

PERPETUAL GLOOM

Pilot Episode

Written
by

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Based on the book 'Perpetual Gloom'

Part 1 of 3 in the novel trilogy of

The Boloney Trail
By

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE PORCH, BASKINS CREEK, TENNESSEE, 1930'S - DAY

A boy, MONROE (10), sits on the porch of a weather-beaten rural house, making fly swatters from the cannibalized bits of an old door screen, wire and colored twine.

He listens, as inside the house TWO MEN shout, curse and argue angrily with each other.

Suddenly a man, JC (40's), Monroe's father, crashes out of the house and falls face first onto the ground from a punch delivered by a relative, DONALD (30's).

Monroe ignores the fracas, casually studying one of the flyswatters.

MONROE (V.O.)

Lord says thou shalt not kill. But what's flies ever done? They's innocent. Just goin' about their business. They's got a right to be left alone.

Reluctantly he turns his attention to his father laying in the dirt.

MONROE (V.O.)

That's my father, JC. Today it was his turn to get swatted.

(beat)

He's a son-of-a-bitch.

Donald steps out onto the porch, blood up, and fists still tightly clenched from the physical confrontation.

He glances at Monroe, before turning his attention back to JC who tries to shake off the concussion of the punch.

DONALD

Kin or no kin. You ain't nothin but a blowhard, all-around-son-of-a-bitch. You hear me!?

Donald shoves his hand in his pocket, pulls out a fifty cent piece and tosses it on the ground next to JC.

DONALD (CONT'D)

First tank's on me. Now git on outta here.

Ignoring the coin, JC dabs a bloody nose with the back of his hand. He gets to his feet, staring daggers at Donald for a moment, before shooting Monroe a menacing look.

JC

And what in the hell you lookin' at
boy?

JC brushes his trousers down as we;

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE, BASKINS CREEK - DAY

JC's truck is being loaded up by MARTHA (30's) JC's wife, and mother to a new BABY (ADILIA), Monroe and his younger brother, WYATT (6).

JC hauls the last of the family possessions onto the truck. Unseen by him, Martha walks over to recover the coin. She looks up at Donald who is overseeing their departure and gives him a silent nod of thanks.

Monroe and Wyatt jump into the back of the flatbed as JC pulls off.

EXT. POTHOLED ROAD - DAY

Monroe and Wyatt are shaken about as JC tries to navigate the heavily potholed road.

INT. JC'S TRUCK CAB - DAY

JC steers around the increasingly bumpy road. He glances across to Martha who is trying to shield the baby Adilia from any knocks.

JC

(to Martha)

Gonna hit the blacktop soon.

(turning his head to speak
to the boys)

Roe, you make sure nuthin' falls off
the back, you hear?

EXT. TRUCK FLATBED - DAY

Monroe pretends that he doesn't hear his father. Instead he lies on his back and scoots towards the tailgate and, with a swift kick, sends the bucket of fly swatters tumbling onto the road.

MONROE
Son of bitches.

Monroe crawls back beside his brother who begins to mimic him.

WYATT
Ya, son of bitches.

Wyatt kneels and pretends to shoot them, before turning his attention to the passing telephone poles.

I/E. TRUCK FLATBED / ROAD - NIGHT

Monroe and Wyatt are asleep in the flatbed of the truck, which now pulls off the road. JC kills the lights and all is still until dawn breaks as we;

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED GRAVEYARD - DAY

Monroe wakes and is the first to jump down from the truck. He surveys the sorry looking old graveyard that they inadvertently camped in on the previous night.

MONROE (V.O.)
Dawn often brings clarity and hope,
but on that morning it only
illuminated our despair.

Monroe's reverie is broken by a clip to the back of his head by JC.

JC
Make yerself useful and go get some
water from that creek over there.

Monroe grabs the water cooling bag that is slung over the truck's hood ornament and walks off towards the small creek that borders the graveyard.

EXT. ABANDONED GRAVEYARD AREA - DAY

JC leans over the hood of the truck studying a plan he has made and talking quietly to Martha, who distractedly shifts from one hip to another as she tries to feed Adilia. She stares out at the broken down gravestones.

JC
You payin' attention?

MARTHA

Milk's gone dried up. I'm worried.

JC

Now ain't no reason to get all worked up. They's out looking for them other two.

MARTHA

But what if they done caught them by now?

JC

If they caught up with Bonnie and Clyde we'd a heard about it, that's one thang for sure.

Martha is about to answer but thinks better of provoking an argument.

INT. COOTER BANK - DAY

A bespectacled elderly CASHIER (60's) holds his hands aloft.

Disguised as a man in JC's work clothes, Martha points a .38 revolver at the frightened teller, whilst JC himself quietly issues instructions to load a bag with cash.

The Cashier stuffs a quantity of bills into an old bag and hands it over to JC.

EXT. COOTER SIDE STREET - DAY

Making good their escape, JC and Martha hurry back to the truck, which is parked in a quiet side street.

Martha pulls back the tarp covering the flatbed of the truck -- and her children. Monroe, Wyatt and Adilia are all huddled underneath it.

Martha reaches in and grabs Adilia from Monroe.

MARTHA

Not a peep, Roe. Not till I come for ya, no matter what.

Martha climbs into the cab, placing Adilia on the seat next to her.

She quickly removes JC's clothes and presses the wrinkles out of her dress with her hands.

She then picks Adilia up and cradles her in her arms, shooting JC a nervous look at he starts the engine and slowly pulls away, heading out of town.

EXT. SINCLAIR GAS STATION - DAY

JC pulls the truck into a gas station, rolling over the service bell. It attracts the attention of CALVIN (70's), the old attendant who emerges from it.

CALVIN
What can I do for ya?

JC can't help but be high on his success.

JC
Fill'er up.

As Calvin moves towards the pumps, JC has a second thought and leans through the window to speak with Calvin.

JC (CONT'D)
Oh and wash these here winders... and while yer at it, need the oil and tires checkin'.

Still disapproving at what they have just done, Martha rolls her eyes.

MARTHA
When you mess with a bull, you get the horn.

JC turns back to Martha to reassure her and gives her a reassuring grin.

JC
They be lookin' for someone who's runnin' all out.

In that moment, a speeding PATROL CAR squeals to an abrupt stop.

The SHERIFF looks across towards JC and Martha before leaning out of his window and calling out to Calvin.

SHERIFF
Hey Calvin!

Calvin pulls his head from under the hood of JC's truck, and wiping his hands on an oily rag, shuffles over to the police cruiser.

CALVIN
Ya, Sheriff?

SHERIFF
Ya see two fellas drive past here in
the last five or ten minutes?

CALVIN
No sir. These is the only customers
I've had in the last thirty minutes.

The Sheriff glances at JC's truck before shifting his cruiser
into neutral.

SHERIFF
Is that a fact?

The Sheriff opens his car door without taking his eyes off JC.

INT. JC'S TRUCK CAB, SINCLAIR GAS STATION - DAY

JC glances at Martha who holds Adilia tightly against her chest.

MARTHA
Quiet down, girl. Ain't gonna let
anythang happen to ya.

Before the Sheriff reaches the truck, JC sticks his head out of
the window.

JC
Howdy, Officer.

The Sheriff stops in his tracks, keeping his right hand casually
on the pistol grip in his holster.

SHERIFF
Where ya folks comin' from?

JC
We'z just comin' from Tennessee. The
wife's grandmaw was feelin' poorly.

SHERIFF
Is that a fact?

