

# HELLHOUNDS

(God Sees Everything)

by

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(Based on actual events.) In 1972, a young musician is arrested in a small Mississippi town where he witnesses institutional racism. Forty years later he returns to the scene and confronts his own white privilege.

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**ACT ONE**

EXT - ARKANSAS DELTA - DAY

Hazy, late summer day at sunset. Insects buzz in the air. At the edge of a flat, dry cotton field is a small, white farmhouse. It's paint is faded and there is a large cottonwood tree standing beside it. Several yards from the house is an outbuilding where we hear an amateur band rehearsing "Funk 49" by the James Gang, minus bass guitar.

EXT - FARMHOUSE DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Three young men are loading guitars and amplifiers into the back of a van parked in the gravel driveway of the farmhouse. They are dressed in jeans and T-shirts. Two of them have long hair and the other has a military style haircut and a mustache.

ANGEL

We can take the van but I have to work Monday morning.

DAN

No problem. We can run down and grab his amp and head straight back. It's only about four hours, so we'll be back that evening.

ROBBIE

I saw him at the bowling alley last night. He'll probably be there tonight. I'll ask him.

DAN

Yeah, what time?

ROBBIE

I'll be there about seven. He'll be there by then. He doesn't like to hang around at home.

DAN

Cool. See you then.

Angel and Dan get in the van. They wave as they pull out of the gravel driveway. Robbie turns and walks back toward the house.

INT - AIR FORCE BASE BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

In a bowling alley decorated with squadron logos and neon beer signs, people are sitting at tables and booths behind bowling lanes. Several are standing at a snack bar counter. The place is full and loud. The air is thick with cigarette smoke. Most of the people are military except for a few wives and children. At a table by the front door are four young men. Dan and Robbie are dressed in jeans, boots, T-shirts, and army surplus jackets. They are sitting with two airmen who are dressed similarly. The crowd is a mixture of age and race, all except Dan and Robbie have military haircuts. Early 70's rock and soul music is playing on the jukebox.

INT - BOWLING ALLEY SNACK BAR - NIGHT

Dan, Robbie, and the two airmen are seated at a large round formica top table with a napkin holder, salt and pepper shakers, and a ketchup container in the center.

DAN

Where is he? I thought you said  
he'd be here.

ROBBIE

There he is now.

Robbie nods toward the front door. A lanky teenager with long wavy dark brown hair enters. He is wearing jeans and a T-shirt, black weathered combat boots, and an old Air Force officer's dress Blue wool overcoat with silver buttons. He's carrying a Bar Kays album.

BLUE

(excitedly)

Gentlemen!

High fives and hugs are exchanged all around.

DAN

Blue! Good to see ya' Blue! How are ya? So... What was it like?

ROBBIE

Yeah, how was it?

BLUE

It wasn't that big of a deal. The teachers were pretty cool and the other kids were okay, but I was definitely ready to get back. There were only three girls.

(laughing)

That was a bummer. And I had to leave my amp there.

DAN

Yeah, we've been talking about taking Angel's van and going to get it. That sound okay to you? We can go Sunday but we have to leave early so we can be back that evening because Angel's on duty Monday morning.

BLUE

Wow, thanks! Sure, that'll work. What time you wanna' leave?

(distracted and  
scanning the place)

Are Andrew or Bucky still around?  
I could use a beer.

ROBBIE

Those guys are laying low. A couple of officer's kids got caught partying at their place and they threatened to bust them. Andrew said the only reason they didn't is because they can't spare anyone that works in the hospital.

Bucky said they almost got transferred to Thailand.

BLUE

Damn, that sucks. I could really use a beer. Who can we get to buy us one?

Blue looks directly at one of the airman sitting at the table.

PEARL (AIRMAN 1)

Don't look at me! I'm not buying you a beer! If I get caught I'll lose a stripe. Fuck that.

Blue looks at the other airman and grins.

ANDERS (AIRMAN 2)

No way man! I'm not taking chances for a bunch of dependent kids. Come on Pearl, let's get out of here!

They move to a table full of other airmen.

BLUE

Wow, how narrow minded.

(laughs)

So what time are we leaving?

DAN

If we leave by nine we'll be home that evening.

ROBBIE

I'll call Angel and let him know.

DAN

Great. Tell him we can leave from my house if you guys want to.

Robbie nods.

BLUE

(looking around)

Cool. Who can I get to buy me a beer?

EXT - DAN'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

A white, late 60s Ford Econoline van is parked in the driveway of a brick ranch-style duplex. Through the open side door we can see two large throw pillows, a small ice chest, and a sleeping bag. Dan and Angel are standing beside the van talking. Dan's girlfriend, Lori, walks up and joins the conversation.

DAN

Hey babe.

(kisses Lori)

We're almost ready.

LORI

Hey. I wish I could go with you but I can't get out of lab duty this weekend.

DAN

Why not?

LORI

Because I skipped last week? To go to Memphis?

(looks at Dan with disbelief)

DAN

Yeah, but wasn't it worth it?

LORI

Yes it was.

She winks and gives him a sly grin. Angel turns and looks inside the van. He speaks over his shoulder.

ANGEL

We should take a couple of lawn chairs. There'll still be room for his amp and stuff.

DAN

Okay, I'll grab a couple from the house. I wonder if I could get rid of some pot down there? I still have that stuff I got from Andrew.

LORI

You sure you wanna do that? It's Mississippi. I mean, Arkansas is bad enough, but it's Mississippi. Ya' know?

DAN

Oh, it'll be fine. We'll be careful.

LORI

I don't know. I don't think it's such a good idea.

Dan gives her a halfhearted shrug.

DAN

Don't be so paranoid.

ANGEL

I'm with Lori. Are you sure you wanna do that?

(looking at his  
watch)

Damn, why are we always waiting for Blue? He's two hours late.

LORI

It's Blue. You know how he is - Always last to show. Mr. Busy.

DAN

I'll go give him a call.

Angel looks over Dan's shoulder toward the road.

ANGEL

Never mind, here he is.

A wood paneled station wagon rolls to a stop at the end of the driveway. Behind the wheel is a frazzled looking woman in her mid 30s. In the passenger seat are two young children. They are fighting and yelling at each other. Blue steps out of the backseat. He turns and leans inside the station wagon and speaks to his mother.

BLUE

I know, I know. Love you!

He closes the back door and waves, then shuffles up the driveway as the station wagon pulls away. He's wearing the same coat from the day before.

BLUE (CONT)

Hey! Sorry I'm late! Mom couldn't get it together.

ANGEL

I would've picked you up if you'd called. It's a drag about your mom, but we still have to pick Robbie up too.

BLUE

Let's just get rolling. I'll tell you about it on the way.

INT - INSIDE OF VAN - DAY

Late afternoon. Angel is driving. Dan is riding shotgun. Robbie and Blue are sitting on lawn chairs behind them. They are passing a joint.

ROBBIE

She just started throwing shit in the yard?

BLUE

Yeah, she gets crazy when he's gone too long. He's supposed to be home next month, thank God. I hope so. It's so embarrassing.

DAN

What did the cops say?

BLUE

Not much. They just told me to keep an eye on her because she'd calmed down by the time they got there.

They ride in stoned silence until they see a hitchhiker on the side of the road. He is wearing jeans and a cowboy shirt and has curly blonde hair. On the ground beside him is a backpack and a small guitar case.

ROBBIE

Hey, let's give him a ride!

DAN

He sure looks like he needs one.

ANGEL

I don't know, man...

ROBBIE

Aw, he looks cool.

BLUE

Yeah, He looks cool. Go ahead and stop.

ANGEL

Okay...

Angel pulls over to the side of the road and the hitchhiker runs to the van. Robbie slides open the side door and the hitchhiker breathlessly climbs in.

GARY

Oh wow, thanks y'all! I've been out there about three hours. I didn't think I was ever gonna' get a ride. Whew!

DAN

Ya' want a Coke?

He fishes a can from the cooler and hands it to Gary.

You look like you could use it.  
I'm Dan. That's Blue, Robbie, and  
Angel.

He points to the others who nod.

GARY

Thanks! It's hotter than hell out  
there. I'm Gary Rogers.

He takes a long drink from the can.

DAN

Where ya headed?

GARY

Lebanon Tennessee. Outside of  
Nashville. My dad lives there.

BLUE

Tennessee? You DO know you're  
going the wrong way, don't you?

They all laugh loudly.

GARY

Right? I was out there so long I  
decided to just try to get a ride  
back to the truck stop so I could  
get something to drink and find a  
damn bathroom.

They laugh again.

GARY (CONT)

I'm actually coming from McComb,  
just south of here. I'm gonna stop  
and see a girl I know in Memphis  
tonight, then head on into  
Nashville in the morning. That's  
where I'm meeting Dad.

ROBBIE

You play?

(pointing at the  
guitar case)

GARY

Just kind of learning. It's my  
dad's. He's a steel guitar player.  
He plays with Roy Davis. The guy  
that does all the truck driving  
songs?

DAN

Oh yeah, I've seen that guy on TV.

GARY

Yeah, he's kind of a dick. Roy, I  
mean. My dad's cool.

BLUE

Wanna smoke a joint?

GARY

Sure! I've got a little hash.

BLUE

Cool!

GARY

Where are you guys headed?

BLUE

We're going to Crystal Springs. I  
left an amp down there. We're a  
band. I'm the bass player.

(points to Angel)  
He plays guitar,

(points to Robbie)  
he plays drums,

(points to Dan)  
and he plays guitar and sings.

I got caught smoking pot and my  
dad sent me to a free school down  
there for six months. I rode the  
bus home and had to leave my amp  
there. We're going to get it.

GARY

Free school?

BLUE

Have you seen the movie "Billy Jack"? It's like that but the "Mississippi" redneck version.

They all laugh.

INT - TRUCK STOP - DAY

Blue and Gary are waiting in line at the checkout counter. Angel, Robbie, and Dan are standing in front of the drink cooler staring at the soft drinks. All are very high. A uniformed sheriff's deputy and another man dressed in overalls and a ball cap walk in the front door. The deputy's name tag reads "Johnson". Both men are laughing as they enter the front door, which is separated from the exit door by a magazine rack. They stop and grin at each other when they spot Blue and Gary in line but their looks turn from mild amusement to distain when they see Angel, Dan, and Robbie joining them at the counter. None of the guys see them as each pays and leaves. The two men don't say anything but watch intently from behind the magazine rack as the guys climb into the van and drive away.

EXT - FREE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - EVENING

Blue and Angel are coming out of what appears to be an old three story white brick school or office building. Each carries one end of a large bass guitar cabinet. They carry it down the wide front steps and place it in the back of the van. As this happens, Robbie, Dan, and Gary are standing by the side of the van talking to three of the students. They see two adults watching them from a second floor window.

FIRST STUDENT

We don't go home except holidays and that's only if we don't have any marks against us.

SECOND STUDENT

So we don't have any money.

DAN

Well, I can't front it to you.

He climbs inside the van. Hiding from the upstairs view, he gives them a plastic baggie with a small amount of pot in it.

DAN (CONT)

Here, take what's left in this bag. It's not much, but it'll get you a buzz. Just don't get caught with it.

Suddenly Blue starts yelling at two younger kids who have climbed into the back of the van in an attempt to stow away.

BLUE

No! Get out! No! You're not going!  
You're gonna get us in a world of  
shit! Get out!

The kids jump out and run around the van out of sight.

BLUE (CONT)

Those little shits are always  
starting something! They're a pain  
in the ass!

ANGEL

Good thing you caught them because  
if we got down the road and had  
them with us...

BLUE

No shit. Gary's the only  
hitchhiker allowed on this trip.

(laughs)

INT - INSIDE OF VAN - DARK

Dan is driving. Angel is in the passenger seat. They're silent. The rest are sitting in back on the lawn chairs and Blue's bass cabinet. They're talking loudly.

ROBBIE

We practice at my mom's house when she's at work. We're playing at the Airman's club on base next month. That's why we had to come get his amp. Did you say your dad's from around here?

