SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

Bulrusher

Eisa Davis

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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BULRUSHER was first developed in readings at New Dramatists directed by the author and later, by Seret Scott. Subsequent readings were hosted by The Cherry Lane (directed by Leah C. Gardiner), Hartford Stage (directed by Kate Whoriskey), Musefire (directed by Lorraine Robinson), and San Francisco Stage and Film (directed by Mark Routhier). Portland Center Stage workshopped the play in its JAW/West Festival, where it was directed by Valerie Curtis-Newton, with dramaturgy by Mead Hunter.

In March 2006, ***BULRUSHER*** received its world premiere at Urban Stages/Playwrights' Preview Productions in New York (Frances Hill, Artistic Director; Sonia Koslova, Managing Director; Lori Ann Laster, Program Director; Stanton Wood, Development Director). It was directed by Leah C. Gardiner.

Scenic Design and Video/Projection Design: Dustin O'Neill
Lighting Design: Sarah Sidman
Costume Design: Kimberly Ann Glennon
Sound Design: Jill BC DuBoff
Original Songs Composed by Eisa Davis
Original Score Composed and Performed by Daniel T. Denver
Additional Guitar Music by Robert Beitzel
Choreography by Jennifer Harrison Newman
Fight Choreography by Denise Hurd
Stage Management and Board Op: Jana Llynn, Leisah Swenson, Sonia Koslova, Holly M. Kirk
Assistant Stage Manager: Stephen Riscica
Assistant Director: Ronald Francis Brescio

Cast (in order of appearance)

BULRUSHER . . . . . Zabryna Guevara/Donna Duplantier
MADAME . . . . . Charlotte Colavin
LOGGER . . . . . Guiesseppe Jones
SCHOOLCH . . . . . Peter Bradbury/Darrill Rosen
BOY . . . . . Robert Beitzel
VERA . . . . . Tinashe Kajese

CHARACTERS

BULRUSHER
MADAME
LOGGER
SCHOOLCH
BOY
VERA

SETTING

Boonville, California, a small town in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County, north of San Francisco. 1955.

The set can be realistic, suggestive, or a combination of both. Water, live guitar, and real oranges and apples are necessary.

NOTES

Actual Boonville residents developed their own dialect of over 1300 words and phrases at the turn of the last century. The language, called Boontling, was primarily devised to discuss taboo subjects and keep outsiders out. But Boontling also functioned to document town history, create unexpected value from the strange, and satisfy the residents' overriding love of inventive talk. Boontling glossary and pronunciation guide for all local terms and the Pomo chant can be found in an appendix at the back.

The characters imagined here do not have a contemporary self-consciousness. They speak with energy and assuredness, in the rhythms of the self-made.

ACT ONE

(In the dark, the sound of dripping water – leaky faucet into a steel washtub. Then, a spot on **BULRUSHER***, entirely wet, looking up into the sky. She wears a green dress. She talks to the river, reciting her first memory.)*

BULRUSHER. I float in a basket toward the Pacific, hands
blue as huckleberries. This air is too sweet,
this cold water a thin, foul milk.

The woman who bore me wrapped me,
gave me to the green of the Navarro,
named me silence. She prays

this river has studied time
and will never turn back
her secret skin, the mark

that stretched into life.
Forgiveness is an insect
that may one day draw my blood.

Catch me, I ask the power lines,
defying the fog's quiet shroud. What is
a motherless daughter but pure will?

The river hears me and turns to molasses.
With a sharp bank through high shams,
I am born into a new language.

(More drops falling quickly, becoming gradually slower as lights darken.)

MADAME. It's gonna happen.

(Lights up on the back parlor of a brothel. **MADAME***,* **LOGGER***, and* **SCHOOLCH** *are in the parlor.* **MADAME** *wears a crucifix.* **SCHOOLCH** *drinks tea. It is the Fourth of July.)*

LOGGER. Oh you're just sayin that.

MADAME. I'm gonna leave here, I tell you.

LOGGER. Say that every summer.

MADAME. I mean it too.

LOGGER. What about your business? What about alla us?

MADAME. Come the Apple Show, I'll stay through the prize giving and then I'm a leave.

LOGGER. Not even stayin for the dance? You love the dance.

MADAME. It don't love me. End up hobbin by myself cause no one's got the beans to say they know me. You, you don't come and Schoolch dance too fancy. What's for me.

LOGGER. The music. They hire that band from Frisk to show all the Boont tunesters how it's done.

MADAME. You never even been to the Apple Show dance!

LOGGER. I heard it's nice.

MADAME. From me! I'm the one told you it's nice. But I can't stay out my years here, Apple Show dance or not. Feel rain comin?

LOGGER. Can't smell it.

MADAME. We'll ask Bulrusher when she get here what the river say.

LOGGER. I want me sweet Michelle today.

MADAME. Sweet Michelle is flattened with the influenzy.

LOGGER. Then young Elinor.

MADAME. She don't like you.

LOGGER. You don't like me with her 'cause she do like me.

MADAME. Elinor ain't the only one.

LOGGER. Well I asked for sweet Michelle. Who else you got? Cory?

MADAME. Her flag's out. She ain't workin today.

LOGGER. You call yourself a businesswoman? Never give me what I want 'cause you like to see me scramble. You like watchin the screw turn.

MADAME. Lucky I let you in here at all. You could have to go all the way into Ukiah for your geechin.

LOGGER. Who left?

MADAME. Well. I suppose I could let you burlap Reina.

LOGGER. That Mexican gal. She so set in her ways. I like to experiment, move things around some. Don't like it the same way all the time.

MADAME. We make the rules around here. Do it the way we like or you can go to Ukiah.

LOGGER. I ain't got the gas.

MADAME. Then take it here the way we say! And you know you only get bahl girls here. Everybody says it and we know it's true. We are the best, because we do it our own way. You don't got no stringy hair and wrinkle socks here. If you want some low quality diseased moldunes head up the pike and cool off in the oaks. But we are the softest madges you goin to find. So is it the Spanish moss or my witch's butter?

LOGGER. I'm tryin to enjoy myself. I'm tryin to buy me some heel scratchin. I got money and you got girls, so why you got to rout me each time?

MADAME. So you'll appreciate what you're gettin. Reina's up front with the rest of the girls; let me tell her you want her.

LOGGER. I never said I wanted her.

MADAME. You didn't have to. She's the quiet one, don't harp much at all. And I can see you ain't in the mood for any more talkin.

LOGGER. That's earth. You sure sulled me.

MADAME. Get your money together. You're payin up front today.

LOGGER. Aw girl –

MADAME. No more credit for you. Can't have you old dehigged jackers tryin to dish me. Makes me cankicky.

(She exits.)