JC
Yes, sir.

The Sheriff twists his head to get a better look at the faded
writing on the truck's side panels.

SHERIFF
Where ya headin' now?

JC
Like the plates say, Louisiana-
Shreveport, to be exact.

SHERIFF
What's your name?

JC
(lying)
Jeb. Jeb Dupree. Anythang wrong?

The Sheriff's jaw hardens and he shakes his head.

SHERIFF
You best keep movin'. We don't allow
roadside campin' or open fires. You
get my meanin'?

JC smiles back at the Sheriff.

JC
Yes, sir, I surely do get your
meanin'.

EXT. SINCLAIR GAS STATION - DAY

The Sheriff is distracted from his business with JC as an unmarked car rolls up alongside his patrol vehicle.

The Sheriff walks over to it and rests his elbow on the open window.

SHERIFF
Hey Marshall Higgeson.

MARSHALL HIGGERSON
Got anything?

SHERIFF
No, but take these names down. Jeb
Dupree and JC Hornbeck. Hornbeck Junk
Hauling.

MARSHALL HIGGERSON
All right. What's your gut tell you?

Marshall Higgeson takes out a notepad from his breast pocket and spits on the tip of a pencil before writing down the names.

SHERIFF

Well, look at that piece of shit truck. You tell me where in the hell is he gettin' the money to top the oil off, fix the spare and fill the tank?

Marshal Higgerson has no answer. He eyes JC and sits back in his car. The Sheriff leans on the door. They both watch Calvin repair the tube in JC's spare tyre.

Higgerson notices JC fingers thump the steering wheel in time to a song that is playing in his head.

Calvin finishes up and tosses the spare into the back of the truck.

INT. JC'S TRUCK CAB, SINCLAIR GAS STATION - DAY

JC starts the engine and slowly pulls away from the Sinclair station. He purposely drives at a snail's pace past the Sheriff and Marshall Higgerson, quietly singing a song under his breath.

JC

Fare thee well, fare thee well,
Fare thee well, my fairy fay,
For I'm goin' to Louisiana for to
see my Susianna,
Singing Polly Wolly Doodle all the
day.

In passing, JC and Higgerson's eyes lock for a few seconds, and the two men doff their hats to one another.

EXT. TENNESSEE BLACK TOP ROAD - DAY

JC and his family drive along the 'black top' road with Monroe and Wyatt riding high on the flatbed of the truck.

JC approaches the outskirts of a small town.

EXT. CANNED GOODS STORE - DAY

JC pulls up outside a general store. He climbs out of the cab, hikes up his trousers and enters the store.

INT. CANNED GOODS STORE - DAY

The bell announcing a customer rings as JC enters, and shortly after HENRY (50's) the shopkeeper emerges from the back room.

HENRY
Howdy. What can I help you with?

JC tips his hat and scans the shelves.

JC
Few provisions.

Henry opens his palms as if to say 'fire away'.

JC (CONT'D)
Gimme a couple of them tins of meat up there. Couple o' sacks of meal. Beans if you got 'em.

HENRY
How much ya want?

JC
Gimmie four pounds.

Henry nods.

JC moves over to a barrel containing pickles. He reaches in, fishes one out and chomps down on it. Henry doesn't look impressed.

JC (CONT'D)
I'll take some o' these pickles too.

HENRY
You got money to pay for all this, mister?

JC pulls out a wad of notes. Henry looks at them and takes in JC's appearance.

JC
And a stogie. Hell, take one for yourself.

HENRY
I wouldn't go flashin' that round these parts if I was you. Should put it in a bank.

JC's eyes roam the store for other items he may have missed.

JC
Banks ain't safe.

HENRY
Ain't that the truth.

Henry weighs JC up, before making a mental decision.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Gotta go get the beans out back.
(cautiously)
Anything else you need?

JC gets the subtext of the question.

JC

Don't suppose ya got somethin'
medicinal? Bout two quarts should do
it?

HENRY

Medicinal huh? You's ailin'?

JC flashes Henry a wide smile.

JC

You could say that. Dryness of the
throat and a dusty road back to
Louisiana -- haul'n a truck full of
brats.

Noticing Monroe and Wyatt horsing around on the back of the truck outside, Henry gives a knowing smile back and disappears, leaving JC alone. He isn't long, and quickly returns with a flour bag of beans in one hand and two quart jars of homemade moonshine in the other.

Henry places them down on the floor. He looks past JC to Martha and the children in the truck outside.

HENRY

So family man is ya? Ya know there's
opportunities for somebody like ya --
bein' in your position an all.

JC

Oh yeah? Like what?

HENRY

A opportunity to put down roots. A
opportunity that will pay ya back
tenfold with a little determination
and hard work.

JC

You know of an opportunity like that?

Henry smiles.

HENRY
Just so happens I do.

EXT. THIRTY-NINE ACRE FIELD - DAY

CAPTION: 1936 ARKANSAS.

CLOSE UP:

A shovel hits a patch of rock strewn ground hard. It hardly makes a dent in the parched earth.

JC stands up and examines the shovel he has just tried to push into the ground. The shaft is cracked. He curses under his breath before bending down and pulling out a large rock that's been lying under the surface. He stands again and looks out across the field to where Wyatt and another son VIRGIL (6) are trying their best to also pull rocks from the ground.

INT. CHICKEN COUP - DAY

Monroe, now older, sits in the chicken coup picking away on a homemade guitar. Through a gap in the wall of the coup he can see JC and his two brothers working hard.

MONROE (V.O.)
A thirty nine acre rock pile. That's
the opportunity he bought with the
money he and ma got.

(beat)
Had more kids and put us all to work
like his rented mules. Reckon that
picture of a high cotton crop in his
head, just about grew all up into his
brain too.

Monroe looks at his brothers, who with difficulty are loading up a cart with rocks. His attention then turns towards his father in the distance. JC stands with his hands on his hips, before taking off his hat and wiping his brow with his forearm.

JC
Boys, time to knock off and git the
wagon and truck unloaded.

Monroe leans his guitar against a bucket, picks up a roll of wire and leaves the coup.

EXT. THIRTY-NINE ACRE FIELD - DAY

Wyatt and Virgil throw the last rock onto the cart and begin to check the mules' harnesses, whilst Monroe strolls over to JC with the wire in hand.

JC

What in Sam Hill took ya so long?

JC smacks Monroe around the head, before snatching the wire from Monroe's hand.

Monroe rubs his head as he climbs into the driver's side of JC's truck. He shuffles himself up close to the push-out windshield, pulls on the choke, and gives the throttle a few hard pumps with his worn-out boot, before trying to turn the engine over. No luck. He stomps his foot down on the accelerator again.

JC (CONT'D)

Don't go a-floodin' it!

JC pushes his face through the open driver's side window.

JC (CONT'D)

Give it little taps.

(aside)

Trouble with ya dagum younguns is ya always in a dang rush -- 'sep when it comes time for work.

Monroe smiles smugly.

JC (CONT'D)

And don't ya go gunnin' it. We ain't got enough gas to be wastin'. Ya hyeer me, Roe?

MONROE

Awraht.

Monroe manages to start the engine and pulls away from JC, who now turns his attention to his two younger boys.

JC

And what yaw waitin' on, an engraved invitation to a debutant-ey ball? Get them mollies movin' up to the corral and get them watered and fed!

WYATT

Yes, sir.

VIRGIL

Yes, sir.