GARY

Yeah. McComb. I stay at my mamaw's house down there when dad's on the road. Him and my mom grew up there. She died when I was six and mamaw's always been like my mom. McComb is where Dad got this guitar. He got it from a guy they went to church with who taught him some licks when he was a kid. It's an old lap steel. He grew up playing blues because so many of those old guys were from around here and it was about all he heard. Then he saw Hank Williams and he had a steel player who showed him some country licks and he was hooked. Mamaw bought him an amp from Sears and the next thing she knows he's gone to Nashville. I guess he's done OK. He always says it beats working cotton. Ha!

Dan (loudly)

Hey! You guys be cool! I think there's a cop behind us.

He just gets the words out before a siren sounds behind them and the van fills with flashing red light.

DAN

Shit! You guys be cool. I'll see what he wants.

He pulls to the side of the road and stops. He leaves the engine running and steps out of the van.

EXT - ROADSIDE - NIGHT

Dan stands beside the van and removes his driver's license from his wallet. A deputy has pulled in behind them and has gotten out of his squad car. He is walking toward the van with his right hand resting on the butt of his revolver.

RONNIE

Go ahead and step back in the van  
and shut it off.

DAN

Oh yes sir. Sure thing.

He climbs back into the driver seat, closes the door, and kills the engine, then gives his license to Ronnie, who shines his flashlight in Dan and Angel's eyes.

RONNIE

Anyone else in the van?

DAN

Yes sir, there's five of us.

Ronnie shines his flashlight on Angel and the others in the back and eyes them for a few seconds then looks at Dan's license.

RONNIE

Where y'all headed?

DAN

Blytheville, Arkansas. We live  
there.

RONNIE

What are y'all doing down here?

Another patrol car pulls up in front of the van and two deputies get out. Ronnie makes a slight waving motion towards them and they stop at the back of the van.

DAN

We came down to pick up an  
amplifier. We're in a band.

DAN (CONT)

Our bass player was going to school down here.

RONNIE

Well, let's go ahead and have everybody step out of the van.

Angel steps out of the front passenger door. The others pile out as the other two deputies approach and cover the side door.

RONNIE (CONT)

Y'all got any weapons or drugs in there? Might as well tell me now, 'cause if you do I'm gonna' find 'em.

DAN

No sir, there isn't anything in there. Why'd you stop us, anyway?

RONNIE

Sheriff wants to talk to you.

DAN

The sheriff?

RONNIE

He'll be here in a minute. We're gonna go ahead and take a look in the van.

DAN

Don't you need a warrant for that?

RONNIE

Not when I can smell pot.

They move all of them to the back of the van and make them stand in front of Ronnie's patrol car.

RONNIE

(to the other  
deputies)

Randy, go ahead. Bob, you keep an eye on them.

INT - INSIDE VAN BACK - NIGHT

Randy opens the back doors and pulls out the bass cabinet, carelessly letting it drop to the pavement then dragging it into the weeds by the roadside. He removes the pillows and lawn chairs, tossing them into the weeds beside the amp. He dumps the cooler on the ground and sees only soft drinks. He sets Gary's guitar case aside and begins going through his backpack.

INT - INSIDE VAN FRONT - NIGHT

Ronnie looks in the ashtray, under the dashboard, and under the seats. He starts unlatching the engine cowling between the two front seats and Dan and Angel exchange quick worried looks. He pushes it into the back of the van and spins the wing nut off the breather cover and removes it.

RONNIE

(matter of factly)

Got it.

EXT - ROADSIDE - NIGHT

He removes a crumpled paper bag stuffed with seven baggies of pot. Randy drops Gary's backpack and hurries to the front of the van to see what Ronnie has found.

RONNIE

(loudly)

Looks like y'all boys are gonna be spending a little time with us.

(to the other  
deputies)

Alright, let's get 'em cuffed and back to the station.

RANDY

I ain't got any extra cuffs,  
Ronnie.

BOB

Me neither.

RONNIE

Good Lord! Just cuff 'em together!

Randy cuffs Gary and Angel together by the wrist. Bob cuffs Blue and Dan together. Robbie is standing beside the van looking confused. Ronnie points at Dan.

RONNIE

No, I'll take the driver.

Bob releases Dan and cuffs Robbie with Blue. Ronnie cuffs Dan behind his back and puts him in the front seat of his patrol car. He seats Robbie and Blue in the back. Randy places Gary and Angel in the back seat of the other patrol car.

Ronnie talks to the deputies briefly before they all get in their cars and do U-turns then speed away. The entire interaction has taken less than 20 minutes.

EXT - DOWNTOWN CRYSTAL SPRINGS - NIGHT

They stop at a red light in a very small town. Ronnie's car is in front. The other deputies car is behind it.

INT - SQUAD CAR - NIGHT

Dan looks around him. About twenty feet to his right he sees a red brick building with tall white columns framing a large entranceway. Engraved in the plaster above the front door are the words, "CARPENTERS HALL EST 1860". Through the large windows he sees a brightly lit ballroom with people laughing and dining. A well-dressed little girl about nine years old is seated with her family at a table next to one of the windows. She notices Dan in the front seat of the patrol car and gives him a kind smile and a small wave.

EXT - DOWNTOWN CRYSTAL SPRINGS - NIGHT

The patrol car pulls away.

ACT TWO

INT - BOOKING DESK - NIGHT

Copiah County Jail. Dan, Angel, Robbie, and Gary are sitting on a bench facing the booking desk. Blue is standing at the booking desk answering questions from the jailer who is looking down while writing in a ledger.

RAY  
Hair?

BLUE  
Brown.

RAY  
Eyes?

BLUE  
Brown.

RAY  
Tattoos or scars?

BLUE  
Brown.

RAY  
(looks up)  
What?

BLUE  
Nothing. Uh, none.

RAY  
Wipe your hands and go stand  
against that wall.

Ray points to a wall beside the bench the others are sitting on as he hands Blue a wet paper towel. The wall is marked with feet and inches to measure prisoner height. Blue stands against the wall wiping his hands. The other jailer tells him to stand still then takes his photo.

ML  
Look straight ahead.

The shutter clicks.

ML  
Turn to your left.

The shutter clicks again.

ML  
Sit down over there and wait for  
your bedding. No talking.

He nods toward the bench the others are sitting on just as  
Sheriff Earl Johnson enters the front door.

RAY  
(loudly)  
Evening Sheriff!

EARL  
Whatcha got Ray?

RAY  
Five with dope. And a lot of it,  
Sheriff. Nearly half a pound.

EARL  
Well, well, well... Let's have a  
look at 'em

He eyes the five sitting on the long wooden bench.

EARL  
Who's in the band?

The four raise their hands meekly.

EARL (CONT)  
Then you must be the hitchhiker?

He points to. Gary

GARY  
Yes sir.

EARL  
You know about all that pot?

GARY

No sir, they picked me up about an hour before y'all stopped us.

The other four do not react.

EARL

Well you have pretty shitty luck, don't ya' son?

ML laughs.

EARL

Well, you may not be here too long. We'll see. But these other boys are going to Parchman for a good while.

Earl looks at Angel.

EARL (CONT)

You the one in the Air Force?

ANGEL

Yes sir.

EARL

I figured by the haircut. Well I'm glad I ain't you. You're gonna be lucky if you see daylight for 20 years. No sir, wouldn't want to be you. Okay Ray, get these monkeys bedded up and tucked in. They look like they need their beauty sleep.

(laughs loudly)

I gotta make rounds and get home. Good night, ladies. I'll see y'all later.

He turns abruptly and leaves, letting the door slam loudly behind him. Ray and ML continue booking the others into the jail.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

The jail is attached to the courthouse. The first floor consists of the booking area, Earl's office, and a large cell with a bathroom. The cell is at a 90° angle to Earl's office and looks straight out to the front door and the booking area. Ten feet to the right of the cell door there is a set of stairs going up to the second floor. The bars on the cell door look like they were added as an afterthought. The cell has three bunk beds and a single twin bed next to the only window, which has bars over it. As ML unlocks the cell door and flips on the light switch they see a young, very obese man asleep on the twin bed and snoring loudly. ML leads all five inside.

ML

(yelling)

Wake up Blair! You got some  
roommates!

The man on the bed wakes abruptly with a confused look.

ML (CONT)

Y'all pick a bunk and get settled  
in. And no switching bunks either.  
Ya' stay in the one you pick!  
Blair here can tell y'all how  
things work around here. He knows.

ML laughs then turns and slams the cell door shut behind him. He locks the door and walks away. Dan takes the first bottom bunk just inside the cell door. Blue takes the one above him. Their bunk looks out the cell door onto the booking area and the small front foyer. The bunks follow the walls of the room, creating a U-shape, with the single twin bed forming a longer end on one side. Robbie and Angel choose the other two bottom bunks and start putting their bedding down. Gary takes the bunk above Robbie and the bunk above Angel remains open. Blair is still half asleep and looks confused. He sits up and pulls a blanket around his shoulders.

BLAIR

Well, howdy. What the hell did  
y'all do?

DAN

We got busted for pot.

Blair laughs loudly.

BLAIR

That's exactly what I was gonna guess! Y'all boys are going to Parchman!

ROBBIE

What's that?

BLAIR

It's the Mississippi State Prison and the hardest working cotton farm in the south, thanks to fools like y'all and them boys upstairs.

DAN

Who's upstairs?

BLAIR

Colored boys. White down here, colored up there.

He points upward. Dan, Angel, and Robbie look at each other curiously.

ANGEL

Wow, really? Well, what are you in here for?

Blair laughs.

BLAIR

Nothin'. Absolutely nothin'.

(laughs again)

ANGEL

How's that?

BLAIR

I called Mary McNeil one too many times. Her daddy and Earl are best friends, so here I am. Again.

BLUE

Again? How long have you been in here?

BLAIR

About eight months this time.

DAN

This time?

BLAIR

Yeah, I did four months two years ago for walking her home from church one night.

ANGEL

What?! Damn.

BLAIR

Well, I can't help it if I'm still in love with her.

He laughs so hard he starts coughing.

BLAIR (CONT)

Besides, the foods better than my mama's.

(laughs again)

BLUE

What'd they charge you with?

BLAIR

Hell, I don't know. I ain't heard.

ROBBIE

You haven't heard? They have to charge you with something! They can't just keep you here without charges!

BLAIR

This Copiah County. They can do whatever they want.

(laughs)

GARY

He's right. You're in Mississippi now. Things are different around here. *Real* different. You'll see. That's why I stay in Tennessee as much as I can.

They hear Ray yell at them from the other room.

RAY

Y'all kill the lights and pipe down!

They turn off the light and start whispering.

ANGEL

What about school? I mean, how old are you? Shouldn't you be in school?

BLAIR

I'm eighteen. My school days ended last time I got thrown in here. Expelled me. When I get out I'm heading to Oxford. Hope I can maybe finish over there and get in the university. I don't know.

DAN

So they're just holding you without charges?

Blair points up at Gary.

BLAIR (CONT)

Like he said, it's real different around here. A lot worse than Tennessee in Tennessee's pretty bad.

He stifles a laugh and starts coughing.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Early morning hours. Dan wakes to the sound of whispering. He sneaks a look over the edge of his bunk and hears Ronnie and Ray whispering in the booking area. They're looking toward the second floor stairway where ML is mopping up what looks like watery blood from the floor. He can just make out what they are saying.

RAY

He wasn't even putting up a fight,  
Ronnie.

RONNIE

It don't make no difference now.  
Just do it quick and keep your  
mouth shut. I'll tell daddy.

RAY

All right but you can't keep-

Ronnie cuts him off.

RONNIE

Shut it, Ray!

Ronnie storms out the front door.

INT - BOOKING DESK - MORNING

Sunrise. All six wake to the sound of Cecil, the dayshift jailer, banging on a clipboard with a spoon and shouting.

CECIL

Rise and shine! Get it while it's  
hot!

A large cardboard box is carried in the front door by a young man wearing a high school letter jacket with "Jake" embroidered on the left side. As he approaches the cell door he looks at the five new inmates and turns to Cecil.

JAKE

Mama didn't have enough for five  
new heads so we're gonna be short.  
Sheriff said to go ahead and feed

this bunch and get something else  
for five of them upstairs boys.

CECIL

Well okay, if Earl knows.

