

NEW DEAL ROAD

Written by

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BLACK SCREEN:

CARD: INSPIRED BY ACTUAL EVENTS

CARD: 1935 BOISE CITY, OKLAHOMA. HEIGHT OF THE DUSTBOWL

FADE IN:

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - MORNING

NOBLE HICKS (40) African American, sits outside the door of the shop. He stares into the distance.

MRS. LAWRENCE (O.C.)
You usin' those fingers Noble?

FLASHBACK

INT. ONE ROOM SCHOOL HOUSE - MOBILE ALABAMA - 1903 - MORNING

Fifteen BLACK CHILDREN of various ages fill the room.

At the blackboard is YOUNG NOBLE HICKS (7) working out a math problem. He looks down at his fingers, counting them.

Young Noble, dropping his hand, quickly looks up at the board.

YOUNG NOBLE
No ma'am.

ELIZABETH LAWRENCE (35) African American, steps next to him. He looks up.

MRS. LAWRENCE
You sure?

YOUNG NOBLE
Maybe just these here ones.

He holds up three fingers.

She smiles down at him.

RESUME

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - MORNING

Nobel, still staring.

DEL (O.S.)

Noble?
 (beat)
 Noble!

Noble wakes from his stare and sees SHERIFF DEL WATTS (50) standing in front of him.

NOBLE

Sheriff.

DEL

You all right?

NOBLE

Yes sir.

DEL

What you lookin' at?

NOBLE

Nothin'. Just lookin'.

Noble gets up.

DEL

Now, Noble. You sure you wanna do this?

NOBLE

Yes sir. I do. Ain't nobody above the law. Said so your own self.

DEL

All right. Just makin' sure.

EXT. LEWIS FARM HOUSE - MORNING

A car and trailer parked in front of the ramshackle house.

HELEN LEWIS (35) looking as weather beaten as the house, loads furniture on the trailer.

WILLY LEWIS (10) in clothes slightly too small, carries a pair of wooden kitchen chairs from the house.

He hands them to Helen, she adds them to the pile on the trailer.

Willy looks down the road, shading his eyes from the sun.

WILLY

Sheriff comin'.

Helen looks up, shading her eyes.

HELEN

What in the world is he doin' out here?

The sheriff's car stops in a cloud of dust.

Del gets out and walks to Helen. Noble in the passenger seat.

Helen meets Del half way, sees Noble in the car.

HELEN (CONT'D)

What you doin' out here, Del? And why's he here?

DEL

Mornin' Miss Helen. Ol' Noble Hicks, there, said he did some work fer y'all and ya didn't pay him. That true?

HELEN

That's a lie! I pay him with cash money!

DEL

How much?

HELEN

Twenty three cents.

DEL

He says the bill is four dollars.

HELEN

Already told him, ain't payin' no four dollars for fixin' no spring! Whole damn trailer ain't worth that!

DEL

Well, Miss Helen, then we got us a problem.

HELEN

Ain't no problem for me! I got packin' to do. Already late leavin'.

She walks away.

DEL

Miss Helen?

Helen keeps walking.

DEL (CONT'D)
Miss Helen, Noble Hicks say he
press charges, you don't pay.

She turns around.

HELEN
Press charges?!

She marches back to Del pointing at Noble.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You takin' sides with a colored?

ROY
Color got nuthin' ta do with it,
Helen. Law's the law.

HELEN
You gonna let *him* press charges on
me?! (beat)
For *what?*

DEL
Not payin' a man is bad as
stealin'. You know that.

Livid, Helen paces in front of Del.

HELEN
*Four dollars for a spring! That's
robbery! I should be pressin'
charges on him!*

Willy walks up.

WILLY
Momma?

Helen turns and snaps at Willy.

HELEN
What!

Willy's flinch changes something in Helen. She softens.

WILLY
You yellin' momma.

Helen extends her hands, telling herself to calm down.

HELEN

Yes.
 (deep breath)
 Mustn't do that.

Helen takes another deep breath, turns back to Del.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Del, I ain't got no four dollars
 for no spring.
 (beat)
 We're near out'a money as it is an'
 need every penny to get to
 California.

DEL

Out of money? Thought John was
 sendin' some back every week?

HELEN

Was. But he needed to get us a
 house. So ain't seen none in a
 while.

DEL

(beat)
 Wait here.

Del goes back to the car and stops at Noble's window.

DEL (CONT'D)

They're headed to California. She
 ain't got enough money to pay ya.

EXT. HELEN AND WILLY - CONTINUOUS

Helen clinches and opens her fists very quickly.

WILLY

You okay, momma?

HELEN

Yeah.

She stops clenching and puts her arm around his shoulder.

WILLY

What ya reckon they talkin' about?

HELEN

Don't know.

Del and Noble walk up to Helen and Willy.

DEL
Noble's got a proposal.

HELEN
A what?

DEL
Noble.

NOBLE
What say you let me ride to
California with ya. I got business
there, need a ride.

She shakes her head.

HELEN
No. Ain't gonna.

NOBLE
I git that ride, we be even on the
four dollars ya owe.

HELEN
No sir. Ain't gonna.

DEL
Why not, Helen?

HELEN
Cuz! We white and he ain't.
What ever would people think?

NOBLE
Maybe they think you cain't pay the
four dollars you owe.

HELEN
Ain't givin' you no ride, and
that's the end of it.

Noble looks at Del, shrugs, then starts back to the car. Del
steps toward Helen.

DEL
I'm sorry, Helen. I'll need to take
ya in then.

HELEN
What?! No! You can't...

Del gently takes Helen by the arm and she jerks it away.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Wait!

Helen extends her hands, calming herself.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Wait.

(beat)

He can ride in the trailer.

DEL

The trailer?

HELEN

Four dollars get a ride in the trailer. That's it.

Del looks at Noble. He nods in agreement.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Wait. Second thought...

Helen looks up at Noble.

HELEN (CONT'D)

How much you weigh?

NOBLE

Don't rightly know.

HELEN

Del, how much you reckon he weigh?

Del glances at Noble.

NOBLE

Hundred eighty, there about's. Why?

HELEN

He charge four dollars to fix a spring. I charge four dollars to ride to California in my trailer. That makes us even. But I charge penny a pound for gas to California, too. Means he owe me one dollar eighty cents. Payable cash money in advance.

She juts her hand out.

Del looks over at Noble.

INT./EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Helen's rig kicks up dust as it bounces down the road.

Inside, Willy reads a map so big he's almost obscured by it.

Noble, wearing a floppy hat, goggles and a kerchief over his nose and mouth, rides in th trailer amongst the furniture. He is covered in road dust.

EXT. ROADSIDE CAMPSITE - DUSK

They pull into a large area surrounded by trees and stop.

Noble slides off the tailgate and stretches. He shakes both legs to get feeling back.

Helen and Willy get out and go to the back of the car.

She opens the trunk and her and Willy dig out a heavy folded canvas tent.

Noble, offering to carry Helen's side of the tent, tries to take it from her.

NOBLE

I kin git it fer ya, ma'am.

Helen, scowling, uses her body to shove him aside.

HELEN

I can get it my own self. You probably charge seven dollars if ya touch it.

NOBLE

Naw ma'am. Just tryin' to help.

HELEN

You helpin' what got us in this mess.

Helen nods toward a spot directly behind Willy.

HELEN (CONT'D)

That flat spot, yonder.

WILLY

Yes ma'am.

They go a bit further and stop. Noble follows at a distance.

HELEN
This'll do.

They flop the tent down.

NOBLE
Y'all got 'nuff fer your supper?

Helen straightens up, turns to Noble.

HELEN
We givin' ya a ride cuz ain't got
no choice. Ain't feedin' ya, too.

NOBLE
No ma'am. I's only askin' cuz...

HELEN
An y'all can't sleep here about's
neither.

She motions her hand to cover the immediate area.

Noble adjusts the satchel on his shoulder. He goes back to
the trailer and picks up his bedroll.

HELEN (CONT'D)
We leavin' at sunup. Ya ain't here,
ya get left.

NOBLE
Yes 'um.

He walks past them into the woods.

WILLY
Night, Mr. Noble.

EXT. ROADSIDE CAMPSITE - LATER

Helen and Willy sit next to the campfire, tent set up in the
background. A small grate over the fire, on it sits a sauce
pan.

HELEN
Get enough? Want some more?

Willy forces a smile.

WILLY
No momma.

Willy holds a tin cup. Helen leans over and glances in it.

HELEN
You hardly ate.

WILLY
Don't like 'mater soup.

HELEN
It's what we got. Might's well eat
it up. We havin' what's left for
breakfast in the mornin'.

WILLY
Aww momma...

A broad smile crosses Helen's face.

HELEN
No 'mater soup ever again once we
get to California.

WILLY
You promise?

HELEN
Cross my heart!

She crosses her heart with her hand.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Daddy got him a real good job now.
Got us a nice place to live.

She sits up straight and looks off in the distance.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Thirty one Melody Lane, Modesto,
California.

She lets out a giddy chuckle.

HELEN (CONT'D)
I memorized it.
(beat)
Don't it sound beautiful? Melody
Lane?

WILLY
Yes momma. Hope they got kids my
age there 'bouts.

HELEN
Daddy says lots a kids. And there's
green grass, an' orange trees right
there in the yard. Can you imagine?
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

Walk out your door and eat a orange
right off a tree?

WILLY

Sounds good, momma!

HELEN

Good? Sounds wonderful if you ask
me! I can't hardly wait!

WILLY

When you reckon we be there?

HELEN

Five days or four, if the roads
stay good.

WILLY

Hope they do.

He stops, tipping his head back and catching a whiff of
something on the breeze.

HELEN

What?

WILLY

Smell somethin'.
(beat)
Someone cookin'.

HELEN

I don't smell nuthin'.

WILLY

Smell like chicken cookin'. Rabbit,
maybe.

Willy turns toward the woods.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Come from yonder.

(beat)

Come on momma, let's go see.

Helen takes Willy by the arm and stops him.

HELEN

No sir. We eat what we got.

Willy looks dejected.

WILLY

Yes ma'am.

EXT. NOBLE'S CAMPSITE - SAME

Half of a cooked rabbit on a stick is perched over the fire.

Noble eats the meat from the bone, tosses it into the darkness and wipes his hands on his trousers.

He gazes into the fire. The gaze turns into a stare.

FADE TO:

FLASHBACK

EXT. MOBILE ALABAMA - STREET - 1903 - AFTERNOON

Mrs. Lawrence, books in her arms, walks down the street.

Young Noble sheepishly jogs up behind her.

YOUNG NOBLE
Miss Lawrence?

She stops and turns.

MRS. LAWRENCE
Well Noble. Hello.

He catches up and they walk together.

YOUNG NOBLE
I wanted to say sorry for usin' my fingers. Just that sometimes them numbers don't come to my head like when I want.

MRS. LAWRENCE
It's all right, Noble. 'Rithmetic can be hard for some.

YOUNG NOBLE
Yes ma'am!

MRS. LAWRENCE
I'm gonna let you in on a little secret, okay?

YOUNG NOBLE
Yes ma'am.

MRS. LAWRENCE
Can't tell a soul. Promise?

YOUNG NOBLE

I promise.

She smiles down at him.

MRS. LAWRENCE

Sometimes I use my fingers too.

YOUNG NOBLE

You do?

MRS. LAWRENCE

I do. Now that's just our little secret, hear?

A stone hits her in the back. One hits Noble. A third and a fourth stone hits them. Mrs. Lawrence shields Noble's head and spins around.

FOUR WHITE BOYS throw the stones.

MRS. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

You boys stop that. Ain't nice throwin' stones at people. Could'a hurt this boy, here.

The boys look shocked.

MRS. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Go on home now. Go on!

They run away.

INT/EXT. YOUNG NOBLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young Noble asleep in the dark room, his face illuminated by FLICKERING LIGHT.

