.

A strained silence. Delilah crosses to the back door-

DELILAH

Meetin gonna start without I'm
there.

TY

Your soul not the one needs savin,
baby.

She gives Ty a lost look, steps out. The screen door slams.
China Doll sees how worried Ty is-

63.

CHINA DOLL

It's all gonna be fine, Daddy.
Everbody in town talkin bout Guitar

Sam comin to Harmony.

39 EXT. REVIVAL TENT - NIGHT - WIDE SHOT

39

A CHOIR sings at the front of the LANTERN-LIT tent, a CONGREGATION of salvation-seekers filling the benches-

CHOIR

Mother died-
Yes she died and left me
It was long- long time ago
Oh but I searched
Searched her record over
I found mother just had to go

UNDER TENT

CHOIR

Oh she cried son,
Son don't you worry
Oh you know the Lord
Always fix a way

Delilah arrives at the rear of the tent, finds herself a spot on a bench-

CHOIR

She left me standing
Standing along the highway
Oh wondering- which way I must go!

REVEREND CUTLIP watches his singers, clapping out time with his big hands-

CHOIR

As I walked-
All along the highway
I was seeking my Lord each day
She left me standing
Standing along the highway
Just wondering- which way must I
go!

'Amen's' and other sounds greet the end of the song. Reverend Cutlip steps to the center of the platform and looks around at the souls gathered-

64.

REVEREND CUTLIP

The Highway of Life, Brothers and Sisters, will twist you and turn you, it will run you this way and that way, it will tempt you with many a detour-- for the Highway of Life, Brothers and Sisters, is designed to lead us astray!

He gets an 'Amen!' from someone in the crowd-

REVEREND CUTLIP

It meanders away from the Light and into the Darkness, it tires our legs and whittles away at our spirits!

The congregation start to get into it, RESPONDING, rocking with the rhythm of the sermon, flapping their PAPER FANS that advertise Beauchamp's Funeral Home in the hot night--

REVEREND CUTLIP

It snares us with the thorns and thistles of wickedness, it is paved with the black deeds of sinners and laid out on a crooked plan! That's not the road we want to be on, Brothers and Sisters, that's not the path we need to follow!

The Reverend picks up speed-

REVEREND CUTLIP

We got to get on that other road!
The one that leads to salvation!
The one that leads to glory! The one that leads to the right hand of God! Praise His name!

CONGREGATION

Praise the Lord!

REVEREND CUTLIP

The thoroughfare I'm talking about, the righteous path we got to tread, is called the Highway to Heaven, and by the great Lord above it is straight and it is narrow!

(MORE)

65.

REVEREND CUTLIP (cont'd)

Keep your eyes on the prize and your feet on the street and you

won't ever make a mis-step, you
won't ever falter, you won't ever
stumble, because Jesus will show
you the Way!

Several people in the audience are up and SHOUTING now,
getting into the Spirit. Reverend Cutlip shifts gear,
filling his voice with a sense of dread and warning-

REVEREND CUTLIP

But you got to pay attention to who
it is walking beside you, Brothers
and Sisters, got to be wary against
those who will hold you back from
your journey! There's many a loved
one got to be left behind! Cause
you either on the road or you lost
in the wilderness!

DELILAH

We TIGHTEN on Delilah as she listens, upset, taking this all
very personally-

REVEREND CUTLIP (O.S.)

You either headed for glory or
doomed to damnation! You either in
with the Lord or you in with the
Devil- and they aint no in-between!

40 INT. JAIL - NIGHT

40

We TRACK past CELLS full of black PRISONERS-

KING (O.S.)

Tulsa aint so bad but for the smell-

NED (O.S.)

Got them stockyards near the jail-

KING (O.S.)

That's right- and the flies.
Course, I had me in a cell in
Georgia once, six other men, didn't
have no window atall.

NED (O.S.)

Must of got caught on one a them
freights.

Sonny is in a big COMMON CELL with the other conscripted LABOR GANG. He hangs on the bars as behind him men pitch pennies, while Ned and another veteran jailbird, KING, compare lodging experiences-

KING

Yeah, aint no free ride allowed through Georgia. And the food there-

NED

Paltry-

KING

Paltry aint the word for it. Breakfast was a joke, lunch was a rumor-

NED

-and dinner was a anecdote.

KING

(laughs) Spose you been locked in that box.

NED

Or one just like it.

Sonny begins to SING softly, almost to himself-

SONNY

Well you wake up in the morning
Hear the bing-bong ring-
Walk up to the table
And see the same damn thing
All Imonna tell you
Knife, a fork and a pan
If you say a thing about it
You're in trouble with the Man

The men join him on the chorus-

ALL

Let the Midnight Special
Shine its light on me
Oh let the Midnight Special
Shine its ever-lovin light on me-

Sonny turns to face them-

NED

You a singer, young man?

67.

SONNY

Singer, guitar player- Imonna be on
the radio some day. People gonna
know my name.

NED

(chuckles) Keep thinkin that way,
young man. Judge Gatlin don't
choose to work you into your grave,
you just might do it.

Sonny ponders this, looking back out through the bars,
singing more moodily now as we TRACK AWAY from the cell-

SONNY

If you ever go to Houston
Don't you stagger don't you fight
Cause the Sheriff will arrest you
You're in the cooler for the night-

FADE TO BLACK.

- 41 INT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING 41**
We hear the slow BLUES DIRGE Bertha May as we see China Doll
applying polish to Bertha Mae's fingernails-
- 42 INT/EXT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - MORNING 42**
MUSIC CONTINUES. We TRACK BACK through the house, looking at
PHOTOGRAPHS and POSTERS of her singing in her glory days,
finally TRACKING out onto the PORCH where Slick sits glumly
on the steps and the undertaker stands in his black suit,
looking at his watch as MOURNERS begin to pass into the house-
- 43 INT. BERTHA MAE'S HOUSE - PARLOR - MORNING 43**
MUSIC CONTINUES. MOURNERS pass the OPEN COFFIN-
- 44 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MORNING 44**
MUSIC CONTINUES. Ty and Maceo help carry the coffin down a
dirt road, Slick walking at the head of the mourners
following it-

68.

45 **EXT. CEMETERY - MORNING**

45

MUSIC CONTINUES as-

Hands grip ropes as the coffin is lowered into the HOLE-

Reverend Cutlip speaks a eulogy-

Slick tries to keep it together-

Scratch and Lonnie watch the ceremony from a tree branch-

Ty looks at his watch, slips away from the funeral party.
Delilah notices, frowns. Reverend Cutlip takes note as well-

A shovel digs into piled dirt-

Dirt is tossed down upon us and the screen goes BLACK.

46 **EXT. RAILROAD STATION - MORNING**

46

Ty waits for a train, still in his mourning suit. We TIGHTEN
on his face- tense, preoccupied with his schemes to save the
club-

POSSUM

Hear tell Miss Bertha Mae passed.

Ty whirls around-- somehow he didn't see Possum, sitting on a
bench behind him, guitar in his lap.

TY

That's right.

POSSUM

She lived it how she sang it.

Ty tries to ignore him, looks down the rails-

POSSUM

Waitin for somebody.

Ty is silent.

POSSUM

Aint nobody on that train gonna
change your luck, Tyrone. Gonna
have to save your own self.

