

WINTER'S BONE

by
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Based on the novel WINTER'S BONE
By Daniel Woodrell

Opening montage

Wide shot of a wintry hollow with a lone trailer and an American flag flying. SONNY, a boy of 12, and his sister, ASHLEE, 6, bounce on trampoline, play with kittens, and horse around on a skateboard.

SINGER (O.S.)

(sings)

Way down in Missouri when I heard
this melody,
When I was just a little baby on my
mama's knee
The old folks were humming, the
banjos were strumming
So sweet and low.
Hushabye my baby, go to sleep on
mama's knee
Journey back to these old hills in
dreams again with me
It seems like your mama was there
once again
And the old folks were strumming
that same old refrain

Ashlee helps her sister, REE, 17, hang laundry. Ree buttons Ashlee's doll's dress, hands it to her sister, and then picks up the full laundry basket.

SINGER (O.S.)

(sings)

Way down in Missouri where I heard
this lullaby,
When the stars were blinking and
the moon was shining high
and I hear mama calling as in days
long ago
Singing hushabye.

REE

Let's go.

TITLE: WINTER'S BONE (OVER IMAGE OF TREE BRANCHES)

INT. REE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Ree splashes her face in the kitchen sink and dries it on a towel. Radio plays softly in the background.

Across the room, Ashlee is sleeping under a blanket on the couch.

REE
(whispering)
Ashlee Dawn!

Ashlee pounces on her brother sleeping in the chair.

ASHLEE
Wake up! Wake up!

Ashlee pounces again.

Ree drops fat into a hot skillet. She cuts a potato and drops the pieces into the hissing fat. The radio music becomes a newscast reporting the cold weather conditions.

Ashlee, wrapped in a blanket, watches Ree at the stove.

REE
Morning.

ASHLEE
Morning.

Ree opens the fridge and pokes around for something to give the dog. She takes out a bowl, smells what's inside and hands it to Ashlee.

REE
Better than nothing.

Ashlee heads outside to give the dog his food.

EXT. REE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ashlee carries the dog's food across the yard. NICKDOG, the family hound, greets her enthusiastically. She places the bowl on the ground.

INT. REE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ree combs her mother's wet hair. A hymn plays on the radio. Sonny enters, holding a dog.

REE
Who's this?

SONNY
Peanut Butter.

REE
Where'd you find Peanut Butter?

SONNY
In the woods.

REE
He's sweet.

Ree and her mother pet the dog.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Ree, Sonny, Ashlee and two dogs are walking to school.

REE
Spell 'house'.

ASHLEE
H - O -

REE
A-woo.

ASHLEE
U - A?

REE
Uh uh.

ASHLEE
U.

REE
Ssssss.

ASHLEE
S - E.

REE
H - O - U - S - E. Seven plus two.

ASHLEE
Nine.

REE

Good.

INT. SCHOOL, CHILDREN'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Ashlee does an art project at a table with other children.

Ree watches her and then walks down the hallway to the high school wing of the K-12 school.

INT. SCHOOL, TEEN CLASSROOM - DAY

A parenting class. The STUDENTS each hold a mechanical baby and follow the TEACHER'S instructions. Ree watches from the hallway.

TEACHER

Transfer. Careful. Cradle the head. And then take him to your shoulder. So he's up a little bit higher, but you're still supporting the head. Make sure you hold this right under...

Shots of the teens in the class earnestly trying to hold their model babies correctly.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

ROTC students march down hallway with rifles and turn to enter the gym. Ree approaches from the opposite direction.

VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM (O.S.)

Could I have your attention, please? Forsyth Missouri chapter of the Family, Consumer and Career leaders of America...

One of Ree's former classmates sees her and waves.

ROTC GIRL IN HALLWAY

Hey, Ree.

VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM (O.S.)

... will meet this Friday at 3:00pm in Mrs. Blair's room.

ROTC DRILL LEADER (O.S.)
Front and Center.

INT SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

From a doorway we see ROTC students drilling in the gym.

Ree watches them through the window.

VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM (O.S.)
Truman University will be here next
Monday at 8:45.

ROTC DRILL LEADER 2
Forward, march!

VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM (O.S.)
If you would like to attend, please
sign up in the counselor's office.

ROTC DRILL LEADER 2
Forward, march!

ROTC DRILL LEADER (O.S.)
Alignment...

VOICE ON P.A. SYSTEM (O.S.)
The Marine Corps Birthday Ball will
be this Saturday evening. All ROTC
cadets and their families are
encouraged to attend.

Ree signs up at a clipboard.

EXT. BLOND MILTON'S YARD - DAY

SONYA, Ree's relative, is feeding her horses in her barn
area. Sonya and her husband live across the holler from
Ree's family.

SONYA
(To the horses)
Alright.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ree leads a horse across a wintry yard to Sonya's barn area.

EXT. BLOND MILTON'S YARD - DAY

Ree walks towards the barn.

REE

Hi Sonya.

SONYA

Hey Ree.

Sonya puts down the pitchfork and faces Ree.

SONYA

You and the kids alright?

REE

We're just a little short on cash
right now.

SONYA

How long's it been since the horse
ate?

REE

About four days.

SONYA

That hay gets kind of expensive,
don't it?

REE

Yes ma'am.

(beat)

Actually, I was wondering if you
could keep her with yours?

After a long pause, Sonya opens the gate to the pasture and
ushers Ree's horse in to join the others.

SONYA

(to Ree's horse)

Alright, Ginger, Come on in. Come
on. There you go. Have a little
bit of that. Come on. Get going.

REE

Thank you, Sonya.

SONYA

Alright.

Ree takes a last look at her horse and retraces her steps across the yard.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ree chops wood. She's got headphones on and the music is fueling her chopping.

There is the sound of a car approaching. Nickdog barks and runs across the yard to greet the car.

Ree's relatives, Sonya and her husband, BLOND MILTON, are skinning a deer in their yard. They look up to see who's approaching. As the car gets closer, Ree can see that it is a police car. She throws down her axe and approaches the car as it pulls to a stop.

SHERIFF BASKIN, 30's, gets out. Ree climbs the porch steps and blocks the front door of her house.

EXT. REE'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

SHERIFF BASKIN

How are you today?

Ree doesn't answer.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Ask me inside. I need to talk some with your mama.

Ree opens the door and steps aside.

REE

She don't talk much.

Sheriff Baskin enters the house.

SHERIFF BASKIN (O.S.)

Ma'am? I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions.

(beat)

Ma'am?

Ree can hear that her mother is not responding. Baskin returns to the porch.

REE

You better just tell me.

Baskin positions himself directly across from Ree and leans against the porch post.

SHERIFF BASKIN

You know your daddy's out on bond, don't you?

REE

So what?

SHERIFF BASKIN

Looks like he's been cooking again.

REE

I know that's the charges you laid on him, but you ain't proved it on him. You got to prove it every time.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Well, that won't be no hard thing to do. But that ain't even why I'm here. His court date's next week, and I can't seem to turn him up.

REE

Maybe he sees you and ducks.

SHERIFF BASKIN

That could be. But where you all come into this is, he put this house here, and your timber acres up for his bond.

REE

He what now?

SHERIFF BASKIN

Jessup signed over everything. If he doesn't show at trial, see, the way the deal works is, you all gonna lose this place.

(MORE)

SHERIFF BASKIN (cont'd)

(beat)

You got some place to go?

Shock courses through Ree, but she tries to mask it.

REE

I'll find him.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Girl, I've been lookin'.

REE

I said I'll find him.

Baskin looks out across the property. He sees Blond Milton scoping him out. After a moment Baskin turns to leave.

SHERIFF BASKIN

You make sure your daddy knows the gravity of this deal.

Baskin drives away. Blond Milton and Sonya resume skinning their deer.

Sonny carries split wood to the porch and stands next to Ree, watching Sonya and Blond cut down the hanging meat in their yard.

SONNY

Maybe they'll share some of that with us.

REE

That could be.

SONNY

Maybe we should ask.

Ree looks at her little brother, holding his chin in her hand.