(O.C.) A woman SCREAMS and men YELLING. He wakes slowly, tosses the covers aside and goes to his window.

From his POV, across the road Mrs. Lawrence in bed clothes is dragged from her burning house by a group of WHITE MEN.

MR. LAWRENCE, bloody, beaten and crying, is held on his knees by another group of MEN.

MRS. LAWRENCE

No! Please! What I do?

WHITE MAN

Ain't no nigger tell my boy what to do!

A noose goes over a branch. Her head is jammed into it.

INT. YOUNG NOBLE'S ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Noble's MOTHER (25) runs into the room. Terrified, she wraps her arms around Young Noble and turns him from the window.

MOTHER
Come away from there now!

Young Noble looks under his mother's arm at the scene outside.

EXT. LAWRENCE FRONT YARD - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

MR. LAWRENCE
Noooooooo! Please-

Mrs. Lawrence is hoisted off her feet.

MR. LAWRENCE (CONT'D)
Nooooooooo-

A GUNSHOT. Mr. Lawrence falls backward.

Young Noble's face lit by the flickering light of the burning house. His face morphs into...

FADE TO:

RESUME

EXT. NOBLE'S CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Noble's face lit by the flickering light of his campfire. He shakes his head and, wide eyed, wipes a tear from his cheek.

Noble blinks hard, gets up and goes to his bedroll.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROADSIDE CAMPSITE - DAWN

Helen comes out of the tent. Willy follows, but turns and goes into the woods.

WILLY
Gotta pee.

HELEN

Go on ahead.

Helen looks at the trailer and sees it's been repacked. It is much more orderly.

Noble steps out from the far side of the trailer and notices Helen.

NOBLE

Oh. Mornin' ma'am. I hope my rumblin' 'round didn't wake y'all.

Shock crosses Helen's face and she runs for the trailer.

HELEN

What?! *What did you do?!*

Noble, surprised.

NOBLE

Moved things 'round a bit. Make a spot to sit, an' keep ever thing in place if come a hard wind.

HELEN

No, No, No!

Helen grabs a chair and pulls it from the trailer.

NOBLE

(bewildered)
Ma'am?

HELEN

I had everything the way I wanted!
Now look at it!

She grabs a second chair and pulls it from the trailer. She turns and manically struggles with a third.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You had no right to touch my things!

Willy bursts from woods and runs to her side. He takes a hold of her arm, stopping her.

WILLY

Momma!
(beat)
Momma! It's okay!

Helen, looking lost, glances at Willy and lets go of the chair she'd been pulling on.

WILLY (CONT'D)
A little thing, momma.

Helen looks at the trailer, then at the two chairs on the ground.

HELEN
Ain't how I had it!

WILLY
Just a little thing.

Helen takes a step back, her face softens. Willy releases her arm.

She studies the items on the trailer, looks at Willy.

HELEN
Little thing?

WILLY
Yes, momma.

Helen lets out a sigh, straightens herself, turns and walks back toward the tent.

Willy looks at Noble and forces a smile.

WILLY (CONT'D)
Mornin' Mr. Noble.

Confused, Noble nods.

Willy picks up one of the chairs and puts it back on the trailer.

WILLY (CONT'D)
Be okay, now.

Noble, bewildered, picks up the other chair and puts it back. He looks at Helen. She squats next to the fire pouring water from a canteen into the coffee pot.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MORNING

Noble in the trailer amongst furniture, tarp flapping above him, car kicking up dust. He wears his goggles and kerchief.

EXT. ROAD SIDE - DAY

The car is stopped on the side of the road. Willy sits on a rock eating a sandwich.

Noble sits on the running board of the car smoking a pipe.

Helen paces a nearby creek bank clenching and unclenching her fists and mumbling to herself.

Noble goes to Willy.

NOBLE
Yer momma okay, boy?

Willy taking a bite from his sandwich, looks at Helen.

WILLY
Yes sir.

NOBLE
She talkin' to herself.

WILLY
She does that sometimes.

NOBLE
Why?

WILLY
(shrugs)
Don't know. She just do.

From their POV, Helen pauses and looks at the ground.

She runs past Noble and Willy to the trailer.

Helen digs through a box, pulls out a tin cup, rushes back to the creek bank.

Helen squats next to the creek.

Smiling, she comes back carrying the cup with a yellow flower in it.

She sees Noble standing next to Willy and her smile fades.

HELEN
(to Noble)
Over there.

She motions her head to a spot behind Willy.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Go on.

Noble obliges.

Helen's smile returns as she stops at Willy and shows him the cup. Inside is the flower planted in dirt.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Look how yellow!

WILLY

Mustard plant, looks like.

HELEN

Daddy and me hated mustard when it come up in the wheat. Sure is pretty now though, ain't it?

WILLY

Yes ma'am.

HELEN

Maybe we plant it in the yard when we get to California.

WILLY

It's a weed, momma.

She glances at Noble and her smile fades.

HELEN

Time to go.

Flower in hand, she turns for the car. Noble and Willy follow.

INT. CAR - LATER

Helen is behind the wheel, Willy reads the huge map. Flower in the cup is on the seat next to her.

WILLY

Looks like next town is Morris. We take a left on route 46.

As they come around a corner, Helen sits up in her seat and peers out the windshield.

HELEN

What in the world?

Willy lowers the map and looks at Helen.

WILLY

What?

HELEN

Looks like a wreck.

Willy looks ahead.

WILLY

Sure is. Bad one, too.

Helen slows the car to a stop.

HELEN

Stay here.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Helen gets out and stands next to the car.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

A truck upside down in the field, a car on its side in the ditch. Both are mangled.

Broken furniture, clothes, baskets, trunks and bodies are strewn through the field near the truck.

Three cars are stopped on the road near the accident.

MEN, WOMEN and KIDS rummage through the debris, grabbing arms full of items and taking them to their cars.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Helen is shocked at the sight. Noble walks up, pulling the kerchief from his mouth.

NOBLE

Why we stoppin'?

He looks up, sees the wreck and takes off his goggles.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Best go have a look.

(beat)

You might should stay here.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Noble walks up to the car in the ditch. The maimed body of a MAN juts through the windshield.

Noble kneels down and places his fingers on the man's neck.

MAN 1 rushes up and pushes Noble aside.

MAN 1

Out'a the way boy! I saw it first!

He snatches the dead man's pocket watch from his vest and runs off.

Noble notices the legs of a woman sticking out from under the car.

He runs his thumbnail along the sole of one of the feet. There is no reaction, he moves into the debris field.

The body of a TEENAGE GIRL lies motionless. He checks for a pulse then moves on. SCAVENGERS run past him.

INT./EXT. ROAD - CAR - CONTINUOUS

Willy notices Helen watching in anger as the scavengers take items from the scene.

WILLY

Momma?

(beat)

Momma?!

She turns and marches to the back of the car. Willy climbs out and meets Helen at the trunk.

She digs through the trunk, pulling out a well worn Colt Peacemaker pistol and checks to see if it's loaded.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Momma! No!

Helen ignores Willy, marches to the front of the car, raises the pistol and fires in the air.

EXT. ROAD/FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The LOUD BOOM of a gun, everybody to freezes in place. They look toward Helen.

HELEN
Everybody git!
 (beat)
Right now!

The scavengers slowly start moving toward their cars.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Git!

She fires another shot in the air.

The scavengers run, climb in their cars and drive away.

Noble's POV looking at Helen and Willy.

NOBLE
 Jesus.

Willy comes to Helen's side.

WILLY
 Momma?

He reaches for the gun, gently taking it from Helen's hand.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 I just put this back now.

HELEN
 Yes. Put it back.
 (beat)
 Same place. Hear?

WILLY
 I will.

Helen walks into the debris field.

EXT. DEBRIS FIELD - CONTINUOUS

At Noble's feet is a WOMAN. He checks for a pulse, then goes to a bloody MAN in the wrecked truck. He bends down to check the man, then stands just as Helen walks up.

Helen looks at the dead man, blank expression on her face.

NOBLE
 Nothin' we kin do here. Best cover these folks up, git to a town, let someone know they out here.

Helen brushes past Noble, bends down next to the bloody man and goes through his pockets.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Ma'am? Aught leave these folks be, now. Ain't right takin' from the -

HELEN

Lucky I run them other's off when I did.

She pulls two bloody dimes from the man's pocket, stands and shows them to Noble.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Two gallon a gas right there. Maybe a loaf a bread.

She jams the coins in the pocket of her dress looks back at the dead man, glances at Noble and walks away.

INT./EXT. CAR - LATER

Helen and Willy stand in front of the car watching Noble as he covers the last of the dead with sheets.

HELEN

Time to go.

She goes to the driver's side, climbs in and starts the car.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Get in. We gotta go.

WILLY

Yes, ma'am.

(to Noble)

Best come on. We goin'.

Willy opens the door and climbs in.

The car pulls away. Noble runs to catch up, then jumps in the back of the moving trailer.

FADE TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE 2 - DUSK

Helen's car goes to the far end of small field, stopping in front of a flat area. Helen and Willy get out.

Noble slides out of the trailer, takes off his goggles and shakes the dust from his clothes.

He grabs his satchel and bedroll from the trailer.

NOBLE
I be back first light.

He moves toward the nearby woods.

WILLY
Night Mr. Noble.

He nods to Willy.

NOBLE
Night.

Noble glances briefly at Helen as he passes.

HELEN
Hey mister.

Noble stops. Helen approaches.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You ever lose everything ya own?
(beat)
Ever watch your farm dry up an'
blow away before your eyes?
(beat)
Been so poor ya can't buy food or
clothes?
(beat)
Or had to shoot your own livestock
'fore they starve to death?

Noble, quiet.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Ever live in a house that like to
fall down around ya? So much dust
come in like ta choke ya ta death?
(beat)
So cold come winter ya gotta pull
up the floor and burn it so's ya
don't freeze?

Noble adjusts the satchel on his shoulder.

HELEN (CONT'D)
We that poor. And worse.
(beat)
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)

But we got us a new life waitin' in California, me an' Willy. The money John sent, we maybe got enough to get there, maybe not.

(beat)

But ain't nothin' gonna stop us. If that mean I gotta take a couple coins from a dead man, then that's what I do.

NOBLE

I don't fault ya ma'am. Ever body do what they need ta git by in this world. Don't always make it right, though.

(beat)

Night ma'am.

He disappears into the woods.

Willy comes up next to Helen and she puts her arm around his shoulders. They turn and walk back toward the car.

EXT. NOBLE'S CAMPSITE 2 - NIGHT

CLOSE ON Noble tossing and turning. (O.C.) Dogs BARKING and men YELLING.

DREAM SEQUENCE

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

NOBLE (17) and WARREN (17) run frantically through the woods. Out of breath, they stop, clinging to a tree.

NOBLE

They gettin' closer.

WARREN

Gotta get to the river.

NOBLE

Why'd you have to go an' smile at that girl?

WARREN

She smiled first!

A GUNSHOT in the distance. Bark flies from the tree above their heads. They sprint away.

Noble in the lead, Warren close behind.

Another GUNSHOT, Warren falls. Noble slides to a stop, tries to go back. Several more GUNSHOTS, BULLETS WHIZZING overhead.

Noble hides behind a tree and looks at Warren.

NOBLE

Warren!

Warren, lying on his side, holds his stomach. He takes his bloody hand away and looks at it, then, terrified, looks at Noble.

WARREN

Noble!

(O.S.) MEN YELLING, GUNSHOTS, BULLETS WHIZZING, DOGS BARKING, all getting LOUDER.

Warren, eyes wide, trying to speak, reaches his hand toward Noble.

Silhouettes of men in the woods coming toward Noble and Warren.

Bark flies from the tree Noble hides behind. In terror, he runs for his life.

The BOOM of a gunshot.