LOGGER. When we gon get you a girl up there Schoolch?

*(***SCHOOLCH** *is silent, but* **LOGGER** *converses with him anyway, judging his responses in the pauses below.)*

LOGGER. Let go a that teacher's English, talk a little how we talk. Harp the ling, and you can take one of these women for a ride. *(pause)* No? Well it's a shame you won't cause they all love it. *(pause)* You seein' the fireworks later? Nice out in the buzzchick field. Open view. *(pause)* You got any kids goin on to high school in the fall? I thought goin on to the upper school would be real special with all the readin of books and poetry; get you some right romantic material. Only finished middle school myself but my daddy was awful proud. He ain't had but a little education so I read the Dunbar and Wheatley to him at night.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *looks quizzical.)*

LOGGER. Negro poets. Colored. Bookers who could write poems. *(***SCHOOLCH** *is unconvinced.)* They did. A whole bunch of em. Long poems too.

(As **MADAME** *re-enters:)*

MADAME. Reina's in her room.

LOGGER. *(continuing, to* **SCHOOLCH***)* I feel poetical all the time 'cause I keep they verses in my head. *(to* **MADAME***)* When you gonna get Schoolch in with one of your girls? He can't be a silent seeker all his life.

MADAME. He won't sleep with none of them, says he's waiting for me. I just think he's scared to roll somebody he taught long division to. Time to pay up now, Lucas.

LOGGER. *(to* **MADAME***)* You ever heard of the colored poets they had in slavery days and right after?

MADAME. It's 10 dollars. Don't try to shike me.

LOGGER. Wait now, 10 dollars? I just got a phone line put in, so I'm watchin my budget. How much a that do I get to keep?

MADAME. Pardon?

LOGGER. 10 dollars ain't what I pay. Now I spect some change.

MADAME. I only gave you a break way back when you were goin with me. You go with her, your same money got two mouths to feed.

LOGGER. You always got two mouths and both of em always wide open.

MADAME. Listen booker tee, ain't no call for that sorta nonch harpin. You can step right out and get your Fourth of Jeel jollies rubbin up 'gainst some tree.

LOGGER. Hold up, you love my nonch harpin.

MADAME. Only when I'm working.

LOGGER. Then what you doin right now?

MADAME. Tryin to get you to give me my 10 dollars.

LOGGER. Oh girl, you ain't gonna leave this town.

*(***BULRUSHER** *enters.)*

BULRUSHER. Evenin Schoolch. Madame. Mr Jeans.

LOGGER. Evenin. *(to* **MADAME***)* Take your 10 then. I need me a fresh smellin girl right now, fresh as a sprig of mint.

MADAME. We don't serve any other kind.

*(***LOGGER** *throws down a ten and heads up the stairs.)*

MADAME. Don't tell me, Schoolch, I already know, don't let no booker tee backtalk me. I know that's what you gonna say. He may not be as single-minded as you, but he's a man all the same, ain't no second class citizen. Don't tell me otherwise not on no Fourth of Jeel. What the river say today Bulrusher?

BULRUSHER. Clear through midday tomorrow, some mornin fog. Then a storm tomorrow evenin.

MADAME. Rain? Now? Well that does my garden no good. All the rows I planted are already dead from heat.

BULRUSHER. Your ground cover and wildflowers should take to it. This kinda rain, they'll grow right over the bald patches.

MADAME. That river tells you everything, don't it. Schoolch, do you realize how much money you have lost over the last eighteen years letting this girl keep her future

readin skills to herself? No excuse, just plain bad business. You raised her and won't let her pay you back. And you're not even religious! You don't even go to church! This is the only place you come to with any regularity besides the schoolhouse. You come here, don't even sleep with the beautiful whores I got workin here, you just come and sit and drink tea with the madame of them all. You ain't a Christian, and you ain't a good businessman. Just a waste. And the real shame is that you never get your sexual release. It ain't nothin like tea-drinkin, I tell you.

BULRUSHER. Supper's in the oven, Schoolch. I done ate so you go head on, I'll see you back at the house.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *looks at* **BULRUSHER**.*)*

BULRUSHER. I'm just gon sit out a while, keep the sunset in view.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *exits.)*

MADAME. You still know how to tell people's futures?

BULRUSHER. I haven't for some time.

MADAME. I suppose everyone in this town asked you to read their bathwater by now. No fortunes left to tell.

BULRUSHER. I've never read your water.

MADAME. And that's how it'll stay.

BULRUSHER. Yes'm.

(Sounds of lovemaking from upstairs.)

MADAME. Alright, time to set yourself spinnin.

BULRUSHER. Alright then.

*(***BULRUSHER** *exits and lights change. She sits, looking into the sunset.*

BOY *enters. He looks at* **BULRUSHER**, *then looks away. She opens a book.)*

BOY. Well we can't just sit here and not say nothin.

BULRUSHER. I'm readin.

BOY. No you're not, you're ignorin me.

BULRUSHER. Just 'cause it's the Fourth of July don't mean we gotta talk.

(He is quiet for a moment, then flares.)

BOY. I'm done with women! They don't tell you what they mean! Hide the truth of they feelins, sweeten it up with rosewater perfume, then just outta nowhere, plop. Splat. You are thrown over and no land for miles.

BULRUSHER. You didn't care about her no way.

BOY. What do you know?

BULRUSHER. She knew things weren't goin nowhere with you and took the words outta your mouth.

BOY. You know who I'm talkin about?

BULRUSHER. You was goin with the McGimsey girl.

BOY. She said somethin bout me to you?

BULRUSHER. You know nobody talk to me.

BOY. You did some a your fortune tellin on me, that's how you know?

BULRUSHER. I ain't never touched your water. I just used my eyes.

BOY. Ain't got no one to go to the fireworks with tonight. Out here talkin to you instead.

BULRUSHER. I told you, we ain't gotta talk. *(pause)* You ain't never talked to me before.

BOY. No one talk to you 'cause all you got is hard truth for people. If you was nice and not cocked darley all the time you might have you a pal.

BULRUSHER. Don't need no pal. Got the river.

BOY. Well I like bein stuck on someone, I don't care how unnatural *you* are.

BULRUSHER. Let's make this our first and last conversation.

*(***BOY** *looks at her and smiles.)*

BOY. You're gonna be my new girlfriend.

(He exits. Fireworks.

BULRUSHER *slams the book closed and talks to the river.)*

BULRUSHER. They want to know who I am.
I don't. I want to swing, swing
over the scrub pine, the hens.

They want me to lend them my eyes.
I won't. I want to snake like ice grass,
thick as a future I can't see.

But at five, I knew it all,
I read it in their bathwater;
I met them in front of the general store.

I want to swing, swing
over the scrub pine, the poppies: be a meteor,
a perfume, love the fly on my tongue.

