

A crew of African-Americans are laying tracks in rural Alabama. The crane operator is the only white man on the section gang.

INT. BUNK CAR

The dormitory of the section gang. The men are through for the day and lounging on their bunkbeds. DUFF ANDERSON plays checkers with FRANKIE, using bottle tops as pieces. Duff makes the winning move and Frankie, disgusted, turns over the board. He saunters over to JOCKO, who is shaving in a broken mirror. Frankie watches him with a grin.

JOCKO

Go to hell, Frankie.

FRANKIE

Man, you sure one ugly cat!

He takes the cigarettes Jocko has rolled, sailor-style, into the sleeve of his T-shirt.

JOCKO

Why don't you guys buy your own?

FRANKIE

'Oughta give up smoking, Jocko.

He stops in front of an older man, who is writing a letter.

FRANKIE

How much longer we got on this stretch, Riddick?

RIDDICK

Five weeks, maybe six.

FRANKIE

Man, what a dump.

He circles restlessly past two cardplayers back to Duff, who is clipping his fingernails.

FRANKIE

What you gettin' all pretty for?

DUFF
(with a grin)
Why don't you relax, Frankie?

RAILROAD TRACK

Duff, Frankie, and Jocko are riding a track-car, powered by a small engine, into the nearest town. The sun is setting. A church bell rings.

POOL HALL

Jocko, a cigar in his mouth, is playing a pinball machine. Duff and Frankie stand at the bar. They are joined by DORIS , a sad-looking woman with bad skin.

DORIS
Who's going to buy me a beer?

FRANKIE
(scornfully)
What's the matter, Doris? Business bad?

DORIS
It sure is.

FRANKIE
Everybody givin' it away free, huh?

DORIS
You gonna buy me a beer, Frankie?

FRANKIE
See Duff. He's the money man.

DORIS
What d'you say, Duff?

DUFF
(to the bartender)
Give her a beer.

DORIS
Thanks, Duff. You' a nice guy. Not like Frankie.

FRANKIE
You know, Doris - you'd make some guy a swell wife.

DORIS
You think so, Frankie?

FRANKIE
Hell, you got steady work.

DUFF
Quit ridin' her, Frankie.

The bartender serves her a bottle of beer

FRANKIE
I ain't ridin' her. Wouldn't ride her on a bet.

Duff pays for the beer and turns to leave.

DORIS
Where' you goin'?

DUFF
Out.

DORIS
Want me to come?

DUFF
No thanks.

DORIS
Come on, honey.

FRANKIE
Where' you goin'?

DUFF
'Round town.

FRANKIE
What's so hot 'round town?

DUFF
(with a grin)
Take it easy, Frankie.

He leaves.

FRANKIE
Don't wanna fish you outa no jailhouse.

STREET (Night)

Duff is walking along the deserted street in the black part of town.

Music from the pool hall fades and we pick up the strains of gospel singing from a nearby church.

INT. CHURCH

The choir is singing "Precious Lord." The women are spirited and the congregation in the small wooden building is alive to the music.

Duff appears in the open doorway and stops to listen.

When the song ends, REVEREND DAWSON rises from his chair.

REVEREND

I'm glad to see this meeting off to a good start. Now we'll take a break and then come back to hear from our distinguished guest - Reverend Butler of the Morgan Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. See you all in a little while.

Reverend Butler compliments him on the choir.

CHURCH YARD

Long tables laden with food are lit by strings of lightbulbs. The sound of a gospel piano from inside the church.

A smiling middle-aged woman has taken Duff in tow and leads him over to a young woman (JOSIE), who is serving food.

WOMAN

Josie - this is Brother Anderson. Now you give him some of that good food. He's a fine young man.

(on her way)

Ain't it a wonderful meetin'?!

Duff studies Josie with a smile. She is clearly middle class. While she puts food on a paper plate, she glances at him - matching his ironic detachment with her own. She hands him the plate

DUFF

Thank you, Ma'am. That's fine.

JOSIE
You must be new in town.

DUFF
(with a grin)
I'll have me some of that punch there, too.

She serves the punch.

JOSIE
Haven't seen you around, have I?

DUFF
No. I'm new in town.

JOSIE
(unwilling to give up)
You working?

DUFF
Yeah. On the section gang.

He is sure that this will put a stop to her curiosity. It doesn't.

JOSIE
(interested)
Oh yeah?

DUFF
You work around town?

JOSIE
I'm a teacher.

DUFF
Went to college, huh?

JOSIE
In Birmingham.

DUFF
Oh yeah? That's my home town.

JOSIE
Your folks live there?

DUFF

No. My mother's dead.
(after a moment)
You goin' back inside?

JOSIE
Yes, aren't you?

DUFF
No. Never had much use for hell-howlers. You
goin'?

JOSIE
(with a smile)
My father's the preacher.

DUFF
(grinning)
Oh yeah? Well, I guess you got no choice.

JOSIE
That's right.

DUFF
(a bit tentatively)
Look, I don't know what you been told 'bout
section gangs, but how 'bout seein' me sometime?

JOSIE
(with a non-committal smile)
Maybe.

INT. CHURCH

The visiting revival preacher is in full swing, preaching and singing. The congregation of women is in a state of high excitement. Josie alone seems out of it, though she sits in their midst.

Duff has been standing in the doorway. He turns away.

EXT. CHURCH

Duff walks away, past a shack. The singing fades. A dog barks.

BUNK CAR (Night)

Duff, Frankie, Jocko, and an older man (POP) are playing cards. While waiting for his turn, Jocko catches a fly and sneaks a look at Frankie's cards.

JOCKO

 You got a lousy hand, Frankie.

Frankie throws down the cards.

 FRANKIE

 Yeah, I quit.

He gets up. At loose ends, he picks up an old Flit-gun and squirts it at

Duff, who is polishing his shoes.

 DUFF

 You got nothin' on your mind but your hair, Frankie. How 'bout your car, Riddick?

 RIDDICK

 Yeah, you can have it.

 JOCKO

 Man, you won't like that back seat.

 FRANKIE

 Man, why 'you messin' around with a gal like that? You won't get no place.

 JOCKO

 Hell, they're all after the same thing.

 POP

 Yeah. All a colored woman wants is your money.

 JOCKO

 What d'you know about women, Pop?

 POP

 Well, I got married to one of them.

 JOCKO

 Hell, I didn't know you was married.

 POP

 Sure. Got a sixteen-year-old girl.

 JOCKO

 Is that right?

 (to Duff)

 Think you're gonna make it with her?

FRANKIE

Just get her drunk.

DUFF

(to Riddick)

How 'bout the key?

FRANKIE

I bet she's easy jam.

DAWSON DINING ROOM (Night)

A middle-class tableau. Dinner is over. Reverend Dawson is reading the paper.

Josie, dressed for an evening out, sits across from her step-mother, who is looking at her with pursed lips.

MRS. DAWSON

I know you pay no mind to my feelings, but d'you think it's right for you to go out with him?

JOSIE

I'm twenty-six years old, Susan.

MRS. DAWSON

Perhaps you ought to tell her, Frank.

Reverend Dawson has no stomach for confrontations, but turns to Josie dutifully.

REVEREND DAWSON

Well, we have a position in town, Josie. You have to remember that. There're lots of other young men.

MRS. DAWSON

I don't think your mother would have approved.

JOSIE

I do.

MRS. DAWSON

Well, there's just one thing you can be looking for in a man like that.

JOSIE

I know that's what you think.

REVEREND DAWSON

Hush your mouth, child.

The doorbell rings.

JOSIE

(leaving the table)

Good night, Dad.

ROAD HOUSE

On the dimly lit, smoke-hung floor a large crowd is dancing. Josie is having a great time. When the music ends, she and Duff return to their table.