EXT. NOBLE'S CAMPSITE 2 - NIGHT

Noble bolts awake, sweating and shaking. Disoriented, he sits up, grabs his stomach, crawls from his bedroll and vomits.

EXT. NOBLE'S CAMPSITE 2 - DAWN

Noble, on his knees next to his bedroll.

He reaches for his satchel and opens it, taking out a shirt, then a Colt Model 1911 pistol.

He holds the weapon for a long beat, checks to make sure it's loaded and sets the gun aside.

He digs through his satchel taking out a small cloth sack closed at the top by a drawstring.

He removes the contents - a STACK OF BILLS. He thumbs through the stack of one's and ten's but mostly twenty dollar bills.

He peels off one of the tens, puts the rest back in the sack and pulls the draw string closed. He takes the bill, folds it and tucks it in the sweatband inside his hat.

He puts the money sack along with the gun on the bedroll and rolls them up inside.

EXT. RUN DOWN FILLING STATION - DAY

The car stops at the pump and the attendant, AL (40) comes out of the garage. He's in grimy coveralls and wipes his greasy hands on an equally greasy rag.

Willy jumps out of the passenger door holding himself as if he's going to wet himself.

Al sees him and points at the building.

AL
'Round side.

WILLY
Much obliged.

Willy runs off.

Helen climbs out as Al approaches. She takes some coins from a small change purse and counts them.

HELEN
Fill it with Ethel, please.

AL
Yes ma'am.

HELEN
Y'all got a ladies room here
about's?

AL
Only got the one privy, an' the boy
in it just now.

HELEN
Much obliged.

AL
'Round side, there.

She walks around the front of the car.

Noble, shaking the dust from his clothes, walks up.

Seeing him, Al stops what he's doing.

AL (CONT'D)
What you want, boy?

NOBLE
Colored washroom?

AL
Do it look like we got a colored
washroom?

INT. DINER - CONTINUOUS

Across the street sitting in a window booth are the local sheriff, CARL (60) and his deputy, LONNIE (25).

They watch Noble and Lewis talking.

LONNIE
Whatcha s'pose we got here?

SHERIFF
No tellin'. He snuck out the back a
that white lady's trailer.

LONNIE
Reckon she know he back there?

EXT. FILLING STATION - CONTINUOUS

Al fills Helen's gas tank.

NOBLE
Be a place here 'bouts where
someone like me might could relieve
his self.

AL
How the hell do I know? I look
colored to you?

NOBLE
No sir, it just that...

AL
Go on, git. Fer Christ sake.

NOBLE
Yes sir.

Noble walks away.

EXT. BACK OF FILLING STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Noble walks amongst trash cans, old tires, the carcasses of dilapidated cars and finds fifty-five gallon drums stacked near the building.

He steps behind the drums and relieves himself.

The sheriff and deputy, both with hands on their guns, come around the corner.

Noble finishes and buttons up.

SHERIFF
What you doin' boy?

Noble turns around. Al joins the officers.

NOBLE
Just relievin' myself, sir.

SHERIFF
You pissin' on this man's wall?

NOBLE
No sir.

SHERIFF
Come on outta there. Be quick,
'bout it, too.

NOBLE
Yes sir.

SHERIFF
Lonnie, he make a run fer it, you
shoot him dead. Hear?

LONNIE
Yes sir.

Lonnie pulls his pistol.

NOBLE
Ain't runnin'. No need fer
shootin'.

SHERIFF
Reckon I'll judge that.

Noble gets to the men, the sheriff takes him by the arm and leads him to the front of the building.

EXT. FRONT OF THE FILLING STATION - CONTINUOUS

Willy and Helen stand by the car. They see the men with Noble. Willy starts for them.

WILLY

Hey...

Helen grabs his arm and brings him back.

HELEN

You hush.

WILLY

But mamma...

HELEN

I said hush, now.

They turn their attention back to Noble and the men as they approach.

SHERIFF

Ma'am, my deputy an' me seen this colored climb out the back a your trailer. You know he back there?

HELEN

Now sheriff, we didn't do nuthin' wrong. We just going down this road...

SHERIFF

Didn't say did anythin' wrong. Just wonderin' you know this boy in your trailer?

HELEN

Musta snuck in somewhere.

SHERIFF

That right?

(to Noble)

You snuck in this ladies trailer?

Willy steps forward.

WILLY

No sir, that ain't right.

Helen takes a hold of his sleeve.

HELEN

I told you hush!

SHERIFF
Let the boy talk.

WILLY
His name Noble Hicks we givin' him
a ride ta California.

Sheriff turns to Noble.

SHERIFF
That right? California?

NOBLE
Yes sir.

SHERIFF
Well, no matter.
(to Helen)
Seems your boy, here, relievin' his
self on the back a Al's building.

HELEN
Ain't my boy...

SHERIFF
That offense come with a five
dollar fine, payable forth wit.

NOBLE
Didn't relieve myself on the man's
wall.

The sheriff cracks Noble across the face with his fist. Noble is stunned but doesn't fall.

SHERIFF
Callin' me a liar boy?

Helen and Willy both flinch at the punch as Helen puts her arms around Willy.

Noble stands up stone faced and looks straight ahead.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
I asked you a question boy. You
callin' me a liar?

NOBLE
No sir, ain't callin' you a liar.

SHERIFF
All right then. Five dollars.

NOBLE

Sold my things, sir. Ten all I git
fer 'em. All I got.

SHERIFF

It's all you got, huh? You hidin'
this, maybe you hidin' more?

NOBLE

No sir. That all I got.

SHERIFF

(to Lonnie)
Check that bag.

Lonnie snaps the satchel off Noble's shoulder and dumps it on
the ground. He digs through it and drops it in the dirt.

LONNIE

Nothin' there.

SHERIFF

Reckon you best get outta them
clothes, boy. We see if you hidin'
any more.

NOBLE

Ain't got no mo, sir. What you got
be all I got.

The sheriff pulls his gun and points it at Noble's head.

SHERIFF

Clothes off, boy.

Noble, stone faced, takes off his jacket. Lonnie snaps it out
of his hand and goes through it, finding nothing.

Noble takes off his shirt exposing three scars from bullet
wounds on his chest, several more large scars on his back.

AL

Jesus.

Noble takes off his shoes and pants. Lonnie goes through them
and finds nothing

PEOPLE in PASSING CARS look at Noble standing in his
underwear. Some laugh, some point, some look at him in
disgust.

Willy runs to the car, grabs an old blanket and runs back.

He tries to give the blanket to Noble but the sheriff takes it from him, drops it on the ground and puts his foot on it.

WILLY

Let him cover up!

Helen grabs Willy and pulls him to her.

HELEN

Hush.

SHERIFF

Listen to yer mamma boy. This ain't fer you now.

(to Noble)

Well, looks like you was tellin' the truth.

Noble's ten dollar bill between his fingers, the sheriff lifts the bill up in front of Noble's face.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

Five dollars for this offense...

(beat)

And one free one if'n ya ever back this way.

He stuffs the money in his shirt pocket, tips his hat at Helen, the men disperse.

Noble, standing in his underwear in front of Helen and Willy. His expression hasn't changed.

After a beat, he puts his pants on. He puts on his shoes, picks up his shirt, jacket and hat, repacks his satchel and walks to the back of the trailer.

WILLY

Mr. Noble?

Helen puts her hand on his shoulder.

HELEN

Leave him be. It's what he gets.

They watch him disappear around the back of the trailer.

WILLY

But he didn't do nuthin'!

HELEN

Relieve himself on the man's wall is what he did. Hid money on top a that.

WILLY
You hide money.

HELEN
That's different. Don't want it to
get stole.

WILLY
Maybe he don't want his stole
neither.

HELEN
Never mind with that. Get in, we
gotta go.

She opens the passenger door. Willy stops and glances toward
the back of the trailer. Helen gives him a gentle push.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Go on get in.

WILLY
Reckon he okay?

HELEN
Why wouldn't he be? Now get in.

INT. CAR - LATER

The car bounces down a dirt road. Willy stares out his
window. Helen glances down at the flower on the seat next to
her, then over at Willy.

HELEN
This here flower'll look nice in
the front yard when we get to
California.

A long silence.

WILLY
It's a weed.

More silence. Willy turns to her.

WILLY (CONT'D)
They make him take his clothes off
in front a God an ever body. Point
a gun at his head and make him do
it.

HELEN

You still frettin' 'bout that?

(beat)

Anyway, he didn't relieve his self on the man's wall, sheriff wouldn't stop him in the first place.

WILLY

Said he didn't, an' I reckon he'd know better'n them which way his business pointed when he makin' water.

HELEN

Willy! Watch your mouth!

WILLY

Just sayin'... even if he did go on that wall, don't give no right to make him do like they done.

HELEN

That ain't fer me or you, neither one, to say. That be the sheriff's say.

A long beat.

WILLY

Momma?

(beat)

What if that be me instead a Mr. Noble?

Another beat, then Helen forces a smile.

HELEN

It weren't you.

She places her hand on his shoulder.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Just a little thing. Right?

Willy turns to her.

WILLY

No momma, it ain't. It ain't a little thing.

Disappointment on his face, he turns and looks out the window.

HELEN
 (forced smile)
 How's 'bout you get out your map,
 see where the next turn's at.

Willy continues to look out the window.

WILLY
 Ain't no turns here 'bouts. Already
 looked.

She reaches over, reassuringly touching Willy's shoulder, but he shifts away. Her smile fades as she takes her hand back.

EXT. CAMPSITE 3 - NIGHT

Willy and Helen are setting up their tent. Fire burning nearby. (O.C.) the sound of a TRAIN WHISTLE in the distance. Noble walks up.

NOBLE
 Gonna come a rain tonight. Be okay
 I sleep under cover, yonder?

He points to the tarp covered trailer.

Helen turns toward him.

HELEN
 Ain't no rain comin'!

NOBLE
 Yes 'um. Be comin' tonight. Kin
 smell it. Comin' from the north.

She smirks, stands up and points to the sky.

HELEN
 What you see in the sky?

Noble looks up.

NOBLE
 Stars.

HELEN
 Stars! Just like every night when
 it don't rain.

She turns back to work on the tent.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You go on now. We leavin' at sun
up. Ain't here, we go without ya.

Noble stands for a long beat.

NOBLE

Yes 'um.

Willy looks disgusted.

WILLY

Won't hurt nothin' to let him sleep
under that ol' tarp.

Helen turns to him.

HELEN

Ain't fer you ta say.

Noble heads for the woods.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Wait.

(beat)

Why you didn't tell us about that
money? Could'a used ten dollars to
help get us to California.

(beat)

But you piss on a man's wall
instead, get it took from ya.

Noble, indignant, turns around.

NOBLE

Didn't piss on no man's wall,
ma'am. Sides, 'twas my money. Y'all
got yo own. Said ya don't need my
help. Say that first night!

HELEN

Never said couldn't use money!

Willy shakes his head.

Noble disappears into the nearby woods. (O.S.) a TRAIN
WHISTLE in the distance.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Brothers ROY (45) and CARL (40) BENNETT walk down the road in a pouring rain. An occasional flash of LIGHTNING and roll of THUNDER.

Roy is a big man with a loud mouth and a quick temper. Carl is smaller, somewhat simple minded but devoted to his brother.

CARL
I'm real sorry, Roy.

ROY
Don't have to keep sayin' it. I know you're sorry. But it don't get us out a this rain, now do it?

CARL
No.

ROY
Next time I say check the oil, what you gonna do?

CARL
Check the oil.

ROY
Damn right you will. Engine don't run with no oil. Gonna be late to them California jobs now, cuz a this.

CARL
I'm sorry, Roy.

ROY
I already told ya, quit sayin...

Roy looks up ahead and spots Helen's car and trailer parked off the road.

ROY (CONT'D)
Well now...

INT. TENT - SAME

Helen and Willy are huddled together, the downpour pounding the tent while thunder rolls and lightning flashes outside. Willy, angry, turns and looks at Helen.

