IFA BAYEZA

FROM BENEVOLENCE

BENEVOLENCE is the third play in *The Till Trilogy*, exploring the epic saga of civil rights icon Emmett Louis Till, the Chicago teenager whose fateful trip to Mississippi in the summer of 1955 is believed by many to mark the beginning of the modern civil rights Movement.

The trio of plays is not constructed like a classic trilogy, but is more a contemporary telling, a jazz integration of past and present, a dramatic interpolation and interaction with archives, oral histories and observations by an historian, playwright and poet. Each play has its own story, style and voice. The plays may be presented together or may stand alone. The order of presentation may also vary, allowing for the refracted perspectives to be in dialogue with each other and with audience members.

The Ballad of Emmett Till recounts the boy's journey, the last two weeks of his life. That Summer in Sumner, concerns less the trial of Emmett's killers than the parallel trial of his family in their quest for justice and the investigative reporters who descend upon the region in pursuit of "truth." Benevolence explores the transformation in the Mississippi Delta in the wake of Emmett's death, the toll of the legacy of enslavement on the smallest units of our society, the family and individual. From the eyes of two women and the men in their lives, it is an intimate play, a tale of love and loss.

Like the land in its time, Benevolence is segregated. Act I is white. Act II is black. In each world, the other is present, but invisible.

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Benevolence is an ensemble play for eight actors, the characters in order of appearance:

ACT I

CAROLINE BRYANT, 21, storekeeper, wife of Roy Bryant, former beauty queen.

RAY BRYANT, 25, labor contractor, twin brother of Caroline's husband, Roy.

ROY BRYANT, 25, Caroline's husband, a storekeeper and part-time truck driver.

JJ BREELAND, 69, attorney for the defense.
DAVID KILLINGSWORTH, 32, FBI investigator.

ACT II
CLINTON MELTON, 29, gas station mechanic, husband to Beulah Melton, father.
BEULAH "BEA" MELTON, 26, housewife, seamstress, churchgoer and mother
MARY JOHNSON, Glendora resident, age nine.
MEDGAR EVERS, 30, NAACP field reporter.
DELORES GRISHAM, 65, Beulah and Melton's oldest daughter

TIME: Late August 1955 to today, the scenes fluid.
PLACE: Mississippi, the towns of Money and Glendora and surrounding areas.
SETTING: A sparse stage conveying various locations: railroad crossing at the town's entrance, interior of a truck; Bryant's Meat Market & Grocery: the store front porch, deli and candy counter; bathroom to the rear of the store; the Sumner County courthouse; the Melton's bayou cottage; McGarrh's Gas Station; the Melton's car interior; the river, Delores' living room in Drew.
SOUND: Like the setting, the soundscape is sparse, characterized by silence, absence of melody or song. In Act I, the sense of isolation may be evoked by the micro- intrusions of technology, the punctuation of trains passing, the rumble of trucks, an overhead fan, the buzz of an iridescent light, faulty plumbing or a wash of camera flashes. In Act II, by contrast, the enveloping sound of cicadas, rain or river water may suggest the palpable inaccessibility of a rural bayou. 3

ACT 1, SCENE 1
(Money, MS, August 24, 1955. railroad crossing at the town's entrance. It is an ordinary day, weekday,Wednesday, in the dark before dawn, already hot. A shrill train whistle announces the approach of a slow, long freight train, heavy with coal, the glare of the morning sun pulsing between the cars. Ray Bryant and sister-in-law Caroline Bryant are seated in a truck at the railroad crossing.

Caroline flips through a True Confession *magazine, not reading the pages, then takes out her lipstick and adjusts the rearview mirror for a touch up. Ray grabs her wrist and puts his mirror back the way it was as the train*

continues to roll by. She angrily opens her magazine, indifferently flipping the pages.)

CAROLINE
You shoulda gone steada Roy . . . Or let Leslie and him go together. Two of you coulda drove straight through . . . I'll be there workin' again, by myself. Again.

RAY
You got a nerve to fix yoah mouth. You the one missed the window, makin' us late, puttin' on lipstick n shit. Stoah two min away n we sittin'ere ovuh half n owwah. You ain't got the nerve to fix yoah mouth bout nothin'. Think the world here to do fuh you.
(Ray snatches the magazine from her.)

CAROLINE
Hey!

RAY
True Confessions.
"Slave Wives in Arizona! Inside Story."
"Evil Bondage."
"He made her a wanted criminal
like himself."
"It was wrong to taunt him, to entice him,
But the hunger inside her drove her on and—
(She grabs the magazine back. He lets her.)

CAROLINE
Give it.
Give it back!
Give it—Give
Give it here!

CAROLINE
You can be a real shit, you know that.

RAY
You oughta quit readin' that crap.

CAROLINE
What I ought be doin is not workin' at all. *(looking over her shoulder and then in the rearview mirror)* An I don't like that nigger drivin' my kah. I kin drive myself, you know.

RAY
In what? That ol piece of junk my brothuh call a kah? I don't know why we bother to run it over there. He need to git a new one fuh it break down altogether.

CAROLINE
Git a new one, how? Run it into a train?

RAY
You should try it. It's called Enterprise. *Enginuity*. Hardly nobody hirin' out. They sittin' on top of each other like flies. Store bidness down and what gas bidness they is, McGarrh's down the road takin' it. We need something to spruce up, show we doin awright. Give us some status. *(Bored with his narrative, Caroline puts her magazine in her purse and takes out her compact, checking her lipstick.)* Give the fam'ly some status. Make people look atchuh diff'ent. Nothin' says that like a new truck. I ask myself, How I'mo get one? Oso! Crazy nigguh, I say, How you like you a new kah? I'd like that Mister Ray, he say. I say, Drive my old pick up into that train. Say, Wait fuh the coal train. Gotta wait for the right train. Time it just so. Swipe the side. With the insurance, we got ourself got a new truck. *(He leans toward her, flirting.)* White paneled, aqua hood, full back seat …

(Just as Ray is about to place his arm over the passenger seat, the railroad crossing warning bell clangs. As the crossing bars rise, Ray shifts the gears and begins driving a short distance, over the tracks.)

CAROLINE
Let go.

RAY & CAROLINE
What a day of shinin' glory.