(Next morning. **SCHOOLCH***'s house.)*

BULRUSHER. I packed a lemon for you to bring over to Madame, for tea. It's in your lunch basket.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *is silent.)*

BULRUSHER. Heard the Gschwends say Darlin ain't gonna make it to the library to help you today. He almost lost a thumb launchin rockets in the field last night.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *is silent.)*

BULRUSHER. Have a good day now.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *picks up his books and basket, exits.*

BULRUSHER *plays with his water glass. Is about to put her fingers into it, then tosses the water out the window. She steps out onto the porch.*

BOY *is stumbling down the road, hung over, trying to keep the sun out of his face. He gets to her porch and sinks onto it to rest. He doesn't acknowledge her as she looks at him a spell. Then she walks to the pump and pumps some water into a bowl. She sets it by him on the step.*

BOY *splashes water onto his face, drinks some, then plays in it, slapping it like a baby.* **BULRUSHER** *sits on her chair.)*

BOY. Where'd you get that moshe?

BULRUSHER. I ain't talkin to you.

BOY. Your truck. Where'd you get it. Where'd you get it?

BULRUSHER. While back I got it.

BOY. I want me a truck. Always hitchin a ride to see my ma in Mendocino – I want me a truck a my own.

BULRUSHER. Yeah, well.

BOY. You got one. I can do as good as you, or better. Get me a new one. Goddamn I need a cigarette. You got a cigarette?

BULRUSHER. You want a cigarette?

BOY. Yeah.

BULRUSHER. They're inside the house.

BOY. Wait. I forgot. You my new girlfriend. I gotta be nice. I pretty please pretty face need a pretty cigarette. Please.

BULRUSHER. I'm getting em anyway. I'm headed into Cloverdale, pick up my oranges.

(She goes in, but peeks out at him through the window.)

BOY. *(sings)* Thorn, spine and thistle
Bramble, pennywhistle
Poisoned flowers on a vine
Sticky cockleburrs and pine
Sap that's sweet but never kind
Stuck like so much gristle

(calls to her) I made that one up. What kinda perfume you use?

BULRUSHER. *(off)* I don't.

BOY. There's a smell I smell when I come near ya.

(She comes back onto porch. She has no cigarettes.)

BULRUSHER. Orange rind.

BOY. No, sweeter.

BULRUSHER. Algae.

BOY. Come on now, say something pretty.

BULRUSHER. Fresh out.

BOY. No pretty words and no cigs? Well. Just looking at you smokes me.

BULRUSHER. Be seein ya.

BOY. Every Monday you head into Cloverdale. Pick up your oranges, sell em to the town. You must make you a lot of money. What you do with it?

BULRUSHER. Well I ain't givin none to you. I'll be gettin on the road.

BOY. The pike!

BULRUSHER. *Road.*

BOY. *Pike.* You harp the ling, maybe people would like you.

BULRUSHER. They buy my oranges. That's enough.

BOY. Schoolch won't let you talk the way we all talk, huh.

BULRUSHER. Don't need to.

BOY. You can't find out anything bout anyone in this town if you don't harp the ling. Like last night. I found out why that McGimsey girl went mossy on me – she's been bilchin Tom Soo, and his ma is Chinese! That ain't so bad, but Tom Soo? Tom Soo from *Philo*? She ain't had a taste for any tarp but boarch, so I'm glad she got ink-standy with me. Can't have no applehead ruinin my track record, sunderin my reputation. I'm a standin man.

BULRUSHER. I reckon.

BOY. I ain't afraid a talkin to you. Hey, I just splashed in this bowl a water.

BULRUSHER. Yeah.

BOY. Means my fortune's in it. You could stick your fingers in there and tell what's gon happen to me. What's my life gonna feel like? What's it gonna feel like when I touch you?

(He reaches for her arm. She lets him touch her, then pulls away.)

BULRUSHER. I only tell the weather now. Ain't read nobody's bathwater in years. After the May Bloyd incident.

BOY. It was you brought that on May Bloyd?

BULRUSHER. I just told her it was coming.

BOY. And you never read nobody since.

BULRUSHER. Sometimes I get a little taste by accident. Like in the general store and one of the twins hand me a coke got beads of water on the bottle.

BOY. Con-den-sa-tion is the proper name.

BULRUSHER. Con-des-cen-sion, I'll try to remember that.

BOY. So you're smart too.

BULRUSHER. Don't try to school the schoolteacher's girl.

BOY. You're so smart, you oughta tell fortunes again. Get you a booth at the Apple Show.

BULRUSHER. I said I ain't done it in years.

BOY. So you can't do it anymore.

BULRUSHER. I'm at the peak of my perception! I can call rain a whole week off from it coming down. I'm the best I ever been.

BOY. And keepin it all to yourself. People come from all over the county for the Apple Show. You could make a name with folks you never even met. You need you a manager, to publicize all your ventures. You could really make a killing.

BULRUSHER. For what?

BOY. I don't know. Why you think you got that power in the first place?

*(***BULRUSHER** *starts to go.)*

BOY. Look, you could just tell my fortune then.

BULRUSHER. I ain't puttin my fingers in there. Or your bathwater.

BOY. What about spit? That's water, right? If you just kiss me you'll know everything there is to know.

BULRUSHER. One of your friends put you up to this? You messin with me just 'cause everyone thinks you're cute? Just 'cause you can?

BOY. Tiger lily, manzanita, you're my girlfriend. *(sings)* Oh my girl –

BULRUSHER. If I'm your girlfriend, prove it. Give me something.

BOY. I ain't got much to offer a girl except my sensuality. We could take a walk through Fern Canyon, watch the salmon run –

BULRUSHER. It's summertime, ain't no salmon running the river.

BOY. There's always trout. Steelhead trout.

BULRUSHER. Take me somewhere where there's people and put your arm around me. Take me to the Anyhow.

BOY. The Anyhow Saloon? I just came from there.

BULRUSHER. And I'm leavin here.

*(***BULRUSHER** *opens the door to her truck and slams it.)*

BOY. Bulrusher, be my fortune.

*(***BOY** *dumps the bowl of water on his head.)*

(sings) Oh my girl, with the cattail curls, be mine, be mine, all mine.

(Rain. **BULRUSHER***'s truck is now filled with oranges. She sees a girl walking.)*

BULRUSHER. Hey.

VERA. Hey.

BULRUSHER. You want a lift?

VERA. 'Preciate it.

*(***VERA** *gets into the truck with her suitcase, exhausted and soaking wet. She has covered her head in newspaper. When they see each other's faces, they are instantly struck but try to maintain their ease.)*

BULRUSHER. You walked all the way from Cloverdale in this storm?

