

THE GHOST OF REV WELLS

Written by

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Inspired by True Events

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EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Loud hillbilly music is heard from a car radio. Not far away, a plume of smoke rises into the sky.

SUPER - 1955 - ALABAMA

INT. ROLAND'S CAR - NIGHT

THREE MALES, in a sedan, drive away from a burning house...admiring their handy-work. They have on Klan robes and big toothless smiles.

The toothless wonder in the backseat wearing a beat-up cowboy hat, KEVIN JENKINS (20's) reflects...

KEVIN JENKINS

Looky at that bad boy...burn.

ROLAND LINDSEY, (30's) driving, adds...

ROLAND LINDSEY

That porch monkey deserved it.
Voting rights, huh? Sure, buddy.
How about a barbecue first?

The occupants in the car laugh. DAVID YORK (20's), in the passenger seat, celebrates.

YORK

We got that ole' boy good. Too bad
he wasn't there, but at least we
got his mammy and mutt in the fire.

They laugh in victory and crack open beers as they drive.

Suddenly, in the unoccupied backseat of the sedan, a Black man (30's) appears from nowhere.

They all are shocked. The driver, Roland, weaves on the road.

The STRANGER is dressed in a clean suit that seems to be from the 1880's. Kevin stares at him, eyes wide.

KEVIN JENKINS

Holy shit. Stop the car...

Roland sees him in the mirror. Pulls over, stops.

ROLAND LINDSEY

Who are you? How'd you get my car,
boy? Start talking.

STRANGER

I'm older than you...but I'm the boy? Ain't you got that backwards, professor?

He speaks with an eloquent Southern drawl. Roland scopes him in the mirror again, his tolerance for the stranger is zero.

ROLAND LINDSEY

Don't you sass me. Get outta my car. Now!

KEVIN JENKINS

Must-a stowed away when we was busy. I say we keep him. Have fun with his black ass in the woods.

STRANGER

Kevin Jenkins, Roland Lindsey, David York...

The violent bigots look astonished.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

I've been seeing you around ever since you could pee, standing up...and I know...everything.

As the stranger chuckles. The Klansmen look uneasy.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

I been watching everything in this world throughout the ages. That's my job. Straighten out what I can.

The stranger's voice gets louder.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Why'd you boys do that to the old lady and the dog? They ain't hurt nobody.

YORK

Her son, running around trying to get schools integrated and you cotton-pickers to vote. We ain't having that in Alabama.

KEVIN JENKINS

Y'all start voting, might have a nigger president one day. Country would go into ruination.

STRANGER

And today, is it running the right way? Freedom and justice for all?

The stranger leans in.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

In reality, aren't you afraid of the saying, 'What goes around, comes around?' God sees your sins and he don't take kindly to it.

Anger rises in the good-ole-boys.

JENKINS

Don't know how you come around us...but you're leaving with a bullet in your head, boy.

Jenkins draws his gun. The stranger smiles.

There is a blinding flash in the car. The stranger turns into a Scarlett O'Hara look-alike. Her hair, gloves and parasol, but it's the stranger. The Klansmen are shocked.

STRANGER

(Southern woman's voice)

Now that wouldn't be gentlemanly at all. My, my, my...What happen to southern hospitality? I would urge you, in the most strident terms, to rescind that offer. A bullet in my head would just ruin my hair-do. You like these bouncy curls? .

The gun is put to his/her head, by Jenkins.

KEVIN JENKINS

Only one way to find out, huh?. I don't know what you're up to, but it's about to end right now.

Another blinding light. The stranger disappears.

ROLAND LINDSEY

What the...let's get outta here.

The car peels out as Roland floors it.

Now running over 60 mph, the stranger returns to the seat as Louis 'Satchmo' Armstrong. Big smile. He sweats heavily as he wipes it away with a hankie.

He scats, Louis style. Trumpet on his lap, expressive eyes. Then...

STRANGER

(sung in raspy voice)

Hello Dolly, well Hello Dolly...

Its so nice...

To send you straight to hell

Where you belong...

The stranger catches a gun butt, to the head, by Jenkins. He doubles over.

YORK

That's right. Teach him a lesson.

A light flashes again. When he sits up, the stranger appears to be Malcolm X. He captures the iconic pose with his index finger on the side of his face.

STRANGER

Lessons? Indeed. Let's start with the evil exploits of these blue eyed devils, shall we? Plymouth rock, landed on us...but these days, we're rolling away the stone.

ROLAND LINDSEY

Could y'all shut him the hell up?

STRANGER

And soon, you will see the glory of the Lord. Get ready for damnation.

KEVIN JENKINS

I HAD ENOUGH OF YOUR NONSENSE, BOY.

He shoots at Malcolm several times with no effect. The Brother Minister, opens his shirt and a big, black 'S' is on his chest. He yanks off the Malcolm specs, Clark Kent style.

Now Malcolm...is similar to Black Superman. Bulging muscles, 'kiss curl' on his forehead.

The stranger picks the bullets out of his body and flings them out the window. The shooter is shocked.

STRANGER

What happened to truth, justice and the American way? Fellas, as a warrior for the Lord, I'm deeply disappointed in you.

Fear is heard in the next voice.

ROLAND LINDSEY
Get out of here and leave us alone.

STRANGER
Okay, but you'll miss me.

The stranger flies out the back window in his super hero costume and disappears into the sky.

YORK
What the hell was that? I ain't never seen noooo nigger like that.

KEVIN JENKINS
Maybe its like a nightmare we're having together.

ROLAND LINDSEY
Was something in that rot gut whiskey we drank earlier?

After a while, York gets a devilish look on his face.

YORK
Let's turn this ship around and go to darkie town. Maybe some rough loving with a mud-honey will get this out our heads.

STRANGER (O.C.)
Did someone say ship?

They look up and the stranger is on the hood of the car dressed as Shirley Temple.

The adult head of the stranger on a little girl's body looks bizarre. She tap dances and the stranger imitates her singing, - [**GOOD SHIP LOLLIPOP**].

STRANGER (CONT'D)
(sung in little girl's voice)
*On The Good Ship Lollipop...
We'd like to see...
The hatred stop...
Where Klansmen pay...
For the sins they did...
When they finally reach...
Judgement Day.*

All in the car, freak out. The driver jerks the car around , trying to remove 'Dark Shirley' from the hood.

ROLAND LINDSEY
What are you?

INSERT - COURTHOUSE SEEN IN DISTANCE, GETS CLOSER.

In Shirley Temple's voice, the stranger scolds all of those in the vehicle.

STRANGER
You fellas...you been some very bad boys. Shame, shame, shame. God doesn't like what you did. Bad, bad...bad.

She points to them all.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
You all need, a good spanking.

YORK
You're not real. Leave us alone.

STRANGER
Heck no, mister. You been a baaaaad boy. And God hates ugly.

INSERT - RIGHT IN FRONT OF COURTHOUSE. THE GROUND LEVEL VIEW NOW LEADS SKYWARD. THE SECOND FLOOR IS SEEN. SOMETHING IS IN ONE OF THE WINDOWS.

ROLAND LINDSEY
Who are you?

STRANGER
I apologize, mister. How very rude of me.

Shirley Temple steps through the windshield without breaking it. She stretches out on the dashboard. The driver, Roland, can't see.

INSERT - THE SECOND FLOOR WINDOW ON THE COURTHOUSE IS SEEN CLEARLY NOW. IT'S A DISFIGURED FACE OF A BLACK MAN.

STRANGER
Who am I? Let me show you, mister.

Her face slowly turns into the image on the courthouse window. The three Klansmen scream. Terror in the eyes.

BOOM!. They immediately crash into a huge tree. The three look dead and the car starts on fire.

Legs stick out the window, then a body emerges and stands near the flames. It's the stranger, wearing the suit he sported earlier.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

By the way, my name is...Reverend Henry Wells.

A bible is in his hand, he opens it and reads...

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Psalms 58:10 The righteous will rejoice...when he sees the vengeance.

The stranger flashes an exaggerated smile.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

He will bathe his feet...in the blood of the wicked.

The stranger then walks in the direction of the courthouse which is in the distance.

POOF. He vanishes after several steps. His laugh is heard as the car continues to burn. The courthouse window glows.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER

"WHY AM I...AS I AM?

TO UNDERSTAND THAT OF ANY PERSON, HIS WHOLE LIFE...FROM BIRTH...MUST BE REVIEWED. ALL OF OUR EXPERIENCES FUSE INTO OUR PERSONALITY. EVERYTHING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO US...IS AN INGREDIENT."

-- MALCOLM X

FADE TO:

EXT. RURAL ALABAMA - DAY

Sunny, blue skies emit a gentle breeze through the old growth trees near the side of a dirt road. The lively sound of a church choir lilts in the air from a distance away.

SUPER - ALABAMA 1878

One of the trees stands out. Something swings from its thick branch. Below it is a puddle. A red puddle.

Following upwards from the bottom of the tree, the source of the redness is found. Blood drips from barefoot, brown legs.

The face of the lynch victim is hidden by foliage. It swings in time with the gospel hymn, like a macabre metronome.

As the entire countryside is seen. Many different brown legs across the landscape, swing from trees...in the same cadence.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Although housed in a restored barn, the choir has the spiritual electricity at maximum voltage as they SING from the soul.

Hands CLAP, feet STOMP and the rafters shake from the power of the life affirming song.

In his pastor's robe, (the Stranger seen earlier) REV. HENRY WELLS (30's), serious yet playful, rocks to the rhythm and urges on the congregation to let loose.

His wife ZERLINA (30's), her inner strength seen in her face, smiles wide and claps as the joy seems contagious. The choir finishes their song as Wells looks on.

WELLS

Open your mouth and shout so the
Lord can hear you! Yes. I said yes.
We got some spirit going on up here
in Alabama this Sunday.

CONGREGATION

Praise God...Hallelujah...Sweet
Jesus.

The sonic earthquake subsides.

WELLS

Whew. Y'all are ready for the Word.
Heaven told me to tell you this...
about a vision I had. Looking down
from a cloud, I saw thousands like
yourself, leaving the South behind.

Wells wipes his sweat soaked face with a hanky.

WELLS (CONT'D)

It was revealed to me, that this generation, this congregation, will lead the first wave of this exodus. Just like the children of Abraham, left Egypt, you too will leave this hostile land, that enslaved you.

Faces of the followers show shock and confusion.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Do I know how this will happen? I do not...but I trust our Lord's promise. Therefore, we must prepare for that fateful day, Amen.

The 'Amen' response is weak. Faces look perplexed.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Today's reading is from Proverbs 4.

He gives people a chance to find the passage, then reads from his own Bible.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Get wisdom, get understanding:
forget it not. Take fast hold of
instruction; let her not go: keep
her; for she is thy life.

He dramatically thumps the Holy book with his hand. He looks like he is joyously letting them in on a well kept secret.

WELLS (CONT'D)

My son, attend to my words...keep
them in the midst of thine heart.
For they, are life.

CONGREGATION

Amen. Speak brother. Preach.

Rev Wells kisses the Bible and gently places it on the podium.

WELLS

Lord, thank you for your sweet words of wisdom. Written so-so long ago, but, during these days of great tribulation, it sounds like a telegram you sent yesterday. Right on time, is it not?

The congregation lets him know they agree in big decibels. In the crowd of the renovated barn is mostly African American but whites and a few Native Americans are in attendance.

WELLS (CONT'D)

What do you get from that passage?
Open your eyes and look within.
Education is something special in
the plans of God, so it seems.
Take fast hold of instruction, for
she is thy life.

He picks up the Bible and points to it.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Y'all hear that? If education is
life itself, if you turn your back
on it, how will the Lord feel about
that? Can't have that. No.

Rev. Wells gets more animated and paces the pulpit and gets closer to his followers.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Your mind is your power...and your
power, comes through your mind.
When you lose your mind, you lose
your power, right? If I was your
enemy, I would go after your mind.

The minister points to his head and smiles.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Yes sir. Keep you ignorant. Keep
your body exhausted. Keep you
miserable. Keep you a slave without
chains.

Gasps are heard from the churchgoers.

WELLS (CONT'D)

But you say, "Rev Wells, some these
folks around here catch me reading,
they might lynch me on the spot."

He emphasizes the word 'spot' with a slap to his palm. He gets even closer to the crowd, determination on his face.

WELLS (CONT'D)

I say, is your God them brutes
running around with whisky on their
breath and a rope in their hand?

Caught off guard, the worshippers have a chuckle.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Then what are you scared of? Are you satisfied with the life you're living? Your God is a mighty God. You don't have to accept the way, they...say it is.

Wells points to the heavens as his volume increases.

WELLS (CONT'D)

We're leaving Babylon and education will determine how we prosper wherever we go. Walk through the roads of creation to victory, that was promised. Can I get an amen?

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A figure stumbles from behind bushes from next door. BANNER (50's) frowns at the church in his dirty long-johns and lethal case of bed-head. It is obvious he was awakened from sleep and is none too happy about it.

The congregation erupts with 'AMENS' so loud it makes Banner wince. He wipes stringy, greasy hair from his forehead.

BANNER

Goddamn niggers yipping and yelling all early in the goddamn morning.

When the praise quiets down some, Banner strikes back in cowardly fashion. He shouts...

BANNER (CONT'D)

Shut up. I'm trying to sleep here. Ain't no niggers getting in heaven. Save your breath.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Rev. Wells rolls his eyes and shakes his head as the words are heard. White men in attendance, hillbillies, get up to go outside. Wells motions for them to stand down.

WELLS

Pray for him. He is a lost soul. Enough lost, hateful souls around you, can lead to a dangerous situation. Amen?

CONGREGATION

Amen. Preach sir.

BANNER (O.S.)

Jesus Christ will you niggers shut
up all that hooting and hollering?

WELLS

(yells)

Not an option today. Or ever.

(to congregation)

Ya see my people, I was blessed to
see courage and power at a young
age when my dad took me to see a
speech by Frederick Douglass.

He pounds his chest and smiles wide.

WELLS (CONT'D)

A man, born a slave, who taught
himself to read and became one of
this nation's greatest orators.
When he spoke, he destroyed the lie
that black people were no more than
beasts of burden. His intelligence
pulverized that lie.

CONGREGATION

Tore it up...God bless him.

WELLS

No one who saw him, black or white,
could ever say again that the black
man was mentally inferior. One
might say, that due to him exposing
his mastery of the language and
killing the lie of inferiority...he
made it impossible for the South to
justify what they were doing to us.

CONGREGATION

Yes, Lord...Sure did.

The pastor winks at the followers and speaks in a low voice.

WELLS

Whew, you know that made ole Johnny
Reb, mad as a hatter. Wherever
Douglass spoke, he could have been
killed at any moment.

Wells spins around and kicks out a little dance at the end.

WELLS (CONT'D)

But guess what? He's still alive to
this day. Good God Almighty. Can I
get a witness up in here?

The muscular preacher bounces up and down as the spirit takes him to the next level. The worshippers shout approval.

WELLS (CONT'D)

From the day I saw him, I wanted to be like him. All of us should. In these days, we don't have the luxury to be scared. If you are walking in the path of the Lord, no weapon fashioned against you will prosper. You hear me?

An exhausted but joyful church full of people stand and shout down the devil. Tears flow and tambourines shake.

Zerlina hands her husband a towel but sweat has soaked through his suit already. He smiles. Worshippers take a breath and finally sit back down.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Please people. Join me after the service and get those minds sharp so that we can wield them like swords and fight for the freedom and happiness that we so rightly deserve.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

On the other side of the renovated barn, the teaching area is set up. Pictures of Frederick Douglass, Abe Lincoln and Harriet Tubman adorn the walls, along with the alphabet.

Most of the congregation has taken seats there. With his suit off, Wells wears a dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

He stands over WILLIE 'QUART SHORT' JONES (20'S) as he struggles through reading a sentence. He stutters and sounds out some words but he gets it out.

QUART SHORT

Y-You are not j-judged by the height you have risen, b-but from the depth you have c-climbed.