RAY *(turning a corner)*
Fold yoah arms n suck yoah teeth if you wont to. You like it. Ridin' in it. Roy need to try it. *(In a few beats, arriving at Bryant's Meat and Grocery Market, Ray pulls up and parks.)*

CAROLINE
That's yoah big idea how to get another new kah? Run the one you got into a train?

RAY
No, stupid, told you, train's only a good claim for once. Same thing, people start lookin. Maybe tree this time . . . or drive it into the rivuh. Or the bayou. Less water. Gonna give it to one of the nigguhs for the job, gotta be able to git it out.

CAROLINE
Roy been gone since Sunday. Sink pipe's drippin behind the counter. Needs a washer.

(Ray angrily gets out the truck and slams the door. He walks toward the store only to see Caroline has not moved. She waits for him to come open her door. He shakes his head and struts round the truck and exaggeratedly opens her door, extending his hand. Ray draws her up, and closing the passenger door, pushes her against it, his arm extended over her shoulder.)

CAROLINE
Can you scheme on that? Drivin me crazy. *(Ray stands too close. She maneuvers away and sashays past him.)* And I ain't askin for no nigguh. I don't want none up in my bathroom. Just fix it.

RAY *(pulling her back)*
What you gon give me if I do?

CAROLINE
Let go.

RAY
Or what? Tell Roy? I'd like to see you try. Fish man come today?

CAROLINE
Quit it.

(Caroline pushes him off and walks in front of the car, her tight sheath and high heel sandals incongruous with the surroundings. She walks to the store front porch and lingers, not wanting to go inside, Ray circling.)

RAY
What's a matter, baby, can't you take it?

CAROLINE
You think a lot of yourself, don't you?

(She notices her white neighbor across the tracks, peeking through the curtain.)

CAROLINE
Mornin', Mrs. Faulkner!

RAY *(sarcastic)*
. . . Friendly.

CAROLINE
You think? After Roy beat the Hell outta her husband?

RAY
Well, the man said he was gon close his store at five—and he didn't. Didn't close till baby brothuh went over there n kicked his skull in.

CAROLINE
Baby brothuh? Y'all twins.

RAY
Two minutes forty-six seconds, make us diff'ent as night . . . and day. You know your husband. Jumpin' outta them airplanes. Landed on his head one too many times.

CAROLINE
You need to stop.

RAY
Do I?

CAROLINE
Behave . . . I'm trying to get a little respect in this town.

(As Caroline searches for her keys in her purse, Ray greets JB, a decrepit old black man.)

RAY
Johnny B!

CAROLINE
Walk across the tracks and have a decent cup of tea. Talk to somebody.

RAY
Late and hung ovuh fuh sho.

CAROLINE
Train wheels rattlin'.

RAY.
Mr. Bryant told you to look out? He tole you to look out while he gon. You do that. Go on back there. Miss Caroline fix you up. Put you inna book.

CAROLINE
Go to Hell

RAY
Now, now. Go on now . . . It's what you asked fuh. Miss In-dee-pen-dence. Free, white and twinny-one. *(dangling his set of keys, mimicking her voice)* "I kin drive myself, yuh know."

(Ray doesn't let her have them, but opens the door, himself. Caroline wanders toward the edge of the porch.)

CAROLINE
I ain't spozed to be workin in no stoah. Roy's spozed to—How much he gon make carting crawfish anyway?

RAY
Ain't crawfish, they shrimp.

CAROLINE

Shrimp then. How much he gon make? Why they cain't get somebody from Gulfport to haul shrimp? What sense it make drivin' all the way down there from the Delta. To drive some shell fish from Louisiana to Texas? In August!

RAY

You need to pay attention to your own bidness and not worry your pretty little head bout men's shit. You know all you need to know bout shrimp.

CAROLINE

Probably wid some whore.

RAY *(to another unseen black man)*

Too Tight, drive the truck on back roun and start loading up them boxes.

CAROLINE

"Yessum, right away!"

RAY

What'd I tell you? I got to open up the store, collect the tally, deliver and take orders, check on the still.

CAROLINE

Wah, wah wah . . .

RAY

Contract day workers for pickin' and ginnin', hire out the picker. I gotta cuvvuh fuh this whole goodam fam'ly, you and my brothuh included.

CAROLINE

Why Roy got to do all the runs? If I have to work in this damned stoah one more day—

RAY

You be all right. You got Johnny B to look out. Ain't that right, Johnny?

CAROLINE
Oh for Christsakes.

RAY
Aw-right, aw-right. I'll look at the pipe. Too Tight, I'mo be a minute. Load up them boxes n when yuh finish, count them sacks, the cotton sacks! Gotta stack missin' . . . Well, count em again. *(to Caroline as he approaches)* All right now . . . You got my undivided attention . . . My brother's keeper . . . *(She swats him away.)*

RAY
Okayyy. Show me where it's drippin.

(Ray enters the store, leaving her on the porch. Caroline starts to follow, then pauses, looking out at the tracks.)

CAROLINE
Own a string uh stores, he said. Fatback, Baby Ruth, bubble gum n credit. All of em servin . . . hmph . . . I oughta. I oughta.

(Alone now, Caroline turns and enters the store and her actions fold into the monotony of the day.)

CAROLINE
Check the shelves, count the change, wipe the counter, arrange the candy, straighten the sign, bag the groceries, collect the money, count the change. Puttin' you in the book, Sistuh. Pay up Satdie. Stack the cans, make the sandwich. Baloney or ham. What size? Yes, you kin buy half a carton. It's on the sign. Flour on sale. Cornmeal not. What you want on it? The sandwich. Kin you close the door, flies comin in. Nigguh n flies all of em come up in here lookin down, lookin way. Gone somewhere.

(Another train speeds by … Peppered through the sound, the light banter of teens on a summer day. Gathered outside, they play checkers, shoot the breeze. She is drawn to the sound of their joy.) Outside laughin—So it ain't cold. I know it's hot. You want the pop or not? Check the shelves, count the change, wipe the counter, arrange the candy, straighten the sign, bag the groceries, collect the money, count the change. It's on the sign. Two

for a pinny . . . We don't sell five. It's two fuh a pinny. "Two fuh a pinny. I'll take twinny," he say. Big spinder. A whole dime. He slap the coin on the glass. Glass I juss clean. Wise-ass. *(She puts out her hand.)* I put out my hand. He put the dime in my hand. *(She looks at her hand, the dime in it.)* Look up. He lookin' back. *(She closes her hand.)* You ain't spozed to do that . . . He smile. What? Juju? We ain't got no Juju bees, naw . . . Bye. Check the shelves, count the change, wipe the counter, arrange the candy, straighten the sign, collect the money, count the change. Who he think he is? I'ma go out there.

