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Sugarcane Blues

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Chris Gordon

B.S. Stephen F. Austin State University, 1993

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE CROSSROADS - CIRCA 1920 - NIGHT

The full moon hangs over a vast pine forrest in the Mississippi Delta.

Frogs and bugs CHIRP loudly in the darkness.

An OWL HOOTS from the top of a pine.

Next to the owl is a break in the trees, where two lonely dirt roads cross in the mist.

A figure makes his way down the road. It is YOUNG PERCY LINCOLN, a skinny, sixteen year old black boy (ALL characters are black) in a dress jacket and bow tie.

He carries a guitar in one hand, a bottle of whiskey in the other.

He walks to the center of the crossroads, sets down his guitar.

As he bends, he winces in pain.

YOUNG PERCY

Ahhh...

Young Percy uncorks the bottle with his teeth, takes a long pull.

He removes a handkerchief from his pocket, slips it under his suit jacket, and presses it to his side.

He removes it, dark with blood in the light of the moon.

Young Percy stares at the bloody handkerchief a long moment, before holding it above the whiskey bottle and squeezing it carefully, so the blood drips down inside the neck.

The whiskey clouds with the blood.

Young Percy sets the bottle on the ground, looks up and down both roads.

YOUNG PERCY

I'm here, Devil. I'm here.

Nothing.

Young Percy drops to a knee, bows his head and clasps his hands in prayer.

YOUNG PERCY (CONT'D)

Please.

He begins to sob. Tears roll down his face and drip onto the dirt.

YOUNG PERCY (CONT'D)

Please...

Suddenly, the frogs and bugs STOP CHIRPING.

Young Percy looks up, slowly.

FOOTSTEPS crunch up the road.

His eyes grow wide.

A tall, dark figure has emerged from the darkness. He wears a black suit and hat, has a chin beard and carries a walking stick. It is the DEVIL.

The Devil stops right in front of Young Percy.

The two lock eyes, and the Devil reaches out to him.

Shaking with fear, Young Percy takes the Devil's hand.

BLACK OUT

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A small wood-plank room, with a bed against the wall.

SILVIE, a good looking woman with large breasts, lies on her back in the bed with her legs spread wide.

PERCY LINCOLN, now a well-built man in his early twenties, pounds away on top of her.

His boots are on. His pants are around his ankles.

There is a large, ugly SCAR on his left side.

SILVIE

Oh! Oh! Oh!!!

Percy pauses, flips her over, and doubles his pace.

A door opens and SLAMS shut in the front room.

Percy and Silvie stop cold.

Heavy FOOTSTEPS approach the closed bedroom door.

Percy looks to his guitar, which is on the floor by a pile of clothes beneath a SHUT window.

Beside the window is a large armoire.

HONEY (MALE, O.S.)
Silvie? Silvie!?

The doorknob jiggles but won't turn.

The door shakes, hard.

A brief silence, before the door is KICKED IN.

HONEY, a burly man in his thirties, bursts through the splintered wood.

He stares at Silvie, now alone in the bed, a wet sheet pulled around her naked, sweating body.

HONEY
Where he at woman!?

SILVIE
Where who at, Honey?

HONEY
You goddamn little whore. Since
when you take up playin' guitar?

Percy's guitar case leans against the now OPEN window.

Honey steps to the window and looks outside.

He does not see the armoire door swing open behind him.

Percy slips out with his pants up, one suspender pulled over a bare shoulder.

He moves toward Honey. A floorboard CREAKS.

Honey spins around, fists raised.

Percy hits him in the teeth.

Honey's legs buckle. Percy punches him twice more, and Honey drops to his knees on the wood planks.

Percy reaches into his boot and comes out with a STRAIGHT RAZOR, flips it open and raises it over his head.

Silvie SCREAMS.

EXT. LEVEE WORK CAMP - NIGHT

A large BONFIRE burns near a collection of small shacks and a rickety bunkhouse on the Mississippi.

