

*MONEY DOWN: AN ORIGINAL WORK WITH  
A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION*

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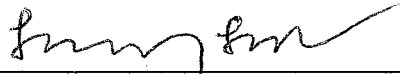
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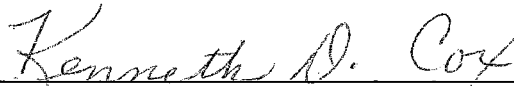
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## INTRODUCTION

Film and adaptation have been handmaidens since the inception of cinema. Early producers often relied on the adaptation of an established play or novel for their movies' story lines and narratives. Even the great director and innovator of cinematic techniques D. W. Griffith looked to theatre and fiction, producing films whose narratives were sometimes tinged with theatrical melodrama or a novel's racist content. Yet, the film industry's reliance on the adaptation process frequently created negative reactions by viewer and critic alike, especially in regards to adapted filmscripts of beloved works.

Adaptation opened a Pandora's box of questions for scholars. Focusing on structural elements and artistic devices of theatre, fiction, and film, analysts compared the adaptation to the original source. While such scrutiny has produced insight (and perhaps more division than harmony), it has also obscured the creativity involved in the process. The film student and the writer of fiction or film may learn something from adaptation, even, surprisingly, from adaptation theory.

Let's look first, though, at the critical literature on adaptation. In 1916, in one of the earliest theoretical studies of adaptation, psychologist and philosopher Hugo

Munsterberg pursued the concepts of space, time, and causality as represented and depicted by theatre and film. For Munsterberg, cinema was defined "by compar[ing] the photoplay with the performance on the theatre stage" (173). In her essay entitled "Film and Theatre," Susan Sontag built on Munsterberg, and, helpfully, moves away from the notion of "pure" theatre and "pure" cinema. "Theatre is confined to a logical or *continuous* use of space," she maintains. "Cinema (through editing) has access to an alogical or *discontinuous* use of space" (367). The media, she says, are different though complementary, and her openness suggests (at least to me) the danger of seeing theatre as the dominant form, film the lesser. Scholars Andre Bazin and Leo Braudy examined "presence" in the adaptation process: the "living" actor in theatre, and the human image and characterization in film, yet, once more, seem careful not to imply a hierarchy of media. Such theories, from Munsterberg to Braudy, may not be useful to dramatists and especially film writers, neither are they an impediment to those interested in the creative process.

Let us now look at several theorists whose work centers on fiction and film. Attempting to unify and rationalize the study of the adaptation process as it regards fiction and film, George Bluestone's Novels into Film: The Metamorphosis of Fiction into Cinema offered a formulaic definition that helped close the gap between the theoretical and the practical. For Bluestone, we read fiction but see

nothing but clusters of words, whereas we see--literally see--film; the differences between fiction and film suggest that the adapter of fiction into film should regard the former as raw material in order to give the latter a structure and form appropriate to its needs, which are more sensual than conceptual. Now, again, though Bluestone doesn't address the sensibilities and creativity present within the writer/adapter, he does, like Braudy, warn us away from what one Shakespearean clown called odious comparisons. He also seems to anticipate John Ellis, who sees the adaptation process as one which creates a "memory" of the fiction, not a faithful duplicate but an essence of the original (3-5).

Neil Sinyard in his "Introduction" to Filming Literature championed adaptation of fiction to film. For Sinyard, echoing Bluestone, "the great screen adaptations are the ones that go for the spirit rather than the letter of the text . . ." (x). As a theorist, Sinyard steps away from isolating structural elements for comparison. Sinyard's implication is that one should enter both fiction and its adaptation to better understand the creative processes.

Dudley Andrew's study of the adaptation process pivots even more than Bluestone's towards the creative process. According to Andrew, "the broader notion of the process of adaptation has much in common with interpretation theory, for in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of a



meaning from a prior text" (97). Andrew, in other words, invites us to examine "meaning" or the "arc of the piece" as it is creatively lifted and maintained or transformed from one genre to another. Indeed, he implies, it is that exploration of meaning within another genre that can expose weaknesses within the original work, or enhance what is best within that work.

Similarly, Seymour Chatman, in his discussion of the study of the adaptation process and its relationship to narrative, maintains "[N]arrative analysis . . . tended to concentrate attention exclusively on the constancies in narrative structure across the different media at the expense of interesting differences. But now the study of narrative has reached a point where the differences can emerge as objects of independent interest" (404). Like those of Sinyard and Andrew, Chatman's study provides the film student and writer paths to explore the practical, the creative process involved in adaptation.

Although theorists may have little interest in the practical, the film student and writer can use the theorists as a starting point to explore the creative techniques in the adaptation process. My study will examine adaptation as a process which can be complementary rather than antagonistic. Adaptation can be used as a methodology for film students, creative writers, and instructors. That is, they can use the process to explore an original fiction and its adaptation to filmscript as a means of entering creative

texts (works-in-progress) to create and re-create, or revise, the prose and filmic techniques and devices of voice (narrative persona), characterization, and plot. By allowing adaptation to be a process which, as Marilyn Hoder-Salmon says, "takes one inside the work, allowing a clinical intellectual metamorphosis to happen through which the adapter may come to know the work as closely as possible" (1-2), film students, screenwriters, and fiction writers can share with one another techniques and concepts concerning craft and creativity.

As an educator and writer I've realized that any move in the revision process is an adaptive move. By enlarging the Pentad approach, one which poses questions to a composition student concerning his/her essay as a scene with characters and action, I've encouraged my students (secondary and higher education) to use the genres of poetry, fiction, filmscript, or stageplay as a means for exploration of ideas. This use of genres as exploration creates a safety zone in which students develop their essays. Once their explorations are completed, they bring their enhanced ideas back into the composition format, revising it in accordance to their discoveries, and, subsequently, creating a richer, more fully developed text.

In creative writing I explore my ideas in various creative genres--poetry, stageplay, fiction, filmscript. If I encounter difficulty in developing a particular character in a stage play, I may explore his/her characterization in a

poem. That is, I may examine the psychological complexity and impact of that character through various poetic devices, such as evoked gestures. When I'm writing a fiction, I may place it in the filmscript genre in order to explore voice (dialogue), characterization, description (visuals), and plot. What I discover in my filmscript exploration, I give back to the fiction, thereby imbuing the prose with a greater sense of detail and intimacy of voice.

Such exploration in the genres no longer privileges one genre over the other as is often present in studies of the adaptation process. Indeed, this exploration doesn't violate the integrity of either the fiction or the filmscript. Both works are enhanced in the areas of voice (dialogue), characterization, description (visuals), and plot. In addition, the film student, screenwriter, and creative writer are afforded the opportunity to better understand the choices, development, and creativity present in the process.

A fiction is a reader-to-creative work experience. This process involves the reader in the interiority of the character(s) through thoughts, feelings, emotions, and memories presented in the narrative. Indeed, Bluestone's analysis notwithstanding, the reader may in her mind's eye create or re-create, emphasize or de-emphasize the visuals, description, and characters presented within the pages of the fiction.

A filmscript, however, is subject to a variety of

interpretations. Passing through the reading hierarchy of the executive board, the director, the cinematographer, the actors, the musicians, the set designer, the editor, and others, the filmscript engages a variety of people. Their interpretations are based on the filmscript's characteristics of detail/description, polished dialogue revealing character, and thumbnail-sketched character descriptions.

Looking to filmscript adaptation as a viable and credible genre, the creative writer, student, and instructor can not only pursue its craft, but can also use it as a means for exploration of fiction. That is, by freely adapting, by working in and out of the two genres, the writer can give back to the fiction what it needs, and add to the filmscript what it needs. Each work is constantly in play whether literally or cinematically. Through adaptive moves, the writer can determine what will make either the fiction or the filmscript or both work better. Such a process becomes not only one of revising but of redefining the creative works.

Redefining creative works through adaptation calls for a new definition of that process, one that is loose, fluid, and allows intertextual moves. Such a definition can be developed from the worlds of technology and cyberspace. A type of continual "upgrading" occurs within cyberspace, and it is applicable to this study of the adaptation process, that is, one which allows exploration in the genres and the incorporation of revision from that exploration. Indeed,

the strategy of a cyberspace product, "hypertext," can be likened to the revision/adaptation process in which the writer creates a web of possibilities not only for the work-in-progress but, ultimately, for the reader/viewer as well.

By using adaptive moves from one genre to the other and back again, a series of "links" occurs in the writing process. These links allow the writer the opportunity to pursue different "paths" for the creative text, thereby allowing her to explore voice, characterization, and plot. The writer can use this hypertext strategy to re-enter a work-in-progress, developing the interconnected elements, and, therefore the potential for a richer text. The path the writer follows through such interconnected elements is her own to decide. She may choose to explore some links and ignore others.

The critical introduction of this study is divided into four sections: the writing of an original fiction (*Fiction A-1*); its adaptation to filmscript (*Filmscript A-1*); an examination, discussion, and example of cinematic and hypertext strategies for exploration, revision, and adaptation in/out of both genres (*Exploration A-1*); and a conclusion. The application of this new definition for adaptation comprises the remainder of the study. *Money Down*, based on the new process, is a revised, completed original fiction. Its adaptation to filmscript of the same title is also based on the new definition for adaptation, one that allows the writer to create and re-create by working freely back and

forth in both genres. The fiction and filmscript follow the conclusion to the critical introduction of this study.

#### FICTION A-1

As an educator, writer, and native Oklahoman, I am fascinated with this state's history. My choices for the fiction evolved from my interests in a significant event in Oklahoma history, the Tulsa Race Riot in 1921. Within the fiction I examined the traumatic impact of the event upon individuals' lives. The fiction doesn't attempt to promote or support any particular perspective, ideology, or myth as much as it examines existing ones during 1918-1921. The principal fictional characters in the creative work are indirectly involved with the Tulsa Race Riot. That is, as fringe dwellers of the marginalized, the characters are "caught up" in a series of situations propelling them towards confrontation with each other and with the event itself. With this in mind, I made a narrative choice involving point of view. I discovered I could craft a fiction based on historical fact, albeit a disputed one, by conceiving it through a first person narrative persona's (Jessica Elizabeth McCormack's) perspective and memory, by re-presenting an era and event, and by placing her within the riot. Witnessing of the Tulsa Race Riot impacts her life and therefore establishes the reason for telling the story.

In the following excerpt labeled *Fiction A-1*, Jessica McCormack, the narrative persona (voice) gives the reader a

stark, direct telling of a specific moment during the Tulsa Race Riot on June 1, 1921.

I remained very quiet, watching until I finally saw Slats through the smoke. He moved slowly, half dragging and half carrying Big George. The shotgun was missing. In the distance I heard bells clanging on fire trucks as they approached. Slats yelled. Jack and Buddy were closing in on my father and Big George. Slats shoved Big George onto the ground, shielding his body as he took aim at Buddy. Jack rushed towards us, his face angry, his voice twisted, shouting at my father.

I raised the .30-30. My father yelled, "Jessie!" Jack looked at me, his mouth forming a round "O" as a slight whoosh of air escaped from thin lips. I aimed the rifle. His face was very white, his eyes light blue, his eyebrows thickly knotted. I fired. Slats had taught me well.

Here, within a potentially emotionally charged passage, the narrative persona is terse, guarded, and limited. Indeed, the passage operates more as a litany with the emotional qualities carefully obscured. This could possibly be effective if the passage occurred during the moment of narration, that is, within the present. However, as it was written, from a temporal distance of many years, the passage loses effect. For a first person viewpoint, the narrator is extremely effaced, the description limited, and the action deliberately plotted. The scene as well as the entire fiction suffers.

In the adaptation process to filmscript, problems within the fiction became evident. Discouraged, but desiring a successful adaptation, I used filmic techniques and devices to develop the potential of the work.

## FILMSCRIPT A-1

Once the fiction was completed, the next step was the adaptation to filmscript. This process required choices involving devices and techniques. The first choice concerned viewpoint. As indicated above, the narrative persona is reticent, and the fiction suffers accordingly. For the filmscript, I decided not to use the fiction's first person viewpoint (Jessica McCormack) in the form of a film voice-over. Instead, I chose a cinematic device of third person viewpoint through the camera's eye. This choice immediately reflected the fiction's weaknesses: that is, how does the screen writer provide camera directions and dialogue for what is neither described nor commented on by the narrative persona in the fiction?

When adapted to filmscript, the scene from *Fiction A-1* is broken into the cinematic elements, or the visual equivalents of prose. Direction, action, description, characterization, and dialogue now operate as separate units of the whole. Such separation illuminates areas that are weak, and can be strengthened through the use of filmic devices. Where the fiction is silent or obscure, and where the narrative persona is reticent, *Filmscript A-1* attempts to open up the visual and psychological contexts through the addition of dialogue, action, and the suggestion of particular point-of-views, and/or camera angles.

A specific example of this in *Filmscript A-1* (and which will be the subject of *Exploration A-1*) occurs in Tulsa's



Frisco track area on June 1, 1921. Through the directions, I indicate the camera becomes Jessica's eyes as she surveys the area, then watches her father and Big George. The directions also strongly indicate that the camera, and subsequently the reader/viewer, participate with Jessica as she sights the .30-30 and fires first at Jack Newley, then Buddy Johnson.

In the fiction, Jessica as the narrative persona is isolated from a scene which precedes the Frisco track incident. In this scene, Slats and Big George search for Lucy and Jonathan. Both men are discovered, and subsequently hunted and wounded by Jack Newley and his gang. On rereading this scene, I determined it was a vital area to explore in the filmscript where the struggle between white and black ideologies could be more dramatically visualized. This addition to the filmscript helps the narrative arc of the piece in that it presents the "completion" of Slats's and Big George's relationship, elevates that relationship above the racial impact of the time, and "sets-up" the lifelong conflict between Jessica and her father, Slats McCormack.

The following is the adaptation *Filmscript A-1*.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie stands outlined against the fire. She holds the .30-30. The Frisco track area is an inferno, houses and buildings burning. The sky glows orange and red. Smoke camouflages everything. A surrealist quality. Chaos.

EXT. BURNING AREA

Supporting a fatally wounded Big George, Slats navigates him towards the truck.

BIG GEORGE  
I can't see nothing.

SLATS  
Hold on! We're almost there!

JACK (OS)  
He's heading for the truck!  
Come on!

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie pivots a bit, concentrating on the recent gunfire just to her right. In Jessie's line of sight, Slats emerges from the smoke, half dragging, half carrying Big George.

SLATS  
(yelling at Jessie)  
Cover me!

As he staggers towards her, Jack and Buddy close in on Slats and Big George in a pincer-like move. Slats glances over his shoulder, then screams at Jessie.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Jessie!

Jessie raises the rifle as Slats pushes Big George to the ground, shielding his body with his own, propping himself, trying to steady his .45, taking a shaky aim at Bobby, and fires.

Jessie sights the barrel at Jack who's stopped short by the sight of her. Jack's mouth opens, a small "O" of surprise as she fires twice, hitting him in the stomach and chest.

In the adaptation of *Fiction A-1* to *Filmscript A-1*, a stronger sense of visuals is present. By using descriptive words such as "inferno," "surrealist," and "chaos," I more clearly present the devastation and violence consistent with

the Tulsa Race Riot. By establishing in the directions that Jessica's body is outlined by the fire, I place her somewhat outside the riot, that is, she's now visualized as one of the marginalized, a fringe dweller who will soon be caught up in the destruction taking place. The scene is energized through the use of active verbs: "navigates," "pivots," "emerges," "staggers," "glances," and "screams." Action is thus intensified through specific directions thereby propelling the narrative.

The addition of dialogue for Big George, Slats, and the off-screen Jack Newley allows the scene to confirm the now-mutual friendship of Slats and Big George while intensifying the conflict and impending danger from Jack Newley. In doing so, I also "up the stakes" for Slats and Jessica in their father-daughter relationship.

Use of a point-of-view via the camera's eye allows Jessie to see her father and Big George, thereby suggesting to the director that an over-the-shoulder shot should be used. Now, the reader/viewer can be drawn into the scene, participating with the characters in their moment of truth.

#### EXPLORATION A-1

After the adaptation to filmscript, I examined the scene through the use of cinematic devices and hypertext links, or interconnected elements. This examination allowed a deeper exploration thereby creating a web of possibilities not only for the filmscript but also for the fiction as I moved in and out of the respective genres.

A series of cuts, or a montage, exists within the scene example of *Filmscript A-1*, suggesting a variety of points of view. By closely examining the various points of view, I could enrich characterization as well as intensify action and the moment of truth for each character.

Each individual in the scene is at a crossroads of purpose and development. For those reasons, as well as others, each individual is an interconnected element or link to the other(s). Emotions and physical actions, the characters' reactions, and dialogue play against a backdrop of violence.

This section breaks the scene into a number of small scenes (cuts or links) in which each character can be more fully explored.

Although *Exploration A-1* is written in prose, it is directed by the eye of the camera. To better facilitate understanding of the potential of this new adaptation process, I pose questions after a specific cut or link. These questions help to expose the interconnected elements of the scene, thereby showing me the numerous paths I could follow in a revision or re-creation of the work.

**Please note:** For the purpose of this exploration, I will begin the Frisco track scene in stasis, a moment captured. The camera with increasing speed will pull in the principles of the action as well as the viewer, as though something is set into motion that cannot be stopped.

The following is an excerpt of *Exploration A-1*.

1. **Long shot**, Jessie outlined by the fire, back towards the camera. Slat and Big George are dim figures in the distance.

**Exploration Questions:**

**What's around her?**

Cinders, ashes, vehicles, people?

Does she seem distanced from or a part of the event?

**What are the sounds?**

Bells clanging on fire trucks?

People screaming, moaning, yelling?

Buildings collapsing? Roar and hiss of fire?

**What does her body indicate?**

Fatigue? Fear? Alertness?

Resignation? Or, absence of emotion? Are her shoulders slumped, drawn in, or squared?

**How does she respond to Slat's and Big George's appearance?**

Elation? Relief? Anger? Nothing?

Or, does she identify them immediately as her father and their partner?

2. **The camera moves closer** to an over-the-shoulder shot, Jessie's point-of-view (POV). Jessie sees her father dragging Big George out of the smoke and fire. The camera swings out and away slightly

from Jessie, moving around her side, allowing the viewer briefly to see Jessie's profile.

3. **The camera pivots slightly**, moves toward the two men, filling the screen with Slats and Big George. Slats struggles with the weight of Big George. He looks at his daughter.
4. **Cut to Slats's POV** looking at Jessie, then glancing over his shoulder, he sees Jack and Buddy closing in on him and Big George.
5. **Cut to Jack's POV** who only sees Slats and Big George.

**Exploration Questions:**

**What is Slats's facial expression?**

Fear? Anger? Resignation? Absence of emotion?

**How does Slats react?**

Pull Big George closer to him? Protective move? Defensive move? Body tense? Relaxed?

**Is Big George aware of what is happening?**

Does he try to help?

6. **Cut back to Jessie (her POV)** who sees her father and Big George are in danger.
7. **Cut to Slats (his POV)** looking at his daughter.
8. **The camera pulls away**, includes Slats, Jessie, and Big George in the shot. Slats yells at Jessie for help. Jessie looks at her father, then looks

(wider angle shot) at Jack and Buddy rushing towards them.

**Exploration Questions:**

**How does Slats's voice sound?**

Angry? Defiant? Frightened? Thin?  
Deep? Booming?

**Does his face and body express action?**

Taking care of business at hand?  
Momentarily frozen? Unable to function?

**What is Jessie's expression?**

Resignation? Anger? Fear?  
Anticipation? Dulled?

**How are Jack and Buddy carrying their weapons?**

Drawn? Waving them?

**What are their facial expressions?**

Angry? Excited? Concerned?

9. Cut to Jack and Buddy.
10. Cut to Jack, close-up (head shot).
11. Cut to Jack's POV as he focuses on Slats and Big George.
12. Slats yells at Jessie.
13. Wide angle shot to include Jessie. All are now in the shot: Slats, Big George, Jessie, Jack, and Buddy. Jack notices Jessie. Jessie's face. She raises the rifle.
14. Cut to the rifle barrel, down the sight (its POV).

15. Cut to Jack's face.

Exploration Questions:

**What are Jack's reactions?**

Surprised? Then, amused? And then, concerned? Sweat on the upper lip? Does he turn to run? Does he try to take cover? Or, does he believe Jessie won't shoot, so he stands his ground? Does he taunt her?

**What are Buddy's reactions?**

Talking? Shouting? Cursing?

16. Sound of rifle firing.

These cuts or links create small scenes, interconnected elements filled with potential for a writer to explore not only for understanding of the mechanics of movement and placement of action within a fiction but also for understanding the interiority of the characters. Fleshing out the passage, I can add details, expression, color, texture, dialogue, and action to the piece. When the passage is fully explored within its cinematic mode, I can take this scene back to the fiction. I can increase the tension by increasing the detail, the particularities not only of the visual texture but also of the emotions of each individual--a bit of sweat on the upper lip, or



dulled eyes from the seeing of too much violence, or surprise, and so on. The moment can be built block by block, intensifying the effect of the traumatic event. Now, it can become a moment which provides a pivotal point in the story's plot, and which represents the theme of the work.

## CONCLUSION

Initially, the adaptation process consisted of the fiction's prose broken into cinematic equivalents in the filmscript, and thus the fiction's weaknesses and strengths were exposed. Such exposure, although frustrating and discouraging, provided me an opportunity to develop another possibility for the adaptation process. By using filmic and hypertext devices and strategies, I entered both texts, examined possibilities, and revised, or re-created both the fiction and filmscript which follow this critical introduction.

In the revised, re-created fiction *Money Down*, Jessica McCormack's voice is vastly different from the original work. Where she was reticent before, she's now open, warm at times, questioning at others. She's observant of details in her environment, and the particularities of people as well as herself. Indeed, the reader/viewer has a stronger sense of who Jessica is, and why she is that way. Her voice is intimate, and, at times, puzzled, regretful, and yes, guarded. As Jessica reveals herself, the reader has a better understanding of her, Slats, the people, the era, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921. By opening up Jessica's voice to be more intimate and revealing, she might have been used to preach about the ideologies of the late Teens and early Twenties in Oklahoma; instead, though, I tried to make her voice the "heart beat" to an era, and to a tragic event.

Taking the revised, re-created fiction *Money Down* into

its adaptation to filmscript now developed into an exciting, intriguing process for me. The increased intimacy of voice in the fiction subsequently created stronger characterization, a greater sense of description (visuals), and a more fully developed plot. Now, I made choices concerning how to highlight the father-daughter relationship, their conflict, and their shared love for aviation. For Jessica's characterization, aviation in the filmscript is less of a reminder of her killing Jack Newley and Buddy Johnson than it is a symbol of her salvation and freedom.

If the conflict in creative writing programs today revolves around whether to be craft-driven or inner-process oriented, then, perhaps, the adaptation process with its use of interconnected links could be a viable tool for one or both of the established schools of thought. For the craft-driven program, the adaptation process may offer a means for the writer to successfully pursue voice, characterization, and plot within an exploratory mode rather than a mechanical one. And, for the inner-process oriented programs, the adaptation process may allow the writer to encounter structure, albeit a different one in accordance to each genre, that is suitable to the revision process.

This newly defined adaptation process then, one which uses filmic and hypertext devices and strategies, may prove a viable and credible methodology for film students,

creative writers, and instructors to employ for private use and educational purposes in their writing endeavors.

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**MONEY DOWN**

An Original Fiction

"For among the displaced it's every man  
for himself--all neighbours are enemies  
and all possessions are a provocation  
Somebody."

Joyce Cary

The Captive and the Free

"I told our story. It was, you tellable."

Hiroshima, Mon Amour



Oklahoma sun light streams through a small uncovered window, bathing my father's face, his chin jutting upward, defiant even now in his passing. Covering his body, the white cotton sheet holds the faint odors of bleach and detergent along with those of his dying. Spreading my fingers against the material I feel the warmth draining from him, the body cooling, losing itself in this private room of Rest Haven Nursing Home.