JC

And don't fidget ta get yourselves
washed up. Get on with it. Ya know how
Lil'bit gets when we'z late.

JC watches as the young children pull on the harness of the team
of mules. He picks up his shovel, and begins to twist the wire
around the broken handle.

JC (CONT'D)

(to himself)

At lease we ain't got dust blowin' in
all which away.

He wipes his brow again and surveys his land.

JC (CONT'D)

I ain't goin' back a broken man.

JC heads off towards the house in the distance, where Adilia is
keeping watch in order to announce their arrival to her mother,
Martha.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

Carrying her nine month old sister, HESTER, on her hip. Adilia
watches JC and the boys approach.

ADILIA

They's bout up ta the house, Mamma.

Adilia reaches down and grabs her naked, brother ORSON (4), who
is busy practicing his aim by peeing into the loosened
foundation rocks below the porch.

ADILIA (CONT'D)

Come on, Daddy, we'z gonna be late!

From below, JC and the boys quicken their pace.

JC

Yaw heard her! Get a hassle in them
there bustles!

WYATT

(to Virgil)

He means, you girly.

Wyatt runs up behind Virgil and sticks his foot out in an effort
to trip him.

VIRGIL

Ya think you's some kinda hotshot,
don't ya? Well, ya ain't!

JC

(to the boys)

Mamma musta taken out that old hen by
the smells of it.

WYATT

Mamma don't fool around. If ya ain't a
layin' bird, you's a Sabbath bird!

JC

Don't yaw forget that boys, she don't
take to freeloadin', so get that wagon
unloaded before Lil'bit crawls into a
hissy fit.

INT. HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

As JC's eyes adjust to the dark interior of the house, he sneaks up behind Martha as she stands cooking over the potbelly stove. He grabs her waist, leans over, and kisses her on the neck, whilst in the background Adilia is still yelling at her brothers to hurry up.

JC

Dang, if that girl ain't got a voice
that could chip paint.

MARTHA

Oh, sugar, she's just shy.

JC

Shy?

JC raises his eyes in disbelief as he moves to the far end of the kitchen where Martha has set up a large, galvanized tub with hot water in it. A quilt strung across a rope, screens off the area for privacy.

MARTHA

When we'z late, everybody turns and
watches us get situated and she don't
like all that attention. I set out ya
clean clothes. Hung 'em up on the
nail. Ya see 'em?

JC nods and begins to undress.

INT. HORNBECK KITCHEN / LIVING AREA - DAY

JC, Monroe and Wyatt have now had their bath and changed into clean clothes.

Virgil slowly makes his way to the back of the kitchen.

MARTHA

Go on now, Virgil, and get warshed up.
Quit draggin those feet, boy. Orson's
gotta get warshed up too.

ADILIA

We're gonna be late, Virgil!

MARTHA

(snapping)
Lil'bit, take the day off. It's the
day of rest.

Reluctantly Virgil makes his way to the washing area and pulls the edges of the quilt screen tight against the wall.

INT. WASHING AREA - DAY

Virgil stands and stares down at the cold, dark gray water in the tub. A thick coat of soapy residue floats on the surface.

He takes a step closer until his toe touches the edge of the small, chipped, floral-patterned saucer his mother has placed next to the tub to hold a bar of soap that is covered in body hair.

Virgil turns back toward the curtain and makes sure there are no gaps. He then picks up the saucer and lets the soap slide noisily into the tub. Then, using the soap saucer, he creates sounds to mimic his bathing -- occasionally letting the water spill over the side of the tub and onto his bare feet.

MARTHA (O.S.)

Don't let that water run all over the
floor Virgil!

VIRGIL

Awraht, Mamma.

Virgil takes a tattered wet wash rag from the side of the tub, and lightly dabs his face and hair, giving the appearance that he has bathed.

After gawking into the small, cracked mirror that hangs on the wall, he is pleased with his look.

INT. HORNBECK KITCHEN / LIVING AREA - DAY

Virgil appears from behind the curtain, fully dressed in clean overalls, he sees that everyone is seated at the table, waiting to start eating.

MARTHA

Roe, Wyatt, go dump that tub and bring it back in so little baby Hester can be up at the table with us.

Monroe and Wyatt jump from their chairs and each grab one of the tub's two handles, slopping water over the sides as they navigate around the kitchen table.

JC

Make sure you don't throw the baby out.

VIRGIL

The water's so dang dirty you couldn't tell if there was a baby in there or not.

MARTHA

Dirty water ain't nothing to be ashamed of. Some folks ain't even got water to get dirty.

Monroe carries the wash tub back into the kitchen and sets it on the floor next to a table leg.

Adilia grabs the quilt from the rope and lines the tub before placing Hester gently inside.

Hester sits upright and grabs the rim with her tiny hands, then bounces up and down on her cloth diaper.

ADILIA

Now that we got everybody at the table, let's say grace so as we can...

WYATT

(cutting across)

Bless this meat, bless this skin, lay back my ears and stuff it in. Amen!

ADILIA

Ya's blaspheming' Wyatt!

MARTHA

Yaw stop it now. Go on Daddy, say grace.

Everyone bows their heads, but nevertheless, JC double checks before beginning.

JC

Bless us, oh dear Lord,
And these Thy gifts,
Which we are about to receive from
Thy bounty,
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

MARTHA

Pass up yaw's plates and I'll dish ya up.

WYATT

She smells good Mamma.

MARTHA

Thank ya son. But it might be a spell 'fore we gets another meal like this'n. All we got left is the one bird that lays the eggs.

WYATT

(laughing)

Maybe we'z just take its legs and give it wooden ones to jump around on.

MONROE

(laughing)

Take the wings too. Chickens don't fly unless they's chased.

VIRGIL

Or its head. They's stupid enough anyhow. Don't need a brain.

The boys become rowdy with their laughter.

MARTHA

That's enough.

Martha ruffles Virgil's hair.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Did ya take a bath?

VIRGIL

Yes, em.

MARTHA

Lean in some and let me take a look.

Virgil leans in towards Martha who painfully tugs at his ears and inspects behind them.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Lord have mercy! What you got goin' on here?

VIRGIL

Ouch!

MARTHA

If you took a bath, how come ya got all this dirt in yur ear?

Martha grabs the end of her Blue Moth patterned apron, spits on it, then twists it inside Virgil's ear.

VIRGIL

That hurt Mamma.

MARTHA

Ain't nearly hurt as bad as it's gonna when I scrub you down when we gets back.

MONROE

Might be outta chicken, but we'z got ourselves a tater patch.

WYATT

I'll grab the hoe.

VIRGIL

Shut your mouth before I come over there and whop the tar outta ya! I know'd ya pissed in the water, Wyatt.

MARTHA

(to Wyatt)

Did ya, Wyatt? Cuz I can tell.

WYATT

(sniggering)

It just come out.

JC

(yelling)

That'll teach yaw. Cuz I pissed in the tub first.

Hester, the baby begins to cry at JC's outburst. He laughs and leans back in his chair, but in that moment the legs splinter and give way, sending JC crashing to the ground.

ADILIA

See what yaw done! Now we'z gone be late.

MONROE

You mean I was sitting in your piss?

JC is still laughing and nods.

MARTHA

That's enough. Git on up from the table, and if yaw's got shoes, get em. It's time to be gettin on down there.

WYATT

But we ain't done et yet.

MARTHA

It'll be here when yaw get's back.

Monroe stands and shoots a hard glance at JC who is struggling to get up off the floor, before grabbing a biscuit from his plate and heading out of the house.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Monroe struts out onto the porch, letting the screen door slam hard behind him.