EXT. CAMPSITE 3 - DAWN

The rain has stopped. Helen slips out of the tent and turns to walk into the woods. She goes a few steps and stops.

Shock passes over her face and she whips around looking to where the car and trailer were parked.

They're gone.

HELEN

No.

She walks toward the parking spot, then speeds up.

HELEN (CONT'D)

No!!

Willy, wrapped in a blanket, comes out of the tent just as she runs past.

WILLY

Momma! What's wrong?

He follows her at a jog.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Momma!?

They both stop where the car was parked.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Where the car at?

Helen looks down at the tire tracks in the wet ground. She follows them to the road.

HELEN

I knew it! I knew he'd go an' do somethin' like this!

WILLY

Who?

HELEN

Who? You know who!

Looking down, she paces while repeatedly clenching and releasing her fists.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Car's gone, car's gone, car's gone, car's gone.

She kicks a small stick at her feet, sending it flying. She turns toward Willy and shakes her finger.

HELEN (CONT'D)
*This is why you never trust a
 colored!*

The sound of her own yelling stops her in her tracks. She extends her hands in front of her, calming herself. She exhales.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 He took it all right. Sell ever
 thing we own first chance he git
 an' run off with the money.

Helen and Willy stand for a beat looking down the road.

NOBLE (O.C.)
 Mornin'. Where the car at?

They both turn around to see Noble standing behind them, satchel over his shoulder, bedroll on his back.

Helen looks at Noble, then down the road, then back at Noble.

HELEN
 You didn't take it?

NOBLE
 No ma'am. Been under a train
 bridge, yonder.

He points behind him.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
 Someone runned off with the car?

Noble walks to where the car was parked and looks around. He crouches down.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
 Two men, look like. One 'bout my
 size. One smaller.

He goes to where Helen and Willy are standing, crouches down and places his fingers in the tracks.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
 Couple hours, I reckon. Goin' west.

HELEN
 Couple hours? They eighty miles
 away by now.

Noble stands.

NOBLE

Yes 'um.

WILLY

Won't never catch 'em.

Noble turns and walks back the way he came.

HELEN

Where you goin'?

NOBLE

California.

HELEN

You gonna walk all that way?

NOBLE

No ma'am. Jump a freight, yonder.

(beat)

Good luck to ya, now.

WILLY

You gonna just leave us here?

Noble keeps walking.

HELEN

Never mind him, Willy. Don't need his help no-how.

Noble disappears into the woods.

Helen and Willy are left standing by themselves. They look at each other, then down the road, then at the woods.

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Willy and Helen, both dressed and carrying their bedrolls, run hard through the woods. A TRAIN WHISTLE in the distance.

WILLY

It's comin' mamma. Gotta hurry!

They jump downed trees and crash through bushes.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

They pop out of the woods and into the railroad cut, the tracks in front of them. Both drop their bedrolls and put their hands on their knees, trying to catch their breath.

Not far from where they emerge, Noble sits on his bedroll smoking his pipe. He looks over at them.

Helen sees him.

HELEN

This... ain't... what you... think.

Noble puffs on his pipe, but doesn't answer.

HELEN (CONT'D)

We... ain't... followin' you.

Noble finishes his pipe and taps it out on his hand.

HELEN (CONT'D)

We gonna... jump that train... too.

Noble gets up and slings his bedroll over his shoulder.

NOBLE

Wouldn't recommend it. Jumpin' a train mighty dangerous.

HELEN

You... just sayin' that.

NOBLE

No ma'am. Train don't stop. Gotta run, then jump on.

Noble looks down the track.

The train heads their way.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Y'all miss, end up under them wheels. Ain't no good come a that.

(beat)

Y'all better off hitch hikin'. Someone sure ta pick up a white lady and boy.

(beat)

Go on now. This here ain't fer y'all.

HELEN

Y'all just tryin' to scare us.

NOBLE

Yes 'um. Hate to see the boy get hurt.

HELEN

What about *me*?

NOBLE

Didn't think much 'bout you.

Noble steps in the woods, out of sight of the train.

Helen and Willy pick up their things and step into the woods.

HELEN

We jumpin' that train. Nothin' you can do 'bout it.

NOBLE

Suit yer self.

(beat)

It go by kinda fast. Only git one chance. Make it good.

They watch the train heading toward them.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

That engine go past, best get out an' find a open door an' jump in. Hear?

The train gets closer. It slows as it goes past them, then stops.

HELEN

Go by real fast, huh?

Noble steps out of the woods and looks toward the engine.

The engineer swings a pipe from an obscured water tower and fills the boiler.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Hope we don't get caught under them wheels or nothin'.

They all go to an open box car and throw their bedrolls in. Noble helps Helen and Willy up, then climbs in himself.

INT. BOXCAR - LATER

The train rumbles down the tracks. The boxcar filled with raggedy looking MEN, both black and white.

Some play cards, some gaze out the open door, one is reading and some are sleeping.

Noble talks to a BLACK MAN in the corner, then walks back to where Willy and Helen sit. Noble sits next to them.

NOBLE

Train take on water two more times.
Second time, we git off. Be ahead a
them what took the car by then.

WILLY

Think we find 'em?

NOBLE

Don't know. Say people camp
overnight near the tracks. Maybe we
git lucky.

HELEN

What if we don't?

NOBLE

'Nother train head west in the
mornin'.

GREASE RAIL (70) sitting across from Helen smiles at her. Most of his teeth are missing. Helen scowls in return.

INT. BOXCAR - LATER

Helen, eyes closed, lays on the floor. Noble sits against the wall, napping. Willy, between them, looks up at Noble for a long beat.

Noble cracks an eye open and looks at him.

NOBLE

You okay, boy?

WILLY

Yes sir.

Noble nods, closes his eye and adjusts himself against the wall. Willy continues to look up at him. After a beat, Noble cracks his eye open, looks at Willy, then opens both eyes.

NOBLE

Somethin' on yer mind, son?

WILLY

Ain't right, what they do to ya
yesterday. Make ya take off yer
clothes, steal yer money.

NOBLE

No, I reckon not.

WILLY

I feel bad.

Noble nods.

WILLY (CONT'D)

They do that cuz y'all's colored?

NOBLE

Colored? Naw.

(beat)

I reckon fear. Fear's what makes
'em do it.

WILLY

Fear? How kin they be a-feared?
They had the guns.

Noble smiles.

NOBLE

Some folks a-feared a what they
don't know.

Willy looks up confused.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Reckon they figure I'm differn't.

(beat)

Makes 'em scared. When they scared,
they act out.

WILLY

But you ain't no differn't than
them, ner me, ner momma. We all the
same. Just a darker color is all.

Noble smiles. He pats Willy on the leg, closes his eyes and
leans back against the wall.

Helen, awake.

EXT. RAIL YARD - NIGHT

The train is stopped. MEN climb from the empty boxcars and disperse throughout the train yard and into the darkness.

Noble climbs out and looks around, then helps Helen and Willy from the car.

HELEN

What now?

Grease Rail climbs out and starts limping away.

NOBLE

'Scuse me.

The old man turns.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Which way the jungle is?

GREASE RAIL

Two of 'em hereabouts. Big one on this side. Smaller one on the other.

NOBLE

Which one fer west bound?

GREASE RAIL

Follow me.

Grease Rail limps down the side of the tracks. Noble, Willy and Helen follow.

GREASE RAIL (CONT'D)

Name's Robert, but folks call me Grease Rail.

NOBLE

My name Noble Hicks. This here Miss Helen. Young 'un name Willy.

GREASE RAIL

Pleased to make your acquaintance.

They walk a bit farther.

GREASE RAIL (CONT'D)

Miss Helen always grumpy like that?

NOBLE

Naw sir. Sometime she only half grumpy.

HELEN

I can hear you.

WILLY

Why folks call you Grease Rail?

GREASE RAIL

Took to puttin' grease on the rails
ahead of a train I want to ride.
Get's them drive wheels slippin',
train slows down an' I can jump on.
(chuckles)
I needs all the help I can get!

Grease Rail stops and looks toward the woods. He points to something up ahead and they move on.

They take a trail into the woods.

EXT. HOBO JUNGLE - CONTINUOUS

They reach a clearing in which are several camp fires and numerous HOBOS. They stop at the edge of the clearing.

GREASE RAIL

Y'all hungry?

WILLY

Yes *sir!*

Grease Rail motions for them to follow. He makes his way to one of the fires.

Over the fire sits a large cooking pot. Men of all ages and colors stand and sit around the fire eating soup from tin bowls and cups.

A TEENAGE BOY and OLDER MAN meet them at the fire. They hand Noble and Willy cups of soup, and Helen a bowl with a spoon.

ACROSS THE CLEARING is a small group of black men by a fire.

JAMES JOHNSON (35) pokes the fire with a stick.

He glances up and sees Noble. He shifts slightly to get a better look.

JAMES

Naw. Cain't be.

LEM, another black man at the fire sees him.

LEM

What you gawkin' at James?

JAMES

That fella yonder. Look like my ol' sergeant.

LEM

Sergeant? What sergeant you ever have?

JAMES

Sergeant Hicks, back when I's in the army.

LEM

Army?

(chuckles)

What you do in the army? Dig ditches?

The men around the campfire all laugh. James slowly stands, still looking at Noble.

JAMES

Naw, man. I's in a fightin' unit. Over'n Europe.

He starts toward Noble.

James makes his way across the clearing, finally reaching Noble. He steps tentatively behind Noble and clears his throat.

JAMES (CONT'D)

'Scuse me sir. You be Sergeant Hicks, from the 369th?

Noble finishes a sip from his cup. He turns to James, studying his features.

NOBLE

Private Johnson?

A smile crosses James' face.

JAMES

Yes sir! That be me! James Johnson. Fought with ya in France. Yes sir!

Noble shakes his hand.

NOBLE

I'll be! Been a long time.

JAMES

Yes sir.

He turns to Helen and Willy.

NOBLE

This here Miss Helen. This here
Willy.

James tips his hat.

JAMES

Miss Helen.

Helen is busy eating her soup and only glances up in
acknowledgement.

He nods to Willy, who nods back.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Reckon y'all goin' to California?

NOBLE

Was. Miss Helen let the car git
stole, so we's workin' ta git it
back.

HELEN

(mouth full)

Didn't let it get stole. Just got
stole.

JAMES

Where it be?

NOBLE

Headin' this a-way. We jumped the
train, yonder so's we git ahead of
it. Y'all know a place nearby a car
might could stop fer the night?

JAMES

Big place not far. Lots'a folks
stop.

NOBLE

Might you could show us where it's
at?

JAMES

Yes sir. Happy to.

EXT. CAMPSITE 4 - NIGHT

Noble, Helen, Willy and James with their belongings walk out of the woods into a large clearing.

James, a knapsack and bedroll on his back.

The clearing is filled with cars, trucks, tents, shanties, campfires and PEOPLE of all ages, shapes, sizes and colors.

Helen pushes herself out in front of everybody. Noble cuts her off.

NOBLE

Whoa, Miss Helen. Cain't have y'all
runnin' off, now.

HELEN

Out'a my way.

She tries to step around Noble, but he blocks her.

NOBLE

Where ya off to?

HELEN

Find my car, that's where.

NOBLE

Yes ma'am. We find it if it's here.
But cain't go off by your own self
like that.

HELEN

I can do what I want. I'm a grown
woman, an' it's my car!

She steps past Noble.

He reaches out, catches her arm and stops her. Incensed, she turns and glares at his hand on her arm, then turns the glare to him.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Don't you put hands on me.

Noble lets go.

NOBLE

Yes 'um. Just that...

She turns and storms off, Willy trailing behind. After a beat...

NOBLE (CONT'D)
 (to James)
 Reckon you could follow her so's
 she don't see ya?

JAMES
 Yes sir.