(She walks out to the porch. A boy whistles.)

VOICES
"What you doin' whistlin'! What! She goin' to they kah! She goin' to get a gun! She got a gun! Git in the Kah! Git in!"

ACT 1, SCENE 2

(Store interior and exterior. Saturday, four days later, late afternoon. Caroline is behind the counter. As an unseen older black woman and her teenaged nephew wait for their order, Roy enters. He puts his arm around her waist, surprising her. Roy is not the mirror of his brother Ray. He is handsomer with more hair, his face hard, jaw square.)

CAROLINE
There's my handsome husbin . . . Hey baby.

ROY *(whispering in her ear)*
You got sompin to tell me.

CAROLINE
Well yeah, you been gon a whole week . . . but not here in the store. Customers comin' in. You can come on round back, we can shut down fuh a bit. You had all mornin' to rest up at J Dub's . . .

ROY
You got nuthin to tell me?

CAROLINE
What? What you talkin bout?

ROY *(snaps his head and addresses the old woman)*
What you want nigguh? Some cut bologna? How much? Half a pound. Fifteen cent, antie . . . And some bread? Git the fuck outta here.

CAROLINE
Roy!

ROY *(to Caroline)*
You got something to say to me?

CAROLINE
What is wrong with you?

ROY
A nigguh come in the stoah doin some talkin?

CAROLINE
Oh.

ROY
Trash talkin' to you? "OH?!"

CAROLINE
He just asked for some—buh—

(Roy dashes round the counter and accosts a customer, perhaps the old woman's nephew.)

ROY
This him?! Talked dirty to my wife. This him?! You the nigguh?! . . . No?!

CAROLINE
Roy!

ROY
Y'all ain't teached this boy nothin'?
Teach this boy to say yes suh, no suh!?
Talked dirty to my wife.

CAROLINE
Roy!
Roy!
That, that ain't him!

(Roy pushes the boy to the floor and grabs Caroline, dragging her beside him. Customers scatter, panicking.)

CAROLINE
Let go of me!

ROY
That him?

(Roy marches into the dusty street. Caroline trails after, her wrist locked in his grasp.)

CAROLINE
Roy, that ain't him. That's not the nigguh. That's not the boy! Stop—people will—That's not him! Roy I keep telling you that's not the—

ROY *(grabbing her arm)*
What'd he say?! Miss Indianola, Miss Cottonwood?

CAROLINE
Roy, baby.

ROY
What'd he say! Huh? What'd he say?!

CAROLINE
That ain't him, leave him alone, that's not the nigguh, that's not the boy! That's not him. Roy, that's not the one. He wasn't from here. He was from Chicago!

ROY
CHICAGO?! Jesus! What was you thinkin'. You talked to him?

CAROLINE
Oh please!

ROY
You liked that?

CAROLINE
YEAH! His eyes were pretty. They were green and they caught the light of the sun. They were havin' fun, while I was sittin here sweatin like uh—

ROY
I oughta break your neck. What was he doin lookin at you? What was you thinkin'? Where was my brother?!

CAROLINE
Your brothuh! The whole lot of you like a bunch of centipedes. Get the hell away from me.

ROY
You ain't nothing but a runner-up cheap cottonseed whore.

CAROLINE
What did you call me, you fuck? You leave me here by myself!

ROY
Who was it?

CAROLINE
You leave me here by my—Let go of me—?!

ROY
Who was it? What'd he say?

CAROLINE
Git your hands offa me.

ROY
I got to hear it from some nigguh?! Everybody talkin' now? I'm gone a week and this happen? This shit happen Wensdie? It's Satdie, these nigguhs think we ain't done nothing.' What they gon think, how they gon act? I'll—

CAROLINE
You'll what? Run off again? Care more bout some bootleg liquor than your—

ROY
You know how this look!? Do you know how this look to the fam'ly. What they gon think uh me!? What they sposed to think?

CAROLINE
What do you care? You weren't here! He coulda put his hands on me, he coulda touched me he coulda killed me he coulda fucked me and you—

ROY
This him?! Talked dirty to my wife. This him?! You the nigguh from Chicago?!

CAROLINE
No! NO!

ROY
Talked dirty to my wife.

CAROLINE
Roy! That, that ain't him. He just—

CAROLINE
Let go of me!

ROY
That him? That him?! THAT HIM! That's the boy! This the one?

CAROLINE
That ain't him. That's not the nigguh. That's not the one. . . He just whistled, he whistled is all.

ROY
Whistled is ALL?! Oh, this keep getting bettuh. NIGGUH COME IN SAY SOME SHIT? And we don't do NUTTIN? Where was Big?! Where was Ray! Where was mah brothuhs!

CAROLINE
ROY! HEY! . . . Calm down.

ROY
You calm down! Get in the truck.

CAROLINE
I'm not doin this.

ROY *(dragging her to the truck)*
Get in the goddam truck!

(Roy opens driver's side and pushes her over to passenger side.)

CAROLINE *(aside to herself)*
Ray let you drive it. How noble.

(They sit in the truck, mirroring the earlier scene. Roy adjusts the mirror.)

ROY
A nigguh come in the store talkin' shit. What'd he come in fuh?

CAROLINE
To buy something? I don't know, what do people normally come into the store for? I put out my hand—and—he—

ROY
You put out your HAND!
You put out YOUR HAND!

CAROLINE
Don't put your hands on me.
Don't!

CAROLINE
All right, all right, all right!

ROY
. . .When was you gon say somethin? *(seeing another black youth, Roy jumps out of the truck. Caroline slides to the driver's side and hollers after him.)* That him!

CAROLINE
No, I told you, that's not him! That ain't him, I never seen him before.