REE

Never ask for what oughtta be offered.

INT. REE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Ashlee and Sonny are warming themselves by the wood stove. Sonya enters, carrying in a large cardboard box that has a venison bone jutting above the rim.

SONYA
Evening, Ree.

REE
Evening.

SONYA
Kids. Hey, Connie. Didn't want
you to think we'd forgot y'all.

Sonya sets the box on the counter.

SONYA
Brought you some meat, some
potatoes, and some stuff for a good
stew, anyway.

REE
Thank you. We can use it.

SONYA
Seen your woodpile's low out front.
We got that splitter up there in
the yard. You should use it.

REE
I'll do that.

SONYA
We seen the law was out here this
afternoon. Everything alright?

REE
He's hunting for Dad.

Sonny, listening to the conversation, looks up.

SONYA
Hunting Jessup is he? You know
where he's at?

REE
No.

SONYA
You sure about that?

REE
Yes.

SONYA

Alright, alright, well I guess you didn't have nothing to tell him, then, did you?

REE

I wouldn't tell him nothing if I did.

SONYA

Oh, we know that. I'm gonna let you get to it, alright?

Sonya leaves abruptly, waving goodbye to Connie and pulling the door shut behind her.

Ree looks at her brother and sister.

REE

How about some deer stew - that sound good?

ASHLEE

Mmm hmm.

REE

Alright, both of you need to get over here and watch how I make it.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Ree walks along a brambly road and turns off into a driveway.

EXT. GAIL'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Ree crosses the yard and climbs a porch. She knocks on the door and stands, waiting. She can hear thrash metal music coming from inside. The door is opened by GAIL, 17, holding her baby NED.

GAIL

Thank god it's you, Sweet Pea, and not Floyd's mommy and daddy again. Them two watch me like I done something wrong.

INT. GAIL'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

FLOYD, 18, is pulling on the boots to his ATV outfit.

FLOYD

Would you hush your mouth about them. They put a roof over your head ain't they?

REE

Hey, Floyd. You gonna invite me in? Or I could just stay out here and talk to you.

FLOYD

Yeah, you can come in.

Ree steps inside the house and walks past Floyd to the kitchen.

INT. GAIL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Gail holds Ned. She hugs Ree.

REE

Hey.

GAIL

Hey.

Ree takes in Ned and the fact that her best friend now has a baby.

REE

Shit.

GAIL

Don't start. Come on.

Gail carries Ned down the narrow hall to the bedroom. Ree follows.

INT. GAIL'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Ree flops down on the bed. Gail lies down next to her, putting Ned between them.

GAIL
It's been a while, Sweet Pea.

REE
Things stack up is all.

GAIL
What's going on?

REE
The sheriff came by looking for my
Dad. If he don't show up for his
court date, we're gonna lose the
house. Gotta get down to the
Arkansas line.

GAIL
I gotta ask him. It's his truck.

Gail gets up and leaves the room. Ree holds Ned while Gail
talks to Floyd.

Gail returns.

GAIL
He said no.

REE
Did you tell him I'd spring for
gas?

GAIL
I told him. He still won't.

REE
Why not?

GAIL
He never says why not to me, Ree.
He just says no.

REE
Man, that's so sad to hear you say
he won't let you do something, and
then you don't do it.

GAIL
It's different once you're married.

Gail flops back onto the bed.

REE

It really must be. Cause you ain't never used to eat no shit.

GAIL

Ned needs his nap.

Gail takes Ned from Ree's arms.

GAIL

(whispers to baby)
Come here.

Ree leaves and Gail watches her go.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Ree treks up a wooded hill.

EXT. TEARDROP'S YARD - DAY

Ree enters the yard, greeted by dogs.

VICTORIA, 30's, opens the door of a rough-hewn brown painted cabin.

VICTORIA

What brings you here? Somebody dead?

REE

I'm looking for my Dad.

Victoria holds the door for Ree and beckons her inside.

VICTORIA

Come on in. Shake off the chill.

Ree enters the house, followed by Victoria.

INT. TEARDROP'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Ree and Victoria enter kitchen.

VICTORIA

Let's keep it quiet. Teardrop's still laying up in bed.

Ree takes off her coat and sits down at the table. Victoria pours two cups of coffee.

REE

The law came by today. Dad signed over everything to his bond. Victoria, I really gotta run Dad down to get him to show.

Ree's uncle, TEARDROP, 40's, a worn, unshaven man enters. He lights a cigarette and crosses the room.

TEARDROP

You ought not do that. Don't go running after Jessup.

Teardrop sits at the table.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

Show or don't show that choice is up to the one going to jail, not you.

REE

You know where he's at, don't you?

TEARDROP

Where a man's at ain't necessarily for you to know neither.

REE

But you do...

Teardrop abruptly shoots a warning look at Ree.

TEARDROP

I ain't seen him.

Victoria places a cup of coffee in front of him. Silence while Ree contemplates her next move.

REE

Could be running around with Little Arthur and them, you think?

Teardrop absentmindedly loads the magazine of a pistol.

TEARDROP

Don't you ever go down around
Little Arthur's asking them people
about shit they ain't offering to
talk about. That's a real good way
to end up et by hogs, or wishing
you was.

REE

We're all related ain't we?

Teardrop continues to fiddle with the pistol.

TEARDROP

Our relations get watered kinda
thin between here and Little
Arthur's.

Teardrop tosses the pistol onto the lazy susan in the middle
of the table.

VICTORIA

You know all those people,
Teardrop. You could ask.

TEARDROP

Shut up.

VICTORIA

None of them's gonna be in a great
big hurry to tangle with you.

TEARDROP

I said shut up once already with my
mouth.

Teardrop gets up and walks across the kitchen to the stove
with his back to Ree.

REE

Jesus, Dad's your only brother.

Teardrop spins back to face her.

TEARDROP

You think I forgot that? Hmm?
Jessup and me run together for
coming on forty years but I don't
know where he's at, and I ain't
going to go around asking after him
neither.

Victoria tries to cut the tension by changing the subject.

VICTORIA

Ree, you still planning to join the
army?

REE

No, I don't think I can any more.
(to Teardrop)
Listen...

Teardrop lunges at Ree, grabs her hair and pulls her face
back to look at him. He leans his face in very close to
hers.

TEARDROP

(shaking his head)

No.

He lets her go and exits the kitchen.

Victoria locks eyes with Ree, then follows Teardrop.

Ree, sitting at the table, can hear their muffled voices from
the next room. She rises and puts on her coat as they argue.

VICTORIA (O.S.)

She needs help.

TEARDROP (O.S.)

Nope. Nope. listen. Listen! You
tell that girl to stay close to
home. Don't move. Give her this.
You send her ass on her way right
now.

Victoria comes back into the kitchen.

VICTORIA

Teardrop says you best keep your
ass real close to the willows,
dear. He hopes this helps.

Victoria presses a wad of bills into Ree's hand. She slips a
joint out of her cigarette package.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Here's a doobie for your walk.

Ree takes the joint.

REE

Thank you.

Victoria stares at Ree as she leaves.

EXT. RURAL FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

Ree hikes across a ruddy pasture strewn with dilapidated
sheds.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Ree crosses the road and heads up a hill.

EXT. MEGAN'S YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Ree enters a yard with laundry hanging on a line. A donkey is
grazing on the other side of the fence. A half-eaten apple
has rolled out of his reach. She picks it up and feeds it to
the donkey. MEGAN, 20, comes out onto the porch and calls
out to Ree.

MEGAN

Hey! What's your business here?

REE

My dad's, Jessup. He's pals with
Little Arthur, and I gotta find
him.

Megan stares Ree down, taking a long time to answer.

MEGAN

Hold on.

Megan goes inside the house. Ree takes in the details of the yard. The wind strikes up, ominous clanking sounds surround her.

Megan comes back out with her coat on, approaches Ree, and guides her through the densely packed debris in the yard.

MEGAN

My name's Megan, and I do know you, really. Seen you at some of the reunions. I knew Jessup when I seen him, too. Never did talk with him much.

REE

You *knew* him?