JAKE

He knows. He stopped by last night  
and told mama. It was too late to  
go to the store.

CECIL

Long as him and your mama know. Go  
ahead and feed 'em and get on to  
school. I'll send somebody to get  
something for them other boys.

Jake approaches the cell door with the cardboard box which  
contains eight smaller cardboard containers. Each container  
has a paper plate wrapped in cellophane with scrambled  
eggs, grits, two pieces of bacon, a biscuit, an aluminum  
spoon, and a cloth napkin. A smaller box contains a dozen  
half pint cartons of milk. He speaks authoritatively as he  
distributes the containers and recites instructions.

JAKE

Everybody gets one breakfast! No  
exceptions!

(looks at Blair  
then continues with  
the instructions)

Every container gets returned with  
the spoon and napkin on top! Y'all  
ain't gonna like what happens if  
we come up missing a spoon. Y'all  
got that?

They all look at him and nod. Jake eyes them suspiciously.

JAKE

Y'all must be the band mama was  
talking about.

BLUE

Why, is there another one?

JAKE

What?

BLUE

Nothing...

ROBBIE

Your mother was talking about us?

JAKE

She just heard they brought a bunch of hippies in last night that had a bunch of dope and they was in a band.

ANGEL

She works here?

JAKE

Oh no, mama cooks for the jail. At home. Earl got her the job after daddy died. It's a county contract so it pays pretty good.

BLAIR

(opening his  
container)

And she knows what she's doin'...

Robbie speaks with a mouth full of food.

ROBBIE

God, this is good. I haven't eaten since yesterday afternoon!

Jake's expression softens.

DAN

How did she hear about us? We just got here last night.

JAKE

Sheriff told her. He stops sometimes when he's making his rounds. Him and mama been friends since high-.

Cecil cuts him off mid-sentence.

CECIL

Jake! You know about talking to  
the inmates! Get them boys  
upstairs fed and get on to school!

JAKE

Gotta go! See y'all later!

Jake runs up the stairs beside the cell with the cardboard  
box. Blair looks at the cell door to make sure nobody is  
listening.

BLAIR

Sheriff's fuckin' his mama.

DAN

(incredulously)

WHAT!?

BLAIR

Yeah. Why do you think she got the  
contract to feed us and not some  
restaurant? She's his last stop  
when he's making his rounds at  
night. Everybody knows everybody  
around here and everybody in town  
knows about them two. Ronnie does.  
He don't much care for Jake but he  
knows to leave him alone 'cause  
Earl would kill him if he ever  
hurt him. Earl's married to  
Ronnie's mama, but... Look - y'all  
want to stay clear of Ronnie. He's  
meaner'n a snake, so watch your  
step around him. Ronnie and his  
boys don't put up with no shit  
from nobody. They'll bounce a  
man's head off every step all the  
way up them stairs if he gives  
them any lip. I've seen him do it!  
Well I've "heard" him do it.

(points at the  
wall)

But anyway, look at Jake and look  
at Ronnie, then look at Earl. The  
math ain't hard on that one. I'm

not sure if Jake knows, but he ain't stupid.

ROBBIE

What about Ronnie's mom?

BLAIR

Hell, she knows. She knows to look the other way, too.

ANGEL

Damn.

Cecil yells from the booking area.

CECIL

Eat up and get ready! Y'all get your chores after breakfast!

BLUE

Chores?

BLAIR

Everybody down here's got a job after breakfast and dinner. It ain't nothing too hard.

BLUE

Down here?

BLAIR

Yeah, like I said, all the white boys are down here. Black boys are upstairs. You'll see.

ROBBIE

Really? They can do that?

BLAIR

"They" can do whatever "they" want. And don't even think about escaping. They'll shoot your ass in a heartbeat. Hell, I could get the bars off that bathroom window in about five minutes but I wouldn't fit through.

(laughs)

Y'all might, but I still wouldn't think about it. Bad news for everybody if anyone escapes.

BLUE

Damn.

BLAIR

Damn right.

DAN

Why does just downstairs do the chores?

Blair points upwards.

BLAIR

County takes them out every morning to work on the road crew. Trust me, you'd rather do chores. Ya' know that whole civil rights movement that happened down here? Ask them boys upstairs how that's workin' out for 'em...

EXT - JAIL PORCH - EVENING

Dan is standing on the front porch outside entrance to the jail. His mop is leaning against the handrail. An upside down bucket is draining off the side of the porch. He is smoking a cigarette unsupervised. He looks around, taking in his surroundings. Earl steps out behind him and the screen door slams. He lights a cigarette. Dan turns as Earl leans against the railing.

EARL

Beautiful evening, ain't it? I love summer in the south.

Earl gazes toward the sunset then turns back to Dan.

EARL (CONT)

So, what were y'all gonna' do, go back and be rock stars? See the

world and fuck a bunch of little hippie girls?

He laughs loudly but Dan stays silent.

EARL (CONT)

Ya' know, I used to be in show business. I was a pro wrestler when I was a kid. Called me the Mississippi Mudshark. Traveled all over the country. Hell, I wrestled up in Madison Square Garden one time. Yessir, I had quite a time, too. You wouldn't believe how well they fed us. And the girls? Lord, it was crazy! But I don't reckon you're ever gonna' find out, because you're gonna be sitting in Parchman a long time.

DAN

How much time do you think?

EARL

Depends. If you fly right I'll put in a word for you and that'll count for something, but I'd say at least ten years or so. You'll probably do about eight of it if you keep your nose clean down there. But that's tough to do. Parchman's hard.

DAN

Like I said Sheriff, that pot really was all mine. Angel doesn't even smoke. Him and Blue didn't want me to bring it. Hell, I don't think Robbie even knew we had it, and Gary was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. I screwed up real bad but I'd hate to see those guys pay for my stupidity. I sure wish you'd keep that in mind.

Earl studies Dan a few seconds then turns and walks back inside without saying anything. Dan turns back and looks across the square at the alley behind the bank for a few seconds then puts his cigarette out in the brick planter on the corner of the porch. He picks up his mop and bucket and walks back inside.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Everyone in the cell wakes up to the sound of the door being unlocked and Cecil's voice.

RAY

In there, JP. You know the drill.

In walks a thin, effeminate man in his early 20s. He has scraggly bleached blonde hair with dark roots. He is wearing cut off jean shorts and a V-neck crop top T-shirt.

JP

Hi Blair!

BLAIR

Lord, JP! What'd you do this time?

JP

I don't know. Something about a tail light, but between you and me, I think Ronnie just likes me.

(laughs)

BLAIR

Yeah, I'm sure that's it.

(groans loudly)

JP

(to the rest)

Hey y'all! I'm JP..

Angel and Dan nod. Robbie gives a half-hearted wave. Blue stays silent and eyes him suspiciously. Gary is still asleep. JP climbs to the open bunk above Angel and sits with his legs dangling over the edge.

JP

So why are y'all here? I know why Blair is.

(laughs)

The four look at each other for a second.

ANGEL

Pot.

JP

I knew it! I just knew it! Y'all got that look. Where'd they bust ya'?

ANGEL

Crystal Springs.

JP

What the hell were y'all doing in Crystal Springs?

ANGEL

We were on our way home. In Arkansas.

JP

Why are y'all down here?

ANGEL

We're in a band and we came to get his amp.

(nods toward Blue)

We were on the other side of Crystal Springs when they stopped us.

JP

His what?

ANGEL

Amplifier. For a bass guitar. He was at Caritas school and left it there when he got out so we came to get it in my van.

JP

Caritas? I've heard weird things about that place. Who stopped y'all?

ANGEL

Ronnie.

JP

That sounds about right. He's an asshole. I'll bet the school called y'all in.

ANGEL

That's what we were wondering. They got us right at the edge of town. Came out of nowhere.

JP

Well, it doesn't look like anybody got beat up, so that's good.

Ray yells from the booking desk.

RAY

Lights out!

JP jumps down and reaches across Blue's bunk and flips the light switch off as if he's done it a thousand times. Blue shoots him a hard look as JP climbs back up to his bunk.

BLAIR

Hey JP, where's Tommy these days?

JP

Hell, I don't know. Or care. We don't hardly ever talk anymore. He can keep his damn money. I ain't going back there. He wants to act all dignified and shit but he don't know a soup spoon from a shovel. Y'all wouldn't know it listening to me, but I was raised right.

(laughing)  
My daddy owns about half this town. Hell, I went to Rhode Island School of Design for three semesters and lived in New York till about three years ago.

All the talk has awakened Gary.

GARY  
Why'd you come back?

JP  
Mama got sick and I came back to take care of her. She died last year and I just ain't got the money to leave this shithole. Yet. But I will.

There's a lull in the conversation. Blair starts snoring loudly. JP laughs.

JP  
I guess that means it's bedtime.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Dan is awakened a couple hours later by muffled sounds coming from the bathroom. Blair and JP are having sex. He listens briefly in disbelief then puts his pillow over his head and goes back to sleep.

INT - CELL - MORNING

Blair is alone, sweeping the cell when Dan comes in with his mop and bucket. Blair follows him into the bathroom where he is rinsing the mop in the sink.

INT - CELL BATHROOM - MORNING

BLAIR  
(whispering)  
I know you were awake last night.  
Me and JP have known each other

since we was kids and I don't  
know, it's just -

He leans back and looks out the bathroom door.

BLAIR (CONT)

It's just, I've never been with a  
woman and sometimes I wonder if I  
ever will. I don't know how to  
talk to 'em the right way and the  
ones I do talk to - I always get  
in trouble. Anyway, just don't say  
anything, okay?

Dan shakes his head.

DAN

Don't worry, I won't. That's  
between y'all.

Blair looks out the bathroom door again.

BLAIR

There's something y'all need to  
know. JP's a snitch. He didn't get  
arrested. Well, he did, but it was  
a while back and Earl made him cut  
a deal to keep from going to  
Parchman. His life would be hell  
down there. So now Earl puts him  
in here when he wants information,  
so watch what you say because I'm  
pretty sure y'all are why he's  
here. In a day or so they'll come  
up with some excuse to get him out  
of here, but watch, he'll be gone  
in a day or so.

EXT - CELL DOOR - MORNING

Blue and Robbie come back from doing their chores. They're  
milling around outside the open cell door. Ray walks over  
from the booking area.

RAY  
(yelling)  
Everybody finish up and get back  
in the cell!

INT - CELL BATHROOM - MORNING

Dan and Blair hear Ray yelling and get quiet. Blair gives Dan a questioning look. Dan gives him an assuring nod.

INT - CELL - DAY

Ray appears at the cell door.

RAY  
JP! Rogers! Y'all gather up your  
stuff!

Ray says this as he unlocks the cell door. Gary looks confused. JP casually hops down from his bunk and walks to the door. He has no belongings.

RAY  
(To Gary)  
What are you doing? I said get  
your stuff! You're going home. JP,  
the sheriff wants to see you in  
his office. Go on in and wait.  
Looks like you're going to  
Jefferson County. Sheriff over  
there's got warrants on you.

EXT - BOOKING AREA - DAY

JP walks into the sheriffs office and closes the door behind him. They never see him again.

INT - CELL - DAY

GARY  
I'm gettin' out?

RAY

Just get your stuff and quit asking questions! Sheriff said to cut you loose. Now gather your stuff and hurry up!

Ray makes waving motions like he's shooin' an animal and walks back to the booking desk. As Gary hurriedly gathers up his belongings he motions for the others to gather around.

GARY

(whispering)

They didn't find the hash.

The rest look shocked.

GARY

Y'all forgot about that, didn't you? I've been worried shitless. It was in the guitar case. Randy was just about to search it but he got sidetracked when Ronnie found the pot. I guess they didn't finish searching my stuff when we got booked. I dodged a bullet. I hate we had to meet like this, but I can't say I'm bummed about getting out. I wish we'd met under better circumstances, but y'all take care of each other. Be sure and look me up if you're ever in Lebanon because I doubt if any of y'all ever wanna' come back to Mississippi after this bullshit.

They all laugh.

GARY

Good luck, guys. I'm outta here. Seriously, hang in there.

They Exchange hugs and do the hippie handshake as Ray appears, unlocks the cell door, and directs Gary toward the booking desk.