ROY *(pacing outside the truck.)*
CHICAGO! Drove for six friggin days n I come home to this? Lowlife, two-faced son of uh—*(explodes in the direction of audience.)* WHATCHO LOOKIN' AT! *(Roy stomps back to the truck and gets in, shoving Caroline*

to the passenger side. To Caroline, without looking.) . . . Fix yoah mouf.

CAROLINE*(more to herself)*
. . . I shoulda just got in that old kah and drove way.

(Roy sits fuming then slams the truck-door. Massaging her bruised arm, Caroline stares out the passenger window.)

ACT 1, SCENE 6

(FBI interrogation room, 2005, fifty years later. Caroline paces under a glitchy overhead fluorescent light. The buzz and ticks bother her. Agent Killingsworth enters brusquely with his badge visible on his hip—notepad, tape recorder, sleeves rolled up. In his crisp shirt and tie, he resembles Ray or Roy.)

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Sorry bout that. Gov'ment. Gotta fix it. Who knows when. I thank you for your patience, Mrs. Bryant.

CAROLINE
It's Donham, Mrs. Donham. I haven't been Caroline Bryant for forty years.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Yes, forgive me, long day. *(speaking into a tape recorder)* This is Agent David Killingsworth, interviewing Caroline Donham. Continuation, August 2005 . . . I just want to go over a few things, if I may. Just to clarify. When, as you say, this Negro man grabbed your hand, and you pulled it away?

CAROLINE
Yes.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
All you did is pull away?

CAROLINE
No, I screamed and screamed. As soon as he touched me I started screaming for Juanita. I was scared to death. I thought he would come back.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
I can imagine. Must have been frightening.

CAROLINE
I thought he would come back.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
So you ran out to your car?

CAROLINE
Yes.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You ran out to the car for your pistol

CAROLINE
Yes.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You ran in front of him.

CAROLINE
I had to, to get to the car.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
In front of eight or nine colored men?

CAROLINE
They was all standin' on the porch there. What was I supposed to do?

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Instead of to Juanita in the back?

CAROLINE
Yes, I told you, my pistol was out there.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Why would you leave your pistol in the car?

CAROLINE
Well, we normally kept it under the counter, but it was not there, so I went to the car to get it out of the car which I had been drivin'.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
What happened after that?

CAROLINE
Well, after that, I went back with Juanita and slept at her house that night.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
But before that you screamed.

CAROLINE
Yes.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Loudly? Lots of times?

CAROLINE
Yes! YES!

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
And no one heard you?

CAROLINE
I don't know who mighta heard me. I was in the back of the store.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Did Mrs. Milam, your sister-in-law, hear you?

CAROLINE
I don't know.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
But she didn't come out. Did she come out?

CAROLINE
I don't remember, no.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Then she didn't hear you?

CAROLINE
I don't know, I don't know why she didn't hear me. Maybe she was sleep.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
If she's there for your protection—

CAROLINE
We were there to protect each other!

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Doesn't sound like much protection if she would sleep through your hollering.

CAROLINE
I say I don't know why she didn't hear me. Maybe she was in the bathroom, maybe she was scared, maybe she didn't wanna come out.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Well, we've spoken to her recently and she says she wasn't there, that she was in Greenville.

CAROLINE
I don't know why she would say that. She made that story up.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
. . . She says the same about you.

CAROLINE
That I was in Greenville?

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
She says that she would not have been baby-sitting for you. She says she doesn't know why you would say such a thing.

CAROLINE
You tended the store or you watched the kids. Those were the rules. When Roy was out of town, that's what we did. They was always sending Roy out of town and when he went she would stay with me just like I said.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Well, she says you made up the whole story
because you didn't want to take care of the store.
That you're making up this story

Would make Roy tend the store
steada of leaving you to do it.

CAROLINE
Jua-ni-ta!
This is all old business.
She's always been
jealous of me,
Always lying.
He wasn't there!

CAROLINE
She's a liar! If I was taking care of the kids, where were they? Where were they then? Two and three? You think I'm accustomed to leaving them unattended and alone back there? And how is it I went back with her and slept at her house that night? She testified in court—

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Well, yes, she testified as a character witness for her husband she was never questioned about the store . . . That's when you told her? On the car ride back?

CAROLINE
I don't remember. I told Juanita at the store what had happened and I asked her not to tell J.W. because I didn't intend to tell Roy.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You didn't tell Roy? You didn't say anything to your husband? You didn't say anything to your husband?

CAROLINE
No.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You didn't want him to know.

CAROLINE
No.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
So, why'd you tell Juanita?
I mean if she was sleep
Through all your hollerin'

CAROLINE
What? What do you mean?
I thought
I THOUGHT THEY WOULD

And you didn't want, I THOUGHT THEY WOULD
You didn't want anybody to know—I thought THEY WOULD—come back.

CAROLINE
I told you I didn't say anything . . . I, I didn't say, ever say anything more about it, was because I was afraid that, what I was worried about was that he's gonna find him and beat him up . . . And I told Juanita what had happened and I asked her not to tell J.W. because I didn't intend to tell Roy, because I was afraid of what they would do.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Had he been violent before? . . . Okay, let's jump head to night of August 27th, Saturday.

CAROLINE
We've been over this. Roy had just come back. We had just sat down for dinnuh, when JW came to that back door and got Roy and they left.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Did you go with them?

CAROLINE
No, I had the children. I was there by myself.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You had the children or you were by yourself.

CAROLINE
I was by myself with the children.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Alone.

CAROLINE
Yes. Alone. With the two boys.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
They left you there alone at night with your two boys ages two and three

after you say you had been accosted and the man had said he would come back . . . He stuttered, you know, the boy?

CAROLINE
I didn't hear any stutter.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Yes, you said he spoke with a Northern brogue. I had to look that up. Brogue. My mama used to clock me every day with a new word. "David Killingsworth, what's a brogue?" Can you use it in a sentence? "The man spoke with a Northern brogue and said he would come back."

(He is greeted with cold silence.)

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH.
And you never said anything to your husband?

CAROLINE
I told you I didn't say anything to him.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
So why did J.W come to get him?

CAROLINE
I don't know. Maybe one of—Maybe Juanita said something. I asked her not to tell him, but she did it anyway.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
And when JW showed up to get your husband, you're alone in the store with your two boys.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH.
You didn't drive to Glendora
and stay at Juanita's
like "you always did?"
You didn't go with them?