He looks young again, muscles relaxed, lines and wrinkles smoothed, no longer age seventy-five, and I am reminded of the father I loved when I was a child. Touching his shoulder, my fingertips lightly trace the length of his body, find his hand, cupped slightly as if he were reaching for something. His long, slender fingers are curved, the scars across the knuckles stretched, losing their sheen, fading into the white skin. I place my hand in his, willing him to hold it. But, he cannot.

Once we were known as *those* McCormacks. Slats and Jessica, father and daughter. Together, we developed an aviation service, built and customized airplanes, and, eventually, operated our own airport. We were a team. Partners. A matched pair. If you were talking to Jessica, people said, then you were talking to Slats McCormack. But few of them realized the conflict between my father and me, always reminding us that once, when I was only fifteen, I killed two men.

When I was young, my father was like a god, standing

tall and lean with tight, wirey muscles from working outside most of his life. Never without an old brown fedora, the color deepening along the crown, covering his black hair shot with gray, and always clothed in khakis, he moved with a grace and purpose I've seen in very few men, only those who were confident of their strength, their control.

I thought he was handsome, and I believe other women thought so, too. They always seemed to look at him, their eyes glancing at his weathered, tanned face, lingering on his broad shoulders, then following the lines of his body. But he never seemed to notice them, not even after Mother died, he was so obsessed with making money.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You're going to love it, Jessie! Ain't nothing better than flying," Slats said. I looked up from my work, the account ledger before me, receipts and statements scattered across the table. Moving the kerosene lamp, I shifted in my chair, turning to look at my father, standing tall and slender in the dining room, his legs straddling the discarded pages of a Tulsa newspaper, June 1920.

We were both tired, having spent a restless night listening to cars and trucks roaring down the road, men shouting and singing out the windows. We kept the house dark, the kerosene lamp our only light, a dim glow from the underground room where I waited. Slats, a sawed-off,

double-barreled shotgun nestled in his arms, watched from the window.

"It's a big rally," he said once, the silence broken only by his voice and the mantle clock ticking.

But no matter how tired my father might be this day, he flashed a big grin at me, then turned back to his latest obsession, his fingers smoothing an advertisement, paste squishing out from the edges onto the plaster wall. "We'll save as much as we can, then buy us one of these airplanes," he said.

I whirled around, grabbing a handful of receipts and statements, waving them in the air, saying, "How do you plan to pay for these?"

"Yes sir, for right now one of these will do just fine," my father said, tapping the description of "Red" Williams' sale of World War I trainer airplanes, the JN-4.

Throwing the papers onto the table, I said, "Grocer ain't gonna carry us no more. Said so last week. Remember?"

"Later on, when we're making more money, we'll build our own airplanes. Think of it, Jessie, our own business!"

I sighed, resting my chin in calloused hands, and began nibbling on my fingernails. There was no getting through to Slats McCormack, not when he was like this, caught up in a dream. But the trouble with dreamers is they always need someone to follow through for them. Somehow, after Mother died in the flu epidemic of 1918, Slats placed that

responsibility on me. I was only twelve years old then. He never asked my permission, and I resented his thinking that as his daughter I would help.

Slats paced the room, boots thumping the floor as he waved his arms, hands punctuating the air, "We'll have a whole fleet of planes someday. Fly people anywhere they want to go. Ranchers, oil men, tycoons. Anyone!" The sound of his pacing stopped, and I felt his eyes on me. He cleared his throat. I continued working. Finally, he called to me, "Jessie!"

"Hm-m-m?" I flipped a page of the account ledger, ran my finger down the column of figures.

"Jessie! Do you know they sing to you?"

Startled, I looked up.

"The wires sing in the air. And when you're taking one down, you know you're getting close to land 'cause they start singing 'Nearer My God to Thee.'"

Another one of his stories. One he heard from the barnstormer who performed the week before in our area. That morning the sun was brilliant, the Oklahoma sky an intense blue. I was scheduled to wash the dishes, several days worth stacked on the counter. I glanced at them, then looked out the window, a breeze topping the old elms, their branches swaying in the sunlight. "I'm going outside," I announced to my father.

"You got chores 'fore we get to town."

"And you got bills," I said, walking to the front door.

"Jessica!" I heard my father push back his chair, his shoes scuffing against the floor as he stood. I continued staring at the doorknob. "Jessica Elizabeth McCormack!"

I stomped into the kitchen, fixed a pan of soapy water, dumped dishes into it, the plates clattering against each other. I scrubbed several of them, suds splattering the floor until Slats grabbed my hands. Sighing, he said, "You're making a mess."

I jerked away my hands, whirled around, my long hair slapping his arms. "Thought you wanted the dishes done," I said.

"Done, not broken," he answered, nudging me away from the counter, plunging his hands into the soapy water. I ran outside, the screen door slamming behind me.

I was lonely without Mother. There were times when I wanted her to hold me again, nestled in her lap as she untangled my long black hair, taming it with her fingers, weaving it into thick, glossy braids. Every morning, in those first few moments of transition between dream and reality, I thought I heard her working in the kitchen. Excited, I'd push back the quilt, fumbling my way out of the bed before I'd hear my father's footsteps. Then, I remembered. My father was all I had.

Later, my father drove us to town, easing the truck down a buckled asphalt road, the countryside a contradiction of native grass pastures, wildflowers, and oil derricks with

salt-encrusted red earth surrounding them. Several miles down the road, the truck's engine began roaring loudly. Slats stopped dead center in the road, but the noise increased even as my father turned off the motor. We quickly hopped out of the truck, unlatching the hood as a bi-plane swept out of the sky like a red-tailed hawk, wheels barely missing the top of the cab.

"What was that?" I asked.

"A fool!"

"Where'd it go?"

"Looks like old man Simpson's place."

"Let's follow it!"

"Gotta pay the grocer, you know that, Jessie."

"Never seen one before. Leastways, not close up."

We parked next to wagons, trucks, and cars lining the side of the road bordering Simpson's pasture. Slats moved us closer to the front of the crowd. Overhead, the pilot pushed his JN-4 into loops, barrel rolls, even flying inverted over the people standing in the native grass.

"Would you look at that, Jessie," my father said.

"Ain't that something."

When the pilot landed the plane, Slats told me to stay put. He pushed, elbowed, fought his way through the crowd to the front of the line forming by the JN-4. Enthralled, and never one to pass up a challenge or a risk, my father spent all of our grocery money and more that day, paying the pilot again and again for rides.

Now, one week, no groceries, and no credit later, my father couldn't stop talking about airplanes and stories of how the wires sing "Nearer My God to Thee." Anticipating being hungry for a long time, I grabbed the receipts and statements, cramming them inside the account ledger, slammed it shut, and stood up. Turning to face my father, I said, "Don't think I'm gonna hear them sing anytime soon."

"How much we got?" Slats asked.

"We stopped getting by last week."

"Lumber job ain't doing it for us, is it?"

"Not as long as you spend everything on airplane rides, it ain't."

My father's face darkened, his eyebrows scrunched together. "Bound to be a better way in this old world of making money," he said. Waving his hand, he dismissed me, saying, "Go on now and get ready for bed. I got me some thinking to do."

Obsessed with wanting a JN-4, with wanting to fly, Slats McCormack decided upon a very different way of making money. A fast way with quick profits and low overhead. In Oklahoma during 1920 there were two ways of making money. If you were lucky you could score big in the oil fields. If not, you could always break the law.

\* \* \* \* \*

I stood relaxed and easy on the red dirt, the July sun overhead, the air still and hot. Cicadas hummed in the

large elms bordering the overgrown pasture. My left hand cupped the barrel of a .30-30, my right hand caressing the stock, fingers close to the trigger.

"Take a bead on it, Jessie," my father said, standing to the right and just behind me.

I raised the rifle, nestled it into my shoulder, and looked down the barrel. The .30-30 felt good to me, comfortable after the past week of target practice. I felt important, special that Slats was taking time to be with me. But making us closer as father and daughter wasn't exactly what he had in mind. Slats McCormack had plans, big plans to make lots of money, and my learning to shoot were part of them.

"Easy now," Slats spoke softly. I looked down the rifle barrel, lining the sight with the target, a small can perched on top of a rock some distance away. "Got it?" he asked. I grunted a response. "Whenever you're ready," he said quietly.

I gently squeezed the trigger, keeping the target in sight, then boom, the .30-30 blew the can apart. I was a natural, my father told me. But, at the time, I thought it was only a game. A game to keep me close to him.

Slats taught me to hunt turtles in the pond bordering our farm. Creeping my way through brush and vines along the bank, I scanned the pond's still surface, only an occasional flip of a fish's tail disturbing the water, ripples stretching to the bank, collapsing against red mud.



Mesmerized by the watery mirror where trees and clouds merged, I'd lose myself there until I heard my father's special call, a wood thrush, low, throaty. I felt his eyes on me, knowing he was close to me. Knowing he had caught me daydreaming.

Once again I scanned the water's surface, my eyes looking through the mirrored trees, focusing on a turtle's head glistening in the sunlight, the body a dark shadow in the red, murky water. Following my father's whispered instructions, I quietly positioned the rifle. Sighted the turtle. Held the rifle steady. Fired. It was an easy target, bits and pieces of shell and flesh flying into the air, then dropping into the water, the image of trees and clouds lost in the ripples.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hammer Joe says he can get us started," Slats said as he unloaded our truck, stacking wooden crates filled with whiskey bottles next to me. I stood in the shade of the porch, looking into the kitchen window, my reflection staring back at me, a wild mane of black hair framing my face. I'd grown since last summer, for I could see deep into the kitchen, dishes stacked on the counter, red dirt from our boots caking the floor.

Joseph Washburn, known as Hammer Joe for his muscular body and arms like sledgehammers, stood five feet, three inches tall, a strutting Bantam rooster of a man always

looking for a fight, and wielding a mean right cross. Together, my father and Hammer Joe worked the oil fields until the early spring of 1918. I was twelve years old before I realized the air didn't always smell like oil, and not all fathers had blackened skin streaked with red mud. Then, the land was thickly covered with wooden oil derricks, stretching into the Cimarron River, the structures anchored in sand bars, their frames sticking up like honey locust trees in winter. Catwalk bridges connected production on both banks while oxen-drawn wagons filled with heavy equipment crisscrossed the deeply rutted prairie. And, everywhere, black oil coated the men, the equipment, and the river's surface.

Slats stacked another crate beside me, removed his fedora, wiping his forehead with a frayed handkerchief, saying, "You gonna help or stare at yourself all day?"

I turned, and walking past him, stepped into the hot July sunshine. Even the cicadas were quiet while heat waves shimmered above the dry pasture grass. Together, Slats and Hammer Joe talked union to the oil field workers in early 1918, turning the foreman Jack Newley and his two henchmen, Buddy Johnson and Malcomb Burnett, solidly against them. Foreman Jack was a slim whip of a man with meanness coiled up tightly inside of him, ready to explode without notice at anyone who crossed him. He was fond of pushing the men, working them night and day without rest. Jack Newley had what my father called "peculiar" thinking, and continually

expressed his ideas about God, Catholics, Indians, gypsies, and, especially, coloreds.

Hammer Joe, a frequent visitor in our home during those years, often stayed late into the night, talking union strategy with my father. Never one to back away from any of Slats's ideas or their outcomes, Mother kept the coffee going and fed the two men.

I reached for a crate, hefted it to my shoulder, the wood cutting into the flesh. I winced. Slats wadded up his handkerchief, placing it on my shoulder like a pad. "Makes a hell of a sore. Gotta think smart, Jessie, you hear."

I gestured to the few crates remaining on the truck, saying, "Don't look like enough to buy a plane with, much less groceries."

"Hammer Joe ain't set-up to bring off much. Leastways, not right now."

I felt uneasy about this fiery little man stepping back into our lives. The last time I'd seen him was the day he brought Slats, bruised and bloody, home from work. After a young man fell to his death from one of the rigs, Slats redoubled his efforts, finally convincing the gang of men to walk off the job, leaving Foreman Jack without workers and a deadline to meet. Angry and vengeful, Jack, along with his friends Buddy and Malcomb, cornered my father, beating him until Hammer Joe and some of the other men intervened.

It took both Mother and Hammer Joe to carry Slats into the house. A big gash along the right temple oozed blood

across his eye and cheek, both swollen and heavily bruised. His nose was flattened, lips smashed, puffy, three times their normal size. A pair of fractured ribs pained him with each breath. My mother and Hammer Joe moved slowly, gently, carrying Slats as if he were a baby. With every step he cried out, his voice thin and gasping, begging them to put him down.

Only twelve years old at the time, I'd never seen anyone, much less my father, beaten like that. I ran outside, hiding in the barn until Mother convinced me that the man she was tending to was really my father. It was some time before I was brave enough to visit him, lying weak and helpless in bed, his body swollen, unrecognizable. Somehow, I always associated Hammer Joe with my father's beating, and, oddly enough, with Mother's death in the flu epidemic several months later. For Slats, that was the end of the oil fields.

Slats stacked another crate on the porch, his shirt drenched with sweat. Removing the fedora, he placed it on one of the crates, then pulled his shirt tail out of the waist band of his khakis, wiping his forehead again. "I quit the lumber yard." I stared at my father as he repositioned the fedora, saying, "Jack Newley came in. Did some talking to the owner. Reckon they must think alike." My father nudged dirt into little piles with his boot. "Anyways, Hammer Joe's got connections for us."

Sick to my stomach, I asked, "Connections?"

"Yeah. Tulsey-town."

"Long ways."

"Not so far," my father replied.

"And these connections?" I asked.

My father scattered the little piles of dirt, saying quietly, "Coloreds."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I look like a boy!" I complained.

"That's the idea," Slats said, easing our old truck down a crowded street in Tulsa colored town. Sitting scrunched down on the floorboard of the truck, I struggled to keep his old shirt tucked into the khakis I was wearing. My long black hair whipped in the wind from the opened window. Slats removed his fedora, handing it to me, "Wear this!" he commanded.

I tucked my long hair up into the old hat, long strands escaping, tickling my neck. "Now?" I asked.

"Yeah, now."

I wiggled myself onto the seat, carefully avoiding the poncho covering the .45 and the rifle, and looked out onto Deep Greenwood, the black Wall Street of Tulsa, "Little Africa" as some people called it. The day was hot, the air still and heavy with thunderheads building in the southwest sky. A few Negroes strolled along the street while others sat on porches, the steady whish of church fans the only movement.

Slats, face impassive, eyes straight ahead, continued driving until we reached a fringe area filled with pool halls and bars. Negro men leaned against the buildings, or sat on wood planks supported by bricks, taking advantage of the little shade offered by ripped sheet metal awnings, the slices drooping like palm leaves above their heads.

Without taking his eyes from the street and the surroundings, my father tapped the .30-30 under the poncho. "Get it," he said.

I retrieved the rifle, resting it on my knees, my right hand touching the stock, the wood comforting, familiar to the touch. "Here?" I asked.

"Chalk beer joints," he said disgustedly, slowing down the old truck, and turning into an alley next to a one-story clapboard building with a large silver hayhook painted on the front. Parking next to a loading dock at the back of the building, Slats turned off the engine. Staring at the dock, he said, "Help me unload, then get back in the truck. Don't do anything. Don't say anything. You savvy?"

Opening the door, keeping the dock in sight, he secured the .45 in the back waist band of the khakis, saying, "First sign of trouble, fire up this truck and get the hell out of here."

Slats looked at the rifle, then stared at me for a long time. "Not yet," he said quietly.

We worked quietly unloading the whiskey onto the weathered dock. There was little movement in the alley or

the street, only a small stray cat staring at us from a huge trash pile next to the building. It was hot work. Thick, damp strands of hair slipped out from the fedora, irritating my neck, sticking to my shirt drenched with sweat. I wished we'd brought water instead of all this whiskey.

Finishing, Slats motioned to me to stand by the trash pile while he banged away at the back door. The cat stared at me, the tip of its tail flicking back and forth. Several minutes passed before a huge Negro man known as Big George Baker stepped outside. He stood several inches taller and a hundred pounds heavier than my father. Big George was very dark with black hair cropped close to the head. His shirt, loose and sloppy over patched jeans, had the sleeves cut out, exposing huge muscled arms. A knife scar zig-zagged its way down his left forearm.

Slats gestured to the cases of whiskey, Big George nodding approval. My father turned, motioning to me. I approached the dock slowly. Big George, his mouth slowly working a chew of tobacco, stared at me. As I placed my hands on the weathered wood, ready to hoist myself up onto the dock, Big George pointed at me. "What's this?" he asked my father. I dropped down.

"My daughter Jessica," Slats answered.

Big George spit a large stream of tobacco juice, turning to the cases of whiskey, saying, "Don't need no white girls here."

I began a slow retreat to the truck, stopping again as Slats responded, "She's my right-hand man."

Big George turned around from the whiskey, glancing first at my father and then at me, saying, "All I see down there is bad luck." He spit another stream, wiping his mouth on his shirt tail. I continued my retreat, taking one small step at a time. Big George hoisted a case of whiskey onto his shoulder as if it were a sack of feathers, and placed it inside the back room of the pool hall.

"You buying that whiskey?" my father asked.

Big George grabbed another case, saying, "You selling it, ain't you?"

"Let's see your money," Slats said quietly.

Big George's shoulders stiffened, and without turning around he said, "Don't carry that much on me, mister." Stepping toward the door, Big George said, "Money's inside."

As my father removed the .45 from the waist band of his khakis, I placed my hand on the truck door. Slats aimed the revolver, pulled back the hammer, the sound strangely loud. "Put your money down, Big George," Slats said.

Big George stood very still, facing the back door, and said, "You're a white man in colored town. What you think's gonna happen if you pull that trigger?"

"Just know what I want is all."

Big George stared at me. "Ain't right," he said.

"Not much is," Slats answered quietly.

Big George said, "She stays in the truck."



"Got no problem with that," my father answered.

The two men stared at each other, faces impassive.

"Out of sight!" Big George said.

"Out of sight," Slats agreed.

"No need to talk out here anymore," Big George said, glancing about. "Too many eyes and ears," he continued.

"You buying that whiskey or not." Slats said.

Big George sighed, fishing around in his pocket, handing Slats a wad of money. I walked back to the dock, watching the two men work together, quickly stacking the cases of whiskey in the back room. Finished, Big George motioned for us to step inside, my father going before me. The room was dark, the air close and musty. The cases of whiskey were stacked next to one wall. A makeshift desk of boards and bricks, several chairs, shelves with boxes, and photographs lined another wall. The largest picture, edges curling in the dry heat around penny-nails, showed a slimmer Big George, dressed in a World War I uniform, standing in formation with a group of black veterans. The second photograph, nicely framed in carved wood, captured Big George in a dress suit, and standing next to him were a strikingly attractive woman and a boy, a bit younger than me.

Big George filled the room with his huge frame. He seemed antsy, nervous as he said, "Wait here." He opened a door, stepping into the pool hall. A rush of slightly

cooler air carrying the odors of tobacco, whiskey, and urine marked his passing, the door shutting firmly behind him.

Slats leaned against the back wall, his eyes on the pool hall door. Scared, I started pacing the room, chewing on my fingernails.

"What you doing?" Slats asked.

Not wanting my father to know I was afraid, I began swinging my arms, taking great clumping strides. "Like this?" I asked my father.

"Like what?"

"Is this how a bootlegger walks?" My father stared at me, his face dark, eyebrows scrunched together.

The pool hall door opened as I strutted about the room. Big George motioned for us to enter. Following Slats, I walked into a long room, the pine board floor patched with flattened tin cans. Dirty windows, half-covered with deep green shades, lined one wall and the front of the building. A crudely made bar ran along the back wall with card tables and chairs crowding the space in front of it. Towards the front, deep in shadows, pool tables formed a rectangular maze. Cue racks and yellowing pictures were tacked to the plaster walls.

"What's she doing?" Big George asked, jerking his thumb back at me.

"Being a fool," Slats answered.

"Ain't no game, mister," a voice boomed out from behind us. Slats and I whirled about, staring at a slender, wiry

black man, his face long and narrow with hair curling about his ears. He stepped away from behind the bar.

"Luther Bohanon." Big George said. Then gesturing with his thumb at the bar, he said, "And this is Hookie Smith."

A short, burly black man using a silver-painted hayhook, hoisted himself over the bar top, landing lightly on his feet just in front of us. The hayhook, tightly bound with baling wire to a wooden stub, served as his left hand.

Slats, face impassive, studied both men, then looked at Big George, saying, "It's hot. We're thirsty." Following my father, I sat down with him at the table closest to the back door. I nibbled at my fingernails. Slats looked expectantly at Big George, saying, "We'd like some water."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thought we weren't gonna go," I said, pushing the .30-30 and fedora across the seat, closer to Slats. The sun was low in the western sky, the light blinding as the truck bounced along a deeply rutted pasture trail. My father's hands gripped the steering wheel, elbows out, arms straining to stay in control. To the right of us, a small ravine chiseled its way across the red earth.

"We need the money," Slats answered.

"You need the money," I said, chewing on a particularly stubborn thumbnail. "Sides, Big George and them don't want us."

"Oh, they want us all right."

I stared at him, saying, "To get killed. You heard 'em. This old man's crazy!"

"It's a test, that's all. Big George wants to know if we're gonna be straight with them." My father turned, looked at me, saying, "Look, just take the rifle and hide in the trees. That's all you gotta do.

"I ain't gonna do it," I said, shoving the rifle and fedora next to him.

"Jessie, we do this and we'll be on our way. We'll get that plane and, you'll see, things'll get better."

"Everything was fine 'till you quit the lumber yard."

"Couldn't be helped," he said, turning in time to dodge an old tree stump.

"Then get a job somewhere else." I shook my head, black hair tumbling about my shoulders.

"Been through all of this, Jessie."

"Don't like it."

"Lots of people do what they don't like."

"Don't mean I have to," I said.

"Hold on!" he said, the truck jerking its way across the ruts. I grabbed onto the .30-30 with one hand and the door with the other, my head snapping back and forth until Slats righted us. Sighing, he said, "Sun's getting awful low, Jessie. We're late. Best go through the plan again."

"No! I'm sick of it."

"It's our first time. The old man don't need to know about you."

"I ain't doing it," I said, scooting the fedora and rifle even closer to him.

"Got no choice, Jessie," he said, pushing the stuff back at me.

Staring at him, I said, "Not fair!"

Slats stopped the truck. I felt his eyes on me, but I ignored him, turning to look out the window, studying a small stand of blackjack trees a short distance away, the leaves gray with a light coating of dust. "Grab your hat and rifle and get out of the truck," he commanded.

"No."

"Jessica!"

"Big George said I was to stay in the truck."

"Big George ain't your daddy," my father answered, his fingers drumming the steering wheel. Sighing, he asked, "Why do you have to fight me on everything? Your mother never did."

"Well, she's dead now, ain't she," I said.

The drumming stopped. "Get the hell out of the truck," he said quietly.

I turned to look at him. His eyes were dark, eyebrows scrunched together in a great frown. I grabbed the fedora, poking my hair up inside of it, opened the door. He handed me the rifle and pointed to the stand of blackjack trees. "Wait there," he said.

I nodded, and stepped out of the truck. My father's face was still dark, his lips a thin straight line. Never

looking at me, he said, "Think smart, Jessie. Stay put for once. And keep that rifle ready, you hear me? We ain't out here for target practice." He put the truck in gear, easing his way down the road.