Several dozen MEN and a handful of WOMEN mill about between the bonfire and bunkhouse. They talk and laugh, drink liquor from bottles and jars.

EXT. BUNKHOUSE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Two LABORERS play dominoes on a barrel under a hanging lantern.

SIMMONS, a well dressed man in his fifties, watches them closely.

At his side is CREOLE GIRL, pretty, in her early twenties.

LABORER 1
Gettin' on near midnight. He gonna show?

LABORER 2
He'll show. He always show.

They each lay down a domino.

LABORER 1
You believe them stories 'bout him?

LABORER 2
Don't you?

Simmons CHUCKLES, lights a cigarette with a fancy silver lighter.

SIMMONS
Speak of the devil and he shall appear.

The laborers both look at Simmons.

LABORER 2
This man ain't the devil himself.

SIMMONS
You sure?

At that moment, Percy emerges in the light of the lantern.

Simmons turns to Creole Girl and winks. He steps off the porch into the darkness

Percy climbs the porch steps and looks at Laborer 2, who stands and offers his chair.

Percy sits down, removes his guitar from the case.

He then takes a dollar bill from his pocket, folds it longways and lays it in the open case.

The crowd moves from the bonfire and toward the porch. Creole Girl eyeballs Percy.

He looks her up and down, begins to pluck the strings and hum.

PERCY

My name's Percy Lincoln. I'm here
to play guitar.

The crowd falls silent as he begins to play a blues tune and SING*.

PERCY

Woke up this mornin', my boots was
full of mud/ Woke up this mornin',
my boots was full of blood/
shouldn't have been up all night,
gettin' nasty in the mud...
*(lyrics by Neal Pollack-- all
other songs are original)

The men and women watch, entranced, as Percy's music drifts out across the moonlit Mississippi.

INT. SHACK - NIGHT

Percy sits at the foot of a cot, shirtless, sweat drying in the breeze from an open window.

Creole Girl lies on her side, naked, eyes closed, on the damp sheets behind him.

Percy lights a smoke from a dim lantern, looks back at Creole Girl's smooth young body.

He CHUCKLES and shakes his head. He stares out the window at the moon.

He takes a long drag. His eyes glaze.

The MOON turns into the SUN.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

The hot sun beats down on a field of sugarcane.

On one end of the field, black smoke rises as a section of cut crop is burned.

On the other end, on the edge of the pine woods, is an old, whitewashed country CHURCH.

Young Percy (16), a smile on his face, moves through an uncut section of shoulder-high cane.

He carries a PRETTY GIRL in a white wedding dress in his arms.

She puts her arms around his neck, their eyes lock and she smiles.

The cane obscures her torso.

As Young Percy nears the church, the bells begin to RING.

BACK TO:

INT. SHACK - NIGHT

Percy stares at the moon with a dreamy expression.

After a moment, he blinks, and his features harden.

Percy takes a leather pouch from his pocket, removes a small piece of BAOBAB ROOT. It crumbles into dust as he rubs it on the heel of his left boot.

Creole girl watches now, one eye open.

CREOLE GIRL
What you doin' to your boot?

Percy turns.

EXT. ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP - DAY

An old house on the edge of a small town. A shingle above the door reads: ME-MAW'S ROOTS AND HERBS.

Percy climbs the porch steps and goes inside.

INT. ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Dried roots and plants hang from the ceiling. Bones and vials of potions line the walls.

Behind the counter is ME-MAW, a heavysset, dark-skinned woman with a perpetual scowl.

Percy enters.

ME-MAW
I help you?

PERCY
Lookin' for some Baobab.

ME-MAW
Bark or flower?

PERCY
Root.

ME-MAW
Root? Sound like you in need of a
readin'.

Me-Maw taps a SIGN on the counter that reads: FORTUNES
TOLD \$2.

PERCY
You don't want to give me no
readin'.

Me-Maw looks Percy up and down, shrugs, turns, and parts a
VELVET CURTAIN behind the counter.

ME-MAW
Baby, get out here get me that
Baobab... Yeah... The root.