CAROLINE
NO!
I was alone
at my home
In Money!

CAROLINE
I told you, no. Because J Dub had come to get him!

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Can we skip back a bit, to Saturday afternoon?

CAROLINE
Why you jumpin' all round?

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You don't recall Roy quizzing a black boy who came into the store.

CAROLINE
I don't recall any exact details, no. I know there was a lady and her little boy or her grandson or somebody was in the store and I don't know, Roy said something to em and I remember telling him to leave him alone that you know, that wasn't him.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
You don't recall riding in a truck that afternoon with your husband and brother-in-law and Johnnie B looking for this boy. Roy, throwing him off the truck. Because you said, "That's not the one." That the one is this the one THAT ONE THAT HIM?!

CAROLINE
No that wasn't me. I was not there. I didn't do anything of the sort. I told you, no, I was at home with my children.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Alone.

CAROLINE
Yes, alone.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
All afternoon.

CAROLINE
Yes.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
And evening.

CAROLINE
Yes.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
So when Mose Wright said in his testimony when he heard your husband Roy Bryant ask if this was the boy and someone said yes, that was the one, that wasn't you?

CAROLINE
How could it be? I wasn't there.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
He said it sounded like a woman's voice.

CAROLINE
It was dark. Maybe it was a nigguh. Some of them got light voices. Maybe was a nigguh bitch.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
. . . Is that the one, this other one, this the one. Sounds like the same conversation you had with your husband in the store on Saturday.

CAROLINE
I don't recall havin any conversation. It's a common enough conversation. Is that the one. That's the one. You could ask it about anything.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
So when did you see you husband next?

CAROLINE
Sometime during the night I think they came back and I think that Kimball man was with em. I think it happened pretty much like he, they said. I think they probably asked me who, if I believe. Because I really think no matter, I thought, I think Roy told me he was gonna take him back.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Then you weren't alone the whole night.

CAROLINE
Well, yes I was. They didn't come in. They just asked me if he was the one and and they told me they were gonna let him go. I was worried sick. Sometime round daybreak. I went down the street to the pay phone and called up to my brother-in-law's Spencer to find out where Roy was. Spencer told me they had been playing poker all night and Roy would be home later.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
When was this? When did you see your husband next? After you went to make the phone call in the morning as you say, when did you see him next?

CAROLINE
I don't know.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
Where were you? What time was it?

CAROLINE
I don't know. Can you turn that thing off, please?! Y'all tryin to put this on me? I have not done this! I have not!

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
How did he seem?

CAROLINE
What do you think?!

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
I'll tell you what I think. I think
you're lyin'. I think you been lyin'.
I think you lied about what happened
in the store, you lied about it to your
husband, you lied bout not tellin'
him like you lied about not bein'
there when they snatched him up.
I think you done lied so much to your
self and everybody else that you can't
even remember

CAROLINE
Everybody lies!
LIES! LIES!
Like you're not doin' that like
you're not doin' that right now?!
Think cuz you pin some bright
shiny badge to your hip you
give a shit bout th—! . . .
. . . the Truth?

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
. . . M'am. For the boy's family. For his mother . . . We're just trying to . . . resolve . . . this . . . Fifty years . . . You ever think about her?

CAROLINE
Of course. I'm a mother too. I know what it is to lose a child. I know what it is to lose someone.

AGENT KILLINGSWORTH
. . . Can I get you something? Coffee, tea?

CAROLINE
Tea would be nice. It's cold in here.

ACT 1, SCENE 7

(Caroline alone.)

CAROLINE
Cold. I'm so Cold. I could not get warm. My bones, my skin—was cold. My feet. Like my blood was cold. Exhausted. I went to take a nap. All my clothes on. Threw off my shoes. Got under the cover and forgot everything. Disappeared. (Then) woke up . . . to a presence. On my back. Dark like a shadow. I could feel it feathered, no bounds, all air, but heavy. A weight on me. Stealin my breath, squeezing. It pressed down upon me. I couldn't move. I thought to feel rage or terror or vengeance or fury—I knew—instead I felt . . . longing . . . not for me—not for truth or even justice, but for life. I thought to feel his wrath or hate and, instead I felt . . . ? Wake up, I told myself, wake up and turn over. But I *was* awake. "Git up. Make some coffee. That's what I'll do. I'll make some coffee." But the kettle kept whistlin', screamin , I grabbed a washcloth an used it fuh to lift the pot an when I set it down, the corner caught fire. It had his smile in it, the cloth, smudged in places from the charrin', a hole in the center, burnt in his smile, turnt up and turnt down, jagged an' black, the smoke still steamin up like it was breath. Roy come in. Fell on me hard, covered in blood. His clothes. His hair. His shirt. His hands. His face splattered with it smeared. He starts strippin. Strippin like fire ants done got him. Stripped naked.

ROY
Git me a clean shirt and pant. Now! Nother for JW. Go! Ball em up in the table cloth, the clothes, woman!

CAROLINE
Sweet, he smelled. His body, rancid n sour . . .You been drinkin.

ROY
Hell, yeah we been drinkin. Too Tight!

CAROLINE
His face and hands black in the shadows, his body white in the window light. That nigguh's eyes wild. As he took the swaddlin from me.

ROY
Go Goddamit! Go! And CLEAN OUT THAT TRUCK!

CAROLINE
Roy come in. Kissed me wet on the lips, his mouth showin me the tip of his tongue in the corner. We killed a nigguh tonight. We killed a nigguh . . . fuh you.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

(Saturday evening, August 27, 1955. It's the weekend, pay day, Saturday the last in August, the heat of the sun still lingers the sky purple above the bayou there is no wind, the air is charged, twilight. Clinton and Beulah Melton's bedroom. Fabric strewn across the bed. Bea looks up with her eyebrows as Melton enters.)

MELTON
Money, Money moneymoneymoneymoney …

BEA
Week's most out. Not workin like you thought, uh-oh.

MELTON
Not a sign of it nowhere. I'm tired.