MEGAN

Knew him when I seen him around, I mean. He does stuff I hear about.

REE

He cooks crank.

MEGAN

They all do now. You don't even need to say it out loud.

INT. LITTLE ARTHUR'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

LITTLE ARTHUR, mid-30s, nervously looks out his window.

EXT. LITTLE ARTHUR'S YARD - AFTERNOON

Megan and Ree approach Little Arthur's house.

MEGAN

If Arthur's been runnin' on crank for a day or two, you should just leave, okay?

The door opens and Little Arthur smiles at Ree.

LITTLE ARTHUR

I knew it - I been in your dreams, ain't I, little Ruthie?

REE

It's Ree, you asshole. And I'm only out to find Dad.

LITTLE ARTHUR

Come on in, ladies.

Ree pushes past Megan and enters the house. Megan follows.

INT. LITTLE ARTHUR'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

No fresh light makes its way through the windows. Little Arthur shows affection to his pet ferret, tapping on the glass of the tank. Ree and Megan hover near the door and watch him from the other side of the room.

REE

This don't gotta take long, man. I'm looking for Dad and thought maybe you'd been seeing him, maybe you two been getting into stuff together again.

He turns away from the ferret and sits on the couch.

LITTLE ARTHUR

Not since the summer. At y'all's place.

REE

You ain't seen him nowhere since then?

LITTLE ARTHUR

Huh-uh.

REE

He kept leavin' the house goin' someplace- you don't know where?

LITTLE ARTHUR

You got cat shit in your ear, girl?

REE

I've got them two boys and Mom to tend, man. I need him.

LITTLE ARTHUR
If I see the dude, I'll tell him
you said that.

Little Arthur lights a cigarette, his hands shaking.

MEGAN
Your dad left you to do all that?
That's fucked up.

REE
Well, he had to, the way things go,
you know.

Ree stares at Arthur. He lurches forward on the couch.

LITTLE ARTHUR
You want a line?

REE
No.

LITTLE ARTHUR
You wanna blow some smoke?

REE
No.

Little Arthur slaps the table and stands up.

LITTLE ARTHUR
Then I guess I got nothing for you.

He waves his hand to dismiss them.

LITTLE ARTHUR (CONT'D)
Go on!

Ree and Megan waste no time leaving. Arthur watches them go.

EXT. LONESTAR ROAD - AFTERNOON

Megan and Ree walk up the road.

MEGAN
Don't tell nobody it was me who
told you this, okay?
(MORE)

MEGAN (cont'd)

But you're going to have to go on up the hill and ask for a talk with Thump Milton. Now, I hope he'll talk with you - he generally won't.

REE

That man, scares me way more than the rest.

MEGAN

Well, scared ain't a bad way to be about him, neither, hon. He's my own granpaw, and I still make damn sure I never piss him off none.

They continue walking until they reach Megan's property.

EXT. MEGAN'S YARD - AFTERNOON

MEGAN

You go see Thump.

Megan holds down a barbed wire fence to allow Ree to climb over it.

MEGAN (CONT'D)

Go on.

Ree heads up the hill while Megan watches her go.

EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

Ree trudges through the woods. Dry leaves and branches crackle under her footsteps as she makes her way.

EXT. THUMP MILTON'S YARD - AFTERNOON

MERAB, 50's, comes out to the porch of her house. Ree crosses the yard. Dogs herald her arrival with loud barking.

MERAB

You've got the wrong place, I expect. Who might you be?

REE

I'm Ree. My Dad's Jessup Dolly.

Merab gestures for Ree to come closer. Ree takes a few steps towards the porch.

MERAB

You ain't here for trouble, are you?

REE

No, ma'am.

MERAB

Cause one of my nephews is Buster Leroy, and didn't he shoot your daddy one time?

REE

Yes'm, but that ain't got nothing to do with me. They settled all that theirselves, I think.

MERAB

Shooting him likely settled it. What is it you want?

REE

I got a real bad need to talk with Thump.

MERAB

And he ain't got no need to talk to you.

Merab turns away towards her doorway.

REE

But I need to. I really, really got to ma'am. Please!

Merab turns around to face Ree.

REE (CONT'D)

Some of our blood at least is the same. Ain't that s'posed to mean something' - isn't that what is always said?

Merab, irritated, moves to confront Ree.

MERAB

Ain't you got no men could do this?

REE

No, Ma'am, I don't.

MERAB

You go wait in the yard somewhere
by that coop, and I'll tell Thump
you're here.

REE

Thank you.

Ree walks in the direction of the chicken coop. Merab goes
inside.

EXT. THUMP MILTON'S YARD - AFTERNOON

Ree finds a place to sit next to the coop.

The camera lingers on the various things Ree notices as she
waits.

REE

(to herself)

Come on, already.

EXT. THUMP MILTON'S YARD - LATE AFTERNOON

Merab comes back outside carrying a mug and calls out to Ree.

MERAB

He ain't likely to have time for
you, child.

REE

I've got to talk to him. If he
don't know, nobody does.

MERAB

Nope. Talking just causes
witnesses. And he don't want for
any of those.

REE

I'll wait.

MERAB

You need to get yourself on home.

She gives Ree the mug.

MERAB

Here, drink it down and be on your way.

Ree drinks and hands the empty mug back to Merab.

REE

Thanks.

MERAB

Thump knows you were in the valley, child. With Megan. And at Little Arthur's. He knows what you want to ask, and he don't want to hear it.

REE

And that's it? He ain't gonna say nothing to me?

MERAB

If you're listening, child, you got your answer.

Merab turns her back and walks toward her house. Ree calls after her.

REE

So, I guess come the nut-cutting, blood don't really mean shit to the big man. Am I understanding that right?

Merab spins on her heel and gets up into Ree's face.

MERAB

Don't you dare. Don't! I want you to listen to me, child. You need to turn around, and get yourself on home.

Merab turns and walks back to her house. As she reaches the doorstep, she turns back towards Ree.

MERAB (CONT'D)

Don't you make me come out here and
tell you again!

Merab enters the house and slams the door. As Ree stomps
away, Merab eyes her suspiciously from the window.

EXT. REE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ashlee bounces on the trampoline on a toy horse.

Ree comes out onto the porch.

REE

Ashlee Dawn, come inside. Bring
Brownie and Cupcake.

Ashlee picks up the two horses and climbs off the trampoline.

INT. REE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ree is slicing potatoes into a sizzling pan.

There is a loud knock at the door.

BLOND MILTON (O.S.)

Ree, Get out here!

EXT. REE'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Ree opens the door and steps out.

BLOND MILTON

Do you know, there's people going
'round saying you best shut up.
People you ought to listen to. Get
your ass in the truck.

He grabs Ree's arm.

REE

Don't touch me.

BLOND MILTON

Get your ass in the truck.

Blond Milton pushes Ree towards the truck. Ree grabs the porch beam to resist. Blond Milton shoves her down the stairs.

REE

Get off!

BLOND MILTON

Get in the truck!

Sonny comes out of the house.

SONNY

Hey!

BLOND MILTON

D'ruther I hit you, boy?

REE

Sonny, get back in the house. Cook them taters 'til they're brown then turn the stove off.

SONNY

Don't hurt my sister.

REE

Sonny!

Blond Milton turns around, climbs the porch steps and grabs Sonny's collar.

BLOND MILTON

Having balls is good, boy, but don't let 'em get you hurt.

REE

Sonny, get in the house!

BLOND MILTON

(to Ree)

Get your dumb ass in the truck.

REE

I'm not getting in there with you.

BLOND MILTON

Get in the truck. There's something that you need to see.

Ree and Blond Milton get into the truck.

INT. BLOND MILTON'S TRUCK - DAY (DRIVING)

BLOND MILTON

Jessup and me may have had our
tussles, but he was my cousin.
It's always a bad deal when these
things blow.

REE

Where are we going?

BLOND MILTON

Down the road.

REE

Down the road to where?

BLOND MILTON

To someplace you need to see.

Ree anxiously looks around trying to get her bearings.