Rev. Wells is the first to start the applause and others join in. Smiling, the pastor rubs the shoulders of his student as Quart Short beams with pride.

WELLS

Great job. Did y'all hear that?
Those fools in town will have to
change your name from Quart Short
to Gallons Full.

Bending down so they are eye to eye, Rev. Wells smiles.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Keep at it. Practice in a safe
place. Don't let how they talk
about you, define you. We are all
precious to the Lord.

Those sitting near Quart Short give him encouragement.

QUART SHORT

Thank you Reverend Wells. Who said
those words I just read?

WELLS

That was from my inspiration,
Frederick Douglass. Some people are
born with everything, others with
nothing at all.

He now speaks to the entire room.

WELLS (CONT'D)

In the eyes of God, those who
overcome great obstacles, are the
kind of soldiers he likes. His own
son was born in a barn, right? Why
did he do that? So that you know
that where you start, ain't near as
important, as what you do with your
life. Keep rising people.

Wells turns to the side and summons forth LUKE (LATE 20's),
with his ear to ear smile. He stands next to the minister.

WELLS (CONT'D)

This here is a soldier I'm sure the
Lord is proud of. Brother Luke has
been with us several months, soon
he will try to spread God's love
and the power of education to his
brothers back in Mississippi, to
prepare for this exodus movement.

Luke waves back to those in the classroom as they applaud.

LUKE

I would never have the courage to even try this in Mississippi if it wasn't for Reverend Wells.

More applause. Wells looks downward humbly.

WELLS

All praise to God. Let's wish our brother the protection of our Lord on his future mission.

CONGREGATION

You go, brother...God Bless you... Protect him, Lord.

WELLS

Before we get back to learning, I just want to remind you that my wife, Zerlina has fresh vegetables and healing herbs set up on the tables over there. Be sure to stock up since the local doctor refuses to treat us.

CONGREGATION

Boo...Evil man...Don't need him

WELLS

We have to maintain our own health. That includes staying away from the poison of the whiskey stills. Walk in light, not darkness.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Rev, Wells and Quart Short arrive in town in the minister's horse-drawn wagon. They stop in front of the doctor's house.

QUART SHORT

You c-can let me out here, sir. Thank you again for the r-ride.

WELLS

My pleasure, Willie. Watch yourself around Doc Kellum. His heart isn't in a good place.

QUART SHORT

I know what you mean.

Quart Short gets out and waves to Wells as he pulls off.

Across the street, three men are gathered as they observe the minister and his passenger.

The meanest looking of the three is Deputy MITCHELL (40'S). He is flanked by pudgy PASTOR SMITH (60'S) and lanky Deputy CORNING (20'S) who looks a bit 'slow in the head'.

MITCHELL

Well looky at Mista High and Mighty. Just-a-strutting.

PASTOR SMITH

Just ain't natural. All full of himself like that. Acting like God didn't curse him to be a black skinned savage.

CORNING

Carrying on and smiling like he is a white man? We could wipe that smile away right quick, huh boys?

MITCHELL

Damn right. That crow better fly straight. Or else.

Further down the road, Rev Wells sees a broken down wagon and a man working on it. He steers his horse towards it.

The man turns to the side and he sees it is SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (30's). His muscular frame is complimented by kind eyes and an easy smile.

WELLS

Howdy, Sheriff. Need a hand?

He looks over to see Wells and gives toothy grin.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Reverend Wells? Good afternoon. Almost done here. Need to get this buggy up and running for the Chief here before the crazies come out at night. Folks here are funny about strangers.

The Native American steps from around the wagon and smiles at Wells and he smiles back.

WELLS

Yeah, they're kinda funny about anybody who don't look like them.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

That's because they haven't seen the world. When I was in the Calvary, we travelled all over. I met Indians, Chinese and had some of my best times ever with Buffalo Soldiers.

The Sheriff tests the wheel he was working on. It holds and he smiles.

WELLS

Need more like you around these parts. Heard a young man got lynched a few towns East, just for doing arithmetic better than the man trying to cheat him.

Williamson has a look of disgust.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Ain't none of that bullshit gonna happen here in Carrollton. Not as long as I'm Sheriff.

WELLS

Yes sir, being the seat of Pickens County, we have to set an example. Y'all have a blessed day now.

They wave good-bye as he trots his wagon down further.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Wells ties his horse in front of the slightly rundown shop. Wells walks up to the front door.

NEWTON (50'S) sees him and goes to the door to meet him. Instead of letting him in, the frumpy man growls harshly.

NEWTON

Coloreds use the back door.

He points to where Wells should walk to get there. As Wells walks that direction, he rolls his eyes. When he gets there, Newton is already waiting.

NEWTON (CONT'D)

What you need here, son?

WELLS

I might have a letter from my brother, James Wells.

NEWTON
Tennessee, right? Yeah, let me get that.

Newton returns with an envelope in his hand. He hands it to Wells then pulls it back last second.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
I guess you want me to read it to you, right?

WELLS
No sir, I will manage.

NEWTON
You ain't one of them niggers that can read are you?

Wells swallows his anger and tries to stay calm.

WELLS
A white man in my congregation is kind enough to do that for us.

NEWTON
Good. This town don't cotton to your kind trying to be white by reading and such.

The letter from brother James is finally placed in his palm.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

VAN LIDDY (30's) sets up his wagon near the blacksmith. Long-haired and looking like he needs a bath, he sets out his wares on the wagon. Rot-gut, bathtub whiskey from his still.

He wraps up a sale with a man for one jug, but keeps pressing.

VAN LIDDY
Be glad to give you a deal on two.
You sure?

The man waves him off and gives him the money for one and walks away.

Just as Van Liddy stuffs the money in his pocket, he turns to see TERRY COLE (20'S) approaching and the ruffian does not look happy.

TERRY COLE

You snake belly varmint. Give me some real whisky or give my money back right now.

VAN LIDDY

All sales are final, big boy. What seems to be the problem?

TERRY COLE

That moonshine was like donkey pee. You owe me,

VAN LIDDY

I told you all I had left was what I sell to darkies. They ain't been-a buying lately and I can barely afford the ingredients I need to cook it up right.

TERRY COLE

Why is that? If I was a nigger I'd stay drunk till I turn white or die. I'd be happier either way.

They have a small chuckle, then Van Liddy looks to the side and points. They turn to see Rev. Wells and his envelope strolling towards his wagon.

VAN LIDDY

That coon and his preaching. That's what's killing me. Losing money left and right. He might need to be learnt a lesson.

Terry Cole nods in agreement.

INT. DOC KELLUM'S HOUSE - DAY

JESSY LOU (20's), perky but tough, straightens up her hair as she walks quickly. Her face, although pretty, reflects distress and agitation.

Behind her and scowling is DOC KELLUM (50's). Balding and with a mean streak that could be seen a block away, he raises his raspy, irritating voice.

DOC KELLUM

I told you to leave sooner, Jessy Lou. Now everyone will see you.

JESSY LOU

Why do you have to be so mean?

They stop. He growls at her as he digs in his pocket and hands her a wad of money.

DOC KELLUM

That's a lot of money for ten minutes of work. Now go.

JESSY LOU

Ha, five minutes, tops. Don't blame me because your friend down there wasn't ready to ride.

He raises his hand up, looking like he might back-hand her. She ignores the threat, takes the cash and counts through it quickly.

DOC KELLUM

I ought to.

She stares him right in the eyes.

JESSY LOU

But you know better, don't you? You still owe me for last week.

DOC KELLUM

Whore.

He gets money from a different pocket, slams it in her hand.

JESSY LOU

Fine. I don't have to come back. Men been having their way with me since I was twelve. Yes, you bastards will pay to touch me. And no. I don't need you.

Doc Kellum seems to panic as she turns towards the door.

DOC KELLUM

Look, I'm sorry. I just--

JESSY LOU

Good day, Doctor Kellum.

Jessy Lou opens the door and scoots out as Doc Kellum continues to stumble over himself. He peeks out the window to watch her walk away.

Several townswomen see her leaving and giggle among themselves. Doc rolls his eyes.

His house is near the General Store and he watches her approach Rev. Wells and greets him.

DOC KELLUM

It figures. Cozy up with one of them donkey dick niggers, huh?

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

As Rev. Wells unties his horse, Jessy Lou walks up to him with a grin on her face.

JESSY LOU

Good morning, Pastor.

WELLS

Well, good morning to you, Miss Jessy Lou. How are you this fine day?

She turns to the side and sighs.

JESSY LOU

Sir, my spirits are kinda low today. Personally, I don't like Pastor Smith, but I think I need to hear the good word once in a while. Could I visit your church sometime?

WELLS

Of course my child. Our doors are open and you are welcome anytime.

She smiles widely.

JESSY LOU

Thank you, reverend. It's nice to be accepted and not judged.

WELLS

I know how you feel. Believe me.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Terry Cole and Van Liddy watch the interaction between Jessy Lou and Wells. Sourness is on their faces.

VAN LIDDY

Well looky that.

TERRY COLE

Shame to see a good looking piece of woman-meat, talking to a monkey like that. Damn floozy. She won't even look my way.

VAN LIDDY

That's 'cause you can't pay her price and she knows it. Why waste her time when she can get paid by the doctor, the judge and I even heard the senator got some.

Terry Cole spits on the dirt and turns away. As he walks off he mutters under his breath.

TERRY COLE

Not good enough? I might have to re-introduce myself to that filly.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

A little boy comes running out of the General Store with a lollipop in his hand. In his joy, he doesn't see the approaching stagecoach as he runs into the road.

Wells sees it unfold and snatches the child out of the way at the last second. The little boy clutches his leg, frightened.

Jessy Lou gets to them first, then Sheriff Williamson. The scared blond boy is hugged by Jessy Lou.

JESSY LOU

It's okay, little one. You are safe, baby. This brave man saved your life.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

This is Sally Nelson's kid. I'll get him back home. Good job Reverend. If this was a different town, I'd make you a deputy.

The adults laugh.

WELLS

A different town indeed.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Thanks for comforting him, ma'am. Don't believe I've met your acquaintance. I'm Sheriff Armstrong Williamson. I'm new.

She looks him in the eye and straightens up.

JESSY LOU

My name is Jessie Lou Bell. A pleasure to meet you. Is your wife from here?

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I'm a widower, ma'am..

Wells sees them exchange looks. He smiles.

JESSY LOU

I'm so sorry to hear that. I've had a lot of loss in my life too.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Maybe we can have coffee sometime.

JESSY LOU

I'd like that.

WELLS

Free coffee at my church, if y'all want to put it into consideration. I think I'll head back home now.

The couple barely notices the pastor at this point. He smiles and heads back to his wagon.

JESSY LOU

Thank you, reverend.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Be safe Pastor, I'll get him home.

He gets in his wagon as the couple continues to talk to each other. Wells waves at them as he trots by.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Wells waits at a fork in the road as he reads his bible. Coming towards him with his wagon is FORTMAN (30's) who wears a suit but it needs cleaning. He pulls up next to Wells.

WELLS

Howdy-do, Mr. Fortman. Beautiful day isn't it?

FORTMAN

Yep, just lovely. I got your books. Let's do this quickly. I don't want to get caught.

Stepping down from the wagon, Wells quickly goes to the back of the wagon and lifts the covers. A dozen books are there.

WELLS

Yes sir. Lovely day indeed. Look at these. Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, Alexandre Dumas? Sweet Jesus, Frederick Douglass? God bless you.

FORTMAN

I'm happy for you. Hurry up and get that loaded.

The minister hustles as he transfers the books to his wagon and covers them up.

WELLS

I thank you very much. Here is the money. Be safe, brother.

Fortman looks through the money.

FORTMAN

I think you owe me some more money...brother.

WELLS

No sir, I would not cheat you. Fifty cents a book would be six dollars for a dozen, right?

FORTMAN

Fine, next time I'll have to charge more. Hella dangerous for me.

WELLS

I understand. I appreciate whatever you can do for me.

Fortman looks over at him and tips his hat. He snaps the reins and takes off.

FORTMAN

Hee-ya.

Rev. Wells looks both ways and carefully proceeds down the country road.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Sitting near the alter, Wells opens the letter from brother James. He kicks back to read it.

JAMES (V.O.)

Dear brother, Henry. I cannot express how proud I am of you. My wife Elizabeth and I have been deathly ill. If we don't make it, please consider raising our daughter Ida. It would be the world to me.

After finishing, he rubs his hands over his face in sorrow. He grabs a pen and a piece of paper and begins to write.

WELLS (V.O.)

Greetings my beloved brother. I am praying for you as I write this. It pains my heart to hear such troubling news. I suggest that you, your wife and my niece, little Miss Ida B Wells come to Alabama and allow my wife Zerlina heal you with herbs and loving care.

Zerlina walks into the room and sees he is upset.

ZERLINA

I see that look. What's wrong?

WELLS

It's horrible. Got a letter from my brother. They are very ill and want us to raise Ida, in case the worst happens.

She sits next to him and gives him a hug.

ZERLINA

Why of course we can help raise her. I hope they get better, but I have no problem bringing Ida here. She is a smart girl.

WELLS

I wrote back saying they all should come down and maybe you can heal them. I hope he comes.

ZERLINA

Me too, I'll do all I can to help. Speaking of family, Henry...

WELLS

Oh no, did your mother's condition--

ZERLINA

No, she's fine. It's about us.

She cuddles his hand with hers, then places it on her belly.

ZERLINA (CONT'D)

Henry...I'm with child.

Her eyes pull him towards her, like she yanked a string that was attached to them. But mere thread wouldn't account for the tears of joy...or the smile that followed.

WELLS

Praise God from who all blessings come. A father, finally? Sweet Lord almighty...Thank you, baby. I'll be the best father, ever.

He gets up and gives her an emotional hug that radiates from his heart. She giggles in the rapture of the moment.

EXT. BACK PORCH - DAY

Wells smiles as he sits in a rocking chair, reading his books. Zerlina comes outside and spots him.

ZERLINA

Hey, daddy-to-be. You reading them scary stories again? Ain't that strange for a preacher to do?

Marking his page, Wells turns to her.

WELLS

I was an angry man before we met. Fought in the Civil War as a kid. Shot down a few men. My temper can still get the best of me.

ZERLINA

Temper? I sure don't see it much.

WELLS

That's because of these scary books. These monsters and what-not, kinda releases that rage that's inside me. Not as much as the Good Book, but plenty.

ZERLINA

Well you keep a-reading then. Don't need you to lose your temper in front of these hateful folk.

WELLS

Right. I watch those wild,
fictional characters win the day
for me. Safer that way. Sometimes,
I wish I was them.

SUPER - NEXT SUNDAY

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The choir finishes up a lively song. Wells bounces on his heels from the vibe in the room.

WELLS

Yes, yes, yes. Hallelujah. I feel
the spirit of the Lord in here
today. Oh yeah. Y'all feel it?

CONGREGATION

Yes Lord...Preach...I feel it.

WELLS

We got plenty reason to celebrate.

The preacher motions for Luke to join him at the podium. Smiling widely, Luke makes his way over to Wells.

LUKE

Good morning, Reverend.

WELLS

This brother has a good word to
share with us this morning.

LUKE

When I first arrived here, you all
took me in as family. I could not
read, write add or speak in public.
Well, things are different now.

Luke flashes a big smile as the light laughter from the congregation is heard.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Now I have read over two dozen
books, written sermons and ain't
afraid to open my mouth in front of
any man.

CONGREGATION

You tell 'em...Go brother.

LUKE

This is the day I leave to share
this blessing with my brothers in
Mississippi who are still held by
force, in the shadows of ignorance.

Wells leads the room with applause. The congregation jumps to
its feet. Wells and Luke hug each other joyfully.