MONROE

(to himself)

I ought to spit on ya.

He rolls his fingers into a fist and slams it into the side of the house, next to another cracked board.

EXT. DIRT TRAIL - DAY

Martha, JC and the rest of the family walk down a dirt road until they reach a cluster of black hickory trees.

They then cut onto a small trail that easily could have been mistaken for an animal track.

EXT. SMALL CLEARING - DAY

JC and family emerge from a grove and into a small clearing, where a dozen men and women stand, dressed in their Sunday best, beside rows of colorful quilts lined up like church pews.

JC nods at the assembly of Jehovah's Witness elders whilst Martha unfurls a crazy patchwork quilt and lays it next to a log cabin.

EXT. SMALL CLEARING, LATER - DAY

BROTHER ISHAM TOOMEY (60's) stands in the middle of his flock, eyes closed and in solemn prayer.

BROTHER ISHAM TOOMEY

...And in summation, dear Lord, we ask you for your blessing and offer you our deepest gratitude for the gift you provided us through the sanctuary of Brother Hornbeck's farm so you might nourish us with your word and protect us from the evils of this old world. In the name of your son Jesus Christ, Amen.

Martha pulls out her black leather King James Bible.

BROTHER ISHAM TOOMEY (CONT'D)

Brother Hornbeck, would you please read the passage for us?

Martha passes her open Bible to JC, who swallows nervously.

MARTHA

Don't fret. I'll hep ya out.

JC

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them: for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

Brother Isham Toomey nods his Amen and addresses the congregation again.

BROTHER ISHAM TOOMEY

It is only a matter of days, a few months at most, until this country enters the conflict overseas.

(MORE)

BROTHER ISHAM TOOMEY (CONT'D)

Make no mistake, every one of us,
 especially these here young-uns -
 all of us will have our obedience
 tested as this country plunges into
 the abyss of patriotism. As the
 Apostle John wrote in Chapter 18,
 Verse 36, Jesus answered, 'My
 kingdom is not of this world.'
 So I ask yaw. Is your heart longing
 for where there ain't no end of
 days?

Brother Isham Toomey fixes his congregation with a hard
 accusatory stare.

EXT. THREE-MILE DIRT ROAD - DAY

Heading home, JC drives his rusty Chevrolet International along
 a badly rutted. On the seat next to him is a newspaper. The
 headline reads: WAR! GERMAN TROOPS INVADE POLAND

JC rolls to a stop on the boundary-line of his property.

His eyes scan the acreage for his boys. In the distance he can
 make out Virgil hoeing weeds between the rows of waist-high
 cotton in the back field, and Wyatt clearing rocks from a patch
 for next spring's planting.

His eyes then finally come to rest on Monroe who is just sitting
 down playing "Cool Water" on his harmonica.

JC

(to himself)

Boy challenges me every chance he
 gets.

JC shakes his head and before he realizes is mouthing the words
 to the tune. A moment later he lays on the horn.

Monroe stops playing, runs over to JC and jumps into the cab.

MONROE

What's up daddy?

JC

It's about dinner time and Sod should
 be up at the house by now. Go on and
 git Virgil. I don't think he heard the
 horn.

MONROE

He'll figure it out fer himself. It's
 every man fer himself.

JC

Well, ya ain't no man yet. Get on up
outta here and carry him up to the
house.

(tapping the harmonica in
Monroe's bib)

And since you know so much about
water, pour some down the radiator
before ya go.

Monroe shoots JC a dirty look. He the pours water from a canvas
bag into the radiator before heading back across the field.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

A smart looking, black DeSoto Businessman Coupe car pulls up in
front of the Hornbeck residence. Once the dust settles the door
opens and out steps SOD HIGGERSON (40's/50's), a retired Federal
Marshall and the Hornbeck's neighbor.

Martha steps out onto the porch and sees him. She briefly checks
her hair and wipes her hands down on her apron.

MARTHA

Nice to see you back Mr Higgeson.

SOD HIGGERSON

Thank you, Miss Hornbeck. It sho's
good to be back in what I would
consider the comfort of friends.

Martha smiles at him.

MARTHA

That there is a fact, Mr Higgeson.
Times can be troublesome, especially
down in Hot Springs. Come on up to the
house for a cool glass of tea.

SOD HIGGERSON

Yes, ma'am.

Sod walks to the back of his car and opens the trunks as Martha
turns to Adilia.

MARTHA

(to Adilia)

Child, run on over to the stream and
fetch the coolest jar of sweet tea.
Run, now!

EXT. TREE GROVE, HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

Adilia sprints barefoot by the side of the house and through the grove of trees next to a stream. Adilia goes to a small alcove containing jars filled with perishables like butter and milk. She fishes around for the coolest jar of tea and carefully dries it with the hem of her dress before heading back to the house.

INT. HORNBECK KITCHEN / LIVING AREA - DAY

Adilia enters the kitchen and hands Martha the jar.

MARTHA

Thank ya, Lil'bit. Now bring them there glasses on out to the porch.

Adilia looks crestfallen at the two glasses.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

No need to get all long in the face. Yaw be gittin' some, but not in the nice glasses -- and, for heaven's sakes, suck that lip in before a mad dog comes along and chews it off.

Martha then turns and pushes the screen door leading to the porch open and lets it slam behind her.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE, PORCH - DAY

Martha calls out to Sod.

MARTHA

Come on up here in the shade, Mr. Higgerson!

SOD HIGGERSO

Yes'm, on my way, Miss Hornbeck. I brung some washing and ironing, if ya have time.

MARTHA

That'd be just fine. Lil'bit run on down and grab Mr. Higgerson's warshin' like a good girl.

Martha looks off to see her husband approach.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I see JC and the boys coming up the road now. Might as well stay for dinner.

(MORE)

MARTHA (CONT'D)

We got Brunswick stew with taters and a passel of wild greens. A little late in the season for 'em, but ya cook greens long enough, and they give up their meanness.

She smiles and hands Sod a glass of cool tea, as Adilia joins Sod and Martha on the porch steps.

ADILIA

Them taters come out of Virgil's ear.

SOD HIGGERSON

Is that a fact now? I reckon I can eat at least a bite of tater. But seein' as I'm so hungry, I could eat a pigtail sandwich too.

Sod playfully tugs at one of her pigtails.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

JC approaches the house in the truck. The boys, on foot, rush ahead to take a look at Sod's car.

JC

Boys, don't nar a one of yaw touch that man's new car!

Monroe immediately jerks his hand back.

MONROE

I ain't touchin' it.

JC

Ya waz a-thankin' about it!

MONROE

(under his breath)
Maybe I was, maybe I wazn't.

Setting his tea down, Sod makes his way down the porch steps to greet JC, glancing at the boys and giving them a nod.

SOD HIGGERSON

Look like yaw got enough rocks cleared to build another wall around China.

JC

Pert near. Took longer than I reckoned it would. Should 'a had twice as many bolls as we got now.

(MORE)

JC (CONT'D)

Afraid come winter, still won't have a dang thang in the pan.

SOD HIGGERSON

Yaw know I appreciate ya looking out on things the way ya do while I'm away. I'm happy to help in any way I can.

JC

Well, that's what neighbors are fur, ain't it.

(noticing Martha)

Best be gettin' on up to the house and see what Ma's got for dinner.

SOD HIGGERSON

Squirrel stew, I hear tell.