I/E. BLOND MILTON'S TRUCK - DAY

They drive past woodlands until they reach a burned out
house. Blond Milton pulls off the road and turns off the
engine.

INT. BLOND MILTON'S TRUCK - DAY (STATIONARY)

BLOND MILTON

This right here is the last place
me or anybody seen Jessup.

REE

He never blew no lab before.

BLOND MILTON

I know it. But something must have
jumped wrong this time.

REE

He's known for never fucking up
labs or cooking bad batches. He's
known for knowing what he's doing.

BLOND MILTON

Well, you cook long enough, this is bound to happen.

REE

You saying Dad's up there burnt to a crisp?

BLOND MILTON

That's what I'm saying.

REE

I'm going' up for a look.

Ree opens her door and starts to exit the truck. Blond Milton grabs her arm.

BLOND MILTON

No! That shit's poison. It'll rip the skin off your bones!

REE

If Dad's up there, I'm bringing him home to bury.

BLOND MILTON

Ree!

Ree wrests herself free and gets out of the truck, slamming the door behind her. Blond watches as she approaches the ruined house.

EXT. BURNED OUT HOUSE - DAY

Ree walks across the road to the burned out house.

She cautiously approaches the house, looking at the details of the wreckage. One wall is blown out to the yard, windows have exploded and the blackened wall fragments and insulation dangle from the broken studs.

She takes in a melted stove and notes weeds growing through the floorboards.

INT. BLOND MILTON'S TRUCK - DAY (DRIVING)

Ree and Blond Milton drive home silently. Ree looks out the window, lost in thought, weighing her options.

EXT. BLOND MILTON'S HOUSE - DAY

Blond Milton and Ree get out of the truck in front of his house. He stops Ree as she starts to walk home across the holler.

BLOND MILTON

I know losing Jessup leaves you all hurting over there. I know it's a lot to handle.

REE

We'll make do.

BLOND MILTON

Sonya and me talked about it. We feel we could take Sonny off your hands. Not Ashlee, I don't reckon, but we could take Sonny.

REE

You what?

BLOND MILTON

We could take him and raise him up the rest of the way.

REE

My ass, you will.

BLOND MILTON

We'd raise the boy way better'n you and that nut job mama of yours can. Maybe on down the line we'd take Ashlee, too.

REE

You go straight to hell, you son of a bitch. Sonny and Ashlee will die living in a cave with me and Mama before they spend one night with you.

Ree walks away, then turns back to Blond Milton.

REE (CONT'D)

Goddamn you! You must think I'm a stupid idiot.

(MORE)

REE (CONT'D)

There's weeds growing chin high in that place. It must have been a year since that place blew!

Ree spits at Blond Milton's feet. He turns and leaves. Ree angrily marches back across the holler to her house.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Sonny and Ashlee place plastic bottles on a picnic table, then run back to where Ree is waiting.

Ree props up a double-barrelled shotgun for Sonny and Ashlee to examine.

REE

Come here, look at this. Ash, quit playing around, c'mere. This trigger shoots this barrel, this trigger shoots this barrel. Now there's hardly ever gonna be a time where you need both. But if you gotta kill something big and mean, then you use both.

Ree puts the double-barreled gun on the ground and picks up the other shotgun that's lying there.

REE (CONT'D)

Now this gun is what you'll use when you're older. But this one is the gun I learned on. This is Daddy's squirrel gun. Now the most important thing is do not put your finger on the trigger unless you're ready to shoot, you're aimed at your target. And don't ever-- both of you look at me-- never point this at each other, not ever. Alright? Kneel down like you're praying. Yeah, just like that. Yup.

Sonny picks up the gun and rests it on his shoulder.

Ree stands over him instructing him.

REE (CONT'D)

You see that cross? It's called the crosshairs. Aim that up at the middle of your target. And when that's lined up in the middle then you squeeze the trigger and you shoot.

Sonny shoots.

REE

Okay.

GAIL (O.S.)

Ree!

REE

Hang on.

(to Gail)

Hey!

(to Sonny and Ashlee)

Both of you sit on your hands.

Don't touch it.

Gail enters with her baby in a baby carrier. Ree hugs her.

GAIL

Hey!

REE

Hey!

GAIL

Damn, Sweet Pea. What's with all the guns?

REE

Just teaching them a little bit of survival.

Ree takes a peek at Ned in the carrier.

REE (CONT'D)

(to Ned)

Hi!

INT. REE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ree and Gail are standing at the kitchen counter. Ned is on the counter inside the carrier.

Gail tosses a set of keys up onto the counter.

GAIL
Got the truck off him.

REE
You are who I always did think you were, Darlin'. You truly are.

EXT. REE'S YARD - NIGHT

Gail and Ree come out of Ree's house. Gail carries Ned in his carrier. They open the doors of Floyd's truck and secure the carrier in place.

GAIL
Turn it this way.

REE
Backwards?

GAIL
Yup. Does your mom know what's going on?

REE
I'm not sure.

GAIL
You think you should tell her?

REE
This is the exact shit she went crazy trying to get away from. It'd be too mean to tell her.

GAIL
I guess she couldn't help, anyhow.

REE
Nope.

They climb into the truck and drive away.

INT. APRIL'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A picking session is in process. MARIDETH, APRIL's mother, sings, accompanied by her friends playing music. April sits on the couch watching. In another part of the room, two couples play cards.

MARIDETH

(sings)

As I look on that valley far below.
It's green as far as I can see.
As my memories return, oh how my
heart does yearn
For you and the days that used to
be.
High on a mountain, wind blowing
free,
I wonder if you still remember me.

Marideth turns to her friends.

MARIDETH

Play it through.

Ree and Gail (with baby carrier) knock at the door.

April gets up to answer their knock.

MARIDETH (CONT'D)

(sings)

I wonder if you still remember me
Or has time erased your memory?
As I listen to the breeze whisper
gently through the trees,
I wonder if you still remember me.

April opens the door and hesitates before greeting Ree.

MARIDETH (CONT'D)

(sings)

Come all ye fair and tender ladies,
Take a warning how you court your
men.

APRIL

Come on in.

She motions Ree and Gail in. They step inside quietly and survey the scene, checking to see if they know anyone.

APRIL (CONT'D)
It's Ma's birthday.

REE
Happy birthday.

APRIL
You want anything? Something to drink, food?

REE
I'm here huntin' Dad.

APRIL
I was guessin' that. Come on in.

April leads Ree and Gail through the living room to her daughter's bedroom.

MARIDETH
(sings)
They're like a star on a a summer morning
They first appear and then they're gone.
I wish I was a little sparrow
And I had wings and I could fly.
I'd fly straight away...

INT. APRIL'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the cramped kids room, Gail and Ree pay close attention to April.

APRIL
You know me'n Jessup quit keepin' company a good while ago.

REE
I figured. I thought you might still know a thing or two.

APRIL

Well, I'm kind of afraid I might.
I wish I could kick back for this
one, Ree.

April sits down next to them.

REE

You still bad on the bottle?

APRIL

No, no, I give that up. A couple
months ago Jessup and me run across
each other by total accident. He
got me to laughing so, things
rekindled for a day or two. Then he
was gone again. Then about, maybe,
three or four weeks back, I'd
stopped at Cruikshank's, he was in
there with three fellas I didn't
know, and they didn't look to be
having no fun, either.

REE

Dad say anything?

APRIL

He looked square at me, but acted
like he didn't know me, like he'd
never seen me before. Something
real wrong was going on.

Ree is lost in her thoughts trying to take this in. April
tries to look her in the eye.

APRIL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

EXT. WOODS - MORNING

Ree, Sonny and Ashlee sit silently with their back against a
large oak. Ree holds a shotgun propped and ready to fire.

REE

If you stay really still and quiet,
they'll come out.

Sonny sneezes.

REE (CONT'D)

Bless you.

SONNY

How long do we have to wait for a squirrel?

REE

A long time, usually.

SONNY

Wish we could get deer.

REE

It's not time for deer.

SONNY

When is it?

REE

In the morning or at night. You know that.

ASHLEE

(whispers to Ree)

Do you see one?