The rifle felt unusually heavy as I looked about me. The country was desolate with patches of native grass, clumps of blackjacks and cedars, and ravines. A lone red-tailed hawk rode an air thermal while scissortails flitted about the trees. I walked the short distance to the small stand of blackjacks, grunting when I saw poison ivy growing along the trunks. I slowly made my way into the trees, their thick leaves and trunks shutting out the setting sun. The air was cool, moist, and I felt movement on my forearms. Glancing at them, I noticed goosebumps, and a slight shiver went through me. The place was dark, eerie, and I wanted to leave.

It was several minutes before I spotted our truck. Slats, .45 tucked in the back waist band of his khakis, walked slowly towards an old barn standing in a small clearing. A grizzly old man peeked out the door.

"Get outta here!" the old man yelled.

Slats kept walking, saying, "Hookie sent me."

The old man spit and said, "Don't know him. Go away!"

"And Big George," Slats continued.

The barn door opened a bit more, "You alone?" the old man asked.

"Ain't nobody out here but you and me."

The old man stepped outside, eyes set deep in his face, white eyebrows shadowing them while a long strawberry-colored beard tied into pigtails covered the front of his overalls. With one hand holding onto the door, he breathed in deeply, nostrils flaring, "You a river bottom boy, ain't you," he said. My father stiffened. "I can smell it," the old man continued, tapping his nose with a long index finger. Suddenly, he swiveled his body in my direction, his eyes studying the stand of trees. I moved behind one of them, peeking around its trunk. The old man stood for some moments, staring, I thought, directly at me. Clenching his hands tight, he turned, facing my father, asking "Sure you're alone?"

"Quit stalling, old man." my father said quietly.

"It's a big load, boy. Think you can handle it?"

"I can handle whatever you got," Slats answered.

"Yeah, that's what they all say." The old man spit, dust rising in tiny clouds where it landed on the dry dirt.

"I ain't them."

The old man pushed the door opened, saying, "Just a different color, that's all."

Uneasy, I slipped closer to the small clearing as my father and the old man stacked two crates on the truck bed. Slats opened one of the bottles from a crate, and took a swig.

"Good stuff, ain't it," the old man said.

Wiping his mouth on his shirt sleeve, Slats answered, "Seems fair enough."

The two men worked steadily for some time, stacking the crates onto the truck bed. Eventually tiring, the old man leaned against the truck while Slats walked back into the barn for another load. The sun was just above the horizon, shadows deepening among the stand of blackjack trees. Suddenly chilled, I shifted position, a small twig popping underneath my boot. The old man stiffened, staring at the trees, his body still, erect like a deer when it first senses danger. I hid behind a tree, taking quick glances at the clearing as Slats emerged from the barn with two more crates. My father hoisted the crates onto the truck bed, wiped his hands, and asked the old man, "Getting dark. You gonna help or stare at a bunch of trees all night?"

The old man kept looking to the trees, his face flushed, body tensed, poised. "They come out at dark, you know," he said. I glanced about, the shadows deep around me. My body brushed a tree limb, the leaves fluttering against my arm. Licking his lips, the old man turned to my father, asking, "Ever see them?" My father stared at him. The old man nodded as he turned to face the trees once again. "I have," he continued. "Twice. Down on the bluffs by the river." Raising his arms, hands outward, fingers sketching his vision into the air, he said, "Lord, what a sight. Dressed in white gowns they was, like angels. Flames shooting up in the air right straight out of the holy



cross. Burning the sky. A cleansing they called it, a cleansing."

"You ain't scaring me, old man," Slats said, looking at the stand of trees as if speaking to me. He nudged the old man towards the barn.

Pointing his finger at Slats, the old man said, "Trouble's riding behind you, boy. I smell it."

Frightened, I moved closer to the clearing, flushing a pair of quail, their wings whirring in the air. "You ain't no different from them niggers, are you, boy," the old man growled.

My father pressed a roll of bills in the old man's hand, then quickly jumped inside the truck, starting the engine, the noise loud and abrasive in the small clearing.

Raising his fist into the air, the old man yelled, "Them angels are coming. Bringing fire and brimstone, they are. You hear me, boy? You hear me!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Thought you said the old man wasn't crazy," I said, scooting the kerosene lamp next to the .30-30 propped on the kitchen table.

"Didn't think he was, Jessie," Slats answered, staring at the airplane advertisement pasted on the wall.

I rubbed the rifle barrel, cleaning the same spot over and over. "We shouldn't have gone."

"You should have stayed put like I told you."

"Big George and them set us up!"

"Told you it was just a test," Slats said.

"Told you they don't want us," I answered, propping the rifle next to the chair. "Could've gotten us killed!"

My father turned, looked at the rifle, saying, "I'll finish that. Go on to bed." I picked up the rifle, checking the barrel. "Jessie, I said go on now," he continued.

"Gotta keep it clean. You told me that, remember?"

"Don't fight me on this, Jessie."

"Never know when you're gonna need it," I said, flicking away imaginary dust from the rifle, then clicked the lever. "A man's gotta have something he can depend on." I sighted the rifle at the window, saying, "Right? Ain't that what you told me?"

Slats reached over my shoulder, grabbing the rifle from my hands. "Go to bed, Jessie!" he said, his voice low and thick.

I whirled away from him, dashing out of the house, running across the yard, my long black hair streaming behind me. Slowing when I reached the end of our driveway, I stared at the road stretching before me like a silver ribbon in the moonlight. I stopped, scooping up a handful of small rocks, and chunked them one at a time at a fence post across the road. The screen door slammed. Feeling my father's eyes watching me, I pitched several rocks at once.

"Jessie! It's time for bed," Slats called.

I reached down, picked up a large rock, shifting it from hand to hand. "Come on now, you hear," my father said. I cupped my right hand around the stone, smooth and cold to the touch, drawing it close to my chest. Leaning back on my right foot, I pitched the rock, watching it spin through the air until I heard a solid whump as it hit, splintering the old fence post.

"Jessica Elizabeth McCormack!" Slats yelled.

Turning, I marched over the yard, dry grass crackling beneath my shoes, feet pounding up the front steps, across the wooden porch, past my father, and into the house. I went straight to my room, flopped down on the bed, sinking deep into the feather mattress. I heard Slats click the rifle lever, examining the chamber, then prop it next to the door. After a few minutes, I slipped down the hallway, peering into the dining room. Slats sat at the table, head resting in his hands. I walked softly back to my bedroom.

The next morning Slats rolled up the living room rug, exposing the trap door to the underground room. The dank odor of moist clay seeped into the air as I handed bottles of whiskey down the opening to my father. Slats carefully stacked the whiskey on makeshift shelves lining the walls. He looked up at me, saying, "Scoot them over by the edge. I'll finish up while you get ready for town."

"You got the list?"

"Right here," he said, patting his shirt pocket.

Thanks to Hammer Joe, our first whiskey delivery to Big George brought us enough cash money to wipe the slate clean. Today, we'd pay our bills, buy a few groceries and clothes, plus make a small deposit at the bank. Towards our future, Slats told me. *Towards the airplane*, I thought.

Our destination that day was the town of Drumright which sprang up on a succession of steep hills during the early days of the oil boom. Often, the sidewalks were crowded with people calling to each other in Lebanese, Syrian, Greek, Yiddish, and Americanized Scotch-Irish. And, frequently, big-boned men whipped teams of horses pulling wagons laden with heavy oil field equipment up the severe grades. Once, when Mother was alive, we watched a team stall, the horses struggling, hooves slipping as the driver shouted and slashed their flanks with a whip. Bodies flecked with foam, knees buckling, the horses eventually collapsed into a heap, their breath stirring the dust, red clouds hanging in the air like curtains.

Today, Slats parked by our bank. After scooting two large rocks before the front tires, he handed me a wad of money, saying, "Pay Silas what we owe him, then pick up some shirts."

Dodging cars and potholes, I crossed the street to the dry goods store. The odor of sweat mingling with new fabrics greeted me as I opened the door. Ceiling fans suspended like spiders from the pressed-tin ceiling pushed around the hot air while Silas, the owner, glasses perched

on the edge of his nose, worked the counter, ringing up sales from one customer after another. Amanda, his wife, trying to keep merchandise arranged on the tables, wiped sweat from her neck with a handkerchief as people rummaged through stacks of shirts and khakis. In the shoe section, a tiny girl, red hair curled like plump sausages, sang and danced about the store, her new black shoes tapping against the wooden floor.

I worked my way to one of the tables. After several minutes and being pushed by customers, I slipped between two women, quickly grabbed several shirts, and eased myself away from the crush of people. Smiling at Silas, I placed my purchase by the cash register.

Silas glanced at the shirts, then pushed them towards me, whispering, "Can't do it for you, Jessie. Not anymore."

I pulled out the wad of money from the pocket of my khakis, thumbed it slowly, being sure Silas saw the bills, then placed it on the counter, saying, "Will this cover it?"

Silas quickly grabbed the money, turning his back to me while he counted it. "All there?" I asked.

Silas turned, facing me, saying, "How's about we just keep the rest on your account?"

"Reckon I'll take what's left."

Disappointed, Silas spent several moments looking up our account in a big ledger book, adding the figure to the total amount of the shirts. He placed my change on the counter.

"How's about a receipt," I said, my fingers reaching for the money, only to be stopped by a man's hand grasping my own, squeezing it until I winced with the pain. I looked over my shoulder, and into the blue eyes of Jack Newley.

"That's nigger money, Silas," Jack said, his eyes noting my fedora, shirt, and khakis. "We don't want none of that 'round here, now do we."

Forcing myself to stare at Jack's face with its two day growth of beard, I heard Silas quickly wrap the shirts in brown paper, white twine whirling off the spool as he flipped the package first one way and then the other. Jack smiled at me, briefly relaxing his fingers. I jerked my hand away, taking the money with me as Silas shoved the package at me. Whirling around, I walked out of the store, hearing Silas say, "When people put their money down, Jack Newley, I do business."

"Maybe we should talk about that," Jack answered, his voice low and thick.

I never mentioned that day to my father. Only later, after the killings, after so many nights of regret, did I ever think that if I had only told Slats, then, maybe, none of it would have happened. Or, at least, maybe, we would have been better prepared that night. But then, I tell myself that Slats had to have known we were heading for trouble. And, that Jack Newley would be part of it. Maybe, though, we were so much into it by that time, my father just couldn't stop it.

But then, no one could stop Slat McCormack when he was deep into his dreams, especially those of money and airplanes. For my father during that time, making money had no boundaries, not even when it came to color. And, it would be the crossing of those boundaries, along with our being watched by Jack Newley and others, that would nearly destroy us.

For we were being watched, by whites, and by blacks, especially at Hookie's. My father and I would step into the cool darkness of the pool hall, bottles clinking against each other in the cardboard boxes we carried, and somewhere deep in the back of the room, blues from a harmonica seeped into the air, then stopped as I walked into the light by the pool tables. Those men knew what my father never seemed to realize until it was too late.

\* \* \* \* \*

Late in Indian Summer, 1920, we purchased our first plane, a JN-4, from Red Williams. The air was cool, crisp with the promise of autumn. The planes, an incredible mixture of wood, wire, and varnished linen, were lined up on the tarmac, sitting still and quiet like dragonflies on the smooth surface of a pond.

For the past several weeks my father had taken lessons from Red. Day after day I watched Slat put the Jenny through maneuvers. Barrel rolls. Loops. Anything he dared to do. After my father soloed for the first time, after he

landed, he scooped me up in his arms, spinning me about. It was the happiest I had seen him since Mother died.

On the day we bought our Jenny, I wore Red's World War I flight helmet, the dark leather cracked with exposure to the sun, rain, and wind. My father positioned goggles carefully over my eyes, his body trembling as he helped me into the plane. "Time to fly, Jessie," he said. My fingers touched the stiff fabric, the smooth wood surrounding the cockpit. Slats fastened the seat belt, giving my shoulder a quick squeeze before climbing into the other cockpit. He looked about, shouted, "Clear!" then nodded to Red who spun the propeller as my father made contact. The Jenny roared to life, the vibrations shaking my body as Slats taxied across the rough pasture, lining up for take-off. He steadily increased the power, the JN-4 speeding down the dirt-packed runway until I felt the plane lift, wobble a bit, then take to the air. We climbed until Slats banked a hard left, and my world as I had always known it changed.

Below us, the Cimarron River, no longer restricted to an earth-bound perspective, snaked across the land, doubling back on itself, bordering farms of mottled colors, green, gray, brown, and red. Above a mile section, my father danced a figure-eight, corner to corner, hard right, hard left. The earth seemed to shrug, loosening itself, rolling this way and that with the plane's movements. Slats pushed the JN-4 into a climb, picked a spot on the horizon, then rotated the Jenny around it, a giant barrel roll taking up



the entire sky. I thought we were like eagles that day, unfettered by the world's problems and loneliness.

Later, I drove our old truck home, my father piloting the plane across the sky, landing it in our pasture. The next few days were spent with the Jenny, bootlegging momentarily forgotten as Slats coached me on the art of flying.

The day I soloed for the first time, my father was edgy, pacing back and forth as he watched me go through a check of the plane and equipment.

"Remember what I told you," Slats said.

"I won't forget," I answered, kneeling down, chewing on a stubborn fingernail as I inspected a tire.

"You're biting your nails again, Jessie. Maybe we better go through it one more time."

I stood up, kicking the tire, saying, "Let's get on with it."

Slats walked alongside the Jenny, his fingers tracing the fuselage. "Nothing fancy, now, you hear."

I groaned, climbed into the cockpit, my fingers trembling as I fastened the flight helmet, the leather soft and cool to the touch.

"Just take her up and land her," my father said, walking around the plane, checking it one more time. "Like we've been practicing," he continued.

Irritated, I shouted, "For God's sake, I remember!"

Slats stopped by the cockpit, looking up at me, his

eyes dark, eyebrows scrunched together, saying, "Gotta think smart up there, Jessie." I motioned to him to spin the propeller, but he remained standing by the plane. "Remember how she drags a bit," he said.

"I won't remember anything if you don't stop talking to me," I yelled. "Let's go!"

"Nothing fancy," my father called over his shoulder as he walked over to the propeller, placing his hands on it, spinning it while I made contact. The JN-4's motor caught, its deep rumbling shaking the plane, disguising the trembling in my hands and legs.

I eased the Jenny over the grass, glancing once over my shoulder at Slats walking behind the plane, hands gesturing, mouth moving with last minute instructions. I waved, shouting, "Wait 'til you see what I can do," the words lost in the roar of the plane. Turning around, I looked out and over the left wing as I taxied the plane to our small runway. Making my last check, I increased the power, the Jenny bumping, speeding down the runway until I felt her lift, wings wobbling as a line of trees rushed towards me.

Coaxing the Jenny to climb, I yelled, "Come on, old girl! You can do it!" until the plane managed to lift just enough, barely clearing the trees. I put the Jenny into a steady ascent, and looked out to the world beyond me. The horizon, shrouded in a blue haze, blurred the boundary of sky and earth. I was alone, free, and happy for the first time in my life. Not even my father could stop me here.

Coaxing the JN-4, I pushed her nose straight up, climbing until the plane seemed to fall backwards, rushing towards the ground, the pressure pushing me down into the open cockpit while the wire supports on the wings sang in the wind. The earth spun, farms, fields, trees, whirling together until I leveled the plane. For the first time in a very long time, I laughed, enjoying this freedom, this space that was solely mine. If my father gave me anything worth having in this life, then he gave me the skies, the only place I would ever truly call home, my first and only love.

Pushing the plane into another climb, I flew south towards Drumright, then made a slow, easy bank to the left, circling back home, executing a perfect landing. I was very pleased with myself as I climbed out of the cockpit. My father, however, wasn't.

"What was that?" Slats yelled, running towards me.

"What was what?"

"Nothing fancy! Didn't I say that? Nothing fancy!"

I unfastened the flight helmet, shaking out my long hair, saying, "Guess you taught me better than you thought."

My father grabbed my arms, shaking me, saying, "Gotta think smart, Jessie! You'll get yourself killed if you don't." I pulled away from him, and began walking to the house. "This old world don't allow for no mistakes, Jessie!" my father called after me.

No mistakes allowed. Gotta think smart. Unknown to us, our mistakes were coming straight us, but thinking smart

was wrapped up into buying the JN-4, the beginning of a lifetime of flying, the only thing I've ever experienced that I couldn't get enough of. Clear mornings, windy days, snow. It didn't matter as long as I could fly. For Slats was right, the wings do sing to you.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Got some clothes for your girl," Big George said, scooting a cardboard box across the pool table. Slats, chair kicked back, feet resting on the rail, glanced at the box, then went back to whittling a piece of wood, saying, "Much obliged, but Jessie's got plenty."

"They're from the wife."

Looking into a broken mirror tacked to the wall, I quickly twirled my hair into a makeshift bun, securing it with pins while I walked over to the table.

"Right thoughtful of her."

"Said I was to give them to you." Big George nudged the box closer to Slats, saying, "They're clean."

Slats lowered the chair, his feet resting lightly on the floor. "Don't doubt it a bit. Just don't need them is all."

Big George looked at me, saying, "She works for white folks. Rich white folks. Big house. New clothes every season."

I nodded, pulling the box closer as Slats stared at me for a few moments, then stood up, motioning for Big George

to follow him. "About this next delivery. What's this Ada woman like?"

The two men walked towards the front windows, Big George shaking his head, saying, "She's one mean bitch, don't think she ain't. Gotta be real careful 'round her."

I opened the box, a mound of colors, textures before me. Plunging my hand deep into the clothes, I lifted up a pale green gorgette dress, raising it to the light, the slightest hint of a fragrance filling the air around me. Roses. Rosewater. Mother's favorite.

Even today, after all these years, there are times when I walk about my home, a place my mother never knew, and I think I can detect her fragrance, that light splash of rosewater she always wore. And, sometimes, in the late spring when I have the windows opened, when there's the faint hint of roses on the breeze, I walk outside, expecting to see her strolling back and forth on the porch, her slender fingers toying with a long strand of black beads, facets catching the light.

There are times now when the memory of her is so strong within me, I turn around in my mind to catch a glimpse of her, but it's as though she walks behind a veil, a shape I can never quite touch. And, it is in those moments my father's image crowds my mind, filling my thoughts as he did all my life.

My fingers, nails chewed and split, caught the green fabric, creating small pulls in the gorgette dress. *Not for*

me, I thought, *not while Slats has anything to say about it.* I dropped the dress into the box, the pale green material swirling across blue, white, gray fabrics.

Big George, his voice sincere and urgent, said, "She knows you're coming, Slats. What you look like and all. Ain't got no idea about Jessie, though."

"Gives us the edge then, don't you think?" asked Slats.

"Better if she don't know at all."

"We can handle it," Slats said, looking at me. Nodding at my father, I grabbed the fedora.

"Don't think so, Slats," Big George said, walking over to the door, blocking it with his huge frame. "I'm going with you."

I rode up front with my father while Big George, shotgun hidden under a tarp along with boxes of whiskey, rode on the truck bed. We traveled for some time, Slats winding our way over rickety wooden bridges, passing by cottonwood trees crowding creek banks, oil filming the water's surface. Eventually, my father eased the truck onto a grassy parking area by a tar-papered building, parking close to the back entrance, a large elm shading it.

Big George, shotgun cradled in his arms, walked over to Slats's side of truck, pointed at me, saying, "Remember our deal."

Slats answered, "I remember." He turned, looked at me, and said, "Stay in the truck."

My father, .45 tucked into the back waistband of his

khakis, carried a box of whiskey to the back door of the building. Big George knocked three times, paused, then knocked twice more before positioning himself along the wall. I slipped out of the truck, rifle in hand, hiding myself on Slats's side, and peered over the hood.

Ada, a large-boned black woman wearing a print dress with an apron, revolver bulging from its waistband, opened the door. "So, you're Big George's friend," she said as my father nodded at her.

I glanced about, making my way to the elm tree. Slats, carrying the box, stood in the doorway. Ada looked him over, then turned, calling over her shoulder to my father, "You gonna close that door, mister? You're letting in flies."

My father sat the box on the threshold, his body leaning against the door frame. "It stays open," he said.

Ada stared hard at Slats, spots of color deepening on her cheeks, saying, "Suit yourself." Big George inched closer to the doorway as I slipped behind the tree. Spotting me, Big George frowned, motioning for me to leave. I smiled, shaking my head at him. Pointing to the box, Ada said, "Just leave it. I'll give the money to Big George later.

Slats pulled out his .45, aiming it at Ada, saying, "Deal was you'd have the money right here. No money, no whiskey, Ada," Slats said.

"Charley!" Ada yelled. "Charley, get your ass in here.

Now!" I peered around the tree as Charley, a scar-faced man in his thirties carrying a shotgun, appeared in the room.

"Get this man his money," Ada said.

Big George stepped through the doorway, shotgun leveled at Charley. Rifle ready, I moved from the tree, glancing about me as I walked to the building. "Nobody goes anywhere," Slats said.

I looked around the door frame as Ada reached for her revolver, saying to Big George, "What the hell you doing here!"

"Protecting my interests," Big George answered.

Slats, .45 still aimed at Ada, reached out his hand, saying, "That's real friendly of you, Ada, to give me your gun." Ada, hair damp with sweat, glanced about her, then carefully removed the revolver. "That's good. Now, ease it out real slow. Good. Empty it on the floor," my father said. Ada dumped the shells, looking at Slats expectantly. "Now, put the gun on the table. Good."

Turning his attention to Charlie, Slats said, "I think you know the routine." Charley popped out the shells, then placed the shotgun on the floor. "Slide it over to me, Charley. Stock first," Slats commanded.

While Big George covered him, my father removed a bottle of whiskey, smashing it against the door frame, saying, "No later about it. Big George is here and waiting. I'd say you bought yourself some whiskey." He removed another bottle, pitching it against the wall, glass



shattering, whiskey streaking the dingy paint. "Your call, Ada," Slats said.

Ada decided that full bottles of whiskey were better than none at all. She reached into her apron pocket, removing a wad of money, throwing it at Slats and Big George. I eased back from the doorway, and walked quickly to the truck. Slipping into the front seat, I held the door closed as Slats, his face dark and angry, strode to the truck while Big George covered for them.

Slats was quiet, staring at the tar-papered building. Big George, glancing about first, leaned into the window, saying to me, "You was to stay in the truck." I shrugged, removed the fedora, shook out my hair. Frustrated, Big George slapped the top of the truck, saying, "Told you this ain't no place for a white girl."

\* \* \* \* \*

Although business was good with Big George, my father wanted more money. According to him, the JN-4 was only the beginning. Using his oil field connections, we branched out, flying the Jenny to make quick deliveries to the roustabouts. We made our first contact in early May, 1921.

The day was radiant, pastures green, dotted with cattle below us. Slats skimmed the Cimarron River, nosing the plane up over the bridge, and flying us directly over a group of roustabouts, their clothes smeared with red mud and oil, waving us to land. We circled the oil derricks several

times before my father put the plane down on a short stretch of dirt road. While I unlashd bottles from the Jenny, stacking them on the ground, Slats entertained the workers crowded about him.

Gesturing to me, Slats said, "Took to it right away." He smoothed his hair, snapped his fingers, saying, "Yes, sir. Took her up a couple of times, then she flew that Jenny like there was no tomorrow."

Walking over to Slats, I removed the flight helmet, shaking out my long hair as he introduced me, saying, "This is my right-hand man. She'll be doing business with you next time."

We made good money that day, handing out bottles of whiskey, and collecting money from the roustabouts. Everything was going well until a car parked a short distance away. Jack Newley stepped out, followed by Buddy Johnson. Malcomb Burnett, shotgun in his arms, waited beside the car. Slats, face dark and eyebrows scrunched together, said, "Load it up, Jessie."

I picked up the remaining bottles, stashing them in the Jenny while keeping an eye on Jack.

"You lost?" my father asked Jack.

Stopping a few paces away, Jack smiled, saying, "Just here to talk to the boys a bit. Got a meeting tonight. Wanta come?"

Slats motioned to me to start the plane, saying, "I'm not much for meetings, Jack."

