

Sounder

Screenplay by Lonnie Elder III  
From the novel by William H. Armstrong

FADE IN

Before titles.

EXT. HUNTING WOODS - LANDSDOWN COUNTY - NIGHT

It is a clear but cold Autumn night at some time in the nineteen thirties.  
The

Landsdown Woods are an assortment of various elements of nature: quiet water streams, rushing rivers, heavy brushland, small trees, and the more dominant, great tall pines. NATHAN LEE MORGAN, a Black man in his late thirties or early forties, treks deep into the woods with his eleven year old son, DAVID LEE, and his hound dog, SOUNDER. NATHAN LEE is a well built, strong manner of a man with a deliberate and quiet manner - DAVID LEE, like his father is tall and strong with big, bright active eyes. SOUNDER, their hound dog, is a mixture of red-bone hound and bulldog, with great square jaws.

TITLES BEGIN

NATHAN LEE carries an old rifle, and a burlap sack thrown across his shoulder -- DAVID LEE walks with a lantern as SOUNDER tracks ahead of them. They keep moving until they come upon a quiet river stream --

EXT. RIVER STREAM - NIGHT

They walk along the edges of the river, with deliberation. It is obvious that they have walked this route many times. They reach a cut-off point and circle back into the woods, and pick up a pathway --

EXT. PATHWAY - NIGHT

They pick up speed in close approach to a weeded area and stop. DAVID looks about in disappointment. SOUNDER scratches the earth -- NATHAN looks out into the darkness with a nagging expression on his face --

TITLES INTERRUPTED

DAVID LEE

There ain't no possums in this woods tonight,  
Daddy.

NATHAN LEE

Looks that way, son. Guess the cold done drove  
most of 'em down to the big water country --  
but if there's one left out here -- we gotta  
find him.

DAVID LEE

It's cold, Daddy!

NATHAN LEE

Here, put my jacket over you.

NATHAN takes his jacket off and drapes it over the boy's frame as SOUNDER begins to scratch and whine with intensity. He moves to stand over the dog.

NATHAN LEE

You all right, boy?

Suddenly SOUNDER's voice lets out and he breaks away in a burst of speed. NATHAN and DAVID react quickly and take up the chase behind him.

TITLES BEGIN AGAIN

As SOUNDER makes his way through the woods -- NATHAN and DAVID rush behind him, following the great unique sound of the dog's voice. It is a sound that bounces -- soulful, louder and clearer than any purebred redbone. It is spaced with precision, bouncing from slope to slope like a rubber ball, filling up the night with music as though the branches of all the trees were being pulled across silver strings.

EXT. THE BASE OF THE TREE WHERE THE POSSUM HAS TAKEN REFUGE - NIGHT

SOUNDER arrives and makes a leap to climb the tree as NATHAN and DAVID rush on to the scene. NATHAN looks up and points to the spot where the possum is. He puts his rifle down near him, and DAVID assists him in the shaking of the tree as SOUNDER makes his leaps upward to the rhythm of the sound coming from his voice. The possum gives way to the force and falls to the ground. SOUNDER charges for the animal -- NATHAN quickly picks up his rifle and aims for the animal. He fires into blank darkness and misses. The possum recovers from the fall and scampers into thick brushland, with SOUNDER in close pursuit.

EXT. THE AREA OF THE THICK BRUSHLAND - NIGHT

SOUNDER cannot overcome the briar thickness of the brushland -- but the possum with his smaller size manages to elude the dog.

EXT. THE EDGES OF THE BRUSHLAND AREA - NIGHT

SOUNDER comes out of the brush area, whining in frustration as NATHAN and DAVID approach him. NATHAN immediately realizes that the possum has gotten away.

END OF TITLES

NATHAN LEE

(slams his rifle to the ground)

Dammit! And I remember the time when a bull couldn't a stopped him from gettin' that possum!

DAVID LEE kneels down and caresses SOUNDER's frame. NATHAN realizes that DAVID is disturbed over his harshness.

NATHAN LEE

Come here, son--

DAVID LEE goes to his father, who kneels to him, and puts both of his huge

hands on the boy's shoulders.

NATHAN LEE

It's all right. He did his job -- I just got foolish for a minute.

He gives the boy a quick embrace and rises to his feet --

NATHAN LEE

If anybody's to blame, it's me -- I oughta nailed him when I took that shot.

DAVID LEE

It was too dark, Daddy.

NATHAN LEE

Yeah. We better git back to house now.

NATHAN puts his hand on SOUNDER's neck, gives him an affectionate rub. They gather their equipment and head for home. They move out of the brush area on to a pathway.

EXT. ROAD AND CABIN - NIGHT

This area of the road is about ten hundred feet from the front yard of the cabin. The yard is wide, and stretches out to the very edges of the road which comes to a horseshoe deadend about two hundred feet at the far end of their cabin.

NATHAN LEE

In all the years me and Sounder been tracking down possums and coons in these woods -- he ain't tore one of 'em up yet... He always brought 'em back whole and healthy... And that's the difference between a hound dog that's dirty and mean, to one that's great like ol' Sounder here.

EXT. THE CABIN'S FRONT YARD - NIGHT

They move through the yard, up the steps, on to the porch, and open the door to the house.

INT. THE KITCHEN-SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

NATHAN, DAVID, and SOUNDER step into the cabin. It is an old house but it is the home of the Morgan family so it is kept neat and clean at all times. To one side of the area is a kitchen table, a wood stove, and an old beat-up cabinet. To the other side are two old rockers, an old dresser, and one or two pieces of other old living room furniture -- there are three portals in this area: the backdoor in the kitchen section which leads to the backyard, and two in the sitting room which leads to the childrens' and NATHAN and REBECCA's rooms.

REBECCA MORGAN, an attractive brown-skin woman in her thirties, sits in a rocker by the stove alone, picking kernels out of walnut shells with a bent hairpin. She looks up to NATHAN as he stands just inside the door, and looks

down at her.

NATHAN LEE

We cornered one, but he got away.

He does not wait for a response from her -- he, DAVID and SOUNDER keep moving across the floor, and on out the back door. REBECCA's eyes slowly trail their backs out the door. Her eyes just hang there after they have moved out of sight.

INT. THE SHED - NIGHT

The shed is medium in size and old like the house. There is a long wide table running along side the right wall. There are hanging nails on all of the walls and alongside the table. The various pieces of archaic farm equipment are all neatly put in organized places. NATHAN, DAVID and SOUNDER enter the shed. NATHAN hangs the burlap sack on one of the wall nails, and places the rifle down on the table -- DAVID does likewise with the lantern.

NATHAN LEE

Bet you're a tired little fellow, David Lee.

NATHAN takes the lantern apart and begins to clean it -- and DAVID LEE picks up a small can of oil and puts it on top of the table.

DAVID LEE

Yes, sir...

NATHAN LEE

You oughta be tired, too, Sounder. That possum shore whipped the hell outta you tonight!

He laughs behind his own remark as he finishes the business with the lantern and picks up his rifle.

DAVID LEE

He beat you, too, Daddy, and you had a big ol' shootin' rifle.

NATHAN LEE

(serious)

Boy, you don't make funny with your daddy like that.

His father has caught him off guard -- he was only joking -- he doesn't understand the attitude -- he doesn't know what to say -- he turns and walks away.

NATHAN LEE

David Lee...

DAVID LEE

(stops and turns)

Yes, sir...

NATHAN LEE

You had a rough time out there tonight -- so

you stay home from that school tomorrow.

DAVID LEE

I wanna go -- the trip don't bother me none.

NATHAN LEE

You learnin' anything at that school?

DAVID LEE

Yes, sir -- I learn to write a little bit, and  
I can read a lot--

NATHAN LEE looks on him for a moment, and then softly nods his head--

NATHAN LEE

Readin' must be somethin' powerful, huh, son?

DAVID LEE

Yes, sir...

NATHAN LEE slams the rifle closed, moves towards the exit and steps hastily out into the backyard -- DAVID LEE and SOUNDER follow him --

EXT. THE BACKYARD - NIGHT

The backyard spreads out in the form of a jagged horseshoe, surrounded by low levels of grass -- at the far end is a pathway, running about three hundred feet away to where the tall grass grows. The shed sits to the far left edge and more to the right edge is a water well. To the right of the water well is a woodpile. Up against the house, to the right of the steps to the back door are two wash tubs with homemade scrubbing boards. NATHAN keeps walking directly to the water well, reaches it and lowers the bucket down into the well, brings the bucket of water up, scoops up with a dipper, drinks, and tries to look out over the plains and hills from the back of his house.

NATHAN LEE

When the fall comes in these parts, the Night  
moon runs away like a rabbit -- you could stay  
out here lookin' all night, and not see a thing  
out yonder.

DAVID LEE

We goin' huntin' again tomorrow ?

NATHAN LEE

Yep. I guess you must wonder why though, what  
with the luck we havin', but like I always  
say--

DAVID LEE

"You lose some of the time, what you always go  
afta, but you lose all the time what you don't  
go afta!"

NATHAN LEE

Now who says I didn't lay my mark on you, boy!

They both laugh as REBECCA steps out into the backyard from the house, and moves swiftly towards them.

REBECCA

David Lee, it's time for you to get to bed!

DAVID LEE

Goodnight.

He starts moving away towards the house.

NATHAN LEE

Night, son!

REBECCA

And don't wake up Josie Mae and Earl!

They watch DAVID LEE enter the house -- then NATHAN LEE looks to SOUNDER as they begin to move for the house.

NATHAN LEE

Your bedtime too, hound dog.

SOUNDER hops up on him -- he strokes the dog's back and then pushes him away.

NATHAN LEE

Off you go, boy!

SOUNDER scampers away around the side of the house.

REBECCA

I bet you could use a hot cup of coffee, Nathan Lee.

NATHAN LEE

I shore could, Miss Rebecca.

They start back into the house.

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - NIGHT

SOUNDER crawls just under the front porch and lies down on a burlap sack for his night's sleep.

INT. THE CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

DAVID LEE has taken some of the walnuts and is sitting up in the bed. EARL and JOSIE MAE, their sister, are fast asleep across from them. EARL is a sprightly little boy about eight years of age who has the kind of round face that gives one the impression that he is forever smiling. DAVID LEE grabs his book and starts to read.

INT. KITCHEN-SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

NATHAN and REBECCA enter the house through the back door -- NATHAN stops at the table in the kitchen area as REBECCA moves directly to the door of the children's room -- just before she gets to the door, she notices that the

bowl of walnuts on the floor by the rocker has been disturbed -- she snatches the bowl up from the floor and looks to NATHAN --

REBECCA

The boy done went into my walnuts! I skin my fingers to the bone to pick two pounds that's worth almost nothing at the commissary and he done took almost half of what I pick!

NATHAN LEE

The boy is hungry, Rebecca.

His words cut through her frustration -- she puts down the bowl on an old dresser next to the door that leads to the children's room and just stands there for a moment -- she and NATHAN, looking directly on each other -- after a moment she moves across the floor and nestles into the embrace of his arms -- he holds her close to him for a moment and then they break the embrace --

NATHAN LEE

Dammit!

He moves halfway across the floor and stops as REBECCA goes to the stove to prepare his coffee --

REBECCA

We been through these off-seasons before -- we made it.

NATHAN LEE

What we make it to? The next season to work ourselves to death, share croppin' for ol' man Howard, so he can get richer and we can't even eat when the croppin' time is done?

His coffee is ready -- she puts it on the table -- he moves to it and sits and takes a sip with the frustration still nagging him. She stands over him from behind and puts her hand on his strong neck for a moment and then she moves for the children's room and enters -- he drinks his coffee --

INT. REBECCA and NATHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

REBECCA enters, unrobes and crawls into bed -- she lies there for awhile in thought, rolls over to position herself and then she hears the back door SLAM. She raises her head for a moment and then she decides to get up. She puts her clothes back on hurriedly and moves out of the room.

INT. KITCHEN-SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

REBECCA moves with directness through the room, on out door to the backyard.

EXT. THE BACKYARD - NIGHT

REBECCA stands in middle of the backyard, looking about in the area.

REBECCA

(softly).

Nathan?

There is not a sound -- then she moves hastily around the side of the house to the front yard.

EXT. THE FRONT YARD - NIGHT

She looks down under the edge of the porch to see SOUNDER fast asleep. She turns and tries to see through the darkness down the road -- she slowly moves up on the porch and stands in the doorway looking out into the night. She begins to hum -- the kind of hum to relax the nerves -- to move the thoughts away from the mind -- thoughts that were plaguing her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE MORGANS' KITCHEN - DAY

It is about six a.m. the following morning and hot food is piping on the stove.

INT. THE CHILDREN'S ROOM - DAY

DAVID LEE awakes first and catches the aroma of the food floating into their room. He jumps out of bed and arouses JOSIE MAE and EARL.

DAVID LEE  
Come on y'all, git up, somethin's cookin' in  
the kitchen! Come on, Earl!

They all jump into their clothes and rush for the kitchen.

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

They head straight for the stove where DAVID takes the lid off one of the pots and then the other.

EARL  
What's in there, David!?

DAVID LEE  
Sausage and hambones!

EARL tries to put his hand in one of the pots but DAVID slaps it away.

DAVID LEE  
Don't do that!

JOSIE MAE  
Where did it come from?

JOSIE MAE is a tall, pretty girl for her nine years -- with a sort of brooding air about her.

DAVID LEE  
Come on!

DAVID sees SOUNDER through the front-door screen, scratching to get in -- he hurriedly lets the dog in, and they all dash out the back door.

EXT. THE BACKYARD - DAY

REBECCA is hanging out wash on the clothes line as the children rush toward her.

DAVID LEE  
Mama, there's hot meat on the stove!

REBECCA  
That's right!

DAVID LEE  
Where did it come from, Mama?

REBECCA  
Where all meat come from -- now git yourself washed up and be snappy about it -- you got six miles ahead of you to that school.

She heads for the kitchen while the children proceed to wash up at the well.

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

REBECCA enters the kitchen and immediately starts preparing breakfast as NATHAN is awakened and is standing in the doorway to the kitchen from their room. She notices him and stops her work for a moment.