DUFF

That's pretty good for a preacher's daughter.

JOSIE

What d'you expect?

DUFF

You know, baby, I can't figure you out.

JOSIE

How d'you mean?

DUFF

Why d'you come out with me? You slummin' or something?

JOSIE

No.

DUFF

So what you doin' with a cat like me in a joint like this?

JOSIE

You don't think much of yourself, do you?

DUFF

(put off)

Well, that's a funny thing to say.

JOSIE

You keep asking me why I'm here.

DUFF

Yeah, and you keep not answerin', too.

JOSIE

I like a place with lots of life.

DUFF

How about another beer?

JOSIE

No thanks.

DUFF

Go on - you can have one!

His attention is drawn by something off screen.

DUFF

Hell!

JOSIE

What is it?

Frankie and Jocko swagger toward them, beer in hand.

FRANKIE

Well, if it ain't Duff!

JOCKO

How you doin'?

(to Josie; with
a bit of a leer)

Hi there!

JOSIE

Hi.

JOCKO

Mind if we sit down?

DUFF

We was just leavin', fellows.

FRANKIE

Let's go, Jocko. The man's got homework.

JOCKO

(leaving)

See you, Duff.

DUFF

Yeah, see you in hell.

Frankie follows Jocko out of the frame.

JOSIE

They must work on the section gang.

DUFF

That's right.

JOSIE

Well, they seem just like everyone else.

DUFF

Hell, baby, I bet you think we got tails.

FRANKIE'S VOICE

(off-screen)

We do!

Frankie and Jocko have occupied the adjoining table and are grinning at them.

Duff gets up, camouflaging his irritation.

DUFF

Come on, baby.

He ushers Josie out. Frankie looks after them.

FRANKIE

School teacher! My nappy head!

INT. RIDDICK'S OLD CONVERTIBLE (Night)

Duff has parked on a country road.

JOSIE

I guess it's hard working on the road like that.

DUFF

Damn few places you can make eighty bucks a week.

JOSIE

I mean, you're kind of cut off, aren't you?

DUFF

That's fine with me. Keeps me out of trouble.

JOSIE
How d'you mean?

DUFF
Well, I don't get on so well most places.

JOSIE
I see. That beer made me dizzy.

Duff is looking at her.

DUFF
You got a lovely face, kid. Ain't too often I
get to meet a girl like you. Hell--

He kisses her, but releases her very quickly.

DUFF
Baby, how many times' you been kissed?

Josie takes a moment to collect herself.

JOSIE
Well, let's see now - not counting tonight ...
must be about twenty-eight times.

DUFF
(with a grin)
You got a problem all right.

Someone moves in back of her. A white man in his early twenties has
emerged
from the dark and looks down at them.

WHITE
(with a smile)
Hi.

The voice of a second white man calls from off screen.

SECOND WHITE
They doin' anything?

WHITE
(calling back)
Nah, nothin'!

DUFF
Get out of here!

JOSIE
(frightened)
Don't Duff--

WHITE
Relax, man!

The second white man joins him.

SECOND WHITE
What's goin' on?

He shines his flashlight into Duff's face.

DUFF
Cut that out!

The white man shines the flashlight across Josie's breast.

DUFF
(very tense)
I said: Cut it out!

WHITE
Don't start no trouble, boy!

SECOND WHITE
Let's go! That's the preacher's girl. Mess with
him and you got old man Johnson on your back.
Come on.

The white men leave.

JOSIE
Let's go, Duff.

DUFF
Take it easy.

We see that he has a knife in his hand. He closes and pockets it.

The white men drive off, whooping and beating on the side of their
car.

DUFF
Don't sound human, do they?

INT. MOVING CAR (Night)

Duff is driving through the center of town.

DUFF

How come you stay 'round here?

JOSIE

Well, my mother was the only good teacher the colored school ever had. Nobody bothers with those kids.

DUFF

That's why you come back, huh?

JOSIE

It's hard to see any change. But I'm going to stay. Another year, anyway.

DUFF

You got more guts than me, baby. It's a no-good town.

JOSIE

It's better than it used to be. Eight years ago they still had a lynching here. They tied a man to a car and dragged him to death. My father knew who did it, but he didn't say anything.

DUFF

Scared, huh?

The car pulls up in front of the Dawson house and Duff parks.

DUFF

Well, good night, baby.

He is about to kiss her.

JOSIE

Not here, Duff.

DUFF

I get it.

(with a laugh)

Yeah, I can see your old man with a shot-gun right now.

JOSIE

But I would like to see you again.

DUFF

You would, huh? If I was you, baby - I wouldn't go 'round stickin' out my jugular vein.

JOSIE

What d'you mean?

DUFF

You almost got into trouble back there.

JOSIE

(with a smile)

I wouldn't have let you.

DUFF

Hell, baby, I'm not in the third grade. Well, look - what' we gonna do next time -- have a nice long chat in the parlor?

JOSIE

No, on the porch.

DUFF

Oh yeah, and then what?

JOSIE

What?

DUFF

Well, either we're gonna hit the hay or get married. Now you don't want to hit the hay, and I don' want to get married.

JOSIE

You have some very primitive ideas, don't you?

DUFF

(defensively)

All right, so I'm primitive. So what d'you want with me?

JOSIE

Look, Duff - most of the men I know - they're kind of sad. When I met you the other day I had a feeling that you're different. That's why I went out with you. I thought we might have something to say to each other.

DUFF

Hell, baby, I don't know what to say.

JOSIE

Good night, Duff.

She gets out of the car and starts toward the house.

He looks after her, then drives away.

OPEN FIELD

The section hands are hunting rabbits, scaring them up out of the tall grass and then clubbing them with sticks that have a heavy bolt fastened to the end.

Jocko is fishing from a trestle. Pop fries skinned rabbit in a skillet. Duff is whittling.

CLASSROOM

The grade school children, all black, are writing at their desks.

The end-of-school bell rings and one of the boys jumps up.

JOSIE

Are you finished, Jackie?

BOY

Yes, Ma'am.

JOSIE

Well, I'm not. Wait till class is dismissed.

She walks over to close the window.

In the yard below, Duff is sitting on one of the swings.

Josie smiles and turns to the kids --

JOSIE

All right. Class dismissed.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE

A bus crowded with noisy kids pulls away to reveal the yard. Duff and Josie are sitting on two swings side by side.

DUFF

At first it was real strange. Hell, Japan is a long ways from Alabama. Really got under my skin, though. Almost didn't come back.

JOSIE

Why did you?

DUFF

I don't know. 'Guess I belong here more than there.

JOSIE

'Been up north?

DUFF

Yeah. Knocked around for a couple of months after the Army. You been there?

JOSIE

No.

DUFF

Well, it ain't that good up there neither. Might as well make it here. 'Course I ain't really makin' it now.

He gets up and gives her swing a forceful shove.

DUFF

Anyway, they can't get to you if you keep movin'!

Josie laughs.

FRONT YARD, DAWSON HOUSE

It is raining. Duff and Josie dash up the path to the front door.

DAWSON PARLOR

Duff and Josie barge in out of the rain and find themselves face to face with

Reverend Dawson and a middle-aged white man - Superintendent Johnson.

JOSIE

Oh, I'm sorry.

JOHNSON

Come on in, Josie. We're all through.

JOSIE
Daddy - this is Duff Anderson.

REVEREND DAWSON
Hello.

DUFF
How are you?

REVEREND DAWSON
All right, son.

JOSIE
This is Mr. Johnson, our school superintendent.

JOHNSON
(with a friendly smile)
How are you?

JOSIE
I'll be right back.

She leaves.