69.

TY

(annoyed) What you know about anything?

POSSUM

Oh, nothin much.

Ty steps away. Possum speaks quietly-

POSSUM

But I know you from way back.

Possum starts PLAYING, a dark, moody, slide-guitar blues.

Ty looks toward Possum, not happy he's there, then looks away. The MUSIC gets LOUDER, FASTER, Possum MOANING and WHOOPING, stomping his foot-

We TIGHTEN on Ty's face, tighter, tighter, then DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

47

47

We're in a BAR ROOM- smoke, heat, packed bodies- Possum's SONG grows more intense as we TRACK IN on GUITAR MAN- young, with slick hair a moustache and tons of attitude. He sneers, flicks his cigarette almost straight at us.

We TRACK IN on YOUNG TYRONE, also swearing, stepping away from his piano-

Guitar Man hands his guitar to one of the eager MEN standing close, hoping for a fight-

A PRETTY GIRL stands to one side, looking scared and excited, covering her mouth with her hands-

Young Tyrone steps in to meet him, the CROWD around almost pushing them together-

Guitar Man pulls out a KNIFE! Young Tyrone grabs for it and they grapple, face to face, struggling in a terrible dance-

A TRAIN WHISTLE breaks the spell!

EXT. TRAIN YARD - MORNING - PRESENT

48

48

Possum stops playing and cocks his head to listen-

The WHISTLE again as the TRAIN APPROACHES.

Ty takes a deep breath, hoping-

70.

49 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/2ND COTTON FIELD - DAY

49

Mourners are walking back down the country road where we saw the coffin carried.

Reverend Cutlip sidles up to Delilah-

REVEREND CUTLIP

A mournful end for a wayward sinner.

DELILAH

She always seemed at peace with herself.

REVEREND CUTLIP

The company she kept, the life she led-

DELILAH

I never knew Bertha Mae to do hurt to a living soul.

The Reverend is not too pleased with Delilah's forgiving attitude-

REVEREND CUTLIP

We're all hoping to see you get over and accept the Lord tonight, Delilah.

DELILAH

I'm hoping so too.

Cutlip nods toward the FIELD as they pass the PRISON LABOR GANG, picking cotton under guard-

REVEREND CUTLIP

You been lingering at the threshold long enough, Sister. Time to step ahead.

Delilah tries not to show how shaken she is by this challenge. She passes out of frame and we see China Doll

bringing up the rear of the funeral party, lost in thought.
She looks over into the cotton field-

POV - SONNY, PRISON LABOR GANG

Sonny bends his back with the other laborers, picking and sweating-

71.

CHINA DOLL

China Doll pauses, frowns as she sees it is Sonny working, a
DEPUTY strolling past him, shotgun in hand. Sonny sees her,
lowers his head in shame-

50 EXT. TRAIN STATION - LATE MORNING
50

The TRAIN has just pulled into the station. A pair of
PULLMAN PORTERS step out--

But nobody else.

Ty feels his heart sink. Shack Thomas comes up behind him,
carrying an overnight bag-

SHACK THOMAS

Tyrone- got somebody gettin off
here?

TY

Supposed to be.

He halts by Ty for a moment, watching. Nobody else is
stepping out-

SHACK THOMAS

What's the party's name?

TY

Sam- Guitar Sam-- don't know his
birth name-

SHACK THOMAS

(impressed) He's comin here?

He calls to the porters further up the platform-

SHACK THOMAS

Yo, Nat! Guitar Sam get on this
train?

NAT

Naw, man. He's in the hospital
back in Little Rock.

TY

Hospital?

72.

NAT

You know music folks- whatever he
was doin, he must have done too
much of it.

The porters LAUGH. Shack, realizing this must be a setback
for Ty, pats his shoulder before he steps onto the train-

SHACK THOMAS

Well, brother- maybe he be in
tomorrow.

We FOLLOW Ty away from the train as Nat calls 'All aboard!'
and the engine gathers power.

Possum sits listening to the single SLIDE NOTES he plays, as
if tuning his guitar-

POSSUM

Somebody didn't show up.

TY

(grim) Wish they'd made you dumb
instead of blind.

We HOLD on Possum, cackling darkly, as Ty walks away. The
train WHISTLE BLOWS-

51 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - DAY

51

A torn and crumpled Guitar Sam POSTER lays on the bar
counter.

FINGERS move on the keyboard.

Ty sits drinking, brooding, PLAYING and SINGING softly at the
piano. Maceo is at the bar-

TY

Well I had my fun if I
Don't get well no more
Well I had my fun if I
Don't get well no more
My head is spinnin
And I'm goin down slow-

MACEO

Man don't take care of hisself- out
drinkin and jazzin the women every
night-

73.

TY

Don't make any difference now.

MACEO

Got so bad, I heard there was some
ole boy goes around pretendin to be
Guitar Sam, fill out the gigs he
misses. Does pretty well for
hissself, what I hear-

Ty pauses on the keyboard-

TY

Somebody we could find?

MACEO

(shrugs) Hell, I don't know. Just
a story I heard.

They both go back to brooding. Ty takes a drink. He stares
at the keyboard-

TY

There must have been a first one.

MACEO

First what?

TY

Back slavery days, they had the
ones that worked in the big house.
Might not of had shoes always, but
their pants didn't have no holes
and they didn't pick no cotton.

MACEO

House niggers.

TY

That's how they called em. They must of had all their African kinda instruments- drums, shakers, some kind of banjo thing- but the piano-

MACEO

Didn't bring no piano over on them ships from Africa.

74.

TY

The piano was just sittin there in the white folks' big room, all polished up-- and I figure this one boy, he goes past fifteen, twenty times a day, running the corner of his eye over it. And he's there when they play, the masters, doin all their minuets and whatever-

Ty PLAYS something like a MINUET-

TY

-him standing there with a tray of white people food pretendin not to have a thought in his head, might be only some dust hangin in the air for all they know- but he's watchin the fingers, see, watchin them keys work. This old boy, the first one, he can play alla them Africa kinda instruments, he can play mud if you give him the key and the tempo, he's got music in his head, in his heart, in every damn piece of him there's music.

MACEO

Down to the bones--

TY

And one day the masters is away, huntin foxes or some rich white people thing they get up to, and he's alone in the room with that piano and he comes over and sits

down on the bench-

MACEO

Watch out now-

TY

-and he spreads his fingers out the way he seen the minuet player do- and he-

Ty hits a MINOR CHORD, lets it decay-

TY

And he thinks- `Lord help me, I could do some damage with this.'

75.

A silence. Maceo is moved by the scene-

MACEO

Would have liked to been there. I mean to hear the cat play, not none of the rest of it.

Ty gets up and crosses the room with his drink in his hand, distraught. This is the end for Ty, no strategies left, nothing but the bitter taste of total defeat-

TY

Mace, Imonna lose my club.

MACEO

Old Man Toussaint finds out you stole his liquor, you like to lose more than that-

TY

I got no more cards to play-

MACEO

Maybe if you was to go down, see Lucky Hardaway in person-

TY

(angry) I aint kissin up to no cokey-nose, conk-headed-

WHAP! He kicks Sonny's guitar case, left sticking out under a table, and sends it spinning across the floor till it CRASHES into the bar and flips open. Ty and Maceo stare at

the contents-

TY

What the hell that sposed to be?