VERA. I didn't know what else to do. Gone so long without sleep can't tell night from day, rain from dry. I come all the way from Alabama on a Jim Crow train.

BULRUSHER. Is that a new model?

VERA. Afraid not. You never heard a Jim Crow?

BULRUSHER. Separately, but not together. Where you going to?

VERA. *(removes newspaper)* Some tiny town where my uncle live.

BULRUSHER. Got his name? I know everybody round here.

VERA. Don't care what name he answer to long as he give me a place to lay my head. Conductor wouldn't give me a berth for nothing. Southern route.

BULRUSHER. Why not?

VERA. If you don't know the answer to that I am pleased to meet you.

BULRUSHER. We'll find him. Where in Alabama you from?

VERA. Birmingham. The Magic City.

BULRUSHER. What's there?

VERA. Church. Iron ore. And a Vulcan that forges everything with fire.

BULRUSHER. You like it there?

VERA. Can't stand it and I can't stand rain. Guess I'm outta luck.

BULRUSHER. It'll stop tomorrow morning.

VERA. Hope so, I gotta find me some work in a jiffy. *(realizes)* How do you know the rain'll stop?

BULRUSHER. The river told me.

VERA. Huh. *(takes this in)* My name's Vera Blass.

BULRUSHER. Bulrusher.

VERA. What's your family name.

BULRUSHER. Ain't got family.

VERA. Dead?

BULRUSHER. Don't know. Was born somewhere far from where I live. And my mother tried to drown me when I got born, but I guess I wasn't ready to go.

VERA. She changed her mind?

BULRUSHER. No. She sent me down the Navarro River but someone found me in the weeds. The bulrushes.

VERA. Like Moses.

BULRUSHER. No. Like me.

VERA. You can have *my* mother if you want – she's too concerned with being a model Negro citizen to drown anyone. *(yawns)* Forgive me, I can barely keep my eyes open. You in school?

BULRUSHER. Naw. But I like books. Got learnt at home.

VERA. What are all these oranges for?

BULRUSHER. Sellin.

VERA. So there's a street got colored merchants here? 'Cause I am howlin hungry. Ain't had a thing to eat since Texas. Would love a plate of fried fish and biscuits, cornbread and greens, ooh. *(looks into sideview mirror)* Look at my hair, oh Lord! I can't meet no one like this. Wrong as a wet cat. Why didn't you tell me?

BULRUSHER. You look beautiful to me.

VERA. Really.

BULRUSHER. Yeah.

(Silence.)

VERA. What kind of beauty shops in your town?

BULRUSHER. Mazie does hair.

VERA. Our kind of hair?

BULRUSHER. No. I do my own.

VERA. Looks – nice. But ain't no colored women to do it for you?

BULRUSHER. I'm the only one.

VERA. *(panicking)* What? My uncle live in a all-white town?

BULRUSHER. He look like you?

VERA. I don't know. I just know he's colored.

BULRUSHER. A logger lives downriver from the general store, maybe he's the one you mean.

VERA. He's the only Negro besides you?

BULRUSHER. Yeah. What's wrong? *(***VERA** *is silent.)* Well how bout some Indians? We just passed the reservation. *(***VERA** *is silent.)* If you hungry, I got an orange –

VERA. *(suddenly)* Let me out.

BULRUSHER. We're almost to Boonville.

VERA. Please.

BULRUSHER. You gotta find your uncle.

VERA. Let me out.

BULRUSHER. You can't walk back.

VERA. Don't tell me what I can't do.

BULRUSHER. Let's at least get you fed and dry.

VERA. I can take care of myself –

BULRUSHER. I can ride you back to the train station in the morning when the rain clears. Just get some rest tonight.

*(***VERA** *is silent. She leans her head back on the seat and closes her eyes. They ride.)*

BULRUSHER. Alabama, huh. So is the dirt really red there?

VERA. Yeah.

(Silence.)

BULRUSHER. That must be confusing to all the honeybees. You got bees right?

VERA. Mm hm.

(Silence.)

BULRUSHER. 'Cause you know they like red. Huh. Red dirt. You come from a place where the dirt looks like flowers?

(No response from **VERA**. **BULRUSHER** *turns to look at her –* **VERA** *is asleep.* **BULRUSHER** *talks to the river, rapt. The storm rages.)*

BULRUSHER. Newspaper over
her head with the ink
just about run off.

In this dark light, I see her,
and build a pedestal
of water. She is the one,

the only one, nothing is caught
between us but my throat.
I want to say this

is a dream but it is true.
Do I know her? Is she the wet sight
of home?

(The brothel. **MADAME, LOGGER, SCHOOLCH**.*)*

LOGGER. *(to* **MADAME***)* I'll get Tuttle's tree up for you, but not tonight. It's a roger out there and I'm gittin back to my mink. This Michelle gives me the fiddlers! *(calls up the stairs)* Michelle, I'm comin to put in on you! Yes, I'm ready for my ricky chow!

*(***LOGGER** *heads up the stairs.)*

MADAME. His tree just fell on *my* property. And Tuttle has the nerve to say it is *my* responsibility to lift that log up. Isn't my tree, it's *his* tree – and I try my best to be patient – but the last time one of his trees fell in my yard, he left it layin there for three whole months! I had to plant my flower garden around it. What sort of look is that? I try to build a little civilization here, I try. But people don't have the work ethic I do, they don't understand that adherin to standards of behavior and so forth is fortifyin to the morals. And I got morals. Keep the whole of my brothel with its eye on discipline. If you don't have that, you don't have nothing divine in your life. If you can't get up regular as the sun each day, no matter what sort of cloud is cloudin ya, you ain't fit to meet God. And I'm a meet him. God will be my final savior and I will be comforted, and it won't be because I chose to give my body over to the menfolk, it won't be because I'm a businesswoman like Mary Magdalene – and Jesus *loved* her – but because I am disciplined and godlike in my approach to all things. I have nothing if not that foundation to stand upon. And so I will be revealed.

And still you judge me. What can I do to make you happy, Schoolch? How is it I can do right by God but never can do right by you? I gotta find a way to sell this place and leave this town for good. I have to see my mother's grave again. I gotta smell the grass growin there.

(She goes to the window.)

Bulrush here with somebody. Ooh, but it is pearlin out there.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *looks as if he is getting ready to say something.* **VERA** *and* **BULRUSHER** *enter.)*

BULRUSHER. Evenin Schoolch, Madame.

MADAME. Evenin. Who's this now?

BULRUSHER. This Vera. She's looking for a relative of hers.

MADAME. Is it a man relative?

BULRUSHER. Uh huh.

MADAME. He ain't here.

BULRUSHER. What about the logger Mr Jeans? If he ain't the man, he might know him.