REBECCA  
Good mornin', Nathan.

NATHAN LEE  
Mornin'...

REBECCA  
You ready to eat?

NATHAN LEE  
I'll wait till after the children.

She goes back to preparing the food as she moves into the kitchen to put together some scraps of food for SOUNDER.

NATHAN LEE  
How's the weather out there?

REBECCA  
Little chilly.

NATHAN LEE  
Hope it don't freeze out our baseball game today!

EXT. THE BACKYARD - DAY

The children meet NATHAN as he is coming out of the house and they are about to enter.

CHILDREN

Mornin', Daddy!

NATHAN LEE

Mornin' back atcha!

They rush on past him into the house as he smiles.

NATHAN LEE

Don't forget to save me some!

He stops in the center of the yard and looks about.

NATHAN LEE

Sounder!

SOUNDER comes running toward him from the field in back of the shed. NATHAN bends to a pan on the ground and puts the scraps of food in it as SOUNDER arrives and begins to eat. NATHAN rises and looks on, pleasingly.

NATHAN LEE

That oughta put you in good shape for tonight!

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

The children are at the table eating as REBECCA is about to return to her laundry work in the backyard.

REBECCA

Don't take all day at that table, David Lee.

JOSIE MAE

Mama, when kin me and Earl go to school with David Lee?

REBECCA

Maybe soon--

She moves out of the door --

EXT. THE BACKYARD - DAY

Out in the backyard, NATHAN is chopping wood with SOUNDER nearby him as REBECCA returns to hanging out the wash. She starts that nervous hum of hers, and occasionally glances over to him at the woodpile. He lifts his head for a moment and calls out to her.

NATHAN LEE

The one thing we got plenty of is wood!

She stops her work and just looks on him with concern when DAVID, JOSIE and EARL dash out into the yard, breaking her trend of thought.

DAVID LEE

Ready to go, Mama!

REBECCA

Tuck that shirt in, David Lee.

He moves toward her, cramming the shirt down into his pants.

REBECCA

You got two shirts on?

DAVID LEE

Yes mam...

REBECCA

When you get outta that school, you come right on back home, y'all gon' have to take this laundry work I done for Miss Boatwright today.

She gives him a quick hug and kiss. He rushes over to his father.

DAVID LEE

'Bye, Daddy...

They shake hands...

NATHAN LEE

'Bye, son...

He takes off with JOSIE MAE, EARL and SOUNDER.

REBECCA starts back toward the clothesline, and as if to make a decision, she stops and turns to NATHAN.

REBECCA

Where was it you went last night, Nathan?

He rises from his chopping position and faces her directly.

NATHAN LEE

I went where I had to go, Rebecca. My children was hungry.

As if to say the conversation is over, he immediately goes back to chopping wood. She gives him a long but soft look and then finally returns to her work.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

DAVID LEE rides in the back of the wagon of a white farmer, who is giving him a lift part of the way.

DAVID LEE runs a distance of the road -- sits and rests on the side of the road for a few minutes -- walks at a slow pace for a while.

The boy climbs up into the wagon of a black farmer -- The wagon pulls away.

He makes the final dash up the road.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

He speeds around the side of the building, and enters through a back door.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

He rushes down the short hallway until he comes to a door, and enters.

INT. CLASSROOM OF THE SCHOOL - DAY

This is a Southern White school where they segregate off into a far corner one or two black children they allow to attend the school.

DAVID LEE enters the room in an exhausted state as he stops just inside the door.

All eyes are upon him, including a black boy and girl who are segregated off in the back corner of the room. The teacher picks up his clock from the desk and looks at it.

DAVID LEE  
I'm sorry, Mr Clay...

MR CLAY  
You are one hour late...

DAVID LEE  
Yessir...

MR CLAY  
Well, take your seat.

DAVID LEE, with all eyes still upon him, moves carefully to a chair in the far corner -- sits next to the black boy and girl. MR CLAY takes up his book from the desk, and looks out on the class --

MR CLAY  
Now where were we before we were interrupted--  
Oh yeah, Huckleberry Finn, chapter thirty-four!  
This chapter is called: WE CHEER UP JIM! Here  
we go: "Tom says: What's the vittles for?  
Going to feed the dogs? The colored boy kind of  
smiled around gradually over his face, and  
says: Yes, Mars Sid, a dog. Cur'us dog, too.  
Does you want to go en look at 'im?"

CLOSE ANGLE - DAVID and other two children. The teacher's words can hardly be heard as he continues with the reading -- as the CHILDREN'S faces hold mixed expressions of confusion, pain, and mostly boredom. A head shaking, pathetic moment --

EXT. FRONT OF MRS. BOATWRIGHT'S HOUSE - DAY

It is a medium size one-family house, painted gray -- trimmed in white around the edges of the frame -- the yard is surrounded by well-kept hedges -- the yard is mostly green grass and flower beds -- with walkways leading to the front and back of the house. The children and the dog move into the yard from the residential street --

EXT. SIDE OF THE HOUSE - DAY

They walk around the side of the house to a back door. The boys put the basket down -- DAVID knocks on the door -- after a moment, MRS. BOATWRIGHT, a tall, attractive white woman in her early forties, opens the screen door.

DAVID LEE  
We brought your laundry, Miss Boatwright.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Come in, children.

They enter the house, leaving SOUNDER in the backyard.

INT. MRS. BOATWRIGHT'S KITCHEN - DAY

DAVID and EARL stop in the middle of the floor, holding the basket.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Put it right up on this table, boys.

The two boys lift the basket up on the table. She looks through the clothes for a moment.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
You tell Rebecca ain't a Chinaman in all this world can beat her ironing.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out some change, picks out some and passes it on to DAVID.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
This is for your mama's work, and here's something for the three of you.

DAVID LEE  
Thank you, Miss Boatwright.

JOSIE MAE & EARL  
Thank you, Miss Boatwright.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Oh, by the way, David, I have the book I promised you.

She moves for another room as the children all look to each other -- she returns immediately with the book, and hands it to DAVID LEE --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
It's about the Three Musketeers.

DAVID LEE  
Thank you, Miss Boatwright.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
When you read it we'll talk about it...

DAVID LEE  
Yes mam... We gotta go, Miss Boatwright.. .

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Tell Rebecca I said 'hi', now...

The children turn and walk out of the back door --

EXT. OUTSIDE MRS. BOATWRIGHT'S BACK DOOR - DAY

MRS. BOATWRIGHT is in the doorway as DAVID, EARL and SOUNDER move ahead of JOSIE MAE, who stops and turns to MRS. BOATWRIGHT --

JOSIE MAE  
What's a Chinaman, Miss Boatwright?

Before MRS. BOATWRIGHT can struggle up a response --

DAVID LEE  
Come on, Josie Mae! We gotta hurry!

JOSIE MAE turns and catches up with them -- they all rush around and out of MRS. BOATWRIGHT'S yard.

EXT. THE COUNTRY - DAY

They run up the road and into a field -- continue on across the field and over a slope until they can see crowds of people at a make-shift baseball diamond where two teams of black sharecroppers are engaged in a heated baseball contest. They keep moving on into the crowd --

EXT. THE BASEBALL DIAMOND AREA - DAY

Men, women and children are standing around, loudly rooting for their team as the three children make their way through the crowd to find their mother. NATHAN LEE is pitching on the mound for his team. He throws a pitch -- the Batter misses it --

DAVID LEE  
Look at Daddy throw that ball!

They keep moving until they spot their mother, who is seated on a bench with another woman. They rush to her.

WOMAN  
Rebecca, your children git bigger by the hour!

REBECCA  
It's the good livin' that do it, Harriet!

She smiles as the children approach her. DAVID LEE hands her the money.

DAVID LEE  
Miss Boatwright gave me this book and all of us  
a nickel apiece!

REBECCA holds her hand out with palm up as if to say "hand it over" -- the three children pass the money on to her --

DAVID LEE  
Who's winning, Mama?

REBECCA  
Nobody yet -- it's all tied up.

The ballgame goes on as they shout and roar for NATHAN's team. NATHAN is putting on quite a pitching performance in the close, exciting game.

NATHAN's team is at bat -- there are two out -- a man at second and a man at bat. The man at bat hits a ground ball to the second baseman, the ball trickles away from his glove into the outfield -- he quickly retrieves the ball and tries to make a play at First Base, but the Batter is called safe -- meanwhile the runner on Second has moved past Third Base and is attempting to score -- the first baseman throws the ball to the catcher at Home Plate as the runner slides into Home. It is a close play and the umpire makes the decision to call the runner safe. An uproar takes place as the other team shows its displeasure over the umpire's call -- but the people who are rooting for NATHAN's team shout and scream in ecstasy. After a short time, order is restored.

EXT. ON THE ROAD AWAY FROM THE BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

NATHAN and his family are on their way home, accompanied by a guitar-playing friend named IKE. As he plays, he sings one of those basic black back-country blues. He finishes the song and gives out with a big laugh and boasts --

IKE  
If they heard me sing like this up North I'd be richer than the man I sharecrop for.

NATHAN LEE  
And if they saw me pitch the way I did today -- they'd hire me just to strike out Babe Ruth!

NATHAN and IKE give out with a big laugh. REBECCA just smiles.

EXT. ROAD AND CHURCH - DAY

They pass a white church on the road. A number of people are standing in the yard of the church and some are entering. DAVID watches with inquisitiveness.

DAVID LEE  
What do they do in the white churches, Mama?

REBECCA  
Same as we -- they pray.

IKE  
You know, one time by mistake I went into a white church down in Row County and to this day I don't know how'n the devil I got outta that church alive.

NATHAN LEE

They probly thought you was crazy.

IKE

I guess so -- but I went home and did me some praying to the Lord. I said, Lord, I went into this white church down in Row and all I want you to tell me is how I ever got outta there in one piece.

NATHAN LEE

What did the Lord tell you, Ike?

IKE

He said, I don't know, Ike -- you doin' better'n me, I been tryin' to git in there for 200 years and ain't make it yet!

Ike bursts out in loud laughter, joined by NATHAN, REBECCA and the children -

REBECCA

If there ever was a devil in this county, Ike, you is it!

NATHAN LEE

Ike, you could make a song outta that!

IKE

I believe I'll do just what you say, speed ball!

They keep moving and come to a stop at crossroad.

IKE

Well, this is where I havta say good night to y'all -- it's been fun, Miss Rebecca.

REBECCA

Us too, Ike.

IKE

It's a good, warm night comin' up, Nathan -- you goin' to the woods?

NATHAN LEE

Oh, yeh -- possums and coons better hide deep from us tonight!

IKE moves away from them -- As they continue on home they can hear him singing to himself --

EXT. ABOUT THREE HUNDRED FEET AWAY FROM THE MORGANS' CABIN - DAY

The dark has set well as the family approach the house. SOUNDER starts to growl -- the children stop, and DAVID LEE turns his head to NATHAN and REBECCA --

DAVID LEE

There's two men in front of our house, Daddy.

They all stop -- and can see the shadowy figures of two men, standing in their yard, and a Pick-Up Truck parked off the road toward the other side of the cabin.

DAVID LEE

Who is they?

REBECCA

Children, come here...

The children move back -- NATHAN LEE looks behind himself and across the fields as if he would like to make a dash for it -- but REBECCA's eyes follow every physical and mental motion he makes.

NATHAN LEE

We better see who they is...

They begin to move slowly toward the house with deliberate caution, with the two men becoming more visible identifiable with their shotguns dropped to their sides. They move into the yard and stop about twelve feet from the two men.

EXT. THE FRONT YARD - DAY

SHERIFF YOUNG steps out of the front door of their house. The two groups do not speak for a moment -- they merely stare at each other -- the MORGAN family with inquiring and fretful eyes.

SHERIFF YOUNG

We been in your house, Nathan--

NATHAN and REBECCA look to each other with knowing glances.

SHERIFF YOUNG

We found what we was lookin' for.

He moves away from the door and stops at the edge of the porch --

SHERIFF YOUNG

You took some food and stuff from the James' Smoke House last night so me and my deputies here gon' hafta take you to the County Court House.

SHERIFF YOUNG nor the DEPUTIES make a physical move toward NATHAN. There is a long moment of tense silence. For a second, NATHAN seems to want to make a desperate break and run, but REBECCA holds him by the arm with all the strength her hand can afford.

SHERIFF YOUNG

Okay, boys...

The DEPUTIES move in and take NATHAN by the arms from both sides and put handcuffs on him.

EARL

What they doin', Mama?

REBECCA

Be quiet, son...

EARL falls into his mother's embrace - suddenly, SOUNDER's voice rips into the atmosphere, and for the first time the DEPUTIES draw their shotguns to waist level --

SHERIFF YOUNG

Shut that mongrel up!

DAVID runs to SOUNDER and tempers him as the sound fades to a growl -- the dog frantically scratches the earth as DAVID holds on to him --

SHERIFF YOUNG

Git that truck up close here, and quick!

One of the DEPUTIES moves out in a hurry to fetch the vehicle as SHERIFF YOUNG moves down the steps into the yard and looks to DAVID, holding SOUNDER.

SHERIFF YOUNG

Now boy, if you love that dog, you better keep  
a good, strong hold on him.

The sound of the truck is heard moving up close to the house, and stopping. REBECCA moves away from JOSIE MAE and EARL, and stops directly in the face of SHERIFF YOUNG.

REBECCA

You been knowin' Nathan for a long time,  
Sheriff Young, and you know what kind of man he  
is, and you know the trouble we face in these  
off-seasons.

The SHERIFF cannot look her in the face -- he walks away from her and everyone, and just looks out over the fields -- then finally he motions with his hand to the two DEPUTIES, standing at NATHAN'S side to put him into the truck. They lift him up into the truck as JOSIE MAE, standing up on the porch with EARL, starts to cry softly as REBECCA moves to the edge of the vehicle, real close to NATHAN'S face. She kisses him lightly on the mouth, and then they just look on each other for awhile, in a way they knew and loved each other so well. Then in a physical, tough manner, REBECCA turns away and walks up on the porch with JOSIE MAE and EARL.

One DEPUTY gets in the back of the truck with NATHAN, and the other sits at the wheel -- as SHERIFF YOUNG climbs up and sits next to him.