Maceo pulls out a home-built SOLID BODY GUITAR, a painted white rectangle with a complicated PICKUP jury-rigged over the strings and yards of ELECTRICAL CORD hanging off it-

MACEO

Some kind of guitar.

TY

A guitar has got a hole in it,
that's where the sound comes from.
That boy must be bout three bricks
shy of a load upstairs.

China Doll rushes in, upset-

76.

CHINA DOLL

They gone and arrest him!

TY

Arrested who?

CHINA DOLL

Sonny. The high Sheriff arrested
him and sold him over to Judge
Gatlin.

TY

Who's Sonny?

CHINA DOLL

Sonny that was here yesterday
morning.

TY

Sonny that got a screw loose is why
they arrested him. Maceo, make a
noise on that-

Maceo plucks a string. Not much of a sound-

MACEO

It's electric-

TY

I plug a chunk of stove wood into
the wall I get more music out of it
than that mess gonna make.

MACEO

Naw, man, it don't work unless it's
hooked up to the juice, see? You
got the juice, you don't need the
hollow inside the box, the music
just runs straight from the strings
through this wire and comes out-

He dumps the sack Sonny brought out and outs falls a mass of
tubes and wires, also home-modified-

MACEO

-your amplifier. Which is what
this thing must be.

CHINA DOLL

Sonny said he fix radios in the
Army.

77.

TY

Sonny didn't do nothin but feed
bedbugs in anybody's Army, and some
of em crawled in his head.
Surprised if that boy got the wit
to pick cotton. Judge Gatlin
bought himself a droolin idiot.
What you want to amplify a damn
guitar for anyway?

CHINA DOLL

Daddy-

TY

Less you gonna sit over on your
chair and play them little Charley
Christian kind of riffs-

MACEO

A sideman-

TY

Sit over there and be all clean and
polite. Guitar hasn't been up
front since them old piss and moan
blues shouters, sit their blind

asses on the corner hollerin for
pennies-

MACEO

Old time music-

CHINA DOLL

Daddy, Sonny didn't do nothin to be
arrested for! He was just lookin
for work.

MACEO

They hung colored boys for less
than that, darlin. Least on the
work gang they feed em, keep their
strength up.

CHINA DOLL

But he doesn't belong there!

Maceo turns the guitar over in his hands-

MACEO

You know, Guitar Sam plays him an
electric, but I don't think it's
this no-hole kind of deal.

78.

TY

I hope he plugs it in the wrong
socket some night, lectrocutes his
sorry no-show ass!

Ty has a thought. He looks over at the guitar in Maceo's
hands-

TY

(thinking out loud) Now if he did
show up here-- and our power was to
go out again while he was playing-

MACEO (O.S.)

I think I fixed it good this time,
Ty.

Ty smiles-

TY

So he come out and plugs his ax in-

MACEO

He come out lookin good, from what I hear. All kind of spangly pants and jacket, got his name spelled out on the back-

TY

Clothes, right-

MACEO

Hair all slick and shiny, flash some gold teeth at them gals, got his sax man behind him, maybe a piano, harmonica, drums-

TY

You remember that night the lights went out in the Esquire Club in Mobile?

MACEO

(smiles) And somebody took off with the gate? Stole the whole damn register off the counter-

TY

They didn't hold it against Reggie Porter, did they?

79.

MACEO

Naw- it was his place that got robbed.

TY

Didn't hold it against him, didn't expect no money back for the show-

MACEO

They all too busy diving on the pot of that tonk game got interrupted-

TY

And nobody suspected it might be Reggie Porter hisself that pulled them lights, did they?

Maceo begins to see where Ty is leading-

MACEO

Aw, no, Ty, we can't-

Ty claps his hands together, jumps up and heads for the door-

TY

China Doll, you mind the place
while we're gone! (to Maceo) Come
on, man, we got work to do.

CHINA DOLL

Where you going, Daddy?

TY

I promise the people Guitar Sam,
they gonna get Guitar Sam!

52 INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

52

We start on a portrait of Governor Big Jim Folsom on the
wall, then TILT DOWN to Sheriff Pugh, feet up on the desk, a
table-top FAN pointed at him, looking up at Ty-

SHERIFF PUGH

Why you interested in this boy?

TY

Got a job for him.

SHERIFF PUGH

Must be doin pretty good for
yourself out there, Tyrone, you
hirin new people on.

80.

TY

Passing well, yeah-

SHERIFF PUGH

But this boy-

TY

Name is Sonny-

SHERIFF PUGH

He's payin off his debt to society
right now, and if I was to pull him
out of the field it would cost the
county-

TY

Judge Gatlin payin three a day for prison labor.

SHERIFF PUGH

You gonna pay me four for the duration of his sentence?

TY

Which might be- ?

SHERIFF PUGH

-as long as I care to make it.

TY

Well, I was counting on more of a one-time deal- if I could just rent him out for the weekend-

SHERIFF PUGH

Fifty dollars.

Ty looks stricken-

SHERIFF PUGH

It's not just the money. There's legalistic principles involved here. Public safety issues-

TY

I pay you Sunday morning?

SHERIFF PUGH

You pay me now or you forget about it.

TY

I don't have it now.

81.

SHERIFF PUGH

You think you too smart for the rest of us, don't you, Tyrone? Think you can go it by yourself.

He puts his feet down and sits forward, drilling Ty with his eyes-

SHERIFF PUGH

You'd rather eat roofin nails than come to me for a favor-

TY

It's not a favor if I got to pay-

SHERIFF PUGH

Oh, you gonna pay all right. You don't hand me that money Sunday mornin, you got yourself a new partner. Same deal as I got with Toussaint. How'd that be?

Ty considers. He doesn't have any options-

TY

(deadpan) You'll get the fifty.

SHERIFF PUGH

(smiles) And that wife of yours-

TY

(wary) Delilah-

SHERIFF PUGH

Them fried chicken sandwiches- if I was to come by, now and then, check up on my interests-

TY

She be happy to fix you whatever you want.

SHERIFF PUGH

My wife's cookin would gag a maggot.

TY

Different people got different kinds of talents.

Sheriff Pugh heaves himself to his feet-

82.

SHERIFF PUGH

Lurleen aint discovered what hers is yet. Let's go fetch that boy.

POV - PICKERS

Faces dripping sweat, prison gang pickers stoop to their work-

TY

Ty stands by his beat-up old Ford at the side of the road, watching, remembering.

A few of the PRISON LABORERS look up, curious, as Sonny is led over-

DEPUTY

This the one?

Ty nods, looks to Sonny-

TY

You got any ideas about turning rabbit on me, you best get rid of em now.

SONNY

You payin my way out?

TY

Till Monday.

SONNY

How come?

They get INTO THE CAR-

TY

You like draggin that cotton sack?

SONNY

No.

TY

Then don't ask questions.

83.

Ty pulls away, leaving the less fortunate stooped in the field-

MUSIC plays on the RADIO as Nadine masterfully works her SEWING MACHINE and Maceo stands by uneasily. He holds up the denim jacket Sonny left at the club-

MACEO

This size, right, but it's got to shine.