BABY, a very pretty girl in her late teens, emerges from
behind the curtain.

Baby takes a large knife from beneath the counter.

She walks across the shop and climbs a stepladder, where she cuts down a piece of BAOBAB ROOT-- brownish black, the size and shape of a dried-up sweet potato.

Baby returns to the counter.

BABY
This Baobab don't come cheap. How much you need?

PERCY
Give you twenty for half.

Baby glances at Me-Maw, who nods.

Percy pulls a wad of MONEY from his pocket, flashily peels off \$20 in small bills.

Baby seems to notice Percy for the first time.

She places the root on a sheet of wax paper on the counter, holds the knife above it as Percy lays his money down.

BABY
Two more, I throw in a readin'.

PERCY
Two, hunh?

BABY
Make it one. Then after, we'll see I can't wrap your root.

Baby CHOPS the root in half with the knife.

Percy raises his eyebrows.

Me-Maw shakes her head.

EXT. ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP/BACKYARD - DUSK

The evening is quiet and still.

Me-Maw removes clothes from a line, including Percy's pants and suit.

Me-Maw reaches up to unpin a shirt when a strange WIND blows through the trees.

She cocks her head, pauses.

There is RUSTLING in the underbrush, where the edge of the yard gives way to deep pine woods.

ME-MAW
Who there?

She takes a step toward the underbrush, but thinks better of it.

She hurries back inside with the basket of clothes.

INT. ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP - DUSK

Me-Maw enters the shop with the basket, sets it on the counter.

Baby comes through the curtain with a dreamy smile on her face.

ME-MAW
(shakes her head)
Get that look out your eye and
straighten up them shelves...

Baby half-heartedly begins to straighten objects on the shelves.

INT. READING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the center of the room is a table, with a crystal ball, cards and bones on it.

Beside the table are two chairs, one overturned.

In the rear of the room is a fainting bed, where Percy lies naked and asleep.

His head is lolled to the side. His left hand rests palm-up on his leg.

Me-Maw enters the reading room through the curtain.

She dumps Percy's clothes on the bed beside him. Percy does not stir.

ME-MAW
You best get yourself on up, you
hear? You damn sure ain't gonna
spend the night.

Me-Maw reaches out to poke Percy but hesitates.

She lowers herself to her knees before him, slides her hand up his bare leg and places it into Percy's upturned palm.

Me-Maw closes her eyes. Her lids begin to flutter and her body begins to sway.

She reaches out to balance herself, and her free hand falls on Percy's scar.

ME-MAW (CONT'D)

Aaaahhh...

Me-Maw's head snaps back and her body goes rigid. She shakes all over and jerks herself away.

ME-MAW (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Sweet Jesus.

Still shaking, Me-Maw crosses herself in prayer.

She stands and quickly exits the reading room, Percy still asleep on the bed.

ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP - NIGHT

Me-Maw holds the front door open as Percy exits.

He nods to Me-Maw, gives Baby a wink just as Me-Maw closes the door behind him.

BABY

Guess I'm goin' up to my room.

ME-MAW

And that's where you gonna stay all night I got to chain you to that bed.

BABY

I'm grown now, Me-Maw. You can't keep me here like that.

ME-MAW

I got to, Baby. That man's heart black as coal.

Me-Maw turns to face the door.

ME-MAW
(whispers)
And he ain't gonna see the risin'
sun.

INT. JUKE JOINT - NIGHT

After hours. The BARTENDER sweeps the floor.

Percy sits alone at the bar with a tall glass of liquor in front of him.

Percy is approached by BYRON, the club's owner, a heavysset man in wide suspenders.

Byron reaches into his pocket and pulls out a wad of bills. He peels off several and sets them on the bar.

BYRON
We rollin' out back, Lincoln, you want to get in.

PERCY
Got to keep it in my pocket tonight, Byron. Gonna need a bit when I get up to Greenville.

BYRON
Greenville? You takin' the train?

PERCY
Imagine I am.