SHERIFF YOUNG

Alright, let's go!

The truck starts to pull away -- DAVID lets go of his grip on SOUNDER, and makes a dash out into the road.

DAVID LEE

Don't take my Daddy! Please don't take my Daddy!

REBECCA

David, come back here!

SOUNDER lets out with his voice, and charges past DAVID for the truck on the road.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

The DEPUTY in the back of the truck aims his shotgun as SOUNDER leaps for the truck -- the thunder from the DEPUTY's shotgun is the only sound that can be heard in the entire valley -- SOUNDER falls to the road.

EXT. THE PORCH - DAY

REBECCA rushes down from the porch to the edge of the yard.

REBECCA

David!

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

DAVID keeps running in the direction of the truck and SOUNDER.

He sees SOUNDER rise and fall, give out with a faint yelp, and circle into the field. He moves in the direction of the house, falling and floundering, with the hind part of his body staying up -- moving from side to side.

DAVID arrives at the spot where the animal was cut down, stops with his eyes deadpan on the truck as it fades from his view. He looks down on a huge blot of blood in the sand -- reaches down and digs his fingers into it -- lifts his hand up and frowns -- looks out into the field to track the dog's movements -- then makes his way back to the cabin.

EXT. THE FRONT YARD - DAY

DAVID trots back to the front yard -- REBECCA is at the edge of the yard -- JOSIE MAE and EARL are still on the porch -- DAVID keeps moving on around the house -- REBECCA stares down the road -- in her background, the figure of DAVID and the lighted lantern can be seen faintly, crawling under the house. JOSIE MAE and EARL come down from the porch, and stop just behind their mother.

JOSIE MAE

Mama, why did they take Daddy away?

REBECCA

(pause)

Because he cared so damn much about you and me, child.

JOSIE MAE

Is he gon' be gone long?

REBECCA

(pause)

Might be...

EXT. UNDER THE HOUSE - DAY

DAVID LEE, with the lantern, crawls about under the house looking for SOUNDER.

DAVID LEE  
Sounder... Sounder...

He stops and looks all around him with a pained expression on his face -- SOUNDER is not under the house...

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

The following morning REBECCA pours the walnuts from the bowl into a paper bag and proceeds to tie the bag up as DAVID LEE looks on. JOSIE MAE and EARL enter.

REBECCA  
Josie Mae, I'm goin' into town for awhile to see about your Daddy -- David Lee is gon' be in charge here, so you and Earl do just like he tells you.

She steps out of the front door with DAVID -- JOSIE MAE and EARL watch them move through the yard, and on to the road leading away from the house.

EXT. THE ROAD NEAR HOUSE - DAY

REBECCA and DAVID LEE slowly move along up the road.

REBECCA  
Watch the fire -- don't go too far lookin' for Sounder, and warm up some of that corn mush for y'all to eat. If anybody comes to the house that's a stranger to you, don't say nothin'.

They come to a halt at a short distance from the house -- and then she looks softly down on the boy for a moment.

DAVID LEE  
'Bye, Mama...

REBECCA  
'Bye, son -- I won't be gone long.

The mother and son move away on the road with their backs to each other. DAVID LEE picks up speed and runs.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

As JOSIE MAE and EARL look on, DAVID LEE completes building a fire in the wood stove. He warms up and serves corn mush to his sister and brother.

EXTs. BACKYARD, UNDER CABIN, ROAD, FIELDS, WOODLANDS - DAY

DAVID LEE chops wood at the woodpile -- rakes up a few chunks into his arms and heads back into the house.

He crawls under the cabin, searching about carefully, looking for the dog.

The boy charges up the road away from the house and then cuts off into the field.

He spirals the brown stalk land in ever-widening circles, searching the fence-rows -- and then he comes to the edge of the woodlands.

DAVID LEE searches under the jack oaks and cottonwoods, but SOUNDER is not there. He stands in one spot, looking about the woods in painful confusion.

EXT. LANDSDOWN MAIN STREET - DAY

REBECCA moves into town, picking up the main street, crosses the town square, moving in the direction of SHERIFF YOUNG's office which is adjacent to the County Court House.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

SHERIFF YOUNG is seated behind his desk -- a DEPUTY is sitting at a table across the room. REBECCA enters and stands before the SHERIFF's desk.

SHERIFF YOUNG

Howya do, Rebecca. I sorta been expectin' you this mornin'.

REBECCA

I wanta see Nathan.

SHERIFF YOUNG

I wish I could, Rebecca, but I can't let you.

REBECCA

I don't understand that, Sheriff Young.

SHERIFF YOUNG

It's the rules and I gotta follow 'em. No visitin' 'cept holidays and Sunday -- and no womenfolk anytime.

REBECCA

You mean to tell me I can't see my own husband?

SHERIFF YOUNG

That's the way they do things here in Landsdown. I just follow orders.

REBECCA

I got to see my husband, Sheriff Young!

SHERIFF YOUNG

I'd like to help you, Rebecca. But all that would do, is git us both in trouble.

REBECCA

Will they give him a trial?

SHERIFF YOUNG

Shore thing -- next week sometime, and as soon as I git the day, I'll ride out and let you know 'bout it.

REBECCA

You gotta low-life job, mister sheriff!

REBECCA turns and storms out of the SHERIFF'S office and onto the street.

EXT. STREET - DAY

REBECCA walks in haste and anger away from the SHERIFF'S Office on the main street of Landsdown.

EXT. COMMISSARY - DAY

She even moves past the commissary -- stops and calms herself for a moment, turns around and enters the store.

INT. THE COMMISSARY STORE - DAY

She moves directly to the counter where an elderly man stands: MR. HOWARD, the owner of the store and farm owner the MORGAN family share-crops for. She puts the bag of walnuts on the counter.

MR HOWARD

Rebecca, you jest the one I wanta see.

REBECCA

I brought these walnuts to trade.

He looks into the bag -- then empties the walnuts onto a weighing scale -- looks to her...

MR HOWARD

That's one dollar an' twenty cents.

REBECCA

I wanta get some things.

MR HOWARD

I hope it ain't a lot, 'cause I can't give you no more credit till the croppin' season gits back, that is if Na--

REBECCA

I didn't say nothin' 'bout credit, Mr. Howard.

MR HOWARD

Whatcha wanta order?

REBECCA

I need some nutmeg, flour, eggs, sugar, and...

A few minutes later, he puts her last article up on the counter.

MR HOWARD

Now what I wanta talk to you 'bout is Nathan. He oughtn' done what he did: sneakin' into the James' place and takin' they goods. That looks bad on me. I been good to y'all -- didn't I go to all that trouble to get the people of Landsdown to let your David Lee go to they school? Didn't I?

With the mood she's in, REBECCA does not have anything to say to this man concerning NATHAN, DAVID LEE or that damn school. For a moment he waits for her to say something and then he goes on --

MR HOWARD

And another thing; with Nathan stuck in jail and all, how you gon' crop for me when the spring season comes, huh?

She still can't find words to say to this man, but tries. He is impatient, and a little snap cracks in his voice.

MR HOWARD

Dammit, I'm talkin' to you, woman! I gotta farm to think about and I need answers.

REBECCA

(pause)

The season is a long way off, Mr. Howard, and by that time, Nathan oughta be home. If he ain't, believe me -- the children and me -- we will grow the crops. We have to because we owe you all that money -- Mr. Howard.

What she has just said about the money they owe is a frustrated thought in HOWARD'S mind as he looks to her helplessly.

EXT. PORCH STEPS OF THE MORGAN'S CABIN - DAY

DAVID LEE, JOSIE MAE and EARL are sitting on the steps, looking out on the road.

JOSIE MAE

Do you think Sounder is dead, David Lee?

EARL

Will he stay dead?

DAVID LEE

He ain't dead, now stop askin' crazy questions!

JOSIE MAE

You don't havta get mad 'cause you didn't find the ol' dog!

JOSIE'S words hit him hard. He looks to her for a moment with a pained expression -- turns his eyes back to the road where he spots someone coming up the road toward the house from an unidentifiable distance.

EXT. THE YARD - DAY

DAVID LEE stops in the middle of the yard with his eyes dead set on the approaching figure.

DAVID LEE  
Somebody's comin' here...

JOSIE MAE and EARL move down from the stoop and stand behind DAVID LEE, their eyes dead set on the road.

DAVID LEE  
It's Mama!

The children run out to greet her.

JOSIE MAE & EARL  
Hi, Mama!

They all reach her as she lays some of the packages down on the ground.

REBECCA  
Hi, Children -- here, take some of these packages.

The children relieve her of all of the packages, and they start moving through the yard for the house.

DAVID LEE  
Did you see Daddy?

REBECCA  
No, son. We havta wait 'til the holiday comes -- anyway, they won't let womenfolk see their men no time.

DAVID LEE  
Can I go when the holiday comes?

REBECCA  
You sure can, son...

They step up on the porch and move into the house.

INT. SITTING ROOM-KITCHEN - DAY

They enter the house and start putting the packages on the table.

REBECCA  
Any sign of Sounder?

DAVID LEE  
No mam -- I looked all over.

REBECCA

I think maybe he was scraped on the head by that shot. I don't think he's dead -- just gone somewhere to heal himself.

She takes out of one of the bags of flour, cocoa, and a small bottle of vanilla flavoring. EARL takes out from one of the bags an empty cardboard box.

EARL

Nothin' in here, Mama.

REBECCA

I'm goin' use it to put a cake in and I'm gon' let David Lee take it to your daddy!

As the children help their mother put the things away.

DAVID LEE

Mama... Make a chocolate cake... Daddy likes things that's chocolate! (smile).

INT. MEZZANINE SECTION, COURT ROOM - DAY

It is a small section provided for "colored only" -- REBECCA is seated with DAVID LEE and IKE -- A few other black people are seated about in this area, overlooking the main courtroom.

COURT CLERK

Defendant will rise and come before the bench.

They don't even bother to sit -- they stand just inside the entrance and watch in intense silence. NATHAN moves slowly before the JUDGE'S bench and stops.

JUDGE

Nathan Lee Morgan, you have been found guilty of unlawful trespass and robbery -- do you have anything to say before sentence is passed?

NATHAN LEE

(almost in a whisper).  
No, sir...

JUDGE

It is the judgment of this court that you be remanded to the custody of the sheriff of this county and that you be taken forthwith to serve a term of one year at hard labor at such county labor camp as shall be hereafter designated.  
Next case, please...

They watch two guards lead him from the courtroom in handcuffs. DAVID looks on sadly as REBECCA cringes at the sight of the Guards taking him away.

EXT. COURT HOUSE SQUARE - DAY

From the top of the Court House building, REBECCA, DAVID LEE and IKE can be seen, slowly walking across the square, moving farther and farther away.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

REBECCA hangs out clothes - DAVID LEE draws water from the well -- JOSIE MAE wrings the water out of the clothes -- EARL pours water into the wash tub.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

DAVID LEE, on his way to school, is late again -- enters the schoolyard, and dashes into the building.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

DAVID LEE roams about the woods, alone, in the hope that he might come upon SOUNDER.

INT. THE KITCHEN - DAY

DAVID LEE reads from "The Three Musketeers" to REBECCA, JOSIE MAE and EARL. It is very funny -- they laugh.

INT. THE SHED - DAY

DAVID LEE, in the shed takes his father's baseball glove down from the wall -- puts the glove on -- holds it up, and then slaps his fist into the pocket several times -- stops and looks off into blank space -- he keeps looking straight ahead as if he can visually see his father off from a long distance.

EXT. LANDSDOWN, MAIN STREET - DAY

Sunday, REBECCA and the children -- DAVID LEE carrying the cake box, make their way down the street -- people are moving back and forth in their Sunday dress. They move into the Square at the Court House.

EXT. COURT HOUSE SQUARE - DAY

At the square, they come to a halt as REBECCA looks up at the clock on top of the Court House building. It is about ten minutes to twelve noon. They continue on around to the back of the building --

EXT. BACK OF BUILDING - DAY

They stop in front of a huge back entrance and look up to the small windows with prison bars. A number of black people are moving into the area, milling about and waiting as REBECCA and the children are.

REBECCA

Be sure to ask your daddy to tell you what camp they goin' to send him to. And whatever you do in there, David Lee, act perkish, and don't grieve him.

The clock above the Court House strikes twelve times. They listen with intensity until the twelfth stroke.

REBECCA

All right, son, that's it -- now don't forget what I told you.

DAVID LEE moves through the doorway with the other people --

INT. THE CORRIDORS AND STAIRWAYS OF THE BUILDING - DAY

DAVID follows the other people down the corridor and then up a group of stairs -- then down another corridor. They line up at a huge steel door. DAVID touches the MAN in front of him on the arm --

DAVID LEE

This where you go visit, mister?

MAN

Yeah...

INT. ADMITTANCE AREA - DAY

The door swings open and a red-faced Guard at a table just inside the door begins to admit people. DAVID's turn comes and the Guard stops him.

GUARD

Whatcha got there, boy?

DAVID

A cake for my Daddy.

GUARD

Well, you put it on this table here'n wait 'til I check it.

DAVID puts the cake on the table just inside the door as the Guard sits at the table.

GUARD

Can't be too careful, boy, jest might have a steel file or hacksaw in it.

The GUARD opens the box, pulls from his pocket a switchblade knife and with slow deliberation punctures knife holes in about fifteen different places in the cake. After he is done, he closes the box and rises.

GUARD

What's your daddy's name?

DAVID LEE

Nathan Lee Morgan...

The GUARD checks his list on the table --

GUARD

Okay, boy, fourth cell down there on your left.

DAVID moves inside --

INT. CORRIDOR OF JAIL CELLS - DAY

DAVID LEE moves along the corridor, looking from one side to the other at the men sitting on cots and standing behind iron gates. He comes To NATHAN'S cell and there is his father, standing with his hands on the bars.

NATHAN LEE

Well, looka here...

DAVID LEE

Hi, Daddy...

NATHAN LEE

Hi to you, son...

He extends his hands and they shake -- and then he draws the boy close and embraces him --

DAVID LEE

Mama is outside with Josie Mae and Earl.