NADINE

And when you need this?

MACEO

Tonight.

NADINE

(considers) That's a tall order.

MACEO

It's got to happen.

NADINE

(fishing) You know, I do my best work, my fastest work, when I'm happy.

MACEO

Yeah, I spose you do-

Nadine looks up at him from the sewing machine-

NADINE

You gone make me happy, baby?

Maceo nervously makes for the door-

MACEO

Uhm- you come by the club tonight, we havin a special show. Tell em at the door you my guest-

NADINE

Food aint the only thing a woman needs three times a day.

MACEO

(mutters) Wouldn't hurt you to skip a few meals.

NADINE

What's that, baby?

Maceo turns at the open door-

MACEO

Boy's gonna need time to try that
jacket on- see how it feels.
Later, Nadine-

He is gone-

55 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - DAY

55

Ty and China Doll stand looking at Sonny as he sits on a bar stool-

TY

You got to do somethin with this
boy's head, darlin. They might not
know what the real Sam look like,
but it aint this.

CHINA DOLL

I can try.

China Doll looks through the beauty products she's piled up nearby-

SONNY

And what exactly I'm supposed to
do?

TY

You gone stand up there with that
contraption you got an play Guitar
Sam numbers.

SONNY

Hell, I do that with my eyes
closed.

TY

We could get the audience to close
theirs we be better off.

MACEO (O.S.)

Ty-

Maceo pops his head in the front door-

85.

MACEO

I tracked Mr. Trenier down-

TY

Let's hit it.

Ty leaves to join Maceo-

CHINA DOLL

Bye, Daddy.

China Doll is a little nervous to be left alone with Sonny. She puts her comb in her hand and walks around Sonny, examining his hair while he examines her face-

SONNY

You know what you're doing?

CHINA DOLL

I fix Mama's hair all the time.

SONNY

But you aint been to that school yet.

CHINA DOLL

You go to school to learn your guitar?

SONNY

(laughs) No.

China Doll steps behind the bar-

CHINA DOLL

I might pick up some new things at beauty school but mostly it's for my certificate, and that is `a ticket to adventure'- that's what it says in the brochure. People lookin for beauty all over the world.

Sonny sees the LOOSE WIRES that come through the wall behind the bar. China Doll searches around-

SONNY

You want to watch out for them wires sticking down- don't look safe.

CHINA DOLL

(shrugs) Yeah- power's always going out, people getting shocks and whatnot-

SONNY

Somebody ought to fix it.

She searches under the counter for something-

CHINA DOLL

`A career in beauty is like money in the bank.' Says that in the brochure too. Plus it isn't physically taxin.

SONNY

Yeah, I can't see no pretty thing like you behind a plow.

CHINA DOLL

I had the rheumatic fever when I was little, left me with a weak heart.

SONNY

Oh. Mine been actin funny too- since I laid eyes on you.

She acknowledges his flirting with a little smile and comes up with a MASON JAR full of clear LIQUID-

SONNY

What's that?

CHINA DOLL

Just some ole moonshine they keep around.

China Doll crosses back to Sonny-

SONNY

(concerned) What you gonna do with it?

CHINA DOLL

They always joke about how this stuff'll straighten your hair right

out-

She twists the lid off, sniffs the liquid, reacts to its strength-

87.

CHINA DOLL

Imonna just make yours relax a little.

56 INT. PARLOR

56

TIME TRENIER, an older musician with a permanently stoic expression, sits watching his pupil, a YOUNG BOY, torture the SCALES with a CORNET. He glances up at Ty and Maceo, trying not to plug their ears as the boy continues to PLAY-

MACEO

Mr. Time Trenier- that's a name to be reckoned with.

Time doesn't seem to react to the flattery-

MACEO

Story goes that you used to play with Buddy Bolden.

TIME

Played with most all of em down there.

MACEO

And King Oliver-

TIME

One band falls apart you find yourself another one. Never any shortage of bands, down New Awlins.

TY

I didn't know you was givin lessons.

TIME

Pays the rent. Almost.

TY

You interested in a playin job?

TIME

Your place?

MACEO

(tentative) It's uhm- backin up a man on the electric guitar?

88.

TIME

(shrugs) If you can pay, I can play.

TY

Got to dress sharp.

No need to say this to Time Trenier. You could cut yourself on the creases on his pants-

MACEO

It aint like a all-night thing- you just start out and there's gonna be a accident-

Ty shoots Maceo a look-

TIME

Accident.

TY

Sudden loss of power. Lights out.

TIME

(shrugs again) It's your gig, man.

TY

Eight o'clock. This aint colored people time and it sure aint New Awlins time. I mean eight o'clock on the money.

TIME

If you got the green I'm on the scene.

TY

That's a deal then.

MACEO

You know any drummers?

TIME

(nods) I'll bring you one.

TY

Nothin fancy, he just got to keep
time-

TIME

Time is my name.

Ty and Maceo wince as the kid hits a particularly SOUR NOTE-

89.

57 **EXT. COUNTRY ROAD, 2ND COTTON FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON**

57

The free pickers are lined up at the side of the road-

CLOSER

A white CLERK sits behind a wooden table in front of the
transport truck and pulls cash from a METAL BOX, consulting a
thick LEDGER in front of him as he pays the pickers off.
Sheriff Pugh observes, his patrol car parked nearby.

Ham has come to the head of the line, Junebug behind him-

CLERK

Twenny-four, twenny-five, twenny-
six, twenny-seven, twenny-eight.
Make your mark here-

HAM

(softly) Owe me thirty.

CLERK

Book says twenny-eight.

HAM

Dollar fifty every hundred pound,
and I picked-

CLERK

Two dollars deducted for stones.

HAM

I didn't put no stones in the sack.

CLERK

We mill the cotton, there's always
stones.

HAM

But there wasn't none in my sack-

CLERK

We take off two dollars a week,
always have. Aint that right,
Junebug?

Junebug knows it's useless to complain-

JUNEBUG

Yes suh. Been that way my whole
life.

90.

Ham is furious but has nowhere to go with it-

SHERIFF PUGH

You gonna take your pay, son, or
give it up to charity?

Ham swipes his pay off the table, stalks away. Sheriff Pugh
glares after him.

We FOLLOW Ham as he crosses to the rear of the truck. Dex
sits on the tailgate, grinning at him-

DEX

Wouldn't let nobody mess with my
money like that.

HAM

They took the same two dollars off
yours.

DEX

Yeah, and you could pave a highway
with the rocks I threw in that
mess.

He catches the eye of Lucille, standing nearby-

DEX

You country nigos let the crackers
run you like dogs-

SNATCH! Ham grabs Dex by the shirt front and yanks him
close, hissing in fury-

HAM

That sheriff wasn't here I'd snap
your neck, boy.

SHERIFF PUGH (O.S.)

Don't let me stop you.

Ham turns to see Sheriff Pugh standing behind him, a wry
smile on his face-

SHERIFF PUGH

But first you gonna sign that
ledger like you sposed to. Don't
want nobody cryin they didn't get
their due.

91.

58 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - DAY

58

Ty is repairing the little STAGE with hammer and nails-

SONNY (O.S.)

Mr. Purvis?

TY

(doesn't look up) People call me
Ty or they call me Pinetop. Mr.
Pinetop to you.