INT - BOOKING AREA - DAY

RAY

Sign here. Now sign this here. And sign here.

Gary signs the papers and Ray gives him a large manila envelope. Gary removes his wallet and his belt from the envelope. Gary checks the contents of his wallet then put it in his back pocket. As he is putting on his belt, Ray reaches down and pulls out Gary's backpack and guitar case from behind the booking desk. He places them on the counter. Gary puts them both on the floor beside him and when Ray turns around for a second Gary looks back at the others who are standing at the cell door watching. He makes a goofy "holy shit" expression, looks down at the guitar case, then grins and winks. They all stifle their laughter.

RAY

Look son, it's a shame you got mixed up in all this, but you might want to watch who you ride with from now on. Go on now and try to stay out of trouble.

He extends his hand. Gary quickly shakes it, picks up his guitar case and backpack, then walks out the door.

INT - OUTSIDE THE CELL DOOR - DAY

Early evening. Jake is at the cell door talking with Dan and Angel as he passes meal containers through a slot in the bars.

JAKE

(whispering)

My buddy Gerald got his car fixed and we're going to get a bunch of beer Halloween night and go riding around. We could sneak y'all a six pack through the bathroom window if you want.

ANGEL

We don't have any money.

JAKE

It's my treat. It sucks that y'all have to be in here while we're partyin'.

DAN

Well, don't go getting thrown in here with us!

They laugh.

JAKE

Me? No way! Mama'd have Earl's head on a platter. I ain't kiddin' either. She lets him know what's what.

They hear Ray yell from the booking desk.

RAY

Dammit Jake! Leave them boys alone. They gotta eat and clean up and I don't need you holdin' 'em up.

JAKE

(Whispering)

All right, I'll let y'all know.

ANGEL

Just be cool about it.

JAKE

I will.

He walks away as Dan and Angel exchange worried looks.

DAN

Halloween? That's almost 3 weeks from now.

EXT - JAIL PORCH - DAY

Early morning. Dan is smoking a cigarette. Five black inmates being transferred to Parchman are moving single file past him toward a truck waiting in front of the courthouse. They are all handcuffed and chained together at the feet. As they shuffle past, two of them give Dan a cold stare.

EXT - TRUCK - DAY

The inmates climb into the bed of the truck and take a seat on one of the benches built on each side of the truck bed. Ronnie is holding a sawed-off shotgun and watching as Randy secures their handcuffs to a heavy chain which runs through a series of steel rings bolted to the benches. After making sure the prisoners are secured, they walk to the front of the truck and climb into the cab. Ronnie has the shotgun and Randy has a bolt action rifle. Both have revolvers holstered on their hips. Ronnie starts the truck and backs out of the parking place and they drive away. The two inmates have been staring at Dan the whole time and maintain eye contact with him as the truck rolls out of sight.

INT - CELL - DAY

Mid morning. Three days later. Cecil appears at the cell door.

CECIL

(shouts)

Alexander! Get up! Sheriff wants  
to see you!

Robbie looks startled at hearing his name called.

ROBBIE

What? I didn't do anything!

CECIL

Ain't nobody said you did nothin'.  
Sheriff wants you. Now get up!  
Don't make him wait!

Robbie gets up and goes to the cell door and waits while Cecil unlocks it.

CECIL

Come on. This way.

INT - EARL'S OFFICE DOOR - DAY

Cecil opens a door marked "SHERIFF EARL JOHNSON" in block gold leaf letters that form an arch on an opaque glass window. Underneath, smaller block gold leaf letters in a straight line read "Copiah County, Mississippi".

INT - EARL'S OFFICE WAITING AREA - DAY

The waiting room is tiny with green walls and dark brown wainscoting. There are two worn oak office chairs along the wall on the side of the room and a solid oak door marked "PRIVATE" in the same block gold leaf letters.

CECIL

Wait here.

Cecil points to a chair for Robbie to sit in, then goes into the sheriffs office and shuts the door behind him, leaving Robbie alone. Robbie can hear voices on the other side of the door. A couple of minutes later Cecil opens the door and motions for Robbie to come in.

INT - EARL'S OFFICE - DAY

Robbie enters and is shocked to see his mother and older brother sitting in chairs facing the Sheriff, who is seated at a large desk with his back to the wall. Cecil follows him into the office and stands quietly by the door.

EARL

(sternly)

Mr. Alexander, your brother here has secured your release. I've arranged for you to pay a fine and go with time served. You're going to go with him and your mama, who's been worried to death about you. I hope you understand just

how lucky you got today and that you'll pay back every penny your brother spent getting you out of this mess.

Robbie is stunned.

ROBBIE

(stuttering)

Uh, uh, yeah - I mean yes sir, of course. I sure will.

EARL

Damn right you will. Good answer. Now, go get your stuff and don't ever come back to Mississippi. And I mean EVER. You understand me?

ROBBIE

Yes sir! Absolutely! Thank you, Sheriff!

EARL

Don't thank me. Thank them.

He points at Robbie's brother and mother.

ROBBIE

Yes sir!

Robbie looks at his brother and his mother.

ROBBIE (CONT)

Y'all don't know how glad I am to see you! Thank you so much!

CECIL

Come on son, hurry up! Let's get you on your way.

Robbie and Cecil leave the room.

MAY (ROBBIE'S MOTHER)

Sheriff, I don't know how we can ever thank you. He really is a good boy, you know.

She and Robbie's brother rise to leave.

EARL

World's full of good boys in jail,  
Mrs. Alexander. Just make sure he  
doesn't go back.

INT - CELL - DAY

Robbie is frantically gathering his belongings in a paper bag and talking quickly.

ROBBIE

I didn't even know they were  
coming! Surprised the shit out of  
me! I don't know what kind of deal  
they struck, but when I get home  
I'll do everything I can to get  
y'all out. Y'all gotta stay  
strong.

Cecil is waiting at the open cell door.

CECIL

Let's go! Step it up! You wanna go  
home or not? Hurry up before the  
Sheriff changes his mind.

They all exchange hugs and hippie handshakes.

ROBBIE

I'll see y'all real soon. I'm not  
gonna forget about you.

He walks out and the cell door slams shut.

BLAIR

(to himself in a  
resigned voice)  
I ain't ever gettin' out of here...

INT - BOOKING DESK - DAY

May and Robbie's brother, John, are sitting on the booking bench while Robbie stands at the booking desk collecting his belongings. He is putting on a string of beads and a chain with a silver Saint Christopher medallion.

JOHN

That it? You got everything?

ROBBIE

Yeah, I think so.

JOHN

All right, let's get going. We're gonna' have to talk about a few things on the way home.

They walk out the front door and the screen door slams behind them.

INT - CELL - DAY

Dan, Blue, and Angel are watching from the cell door as Robbie leaves with his mother and brother.

BLUE

Well, that's two.

He sighs deeply.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Dan wakes to the sound of shouting and scuffling. Ronnie and a very big deputy, Carl, are on top of a thin black man who is face down on the floor in front of the booking desk and struggling. His hands are cuffed behind him. Ronnie is astride the man's back and hitting him on the back of the head with a small leather blackjack. Carl is straddling the man's thighs and yelling at the man to calm down.

INT - BOOKING DESK - NIGHT

RONNIE

(shouting)

What's that, Darnell? I didn't catch that! Say it again Darnell!

Darnell says something muffled and Ronnie hits him three more times in the back of the head with the blackjack.

CARL

Sit still Darnell! Stop fighting!

RONNIE

You mouthy son of a bitch! You  
don't talk to ME like that!

He rolls Darnell over on his back and starts punching him in the face. Darnell goes limp. Ronnie is in a rage and keeps hitting him. Carl grabs Ronnie's arms and pulls him backwards off of Darnell, who is now unconscious and bleeding heavily from his mouth. Ronnie spins and with a crazed look draws back to hit Carl, who shoves him away and takes a fighting stance.

CARL

(yelling)

Go ahead! Swing on me you little  
worm and it'll be the last thing  
you ever do! I don't care who your  
fuckin' daddy is! You better get  
your mind right and do it NOW!

Carl takes a step towards Ronnie. He stops and gets his wits about him then lowers his fists. He picks up the blackjack from the floor and slicks back his hair with his hands as he regains his composure. Ray has observed all of this from the other side of the booking desk.

RAY

Goddammit Ronnie! Now I gotta'  
clean this mess up! This shit's  
getting old, dammit!

Carl leans over Darnell and removes the handcuffs.

CARL

(To Ronnie)

Here, these are yours.

Ronnie takes the handcuffs.

CARL (CONT)

Help me get him up. Jesus, Ronnie,  
he's in rough shape. Ray, get  
Helen over here. Now!

RAY

It's 3 o'clock in the morning!

CARL

I don't care what time it is! I'd rather have *her* look at him *now* than the corner in the morning. You really fucked this up, Ronnie. All Darnell did was get a little drunk and shoot his pistol in the air. In his own damn yard. On his fucking birthday, you asshole! What the hell is wrong with you?

RONNIE

(Barely under his  
breath)

Watch your mouth, Carl.

Carl spins and with one quick motion pins Ronnie against the wall by the throat. He towers over him. His face is only inches from Ronnie's as he speaks in a low tone.

CARL

Watch my mouth!? *Watch my mouth!*?  
Ronnie, I've known you since you was a boy and I didn't like you then and I don't like you now.

(pauses)

So here's what's gonna happen: You ain't never gonna do this kind of shit ever again because if you do I swear to God they won't find a goddamn thing when I'm done with you. And you know damn well I'll do it. You bow up on me again and you're a goner, son. Are we clear?

Ronnie is visibly shaken.

RONNIE

(grudgingly)

Yeah, I got it.

Carl relaxes his grip on Ronnie's throat.

CARL

You better hope so Ronnie, 'cause  
I mean every fuckin' word I said.

(points at Darnell)

Now let's get him cleaned up.

RAY

What're we chargin' him with?

CARL

(incredulously)

Huh? Not a goddamn thing, you  
moron! We'll be lucky as it is if  
we don't have every civil rights  
lawyer in the country up our ass  
by this time tomorrow. We're  
gonna' clean him up, then after  
Helen sees him and he's sober,  
we're going to send him home with  
a warning and pray the poor man  
keeps his mouth shut! Then we're  
not ever gonna do this kind of  
shit again!

He glares menacingly at Ronnie.

CARL (CONT)

Are we Ronnie?

He repeats himself. This time he is shouting.

CARL (CONT)

Are we Ronnie?!

Ronnie shakes his head slowly and says nothing. They each  
pick Darnell up by one arm and carry him past Dan's cell  
and up the stairs.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Dan sees Darnell's bloody face and stifles a groan. They  
carry Darnell up the stairs. Dan can hear his feet dragging  
on the steps as they go.

INT - BOOKING DESK - NIGHT

Ronnie and Carl come downstairs without speaking. They grab paper towels from the booking desk counter and walk into the office, wiping their hands. They close the door behind them.

INT - UPSTAIRS CELL - DAY

Early morning. The upstairs cell is a duplicate of the one downstairs except there are six bunk beds instead of three and the cell door is plate steel with no bars and a narrow slot about chest height. There are two mattresses leaned against a back wall. Socks and clothing hang from upper bunks. There are eleven inmates in the cell. They are all black. They all appear to be asleep except for two who are sitting on the edge of their bunks across from each other. One man motions to the other and points toward the bathroom. They walk to the bathroom.

INT - UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

They stand by the bathroom window and light a cigarette, which they pass back and forth, blowing the smoke through the bars that cover the open window. They begin to whisper.

REGGIE

I heard it going on. I knew he was gonna be in bad shape when they brought him up.

C.K.

I know. When I woke up I didn't know what was going on. I seen some hard ass beatin's in here but damn, they worked that man over.

REGGIE

Yeah, wasn't no way he was getting in a bunk without our help. It's a sorry motherfucker that beat a man like that then leave him layin' in the floor like a pile of dirty clothes. A sorry ass motherfucker..

C.K.

That's right. He ain't moved since we put him there. I hope he ain't dead.