REE

Mmm. Where?

Ashlee points.

ASHLEE

(whispering)

There.

REE

Ah! Help me pull the trigger. Put your finger right there.

Ree and Ashlee shoot.

EXT. REE'S YARD, SKINNING TABLE - MORNING

Ashlee and Sonny lay three squirrels on the skinning table. Ree puts down a bucket.

REE
Alright, you want these fried or
stewed?

SONNY, ASHLEE
Fried.

REE
Fried? Alright.

Ree grabs a knife and begins to skin the squirrel.

Gail approaches with a mug of coffee.

REE
Hey.

GAIL
Hey.

Ree starts to work the knife under the skin.

REE
Alright. Now get your fingers in
there, and I'll get mine in. One,
two, three.

Ree and Sonny pull at opposite ends of the squirrel's skin.

REE (CONT'D)
Pull. Pull hard.

They continue to pulling.

REE (CONT'D)
Now I'm just gonna slit it down
here.

She begins to slice the squirrel's flesh.

REE (CONT'D)
Now get in there and get them guts
out.

SONNY
I don't want to.

REE

Sonny, there's a bunch of stuff
that you're going to have to get
over being scared of.

Sonny backs away.

SONNY

I'm not scared, I just don't want
to.

REE

Come on. Put your fingers in
there.

Ree guides Sonny's hand inside the squirrel.

REE

Good.

Sonny pulls out a long strand of entrails.

SONNY

Do we eat those parts?

REE

Not yet.

EXT. BLOND MILTON'S HOUSE, WOODSHED - DAY

Ree operates the wood splitter. Teardrop approaches her
silently and turns the engine off. Startled, Ree spins
around.

TEARDROP

You think I forgot about you?

REE

What do you mean?

TEARDROP

Forgot about you and everything
happening over here.

REE

That's your business - you forget
us if you want.

TEARDROP

The law found Jessup's car at Gullet Lake this morning. Somebody set fire to it last night, burnt it down to nothing almost.

(beat)

He wasn't in it.

Ree looks away, then turns back to him.

REE

He's gone, ain't he?

Teardrop takes a wad of folded bills from inside his jacket and hands it to Ree.

TEARDROP

This is for you all. His court day was this morning and he didn't show. I'd sell off your timber land now while you can.

REE

No, huh-uh. I won't be doing nothing like that.

TEARDROP

That's the very first thing they'll do -

Teardrop takes her chin in his hand.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

- once they've took this place from under you all, girl. Go out and cut them 100 year old woods down to nubs. Might as well have the dough to spend on your own.

Teardrop slips a bag of crank from his pocket and scoops a bit out with a key and snorts. Ree looks away. He shakes the bag of crank at her.

TEARDROP

You get the taste for it yet?

REE

Not so far.

TEARDROP

Suit yourself, little girl. Them pills help your mama's mood any?

REE

She keeps taking them, but they ain't working.

TEARDROP

Tell her 'hey.'

Teardrop slowly walks away. Ree stares after him.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, CONNIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ree stands in front of her parents' closet looking at Jessup's things. She fingers his clothes and stares at his small collection of boots, remembering him.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ree's brother and sister sense the tension surrounding them. Ashlee cuddles a dog. Sonny drapes himself over the trampoline.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Ree takes her mother's arm, guiding her over stumps and roots as they walk into the woods on their property.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Connie and Ree sit among the trees.

REE

Mom, look at me.

Connie stares straight ahead.

REE

There's things happening, and I don't know what to do.

Ree waits for her mother to respond.

REE (CONT'D)
Can you please help me this one
time? Mom? Mom, look at me.

Connie looks vaguely in Ree's direction.

REE (CONT'D)
Teardrop thinks I should sell the
woods, Mom. Should I sell?
Please, help me this one time.

Ree turns away, helpless and trying to hold back her tears.

REE (CONT'D)
I don't know what to do.

The wind gently blows through the woods, and the clouds roll
in.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Gail and Ree slowly drive the truck along the rut road up to
Ree's house. Waiting near the house is a stranger standing by
his car. Blond and CATFISH MILTON keep watch from across the
scrabble.

INT. FLOYD'S TRUCK - DAY (DRIVING)

REE (O.S.)
Who he hell is he?

GAIL (O.S.)
Judging by that car, he ain't from
our neck of the woods.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

The truck pulls up and MIKE SATTERFIELD, displaying a badge,
approaches Ree as she gets out.

SATTERFIELD
I'm Mike Satterfield, A-1 Bonds.

REE
What is it you want?

SATTERFIELD

We hold the bond on Jessup Dolly
and now he's a runner, it looks
like.

REE

Dad ain't no runner.

SATTERFIELD

He didn't show for court - that
makes him a runner.

(to Gail)

Will you excuse us, please. Go on!

Ree hands a bag of groceries to Gail. Gail takes Ned up to
the porch and listens to the conversation from there.

SATTERFIELD (CONT'D)

Look, I don't want to kick your
dad's ass, alright? I just want to
keep the judge off mine.

REE

Dad's dead. He didn't show for
court 'cause he's lying dead
somewhere.

SATTERFIELD

When was the last time you saw him?

REE

A couple of weeks.

SATTERFIELD

Who's he running around with? Where
they all hanging out?

REE

He doesn't tell me that stuff, Sir.

SATTERFIELD

Now, you know I've got the legal
right to go in there hunting the
man any place I want?

REE

I know you'd be wasting your time
and pissing me off. Jessup Dolly
is dead.

(MORE)

REE (cont'd)

He's lying in a crappy grave
somewhere or become piles of shit
in a hog pen. Maybe he's been left
out plain in the open, but wherever
he is, he's there dead.

SATTERFIELD

And you know this how?

REE

You must've heard what Dolly's are,
ain't you, mister?

SATTERFIELD

Well, I've heard what some are
anyhow, and I have bonded a few.

REE

I'm a Dolly, bred'n buttered, and
that's how I know Dad's dead.

SATTERFIELD

How old are you?

REE

Seventeen.

Satterfield takes this in, not sure how to proceed.

SATTERFIELD

You know, uh, your daddy was short
on his bond. This house and stuff
here couldn't cover it, not nearly -
did you know that?

REE

I didn't know nothing. They told me
everything after.

SATTERFIELD

Well, he was short on his bond.
Then this fella comes in the office
one evening, got him a sack full of
crinkled money and just laid it
down right there to cover the rest.
Seemed like somebody needed him
sprung in a hurry.

REE

This fella with the money have a name?

SATTERFIELD

Shit, no. Probably left that in his other pants.

Gail looks on from the porch, listening intently, concerned, trying to make sense of Satterfield's story.

REE

How long before we get kicked off our own property?

SATTERFIELD

I reckon...I reckon y'all got this place about another week. That's my guess.

REE

A week? And there ain't nothing I can do?

SATTERFIELD

Nope. There ain't nothing left to do, unless you can prove he's dead.

Satterfield turns to go, and calls out to Catfish and Blond Milton.

SATTERFIELD (CONT'D)

Catfish, Blond, you boys staying out of trouble?

Blond flips him the bird. Satterfield gets in his car and drives off.

INT. CATTLE STOCKYARD, AUCTION HALL - DAY

A cattle auction is underway. The auctioneer rattles off prices to a crowd.

Ree enters and searches the crowd for THUMP MILTON, 60s. Thump sees her and leaves. Ree follows him.

EXT. CATTLE STOCKYARD, HOLDING PENS - DAY

Walking gingerly but intently along an elevated catwalk, Ree searches for Thump amidst the massive maze of cattle pens below.

The mooing of the cattle is deafening.

Finally, Ree spots Thump. She tries to get his attention.

REE
 (shouting)
 Thump Milton! I need to talk to
 you! Thump Milton! Thump Milton!
 Thump!

Ree's voice competes with the din of the cattle. Thump Milton quickly leaves the area, and she runs down the catwalk after him.

EXT. THUMP MILTON'S YARD - DUSK

Ree walks across the yard towards Thump Milton's house.

The door opens and Merab comes out carrying a steaming mug.