SONNY (O.S.)

I just wanted to tell you- I
preciate the opportunity.

Ty looks up to see Sonny with his hair pressed under a tight
cap made from an old STOCKING-

TY

Right.

SONNY

I know ever one of Guitar Sam's
songs- know the chords, know the
words-

TY

That's fine.

Sonny begins to stroll around the edge of the club, looking
at PHOTOS and SHOWBILLS on the walls-

SONNY

China Doll said how you was famous
once.

Ty is pleased at his step-daughter's bragging, but doesn't
show it-

TY

I was known, but I was never what
you call famous.

SONNY

How'd you get your start?

Ty sighs, sits back from his work-

92.

TY

Down in Mobile there was an old
cathouse professor name of Joe
Dudlow, had had a stroke on one
side, curled him all up- but he
kept on pluggin. I used to come
out and play his left hand for him.

SONNY

How old you were?

TY

(shrugs) Thirteen, fourteen. This
one night it was goin hot and heavy
and Joe just passed, right there at
the piano, in the middle of Black
Bottom Stomp. They propped him up
at the bar, stuck a drink in his
hand, and told me to keep poundin
them ivories. (shakes his head)
There was a meanness hanging over
them juke joints, there was murder
in the air. You stopped playin for
a minute, it come down like a flock
of crows.

Sonny stops by a poster for the `REGINALD ERSKINE BAND
featuring Tyrone "Pinetop" Purvis'-

SONNY

This is you-

TY

Big band days, on the road. If a railroad train run through it, we played it.

SONNY

(reading) `Reginald Erskine'.
Don't believe I ever heard of him-

TY

Big tall light-skin fella out of Carolina, said he's part Cherokee. Couldn't play nothin, but he waved his little stick and had this long greasy hair he throw around like Cab Calloway.

SONNY

And you were the piano man.

93.

TY

Piano man, arranger, you name it.

SONNY

That must of been somethin, see the country first class.

TY

I don't know about first class, but we seen the country.

SONNY

How come you stopped?

TY

(shrugs) Got tired of carrying another man's water. Didn't want to die in no colored hotel some night in Who-Knows-Where Arkansas.

He bangs the last nail in-

TY

Met Delilah and wanted something of my own.

SONNY

Well you don't have nothing to worry about, Mr. Pinetop. I won't let you down tonight.

Ty looks at Sonny, considers telling him what the plan is-

TY

No- I don't sponse you will.

Ty gets up and goes into the back.

Sonny crosses to the tangle of wires coming out of the wall behind the counter and snaking off in every direction. He grabs hold of one, thinking-

59 INT. PURVIS HOUSE - KITCHEN

59

Delilah is in her kitchen, HUMMING a GOSPEL SONG to herself, apron on as she begins to make a pie. She pulls a METAL FLOUR CANNISTER down from the shelf, flips the lid off- about half full.

She starts to scoop flour out from it and something falls out- a small CLOTH PURSE. She picks it up to put it aside, then frowns at the way it feels. She shakes flour off, unzips it-

94.

Nothing inside.

60 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - BACK ROOM

60

Maceo loads bottles of beer into the ICEBOX, wincing as the sounds of a SCREAMING ARGUMENT blast in from the bar-

DELILAH (O.S.)

How could you do that?

TY (O.S.)

Imonna put that back and double-

DELILAH (O.S.)

You don't go gamblin with my baby's money!

TY (O.S.)

I had to send off the advance pay or the man don't come and play-

DELILAH (O.S.)

I don't care what you took it for, I saved that money up for China Doll-

Delilah bursts through the swinging door into the back room, pursued by Ty, trying to explain-

DELILAH

-and you got no business puttin your fingers on it!

TY

China Doll don't need any school, baby, she could walk into one of them shops right this minute and get a job!

DELILAH

There's got to be some line you won't cross, some thing you won't do-

TY

The world starts throwin me breaks, woman, maybe I'll catch religion and walk the straight and narrow like them Bible thumpers you sit up with, but till that day, I-

95.

DELILAH

Reverend Cutlip is right about you!

WHAM! Delilah slams the back door as she storms out. Ty turns and CRACK! kicks an empty crate halfway across the floor before stomping out to the bar. Maceo opens a beer with the church-key hanging from the icebox handle, takes a gulp and sits to ponder this new development-

61 INT. BEDROOM - OPAL - EARLY EVENING

61

We hear the revival meeting CHOIR SINGING an upbeat number as Opal, dressed for Saturday night, checks herself out in a spotted, cracked MIRROR and works on her make-up-

CHOIR (V.O.)

You got to choose
Got to choose tween the fire and
the Light

62 EXT. TOWN - LUTHER - EARLY EVENING

62

MUSIC CONTINUES. Luther struts around a corner in the black section of town, dressed up to party. Behind him we see a

half-dozen other YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN, all decked out, moving toward the railroad tracks-

CHOIR (V.O.)

You got to choose
Got to choose tween the fire and
the Light
All you sinners
Got to choose tween the fire and
the Light

63 INT. ARMY BARRACKS - EARLY EVENING 63

MUSIC CONTINUES. A trio of BLACK PRIVATES share a mirror, spiffing up their uniforms to go out on leave-

CHOIR (V.O.)

No earthly love
Is gonna make it right!
You got to choose-

96.

64 INT. WORKERS HOUSING - EARLY EVENING 64

MUSIC CONTINUES. Dex, dressed to go out, pulls a SHOEBOX out from under the cot he sits on. He lifts the lid to reveal an old .38 PISTOL-

CHOIR (V.O.)

Got to choose tween the world and
the Lord
You got to choose
Got to choose tween the world and
the Lord

65 EXT. WORKERS HOUSING - EARLY EVENING 65

MUSIC CONTINUES. We TRACK toward the barracks-like housing for itinerant workers as PICKERS come out, cleaned up and ready to celebrate-

CHOIR (V.O.)

All you sinners
Got to choose tween the world and
the Lord

Ham walks alone. We see him stuff his ROLL of single dollar BILLS into one pocket, tuck a FOLDING KNIFE into the other. He passes a telephone pole and we HOLD on the Guitar Sam POSTER tacked up on it-

CHOIR (V.O.)

Train is leavin
Better jump on board!

66 EXT. REVIVAL TENT - EVENING

66

Delilah arrives at the revival tent, the CHOIR already
SINGING-

CHOIR

You got to kneel
Got to kneel for the Savior and
pray
You got to kneel
Got to kneel for the Savior and
pray

97.

67 EXT. HONEYDRIPPER - EVENING

67

MUSIC CONTINUES. The BLUE LIGHTS of the SIGN come on.
PEOPLE fill the yard in front, heading into the Honeydripper.
Metalmouth collects COVER CHARGE at the door, MONEY passing
hands-

CHOIR (V.O.)

All you sinners
Got to kneel for the Savior and
pray
Aint no hidin
From the Judgement Day!

68 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - EVENING

68

Maybe fifty people are in the club already, mostly LOCALS and
HARVEST HANDS, with more arriving all the time-

Ty stands watching the crowd, tense, not at all confident
that any of his scheme is going to work-

A group of twenty of the black SOLDIERS from the base step in-

Maceo comes over and lays a hand on his shoulder-

MACEO

Natives gettin restless.