JC

Ain't that fond of squirrel myself, but my breadbasket is so dang empty, I could eat the ass out of a rag doll.

The two men smile, as JC ushers Sod towards the house.

INT. HORNBECK KITCHEN / LIVING AREA - DAY

Sod and JC enter the house. Martha and the rest of the family are already seated at the table, whilst baby Hester sits in the washtub and teethes on a piece of old leather.

MARTHA

Go on, take a seat. Ain't nothin' fancy.

(swiping flies)

Dang flies. They's better fed than the rest of us.

MONROE

Sit next to me, Mr Higgerson. I wanna hear again about when ya was a US Marshall in Missouri.

JC glances at Martha and then quickly rolls snake eyes in Monroe's direction; who just shrugs them off.

MARTHA

Hush up an' act like you got some raisin', Roe. Daddy's gonna say the blessin', and then we'z gonna have a nice, quiet dinner.

JC

That boy collects more stories than a set of Funk & Wagnalls. There ain't 'er a story he can't recollect since the day he was in diapers.

Everyone laughs, except Monroe.

MARTHA

Come on now, JC. Say the blessin' before the food gits cold...

WYATT

And after, I wanna hear how fast you can get your De Soto when ya's runnin' flat out.

MONROE

And I want to hear what's goin' on in Hot Springs. The paper said...

JC cuts across him.

JC

Bow your heads.

The room falls silent.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

With dinner over, JC and Sod walk down to the DeSoto.

SOD HIGGERSON

Well, the house seems to be standing all right.

JC

(chuckling)

It woulda come down by now, but it can't figure out which way to fall.

Sod pulls out a tobacco pouch and rolls himself a cigarette.

SOD HIGGERSON

Maybe ya otta go on up to Conway. They set up a relief station there, and you can load up on food. Why, I hear they got more resources than they got over in Ola.

JC

I ain't lookin' for no handout, Sod.

Sod's eyes wander towards Martha and then to the children playing around the porch. His eyes then come to rest on young Orson.

SOD HIGGERSON

Yah, I know, but if Martha gets any skinnier, she's gonna have to stand up twice just to cast a shadow. And ain't nobody gonna know you in Conway. Besides, if my eyes don't deceive, I think you got one in the oven again.

JC checks to see if he's out of earshot of Martha.

JC

Dang, if she ain't fertile Myrtle. All I gotta do is look at 'er.

Sod is still focused on Orson until his reverie is broken. He looks up to JC who is staring at him. JC's eyes flick to Orson and then back to Sod. JC looks embarrassed and lowers his head.

SOD HIGGERSON

Well, ya get over to Conway.
(beat)
Need somethin' for gas?

JC

Na, I thank we got enough to get there and back. I'll go up in the next few weeks.

SOD HIGGERSON

Don't wait too long. Ya never know how long these rations will hold, with talk of war and all.

JC

No, sir, that's a fact.

Sod curses his cigarette with the toe of his boot, before getting into his car and starting the engine.

SOD HIGGERSON

Anyways, I'm headed down to Hot Springs tonight. Brother's got a situation involving a few fellas that came down from Chicago, and the state's attorney is starting to snoop around. The whole setup might turn into a sidwinder.

JC

Keep your boots on.

SOD HIGGERSON

I am the boots.

Sod shifts the gear and with a nod of farewell to JC, pulls away.

JC's eyes track Sod's De Soto as it kicks up dust down the hill and along the twisting dirt road.

JC then turns back toward the house where he sees Monroe, leaning over the porch with a piece of straw between his lips, defiantly studying and judging him.

JC

(to himself)

That boy's got a snake in 'im. And by God, I's just the man to kill it.

EXT. ROAD TO CONWAY - DAY

JC drives with Monroe towards Conway. Monroe stares out of the window looking bored and not paying any attention to his father.

A town sign announces their arrival.

EXT. CONWAY GAS STATION - DAY

JC pulls into the gas station, rolls down his window and calls to get the attention of a young ATTENDANT in greasy overalls.

JC

Hey there. Ya know where they's handin' out relief.

Monroe is horrified and crouches further down in his seat, pulling his chin into his chest.

ATTENDANT

I reckon they's still got a relief station set up in Lumkin's Store about a quarter mile up First Street. Can't miss it.

The Attendant's CO-WORKER squints into Monroe's dirty window.

CO-WORKER

Yaw need sum gas?

Monroe gives him the finger and scoots down some more in his seat.

EXT. LUMKIN'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

JC and Monroe drive past Lumkin's General Store. Over its porch hangs an oversized American flag and a long queue of poor and downtrodden people wait in line.

Two blocks on, JC finds the end of the line and parks the truck.

MONROE

I be waitin' in the truck.

JC's temper flares.

JC

No! No ya ain't, boy! Ya gonna get your ass outta that dagum seat and get on up those steps if I have to beat you with my belt all the way!

Monroe doesn't answer but just gets out and takes their place at the back of the line.

EXT. RELIEF QUEUE, CONWAY - DAY

As they slowly advance towards Lumkin's General Store, JC notices a small group of YOUNG MEN leaning against the door jamb and blocking the entrance.

JC

(to Monroe)

Do any a-them boys look familiar?

MONROE

Why don't you wear your glasses?

JC

(elbowing Monroe)

They's busted.

MONROE

(quietly)

No wonder ya's such a shitty driver.

JC

What'd ya say?

MONROE

I said I don't recollect any of 'em, except maybe that one with the wonky eye.

JC feels relief at their apparent anonymity.

JC

That's what I was figuring. The fella
with the wonky eye.

JC then twists his chin over his left shoulder and lets go of a
wad of spit.

WOMAN (O.S.)

You S.O.B. That's my young-un ya just
spit on.

JC turns around to see the WOMAN (30's) with her CHILD.

He tips his fedora by way of an apology, but the Woman isn't
letting go.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Ain't ya got no raisin?

The Woman tries to remove the saliva from her small child's head
before the child can smear it deep into her scalp.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

(to a sniggering Monroe)
And you! It ain't no laughin' matter!

MONROE

No ma'am.

WOMAN

(to JC)
Ain't you got no little uns?

JC

Yes ma'am, I do.

WOMAN

Do you spit on 'em?

JC

Only the boys ma'am. When they's hair
won't calm down.

JC turns away from the Woman and faces towards the front of the
line which has started to climb the steps of the general store.

However, the commotion has raised the interest of two of the
YOUNG MEN holding up the store's doorjamb. They quickly close
ranks and block the entrance when JC and Monroe are about to
enter.

JC (CONT'D)

Get outta my way.

JC tries to push his way past GROVER (20's), one of the young men sporting a low fade haircut, but he blocks the way.

GROVER
You come for relief, old man?

JC
I said get on outta my way.

JC then tries to push past FERGUS (20's), the second young man, with a wonky eye and foul breath. JC reels at the foul stench coming from the other man's mouth.

JC (CONT'D)
Get that thang pulled.

FERGUS
Yaw tank you's man enough to pull it?
(to Grover)
Ya know who we'z got here, Grover?

GROVER
No, Fergus, who we got?

FERGUS
We got here a real live commie. Yes, siree, Grover, an honest-to-God, real live commie.

A third young man, EUGENE (20's) now steps up closer to JC and Monroe. Monroe decides to remove himself from the escalating confrontation and backs away from his father and down the steps of the store.

EUGENE
Is that a fact?

FERGUS
Indeed, we do.
(broadcasting)
Look i' here, folks.