BYRON
Well, you still got a couple hours to kill. Who knows? This may just be your lucky night.

Byron exits.

The door swings shut.

Simmons emerges from the darkness at the rear of the club.

SIMMONS
Percy Lincoln?

PERCY
That's right. Who are you?

SIMMONS
Name's Simmons. I been watchin' you
play these last three nights.

PERCY
Hope you been leavin' money in my
hat.

SIMMONS
I have. And there's a whole lot
more where it come from.

Simmons takes several crisp \$20 bills from his jacket, hands
them to Percy.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)
This here a hundred dollars.
Consider it a down payment.

PERCY
Down payment on what?

SIMMONS
On you comin' down to New Orleans.
I run a club there called the S&S.
Ain't a man in town don't know it.

PERCY
So?

SIMMONS
So, I can make you a rich man.

PERCY
Ain't a thing you can give me I
ain't got.

SIMMONS
What about a record?

PERCY
A record?

SIMMONS
Damn right. I'm drivin' back
tonight. I can take you with me.

Percy stares at Simmons a long moment.

PERCY
I'm playin' tomorrow up in
Greenville. Told some folks there I
was comin'.

SIMMONS
Then we head back tomorrow night.

PERCY
I got to be in Rosedale then.

SIMMONS
And the night after that?

PERCY
Oxford.

SIMMONS
OK then, Lincoln. I heard you was a
tough nut.

Simmons removes a Thousand Dollar Bill from his wallet.

Percy seems unimpressed.

Simmons rips the bill in two and lays one half on the bar,
slips the other half back in his wallet.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)
You wise up, you come see me down
in New Orleans.

Simmons stands and exits.

The bartender approaches Percy.

BARTENDER
I ain't never seen a thousand
dollar bill in my life. You playin'
that man, or turnin' him down?

PERCY
Mind your business. And get me a
damn bottle.

Percy slides one of his new \$20s across the bar, slips the
others in his jacket.

The bartender sets a bottle in front of Percy, lays several
bills worth of change beside it. Percy absently picks up the
change, along with the torn bill, and slips it all in his
boot.

The bartender puts up his broom and walks out the back door.

Percy, now alone in the club, drinks straight from the
bottle.

He lights a cigarette on the lantern on the bar, watches as a MOTH flies inside the lantern.

The moth circles around under the glass for a moment before it CATCHES FIRE.

Percy's eyes grow wide as the moth burns.

He laughs, weakly, looks over his shoulder at the dark, empty club.

Percy pulls the collar up on his jacket and knocks back his drink.

He exits the bar.

The candle flickers and goes out completely.

EXT. JUKE JOINT/BACK PORCH - NIGHT

A group of a half dozen MEN, including Byron, the Bartender, and PINKY (a gaudily dressed man with large diamond PINKY RING) shoot craps on a plank of wood set up against a wall.

Byron shakes the dice.

BYRON
Come on baby, hit the five, hit
it...

Byron rolls a seven.

BYRON (CONT'D)
Goddamn!

Percy exits the club with his guitar and the bottle.

BYRON (CONT'D)
Change your mind, Lincoln?

PERCY
Gimme them dice.

Percy throws down \$80 (the four remaining twenty dollar bills given him by Simmons.)

The other players throw their money in on top.

Percy rolls the dice, hits a seven.

BYRON
Son of a bitch. Go on try that
again.

Percy keeps all his money on the plank. He rattles the dice,
blows on them, and hits another seven.

Several of the men GROAN.

BYRON
Guess it is your lucky night.

PERCY
Who's puttin' in?

PINKY
I am.

Pinky matches the pile of money. No one else bets.

Percy shakes the dice and rolls a third seven.

Percy LAUGHS and rakes in the money.

PINKY
Ain't nobody that lucky.

Pinky reaches out and grabs Percy's arm.

The dice rollers step back and fall dead silent.

PERCY
Turn my arm loose.

PINKY
Let me see them dice.

BYRON
They my dice, you damn fool...

Percy jerks his arm away from Pinky.