MADAME. *(to* **VERA***)* Where you from?

VERA. Well, it's a little browner than here.

MADAME. Is it.

VERA. I'm from Alabam. We lost the war.

MADAME. We try to forget about that stuff round here. You'll get used to it.

(Sounds of **LOGGER** *and Michelle's lovemaking.)*

MADAME. Well you can't stay here. No offense darlin, but I don't take in no strays.

BULRUSHER. Schoolch, you go on home and eat – I'll make sure she's got a place to stay for the night.

VERA. It's alright.

BULRUSHER. If we can't find the logger you can have my bed.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *looks at* **BULRUSHER***.)*

BULRUSHER. It's my room. If she hasn't got a place to stay, I'm giving her my room.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *looks.)*

BULRUSHER. I'm eighteen now Schoolch, I got majority.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *exits.)*

MADAME. Ooh, he's upset. Well, let me call out to the logger's house then. It *is* late, you know. He most likely ain't in.

VERA. You don't have to call him. I'll find him on my own.

MADAME. It's raining child. The phone is drier and has a little less pride.

*(***VERA** *goes out and sits on the porch.)*

BULRUSHER. *(calling to her)* Sit under the awning so you don't get wet.

MADAME. *(to herself)* I'll be. Another piece of cut cabbage in this town. *(to* **BULRUSHER***)* Tell her to stand on the side. Don't want her affiliated with my business.

*(***MADAME** *picks up the phone, pretends to dial, harried.)*

BULRUSHER. You got any fried fish or biscuits, cornbread or greens?

MADAME. There's a plate a biscuits in the kitchen. None a that other stuff. What's it for? You can't eat my food for free now.

BULRUSHER. It's for Vera. I'll get it.

MADAME. The butter and preserves are in crocks by the icebox. But don't mess up the place now, and don't get any crumbs on the counter!

(Sounds of ceramic bumping around.)

MADAME. Don't doll around in there I said! Slice a ham in the box if you want it – but put the lid back on the container, don't let it go bad. *(pretending to "end" her phone call)* Well I just rang the logger and he ain't home. You all might want to hit that hotel.

*(***BULRUSHER** *comes back out with a plate for* **VERA***.)*

BULRUSHER. *(calling to* **VERA***)* I got some biscuits and ham for you Vera if you want to step in and have it at the table.

MADAME. No, you better wrap that gorm up and walk down to the hotel now; it's getting on into the night, wanna make sure she can get a room without any fuss. It's really not good for my business havin you two round here on a rainy night like this.

BULRUSHER. Vera, don't bother bout comin inside, I'm headed out there.

MADAME. That's right, use that common sense.

*(***LOGGER** *enters from a room upstairs. He wears only a woman's Chinese silk robe.* **BULRUSHER** *sees him and stops.)*

LOGGER. Heard some talk about biscuits –

MADAME. Oh limpin Jesus –

LOGGER. – and had to get right up out of that bed and see what you was hiding from me. You know geechin gets me scottied. Better give me some of those flories so I can go another round with Michelle –

MADAME. I just called you.

LOGGER. No you didn't, I didn't hear you say my name. Did you holler up to me, say, Lucas, come on down, I need you?

BULRUSHER. She called you on the phone. Called your house.

LOGGER. *(proud)* Yeah, I just got me a telephone. *(to* **MADAME***)* But you knew I was here.

BULRUSHER. She did, huh?

LOGGER. Yeah. What you want me for? *(takes a biscuit from* **BULRUSHER***)* Think I'll have this biscuit right here.

BULRUSHER. I got a person for you to meet. Vera! Come inside and meet a Negro.

LOGGER. I always say colored. That other one's too easy to mispronounce.

*(***VERA** *comes inside.)*

BULRUSHER. This Vera.

MADAME. She just came to town. I didn't want to disturb you.

VERA. Your name is Lucas?

LOGGER. Yes ma'am. Lucas Jeans.

VERA. I'm Ina's daughter Vera.

LOGGER. You Vera? *(exuberant)* Oh my goodness. Let me get my pants on. I didn't know you were coming here. Just let me splash a little water on and cleanse myself –

(He runs upstairs. **VERA**, **BULRUSHER**, *and* **MADAME** *stand in silence as he fumbles around, noisily picking up his clothes. He runs down the stairs, still dressing, and hugs* **VERA**.*)*

LOGGER. You look like Ina round the eyes, but you shaped different. I ain't seen your mother since we was kids. She here with you?

VERA. No, I'm by myself.

LOGGER. How is she?

VERA. She's doin her best.

LOGGER. And did your daddy keep his job as a porter on the railroad?

VERA. He's at the steel mill now.

LOGGER. Well, you can only go so long bowing and scraping for people before it breaks your manhood, that's just how it is. I wish I'd a known you were comin.

VERA. Didn't my mother send you a telegram?

LOGGER. Huh. Reckon she sent it to the sawmill. It's closed now, logging days are done. I just do odd jobs now, pickin apples and hops, herdin sheep and trainin horses. But Lord you just in, you don't need to hear all this. Let's get you some food and into a warm bed.

VERA. Thank you.

LOGGER. You already grown, land's end. Why don't I drive you back over to my region. Make a pallet for myself and you can have the ticking and boxspring, alright? You got your things, suitcase somewhere?

VERA. In Bulrusher's truck.

LOGGER. You got Vera from the station?

BULRUSHER. Saw her walking the road and gave her a lift.

LOGGER. My goodness, but that was Christian. I won't forget that, girl. Thank you for your trouble.

BULRUSHER. Alright. *(to* **VERA***)* Here's the food if you still want it.

LOGGER. *(to* **MADAME***)* Let me give you toobs for it.

BULRUSHER. No, I got it. *(to* **MADAME***)* Here's a quarter.

MADAME. Let Lucas pay. He owes me a belhoon for leavin early anyway.

LOGGER. You always trying to rooje me.

MADAME. You woulda spent at least that much on horn and chiggle if'n you kept your normal hours.

LOGGER. You ain't got one straw of kindness in that heart of hay do ya? I just want a tidrey of love. Just a tidrey.

(He throws a dollar on the pool table and leaves with **VERA**. **BULRUSHER** *walks out with them.)*

LOGGER. Vera, that woman ain't representative. Got a lot of honest two handed folks around here, they'll be happy to meetcha. Thanks again Bulrusher. You done a bahl thing. *(to* **VERA***)* You know I was the one told Bulrusher she was colored. She was five and didn't even know. My moshe is over here, I'll jape you home.

VERA. I don't know what that means.

LOGGER. You don't have to. Just another part of the scenery.

(He takes her bag to his car.)

BULRUSHER. If you need anything.

VERA. How bout an orange.