NOBLE
 I go look 'round yonder. She find
 'em, you come find me. Hear?

JAMES
 Yes sir.

NOBLE
 Don't let her make no trouble.
 (beat)
 Okay. Go on now.

JAMES
 Yes sir.

James moves off following Helen and Willy. Noble moves off in
 the opposite direction.

EXT. CAMPSITE 4 - HELEN - MOMENTS LATER

Helen and Willy move through the various campsites, checking
 out vehicles. James inconspicuously follows.

EXT. CAMPSITE 4 - NOBLE - CONTINUOUS

Noble walks through the camp sites.

EXT. CAMPSITE 4 - CONTINUOUS

Noble stands near the entrance to the campground. James runs
 up.

JAMES
 Sergeant Hicks! Best come quick!

NOBLE
 She find 'em?

JAMES
 Yes sir. It ain't goin' good,
 neither.

EXT. BENNETT CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

A group of ONLOOKERS, including Willy, have gathered in a semi-circle around Roy and Carl's campsite, Helen's car and trailer parked nearby.

On one side of the campfire Helen holds a tree branch the size of a baseball bat.

On the other side of the fire, in front of her car and trailer, are the Bennett brothers, each holding a tree branch of equal size to hers.

James and Noble come running up and stop among the onlookers.

ROY

You're tryin' my good nature, lady.
Now go on an' git.

HELEN

Ain't goin' nowhere without my rig.

ROY

I already told you, this ain't your rig.

NOBLE

Yes sir. It do be hers.

Everybody turns and looks at Noble as he steps into the light.

Roy and Carl both chuckle at the sight of him.

ROY

This ain't none a your business, boy. Best you just keep your mouth shut.

NOBLE

Is my business. That rig, yonder, belong to Miss Helen, here.

Carl steps toward Noble, raising his stick.

CARL

We found this rig, boy. Abandoned on the side a the road.

NOBLE

Weren't abandoned. Just parked fer the night. Y'all took it when her and the boy was sleepin'.

ROY
You callin' me a liar, boy?

NOBLE
Naw sir.
(beat)
Callin' ya a thief.

Roy, angered and ignoring Helen, starts across the campsite for Noble.

ROY
Why you son of a...

As he passes Helen, she hits him hard across the face with her stick. He stumbles backward, but doesn't fall.

Noble takes off his backpack and satchel and hands it to Willy.

NOBLE
Mind this fer me?

WILLY
Yes sir.

Helen rushes Roy and swings again, hitting his arm and backing him up more.

Carl runs and hits Helen on the back with his stick, she drops.

He goes to hit her again but the stick stops in mid air.

He turns to see Noble holding the stick with one hand.

Noble takes a hold of the stick with the other hand and tosses Carl aside, disarming him at the same time.

Roy, stick in hand, charges Noble and swings at his head.

Noble ducks under and punches Roy in the face, sending him tumbling backward.

Three MEN from the crowd jump into the fight.

Man 2 grabs Noble from behind. Noble easily tosses him aside.

Man 3 strikes Noble in the side of the head, stunning him for a second. Man 3 is able to get his arms around Noble from behind.

Man 2 punches Noble in the stomach, buckling him. Carl gets to his feet and punches Noble in the face.

James jumps into the fight, tackling Carl.

Noble breaks Man 3's hold, punches him in the face. Man 2 reaches to grab Noble, Noble tosses him aside.

Carl pulls a knife. He and James struggle over it as they wrestle on the ground.

Roy shakes the cobwebs from his head gets up and charges Noble. He is about to hit Noble when... a LOUD GUNSHOT.

Everybody freezes.

Helen stands near the back of the car holding her pistol, the barrel smoking and pointed at the sky. She levels it at Roy.

HELEN

If this ain't my rig, how I know
where this gun's at?

While Carl is distracted, James snatches the knife from his hand.

Roy drops his stick.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Good. Reckon that's settled.

Willy steps up, hands Noble his things, then goes to Helen.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Mr. Noble? James? Y'all comin'?

James joins Noble and, facing the crowd, they back toward the car. Willy climbs in the front seat.

ROY

This ain't over. We'll see you all
again.

HELEN

You best hope not. I see ya again
my warnin' shot'll be through your
innards.

James and Noble approach Helen and stop.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Well, don't just stand there.
(motions toward the car)
Get in!

The two men climb in the back seat.

Helen goes to the driver's side and still pointing her pistol, climbs behind the wheel.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Helen, sets the pistol on the seat next to her, notices her flower is gone.

HELEN
No, *no!*

WILLY
What *momma?*

HELEN
My flower! *They took my flower!*

She grabs the pistol and jumps out of the car.

WILLY
Momma, *no!*

Willy gets out and meets Helen as she comes around the front of the car, pointing the pistol at Carl and Roy.

NOBLE
(quietly to James)
This ought be interestin'.

HELEN
You *bastards!* What you do with my *flower?!*

Surprised, Roy and Carl put their hands up and back away.

ROY
Jesus lady!

HELEN
Where's my flower?!

ROY
What the hell you talkin' about?

WILLY
Momma?

Willy tugs gently at her dress.

HELEN
There was a flower on the seat. Now *where is it?!*

WILLY
 Momma, come on now.

ROY
 Flower? You mean that weed?

HELEN
 Flower! A *Yellow flower!*

ROY
 Carl's 'llegic, so he threwed it
 out.

HELEN
Throwed it out?!

She raises and cocks the pistol. People behind the brothers
 part like the red sea.

HELEN (CONT'D)
You throwed out my flower?!

WILLY
*Momma! A little thing! Just a
 little thing!*

Helen snaps to her senses.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 Little thing!

Helen, anger draining from her face, looks at Willy.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 More where that come from. We can
 find another.
 (beat)
 Just a little thing.

HELEN
 Wanted to plant it in the yard.

WILLY
 I know. We can get another.
 (beat)
 Come on, now. We should go.

IN THE CAR - CONTINUOUS

James looks at Noble, surprise on his face.

NOBLE
 I know.

WITH HELEN AND WILLY - CONTINUOUS

Helen turns back to the men, thrusts the pistol in their direction, then turns and walks back to the car with Willy.

They climb in and drive away.

EXT. ARIZONA - CREEK - DAY

Helen washes clothes in the creek surrounded by pine trees.

James comes to the creek carrying his knapsack and stops just upstream from Helen.

JAMES

Miss Helen.

Helen looks at him and nods.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Mind I wash some clothes? So dirty they almost stand up by they self.

HELEN

Free country.

James squats near the water and takes clothes from his knapsack.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Not there!

JAMES

Ma'am?

HELEN

Down stream. Yonder.

Motions her head downstream.

JAMES

Ah, yes'um.

James moves around Helen, settles down not far from her and pulls clothes from his knapsack.

Helen ignores him at first, then nonchalantly glances over at him.

EXT. WOODS - SAME

Noble and Willy kneel next to a rabbit snare.

NOBLE

Ol' hare come through this loop,
pull on this string, move that
stick an' just like that, we havin'
rabbit fer supper.

WILLY

(studying the snare)
Sure don't look like much.

NOBLE

That's how come ol' hare git's
fooled into steppin' in it.

Noble stands up brushing the dirt from his knees.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

What say we go back'n check that
other we set. See if'n a ol' hare
find his way to it.

Willy, smiling, jumps to his feet and he and Noble head into
the woods.

EXT. CREEK - SAME

Helen and James wash clothes in the creek.

HELEN

How you come to know that Noble
fella?

JAMES

Sergeant Hicks? He my platoon
sergeant in the army.

HELEN

They let nig... They let folks like
y'all in the army?

JAMES

Mean coloreds? Yes ma'am. 369th
Infantry Regiment. Fought Germans
in France. That's a-way yonder in
Europe.

HELEN

I know where France is.

JAMES

Yes ma'am.

HELEN
So y'all's fightin' men?

JAMES
Yes ma'am. Specially Sergeant
Hicks, there. Fought so hard
Germans call him "Black Death".

HELEN
Black Death. You makin' that up.

JAMES
No ma'am, I ain't. Once, all by his
self, he fight off a enemy patrol
that was headin' our way. He got
shot up good, but he kept on a
fightin'. When he run outa'
bullets, he use his rifle fer a
club, and cut 'em up with a bolo
knife. Killed him seven Germans in
that fight an' wounded twenty four
more. The rest run off.
(laughs, then turns
serious)
First American ever ta get the
Croix de Guerre.

HELEN
What's that?

JAMES
A metal the French give fer bravery
in combat.
(beat)
Yes ma'am. Sergeant Hicks a real
live hero.

EXT. CAR - LATER

James and Helen have strung a clothes line. Helen hangs her
clothes on one end of the line, James hangs his on the other.

Noble and Willy come out of the woods, Willy carries a dead
rabbit in each hand. He holds them up and jogs to Helen.

WILLY
Momma! Look!

Helen smiles as she watches him come her way.

HELEN
Well I'll be! Looks like we havin'
rabbit fer supper.

WILLY

Yes ma'am! Mister Noble show me how to set snares. Caught this one in mine!

Holds one of the rabbits up.

WILLY (CONT'D)

Big, ain't he!

HELEN

He'll be good eatin'.

Noble walks up, winks at Willy and pats him on the shoulder. Willy looks up, beaming.

Helen takes one of the rabbits from Willy and for the first time, she smiles at Noble. He nods in response.

She wraps her arm around Willy and happily ushers him toward the camp fire.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Mister Noble show ya how ta skin 'em too?

WILLY

Um, no.

HELEN

Well, what say you an' me go figure it out.

WILLY

Yes ma'am.

NOBLE

Ma'am?

They stop, Helen turns back.

Noble takes a small yellow mustard plant from behind his back, roots packed in his handkerchief.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Maybe it'll do fer plantin' in yer California yard?

HELEN

It's a weed.

NOBLE

Yes ma'am. Mustard, I reckon.

Helen goes to him and gently takes the plant. Without looking up, she nods and walks away.

EXT. CAMPSITE 5 - NIGHT

Helen, James and Noble sit around the fire.

Noble smokes a pipe. Willy sleeps under a tarp fashioned into a lean-to attached to the car. Helen drinks from a coffee cup.

James finishes his coffee, slings the remnants from the cup, stands and stretches.

JAMES

Believe I best get me a little shut eye.

(to Helen)

Much obliged fer the meal, ma'am. It were mighty tasty.

HELEN

Welcome.

JAMES

Night y'all.

HELEN

Night.

NOBLE

Night.

James walks into the shadows. Noble puffs on his pipe and pokes the fire with a stick.

HELEN

Thank ya fer helping get the car back.

NOBLE

Ma'am?

HELEN

I appreciate it. Ever thing we own in there.

NOBLE

Reckon you did more than me. Pullin' that gun sure 'nuff got them fella's thinkin' different.

Helen smiles proudly. They sit for a beat.

HELEN
Your friend, there, he say y'all
was in the Army?

NOBLE
That's right.

HELEN
He say you was a war hero. Got a
medal an' every thing.

NOBLE
Weren't no hero.

HELEN
He say they give you a medal fer
killin' Germans?

Noble sits for a long beat.

NOBLE
He talk too much.

HELEN
Why you go off an' fight in that
war anyway? Why men do that?

NOBLE
Oh, I's young. Thought maybe it do
some good fer some folks.

HELEN
You reckon it did?

Noble shrugs.

NOBLE
Helped folks over there, I s'pose.
(smiles)
They give us a big ol' parade after
the fightin' was over. Never seen
so many white folk in all my life.
Thousands and thousands. Far as ya
could see.
(beat)
They was all cheerin' they heads
off for a whole regiment of black
men.

HELEN
Don't say!

NOBLE

Yes ma'am! Almost like they
couldn't see we was colored.

(beat)

After that parade, one a my men
say, "Guess we got ta be white fer
a day." And we all laughed.