REGGIE

He's alive but he's in bad shape. I checked him a little while ago. I know his ass gonna' be sore when he wakes up. You see that eye? Mother-fucker.

C.K.

He probably gonna lose it.

REGGIE

Could be. Here, finish this. I'm gonna' go check on him.

He hands C.K. the cigarette and walks back into the bunk area.

INT - C.K.'S BUNK - DAY

Reggie sits down on the side of C.K.'s bunk and looks closely at Darnell's face. Darnell senses his presence and stirs. Reggie leans over Darnell.

REGGIE

(whispering)

You awake?

Darnell stirs again and slightly opens his left eye. His right eye is swollen shut. He moans quietly, looks at Reggie, and gives a small nod.

REGGIE (CONT)

Good. That right ear and eye lookin' pretty rough. Here, can you drink some water?

He offers Darnell a small paper cup filled halfway with water. Darnell shakes his head slightly. He tries to lift his head and falls back on the pillow.

REGGIE (CONT)

Don't do nothing, Darnell. Just lay still. I'll get you a wet washrag. Don't try to move.

Reggie gets up and goes back into the bathroom.

INT = UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY

Reggie pulls a washcloth off of the shelf above the sink and begins to wet it in cold water.

REGGIE (CONT)

Jesus, C.K., they 'bout killed Darnell. He's gonna be alright but it's gonna take him a good while to heal up from this bullshit. Cassie gonna throw a fit when she sees him. Wouldn't surprise me none if she come back and shot Ronnie. Somebody needs to. That dog needs puttin' down.

C.K.

Well if she gonna do it, she better do it right. You know what happened to Tyler...

REGGIE

Uh huh... He shouldn't have hung around after he tried Ronnie. If he'd gone to Memphis or North somewhere like I told him... Everybody knew Ronnie be comin' for him after he got out the hospital. Tyler was stupid.

C.K.

Now he stupid and dead...

REGGIE

Yeah, well, I ain't stupid. I get out of here, I ain't stayin'. Fuck a buncha' Mississippi...

Reggie takes the wash cloth and leaves the bathroom.

INT - BOOKING DESK - DAY

Mid morning the next day. Darnell's wife, Cassie, and their two children are sitting on the booking bench. Cecil and Earl are talking quietly in the office behind the booking desk. Earl walks to the back of the office as Cecil comes out and goes upstairs. He returns with Darnell walking very slowly down the stairs ahead of him. Darnell's right eye is swollen shut and there are multiple lacerations on his face, which is so bruised he's almost unrecognizable. He has a gauze bandage wrapped around his head and right ear. Cassie screams in horror when she sees him.

CASSIE

Oh my God! What have y'all done to him? Oh Lord, baby, oh Lord! Why? Why y'all do this?

She turns and screams at Earl, who is now standing behind the booking desk.

CASSIE (CONT)

You *know* him Earl! You *know* him! He's a good man, Earl! Y'all didn't have to do this! He just had a little too much liquor, that's all! I know it was that damn boy of yours, too! This ain't right and he ain't right! You need to do something about him before he kill somebody else!

EARL

(calmly)

Now, Cassie, settle down. Wasn't neither one of us here last night so we don't know what happened. Ronnie said he threw a fit and

resisted arrest. You know how liquor can change a man. You remember how your daddy got. Look, I'll get to the bottom of it and if Darnell was done wrong we'll make it right, but right now you need to get him home and let him get some rest. He's had a rough night.

CASSIE

(seething)

Rough night?! Y'all damn near killed him! This ain't right, Sheriff. You better get that boy of yours on a leash. It ain't 1950. This shit don't fly no more. I *campaigned* for you, Earl Johnson! That boy of yours gonna' cost you the next election. People won't put up with this bullshit and be bought off of with a truck patch of greens no more.

EARL

I'll take care of it Cassie. I promise. Now here's his stuff. Y'all just get on home.

Darnell looks at Earl and speaks.

DARNELL

Sheriff, I ain't never give y'all no reason to treat me like that. I was a little drunk and rowdy last night but I ain't do nothing to deserve this shit. Our families been friends a long time, Earl. At least I thought so. We helped you get elected!

Darnell looks at his kids then back at Earl.

This gonna cost me at least a week's work. That's groceries for a month and I got these kids.

Earl looks at Darnell for a second and then reaches down and takes a small cashbox from a locked drawer under the desk. He opens it and counts out five \$20 bills that he hands to Darnell.

EARL

That cover everything?

Darnell looks at him coldly, counts the money and nods once. Cassie is still enraged.

EARL (CONT)

Okay, now y'all go on home and  
Darnell, you get some rest. I'll  
look into this. I promise.

As Darnell, Cassie, and the kids turn to leave, she sees Dan, Blue, and Angel watching from their cell door. She stops and points toward Dan, Blue, and Angel.

CASSIE

Y'all wouldn't do them boys like  
this.

She turns to face Earl and gives him a hard look.

CASSIE (CONT)

God sees everything, Earl.  
Everything...

She turns and leaves with Darnell and the children. The screen door slams behind them.

EXT - CELL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Halloween night. The moon is bright. Jake and Gerald are standing outside the bathroom window of the jail cell. The window has vertical bars welded to a metal frame that is bolted into the exterior walls.

JAKE

(whispering loudly)  
Blue! Angel! Hey! Y'all there?

Jake scratches at the window pane. He finally knocks lightly on the glass and after a few seconds Angel raises the window sash and squints at them through the window in the dark.

INT - CELL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Blue and Dan appear in the dark behind Angel.

ANGEL

Jake?

JAKE

Yeah. Here, take these!

Jake starts slipping cans of beer through the bars until he has passed 10 cans to them.

BLUE

Jake, you're an angel!

(nods toward Angel)

So is he, but he doesn't have beer.

They stifle a laugh. Blair watches from his bed.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

BLAIR

(whispering)

Psst, hey, y'all give me one!

INT - CELL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Blue softly pitches him a beer underhanded.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Blair catches the can and muffles the sound of the can opening with his blanket.

INT - CELL - DAY

Mid morning. Dan, Blue, and Angel are sitting on their bunks talking. Earl appears at the door. They go silent.

EARL

Y'all planning a breakout or something?

(laughing)

Don't hush up on my account. Better get all your talking in while you can cause y'all ain't gonna be seeing much of each other after you get to Parchman. They'll split y'all up real quick down there.

ANGEL

Hey Sheriff, when are we going to see the judge? We've been here almost a month and still don't have a court date.

EARL

Your court date is going to be on uncle Sam's time, Mr. Torres. Military police are coming to take you back tomorrow.

Angel looks shocked.

ANGEL

What!?

EARL

You're gonna face the base commander and he wasn't none too pleased when he called the other day. He is not happy with you.

ANGEL

You spoke to the base commander and you're just now telling me? They're taking me back tomorrow? What about my van? I have to get it back to the base!

EARL

That van is now property of the Copenh County Sheriff's Department. Your ride home is gonna be in the back of a military police car, son.

ANGEL

You can't keep my van! I just got it! It's not even paid for!

EARL

You should've thought of that before you brought dope into Copenh County, son. You broke the law and that's the price you pay. Besides, you're going home tomorrow. If I was you I'd be counting my blessings. Or maybe you'd rather spend a few years in Parchman with Dan and Blue and some of them boys upstairs. They don't like them colored boys in Parchman and I'll bet they don't take much of a shine to Mexicans, neither.

ANGEL

I'm not Mexican. I'm Puerto Rican.

EARL

They don't care if you're the king of Spain in Parchman. You'll learn to chop cotton just the same as everybody else. So you might oughta' think about it. Choppin' cotton for a few years, or surrender the van? Don't seem like too hard of a choice if you ask me. I got things to do.

He turns and leaves.

DAN

Fuck... I'm so sorry.

BLUE

Yeah man, that really sucks.

BLAIR

Mm,mm,mm. That's tough...

DAN

Don't worry, Angel, I'll make sure you get your van back or help you get another one. At least you're getting out of here.

BLUE

Yeah, you're getting out of here and -

(Angel is enraged  
and cuts him off)

ANGEL

That's bullshit man! I just got that van!

(glaring at Dan)

You just had to bring that pot, didn't you? You shoulda' listened to Lori, man! This is so fucked up! My CO is gonna' kill me. He just put me in for a promotion. Even if they don't discharge me, my mom's gonna' find out because I won't be able to send her any money. She's raising my little brother and sister by herself! In the fucking Bronx! Fuck you, Dan!

Angel sits down on his bunk shaking his head. He is stifling tears.

DAN

I'll make it right Angel, I swear to God. I will...

BLUE

Yeah, when we start gigging we'll get you another van. It won't take that long to get another one.

(Angel calms down  
and turns to Dan)

ANGEL

I don't know. This is so fucked  
up. I don't even know if I want to  
play with you guys anymore.

He lays back and puts his hands behind his head and stares  
straight up. Dan and Blue quietly sit back down on their  
bunks.

BLAIR

Hell, I'd give 'em my grandma's  
Cadillac to get out of here.

INT - BOOKING DESK - DAY

Early next morning. Two Air Force police officers are  
standing at the booking desk. Jake has arrived and is  
handing out breakfast.

CECIL

Y'all sign here and have a seat.

He nods toward the booking bench.

CECIL (CONT)

Sheriff will be here shortly.

They sit and watch Jake handing out breakfast plates.

CECIL

If y'all want, you can wait at  
Patsy's across the street. They've  
got a real good breakfast. Sheriff  
oughta' be here by the time you're  
done.

CONWAY (MP1)

Thanks, but we stopped in Jackson  
on the way down.

HELM (MP2)

I *will* take a cup of that coffee  
if there's any more.

CECIL

Help yourself. There's cups on the  
bottom shelf.

He points at the coffee pot on the counter in the office  
behind him.

CONWAY

Where's Airman Torres now?

CECIL

Right over there.

He nods toward the cell door where Jake is talking to Angel  
Dan and who are watching them.

CONWAY

Can I talk to him?

CECIL

Sure.

Conway gets up and approaches the cell door as Helm goes  
behind the desk to get coffee.

INT - CELL DOOR - DAY

Jake sees Conway coming and steps aside. Conway gives Jake  
a hard look and Jake walks over to the booking desk.

CONWAY

Airman Torres?

ANGEL

Yes sir.

CONWAY

I'm Sergeant Conway. How ya'  
doing?

ANGEL

I've been better.

Conway looks around and takes in his surroundings.

CONWAY

I'll bet. Well, look, we're gonna take you back to the base. You'll have to see the base commander and go from there. So go ahead and start getting your things together.

ANGEL

I don't have anything in here. They've got it all.

He points toward the booking desk.

CONWAY

OK, well, hang tight while we get your paperwork squared away. We'll have you out of here pretty soon. We're just waiting for the Sheriff.

ANGEL

Yes sir.

(quietly)

You know, it wasn't even my pot.

Angel looks at Dan who nods his acknowledgment to Conway.

CONWAY

I don't know if that even matters now. You'll get your chance to explain it to the commander. Just sit tight.

Conway goes back and sits next to Helm and they begin talking quietly.

INT - BOOKING AREA -DAY

The front door opens and Earl enters carrying two paper grocery bags. Earl looks at the two military police officers and smiles.

EARL

Good morning gentlemen. I'll bet I  
can guess why you're here.

(Laughs)

Cecil, put this stuff in the  
fridge.

He sets the bags down on the counter and turns to the MP's.

EARL (CONT)

Gentlemen, right this way.

He points toward his office door. The MP's get up and  
follow him. Right before he enters his office, Earl turns  
and gives Jake a hard look.

EARL

Jake! If you've got that stuff  
cleaned up, get on to school. Your  
mama said you were late yesterday.  
Can't have that.

Jake nods, picks up the cardboard box, and walks out the  
front door. Earl turns and walks into his office followed  
by the MP's then closes the door.

INT - BOOKING DESK - DAY

Angel is signing for his belongings. Dan and Blue watch  
from the cell door as Angel finishes his paperwork and says  
something to one of the MP's, who nods. Angel walks to the  
cell door.

INT - CELL DOOR - DAY

Angel is whispering with Dan and Blue through the cell  
door.

ANGEL

He's keeping my van.

BLUE

Fuck, man...