WELLS

Let us wish our brother the very
best, as we encourage others to do
the same. This is a new age. Let
the entire nation see that we are a
new people. Set the captives free.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Parishioners wave good-bye to Luke as he pulls off in his
wagon. Wells hugs his wife as he watches proudly.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Van Liddy drives his wagon into town and parks in front of
Donaldson and Terry Cole who are near the blacksmith. They
turn their backs and wave him off.

TERRY COLE

Get outta here with that weak ass
hootch. I'd rather drink kerosene.

VAN LIDDY

Good day, gentlemen. This here is a
new batch. Looky here. I'll give
you a sample.

Van Liddy grabs a jug of the new batch. Gives them a swig, it
burns going down, but they like it.

DONALDSON

Ahh, much better. Feels like an
angel just peed in my mouth.

TERRY COLE

No bullshit, I'll take two bottles.
God knows when it will be this good
again.

DONALDSON

Me too. Two jugs.

They do the transaction.

VAN LIDDY

Sold the nigger whiskey to some
stupid hillbillies, now I can
afford the ingredients for good
stuff.

INT. DOC KELLUM'S HOUSE - DAY

Quart Short rakes the yard. Doc goes out to the porch with a
bucket in his hand.

DOC KELLUM

Quart Short. Get yourself over here
and wash out these bloody rags.
I'll need them soon.

QUART SHORT

Yes sir.

He hustles over to the Doc and takes the bucket but spills
some rags on the porch floor. After the rags are picked up,
blood stains remain.

DOC KELLUM

You goddamn dummy. You people ain't
got a lick a sense. Clean that up
after you finish the rags.

QUART SHORT

Yes sir. Sorry sir.

Quart Short moseys off to the backyard as Doc Kellum looks at
the blood stain and shakes his head.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Corning congratulates Mitchell with a pat on the back as they
exit the building.

CORNING

What a Klan meeting last night huh?
Your speech really got 'em stirred
up ole boy.

MITCHELL

Just speaking from the heart.

CORNING

Grand Dragon told me he will retire
soon and wants you to replace him.

(MORE)

CORNING (CONT'D)

I think he is impressed with all the darkies you sent to chain gangs, labor camps and coon heaven.

MITCHELL

No voting and no education for 'em either. A blight on Dixie. I'd drive them off the planet if I could.

CORNING

Your dad would be proud. He died at Gettysburg right?

MITCHELL

Goddamn Yankees. Fighting for a bunch of monkeys that they don't want nothing to do with either. I'm ready to take over as Grand Dragon and really turn up the heat on these jungle bunnies.

EXT. DOC KELLUM'S HOUSE - DAY

Now in scrubs, Doc Kellum goes to the porch and looks around the front yard. He looks down and sees the blood stain still there. Rage covers his face.

DOC KELLUM

Why that lazy bastard. Where the hell is he?

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Quart Short is hunched over with the bucket next to him. Doc sees him and starts to approach him from behind. He hears Quart Short speaking.

QUART SHORT

"And...when your s-son asks you... saying... 'What is this?' Then you shall s-say to him... 'With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of s-slavery."

DOC KELLUM

What in the hell you doing, boy?

Terrified, Quart Short quickly tries to hide the bible he was quoting, but Doc Kellum sees it.

QUART SHORT
Rags almost done, sir.

DOC KELLUM
You was reading? Don't you lie to me, goddamn it.

QUART SHORT
J-just the Lord's word, sir.

His body shudders in fear.

DOC KELLUM
You know we don't cotton to niggers trying to read in this town. Who taught you?

Silence. Quart Short looks to the ground as the rage on Doc Kellum's face spreads.

QUART SHORT
I j-just...learned myself.

SLAP! Doc Kellum's open hand smashes into Quart Short's cheek. He backs up in fear.

DOC KELLUM
Don't lie to me you little retard. You ain't got the sense of a tick on a rat's ass and you want me to believe you taught yourself?

QUART SHORT
Sir, p-please. Won't ever do it again. I p-promise.

Another slap. The backhand knocks him down. Doc Kellum sees the deputies walking down the street.

DOC KELLUM
You can tell me who taught you how to read or you can let the deputies beat it out of you. What'll it be?

QUART SHORT
Please, please. J-just forget it happened. I ain't hurting nobody.

DOC KELLUM
I guess that means you want to take a walk.

Doc Kellum pinches his ear and pulls him to his feet and marches him out to the street.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Deputies see Doc taking the struggling teen towards them.

MITCHELL

Well what do we got here?

CORNING

Probably stole a watermelon.

Now several shots deep in the moonshine jug, Donaldson, Terry Cole and Van Liddy stumble over and join the other men.

DOC KELLUM

Caught his nappy head reading and
he won't tell me who taught him.

Mitchell gets in Quart Short's face, then punches him in the gut, doubling him over.

MITCHELL

You going bad, Quart Short? I been
thinking you was one of the good
niggers.

CORNING

You dumb retard. I think you just
broke his heart. You okay,
Mitchell?

MITCHELL

Can't trust any of these mud
puppies these days. Damn shame.

CORNING

Boy, you best start talking before
these fellers here, tan that hide
of yours.

Donaldson looks Quart Short, up and down.

QUART SHORT

S-sir. I learned it myself. Please--

Donaldson delivers a hard shot to the stomach.

DONALDSON

Townfolk don't need to see y'all
officers beating the tar outta this
here monkey. Let me and Terry Cole
take him over yonder in the alley.
We'll have your answer right quick.

Mitchell looks at Quart Short, then nods affirmatively to Donaldson. The two men grab the teen and start to drag him away as he pleads for mercy.

TERRY COLE

You like lessons boy? We got one to teach you about trying to be white. Let's go.

QUART SHORT

No, p-please. Y'all don't n-need to d-do this. Please.

After they disappear down the alley, sounds of punches landing are heard, as are Quart Short's whimpers.

MITCHELL

Why did I agree to let them two rascals have all the fun?

CORNING

Just in case that nigger loving boss of ours comes by. He'd have a fit. We don't need that.

DOC KELLUM

I got to get back to work. Be sure to tell me what you get from him. Now I gotta find a new Sambo to replace that boy.

Sound of Quart Short being slammed into a wall is heard.

MITCHELL

Yeah, I gotta feeling he won't be too ginger on his feet after this.

DONALDSON (O.S.)

You know we will beat you to death in this alley unless you tell us right?

Sounds of punches, kicks and agony.

TERRY COLE (O.S.)

You best tell us, boy.

DONALDSON (O.S.)

What did you say? Louder.

QUART SHORT (O.S.)

Wells. R-reverend Wells.

Mitchell looks over to Corning and smiles.

CORNING

I kinda figured that. What should we do?

Mitchell mimics slitting his throat. They both smile.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Along the waterway, the congregation is all dressed in white. Waist deep in the water, Rev Wells baptizes a child.

When the child rises from the water, the congregation applauds and starts to sing hymns.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The congregation marches back to the church, singing hymns. They pound tambourines and laugh with joy as they walk. Banner sticks his head out the window.

BANNER

Shut up, will ya?

WELLS

Sorry to disturb your Sunday morning, neighbor. Let me invite you to church.

BANNER

Never.

WELLS

Fair enough. I see all of those holes you been digging. Good fertile soil here. Need a hand with that shovel?

BANNER

Mind your business, Preacher man. I take care of my own.

The congregation comforts Wells and gets his mind off of his rude neighbor.

ZERLINA

Don't you pay that fool no mind.

Banner watches them go inside with a snarl on his face.

WELLS
(to Zerlina)
I didn't see Willie at the service.
Wonder if he's sick.

SUPER - A FEW DAYS LATER

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Rev. Wells waits at the counter as Newton gives him change.
Donaldson walks in and balks at the pastor.

DONALDSON
Hey there, Newton.

NEWTON
Good day, Donaldson.

Several small black kids enter through the door behind him.
Donaldson is startled, he yells.

DONALDSON
What the...? Don't you little
niggers know this ain't the door
y'all use?

The Sheriff, seen through the window, is out front and starts
to walk towards the door.

WELLS
You don't have to talk to them like
that. They're just kids.

Donaldson swivels around to face Wells. The Sheriff enters.

DONALDSON
You don't tell me what to do, boy.

WELLS
Just saying, that we all should be
nice to children.

DONALDSON
These pickaninnies? Teaching them
to respect the white man is saving
their lives. You should thank me,
boy. Or are you frisky?

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Alright. Calm down everybody.

Donaldson pushes Wells on the shoulder.

DONALDSON
You frisky, huh?

A harder shove almost knocks Wells over.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Donaldson. Enough.

He gets in the preacher's face but Wells tries to look the other way.

DONALDSON
Think you are tough, don't you?

Wells points to the kids, then at the door.

WELLS
Git.

The kids leave as Donaldson gets even closer.

NEWTON
Hey, not in my store.

WELLS
I don't want no troub--

Donaldson punches Wells in the mouth. Before the Sheriff can get between them, Wells pops Donaldson in the jaw. He is knocked out before he hits the ground.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Wow, preacher.

NEWTON
Arrest him. Get that gorilla outta my store. Now.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
We both seen that ole' boy swing first. No crime to swing back.

NEWTON
Fine. Just get him off my property before I put a bullet in him.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Rev Wells gets in his wagon and grabs the reins. Williamson looks up at him.

WELLS

Sheriff, I'm so sorry. Mad at myself. Just...lost my temper. Now I may have put my whole church community in danger.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Donaldson is snake belly, low. I know you are a good man and I won't let harm come to you.

WELLS

I appreciate that, sir

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Hatred around here gets to me some days. So stupid. I'm from California. Got grandpa's land, became sheriff. Sometimes I just want to pack up and leave.

WELLS

My soul is as tied to protecting people in this town, as yours is. Just think, what would this place be like without us?

The Sheriff laughs.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I wouldn't want no parts of that. You be safe, hear?

They both laugh as Rev Wells pulls off down the road.

SUPER - A FEW DAYS LATER

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Zerlina sits in front of a display of herbs on the table. Several women listen to her lecture intently.

Rev. Wells sits under a willow tree as he reads from, 'FRANKENSTEIN'.

ZERLINA

Since that good for nothing doctor in town won't go near us, we need to use the medicine that nature gave us.

She picks up some herbs to show them.

ZERLINA (CONT'D)

This plant is the Geranium. The powdered form of the root is used to heal wounds and swollen feet. It can be used as a remedy for inflamed gums and sore throat. The fresh leaves are used to treat insect stings.

The women nod that they understand. Just as she picks up some spearmint, a black man on horseback trots onto the property.

GROVER (late 20's), looks worn out and sad. Wells marks his page, puts down the book and goes over to him.

WELLS

Greetings Brother. My name is Reverend Henry Wells. You look tired, friend. May we offer you water or food?

GROVER

You're just as nice as he said you were. My name is Grover and I'm Luke's big brother.

The man dismounts and shakes the preacher's hand as Wells smiles broadly.

WELLS

Brother Luke? That's my boy. Love him. So smart and so brave. How is he getting along?

Grover looks to the ground. His voice falters as he responds. Zerlina and her herbalists turn to them.

GROVER

Reverend. It saddens me to tell you that my little brother, who I loved dearly, was murdered.

After a moment, Wells hugs Grover as tears well up in his eyes. Sadness sweeps over the women too. Some weep.

WELLS

Oh Lord, no. I-I am so sorry. What a loss.

Both men comfort each other.

EXT. WELLS HOME - NIGHT

On the porch, Grover digs into Zerlina's home cooking as Wells sits next to him.

WELLS

So sad. And you are pretty sure it was the Night Riders?

GROVER

Yes, not only did they kill all five people, but they burned the church and classroom down.

After a sip of coffee, Wells looks to the heavens, then back to Grover.

WELLS

I must go to Mississippi and do the eulogy. I feel that all this is my fault. It's the only thing I can do to make it right. We cannot let his flock be scared away.

Zerlina comes outside. Heavy worry is on her face.

ZERLINA

No. Henry, you can't go there. That place is even worse than Alabama. It's too dangerous. And what about...us?

She rubs her slightly swollen baby bump, near tears.

WELLS

I feel a calling from the Lord himself about this one. Not my will, but HIS.

She runs into the arms of her husband and hugs him tight as the tears flow freely.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Grover helps Wells pack up his wagon. Zerlina comes over to her husband with a letter in hand and worry on her face.

ZERLINA

Henry, when I went to town yesterday morning, I got this letter. So much happened yesterday that I forgot to give it to you.

He looks at the envelope.

WELLS

It's from Ida. Oh no. I hope my brother is alright. Sixteen year-olds don't usually write their uncles.

He opens it and reads.

IDA B WELLS (V.O.)

How are you, Uncle Henry. Things are not well here. My dear parents have both died after a long illness. Dad had said that if something bad happened, I should live with you. Is that still possible? Love, your niece, Ida B Wells.

After he reads it he hands it back to Zerlina and then takes a seat as he covers his face with his hands. His wife reads it and soon tears flow.

ZERLINA

My sweet Jesus. Now James and Elizabeth? My lord, Henry. So much sorrow. When will it end?

A moment of grief passes, Wells looks up as his wife sits next to him. They comfort each other.

WELLS

I loved that man. Looked up to him. Now his daughter is an orphan? We have to leave soon to get to Mississippi before dark. Could you pen her a letter?

ZERLINA

My God, Henry. What would I say?

WELLS

Tell her we love her and welcome her into our family. But tell her to stay with her grandma in Tennessee until we are ready to get her. Once I get back, we can send for her.

ZERLINA

Sure, I can do that. Poor child.

Grover walks over to them.

GROVER

Sir, the wagon is all packed up.
We best get a moving. Don't want to
run into them Night Riders.

Wells and Zerlina as he rubs her pregnant belly, then strolls
over to the wagon, they see that the whole congregation is
there. Wells is humbled as they wish him well on the trip.

Next door, Banner digs a hole, but stops as he sees the
gathering. He sneaks over to listen to them.

WELLS

Thank you all for coming out to
wish me a safe voyage. You didn't
have to do that. But then again,
this is Mississippi I'm going to.

The tension breaker leads to some chuckles.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Dark days have come upon us. This
is the time to stand strong. Let
these devils know that we do not
fear them, because we have the one,
true God on our side.

CONGREGATION

Tell 'em Preacher...Speak
brother...Fear not.

Banner sticks his head out from behind bushes.

BANNER

If you're going, then GO. Take all
that noise with you.

He walks back to his house.

WELLS

Well thank you neighbor. God bless
you too.

The minister nods in his direction and makes a face. The
congregation chuckles.

GROVER

Reverend Wells, sir. We'd best
leave now.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

The congregation waves good bye to their minister and Grover. Wells waves back as he sees his wife fight back tears.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

The horses of both Rev. Wells and Grover pull the wagon. They pass Black prison laborers working a field.

GROVER

I gotta question for you Reverend. Let's say all the colored folk in the country learn to read, write and do math. Do you really think we'll be treated equal?

WELLS

That's a mighty good question. I reckon it will take a few generations after we master those skills, till they treat us right.

GROVER

I don't know about that. That hate runs deep in some folks. I bet a hundred years from now we will still be getting churches burned and seeing chain gangs filled with black folk, with somebody making a slew from their free labor.

Wells, driving the wagon, makes eye contact with Grover.

WELLS

I hope not. Good lord. Even if it turned out that way, we have to do our best, to become our best. Especially in the eyes of God.

They drive on and pass sharecroppers and vast farms. Up ahead is a sign. WELCOME TO MISSISSIPPI.

GROVER

I hate this place. After I bury my brother, I'm fixin' to join up with the Buffalo Soldiers out West. I ain't got no love for these blood thirsty killers in Dixie.

WELLS

Whatever you do, take pride in it and be the best. Shine, brother.

(MORE)

WELLS (CONT'D)

Them Buffalo Soldiers are blazing a trail for our people to spread out across this nation.

Further into Mississippi, Grover taps Wells on the shoulder and points to the side. A distance from the road, 'strange fruit' hangs from a tree.

Two males and one female, all of them black, swing from the neck under the Mississippi sun.

GROVER

Like the sign said, 'Welcome to Mississippi', but if you ain't white, consider it hunting season on your ass.