She hurls the liquid at Ree, then hits her in the face with the mug as ALICE and TILLY, Merab's sisters, emerge from the house.

Ree cries out and falls to the ground.

MERAB
 I done told you to leave him be.

Merab and Alice grab Ree and drag her to the barn with Tilly leading the way. Ree resists with all her strength.

MERAB (CONT'D)
 Get her, Alice!

ALICE
 (to Ree)
 No, you don't!

The sisters get a tighter hold on her and force her inside the barn.

MERAB

That's what you get for not
listening.

Ree's screams pierce the air as the barn door lowers.

INT. THUMP MILTON'S BARN - NIGHT

Ree regains consciousness in the glow of a fluorescent light. She can see the rafters of the barn ceiling and a large assortment of metal tools and pieces of equipment all around her. Merab stands over her.

MERAB

You was warned. You was warned nice
and you wouldn't listen - why
didn't you listen?

Ree spits a bloody tooth into her palm. She looks around and sees people she can barely make out, watching her in silence. Among them she recognizes; Little Arthur, SPIDER MILTON, and RAY.

Megan bends down next to Ree and strokes her hair.

MEGAN

What are we ever gonna do with you,
baby girl?

REE

Kill me, I guess.

MEGAN

That idea has been said already.
Got any others?

REE

Help me. Ain't nobody said that
idea yet, have they?

MEGAN

I tried to help you some before,
and this is what come of it.

Megan backs away as Thump Milton enters the barn and walks up to Ree. He grasps her chin and examines her bloody face, shooting a look at Merab.

THUMP MILTON

You got something to say, child,
you best say it now.

Ree thinks a minute, her eyes locked on Thump.

REE

I got two kids who can't feed
themselves yet. My mom is sick, and
she's always gonna be sick. Pretty
soon the laws are coming and taking
our house and throwing us out to
live in the field like dogs.

Ree catches her breath.

REE (CONT'D)

If Dad has done wrong, Dad has
paid. And whoever killed him, I
don't need to know all that. But I
can't forever carry them kids, and
my mom - not without that house.

She is met with silence. Thump leaves the barn with BOBBY.
Dogs bark outside as we hear the sound of an engine
approaching.

SPIDER MILTON

Aw, shit.

Ray makes to leave.

RAY

I ain't gonna stand here naked when
that motherfucker comes in.

Everyone can hear a truck door slam and heavy footsteps
coming up the gravel. The barn door opens to reveal Teardrop.

TEARDROP

Where is she?

LITTLE ARTHUR

Don't get all excited, Teardrop.
She was warned, and more than once.

Teardrop gazes at Ree, his expression unchanging, then turns
to Spider Milton.

TEARDROP

You hit her?

Spider Milton drops his arm to the small of his back, wrapping his hand around the gun tucked into his pants.

Merab steps up to Teardrop.

MERAB

He never! No man here touched that crazy girl. I put the hurt on her. Me and my sisters, they was here too.

Thump Milton walks back into the barn flanked by Ray and Bobby. He stops within an arm's length of Teardrop.

TEARDROP

What Jessup done was against our ways, he knew it, I know it, and I ain't raised no stink at all about whatever became of him. But she ain't my brother.

Teardrop looks around the gathering, finally locking eyes with Ree before concluding his case.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

She's about all the close family I got left, so I'll be collecting her now and carrying her on out of here to home. That suit you, Thump?

THUMP MILTON

You're gonna stand for her, are you?

TEARDROP

If she does wrong, you can put it on me.

Ree registers the gravity of this commitment on Teardrop's part.

THUMP MILTON

She's now yours to answer for.

TEARDROP

This is a girl who ain't gonna tell
nobody nothing.

THUMP MILTON

You boys give him a hand. Go on
and put her in the truck.

Little Arthur and Spider Milton shoulder Ree and walk her
from the barn to the truck.

The rest of the family in the barn watch Ree and Teardrop
drive off.

INT. TEARDROP'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Teardrop drives Ree home. They park in front of the house
but remain in the truck. Teardrop and rips a bandana and
sticks the cloth into her mouth.

TEARDROP

Chomp down on that 'til the blood
lets up.

Ree holds the cloth in her mouth.

In the silence and dark of the truck, Teardrop levels with
Ree.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

Your daddy couldn't face this last
bust. Couldn't face a ten year
jolt. He started talking to the
fucking sheriff.

Teardrop takes a drag off his cigarette.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

You own me now. You understand?
They been waiting to see if I'll do
anything. Watching. I can't know
for a certain fact who went and
killed my little brother. Even if
you find out, you can't ever let me
know who killed him. Knowing that
would just mean I'd be toes up
myself pretty soon. Deal?

Ree reaches across the cab of the truck to squeeze Teardrop's shoulder.

EXT. REE'S YARD - NIGHT

Gail comes out of the house and runs to the truck. Ashlee and Sonny follow her and watch from the porch.

Gail and Teardrop lift Ree from the truck and walk her towards the house, pushing Sonny aside.

GAIL
(to Sonny)
No, get out of the way. Open the door.

Teardrop closes the door to the house and lingers on the porch.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

Gail carefully cleans Ree's wounds with peroxide.

GAIL
Gonna burn. Squeeze my hand.

Ree rinses her mouth and spits more blood into the sink. She sits, exhausted, appreciating Gail.

REE
Thank you.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ree lies on the bed. Gail arranges packs of frozen vegetables over Ree's bruised ribs.

Sonya enters.

SONYA
I just heard. I brought these over for you.

Sonya hands Gail a plastic vial.

SONYA

They're painkillers. They're real strong. These are gonna kick in real quick. Start with two.

GAIL

OK.

SONYA

She's gonna want more, just start with two and build from there, whatever number lets her rest.

REE

Thank you.

Sonya leaves.

Gail brings a glass of water to Ree's lips and helps her swallow the pills.

REE (CONT'D)

(to Gail)

Will you stay until I fall asleep first?

GAIL

Yeah, I will.

REE

But then make sure they're doing their homework.

GAIL

Alright.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ree lies on her bed wafting in and out of consciousness.

Sonny enters the room, places a glass of water on the night stand and drops Ree's tooth into it.

He and Ashlee contemplate Ree for a moment before carefully laying down next to her. Ashlee cradles Ree's arm.

ASHLEE

Does your arm hurt?

REE
No. Not bad.

Ree falls back asleep.

CUT TO:

REE'S DREAM

Ree dreams through the painkillers. Abstract images of Ozark wilderness and wildlife, sounds of chainsaws.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ree wakes up from her dream, Ashlee and Sonny are sleeping beside her.

EXT. REE'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Ree and Gail stand on the porch with baby Ned, while Sonny and Ashlee jump on the trampoline.

Gail tends to Ned. Ree, feeling worried and defeated, watches her brother and sister.

REE
Blond Milton said him and Sonya would take Sonny in. I tell you that? Raise him up from here for me.

GAIL
Does he know? Sonny?

REE
Not from us. If he knows, it's from somebody else blabbing, 'cause I never. He doesn't even know Dad cooks.

GAIL
Well, if they took him, that might help some. What about Ashlee?

Ree and Gail glance again at the two kids playing.

REE

She don't shine for them.

GAIL

Well, what else can you do?

REE

Beg Victoria and Teardrop to take
Ashlee in.

GAIL

God, I hope that ain't the way it
goes, Sweet Pea. I hope to hell it
ain't.

INT. SCHOOL, ROTC CLASSROOM - DAY

Army recruiter SGT. SCHALK, 30's, rises to shake hands with a
student who he has just interviewed.

SGT. SCHALK

It was nice meeting you. Have a
good day, OK?

STUDENT

Thanks.

Sgt. Schalk beckons Ree over.

SGT. SCHALK

Hi, how are you doing? Sergeant
Schalk.

REE

Ree Dolly

SGT. SCHALK

Nice to meet you. So, what brought
you down here today, Ree?

REE

I wanted to find out more about the
forty thousand dollars I get for
signing up.

SGT. SCHALK

Well, that's a good reason for
joining, but why don't you give me
three better reasons for joining.