JOHNSON
So you're courtin' the preacher's girl. Well,
just watch your step, boy, or he'll preach you
right into hell.
(to Reverend Dawson)
I'm counting on you, Reverend.

REVEREND DAWSON
I understand.

JOHNSON
Wouldn't do for one of your people to sue at a
time like this.

REVEREND DAWSON
I know.

JOHNSON
(on his way out)
I'll talk to the Mayor.

REVEREND DAWSON
That'll make the folks very happy.

Johnson leaves.

Reverend Dawson sits down in a rocker.

REVEREND DAWSON

It's hard to know how to talk to the white folks these days.

DUFF

Guess it's never been easy.

REVEREND DAWSON

It's a changing time. Sit down, son.

DUFF

Thank you.

He sits down opposite Reverend Dawson.

REVEREND DAWSON

Well, it looks like we'll be getting our new school.

DUFF

How come you all ain't sendin' them to the same school?

REVEREND DAWSON

Well, you've got to go easy. We haven't had any trouble in town for eight years, and we're not going to have any now.

DUFF

Can't live without trouble, can you?

(he sees he is on
the wrong track)

Nice place you got here. Real nice.

REVEREND DAWSON

Yes, the Lord's been pretty good to us. I guess you're a church man, aren't you?

DUFF

I guess I ain't.

REVEREND DAWSON

Why? Don't you believe in the Lord?

DUFF

Aw, I do. But 'seems to me us colored folks do

a whole lot of church-goin'. It's the whites that need it real bad.

REVEREND DAWSON

I think if you tried livin' in a town like this, instead of running free and easy, you'd soon change your tune.

DUFF

I doubt it.

REVEREND DAWSON

I see.

(rising)

Well, I guess we don't have much to say to each other.

DUFF

I guess not.

REVEREND DAWSON

And since we're talking, my wife and I don't want you hanging around our daughter.

DUFF

Well, that figures.

(he too stands up)

Kind of fits in with everything else, don't it!

DAWSON PORCH

Duff comes out. Josie joins him a moment later.

JOSIE

I'm sorry.

DUFF

Ain't your fault.

JOSIE

That's the way he is.

DUFF

Yeah. It's just like I figured.

JOSIE

What d'you mean?

DUFF

Hell, I don't belong here. I don't know what I'

been thinkin'.

JOSIE

Look, Duff - if you're free, I'm not working tomorrow.

DUFF

Sorry, baby. I'm goin' to Birmingham.

JOSIE

Just for the day?

DUFF

Goin' to see my kid.

JOSIE

I didn't know you had one.

DUFF

Yeah. Well, I do.

JOSIE

Are you married?

DUFF

No, I ain't married.

(leaving)

Well, good-bye.

COURTHOUSE SQUARE (Morning sunshine)

A bus has pulled in.

INT. BUS

Duff is making his way down the aisle. To his surprise, he comes upon Josie, who is sitting at a window with an empty seat next to her.

DUFF

(with a grin)

Well, what-do-you-know?

JOSIE

Surprised?

DUFF

No. Women're always followin' me 'round.

JOSIE

I'm just going in to do my shopping.

DUFF
Yeah, it's just a coincidence.

JOSIE
That's right.

DUFF
(moving on)
I'll see you later.

JOSIE
Come here, Duff. No point running away from
coincidence.

He sits down next to her.

DUFF
Baby, you must be crazy.

The bus starts up.

JOSIE
How old is your boy?

DUFF
Four.

JOSIE
What's he like?

DUFF
I ain't seen him in a couple of years.

ALLEYWAY, BIRMINGHAM

Duff is walking past crowded back-porches in a black section of town. Gospel music.

He steps up onto one of the porches and knocks at the screen door.

EFFIE'S PARLOR

Through the screen door we see EFFIE SIMMS, a woman in her twenties. She is sitting on a chair and cradles a sleeping child.

DUFF
'You Effie Simms?

EFFIE
(suspiciously)
What d'you want?

DUFF
Guess you must be lookin' after my boy. I'm
Duff Anderson.

EFFIE
'Bout time you showed. Door's open.

Duff enters.

EFFIE
(calling)
James Lee, you come in here and meet your daddy.

DUFF
Where's Wilma?

EFFIE
She done moved to Detroit.

DUFF
Ain't she goin' to take the boy?

EFFIE
She got herself a husband now. They don' want
him 'round. And I tell you, man, I got no use
for him neither.

DUFF
I been sendin' her money.

EFFIE
Well, she never gave me none. Look, you better
find him a place pretty quick.

DUFF
Like where?

EFFIE
I don't know. He's your boy.

DUFF
I ain't so sure of that. If I was, maybe I'd
feel different.

Effie gives him a scornful look, puts down the child, and opens the curtain that leads into the bedroom.

EFFIE

(sharply)

James Lee - I said for you to come in here.

BEDROOM

Two children are playing on the floor. James Lee is up on a Castro convertible.

Duff appears beside Effie in the doorway.

DUFF

How 'you been, boy?

James Lee looks at him, scared and silent.

EFFIE

Go on. Tell him.

She returns to the parlor.

DUFF

I got you something.

He crouches down and holds out a toy. James Lee approaches, takes the toy, and withdraws.

EFFIE'S PARLOR

Effie is folding diapers. Duff comes out of the bedroom.

EFFIE

'Doctor says he could use some shots.

DUFF

Yeah. Look, I'll be sendin' you the money from now on.

EFFIE

Okay.

DUFF

Make sure he gets those shots.

He looks back at the boy in the bedroom.

EFFIE

They say your dad's 'round town.

DUFF

'That right? I thought he was up North.

EFFIE

People seen him 'round.

DUFF

Where's he at?

EFFIE

I don't know.

STREET

Duff is walking through a black section of town.

EXT. TENEMENT STAIRS

Duff climbs to the top of the rickety wooden steps.

WILL ANDERSON'S ROOM

Duff's father, a big man in his fifties, is reclining on the bed.

Duff appears in the open doorway.

DUFF

'You Will Anderson?

WILL

Who're you?

DUFF

I'm Duff.

WILL

(sitting up, with
a faint grin)

Wouldn't have known you.

DUFF

Wouldn't have known you.

WILL

What's on your mind?

DUFF

Nothing. Heard you were in town.

WILL
Wanted a look at your old man, huh?

DUFF
Yeah. That's right.

Will gets up and crosses the room.

WILL
How about a drink?

DUFF
Okay.

Will pours whiskey into two glasses. Duff sees that Will's left sleeve hangs empty.

DUFF
What happened?

WILL
Workin' a saw mill.
(raising his glass)
Here's to.

A woman in her late thirties (LEE) comes in with a shopping bag.

WILL
Baby - want you to meet Duff.

LEE
(flatly)
Hi.

WILL
He's my son!

She turns and looks at Duff with a glimmer of interest.

LEE
Come and have some coffee.
(sitting down)
I'm Lee. Sit down.

He joins her.

LEE
Come on, Will.

WILL

What's the matter?! You mad at me?

LEE

No. Why?

WILL

(sitting down)

Nothin'.

(to Duff)

She's all right. Wouldn't have made it without her. Christ - haven't worked in eight months. Right now, I'm waitin' for some insurance money. And man, when I get it, I got plans to make me some more.

(he gets up restlessly)

Let's get out'a here. This place gives me the willies.

(to Lee)

You got some money?

LEE

(she knows what's coming)

Let's stay here, Will.

WILL

(aggressively)

What's the matter?! It's a celebration!

BAR

Will, Lee, and Duff are standing at the bar. Will has been drinking.

WILL

So what's this about a woman? You got woman trouble?

DUFF

I said, I come to town with a girl.

WILL

Plannin' on getting married?