BEA
The pins I discovered not sharp, too lightweight. They bent and stubborn. Prodding through the fabric, leaving visible holes. *(she holds up a partially sewn rag doll)* I stopped with the leg. It's back to the store for decent pins, a zig-zag, maybe even heavy duty thread for this fabric. Folded up the big pattern. Have to do the doll in sections. Otherwise too much fabric.

MELTON
The gingerbread pattern is cute.

BEA
Maybe I sell it like that. With instructions on how to cut out the pieces n do it yourself. We'll see. But that's as much as I can do today. Better add a decent pack of needles.

MELTON
I'm not feeling very good. Can't lie down. No room on the bed. This doll hand look like mine.

BEA
Stuck wid pins? Lemme see.

MELTON
Can't lift much. Three finguhs.

BEA
Linament in the cuhbud.

MELTON
Where are we on this?

BEA
Not going to be able to get buttons and yarn different colors till Tuesdie I bet. Wrong color for the lips and frayin' fabric. Straight pins thirty-nine cent too thin. Bent n hurt my hand when I try to push em through. Thread. Needs to be a shade darker than the fabric. Lips, Too loud.

MELTON
Bea.

BEA
And this model. Took me all day and still the neck's too thin to hold up her head. Flops over like it's broke. I'm supposed to be finished and on to church. Lord knows I need to do laundry. Thought to be done by now and look. No pattern to it.

MELTON
No buttons, huh?

BEA
Spozed to make money, only costin it. I can do the seam stitchin' to prevent the frayin', stitch the legs & arms together. I can do eyes n nose. The neck. Don't know what to do about that. Do I feel like any of it today? And laundry waitin'.

MELTON
We should move. Tupelo. Tougaloo.

BEA
How? Swim? We underwater ever'where.

MELTON
Don't abandon me, Bea.

BEA
How I'm to do that wid four babies, another one . . . ?

MELTON
I'm out of sorts.

BEA
Talk about it.

MELTON
Remember our first dance.

BEA
Don't.

MELTON
You took my hand . . . What do you want me to do?

BEA
Judge's house tomorruh, if I evuh git these dolls done, still got laundry soakin. Milam's dirt on the collar, sweat stains.

MELTON
Fever season. People sweat . . . I don't wanna be goin' round like this. And I don't want you goin in there. When I'm not round.

BEA
Where else we gon go? It's th'only bridge to th'other side. *Bridge* Av—

MELTON
I said. I don't want you goin by there. Not droppin' you off at the crossin' by there. Drop you off where I work at, the gas station, McGarrh's. Cross over by there.

BEA
That's an extra half-mile, Clint, I'm not doin' that. All the way to the end of town to go back to the middle.

MELTON
Milam asked after you tuhday. Don't want you goin by there.

BEA
I'm not the one we need to worry about. Kids need shoes. I'm buried up to my neck, Melton. I can't be wasting no time walkin no extra half-hour.

MELTON
I'll drive you—

BEA
With what gas? We three miles outta town as it—

MELTON
I said I don't want you goin by there, Bea.

BEA
Let me loose. Got your nerve. "What you want."

MELTON
We a pair, huh?

BEA
We ain't that. We ain't hardly that. I should read through the scripture. See what songs may go for service Sundie.

MELTON
Bea? I'm not feelin' like we through. Not feelin' relief neither. Not feelin' my own story. I'm outside of it. Out of sorts, that's what that must mean. Seem I can't move in any direction.

BEA
Yoah story? You the man that swept me up. Figure out how to do the next passage of it, Melton. We can't afford no nother baby. Can't afford the ones we got.

MELTON
I thought I could make more of this life.

BEA
You think that's where it is? In fatherin another woman's child? Spittin' in the face of my misery, our last not cold in the ground? The grief I feel cannot measure to the anger I have toward you. Now, you that chile's father on top on your own. What lesson you gon show him?

MELTON
You got no cause to talk to me like that, Bea.

BEA
How's that? Melton, how's that?

MELTON
I hurt much as you and I provide. You ain't never had to work in no fields.

BEA
Oh, nice house to clean. Room to stretch out. Don't you dare! You hurt as much. You got no idea what I go through. Bring me out to this god-forsaken piece of nowhere.

MELTON
It's a good piece of land!

BEA
So hung up in your own world, your own pain, makin yourself feel bet-tuh. I am your wife. What I'm to do? How I'm to feel? Talkin bout what you gon make of this life. You betray me n then you lie?

MELTON
How long we gon go on like this? BEA I need to finish this bastin', then read through the scripture, see bout those songs.

MELTON
This our marriage bed.

BEA
Not no more, Melton, not no more.

MELTON
Come on now. I'm askin' you. Please …

BEA
What the Hell was you thinkin? This is for life! Melton, for life. You can come to the house, but I can't have you back in my bed. Not yet. Not now. No. We weren't like that. That warnt us. Havin babies—one aft nother, all diff'ent fathers, diff'ent colors. Shackin. We weren't like that.

MELTON
Bea . . .

BEA
Gotta finish this ironin'.

MELTON
You know how I feel about you. I can't breathe . . . withoutchu.

BEA
You hurt me, Mel, like you reached in my chest and pulled out my heart still beatin . . . I don't even feel it. I don't feel nothin. That's why I'm mad the most. You stole my heart. Again. Thief in the night. Go on back to your darkness. Nothin left for you here.

MEL
I hear you.

BEA
Do you?

MELTON
Can't we keep what parts work. Let it be the real story?

BEA
I don't have feelings for you. I've tried. I may not have feelings no more at all. I don't know. I do know I do not want to be intimate. Don't. If I touch you I could juss tear you to pieces.

MELTON
I don't want to fight. I need to say I'm sorry. Can't stand to let you go over something stupid I did. I really went low being disloyal and after that I was selfish in my fear of tellin' you.

BEA
You make the mess. I am stuck with the clutter. Altar to my failure.

MELTON
What you want me to do?

BEA
You can't stay here.

MELTON
This is my home!
You'll wake the—

BEA
Your home, no! NO!
Leave me be—NO!

MELTON
Was too soon.

BEA
So you stick your dick in some heiffuh. That's your solution—don't touch me!

MELTON
Bea! You gon wake the—

(Melton spies his daughter at the door.)

MELTON*(speaking softly to his daughter)*
Hey, sweetheart. No, now. . .
You know your Mama just gets excited.
Sometime—Bea, we been done over this.