NATHAN LEE

They is!?! It shore is good to see you, boy!

Finally DAVID passes the box with the cake on to him.

DAVID LEE

This was a real cake before the man at the door put all these holes in it.

NATHAN takes the box and immediately opens it --

NATHAN LEE

Aw, don't make no difference, son. If I know your mama, a few knife holes ain't gon' destroy the soul she put into this cake. Come on, have a piece with your daddy.

NATHAN breaks a piece for himself and passes another on to DAVID. DAVID takes a bite out of the cake.

DAVID LEE

We didn't find Sounder yet.

NATHAN LEE

He'll show up one day.

DAVID LEE

Do you think he's dead, Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

Naww -- he'll come back to you, soon as his wounds heal. This cake shore is tasty, son.

He walks away from the cell door and moves to the window of his cell, looks up with his back to DAVID.

NATHAN LEE

It's a shame they won't let 'em come in here.  
If I had the strength I'd knock down these damn  
walls -- if I could just git my arms 'round  
your mama right now -- is they on this side of  
us, son?

DAVID LEE

I think so...

NATHAN jumps up to the window a couple of times until his hands can get a grip around the bars of the small window -- he strains and pulls, trying to get his eyes up to the window level --

NATHAN LEE

Dammit! I'm gon' see 'em if I have to break my  
arms!

NATHAN finally gets his eyes up to the window -- he looks down -- he can see them --

NATHAN LEE

I can see them! I can see them!

His arms give way and he drops back to the floor on his feet -- he moves slowly to DAVID and takes him by the arms through the bars of the cell --

NATHAN LEE

Son, don't ever let yourself get caught in a  
place like this.

There is a moment of agonizing silence as they look at each other --

DAVID LEE

Can you say what camp they gon' send you to,  
Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

I don't know, son -- they won't tell us things  
like that -- but I don't want y'all to come  
here no more.

DAVID LEE

Why, Daddy; you won't be here?

NATHAN LEE

Just do like I tell you -- I'll get word to you  
through the visitin' preacher.

GUARD'S VOICE

Visitin' over!

People start filing out but DAVID remains in front of the cell, looking on his father --

GUARD'S VOICE

Come on, boy!

NATHAN LEE

Go, son...

NATHAN and DAVID shake hands and then DAVID slowly moves away from the cell, sporadically looking back over his shoulder toward his father until he moves through the cell block door -- the door slams behind him --

EXT. BACK OF THE COURT HOUSE BUILDING - DAY

DAVID steps out into the Court House yard where they are waiting for him -- his feelings bound in confusion, and his face flooded in tears -- he runs to his mother's arms. She embraces him long and deep.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

REBECCA and the children attend services at the Church -- Everyone is standing -- they are in the midst of a song, led by the Pastor of the Church.

Like everything else in Landsdown for Black People, it is an old disinherited structure with creaky, movable chairs for the worshipers to sit in -- there are two high windows on both sides.

The Pastor reads the verses of the song in the traditional, dramatic Black Preacher's fashion, and the congregation repeats the verses musically.

Song --

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Coffee, cold drinks, cookies and fruit are being served to a laughing, chattering crowd of church goers -- inside a woman is at the piano, playing rhythmic uptempo gospel songs. IKE is there also.

REBECCA, with HARRIET in line behind her, and the children, are moving up to the table to be served.

HARRIET

If this wasn't a church, I'd do me a dance to that music she's playin'.

REBECCA

Why don't you try it, Harriet, and just see what everybody would do.

HARRIET

Now, Rebecca, I may be a country woman, but I ain't no fool.

REBECCA and HARRIET take coffee and cookies at the table while the children take fruit. They move across the floor for a corner to sit. HARRIET does a little moving dance step as they arrive to the corner and sit.

REBECCA

You determined to get that dance in.

HARRIET

Well, you can't blame a girl for tryin' if the feelin' hits her.

REBECCA notices the PREACHER talking to a group of women across the floor.

REBECCA

If I don't go over there and butt in, I ain't gon' ever get to talk to the Preacher about Nathan.

She rises and moves across the floor. DAVID LEE watches closely as his mother approaches the PREACHER and gets his attention by touching him on the arm, and they move off to a more secluded spot in the Church. DAVID rises and moves to join their company.

PREACHER

No, I ain't got no word yet, Rebecca. I went to the courthouse yesterday to see 'bout it, but they just won't tell me nothin' about what labor camp Nathan was sent to. I'm sorry, Rebecca.

REBECCA

It's a shame, Reverend. It's a damn shame.

PREACHER

I hope you don't take to bitterness, Sister Morgan. I tell you like I tell all the women in this church who got the same trouble you got. No matter what the trial or what the misery is, I tell 'em to stay with God.

REBECCA

Yeah, he'll crawl into my bed tonight, lie close to my body and keep me warm -- and rectify the evil in the men who live over us in this valley.

PREACHER

It's not that simple, Sister Rebecca -- the Lord works in mysterious ways -- we come into this life with nothin' and we'll leave it with nothing.

REBECCA

Is that a blessing, Reverend?

Her words jar and disturb the PREACHER --

EXT. FRONT OF THE MORGANS' CABIN - NIGHT

REBECCA and the children are just about to enter the yard, when DAVID LEE stops and pulls on his mother's arm.

DAVID LEE

Mama, did you hear that?!

REBECCA, JOSIE MAE and EARL come to a halt on his words.

REBECCA  
What is it, David Lee?

DAVID LEE  
Listen, Mama...

They stand quietly for a moment -- and then they hear the sound of a faint whine coming from the direction of the porch -- the whine becomes louder --

DAVID LEE  
Mama, I hear Sounder!

He takes off in the direction of the porch --

EXT. THE PORCH - NIGHT

DAVID stops just at the top of the porch, and there, scratching at the door and wagging his tail, is SOUNDER. The side of his head where the shot scraped him is discolored and hairless -- the top of his eye is scarred causing it to be half-closed, and what's left of his ear on the same side, sticks straight out. Upon seeing DAVID LEE, he raises his good ear and whines. DAVID rushes to grab him.

DAVID LEE  
You come back, boy! I just knowed it! I just knowed you'd come back!

REBECCA, JOSIE MAE and EARL arrive at the porch -- REBECCA kneels, looks on the bad sight of the dog and strokes his back --

REBECCA  
Poor creature...

DAVID LEE  
He'll be all right, Mama. I'll make him all right.

EXT. THE BACKYARD - DAY

The next morning, DAVID LEE feeds SOUNDER as EARL stands by, looking on.

DAVID LEE  
He eats all right -- his throat ain't scarred.

EARL  
Then why don't he holler like he usta?

DAVID LEE  
He will... Come on, git down and act like a possum.

EARL  
I don't look like no possum!

DAVID LEE

Act like one!

After a moment of hesitation, EARL gets down on his hands and knees --

DAVID LEE

Git him, boy!

EARL jumps to his feet quickly and backs away across the yard --

EARL

Don't tell that dog to git me!

SOUNDER merely turns to DAVID LEE and gives out with a few muffled whines --

DAVID LEE

I guess I'll havta work harder to git him back  
like he usta be.

EARL

Why don't you try and git you a new dog?

DAVID LEE takes off after EARL who turns, breaks and runs out into the back field --

EXT. CROP FIELD - DAY

REBECCA, DAVID LEE, JOSIE MAE and EARL up in the field, working, planting, hoeing and cultivating the soil -- SOUNDER trots about the field in the vicinity of DAVID LEE --

EXT. THE FIELD - DAY

REBECCA is looking on about three hundred feet away as DAVID LEE runs about with SOUNDER in open field, trying to work him back into physical shape -- he halfway picks the dog up -- drops him to the ground, takes off and runs but SOUNDER does not follow him. He comes back to the dog and ruffles him affectionately -- takes off and runs again -- this time, SOUNDER takes off after him. REBECCA and DAVID look to each other and smile broadly -- success!! He caresses and hugs the dog -- they move toward REBECCA, join her, and they start walking back toward the house -- and then the rains come -- they and the dog take off in speed with huge raindrops splattering against their faces and bodies. From the field, as they make a run for it, their figures become smaller as they near the backyard and the doorway to their home...

EXT. MRS. BOATWRIGHT'S BACKYARD - DAY

A bright sunny day -- DAVID LEE is just about to quit for the day in some gardening work he is doing for MRS. BOATWRIGHT -- He moves to the side of the house to put some equipment away when the lady approaches him --

MRS BOATWRIGHT

David, you never cease to amaze me at how good  
you are in taking care of my garden.

DAVID LEE

My father taught me...

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Would you like to have a cool drink, David?

DAVID LEE  
No, thank you -- I gotta go do some work in the field today.

DAVID starts to walk away and then decides to stop, turns to her as she is heading back into the house --

DAVID LEE  
Miss Boatwright --

MRS BOATWRIGHT  
(stops, turns)  
Yes, David...

DAVID LEE  
Will you help me to find out what camp they sent my father to?

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
The courthouse has rules about things like that, David -- but I'll ask around town about it.

He looks on her with an expression of disappointment, turns and walks away.

DAVID LEE  
See you tomorrow, Miss Boatwright.

MRS BOATWRIGHT  
David!

DAVID LEE  
(turns to her)  
Yes, ma'am...?

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
I'll find out where your daddy is for you.

DAVID LEE  
(smiles)  
Thank you, Miss Boatwright!  
(turns and runs away)

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Don't mention this to anyone! You hear me, David!

He just keeps running --

EXT. FRONT YARD, BACK YARD, BACK FIELD - DAY

DAVID LEE, at top speed, runs into the front yard from the road, on around the side of the house through the back yard and on into the field in the back

of the house, heading for the crop field.

EXT. THE CROP FIELD - DAY

REBECCA, JOSIE MAE and EARL are working the field as DAVID LEE comes running towards them --

DAVID LEE

Mama! Mama! Miss Boatwright, say she gon' help me find where Daddy is!

REBECCA

Good! But you don't have to tell the whole valley 'bout it! You'll get that woman in trouble!

INT. COURT CLERK'S OFFICE - DAY

CHARLIE DAVID, the Court Clerk, is standing behind his desk -- MRS. BOATWRIGHT is seated in a chair before his desk. There are two windows in the small office, a coat rack in the corner diagonally behind his desk, three chairs, another small working desk, and a row of file cabinets against the wall --

CHARLIE

I can't do it, Rita -- that's the policy here on colored prisoners, and I ain't about to change it, not even for a friend like you.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

Charlie, just because a man and his family are colored, you--

CHARLIE

Now look, Rita, I don't make the rules -- you puttin' yourself on a limb, comin' here, askin' me to do a thing like this. And I be damn if I'm going to jeopardize my job because you are in love with a little colored boy!

The phone on his desk rings -- he picks up the receiver to his ear and sits down --

CHARLIE

County Clerk's office, Charlie Davis speaking... Yes, sir... You bet your life, sir...Yes, sir, I'll be right there.

He puts the receiver down -- jumps up, goes to the rack and gets his coat and starts to fix his tie --

CHARLIE

That was Judge Elliot on the phone and when Judge Elliot calls, I jump! Good day, Rita.

He moves to the door, to the waiting area and opens it to leave -- DAVID LEE can be seen standing in the background of CHARLIE --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

But, Charlie --

CHARLIE

NO! N-O, NO!

Just like that he is gone. MRS. BOATWRIGHT stands in the middle of the floor in a moment of frustration, with DAVID LEE looking on from the alcove. She thinks for a moment and then looks to the file cabinets against the wall. DAVID stands in the doorway as she decides to go to the file cabinets. She checks the outer notation on each one of the cabinets until she comes to the one that reads: PRISONER CASES. She quickly opens the cabinet drawer and hurriedly fingers through the files until she finds the file with NATHAN LEE MORGAN's name on it. She goes through it until she has gotten the information she wants and just as she is about to put it back, CHARLIE DAVIS has returned and has caught her in his files. She looks cheaply to him, slips the file back into its place, closes the cabinet drawer and backs away from the file cabinet. He moves past DAVID LEE into the office on to the file cabinet where she was, opens it enough for him to tell that she has disturbed the one single file of NATHAN LEE MORGAN. He slams the file drawer back shut and turns to her.

CHARLIE

I see you found what you was lookin' for.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

I did look, Charlie, but I--

CHARLIE

No buts, Rita!

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

Charlie, you have no legal right not to let this boy know where his father is! You hear that, you and this whole damn court house; what you are doing is wrong!

CHARLIE

Don't tell me about what's wrong. You come into my office as a friend and steal city files! I could have you arrested for that -- and if you give out that information to anybody, that's exactly what I'm going to do -- and I'll tell everybody in this town how you got the information and who you got it for! You won't have a friend left in this county to bring you a piece of candy!

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

You would do that, wouldn't you?

CHARLIE

You getting the point, Mrs. Boatwright.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT gives him a hard and long look with the feeling that he means what he says --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Let's get out of here, David Lee.

She turns and moves out of the office, through the door, with DAVID LEE following --

EXT. COURT HOUSE STEPS - DAY

MRS. BOATWRIGHT and DAVID are slowly descending the Court House steps, and on towards her automobile, parked about a hundred feet away. She is about to open the door of the car, when DAVID LEE stops --

DAVID LEE  
You know where my father is, don't you, Miss Boatwright?

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
(pause)  
No, he was wrong, David, I didn't find out.

DAVID LEE  
But I saw you -- you looked in there, and you found out, Miss Boatwright.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
If I tell you I didn't, David, that's what I mean.

DAVID LEE  
But, Miss Boatwright, you--

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
I don't know a damn thing, now stop bothering me about it!

She gets into the car as he shuffles his feet about on the ground with his head turned slightly down, remaining in one place --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Come, I'll take you home.

DAVID LEE  
I'll walk...

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Don't pout now, David, it's a long trip.

DAVID LEE  
I'm used to it.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Well, you can't say I didn't try.

DAVID LEE watches her drive off and away and then he slowly starts walking away...

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

DAVID LEE, at the well, draws up a pail of water and pours it into a container for SOUNDER who is standing beside him, anxiously waiting for the water. As SOUNDER drinks the water, DAVID turns around to see MRS. BOATWRIGHT standing in the middle of the yard.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
Hello, David...