Fergus presses his finger on JC's chest.

FERGUS (CONT'D)
This here is Mr. Hornbeck, Mr. JC Hornbeck from over in Ola.
(to Grover)
And a friend of ol' Sod.

GROVER
So, you the crazy-ass religious commie that meets out in the woods?

JC

I ain't no commie. Now let us through.

GROVER

Let's see you salute that flag first.

JC fixes Grover with a hard stare.

JC

I ain't gonna do it.

GROVER

Well, there ya go folks!

A crowd begins to form around the fracas in order to get a better look and listen. A HALFWIT OLD MAN (70's) with a long stained beard steps forward.

HALFWIT OLD MAN

Prove you ain't no commie!

A WOMAN with hollow cheeks pipes up.

HOLLOW CHEEK WOMAN

Why ya takin' food from our babies
when out husbands will soon be
headed overseas to fight for our
freedom? Ya ain't got no right.

JC turns to face the swarm that had gathered beneath him.

JC

Thou shalt not make thee any graven
image nor serve them! For I, the Lord
thy God, am a jealous God.

Seeing the mood turn ugly, Monroe runs back up the steps and tries to pull JC away, but his father refuses to move and shrugs him off.

FERGUS

Last time I saw a mouth that big, it
had a hook in it.

JC

If ya don't let me pass I'll jerk a
knot in your tail.

Just then a stocky man steps out of the shadows of the doorway. This is the CONWAY SHERIFF (50's).

CONWAY SHERIFF

Wow, slow your roll there. No need to
blow your wig.

(MORE)

CONWAY SHERIFF (CONT'D)

And if there's gonna be any knot tyin', I'll be the one doin' it.

WOMAN

Ya just in time, Sheriff. We caught ourselves a commie.

CONWAY SHERIFF

Is that a fact?

FERGUS

Sho' did. Mr. Hornbeck refuses to salute the American flag.

CONWAY SHERIFF

That true?

JC

Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world,' John 18:36.

CONWAY SHERIFF

I'll take that as a yes. We'll let the judge figure it out.

The Sheriff takes JC's arm and begins to lead him to the patrol car accompanied by the shouts of the crowd.

JC

(to Monroe)

Get ya mamma!

Monroe cannot hear him above the noise.

CROWD

Better dead than red. Better dead than red.

INT. JC'S TRUCK CAB - DAY

Monroe quickly finds the keys on the truck's floorboard. Monroe starts the engine and speeds out of town as fast as he can.

INT. HORNBECK KITCHEN / LIVING AREA - DAY

Martha listens to Monroe's news of JC.

MARTHA

Slow down, son. Don't get your cows runnin'.

She grabs a piece of paper, sits down at the kitchen table and scribbles a note on it, before stuffing it into an envelope.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Well, we gotta get that man home.

Martha stands and wipes her palms on her apron.

MONROE

Why?

MARTHA

You ain't through climbin' fool's hill yet, boy?

(sternly)

You think he went up to Conway for himself? That man swallowed his pride for yaw. And I'm here to tell ya, he done did it more than once.

Martha hands Monroe the note.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Go on down to Hot Springs and see if you can't find Sod. Let him know what happened and see if he can't hep. And drop this here off at the post office as ya go through town. Go on. Ya burnin' daylight, boy.

EXT. HOT SPRINGS HIGH STREET - DAY

Monroe is behind the wheel driving down the main street of Hot Springs.

He pulls the truck over to the curb to speak to a PASSER BY.

MONROE

Say mister! Ya know where's I might find a fella? I thank he's a judge.

PASSER BY

I may. What's his name?

MONROE

Higgerson.

PASSER BY

You a friend of Judge Higgerson?

MONROE

Not in particular. I's actually
lookin' fer his brother Sod. He's our
neighbor up north a-ways.

PASSER BY

(disapproving)

I see. Well, you most likely won't
find Sod here. But you could try
Bathhouse Row or The Ohio Club down
Central Avenue.

Monroe tips his forehead, puts the truck into gear and pulls
away.

EXT. CENTRAL AVENUE / SIDE STREET - DAY

As Monroe approaches Central Avenue, he spots a black De Soto
coupe parked along a side street. He jumps on the brake, pulls
into the side street and pulls up beside a sign that says "No
Parking".

Monroe jumps out and heads towards a door at the back of the
building, just as a large man, FREDDY steps out from the shadows
of a stack of wooden crates.

FREDDY

Hey, can't you read -- no parking.

MONROE

(cheekily)

Nar a word.

Monroe pushes on the metal door and steps inside.

FREDDY

Hey, you can't go in there!

Freddy tosses his cigarette and runs after Monroe.

INT. OZARK BATHHOUSE - DAY

Monroe enters the building with the echo of Freddy's shouts
ringing in his ears.

FREDDY (O.S.)

Hey you little hood rat. You're dead
meat.

On the far end of the room, Monroe sees a flight of wooden
stairs and runs towards them.

INT. OZARK BATHHOUSE - DAY

Monroe emerges onto a dimly lit landing with a line of doors on each side. He bolts the door behind him.

He pauses for a moment, thinking he hears someone. He quietly puts his ear to each of the doors and listens.

Behind the third door Monroe hears Sod's muffled voice, just as Freddy starts kicking down the door to the landing.

Without knocking, Monroe pushes the door open and quickly shuts it behind him.

INT. OZARK BATHHOUSE - DAY

Monroe stands frozen with his back against the closed door, staring at the back of a naked woman with her legs straddling a man's thighs. The man lifts his head and sees Monroe. It is Sod.

SOD HIGGERSON
Don't you knock, boy?

MONROE
(finding his voice)
Yes, sir, but there's a big ol' fella
chasin' me.

SOD HIGGERSON
What for?

Sod pushes the frizzy-haired woman, MISS ELLIE (20's) off him and over to the other side of the bed. She angrily slips into a blue silk kimono.

MISS ELLIE
Ya ain't gettin' no refund.

SOD HIGGERSON
Best tell me what's going on then, as
you seem to have ruined Miss Ellie's
day.

Monroe glances at Ellie and offers his apologies as Sod slips on his pants.

MISS ELLIE
Don't worry, kid. He already got his
money's worth.

Miss Ellie lights up a cigarette and gives Monroe a wink. Monroe turns bright red.

MISS ELLIE (CONT'D)

Well, ain't you just a gem, one eye
the color of a blue sapphire and
another that sparkles like emerald.

Miss Ellie moves her legs slightly, wrapping the opening of her kimono over one of her knees, exposing a small puff of soft, auburn hair.

SOD HIGGERSON

(laughing)

Kitty got your tongue?

MONROE

(to Sod)

No sir. They got my daddy. Sheriff
over in Conway. Them boys Grover and
Fergus. Sayin' he's a commie.

SOD HIGGERSON

I get the picture Roe. I reckon we
need to get this taken care of once
and for all.

(to Miss Ellie)

See ya next week, sugar.

INT. OZARK BATHHOUSE - DAY

Just as they step into the corridor, they hear huffing and puffing coming from Freddy who has been hunting for Monroe behind each closed door.

FREDDY

There you are, you little shit!

SOD HIGGERSON

He's with me Freddy.

FREDDY

Why didn't he just say so! Next time
I'll fit him for a Chicago overcoat.

SOD HIGGERSON

It won't happen again, Freddy.

FREDDY

Today of all days. We got deliveries,
if you get my drift.

The three head down towards the wooden stairs.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Everything was goin' smooth until this little shit gummed up the works.