BEA*(stoking her anger)*
Then we see the scene,
Together?!
Walkin down the street.

BEA*(hollering over her shoulder)*
GO ON BACK TO BED!

MELTON
Bea!

MELTON
No, baby you go on back to sleep.
Just a dream, just a dream.
That's my girl . . .
Go on back to bed. It's awright.

BEA
. . .
Ever'body else know about it.
Your Mama! "Gal come here
and bring that baby here. Yeah,
that's my son's."

BEA
Don't tell me what I can and cannot do! This a small town, Melton. Everybody know everything! How I'm to hold my head up?

MELTON
Ain't no used to goin roun like this . . .

BEA
Yoah dinnuh's onna stove. I wrapped it.

MELTON
I'll go on back to the gas station then.

BEA
I don't care what you do. If you takin' the car—make sure you back –

(Melton exits.)

BEA
Fuh service . . . Delores? You sleep?

ACT 2, SCENE 4

(Sunday morning, August 28, 1955, the Melton's.)

BEA
(What he sees in that woman, what he doesn't see in me anymore? Fixed up muhself. Put on a nightgown). And fuh what!) WHAT! (Heart actin up today.) Dolores put that down! (Must be like Mom's shortness of—cain't hardly—take a—the moment I—Ow! Shoot! Didn't sleep a wink waitin' on his—Ow! too hot, nightgown all up in my)—Delores, umph, come here, baby, Mama didn't mean to holler lemme tie your shoes, well they might feel right pair if they was on the right feet, Missy—they not too small you just gon have to wear em a little bit longer till—where's th'other one? Did you look under the bed?—and see if your brother n sister's wake. It's late. (Shoulda been ready. Church! On top of—he shoulda been here to pick us)—Now look, you woke the baby! (Aspirin. Bakin soda. Peptobismol—Couldn't sleep, couldn't lie down. Now cain't) Stand up straight Delores, don't hunch your shoulders. Oh that's a good boy all by yourself! Yes! Mornin', Miss Vivian, cat got your—What is it now? She what? (UH!) How'd you get your hair caught in the spring I told you to look up under the bed not to crawl up under—hold hold hold still hold still Stop cryin' now. Ain't gon help. There! Com'ere, boy, let me—I know he's cryin'. Can hear it clear in—

Ain't got but two hands. Yes, all right, you can help with the diaper. That'll be your job, your special treat, cuz you're my big girl, Miss Delores, five years old, not gon give it to anybody else, that's your job! (Like I need another?) Didn't hear from any of the folk I asked for one. Mr. Sydney, Miss Martha, de Soto. Past the time, way past, when each said they would say n not even a word. 'Lectric bill due overdue.
Don't know if I stand to gain any from the effort. Fixed muhself up. Put on a nightgown. (Spozed to fight fuh me, spozed tuh) Lawd today. Breakfast!

(Melton comes in.)

BEA

You gotta be kiddin'.
You could at least get back
in time to get us to service.
Kids been ready.
I am furious! Comin' up in here—

MELTON *(near inaudible, mumbling to himself)*

Water hyacinth at the mouth of the
stream Gotta clear 'em, bloated
bladders Shuttin out light n air,
flowers shaped like bells Blue,
purple, orange, red . . . like fire, like

BEA
What you mumblin? Way you ballin that fist need to be holdin a jack or rinch or something, I know you not squeezing it at me?

MELTON*(almost asides to himself, trying to absorb)*
What they burnin' out there? "Huntin'." What y'all huntin for in August?

BEA
What, what are you goin' on about? Huntin'?

MELTON
"Oh we kilt a coon."

BEA
I smell drink?

MELTON
Never seen blood like that. Look like jelly.

BEA
Blood? Where's your shoe, Delores? Blood?

MELTON
Shoes—one of his shoes.

BEA
Delores, take your brother onto the porch n help him. That's right. Yes, that's a good dress. Y'all stay out there and watch the birds with long legs, see if you can find em out there. Take your toast outside and don't get anything on that dress.

BEA
Don't go near the water.
Stay on the porch.
And don't feed them birds!

MELTON
Loafer. Penny loafer.
Nickel still in it.
Nickel still in it.

MELTON
This what happens to smart nigguhs!

BEA
. . . Melton?

MELTON
Milam and his brothers have killed someone.

BEA
What?

MELTON
Killed that boy.

BEA
What you sayin'? What boy?

MELTON
I dunno I dunno I dunno. Some kid. I seen the blood. I never seen so much blood! Nigga blood.

MELTON
Never seen so much. Killed that boy.
H.L. n Too Tight laughin.
Cacklin. yellow eyed dogs . . .

BEA
YOU!
TOLD THEM!
THAT?

MELTON
That big ole white crackuh just grinnin', his bald head beamin wid sweat, barkin orders. Bundle up them clothes n burn em and clean out muh goddam truck! . . . His brother, the one that think he a movie star, Bryant, back there in the shadows, nothing showin but the tip of a cigarette. Kimball dancing in the firelight. "Die nigguh, die nigguh, die nigguh, die!"

BEA
Jesus.

MELTON
They gon run his body out there and dump him in the bayou. Like he never existed. Killed a deer. Deer blood, he say. Deer blood. That ain't deer blood. That's nigguh blood.

BEA
Clint. Melton! You didn't say that. Tell me you didn't say that to him.

MELTON
Black Bayou. Milam and his brothers run they liquor out that road. This time of year, the water up to the trees. That boy gon disappear forevuh. I need to tell someone!

BEA
Melton, THINK! Who you gon tell? The Sheriff? Milam and his brother, that whole family, work for him. He get his labor from them. Dolores, go outside and STAY! Take your brother—Clinton, listen to me . . . You can't, you cain't tell anyone.

MELTON
You set there only last night n bless me out for not bein' a man. Now you want me to lay down like a beat dog n say nothin'?

BEA
That got nothin' to do with this.

MELTON
That got everything to do with this!

BEA
You got a fam'ly. They know us.

MELTON
I got to, I got to, I got to—do ssssomething!

BEA
Okay, okay, okay, siddown, please tell me, Melton, Melton, tell me what happened.