*(***BULRUSHER** *throws her one.)*

BULRUSHER. You gonna stay?

*(***VERA** *waves goodbye.* **BULRUSHER** *stands and watches her go in the rain. Suddenly she realizes how wet she is and smiles. Heads inside.)*

MADAME. Don't track mud in here, you're all wet.

BULRUSHER. You lied on the night of the only rain of the summer. The logger was here all the time.

MADAME. It's a habit Bulrusher. Think I would jenny on a customer that's got a woman asking for him? Woulda lost this madge house long ago if I was that tuddish. If you going to be a businesswoman – and I see you are enterprising with them oranges – you gotta be wise. Think on both sides of your head. Don't be afraid of anything anyone can ever say to you.

BULRUSHER. You woulda had us over to the hotel wasting good money on a room when he was here all the time.

MADAME. I woulda told him soon as you were out the door. He'd a come and found you – and didn't he? Find you? Don't judge me for what never happened.

BULRUSHER. I don't like to argue with Schoolch.

MADAME. When has he ever stayed mad with you? He can see what's goin on.

BULRUSHER. What.

MADAME. You ain't never had a – a friend. You ain't never had somebody you can see yourself in.

BULRUSHER. I ain't like other folks, don't need no friends. I was born to read. Born to read water.

MADAME. Go see Schoolch before he goes to sleep. He'll steam you but you can take it.

BULRUSHER. I need a beer first.

*(***BULRUSHER** *exits.)*

MADAME. You left crumbs on my pool table.

*(***BULRUSHER** *enters* **SCHOOLCH***'s house. She is tipsy. Moves around the kitchen, soaking some beans. Distracted, she knocks over a bowl and it breaks.* **SCHOOLCH** *comes down the stairs.)*

SCHOOLCH. You'll replace that with your orange money.

BULRUSHER. Yes sir.

SCHOOLCH. Careless. But you eighteen! Got your majority! Telling me how old you are. I know how old you are. You are alive because of me.

BULRUSHER. Yes sir.

SCHOOLCH. You broke that on purpose to make your point?

BULRUSHER. No sir.

SCHOOLCH. Well you must want an ear settin after all the backtalk you gave me tonight. In front of a stranger at that.

BULRUSHER. No sir.

SCHOOLCH. Then what's all this somersettin for? I never expected to see you acting like this.

BULRUSHER. Yes sir.

SCHOOLCH. Like all the other children when their comb's gittin red. I thought I trained you so you'd never jump track on me.

BULRUSHER. I've been good. I done everything you said. I stopped readin water and tellin fortunes, did all my lessons here at home so I wouldn't be 'taminated by the children at the school. I don't harp the ling with anybody and I save up all my money steada spendin it in Cloverdale or Fort Bragg. All I do is show my 'preciation.

SCHOOLCH. More backtalk? My house, my rules. Break them, and you can leave here. But you won't. How many times do I have to tell you? When you were a baby, when you were just a few days old, your mama sent you down the river, sent you floating down to the brine. Wanted nothing to do with you. But you got yourself caught in some weeds and the Negro Jeans found you, brought you to the brothel tied up in his suede duster. Put you on the pool table and there you were, kicking up the smoky air. You didn't blink or cry under that hanging lamp, you just lay there kicking for your life. Madame, she ain't the kind to take pity, wasn't going to risk her business taking you in. But even if she said she wanted you, she would have had to fight me. I saw you and I felt like you had answered a question. Your eyes, the clay color of your legs, the curly hair on your head – you seemed like family, like mine. That if I had you, I'd be alright. And if you had me, you'd be alright. I knew I could protect you, I knew that you weren't supposed to be alive, that you weren't supposed to belong to me at all and that's why I needed you. That's why you fit. So there's no separating us Bulrusher, we are just like our names, bound to what we do and what's been done to us. Our names are our fates and our proper place. Don't forget that.

(Pause.)

BULRUSHER. Gotta clean this up.

*(***SCHOOLCH** *starts up the stairs.)*

BULRUSHER. Schoolch, I was Christened at the church, right?

*(***SCHOOLCH** *stops.)*

BULRUSHER. Did the reverend give me a name when he tapped me with the water? I got a Christian name, don't I?

(Pause.)

SCHOOLCH. Once we had another name for you, but I forget it now. You're Bulrusher to me.

(Next morning. **LOGGER***'s house. He is tending a fire in the wood burning stove. He puts a few pieces of bread and a pot of water over the flames.* **VERA** *comes into the kitchen in a nightgown. It's too large; she has to pick up the hem to walk. The hem is splattered with a little mud.)*

LOGGER. You look like you still sleep. *(***VERA** *frowns, squinting.)* "Ere sleep comes down to soothe the weary eyes." That's Dunbar. You like the morning? *(***VERA** *mumbles.)* Your mother would stay in bed all day if she wasn't colored. I can't imagine what she look like now, grown and running a house. See I was always the one up and getting breakfast on. She liked to sit in the bed and play with the strings from her blanket, talk a little bout her dreams from the night before. Stare out the window like a princess waiting for some magic. My sister.

VERA. It's cold.

LOGGER. Yeah, mornings are cool here then it heats up by midday – lot different than Birmingham. I tend to ride in the mornings, but I thought I'd stay in today, hear your news. *(a brief pause, then)* I hope you brought a comb with you. I've tried not to say anything since we're just meeting but your hair looks like the burning bush.

VERA. Well if nobody does hair around here I don't know what I'm a do.

LOGGER. You don't do your own hair?

VERA. Mother always does it.

LOGGER. *(looking at her)* And it's thick too. Huh. I ain't got a pressing comb but I can plait it for you.

VERA. That's alright, I'll just get some rollers and smooth it down that way.

LOGGER. But you can't go in the store to buy rollers looking like that.

VERA. I'll wear a scarf.

LOGGER. Didn't Ina tell you always wear clean panties case you have an accident and have to get operated on in the hospital?

VERA. Yes.

LOGGER. Well why would you walk out the house with clean panties and a nappy head? That defies all reason, makes my mouth hurt to say it. I'm gonna plait your hair up before you even think about goin outside. Sit down here. And bring the comb and grease from the dresser.

(He sits on a chair and opens his legs. **VERA** *stands stock still.)*

LOGGER. Come on. I don't care if you tenderheaded, it's gotta be done.

VERA. You gon braid my hair? You a man. You ain't sposed to do that.

LOGGER. Used to do Ina's every Saturday night, with clean square parts. What am I doing explaining myself to you! Just set down.

VERA. You gon be careful?

LOGGER. No.

VERA. I'll just wear a scarf –

LOGGER. What did I just say to you? Now set!