"Running with the wrong kind, Slats," Jack said.

"Is that so."

Jack moved closer to Slats, flicking dust from my father's shirt, saying, "Need to make some changes."

Slats stood still, his voice quiet, deadly, "Changes?" he asked.

Smiling, Jack said, "You've been seen. You and the girl. In Tulsa nigger town."

My father turned, began walking to the JN-4, saying, "Fire it up, Jessie." I made contact while Jack ran after Slats, slapping him on the shoulder, shouting, "Ain't right!"

Slats whirled around, saying, "You still here, Jack? Thought you had to talk to the boys." And just as quickly, Slats climbed into the plane, yelling, "Get us out of here, Jessie. Now!"

I increased the speed, the Jenny bouncing down the dirt road as Jack ran alongside of us, his voice hoarse with screaming over the noise of the plane, "It ain't natural, Slats McCormack. It ain't natural!"

\* \* \* \* \*

The men came one night in late May of 1921. Slats, standing tall and slender in the porch light, .45 in his right hand, asked, "What you boys want?" Carrying the .30-30, I stepped closer to my father.

Buddy Johnson and Malcomb Burnett stayed in the shadows

as Jack Newley said, "Don't come around tomorrow."

"That's delivery day."

Jack shrugged, "Not anymore."

"Who says?"

Jack smiled, picked up a stick, tapped it against a tree. Dropping into a squat, he began drawing in the dirt. "You a religious man, Slats?"

Slats grunted, "You here to witness to me?"

Jack stood, wiping his hands on his trousers, and stared at me, saying, "Ever wonder what Christ wrote in the dirt?" Smiling, he looked at Slats, and said, "Stay home." Jack walked backward a few steps, saying, "And keep her home, too." He turned, and the three men walked into the darkness, Jack calling as they disappeared from view, "Stay away from those Tulsa niggers, Slats."

Once inside our house, we bolted doors, covered windows, and checked our supply of ammunition. When Slats was satisfied, he rolled up the living room rug, revealing the trapdoor. Deep inside the underground room with its dank odor of red clay, I held the kerosene lantern while Slats checked our whiskey inventory. He looked up at me, saying, "We'll stay put a few days, then unload this in Tulsa."

"Hookie's?" I asked.

"Without a doubt."

On May 31st we loaded the truck. My father was edgy, glancing about, his movements quick and jerky. I chewed on

what was left of my fingernails, checking the .30-30, making sure it was loaded, and within reach. Slats positioned the .45 next to him while behind the seat, covered with an old poncho, was a double-barrel sawed-off shotgun and our ammunition.

He took his time driving to Tulsa, taking backroads, even using cowtrails through pastures when necessary. After we crossed the Arkansas River, he took a circular route to Hookie's, winding our way downtown. Street lamps, their lights glowing softly in the dusk, revealed deserted sidewalks and streets. Puzzled, Slats looked at me. I shrugged, then peered out the window as he drove several more blocks, turned a corner, driving us straight into hell.

Torches, their light weaving and bobbing about the street as the men holding them ran first one way and then another, revealed a swirling mass of Negroes and whites fighting by the courthouse. Stray bullets ricocheted off building walls, the sounds pinging and whining in our ears along with men cursing and groaning. A man who looked like Luther Bohanon, or, at least, what was left of him, crawled along the sidewalk, his face slashed. Blood poured through a gash in his shirt, pooling onto the concrete beside him. He raised his head briefly, looking at us, before collapsing face down.

"Get us out of here," I screamed.

Slats whipped the truck around, but not before some of the mob saw us, their shouts frightening as they pelted us

with rocks. Truck gears grinding, my father yelled, "Get down, Jessie. Get down!"

I scrambled to the floor board, holding the rifle in my hands, as Slats weaved first this way and that. A white man, running alongside of us, grabbed a door, trying to hold on as my father drove out of the area. The man's face was bloody, his eyes wild as he reached for the steering wheel, trying to grab it from Slats's hands. Using the butt of the .45, my father beat the man across the side of his head and face until he finally let go, his body crumpling to the street.

Slats drove down alleys, crossing vacant lots, jumping curbs as he made our way to Hookie's. Several blocks away from the pool hall, my father stopped the truck. The street was deserted of children, only scattered toys and paper blowing in the wind. "Smell that, Jessie?"

I raised up, positioning myself and the rifle on the seat, and leaned out the window. Smoke. Thick and pungent with wood and tar. "Look!" I said, pointing to several fires burning in the distance.

Slats eased the truck down the street, both of us searching the buildings and houses for lights in the windows, or movement of any kind. Nothing. It was if the Rapture had come, and all had been lifted up. No one. Nothing. Not even dogs or cats lurked about the alleys or doorways.

About a block from Hookie's, Slats stopped the truck

again, pointing at an old Ford parked across from the pool hall. Two white men leaned against the car. I pulled down the brim of the fedora, covering part of my face. My father moved the .45 closer to him as I held the rifle in my lap. Slats eased the truck down the street, driving slowly past the car, giving the men a quick nod of recognition.

"Buddy Johnson," Slats said, continuing to drive down the street. "The other one's Malcomb Burnett."

"Couldn't see who was in the car," I said.

"Don't have to," my father sighed, turning the truck down an alley.

"Jack Newley?" I asked, feeling sick inside.

"We better warn Big George," Slats answered.

We parked behind Hookie's pool hall. Slats quickly unloaded the whiskey, stacking the cases on the dock. The smell of smoke was stronger, and, occasionally, we could hear shouting and gunshots in the distance. My father knocked twice on the back door, then scratched the surface with his fingernails. We waited a few moments, my stomach churning, my fingernails chewed down to the quick. He knocked again, three times in rapid succession. The door opened, Big George peering out cautiously, then grabbing our shirts, pulled us into the darkness of the back room, pushing us to one side.

"Hell of a time for a delivery," he said, motioning to Hookie to help him. Big George brought the cases inside the room as Hookie propped open the door. Finishing, Big George

barricaded the door as Hookie walked by us without speaking, entering the pool hall. Wiping his hands on his shirt, Big George looked at Slats, asking, "What brings you to hell?"

"I know those white men out front," Slats answered, quietly.

Deep in the darkness of the pool room, my father paced the floor while Big George worked behind the bar, removing weapons and money, stacking them on the counter. Crouched in the shadows by the windows, Hookie watched Buddy and Malcomb across the street. I sat alone at the back of the room, fedora and rifle on the table before me.

"Sure it was Luther?" Big George asked.

"Looked like him. Hard to tell for sure," Slats answered.

"Luther always did like a good fight."

"Seems to be headed this way. Won't be long."

Big George pointed to the front of the building, saying, "And those men out there? They part of it?"

"Reckon so."

"Should have told us about Jack Newley and his boys, Slats."

Slats stopped pacing, walked over to the bar, bracing his arms against the counter top, saying, "Can't never tell how deep meanness goes in a person. You know that."

"What I know is trouble's riding hard after you. And, what I see is that it's right there across the street."

Uneasy, I stood up, my hand resting lightly on the .30-



30. Catching my movement, Big George pointed at me, saying, "Told you she'd get us all killed!"

"Jessie's got nothing to do with this."

"Where you been living, Slats McCormack," Big George snorted.

Slats looked at me, his eyes soft and sad. He motioned for me to sit down. I remained standing while he turned to Big George, asking, "Got any suggestions?"

"Yeah, get her outta here."

Sighing, Slats said, "I'll make a deal with you. If you and Hookie create a diversion, I'll get Jessie out of here."

Big George stared at him, "You know what you're asking?"

"Do it and we're gone."

"Hookie's got himself to worry about, and I got a family to get outta here. No, Slats. No deal."

"You wanta get your wife and son?" Slats ran his fingers through his hair, saying, "I'll take you there. You all can stay at my place 'till this blows over."

"You're talking crazy."

"No more crazy than you trying to get your family out of here. How you gonna do that? On foot? Don't stand much of a chance, now, do you."

Big George stared at Slats for a long time, then walked over to Hookie, bent down, whispering in his ear. Hookie stood up, nodded, positioning a revolver in his waistband. Without speaking, he walked past me into the back room. I

grabbed my fedora and rifle while Slats and Big George gathered up the money and weapons, my father calling to me as I walked into the back room. Ignoring him, I stood just outside the back door, watching Hookie ease his way alongside the building to the street. I slipped off the dock, following him, my body crouched, rifle secure in my hands. In the lamp light, Hookie, leaning against a porch column, whipped out a long file, and with his left hand began sharpening his hook. Buddy and Malcomb, their bodies relaxed and easy against the old Ford, watched him.

A quick burst of gunfire, accompanied by angry voices closeby, alerted Buddy and Malcomb. Drawing their weapons, they glanced from Hookie to movement down the street. Smoke hung thick in the air, and I could barely hear my father's whistle over the sounds of people running, shouting. I turned slightly, waving to my father as he and Big George loaded the money and weapons into our truck. When I turned back around, Hookie dropped his file into the dirt, slipping out the revolver. It was the last time I would ever see him.

I ran back to the truck, the smoke choking me. I crouched down on the floorboard while Big George covered me with the poncho. Big George, cradling the shotgun, rode up front next to Slats, whose free hand held the .45.

The ride was bumpy, uncomfortably hot under the poncho as Slats maneuvered potholes and executed quick, sudden turns. Big George talked continuously about his wife and

son, pausing only to give my father directions to the Frisco track area where they lived.

Eventually, my father stopped, and through an incredible din of noise, I heard Big George say over and over again, "Sweet Jesus! Oh, sweet Jesus!" I threw back the poncho, making my way onto the seat between the two men, and looked out onto a world of fire. Smoke spiraled into the air from the tracks, flames shooting twenty to thirty feet into the air, tingeing the sky orange and red. Ashes, so thick they looked like snow, coated the ground, the trees, our truck.

Big George stared at Slats who looked away, saying, "They're gone."

"We gotta get Lucy and Jonathan," Big George cried.

"Nobody could live through that," my father answered quietly.

Big George reached over me, grabbing Slats's arm, forcing my father to face him, shouting, "You owe me this!" Big George kicked open the door, grabbed the shotgun, and stepped into hell. Slats groaned, saying, "Cover us!" Taking his revolver, my father opened the door, and ran after Big George. I grabbed my rifle, and hopped out of the truck.

There must be a moment like this during a war when the normal world seems far away, and this new world of chaos, surreal colors and sounds seems to be the only one, the real world. I only know I still wake up in the night hearing the

roar of fire consuming a building, or the rapid bursts of gunfire, and, even the sounds of children screaming. Somehow, it never leaves, filling my life, consuming it. But that night I only knew I was alone. Alone with mad people killing each other.

In the distance, outlined by the light of a fire, Slats ran a zig-zag pattern after Big George. I crouched down, easing my way around the truck when I heard the shouts of men close by. Glancing about me, I ran across the street to a large thicket of lilac bushes. Deep within them I had a good view of the area, hidden from sight.

Jack Newley, Buddy Johnson, Malcomb Burnett, and several other men rushed our truck. "Damn that Slats McCormack! He's here with that nigger of his," Jack yelled. He kicked the truck, saying, "Slats is mine. I don't care what you do with the nigger."

The men divided into two groups, forming a pincer, and set out across the area I'd last seen my father. I felt sick to my stomach, and moved deeper into the lilacs. Armed white men in small groups of three and four, their faces streaked with soot and sweat, roamed about the area. More men arrived, a few at a time, parking their cars and trucks here and there, beginning a blockade of the Frisco tracks. Far away, the sound faint, almost tinny in the smoke-filled air, I heard the clanging of fire trucks.

A quick burst of gunfire to my right startled me. I quickly focused my attention in its direction. Just in the

distance, I heard men's voices shouting excitedly when an explosion in one of the buildings sent flames shooting up into the air. In the false light of the fire I saw Slats emerge from the smoke, half-carrying, half-dragging Big George. The shotgun was missing.

I made my way out of the thicket, checking to see if anyone was about, then walked quickly towards my father, who yelled, "Jessie!" Closing in on Slats and Big George, Jack Newley and Buddy Johnson, their revolvers drawn, cursed, their voices angry, ugly among the sounds of the fire. I looked at my father, his mouth pinched white amid dirt and ashes, blood seeping from wounds in his arm and leg. He stared at me, unseeing for a few moments until I yelled, "Here I am!"

Slats shoved Big George to the ground, shielding him with his body. He motioned to me, pointing at Jack, then took aim at Buddy. In that moment I realized what he wanted me to do. What he had trained me to do. I felt sick deep inside, and suddenly very old as I raised the rifle. Jack rushed towards us, his voice twisted, shouting at my father. Slats yelled, "Jessie!" I sighted the barrel at Jack who stopped suddenly at the sound of my name, glancing about, then finally spotting me with the .30-30.

His face was unusually clean, very white, eyebrows a straight line across his forehead. He stood very still, his mouth forming a round "O" as a slight whoosh of air escaped from his thin lips. I pulled back the hammer. Jack smiled,

taunting me, unnerving me, and my arm began shaking. To my right I heard Slats fire the revolver, and in the next moment, almost without thinking, I fired the rifle. Jack crumpled to the ground. I injected a new shell into the chamber, and fired again, this time at Buddy, my father only wounding him. Slats had taught me well.

I pulled, dragged, and tugged Slats and Big George over to the truck, managing to get both onto the bed. Quickly throwing the old poncho over them, I hopped into the cab, placing the rifle on the seat beside me, and fired up the engine. I eased the truck onto the street, dodging people waving their guns at me, shouting and cursing. I made an abrupt turn into an alley, the deeply rutted road now barricaded with rocks. Looking about me, I spotted a vacant lot a few feet away. I whipped the truck to the left, bouncing over small rocks, driving us between burning buildings, the staccato sounds of lumber collapsing, sheet metal groaning and popping in the heat covering any moans made by Slats and Big George.

I jumped the curb onto the next street, and quickly turned down another street, then another, weaving my way out of the Frisco track area. Behind me, smoke plumes streaked the Tulsa sky a brilliant orange and red. The fire trucks never made it to the Frisco tracks, the blockade of men and vehicles preventing them.

I drove to the riverfront, stopped the truck, checking on the two men. Big George, his head and face a mass of

blood, was unconscious. By the time I reached Sapulpa, he was dead. The doctor told me he wouldn't have made it anyway. But I always believed that when Big George saw his home burning, he thought his wife and son were dead, and he just didn't care anymore.

\* \* \* \* \*

Weeks later, Slats sat on the porch, a stack of small tree branches beside him, shavings about his feet. With his knife he slowly whittled the twigs into pieces, tossing them aside when they became too small to carve anymore. I stood beside him, looking at the pasture and the barn we converted into a hangar for the JN-4.

"I think I'll go up tomorrow," I said.

"It'll be good to fly again," Slats answered.

"We've been away too long."

"You're a good pilot."

"I had a good teacher," I said.

"We need to get to things around here. Weeds are too high. Don't want to start a fire," Slats said, selecting a fresh branch, dragging it across his khakis, the material whispering against the green wood.

"I can do it today."

"No, wait 'till I can help you," he said.

I stretched, walking over to the screen door, opened it, studying the southwest sky. "It's clouding up. Looks like a promise of rain," I said.

"We can always use rain."

"Everything's different now, ain't it?" I closed the screen door, turned, watching my father's movements, awkward from stiff muscles, the blade cutting into the bark, exposing green wood.

"Life has a way of changing on a person," Slats said, stopping his whittling for a moment, and with his boot pushed the shavings into little piles. "You teach somebody something but you got no idea how they're gonna have to use it," he continued.

"Still don't make it right, now does it?"

"No, I reckon it don't."

"Not much of a game anymore."

Slats stared at me for a long time. "Never was," he finally said, turning to select a fresh branch.

We were finished with bootlegging.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the Jenny came business, and, eventually, our airport. Slats and I kept the JN-4 all of these years, eventually housing it in Hangar One at our airport. There, my father tinkered with the plane every day, checking for oil drips, polishing the wood, replacing the linen as needed. It was immaculate.

The day of his first stroke I found him next to the Jenny, his body crumpled against a tire, struggling to lift his now useless right arm with his left one. I called to



him. He didn't hear me. I approached slowly, calling his name with each step. Finally, he looked at me, his face ashen, slightly drawn to one side, sweat dampening his graying hair. It was the first and only time I saw my father cry.

Strange how the residents know he's dead. Sitting here with my father, I've heard their slippers shuffling along the tiled hallway, conversations muting to whispers, then nothing as they stand silently by the closed door of Slats's room. For a few moments they wait, then, with a soft swish of material brushing the wall, they hurry to the dining room, the need for food outweighing the importance of the passing of one of their own.

Earlier this week, I visited my father for the last time, wheeling him outside, where he always wanted to be. The late afternoon sun, brilliant, intense, pierced the trees, shooting light through the leaves. Just in the distance over empty pastures, we could hear a motor, the sound strong as it pulled a fiery red plane up, up, up until it almost seemed to stall before tumbling through the air, the engine roaring to life.

Slats grasped my hand, holding it so tightly it hurt. The sun, so wonderfully brilliant that day, made my eyes water. My father smiled crookedly at me, exclaiming, "I did that!"

*Yes, I thought, we did that.*

There are times now when I wander about the house,

opening closet doors, removing his flight suit and helmet, the fabric and leather cool, soft to the touch. I spend the remainder of the night, drinking coffee, remembering, and waiting for the sky to quicken with light.

I think when there is grief, anger inverts, shaping itself to memory. But, memory can be a fickle thing, selecting moments randomly, thrusting them into our consciousness when we least expect them. And, as children we spend most of our lives trying to explain, trying to understand those emotional gaps in our parents' lives, fashioning some type of reason for ourselves of why we are what we are.

I often think about this legacy parents leave their children, knowing I lived my father's legacy to me. And, sometimes, in those weak moments late at night, I wish I had children. That I, too, could leave something. But, I never married. I never found a man who compared to my father. Or, maybe, I never looked up from work long enough to see any one. But then, I always had the skies.

**MONEY DOWN**  
A Filmscript

FADE IN:

EXT. JN-4 (JENNY) AIRPLANE PASTURE CENTRAL OKLAHOMA DAWN

Black screen. Sound of bottles clinking. Screen gradually lightens with the sunrise, revealing SLATS MCCORMACK, tall, slender, thirtyish, and his daughter, JESSIE (JESSICA), fifteen, attractive with long hair tucked into a flight helmet, wisps escaping, tickling her neck as they load whiskey into the front cockpit of the JN-4 (Jenny). Jessie's a stunning duplicate of Slats.

Finished with their loading, Slats steps away as Jessie buckles up, fastens the helmet, positions her goggles, and gives a thumbs up at Slats. He spins the propeller, Jessie makes contact, and the JN-4 roars to life.

Begin roll of opening titles over the next visuals.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The JN-4 bounces across the pasture, Jessie increasing power until the plane lifts, bites the air. The Jenny gains altitude, then Jessie circles back, flies over the farm, wiggling the wings at Slats. She climbs, leaving the farm behind. Pastures, farms stretch out below her.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie peers left and right, checks her bearings. Ahead is the Cimarron River. She banks the plane a bit, lining up with the river, then comes down in altitude.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The Jenny loses altitude until it's just above the river's surface, the tires barely touching the water, creating a rooster tail effect. Jessie's skiing the river.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie grins, loving it.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Just ahead is a bridge. The plane climbs, clears the bridge, and wooden oil derricks stretch out before her, in and along the river. Jessie banks, flies over the oil field, circles it as the roustabouts watch. She tips the plane, flies sideways between two rows of derricks, then rights the plane, banks, circling back, climbing towards the sun in the east. Light of the sun fills the screen.

End roll of opening titles.

DISSOLVE TO:

On a white screen:

**TULSA, OKLAHOMA**  
1960

EXT. MOVING CESSNA EARLY MORNING

Light fills the screen then lessens until we distinguish the Cessna's wing. The plane banks, moving away from the sun, then climbs, a steady ascent straight up until the Cessna seems to stall, tumbling backwards, then pulls out, levels, flying to the west.

EXT. MCCORMACK AIRPORT AND FLYING SERVICE OKLAHOMA DAY

The airport looks as though once it was prosperous, but now is idle. Disrepair here and there. A short high-energy man, BILLY FOX, assistant manager, waves his clipboard at BURNEY TAYLOR, maintenance supervisor, and CURLEY SMITH, pilot, standing by an Aerocommander.

BILLY

Burney!

Burney, fiftyish, turns, staring at the rapidly approaching Billy. Curley makes himself busy by walking to the other side of the plane.

BILLY (CONT.)

Where is she?

BURNEY

You've been here five years,  
and you gotta ask?

BILLY

What a time to go flying.

BURNEY

Perfect time, if you ask me.

BILLY

They're here.

(BEAT)

The buyers.

BURNEY

Vultures usually wait.  
Don't reckon these people  
are much different.

INT. MOVING CESSNA

A mature JESSICA MCCORMACK, fiftyish, hair touched with gray, features relaxed, smiles, reaches for the headset. She's in her element and loving it.

EXT. MOVING CESSNA

The plane makes its approach to the McCormack runway. Wheels touch, and the Cessna taxis to the main hangar.

INT. MOVING CESSNA

Jessica sees Billy Fox waving his clipboard at her. Frowning, she checks her instruments.

EXT. PARKED CESSNA

Jessica steps down from the plane, waves at Burney.

BURNEY  
(yelling)  
Good flight?

JESSICA  
(yelling back)  
Wanta try it?

Billy rushes up to Jessica.

BILLY  
Thank God, you're back.

JESSICA  
Like a bad penny, huh.

BILLY  
The buyers are here.

Burney approaches Jessie and Billy.

JESSICA  
(to Burney)  
You did good work on her.  
Thanks.

BURNEY  
She's a good little plane.

JESSICA  
(pointing to the Aerocommander)  
How's the Silver Baron doing?

BURNEY

According to Curley, like a dream.

BILLY

The buyers, Jessica.

JESSICA

(glances at her watch)  
Appointment's not for thirty  
minutes.

(BEAT)

Let's look at the Baron.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JESSICA'S OFFICE MCCORMACK AIRPORT

The office is spacious with a small conference table, chairs, and a large desk and chair. Photographs, awards, aviation memorabilia line the walls. Jessica stands in front of the office window, looking out at the airport and buildings.

EXT. MCCORMACK AIRPORT

Curley leans against the AeroCommander watching two men dressed in suits and carrying briefcases walk around the main building. Scraps of paper blow in the wind.

INT. JESSICA'S OFFICE

Jessica turns at the sound of a knock at the door.

JESSICA

Come!

Secretary/receptionist HELEN TUTTLE, sixty, stands in the doorway.

HELEN

Burney's here.

JESSICA

Thanks, Helen.

(BEAT)

For everything.

HELEN

It was the best twenty years  
of my life.

(BEAT)

Are you O.K.?

JESSICA  
 (turning back to the window)  
 Send Burney in.

Burney, carrying a bottle of tequila and two glasses, enters the room. Jessica continues staring out the window.

JESSICA (CONT.)  
 What am I going to do without  
 all of this?

BURNEY  
 You still got the Cessna.

JESSICA  
 Small potatoes after this.

BURNEY  
 Not much different than when  
 you and Slats started out, is  
 it?

Jessica turns, notices the bottle and glasses in Burney's hands.

JESSICA  
 That brings back memories.

BURNEY  
 Been too long.

JESSICA  
 Can't rebuild what's over, Burney.

BURNEY  
 Maybe it's not over.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOVING PICK-UP PRE-DAWN

Jessica weaves the pick-up in and out of traffic on the freeway.

INT. MOVING PICK-UP

Jessica clenches and relaxes her hands on the steering wheel, and reaching a decision she flips the turn signal, slows, and exits onto an off ramp.