Noble's smile fades.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Some of us figured things be
differnt' when we got home. Thought
maybe white folk appreciate what we
done.

(beat)

But didn't change nuthin'. White
folks still white, colored still
colored.

HELEN

How it's supposed to be, I reckon.

NOBLE

Naw, ma'am. Supposed to take a man
fer who he is, not what color he
be. Sheriff Del, back in Boise
City. He treat a black man good as
any white man, long as that man
respect the law.

(beat)

That how it supposed to be.

HELEN

Maybe.

Noble draws on his pipe, but it's gone out.

HELEN (CONT'D)

So why you goin' to California?

NOBLE

Business.

He taps the pipe on his hand.

HELEN

What kind a business you got? Can't
be blacksmithin' business.

NOBLE

No ma'am. Family business.

(beat)

(MORE)

NOBLE (CONT'D)
Sister got herself killed in a
automobile accident. Goin' out
there ta take care a her things.

HELEN
Oh. Sorry to hear that.

NOBLE
Yes 'um. Got this letter.

Pulls a piece of paper from his shirt pocket.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
Lawyer in Turlock say if I ain't
there by this comin' Thursday,
state come an' git Della's things.

HELEN
Well then, looks like we both got
good reason to get there.

NOBLE
Yes ma'am.

Noble puts the pipe in his shirt pocket. He starts to stand,
but settles back down.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
Mind I ask you somthin'?

She shrugs "okay".

NOBLE (CONT'D)
Where you learn to fight like you
do?

Helen, a proud grin.

HELEN
My momma.
(beat)
After daddy passed, man come around
sayin' he take our property. Momma
said no because she had the deed
safe under the mattress.
(beat)
That man got real mad and grab her
arm. She punch him in the mouth and
knock out one a his teeth.

She points to one of her front teeth.

HELEN (CONT'D)

This one here. Then she punch his eye and blacked it good. He said he come back with the law, but never did.

(beat)

Reckon he liked them other teeth too much.

NOBLE

Wouldn't want that woman mad at me!

HELEN

(smiling)

No sir, you wouldn't.

Her smile fades.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Used to say, never let nobody take what's yours. Always keep your babies safe, trust no man 'sept your husband, and then only so long as you can see him. An' never trust no nigg...

She stops herself, looking over at Noble.

NOBLE

Sound like she take good care a y'all.

HELEN

She did.

(beat)

I miss her. Died of the cancer when I was fifteen.

(beat)

I married a year later, but he was a drinker, and a mean one. So I ran off. Change my name so's he couldn't find me and got married to John. Year later Willy come along.

She glances at Willy sleeping nearby.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Me an his daddy, we's wheat farmers. Good 'uns too. 'Til the drought come along.

She takes a sip from her coffee cup.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Got so bad he went off to California to find work. Sent a letter sayin' he got him a job at a garage in Modesto. Found a nice house too, on Melody Lane.

(smiles)

He said to wait a bit more 'fore we come so's he could clean it up a bit.

(beat)

But we can't wait. Farm near blew away, an' I didn't want me or Willy gettin' the dust pneumonia.

She looks around and shrugs.

HELEN (CONT'D)

So here we are.

She glances over at Noble, who smiles as he listens.

HELEN (CONT'D)

(embarrassed)

Would ya just listen to me? Blabberin' on an' on like I ain't got no sense.

NOBLE

No ma'am. I like listenin' to ya talk. You got a cheery voice, when ya ain't troubled so much.

HELEN

I ain't been -

Noble gets to his feet.

NOBLE

But I reckon I best get some sleep.

(beat)

Night Miss Helen.

He turns to walk away. Helen gets to her feet.

HELEN

Mister Noble?

He stops and turns back.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Night.

EXT. CALIFORNIA BORDER CHECKPOINT - DAY

Armed border guards have a long line of vehicles filled with destitute families and their belongings stopped.

An old car, barely running, pulls to the head of the line. Inside is ED PLONSKI (50) his WIFE and four CHILDREN. Waiting for them are officers LEE (40), SMITH (35) and WILSON (30).

OFFICER LEE

Afternoon. Where you all coming from?

ED

Oklahoma, sir.

OFFICER LEE

Where you headed?

Ed points straight ahead.

ED

California.

OFFICER LEE

Where in California? You got a job waitin'?

ED

Job? No sir. Gonna be lookin.'

OFFICER LEE

Got relatives here?

ED

No sir.

OFFICER LEE

How much money you bringing with you?

Ed looks at his wife. She digs through her ragged bag and pulls out an old coin purse. She opens it and dumps the contents, all coins, into Ed's hand. He counts them.

ED

Forty three cents.

OFFICER LEE

That's all?

ED

Yes sir.

Lee shakes his head.

OFFICER LEE

Sorry sir. Can't let you in. Gotta either have a job lined up, family in the state, or at least fifteen dollars.

ED

But...

OFFICER LEE

You can turn around here.

He points to a well worn turn around area on the side of the road.

ED

But, we came all this way!

OFFICER LEE

Move it out, sir.

ED

We got nothin' to go back to! Please sir! I'm beggin' you! My family...

OFFICER LEE

Move it, sir, or we'll impound your vehicle and belongings, and then we'll move it.

ED

No! Please sir!

Lee motions for his men to approach. They do.

ED (CONT'D)

No... no. We're going.

He jams the car into gear and it chugs through the small turn around and heads away from the border.

OFFICER LEE

Next!

He waves the next car forward.

INT./EXT. HELEN'S CAR - SAME

The car stops at the end of the line of cars. James and Noble in the back seat, Willy and Helen in the front.

Ed's car chugs past. Everybody inside is crying.

WILLY
Why them folks cryin', mamma?

HELEN
Don't rightly know.

Noble leans his head out the window for a beat.

NOBLE
They turnin' people away.

JAMES
I heard they do that if ya got no
money 'er job.

The line of cars moves forward a bit. Helen pulls ahead.

NOBLE
Miss Helen, how much money you got?

HELEN
Maybe three dollars.

Noble gets out of the car and goes back to the trailer.

He digs in his bedroll and pulls out his money pouch.

Another car with a family inside passes going the opposite
direction.

Noble returns and goes to Helen's window. He hands her two
ten dollar bills.

NOBLE
They want to see yer money, show
'em this.

HELEN
(surprised)
Where you get -

NOBLE
Don't mind 'bout that. Y'all just
take it.

The line moves again.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
Me an' James'll git out and walk
through.
(to James)
Come on.

HELEN

But...

James gets out of the car. Another vehicle passes going the other way.

NOBLE

We meet up two miles the other side. We ain't there in three hours, y'all go on ahead. Hear?

HELEN

Where'd you get this money?

NOBLE

Two hours.

Noble and James meet up at the back of the trailer then move into the shade of a small clump of trees that lines the road.

EXT. TREES - CONTINUOUS

Noble and James make their way through the trees toward the border.

JAMES

Sergeant Hicks, I only got about seventy cents.

They stop. Noble digs in his pocket and pulls out a small fold of bills. He peels off a ten and several ones and hands them to James.

NOBLE

They ask, show 'em this.

James, surprised to see the money.

JAMES

Yes sir.

EXT. BORDER CHECKPOINT - MOMENTS LATER

Helen pulls her car up to the head of the line and stops. Officer Lee and his men approach.

OFFICER LEE

Afternoon ma'am. Where you all coming from?

HELEN

Boise City, Oklahoma.

OFFICER LEE
Where you headed?

HELEN
Modesto.

OFFICER LEE
You got a job waitin'?

HELEN
No sir. Goin' to meet my husband.
He got him a job.

OFFICER LEE
Your husband?

HELEN
Yes sir. He come here a year ago.

OFFICER LEE
Where does he work?

HELEN
In a garage.

OFFICER LEE
What garage?

Helen looks at Willy, who shrugs.

HELEN
Don't remember the name. It's in
Modesto. He got us a house at 31
Melody Lane.

OFFICER LEE
But you don't know the name of
where he works?

HELEN
No sir. I don't reckon he ever
said.

OFFICER LEE
I see. How much money you bringing
with you?

EXT. WOODS - SAME

Noble and James are a few hundred yards from the road. They watch Lee question Helen.

NOBLE
 (to James)
 Stay with me.

Noble, followed by James, walks out of the woods and strolls from the Arizona side of the border over to the California side.

INT./EXT. HELEN'S CAR - SAME

Helen has taken the money Noble gave her and is counting it for Officer Lee.

Behind Lee, his men see Noble and James crossing the border.

OFFICER SMITH
 Boss! We got some runners.

Lee looks up and sees Noble and James.

OFFICER LEE
 Get 'em caught up, boys.

His attention stays on Noble and James as Helen shows him the money.

HELEN
 It's twenty three dollars.

Lee watches as his men jog after Noble and James.

HELEN (CONT'D)
 Sir?
 (beat)
 Sir? Twenty three dollars.

Lee glances down, then back up to his men. He waves Helen through.

Helen puts the car in gear and drives off, glancing into the desert at Noble and James.

EXT. DESERT - SAME

Officer Smith and Officer Wilson jog after Noble and James.

OFFICER SMITH
 Hold it right there! Stop!

Noble and James continue without turning around. Wilson pulls his pistol and fires a shot in the air. The two men stop.

INT./EXT. HELEN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Helen and Willy hear the shot. She stops the car and they both look out at Noble and James. With a look of concern, Willy turns back to Helen.

HELEN

They be okay.

Noble and James turn toward the officers and put their hands up.

HELEN (CONT'D)

They all right. See?

Willy looks out at the men as Helen drives on.

INT./EXT. CHECKPOINT GUARD SHACK - MOMENTS LATER

Wilson holds his gun on Noble and James. They are met at the guard shack by Lee.

OFFICER LEE

Where you boys think you're going?

NOBLE

We sorry boss. Didn't know we s'pose ta stop.

Lee nods to Wilson who then holsters his gun.

OFFICER LEE

Everybody stops.

Lee opens the door and Noble and James are ushered inside.

OFFICER LEE (CONT'D)

Looks like you boys sneakin' into our state.

JAMES

No sir. Ain't sneakin'. Headin' to our jobs.

James glances at Noble.

OFFICER LEE

Is that right? And what jobs are those?

JAMES

Workin' on the new bridge in San Francisco.

OFFICER LEE
You're bridge builders, are you?

Wilson chuckles.

JAMES
We riveters, sir.

OFFICER LEE
Riveters. What exactly is it that riveters do on a bridge?

JAMES
Rivet joints together, sir.

OFFICER LEE
And you men are skilled riveters, are you?

JAMES
Not much skill to it, sir.

OFFICER LEE
Is that right?

JAMES
Mostly just swingin' a big hammer.

OFFICER LEE
I see.
(beat)
I tell you what. How about you explain to Officer Wilson and me just how someone like yourself would rivet a joint together on a big bridge.

James glances nervously at Noble.

OFFICER LEE (CONT'D)
Don't look at him, boy. I'm the one asking the questions. Sides, no need to be nervous. Of course unless your lying about having a job on that bridge. In which case, there's plenty for you to be nervous about.

JAMES
Yes sir.

OFFICER LEE
We're waiting, boy.

JAMES

Well sir, a furnace gits set up near the joints bein' riveted. Rivets go in the furnace till they white hot. Rivet cook use tongs ta take them hot rivets and throw 'em to the catcher standin' near the joints gonna be riveted. The catcher catch them rivets in a leather bucket with ash in the bottom. He put the rivet in the hole bein' riveted. One man hold a dolly block 'gainst the round head a that rivet, 'nother man whack the straight head on the backside, make it mushroom tight against the iron. When that rivet cool, make a real strong joint.

Everybody in the room sits quiet. Noble, a bit surprised, glances at James out of the corner of his eye.

OFFICER LEE

I suppose you both have paperwork saying you got jobs waitin'.

Another beat passes.

NOBLE

Yes sir, we do. Um, did.