(MORE)

SGT. SCHALK (cont'd)

Because once you join up, there's no turning back, and it might not be worth forty thousand dollars to you.

REE

Well, the main reason is I need the money. It'd be nice to travel, I suppose.

SGT. SCHALK

You know, five years is a long commitment.

REE

Well, how long before I get the money?

SGT. SCHALK

Well, after you sign up it would be anywhere between fourteen weeks to eighty-two weeks.

REE

Well, how come it doesn't say that on the poster?

SGT. SCHALK

Probably a clerical error, or it just wasn't on there. It might have been in fine print at the bottom. Do you mind me asking, what happened to your eye and your lip?

REE

I fell off my bike.

SGT. SCHALK

Fell off a bike? Well, um, how old are you?

REE

Seventeen.

SGT. SCHALK

You're seventeen. OK. Now, if this is something you really wanted to do, we'd have to bring Mom and Dad in on this, OK.

REE

I can sign for myself.

SGT. SCHALK

Not at seventeen you can't. At seventeen you're still considered a minor by the U. S. Government. OK? You have to be eighteen to sign up. Would it be a problem getting Mom and Dad in here? I mean, I can come out to you guys' house and-

REE

My mom's sick. My dad's gone.

SGT. SCHALK

Well, do you have any brothers or sisters that might be able to help?

REE

I got a little brother and a little sister, twelve and six.

SGT. SCHALK

Well, who's taking care of them right now?

REE

I am.

SGT. SCHALK

You are? Is that why you need the forty thousand dollars?

REE

Yes sir.

SGT. SCHALK

Well, it sounds like it might be a bigger challenge just to stay home, you know, and actually take care of your brother and sister. Because you know you're not going to be able to take them with you to training, right?

REE

I thought maybe I could.

SGT. SCHALK

Not right at the beginning. Plus, you wouldn't be able to have them when you're actually in the active duty army. Because who's going to be there to take care of them if you have to go off and actually fight?

Ree falls silent.

SGT. SCHALK (CONT'D)

So it sounds like right now, you need to buckle up and stay home. It's going to take a lot of backbone and a lot of courage to stay home, but that I think is what you need to do right at this point. OK? Now, something might change here in the next year or so. You might decide this is what you want to do, you know? But don't take it lightly, and don't do it just for the money. You need to have a good reason to do this, OK?

REE

OK.

SGT. SCHALK

Alright. Well, it was nice meeting you.

REE

Nice meeting you.

SGT. SCHALK

Have a good day, OK?

REE

Thank you.

They rise and shake hands. Ree exits.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DUSK

Ree is curled up in a chair next to the wood stove, lost in thought. Ashlee and Sonny eat on the couch next to her.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ree sleeps on the couch. Teardrop appears and jostles her awake with his knee.

REE
What's going on?

TEARDROP
I'm tired of waiting around for
shit to come down. Let's get out
and poke 'em where they're at and
see what happens.

Teardrop helps Ree up off the couch.

INT. ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

A small LOCAL BAND plays in the back.

Teardrop sits at the end of the bar scrutinizing the crowd.

EXT. ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

Ree is asleep in Teardrop's truck. She wakes up and notices Ray standing with two other men in front of the gas station across the street.

REE
Oh, Lord.

Ree gets out of the truck.

INT. ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

Ree walks through the bar as patrons stare at her. She catches Teardrop's eye and motions him outside. Teardrop follows her out.

EXT. ROADSIDE BAR - NIGHT

REE
Ray and them are over there.

Ree gets back in the truck. Teardrop walks over to Ray and his buddies.

TEARDROP

Ray!

RAY

What do you want? I ain't seen him. If I could help you, I would. There are certain things you can't do.

TEARDROP

I'm sick of this shit. You're useless as tits on a fuckin' boar.

RAY

I don't know where he is.

TEARDROP

It's gonna be much worse next time I come back, I'll tell you that right now.

Teardrop walks away. Ray yells at his back.

RAY

Yeah? Best thing you could do is leave it alone, brother. Believe me. You come back up in here you gonna get you an ass whooping that won't quit.

TEARDROP

Oh, yeah?

RAY

Look what this shit already caused.

Teardrop walks back to the truck and grabs an ax out of the trunk as Ree watches from the front seat.

REE

(whispering to herself)

What the hell?

Teardrop smashes the windshield of Ray's truck with the ax. Ree cringes, not wanting to witness Teardrop's out of control behavior.

RAY (O.S.)
(yells)
Hey, what the hell you doing? Hey!
It's on now. It's so on.

Teardrop gets in the truck and pulls out.

RAY (O.S.)
(yells)
We're coming after you, dude.
We're coming, and we're bringing
hell with us.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Teardrop and Ree get out of the truck carrying flashlights
and enter the cemetery gates.

They walk among the graves.

REE
What are we doing?

TEARDROP
Looking for humps that ain't
settled.

Teardrop and Ree pick their way amongst the headstones,
scanning the ground with their flashlights. They finally
pause and Teardrop surveys the area.

TEARDROP
He ain't here.

Teardrop sits and lights a cigarette. Ree settles down next
to him. Wind rustles through the dry leaves.

REE
He ain't anywhere.

TEARDROP
He's somewhere.

They walk out of the cemetery.

INT. TEARDROP'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Teardrop and Ree drive in silence, Ree dozing and Teardrop fighting sleep. Ree jolts awake and notices flashing lights whirling over the truck from behind. Teardrop makes no move to stop. A siren squawks.

REE

Teardrop, you should stop. Just see what he wants.

Teardrop stops the truck and rolls down his window.

EXT. TEARDROP'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Sheriff Baskin approaches holding a flashlight as Teardrop stares straight ahead. He halts a few feet from the door.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Get out of the truck, Teardrop. I need to talk to you.

TEARDROP

I don't think so.

SHERIFF BASKIN

It ain't about you. You're not in trouble. It's about your brother.

Teardrop watches Baskin in his side mirror.

TEARDROP

Nope. Tonight I ain't doing a fucking thing you say.

Teardrop's hand closes around the rifle.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Get out of the truck and put your hands where I can see 'em. Come on, get out.

TEARDROP

Why'd you tell? Why? You went and got his ass killed. You happy now?

Baskin and Ree register Teardrop's accusation. Baskin, apprehensive, makes eye contact with Ree and draws his pistol from the holster. Attempting to regain control, he taps the side of the truck with his gun.

SHERIFF BASKIN

I know you. I know your family.
Get out of the car now.

Teardrop raises his rifle and rests it on the open window, staring Baskin down in the side mirror. Baskin shifts uneasily, again looking to Ree.

TEARDROP

Is this gonna be our time?

Teardrop and Baskin hold each other's eyes in the mirror as Baskin slowly backs away, still brandishing his flashlight.

Teardrop fires up the engine and Baskin shines his flashlight on Ree in the truck. Teardrop pulls out and leaves Baskin standing alone in the road.

INT. REE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Teardrop and Ree sit on the couch.

REE

What I really can't stand is how I
feel so ashamed--for Dad.

TEARDROP

Well, he loved y'all. That's where
he went weak.

Ree looks at him.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

Lots of us can be tough, plenty
tough enough, and do it for a long
stretch, too.

REE

But snitching.

TEARDROP

For lots'n lots of years he wasn't.
He wasn't, he wasn't, and then one
day he was.

Teardrop snorts crank off a key as Ree watches him.

REE

You always have scared me.

TEARDROP

That's cause you're smart.

They fall silent.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ree carries a heavy box of belongings out and begins throwing papers into a smoking barrel in the yard.

INT. REE'S HOUSE - DAY

Ree and Connie sort through a box of family photos.

REE

Will you look through this stuff?
See what you want to keep.

Connie nods and starts to go through the box.

Ree turns the pages of a photo album. Sonny and Ashlee look on.

REE

That's Dad. And Teardrop.

She hands a small hand-carved wooden horse to Ashlee.

REE

Ashlee, you remember when dad made
that for you?

ASHLEE

Mmm hmm.

REE

Look at this guy with her.