DUFF

No.

WILL

'Don't sound so sure.

DUFF

Well, matter of fact, I done a lot of bangin'
'round.

WILL

Yeah. That's how me an' your mother got started.
I'm tellin' you, boy, you ain't got a chance
without dough. They take it all away from you.

He drains his glass and puts it down for Lee to refill.

LEE

Pour your own trouble, Will.

WILL

Your mother used to lay for her boss, boy. Did
you know that?

LEE

Shut up, Will.

WILL

Okay, so what's a girl supposed to do? Me not
workin' and her cleanin' house for a white man.
I'm tellin' you, boy, keep away from marriage.
Ya gotta stay light on your feet or you won't
make it.

He puts his hand on Lee's bare arm.

WILL

Is she good in the hay? No point marryin' her
just to find out. Is there, baby?

LEE

If you don't quit it, Will, I'm leaving.

WILL

You're breaking my heart.
(he grabs her neck
and shakes her)
Got to see a man about a dog.

DANCE FLOOR

Duff and Lee are dancing. She looks at him with a touch of
sympathy.

LEE

Don't let him get you, Duff.

DUFF
How often does he get like that?

LEE
Whenever he's got an edge on.

DUFF
How often is that?

LEE
He's been hitting it pretty hard. Got high
blood pressure, too. I guess it's hard on him,
having you around.

BAR
Will is back and drinking when Duff and Lee come off the dance
floor.

WILL
(aggressively)
Well, what d'you think of her?

Duff says nothing.

WILL
I asked you somethin', boy!

DUFF
I heard you.

WILL
Pretty good for a one-armed nigger, huh?

DUFF
Great.

WILL
What d'you want anyhow? What you come and
bother me for?

LEE
He's your son.

WILL
Okay, boy, beat it.

DUFF

I got the point.

He leaves money on the bar.

LEE

Come back some other time, will you?

DUFF

Yeah, sure. Good luck.

DOWNTOWN STREET (Night)

Duff is walking, lost in thought.

INT. BUS DEPOT (Night)

Josie enters with her purchases. She joins Duff at the sandwich counter.

JOSIE

Hi.

DUFF

(relieved to see her)

I thought you wasn't comin'.

She sits down.

JOSIE

How did it go?

DUFF

What?

JOSIE

Your boy.

DUFF

Okay, I guess.

JOSIE

(to off-screen waitress)

I'll have some coffee, please.

DUFF

You know, I been thinkin' - how 'bout us gettin' married?

Josie is stunned.

JOSIE

(playing for time)
What d'you mean?

DUFF
Just what I said. Don't look so scared.

The waitress puts down a cup of coffee.

JOSIE
Thank you.

DUFF
How about it?

JOSIE
What happened, Duff?

DUFF
Look, baby - I don't know 'bout you, but it's
the right thing for me. I just know it is. So,
what d'you say?

JOSIE
Don't push me, Duff.

DUFF
Yeah. Wouldn't be no picnic for you. I ain't
exactly housebroken.

JOSIE
What about that girl?

DUFF
She don't mean nothin' to me. That's all over.
(after a moment)
Hell, baby - I'm askin' you to marry me. I
guess you want a big scene, huh?

JOSIE
No. But a small one.

They look at each other.

DUFF
It's yes, huh?

INT. BUNK CAR (Day)
Frankie is looking scornfully at Duff, who is lying on his bunk
bed.

FRANKIE

I'll be a monkey's kid sister! What d'you want to do a thing like that for?

JOCKO

'Musta knocked her up.

FRANKIE

What're you gonna get out of it, huh?

DUFF

(with a smile)

A whole lot, Frankie.

FRANKIE

(aggressively)

Like what?

DUFF

Like a home, for one thing.

FRANKIE

You gonna sit at home the rest of your life? Jesus!

DUFF

Well, it's better than windin' up like a bum.

FRANKIE

(defensively)

What 'you signifyin'?

DUFF

I wasn't thinkin' about you, Frankie.

JOCKO

Ol' Doris sure goin' to miss you.

FRANKIE

Just give him a couple of months. A girl like that, she don't know any tricks.

JOCKO

You know what Doris told me? She say: That Duff's a nice guy. Wouldn't even charge him nothin'.

FRANKIE

I guess you'll be quittin' the railroad, huh, man?

DUFF

That's right.

FRANKIE

Man, you must be plumb outa your mind! You'll be makin' twen'y bucks a week, if you're lucky.

INT. MOVING CAR

Josie is next to Duff. They are driving past a row of small attached houses in the black section of town.

JOSIE

Turn here. There it is!

They stop in front of a house. It is barely larger than a shack.

DILAPIDATED LIVING ROOM

Duff and Jose come in. The room is full of abandoned, broken furniture and the ceiling and wallpaper hang down in strips.

JOSIE

I used to know them. They've gone North.

DUFF

(with a laugh)

I can see why.

JOSIE

Well, what d'you think?

DUFF

It's okay with me, baby. But how' you goin' to like it?

JOSIE

It'll be fine when we get done with it.

EXT. WINDOW OF LIVING ROOM

Duff is looking out through the broken pane of glass.

DUFF

Who's that?

NEIGHBORING HOUSE, SEEN FROM WINDOW

A woman is putting laundry into a washing machine on the open porch. Her children are all around her and in the yard below.

EXT. WINDOW

Josie has stopped next to Duff and looks out.

JOSIE

That's Bessie Hall. Barney works at the mill.

DUFF

Yeah?

Josie removes a shard of glass from the window; a larger piece falls out.

DUFF

Hey, watch out! Guess you want a house full of pickaninnies too, huh?

JOSIE

Don't call them that.

DUFF

That's all right with me. Always liked kids.

He moves to the rear of the room.

LIVING ROOM

Josie turns to him.

JOSIE

What about your boy?

DUFF

(defensively)

What about him?

JOSIE

He could live with us.

DUFF

Let's just see how the two of us make out first, huh?

INT. CHURCH

Duff and Josie are getting married. Duff is waiting near the pulpit. The

section hands are seated on one side of the aisle, Josie's family and friends on the other. The gospel piano segues into the wedding march. Josie is coming down the aisle by herself. She joins Duff and they step forward to face Reverend Dawson.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S BEDROOM (Early morning)

Josie lies in bed with closed eyes. She hears Duff move and turns to him. He is dressed for work.

JOSIE

Good luck, baby.

He sits down beside her for a moment.

INT. MOVING CAR

Duff is in the rear seat with his new neighbor, Barney.

Joe, a millhand, sits next to the driver in front. He turns to Duff.

JOE

Hard to get up in the morning, huh?

DUFF

(with a grin)

That's right. How' you doin', Barney?

BARNEY

(not given to saying much)

Okay.

EXT. SMALL HOUSE

The car drives up and Joe leans out.

JOE

Come on, Willie!

Willie, a big man, has been fixing his front step.

WILLIE

Just a minute, man.

JOE

Come on - we're late!

WILLIE
(taking his time)
Yazzuh, Boss - ah's comin' as fast as ah can.

He picks up his lunch box and shuffles toward the car, Stepin' Fetchit style.

JOE
(laughing)
Get in the car, man!

INT. CAR
Willie climbs in next to Duff.

WILLIE
How' you doing, man?

DUFF
Okay.
(to the driver)
Let's go.

WILLIE
That's right, Jethro - take us to the plant.
And hurry, boy - ah's got a heavy day.

The driver backs up fast, jerking the passengers forward.

WILLIE
Ah tells you, man - you give these niggers a
machine and they go stark-ravin' wild!

Laughter.

INT. MILL ENTRANCE
Duff is among the mill hands punching in on the time clock.