WELLS

Such brutality. My sweet Jesus.

GROVER

Wait till you see what they did to my brother.

WELLS

The Lord sees all things and justice will be done, somehow.

Wells picks up the speed. Grover stares at the hung corpses as crows peck on them, until they are out of sight.

GROVER

Why does God put our people through times like these? Like slavery. A God of love? Sometimes I think he hates us more than these crackers.

WELLS

Don't blaspheme, young man. God has a plan that we don't understand yet. After what we have been through, if we can rise up and overcome all that is against us, we will be a shining example across the world, to all who suffer.

The sign ahead reads 'WELCOME TO COLUMBUS'. Grover points to it and signals Wells to take a left.

GROVER

Well, here we are. The place I loved as a child and hate as a man.

WELLS

The sun is starting to go down.
Good thing we are close.

Long shadows cast themselves across the road.

GROVER

Pastor, do you want me to take you
to see where...To the place?
Luke's church. Not much left. We
pass it on the way.

WELLS

Yes, I want to say a prayer there.

They journey on, then Wells sees the burned out structure
before Grover points it out. Blackened beams and scattered
bricks are all that is left.

GROVER

The few folks that got out alive
said the Night Riders set the whole
thing on fire and shot at whoever
ran outside.

Wells stops the horses, grabs his bible and comes down from
the wagon.

WELLS

The animals. They will not have the
last word. I will cleanse this site
in the name of Jesus.

GROVER

I don't want nothing to do with
this place. See that big tree over
yonder? I cut my brother down from
there. Spooks me to be here.
Please don't dally, sir.

Wells nods to him and goes over to the ruins. Grover watches
from the wagon as the minister reads from the book.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Luke's coffin sits on crates next to the newly dug grave-
site. It is early and just a few mourners are arriving
dressed in black.

Grover and Wells walk up to the casket. Wells wears his
pastoral robe.

GROVER

My poor brother. He didn't deserve this. He was trying to make this hell hole better. This is what he gets in return. And making the killers pay? Ha, never happen.

WELLS

I loved that boy. Wish I could have said good bye.

GROVER

Lift that lid. Say your piece. Then have a gander at what them devils did to him.

Slowly, Wells goes over and lifts the lid of the coffin. His eyes get big. He freezes in place.

The burned and mutilated corpse stares back at the preacher. Wells lets the lid drop back down as he turns to the side and vomits, hard.

WELLS

Jesus, Mary and Joseph. That poor kid. They need to pay for that.

GROVER

But they won't, will they? They never do.

Grover rubs the pastor's back as he tries to pull it together. A woman gives him a glass of water.

WELLS

God bless you, sister.

She walks away.

GROVER

Can you go on, sir?

WELLS

I swear to God, that if something like this happens to me and there is no justice, I will come back and haunt the killers to their graves.

GROVER

That's a bridge I hope you never cross. Most of the people are here. Maybe we should start.

Wells nods yes. Grover takes his seat with the mourning family members. The minister takes a deep, cleansing breath.

WELLS

Welcome brothers and sisters to celebrate the life of a man I have come to love and respect. Brother Luke. Our scripture is from the book with the same name.

Wells reads from the bible.

WELLS (CONT'D)

The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified.

Wells closes the Holy book and puts it to the side.

WELLS (CONT'D)

From here it is hard to imagine the grief Christ's followers felt. Their hope, their Messiah - beaten, bloody and dead. Humiliated and stripped naked for the whole city of Jerusalem to see. The final hope for their people, for humanity...erased.

CONGREGATION

Yes Lord...Just Like Brother Luke...Sad days.

WELLS

An innocent man who represented the best in the human race - executed, right in their face, no sympathy. And there was nothing they could do about it. No one to be held to account for this monumental injustice.

CONGREGATION

Just like us...Treat us like dogs...Tell 'em, Preacher.

WELLS

They were put in a position, to have to carry-on after losing the guiding light of God, himself.

He points to the heavens above. Wells strolls closer to the mourning congregation.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Ya know brothers and sisters,
sometimes life can hit so hard that
you don't know which way is up.
The loss of a true leader like
Luke, is devastating.

CONGREGATION

Yessir...Preach.

WELLS

Many of you remember the loss of
our precious friend and liberator,
Abraham Lincoln. Was some sad days
after that, y'all remember?

CONGREGATION

My Lord...I remember...

WELLS

Guess what? God has a plan for us.
Just like the apostles of old, we
cannot be afraid.

The minister pounds his fist into his hand.

WELLS (CONT'D)

We must become stronger than we
have ever been...because a new
chapter in our story...is just
beginning.

CONGREGATION

Hallelujah...Praise God...Yes.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Now out of his ministerial robe, Wells walks with Grover to
the wagon.

GROVER

Doubt ya make it back before dark
falls. Couldn't live with myself if
I lose another brother. Why don't
you spend another night here.

WELLS

Thank you kindly. I'll take you up
on that.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Sharing a blanket and a basket of goodies are Sheriff Williamson and Jessy Lou.

JESSY LOU

I need to get out and do this more often. I love being by water.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Alabama does have its charms. They call this the Black Warrior river?

JESSY LOU

Yep. Unfortunately, 'Bama is the only place I know. To be honest, there's been a longing to see the rest of the world building in me.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I know what you mean. I've been out West and all across the South, but one day, I hope to see New York City, Niagara Falls and such.

Jessy Lou brightens up even more.

JESSY LOU

My word, those are the places I'd love to experience. Do you have Gypsy blood? You read my mind.

They have a laugh.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I'm a man of many talents. I hate to be forward, but I like this...and I hope we can do it again, soon.

JESSY LOU

Why Sheriff, you getting sweet on little ole me? That's so cute. I'd love to, anytime.

She leans over and gives him a kiss on the cheek. He smiles.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

It would be my pleasure, my dear. Things have been sorrowful since my wife died.

Jessy Lou rubs his back in sympathy as painful emotions show themselves on his face. They lock eyes. Sparks.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
We best get back to town before it
gets dark.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Terry Cole and Donaldson stumble towards the alley. Both with
a jug of hootch...and both with bloodshot eyes.

TERRY COLE
This here rot-gut is mighty fine.
Got me in the mood for some rough
loving with Jessy Lou.

DONALDSON
You ain't got the money for that
honey, who you fooling?

TERRY COLE
Hey. Who said anything about paying
for it?

Terry Cole's devilish smile says it all. Donaldson stops for
a moment, then busts out laughing.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The sheriff helps Jessy Lou up from the picnic blanket, as
her eyes study him. Something seems to weigh heavy on her.

JESSY LOU
Darling, there's something I need
to tell you, about me...

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
If it's distressful, it can wait.
I just want to enjoy the moment.

Jessy Lou beams joy, that her secret can wait another day.

JESSY LOU
This moment...I needed more than
you could ever know. Enjoy it? I
wanna wallow in it, like a piggie.

They walk towards their horses as they chuckle.

EXT. JESSY LOU'S HOUSE - DAY

The Sheriff and Jessy Lou ride up and stop. Jessy Lou
dismounts and smiles back to her new beau.

JESSY LOU

That was wonderful. Remember, stop
by anytime.

The Sheriff gives her a tip of the hat and a toothy smile,
then rides off. After he is out of sight, Jessy Lou, still in
a romantic mood, does a waltz with her imaginary lover.

She giggles to herself as the sun starts to set, ties her
horse and turns to go into the house.

Suddenly Terry Cole and Donaldson, drunken..appear in front
of her. She is startled. Fear on her face.

DONALDSON

Well looky here, Terry. Got us a
ballereeny here in Alabama.

TERRY COLE

Yeah, I liked them moves there
little girly. Do it again.

JESSY LOU

Look, get away from me. Can't I
enjoy being alive without y'all
getting your drawers in a bundle?
Good-night boys.

She walks towards her door.

TERRY COLE

I ain't sleepy, ma'am, but I sure
would like to go to bed.

Jessy Lou cuts her eyes at him with a cold stare.

DONALDSON

Look at her. The town whore that's
too good for us.

TERRY COLE

I think she just needs to know us
better. Ain't that right, Sugar?

As they advance in her direction, Jessy Lou sprints into the
house and closes the door just in the nick of time.

The sound of dead-bolts locking is heard. Terry Cole grabs
his jug, takes a swig and passes it to Donaldson.

DONALDSON

Excuse me, Missy. You accidently
locked the door. But we can fix
that for ya, right quick.

Donaldson takes a swig and kicks the door. After falling on his ass, spilling some booze, Terry Cole has a laugh at him.

TERRY COLE

You goddam fool. Get your drunk ass outta the way.

On the second kick, the door gives way. They enter.

DONALDSON (O.S.)

Where's my Dixie Belle? It's time to dance.

They slam the door behind them. The sound of Jessy Lou's screams can be heard outside.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Quart Short speaks to Zerlina from the back of a wagon. He is heavily bandaged and a splint is on his leg.

QUART SHORT

I-I'm sorry I couldn't warn you sooner. They m-messed me up pretty bad. Them boys...c-crazy.

A bag of herbs is given to him as the sun goes down.

ZERLINA

I know. Thank you for the warning. You poor child, I'm so sorry this happened. Hurry home and boil these herbs. Be safe brother.

He smiles back as the wagon pulls away. They both wave. After the wagon is gone, Zerlina casts her teary eyes to the heavens. She prays.

ZERLINA (CONT'D)

Good Lord. Please watch over my husband and keep him safe. We need him. Both of us.

She rubs her small baby bump as darkness descends.

EXT. GROVER'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Leaning back, Wells takes in the night sky. He takes a sip of his warm drink, as does Grover.

GROVER

So this tea is made of herbs you grew? It's delicious.

WELLS

Thanks. Really, my wife handles that. I just run my mouth. I'm a very blessed man.

GROVER

Say Rev, if you had the chance to do any job in the world, what would it be?

The minister chuckles to himself.

WELLS

I imagine this sounds funny coming from me, but I'd like to be an author. Write a scary story or two. Be remembered for generations. Sound crazy?

GROVER

I didn't expect that answer, but it's not crazy. What is your favorite scary story?

WELLS

Tough question. Just finished, 'Frankenstein', was very good. Before that, my favorite was 'The Headless Horseman'. Both are about coming back from the dead.

Grover looks surprised.

GROVER

Preacher, I thought the only man you celebrate coming back from the dead, was born in Nazareth.

They both have a laugh.

WELLS

Very true. One thing I liked about that story is where it was set. Sleepy Hollow, New York. Compared to Alabama, it seems like paradise. I feel one day soon, our people will leave the South. You watch.

EXT. JESSY LOU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The damaged door is opened and Terry Cole and Donaldson stumble outside, laughing.

As they leave the porch, a vase shatters on the post they walk by. They turn back and see Jessy Lou, in ripped clothes, seething with anger.

JESSY LOU

Get out! You bastards. I hate you.
One day you will pay for what you
did to me.

DONALDSON

Right. You and what Army?

They laugh and walk off. Jessy Lou goes back in the house, now a pistol is in her hand. She fires at the two as they run away. She slumps against the broken door and sobs.

EXT. GROVER'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Wells puts down his cup and stands. He looks around.

WELLS

Guess I should turn in, get an
early start. Hey, do you smell
something burning?

Grover sniffs the air. He rises and dashes to the back porch, then points to a hill in the distance.

GROVER

Them fools. They're at it again.

The minister joins him, glowing in the dark night is a cross, on fire. Blurry figures encircle it.

Looks exchanged by Wells and Grover, speaks volumes.

WELLS

Such wickedness.

Grover fuming mad, sprints to the back porch and lifts a floorboard and extracts something. A handgun reflects the moonlight. He stomps back to the pastor.

GROVER

Take this with you back to Alabama.
Just in case.

The eyes of Wells study the weapon, then he picks it up.

WELLS

I ain't held one of these since the Civil War.

He handles it like a pro, checking every essential part like an expert.

GROVER

Why don't you keep that one. I got others stashed around.

WELLS

Needs a cleaning. I'm done with guns. Had enough of that. My mind is my greatest weapon. If I ever get in a bad situation, I'll defend myself some other way.

A curious look is given by Grover as the pistol is handed back to him.

GROVER

Does that weapon of your mind, work on mad dogs? They ain't too big on words, when they foaming at the mouth...and want to bite.

They turn back to the burning cross. Etched in their faces is the realization that the terrorism is growing and no one is willing to help them.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Sheriff Williamson trots his horse over to his deputies, who sip coffee.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Got a conference in Greene County. Not sure when I'll be back. Keep my town safe in the meantime.

CORNING

Yes, sir.

After the horse is a distance away, they share a devilish smile between them.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Wells packs up his wagon. Grover strolls over.

GROVER

Thank you again, Preacher. Since you gave that eulogy, feels like a weight has been lifted from my soul. Might even have some hope.

WELLS

Love to hear that, brother. Keep that hope. Water it and let it grow. Might be a forest one day.

Grover hands Wells a book.

GROVER

This here is the bible you gave my brother. Figured he'd want you to have it.

As the preacher grips the Holy book, a paper falls out. Wells examines it, his eyes show surprise.

WELLS

This letter is from Frederick Douglass, my goodness.

GROVER

Could you read it, Rev? I'd like to know what it's saying.

A hand written note is extracted.

WELLS

It says, "Greetings, Brother Luke. It's good to hear from another soul, fighting the good fight. Yes, education is the key to our survival. The 1867 law stating that literacy was our right, is unlawfully being trampled across the South. But we will not be stopped. I commend your bravery in the face of barbarity. My prayers go out to you and your mentor...Rev Wells. Go with God."

Although the preacher clears his throat, the tears from his heart, drip from his eyes. Grover does the same.

GROVER

My little brother. My God...he was something...wasn't he?

Wells slides the letter back in the envelope and with shaky hands, returns it to Grover.

WELLS

When you become a Buffalo Soldier,
share his story with your brothers.
Spread the word and remind them of
the FUTURE America...they are
fighting for. I'm dedicated to
bring about justice. In this life
and in any that follow.

The two hug in an embrace, slathered with pain. Using his
forearm to wipe the tears from his cheeks, Wells gets in the
wagon and grabs the reins.

GROVER

Have a safe trip, my friend.

Admiration in his voice. The wagon pulls away as Wells waves.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

With fat lip, matted hair and bloodied nose, Jessy Lou slowly
moves down the dusty road, seething with rage. She sees the
deputies up ahead and goes to them.

JESSY LOU

I've been attacked. Please help.

CORNING

You look like hell, girl. What
happened?

JESSY LOU

Donaldson and Terry Cole. They
broke in my house and took me
against my will. I want them
arrested. Pigs.

Mitchell looks her over and rolls his eyes.

MITCHELL

Goddamn drunks. Yeah, we'll rustle
up them fools.

Corning taps Mitchell on the shoulder and motions for him to
move away from Jessy Lou.

CORNING

(under his breath)

You know that trouble making nigger
preacher? We should blame this on
him. Stretch that neck and we got a
good excuse for it.

Scratching his chin, Mitchell ponders the idea, then slaps Corning on the back and smiles.

MITCHELL

I like the way you think, boy.

Jessy Lou is waved over to follow them as they walk to the side of a building and away from eyes.

JESSY LOU

What?

MITCHELL

There's been a change. We will kick the stuffing outta them two later, but for this, you need to name someone else.

JESSY LOU

Huh? What are you talking about?

CORNING

That nigger preacher is causing trouble around town. Teaching other niggers to read and so on.

MITCHELL

You ain't even got to say nothing. Just go along with what we say.

She looks at them both and backs up.

JESSY LOU

I came to you looking for justice and you want me to sentence an innocent man to death? Have you lost your minds?

MITCHELL

I'd hate to let the Sheriff know that the little gal he is so sweet on is the town whore. That would be a sad scene, wouldn't it deputy?

CORNING

So very sad.

JESSY LOU

You bastards.

A smile breaks out on Mitchell's face.