OFFICER LEE

Did?

NOBLE

Yes sir. See, our car got stole a few nights back while we's sleepin'. Be how come we walkin'. All them papers got stole, too.

OFFICER LEE

So no paperwork.

NOBLE

No sir.

OFFICER LEE

What's your name, boy?

NOBLE

Noble Hicks, sir.

JAMES

James Johnson.

OFFICER LEE
Either of you got any money?

NOBLE
Yes sir.

Lee nods to Wilson, who turns and walks out of the shack.
After the door closes, Lee looks back at James and Noble.

OFFICER LEE
Lets see it.

The men dig through their pockets, pull out their cash and count it.

NOBLE
Thirty seven dollars.

JAMES
Seventeen.

Lee nods slowly.

OFFICER LEE
The fine for no paperwork is...
(to Noble)
Twenty dollars for you.
(to James)
And ten for you.

JAMES
But...

Noble nudges him, peels off the bills and hands them to Lee.
James does the same. Lee, smiling, counts the bills then gets up and goes to the door.

JAMES (CONT'D)
We kin go now, boss?

OFFICER LEE
Go?
(chuckles)
Course not.

JAMES
But...

OFFICER LEE
This?

He holds up the cash he just took from them.

OFFICER LEE (CONT'D)
Already told you. This was the fine
for not havin' your paperwork.
(beat)
I still need to decide if you're
telling the truth about having
jobs.

He stuffs the money in his pocket.

OFFICER LEE (CONT'D)
You boys wait here. I'll be back.

He opens the door.

OFFICER LEE (CONT'D)
Welcome to California.

Smiling, he leaves the shack, locking the door from the
outside.

Noble looks at James.

NOBLE
Riveters?

James looks out the window.

JAMES
I am. And I do got a job on that
bridge. Where I was headed when I
run into y'all.
(beat)
What if they don't let us in?

Noble goes over and looks out the window.

NOBLE
No matter. They kick us out, we'll
sneak back after dark.

He turns away from the door.

JAMES
Sergeant Hicks?

NOBLE
Yeah?

JAMES
Them fellas in that truck yonder.

He points out the window.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Them the ones stole Miss Helen's
car?

Noble comes back to the window.

From his POV, we see Roy and Carl coming through the
checkpoint in a broken down pick up truck.

NOBLE

Looks like.

INT./EXT. OLD TRUCK - ROAD - LATER

Roy and Carl are bumping down the road. Carl looks out the
windshield ahead of them and sees Helen's truck and trailer
in a small parking area well off the road.

CARL

Hey. Look!

Roy looks over and slows the truck. From their POV Helen sits
on the running board and Willy is throwing rocks at a cactus.

ROY

Well I'll be.

The truck rolls past.

EXT. PARKING AREA - DUSK

Willy stands near the side of the road looking in the
direction of the border crossing. Helen walks up, puts her
arm around him and looks down the road with him.

WILLY

Been three hours?

HELEN

It has.

WILLY

Reckon they comin'?

HELEN

Don't know.

(beat)

We'll wait a while longer.

She smiles down at him.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Hungry?

WILLY
A little.

HELEN
Lets make some soup.

She gently turns him back toward the car.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Come on.

Willy glances down the road, then goes with her.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DUSK

Officer Lee walks to his car, followed by Officer Wilson.

WILSON
What you want us to do with them
two coloreds?

Lee climbs in and closes the door.

OFFICER LEE
Leave 'em till morning, then send
'em back.

He starts the car and drives off.

INT. GUARD HOUSE - DUSK

Noble sits against the wall. He's asleep.

CLOSE ON Noble. SOUNDS of a fierce battle, EXPLOSIONS, RAPID GUNFIRE, MEN SCREAMING. Noble, begins jerking in time with the sounds.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)
*Help! Help me! Sergeant! Sergeant
Hicks!*

LOUD EXPLOSION. Noble bolts awake, sweating and shaking.

JAMES
Sergeant Hicks?

Noble, wide eyed, looks up at James.

James looks out the barred front window.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Fella put us in here leavin'.

Noble wipes sweat from his brow, gets up and goes to the window.

From their POV, Lee drives away.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Reckon he forgot us?

NOBLE
Naw. Teachin' us a lesson, more like.

Noble goes back and sits in a chair by the table.

JAMES
They just leavin' us here?

Noble glances around and his gaze rests on another window, also barred.

An inquisitive look crosses his face, he gets up and goes to the window.

NOBLE
Maybe.

CLOSE ON where the bars are anchored at the bottom of the sill.

Noble uses his fingers to scape at the wood covering the bars. Rotten wood falls away. He smiles.

FADE TO:

EXT. PARKING AREA - NIGHT

Helen and Willy sit next to the camp fire. Willy dejectedly pokes the fire with a stick.

WILLY
Should'a been here by now.
(beat)
Don't reckon they shot 'em, do ya?

Helen reaches over and rubs Willy's arm.

HELEN
We'll wait till mornin.' But they don't come, we gotta go on.

WILLY

(sad)
Yes ma'am.

An old truck rattles into the parking area and pulls up near the fire.

The headlights blind Helen and Willy. They both shield their eyes with their hands.

Helen cautiously gets to her feet.

The truck doors open and the silhouettes of two men show up just outside the lights.

HELEN

Mister Noble? That you?

The two figures step into the headlights and are backlit. One is holding a club, the other a rope.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Willy! Run!

WILLY

Momma?

HELEN

Run!

She grabs his arm, turns and pushes him away from the figures.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Run!

They run away from the men and into the desert, the men hot on their heels.

Helen and Willy dodge rocks and cactus, jump over and through and around bushes.

Helen glances back and sees the men are easily gaining on them.

HELEN (CONT'D)

Run Willy! Go! Don't stop! No matter what! Don't stop!

Willy pulls ahead of Helen.

With the men only feet away, Helen wheels around and launches herself at them, hitting the man in the lead, Roy, with the force of her entire body.

The impact knocks Roy backward into Carl and all three end up in a heap on the ground.

Helen, striking and kicking.

Roy is taken by surprise by the barrage, but quickly gets hold of one of her arms and grins as she hits him.

Carl scrambles to his feet and grabs Helen's shoulders. She moves her body so violently he loses his balance and crashes back to the ground.

ROY

I got this one. Go get that damn boy.

Carl scrambles to his feet and runs off.

Helen continues to strike with her free hand. Roy hits her in the face, stunning her momentarily.

She tries to shake off the cobwebs, but he hits her again, hard. She goes limp.

EXT. PARKING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Roy walks into the wash of the headlights carrying the club, Helen draped over his shoulder.

He drops her to the ground as Carl comes into the light from another direction.

ROY

Where's the kid?

CARL

Hell I don't know. Too damn dark. Cain't see a damn thing.

Roy picks up a nearby tin cup.

ROY

No matter. I got what I want.

He smells the contents of the cup, walks over to Helen and splashes it on her face.

She bolts awake, sees the men and, still groggy, tries to get up. Roy holds her down with the end of his club.

ROY (CONT'D)

You stay right there.

He squats down next to her, grabs her hair and jerks her head back. Her eyes widen as she comes to her senses.

Her face shows more anger than fear.

ROY (CONT'D)
Told ya I'd see ya again.

Helen spits in his face. He laughs, wipes the saliva with the palm of his hand, then slowly licks it off.

His face turns cold and he gets to his feet, pulling Helen up by the hair.

Helen hits him as he stands her up.

Roy ignores her strikes and drags her toward the darkness.

CARL
I wanna turn when you're done!

ROY
Shut up, Carl.

At the edge of the light, Willy leaps out of nowhere latching himself around Roy's shoulders and scraping his face with his fingernails.

ROY (CONT'D)
Ahhhhrrrrggggg!

Roy spins, trying to shake Willy loose. Carl runs to his aid, pulling Willy off and tossing him across the clearing.

Willy scrambles to his feet, but Carl is quickly on top of him. Carl's fist crashes into Willy's face, knocking him unconscious.

HELEN
Willy!

Helen fights, knocking Roy off balance. He sends a hard punch to the side of her head, knocking her senseless.

He holds her semi-limp body with one hand and draws his other hand back to punch her again.

NOBLE (O.C.)
That's 'nough!

Roy looks up and sees Noble across the clearing pointing his Colt Model 1911 pistol at him.

Carl gets up and offers to charge Noble.

JAMES

No sir.

The clicking of the hammer on Helen's Colt revolver.

Carl turns to see James standing behind him pointing the pistol at Carl's head.

CARL

Well, shit.

Roy drops Helen to the ground, turns to Noble and grins.

ROY

Never met a nigger yet had the guts
to pull the trigger on a man
lookin' him in the eye.

He takes a step toward Noble. Noble fires. Roy, shocked, puts his hands on his chest and drops to his knees.

CARL

Roy!

Carl charges Noble.

Noble coldly turns the pistol on him and fires at the same time James fires. Carl is dead before he hits the ground.

Noble turns the pistol back on Roy.

Roy takes his now bloody hands off his chest and looks at them. He looks up at Noble, then collapses in the dirt.

Noble, eyes wide, shaking and sweating, still points the gun at Roy. James, concerned, walks towards him.

JAMES

Sergeant Hicks? You okay?

Noble is unresponsive.

James looks at the dead man, then back at Noble.

JAMES (CONT'D)

He dead. It's over now.

NOBLE

Over?

(long beat)

This ain't over!

(beat)

*It ain't never over! Don't you know
that? It never ends!*

(MORE)

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Why we gotta fight every day a this
life ta stay alive, when we should
just be livin'?!

He turns, lowering the gun.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

And now look! All I wanted was to
git to California.

He thrusts the gun toward Roy's body.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

*But these... they just couldn't
leave us alone, could they?! And
now what? Huh?*

(beat)

White man come along, see what we
done, hang us like laundry from a
tree. Nobody bat an eye.

(beat)

Nobody care it was them in the
wrong!

He turns, head back, looking to the sky. He lets out a laugh,
as tears stream down his face.

Helen, regaining her senses, looks at the dead men.

Noble turns abruptly to Helen.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

And you! Y'all thinkin' all along
you better'n us...

(points to James and
himself)

Why? 'Cuz you white and we ain't!
Why you think that way? Huh? Why
you teach your boy that?

Willy, still unsteady from his beating, goes to Noble.

Willy's face, bruised and bloodied. He looks up at Noble,
hugs Noble around his waist.

Noble wraps his arms around Willy.

EXT. DESERT - LATER

In a thicket of sagebrush and thorns, James and Noble drag
Roy to a shallow grave and drop him in next to Carl.

James looks into the grave.

JAMES
They had it comin'.

NOBLE
I reckon.
(beat)
You rub out them tracks we made,
I'll cover these boys up.

JAMES
Yes sir.
(beat)
You okay?

NOBLE
Best git busy.

JAMES
Yes sir.

James starts back the way they came. He stops and looks back at Noble.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Sergeant Hicks?

Noble looks at him.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I get 'em too. The nightmares. I
get 'em too.

James turns and leaves. Noble shovels dirt into the graves.

Noble, a lone tear runs down his cheek.

EXT. CLEARING - LATER

Noble sits on the running board of Helen's car as Helen walks up.

HELEN
Mr. Noble, I want ya ta know, I'm
mighty obliged. If you an' James
don't come along, do what ya
done... no tellin'...

Noble glances up, stands and walks away.

EXT. CLEARING - DAWN

Willy and Helen stand by the car, Noble walks up.

WILLY
Mr. Noble, you really goin'?

NOBLE
We talked 'bout this, now. Be safer
for you and your momma this'a way.

WILLY
Don't feel safe.

NOBLE
Nope. Usually don't.

Noble leans into the boy's ear.

NOBLE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Keep takin' good care of yer momma,
hear?

WILLY
Yes sir.

Noble offers his hand to the boy who shakes it strongly. He
tips his hat to Helen.