VOICE OF FOREMAN
(off screen)
You new here?

DUFF
That's right.

MILL YARD
Duff and two other men are working on top of a pile of lumber.

A white supervisor on a forklift has been watching them.

FOREMAN
(calling)
Hey, Jack!

Duff doesn't respond.

FOREMAN
Hey, boy - I'm talkin' to you.

DUFF
(after a moment)
Name's Duff.

FOREMAN
How 'you doing?

DUFF
Okay.

FOREMAN
(genially)
Looks like you're doin' a good job.

DUFF
Thanks.

FOREMAN
Don't say much, do you?

DUFF
Guess I don't.

FOREMAN
Just so you do your work.

EXT. MILL SHED

The mill hands are on their lunch break. The only white man among them is looking at Duff with a grin.

WHITE
Hell, I bet those black girls really go for you, huh? That's the best-lookin' colored girl in town.

Duff is eating and says nothing.

WHITE
What's the matter? Still on your honeymoon,

huh? Just like you, Barney. 'Been on your honeymoon for twen'y years, huh?

BARNEY
(cautiously)
Yeah.

The white mill hand helps himself to a piece of Barney's pie.

WHITE
How many kids you got now, Barney?

BARNEY
Four.

WHITE
(eating the pie)
Hmmm - she can cook, too. Man, it's no wonder you 'been draggin' your tail on the job. You 'been doin' your best work at home.

He notices that Duff's face is set.

WHITE
(aggressively)
What's the matter, boy? Never smile?

DUFF
I'll smile when it's funny.

WHITE
So it wasn't funny, huh? Well, I thought it was. What d'you say, Barney? Wasn't it funny?!

BARNEY
Yeah, it was funny.

WHITE
Sure.
(to the others)
What d'you say, boys? Wasn't it funny?

MILL HANDS
Yeah. Sure.

WHITE
(to Duff)
Trouble with you, boy, you ain't got no sense of humor. Ought to smile more.

DUFF

I know.

WHITE

You' new here, man!

(he gets up to leave)

See you, boys.

JOE

(to Duff after a moment)

You know, man, that guy was trying to be friendly.

DUFF

That ain't my idea of friendliness.

BARNEY

You got to watch yourself pretty close.

WILLIE

Yeah, you want to get along, act the nigger.

DUFF

Like hell. You know, if you fellows stuck together 'stead of letting them walk all over you, they might not try it.

JOE

Like hell they wouldn't.

WILLIE

They been doin' it all my life.

DUFF

Maybe it's time you stopped letting them.

Jesse, a heavy-set man who has been silent till now, stands up and looks at Duff.

JESSE

Man, you sound like a trouble man.

EXT. DUFF AND JOSIE'S HOUSE (Dusk)
The lights are on inside.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S KITCHEN

Duff is finishing his supper at the table. Josie is at the stove pouring coffee. She puts a piece of pie in front of him. He drinks his Coke out of the bottle.

JOSIE

Use the glass, honey. That's what it's for.

DUFF

(with a grin)

Is that so?

JOSIE

Yeah, that's so.

She returns to the stove. Duff picks up the pie and sniffs it suspiciously.

JOSIE

What's wrong?

DUFF

Smells like something crawled in there and died.

JOSIE

(innocently)

Oh really? I thought it was pretty good.

DUFF

Come here, baby.

He gets her to sit on his lap.

DUFF

Everything you cook is good.

JOSIE

Duff - you know those women you used to know--

He forks a bite of pie into her mouth.

DUFF

What about them?

JOSIE

(her mouth full)

Am I as good as they?

DUFF
(drinking)
Hmmm - good coffee.

JOSIE
You didn't answer my question.

DUFF
Baby, you're the best thing that ever happened
to me.

JOSIE
You still didn't answer my question.

DUFF
Well, if you don't know I can't tell you.

She elbows him in the stomach. He laughs.

BACKYARD (Night)
Duff is helping Josie take in the wash. Music from Barney's house.

JOSIE
You know how to box?

DUFF
Uh-huh. Why?

JOSIE
My kids want me to teach them.

DUFF
Okay. Come on. Put 'em up!

She assumes the posture of a boxer. Duff laughs and adjusts her hands.

DUFF
Like so. There you go. Okay, hit me!

JOSIE
I don't want to hurt you.

DUFF
Go on - hit me!

She does.

DUFF

Ooh! My, oh my!

They spar - briefly in sync with the music. She goes after him, flailing her arms.

The music is turned off abruptly and we hear Bessie's raised voice. She is out on the porch of her house, yelling at Barney.

BESSIE

Just leave me alone! You can sit out here all night. I don't care what you do! You're no good around the house anyway.

Barney remains silent. Duff and Josie exchange a look.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S BEDROOM (Night)
They are in bed.

DUFF

(gravely)

It sure scares you, a guy like that - settin' out on his porch, doin' nothin'. I seen hundreds of them - all my life.

JOSIE

My father's never done a thing for any of them.

He touches her face.

JOSIE

I'm very happy, Duff. How about you?

He smiles.

Josie gets up and slips out of her nightgown. Her body merges with the darkness.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S LIVING ROOM (Evening)
The place has been painted and simply furnished.

Josie has made dinner for the section hands. Pop is the only one who is still eating.

FRANKIE

You sure done a great job, Mrs. Anderson.

JOSIE

Thanks, but you haven't eaten very much. How about it, Frankie? I bet you could eat some more.

FRANKIE

No, thanks.

RIDDICK

(to Duff)

How's that job comin'?

DUFF

Well, it ain't the railroad. Those guys are scared. Guess they've never known nothin' but takin' it.

JOCKO

(with an edge)

They all got families to support.

DUFF

(good-naturedly)

Yeah. That's right, Jocko.

(to the others)

Those white guys sure shoot up at you like a yeast cake if you just cock an eye at them.

JOCKO

(sarcastically)

I guess you'll be making' some changes 'round here.

DUFF

(with a grin)

What's eatin' you, Jocko?

JOCKO

Nothin'. I just figure you were the right man for the job.

JOSIE

(changing the subject)

I guess you'll all keep workin' together, won't you?

FRANKIE

Heck, no. They're shippin' us all over the map.

JOSIE

That's too bad.

RIDDICK

If you wan' 'em, there's some expert dishwashers here.

JOSIE

No, thanks. My kitchen's too small.

Riddick gets up.

RIDDICK

Okay, fellows - let's give the folks some privacy.

DOORWAY

The men, on their way out, shake hands with Duff.

DUFF

Good-bye, Frankie.

FRANKIE

'Got a good thing, man.

POP

See ya.

DUFF

Take it easy, Pop.
(shaking Riddick's hand)
'See you before you take off.

JOCKO

'See ya.

DUFF

'Bye, Jocko.

BATHROOM (Night)

Duff is washing his face at the sink. Josie comes up behind him. She is in her nightgown.

JOSIE

Duff.

He turns to her. Instead of speaking, she turns her back to him.

JOSIE

My back itches.

He scratches her back.

JOSIE

How would you like to have a baby, Duff?

DUFF

Huh?

JOSIE

Don't look so scared.

DUFF

You jivin' me?

JOSIE

Well, I haven't come around.

Duff is taken aback.

DUFF

Ain't that something?!

(recovering)

That's just fine, baby.

JOSIE

We'll be all right.

He kisses her and sits down on the rim of the bathtub.

DUFF

Man, we sure hit the jackpot fast around here.

JOSIE

What about your boy?

DUFF

How come you keep askin'?

JOSIE

I keep thinking about him.

DUFF

Well, he ain't mine, so skip it.

She gargles. Duff moves over to her with a grin and puts his arms around her--

DUFF

Baby, we're goin' to put a whole lot of little kids into this world. Hell, we'll swamp 'em.