MITCHELL

It's settled then. You go home and uh, get yourself together. We'll take it from here.

JESSY LOU

Don't you dare kill that man in my name. I refuse to help.

CORNING

It's a done deal, Missy. Just mosey on back home and leave this to your trusted public servants.

The men laugh as Jessy Lou scowls at them, eyes ablaze.

MITCHELL

Now go on. Git. If we need you we'll know where to find you.

JESSY LOU

I hate you. All of you.

The officers could care less as they walk away. Jessy Lou looks to the heavens as tears fall.

EXT. JESSY LOU'S HOUSE - DAY

Her horse stands stoically, loaded with saddle-bags and blankets. Jessy Lou finishes packing with tears in her eyes.

She goes back into the house and comes back with a rifle and a pistol. She flops the belt of bullets over her shoulder.

JESSY LOU

Stay here? Don't think so. Come looking for me, you better be ready. Right now, I need peace.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

In the same spot where she had a picnic with the Sheriff, is where she has pitched her tent. Jessy Lou cleans her guns as she stares out to the lazy river.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Deputy Mitchell addresses the gathering of men. Doc Kellum, Pastor Smith, Newton, Van Liddy and Fortman listen.

MITCHELL

Since the Sheriff will be out of town till tonight or tomorrow, the responsibility to defend white womanhood falls on our shoulders.

CORNING

We'll go over and snatch him up, rightly. I trust y'all can rustle up a rope in the meantime.

EXT. OUTDOOR STAND - DAY

Wells pays a young man coins and buys a Mississippi newspaper. He looks it over quickly and gets back in the wagon.

EXT. BANNER'S HOUSE - DAY

As Banner digs yet another hole on his property, he looks up to see the deputies leering at him from their horses. Banner is startled and jumps.

BANNER

Goddamn. You scared the beejezzus outta me.

MITCHELL

Scared? You burying bodies? Why would we scare you?

Banner lets the shovel drop and goes to them.

BANNER

Ha, funny. What can I do you for?

CORNING

We're looking for your colored little neighbor. Seen him?

BANNER

Overheard them say he went to Mississippi.

MITCHELL

Mississippi? Shit. How long he been gone?

BANNER

Couple days, why?

CORNING

How we gonna pin it on him when he ain't in town? Damn. That ruins everything.

MITCHELL

It will be our word against a niggers word. Banner, when will he be home?

BANNER

Since tomorrow is Sunday, I reckon he will be back tonight so he can hoop and holla tomorrow morning and disrupt my beauty sleep.

Mitchell looks around the area.

MITCHELL

Coming from Mississippi, we can ambush him before he gets home. Take him to the courthouse and force them to find another preacher for church tomorrow.

CORNING

As far as you know, he's been here and never left town, understand?

BANNER

What y'all say he done did?

Mitchell summons him over and whispers in his ear. Banner smiles.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Wells looks tired as he heads home. Up ahead, three men on horseback block the road.

WELLS

Great. Well, it's still daytime. Too early for Night Riders.

As he gets closer and sees who it is, Wells stops the wagon.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Good afternoon, gentlemen.

MITCHELL

Hands over your head, boy. And don't try nothing.

Mitchell levels his rifle at the face of Wells. The preacher is wide-eyed in astonishment as he complies. Corning dismounts his horse.

CORNING

I'll check him for weapons.

Corning pats down the frightened minister and searches the wagon as Mitchell stares him down.

CORNING (CONT'D)

Don't see nothing.

WELLS

Sir, maybe you have the wrong person. I am a man of the cloth and-

MITCHELL

Shut your mouth, boy. We do the talking around here. You are hereby under arrest. Drive your ass to the courthouse. We'll be right behind you. Don't get cute.

WELLS

Sir, could I tell my family where I am going and drop some supplies I got from out of town?

Mitchell glares back coldly.

MITCHELL

No, you may not. Move, boy.

Wells swallows hard and looks around himself and to the heavens as he again proceeds down the road.

The deputies and Banner trot their horses behind him, menacingly. Shadows start to cover the avenue as night creeps in and a storm approaches.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

Towns-folks line the streets and jeer at Wells as he approaches the courthouse. Deputies and Banner follow behind him. Terry Cole throws a rock, hits Wells in the head.

TERRY COLE

Filthy cotton picker, keep your dirty hands off our white women.

Blood drips from Rev. Wells face as he stops.

MITCHELL

Get down outta that wagon, boy.

The Sheriff walks outside from the courthouse.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

What is this all about?

The deputies are surprised he returned early.

CORNING

Well, sir. This here piece of crap has defiled one of our women. Time to make him pay. Pay dearly.

Corning shoves Wells hard in the back.

WELLS

Sheriff, I am innocent, please.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

What ever happened, you will get a fair trial, I promise.

MITCHELL

I say we string him up.

Mitchell turns to the crowd that includes Donaldson, Newton, Banner, Doc Kellum, Pastor Smith, Fortman and Van Liddy. They are boisterous.

CROWD

Yeah...Stretch that neck...Kill em.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Enough. I need to know the details. Talk.

MITCHELL

Here's a detail you won't like. He done raped Miss Jessy Lou. Yep, sure did.

Sheriff Williamson has the air taken out of him for a moment. Wells is horrified. He looks at the pastor with disbelief.

WELLS

What? Not true, sir, at all. I'm a minister, you know that. I try to show love to all. Ask her. It's not true. Wrong man.

The Sheriff takes a moment to sort it out in his mind.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Where is Jessie Lou?

CORNING
We sent her home. She got beat up
pretty bad too.

WELLS
That poor child.

Mitchell backhands Wells.

MITCHELL
Shut your filthy mouth you animal.
You did this to her last night.

Wells pleads to Sheriff Williamson.

WELLS
Sheriff, I was out of town until
this afternoon and I can prove it.
In my saddlebag is a newspaper from
Mississippi, dated today.

CROWD
Liar...Hang him...

WELLS
And there is a whole congregation
full of people that saw me preach
yesterday at a funeral. Witnesses.

CORNING
Nigger witnesses. Tell me they
wouldn't lie for Mista Preacher-
man. Don't listen, boss.

The Sheriff takes a deep breath. He walks over to the
saddlebag and pulls out the newspaper and sees the date.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Looks like he's telling the truth.
Don't touch this man. Look, I will
speak to Jessie Lou. In the
meantime, come with me.

He takes Wells by the shoulder and walks him to the
courthouse. The others follow.

WELLS
I don't know what this is about,
but I would never harm a hair on
her head. I hope you know that.

Sheriff Williamson whispers back.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I know. I just have to prove to the towns folk you are innocent, then find the real criminals.

They walk to the door of the courthouse and stop.

MITCHELL

We gonna hang that monkey inside?

A stern stare is given by Williamson to his subordinate. He then turns to address the whole crowd.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

As top lawman in this town, I order you and anyone else with bright ideas to leave this man be, until we have a fair trial. Understand?

He looks over at the discontented masses.

CROWD

Hang him now...Don't need no trial...He's guilty...

Mitchell and Corning are motioned to come closer.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Look here, I will go see Jessy Lou. Wells, I need you to go upstairs to the courtroom and lock the door. You two keep him from being lynched till I get back.

MITCHELL

We'll try.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Do it or I replace you, if I don't decide to shoot you first. I will not stand for that stuff in my town.

Wells grabs the Sheriff's hand and shakes it.

WELLS

Thank you, sir.

Wells goes inside and up the stairs. The Sheriff goes to his horse and mounts it. He gets the crowd's attention.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Anyone who commits an unlawful act will be prosecuted, fully. He has proof of his innocence. I'll decide what to do when I get back. The real criminals will hang for this. Keep your hands off that man. I mean that.

Looking up to the courtroom window, the Sheriff can see Wells observing him and the crowd below.

As the sheriff gallops off, the winds pick up and rain starts to fall. Good camouflage for the tears in his eyes.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

Come on, Jessy Lou. Please let this all be a big lie.

INT. COURTROOM - NIGHT

Standing at the window, Wells sees the Sheriff disappear in the rain as he rides off. Below, the crowd inches closer to the courthouse.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

Mitchell and Corning look into the crowd, then huddle.

MITCHELL

We gotta get this fool strung up before he gets back.

CORNING

Christ on a crutch, what do you think that whore will tell him? We could be in a world of hurt.

MITCHELL

I think we scared her. If not, we say she is hysterical. Got to figure a way to kill him without losing our jobs.

CROWD

Hang him...Why we waiting?...

They look out at the angry crowd.

MITCHELL

We can just let the good citizens
of Carrollton do it. They sho' nuff
seem to be in the mood.

CORNING

Got that right. Look at 'em. But we
got orders.

MITCHELL

Not if they...knock us out.

The deputies smile at each other in the rain.

INT. COURTROOM - NIGHT

Through the rain streaked window, Wells, nervously looks at
the mob below.

The deputies move to the side as the crowd surges to the
door. They start to hammer and kick at it. The sound of
THUNDER mixes with the pounding.

CROWD (O.S.)

We gonna get you, boy...Get ready
to swing...You dying tonight...

Wells rubs his sweat covered forehead. The stress gets to
him. He screams.

WELLS

Stop! I am innocent. Do not kill
me. I was not in town. Wasn't me.

The sound of the door splintering. More pounding.

CROWD

We gonna get you, boy...Kill him.

WELLS

IF YOU KILL ME, I SWEAR TO GOD, I
WILL HAUNT YOU TO YOUR GRAVES!

Bright lightning flashes, as the storm rolls overhead. Wells
jumps back from near the window and seems to shake off
temporary blindness.

Just then he hears the door give way and boots stomping up
the stairs. Wells looks to the heavens.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Lord, give me the strength. If I
must die, let me die as your
soldier. Not a coward.

The door of the courtroom is knocked off the hinges.
Donaldson and Van Liddy enter first. Donaldson charges him.

Wells steps to the side and pops him in the head as he goes
sprawling on the floor.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Just like last time, buddy.

A series of lightning strikes gives the subsequent brawl a
strobe light effect as Wells tries to hold off half the town.

From behind, a chair hits Wells in the head. It is wielded by
his ungrateful neighbor, Banner. Wells goes down.

EXT. JESSY LOU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As Sheriff Williamson dismounts in the rain, he peers around
and sees the broken front door. He hangs his head.

The lawman walks to the door. Just as he is about to walk
through, a series of lightning flashes light the empty house.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Jessy Lou? Jessy Lou, you in here?
It's me, the Sheriff.

INT. JESSY LOU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Sheriff walks inside and shakes the wetness off of him.
He looks around and sees broken furniture. He peers into the
bedroom in disarray and rubs his eyes.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

You poor thing. Dammit. Hey, what's
this?

He picks up a jug near the bed. He smells it.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

Rot gut moonshine? She doesn't
drink that. He sure the hell
doesn't either. Where is she?

EXT. RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

As rain pours down on the tent, Jessy Lou peeks out. Lightning makes her wince. She closes up the tent.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Zerlina sits alone, next to a candle. She caresses her husband's bible...and her belly, as tears flow.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

The limp body of Wells is carried outside. He immediately gets punched and kicked by all around, even Pastor Smith.

PASTOR SMITH

That's right. Send him back to his nigger god. The real one don't want his kind there either.

FORTMAN

Dumb coon was just a little too smart for his own britches.

Blood mixes with falling rain and gushes out of the mouth of Wells as Fortman's boot connects.

NEWTON

Guess who will donate the rope?

Newton holds the merchandise from his store up proudly.

DOC KELLUM

Gimme that.

The doctor makes a noose out of it and Donaldson takes it and puts it around his neck.

DONALDSON

Mess with our women? Huh boy? Maybe I should cut them nuts off as a warning to other darkies.

VAN LIDDY

Yeah, do it. Son of a bitch ain't nothing but trouble. We need to round-up them other high-fluting jigs he taught, string them up too.

The screams of Rev Wells, reverberates through the treetops as the clouds above, weep down rain, in sheets.

The winds, angry, as they bend trees in it's fury. They howl from their roots, in the toxic soil of Alabama.

FADE TO BLACK.

INSERT - GRAPHIC

For he is a minister of God to thee -- for good. But...If thou do which is EVIL...BE AFRAID...For he beareth not the sword in vain...For he is a minister for God...A REVENGER... To execute wrath upon him...That doeth EVIL! -- MARK 11:25.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

Rain ripples across the surface of the Black Warrior river. Winds rustle the small tent on the embankment as the storm surges in torrents of rain.

Jessy Lou emerges from the tent. She is shaking. In her hand...her pistol. In her eyes, the pain of a lifetime of abuse. The rain pours over her as she raises her trembling hand to her head.

JESSY LOU

Kill an innocent man because of me?
No. No, I can't live with that.

Her whole body sobs. The gun is pointed at her temple as she tries to keep her body still for the kill-shot. Suddenly, her hand is empty. Startled, she looks around afraid.

JESSY LOU (CONT'D)

What the--

Standing in front of her, smiling, is Rev. Wells.

WELLS

You looking for this? You don't need it.

He shows her the firearm, then tosses it over his shoulder.

JESSY LOU

Oh my God! Thank the Lord you escaped. Praise God!

She goes to hug him. Her arms go through him. She blinks several times, then it hits her.

WELLS

Yes my child. It's true. I am here, but no...I did not survive.

Jessy Lou steps back. She looks him up and down, then falls to her knees weeping.

JESSY LOU

Did you come back to kill me? I deserve it. I know you are a good man. Forgive me, please. The deputies, they...

WELLS

Forgiveness? You did what you could to stop it. And yes, my friend. I know. Men have taken horrible advantage of you, your whole life. I see everything from this side.

Still sobbing, she looks up to him. He helps her stand up.

JESSY LOU

Maybe the world would be better if I join you on the other side. I'm worthless.

WELLS

No, you are not. Actually I have a plan for your life. Let's go inside the tent so you don't die from consumption before that.

She leads him into the tent, then she closes it back up.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

A horse's legs stop as the rain starts to let up. Atop the horse is the Sheriff. Anger consumes his face.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Oh you no good bastards.
Goddamnit!

The light rain drips off of his hat as he stares at the horrific scene.

The courtyard is empty now, except for one soul. And that soul swings in the breeze, by the neck. Williamson looks away and fights tears.

He guides the horse over to where Wells is strung up. Looking closer, he sees the swelling of the face to grotesque proportions.

Blood stains cover his crotch and forms a puddle below. The Sheriff cringes.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
They will pay for this my friend.

The lawman goes full speed to the steps of the courthouse. The door is broken and his deputies lay prostrate. He dismounts and goes to them.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
Hey, wake up. Wake up, I said.

Mitchell acts groggy, as does Corning.

MITCHELL
Oh, damn. My head. What happened?

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
That's what I'd like to know.

He points to the hanging clergyman.

CORNING
Oh no.

MITCHELL
Crowd started throwing rocks when we wouldn't let them in. I guess we both got hit and knocked out.

Sheriff looks around them.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
I don't see any rocks. You dummies have guns. What about that?

CORNING
It all happened so fast. Maybe we got hit with a pipe. I don't know.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Yeah, I don't know either. Cut him down, this instant, before I fire you on the spot. We will talk later. Count on it.

The Sheriff goes inside the building and slams what is left of the door.

MITCHELL
Buddy, we might have a problem.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The windows of the dark room shake from the strong breezes outside. The sheriff closes his eyes and breathes deeply... several times.

He lights the kerosene lamp and sits at his desk, heavily despondent. His head shakes in despair as his hand reaches a secret compartment in the desk. He looks around to make sure he's not observed, then pulls out a wrapped object.

Removing the covering with reverence, a box is revealed. After the lid is removed, a framed photo is seen. It appears to be a wedding portrait...and the bride is RUTHIE, a Black woman (20'S) dressed in all white.

Slightly shaking, he studies her bright smile, then brings the photo to his face and kisses her image. Tears flow.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I failed, my love. I promised you,
this would never happen in my
town...it did, Ruthie.

(beat)

I'm so sorry. Especially after what
happened to you. Help me get
justice, my beloved.