DAVID LEE  
Hi, Mrs. Boatwright...  
(pause)  
I'm sorry 'bout the way I acted the other day,  
Miss Boatwright.

MRS BOATWRIGHT  
There's nothin' to be sorry about, David --  
where's your mother?

REBECCA  
Right here, Miss Boatwright.

REBECCA is standing in the doorway of the shed -- MRS. BOATWRIGHT doesn't quite know how to begin -- the two women just look to each other for awhile -- then --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT  
The camp Nathan is at is called Wishbone Labor  
Camp. It's in Nolan Town!

REBECCA lets the news soak in for a moment -- DAVID LEE has a big smile on his face. REBECCA moves from the doorway and stands directly before MRS. BOATWRIGHT.

REBECCA  
Miss Boatwright -- you shore is a crazy actin'  
woman sometime!

She bursts out laughing and kicks up her leg -- DAVID picks up the laughing, then MRS. BOATWRIGHT... EARL and JOSIE MAE arrive and stop at the corner of the house -- can't quite make out what this crazy laughing is all about but they move to the center of the yard with them and join in with the laughing. After a short while the laughter comes to a sudden stop -- sudden, absolute silence --

JOSIE MAE  
Mama, what was we laughin' for?

REBECCA  
At the way you ask funny questions, Josie Mae!

INT. THE KITCHEN-SITTING ROOM - DAY

In the house, REBECCA and all the children are gathered around MRS. BOATWRIGHT at the table with a map spread out as she scans it carefully with a pencil --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

We go from "A-2" -- now let me see where we go from here...

REBECCA

Trouble, Miss Boatwright?

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

Oh no, these maps are easy to read.

But she is having trouble locating the place as her pencil moves about in several confusing spots on the map -- like having to find a bigger town's indicating alphabet and number in order to search about at random to locate a smaller town -- but finally --

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

There it is, right there!

She makes a marker with the pencil and holds it down on the place -- everybody leans over the map as close as possible to see the little area she has made a circle around -- DAVID straightens up --

DAVID LEE

How do you get there, Miss Boatwright?

Everybody straightens up to get MRS. BOATWRIGHT's directions. She holds the map up as they look on.

MRS. BOATWRIGHT

Now they have numbers and letters on here to tell you where to look on the map, but Nolan Town is not under a number but we know it's in Northern Landsdown -- the number for Northern Landsdown is: "h7", but since Landsdown is the largest county, it actually stretches over into "a2" but "a2" is -- Am I making myself clear?

REBECCA

It's clear, Miss Boatwright -- it's so clear, you don't havta go any further -- thank you -- when the time comes for us to find that place, we will -- won't we, children?

ALL THE CHILDREN

RIGHTTTTTT!

EXT. CROP FIELD - DAY

REBECCA and DAVID LEE are hoeing as JOSIE MAE and EARL run up and down the grooves planting seeds -- REBECCA and DAVID complete their hoeing and plop down on the ground out of exhaustion as JOSIE and EARL move toward them, seeding the last grooves of earth.

INT. THE SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

REBECCA is sitting in her rocker, knitting, when DAVID LEE comes out of his

room -- she turns and looks to him --

REBECCA

Can't sleep?

DAVID LEE

No, ma'am...

(pause)

Mama, I wanted Mrs. Boatwright to find out where Daddy is, so me and Sounder can go see him.

REBECCA

So did I. I figured when the time got right, we could all take a day or two and walk up there, but it's not the kind of long trip for a child to take alone.

DAVID LEE

I can do it, Mama -- you know that. In the Bible stories you read to us, everybody's always goin' on a long journey. Jacob goes into a strange land where his uncle is and he don't even know where he lives, but he finds him. Everybody finds what they supposed to find.

REBECCA

But you'll be away from home for days -- what will you do when the dark comes, where will you sleep? I can't send you away from here like that!

DAVID LEE

Mama, don't I always do what you say -- every time I go to the fields to plant the corn, to Miss Boatwright's and the woods -- you tell me what to do and I do it, and you don't worry.

REBECCA

(pause)

No, I don't and I oughtn't not to after the way you've taken over since they took him away -- and I would like for you to see 'im so you can come back and tell me about 'im.

(pause)

The field's all planted, so I guess I can spare you for a little while. When do you wanta leave?

REBECCA gets up from the rocker and starts putting her knitting away in the dresser --

DAVID LEE

Can I go day after tomorrow?

REBECCA

Yes, son. You better get back to bed.

DAVID LEE

Good night, Mama...

REBECCA

Good night...

He turns, moves out of sight into his room. REBECCA gets up from the rocker, puts her knitting away, picks up the map MRS. BOATWRIGHT left, off the dresser, and spreads it on the table to the light of the lantern. She can't make sense of the map -- she folds it back up and shoves it to the side -- looks across the room in thought.

INT. KITCHEN-SITTING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Two days later, a little after daybreak, DAVID is all set to make the journey with SOUNDER -- DAVID is at the table -- IKE is standing over him as he writes on a piece of paper -- REBECCA and the other children are looking on -

IKE

Now afta you go by Nolan, the first road you come to is Jordan road -- keep walkin' on that road and you'll run right into it. It's a long trip, David Lee, so good luck to you.

DAVID LEE

Thank you, Mr. Ike...

They all turn around and move out the front door --

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - DAY

They move out the house and down into the yard and stop.

REBECCA

I wish you wouldn't take the dog with you, David -- he's likely to be a burden to you.

DAVID LEE

I got to, Mama. I know Daddy wants to see him.

REBECCA passes on to him a big brown bag of food --

REBECCA

Here's your food -- now you go straight to that place -- if you need to rest, go into a church or railroad station -- but don't go into nobody's house, you hear me?

DAVID LEE

Yes, mam...

REBECCA

Ask your daddy to give you some word about when he'll be comin' home -- and tell 'im we love

him.

IKE

Tell 'im I said, "Hi", too, David.

REBECCA pulls him into her arms --

REBECCA

Good luck to you, son...

(releases him)

All right now, get movin', you losin' daylight.

DAVID gives quick embraces to JOSIE MAE and EARL -- and then he and SOUNDER hit the road -- JOSIE MAE and EARL, follow him part the way -- REBECCA moves back up on the porch, stops and turns in time to see DAVID bidding JOSIE MAE and EARL "goodbye" -- JOSIE MAE and EARL move back toward the house, and then the boy and dog slowly fade from her view...

EXT. SHARECROPPERS' CABIN - DAY

DAVID LEE and SOUNDER walk the road. They pass a cabin, where another family is working.

INT. RAILWAY STATION - NIGHT

DAVID and SOUNDER are in a small cubby hole of the station with a sign overheard that reads: "Colored Waiting Room." He is looking over an old newspaper as a man in a chair across from him is fast asleep and snoring -- finally he too falls asleep.

EXT. STREAM POND - DAY

DAVID goes in the water to cool off and refresh.

EXT. A MIGRATORY CAMP - DAY

DAVID and SOUNDER come upon a sign in front of a migratory farm with a sign that advertises: "Fruit pickers and sorters needed."

EXT. SORTING AREA - DAY

DAVID works sorting fruit for part of the day and after he is done they have a bite to eat --

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

Back on the road as DAVID LEE and SOUNDER continue their journey. They move through an area with landscapes and mountains, the size and shape that DAVID has never seen. At one point, he stops and looks on in wonder and admiration.

EXT. THE FRONT OF A HOUSE - DAY

DAVID LEE washes a car as SOUNDER looks on. A man pays him -- he goes over the piece of paper with IKE's directions and then they move on --

EXT. THE ROAD - NIGHT

DAVID and SOUNDER approach the camp. He moves close to a sign that reads:  
WISHBONE LABOR CAMP, NOLAN COUNTY.

They move on farther along the barbed wire barricade of the camp and then they come to a halt when DAVID sees two lights and a wide barbed wire gate entrance with two guards just inside the gate. They move off the road down a sloped hill just beneath the entrance of the camp. They lie down on the grass to sleep.

EXT. THE SLOPE OFF THE ROAD - DAY

It is early morning as DAVID is awakened by the voices of the guards and the motor of a truck.

TRUCK DRIVER'S VOICE

Whatcha got for me today!?

GUARD'S VOICE

Same bunch you had yesterday!

TRUCK DRIVER'S VOICE.

Well, I'll take what I kin git!

DAVID hears the truck motor into the grounds of the compound. He and SOUNDER crawl up to the edge of the slope so they can see. Finally he decides to walk across the road to the gate where the guard is --

EXT. LABOR CAMP GATE - DAY

DAVID and SOUNDER approach the gate and stop -- one of the guards sees them and walks over --

DAVID LEE

Mister, can you visit anybody here?

GUARD

Gotta wait 'til visitin' days.

DAVID LEE

When's that?

GUARD

Sunday...

DAVID LEE

Do you know my daddy, Nathan Lee Morgan?

GUARD

Never heard of 'im. We gotta lotta men here...

The sound of the truck, approaching --

GUARD

All right, boy, outta the way, truck's  
comin'...

He opens the gate as DAVID and SOUNDER scatter back across the road -- the

OTHER GUARD calls out --

OTHER GUARD  
Section J comin' through!

GUARD  
Let 'er roll!

The truck motors through the gate and stops just outside as the GUARD makes his final check of the men. DAVID, from where he is standing, also checks it thoroughly to see if his FATHER is on the truck. A number of trucks roar through the gate and DAVID checks them all thoroughly, but his father is not on any of them. Finally the last truck comes out-

OTHER GUARD  
Last one comin' atcha!

GUARD  
Let me have it!

The truck pulls to a halt just outside the gate, and DAVID eyes the men on the truck carefully as the GUARD makes his check --

DAVID LEE  
He gotta be on this one, Sounder, it's the last truck.

There are not too many men on this truck which makes it quite easy for DAVID to see that his father is not on it. Then where is he? The boy thinks to himself as he sees the truck move away up the road. The truck is moving no more than about twenty miles an hour -- DAVID LEE makes a decision and takes off after the truck, running --

EXT. A FARM - DAY

A half hour later, the truck with the convicts pulls into a huge farm area -- the TWO GUARDS jump down from the truck and herd the men into a group while a third guard gets out of the cab -- and they distribute farm equipment to the men. A picket fence stretches the area where the men work.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

Some minutes later DAVID LEE and SOUNDER, walking, approach the farm area where the convicts are, moving along the road outside of the fence.

They stop -- DAVID watches the men work and the guards, covering them from distances of about three hundred feet in a half moon formation, spread out. DAVID decides and moves to the fence to question the men. When he gets to the edge of the road next to the fence, one of the guards spots him and starts moving over --

DAVID LEE  
Mister...?

CONVICT  
Boy, where did you come from?

DAVID LEE

I wanta find out 'bout my Daddy. Is he here?

CONVICT

Can't you see that guard comin'-- git!

GUARD

Whatcha doin' here, boy, move!

DAVID hurriedly gets back across the road with SOUNDER and watches the guard as he moves the men back. DAVID looks on in frustration, trying to figure out what his next move will be -- The guard moves away from the men and walks up to another guard to engage him in a conversation -- while the two guards are rapping with each other, DAVID decides to make a desperate try of it --

DAVID LEE

Okay, Sounder, let's go!

DAVID LEE and SOUNDER dash across the road, and slip under the fence into the farm area --

EXT. THE FARM - DAY

DAVID LEE and SOUNDER turn on all the speed they can muster, heading directly for the group of CONVICTS -- They get there --

DAVID LEE

Please tell me, mister! Is Nathan Lee Morgan here?

CONVICT

There is nobody name Morgan! Now get away from here before you git us in trouble!

SOUNDER lets out a growl at one of the Guards who is now charging toward them. DAVID takes off in a circle with the Guard in pursuit of him, away from the direction of the road -- SOUNDER is close behind him -- They circle back into the direction of the road and zoom past the group of CONVICTS -- DAVID is running at electrifying speed. DAVID and SOUNDER are making tracks with the Guard still after the boy. They come to the fence and quickly slip through, but DAVID's hand falls on a broken bottle with gashing force -- he leaps up and continues on across the road and into an open field. The Guard stops at the edge of the road and gives up the chase --

EXT. FIELD - DAY

DAVID and SOUNDER are still running with great speed. DAVID looks back over his shoulder to see if the Guard is still after him. They slow down when they approach an old abandoned barn --

INT. THE BARN - DAY

He staggers into the barn and drops his body against one of the walls to catch his breath. SOUNDER hobbles in and nestles beside him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

DAVID, holding his hand, sits on the road with the dog -- puts his hand up before his eyes -- it is practically covered in blood. A pain strikes him, causing him to grimace for a moment -- looks about the area -- They rise and start out once again --

DAVID LEE

Sorry, Sounder, but we lost. Better keep movin' though, 'til we find somebody to tell us how to get back home.

EXT. ROAD AND SCHOOL - DAY

They come upon a large schoolhouse with the name over it: Borderdale School. They stop when DAVID sees a number of Black Children playing on the grounds -- climbing on little ladders and swinging on swings. He notices a water pump on the grounds, looks at his blood-covered hand -- hesitates for a moment and then decides to enter the grounds --

EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - DAY

DAVID and SOUNDER head straight for the pump and just as they arrive at the pump a group of Children gathers around them --

#1 CHILD

You new here?

#2 CHILD

You comin' here to school?

#1 CHILD

What's wrong with that dog?

Two dogs near the side of the schoolhouse bark at SOUNDER -- he merely whines and scratches back at them but their barking intensifies until a young, attractive black female teacher interferes --

CAMILLE

Come on now, get away from here!

The two dogs gallop off as do the Children -- they scatter away from around DAVID and SOUNDER. The TEACHER walks over to DAVID and stops --

DAVID LEE

I just wanta wash my hand. It's got blood where I hurt it.

CAMILLE

You don't live around here, do you?

DAVID LEE

No, mam... I come from way back there. Me and my dog was tryin' to find my daddy and we got lost.

CAMILLE

Is he here in Borderdale?

DAVID LEE

I don't know, he's in a prison camp.

CAMILLE

Here, you put your hand under the water and I'll pump for you.