INT. BOTTOM OF STAIRS, OZARK BATHHOUSE - DAY

When the three reach the bottom of the stairs, they hear a loud commotion coming from the side street. The two men exchange glances.

Sod motions for Monroe to stay quiet and to crouch behind the wooden barrels, as he and Freddy each draw their handguns from their shoulder harnesses and move forward to investigate.

FREDDY

Can ya make out what's goin' on?

SOD HIGGERSON

Sounds like someone just got pinched.

FREDDY

Who?

SOD HIGGERSON

Who do ya think? Your special delivery, I'm presuming. Well they don't call him Lucky Luciano for nothin'.

Freddy shakes his head.

FREDDY

(laughing)

You shred it, wheat.

The men holster their handguns.

Sod shakes his head at Freddy, then motioned for Monroe to come out from behind the barrels. They walk out the back door, giving the handcuffed "LUCKY" a nod.

EXT. OZARK BATHHOUSE - DAY

Guiding Monroe by the nape of the neck with a firm hand, Sod manages to keep him from gawking, and moves him past both of their vehicles.

SOD HIGGERSON

Nice parking job, city slicker.

Monroe is about to answer but Sod cuts him off with his grip and walks him to the main street.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Sod and Monroe stride along the sidewalk.

SOD HIGGERSON

Everything is going to be just fine,
Roe. I'm gonna make a couple of calls.
You need to get on back to Conway and
pick up your daddy. I'll have covered
his bail by the time you get there.
Let him and your mamma know I got a
good lawyer for him too.

MONROE

(pulling on empty pockets)
Except fur....

Sod stops, digs into his own pocket and pulls out a five dollar bill which he hands to Monroe.

SOD HIGGERSON

(smiling)
Here ya go. After you get the truck
gassed up, get yourself a pop and a
slice of pie. Your daddy can sit a
spell. You've had a man-makin' day.

Sod gives Monroe a wink and a slap on the back.

EXT. ROAD TO CONWAY - DAY

Monroe drives along the dirt road. He smiles to himself. On the seat at his side is a brown paper bag. He reaches into it and pulls out a small black case. He holds it up and flips the lid open to reveal a beautiful Horner Marin Band harmonica. He smiles and shakes his head.

MONROE

(out loud)
Who needs pie when ya can git a church
in a case?

Monroe puts the harmonica to his lips and spits out a tune.

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE - DAY

Brother Isham Toomey and a small assembly of his congregation are saying their goodbyes to JC and the rest of the family. They shake JC's hand in turn, as if he were a hero.

A moment later a truck pulls up and out steps JANE (60's) JC, mother, his sister NOREEN (40's) and their four children.

ADILIA
Grandmaw's here!

INT. HORNBECK KITCHEN / LIVING AREA - NIGHT

The entire family sit around the table eating dinner. CLYDE (12), Noreen's eldest is excited.

CLYDE
What did the jailer feed ya, Uncle JC?

JC
Cornbread and beans.

CLYDE
Shucks, that ain't bad. Bet I could do time.

JC shakes his head and leans into Martha.

JC
(whispering)
Bet he will at that.

CUT TO:

EXT. HORNBECK HOUSE - NIGHT

Martha hands Monroe and Wyatt two tattered quilts and tells them to make their pallets on the back of the truck.

MARTHA
Boys. Go and make up your pallets on the back of the truck.

Martha hands Adilia her blanket but she looks anxious.

ADILIA
(whispering)
Momma, can't I sleep in the house?

MARTHA
No, Lil'bit. Your gandmaw's taken our bed and your daddy and I will be needin' your spot. We'z got a big day tomorrow so you have to mek do on the pallets like the rest.

ADILIA
But Clyde gives me the heebie-jeebies.

Martha shakes her head and sends her off into the night.

INT. TRUCK FLATBED - NIGHT

The seven siblings and cousins lie on the wooden planks of the flatbed truck. Without adult supervision, Monroe and Wyatt gently strum on their mouth harps, while the kids giggle and joke amongst themselves, until eventually they all fall asleep.

INT. TRUCK FLATBED - LATER

Adilia is fast asleep but begins to stir as something under her blankets begins to move and make its way to her crotch area. Suddenly she wakes up, sits bolt upright and begins to kick and push Clyde's wandering hand away from her.

A moment later, through the darkness she makes out Virgil.

He reaches over and jerks Clyde by his hair, sending him crashing out of the truck and onto the ground.

VIRGIL
(whispering)
I thank you'd best be sleepin' on the
ground tonight.

Caught red handed, Clyde has no defense.

CLYDE
(whispering)
At least throw me down a cover.

VIRGIL
(whispering)
No. You sleep like the dog you is.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE / COURTROOM, CONWAY - DAY

The schoolhouse has been commandeered for a courtroom. Martha, Jane and the rest of the family take their seat behind JC who is ushered to his place in the front row by a COURT CLERK.

The Court Clerk walks over to JC and hands him a folded daily newspaper.

COURT CLERK
Here's some light reading material.

JC glances at it, before placing the paper down on the table in front of him. The headlines read:

'FRANCE GIVES UP PARIS TO NAZIS'

Soon more people begin funneling into the small schoolhouse. Many are from Brother Toomey's congregation. Mixed in between the assorted curiosity seekers and communist haters carrying signs, are a small group of eleven heavily armed men, who take their places along the outer left wall.

Another group of twelve, the JURY, then find their appointed seats and sit down hats in hands, avoiding eye contact with JC for fear of prematurely revealing their already affirmed verdict.

JANE

(whispering to Martha)
Best be gettin' these babies outta here.

MARTHA

What's ya thinkin'

JANE

Too much iron for a schoolhouse.
(patting her pocket)
And I only got one.

Martha is worried and turns in her chair.

MARTHA

Where's Sod? More men comin' through.
Dang Mamma, ain't sure we gonna get outta here.

JANE

Of course we is. This ain't how we all gonna die.
(to the kids)
Yaw give them there seat to the grownups. Go on now. We'z be along directly.

The older children pull themselves out of their seats, grab the hands of the younger ones, and make their way to the door. Here Monroe shoots a look at Grover - This ain't over.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE / COURTROOM, CONWAY - DAY

Monroe walks from the building with the kids in tow, just as Sod, accompanied by JC's lawyer, ARTHUR "ART" HAACK approach.

MONROE

(whispering to Sod)
Somethang is goin' on in there.

SOD HIGGERSON

Don't ya fret. I got this one covered.
 (joking with Adilia)
 Yaw run along before I get hungry and
 need to grab me a pig's tail.

Sod reaches out and tugs playfully at one of Adilia's pigtails before striding off into the temporary courthouse.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE / COURTROOM, CONWAY - DAY

CLOSE UP: A signet ring with a blue sardonyx stone, carved with a moth.

CUT TO:

Sod pauses at the threshold, blocking the sunlight streaming through the schoolhouse doorway. The jury and those already seated turn in his direction.

He moves forward along the right wall, where the second group of men pinch together to give him room to stand alongside them.

Martha looks at Jane and nods. Jane takes in the rest of the room and reaches into her bag to grab the butt of her 'Rainmaker' pistol.

COURT CLERK

All rise.

Everybody stands as the JUDGE enters and takes his seat. He waves at the COURT CLERK to proceed quickly.