Heavy sobs are drowned out by rolling thunder.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Donaldson and Terry Cole walk home in the rain as they pass a jug back and forth.

DONALDSON

Running out of hootch. We should
get more from Van Liddy. Maybe see
if we can find Jessy Lou again.

TERRY COLE

Stomping that old boy wore me out.
Just going home to sleep.

DONALDSON

Yeah, that was fun. See ya, Terry.

Terry Cole takes a left and Donaldson walks on alone. He hears a girl's voice GIGGLE.

As he looks around him, he sees a glimpse of a night gown billowing in the breeze. Donaldson follows it thru the woods. He pulls out a knife.

DONALDSON (CONT'D)
 Hey Missy. Let me help you.

As he closes in, he smiles. He drunkenly dashes over to her as he hides the blade. The Earth disappears from under his feet. Donaldson tumbles over a cliff.

He is impaled between the legs, on the jagged boulder below. Scream after scream penetrates the evening sky.

The 'ghost' of Rev Wells walks out of the woods with the night gown on his arm. As Donaldson struggles, his feet dangle just inches from the ground, blood pours out.

WELLS
 Oh-oh. Did you have a boo-boo?

DONALDSON
 You--You son of a bitch.

WELLS
 Very rude, Mr. Donaldson. I'm a preacher. Shame, shame. That hurt. Not as bad as castration. But I guess you know that now.

Wells smirks unsympathetically, then turns to leave.

DONALDSON
 Don't leave me here, you bastard.

WELLS
 Right. Where are my manners? How about some puppies to talk to?

The ghost turns to the forest and WHISTLES. Three WOLVES slink out of the darkness, growling.

DONALDSON
 No. Noooo!

The DROOLING wolves close-in for a midnight snack. The ripping of flesh and shrieks are heard as Wells vanishes.

INT. OUTHOUSE - NIGHT

Terry Cole enters the primitive bathroom and closes the door, drops his drawers and has a seat over the hole in the board. Suddenly a roaring voice is heard.

WELLS (O.S.)
 Poop, making more poop? Terry Cole, you are a talented man.

Panic covers the face of the crapping man. The door and windows lock on their own.

TERRY COLE

Who is that? Don't you mess with me. Not funny. I'll kill you.

WELLS (O.S.)

Your carnal transgressions are too many to count. You raped women with your manhood. Tried to take my manhood with castration?

LOUD POUNDING is heard on the roof. Wide eyed, Terry Cole looks to the ceiling of the outhouse.

WELLS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

MATTHEW 23:33...You serpents, you brood of vipers...How will you escape the sentence of hell?

Terry Cole's terrified eyes spots a huge water moccasin snake with glowing eyes slither under the door. Big laughs from Wells as Cole dances from the snake, without pants.

When he falls, the snake bites him in the groin. He screams as fangs sink in and inject venom.

Poison effects are seen in Terry Cole's face. He starts to puke in toilet. He dies there, face in the toilet hole. A snake dangles from between his legs.

WELLS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Thank you, Lord. Vengeance is not mine, but yours. And that...Was perfect. Poetically so.

The laughter of the ghost is loud, then trails off.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Zerlina, asleep on the altar, stirs as she hears KNOCKING at the door. She slowly gets up and gathers herself.

The preacher's wife stumbles to the door. She looks through the peephole and opens it up. Jessy Lou stands before her.

JESSY LOU

Good morning, Missus Wells. My name is Jessy Lou. Your husband sent me.

Looking at the wounds on her face and her wet dirty clothes, Zerlina motions her to come in.

ZERLINA

What happened to you child?

JESSY LOU

Two men, they attacked me and took me against my will. They beat me up and--

A motherly hug is given by Zerlina.

ZERLINA

I understand, baby. I understand, You're safe here. We got clothes and food.

She opens a closet and pulls out towels and a dress.

ZERLINA (CONT'D)

This should fit. Wash up and get in some dry clothes. By that time the vittles will be done.

JESSY LOU

Thank you, ma'am.

She bows to the preacher's wife and takes the items.

ZERLINA

Call me Zerlina. You seen my husband? He was supposed to be back yesterday. I'm worried.

Jessy Lou hangs her head and sighs. She looks back up at Zerlina and gently holds her hand.

JESSY LOU

Miss Zerlina, uh, something--

WELLS (O.C.)

Looking for me?

Wells, at the pulpit, waves to them in his suit, smiling.

ZERLINA

Where you been? Had me worried.

WELLS

Was out back, watching the new day that our Lord has given us, begin. Good to see you, Jessy Lou. Get dressed, we'll have to speak later.

ZERLINA

You hungry, Henry?

WELLS

Naw, got to go. Be back soon.

Zerlina turns to pour something in a cup.

ZERLINA

At least have some herb tea.

JESSY LOU

He already left.

When Zerlina spins around, she is shocked by his vanishing.

EXT. VAN LIDDY'S HIDE OUT - DAY

The outdoor distillery is littered with barrels, jugs, hoses and a hammock slung between two large trees.

A group of unkept, bearded hillbillies enter the camp and look around. They spot Van Liddy and toss him out of the hammock.

VAN LIDDY

Hey! What the hell, buddy?

ELMO, (60's) the tallest man with the grayest beard gets in his face. His missing teeth do not shame him.

ELMO

Your booze is watered down. It's crap. We want our money back.

Van Liddy picks himself up, then sits on a nearby stool.

VAN LIDDY

Work with me, Elmo. Can't pay you now. I had to skimp on ingredients since the darkies don't buy it anymore because of that preacher. Not a problem now. We lynched him.

The hillbillies look among themselves. They look angry.

ELMO

First you won't pay us. Then you kill the man we buy our crops from. A man we considered a friend?

The visitors crowd the sitting moonshiner. Elmo cuts down the hammock and twists it. Fear is on Van Liddy's face.

VAN LIDDY

What the hell you doing?

A shotgun in the corner catches Van Liddy's eye. He dives for it, unsuccessfully.

ELMO

Now you wanna shoot us? Boys.

The hillbillies hold him up as he is punched silly.

VAN LIDDY

No more. Please.

ELMO

We aim to please. He likes lynching? Let's give him one.

As Van Liddy struggles, Elmo makes a noose. Van Liddy kicks one hillbilly, then a different one lands an upper cut that leaves the distiller visibly dazed.

He looks to the side and sees Rev. Wells behind a tree, smiling at him.

VAN LIDDY

Nooo.

As the noose is put around Van Liddy's neck, he sees the face of Wells -- on all the hillbillies.

He is hoisted by the neck up into the air as his legs kick. As he strangles, he sees Wells relaxing in a chair, reading THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW by Washington Irving.

WELLS

Bye-bye, bad guy.

Wells waves to the soon-to-be, cadaver. In short time, the legs stop kicking.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Now in a dress and cleaned up, Jessy Lou finishes eating.

JESSY LOU

That was delicious.

Zerlina has already finished her food.

ZERLINA

Fresh herbs from my garden is in that. You want seconds, baby?

WELLS (O.C.)
 Hey ladies, I'm back. Sorry I had
 to step out.

They turn to see him standing in the pulpit again, but now he
 is wearing his pastoral robes.

ZERLINA
 There's my man. Come 'round here
 and get something in that belly.

Wells smiles at them both.

WELLS
 We can discuss food later. Right
 now we have to move quickly.
 Please, come over here. There is
 much to tell you.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Sheriff Williamson is assisted in placing the body of Rev.
 Wells into a pine-box coffin by Quart Short. The latter
 fights back tears.

QUART SHORT
 This here. It's m-my fault.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
 Why would you say that? It's
 nobody's fault but some hateful
 men. Who I will punish.

The horribly disfigured face of Wells is seen in the daylight
 as he is laid down in his forever home. They both have to
 look away.

QUART SHORT
 Naw, m-my fault. They made me tell
 them that he was t-teaching folks
 how to read and such.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
 What? That explains your injuries.
 Who did it? Give me names.

QUART SHORT
 I c-can't, sir. They would kill me
 sure 'nuff. And g-get away with it.

As the sheriff grabs the lid and nails. He looks to the
 ground, fearing the answer.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Was my deputies, wasn't it?

Avoiding eye contact at all cost, Quart Short picks up a hammer and focuses on the task ahead.

QUART SHORT
Sir, we should have a c-closed coffin. The missus don't need to see what they d-done to him. She would never be r-right again.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
My thoughts exactly. And on the other matter, I hear you loud and clear. I think they are Night Riders on the side.

They both start to nail the lid shut.

QUART SHORT
You ain't heard that from m-me. I'm-I'm just putting the final nails in his coffin.

He sobs into his shoulder as Williamson looks on empathetically at his pain.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Still in pastoral robes, Wells sits near the pulpit as Zerlina and Jessy Lou face him on the first pew. Zerlina sadly wipes tears but Jessy Lou looks confused.

JESSY LOU
My goodness, Reverend. That was a lot. From gardenias, to Sleepy Hollow, to your funeral and even gold? I think I got it.

WELLS
How about you, my love?

ZERLINA
Wanna know how I feel? Really? Girl, you do all them things he asked for. Me? Gimme that gun and teach me how to shoot it.

WELLS
Babe, come on.

His wife jumps up as the passions of anger and a broken heart meet. She stomps her feet.

ZERLINA

They are gonna kill my baby in cold blood and expect to keep living? I don't care about the rest of that. I got no life. Neither will they.

He floats over and smiles. She sobs heavily.

WELLS

You know as well as I do that God has a way of, well...taking care of things. Trust me. Do it for the baby and his future.

Jessy Lou stands up and moves towards them.

JESSY LOU

Zerlina, I am so sorry. Especially that they used me. Killed your husband and make this life hell for you and your youngin-to-come. I'm ready to do what ever I can to make his plan work, but I can't do it without you.

Anger, loss, and fear of failure are in the widow's eyes.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Wells, Zerlina and Jessy Lou walk through the garden with shovels in hand. They stop at the gardenias which are near the property line with Banner.

JESSY LOU

So right here?

WELLS

Yes ma'am.

Zerlina pulls the plants out by the root and puts them in a basket.

ZERLINA

No use wasting good medicine. Okay let's get started.

They all start to dig a hole with shovels. After a while, Wells sees the women tire. He looks to the heavens and says a silent prayer.

WELLS

Ladies, Banner will be up soon and we have to be finished and out of here. Let me do the digging. Go prepare what needs to be packed.

ZERLINA

Are you sure?

WELLS

Yes, and bring the wagon over when you are done.

Wells starts digging with incredible speed as the women walk away but look back at him.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Sheriff Williamson and Quart Short ride in the wagon that carries the body of the slain clergyman.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Have you seen Jessy Lou? I looked for her. Wasn't at her house.

QUART SHORT

No sir. Ain't s-seen her. Hope she is alright.

They drive on. The Sheriff looks over at Quart Short.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I truly believe that there is no chance that the minister did what they said he did. I would, uh, really like to hear it somewhere else. You know?

Quart Short turns to face him, no expression.

QUART SHORT

Sir, there is no chance. None at all. He l-loves her, and you.

A slight smile crosses the lawman's face.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Deep down I knew it. Felt it.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Zerlina and Jessy Lou pull up the wagon to the huge hole in the garden. The hole is so deep, Wells is not visible but the dirt he shovels out is. A CLANK sound is heard.

WELLS (O.S.)
Y'all came just in time.

After a little more digging, Wells floats out of the hole. He reaches back down and pulls out a large, muddy metal box.

JESSY LOU
This can't be real.

He picks it up easily and puts it in the back of the wagon with a heavy thud. The women get closer. Zerlina tries to pick it up. She is shocked by the weight of it.

ZERLINA
My God. How much is in here?

WELLS
Let's see.

With a outstretch of his hand over the box, the rusty locks fall away on their own. He opens up the lid. Inside are solid gold coins. Mouths drop.

ZERLINA
Oh my God. It's true.

WELLS
Sure is. Got everything packed I see. Cover this up and I'll see you later. You're about to get some visitors.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

While Zerlina and Jessy Lou wash up in a basin, there is a KNOCK at the door. They look to each other.

ZERLINA
I sure hope I got the gumption to handle this.

Jessy Lou hugs her. Zerlina goes to the door. When she opens it, Quart Short stands before her. He casts his eyes to the ground.

QUART SHORT

G-good morning, Miss Zerlina. I have some God awful news. I-I have to tell you. Reverend Wells. He, he's dead. Got l-lynched.

Zerlina closes her eyes. Sheriff Williamson comes over.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I'm the sheriff ma'am. Your husband was a good man. I will make the killers pay. You have my heart-felt sympathy.

QUART SHORT

Them hateful f-fools. I heard Reverend Wells c-cursed them before he passed. His b-body is in the wagon. Where would you l-like it?

From the shadows, Jessy Lou steps forward. The jaw of the Sheriff hits the floor but bounces back in time for a wide smile, accented with tears of joy.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Jessy Lou? Oh God. Girl. Are you alright? I mean--

He dashes pass everyone and goes over and hugs her.

JESSY LOU

I been through it. But I'm still standing. It's so good to see you. I need to tell you what happened, so you know the truth.

They stroll off arm and arm, to speak alone.

ZERLINA

(to Quart Short)

Come on in, brother. After they stop hugging-up on each other, we got to discuss some plans.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Zerlina and Quart Short walk outside, followed by Jessy Lou and Williamson. Quart Short mounts his horse as the couple stare longingly at each other.

QUART SHORT

Alrighty then, I'll get the congregation together and m-meet you there. Be s-safe everybody.

They all wave good bye to him as he gallops off.

ZERLINA

Baby girl, we best move along now.

Jessy Lou looks to her and smiles, then hugs Williamson.

JESSY LOU

Please make sure you come tonight.

He kisses her forehead.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

I wouldn't miss it pretty lady.

She kisses him full on the lips.

JESSY LOU

You best not.

They laugh then part ways. The wagons veer off in different directions.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Zerlina drives through the woods with Jessy Lou riding shotgun. She looks to the coffin in the back.

ZERLINA

Don't worry my beloved husband... Warrior. This part of the journey will be over soon.

EXT. BANNER'S HOUSE - DAY

Yawning and scratching his chest, a disheveled Banner greets the day.

BANNER

Goddamn hung-over. Was sure fun putting that ole boy in his place. Figured them darkies would be pissing and moaning by now.

He walks over to the property line and listens. Hears nothing. As Banner looks around he sees the soil from the newly dug hole on the Wells side.

BANNER (CONT'D)

No. No no. No way.

He stumbles over to where the gardenias used to be. Eyes wide, his body shudders in anger.

BANNER (CONT'D)

You black sons of bitches. You better not have taken my stuff.

Stomping over to the Wells house, he sees no one is there. He pulls a ragged map out of his pocket and looks at it.

Going back to the hole he looks around. A coin sticks out of the ground. Banner grabs a shovel and goes in after it.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Steal my shit will ya? Y'all be buried in this hole when I find you. Damn monkeys.

Shoveling like a madman, Banner goes deeper in the hole.

BANNER (CONT'D)

Got me madder than a wet hen behind this cotton picking bullshit.

As he tries to move, he realizes his feet are stuck. While he struggles, he turns to see Wells slowly stick his head out from the opposite wall of mud. Banner is shocked.

WELLS

Well howdy neighbor, miss me?"

Banner pisses himself in fear, then tries to crawl his way out. Nothing works. Scared to death, he stammers.

BANNER

No, it can't be. You. You're dead. Saw you die.

WELLS

And maybe you helped...a little?

BANNER

I'm sorry. Really, I was drunk. Please, don't kill me.

WELLS

Aren't you precious? No, I am the man of the cloth that you liked to harass. But your old boss would like to have a word with you.

On the opposite wall of the hole, a white man sticks his head out to the shoulders. He appears to be a Confederate officer with a white beard and he is pissed.

It is GENERAL ROBERT E LEE (70's). He gets one arm free and tries to grab Banner.

BANNER

Who the hell is you?