She pumps and DAVID puts his hand under the cool, flowing water --

CAMILLE

My name is Camille -- Camille Johnson and I'm the Supervisor of this school. What's your name?

DAVID LEE

David Lee Morgan. My dog's name is Sounder.  
(takes his hand out  
from under the water)  
That feels better.

CAMILLE

Let me see it...

She takes his hand into hers -- pulls a kerchief from her pocket and dries the water off --

CAMILLE

Your hand needs medicine on it. You better come with me into the school so I can put something on it --

INT. A CLASSROOM IN THE SCHOOL - DAY

She applies some medication to his wound -- he winces for a moment -- and then she begins to wrap it in a bandage -- DAVID keeps looking about the room, admiring its cleanliness, the long blackboard, the strong, steady student chairs --

CAMILLE

You keep looking around, David. Don't you go to school?

DAVID LEE

Sometime, but not like this.

CAMILLE

It's a good thing your hand did not become infected -- how did you cut it like this?

DAVID LEE

Me and Sounder went to this prison camp to see my Daddy and the police guard runs us away and I fell on some glass.

CAMILLE

Did your mother know you were going to see your father?

DAVID LEE

Uh huh...

CAMILLE

(completes the bandaging)

That does it...

DAVID LEE

Thank you, Miss Johnson.

CAMILLE

I don't live far from here. You and your dog can come home with me and have yourself a hot meal and then we'll talk about how to get you back home.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMILLE'S PLACE - DAY

DAVID walks about CAMILLE'S quaint, neat little home with his eyes lit up as he looks around and about --

DAVID LEE

You got a pretty house, Miss Johnson!

CAMILLE

I try...

INT. CAMILLE'S - DAY

They enter. DAVID spots the many books she has on a shelf -- he moves to the shelf as she stands next to him --

DAVID LEE

You got a lotta books, too.

(scanning the books)

You got any books with people in 'em like Huckleberry Finn?

She turns in a quick, reflex motion, directly to the boy --

CAMILLE

Hell, no!

DAVID breaks out in a big smile because he is glad to know that she has no books like Huckleberry Finn. She returns his smile, and puts her finger on one of the books --

CAMILLE

Here, let me tell you something about the books on this shelf: This one's about a man whose name was Crispus Attucks. He fought in a war to help this country to become the United States.

And this one is about a woman who helped to free slaves. Her name was Harriet Tubman, and...

INT. CAMILLE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

CAMILLE finishes washing the dishes -- moves for the sitting room as DAVID trails her --

DAVID LEE  
And you say all them people is dead now?

CAMILLE  
That's right--

INT. CAMILLE'S SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

She moves into the room with DAVID following her --

CAMILLE  
They lived a long time ago -- before you and I were born.

DAVID LEE  
Where is Africa, Miss Johnson?

She moves to her desk and pulls out a drawer --

CAMILLE  
Come here and I'll show you.

She opens the desk drawer -- gets down on the floor and spreads the map out. DAVID sits down next to her as she goes over the map.

CAMILLE  
Here it is, right here.

DAVID LEE  
That's where we come from first?

CAMILLE  
That's where we came from first.

She rises from the floor and puts the map back into the desk drawer as DAVID moves to the book shelf --

DAVID LEE  
And the other people you told me 'bout, they is all colored folk?

CAMILLE  
Colored.

DAVID LEE  
Don't you teach in your school 'bout folk who ain't dead?

CAMILLE

Sure--

She moves to the shelf next to him and takes a book from it --

CAMILLE

Here's one by a man that's very much alive.

DAVID LEE

What's his name?

CAMILLE

Dr. William E. B. Dubois.  
(fingers through the book)

DAVID LEE

What he talk 'bout?

CAMILLE

Why don't you sit and I'll read you something  
he said.

She sits in a chair at the desk and he takes a place on the floor just  
beneath her, waiting anxiously for her to begin the reading --

CAMILLE

(reads from the book)

THE LONGING OF BLACK MEN MUST HAVE RESPECT --  
(she diverts)

Which means that a man and a woman are human  
and must be treated that way--

(she returns to the text)

THE RICH AND BITTER DEPTH OF THEIR EXPERIENCE,  
THE UNKNOWN TREASURES OF THEIR INNER LIFE--

As she reads, DAVID'S mind and imagination take to drawing pictures and  
images of what he can apply to his intuitive understanding of what she is  
reading to him --

CAMILLE'S VOICE OVER:

--THE STRANGE ENDINGS OF NATURE THEY HAVE SEEN, MAY GIVE THE WORLD NEW POINTS  
OF VIEW AND MAKE THEIR LOVING, LIVING, AND DOING PRECIOUS TO ALL HUMAN...

DAVID'S IMAGES:

The night in the woods with his father and SOUNDER. The shouting and laughter  
after the baseball game --

CAMILLE'S VOICE OVER:

...HEARTS. AND TO THEMSELVES IN THESE DAYS THAT TRY THEIR SOULS...

DAVID'S IMAGES:

HE, JOSIE and EARL, running and playing in the field.

CAMILLE'S VOICE OVER:

...THE CHANCE TO SOAR IN THE DIM BLUE AIR ABOVE SMOKE IS TO THEIR...

DAVID'S IMAGES:

His visit with his father at the County Jail house --

CAMILLE'S VOICE OVER:

...FINER SPIRITS BOON AND GUERDON FOR WHAT THEY LOSE ON EARTH BY BEING BLACK.

DAVID'S IMAGES:

His mother, with her head thrown back, her eyes aglitter and laughing.

CAMILLE has finished reading -- she places the book down on the desk as he looks on her from the poor with tenderness --

DAVID LEE

You're a friendly lady, Miss Johnson.

CAMILLE

And you're a tired little boy. I'll make up the cot and you must get some sleep.

She moves into the corner to prepare a place for him in the sitting room.

DAVID LEE

What about Sounder?

CAMILLE

He'll get his place too -- now off with your clothes and into bed.

DAVID unclothes himself and crawls into the bed as CAMILLE stands over him --

CAMILLE

Now don't you think it's time you told me all about yourself?

DAVID LEE

I have a mother and her name is Rebecca -- My father's name is Nathan Lee Morgan, and...

INT. SCHOOL ROOM CLASS - FULL ANGLE - DAY

CAMILLE is standing in front of her desk before an overfilled class room. DAVID LEE is seated in a chair against a wall on one side of the room.

CAMILLE

Anyone here know what chapter that story was from?

A boy rises with abrupt and fast confidence --

BOY #1

Chapter twenty-six!

CAMILLE

Twenty-six? The text has but six chapters!

BOY #1

That's what I meant, Miss Johnson. Take away the two in front and all you got left is a six!

The class room breaks out in a gusto of laughter.

CAMILLE

Now you know I'm not going to have the laughing!

The laughing dies sharply and quickly -- CAMILLE smiles to herself --

CAMILLE

I'll get back to you later, Mr. Twenty-six. Let's not stop now, we have to keep this mood moving. The story has to come from one of the text books we've already read in class, or it has to be a true story of your own. Let's get it going now -- we don't have that much time left...

She moves around and sits at her desk -- after some indecision on the part of all of the Children, one boy finally rises from his chair --

CLARENCE

I got a story, Miss Johnson -- It's a true story that happened to me.

CLARENCE is a soft-eyed boy about eleven or twelve years of age. He behaves as if he's not too sure he wants to tell his story --

CAMILLE

You know that the class is going to challenge your story, don't you, Clarence?

CLARENCE

Yes, Miss Johnson...

CAMILLE

Go on...

CLARENCE

(hesitates)

Me and my little sister, went down to the water hole, last Saturday--

A GIRL rises and interrupts him --

GIRL #1

You're doin' somethin' wrong already -- You didn't tell us the name of your sister...

CLARENCE

(pause)

My sister's name is...

(pause)

Me and my sister, Laura, went down to the water hole last Saturday and we was playin' 'long the edge of the water and Laura slipped and fell in the water. I started to run back home, but I

turned around, ran back, dove into the water  
and got her out before she could drown...

No one says anything -- CLARENCE just stands there, looking around the room,  
waiting for someone to utter something -

CAMILLE

How was your sister after you pulled her out of  
the water?

CLARENCE

She was dirty and wet...

SWING TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - GIRL #1

GIRL #1

What were you doin', runnin' away from the  
water?!

SWING BACK TO:

ANGLE - CLARENCE

CLARENCE

I was going home to get my daddy.

QUICK TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - BOY #1

BOY #1

What made you stop and go back!?

QUICK TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - CLARENCE

CLARENCE

Cause if I hadda ran home, by the time I got  
back, my sister woulda drowned.

QUICK BACK TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - GIRL #1

GIRL #1

How come you didn't know that at first?

MOVES BACK TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - CLARENCE

CLARENCE

I was scared!

QUICK MOVE TO:

ANGLE - BOY #2

BOY #2

Hold it! Clarence's story ain't true! Me and  
Clarence been to the river a lotta times, and  
I know, he can't swim!

MOVES TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - CAMILLE

She is somewhat thrown -- hesitates but must follow through, delicately --

CAMILLE

Clarence, would you tell us a story that was  
not true, after telling us it was?

PULLS TO:

CROSS HALF ANGLE - CLASSROOM

CLARENCE

No, Miss Johnson...

CAMILLE

Can you swim?

CLARENCE

(pause)  
Yes mam...

SWING TO:

ANGLE - BOY #2

BOY #2

Clarence, you know you can't swim! Every time I  
tried to show you, you fell down, and I had to  
always pull you out!

SWING TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - CAMILLE

CAMILLE

Is that true, Clarence?

MOVES TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - CLARENCE

CLARENCE

(pause)  
Yes mam... But when I saw my sister 'bout to  
drown in the water, I tried because I wasn't

scared no more! I was just swimming and kickin'!  
I don't know how I was doin' it! But I was,  
cause my sister was drowning! She was drowning!

PULLS TO:

FULL ANGLE - CLASS ROOM

CLARENCE sits -- the class is silent --

MOVES TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

DAVID LEE has been deeply involved in everything that has taken place in the room. As he sits, he is split with indecision as to whether he should rise and say something or to remain in his place. But he makes a sudden decision, and rises --

DAVID LEE  
I believe Clarence's story...

PULLS TO:

FULL ANGLE - CLASS ROOM

All eyes turn to David Lee --

CAMILLE  
You want to come forward and tell us why,  
David?

He hesitates for a moment -- he moves and stands before the class --

DAVID LEE  
Some people came and took my daddy away and  
other people said we couldn't work the farm.  
But we had to, 'cause we didn't wanna lose our  
farm. We planted the crops and they grew. I  
believe his story 'cause his story is about  
what he did when he had to do somethin'. He  
didn't know how to swim but he had to or else  
his sister woulda drowned. That's how he did  
it...

He looks around to CAMILLE, and then he moves back to the place where he was,  
and sits and then the class room breaks out in applause -

MOVES TO:

ANGLE - CLARENCE

He is happy to know that his story has finally been accepted as the truth --

SWINGS TO:

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

His face too is beaming with laughter --

EXT. FRONT OF BORDERDALE SCHOOL - DAY

CAMILLE and DAVID LEE exit from the school house -- DAVID is filled with excitement over his adventure in the class room. They are joined by SOUNDER who is impatiently waiting for DAVID. DAVID LEE strokes the dog a few times, and they keep moving on out of the school yard --

CAMILLE

Well, how did you like the class, David?

DAVID LEE

It was the best thing I ever been to, Miss Johnson!

They move out of the school yard towards town.

INT. CAMILLE'S PLACE - NIGHT

CAMILLE is busying herself, sweeping, dusting furniture items, putting things in place, etc. -- DAVID LEE is following her about the place, helping her wherever he can -- His spirits are very high at the moment. SOUNDER is crouched in a corner, looking on at the activity --

DAVID LEE

... So me and Sounder, ran right by the men that was the prisoners, and crawled under the fence! That's when I cut my hand on the glass. It hurt like mad! But I kept runnin', and then I didn't feel no more hurtin' till I stopped runnin'!

(pause)

Why was that, Miss Johnson?

CAMILLE

Because all you could think of was getting away from the guard.

DAVID LEE

Oh...

(pause).

You right, that's all that was worryin' me right then...

CAMILLE

You know, that was a good thing you did for Clarence, in class today. I believed his story, but I was afraid the other children wouldn't...

DAVID LEE

He was real scared nobody would believe him -- I could tell, even when he first stood up.

CAMILLE

You could? How?

DAVID LEE

I been like that myself, when I thought nobody was gonna believe me...

(pause)

You wanna hear another story?!

CAMILLE

Not now, David, it's time for bed. You have a long trip ahead of you in the morning...

A thought grips the boy, and he moves to the window, and stares out into the darkness, as CAMILLE starts to make the bed for him -- she stops for a moment, and looks up and over at him at the window --

CAMILLE

What are you looking at, out there? There's nothing to see.

DAVID LEE

My daddy likes to look into the dark, even when there ain't nothin to see -- it's what you hear he say.

CAMILLE notices and feels that his mood has changed.

CAMILLE

You think about your father a lot, don't you?

DAVID LEE

Yes mam...

CAMILLE

Well, you shouldn't worry about him too much, David.

DAVID LEE

What do I tell my mama when I get home? I didn't find him and that's what I wanted to do.

CAMILLE

But you did all you could, David. Not many little boys could've gone on such a journey as you did.

DAVID LEE

But where is my daddy!?

CAMILLE

I can't answer that for you -- but it's no fault of your own that you don't know where your father is now. You tell me what you did that kept you from finding your father.

(pause)

Come on, tell me...

DAVID LEE

(pause)  
Nothin'...

CAMILLE  
And so you did your job, right?

DAVID LEE  
(pause)  
Yes, mam...

CAMILLE  
Whewwww! You sure keep my mind jumping, boy!

DAVID LEE  
What do that mean?

CAMILLE  
Means you keep me using my head, and that's good!

She returns to making up the bed.

DAVID LEE  
(pause)  
Miss Johnson... Do you think I can come back here, and you let me study school with the other children?