EXT. MOVING PICK-UP

Jessica maneuvers the pick-up onto the freeway, going back the direction she came. The pick-up zips around other



vehicles, exiting again onto an off ramp. She drives some distance, then turns onto a narrow two-lane road. A sign proclaims "MCCORMACK AIRPORT" just ahead.

EXT. PARKED PICK-UP MCCORMACK AIRPORT GATES

A large sign reads "MCCORMACK AIRPORT AND FLYING SERVICE." Jessica unlocks the gates.

EXT. MOVING PICK-UP

Jessica eases the pick-up down a single lane road close to the hangars, making her way to the last hangar, an older quonset hut structure with "HANGAR ONE" painted on the side of it.

EXT. HANGAR ONE

Jessica leans against her pick-up door as if for support, studying Hangar One, then moves towards it. She unlocks the doors, slides them apart, steps inside.

INT. HANGAR ONE

Jessica flips on the light. Although it is an old structure, tools, equipment are arranged neatly, everything in order as if waiting for someone to come inside and begin working. It's like a museum with photographs, awards, aviation gear lining the wall. Dominating the interior is a JN-4 in mint condition, beautiful in its starched linen and wood frame, motor, and propellers.

There's a sense of peace here, and Jessica noticeably relaxes as she walks over to a table, plugs in an old record player, opens the case. She plays an old record, the scratchy sound of King Oliver's band's "St. James Infirmary" filling the hangar. She walks around the plane, checks the tires, examines the covering, looks for any oil drips from the motor.

DISSOLVE TO:

On a black screen:

**REST HAVEN NURSING HOME**

INT. REST HAVEN NURSING HOME OKLAHOMA SLATS MCCORMACK'S ROOM SAME DAY EARLY MORNING

Early morning light fills the screen as the camera pulls back, then pans the room revealing photographs of airplanes. For 1960 and for being in a rest home, the photographs are unusual, sepia-toned, quite old and distinctive in their presentation of vintage airplanes from the early Twenties:

the JN-4 from the previous scene, a custom-built monoplane, and a three-seat biplane.

Other photographs of recent model airplanes ranging from an AeroCommander to a Cessna 170 complete the picture gallery. In each picture Slats and Jessica stand beside the planes, representing their own progression of time and aging process. What is startling is that the photographs show only the two of them.

The room continues to lighten. In a bed, next to the wall with the photographs, Slats McCormack, snore. A bedpan, other necessities are on a table beside him. Jessica sits in a chair beside the bed. As she studies her father, she chews on her nails, glances at her watch from time to time, then to the photographs on the wall. Slats stirs, wakes up, looks over at Jessica. He's in his mid-seventies, a stroke victim, partially paralyzed, his speech measured, at times a drawl. Jessica leans forward.

SLATS

You're early.

JESSICA

Like some water?

SLATS

No.

JESSICA

Shouldn't they have your  
breakfast by now?

SLATS

Too early, like you.

JESSICA

How are you feeling?

SLATS

Like I didn't get enough sleep.

JESSICA

Only time I had. Got a full  
schedule today.

SLATS

Busy day?

JESSICA

(chews her nails)  
Yeah.

SLATS  
Anything wrong?

JESSICA  
Just early, that's all.  
Why?

SLATS  
You're biting your nails,  
again.

JESSICA  
Airport. Lots to do.  
You know the routine.

SLATS  
I should be there, Jessie.

JESSICA  
I can handle it.  
(BEAT)  
After all, I'm Slats McCormack's  
daughter, right?  
(glances at her watch)  
I better go. Can I get you  
anything?

SLATS  
You can get me out of here.

EXT. REST HAVEN NURSING HOME PARKING LOT

Jessica walks to her pick-up.

INT. PARKED PICK-UP

Jessica throws her purse on the seat, starts the engine,  
lets it idle as she stares at the purse. She opens it,  
pulls out a sheet of paper, and reads it.

INSET SHEET OF PAPER, TOP PORTION SHOWING

Rest Haven Nursing Home  
Statement of Account  
for  
Slats McCormack, Room 116

Jessica crumples the paper, throws it on the floorboard.  
She jams the pick-up into gear, and roars out of the parking  
lot.

EXT. MCCORMACK AIRPORT DAY

Cars, trucks line the road. Johnson grass fills bar

ditches, Bermuda grass pokes through buckled asphalt. The place has a once-prosperous look, but now unkempt. Posted signs read:

AUCTION TODAY  
AIRPLANES  
EQUIPMENT  
ITEMS TOO NUMEROUS  
TO LIST

EXT. TARMAC

A variety of planes line the hard surface area: a customized B-25, a revamped Stearman PT-17, a Beechcraft Model 17 Staggerwing, a Twin Beech, a Piper Cub, an Aero Commander (same as in the photograph in Slats's room), and several other models. It's a veritable line-up of top quality and unusual planes. Ticket numbers on several of the airplanes' windows have been marked through with "SOLD."

EXT. MAIN HANGAR

Groups of people stand, sit on board and concrete block benches, munch hot dogs, sip bottled Coke and Pepsi. There's an air of expectancy.

Jessica stands to one side confronting the auctioneer, "SMILIN'" DENNIS WALKER, sporting a crew cut and flashy sports jacket. Billy Fox, Jessica's assistant manager, stands a discrete distance away. Nervously chewing his gum, trying not to be obvious, he edges closer to the two people. Suddenly, the conversation becomes heated, and Billy rushes to her side.

JESSICA

Get everything you can out  
of Hangar One. Or, by God, I'm  
stopping this damn auction  
right here and now.

SMILIN' DENNIS

If I didn't know better I'd  
think I was talking to old  
Slats McCormack.

JESSICA

You are talking to him.

Smilin' Dennis shrugs, picks up a bullhorn.

SMILIN' DENNIS

(through the bullhorn)  
Hangar One, folks! We'll start  
in fifteen minutes.

Jessica stands alone as Smilin' Dennis, his crew, and the crowd make their way towards Hangar One, located some distance away.

BILLY  
How's it going?

JESSICA  
I've known better days,  
that's for damn sure.  
Where's the crew?  
Haven't seen anyone for  
hours.

BILLY  
Helen's at Hangar One.  
Protecting your interests  
she said. I guess people  
started nosing around too  
much.

The two begin walking towards Hangar One. Loose paper, litter, blow about the area.

JESSICA  
Looks like we're gonna need a  
clean-up detail.

BILLY  
Burney and Curley are taking care  
of it.

JESSICA  
(surprised)  
They're not at the hangar?

BILLY  
No.

JESSICA  
Can't say that I blame them.

BILLY  
Why don't you stay here? I'll  
go down.

JESSICA  
I can handle it.

EXT. HANGAR ONE TARMAC

On the tarmac, a monoplane with cantilevered wings, a three-place biplane, and a JN-4 are roped off, preventing the

crowd from touching them. They're the same planes in the photographs in Slats's room at Rest Haven. Helen Tuttle stands next to the Jenny. She waves at Jessica. Inside the roped area, Smilin' Dennis stands on a platform.

Jessica slows noticeably as she approaches the area. She steps onto the tarmac, her knee buckles, Billy grabs her arm. For a few moments, she uses his support.

BILLY

You sure you want to do  
this, Jessica?

JESSICA

(shrugs away his arm)  
I said I can handle it!

Jessica nods at Smilin' Dennis who motions the crowd to look at the three planes. Smilin' Dennis beams at the crowd.

SMILIN' DENNIS

Here they are, folks. Two  
custom built, McCormack designed  
planes straight out of the Twenties.  
And the JN-4, the Jenny, a vintage,  
World War I workhorse. Superb  
condition, folks.

Several people in the crowd take pictures, flash bulbs popping. A young father hoists his son up on his shoulders to get a better view. Burney appears around the corner of Hangar One, makes his way to the JN-4.

SMILIN' DENNIS (CONT.)

Take a good look, folks.  
You won't see the likes  
of these again.

Jessica steps over the ropes, approaching the JN-4. Billy follows her as Helen moves to one side for Jessica. Burney closes the distance between him and the plane.

SMILIN' DENNIS (CONT.)

These planes are worth their  
weight in gold. World War I.  
The Twenties. History, folks.

Jessica's fingers traces the fuselage as she walks around it, then stops, staring at the cockpit.

SMILIN' DENNIS (CONT.)

(voice fading)

Yes, sir, history right here  
in front of you, folks. And  
you've got the rare opportunity  
to buy some of it.

Smilin Dennis's voice fades before he finishes as the sound  
of a JN-4 firing up increases along with Slats's voice from  
the past.

SLATS (OS)

You're going to love it, Jessie.  
Ain't nothing better than flying.

DISSOLVE TO:

On screen:

OKLAHOMA 1918

EXT. OILFIELD NEXT TO CIMARRON RIVER EARLY SUMMER DAY  
1918

Wooden oil derricks, crowding the landscape and horizon,  
extend from pastures into the Cimarron River. A catwalk  
bridge across the river connects the oil production along  
the banks and on the sand bars of the river. Horse- or  
oxen-drawn wagons filled with heavy equipment make their way  
along deeply rutted roads crisscrossing the area. There are  
few trees along the river banks, the ground around the  
derricks raw slashes of red earth, salt encrusted. Black  
oil coats the men, the equipment, and creates pearlescent  
blotches floating on the river's surface.

SLATS MCCORMACK, mid-thirties, stands tall in the center of  
a group of angry men. A young man, TOMMY, pushes his way to  
the center, stands next to a short, heavily muscled man  
named HAMMER JOE, and a man about Slats's age named CARL.  
In the background, FOREMAN JACK NEWLEY along with companions  
BUDDY JOHNSON and MALCOMB BURNETT load the dead body of a  
young man, SAMMY MILLER, into an old Ford.

TOMMY

What you saying to us, Slats?

SLATS

The Foreman's pushing us  
too hard. A man don't  
rest proper, then he  
makes mistakes.

HAMMER JOE

Like the Miller boy. That's  
why he got killed, ain't  
it, Slats?

Finished with loading the Miller boy's body into the car,  
Buddy and Malcomb pick up shotguns, cradling them in their  
arms.

SLATS

Foreman ain't paying us enough  
for that.

CARL

But we're getting something.  
Don't know about you, but I've  
got a wife and kids.

Jack walks towards the group, Buddy and Malcomb following.

HAMMER JOE

And Sammy Miller's wife a widow  
now and her kids ain't got a  
daddy.

(BEAT)

'Sides, doing what the Foreman  
say all the time don't mean  
we're gonna always have us a job.

TOMMY

Look what happened to  
the last crew. They did  
their work. Got fired anyway.

HAMMER JOE

Plenty of other places to work.  
Why, oil's everywhere around here.  
People going crazy with the  
wanting of it.

SLATS

The crew before us got fired  
'cause they weren't the right  
kind.

(to Carl)

You're a Czech, ain't you?

Jack, Buddy, and Malcomb split up, forming a triangle around  
the group of men. Slats notices them but keeps talking.



SLATS (CONT.)

Foreman don't like Catholics,  
coloreds, Indians, gypsies  
you name it, he don't like it.

(BEAT)

Time you find another job while  
you're still alive to do it.

TOMMY

What you calling for, Slats?

Jack pushes his way into the group. The men quiet as Slats continues talking, but this time it's directed to Jack approaching him. Buddy and Malcomb make their way through the group towards Slats.

SLATS

I don't plan to die  
for some goddamn foreman.

(staring at Jack)

I say walk away from this  
while you all still got  
two legs to do it with.

Jack stands in front of Slats. Buddy and Malcomb forming two points of triangle, their shotguns aimed at Slats.

JACK

(to Slats)

I'd say this is what we'd  
call an unauthorized  
meeting. Don't need no union  
talk around here, Slats McCormack.

(turning to face the other men)

You boys get back to work now,  
you hear?

There's a slight movement by several of the men, but then they settle back to stay put.

JACK (CONT.)

(turns back to face Slats)

Well, lookee there, Slats.  
Got yourself a little following,  
now don't you.

Slats steps to one side, attempting to leave. The men, following his lead, begin walking away but stop when Jack steps in front of Slats, preventing him from leaving.

JACK (CONT.)

(to Slats)

Not so fast, Slats McCormack.  
We got three hours  
of daylight left and with  
torches, why, you boys can  
work through the night. Don't  
you think so, Buddy? Malcomb?

Buddy and Malcomb prod several of the men with their shotguns, indicating they should return to work. The men stand their ground.

SLATS

Ain't nobody gonna work  
through the night, Foreman.  
Now, step aside.

The two men stare at each other as Buddy and Malcomb quickly close in on Slats, shotguns raised at him.

SLATS (CONT.)

(to Jack)

Be a little tough explaining  
how I got killed to your bosses,  
don't you think.

The men disperse, walking away in groups of two's and three's, gathering their stuff, heading toward town. Slats remains encircled by Jack, Buddy, and Malcomb. Hammer Joe and Tommy, standing a short distance away, watch.

JACK

(to Buddy and Malcomb)

Take him!

Buddy and Malcomb converge on Slats, using their shotguns to beat him. They get in several very good blows before Hammer Joe and Tommy manage to stop it.

JACK (CONT.)

(to Hammer Joe)

Tell your friend I ain't  
forgetting what he did  
to me.

(BEAT)

No, by God, I ain't forgetting.

EXT. MCCORMACK FARM DAY

A small white frame house with a screened front porch lies nestled on bottom land of the Cimarron River. Several small outbuildings with a large barn complete the farm.

INT. SCREENED FRONT PORCH

Jessie (Jessica) sits on her mother's lap. She snuggles closer as her mother, ELIZABETH MCCORMACK, thirty, patiently brushes her twelve year old daughter's hair. From time to time Elizabeth looks to the road as if expecting someone.

EXT. MOVING CAR

Hammer Joe drives down a narrow country road.

INT. MOVING CAR

Hammer Joe, concerned, glances at Slats, badly beaten, slumped against the door.

HAMMER JOE  
God Almighty! Help me  
explain this to his  
woman.

INT. MCCORMACK SCREENED FRONT PORCH

Quickly braiding Jessie's hair, Elizabeth paces the front porch. Dressed in a soft color dress, she absentmindedly fingers a necklace of jet beads resting against her chest. Jessie paces along with her mother, mimicking her.

EXT. MOVING CAR MCCORMACK DRIVEWAY

Hammer Joe pulls the car into the driveway.

EXT. MCCORMACK DRIVEWAY

Hammer Joe gets out, walks around and pulls a beaten Slats from the car.

EXT. MCCORMACK SCREENED PORCH

Screendoor slamming behind her, Elizabeth runs to the car.

INT. SCREENED PORCH

Jessie presses her face against the screen, watching her mother, father, and Hammer Joe.

EXT. OLD CAR

Elizabeth rushes to Slats, and looks questioningly at Hammer Joe.

HAMMER JOE  
(to Elizabeth)  
Jack Newley and his boys.  
(BEAT)  
He's in pretty bad shape.

Elizabeth helps to support Slats.

ELIZABETH  
Help me get him inside.

Struggling, they awkwardly carry Slats to the house. From time to time Slats groans.

INT. SCREENED PORCH

Frightened, Jessie shrinks back from the screen.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

Hammer Joe and Elizabeth stand by the porch, Slats, heavy and nearly unconscious, sags against them.

ELIZABETH  
Jessica! Jessica, open the door for us.

INT. SCREEN PORCH

Jessica, frightened, pulls back, looks about her, then bolts for the door.

EXT. YARD

Jessie runs past her mother, father, and Hammer Joe.

ELIZABETH (CONT.)  
Jessica! Come back here!

EXT. PASTURE

Jessie, hair streaming behind her, runs towards the barn.

EXT. BARN

Jessie fumbles with the door, finally opens it, and runs inside.

INT. BARN

Jessie hides in the hay.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK KITCHEN SOME TIME LATER DAY

Jessica watches Elizabeth prepare a plate of food for Slats.

ELIZABETH  
(handing the plate to Jessica)  
Take this to your father.

JESSICA  
(darting to the door)  
Gotta go outside.

ELIZABETH  
Jessica! He wants to see you.

INT. HALLWAY MCCORMACK'S HOME EVENING

Chewing on her fingernails, Jessie balks in the doorway until Elizabeth pulls her gently inside.

INT. SLATS'S AND ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM

A small kerosene lamp glows on a vanity next to a framed photograph of a younger Elizabeth. Slats is propped up on a bed, quilts pushed back, a sheet covering his body. His face is badly bruised and swollen. Jessie reluctantly lets her mother guide her to the bed.

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. DINING ROOM SOME DAYS LATER

Jessie plays dominoes with Slats at the table.

INT. MCCORMACK PORCH

Jessie reads to her father.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

Jessie walks her father around the yard.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN DRUMRIGHT, OKLAHOMA SEVERAL MONTHS LATER  
AFTERNOON

The business district, buildings sprawled up a progression of steep hills, reflects the various cultures with signs advertising Greek dry goods stores, Syrian and Lebanese grocery stores, etc. For a Saturday, the town appears subdued, a sense of waiting and suffering in the faces of

the townspeople out and about. Teams of horses struggle as they pull wagons filled with field equipment up the severe grades. Along with the look, feel, and smell of oil is one of sickness. Several stores are closed, black wreaths and ribbons covering their doors.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK DOWNTOWN

A recuperating Slats, stiff and awkward in his movements, stands with Elizabeth and Jessie beside their truck. Jessie fidgets, then wanders over to a store window.

SLATS

(glancing about)  
Awful quiet around here.

ELIZABETH

(points to a door wrapped in black)  
The fever. Been taking a lot  
of people.

SLATS

Give me the list. You and Jessie  
wait here. I'll get what we  
need.

ELIZABETH

(laughing, keeps the list)  
And what do you know about  
groceries?

SLATS

(glances about)  
Where's Jessie?

ELIZABETH

(looks around, points)  
Looking in Saffa's window.

SLATS

(yelling at Jessie)  
Jessie! Come on now!  
(to Elizabeth)  
The girl's got no sense.  
Taking off like that.

ELIZABETH

(laughing)  
Oh, she's got plenty of  
sense. She's just a carbon  
copy.

SLATS

Jessie! Get over here now.

ELIZABETH

I'll go get the groceries.  
You and Jessica window shop.

Before Slats can protest, Elizabeth whirls away and walks up the street. Jessie reluctantly makes her way over to Slats who grabs her hand and the two window shop.

INT. GROCERY STORE

The owner, a middle-aged man, moves slowly behind the counter, boxing up Elizabeth's purchases.

ELIZABETH (CONT.)

Tell your wife I'm thinking of her. Hope she gets to feeling better. Take care of yourself now, you hear?

Elizabeth gives him money for her purchases, picks up the box.

THE MAN

Here, Mrs. McCormack, I'll carry that for you.

ELIZABETH

That's all right. I can get it. 'Sides, you look worn out.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Elizabeth struggles with the box as Slats and Jessie approach. Slats rushes to help.

SLATS

Here, I'll take it.  
(taking the box)  
How come you carrying this?

ELIZABETH

His wife's been taken with the fever. He looks done in, for sure. Didn't have the heart to have him walk all this way carrying that.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK KITCHEN DAY

Elizabeth, visibly ill, tries to prepare dinner.

INT. DINING ROOM

Slats and Jessie sit at the table, plates and silverware before them waiting for Elizabeth to serve the meal.

INT. KITCHEN

Elizabeth, dizzy and trying to balance a bowl of soup, sags against the counter, then falls to the floor.

INT. DINING ROOM

Slats, hearing Elizabeth fall, jumps up, runs towards the kitchen. Jessie, gripping the sides of her chair, stares at her plate.

INT. MCCORMACK HOME SLATS AND ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM DAY

Slats tends to Elizabeth, stricken by the fever. She tosses about, speaking nonsense in her hallucinations.

INT. HALLWAY

Jessie stands next to her parents' bedroom door. She listens to her mother's voice. Jessie opens the door, peers inside.

INT. SLATS AND ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM

Slats yells at Jessie.

SLATS  
No, Jessie! Get back!  
Get back!

EXT. CEMETERY SEVERAL DAYS LATER DAY

Slats and Jessie stand by the grave of Elizabeth.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK DRIVEWAY MCCORMACK HOME DAY

Slats closes the truck door, walks to the pasture. Jessie follows.

EXT. BACK YARD OVERLOOKING FIELD

Slats stands staring at the barn a short distance away. Jessie stands along side of him.

DISSOLVE TO:

On screen:

Oklahoma 1920



INT. MCCORMACK HOME KITCHEN MORNING

Jessie, dish rag in her hands, stands before a counter and sink filled with dirty dishes. She watches the wind move the tree tops outside. She throws the dish rag down.

INT. DINING ROOM

Slats, sitting at the dining room table, reads a Tulsa newspaper. Jessie walks to the front door.

JESSIE  
I'm going outside.

SLATS  
You got chores 'fore we  
get to town.

JESSIE  
(hand on the door knob)  
And you got bills.

Slats throws down the newspaper, stands up.

SLATS  
Jessica!

Jessie starts to open the door.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Jessica Elizabeth McCormack!

Aggravated, Jessie marches into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Jessie fixes a dishpan of soapy water, begins scrubbing the dishes, splashing the floor. Slats follows her, watching a few minutes.

SLATS (CONT.)  
(grabs Jessie's hands)  
You're making a mess.

JESSIE  
(jerks away)  
Thought you wanted them done.

SLATS  
Done, not broken.

Slats begins washing the dishes as Jessie runs from the room, and out the door.

EXT. MCCORMACK FARM

Jessie, thirteen, walks through overgrown fields, picking wildflowers.

INT. SLATS'S BEDROOM

Slats sits at his late wife's vanity, studies her picture, the frame draped in black.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

The yard and house are unkempt, in disrepair. Slats, shoulders stooped, stands by the truck. He pulls out a wad of money, counts it, and places it back into his pocket.

SLATS

Jessie! Come on now.

It's time to go.

(looks about for her)

Jessie!

EXT. FIELD

Jessie stops, listens to her father's voice, then goes back to picking wildflowers.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

Concerned, Slats walks quickly towards the fields.

SLATS (CONT.)

Jessie! Answer me, now.

It's time to go. Jessie!

As he walks around the corner of an outbuilding, Jessie nearly bumps into him, her arms filled with wildflowers.

SLATS (CONT.)

Didn't you hear me call?

JESSIE

I was coming.

SLATS

Go on now. Get in the truck.

We got work to do when we get back.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats maneuvers the truck down a bumpy country road. Jessie rests her head on the opened window frame, the bouquet of wildflowers in her hand.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

The day is clear, the sun bright. Jessie drops flowers from the bouquet out the window, the wind catching them, scattering them among those bordering the dirt road. Increasing sound of an engine other than the truck's can be heard.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats glances about, worried about the sound.

JESSIE  
What's wrong?

SLATS  
Truck don't sound right.  
We better stop.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie and Slats get out of the truck.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

A JN-4 swoops down from the sky, flying just over the truck. Slats and Jessie duck as the pilot wiggles the plane's wings at them.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

JESSIE  
What was that?

SLATS  
A fool!

JESSIE  
Where'd it go?

SLATS  
Looks like over to old man  
Simpson's place.

JESSIE  
Let's follow it!

SLATS  
We got to get to town.

JESSIE  
Never seen one before.  
At least, not close up.

EXT. OLD MAN SIMPSON'S FARM PASTURE

Cars, Slats's truck, and horse-drawn wagons are parked alongside the road next to a pasture. Slats and Jessie stand in a small crowd of people watching the barnstormer put his JN-4 through a barrel roll, a large maneuver seemingly taking up the entire sky.

Jessie shields her eyes from the sun as she watches. Slats, enthralled, comes alive as he watches the pilot and the plane.

The pilot rights the Jenny, puts it into a steep climb. When he reaches the altitude desired, he puts the nose down, the JN-4 rushing toward the earth, picking up air speed. Then he pulls it up, up, up until the plane almost stalls, and in a sense, seems to fall over, plunging vertically. The pilot then levels out the Jenny, performing a loop which looks more like an "L."