MELTON
I just went to work on a car. Didn't have no place else to go, so so I just went to work on the car I was workin on the car and went to walk Mary back to her—

BEA
Mary was with you?

MELTON
You know how she do. I went to walk her back cuz they was still goin at King's, but they was more commotion back of Milam's house just cross the way from hers. His nigguhs runnin round like ants. Milam standin' next to that weasel Kimball n that dumb one, the twin. I told her go on home, I'd fetch her pa. Need no part of that. Milam struts over. "Melton, when you gon come woyk fuh me," he say. "You know I'll do you better'n McGarrh's." Say to me just as casual like he jog ever'day he pass by. "When you gon come woyk fuh me?"

BEA
Why'd you even go up there. Why'd you go up there?

MELTON
"Com'ere, lemme show you sompin," he say . . . I never seent blood like that befoah. Smeared cross the bottom like they had dragged somethin'— "This what happen to smart nigguhs." He leaned on the truck. It shook. Like . . . jelly it twas. It shook.

BEA
They just words, Clint. They just words.

MELTON
He leaned on the truck. It shook. Like . . . jelly it twas. It shook.

BEA
Baby, think, think.

MELTON
Think what?! SMART NIGGUH! That make me a coward and stupid both! I take that shit from him? I let them do that to somebody!

BEA
Oh, baby . . . Please please please.

MELTON
He look at me straight in the eye and speak them words. Then pulled back the tarp. . . I couldn't of knowed him even if I did. Body bent broke. Fat boy. No man about him. Just a boy. 282

BEA
Let's leave from here. I forgive
you everything. I can't lose you.
You can't. I can't lose you again.
We gotta get away

MELTON
We'll start again. I gotta find
somebody to tell. Gotta do
somethin'. Do something . . .
Let them get away with this.

BEA
We can get in that car and drive away like you said. Won't take me a minute to get the kids ready. We can go to my sister's or or—

MELTON
. . . I ain't goin nowhere. This is my home. The one I brought you to. Built for you. Ever'time I'm thinkin' somethin' gon change, this land gone live up to its promise, and this happen? I'm not goin' nowhere. If we don't stand up to them, Bea, we don't stand a chance.

BEA
What chance we got now, Clint?!

MELTON
Hold me, Bea, please. Hold onto me. Let me hold you.

BEA
Whatever you're thinkin', Clint, please, please don't do this. Please.

(He turns away. She grabs his hand and kisses it. He turns toward her. She touches his face. He kisses her. They embrace, their love desperate and afraid, but strong.)

MELTON
Remember our first dance.

BEA
Don't (do this). . .

MELTON
I was too afraid to ask you. You were the strong one asked me. I need you to be strong, Bea. I need you to be strong for me. 283

ACT 2, SCENE 5

(Melton and Bea's kitchen, September, 1955. Melton seated at the table, not touching his food. Bea is sprinkling, ironing, folding clothes.)

MELTON
I should go up there to that trial. I wish I could go up there. Drive on up there. People ever'where else know more n us. Tried to read about it from the papuh. Mary's mama tore it up. "Not gon set my house afire!" She saved some though. Funeral lined the streets. 50,000 people, they say. How many that be? Never knew him. Miss him like I did. Least

now I know his name. Till.

BEA
I don't know why you torture yourself.

MELTON
The boy's uncle gon testify. His mother flew down in an aeroplane. They got her surrounded by armed guards in Mound Bayou.

BEA
Nobody to guard us . . . Clint, what's hap'nin to us? We can't talk. We don't touch. You remove your hand whenever I touch you.

MELTON
They had their confessions, the body, witnesses. The boy's uncle's testimony. And they gon let em off.

BEA
Told you that. There's no news in it. Why you goin' on so.

MELTON
They let em off. Scott free. Not even guilty of kidnapping and they admit to that.

BEA
Don't know why you thought different. Colored man testifyin' 'gainst a white mean nothin. All white jury, judge. Sheriff testified for the defense. All the while got H.L. and Too Tight locked up in his jail, pretending to be searchin' for 'em. You own boss testifyin' on their behalf as to their good character. Your own boss, good ole Mr. McGarrh. Come home and tell me how he fuss bout Milam ever'day jackin' down the prices, selling bootleg, trying to pull his business, tryin to lure you away. That same ole McGarrh sat up there and said he's a good man—

MELTON
I don't wanna hear no more.

BEA
Give it time.

MELTON
Can't do it. Cannot and will not do it. Everyone knows and nobody tells the truth.

BEA
There's nothin you could do.

MELTON
Jesus Christ! Will you shut up! You don't understand.

BEA
And that woman do?

MELTON
This ain't about that—you think it's about that? What does she have to do with this? I told you I warnt with her. I just can't be with you is all. If I'da testified—

BEA
If you had testified, you'd be dead.

MELTON
How to live? Like this? I did what you asked and was silent and hate myself for it. Like uh animal scratchin' at my insides, it feel like I just done gave up. It feel like surrender.

BEA
Fightin' for something else is all. For us.

MELTON
I have been brought to my knees and lowered my eyes before my own children.

BEA
Stop this, you must stop this.

MELTON
Ain't never gon stop if we don't stand up, Bea.

BEA
To what! Where? Ain't nobody come round here askin bout nothin', why you think that is? Don't nobody care bout no dirt poor nigguhs like us. Some high yellah light n bright kid from Chicago show up, got the NAACP, national news. Where they at—where they at huh, when somebody disappear in the swamp, some gal get snatched from the side of the road, some stranger dangling from a tree with his manhood stuck down his throat. Where was they at then?! Emmett Till, Emmett Till, I'm sick of hearin' about him! Least he had a name. The bayou can't hold all the dead bodies buried out there. No name nobobies.

MELTON
Like us? . . . It don't have to be this way, Bea. We outnumber them. If we stand up, we got a chance to change.

BEA
We ain't got a chance in hell. They got guns, Melton, they got the law, they got the power. Always had and always will. We only got each other, our family, our children. The future here with me.

MELTON
It's not enough.

BEA
It's all we've got. All I've ever done is love you . . . You gon let them take that from us, too.

MELTON
We did that to ourselves. I can't undo what's done, but I can't live with the feelin' of it. I'll stay at my mamas. Come to see the kids regular. You won't want for nothin. I gotta figure what to do.