The question stops her work -- and then she momentarily struggles for an answer for the boy -- she sits down on the bed as he turns back to gazing out of the window. She looks on him for a moment, rises, moves to the window, puts her arm around his shoulder -- and they both look out of the window into the blank darkness --

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - ROAD - DAY

JOSIE MAE is on the porch with EARL when she spots DAVID and SOUNDER on the road, rushing toward the house.

JOSIE MAE  
Mama! Mama!

She and EARL rush out to the road to meet them -- REBECCA moves out of the front door behind them. DAVID is carrying two books given to him by CAMILLE. They all reach him about the same time.

JOSIE & EARL  
Hi, David! Sounder!

REBECCA  
What happened to you? I've been worried out of my life. What's wrong with your hand, son?

DAVID LEE  
I cut it on some glass and we got lost, Mama.

REBECCA

Did you find your father?

DAVID LEE

Didn't see 'im, Mama. The other men there say they didn't know Daddy.

REBECCA

I guess they musta sent 'im to another camp.

They all start moving for the house.

REBECCA

What's that you carryin'?

DAVID LEE

Some books Miss Johnson gave me.

REBECCA

Who's Miss Johnson?

DAVID LEE

Miss Johnson is a teacher, and...

They move on through the yard.

INT. KITCHEN-SITTING ROOM - DAY

They enter -- DAVID and the other children sit at the table -- REBECCA begins to prepare something for the boy to eat.

DAVID LEE

So when I left, she gave me these books.

REBECCA

Miss Johnson must be a real kindly lady.

DAVID LEE

She is, Mama...

(pause)

When the fall comes, she wants me to come to her school.

REBECCA

How can you do that? You don't live anywhere near that school.

DAVID LEE

She says I can come live with her while school goin' on, and come back home every time there ain't no school.

REBECCA

But who's gonna help me here with the house and in the field?

She puts some food on the table before him -- he hesitates before eating -- she is about to exit through the back door -- stops in the doorway and turns

back to him.

REBECCA

If your father is back by then it's all right  
with me if it'll be all right with him...

REBECCA moves out just like that, leaving the boy thrown and bewildered for a moment -- he looks in the direction of his mother's room for awhile and then slowly starts to eat, with his appetite practically gone -- JOSIE MAE and EARL on the other side of the table are staring at him.

DAVID LEE

Whatcha starin' at?

JOSIE MAE

Tell us some more 'bout the trip!

EXTs. CORNFIELD-WEIGHING STATION - DAY

A hot, mid-July day -- late afternoon -- REBECCA, DAVID LEE, JOSIE MAE and EARL are working the mill.

DAVID LEE points with his fingers in giving out assignments to JOSIE MAE and EARL. They run across the fields to a particular row of corn, with croker sacks in their hands.

JOSIE MAE and EARL are behind REBECCA, picking the corn in armfuls -- run back to the stationary place where they left their croker sacks, and drop the corn into the sacks.

EXT. CORNFIELD - DAY

A white man in a wagon rolls in the aisle between the rows of corn -- stops the wagon at each sack, where REBECCA and DAVID LEE load the corn up on the wagon.

EXT. WEIGHING STATION - DAY

The wagon rolls up to the weighing station on MR. HOWARD'S premises and comes to a halt -- REBECCA and DAVID LEE climb down from the wagon. MR. HOWARD is there.

REBECCA and DAVID LEE unload the sacks from the wagon, and put them down on the scale, while the man who was driving the wagon writes down the weight numbers on a piece of paper --

INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

REBECCA, JOSIE MAE and EARL are gathered around DAVID LEE as he slowly completes writing a letter -- he sits back to read it.

DAVID LEE

(reads)

"Dear Miss Johnson. How are you? I am doing  
okay. I told my mama, my brother and my sister  
about you, and they like you too. I can't make  
this letter too long because I have work to do.

Bless you, David Lee Morgan"

They all look to each other with big triumphant smiles of pride on their faces.

REBECCA

Son, you sure write a good fine letter!

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

DAVID LEE walks through the woods with a book in his hand -- he stops, sits down at the base of a tree, when suddenly he reacts as if he hears something -- he rises and rushes away -- he runs, stops and looks around him, in search of someone, and then he takes off again at high speed along a pathway of the woods. His speed builds and builds, and suddenly he breaks the woods, and the night, into high grass field.

EXT. GRASS FIELD - DAY

It is broad daylight, and the sun is shining -- DAVID LEE wipes his eyes and looks about the field of high grass -- he hears a voice and takes off running until he breaks the high grass into open field.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

He sees his father, with SOUNDER at his side, standing about three hundred feet away from him, smiling. He rushes to his father -- they embrace and then they start to run across the open field, the three of them. They run and they run, keeping pace with each other, as their speed increases. DAVID LEE drops his book, stops to pick it up -- after he straightens up with the book to continue the running, he stops in his tracks -- his father and SOUNDER are nowhere to be seen -- he looks out over the entire field -- they are not there.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

DAVID LEE wakes up -- he looks to EARL and JOSIE MAE, and then into the empty darkness of the room, and wonders; where did the dream come from -- where did it go to --

EXT. THE PORCH - DAY

Later the same day, DAVID LEE is lying on his stomach, reading from one of his books. REBECCA is doing some sewing -- SOUNDER comes from around the side of the house, hobbling back and forth to the road and back.

REBECCA

What's wrong with him, David?

DAVID LEE

It's the heat.

REBECCA

It's when the heat is so bad, dogs go crazy.

DAVID LEE

He won't go mad -- he's just lookin' for a

cooler spot.

REBECCA sees a lone figure upon the landscape way out from the house emerge as a speck and slowly grow into a ripply form through the heat waves -- JOSIE MAE and EARL come from around the house and sit down in the yard.

REBECCA

Who's that to be fightin' scorchin' heat out in open land like that?

SOUNDER moves about restlessly in the yard -- and then suddenly the voice of the great coon hound breaks the sultry August deadness and dashes across the road toward the figure. REBECCA jumps to her feet.

REBECCA

He's gone mad! Stop him, David!

DAVID LEE takes off after SOUNDER -- his voice is ringing at a peak as he keeps moving until he arrives at the figure. REBECCA sees the man kneel and take the dog into his arms, and now the light hits at the top of her mind.

REBECCA

Oh my God, it's Nathan! It's Nathan!!!

She drops everything and charges off the porch with JOSIE MAE and EARL, making haste behind her.

MEDIUM ANGLE - REBECCA, JOSIE MAE and EARL - PORCH POV

As they dash across the road and into the field, almost in one physical motion.

QUICK PULL TO:

FULL LONG ANGLE - MORGAN FAMILY - PORCH POV

DAVID LEE falls into his father's arms -- REBECCA embraces and holds him close to her -- JOSIE MAE and EARL move into his embrace -- SOUNDER moves back and forth around them -- DAVID LEE jumps up and down with joy -- They start moving toward the house -- NATHAN moves with an accented limp in his right leg, and then they stop.

SMASH TO:

EXT. THE FIELD - CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE - DAY

DAVID LEE

What's wrong with your leg, Daddy?

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - NATHAN LEE

NATHAN LEE

Got it hurt in a dynamite blast, son. The dirty dogs had no more use for me, so they let me have time off my sentence, and let me come home.

PULL TO:

FULL ANGLE - EVERYONE

REBECCA

The most important thing is that you're home!

(pause)

We was gonna have cold eatin' tonight, 'cause  
of the heat, but now, I'm goin' to cook!

NATHAN LEE

Well, let's get to it, Miss Rebecca, 'cause I  
been waitin' too long a time for your good  
cookin'!

They move out of the field and across the road for their home.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

NATHAN and the children are at the table just after eating as REBECCA is  
busying herself in the area, cleaning up.

NATHAN LEE

All I can say, Rebecca, is that was some meal!  
Thank you!

She stops her work, turns to him and smiles.

REBECCA

I'm glad you liked it, Nathan.

She returns to her work.

REBECCA

Alright, children, it was your bedtime two  
hours ago -- let's get a move on you...

JOSIE MAE and EARL rise and move around the table to their father.

JOSIE MAE

Goodnight, Daddy...

NATHAN LEE

Goodnight to you, little girl.

He kisses her on the face and then EARL moves to him.

EARL

Night, Daddy...

NATHAN LEE

Goodnight, son...

He embraces EARL -- and then the two children move for their room, with  
REBECCA accompanying them.

NATHAN LEE

Son, that was some trip you went on...

DAVID LEE

Where was you, Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

That musta been afta they sent me to this place call Clayburn. That was the hardest workin' camp they sent me to. The work was so hard, you had to look for somethin' to laugh about to keep from feelin' the whole pain in your body. Like one time, it was in the middle of the day, and there weren't no sun -- you hear that?

DAVID LEE

Where did the sun go to, Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

Into the clouds and behind the mountains.

DAVID LEE

What happened afta that?

NATHAN LEE

The rains started to come, and the prisoners were scared to run 'cause they had to wait for guards to round us up, and tell us when to move -- but we didn't mind the rain comin' 'cause it meant we would git a little rest -- we just stood there, watchin' the guards and they weapons get wet, and that made us all feel kinda good for a minute. I was laughin' all over inside -- a minute, that's all, but what a minute it was!

He laughs -- DAVID LEE laughs along with him -- the laughter trails off.

DAVID LEE

Daddy, I'm so glad you home!

NATHAN reaches across the table and shakes the boy's head with his hand.

NATHAN LEE

And me too, son! You shore done got to be such a big little man!

DAVID LEE

We goin' huntin' again, Daddy !?

NATHAN LEE

You bet we is!

DAVID LEE

I cleaned and oiled all your stuff while you was gone...

REBECCA re-enters from the children's room, crosses for her room, stops at the door, and turns to them.

REBECCA  
Your time now, David Lee...

She enters the room -- DAVID LEE rises from the table, moves to his father, and extends his hand out to him for a shake -- they shake hands.

DAVID LEE  
Goodnight, Daddy...

NATHAN LEE  
Goodnight to you, son...

DAVID LEE moves for his room, stops and turns back to his father.

DAVID LEE  
Daddy, you home now... that's all I want -- I  
don't want nothin' else...

NATHAN LEE  
Come here, son...

DAVID LEE moves closer to him -- NATHAN takes the boy into his arms, and holds him close. He releases him -- the boy smiles, turns and moves into his room. NATHAN looks on the door for awhile where the boy has entered, rises from the table and moves into his room.

INT. NATHAN AND REBECCA'S ROOM -- CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE - DAY

An expression of soft thoughts and affection.

PULLS TO:

ANGLE - NATHAN LEE - DAVID LEE POV

NATHAN is in bed, asleep. He turns over and as he does, his eyes catch sight of DAVID LEE -- He props himself on his elbow to come out of the sleep as he looks to the boy.

NATHAN LEE  
Mornin', son...

DAVID LEE  
Mornin', Daddy...

MOVES TO:

FULL ANGLE - NATHAN and DAVID LEE

NATHAN LEE  
Where's everybody?

DAVID LEE  
They gone to the field...

NATHAN LEE  
Guess I can't just lay here, then.

He lifts himself up and sits on the edge of the bed, rubs his hand through his hair -- reacts, looking down on the floor.

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

As he looks to his father with affection --

PULLS QUICK TO:

FULL ANGLE - ROOM

DAVID LEE crosses to a chair, takes up his father's trousers and shirt off a chair and his shoes from the floor and passes them on to him at the bed.

NATHAN LEE

Thank you, son...

He begins to slowly put on his clothes --

DAVID LEE

You feel alright today, Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

Great, son -- not like wakin' up in jail. For a minute or two, didn't quite know where I was, but when I saw your face lookin down on me, made me know right away the day was gonna be a good one, and it all belonged to me!

CLOSE HALF ANGLE - NATHAN LEE

As he smiles down to the boy-

CUT TO:

CLOSE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

As he returns his father's smile -

PULLS TO:

FULL ANGLE - ROOM

As they both exit from the room -- NATHAN LEE leading the way --

INT. SITTING ROOM-KITCHEN - FULL ANGLE - DAY

They keep moving to the kitchen area.

DAVID LEE

Mama left somethin' for you to eat on the stove--

They arrive at the stove -- NATHAN takes the cover off a pan to take a look.

NATHAN LEE

Smells good, too!

He turns away from the stove, and they move out the backdoor for the backyard.

EXT. THE BACKYARD - FULL ANGLE - DAY

Just as they step out into the yard, they are immediately greeted by SOUNDER.

NATHAN LEE

Hi there, big boy!

SOUNDER leaps all over him -- he wrestles playfully with the dog.

NATHAN LEE

They thought one little ol' shotgun was gonna stop you -- you showed huh, boy!

SOUNDER continues to paw all over him.

NATHAN LEE

Down boy! That's enough!

SOUNDER turns to DAVID who kneels to stroke and caress him as NATHAN moves to the water well, and begins to wash up.

DAVID LEE

Daddy, when is we goin' huntin'?

NATHAN LEE

Soon -- but it won't be too much huntin' you'll be doin', 'cordin' to a good little story your mama told me last night -- you'll be goin' away from here, won't you?

QUICK MOVE TO:

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

NATHAN'S question seems to stab the boy, and he sinks into a troublesome silence.

PULLS BACK TO:

FULL ANGLE - NATHAN - DAVID POV

He waits a moment for the boy to reply, then moves for the shed and enters -- DAVID LEE looks on the blank door of the shed where NATHAN has entered -- He rises from the ground and he and SOUNDER move into the shed.

INT. SHED - ANGLE - NATHAN - THEIR POV - DAY

DAVID LEE and SOUNDER enter and stop just inside the door. NATHAN is going over his equipment.

NATHAN LEE

You kept my stuff in real good shape, son.

He takes up his baseball glove and a ball -- tries the glove out in his hand -- then tosses the ball to DAVID. DAVID catches it -- NATHAN picks up his bat --

NATHAN LEE  
Come on, son, throw a couple to me!

He moves briskly out of the shed back into the yard -- DAVID and SOUNDER run out behind him --

EXT. BACKYARD - FULL ANGLE - DAY

NATHAN moves to the house end of the yard -- DAVID takes a position at the field end.

NATHAN LEE  
Alright, chunk it to me!