The barnstormer makes his landing approach. As the Jenny's about to touch the ground, Slats touches Jessie's shoulder, motioning for her to follow him.

Slats trots over to the approaching plane, Jessie right behind him. The pilot taxis, then stops. Dressed in leathers and helmet, he barely steps away from the plane before Slats hands him money for a ride.

EXT. PARKED JN-4

Slats puts on goggles, waves at Jessie, climbs into the cockpit.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The pilot taxis, increases speed, the Jenny lifts off the ground. Slats loves it.

EXT. PASTURE

Jessie, concerned, watches her father.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The pilot circles the pasture several times, dipping the plane's wings at the spectators.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Slats grins, loving it.

EXT. PARKED JN-4

People, money in hand, line up for rides as Slats steps from the plane, and, with the wad of money in his hand, moves promptly back in the line for another ride. Angry, Jessie stomps away to the truck.

EXT. MCCORMACK FARM NEXT DAY AFTER SUNRISE

House, outbuildings, barn, trees touched by the sun. Morning doves call in the distance. Slats stands in the yard, looking to the southwest sky. The sound of an engine can be heard, then gradually the shape of the barnstormer's JN-4 can be seen approaching the farm.

INT. JESSICA'S BEDROOM

Jessie wakes up, listens, jumps out of bed, runs from the room.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

Jessie dashes out of the house, screen door slamming behind her.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The Jenny flies over the farm, the pilot dipping its wings at Slats.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

Jessie stands alongside Slats. The two watch the plane until it's lost from sight.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MCCORMACK FARM SPRING 1920 NIGHT

Moonlight illuminates the home and buildings. Only sound is a mantle clock ticking.

EXT. ROAD

Cars and trucks, one at a time then several at a time, roar down the road.

INT. MOVING CAR, AN OLD FORD

Jack Newley, dressed in Klansman white, manuevers the Ford down the road. Riding with him are Buddy Johnson and Malcomb Burnett.

INT. MCCORMACK LIVING ROOM

The house is dark, a light glows dimly from an opened trap

door of the living room floor, a rug rolled up beside it. Slats stands before a window, a sawed-off shotgun in his arms.

INT. UNDERGROUND ROOM, LIVING ROOM

Jessie, chewing her fingernails, sits on the floor, her back against the wall. A kerosene lamp glows beside her.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Slats, continuing to watch the road, calls softly to Jessie.

SLATS  
It's a big rally.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK KITCHEN NIGHT 1920

Jessie works over their accounts at the kitchen table. Receipts and statements stacked beside her. Scattered remnants of a newspaper, dated 1920, the front page covered with articles about the Halstead Act, "Prohibition," speak-easies, bootlegging, and troubles with Negroes and the union movement, the International Workers of the World. Slats fastens an advertisement, its edges jagged from being ripped from the newspaper, to the wall. The ad announces "Red" Williams's airplane sale. Pictures depict rows of World War I surplus trainer planes--JN-4's--for sale.

SLATS  
You're gonna love it, Jessie.  
Ain't nothing better than  
flying.  
(BEAT)  
We'll save as much as we can,  
then buy us one of these Jenny's.

JESSIE  
(waving statements in the air)  
How do you plan on paying  
for these?

SLATS  
(tapping the advertisement)  
Yes sir, for right now one of  
these will do just fine.

JESSIE  
(disgusted)  
Grocer ain't gonna carry us  
no more. Said so last week.  
Remember?

SLATS

(warming to the dream)  
 Later on, when we're making  
 more money, we'll build our  
 own airplanes. Think of it,  
 Jessie, our own business.

(BEAT)

We'll have a whole fleet of  
 planes someday. Fly people  
 anywhere they want to go.  
 Ranchers, oilmen, tycoons.  
 Anyone.

Jessie rests her head in her hands, chewing on her  
 fingernails as Slats paces, waving his arms in the air.

SLATS (CONT.)

Did you know they sing to you?

(BEAT)

The wires sing in the air.  
 And when you're taking one down,  
 you know you're getting close  
 to land 'cause they start singing  
 "Nearer My God to Thee."

JESSIE

(slamming the ledger shut)  
 Don't think I'm gonna hear  
 them anytime soon.

SLATS

How much we got?

JESSIE

We stopped getting by  
 last week.

SLATS

Lumber job ain't doing it  
 for us, is it?

JESSIE

Not as long as you spend it  
 all on airplane rides,  
 it ain't.

SLATS

Bound to be a better way  
 in this old world of  
 making money.

(dismissing her)

Go on now and get ready  
 for bed. I've got me  
 some thinking to do.

SLATS

(warming to the dream)  
 Later on, when we're making  
 more money, we'll build our  
 own airplanes. Think of it,  
 Jessie, our own business.

(BEAT)

We'll have a whole fleet of  
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 it ain't.

SLATS

Bound to be a better way  
 in this old world of  
 making money.

(dismissing her)

Go on now and get ready  
 for bed. I've got me  
 some thinking to do.



Slats turns slowly, looks at Jack walking towards him.

JACK (CONT.)

You catch that order, Slats?

SLATS

Top grade. Half-a-dozen two  
by fours. Right?

JACK

Load them one at a time.  
I wanta make sure they're  
top quality. Can't be too  
careful around you people.

Slats places the lumber one plank at a time on the bed of the truck, turning each one over so Jack can see all four sides, see if it runs true. Slats is methodical, slow, and Jack takes his time, both playing out the moment, a dance of sorts between the two men.

JACK (CONT.)

Can't see this as top grade.  
Sure you're not holding out  
on me?

SLATS

(gestures to the sign)  
Sign says "Top Grade." It's  
the best we got.

JACK

(walking to the cab)  
Come here, Slats McCormack.  
Got something for you.  
Help tie that lumber down.  
Don't wanta lose none,  
you hear.

Slats walks to the cab of the truck.

EXT. TRUCK

Waiting, Slats glances over at Hammer Joe's house across the street.

EXT. HAMMER JOE'S HOUSE

Jessie's gone, but Hammer Joe, carrying a box, walks to the man's car.

EXT. TRUCK

Jack opens the truck door, reaches inside, throws a coil of rope at Slats.

JACK (CONT.)  
Try this. Brand new.

Slats catches the rope, glances back at Hammer Joe's house.

EXT. HAMMER JOE'S HOUSE

Hammer Joe receives something from the man now sitting in his car. He pockets it, nods, and walks away.

EXT. TRUCK

Slats fastens down the lumber. Jack watches.

JACK (CONT.)  
Heard about your wife.

Slats finishes, walks back to the building.

JACK (CONT.)  
(calling after Slats)  
I'll be back real soon.  
Think I'm gonna need quite  
a few things from now on.

INT. CARTER'S STORE

Slats walks over to Carter.

SLATS  
I'd like my pay.

CARTER  
Not pay day.

SLATS  
It is now. I quit.

EXT. HAMMER JOE'S HOUSE LATER

Jessie waits in the truck as Slats and Hammer Joe talk by the front porch.

SLATS (CONT.)  
(hands Hammer Joe money)  
Tell your wife thanks. But  
I won't be needing her to  
watch Jessie anymore.  
(BEAT)  
I quit the lumber yard.

HAMMER JOE  
How do you think you're  
gonna make it?

SLATS  
Set me up.

HAMMER JOE  
Set you up? Doing what?

SLATS  
Bootlegging. Like you.

HAMMER JOE  
There's them that's got this  
all sewed up 'round here, Slats.  
I just penny-ante this stuff.  
Keep it real quiet. Sell to  
them that I can trust.

(BEAT)  
Got to. The Klan's raising  
bloody hell about whiskey.

(BEAT)  
It's bad out there, I tell you.  
Don't know who to trust.

SLATS  
I'll sell it for you.

HAMMER JOE  
I can't make enough to go  
partners.

SLATS  
I want in.

HAMMER JOE  
Ain't no place for you.

SLATS  
I want in.

HAMMER JOE  
(reluctantly)  
There's places to sell,  
all right, but not for  
the likes of you.

SLATS  
I'm listening.

HAMMER JOE  
(reluctantly)  
Tulsa colored town.

SLATS  
They got money?

HAMMER JOE  
Seem to.

SLATS  
Then what's to matter.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MCCORMACK FARM, PASTURE NEXT DAY

Sound of cicadas in July sun. Heat waves across the land. A small can's perched on top of a rock. Some distance away, Slats stands to one side and a bit behind Jessie who holds a .30-30.

Jessie's relaxed and easy, left hand cupping the barrel, right hand resting on the stock.

SLATS  
Take a bead on it, Jessie.

Jessie raises the rifle, nestling it into her shoulder, looks down the barrel.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Got it?

Jessie grunts an answer.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Whenever you're ready.

Jessie fires, blowing the can into bits. Turning, she looks expectantly at Slats.

SLATS (CONT.)  
(avoiding her)  
Reckon that'll do.  
(BEAT)  
This way, now.

Slats walks away, Jessie following, rifle in hand.

EXT. POND

Slats and Jessie creep through the brush along the pond's bank. Hand on her shoulder, he stops her, pointing at a small spot on the water's surface.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 (whispering)  
 Turtle.  
 (motions to the rifle)  
 Do it!

Frowning, Jessie hesitates. The turtle submerges.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 Lost him!  
 (BEAT)  
 Next one you see, shoot it,  
 you hear! Go on, now.  
 I'll wait here.

Jessie makes her way through the trees, bushes, and weeds. Coming upon a small clearing, she drops down into a squat, easing herself onto the top lip of the bank, overlooking the pond. She's mesmerized by the sight of trees, clouds mirrored in the water's surface. Daydreaming, she enjoys the moment until the sound of a wood thrush, low and throaty, close by catches her attention. Turning, she sees Slats, motioning to her. She quickly scans the water's surface, spots a turtle's head. She aims, fires, bits of shell and flesh splattering the water.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK SCREENED PORCH

Jessie, staring into the kitchen window, fusses with her long hair as Slats stacks a case of whiskey beside her.

SLATS  
 Hammer Joe says he can  
 get us started.  
 (to Jessie)  
 You gonna help or stare  
 at yourself all day?

EXT. MCCORMACK TRUCK

Jessie and Slats stack cases by the screened porch door.

JESSIE  
 (pointing to the cases)  
 Don't look like enough  
 to buy a plane with,  
 much less groceries.

SLATS  
 He's not set up to bring  
 much off, leastways not  
 right now.

JESSIE  
Then why do it?

SLATS  
It's a start.  
(BEAT)  
A man could do worse,  
I reckon.  
(wiping his face)  
Jack Newley came in the  
lumber yard the other  
day.  
(BEAT)  
I quit the job.

JESSIE  
Quit? Just like that?

SLATS  
I'm shut of that place,  
you hear?

JESSIE  
How we gonna eat? Pay  
the bills?

SLATS  
(picking up another case)  
Don't matter. Hammer Joe's got  
connections for us.

JESSIE  
Connections?

SLATS  
Tulsey-town.

JESSIE  
It's a long ways.

SLATS  
Not so far.

JESSIE  
And these connections?

SLATS  
(sits down the case)  
Coloreds.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MCCORMACK MOVING TRUCK TULSA, OKLAHOMA DAY

Slats, Jessie beside him, drives by oil refineries along the Arkansas River.

EXT. OIL REFINERY GATE

Jack Newley, Buddy Johnson, and Malcomb Burnett stand next to a car parked by the gate. They visit with several employees. Jack notices Slats's truck approaching the refinery, motions to his two friends to get into the car.

EXT. PARKED CAR GATE

Jack waits until Slats drives by, then pulls out, following him.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats maneuvers the truck, moving closer to Tulsa colored town with Jack's car a discreet distance behind.

INT. JACK'S CAR

Jack's realizing where Slats is headed.

JACK  
 (to Malcomb and Buddy)  
 Keep your eyes opened. I  
 wanta know what Slats is  
 up to.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats drives into the black section of Tulsa, the Deep Greenwood area, or "Little Africa." It's prosperous, predominantly middle class with businesses, etc. The day's hot, air still and heavy. A few Negroes stroll along the street, others fan themselves on their front porches.

INT. MOVING TRUCK DAY TULSA COLORED TOWN

Slats removes a .45 from under a poncho on the seat. He places the revolver in his lap, and then takes off his fedora, handing it to Jessie.

SLATS  
 Wear this!

As Jessie tucks up her long hair into the hat, Slats taps the poncho on the seat.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 (to Jessie)  
 Get it!

Jessie slips the .30-30 out, resting it on her knees.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats continues driving until he reaches a fringe area, rough now with pool halls, bars and such. Negro men sit on planks of wood or lean against buildings, the sheet metal awnings above them ripped, providing little shade in the summer heat.

Jack continues to trail behind. Slats slows the truck, easing it into an alley next to a one-story structure with a large silver hayhook painted on the front and the words "HOOKIE'S POOL HALL." Slats parks next to a loading dock in the back.

INT. JACK'S CAR, MOVING

JACK  
(to Buddy and Malcomb)  
That son-of-a-bitch's  
working for niggers!

EXT. JACK'S CAR, MOVING

Jack drives slowly by the pool hall.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats turns off the engine, and studies the loading dock.

SLATS  
Help me unload, then get  
back in the truck. Don't  
say anything. Don't do  
anything.  
(looking at Jessie)  
You savvy?

Slats puts the .45 in the back waistband of his khakis, and steps out of the truck. Jessie moves to take the .30-30.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats looks through the window at the rifle, then at Jessie.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Not yet.

Jessie joins her father. The two quickly unload the truck.

EXT. LOADING DOCK

Jessie and Slats stacking the cases on the dock. It's hot,



dirty work. Finishing, Slats bangs away at the pool hall's back door as Jessie walks back to the truck. BIG GEORGE BAKER, a large Negro man, chewing tobacco, steps outside the door. Slats gestures to the cases of whiskey, Big George nodding approval. Slats gives a low throated wood thrush call. Jessie turns, walking back to the dock as Big George points at her.

BIG GEORGE  
(to Slats)  
What's this?

SLATS  
My daughter Jessica.

BIG GEORGE  
Don't need no white girls here.

SLATS  
She's my right-hand man.

BIG GEORGE  
All I see down there is  
bad luck.

Big George hoists a case of whiskey, moving to put it inside the back room.

SLATS  
You buying that whiskey?

BIG GEORGE  
You selling it, ain't you?

SLATS  
Let's see your money.

BIG GEORGE  
Don't carry that much on me.  
(steps to the door)  
Money's inside.

Slats removes the .45, pulling back the hammer, aiming it at Big George's back.

SLATS  
Put your money down,  
Big George.

BIG GEORGE  
You're a white man in colored  
town. What you think's gonna  
happen if you pull that  
trigger?

SLATS  
Just know what I want is all.

Big George slowly turns around.

BIG GEORGE  
(staring at Jessie)  
Ain't right.

SLATS  
Not much is.

Slats eases the hammer back, then secures the revolver in the back waist band of his khakis. Big George continues staring at Jessie.

BIG GEORGE  
She stays in the truck.

SLATS  
Got no problem with that.

BIG GEORGE  
(staring at Slats)  
Out of sight!

SLATS  
(staring at Big George)  
Out of sight.

BIG GEORGE  
(glancing about)  
No need to talk out here  
anymore. Too many eyes  
and ears.

Big George picks up the case, moves towards the back door.

SLATS  
You buying that whiskey  
or not?

Big George fishes a wad of money out of his pocket, handing it to Slats. The two men move the cases into the back room as Jessie waits on the dock.

INT. BACK ROOM

The room is dark. Cases of whiskey are stacked next to one wall. A makeshift desk of boards and bricks, several chairs, shelves, and photographs line another wall. The largest picture is of a much younger Big George dressed in a World War I uniform standing with other black veterans. A framed photograph shows Big George, an attractive woman, and

young boy. Uneasy, Slats and Jessie stand by the back door as Big George opens the pool hall door.

BIG GEORGE

Wait here.

INT. HOOKIE'S POOL HALL

Dirty windows are half-covered with deep green shades. A crudely made bar runs along the back wall with card tables and chairs crowding the space in front of it. Towards the front of the building, pool tables form a rectangular maze. The pine board floor's patched with flattened tin cans. Cue racks and yellowing pictures line the plaster walls. A set of large windows cover the front of the building.

HOOKIE SMITH, a short, burly man with a painted hayhook bound to a wooden stub serving as his left hand, LUTHER BOHANON, a tall, slender man with long hair curling about his ears, and Big George sit around one of the card tables. An opened bottle and three glasses rest on the table.

LUTHER

Why us?

HOOKIE

Why's this white man needing us for? What about his own?

BIG GEORGE

(takes a drink)

It's good stuff. Bring a good price. Make us some money.

HOOKIE

Old man Bert's is better.

BIG GEORGE

That may be but that old man's crazy, don't want nothing to do with any of us, remember?

LUTHER

Run the white man by him.

HOOKIE

Yeah, if he makes it, then, maybe we'll consider partnering.

LUTHER

If not, we'll have two good shipments. We can make it last till something else comes along.

HOOKIE

Run him by old Bert. Then, maybe, we'll have a little something of our own to throw at him.

BIG GEORGE

Slats McCormack ain't stupid. He'll know right off we're up to something.

(finishes his drink)

I vote we either partner straight up with him or leave it the hell alone.

HOOKIE

You're outvoted. Right, Luther?

INT. BACK ROOM

Slats watches the pool hall door. Jessie, nervously chewing her fingernails, begins pacing the floor.

SLATS

(to Jessie)  
What you doing?

JESSIE

(faking it)  
Like this?

Swinging her arms, Jessie takes great clumping strides about the room.

SLATS

Like what?

JESSIE

Is this how a bootlegger walks?

Before Slats can answer, Big George enters the room, watches Jessie for a few moments, then motions Slats to follow him.

INT. POOL HALL

Slats walks behind Big George who jerks his thumb at Jessie tailing behind them.

BIG GEORGE

What's she doing?

SLATS

Being a fool.

LUTHER  
Ain't no game, mister.

Luther steps from around the bar as Hookie, using his hayhook, hoists himself over the counter from behind the bar.

BIG GEORGE  
(gesturing to Luther)  
Luther Bohanon.  
(pointing to Hookie)  
And this is Hookie Smith.

SLATS  
(studying Big George)  
It's hot. We're thirsty.

Turning, Slats walks to the back table. He and Jessie sit down.

SLATS (CONT.)  
We'd like some water.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MOVING TRUCK DAY

Slats maneuvers the truck down a rough road, the .45 next to him on the seat, the .30-30 next to Jessie. She wears Slats's old shirt, and khakis, his fedora on her lap. The countryside, wild and rugged, is a contradiction of pastures, scrub oaks, oil derricks, the land around them raped by raw salt water used during drilling. Eroded ravines, and wildflowers.

Jessie pushes the rifle and fedora over to Slats.

JESSIE  
Thought we weren't gonna go.

SLATS  
We need the money.

JESSIE  
(chewing on her fingernails)  
You need the money.  
'Side, Big George and them  
don't want us.

SLATS  
Oh, they want us all right.

JESSIE

To get killed! You heard  
Big George. Old man Bert's  
crazy.

SLATS

It's a test, that's all.  
They wanta know if we're  
gonna be straight with  
them.

Slats pushes the fedora and rifle back towards Jessie.

SLATS (CONT.)

Look, just take the rifle  
and hide in the trees.  
That's all you gotta do.

JESSIE

(shoving the stuff back at Slats)  
I ain't gonna do it!

SLATS

Jessie, we do this and we'll be  
on our way. We'll get that  
plane and, you'll see,  
things'll get better.

JESSIE

Everything was fine 'til you  
quit the lumber yard.

SLATS

Couldn't be helped.

JESSIE

Then get a job somewhere else.

SLATS

(dodging ruts)  
Hold on!

Jessie grabs the rifle as the truck bounces across ruts.

SLATS

Sun's getting awful low.  
We're late. Best we go  
through the plan again.

JESSIE

No! I'm sick of it.

SLATS  
It's our first time. He  
don't need to know about  
you.

JESSIE  
(scooting hat and rifle away)  
I ain't doing it.

Slats stops the truck.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats looks at Jessie who stares out the window.

SLATS  
Grab your rifle and get  
out of the truck.

JESSIE  
Big George said I was to  
stay in the truck.

SLATS  
Big George ain't your  
daddy.  
(BEAT)  
Why do you have to fight  
me on everything?  
(BEAT)  
Your mother never did.

JESSIE  
Well, she's dead now,  
ain't she.

SLATS  
(deadly quiet)  
Get the hell out of  
the truck.

Jessie grabs the fedora and rifle.

SLATS (CONT.)  
(pointing to a stand of trees)  
Wait there.

Jessie scrambles to get out of the truck.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie stands by the truck window. Slats stares straight  
ahead.

SLATS (CONT.)

Keep that rifle handy, you  
hear me? We ain't out here  
for target practice.

Slats drives away as Jessie cautiously makes her way towards a stand of scrub oak trees. The country's desolate, lonely, eerie.

EXT. STAND OF TREES

Jessie enters the stand of trees. It's creepy and she's scared, ready to bolt at the slightest noise. Eventually, she reaches the edge of the trees, just ahead is Slats, the truck, and an old barn. She hides behind a tree, peeking around it to watch her father.

EXT. THE OLD BARN

Slats stands beside the truck. He carries the .45. OLD BERT, a grizzly old man, peeks out of the barn door.

OLD BERT

Get outta here!

SLATS

Hookie sent me.

OLD BERT

(spits)

Don't know him. Go away!

SLATS

And Big George.

The barn door opens a bit more.

OLD BERT

You alone?

SLATS

(walking towards Old Bert)

Ain't nobody out here  
but you and me.

Old Bert steps outside. A strawberry-colored beard tied into pigtails covers the front of his overalls. He breathes in deeply.

OLD BERT

(to Slats)

You a river bottom boy,  
ain't you?

(taps his nose)

I can tell.



Old Bert suddenly shifts, looks towards the stand of trees.

OLD BERT (CONT.)  
Sure you're alone?

SLATS  
(pushing past him)  
Quit stalling, old man.

OLD BERT  
It's a big load. Think  
you can handle it?

SLATS  
I can handle whatever  
you got.

OLD BERT  
Yeah, that's what they  
all say.

SLATS  
I ain't them.

OLD BERT  
Just a different color,  
that's all.

Slats and Old Bert disappear into the barn.

EXT. STAND OF TREES

Uneasy, Jessie inches closer to the clearing.

EXT. OLD BARN

Slats and Old Bert stack two crates of whiskey onto the truck bed. Slats removes a bottle, samples it.

OLD BERT  
Good stuff, ain't it.

SLATS  
Seems fair enough.

The two men work steadily, stacking crates onto the truck. Tiring, Old Bert leans against the truck, staring at the stand of trees.

EXT. STAND OF TREES

The sun's setting. It's dark, eerie. Jessie shivers, shifts position, a twig popping underneath her boot.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Old Bert stiffens, staring hard at the trees. Slats hoists a crate onto the truck.

SLATS (CONT.)

(to Old Bert)

Getting dark. You gonna help finish this or stare at a bunch of damn trees all night?

OLD BERT

(staring at the trees)

They come out at dark, you know.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Frightened, Jessie looks about.

OLD BERT (CONT.)

(to Slats)

Ever see them?

(to the stand of trees)

I have. Twice. Down on the bluffs by the river.

Old Bert warms to the sight of his visions. Arms raised, sketching the air, voice a sing-song, a litany.

OLD BERT (CONT.)

Lord, what a sight! Dressed in white gowns they was, like angels. Flames shooting right out of the holy cross. Burning the sky.

(BEAT)

A cleansing they called it, a cleansing.

SLATS

(to Jessie hidden in the trees)

You ain't scaring me, old man.

Slats nudges Old Bert towards the barn.

OLD BERT

(resisting)

Trouble's riding hard behind you, boy. I smell it.