Sonny points to a photo of Jessup and Connie.

SONNY

That's him?

REE

Mmm hmm.

SONNY

How old was he in that picture?

REE

Probably around my age.

They contemplate the photos. Ashlee arranges her horse on the table in front of her.

Ree turns over a small portrait photo of a woman and reads aloud the inscription on the back.

REE

I don't know how I ever latched on to someone like you, but I sure hope I can keep you interested in me forever. I love you and will always be true.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ree watches the fire in the barrel, then heads back into the house.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ashlee and Sonny climb on and around large bales of hay, playing hide and seek.

ASHLEE

Ho! Found you! Found you!

EXT. REE'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Merab and her sister Alice knock at Ree's front door. After waiting a beat, Merab knocks again.

Ree comes out with a shotgun, livid. Merab and Alice are unfazed.

MERAB

We're going to fix your problem for you.

REE

Right now I'm feeling like blowing
me a clean hole through your
fucking guts.

MERAB

I know you do. But you won't.
You'll put that scatter gun away
and come along with us.

REE

You must think I'm crazy!

MERAB

We'll take you to your daddy's
bones. We know the place. We need
to put a stop to all this nonsense
talk about us we've been having to
hear.

REE

I ain't said a thing about you.

MERAB

I know. But everybody else has.

Ree gestures with the shotgun.

REE

I'm bringing this.

MERAB

No, you won't bring that, either.
You want his bones, you'll set that
down and come along.

EXT. FIELD - DUSK

KAT, Merab's sister, opens the gate to the field. Merab
drives through and parks in the field. Merab, Tilly and
Alice get out.

MERAB

You can go on and take that sack
off your head. Give it to me.

Ree removes a burlap sack from her head and gets out of the
car.

MERAB

Child, you might know where you are. If you do, you forget you know it. You get me?

Ree nods. Merab pulls a chainsaw from the trunk and hands it to Alice.

Merab and Kat illuminate the ground with flashlights as Merab leads the group through the gathering darkness to the edge of a pond. Cows moo plaintively. The sisters pull a rowboat from the underbrush. No one speaks. Merab, Alice and Ree get in. Kat puts the chainsaw in the boat and Merab paddles away from shore towards a tangle of branches in the middle of the pond.

MERAB

He should be right there. You're gonna need to reach down and tug him up.

Ree removes her coat and rolls up her sleeves. She hesitates.

MERAB

He ain't deep.

Ree plunges her arm into the pond, groping in the water.

MERAB

Straight down. Can you feel of him?

Ree shivers, feels something and gasps, recoiling. Merab shines a light on the water as Ree goes back in, horrified but determined, grabbing a firm hold of an icy hand.

MERAB

Alright now, take this.

Merab lifts the chainsaw to Ree.

REE

What?

MERAB

Well, how else you gonna get his hands?

REE

No.

ALICE

Oh, come on, child. Your daddy would want you to do this. Now here, take the saw.

Ree looks to Merab and away, making no move to take the chainsaw.

ALICE

She can't do it, Merab.

Merab sees that Alice is right.

MERAB

Hold his arm out straight, child.

Merab starts the saw and begins to cut.

Ree sobs. She drops the severed hand in the boat. Her father's body sinks away from her grasp.

MERAB

Why'd you let go? You're gonna need both hands, or sure as shit they'll say he cut one off to keep from going to prison. They know that trick. Now reach back down in there, now - quick.

Ree reaches back into the pond. She grabs hold of Jessup's body again and hangs on. Merab revs the chainsaw and severs the second hand.

Ree is stunned, Merab wraps her coat around her.

MERAB

(whispering)

Let it go.

Ree is motionless.

MERAB

Let's go, Alice.

They row away, leaving an oily film on the water's surface.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE, WAITING ROOM - DAY

Ree sits waiting for Baskin with a plastic bag on her lap. As she waits, the DISPATCHER answers radio calls.

Baskin appears and motions for her to come inside his office.

SHERIFF BASKIN

C'mon back.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Ree places the sack on Baskin's desk. He takes a look inside and flinches.

SHERIFF BASKIN

How in the hell did you come by these?

REE

Someone flung them up on the porch last night.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Reckon I'll run these straight over. The lab can tell me if they're his.

REE

They're his. Those are my dad's hands.

SHERIFF BASKIN

We'll know yes or no on that soon enough. I bet your dad would still be here if he was just growing his marijuana.

Ree restrains her urge to verbally assault him, and heads for the door.

SHERIFF BASKIN (CONT'D)

Hey! I didn't shoot the other night 'cause you were there in the truck. He never backed me down.

Ree leans against the doorway.

REE

It looked to me like he did.

SHERIFF BASKIN

Don't you let me hear that's the story getting around.

REE

I don't talk much about you, man.
Ever.

INT. REE'S HOUSE, CONNIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ree stands in front of the closet looking at Jessup's things for a minute. She pulls out a banjo and lays it on the bed.

EXT. REE'S YARD - DAY

Ashlee pets Nickdog.

ASHLEE

You're a good boy. Good boy.

Ashlee comes over to the clothesline and helps Ree take the laundry down. Connie folds the clothes at a table nearby.

Sonny sits on his skateboard, rolling back and forth on plywood laid on top of the scrabble.

Teardrop approaches, carrying a small bundle.

TEARDROP

Sonny. Hey, Ashlee.

He unwraps two chicks and offers them to the kids.

TEARDROP

I brung these for you two to raise up.

Ashlee and Sonny each take one.

ASHLEE

Thank you.

Satterfield's car pulls into the yard. Teardrop looks at him, then turns to Ree.

TEARDROP
What's he doing here?

REE
I have no idea.

Satterfield approaches.

SATTERFIELD
I know you.

TEARDROP
Yup.

Satterfield studies Ree a little more closely.

SATTERFIELD
Looks like you earned this money
with blood, kid.

He reaches inside his coat, pulls out a brown paper bag and hands it to Ree.

SATTERFIELD (CONT'D)
That's yours.

REE
How's it mine?

SATTERFIELD
Well that fella never did give a
name. But he sure was good news for
you all when he put that money down
on Jessup.

REE
Ain't it still his, though?

SATTERFIELD
You can use it a hell of a lot more
than him. And he ain't gonna come
back for it neither, not the way
things happened. We took our cut,
and that there's what's left. That
makes it yours.

Sonny observes the exchange.

SATTERFIELD
I don't know how you did that.

REE

Bred'n buttered. I told you.

Satterfield searches for the right thing to say.

SATTERFIELD

Well you take care, OK?

He nods to Teardrop and walks away. Ree turns to look at Connie and their eyes meet.

EXT. REE'S HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Teardrop leans against the porch. Sonny, followed by Ashlee, comes down the steps and offers Teardrop the banjo.

SONNY

Here.

TEARDROP

Well, it's been a long time. Back off a little, you make me nervous. Oh, shit.

Sonny and Ashlee sit on the porch steps and Teardrop picks out a tune. Ree comes over and leans against the porch next to him. After a moment, Teardrop stops playing and puts down the banjo.

TEARDROP (CONT'D)

I was never good like your daddy was.

He looks down, pauses. Something is heavy on his mind.

TEARDROP

I know who.

REE

What?

TEARDROP

Jessup. I know who.

He walks towards his truck. Ree looks down at the banjo.

REE

You should have this.

Teardrop turns back to her, and she offers him the banjo.

TEARDROP

Oh, no, you...I'll let you keep it
here for me.

They stare at each other silently for a moment.

Teardrop gets into his truck, and Ree watches him drive away.

Ree sits on the porch steps and Ashlee and Sonny join her on
either side, cradling their chicks.

SONNY

Does that money mean you're
leavin'?

REE

I ain't leavin' you guys. Why do
you think that?

SONNY

We heard you talking about the
Army. Are you wanting to leave us?

REE

I'd be lost without the weight of
you two on my back.

Ree kisses her sister's head.

REE (CONT'D)

I ain't going anywhere.

Ashlee hands her chick to Ree. She picks up the banjo where
Ree left it, sits back down on the porch, and strums.

THE END