TY

How we doing?

MACEO

We gonna be full up. But the food-
Delilah comin in?

Ty's expression gives him the answer-

TY

What if I lost her?

MACEO

She won't let you down, Ty-

TY

This aint gonna work, is it?

MACEO

We just got to play it out and see-

98.

DEX

(calling) Guitar Sam!

They look out at the growing crowd. Ty is grim-

TY

See if you can push another round
of drinks while I stall em.

MACEO

Then you gonna bring him out?

Dex is joined by several OTHERS in the club, calling out-

DEX AND OTHERS

Sam! We come to hear the guitar
man play! Guitar Sam!

TY

You be on those wires. Give him
three bars and then you pull it.

MACEO

I got a baseball bat under the
counter, but you out here all alone-

TY

Just get the liquor movin, Mace,
and keep that money where you can
run with it.

Reverend Cutlip holds forth under the LANTERN LIGHT-

REVEREND CUTLIP

The Lord don't want nobody to sit
back suffering! He wants you to
stand up! He wants you to rise up!
He wants you to step forward! He
wants you rush down into the
merciful arms of His eternal
salvation!

Many of the congregation are up on their feet, clapping and
testifying-

REVEREND CUTLIP

Is there anyone out here tonight
gonna answer His call? Is there
anyone out here tonight gonna come
forward and be saved?

99.

DELILAH

Delilah is standing, tears running down her cheeks, filled
with the emotion of the moment-

REVEREND CUTLIP

The fire is heatin up, Brothers and
Sisters, and Judgement Day is nigh!
Aint no time to hesitate, you got
to come on down and take Him into
your heart!

Delilah starts to walk down the aisle-

REVEREND CUTLIP

That's right- come on down! They
no turning back now- feel the
Lord's hand at your back- got to
leave all them sinners behind!

Delilah stops in the middle of the aisle, trembling, unsure-

REVEREND CUTLIP

(sees her) You got a voice in your
heart, Sister- that's the Lord

talking! You hear him?

Delilah starts to nod her head, weeping-

REVEREND CUTLIP

That voice telling you where you
need to be right now! You just got
to move your feet and get there!

70 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

70

China Doll fusses with Sonny's hair after he hangs his
guitar, dangling with electrical hookups, over his head-

CHINA DOLL

You look good.

Ty steps back in with them, wiping sweat from his forehead
with a handkerchief. He looks Sonny over- his hair slick
and shiny, the outfit Nadine sewed up for him tight and
sparkling-

TY

(impressed) Damn-

100.

CHINA DOLL

He looks good, doesn't he Daddy?

TY

Honey, I want you to get right by
that front door and take over
collectin the cover charge. And if
anything should happen- like go
wrong or something- you just step
out and walk away from the club,
hear?

CHINA DOLL

What's gonna go wrong?

TY

Oh- our Guitar Sam here gets them
soldier boys jumping it could get a
little rough- just be on your toes,
that's all.

CHINA DOLL

Okay.

She starts away-

TY

China Doll-

CHINA DOLL

Yeah?

TY

You know there aint a thing in this world I wouldn't do for you. Even if I mess up sometimes, you know that, right?

China Doll looks at him, not sure what brought this on, but pleased to hear it. The CALLS for Guitar Sam grow LOUDER from the floor-

CHINA DOLL

I know that, Daddy.

TY

You go on, now.

China Doll exits and Ty looks back to Sonny-

TY

Well, you look like something might of come outa New Orleans-

101.

SONNY

I forget to tell you- I fixed your hook-up.

TY

My what?

SONNY

Where the electricity comes in? It was all-

MACEO (O.S.)

Ty!

They turn to see Maceo stepping in, concerned-

MACEO

We got a situation out there-

TY

You don't think I know that?

MACEO

Got the law in the house.

71 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - BARROOM

71

Sheriff Pugh stands near the piano, putting a considerable damper on the mood in the room. Ty hurries out to him, with a panic-stricken smile on his face-

TY

Didn't think we'd be seeing you so soon!

SHERIFF PUGH

(looking around) Got a nice crowd in here tonight, Tyrone. See them army uniforms-

TY

Yeah, well we got ourselves this special attraction, see, and-

SHERIFF PUGH

Chicken.

TY

Huh?

102.

SHERIFF PUGH

Them ribs outside smell real good, but I got my heart set on some of your Delilah's fried chicken.

TY

Right-

SHERIFF PUGH

She made it last Saturday at the mayor's but ole Clayford Gentry was up from Eufala and he got the drumsticks.

Sheriff Pugh is distracted for a moment as Opal and the girls from the store step in, dressed to the nines, drinking up the eyeball action from the pickers and soldiers-

SHERIFF PUGH

I'm partial to dark meat.

TY

See, the thing is-

SHERIFF PUGH

She is back there cookin, aint she?
Our agreement was-

TY

The situation we got, Sheriff, what
with this special guest come up
from Louisiana- what it means is-
uhm-

Ty has nothing, the crowd is starting to CHANT for Guitar Sam
again. He wipes his forehead-

TY

Maybe if you were to come back in-

DELILAH

Regular or spicy?

Delilah is there, smiling at Pugh, pulling her coat off-

DELILAH

They both take the same time to fix
up, I just got to know which.

Ty and Delilah exchange a long look-

103.

SHERIFF PUGH

Have to make mine regular. I like
the spicy fine but it always come
back to nip me later.

She shoots a look to Ty-

DELILAH

It's important not to bite off more
than you can chew. (to Pugh) Yall
just make yourself at home.

She kisses Ty on the cheek and heads for the kitchen-

DELILAH

Good luck tonight, baby.

SHERIFF PUGH

Slap some maynaise on it!

Ty smiles, his nerves all gone now-

TY

(pointing) Might want to wait over
there, Sheriff. Don't want to
scare off the customers-

A CHEER from the crowd. Sonny has wandered uncertainly out
onto the stage!

TY

Oh Lord-

Ty runs up to his microphone, shoots a look to the bar-

Maceo is pouring a scotch with one hand, the other wrapped
around the wires coming out of the wall. He nods to Ty-

Sonny starts to hook his guitar up with a thick COIL OF WIRE,
then into the dented AMP sitting on a wooden chair beside him
and pointed out at the crowd. Metalmouth Sims looks on
uncomfortably. Ty puts on his biggest grin, easing behind
the keyboard-

TY

So here's what you all been waitin
for, people, the noted performer
and recordin star-

104.

ENTRANCE - TIME AND YOUNG HENRY

Time Trenier strolls in with his sax still in its case, hat
on his head, exuding his no-sweat attitude. Beside him is
YOUNG HENRY, a kid who can't be more than 14, wearing a
fedora-

TY (O.S.)

-direct from New Orleans, Louisiana-

STAGE

TY

-Guitar Sam!!!!

A TERRIBLE SQUAWK emits from the amp as Sonny makes the connection-

Sheriff Pugh cover his ears-

The girls from the store cover their ears, making pained faces-

Sonny pulls his guitar away from the amp and the SQUAWK settles to a FUZZY BUZZ. Sonny frowns at the amp-

SONNY

Sorry, folks- must of got kicked on the train.

The audience is stone-faced. Could this really be the man?