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

I was the supreme commander of your sorry ass in that stupid war. Robert E Lee. Get over here nigger so I can strangle you.

BANNER

Him?

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

The Rev? Hell no. You! Ya lowdown varmint. Where did you get the map you been looking for the gold I hid from the Yankees? Huh?

Banner's eyes dart around in panic.

BANNER

I found it.

The General's eyes bulge out, just slightly more than the veins on his neck, as he shakes with rage.

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

Liar! You burglarized a home of an old woman in Lexington, Virginia. You killed her, made it look like natural causes. Stole some jewelry and the map.

BANNER

No, no. I, uh--

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

You got the map and the money to buy your house at the same place. When you killed my wife!

Banner falls down, petrified. Maggots start to crawl up his legs by the hundreds. He screams. The maggots are seen crawling up his throat and collar. He claws at them.

BANNER

You were a confederate. Our king.
You can't be on that coon's side.
I'm white, he is lying to you. You
know how they are.

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

I was stupid as hell to believe
that shit when I was alive. On the
other side, you realize it was all
bullshit. All lies.

The General slams his hand into the mud-wall to emphasize the point. His fury explodes, as does the volume of his voice.

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE (CONT'D)

A lie I will pay eternity praying
forgiveness for. And you try that
angle on me? Do you believe the
gall of this fool, Brother Wells?

WELLS

Breaks my heart. That kind of
thinking made my wife a widow.
Maybe we should do something to
stop this disease he has, from
spreading.

Banner frantically tries to swipe away the maggots from his face. Now cockroaches and ants join in on the parade around his body.

With both arms free, Wells and the General reach each other and shake hands.

GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

I hear you brother. Can't let this
craziness spread any further.

At ground level, black hands and white hands pull dirt over the hole that the gold was in. Banner SCREAMS until it is MUFFLED by the soil.

The ground on top is now leveled smooth. The final screams are heard as grass instantly grows on top of the dirt.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

On way to work, Doc Kellum, giggles as he passes the tree where Wells was an ornament the night before.

Doc Kellum happens to look at the courthouse. Then looks closer. He sees the image of a face in the window there. He can't believe his eyes.

Fortman and Pastor Smith walk up to the dumb-founded physician.

PASTOR SMITH
Hey Doc, reliving the glory from
last night?

DOC KELLUM
What the hell is that? It wasn't
there yesterday.

FORTMAN
Jumping Jesus almighty. You see who
I see?

Silence as they stare at the face in the window. It looks male, African American and the face seems to be contorted in extreme pain.

DOC KELLUM
It can't be. How?

PASTOR SMITH
That nigger claimed to be a
preacher? Now we see the truth. He
was a witch. We did the Lord's work
by stringing him up before he could
infect the whole town.

DOC KELLUM
Damn baboon cursed us before we
snatched his ass. Remember?

PASTOR SMITH
Who could forget? Proof that he
was in service to Satan. We
should've hung him sooner.

Now more towns folks gather around them and ponder the image they see.

Just then Sheriff Williamson rides up to the courthouse with his now empty wagon. He sees the face in the window and takes off his hat in respect.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Rev, you are too much. Nice touch.

The crowd near the courthouse, makes excuses.

DOC KELLUM

It's probably just finger smudges
from him eating fried chicken. You
know how they get about yardbird.

Nervous laughter spreads across the crowd.

FORTMAN

You're right. Probably just grease.
Trying to scare us. I'll go over to
the General Store and have Newton
give me something to clean it with.

PASTOR SMITH

Good idea. Disprove the hoax.
Black savages been cursed since
bible times. They ain't got the
power to curse nobody else.

DOC KELLUM

Especially white folks, right?

Williamson has heard enough. He stands on top of his wagon to
address those gathered.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Listen up. I don't curse people. I
arrest them and bring them to
justice. If anyone here had
anything to do with the death of
that innocent man. I will make sure
you hang. I don't care what color
you are. Understand?

The towns folk look amongst each other then nod.

The lawman takes the reins and brings the wagon to its normal
spot closer to the courthouse. He dismounts and goes to read
a note on the door.

MITCHELL (V.O.)

*Hi Sheriff, we went to Leeds,
Alabama for a deputies meeting.
Will be back tonight.*

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Deputies meeting? I would have
heard about that. Probably a Night
Rider convention, the bastards.

He goes inside and slams the door behind him.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The wagon, helmed by Zerlina and Jessy Lou comes to a stop, not far from Jessy Lou's weathered tent.

ZERLINA

This is where he wants it.

JESSY LOU

I'm not surprised. I was about to blow my head clean off in that tent over yonder. Your husband, I mean his ghost, talked me out of it.

Zerlina wipes a tear.

ZERLINA

Yep. That's my Henry.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Fortman scrubs the window with a rag and soapy water from the inside. Towns people look on. He dries it off. The image is still in the window.

DOC KELLUM

What the hell, boy? Put some elbow grease on it.

FORTMAN

I have. Scrubbed this window inside and outside. It don't come off for nothing.

PASTOR SMITH

In the name of Jesus, be gone!

The image of Wells seems to roll his eyes, but goes nowhere. That act frightens some people and they scurry away.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Congregation members look sad as they gather near the water's edge. Quart Short brings a member on the back of his horse as the sun begins to go down.

The body of Wells lays atop a makeshift funeral pyre. Holding her husband's bible, Zerlina walks over and stands in front of the open air crematory.

She takes a deep breath. Williamson arrives, ties his horse and is embraced by a very happy Jessy Lou.

JESSY LOU
I'm glad you made it darling.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Me too. Wait till I tell you what
is going on in town.

ZERLINA
I would like to thank you all for
coming here in remembrance for my
dear late husband, Reverend Henry
Wells. He did not die in vein. He
died to make us a better people.
And we will not let him down.

Jessy Lou and Quart Short ignite the funeral pyre. The blaze
lights up the sky as the sunsets and clouds roll in.

ZERLINA (O.C.) (CONT'D)
EXODUS 14:14...Be still. The Lord
will fight for you. You only
need...To be still.

INT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Newton goes to the door and puts the 'CLOSED' sign on it as
he feels the strong breeze. The wind blows some products off
the shelf. He struggles to close it and lock it.

NEWTON
This storm is gonna be another
dozy. I best get home.

Newton sees the door swing open, but no one is there. Looks
down, sees the back of a kid dash by him. Angry, he shouts.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
Hey, ya little pick-a-ninny. You
didn't use the colored door. Get
back here. I'm closing.

He hears the sound of little feet SCAMPER around, out of
sight. Newton looks down aisles, sees no one.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
Why you nappy headed so and so.
Come out here so I can whip you
like your mammy SHOULD HAVE.

Newton finally locates the intruder, but his back is to the
store owner.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
Ain't you heard me boy? I said GIT.

Slowly the small frame turns around. It appears to be a child with a Reverend Wells mask on. Fear consumes Newton.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
What the...? You ain't funny you
little shit. Get outta my store.

The mini Wells laughs at Newton in a shrill voice that seems to ECHO.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
I've had about enough of you.

Newton kicks him and the kid flies behind a display.

As Newton goes over to finally toss him out, the scamper of many more little feet are heard coming through the front door. He turns, sees nothing, but hears kids giggling.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
Unless y'all want what I gave that
other little savage, you best get
out now. I ain't playing.

Sweat pours off his brow as he nervously looks around. Suddenly he hears giggles behind him. He turns to see three little figures with the Rev Wells mask on.

More giggles are heard. He spins to see four more...but their masks looks like the contorted face in the window.

Speechless, Newton back-peddles, eyes bulging. The giggles stop. The little people smile to expose long, jagged teeth. Then the miniature ministers attack.

NEWTON (CONT'D)
Nooo.

Now ten small bodies and ten sets of teeth make Newton their target. He struggles and screams as they bite him.

Newton hits the floor, they pile on. He looks up to see one pour black paint on him.

Managing to throw some off of his body, he gets to his feet. The black paint makes him look like a minstrel. Suddenly the little tormenters...have vanished.

He sighs in relief, then turns...to see Rev. Wells standing in front of him the way he looked after the lynching.

WELLS

You did this. Now you will pay.

Hysterical with fear, Newton screams and turns to run. He slips on the black paint on the floor. Newton hurtles towards the 'COLORED ONLY' glass side door.

He crashes halfway through it, as the door shatters. Newton gets impaled through his torso by long glass shards.

EXT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

As a storm starts to rage overhead, lightning flashes illuminate the small establishment.

Slightly below the sign that reads, 'COLORED ONLY' is the blackened body of Newton and bright red streams of blood running down the door.

EXT. PASTOR SMITH'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Rev. Wells walks out of the woods as the storm rages. In front of him, a large, freshly painted chapel with a golden cross on its steeple. He smirks, then looks to the heavens.

WELLS

Sister Ruthie. I need your help for a moment or two.

Wells stops, turns back to the woods as lightning FLASHES. When he turns back, Wells is now a very pregnant black woman. It is Ruthie. The same bride from the sheriff's photo.

The woman goes up to the church's door and knocks. She waits in the rain until the door opens. Pastor Smith sticks his head out.

PASTOR SMITH

What do you want? This ain't your church.

RUTHIE/WELLS

Sir, please. I am with child. There's a bad storm out here.

PASTOR SMITH

Not my problem. There's a darkie church across town. I hear they need a new preacher there. Now get steppin'.

RUTHIE/WELLS

But sir, are you not a servant of
God? If you really believe in Jesus
and what he said--

PASTOR SMITH

Enough. Now git!

INT. PASTOR SMITH'S CHURCH - NIGHT

The clergyman slams the door on the drenched woman's face.
He turns from the door and rolls his eyes.

PASTOR SMITH

This is the house of God. No
niggers allowed.

He looks around and takes in the splendor of his well
decorated and immaculate chapel. Lightning FLASHES.

Pastor Smith looks down and sees liquid on the floor. He
bends down and touches it as lightning FLASHES again. The
realization makes his voice jump an octave.

PASTOR SMITH (CONT'D)

Blood? What? No.

Pastor Smith looks around for the source. It seems to be
coming from the life-size statue of Jesus.

He steps over with eyes wide. The life fluid drips from the
palms. Suddenly the hand turns brown. Smith jumps back.

PASTOR SMITH (CONT'D)

No way. Oh my God.

He looks up at the statue. Smith freezes when he sees the
face of Wells where the statue's was, and wearing the same
ancient robes.

WELLS

You have no God.

Pastor Smith back peddles down the aisle, terrified.

PASTOR SMITH

You? You're dead. I saw you die.

WELLS

Don't be so humble. You actually
helped murder me. What kind of Holy
Man is that? Huh?

Wells follows him as he bolts for the door.

PASTOR SMITH
Get behind me Satan. Go away.

He fumbles with the door as sweat drips. It opens and Smith runs out into the rain.

Wells watches from the doorway as...

EXT. PASTOR SMITH'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Smith dashes out into the storm. Strong winds whip around him. The steeple teeters atop the chapel in the breeze.

WELLS
Satan? I don't see your daddy
around here. You have blasphemed in
the name of the Lord and told lies
that advance evil. The true God
loves all, not some.

Pastor Smith slips and falls down in the mud.

PASTOR SMITH
My God don't give a bucket of spit,
about nappy-head niggers.

WELLS
Your God is false and a weakling.
This is where your fake God and the
real God meet. Who do you think
will win?

EXT. PASTOR SMITH'S CHURCH - NIGHT

The gold cross fixed to the steeple breaks loose and hurtles to the ground.

PASTOR SMITH
You're a witch. I condemn you.

Between its path to the muddy soil, is the torso of Pastor Smith. The heavy cross penetrates his abdomen and impales him to the wet Alabama earth.

As Wells walks out the door, lightning flashes and he turns back into Ruthie. She walks over to Smith.

RUTHIE/WELLS
Look at you all covered in mud.
Poor baby.

(MORE)

RUTHIE/WELLS (CONT'D)
 Maybe you should go to the darkie
 church. They need a new preacher,
 right?

She walks to the woods as the Pastor bleeds out in the rain.

WELLS (V.O.)
 The wrath of God is being revealed
 from heaven, against all the
 godless people, who lie in the
 Lord's name, they will be doomed by
 their wickedness.

INT. BEDROOM OF DOC KELLUM - NIGHT

The physician tosses and turns in his bed as his eyes, under
 closed lids, flicker back and forth.

Outside the window, the storm continues. His NURSE (50's)
 waddles her stocky frame into the darkened room. He opens one
 eye.

NURSE
 Doctor. Excuse me sir. There is a
 woman here. Pregnant and about to
 deliver.

DOC KELLUM
 Jesus. Fine. She local? Whose
 family is she from?

NURSE
 Sir, she's colored.

He closes his eyes and rolls over.

DOC KELLUM
 I don't touch their kind. Send her
 on her way. I'm tired.

NURSE
 I told her the situation. She
 refuses to leave.

Doc Kellum jolts up in bed. Anger on his face.

DOC KELLUM
 Won't leave? Who in the hell?
 Fine. I'll be down and I'll teach
 that bitch about trying to bully
 me. No niggers will ever try and
 come here again when I'm through.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - NIGHT

The doctor walks in and sees the back of the problematic patient who stares out the window.

DOC KELLUM

Hey you. Didn't my nurse tell you
we don't service your kind?

The female who already is on the table and whose feet are in stirrups turns to face him. It is Ruthie.

RUTHIE/WELLS

Please sir. I need your help. It's
coming quick. Can you forget my
color and be Christian? Didn't you
take an oath?

DOC KELLUM

How dare you question me, wench.
I'll help you, goddamnit, but you
might not like it.

RUTHIE/WELLS

Just hurry, please.

The nurse walks in as Doc Kellum shields his patient from the bottle he fills the syringe from. The small bottle is marked, 'XX'. The nurse sees it.

NURSE

Are you sure you want to do this?

Kellum nods and smiles.

DOC KELLUM

More than ever. Let's get started,
shall we?

RUTHIE/WELLS

Thank God.

DOC KELLUM

I'll give you a shot to, uh, help
with pain. Nurse, please get me
some water.

The nurse looks worried as she leaves the room.

RUTHIE/WELLS

What's that?

DOC KELLUM

Something for the pain.

He roughly grabs her arm and slams the needle in.

RUTHIE/WELLS

Ouch!

DOC KELLUM

Actually, it's for MY pain.

As the fluid gets injected, Kellum's smile gets wider. Suddenly, the syringe starts to jam, then works in reverse.

Her blood streams into the glass syringe with velocity, then explodes in his hand. He jumps back in fear.

DOC KELLUM (CONT'D)

What the hell?

From underneath the sheet that covers the patient, a brown males arm stretches out from her birthing area.

Still amazed at the syringe. The doctor doesn't see it. He gets snatched by the back of the neck.

WELLS (O.C.)

Hell? That's where I'm about to take you.

Doc Kellum is yanked backwards violently.

INT. BIRTH CANAL - NIGHT

When he opens his eyes, Rev. Wells sits across from him in what appears to be a tiny red room. The walls of the space look wet and seem to pulsate.

DOC KELLUM

YOU? No. *It can't be.* What the hell is going on here?

WELLS

Just keeping me company and paying for your sins. By the way, why did you try to kill that pregnant woman? You took an oath. Shame, shame, shame.

The physician starts to choke and heave.

DOC KELLUM

Can't breathe. Get me outta here.

WELLS

Naw, sorry. Don't think so. You're a doctor that kills people on purpose. Does Alabama really need that kinda thing?

At the end of the room is a tiny opening. Doc Kellum scrambles towards it.

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM - NIGHT

Ruthie looks down and sees a white arm sticking out from under her sheet. She laughs and pushes the arm back where it came from.

RUTHIE/WELLS

Where you going? Get back in there, fool.

INT. BIRTH CANAL - NIGHT

Doc Kellum lands back where he was, with a thud.

WELLS

Why'd you leave? First you kill me, then you abandon me. Is it my breath? Be honest.