*(***VERA** *gets comb and grease.)*

LOGGER. Questioning your elders, mmph. I don't know how Ina raised you but no sellin wolf tickets round here. You got you a job and your own place to stay, *then* we can put our conversation on an even plank.

*(***VERA** *is afraid to sit down.)*

LOGGER. I ain't tellin you again.

*(***VERA** *sits between his legs. He begins to comb and part* **VERA***'s hair.)*

LOGGER. I'm gonna do it so you don't need no rollers. If you wet it and let it dry like this, when you take it out you'll have all the pincurls you need.

(He goes to work on two french braids. Silence.)

VERA. I do want to find me a job while I'm here.

LOGGER. Well, what can you do?

VERA. Type. File. Take minutes.

LOGGER. Nobody need none of that fingernail polish stuff round here. We'll find you something you can put your back into.

(He combs. She looks out the window.)

VERA. That Bulrusher girl said it would clear up this morning.

LOGGER. She's always right about the weather. You oughta pay her a visit today, thank her for her kindness.

VERA. Is she really the only Negro this way? I don't want to work for white people.

LOGGER. Used to be more of us here during boom time, but once the sawmills closed, everybody went south. Oakland, Fresno, Los Angeles.

VERA. But you stayed.

LOGGER. Keep your head still.

VERA. You like living with all these ofays?

LOGGER. It's alright. Indians are the colored folk here, what's left of em. They got it *bad*. All their land got took, they ain't allowed to go to school, and some of em can remember when they was legal slaves. So don't go lyin and sayin you're part Cherokee.

VERA. White folk just don't have no morals. And easy women too. Never thought I'd see a town a crackers let a buck into their bordello.

*(***LOGGER** *yanks her head to the side. She yells.)*

LOGGER. I know we're just getting to know each other, but I have to ask. Why you here, Vera?

VERA. Mother sent me.

LOGGER. By yourself. In the middle of the summer.

VERA. She needed to get me off her hands for a while.

LOGGER. Lean forward. You done with school?

VERA. Graduated Parker High. I'm going to college.

LOGGER. *(excited)* That's all right! *(hugs her head)* Oh Vera, I'm proud. Proud of ya.

VERA. I just need a job so I can save up.

LOGGER. College! Pretty soon you'll be a teacher yourself, huh.

VERA. *(with real hope)* Maybe.

LOGGER. Don't sell yourself short, now, you can do anything you put your mind to.

VERA. Mother always talks so fondly of you. Said you cut down fifty foot trees all by yourself. That white men look up to you in California.

LOGGER. How is Birmingham doin these days?

VERA. They only bomb our houses every *other* Sunday.

LOGGER. Yeah, I like these ofays a lot better than those. Listen Vera, you are family and you are welcome to stay. We'll find you a job, that's earth.

VERA. I won't be no trouble.

LOGGER. Love braidin hair.

*(***BULRUSHER** *talks to the river.)*

BULRUSHER. She has tiny burns on her arm and on her ear and on her forehead near her hairline. Thin feathery scars, with crosshatching that looks like the teeth of a comb. All hot and fried and ironed – her smell begins with that – her hair, her clothes – all of her seems to have been cooked with corn oil and a strip of metal. Is it the smell of Birmingham, the steel pressing against her, burning her skin? Is that where her scars are from?
I want to dream of her.

*(***SCHOOLCH***'s porch.* **BULRUSHER** *is cleaning her shotgun.* **VERA** *enters.)*

BULRUSHER. Hey.

VERA. Hey. It stopped raining.

BULRUSHER. Yeah. You sleep good?

VERA. No. After the rain it was too quiet. Silence in my ears all night.

BULRUSHER. You don't like it?

VERA. I just never heard darkness before. Is it too early to visit?

BULRUSHER. No. I been up, out in the woods, catching some dinner.

VERA. You used that gun?

BULRUSHER. Mm hm. Want to see what I shot?

VERA. That's alright.

BULRUSHER. Sure? I ain't cleaned her yet –

VERA. It's alright. Thanks again for helping me last night. Hope I didn't get you in trouble.

BULRUSHER. Well, Schoolch never speaks to me otherwise so I think of it as a special occasion.

VERA. I don't want to step on anybody's toes. Especially when I got to find a job.

BULRUSHER. I never even seen anyone like you.

VERA. We look just the same.

BULRUSHER. No we don't. You're pretty, like the kind you feel inside of yourself when you go to the movies and think you're in it?

VERA. Yeah? You never seen another colored girl before?

BULRUSHER. No. I had to drink some beer just to get over you.

VERA. Beer? But that's only for men! You'll grow hairs on your tongue you keep that up.

BULRUSHER. I been doin it since I was twelve! Are there hairs?

*(***BULRUSHER** *opens her mouth.)*

VERA. Let me see your – open wider. *(She looks.)* Looks clean, but your tongue is real long. You have to be careful.

BULRUSHER. But I don't like whiskey. What else am I gonna drink at the Anyhow?

VERA. The Anyhow?

BULRUSHER. Saloon.

VERA. They let you drink at a saloon?

BULRUSHER. Something wrong with that?

VERA. And you walk right in the front door?

BULRUSHER. Ain't no other door.

VERA. I used the front door once at Pizitz. Department store. We supposed to use the back entrance, in the alleyway, by the trash – but I strode right in the front.

BULRUSHER. Why are you supposed to use the back?

VERA. I went to buy some doughnuts and they came to throw me out. Back door, they said. My pocket got caught on the door handle when they were pushing me, and the whole front panel of my dress just came off. Came off right in this cracker's hand. And he got so red when he saw my stockings, he just walked off real fast. The bus wouldn't pick me up. Had to walk all the way home holding myself with newspaper.

*(***BULRUSHER** *looks at her.)*

And it's the dark that scares me, huh?

BULRUSHER. You gonna stay?

VERA. If you'll be my friend.

BULRUSHER. I'll take care of you, whatever you need.

VERA. *(smiles)* So what do y'all do around here? For fun?

BULRUSHER. Drink. The Apple Show is coming up though. Big dance for that.

VERA. Applesauce, huh.

*(***BOY** *enters.)*

BOY. Whoa, seein dubs. Whose sneeble are you?

*(***BULRUSHER** *aims her gun at* **BOY***'s crotch.)*

VERA. Bulrusher!

BULRUSHER. Show her some manners.

BOY. That thing ain't even loaded, you just cleaned it.

BULRUSHER. She ain't nobody's sneeble. Introduce yourself proper.

(She pokes him with the gun.)

BOY. Pleased to make your acquaintance.

VERA. I'm Vera, pleased to meet you.

BULRUSHER. Say *your* name.

BOY. Damn Bulrusher, take that highgun offa me!

BULRUSHER. Say it.

BOY. I'm Wilkerson, *enchanté.*

BULRUSHER. Your whole name.