Young Henry steps up and sits behind the DRUM KIT, pulling sticks from inside his shirt-

Ty closes his eyes, begins to shake his head in defeat-

China Doll looks worried, collecting another cover charge at the door-

Delilah steps out from the kitchen and looks to the stage, worried-

Sonny holds his arms out wide, shifting his body to get the BUZZ under control-

Dex leans to talk in Junebug's ear-

DEX

What's this fool playin at?

105.

Maceo isn't going to wait to find out. He grabs the wires with both hands, yanks- they hold firm! He looks to the stage, panicked-

-as Sonny brings his fingers to the strings and the amp BLASTS the room with a long, trip-hammering, spine-shivering, **ELECTRIC GUITAR INTRO!**

Ty stands at the piano with his mouth hanging open-

Sonny WHOOPS and leans into his microphone-

SONNY

Gonna hold my baby as tight as I
can
Tonight she'll know I'm a mighty
man!
Have you heard the news?
There's good rockin tonight!

Sonny looks over to Ty, who catches himself and begins to play along. Young Henry is impassive as he plays a fast shuffle on the skins-

Ty looks over to Maceo, half-climbing the wall as he tries to pull the wires out. Maceo sees Ty, who waves him off-

SONNY

Have you heard the news?
There's good rockin tonight!

Delilah smiles and presses her hands together, shooting a look upward-

DELILAH

Thank you, Jesus.

Time Trenier has his case open now, the gleaming instrument in one hand, squinting at the mouthpiece as he holds it up to the light with the other-

SONNY

Meet me at midnight behind the barn
Don't you worry I'll do you no harm

The crowd is already CLAPPING and STOMPING in time with the song. Henry starts to hit the two and the four beat hard to keep time-

SONNY

Make sure to bring my rockin shoes
Tonight I'm gonna rock away all of
my blues!

106.

Time Trenier screws the mouthpiece on, puts his horn to his lips and BLOWS right on the beat to take the sax break, walking through the parting crowd to the bandstand!

Junebug grabs Opal's hand and they begin to DANCE a modified jitterbug, people spreading to give them room-

Sheriff Pugh, hands still over his ears, sits in a corner paying special attention to Opal's hip action-

As Time continues to blow, stepping up onto the stage, Sonny keeps urging Metalmouth Sims to come closer to his microphone with the harmonica. Sims is hesitant but Sonny keeps waving-closer, closer-

Metalmouth shoots a nervous look to Ty, who nods from the piano, so he butts his harp smack against the microphone, takes a deep breath and HONKS his soul out, grabbing the break from Time!

The audience goes wild, a half-dozen couples dancing now, others clapping and finger-popping and jumping to the beat where they stand. Sonny shakes out the long CORD attached to his guitar-

China Doll is trying to keep collecting from the new CUSTOMERS pressing in the door and dance at the same time, thrilled by the music. Lonnie and Scratch sneak in behind her as she turns toward the bandstand-

Metalmouth wraps up his break and Sonny takes over with the guitar again, making it WAIL as he hops off the stage, steps up on a chair, then onto the bar counter!

He walks the length of the bar, playing his ass off, hops down at the far end, grins at China Doll and heads out through the door, dragging extension cord behind! Lonnie and Scratch hurry to pull slack for him as he steps out into the **NIGHT-**

72 EXT. ACE OF SPADES - NIGHT

72

Ham and a few other pickers stand outside Toussaint's, beers in hand, staring across toward the Honeydripper as Sonny steps out PLAYING with a CROWD behind him-

HAM

What the hell is that?

Sonny steps out into the middle of the crossroads and plays, a CAR stopping short of running him over.

107.

He hops up on the hood and keeps playing, a TRUCK from the other direction stopping to blast him with its HEADLIGHTS.

Sonny indicates with his guitar neck to the CROWD emptying out of Toussaint's that he wants them to follow, then hops

down onto a big picker's back and is carried back in to the Honeydripper, still playing-

HAM

We got to check that out!

A couple dozen patrons move away with him. We HOLD on the doorway as OLD MAN TOUSSAINT comes out to look, puzzled and angry-

73 INT. HONEYDRIPPER - NIGHT

73

Time and Metalmouth SING into the same microphone as Sonny plays his way back up to the stage-

TIME AND METALMOUTH

Have you heard the news?
There's good rockin tonight-
Have you heard the news?
There's good rockin tonight-

We FOLLOW as Maceo hustles back and forth, trying to keep up with orders for ribs, bring cold beers out from the icebox, etc. He suddenly stops in his tracks-

Nadine stands before him, looking fatally sexy in a SATIN DRESS she no doubt made herself.

MACEO

Oh my soul.

NADINE

Don't tire yourself out, Poppa.
You an me got bidness together.

MACEO

I believe we do.

He hurries past with his arms full of beer, pivoting to check her out from another angle-

Dex sees across the room, frowns-

Ham is talking to Lucille at the bar, leaning in close to be heard over the music-

108.

SONNY

I heard the news-
There's good rockin tonight!

Sonny finishes with a squawking chord and the joint goes wild-
CHEERING, WHISTLING, STOMPING!

SONNY

Alla you men grab hold of a woman!
You can't find a woman, just grab
hold of yourselves- we gonna play
this one slow and tight.

Sonny goes into the intro for Louis Jordan's Blue Light
Boogie. Time lays down a steady rock beat with his sax and
Ty joins in at the piano-

SONNY

They	did	the boogie real	slow
With	the	blue lights way	down low
They	did	the boogie real	slow
With	the	blue lights way	down low

Ty joins him-

SONNY AND TY

They did the boogie real slow
With the blue lights way down low

Ty takes the verse-

TY

I went to a party
With a bobby sox
I started swingin
All she would do was rock

As they join in the chorus, Ty sees-

Cool Breeze, strolling in, checking out the action with a
proprietary air.

Ty looks to Maceo, getting back behind the bar. Maceo sees
as well, tightening up-

Cool Breeze nods to Ty.

A slow, sexy SAX BREAK comes up and Ty leaves the piano to
cross to the bar. When he gets there Maceo is already
counting out a huge pile of BILLS-

109.

MACEO

Hundred forty-two, forty-three,
forty-four, five, six, seven,
eight, nine- hundred fifty. And
they's another fifty in here-

Maceo thunks a heavy CLOTH SACK full of change onto the
countertop-

MACEO

Lucky Hardaway don't mind some
change, does he?

Cool Breeze doesn't even glance at the money, hard-eying Ty
instead-

COOL BREEZE

What if Mr. Hardaway was to say let
the chumps keep their change, he
wants the club back one way or the
other?

Maceo looks to Ty, who remains impassive, mind working-

COOL BREEZE

How'd that be?

TY

Well- he'd have to take it up with
my bidness partner.

Ty shifts and we RACK FOCUS to see across the room to Sheriff
Pugh, receiving his sack of chicken and white bread from
Delilah. Ty smiles and waves-

Cool Breeze reconsiders his terms-

COOL BREEZE

That sheriff your partner?

TY

(sighs) Yeah, and he's twice as
mean as he is ugly.

Cool Breeze grins, scoops up the bills on the counter-

COOL BREEZE

You must want this club awful bad,
brother.