LOCKER ROOM, MILL

The men are done for the day. Duff is putting on his shirt. Willie is under the shower.

DUFF

Hell, if they can do it in Birmingham - and that's a mean town, we oughta do something here.

Willie says nothing. His eyes are on a white supervisor, who has stopped in the doorway.

SUPERVISOR

'You Duff Anderson?

DUFF

That's right.

SUPERVISOR

Want to talk to you.

DUFF

Okay.

SUPERVISOR

I hear you're tryin' to organize this place!

DUFF

I don't know what you're talkin' about.

SUPERVISOR

That's no way to talk, boy. Now we had one of them union men 'round here coupla years ago. Stirred up a lot of trouble. They're always after you colored boys.

DUFF

I still don't know what you're talkin' about.

SUPERVISOR

You a union man?

DUFF

Used to be. On the railroad.

SUPERVISOR

Uh-huh. Well, this ain't the railroad. Now what's all this talk about stickin' together?

DUFF

Well, what d'you know?!

He looks over at the other men. They avoid his eyes.

SUPERVISOR

Look, boy, we got a smooth operation here, and I aim to keep it that way. Now I got an idea you're plannin' trouble.

DUFF

No. You got the wrong idea.

SUPERVISOR

All right, then. All I want you to do is tell these boys here you didn't mean what you said about stickin' together an' all.

Duff says nothing. The mill hands watch him silently.

SUPERVISOR

Want to keep your job, boy?

DUFF

What d'you think?

SUPERVISOR

Then do like I said.

(to the men)

Men - this boy here's got something to tell you-all.

(to Duff)

Well, how about it?

Duff looks at the supervisor in silence, fully aware that he is about to be fired. He turns and opens his locker.

SUPERVISOR

Boy, you're actin' like a nigger with no sense. All right, go down' the office and get your pay.

Tell them you're through.

DUFF'S CAR

He is driving past Josie's school and slows down. The kids are out in the yard but Josie is not in sight. He accelerates, his face set.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S BEDROOM (Night)

Josie is correcting papers on the bed. Duff is at the mantel, playing with a cat. He puts a small box over its head. The cat cries out and backs up clumsily, trying to free itself.

JOSIE

Don't, Duff.

DUFF

Yeah.

He sits down. Josie comes over and sits on the arm of the chair.

DUFF

I'm jumpy, that's all.

She runs her hand through his hair.

JOSIE

Well, you've had quite a day.

He brushes her off:

DUFF

I don't like bein' mothered.

When she touches him again, he jumps up.

DUFF

Jesus, baby -- leave me alone, will ya?

He flings himself down on the bed.

JOSIE

(sitting down beside him)

Don't deny me, Duff.

DUFF

Hell, baby - I met this beautiful chick and she's just dyin' for me, okay?

She takes him by the shoulders and shakes him.

JOSIE
Don't be so silly.

Duff laughs.

DUFF
Yeah. But just how're we goin' to make out? I got to get me a job.

JOSIE
You will.

DUFF
Pay is so damn low. I don't want my kids to grow up like Barney's.

JOSIE
They won't.

DUFF
I'm telling you, baby, maybe we better get out of here.

JOSIE
(gravely)
We can always do that, Duff.

DUFF
Yeah. Yeah, I know. I'm not really thinkin' about it. Anyway, don't want those white guys laughin' up their sleeve at me when they see me pull out.

EXT. HIRING SHED, MILL YARD
Duff waits outside the open window, while the white man in the shed checks his job application.

WHITE
Yeah, we can use you. Ever work a saw mill?

DUFF
Yeah.

WHITE
Where was that?

DUFF
(after a moment's hesitation)
Walker and Williams.

WHITE
What did you say your name is?

DUFF
Anderson.

The man checks for Duff's name on a list.

WHITE
(turning to Duff)
Sorry, boy, there ain't nothin' here.

INT. RESTAURANT
Duff is sitting at the lunch counter. Joe, the mill hand, comes in.

JOE
(to the waitress)
Hello, Frances.

He sits down next to Duff.

JOE
How 'you doin' man?

DUFF
(non-committal)
Okay.

JOE
(to Frances)
Cup of coffee.
(to Duff)
I 'been meanin' to talk to you.

DUFF
Oh yeah?

JOE
You know, over at the mill, there's just one guy
that talked. It's kinda late to say it, but we
shoulda acted different.

The waitress brings his coffee.

JOE

Been over to the other mill?

DUFF

Yeah, I been there.

JOE

It's just that we're not used to seein' anyone stand up 'round here. Kinda took us by surprise.

DUFF

Oh yeah? That's good.

INT. POOL HALL

Duff is at the bar.

BARTENDER

Well, if you tried the mills, there ain't no other industry 'round here.

DUFF

How 'bout that furniture plant?

BARTENDER

(with a laugh)

Man, the darkest thing they got in there is Coca-Cola.

DUFF

Yeah.

BARTENDER

Now, if you want to work like a real nigger, you can always go out and chop cotton.

DUFF

(grimly)

They done that too long in my family.

BARTENDER

They pay you three bucks a day an' all the cotton you can eat.

Duff laughs.

HOTEL LOBBY

Duff faces the white manager, who is behind the registration desk.

MANAGER

Yeah, I might have something for you, if you want to put on a uniform.

Duff looks over at the one black man in the lobby - a uniformed bellhop emptying ashtrays.

DUFF
What's the pay?

MANAGER
Pay's ten dollars a week, plus tips and lunch.

DUFF
I see. Ain't for me, thanks.

INT. GENERAL STORE
The white proprietor has rung up the order for an elderly black woman.

PROPRIETOR
Now what about soap?

WOMAN
I got enough.

PROPRIETOR
(insisting)
I got a good buy on soap. You go on over there an' take a look!
(urging her on)
Right over there.

The woman goes over to look at the soap. The proprietor turns to Duff.

PROPRIETOR
Yes?

DUFF
I'm lookin' for work.

PROPRIETOR
I got a boy. Thanks.

INT. DUFF'S CAR
He is driving through town at a fast clip. The car rattles.

INT. BEAUTY PARLOR

The staff and clientele are black.

Duff enters and sits down close to Josie, who is having her hair done.

JOSIE

Hi.

DUFF

Don't ask, baby - huh!

(lowering his voice)

How much money you got with you?

JOSIE

About ten dollars.

DUFF

Water pump's busted. I don't know if it's worth fixin', but I need that car.

JOSIE

You can have what I've got. It's right there.

Duff opens her pocketbook, embarrassed by the women watching him.

FLAT BED TRUCK

It rattles over a country road between cotton fields. Duff stands among the field hands on the open flatbed.

EXT. COTTON GIN

The white foreman is up on the loading platform. He addresses a group of field hands looking for work.

FOREMAN

Startin' tomorrow mornin', we got work for fifteen hands. All we're gonna pay is two-fifty a day. Can't pay you the three 'cause ain't gonna be much of a crop this year. Now you all who want to work, step up and we'll take your name.

Duff is among the few who leave. The others surge closer to the platform, ready to work for any wage.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S PORCH (Night)

Josie is sewing on the porch. Duff is in the yard a few feet away, using the back of an axe to hammer loose nails into an old chair.

JOSIE

It's not as hard on a girl. They're not afraid of us.

Duff says nothing.

JOSIE

You know - we do have enough money. Especially now.

DUFF

(grimly)

Sure, baby. 'Fact, I don't ever have to work no more. When that baby comes, I can just stay home and send you back to school. How about that?

JOSIE

I'm trying to help, Duff.

DUFF

Yeah!

JOSIE

(after a moment)

I could work even after the baby comes. A few hours a week, anyway.