BOY. Streebs Wilkerson –

BULRUSHER. Streebs, which means strawberries –

BOY. Don't tell her that –

BULRUSHER. – 'count of the red birthmark he got on his balls.

BOY. You supposed to be my girlfriend, don't go spreading lies. *(to* **VERA***)* She ain't even seen my privates.

BULRUSHER. Don't need to, as much as you talk about em. He says I'm his girlfriend but he didn't even talk to me last night at the Anyhow.

BOY. We're in the early phases of love. You all kin?

BULRUSHER. She kin to Mr Jeans.

VERA. I'm kin to Mr Jeans.

VERA. From Birmingham.

BOY. My great granddad died over you, tryin to keep the Union together.

VERA. You think us colored folk are worth it?

BOY. What?

VERA. Death.

BOY. Haven't really sized up the race as a whole.

BULRUSHER. Yeah. We are.

BOY. You ain't colored, you a bulrusher and a fortune teller. And you my girlfriend.

BULRUSHER. Just 'cause you say something don't make it true. Get off my porch 'fore I load up this gun and use it.

BOY. Aw, manzanita –

BULRUSHER. Off.

BOY. I'll stack your oranges for you nice and tight.

BULRUSHER. What did I say.

BOY. Don't be so teet lipped. Leavin me all dove cooey. I just wanna see your golden eagles.

*(***BULRUSHER** *chases him off. As he exits, he yells:)*

You can't get rid of me, doolsey boo, no no! I'm gonna geech you!

VERA. What's a sneeble?

BULRUSHER. Like a snowball. It's the funny way to say Negro.

VERA. And you'd point a gun at a white man for that?

BULRUSHER. He's a boy. I won't have him treat you wrong.

VERA. Fred – my boyfriend at home – he'd never do what you just did. He fears the Lord God. He did steal me a pickle dipped in Kool-Aid powder from the store once, but that's about it. Sneebles. Why's everyone talk so funny here?

BULRUSHER. They're harpin the ling. Folks made it up a while ago to tell jokes and secrets, to make everything they talk about something they own. I can harp it but I don't. Made up my own way to talk instead, a way to talk to the river. I tell stories, make poetry, like I'm writing my own book. I tell things over and over so I can understand em. Hey, you really want a job?

VERA. Yeah. Need one bad.

BULRUSHER. I'm thinking of expanding my business. Summertime and all, oranges always do good, but I thought I might sell some lemons.

*(***VERA** *laughs.)*

BULRUSHER. What? If lemons don't please you, we could try pineapples. Or bananas.

VERA. You want my help?

BULRUSHER. Sure. We could split our yield clear down the middle.

VERA. You sure? All I done is office work.

BULRUSHER. I'll teach you what you need to know. How to choose the ripe ones, how much to charge on the road versus my regulars buy crates. You're smart enough; you won't have to pay me no mind after the first day.

VERA. *(laughing)* Applesauce *and* lemonade. And I thought California didn't have nothing else in it but movie stars and palm trees.

BULRUSHER. You don't want to work with me?

VERA. Of course I do, I was just kidding you. It's how I say thanks.

BULRUSHER. I got a twang in my stomach when you walked up today. Then it spread all over. Still feels like there's turpentine under my skin. You did all that to me. Wait till I tell the river.

VERA. You something else.

(The brothel porch. A month and a half later. **LOGGER** *sings.* **BOY** *accompanies him on his guitar.)*

LOGGER. *(sings)* Oh she caned me with her look
She slayed me with her eye
But I had her sweet jerk once
And for it I would die
And for it I would die
And for it I would die

She turned me like a horse
She reined my wildness in
But every time she pats my rump
Oh Lord I want to sin
Oh Lord I want to sin
Oh Lord I wants to sin

BOY. That's an old song from the mill ain't it. Pa sang it different. You changed the words.

LOGGER. Naw, the song changed on *me*. I can't sing it like we used to 'cause I don't feel it that way anymore. I mean, they got electric saws now.

BOY. What's the electric saw got to do with a girl?

LOGGER. I'm saying! I mean, I came out here from Birmingham when I was about your age and that whole field in front of you was a stand of conifers. Used to ride my Appaloosa over that ridge with your pa, just take in the country. Built my own house. Not with siding, not with half logs. Tongue and grooved my own cabin all from redwood I felled myself. Now you're lucky if you see a pygmy tree.

BOY. Where's the girl in that?

LOGGER. Right! All through the valley, up and down the coast, the trees are gone and so is my youth – I have nothing left to destroy. Nothing fallin around here but apples on sheep.

BOY. Yeah, I'm kinda weary of doin what all everyone else do. I mean I'm not different from nobody, I'm just not always the same. Hey, I got a new song to keep me company. You wanna hear it?

LOGGER. Not one of them lonesome tunes now.

BOY. Oh I can't write those. I just missed the draft to Korea, got all my days in front of me, so I think I got a right to be happy, to sing a happy song.

LOGGER. Alright. Ply it for me. But soft now. I don't want to get jangled. Too pretty an evening for nothing loud.

BOY. It's in a new key I found, real sweet. *(He plays a chord.)* Isn't that bahl.

LOGGER. See what'n all you got jacker, ply your song.

BOY. *(sings and plays guitar)*

Twelve nights of hard liquor
Sent Rowan to his grave
He saw the lights of Galilee
And Mary just the same

And if you call for Rowan now
The road'll answer back

He's twelve nights gone to perfidy
Spread on a burlap sack

Oh save me in my nightly walk
Save me in my days
Don't want to go like Rowan Hale
I'll keep my goodly ways

Oh save me in my nightly walk
Save me in my days
Don't want to go like Rowan Hale
I'll keep my goodly ways
I'll keep my goodly ways

LOGGER. Huh. That's your happy song? You got kinda loud at the end there.

BOY. I didn't know what I was sayin for a minute and I sang with my full power to get me through.

LOGGER. And you made that tune up.

BOY. Most of it.

LOGGER. Clearly, you been inspired – but stop that loud singing. It sounds like you wanna hurt somebody. Don't you got a gal?

BOY. Yeah, I'm gettin her.

LOGGER. Well what you doing about it? You need to marry and set up house. That's what you oughta do since you ain't in the service or a travelin man. Need you a wife.

BOY. You ain't had one.

*(***MADAME** *enters with glasses on, reading a letter.)*

MADAME. Are you comin in today or are you just tryin to hoot on me by sittin on my stoop?

LOGGER. If you got any vision in that pinchy face of yours, you could see I am whittlin and warblin with this yink here.

MADAME. Yes but I don't see either a y'all payin my loiterin fee. If you gonna porch up and tell jonnems and wess all day, fine by me but you have got to give up some rent.

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