NOBLE
Ma'am.

HELEN
Mr. Hicks.

James drives up in the old truck. Noble gets in and they pull
away. Helen and Willy watch them go.

FADE TO:

INT./EXT. TRUCK - DAY

The old truck stops in front of a well-kept two story house
on an equally well-kept street.

A sign hangs from the porch reads: HARRIS AND HARRIS LAW
FIRM.

Noble in the passenger seat, opens a folded piece of paper
and looks at it, then looks at the sign on the house.

NOBLE
Looks like this is it.

He shakes James' hand.

JAMES

Sure you don't want me to wait?

NOBLE

Naw man. You go on ahead. That bridge won't wait forever.

Noble gets out, grabs his satchel and bedroll from the bed and slaps the roof of the truck. James drives off.

FADE TO:

INT./EXT. SUNSHINE MOTEL - MODESTO - DAY

Helen's car and trailer pull up in front of the shabby motel.

She looks out at a lone, half dead orange tree in front of the building.

The place is surrounded by tall, dried grass and miscellaneous lawn ornaments.

HELEN

This can't be right.

Willy, slightly distressed, holds himself, he has to pee.

WILLY

Road sign back yonder say Melody Lane. Number on the building say thirty one.

HELEN

Can't be.

WILLY

I gotta go, momma.

HELEN

Yeah, sorry. Try 'round back.

Helen motions toward the side of the building.

WILLY

Yes ma'am!

Willy swings his door open and bolts for the back of the building.

Helen gets out, glances around, goes into the office.

Behind the desk is BLANCHE FORD (70).

She wears heavy eye makeup and is dressed like a silent film actress, smoking a cigarette in a long holder and reading VARIETY MAGAZINE.

Helen is a bit taken aback at the sight of her.

She goes to the desk and clears her throat, getting Blanche's attention.

Blanche glances up as she puts the magazine down and takes a drag from cigarette. She coughs.

HELEN
Afternoon, ma'am.

BLANCHE
(raspy voice)
Yes dear? Can I help you?

HELEN
I'm Helen Lewis. My husband, John,
be stayin' here?

Blanche gets up, her movements dramatic and sweeping, like the movie heroines of the time.

BLANCHE
John... John Lewis?
(beat)
Oh yes! Johnny! Dear, dear Johnny.
Such a sweet lad!

HELEN
So he be stayin' here?

BLANCH
Was my dear, was. Not any more.

Willy comes running into the office but stops short upon seeing Blanche.

HELEN
He ain't here no more?

BLANCHE
Oh, no dear. He and that darling
sister of his, Louise, moved out.

HELEN
Sister?

Blanche floats over to a calendar hanging on the wall. She taps a date on the calendar with the mouthpiece of her cigarette holder.

BLANCHE

They left on Friday the 12th. A glorious spring day, it was.

HELEN

His sister?

BLANCHE

Yes dear. His sister Louise. She moved in with him a year ago, I believe.

Blanche floats back to the desk.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

Strange, but I never really did see the family resemblance, what with his dark hair and her with all of that blonde. Gorgeous, just gorgeous hair. I asked what her secret was to get it so shiny but she -

WILLY

Daddy got a sister?

A beat.

HELEN

No. He don't.

Blanche stops, realizing the implications of what Helen has just said.

BLANCHE

Oh dear.

A look of exhausted sadness crosses Helen's face.

HELEN

Did... did they say where they was goin'?

BLANCHE

Why, no. I'm afraid they didn't.

(beat)

I'm so sorry dear.

Helen, stone faced, wipes a single tear from her cheek.

BLANCHE (CONT'D)

Is there anything I can do, dear? Do you and the boy need a place to stay?

HELEN
No. Thank you.

BLANCHE
I can give you the first night for
free.

HELEN
No.

Helen takes Willy by the shoulder, they turn and hurry out
the door.

EXT. SUNSHINE MOTEL - MODESTO - LATER

Helen's car is gone but the trailer with all the furniture
remains.

INT. CAR - LATER

Helen drives, Willy sits next to her. Helen is shaken.

Concerned, Willy looks at her for a long beat.

WILLY
Momma, what that lady mean when she
say daddy got a sister.

She bangs her hands on the steering wheel.

HELEN
No, no, no, no, no, no...

She pulls over and gets out.

In the middle of the road, she starts turning in tight
circles, her hands balling up, then releasing - faster and
faster.

HELEN (CONT'D)
No, no, no, no, no...

Willy gets out and goes to her.

WILLY
Mama! This a little...

Helen REELS on the boy.

HELEN
(crying)
No it ain't!
(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)
*This ain't a little thing! This...
 A big... What we gonna' do! Where
 we gonna go! We come all this way!*

WILLY
Mama! Stop! Stop it right now!

Helen suddenly stops, eyes wide, and turns to face the boy.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 If daddy gone, he gone. I wished he
 weren't, but he is.
 (beat)
 We been doin' without him for a
 good while. Reckon we kin do
 without him some more. We be okay.

HELEN
 (wiping tears)
 How you know? You're just a -

WILLY
 I know because I know. Now let's
 get goin'. I'm hungry.

Willy gets back in the car.

Helen watches him. Still standing in the middle of the road,
 her face softens.

She gets in and they pull away.

EXT. CAMPSITE 6 - NIGHT

A tarp tied to the top of the car and fashioned into a lean-
 to that extends off the passenger side.

Willy is in his bedroll. Helen tucks him in.

WILLY
 Momma? What we doin' tomorrow?

HELEN
 Don't rightly know.
 (beat)
 Head south, I reckon. Maybe see if
 I kin find a job pickin' fruit
 somewhere's.

WILLY
 I kin pick fruit too. Maybe carry
 baskets 'er somethin'.

Helen smiles, placing her hand gently on his head.

HELEN

We'll see. Main thing... you and me
be together. That's all that
matters. Ain't no little thing,
neither.

FADE TO BLACK:

CARD: SIX MONTHS LATER

FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE TURLOCK - DAY

Helen's car drives past a small, almost unnoticeable road
sign that reads: TURLOCK 3 MILES.

INT. HELEN'S CAR - SAME

Helen and Willy sit side by side as she drives. They're
darker skinned and healthier looking from working in the sun.

HELEN

Should be there in time for
lettuce.

WILLY

Better than pickin' them dang
pers.. pars... pass...

HELEN

Persimmons.

WILLY

That's them!

HELEN

Hungry?

WILLY

Yes ma'am.

HELEN

We can stop an' make some soup.

WILLY

(wincing)
'Mater soup?

HELEN
'Mater soup.

WILLY
Ain't that hungry.
(beat)
I could set a snare, see if we can
catch a rabbit!

HELEN
Got me a better idea. Look yonder.

She points ahead at a general store on the side of the road.

WILLY
A store!

HELEN
Maybe we see they got some canned
meat an' bread that ain't too dear.

WILLY
I'd like that!

INT. GENERAL STORE - MOMENTS LATER

A little bell above the door RINGS as Helen and Willy enter.

The shelves along the walls are full of canned foods as well as shovels and rakes, feather dusters and everything in between.

HELEN
Well, let's see what we can find.

Willy sprints toward the shelves scanning each one carefully. Helen follows. A voice comes from the back room.

MALE VOICE (O.C.)
Be right there.

HELEN
No hurry!

WILLY
Momma, look! They got pork 'n
beans! And sardines!

He runs up to her with a can in each hand and shows them to her.

HELEN
Let's see what else they got.

WILLY

Yes, ma'am.

He runs off again.

NOBLE (O.C.)

Sorry 'bout that.

Noble comes from the back room wearing a clean white shirt and a store keeper's apron. He's clean shaven and his hair is slicked down. He's looking at a clipboard.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

Tryin' to git that back room...

He looks up and sees Helen at the same time she sees him. They both stop in their tracks.

WILLY (O.C.)

Mister Noble? Mister Noble!

Willy runs up and hugs Noble around the waist. Noble pats him on the back and sets the clipboard on the counter.

NOBLE

Well Willy! Looks like you grew a foot since last I seen you!

WILLY

You joshin'. Only been a couple months!

NOBLE

Maybe you right. These ol' eyes play tricks on me sometime.

Willy steps back.

WILLY

There's pork an' beans and sardines here!

NOBLE

Yes sir. Canned meats toward the back there.

Willy looks at Helen.

WILLY

Can I?

Helen nods, Willy turns and sprints for the back of the store. Noble turns to Helen.

HELEN
So, you workin' here?

NOBLE
Could say.
(beat)
Weren't 'spectin' to see y'all.
Thought you was in Modesto?

HELEN
Already been an' gone.

NOBLE
Find your husband?

HELEN
He been an' gone, too.

NOBLE
Oh?

Helen forces a smile.

HELEN
Just me an' Willy now.

NOBLE
Sorry to hear that.

HELEN
No matter. Reckon it's all for the
best.
(beat)
How 'bout you? You come all this
way to work in a store?

NOBLE
Don't just work here. Own the
place.

HELEN
Go on now. You don't!

NOBLE
Yes ma'am, I do. Lock, stock and
barrel. Was my sister's an' her
husband's 'fore they was killed in
that car wreck. Turns out how I was
they only kin, they went on and
Willed it to me.

HELEN
(smiles)
Well I'll be! Ain't that somethin'?

NOBLE

Yes ma'am.

Willy runs up with a can of pork and a can of beef.

WILLY

Look momma! Pork *and* beef!

HELEN

Go ahead, pick one.

WILLY

But momma, can't we get both...

HELEN

Only afford one. Go ahead and pick.

NOBLE

Y'all take both. On me.

HELEN

No sir. We pay our way in this ol' world. Always have. Always will.

Noble smiles.

NOBLE

Yes ma'am.

He looks at the cans Willy holds.

NOBLE (CONT'D)

How do a nickle sound?

HELEN

Now Mister Noble, that ain't right. They gotta be twice that fer one.

NOBLE

A solid nickle. That's what I'm chargin' today.

WILLY

Can we get both?

HELEN

I reckon we can.

WILLY

Swell!

Helen digs in her pocket book, brings out a nickle and hands it to Noble. He nods.

Helen smiles.

HELEN
Much obliged.

Helen holds out her arm and as Willy goes under it, she puts her arm on his shoulder and they turn for the door.

Noble takes one step with them and stops.

NOBLE
You all livin' here about's?

Helen hesitates and turns back.

HELEN
Naw. We on our way north. Lookin' fer work.

NOBLE
Work? You don't say! I be needing some help right here. Been pretty hard findin', though.
(beat)
Maybe you all could -

HELEN
(smiles)
Appreciate it. Really do.
(beat)
But we got word of a good job... you know, up north.

WILLY
Pickin' lettuce.

Noble nods and smiles.

NOBLE
Well then...

HELEN
Much obliged fer the food.

Helen and Willy turn for the door.

NOBLE
Travel safe now.
(beat)
Stop by if you ever get back this way.

Helen turns and smiles.

She and Willy walk out the door, the little bell RINGS.

Noble turns, picks up the clipboard and starts for the back room.

The Model A starts up and drives away.

INT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Helen and Willy drive down the road. Willy holds the two cans purchased from Noble.

WILLY

Ain't that somethin' momma? Mr.
Noble right there in that store!

HELEN

That's somethin' all right.

WILLY

I like him. Be nice to see him
again sometime. Ya think?

Helen looks down at Willy and gives him a smile. Still smiling, she looks at the road as Willy opens his map.

CLOSE ON Helen.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - LATER

The car kicks up dust as it heads into the sunset.

INT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Noble flips the sign hanging on the door to CLOSED.

He takes off his apron, hangs it up behind the counter, goes into the back room.

The bell above the door RINGS.

He comes back out.

NOBLE

Sorry, just closed up for the
night.

Helen stands just inside the door, her arm around Willy's shoulders and holding a large mustard plant in the other hand.

They all stand quiet for a long beat.

Willy smiles.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END