EXT. STAND OF TREES

Thoroughly frightened, Jessie moves even closer to the clearing, flushing a pair of quail.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

The quail fly overhead. Old Bert stares at Slats.

OLD BERT (CONT.)

(angry)  
You ain't no different from  
them niggers, are you, boy?

Slats quickly presses a roll of bills into Old Bert's hand, then jumps into the truck, firing it up, driving away.

OLD BERT (CONT.)

(shouting after Slats)  
Them angels are coming.  
Bringing fire and brimstone,  
they are. You hear me, boy?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK DINING ROOM NIGHT

Slats stares at the airplane advertisement as Jessie cleans the .30-30.

JESSIE

Thought you said the old  
man wasn't crazy.

SLATS

Didn't think he was.

JESSIE

We shouldn't have gone.

SLATS

You should have stayed put.

JESSIE

Big George and them set  
us up.

SLATS

Told you it was just a test.

JESSIE

Told you they don't want us.  
(props rifle next to table)  
Could've gotten us killed!

SLATS  
(looking at Jessie, the rifle)  
I'll finish that. Go on  
to bed.

Jessie picks up the rifle, checking the barrel.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Jessie, I said go on now.

JESSIE  
Gotta keep it clean. You  
told me that, remember?

SLATS  
Don't fight me on this,  
Jessie.

JESSIE  
(clicks the rifle lever)  
Never know when you're gonna  
need it.  
(sights the barrel)  
A man's gotta have something  
he can depend on. Right?  
Ain't that what you told me?

SLATS  
(grabbing the rifle)  
Go to bed, Jessie.

Jessie whirls away, dashing out of the house.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD MOONLIGHT

Jessie runs across the yard.

EXT. ROAD

Jessie stands by the road, silvery in the moonlight, and  
pitches rocks at a fence post.

EXT. MCCORMACK HOUSE

Slats steps outside, looks about for Jessie.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Jessie! It's time  
for bed.

EXT. ROAD

Jessie selects a large rock, leans back, throwing it hard

into the air. A loud whump can be heard as the rock connects, splinters the fence post.

EXT. MCCORMACK YARD

Slats walks into the yard.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Jessica Elizabeth McCormack!

Jessie marches across the yard, past her father, and into the house.

INT. JESSIE'S BEDROOM

Jessie walks into her room, flopping down on the bed. She listens to the sounds of her father locking the door, checking the rifle, then placing it against a wall. Jessie gets up, creeps out of her room.

INT. HALLWAY

Jessie peeks around the corner, looking at her father in the dining room.

INT. DINING ROOM

Slats, sitting at the table, rests his head in his hands.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MCCORMACK TRUCK, PARKED MORNING

Slats and Jessie stand by the truck.

SLATS  
Remember what I told you?

JESSIE  
Yes.

SLATS  
This ain't no practice today,  
you savvy that?

JESSIE  
Yes.

SLATS  
Let's do it, then.

Jessie climbs into the truck, driver's side while Slats positions himself as the passenger.

## SERIES OF SHOTS

## INT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie methodically goes through the motions of starting the truck, Slats watching every move.

## EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie tries to circle the truck around, heading for the road. The truck lurches, stalls.

## INT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie, once again, goes through the motions.

## EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie makes the circle, then suddenly accelerates to the road, the truck's engine roaring away.

## EXT. ROAD

The truck alternately speeds, lurches down the road. Slats's hand grasps the door as his fedora flies out the window.

## END SERIES OF SHOTS

## INT. MCCORMACK LIVING ROOM MORNING, SOME TIME LATER

Slats climbs down into the underground room. Jessie hands him bottles of whiskey to store.

SLATS

(peeking over the top)  
 Scoot the rest of them next  
 to the edge, will you?  
 I'll finish up while you  
 get ready.

## INT. DINING ROOM

Jessie fusses with her hair as Slats walks into the room.

JESSIE

Got the list?

SLATS

(pats his pocket)  
 Right here.

JESSIE  
And the money?

SLATS  
Got it.

INT. MOVING TRUCK DAY

Jessie's driving has improved. Slats leans back his head, resting it as he daydreams.

SLATS  
Got us some real cash money. Yes sir, pay those bills. Get some groceries. Clothes.  
(BEAT)  
Think I'll make me a deposit at the bank. Save some of this for our future.

JESSIE  
You mean for the airplane, don't you?

EXT. DRUMRIGHT, OKLAHOMA

A variety of people--Syrian, Lebanese, Greek, Jewish, Scotch-Irish--crowd the streets. The town's busy, prosperous. Jessie parks the truck on a steep hill in front of the bank.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats scoots some rocks in front of the tires as Jessie looks about.

SLATS  
(hands her money)  
Pay Silas what we owe him.  
And get some shirts, too.

EXT. STREET

Jessie jumps across pot holes, dodges cars and horse-drawn wagons.

EXT. SILAS'S STORE

Jessie window shops a few moments before entering.

INT. SILAS'S STORE

Pressed tin ceilings, fans, and people crowd the store. A little red-haired girl dressed in new shoes dances her way across the wooden floor of the store. Unknown to Jessie, Jack Newley shops in the hat section. Glancing about, he notices Jessie and smiles. Jessie makes her way to one of the tables, worms her way by several women, grabbing a handful of shirts. She walks to the cash register, placing her purchases on the counter. SILAS, a thin, serious man, looks at the shirts, pushes them back towards Jessie.

SILAS

Can't do it for you, Jessie.  
Not any more.

Jessie pulls out the wad of money, thumbing it front of Silas.

JESSIE

(placing money on the counter)  
Will this cover it?

Silas grabs the money. Turning his back, he carefully counts the money.

SILAS

(turning around)  
How's about we keep the rest  
on your account?

JESSIE

I reckon I'll just take  
what's left.

SILAS

Suit yourself.

Silas opens a ledger book, running his finger down Slats's account sheet, posts some numbers.

JESSIE

How's about a receipt?

Silas, taking his time, fills out the receipt, then places it next to Jessie's money. Jessie reaches for them when her hand is grabbed hard by Jack Newley. Turning her head, she looks directly at Jack.

JACK

(to Silas)  
That's nigger money, Silas.  
We don't want none of that  
'round here, now do we.

Customers's chatter, movement stop. The store is quiet,



only the sound of Silas quickly wrapping Jessie's purchase, twine whirling off the spool. Jack squeezes Jessie's hand, she keeps staring at him. Finished, Silas pushes the package at Jessie. Jack releases her hand. She grabs the package, money, and whirls away walking to the front door.

SILAS  
(to Jack)  
People put money down,  
I do business.

JACK  
Maybe we should talk about  
that.

SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. SILAS'S STORE

Jessie glances about for Slats, and not seeing him, runs to the truck, cars honking at her as she dashes in front of them.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie sits, staring out the window, package and money in her lap as Slats gets inside. She pushes the stuff towards her father, continuing to stare out the window. Puzzled, Slats takes the money, carefully folding it, putting it into his pocket.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats drives through the countryside.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

From time to time, Slats glances at Jessie who, chewing on her fingernails, continues to stare out the window.

INT. PARKED TRUCK MCCORMACK DRIVEWAY

Jessie jumps out of the truck.

EXT. YARD

Jessie runs to the house.

INT. DINING ROOM

Jessie grabs the .30-30 as Slats enters the house, placing the package on the table. Without speaking, Jessie, carrying the rifle, goes outside.

Puzzled, Slats sits at the dining room table, waiting, listening. Soon the sound of the rifle firing once, then again, and again can be heard.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RED WILLIAMS'S PLACE MORNING INDIAN SUMMER

JN-4's are lined up on the tarmac. Slats, Jessie, and Red stand by one of the Jennys.

RED  
You've done pretty good  
up there.

SLATS  
Thanks for the lessons.

RED  
You can thank me by paying  
for this here Jenny.

SLATS  
(hands Red a large wad of money)  
Here. That covers it, don't  
it?

RED  
(pocketing the money)  
Got no complaints by me.

EXT. PARKED JN-4

After Jessie tucks up her hair into a leather flight helmet, Slats positions her goggles, then helps her into one of the cockpits, fastening her seat belt.

SLATS  
Time to fly, Jessie!

Slats climbs into the other cockpit, looks about, nods at Red whose hands rest on the propeller.

SLATS (CONT.)  
(shouting)  
Clear!

Slats makes contact, the propellers whirl, and the engine roars to life.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Slats taxis the plane to the grass runway, the Jenny bouncing over the ground. He lines up, steadily increasing the power, and the JN-4 speeds down the runway, and takes off.

The plane climbs, then Slats banks a hard left.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie's both scared and thrilled. She looks out over the cockpit to the world below her.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Farms, pastures, and the Cimarron River are below. Slats puts the plane through a figure eight above a mile section.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie grips the edge of the cockpit, balancing herself.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Slats puts the Jenny into a climb, then rotates the plane around a spot on the horizon, a giant barrel roll in the sky.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie grins, loving it.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Slats loses altitude, makes his approach, landing the Jenny on the grass runway. He taxis over to Red Williams.

EXT. PARKED JN-4

Slats removes Jessie's helmet and goggles, tossing them to Red Williams.

SLATS  
(to Red)  
Much obliged.  
(to Jessie)  
Take the truck. Drive it  
straight home. I'll meet  
you there in a bit. Savvy?

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie, alone and loving it, experiments with the truck as she drives down the road.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Slats watches Jessie.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARKED JN-4 MCCORMACK PASTURE SOME TIME LATER DAY

Slats is edgy, pacing back and forth as Jessie, wearing a flight helmet, straps unfastened, runs through a check of the plane and equipment.

SLATS

Remember what I told you.

Jessie kneels down, inspects a tire as she chews on a fingernail.

SLATS (CONT.)

You're biting your nails again, Jessie.

(BEAT)

Maybe we better go through it one more time.

Jessie stands up, kicks the tire.

JESSIE

Let's get on with it.

SLATS

(checking the plane again)

Nothing fancy, now, you hear?

Groaning, Jessie climbs into the cockpit, fingers trembling as she fastens the flight helmet.

SLATS (CONT.)

Just take her up and land her. Like we've been practicing.

JESSIE

For God's sake, I remember!

SLATS

(looking at Jessie)

Gotta think smart up there, Jessie.

Jessie motions to him to grab the propeller.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 (ignoring her)  
 Remember how she drags a bit.

JESSIE  
 (yelling)  
 I won't remember anything if  
 you don't stop talking.  
 Let's go!

Slats walks over to the propeller, begins to spin it.

SLATS  
 Nothing fancy!

Jessie makes contact, the JN-4 roaring to life.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

As she taxis she looks over her shoulder at Slats whose walking behind her, hands and mouth moving with last minute instructions. Jessie waves, shouting, her words lost in the noise.

JESSIE  
 Wait 'til you see what  
 I can do!

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie concentrates on the plane, increasing speed, the plane lifting in take off, wings wobbling a bit.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Directly in line with the plane is a wide stand of tall trees. The Jenny's dragging a bit.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie, a bit worried now, works with the plane.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats runs after the plane, watches, his body urging the plane and Jessie to pick up speed, to lift.

SLATS  
 Come on, Jessie. Up,  
 up! Clear those trees.  
 (yelling)  
 Get her up, Jessie!  
 The trees, damn it,  
 the trees.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie's concentrating, a little concern here.

JESSIE  
Come on, old girl!  
You can do it!

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The Jenny finally takes hold, climbs, barely clearing the trees. The plane continues to climb, then banks left.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Visibly relieved, Jessie relaxes a bit, checks everything.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats walks the flight with Jessie, gesturing the moves, living it with her.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The plane circles the pasture, then climbs. The horizon, shrouded in blue haze, blurs the boundary of earth and sky.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie's alone, in control, and loving it.

JESSIE  
Now, watch this!

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie places the plane into a steep climb.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats stops, watches.

SLATS  
I said nothing fancy,  
Jessica McCormack!

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The plane continues to climb, up, up, until it seems to fall backwards, rushing towards the ground.

INT. MOVING JN-4

The wires are singing in the air, the pressure pushing

Jessie down into the seat as she struggles to control the plane.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Earth, sky spin about the plane as it rushes to the ground.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats, worried, waves his arms, shouting.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Pull out of it, Jessie!  
I said pull out of it,  
goddamn it, pull out of  
it!

INT. MOVING JN-4

There's a struggle here as Jessie works to pull the plane out of the dive.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Finally, the plane levels a bit, then more as Jessie regains control of it.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats waves his arms at Jessie, trying to get her to land.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The plane noses back up, levels out, and circles the pasture again.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats motions for Jessie to land.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie prepares for her approach.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The plane approaches, losing altitude and air speed, almost dropping from the sky.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie lines up the plane.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The plane continues to lose altitude, crossing the pasture, then touching, bouncing a bit, until tires are on the ground. Jessie taxis over to Slats.

EXT. PASTURE

Slats races to Jessie.

EXT. PARKED JN-4

Jessie climbs out as Slats reaches up to help her. He swings her down.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Nothing fancy. Didn't  
I say that? Nothing  
fancy!

JESSIE  
(removing her helmet)  
Guess you taught me better  
than you thought.

SLATS  
(grabbing her shoulders)  
Gotta think smart, Jessie.  
You'll get yourself killed,  
if you don't.

Jessie pulls away from him, walks toward the house.

SLATS (CONT.)  
This old world don't allow  
for no mistakes, Jessie.  
You hear me!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOOKIE'S POOL HALL DAY

Jessie fusses with her hair in front of a cracked mirror on the wall. Slats, chair kicked back, feet resting on a pool table, whittles a piece of wood. Big George scoots a cardboard box across the table to Slats.

BIG GEORGE  
Got some clothes for your  
girl.

SLATS  
(glancing up)  
Much obliged. But Jessie's  
got plenty.



BIG GEORGE  
They're from the wife.

Interested, Jessie quickly twists her hair into a bun, and walks over to the table.

SLATS  
Right thoughtful of her.

BIG GEORGE  
Said I was to give them  
to you.  
(nudges the box closer to Slats)  
They're clean.

Slats lowers the chair, feet resting lightly on the floor.

SLATS  
Don't doubt it a bit.  
Just don't need them  
is all.

BIG GEORGE  
(to Jessie)  
She works for white folks.  
Rich white folks. Big house.  
New clothes every season.

Jessie nods, pulling the box to her as Slats stares at her a few moments, then stands up, motioning to Big George to follow him. The two men walk towards the front of the building. Their voices fading some.

SLATS  
About this next delivery.  
What's this Ada woman like?

BIG GEORGE  
She's one mean bitch, don't  
think she ain't.

Jessie reaches into the box of clothes, pulling up a gorgette dress. She holds it to the light, smells the fragrance. It's her own reverie of times with her mother, of being a young woman. Jessie molds the dress to her body, swaying a bit in the light.

BIG GEORGE (CONT.)  
(loudly)  
She knows you're coming,  
Slats. What you look like  
and all. Ain't got no  
idea about Jessie, though.

Startled, Jessie drops the dress into the box, glancing over her shoulder at Slats and Big George walking back towards the table. She touches the dress one last time before turning to face the two men.

SLATS

Give us the edge then,  
don't you think?

BIG GEORGE

Better if she don't know  
at all.

SLATS

(looking at Jessie)  
We can handle it.

Jessie nods at Slats, grabbing her fedora. Big George walks over to the door, blocking it with his large frame.

BIG GEORGE

Don't think so, Slats. I'm  
going with you.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats drives as Jessie holds the .30-30.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Big George leans against the truck cab. A tarp covers boxes of whiskey and a shotgun beside him.

Slats maneuvers the truck down a narrow road, over a rickety wooden bridge. Cottonwood trees crowd the creek banks, oil filming the water's surface.

Slats eases the truck onto a grassy parking area by a tarpapered building. Half-a-dozen vehicles are parked haphazardly. He pulls up to the back entrance, a large elm tree shading it.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Big George, shotgun in his arms, walks over to Slats's side of the truck.

BIG GEORGE

(pointing at Jessie)  
Remember our deal.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats turns, looks at Jessie.

SLATS  
Stay in the truck.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats, .45 tucked in the back waistband of his khakis, carries a box of whiskey. Big George walks beside him.

EXT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

Big George knocks three times, waits, then knocks twice more. He quickly positions himself along the wall.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie, rifle in hand, crouches down on the driver's side, peeking over the hood.

EXT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

ADA, a large-boned black woman, wearing a print dress with an apron, opens the door.

ADA  
So, you're Big George's  
friend.

EXT. PARKING AREA

Jessie, glancing about, makes her way to the elm tree.

EXT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

Ada turns, walking inside. Slats sits the box down on the threshold, his body leaning against the door frame.

ADA (OS)  
You gonna close that door,  
mister? You're letting in  
flies.

SLATS  
(stepping a few feet inside)  
It stays open.

EXT. PARKING AREA

Big George inches closer to the entrance. Jessie slips behind the elm tree. Spotting her, Big George motions for her to go back to the truck. Jessie smiles, shaking her head "no."

INT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

Ada stops, walks back towards Slats.

ADA  
 Suit yourself.  
 (pointing to the box)  
 Just leave it then.  
 I'll settle up with  
 Big George later.

Slats pulls out the .45, aiming it at Ada.

SLATS  
 Deal was you'd have the  
 money right here. No  
 money, no whiskey, Ada.

ADA  
 (yelling)  
 Charley! Charley, get  
 your ass in here. Now!

Charley, carrying a shotgun, appears, and stands by Ada's side.

ADA (CONT.)  
 Get this man his money.

Big George suddenly steps through the doorway, shotgun leveled at Charley.

SLATS  
 Nobody goes anywhere.

Ada reaches for a revolver bulging from the waistband of her apron.

ADA  
 (to Big George)  
 What the hell you doing  
 here!

BIG GEORGE  
 Protecting my interests.

EXT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

Jessie inches her way along the wall, within easy hearing and seeing distance of the back entrance.

INT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

Big George, shotgun in hand, covers for them as Slats,

holding the revolver in one hand, barrel pointed at Ada, extends his other hand towards her.

SLATS

That's real friendly, Ada, to give me your revolver. Ease it out slow. That's good. Empty it out on the floor. Now, put it on the table.

(to Charley)

I think you already know how to do this, so get to it. Now! That's good. Put the shotgun on the floor and gently slide it over here. Stock first, please.

(to Big George)

Cover the back.

Big George pivots slightly, looks out the back door into Jessie's face. Scowling at her, he motions her away. Unaware of Jessie's presence, Slats removes a bottle of whiskey from the box, smashing it against the door frame.

SLATS (CONT.)

No later about it, Ada. Big George's right here and he's ready for his money. I'd say you bought yourself some whiskey.

Slats removes another bottle, pitching it against the wall, whiskey streaking the dingy paint.

SLATS (CONT.)

Your call, Ada.

EXT. TAR-PAPERED BUILDING

Jessie eases away from the doorway and walks quickly back to the truck.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Slipping into the front seat, she holds the door closed as Slats and Big George leave the building.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats, angry and quiet, stares at the building as Big George leans into the truck window.

BIG GEORGE

(to Jessie)

You was to stay in the truck.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie removes the fedora, shaking out her long hair.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Frustrated, Big George slaps the top of the truck.

BIG GEORGE (CONT.)  
 (to Slats)  
 Told you this ain't no  
 place for a white girl.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK LIVING ROOM EVENING

Slats and Jessie walk down the steps into the underground room.

It's dank, red clay walls are covered in flaking plaster. Shelves filled with cases of whiskey line the walls. Slats carries a case up the ladder while Jessie holds the lantern.

DISSOLVE TO:

On screen:

**OKLAHOMA**  
**APRIL 1921**

EXT. OILFIELDS DAY

Aerial view. A red blotch of land, splashed with salt erosion, nearly barren of grass and trees, crowded with wooden oil derricks, and criss-crossed with narrow one-track roads filled with trucks and horse-drawn wagons carrying equipment. Swarming around the derricks and equipment are roustabouts, their clothing smeared with red dirt and oil.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Slats circles the plane about the oilfields. The roustabouts below them wave, cheer, as he daringly lands the Jenny on a short stretch of road among a cluster of oil derricks.

EXT. PARKED JN-4

Jessie unlashes bottles from the plane, stacking them on the dirt as Slats entertains the oilfield workers crowded about him.

SLATS  
 (gesturing to Jessie)  
 Took to it right away.

Slats smoothes his hair, then snaps his fingers. Startled, the workers jump back.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 Took her up a couple of times,  
 then she flew that Jenny like  
 there was no tomorrow.

Jessie stands by her father, removes the flight helmet, shaking out her long hair. The men line up for the whiskey. Jessie hands out the bottles, Slats takes the money. The men openly stare at Jessie.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 This is my right-hand man.  
 She'll be doing business  
 with you next time.

EXT. MOVING CAR

Jack Newley eases his car over the deeply rutted road toward Slats and Jessie.

EXT. OIL FIELD

Slats and Jessie gather up their things, business concluded as Jack parks his car.

EXT. PARKED CAR

Jack and Buddy walk toward Slats and Jessie as Malcomb, shotgun in his arms, waits by the car.

EXT. OIL FIELD

Slats notices Jack.

SLATS  
 Load it up, Jessie.  
 We got company.

Jessie glances at Jack, nods at her father, stashes the extra bottles in the JN-4.

SLATS (CONT.)  
 (to Jack)  
 You lost?

Jack stops a few feet away, Buddy close behind him.

JACK  
Just here to talk to the  
boys a bit. Got a meeting  
tonight. Wanta come?

SLATS  
I'm not much for meetings.

Slats motions for Jessie to start the plane.

JACK  
You're running with the wrong  
kind, Slats.

SLATS  
Is that right.

Jack steps in front of Slats, flicks dust from his jacket.

JACK  
You need to make some  
changes.

SLATS  
Changes?

JACK  
You've been seen. You  
and the girl. In Tulsa  
nigger town.

Slats walks to the plane.

SLATS  
(yelling to Jessie)  
Fire her up, Jessie!

Slats turns, walks to the plane, spins the propeller as  
Jessie makes contact.

Jessie starts the engine, begins taxiing. Slats moves to  
hop into the cockpit. Jack runs after Slats, slapping him  
on the shoulder.

JACK  
(shouting)  
Ain't right!

SLATS  
(turning)  
You still here, Jack?  
Thought you had to talk  
to the boys.  
(jumping into the plane)  
Get us out of here, Jessie.  
Now!



Positioned in the cockpit, Slats waves at Jessie to increase the speed. The JN-4 bounces down the dirt road as Jack runs alongside the plane, his voice hoarse with screaming over the noise.

JACK  
It ain't natural, Slats  
McCormack. It ain't  
natural!

The Jenny lifts, wobbling a bit as Jessie maneuvers it between air derricks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JN-4 DAWN

Sound of bottles clinking. Gradually we see Slats and Jessie loading whiskey in the front cockpit.

SLATS  
No fancy stuff. No trouble.  
Just deliver it, sell it, and  
get out of there.

JESSIE  
I can handle it.

SLATS  
You see Jack and them, you  
get the hell out of there  
fast.

Jessie buckles up, positions the goggles, and gives a thumbs up at Slats. He spins the propeller, Jessie makes contact, and the Jenny roars to life.

SLATS (CONT.)  
Good flying!

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The Jenny bounces across the pasture, Jessie increasing power until the plane lifts, bites the air. The JN-4 gains altitude, then Jessie circles back, flies over the farm, wiggling the wings at Slats. She climbs, leaving the farm behind. Pastures, farms stretch out below her.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie peers left and right, checks her bearings. Ahead is the Cimarron River; she banks the plane a bit, lining up with the river, then comes down in altitude.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

The Jenny loses altitude until it is just above the river's surface, the tires barely touching the water, creating a rooster tail effect. Jessie's skiing the river.

INT. MOVING JN-4

Jessie grins, loving it.