DAN

Let's deal with that later. Right now you just gotta get outta' here.

ANGEL

I know. Sorry I got so pissed off yesterday, but man, this is bullshit.

DAN

I know. We'll figure something out. What did they say is gonna' happen when you get back?

ANGEL

Conway says he doesn't think I'll do more than a couple weeks extra duty after I explain it wasn't my pot. He said the Base Commander will chew my ass real good and then write me up and it'll probably blow over in a couple of months. They're up to their ass in bomb runs, so they need me on the flight line. Sheriff didn't even fine me. He said he figured the van was a high enough price. They're gonna' release me on my own recognizance with time served. He said I wasn't allowed to come back to Mississippi like I ever want to see fucking Mississippi again. I hope this whole fucking state burns to the ground.

There's a short pause before he takes a quick look around and whispers again.

ANGEL (CONT)

Look, the way Conway was talking you guys will be coming home next. The Base Commander knows you're here and isn't very happy about it. So it looks like you're coming home, no matter what Earl says.

CONWAY

(shouts)

Airman Torres! Let's roll! We got  
a long drive ahead of us.

ANGEL

See you guys.

BLUE

See ya, angel.

DAN

I'm so sorry about all this, man.  
Be safe. See you later.

ANGEL

I know. You guys don't worry. I  
don't think you're gonna be here a  
lot longer.

They do the hippie handshake through the cell bars.

BLAIR

Adios Muchacho!

Angel laughs and looks past them at Blair.

ANGEL

Leave the girls alone, Blair!

They all laugh.

INT BOOKING AREA - DAY

Angel turns and walks over to the two MP's who cuff his  
hands in front of him. As they approach the front door to  
leave, Angel turns and raises his hands in a small wave  
goodbye.

INT - CELL - DAY

Late afternoon. Dan is laying on his bunk thumbing through  
a copy of Readers Digest. Cecil yells from the booking  
desk.

CECIL

Harris! Ya' got a package!

Dan leaps to his feet and goes to the cell door.

DAN

What?

CECIL

You got a package from your folks.  
You can have it in a little while  
but I have to inspect it first.

Dan watches through the cell door as Cecil inspects the package.

INT - BOOKING DESK - DAY

Cecil tears open a box wrapped in brown paper and begins removing and placing each item on the counter in front of him. There is a small paper bag containing an envelope, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a hairbrush, and an aerosol can of deodorant. Also in the box is a battery operated portable AM/FM radio and a carton of Marlboro cigarettes. He opens the envelope which contains a handwritten letter, a small greeting card, and \$40 in cash. He places the cash back in the envelope and sets it aside with the can of deodorant.

CECIL

No aerosol cans. And prisoners  
can't have any money. We'll keep  
it for you.

He opens the battery compartment of the radio, removes the batteries and carefully inspects it. Satisfied, he reinstalls the batteries, powers it on, and tunes in a country station. He raises the antenna, turns all the knobs and switches to make sure they function properly, then turns it off and lowers the antenna. He puts it back in the box. He opens the carton of cigarettes and inspects each pack to make sure it's unopened before placing them back in the carton.

CECIL (CONT)

Well, doesn't look like there's anything you're going to bust out with. Do you want me to keep the smokes for ya?

DAN

What?

CECIL

So nobody steals them.

DAN

What? No! Blue's okay and Blair doesn't even smoke. Geez, Cecil.

CECIL

You never know what a guy will do for a smoke. Don't let them boys upstairs know you got 'em. Some of them'll hurt you bad for a pack of smokes. I'll keep 'em for you.

Dan shakes his head and rolls his eyes.

CECIL (CONT)

Sheriff'll be here after supper. He's gonna' want to sign off on this stuff, but here's a pack of smokes in the meantime.

He slides a pack of cigarettes across the floor under the cell door.

INT - CELL - DAY

Dan catches the cigarette pack with his foot. He picks them up and opens the pack. He takes a book of matches from under his mattress and lights two cigarettes. He hands one to Blue, who says thanks. Dan walks into the bathroom and closes the door behind him.

INT - CELL BATHROOM - DAY

Dan lowers the seat on the toilet and sits back to enjoy the cigarette in solitude. He inhales deeply and when he exhales the smoke creates paisley-like circular patterns in the rays of sunlight coming at a sharp angle through the barred window. The room is silent. Dan closes his eyes and takes another long drag from the cigarette.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Later night. The radio is playing softly and propped against the wall by Dan's bunk. The DJ nonchalantly says, "this is WZZQ Jackson" as Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells" begins playing. Light from the booking area filters through the cell door into the bunk where Dan lies reading the greeting card from Lori.

DAN (V.O.)

*Hey Sweetie,*

*I hope you're okay. I can't believe this happened. It's like a horrible dream. Everyone at school is talking about it and I heard Mr. Hall tell Mrs. Carter they're probably going to expel you. My folks found out and my father says I'm not allowed to see you anymore, but he's just very angry right now. Your folks are doing everything they can to get you out. I miss you so much and I love you, baby.*

*XOXOXO, Lori*

Earl appears at the cell door.

EARL

They put a file in that radio?

(laughs)

Startled, Dan looks up angrily.

DAN

I wouldn't need a file to bust out  
of here.

He practically growls the words then quickly regains his  
composure and grins at Earl.

DAN (CONT)

Besides, you'd miss me too much if  
I got away.

EARL

(grinning)

Yeah, right up until I popped your  
ass with my shotgun.

Blair laughs from the darkness.

BLAIR

He ain't going nowhere. He don't  
wanna' miss Betty's cooking.

Suddenly Earl reaches into the cell and flips the light on.  
He shoots Blair a hard look, starts to say something, then  
reconsiders and flips the light back off. He returns his  
attention to Dan.

EARL

Ain't no care packages down in  
Parchman. You get what they give  
you. Won't be no ready-rolls and  
radios down there, neither.

The talking and lights have awakened Blue.

BLUE

(sleepily)

Hey, that reminds me, what  
happened to the stuff in the van?  
Where's my amp?

EARL

It's in the impound with the van.  
I thought Randy was going to pull  
a hernia dragging that thing  
outta' there.

He laughs loudly. Blue comes alive and sits up.

BLUE  
(angrily)  
What? You're keeping it?

EARL  
Of course. That van and the  
contents of it are now property of  
Copiah County.

Blue is seething.

BLUE  
What do you want with it? It's not  
any good to you.

EARL  
It's goin' in the county auction.  
Whatcha' reckon that thing's  
worth, anyway?

Blue is enraged.

BLUE  
That's bullshit!

He quickly jumps off his bunk and stands to his feet. He punches his mattress before catching himself and sitting back down on Dan's bunk. He is fighting back tears of rage.

BLUE (CONT)  
Fuck! That's bullshit! Fuck!

DAN  
Blue! Calm down, man!

Surprised, Earl reaches in and flips the light back on. He starts to unlock the cell door but stops abruptly and steps back, feigning fear. He grins menacingly as he shrugs and shakes his head, holding his hands out, palms up, as if to plead innocence.

EARL  
Don't know what you're so mad  
about, Blue. You can't take that  
thing to Parchman anyway.

Earl waits to see if there's a response from Blue. Blue silently climbs back up to his bunk. Earl looks at each of them before reaching in and turning off the light switch.

EARL (CONT)

Lights out, ladies!

INT - CELL DOOR - NIGHT

Earl turns and walks into his office, closing the door behind him.

INT - CELL - NIGHT

Blue falls back into his bunk, cursing at the ceiling under his breath.

BLAIR

(quietly)

Blue, Earl's real dangerous when he wants to be. You don't want to get on his bad side. You really don't. Be careful. If Earl stops laughing, it can get real bad, real fast. How do you think Ronnie got how he is?

BLUE

Fuck Earl Johnson.

Dan remains silent. He finally falls asleep, exhausted. "The King of the Mountain Cometh" by T.Rex is playing on the radio. A few minutes later he wakes up startled, kicking and in a panic. He is breathing heavy and sweating. The sound wakes Blue, who looks over the side of his bunk at Dan, who is obviously rattled and breathing heavily.

BLUE

You OK?

DAN

Yeah, I'm alright. I just had a bad dream that I dreamed I ran away and made it all the way out of town and was hiding in the brush by a cotton field when I

heard a shot. I woke up right when the buckshot hit me.

BLUE

Damn. You aren't planning on escaping, are you?

DAN

It's crossed my mind a couple of times while I was outside smoking. But no, I'm not gonna do it. I'm not ready to die just yet. Especially here.

BLUE

Don't do anything stupid, Dan.

DAN

Don't worry, I'm not gonna run. Go back to sleep.

Dan lights a cigarette and stares up at Blue's mattress with rage in his eyes.

INT - BOOKING DESK - MORNING

Two people are standing at the booking desk speaking with Cecil. One is a tall black woman who appears to be in her mid-50s. The other is a white man in his early 30s. Both are smartly dressed.

CECIL

Like I said, I don't know exactly when he's going to be in, but you can leave your number and I'll make sure he gets it as soon as he gets here.

LOTTIE

(writing in a notebook)

These are very serious allegations, Mr. - ?

CECIL

Tidwell, Cecil Bagwell.

LOTTIE

Mr. Bagwell. So, if it's all the same to you, Mr. Schulman and I will just wait.

She nods to Evan and they take a seat on the booking bench. They begin quietly discussing some paperwork that she removes from her briefcase. Cecil walks to a desk at the back of the office and makes a phone call.

LOTTIE

I am *not* driving down here just to get the brush off from some skinny little deputy. No sir. I *will* be speaking to Sheriff Johnson today.

EVAN

I know Lottie, but don't you think it might be good to tread lightly? You know what happened down here ten years ago.

LOTTIE

I do. And two years later Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. We've got the full weight of Federal Marshalls behind us, so if they wanna' play intimidation we can play that game too. I've been dealing with peckerwoods like them long enough to know they might still run things locally, but they step too far out of line and we step in. I seriously doubt if the County Commissioners want the national press swarming all over their little town and the State Attorney General going through every sheet of paper in this office for the next six months. We have to handle things a little differently here than they do in New York, Evan. He'll talk to us.

EVAN

But you said you catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

LOTTIE

Always start with the honey, Evan,  
but make sure you've got the  
vinegar too, in case you need it.

She gives him a sly grin.

INT - BOOKING AREA - DAY

Earl enters the front door. He stops and looks Lottie and  
Evan up and down.

EARL

You two have *got* to be the NAACP  
lawyers from Jackson!

He laughs loudly.

LOTTIE

Sheriff Johnson -

Earl interrupts her.

EARL

Y'all come on in my office. Cecil!  
Put on a fresh pot of coffee.

LOTTIE

Sheriff, we're here -

Earl interrupts her again.

EARL

I know why you're here. Come on in  
my office. Cecil, bring me a cup  
when that pot gets finished. Y'all  
want some coffee?

EVAN

No thanks.

LOTTIE

I'd love a cup, thank you Sheriff.  
Black.

EARL

Two black coffees, Cecil!

INT - EARL'S OFFICE - DAY

Earl is seated behind his desk. Lottie and Evan are sitting in two chairs facing him.

EARL

So how can I help you, Miss Davis?  
Or is it Mrs.?

LOTTIE

Mrs. I'm a widow. I lost my  
husband about 10 years ago.

EARL

Well, I'm sorry to hear that  
ma'am. What can I do for you?

LOTTIE

We're here representing a suit  
filed by Mrs. Cassie Jackson  
alleging that one of your deputies  
severely beat her husband Darnell  
while he was in your custody. She  
says it was your son Ronnie. She  
also says your jail is still  
segregated and that only the black  
inmates are sent out to work on  
road gangs.

Earl listens intently.

LOTTIE (CONT)

I know change is slow and things  
take time, Sheriff, but as you  
know, the NAACP takes these  
allegations very seriously. We're  
requesting a hearing and an  
inspection of your facilities as  
part of our investigation. I was  
hoping we could count on your  
cooperation, Sheriff. So I guess  
my first question would be are we  
gonna' have to get a warrant to  
complete the inspection?

Earl leans back in his chair and acts surprised.