DUFF

What the hell could you do?

JOSIE

Day work.

DUFF

'You kiddin'? You ain't goin' to no white home. I seen the way they look at you when you go down the street.

He jumps up and raises the axe--

DUFF

No point fixin' it!

JOSIE

(frightened)
What're you going to do?

He smashes the axe into the chair.

JOSIE
(jumping up)
Don't do that!

DUFF
Watch out!

He smashes the chair to pieces.

DUFF
(throwing down the axe)
Good kindlin'!

He turns to Josie. She is looking at him, deeply upset.

DUFF
What's bitin' you now!?

She turns away. He jumps up onto the porch and grabs her.

DUFF
You heard me!

JOSIE
I can't stand to see you like that. I know you
can't help it.

DUFF
(darkly)
Stop bein' so damn understandin'.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S LIVING ROOM (Day)
Duff is on the sofa, looking up at Reverend Dawson.

REVEREND DAWSON
I know just how you feel, son. But believe me,
you're going about it the wrong way.

DUFF
Don't look like there's a right way.

REVEREND DAWSON
Well, you have to be reasonable. Now they say
you're a troublemaker. That's no good. Use a

little psychology. Make 'em think you're going along - and get what you want.

DUFF

It ain't in me.

REVEREND DAWSON

You'll be in trouble, son.

(after a moment)

Now just how do you intend to support your family?

DUFF

I guess I'll rob a bank.

REVEREND DAWSON

Don't you get smart with me, boy.

We hear a dish break.

KITCHEN

Josie is on the floor, picking up pieces of broken glass.

LIVING ROOM

REVEREND DAWSON

Maybe you ought to move. You'd be a lot better off in the North.

DUFF

So I been told.

REVEREND DAWSON

It's for your own good.

DUFF

Oh yeah?

(he gets up)

Seems to me, Reverend, you' more concerned 'bout your good. Guess it looks kind 'a bad, havin' me for a son-in-law.

REVEREND DAWSON

You can be cocky now, boy. But you won't make it. You won't last. I just feel sorry for Josie. I knew it wouldn't work out.

DUFF

Well, at least she ain't married to no white

man's nigger! You been stoopin' so long,
Reverend, you don't even know how to stand
straight no more. You' just half a man!

KITCHEN

Josie has cut her finger on the glass. She is weeping silently.

LIVING ROOM

Reverend Dawson turns to leave. His sense of calm superiority is
shattered.

REVEREND DAWSON

(at the door)

Maybe I could talk to Bud Ellis. He might have a
job for you at his filling station.

DUFF

Oh yeah?

REVEREND DAWSON

I'll be seeing you.

Josie has come into the room.

JOSIE

(gravely)

'Bye, Dad.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S BEDROOM (Night)

Duff watches Josie. She is sitting at her dressing table.

DUFF

How come you don't hate their guts?

JOSIE

I don't know. I guess I'm not afraid of them.

DUFF

You were plenty scared that night in the car.

JOSIE

Just of getting hurt. They can't touch me
inside.

DUFF

Like hell they can't.

(he gets up)

They can reach right in with their damn white
hands and turn you off and on.

JOSIE

Not if you see them for what they are, Duff.

DUFF

(exploding)

Jesus, baby, you're so full of talk! Well, you ain't never really been a nigger, have you - livin' like that in your father's house! So just shut your mouth.

EXT. GAS STATION (Night)

Duff finishes pumping gas into Joe's car.

DUFF

That's two bucks, Joe.

JOE

(paying)

Why don't you come over for a beer when you get through?

DUFF

Okay, I will.

Brad Ellis, the white owner of the service station, comes out of his office.

ELLIS

Hey, Duff! Run the truck down Holly Road. There's a guy in the ditch.

CAB OF TOW TRUCK (Night)

Duff is driving along a wooded country road. Shreds of fog drift across the headlights.

A ditched car comes into view, its front end crushed against a tree. A tubby white man stands beside it, waving to Duff with a flashlight. Duff passes him and backs up to the car.

COUNTRY ROAD

The owner comes toward him eagerly.

OWNER

Sure glad to see you, boy.

Duff gets out of the tow truck to inspect the damaged car. The owner follows him, nervous and garrulous.

OWNER

Guess I was kinda lucky, huh? My wife's going to give me hell.

Duff lowers the hoist on the truck.

OWNER

(anxiously)

How you doin', boy?

DUFF

Okay.

He gets under the car to attach the chain.

OWNER

Want me to hold the light for you?

DUFF

No, thanks.

OWNER

Just tryin' to be helpful.

He continues talking, though Duff can't hear him.

OWNER

Most folks around here got no use for nigras. Got to understand them, that's all. How you doin', boy?

DUFF

(emerging from under the car)

Okay.

The owner tests the rig with his foot.

OWNER

Seems a little loose!

DUFF

(with a grin)

She'll do.

He starts raising the car.

OWNER

She ain't comin' up even!

Duff ignores him.

The chain slips and the car drops to the ground with a bang.

OWNER

(jumping back)

Jesus, I told you to watch it!

DUFF

Sorry.

He gets back under the car.

OWNER

That's the trouble with you boys! Don't listen when a man tells you something.

DUFF

She don't look no worse to me.

OWNER

Don't do her no good to get banged like that.

DUFF

(under the car)

Don't do her no good to go into a tree.

OWNER

(enraged)

What did you say, boy?!

DUFF

I said, she's in great shape.

OWNER

I heard you! Now 'stead of bein' smart, you just get that car out of here!

GAS STATION (Night)

Duff is changing a tire outside the repair bay.

A car shoots out of the dark with its horn blaring, and screeches to a stop at the pump.

Brad Ellis steps up to the driver.

ELLIS

Can I help you?

The driver is the white mill hand who gave Duff a hard time at the mill.

DRIVER

(indicating Duff)

Like some service from that boy there. Like the way he takes care of us.

ELLIS Okay.

Duff has come over. He is aware of impending trouble. One of the men in the car is the owner of the ditched vehicle.

DUFF

Fill her up?

DRIVER

No, boy. Thirty-eight cents worth of gas. And watch you don't make it thirty-nine.

Duff starts the pump.

DRIVER

Didn't hear you say "Yessir!" Don't they say "Yessir" where you come from?

Duff finishes pumping and puts the nozzle back onto the pump.

DRIVER

Boy - you hear me?!

DUFF

That'll be thirty-eight cents.

DRIVER

Goddamnit, nigger - you must think you're white! Who d'you think you are - king of Harlem?

SECOND WHITE

How 'bout this windshield, boy? Like a little service.

Duff takes a moment before moving to the windshield and wiping it.
The men
inside the car watch him through the glass.

THIRD WHITE

Hell, they're getting' too big for their
britches.

SECOND WHITE

Yeah, his wife's the same way, struttin' through
town like she owns the place - shakin' that
little rear end.

THIRD WHITE

It's all that education they're getting.

DRIVER

Real cool, ain't he! Just like we're not here.

Duff moves over to the driver.

DUFF

That'll be thirty-eight cents.

DRIVER

You in a big hurry, boy?

SECOND WHITE

Yeah, he's tryin' to get home!

DRIVER

Bet she's pretty hot, huh?

DUFF

(very tense)

You watch your mouth, man!

The driver has finally found a way of getting to Duff and a grin
spreads over
his face.

DRIVER

I bet she's a sly little nigger, that girl.
Wouldn't mind a piece of her myself!

DUFF

All right, you get out of here, man!

DRIVER

(exploding)
Who're you tellin' to get, boy?! You watch it,
or there'll be some dyin' done 'round here!

DUFF
That dyin's gonna be done two ways.