Cool Breeze hefts the sack of change, shoots a look to the
stage and leans over to speak into Ty's ear-

COOL BREEZE

You maybe know this already, but
that aint no Guitar Sam.

He steps away just as the song ends to APPLAUSE, Ty taking a deep sigh of relief. Sonny steps up to the microphone to introduce the next song-

TOUSSAINT (O.S.)

You is a lie!

A shocked silence.

The audience makes way for Old Man Toussaint to come tottering up to the foot of the stage. He points a bony finger at Sonny-

TOUSSAINT

You is a lie, boy! I known Sammy
since he's drinkin mama's milk,
hell, I known his Mama herself when
she live up to Plaquemine- and you
aint him!

The audience looks to Sonny for his defense-

Ty holds his breath. Maceo brings the baseball bat up from behind the bar.

Sonny just smiles-

SONNY

That's Creole Guitar Sam you talkin
bout, Pops. I'm Delta Guitar Sam.

Toussaint ponders this a moment, then huffs-

TOUSSAINT

As long as we straight on that.

JUNEBUG

Get on outa there and let the man
play!

A CHORUS of CRIES to the same effect, and Sonny crosses back to his microphone-

SONNY

Imonna play you one I come up with

today while I was havin my hair cut-

He starts into a bouncy INTRO that Metalmouth joins in with,
then starts to SING as the crowd starts to dance and clap-

111.

SONNY

Oh China Doll
Can't get you offa my mind!
Oh China Doll
I can't get you offa my mind!
If you be my baby
Gonna leave all them others behind!

The front row is all girls goggling at Sonny, instant groupies- but we RACK to China Doll, transfixed, as she is drawn toward the stage-

SONNY

Oh China Doll
Think about you day and night!
Oh China Doll
I think about you day and night!
Can't forget you baby
Oh when you gonna treat me right?

Time Trenier steps in for a growling SAX BREAK-

TY

Ty looks around the crowded, rocking room-

POV - SHERIFF PUGH

The Sheriff makes his way through the crowd and out the door.
The last person he passes turns toward Ty-

Possum?

But then DANCERS cross in front and he is gone.

TY

Ty frowns, troubled. Under the sax now we hear a dissonant SLIDE GUITAR, the haunting notes Possum was playing at the train station. Ty searches the crowd-

POV

The SLIDE GUITAR continues underneath as we PAN across the crowd dancing-

There's Possum again, at the bar, face turned toward Ty.

112.

TY

We TIGHTEN on TY. Why is he here?

POV - POSSUM

Possum turns his head slowly, fixes on something, and we PAN to see Dex and Ham standing toe-to-toe, snarling into each other's face.

We PUNCH IN tighter and tighter on the young men, body language telling us a fight is about to break out-

ECU TY

Ty desperately pushes his way across the crowded floor to reach them and the FLASHBACKS come again, the SAX MUSIC growing echoey and menacing-

INT. BAR - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

74

74

The shaky perspective and over-saturated colors again, tight on the men struggling, the Girl cowering, then Young Tyrone twisting the Guitar Man's wrist and thrusting, again and again, hugging close to him, then pulled away and the-

-KNIFE falls to the floor, BLOODY, and the-

-Guitar Man falls to his hands and knees, his stomach a bloody mess, crawling on all fours and HOWLING and Young Tyrone watching in horror as he is held back by many arms and the Girl SCREAMING-

INT. HONEYDRIPPER - NIGHT - (PRESENT)

75

75

-which becomes Time BLOWING HIS SAX into the microphone-

-and Dex reaches for his pistol-

-and Ham reaches for his knife, but-

-a huge, strong hand clamps down on Dex's wrist-

-and another huge hand grabs Ham's wrist!

Ty is there, clamping onto them with a grip of iron.

113.

A lighter, bouncier ELECTRIC GUITAR RIFF has replaced the sax now. Ty looks deep into the eyes of the two surprised pickers-

TY

Yall in my house, here, gentlemen.
Don't have no fightin, don't have
no killin, don't have none of that
dismal nonsense in my house.
Understand? What's your name son?

Dex is shaken by the strength of the grip on his arm-

DEX

Dex- Dexter Moncrief.

TY

And you?

HAM

Hamilton Drinkwater.

TY

Well, gentlemen, this is the night
there won't be no pitiful song
written bout you two killin each
other. Don't nothin rhyme with
'Moncrief' anyhow.

Maceo is there now, holding a cardboard BOX in one hand and the BASEBALL BAT in the other-

MACEO

Got a problem here?

TY

These young men seem to brought
something in for our collection.

MACEO

(to Dex) Yours first.

Ty gently takes the pistol from Dex, regards it grimly before laying it in the box. He turns his attention to Ham-

TY

Now yours.

He takes the knife from Ham, tosses it in the box-

TY

Yall still need to mess with each other, you go outside and do it.

114.

Ty lets go of their wrists-

TY

This world is full of people got no use for us, like to see us in the grave. We don't need to give em any help.

The two give each other a final dirty look and move away into opposite corners-

STAGE

Sonny keeps playing-

SONNY

Oh China Doll
Got to let you into my heart!
Oh China Doll
Got to let you into my heart!
I surrender darlin
I loved you from the very start!

Ty rushes to the piano, joins in jamming with the other players-

76 EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

76

Slick sits on a tomb, drinking wine, MOONLIGHT spilling over Bertha Mae's fresh-dug GRAVE. He listens to the MUSIC in the far distance-

SLICK

Sound like the music movin on
again, darlin. The way it always
do.

He listens for another moment, sighs-

SLICK

Time to make room for whoever comin
next.

FADE TO BLACK.

115.

77 EXT. HONEYDRIPPER - MORNING

77

The SUN RISES next to the Honeydripper sign. We hear the
CROW of a distant ROOSTER. The parking lot is empty but for
Ty's old Ford-

Ty, exhausted but happy, steps out front. He pastes a SNIPE
that says HELD OVER! across the Guitar Sam poster-

POSSUM (O.S.)

That boy can play some.

Ty turns. Possum is on the road, guitar strung over his
shoulder, feeling his way with a red-tipped CANE.

TY

You leavin?

POSSUM

Aint needed round here no more.

TY

Where you headed?

POSSUM

(smiles) Oh-- down the road.

Ty watches the blind man move away for a moment.

MACEO (O.S.)

Tyrone-

Ty turns as Maceo steps out, equally tired and unshaven-

MACEO

Who you talkin to out here?

Maceo looks down the road, but Possum is nowhere to be seen.
Ty shrugs-

TY

Just myself.

78 EXT. SHARECROPPER SHACK - EARLY MORNING

78

Scratch and Lonnie are set to pretend to play music again.
Lonnie spreads his fingers over the keys he's drawn on the
board-

-and begins to PLAY! Fast, rhythmic boogie piano-

116.

Instead of a Diddley bow, Scratch is pretending to tune the
two strings on a `guitar' made of a plank of wood and baling
wire. He carefully takes a length of clothesline rope
leading from the guitar, tacks the end of it to the wall of
the shack, plugging himself in. He looks to Lonnie, who
nods, and then-

-he begins to PLAY in time with Lonnie.

We CRANE UP and away from them, the MUSIC spilling out over
the field-

It sounds a whole lot like rock and roll.

THE END