EARL

Cassie said that? Cassie Jackson? Huh... Okay... Well, first of all, Darnell Jackson was booked in on a drunken disorderly charge for shooting his .38 at the neighbor's house at 2 o'clock in the morning. Then he resisted arrest when my deputies tried to disarm him. He's lucky he didn't get charged with felony assault on an officer, but as it was, we dropped the charges and let him sleep it off and go home with Cassie the next morning. As for inspecting my jail, you're gonna have to get that warrant, but before you do, or even move forward with your investigation, let me draw your attention to those pictures on the wall behind me.

He motions with his thumb over his right shoulder to the wall covered in several photographs. He swivels in his chair and points to one of the photos.

EARL (CONT)

The one with me and those four colored folks? That was taken when I got re-elected two years ago. Look close. See those people standing next to me? Who do you think they are? That's right, that's Cassie and Darnell Jackson. And that's both their daddies standing next to them. I've been friends with their families for over 30 years and they've helped me get re-elected three times..

Earl spins his chair back around to face them.

EARL (CONT)

So... You might wanna think twice before you try to bring that suit against this department based on

her testimony, because I've got twenty character witnesses from South Hazlehurst, including her daddy, who'll dispute every allegation you wanna' throw at me and this department.

Evan is stunned and looks at Lottie who is clearly angry and confused. She stands and picks up her briefcase. Evan follows her lead.

LOTTIE

Well, Sheriff, I was really hoping for your cooperation but I guess we'll have to get that warrant.

EARL

I guess you will. Y'all take care.

Lottie and Evan turn and leave the office. As soon as they're gone Earl picks up the receiver from the phone on his desk and begins dialing.

INT - NAACP JACKSON OFFICE - DAY

Mid morning. Lottie is seated at her desk a short distance from Evan's. Her phone rings and she answers it. As she listens a look of shock comes over her face.

LOTTIE

What? When? But she just - yes sir, of course, I know. Yes sir, I understand. Yes sir. Okay, I will.

She hangs up and sighs loudly then looks at Evan.

LOTTIE (CONT)

That was the Attorney General. Cassie dropped her suit this morning.

They look at each other with bewilderment.

INT - CELL BATHROOM - NIGHT

Blue is sitting just inside the bathroom doorway on a folding chair with a bath towel around his shoulders. Dan is giving him a haircut with a pair of children's scissors. Blair watches through the bathroom door from his bunk.

BLUE

Mom said she's gonna go see your folks tomorrow.

DAN

I hope that helps because mine's worried to death. That letter tore me up.

BLAIR

I can't believe they let you call her.

BLUE

I guess they decided to give me my phone call. A month after booking me.

They all laughed.

BLAIR

I ain't had a phone call since I've been here and probably ain't gonna get one, either.

BLUE

You think that might be because they know exactly who you'll call?

They all laugh again.

BLAIR

Maybe, But I still ain't got my damn phone call.

DAN

There ya' go. What do ya' think?

Blue stands up and goes to look in the mirror. His hair is cut just over his ears. He smiles at Dan and pulls a long rattail strand of hair from the back of his neck and wraps it over his right ear, effectively hiding it. He grins broadly.

BLUE

Perfect. Fuck 'em...

They both smile.

INT - CELL - DAY

Mid morning. Dan writes a letter home.

DAN (V.O.)

*Dear Mom, Dad, and Lori,*

*How are you guys? I sure miss you. I guess I'm okay, but yesterday the sheriff said the DA wants to send me to the state prison for at least 20 years. He said they might give Blue probation, so at least that's the good news. You probably know that Robbie and Angel are home by now and that they kept Angel's van. Angel said the police that picked him up told him we would probably be getting out of here soon, but I don't know how true that is because you can't get any information about what's really going on around here. I've lost faith in so many things and "liberty and justice for all" feels like a cruel joke. There's a guy who's been here over a year and doesn't even know what he's charged with. Just because he called a girl who gave him her phone number. Her dad is friends with the sheriff and doesn't like him, so he had him thrown in jail. It's crazy. All the black inmates*

*are kept in a separate cell upstairs and I've seen the deputies do things to them that would make you sick. I'll never forget this place. It's changed me. Every night I sleep off the fear and anger and then wake up to it all over again. I'm so confused right now and I probably don't make much sense. Sorry for being so negative, but there's nothing much positive down here. It would be so good to see you all. Anyway, I'll keep you posted of any changes. Again, I'm sorry. Love and miss you all,*

*Dan*

INT - EARL'S OFFICE - DAY

Mid morning. Dan's father, Dave, has arrived and is seated across from Earl, who is seated behind his desk.

EARL

Well, Mr. Harris, that's a lot of pot and that's a pretty serious charge in the state of Mississippi. DA says he can get 20 years in Parchman for that much marijuana. But honestly, after getting to know 'em I'm inclined to believe them boys ain't so bad, they just got caught up on the wrong end of all that hippie bullshit. And seein' as how there ain't been no formal charges filed yet, I believe we can forgo any prison time for both of 'em with time served, a small fine, and court costs. How about a \$200 fine and \$200 court costs each, your boy gets a ticket for reckless driving, and both of 'em go home with you today?

Dave is shocked and surprised. He thinks quickly and answers.

DAVE

I think that sounds reasonable but what about Airman Torres's van?

EARL

I'm afraid that matter is settled, Mr. Harris. That van is now property of the Copleah County Sheriffs Department. As a matter of fact, it's over at the city garage right now, getting painted, lettered up, and wired for lights.

DAVE

Don't you think that's a little harsh? Torres is a good troop. He's just a kid and it wasn't even his pot. It's gonna take him a long time to get out from under all this. Are you sure that's absolutely necessary?

Earl's eyes narrow and a look of anger flashes over his face at Dave's audacity to question his decision. He leans in menacingly toward Dave.

EARL

I bet he'll be an even better troop after this.

He glares at Dave.

DAVE

(sighs)

Maybe so. Can you take a check?

Earl's demeanor immediately changes from threatening back to cordial. He smiles.

EARL

(laughing)

As long as it don't bounce. Hell, if we didn't take checks this

place would be packed to the rafters.

(seriously)

You can make the checks for the fine payable to Copiah County Sheriff's Office. Make the checks for the court costs payable to ENJ Services. I'll write you up some receipts.

As Dave writes the checks, Earl writes the receipts which read:

"\$200 fine - Possession of marijuana - Paid to Copiah County Sheriff's Office."

Then next receipt reads:

"\$200 - Court Costs - Paid to Ellis Jones Atty At Law dba ENJ Services"

Earl pulls a ticket book from his desk drawer and writes out a citation. He gives Dave a yellow copy of a "uniform arrest ticket issued for reckless driving".

Dave notes the court costs have been paid to an attorney that nobody has seen and notices the attorney's initials. He decides not to question it.

EARL

Oh yeah, one more thing. I'm gonna need your boy to sign this. Blue already signed his but he's not gonna need a haircut because your boy gave him on the other day. I swear I can't believe Cecil let them boys have a pair of scissors.

He laughs and shakes his head as he hands Dave a sheet of paper that reads:

"Defendant agrees to get a haircut and to never return to the state

of Mississippi as terms of adjudication."

Dave nods, barely masking his anger. He knows the haircut is just for additional humiliation. While Dave writes the checks, Earl puts the receipts in a small white envelope, which he gives to Dave after receiving the checks. Earl gives the checks a quick glance, folds them and puts them in his shirt pocket, then smiles and nods.

EXT - HAZLEHURST TOWN SQUARE - DAY

It is a beautiful fall day. The big trees on the courthouse lawn have turned bright yellow and gold. Earl, Dave, and Dan walk straight across the street from the courthouse and enter a barbershop. Dan's hands are cuffed in front of him.

INT - BARBERSHOP - DAY

Dan is sitting in an old barber's chair. Bob, an old thin barber is cutting Dan's hair. Bob occasionally turns and spits tobacco juice into a tin can. Bob and Earl nonchalantly discuss the Hazlehurst Indians football team's chances of winning the state championship. Dave watches in silence. He and Dan exchange defeated looks while Dan's hair falls to the floor.

EARL

Some of them Vicksburg boys are topping the scales at over 300 so they're gonna have their hands full.

BOB

Maybe, but we didn't get to 7-0 by accident. I think they'll hold their own.

EARL

I reckon we'll see. I sure hope so. Winning state would really be good for this town.

BOB

Mmm hmm. It sure would. What do you think, Earl? Short enough?

He spins the barber chair so that Earl and Dave can see Dan's haircut, which is just slightly longer than a buzz cut.

EARL

Oh, that's a big improvement. Just what we were looking for. You clean up nice, son. What do you think, Dad?

Dave can barely hide his contempt.

DAVE

I think we're about done here, aren't we?

Earl takes a step back and looks at Dan.

EARL

I reckon so. Just one more thing. You need to sign this and y'all can be on your way.

He pulls the handwritten release sheet from his shirt pocket. He unfolds it and lays it on the counter next to the cash register. Dan gives the paper a quick once over, signs it, and gives it back to Earl, who refolds it and puts it back in his shirt pocket.

EARL

I don't guess we'll be needing these now.

Earl laughs and unlocks the handcuffs on Dan's wrists and puts them in his shirt pocket and turns to leave. Dave is visibly upset. He stands up and walks to the door. He nods to Dan who follows him. As they all walk outside Earl stops and looks at Dan. He turns serious.

EARL

That release sheet y'all signed means exactly what it says. You do

not come back to Mississippi. You understand me?

DAN

I do. Don't worry, you won't ever see me again.

INT - 1969 CHEVY MALIBU - DAY

Late autumn afternoon. Dave is driving. Dan is in the passenger seat and Blue is in the backseat. They ride through the Mississippi Delta afternoon in silence. "If We Make It Through December" by Merle Haggard is playing quietly on the radio. The highway is lined with rows of cotton. Black laborers are working in the fields. Small sharecropper shacks are tucked into the trees along the edges of the cotton fields.

### **ACT THREE**

EXT - HOTEL PARKING LOT - DAY

50 years later. Overcast day, just after sunrise. Jackson Mississippi. A black tour bus is parked in the back of a hotel parking lot with its generator running. Dan steps off the bus. He's wearing a black backpack and holding a disposable coffee cup. He sets the coffee cup on the ground and opens the luggage bay where he retrieves a rolling suitcase with a black tag that reads "3" in bold letters with "D.H." in smaller letters below that. He closes the bay door, picks up the coffee cup, and, suitcase in tow, walks across the parking lot into the hotel lobby.

INT - HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Dan's tour manager, Steve, is standing at the front desk. He is wearing a T-shirt, athletic shorts, and jogging shoes. He gives Dan a rooming list and a room key envelope.

STEVE

Morning. Here's your key. Sleep all right?

DAN

Yeah, pretty good. I woke up in Arkansas. Of course.

They both laugh at what is apparently an inside joke.

STEVE

Car's ready whenever you want to pick it up. Wanna' grab breakfast? I just have to make a quick call and then I'm going to eat.

DAN

Thanks, but I'm heading out as soon as I get a shower. I'll grab something when I get there. I'm only gonna be gone a couple hours. I gotta' meet Weston at two, so I'll be back by then.

STEVE

Sure you don't want any company? I could stand to get away from the phone for a couple hours.

(laughs)

DAN

Yeah, that'd go over well. I'm fine, I just want to see the place again. Return to the scene of the crime?

Steve laughs.

STEVE

Okay, just don't get arrested. Again.

Dan grins broadly.

DAN

Can you imagine? Weston would  
freak...

STEVE

No shit. I don't even want to  
think about it.

Steve shakes his head and rolled his eyes.

Well, call if you need anything.

DAN

I will. And thanks again for  
taking care of the car.

STEVE

No worries, buddy.

Dan looks at the rooming list then turns and walks down the  
hallway pulling his suitcase behind him.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

Dan is behind the wheel of the rental car. The sky is  
overcast and a light mist is falling. The windshield wipers  
are intermittently swiping back-and-forth. He is stopped at  
a small highway intersection with a red light. He sees a  
sign with an arrow pointing left that reads, "Robert  
Johnson Blues Museum". Below that is another sign pointing  
left which reads "Crystal Springs". He turns left.