COURT CLERK (CONT'D)

The judicial court of Arkansas, of which Searcy County is a part, in the name and authority of the State of Arkansas, on oath, accuses the defendant, JC Hornbeck, to have willfully and publicly exhibited contempt for the United States' flag against the peace and dignity of the United States.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE / COURTROOM, CONWAY - DAY

Further on in proceedings, it is the defense's turn.

JUDGE

And now your first witness, Mr Haack?

ART HAACK

Thank you, Your Honor. I would like to call Grover Murdock.

Grover drags his boots across the wooden floor and swaggers to the front of the room before taking a seat.

ART HAACK (CONT'D)

What is your occupation, Mr. Murdock?

GROVER

I work in various family businesses.

ART HAACK

That would be the businesses owned by your daddy, who is also the county assessor, is that correct?

GROVER

Yes, sir, that would be my daddy.

ART HAACK

What were you doing at Lumkin's General Store that day?

GROVER

My daddy owns that store, and I always help when the commodities are being handed out.

ART HAACK

What are your duties?

GROVER

At that time, I talked to all who came in and questioned their cases.

ART HAACK

That was part of your duties?

GROVER

Yes, sir, because I handle every order as it come up.

ART HAACK

What do you mean by "questioning their cases"?

GROVER

Just as I said, if a rumor was brought to us, certain things were not right; it was my duty to ask about those things.

ART HAACK

Are you under federal law to ascertain this information?

GROVER

No, not directly.

ART HAACK

Did you have any instruction from any federal agency not to let Jehovah's Witnesses have any commodities unless they salute the flag?

GROVER

No cult was named. They were sworn by affidavits that they wouldn't receive anything unless they were a loyal American citizen.

ART HAACK

Then you asked him to salute the flag as a test?

GROVER

I said, "To quiet the rumor, there is the flag, let's see ya salute it."

ART HAACK

Did you say anything more on that occasion?

GROVER

No. Just told him to hush and get off the steps.

ART HAACK

(casually)

So the only thing you said to my client, Mr Hornbeck was based on these rumors?

GROVER

Damn right.

Art Haack smiles to himself and then turns to the assembly.

ART HAACK

...And when in this fine country have we got into the habit of convicting men based upon rumor?

He turns to the Judge and Jury and extends his hands to signal a fait accompli.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE / COURTROOM, CONWAY - DAY

A baying and angry crowd spill out of the courthouse. For his own safety, the Sheriff leads JC by his elbow to his cruiser and whisks him away.

Jane, Martha and Noreen push their way through the crowd.

JANE

Yaw get on ahead now. Get that truck started if ya can.

Martha and Jane hurry to the truck, gather the children together and jump into the cab. Martha starts the engine and lays on the horn.

NOREEN

We'z gotta wait for Mamma. She's comin'.

Martha revs the engine as Art Haack appears at the window.

MARTHA

What's happenin'?

ART HAACK

'Ya better get on outta here faster than a monkey on moonshine. They's about ready to tear into each other. JC'll be home in twenty four hours.

MARTHA

Thank you Mr. Haack. How can we ever...

Jane catches up to the truck, pushes Art Haack out of the way and jumps into the truck.

JANE

Yes, sir, Mr Haack. Most appreciative.
(without a beat)
Step on it girl!

Art Haack nods, looks over his shoulder and runs to his car.

Martha guns the throttle and the truck fishtails away, just as gunshots begin to ring out.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF CONWAY - DAY

Martha drives the truck hard and fast as Noreen looks behind to see if anyone is following them.

NOREEN

Woo-wee! If that weren't a close one!
I thank we all deserve a cold beer!

JANE

I thank you's right, sugar and I'm a-
buyin'.

EXT. RURAL GENERAL STORE - DAY

Martha pulls into a small roadside general store.

CUT TO:

Martha and Noreen sit on the bench. Jane emerges from inside the store with three cold cans of beer. She hands one to Martha and another to Noreen.

NOREEN

Thank God this ain't a dry county. Let
me see ya 'church key', Mamma."

Jane fishes through her bag and pulls out a can opener and, after puncturing two holes in her can of beer, passes it on.

The three sit quietly, away with their thoughts and slouched on the wood bench; whilst the kids amuse themselves a little way off by the truck. A FAT MAN disturbs their reverie.

FAT MAN

Hey. Heard yur old man got off easy.

Martha opens her eyes to see a fat bellied man in a summer suit staring down at her.

MARTHA

Go to hell! Ain't nothin' come easy
fer none of us!

Martha chugs the rest of her beer and tossed the empty onto the dirt.

Before the Fat Man has time to respond, Jane jumps to her feet.

JANE

Don't let me start the headlights on
the hearse.

Noreen and Jane chug back their beers and also toss the cans onto the ground next to Martha's.

The three amble back to the truck, start the engine. The Fat Man is incensed.

FAT MAN
Trash! Yaw nothin' but ugly trash!

Martha sticks her head out of the window.

MARTHA
Another man's trash...

She revs the engine to drown out the Fat Man's reply

MARTHA (CONT'D)
Hold onto your diapers kids.

Martha drops the clutch and pulls away.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF CONWAY - DAY

The three women are in fits of giggles as the Fat Man disappears into the distance.

NOREEN
I think I leaked.

JANE
Ya always was a bedwetter.

EXT. THIRTY-NINE ACRE FIELD, TRACK - DAY

Within sight of the house, Sod pulls his car over next to the stony field. JC is with him.

JC
Here's fine.

Sod and JC get out of the DeSoto. JC takes in his property.

CUT TO:

With his back leaning against the passenger door Sod finishes rolling a cigarette and strikes a match with his thumbnail.

SOD HIGGERSON
Wish you'd reconsider. Things'll cool off and get back to normal.

JC

That's what I's afraid of.

(thoughtful)

I done looked at it ever which-a-way.
See that cotton field below?

Sod looks towards a sorry looking patch of bushes.

JC (CONT'D)

Produced nuthin' but near starvation.
Same all over. Now with Noreen's
husband gittin' hit by lightning while
down 'spectin' a boiler? Well -- Of
all the dirty rotten luck.

SOD HIGGERSON

That's why those boiler operators
make the big dough. Wouldn't catch me
down there.

JC

Now they's as destitute as the rest of
us.

SOD HIGGERSON

I get that you're broke, but you can
always fix broke.

JC

Broke?

(spitting)

Hell, I'm as broke as the Ten
Commandments and ya can't fit that
kinda broke.

Sod sighs and draws on his cigarette and throws it into the
dirt.

SOD HIGGERSON

Where will ya go?

JC shrugs.

JC

Figure sumthin'.

SOD HIGGERSON

Well, I can't stop ya, so I won't even
try.

JC

Ya know the Hornbecks will never
forget what ya's done fur us.

SOD HIGGERSON
I know. Let's get goin'.

JC
Think I'll walk.

JC extends his hand. They shake and pat each other on the shoulders.

Sod gets into his car, starts the engine, does a U-turn and drives away.

EXT. THIRTY-NINE ACRE FIELD - DAY

JC looks at his rough and near barren land and then up to his little run down family home in the distance.

He spits on the floor and then with the toe of his boot he smears the saliva into the shape of a cross.

MONROE (V.O.)
So we was off again. Chained to daddy;
headin' to nowhere, with nothin' but
pocketfuls of stubbornness and
desperation. Them two's often
travellin' partners... kinda friends.
(beat)
But I for one ain't gonna be around
much longer to get acquainted with
them.
(beat)
See I got plans. Big plans...

A moment later JC rubs out the cross and begins to cross the field, just as one of Monroe's tunes begins to play in the distance.

THE END