DOC KELLUM

Can't breathe. Dying.

WELLS

Really? That's sad. You're breaking my heart.

DOC KELLUM

Help!

WELLS

Sure. No problem. I'll help you the way you helped this poor black woman in need of medical attention. How's that sound?

Eyes and veins bulge on the doctor as he struggles with oxygen depletion.

INT. BEDROOM OF DOC KELLUM - NIGHT

Still tossing and turning in his bed, gurgle sounds are heard as he tries to breathe. He gasps for air as his eyes pop open. The eyelids stay open, as he dies on the mattress.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Mitchell and Corning travel on horseback. Their hoods are off but they are still in Klan robes.

CORNING

Crazy proud of you ole boy. Making Grand Dragon your first nomination. Ain't that something.

MITCHELL

Some people have a calling to be teachers and what not. My calling is to keep niggers in their place. It's a gift.

CORNING

Anointed by God himself.

They laugh and ride on then see another NIGHT RIDER on horseback with hood on. He waves them over and points to some boulders ahead.

NIGHT RIDER

Y'all see what I'm seeing?

They look to the boulders and spot a black man with his back to them. In the moonlight it is seen he wears a suit.

Mitchell and Corning stop and flank the Night Rider, then put back on their hoods.

MITCHELL

Hey brother. That nigger slow in the head or what?

CORNING

I got some rope in my saddle. Never know when a party like this can just fall on ya.

MITCHELL

Say boy. You looney or just stupid?

The man starts to dance in place and rub his buttocks.

WELLS

Butter my buns and call me a
biscuit. I'm showing you my
booty...so you can kiss it.

The Night Riders look back forth among themselves, astounded.

MITCHELL

Did ya?...Am I hearing things?

CORNING

Boy, turn 'round here so you can
see who's sending you to monkey
heaven.

The man starts laughing and it seems to reverberate through
the rocky backdrop. He slowly turns around.

The post-lynching face of Rev, Wells stares back at them. A
gasp is heard from the mounted men.

MITCHELL

You? No. No way.

WELLS

I know. Look, you circus clowns
tried your best. But when you work
for the Lord, no weapon formed
against you can prosper.

The deputies pull their handguns and point them at Wells with
shaky hands.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Any weapon...includes those, dummy.

The lawless deputies open fire. Bullets ricochet off the
surrounding rocks and end up hitting the shooters in the legs
and arms.

They scream. Smoke clears and Wells still stands in front of
them, unscathed.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Fellas, you must have fallen outta
the stupid tree and hit every
branch on the way down.

NIGHT RIDER

My three legged dog can walk
straighter than y'all can shoot.
Try again for Christ's sake.

More shots, more ricochets, more bullet holes. They scream.

CORNING

Pastor Smith was right. That coon's
a witch.

WELLS

Just a preacher making sinners pay
for abominations. Ready to pay?

NIGHT RIDER

I swear, if y'all can't hit that
ole boy over yonder, I'm gonna lose
my head.

The mounted stranger grabs the top of his hood and pulls.
From the shoulders up, there is nothing visible.

The deputies scream again. Lightning FLASHES as the horse
with the headless rider, rears and whinnies.

As the hood is yanked off, it is seen that the head the
horseman holds is that of Wells, pre-lynching. It is held so
that the frightened deputies see it.

HEAD OF WELLS

Hope you got more bullets left.

Both deputies empty their guns at the headless horseman, in
between them. The lead goes through the apparition and into
each other.

Bloodied, they fall off their horses and the white robes turn
bright red.

HEAD OF WELLS (CONT'D)

I always wanted to do that. Thank
you, Washington Irving.

The Rev Wells by the rocks disappears...as the horseman
reattaches his head.

WELLS

Who'd guess a little old Tennessee
boy would be slaying dragons? Don't
that beat all?

Bodies of bad cops litter the ground as horse and Preacher
travel down the road, then disappear into the mist.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

As Jessy Lou and Sheriff Williamson head towards the door, he
waves back to the congregation who came over from the funeral
and are now packing up their worldly goods. They wave back.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Like I said, I will do everything
in my power to get justice for the
minister. That's a promise.

They get to the door. Outside, hail pummels the earth. He
takes her hand and looks Jessy Lou in the eyes.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

I promise to get you justice too,
my dear. I'll start by arresting my
own deputies. Might just shoot
Donaldson and Cole. No trial.

JESSY LOU

Thank you, baby. They are some evil
men. What about the plan? What do
you think? Will you come with us?

He hugs her then kisses her forehead.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

To be able to spend the rest of my
life with an angel like you? I'd
live anywhere. Even New York. Did
Wells say why there?

She shrugs.

JESSY LOU

Has something to do with that
'Headless Horseman' story he liked
so much. I trust him. Has to be
better than this place.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Gimme some time to clean up the
mess these killers made. I just
can't leave our town like this.

JESSY LOU

If the minister is still on the
window...say hello for me.

They laugh and kiss as the hailstorm ceases. She watches as
he mounts his horse and speeds off.

EXT. OUTHOUSE - DAY

Sheriff Williamson looks around as he walks from Terry Cole's
shack, to the outdoor bathroom. The sound of FLIES is very
loud from behind the door.

He opens it and covers his nose. Terry Cole's head is in the dookey hole of the outhouse.

The snake's poison has bloated his body and changed its color. He closes the door quickly.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
You got justice on this one
already, Miss Jessie Lou.

In the distance, he hears DOGS FIGHTING. He follows the sound, gun drawn, to a cliff and looks down. The dogs are ripping apart an impaled male body.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
Is that Donaldson?

He sees a moonshine jug laying nearby.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
Yep, what's left of him. Nice of
you boys to save me some bullets.

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Hail damage grabs the attention of the Sheriff as he travels into town. Almost all of the windows are shattered.

He sees something hanging out of the window of the side door of the General Store. He goes over.

Newton, painted black, hangs halfway out of the COLORED ONLY door as glass shards stick out of his torso.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Okay, I don't get it.

Just then he hears a female voice and looks around to see Doc Kellum's nurse in tears.

NURSE
Sheriff, come quick. The doctor, I
think he's dead.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Him too?

NURSE
Who killed that nigger?

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

That's actually Newton. Except for the holes, I think he's more handsome with some color. Have you seen my deputies around?

NURSE

I ain't seen them. Maybe they over at the courthouse.

EXT. PICKENS COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

With the nurse trailing behind his horse, the Sheriff slows as he sees a crowd staring at the building's windows.

He dismounts and sees what the others have witnessed. Every window has been shattered except the one showing Wells.

NURSE

Must be witchcraft.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Or a miracle. Maybe I should let Pastor Smith see if he can top this one. Tell the undertaker I'll meet him back here. I think he's got a busy day ahead.

EXT. PASTOR SMITH'S CHURCH - DAY

The damaged steeple catches the eye of the Sheriff first. Glimmering in the morning sun is the gold cross and under it, the dead, un-holy man. Williamson looks to the sky.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Gee, Reverend Wells. I don't know if you're listening, but it seems like the entire lynch mob...has been struck down with extremely bad health. How unfortunate.

He rides over, takes a closer look and winces. He turns the horse around and heads back to the road.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

Guess I'll head out and see what's left of my stupid deputies.

EXT. VAN LIDDY'S HIDE OUT - DAY

Fortman and his carpetbagger wagon approach the property.

FORTMAN

Van Liddy. You horse's ass, you owe me some money. Where you at?.

After tying his horse, he walks through the sloppy camp.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Ahead in the road, crows gather and feast on two white and red mounds at the feet of two horses. From a distance, Williamson sees them.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON

Night Riders? Did the Union Army come back to visit?

Now closer, he recognizes the horses. He reaches down and yanks the hoods off of both heads.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)

Guess the Reverend caught you boys coming back from your full time job. How shameful. Lucky I didn't kill you myself.

EXT. VAN LIDDY'S HIDE OUT - DAY

Fortman strolls through the camp. He looks confused.

FORTMAN

Hey, Van Liddy...where's all of your shit. Did you find Jesus or something?

WELLS (O.S.)

Jesus don't want anything to do with either one of you.

Spinning around, Fortman sees Wells standing behind him. Next to the preacher hangs Van Liddy.

FORTMAN

What? Oh my God.

WELLS

You have no God, Judas. Thought I could trust you. What happened?

Eyes bulging, sweat pouring and hands shaking, Fortman pulls his gun and fires at Wells twice.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Sheriff Williamson looks around when he hears GUNSHOTS.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Sounds like it's your turn, Van
Liddy. Good riddance.

He determines the direction of the shots and gallops off.

EXT. VAN LIDDY'S HIDE OUT - DAY

Fortman inches over to where the body of Wells should be. Nothing. He is perplexed.

WELLS (O.C.)
Looking for me, Mister Iscariot?

Looking up to where the voice came from, he sees that Van Liddy's face has been replaced by Wells. He sports the post-lynching look.

Fortman falls backwards on his ass. With quaking hands and bulging eyes, he fires at the hanging body.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (O.C.)
Drop it, Fortman. Now.

He spins to see the lawman with pistol drawn. He looks back to the hanging body. Van Liddy's body oozes blood from the gunshots. His eyes reflect confusion and madness.

FORTMAN
But, But...

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
Why did you hang him, then shoot
him too? You're under arrest. Drop
the gun.

FORTMAN
You're not gonna take me down for
this. I'll be damned.

Fortman fires at Sheriff Williamson as the lawman ducks behind some barrels. Shooting as he runs to his wagon, Fortman misses Williamson.

The lawman takes aim and lands two rounds into his chest. He falls, dead against the wagon.

Sheriff Williamson carefully goes up to the body. He checks the pulse.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON
 Yep, better put another pot of
 coffee on for the undertaker.

He stands and scans the area.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
 Rev, you sure made my job easy.
 You got 'em all. Like to shake your
 hand but I'd probably piss myself
 instead.

The lawman giggles to himself, then straightens up.

SHERIFF WILLIAMSON (CONT'D)
 Rest in peace, old friend. Finally.

The sheriff gets on his horse, looks around, then trots off.

FADE TO BLACK.

INSERT - GRAPHIC

*Our country's national crime is lynching...Brave men do not
 gather by thousands to torture and murder a single
 individual...Somebody must show that the Afro-American race
 is more sinned against, than sinning...And it seems it has
 fallen on me - to do so. -- IDA B. WELLS*

FADE IN:

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - PRESENT DAY

A mixed crowd of college students in TUSKEGEE, AUBURN and
 CRIMSON TIDE apparel, demonstrate near the courthouse
 against...anti-CRT, migrant hatred, religious bigotry and
 loss of women's reproductive rights.

Banners and flags fly high, but some eyes seem transfixed on
 something across the street - as modern cars drive on both
 sides of the avenue.

On a second floor window. Could it be...a man's face? The
 closer the image gets, it is clear...a Black man -- in agony,
 is seen. Looking out over his flock, for eternity.

The apparition catches the eyes of the college aged, WINNIE
 (White), BELINDA (Black), AOKI (Asian) and LEO (Hispanic).

WINNIE
 And we can still see him in the
 window to this day? Amazing.

BELINDA

Can't scrub him off, can't scratch
him off. Replace the glass, he'll
show up on the new one.

AOKI

It can't be erased? Even with the
technology we have now?

LEO

Must be a real ghost. That's loco.
Nobody can explain it?

With a self-assured smile, Belinda turns and faces her peers.

BELINDA

I can. It's God letting us know...
not to be afraid. No matter what.

The sound of a large vehicle's engine gets louder. The
students look over at the last minute to see a truck on the
sidewalk...barreling down on them.

Bodies and banners go sprawling everywhere. The U-HAUL type
rental truck stops. The backdoor rolls up to expose jack-
boots, ready to stomp.

Young, bald-headed men with Nazi shirts and face tattoos pour
out of the back of the transport. Clubs, baseball bats and
pipes are gripped with smoldering hatred.

The neo-Nazis descend on the injured marchers with weapons
swinging. Blood and screams fill the air.

Leo helps to shield Belinda and gets her to her feet. She is
dazed and bleeding.

LEO

Quick. Let's go.

Although, bloody and concussed, she points to the window of
the courthouse.

BELINDA

He-he's gone.

In the midst of the chaos, Leo, Winnie and Aoki see it too.
Confusion covers their face for a second, then they all help
to drag her away from the center of the violence.

INT. RENTAL TRUCK - DAY

The NAZI DRIVER (20S) does a bump of white powder off his hand and puts the vial on the empty seat beside him. Gleefully observing the carnage out his window, he doesn't notice the vial get switched.

Half giggling, he takes a swig of beer, then pours out another bump on his hand. Snort-snort. Suddenly his nose starts to bleed, his eyes get wide. Someone now sits in the passenger seat.

It is a Black man, who is dressed like Rick James. A big smile is shined to the driver. Could it be...Rev. Wells?

WELLS

Don't put that up your nose, buddy.
Aw shucks. I'm too late, huh?

The driver tries to speak but only a gurgle sound escapes.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Cocaine is a hell of a drug.
Battery acid? Much worse.

Blood flows from the driver's nose and he starts to seizure.

EXT. RENTAL TRUCK - DAY

The Nazi driver opens the door and yells to his crew.

NAZI DRIVER

Let's go. Cops will be here soon!

The goons get a few last licks in, then pile into the back of the truck. After they have all entered and close the door in back, the driver grins, then...

INT. RENTAL TRUCK - DAY

...Transforms into Rev. Wells.

In the passenger seat, the real driver's corpse deals with the acid in his nostrils, eating away his face.

WELLS

Bad case of acne, there buddy. You should have it looked at.

He guns the engine. It speeds off.

INT. TRUCK CAB - DAY

Hyped with adrenalin, the Hitler youth are ecstatic about their stomping of the protesters and congratulate each other. They don't even notice a dark figure enter through the wall.

The Nazi with a SWASTIKA on his FACE, reacts first...with surprise, then anger. The black cloaked, masked figure, resembles Darth Vader.

SWASTIKA FACE

Who the fuck are you?

WELLS

(modified voice)

Puke...I am your father.

The Nazis go for their weapons. The black helmet starts to be removed by the stranger.

WELLS (CONT'D)

(regular voice)

Just kidding. I'm actually...

The helmet is fully removed and they jump at the sight. The SCREAM mask frightens them.

WELLS (CONT'D)

Boo!

Now recovered, Swastika face and others pull out guns and point them at the stranger.

SWASTIKA FACE

Think you're funny, huh? You'll be a phantom for real after we fill you with lead. Fire.

TIME SLOWS DOWN as the mask disappears and the stranger becomes like Neo from MATRIX fame. His leather trench coat winds around his twisting body as bullets fly by him. The errant shots, rip into the Nazis around him.

Screams of agony echo off the walls of the box cab. Wells removes his futuristic sunglasses and squats down to be face to face with Swastika boy...who is in the process of bleeding out. He spit at Wells.

SWASTIKA FACE (CONT'D)

Fuck you.

Wells gets closer, wipes his face. He changes to what resembles THE JOKER. The iconic, grotesque grin, mocks him.

WELLS
Why so serious?

The Nazi struggles to back away.

WELLS (CONT'D)
Would like to spend more time with
you lovely boys, but I feel the
need to... take a swim. How about
you fellas?

Wells stands up and transforms into a Black version of Michael Phelps. Speedo, cap, goggles and Olympic gold medals around his neck. He mocks swimming moves with his arms.

WELLS (CONT'D)
Other than water moccasins and
gators, you'll love it.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

The speeding, driverless truck, careens off the highway, over an embankment...and into the river. It slowly sinks.

A site marker comes into view. It reads, THE BLACK WARRIOR RIVER...

EXT. STREETS OF CARROLLTON - DAY

Citizens and paramedics, tend to the injured students. Just as the bandaged Belinda is being put in the ambulance, she nudges her friends and points at the courthouse window again. Belinda eases out a smile.

BELINDA
He's back...

They crane their necks to look over. The face is indeed there again. And it seems...to wink.

THE END