He steps away from the car, a hand on the rear pocket where he
keeps his
knife.

In the backseat, the owner of the ditched car looks nervous.

OWNER
Let's go, Al. He ain't worth it.

DRIVER
(turning on him)
Now you stay out of it!

Brad Ellis has come over.

ELLIS
What's goin' on?

DRIVER
You better get rid of this white-eyed nigger!

ELLIS
(to Duff)
What happened?

DRIVER
Never mind! You keep him workin' here and this
place won't be around. And I ain't kiddin'!

He guns the engine and shoots out of the service station in a cloud
of dust.

Duff looks at Ellis, whose next move is predictable, and leaves the
frame to
run a water hose over the back of his neck.

Ellis stops next to him.

ELLIS
Guess we got trouble.

DUFF

(blowing up)
You ain't got none, Mister!

ELLIS
I'm sorry, Duff.

DUFF
(tossing down the hose)
Don't tell me. I know.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S LIVING ROOM (Night)
Duff enters.

Josie comes out of the bedroom in her nightgown. She has been waiting up.

JOSIE
I called the gas station. I've been worried.

Duff slumps down on the sofa, utterly discouraged.

DUFF
Hell, if they don't blow up his place, they'll get him some other way. Don't make no difference no-how.

JOSIE
(anxiously)
What d'you mean?

DUFF
Nothin. Quit lookin' at me like that!

He gets up.

JOSIE
(approaching him)
Duff, I love you.

DUFF
Well, that don't do me one bit of good!

She touches him.

JOSIE
Come on, Duff - let's go to bed.

He gives her a sudden, violent shove. It sends her sprawling to the floor.

She picks herself up, weeping.

DUFF

I never should have married you in the first place.

He stares at her.

DUFF

Ain't you goin' to say something?

JOSIE

There's nothing to say.

DUFF

Well, that'll be the first time.

He leaves the room.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S BEDROOM (Night)

Duff is packing his things. Josie is on the bed.

JOSIE

Where're you going to go?

DUFF

When I get set, I'll send for you.

JOSIE

I don't think that'll happen.

DUFF

You'll be better off without me. I ain't fit to live with no more. It's just like a lynchin'. Maybe they don't use a knife on you, but they got other ways.

JOSIE

You're not a man because of a job, Duff.

DUFF

You don' know nothin' 'bout it, baby. Nothin'! And don't kid yourself - you did your bit.

He closes his bag.

DUFF

Okay.

JOSIE

Duff--

DUFF

(at the door)

Like I said, baby - I'll write you.

INT. DUFF'S CAR (Dawn)

He is driving across a bridge into Birmingham.

DOWNTOWN STREET

Duff stands on a deserted corner.

EXT. TENEMENT STAIRS

Duff climbs up to Will Anderson's room.

WILL'S ROOM

Will is sitting at the table in a drunken stupor. There is a knock at the door.

WILL

Who is it?

LEE

It's your son.

Duff enters.

WILL

My son? I ain't got no son. You Duff?

DUFF

That's right.

WILL

Beat it!

He gets up and staggers toward Duff

DUFF

Take it easy, Pop.

WILL

What's the matter? Don't smell so good, huh?
Must'a broken some records.

He pushes Duff away and pours himself a glass of whiskey. His hands are

shaking.

DUFF

(trying to restrain him)

Come on, Pop.

LEE

Nothing you can do. Been like this for days.

WILL

Got no use for nobody.

He raises the glass to his mouth, but drops it and puts his hand on the back of his head.

DUFF

What is it? What's the matter?

Lee grabs Will and pushes him onto the bed.

LEE

(at the end of her rope)

Now you lay down and get some sleep!

Will grabs her blindly and pulls her down onto the bed.

LEE

(freeing herself, furious)

You let go!

She starts picking up the broken glass. Will sits up again. He is dazed.

LEE

Now you stay put!

WILL

(leaving the bed)

I ain't drunk, honey.

LEE

Like hell you ain't!

He sits down at the table and touches the back of his head.

WILL

Got a thick feelin' here.

LEE

What's the matter now?

WILL

Better now.

(closing his eyes)

Where 'you at?

LEE

(concerned)

Right here.

She puts her hand on his forehead.

WILL

Couldn't get the words out before.

DUFF

Better get him to a hospital.

WILL

Didn't I tell you to beat it - huh?

LEE

(taking Will's arm)

Let's go.

WILL

Anything you say, baby.

With Duff's help, Lee raises Will out of the chair.

EXT. TENEMENT, RAIN

Duff has helped Lee get Will into the backseat of his car.

Through the window we see him grope blindly for Lee's breast.

INT. MOVING CAR

Duff, in the driver's seat, is lost in thought.

LEE

(off-screen)

Duff.

Duff turns to her. Will's head is in her lap.

LEE

He stopped breathin'.

Duff stops the car.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR

The undertaker sits down behind his desk. He lays out Will's watch and a few other belongings for Duff and Lee, who are standing in front of him.

UNDERTAKER

We thought you might want these.

DUFF

Thanks.

UNDERTAKER

Would you like me to say anything tomorrow?

DUFF

Guess so.

UNDERTAKER

Have anything in mind?

DUFF

No. What you usually say, I guess.

UNDERTAKER

Where was your father born?

DUFF

I don't know.

He looks at Lee. She shakes her head.

UNDERTAKER

His profession?

DUFF

Well, he worked around.

UNDERTAKER

And his age?

DUFF

I don't know. Forty-eight, I guess.

UNDERTAKER

Any other family?

DUFF

No. Just me.

(he includes Lee)

Me an' her.

UNDERTAKER

Well, I guess that's all till tomorrow.

DUFF

Okay, thanks very much.

URBAN CEMETERY, BIRMINGHAM

The mechanical arm of a backhoe opens up a new grave.

Duff and Lee walk away from the burial site. The camera moves with them.

LEE

What're you going to do?

Duff says nothing.

LEE

Want to come up the house? You can stay there till you get on your feet. There's no point paying a hotel.

DUFF

No thanks, Lee.

LEE

It's just that I hate empty rooms.

DUFF

Sure.

LEE

Well, what're you going to do?

DUFF

I guess I'll make me some trouble in that town.

LEE

Going back, huh?

DUFF

That's right.

LEE

They'll run you out.

DUFF
No, they won't.

LEE
How 'you gonna live?

DUFF
I can always chop cotton if I have to.
(he stops)
If you want a ride, I'll take you home.

LEE
No, thanks. I'll take the bus.

DUFF
Okay.

LEE
Don't be too hard on him.

DUFF
Hell, I'm just like him.

LEE
I know he wasn't much of a father.

DUFF
Who is?!

LEE
Good-bye, Duff.

She walks away.

BIRMINGHAM ALLEYWAY (Night)

From the interior of Duff's car we see Duff come out of Effie Simms' house, carrying James Lee through the rain. He deposits the scared-looking boy in the front seat and gets in on the driver's side. James Lee shrinks as far away from Duff as the seat allows.

DUFF
(with a kindly grin)
That window's broke, boy. You stay over there,
you're gonna get awful wet.

INT. MOVING CAR (Dawn)

The sun is coming up through the trees. James Lee is asleep on the front seat.

DUFF AND JOSIE'S LIVING ROOM

Duff brings in the sleeping boy and puts him down on the sofa. Then he leaves to get his belongings.

Josie has woken up and comes in from the bedroom in her nightgown. She sees James Lee and leans over him.

JOSIE
(softly)

Hi.

James Lee opens his eyes.

Josie hears Duff enter and turns to him. They come together and hold each other for a long moment.

DUFF
Ain't gonna be easy, baby - but it's gonna be all right.

Josie is weeping.

DUFF
Baby I feel so free inside.