EXT. MOVING JN-4

Just ahead is a bridge. The plane climbs, clears the bridge, and flies over into a world of wooden oil derricks in and along the river. Jessie banks, flies over the oil field, circles it as the roustabouts watch. Then she tips the plane, flies sideways between two rows of derricks, rights the plane, circles, makes her approach, and lands on a stretch of cleared land by some of the derricks.

EXT. OIL FIELD

A short distance away from Jessie's landing spot, Jack Newley, Buddy Johnson, and Malcomb Burnett watch from his parked car.

INT. PARKED CAR

Jack spits out the window.

JACK

That boy don't listen good.  
Think we better teach him  
and that girl of his a  
lesson.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MCCORMACK HOME NIGHT MAY 30, 1921

On the screen:

**MAY 30, 1921**

Lamps glow from the house, windows opened, curtains hanging still. Night sounds of an owl, a pack of coyotes, frogs.

INT. KITCHEN

Slats works over plane designs scattered across the kitchen table. Jessie reads a book.

EXT. MOVING CAR ROAD

Jack Newley parks his car a short distance from the McCormack home.

INT. PARKED CAR

Jack, Buddy, and Malcomb sit in the car.

JACK  
I'll do the talking. Just back  
me up if I need it. You never  
know with these people.

EXT. PARKED CAR

The three men make their way through the trees towards the house. Night sounds are quieted.

EXT. MCCORMACK HOME

Jack, covered by Buddy and Malcolm, knocks on the door.

INT. HOUSE

Slats and Jessie grab their weapons.

EXT. HOUSE

The three men back away from the door, standing apart, forming a triangle. Slats stands in the porch light, Jessie slightly behind and to the right of him.

SLATS  
What you boys want?

JACK  
Don't come around tomorrow.

SLATS  
That's delivery day.

JACK  
Not anymore.

SLATS  
Who says?

Jack smiles, picks up a stick, taps it against a tree, then drops into a squat, and begins drawing in the dirt.

JACK  
You a religious man, Slats?

SLATS  
You here to witness to me?

Jack stands, wipes his hands on his trousers, and stares at Jessie.

JACK  
 (to Jessie)  
 Ever wonder what Christ wrote  
 in the dirt?  
 (to Slats)  
 Stay home.  
 (walks backwards a few steps)  
 And keep her home, too.

Jack turns and with Buddy and Malcolm walks into the darkness. Jack calls back as they disappear from view.

JACK (CONT.)  
 Stay away from those Tulsa  
 niggers, Slats.

INT. HOUSE

Slats and Jessie bolt doors, close and cover windows, and check their supply of ammunition. Slats descends the steps into the underground room, Jessie follows carrying a kerosene lamp.

INT. UNDERGROUND ROOM

Jessie holds the lamp as Slats checks their whiskey inventory.

SLATS  
 We'll stay put a few days  
 then unload this in Tulsa.

JESSIE  
 Hookie's?

SLATS  
 Without a doubt.

DISSOLVE TO:

On screen:

**Tulsa, Oklahoma**  
**May 31, 1921**

EXT. TULSA COURTHOUSE MAY 31st, 1921 DAY

A white man standing on the front steps of the courthouse finishes reading a Tulsa newspaper, throws it down, walks across it. Close-up on the newspaper's headline.

**Negro Arrested  
Attacked White Girl**

EXT. PARKED TRUCK SAME TIME

Slats and Jessie load the truck with whiskey, their weapons plus a double-barrel sawed-off shotgun, and extra ammunition. Slats is edgy, Jessie's chewing her fingernails.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats, quiet and tense, his .45 on the seat next to him, drives carefully, taking his time, watching side roads, and what might be behind them. Jessie checks on the shotgun covered by an old poncho behind the seat. She carries her rifle.

EXT. TULSA COURTHOUSE SOMETIME BETWEEN 6:00 & 9:00 p.m.

An increasing number of angry whites, their weapons barely concealed, form outside the courthouse, demanding to see the young Negro accused of assaulting a young white girl.

INT. COURTHOUSE

The sheriff sends his guards into the elevator. At the top floor, the jail, the guards barricade the stairwells and elevator.

EXT. TULSA COURTHOUSE SHORT TIME LATER

A small group of blacks shout for the sheriff. Various policeman herd the blacks away from the courthouse, shooing them on home. The whites remain.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK ARKANSAS RIVER BRIDGE TULSA

Slats maneuvers the truck through traffic which is unusually heavy.

EXT. NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY

A small group of white men try to break into the armory for its weapons. The commander arrives, dispersing them.

EXT. FREDDIE'S PAWNSHOP

White men break the windows of the pawnshop.

INT. FREDDIE'S PAWNSHOP

The white men grab weapons and boxes of ammunition.

EXT. WALKER'S HARDWARE

Another group of white men run from the hardware store, their arms filled with weapons and ammunition.

INT. MOVING TRUCK DOWNTOWN TULSA EVENING

Street lamps glow softly onto deserted sidewalks and streets. Puzzled, Slats glances at Jessie who shrugs and looks out the window.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats drives several blocks, then turns a corner, driving straight into the Tulsa Race Riot. Men run about, some holding torches, others knives and guns. A swirling mass of Negroes and whites fight by the courthouse. Sound of bullets ricocheting off building walls along with men cursing and groaning can be heard.

A man who looks like Luther Bohanon crawls along the sidewalk. His face is slashed, blood pours through a gash in his shirt. He raises his head briefly, looking at Slats and Jessie before collapsing face down.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie covers her face.

JESSIE  
(screaming)  
Get us out of here.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats whips the truck around, gears grinding, as some of the mob begin pelting rocks at the truck.

SLATS  
Get down, Jessie! Get  
down!

Jessie scrambles to the floor board, holding the rifle in her hands. Slats weaves this way and that trying to get away from the mob. A white man runs alongside the truck, grabbing the door, hanging on as Slats swerves. The man, bloody, eyes wild, grabs for the steering wheel. Slats uses the butt of the .45 to beat the man away from the truck until he finally collapses, body crumpling to the street.

Slats, driving wildly, whips down alleys, crosses vacant lots, jumps curbs as he makes his way to Hookie's Pool Hall.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK BLACK DISTRICT

The street is deserted, only scattered toys and paper blowing in the wind.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats breathes in deeply.

SLATS  
Smell that, Jessie?

Jessie gets back up on the seat.

JESSIE  
(pointing out the window)  
Look!

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Several fires burn in the distance as Slats eases the truck down the street. No lights, no movement can be seen from any of the buildings. No dogs or cats, move in the alleys. The area's eerie in its desolation.

About a block from Hookie's, Slats stops the truck. An old Ford is parked across from the pool hall. Two white men lean against the car.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie pulls down the brim of the fedora and holds the rifle close to her. Slats grabs the .45.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats maneuvers the truck down the street, giving the men a quick nod of recognition as he passes them.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats continues driving down the street, Jessie chews on her fingernails.

SLATS  
Buddy Johnson. The other  
one's Malcomb Burnett.

JESSIE  
Couldn't see who was in  
the car.

SLATS  
Don't have to.

JESSIE  
Jack Newley?

SLATS  
We better warn Big George.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Slats turns down an alley, making his way to Hookie's, and parks behind the pool hall.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats and Jessie unloads the whiskey, stacking the cases on the dock. Sounds of shouting and gunshots in the distance.

EXT. LOADING DOCK, BACK DOOR

Jessie stands by Slats as he knocks twice, pauses, then knocks three times. Big George peeks out the door, then grabs Slats and Jessie pulling them into the back room.

INT. BACK ROOM

Slats, Jessie, Big George, and Hookie stand in the darkness.

BIG GEORGE  
(to Slats)  
Hell of a time for a  
delivery.

Hookie holds open the door as Big George quickly brings in the cases of whiskey. Finishing, Hookie, without speaking, walks into the pool hall. Big George turns to Slats.

BIG GEORGE (CONT.)  
What brings you to hell?

SLATS  
I know those white men  
out front.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POOL HALL

A small kerosene lamp glows on the bar top, the rest of the pool hall is dark. Slats paces the floor while Big George stacks weapons and money on the bar. Jessie sits alone at a back table, fedora and rifle before her. Hookie, crouched in the shadows by the front window, watches Buddy and Malcomb across the street.



BIG GEORGE  
Sure it was Luther?

SLATS  
Looked like him. Hard  
to tell for sure.  
(BEAT)  
Trouble seems to be headed  
this way. Won't be long.

BIG GEORGE  
(pointing to the street)  
And those men out there?  
They part of it?

SLATS  
Reckon so.

BIG GEORGE  
Should have told us about  
Jack Newley and his boys,  
Slats.

Slats stops pacing, walks over to the bar, bracing his arms  
against the counter top.

SLATS  
Can't never tell how deep  
meanness goes in a person.  
You know that.

BIG GEORGE  
What I know is trouble's  
riding hard after you.  
And, what I see is that  
it's right there across  
the street.

Uneasy, Jessie stands up, her hand resting on the .30-30.

BIG GEORGE (CONT.)  
(pointing at Jessie)  
Told you she'd get us all  
killed.

SLATS  
Jessie's got nothing to do  
with this.

BIG GEORGE  
Where you been living,  
Slats McCormack!

Slats motions for Jessie to sit down. She remains standing.

SLATS

Got any suggestions?

BIG GEORGE

Get her outta here.

SLATS

I'll make a deal with you. If you and Hookie create a diversion, I'll get Jessie out of here.

BIG GEORGE

You know what you're asking?

SLATS

Do it and we're gone.

BIG GEORGE

Hookie's got himself to worry about and I got a family to get outta here. No, Slats. No deal.

SLATS

You wanta get your wife and son? I'll take you there. You all can stay at my place 'til this blows over.

BIG GEORGE

You're talking crazy.

SLATS

What's crazy? How you gonna get your family out of Tulsa? On foot? Don't stand much of a chance, now, do you?

Big George walks over to Hookie, whispers in his ear. Hookie nods, stands, positioning a revolver in his back waist band. Without speaking, he walks out of the room. Jessie, grabbing the fedora and rifle, follows Hookie.

SLATS

Jessie! Wait!

Jessie walks to the back door, watching Hookie make his way down the side of the building.

EXT. POOL HALL

Jessie follows Hookie who leans against a porch column. He whips out a file and begins sharpening his hook.

EXT. STREET

Buddy Johnson and Malcomb Burnett watch Hookie until they hear a burst of gunfire, shouts closeby. Buddy and Malcomb grab their shotguns as Hookie drops the file, and pulls out the revolver.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats and Big George load the truck. Slats whistles for Jessie.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie scrunches down on the floorboard, Big George covering her with a poncho. Slats's free hand holds the .45, Big George carries a shotgun. As Slats starts the truck, sound of gunfire, screams from the front of Hookie's Pool Hall.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

The truck bumps along as Slats maneuvers potholes and makes quick turns, avoiding gangs of men. Slats gradually makes his way to the Frisco track area, where an unnatural glow fills the sky.

On screen:

June 1st, 1921

EXT. FRISCO TRACK AREA PARKED TRUCK BEFORE DAWN

Fires, smoke surround the truck. People running, screaming, cursing.

INT. PARKED TRUCK

Slats and Big George stare at smoke spiraling into the air, the sky tinged orange and red.

BIG GEORGE

Sweet Jesus! Oh, sweet Jesus.

Jessie, drenched in sweat, pushes aside the poncho and looks out into an inferno of burning houses and buildings. Big George turns to Slats. Slats turns away.

SLATS

They're gone, Big George.

BIG GEORGE  
We gotta get Lucy and Jonathan!

SLATS  
Nobody could live through that.

Big George reaches over Jessie, grabbing Slats's arm.

BIG GEORGE  
You owe me this!

Big George kicks open the door, grabs the shotgun. Slats groans, grabs the .45 and the two men step outside, the noise deafening.

SLATS  
(to Jessie)  
Cover us!

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

In Jessie's line of sight, outlined by the light of a fire, Slats runs a zig-zag pattern after Big George. Carrying the rifle, Jessie makes her way across the street to a thicket of lilacs.

EXT. BUILDING, SHORT DISTANCE AWAY

Several cars pull up to a building in the area. Jack, Buddy, and Malcomb climb out. Malcomb's been shot, his arm in a makeshift sling. Four men get out of the other cars. They glance about the area, look to Jack for orders.

EXT. BURNING HOMES

Slats runs after Big George who turns this way and that, confused by the fires and smoke.

SLATS  
Wait up! Big George!

BIG GEORGE  
(turning to face Slats)  
I can't find it!

Slats reaches Big George, both men exhausted from their run, breathing hard with the smoke, coughing.

BIG GEORGE (CONT.)  
(grabbing Slats's shoulders)  
I can't even find my own house!

SLATS  
Things just look different  
right now. Don't you worry,  
we'll find it.

EXT. BUILDING

Buddy Johnson and others torch a building as Jack Newley notices the McCormack truck.

JACK  
Over there! By that truck.

EXT. BURNING HOMES

Slats and Big George make their way through the area. They've removed their shirts, wrapping them about their faces. An older woman, EFFIE ANDERSON, darts out from behind a pile of rubble.

BIG GEORGE  
Effie! Effie Anderson. It's  
George Baker.

Effie screams at Slats.

EFFIE  
(points to Slats)  
Ain't you done enough!  
Leave us! Leave us alone!

BIG GEORGE  
Effie! Where's Lucy? Jonathan?

Effie stares at Big George, not recognizing him.

EFFIE  
There ain't no one here no more.  
We're all dead.

She turns, runs into the smoke.

EXT. LILAC BUSHES

Hearing the sound of men approaching, Jessie shrinks back into the bushes.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jack and the other men rush the truck.

JACK

Damn Slats McCormack to hell!  
He's here with that nigger of  
his.

(kicks the truck, glances about)  
I don't care what you do  
to the nigger. But Slats is  
mine. Find them!

The men split into two groups. Malcomb leads the others as Jack and Buddy run into the smoke, taking the same direction as Slats and Big George.

EXT. BURNING HOME, BIG GEORGE'S

Slats wrestles with Big George trying to enter one of the burning homes.

BIG GEORGE

Let me go!

SLATS

We're too late.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

The fire intensifies as trucks and cars arrive, beginning a blockade of the area.

EXT. BURNING HOME, BIG GEORGE'S

Buddy eases around an old car, sights Slats and Big George struggling with each other.

JACK (OS)

See anything?

BUDDY

He's big. Take maybe two,  
three shots.

Jack appears beside Buddy, sees Big George and Slats wrestling with each other. Big George pushes Slats down.

JACK

Do it!

Buddy fires, hitting Big George in the shoulder. Slats twists about, fires his .45, stands, takes a hit in the thigh.

EXT. LILAC BUSHES

Hearing the gunfire, Jessie steps away from the bushes, moves to the truck.

EXT. BURNING HOME, BIG GEORGE'S

Slats grabs Big George, pulling him into the smoke. Together, Jack and Buddy open fire, wounding Slats in the arm and Big George in the head.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK

Jessie stands outlined against the fire. She holds the .30-30. The Frisco track area is an inferno, houses and buildings burning. The sky glows orange and red. Smoke camouflages everything. A surrealist quality. Chaos.

EXT. BURNING AREA

Supporting Big George, Slats navigates him towards the truck.

BIG GEORGE  
I can't see nothing.

SLATS  
Hold on! We're almost there!

JACK (OS)  
He's heading for the truck!  
Come on!

EXT. AREA BY THE PARKED TRUCK

In Jessie's line of sight, Slats emerges from the smoke, half dragging, half carrying Big George. He looks about for Jessie.

SLATS  
Jessie!

Slats, wounded, face and mouth pinched white, stares unseeing in Jessie's direction.

JESSIE  
(waving at Slats)  
Here I am!

As he staggers towards her, Jack and Buddy close in on Slats and Big George in a pincer-like move.

Slats pushes Big George to the ground, shielding his body with his own, propping himself, trying to steady his .45. He motions for Jessie to fire at Jack rushing towards them

as he takes a shaky aim at Buddy. Stunned, Jessie raises the .30-30.

SLATS

Jessie, cover me!

Jessie sights the barrel at Jack who's stopped short by Slats calling her name. He glances about, finally spotting her with the rifle. Jack stands still. Jessie pulls back the hammer. Jack smiles at her, taunting her. She begins to shake. Slats suddenly fires the revolver at Buddy, and Jessie instinctively, fires the rifle.

Jack crumples to the ground. Jessie injects a new shell into the chamber, and fires at Buddy whom Slats only wounded.

Jessie turns to her father. Her eyes are haunted, empty until Slats' and Big George's images fill them as she moves to help them. She helps Slats load Big George onto the bed of the truck. She throws a poncho over both of them, then jumps into the cab, fires up the truck.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

People continually arrive at the Frisco Track area, parking their cars and trucks, effectively blockading the site from fire trucks, their clanging bells cutting through the chaos. Men wave their weapons at Jessie as she turns down an alley. It's deeply rutted, the way blocked with rocks and debris.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie glances about.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie whips the truck into a vacant lot to her left. Buildings burn on either side of it. She pushes the truck between the two structures. Sound of sheet metal popping, lumber crashing. Smoke obscures everything.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie wipes her eyes from sweat, pulls up her shirt to cover her nose and mouth.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie jumps the curb onto the next street, accelerates, then careens around the corner, taking still another street. She continues to weave her way from one street to the next, crossing vacant lots as necessary until she's out of the



Frisco track area. Behind them, smoke plumes, streaked with red and orange, fill the Tulsa sky.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie concentrates on crossing the Arkansas River bridge.

EXT. MOVING TRUCK

Jessie enters Sapulpa city limits.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK DR. MARTIN'S MEDICAL OFFICE

It's a busy place with people arriving with various types of wounds from the riot. Jessie waits outside Dr. Martin's office.

INT. MOVING TRUCK

A bandaged Slats sits beside Jessie.

EXT. PARKED TRUCK FARLEY'S FUNERAL HOME

Several vehicles are parked haphazardly next to the funeral home. People transporting bodies from the riot. Slats and Jessie stand by the truck as Pete Farley removes Big George's body.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK HOME BACK PORCH MUCH LATER DAY

Slats sits on the porch whittling twigs into pieces, dumping them beside him when they become too small. His movements are stiff and awkward. Jessie looks out the screen door to the hangar and the JN-4.

JESSIE

I think I'll go up tomorrow.

SLATS

It'll be good to fly again.

JESSIE

We've been away too long.

SLATS

You're a good pilot.

JESSIE

I had a good teacher.

SLATS

(selects a fresh twig)  
We need to get to things around  
here. Weeds too high. Don't  
wanta start any fires.

JESSIE

I can do it today.

SLATS

No, wait till I can help you.

Jessie walks over to the screen door, opens it, studying the southwestern sky.

JESSIE

It's clouding up. Looks  
like a promise of rain.

SLATS

We can always use rain.

JESSIE

Everything's different now,  
ain't it?

She closes the screen door, moves closer to Slats.

SLATS

Life has a way of changing  
on a person.

(BEAT)

You teach somebody something  
but you got no idea how they're  
gonna have to use it.

JESSIE

Still don't make it right,  
now does it?

SLATS

No, I reckon it don't.

JESSIE

Not much of a game anymore.

SLATS

(stares at her)

Never was.

Slats selects a fresh twig, begins whittling again.

DISSOLVE TO:

On screen:

REST HAVEN NURSING HOME  
1960

INT. REST HAVEN HOME THE RECREATION ROOM LATE AFTERNOON,  
AFTER THE AUCTION

An aide wheels Slats over to Jessica waiting by the windows.

AIDE

He's been very anxious to see  
you.

SLATS

Let's go, Jessie.

JESSICA

(to Slats)

He likes being outside

(to the aide)

Thank you.

Jessica wheels her father to the door.

EXT. REST HAVEN GROUNDS

Jessica pushes the wheelchair across the yard, parking it  
just under the shade of a tree. The sound of a plane  
executing aerobatic maneuvers can be heard. Slats looks at  
Jessica.

JESSICA (CONT.)

Must be Joe Don Turner.

He came out to us years ago.

Loved those planes. We taught

him to fly. Now listen to him.

I heard he's ranked number seven  
in world competition.

(BEAT)

Let's see what he's got, O.K.?

Jessica pushes the wheelchair out into the sunshine. In the  
distance, at the edge of town over empty pastures, a fiery  
red plane pushes upward into the sky, smoke stream trailing  
behind it. Vertical, the plane seems to slip back, wriggling  
its way through the smoke, then tumbling, spiraling like  
eagles mating in flight. Slats grabs Jessie's hand, squeez-  
ing it tightly. She stares at the sky, the sun brilliant,  
her eyes tearing. Slats shakes her hand, she looks down at  
him.

SLATS

We did that!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MCCORMACK'S HOME NIGHT

Jessica, restless, wanders about the house, finally opening her father's bedroom door.

INT. SLATS'S BEDROOM

Jessica switches on the light revealing awards, plaques, certificates, photographs of her father. She opens his closet, removing a hat box and flight suit, placing both on the bed. Opening the hat box, she takes out an old leather flight helmet.

INT. KITCHEN

Jessica has made a pot of coffee; she sits down at the table. Before her is Slats's flight helmet. She sips the coffee and watches the sunrise.

EXT. MCCORMACK AIRPORT, PARKING LOT DAY

Jessica's supervising the loading of boxes, equipment, office furniture into a moving van. Billy approaches, clipboard in hand.

BILLY

Everything's checked off.

JESSICA

You did a good job. Much obliged.

BILLY

Got your bags? Fishing rod? Tackle box?

JESSICA

Should be in the Cessna.

BILLY

Want me to check?

JESSICA

Helen and Curley loaded it.

BILLY

Guess we'll see you in about a week. Right?

JESSICA

Right!

BILLY  
Good flying!

JESSICA  
It always is.

Billy visits with the truck driver as Jessica walks around the building to the main hangar.

EXT. MAIN HANGAR

The Cessna, washed and ready, sits by the hangar. Helen, standing next to the plane, waves at Jessica as she approaches.

HELEN  
You got great weather!  
Should last all week.

JESSICA  
Nice to have something  
work right for once.

HELEN  
Everything's loaded.  
You're all set to go.

JESSICA  
Early retirement, huh.

HELEN  
Think of it as a reward.  
It helps me when I think  
about all of it.

JESSICA  
Reward. I'll give that  
some thought.

Jessica walks around the plane, inspecting it before flight.

HELEN  
Curley's already checked  
it out.

JESSICA  
Old habits die hard, you  
know.

(BEAT)  
Slats'll be all right while  
you're gone.

As Jessica checks the plane, Burney walks out of the hangar.

BURNEY  
Can't let it rest, can  
you?

JESSICA  
Hey, Burney! She looks  
good, doesn't she.

HELEN  
I'm going to check the  
office one more time.  
Make sure we didn't  
forget anything. See  
you when you get back.  
(walking away, over her shoulder)  
Your father will be  
fine. I'll check on  
him every day. Any  
changes we'll call  
you.

Jessica continues her inspection.

BURNEY  
Fishing? You're going  
fishing?

JESSICA  
Got a great spot. Nice  
little cabin. Great view.  
And the fish always bite.  
(BEAT)  
You're looking a little  
worn around the edges,  
Burney. Time you took  
a vacation.

BURNEY  
Is that right?

Finishing her inspection, Jessica climbs into the plane.

INT. CESSNA

JESSICA  
(yelling to Burney)  
How long since you been  
in a plane?

EXT. HANGAR

Burney moves closer to the plane

BURNEY  
Been awhile, that's for  
sure.

INT. CESSNA

Jessica motions him to step up into the plane.

JESSICA  
Dare you.

Burney steps up into the Cessna, settles down in the seat.

BURNEY  
You're on.

JESSICA  
(grinning at Burney)  
Wait 'til you see how  
I can put this plane  
down on the side of  
a mountain.

FADE OUT:



VITA

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