EXT - CRYSTAL SPRINGS - ROBERT JOHNSON MUSEUM - DAY

Dan parks in front of the Robert Johnson Blues Museum.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

Dan surveys his surroundings. There is a "CLOSED" sign  
hanging in the museum's plate glass window.

EXT - MUSEUM SIDEWALK - DAY

Leaving the car running, he gets out and walks to the door. He cups his hands around his eyes and looks through the window. Seeing nobody inside, he returns to the car and gets back behind the wheel.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

He backs out of the parking space and drives two blocks, where he stops at a red light. To his right he sees a brick building that has been painted gray. There are two tall columns on either side of the doorway. The white paint on the columns is cracked and faded. The windows have been painted white with large fluorescent pink and yellow letters that read, "PAYDAY LOANS/CASH ADVANCES". Above the front door Dan sees the worn inscription, "CARPENTERS HALL EST. 1860". The light turns green but Dan's attention is captivated by the familiar look of the building. After a few seconds, the driver behind him honks. Dan looks in the rearview mirror and throws up his hand and waves an apology and drives on.

EXT - HAZLEHURST - DAY

Dan's car enters a small town with a sign that reads "Hazlehurst City Limits". It passes run-down motels, dollar stores, liquor stores, and mom and pop convenience stores with bars on the windows. It is a predominantly black area with people congregating by cars in front of many of the businesses. There is music playing loudly from some of the cars, and children on bicycles circle parking lots.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

As Dan gets closer to downtown he notices that the buildings begin to get a little nicer. The visible population remains predominantly black. On the left he sees a large sign that reads, "Mississippi Music Museum" in front of what appears to be an old railroad depot. He pulls in and parks.

INT - MUSEUM - DAY

Dan enters the museum and the owner, Randall Blackwell, is standing at a counter behind a display case with his back to him.

RANDALL

Be right there. Just a second.

He finishes pouring water into a drip coffee maker, replaces the filter basket, then turns and addresses Dan.

RANDALL

Mornin! Come on in. First time here?

DAN

Yeah, I saw the sign and thought I'd stop. I stopped at the Robert Johnson place in Crystal Springs, but they were closed. I was kind of surprised when I saw your place.

RANDALL

Oh hell, there's several music museums around here now. This place, the Robert Johnson place, the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale. Hell, the whole town of Clarksville is practically one big museum now. I guess anybody with an old pair of work boots and a National guitar can open a museum nowadays.

(laughs)

I guess all those civic-minded baby boomers finally figured out how to make some money off that devil's music. Some things don't never change.

DAN

No shit. Drag a bunch of people through hell and then cash in on

'em. Sounds about right. Do I need to buy a ticket or something?

RANDALL

Oh hell no. All of my merchandise money either goes to paying the rent or back into the community one way or another. If it wasn't for that and a couple small grants from the state and the National Endowment for the Arts, I couldn't keep the doors open. I might could make a little money out of the place but that ain't what I'm here for. This town's seen better days and needs what little tourism it gets. Most people can't afford to farm anymore unless you got a couple thousand acres and grow for the big cotton companies. None of the kids wanna' stay. They all move off somewhere they can get a decent job. Everybody else is just trying to scratch out a living. It's pretty rough.

Randall stops talking for a second and laughs.

So, now that I've cheered you up, help yourself and look around. There's some pretty cool stuff in here. If you want the official tour, I'm the guide. I just have to find my special hat. It's around here somewhere.

They both laugh. Dan walks around the museum looking at the items on display from various Mississippi musicians. There are Robert Johnson and Elvis Presley displays, alongside smaller ones featuring lesser known natives like Babs Wood and Elizabeth Greenfield. After a few minutes Dan returns to the counter Randall is sitting behind

DAN

You have some pretty cool stuff here. That Jimmie Rogers reel to

reel machine is amazing. I'm glad I stopped.

RANDALL

Good eye. Most people go gaga over the Elvis stuff. Glad you enjoyed it. First time in Mississippi?

DAN

No, I was down here for a little while when I was a kid. A long time ago.

RANDALL

Oh yeah? Well, my name's Randall Blackwell. I own this place.

He extends his hand, which Dan shakes.

RANDALL (CONT)

Want a cup of coffee? I just made a pot right before you walked in. Or I've got bottled water.

DAN

Thanks, coffee would be great. I'm Dan Harris. Nice to meet you.

RANDALL

You too. Cream or sugar?

DAN

Black is fine, thanks.

Randall gives him his coffee in a mug that reads "Mississippi Music Museum".

RANDALL

So where ya' from?

DAN

I live a few miles out of Nashville. I've been there about 40 years but I grew up in Texas.

RANDALL

You a musician? You kinda' got  
that look and you live in  
Nashville...

He looks him up and down with a grin. They laugh.

DAN

I guess I do, don't I? Yeah, I  
play bass for Weston Fuller and  
we're in Jackson tomorrow night.

RANDALL

(Surprised)

Oh yeah? I like that guy. I've got  
a couple of his albums. I really  
like that song "Liars Wine".

(grinning slyly)

My ex-wife used to play it all the  
time.

They both laugh loudly..

DAN

I'll bet she did. Mine hated that  
song.

They laugh again.

RANDALL

How long you been with him?

DAN

About 15 years. It's a good gig  
and he's a good guy. I got lucky.

RANDALL

Didn't I see y'all on TV not too  
long ago?

DAN

We did Jimmy Kimmel a couple weeks  
ago. Maybe there?

RANDALL

Yep, that was it!

DAN

Yeah, Weston does the talk shows every couple years when there's a new album.

RANDALL

Where's he? How come he didn't come with you?

DAN

He's at the hotel. I came alone.

RANDALL

So y'all are playing in Jackson tomorrow?

DAN

Yep. We had a day off today so I thought I'd come look around down here.

RANDALL

(smiling)

So you've been here before? Whatcha' doing, looking up an old flame?

DAN

Lord, I wish. It's a long story but the short version is I got busted for pot in Crystal Springs about 50 years ago and spent a little time in the Copiah County jail, so I just came back to see if it looks like I remember it.

RANDALL

Well I can assure you it looks about the same.

Randall pauses and tilts his head for a second.

RANDALL (CONT)

Ya' know what? You ain't gonna believe this, but you're the second guy that's come in here with that same story. The other

guy was in here about three years ago. Same deal. Busted for pot in Crystal Springs. Early 70s. I don't remember his name but he had a real similar story. They were fuckin' with hippies real bad back then, so truth be told, I'm kinda' surprised there ain't one of you guys coming through here about every other week.

DAN

Damn, I wish you knew his name. Did he say he was in a band? I had just turned 18 and there were five of us and we were in a band. Well, four of us were in the band. We had picked up a guy hitchhiking and he got busted too. Nobody did any prison time, thank God, but they kept our van. It broke up the band just when we were starting to get kinda' good. I reconnected with one of those guys on Facebook a few years ago but neither one of us can find any of the others. I wonder if it was one of them? That was a hell of a deal. I saw some ugly shit in there that really changed me.

RANDALL

I'll bet. He didn't say anything about being in a band, but we didn't talk long. Like I said, it's not great around here now but I know it was real bad back then.

They're both silent for a few seconds until Randall's face lights up.

RANDALL (CONT)

Hey! I just thought of something! Ya' know what you need to do? You need to go over to the courthouse and look at what's out front. I'm

not gonna' spoil it for you, but a few years ago some of us got an idea that really stirred up a bunch of shit after the historic commission approved it.

He laughs loudly.

RANDALL (CONT)

We couldn't believe they let us do it. Anyway, here, let me warm up your coffee. Keep the cup. It's on me.

DAN

Wow, thanks. I guess I better get rolling if I'm going to get to the courthouse. I have to be back this afternoon for a meeting. I sure appreciate the info and the chat. It was nice meeting you. You wanna come to the show tomorrow night? I can put you on the list plus one if you wanna bring a friend.

RANDALL

Well, I'd love to but I've already got a commitment to be in a friends wedding over in Clarksdale. I sure appreciate the offer, though. Sorry they was so rough on you back then but make sure you go see what's in front of the courthouse. I think you'll get a kick out of it.

DAN

Will do, and thanks. If you change your mind or something comes up tomorrow night, look for the black bus behind the building and ask security to find Dan Harris. I'll get you in.

Dan raises the mug in a toast to Randall, then turns and leaves.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

Dan pulls the car into a parking space directly in front of the Copiah County Courthouse and shuts the engine off. He looks around, slowly taking in his surroundings. The courthouse is a large old tan brick building with a rounded entryway and two large white pillars on each side. There is a large octagonal room on top. It is virtually unchanged, as Randall said, and the two story rectangular jail to the right still has the front porch where Dan had smoked fifty years earlier.

EXT - COURTHOUSE - DAY

Dan steps out of the car onto the sidewalk and looks around. About ten yards to his right he sees a polished marble monument that resembles a rectangular headstone. It is approximately four feet tall and two feet wide. He walks over and sees engraved on its face an image of an acoustic guitar with music notes floating around it. On the base is an inscription that reads "ROBERT JOHNSON". Engraved below that "BORN HAZLEHURST, MISSISSIPPI MAY 8, 1911 COPIAH COUNTY". He smiles and takes his phone out of his pocket. He steps back and shoots a picture of the monument, then takes another with the courthouse visible in the background. He texts the photo to a contact listed as "Blue" with a one line comment: "Thought you might appreciate this."

INT - TRUCK STOP - DAY

Same truck stop from 50 years earlier. It has been moderately updated but is essentially the same. Dan is sitting in a booth stirring his coffee. On the table is a plate with a few leftover french fries, the rental car keys, a pamphlet from Randall's museum and the check for lunch. He gets up and picks up the keys, the check and the pamphlet. He leaves a five dollar tip and walks toward the checkout counter.

INT - TRUCK STOP CHECKOUT COUNTER -DAY

Behind the counter is a young female clerk with jailhouse tattoos and dyed blue hair. She is wearing a black spaghetti strap halter top with a blue employee vest over it. Her name tag is upside down and reads "KRISTI".

KRISTI

You find everything you was  
lookin' for?

DAN

Yeah, I think so..

As he hands her his credit card he notices a large calendar hanging on the wall behind her. At the bottom of the calendar is a photo of a row of sheriff's deputies. They are lined up in black tactical assault gear, with two police dogs. They are posing in front of a black military-type assault vehicle. Large letters above the photo read, "Re-elect Sheriff Ronnie Johnson. Serving Covich County more than 40 years." He looks closely until he sees Ronnie, standing front and center, with full sleeve tattoos and a grey goatee. His hands are clasped in front of him and he has a hard look on his face. Dan barely recognizes him because he has not aged well and is morbidly obese.

KRISTI

You want your receipt?

Dan doesn't hear her and she repeats herself.

KRISTI (CONT)

Do you want your receipt, sir?

DAN

Huh? Oh, sorry, no, that's fine,  
thanks.

Dan glances at the calendar again then turns and walks toward the door.

EXT - TRUCK STOP PARKING LOT - DAY

As Dan crosses the parking lot toward the rental car, he hears music and sees an approaching Dodge Challenger. In it are two young black men with dreadlocks. "Fragile" by Tech N9ne plays loudly as the Challenger pulls up to the gas pumps and the driver shuts off the engine, leaving the music blaring. Dan gets in the rental car and closes the door.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

Dan watches as the driver gets out of the Challenger and approaches the fuel pumps. As he is pumping the gas he leans against the car with one arm folded on the roof. A Copiah County Sheriff's Department patrol car pulls into the parking lot and slows to a crawl as it rolls past the Challenger with its windows down.

EXT - TRUCK STOP GAS PUMPS - DAY

With a blank stare, the driver watches the officer from across the roof of the Challenger as the patrol car creeps by. The deputy stares back coldly and keeps driving.

INT - RENTAL CAR - DAY

Dan observes the interaction. As soon as the patrol car rolls out of sight Dan starts the car.

EXT - HIGHWAY - DAY

With the music from the Challenger still playing in the background, Dan steers the rental car to the parking lot exit. He turns left and drives out of sight.

"Fragile" by Tech N9ne crossfades into "New Grass" by Talk Talk.

Fade to black

**THE END**

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