DAVID throws the ball softly and it lands in NATHAN's glove. He throws the ball back to DAVID -- DAVID catches it in his bare hand.

NATHAN LEE  
Let me have one with a little steam on it, now!

DAVID rears back and fires a hard one at him. It pops into his glove.

NATHAN LEE  
Boy that was a mean curve you just threw!

PULLS BACK TO:

DAVID rears back once again, and throws a hard one.

NATHAN LEE  
That's enough for now, son. I better eat so we can get out to the field and help your mama before she come lookin' for us, and you know how tough your mama can get!

EXT. CORNFIELD - DAY

REBECCA, JOSIE MAE, and EARL are working the field when MR. HOWARD drives out in his truck -- He gets out and approaches them.

MR HOWARD  
(smiling)  
Hi ya, Rebecca...

REBECCA  
(the cynical truth)  
Tired.

MR HOWARD  
(looks about the field)  
Somebody told me Nathan was back. How is he?

REBECCA

Why don't you pay him a visit, Mr. Howard?  
He'll tell you all about it.

MR. HOWARD

I'll do that, Rebecca... I'll do that...

MR HOWARD moves back to his truck and drives off. As they watch the truck  
move away --

EXT. CORNFIELD - DAY

They all turn to see NATHAN limping toward them with SOUNDER and DAVID LEE --  
They wait until they arrive --

NATHAN LEE

What did he want?

REBECCA

To invite you to his house -- the two of you  
could just sit under the shade tree, drink ice  
cold whiskey, and just shoot the breeze!

NATHAN LEE

Did you tell 'im I was too busy for that kinda  
stuff?

He puts his arms around her shoulders, and draws her close to him -- The  
children stand by with big wide open smiles on their faces --

NATHAN LEE

Dammit! It shore feels good to be back home!

He releases her -- walks about twelve feet away -- inspects some of the corn  
-- looks about over the field --

NATHAN LEE

Y'all did some good job with the crop.

He turns and walks back to them --

NATHAN LEE

Well, let's get to work!

REBECCA

You sure you feel up to it, Nathan?

NATHAN LEE

Yeah. I feel real up to it right now. Come on,  
David Lee, you and me'll do the loading.

REBECCA and the other children start in with the picking, but REBECCA watches  
NATHAN with concern as he, DAVID LEE and SOUNDER move through the field --  
finally, she returns her full attention to the work --

NATHAN LEE

I'm real proud of how you helped your mama to

keep this place goin', David Lee.

DAVID LEE

Thank you, Daddy...

They come to a group of corn-filled sacks alongside the wagon and stop.

NATHAN LEE

I'll lift up the back end, and you just hold on to the front end for me.

He lifts up the back end of the sack -- DAVID LEE takes hold of the front, tied end, and they struggle to get it up on the wagon, with NATHAN grunting and groaning. The same thing happens with the second sack --

NATHAN LEE

Wheew! This is some hard work, but it beats goin' to jail.

DAVID LEE

You won't be goin' to jail again, will you, Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

No, son -- they'd have to kill me before I'd let 'em do that to me again!

He realizes he has said the wrong thing from the worried look on the boy's face.

NATHAN LEE

Nobody's goin' to jail, and nobody's gittin' hurt. Come on, let's get this one up on the wagon.

NATHAN reaches down for the bag -- his leg gives way on him and he falls on his behind --

DAVID LEE

You hurt, Daddy!?

NATHAN LEE

No, no, I'm all right, son... This damn leg just won't act right no more!

He tries to get up right away but the leg is in such pain, he can't make it -  
-

DAVID LEE

Mama! Mama!

REBECCA and the other children come running toward them --

REBECCA

What's wrong, Nathan?

DAVID LEE

He can't get up, Mama!

NATHAN LEE

This done happen before. It ain't nothin' -- I just have to wait a minute or two.

REBECCA

Is there something I can do to help you?

NATHAN LEE

Yeah, just stay where you is...

He supports himself on his right arm and slowly pushes himself up to where he can stand on his foot --

NATHAN LEE

There, you see?

REBECCA

I see, all right -- It's time for us to get out of this field.

NATHAN LEE

I just got out here!

REBECCA

It's lunchtime, and I wanna have a talk with you, Nathan Lee. Come on, children...

She turns briskly and moves off with JOSIE MAE and EARL following --

NATHAN LEE

Woman worries too much for me.

He slowly starts to limp away with SOUNDER but DAVID LEE remains standing where he is --

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

There is worry and concern in his face as he watches his father strain to walk on the injured leg --

PULLS TO:

FULL ANGLE - NATHAN LEE, SOUNDER and DAVID LEE

As NATHAN stops and turns to DAVID LEE --

NATHAN LEE

You comin' with us, son?

After a bit of hesitation, DAVID LEE slowly moves toward his father, who has now turned and is moving farther out of the field --

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - FULL ANGLE - EVERYONE - DAY

REBECCA is sitting on the porch, cutting string beans -- JOSIE MAE and EARL

are playing hop scotch -- DAVID LEE is tossing the baseball to his father as IKE enters the yard -- he has a white envelope in his hand -- SOUNDER is standing near NATHAN.

NATHAN LEE

Hi ya doin' there, Ike?

IKE

Any time it's Saturday and I don't hafta do any work, I'm doin' okay!

NATHAN LEE

Whatcha got there?

IKE

Seems this piece of mail came to Mr. Howard's place this mornin' and he had me to bring it over here.

NATHAN LEE

Well, let me have it.

IKE

Don't belong to you! It's for the little important man, here!

He hands it to DAVID LEE -- DAVID LEE does not look at the envelope as he takes it -- Everyone's attention is to DAVID LEE and the letter now --

NATHAN LEE

Well, son, who is it from?

DAVID LEE hesitates for a moment, then holds the letter up to read --

DAVID LEE

(pause)

From Miss Johnson --

NATHAN LEE

Well, ain't you gon' open and read it for us?

He looks directly to his father, and then to his mother -- walks to the steps and sits. They all gather closer to him as he takes his time, opening the envelope. When it is opened -- he seems not to want to read it --

DAVID LEE

(reads)

Dear David, if you are coming to school here, be sure to bring some warm clothes. The school term will begin September 8th, but it would be good for you to be here by the 4th or 5th of the month. I do hope everything is fine and you will be here. Give my "hello" to your family. Yours truly, Miss Camille Johnson...

NATHAN LEE

September 4 -- how far away is that?

REBECCA

'Bout a week...

With directness, NATHAN LEE moves toward the wagon in front of the yard -- stops and turns --

NATHAN LEE

Come on, children, let's go!

Moves on to the wagon.

PULLS TO:

WIDER ANGLE - INCLUDE EDGE OF ROAD AND WAGON

NATHAN climbs up on the wagon and SOUNDER leaps up behind him as JOSIE MAE and EARL follow. DAVID LEE steps down into the yard and merely looks on --

REBECCA

Where you goin'!?

NATHAN LEE

To the commissary to get this boy some clothes!  
I'm gon' get everybody somethin'!

REBECCA

But, Nathan--

NATHAN LEE

Don't tell me nothin' 'bout what we owe ol' man  
Howard! I'll do the owing, and let him worry  
'bout the collecting! Come on, David Lee!

DAVID LEE does not move from where he is standing.

NATHAN LEE

Did you hear me, boy? Come on!

DAVID LEE moves slowly to the wagon stops and looks up to his father --

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

DAVID LEE

You just came back home, Daddy. I don't wanna  
leave right now -- I wanna stay home and be  
with you.

NATHAN LEE

And I wanta be with you, too, but this school  
is somethin' that's good for you -- somethin'  
you need, like good air to breathe, and I want  
you to have it, boy, and that's the way it's  
gonna be!

DAVID LEE

But, Daddy, you need me here to help you in the

field -- Daddy, your leg is hurt -- you can't work like you used to. Who's gonna help you!? Who's gonna do the work, Daddy?!

NATHAN LEE

(grabs him by one arm)

Let me tell you somethin', boy! I don't care if both of my legs was cut off! I can do more work in that field, than you could in a hundred years!

DAVID LEE

I won't go, Daddy! I won't go!

NATHAN LEE

Now wait just a minute! You don't tell me what you ain't gonna do! I tell you! I say, you goin' to that school, you goin'! You hear me!

He releases the boy, climbs back up on the wagon, and looks down to him --

PULLS TO:

WIDER ANGLE - INCLUDE WAGON, CHILDREN AND SOUNDER

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

With a look of confused sadness --

DAVID LEE

Daddy, don't make me go away from you.

QUICK MOVE TO:

ANGLE -- NATHAN LEE

The boy's words have rendered him speechless -- he doesn't quite know what to do or say for the moment.

MOVES TO:

FULL ANGLE - FRONT OF THE HOUSE

DAVID LEE turns and runs out into the field --

NATHAN LEE

David!

The boy keeps running -- NATHAN climbs down from the wagon and goes after him --

NATHAN LEE

David Lee, come back here!

REBECCA rushes down from the porch and moves for NATHAN --

REBECCA

Nathan!

NATHAN LEE stops in his tracks, his back to her --

PULLS TO:

ANGLE - REBECCA - NATHAN'S POV

REBECCA

Please, leave him be, Nathan! He missed you in a grave way while you was gone -- he sweated and worried to find out where they holdin' you -- went on that long journey -- you come home, and it's a natural thing for him to wanta hold on to you now.

MEDIUM CLOSE ANGLE - NATHAN LEE

As he takes a long hard look to her -- turns, and moves out into the field to find the boy -- SOUNDER follows him --

MOVES TO:

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - REBECCA

As she watches him move out into the field --

EXT. THE CORNFIELD - NATHAN LEE - DAY

As he moves about the field in search of DAVID -- He moves into various areas -- farther and farther into the field.

NATHAN LEE

David! David Lee!

He gets no response to his call -- He moves on and on about the field in search of the boy --

NATHAN LEE

David! You hear me callin' you!?

He moves on even farther, and finally he spots the boy, sitting on a high lump of earth with his face down between his legs, crying -- NATHAN stops, and then slowly moves to the boy and sits beside him --

NATHAN LEE

Son, will you listen to me for a minute?

After a minute's hesitation, DAVID slowly raises his head, and looks up to his father --

NATHAN LEE

You know, son, when I got this leg hurt, I was down in a rock quarry, and all of a sudden, there was this dynamite blast comin' at me with the kind of force to kill ten men, but I got outta the way of most of them rock, quicker'n

the lightnin' in God's mind -- 'cause I made it up in my head, just that quick to beat the death that was comin' at me. And that's what I'm gonna do with this trouble in my leg. I'm gon' beat it. That's all that's left for me to do. That's what I want you to do. I want you to beat the life they got laid out for you in this valley.

DAVID LEE looks directly at him and then turns away.

NATHAN LEE

I was watchin' your sister and brother out here the other day, and I said to myself, these is just children -- they ain't got no business out here in this hot sun... As for me and your mama, we been in this field so long, we ain't never known anything else.

DAVID LEE is looking straight out and away from him. NATHAN waits as DAVID hesitates -- finally the boy holds his hands up before his eyes -- he drops his hands, rises and moves away from his father -- stops about five feet away. About three rows away, the white man is driving through the field in a truck -- They watch the truck move on --

NATHAN LEE

There ain't nothin' here but people like them bastards that sent me away, and tried to kill me. Son, please don't get too used to this place. I'm gonna love you wherever you is. Me, your mama, Josie Mae and Earl, we gonna love you even more. We gonna be at that school to see you every chance we get.

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - NATHAN LEE

CUT TO:

CLOSE FACE ANGLE - DAVID LEE

As they look to each other -- their eyes drawing them closer to each other, and then DAVID rushes into his father's waiting arms --

NATHAN LEE

I love you, son! Don't ever think I don't love you!

(pause)

We gon' get to be friends?

DAVID LEE

Yes, Daddy! Yes!

NATHAN holds the boy out from him -- They just look to each other as DAVID wipes his eyes and calms down. They start moving out of the field --

PULLS TO:

LONGER ANGLE - NATHAN AND DAVID LEE

As they make their way out of the field --

INT. THE CHILDREN'S ROOM - FULL ANGLE - DAY

DAVID LEE is packing a bag with SOUNDER nearby him as JOSIE MAE and EARL look on -- when he is done, he closes the bag [and hands it] on to EARL --

DAVID LEE  
All right, get a move on you, bag boy!

EARL drops the bag on the floor --

EARL  
You carry your own bag!

JOSIE MAE  
I'll carry it, David...

EARL quickly picks the bag back up --

EARL  
Naw, I'm carryin' it!

DAVID LEE  
Thank you, Josie Mae.

JOSIE MAE  
For what?

DAVID LEE  
For Earl helpin' me out with my bag!

He laughs as they all move out of the room --

EXT. FRONT OF THE HOUSE - DAY

As the children exit from the house, REBECCA is at the wagon, looking on NATHAN as he loads a box of DAVID'S things on the wagon -- they approach him, and he takes the bag from EARL and loads it up on the wagon. NATHAN climbs up to the reins, SOUNDER hops up on the wagon, and then REBECCA takes DAVID into her arms --

REBECCA  
Be good and be smart, little boy.

DAVID LEE  
Yes, ma'm...

She releases him. He embraces JOSIE and EARL -- Climbs on the wagon behind his father.

NATHAN LEE  
I oughta be gettin' back here by tomorrow night  
some time... Gitttt!

The wagon rolls away -- DAVID turns back to wave --

DAVID LEE

BYE...!

ALL

BYE...!

REBECCA keeps her eyes on the wagon for awhile, and then, she and the children turn and slowly move into the house --

EXT. THE WAGON - DAY

As the wagon rolls up the road, DAVID LEE reaches back and ruffles SOUNDER about the neck -- looks out over the field, and all the places he is familiar with -- turns to his father --

DAVID LEE

You know somethin', Daddy?

NATHAN LEE

What's that, son?

DAVID LEE

I'm gon' miss this ol' raggedy place.

NATHAN is worried for a moment -- but DAVID breaks out in a big grin as if he's about to get to the punchline of a joke --

DAVID LEE

But I ain't gon' worry 'bout it!

The father and son break out in a gusto of laughter as the wagon rolls along up the road...

FADE OUT