He punches him in the head and knocks him to the ground.

Pinky tries to stand, but Percy kicks him back down.

He pulls his razor from his boot and slashes Pinky across the
arm.

PINKY
Ahhh!

Pinky tries to protect himself but Percy moves in.

He grabs Pinky's collar and pulls back to slash his throat when Byron grabs hold of Percy's wrist.

BYRON

Lincoln! Just settle on down.
Last thing I need is another body
turn up behind this damn club.

Percy jerks his arm from Byron, DROPS the razor.

The men begin to LAUGH. After a moment Byron begins to LAUGH with them.

Pinky holds his bloody arm and backs away from the porch.

PINKY

This ain't over.

BYRON

Shut your mouth and start walkin',
or I'll hand you your hat myself.

Byron pulls back his jacket to show the butt of a REVOLVER.

Pinky CUSSES under his breath, turns and walks away.

Percy collects his winnings, folds the bills in a wad and slips them in his boot.

EXT. JUKE JOINT - NIGHT

The front door swings open and Percy staggers outside, his guitar in one hand, a bottle in the other.

Byron stands in the doorway behind him.

PERCY

Devil done me right this evenin'.
Ain't that right, Byron?

BYRON

Sure it is, Lincoln. You watch
yourself now. And don't go spendin'
all that money on liquor, unless
you gonna come back and spend it
here.

Percy raises the bottle to Byron, drains the last of the whiskey and drops the bottle to the ground.

He staggers toward the Train Station, a ways down the road.

A train whistle SOUNDS in the distance.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

A train whistle SOUNDS in the distance.

Pinky stands in the shadows of the dark platform.

He pulls a small REVOLVER from his pocket and spins the cylinder.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Percy is a fifty yards from the station, when he passes a point deep in the shadow of pine trees.

SILVIE (O.S.)

Percy?

Percy freezes in place.

Silvie emerges from the shadows with a shawl wrapped over her head. She removes it to expose a bruised and misshapen face.

PERCY

Jesus...

Percy reaches out and touches her cheek. Silvie backs away.

SILVIE

I'm sorry.

A twig CRACKS in the shadows.

Percy turns just in time to catch a wood plank to the ribs.

Percy drops to his knees, reaches for his razor-- but it isn't there.

Two BURLY THUGS emerge, pummel Percy with their boots and fists.

Percy falls on top of his guitar case, curls himself around it.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - CONTINUOUS

Pinky shakes his head in disbelief, LAUGHS as he watches the Thugs beat Percy.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Thugs move aside as Honey steps into the moonlight, plank in hand.

HONEY
Say you prayers, music man.

Honey raises the plank, brings it down on Percy's head.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVERBANK - DAY

The sun rises on the misty river.

BOY, a shirtless, barefoot ten year old with a cane pole and a burlap worm pouch, makes his way down to the water.

Boy baits his hook with a worm from the pouch, is about to throw out when he stops cold.

He has nearly stepped on PERCY'S ARM, which sticks out of the reeds.

Boy sets his pole down and parts the cattails: Percy lies face down on the edge of the water.

He does not move.

Boy pokes Percy in the shoulder with his toe. Nothing.

Slowly, Boy reaches down to touch Percy.

Suddenly, Percy's own hand snaps up and SNATCHES Boy's wrist.

Boy SCREAMS.

He pulls his arm free and claws his way back up the riverbank.

BOY
Daddy! Daddy!

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - DAY

Percy leans against a tree, shoeless, stripped to the waist.

Boy's DADDY, a large, muscular man in worn overalls, kneels beside Percy.

Boy watches on from several feet away.

Daddy dips a ladle into a bucket of water, hands it to Percy.

Percy takes a sip and pours the rest over his head. He attempts to rise.

DADDY

Don't you move now. You been beat bad.

PERCY

Where my guitar?

DADDY

I ain't seen no guitar. Go on look, Boy.

Boy moves into the underbrush.

Percy looks down and touches his side. The old scar is torn open and bleeds badly.

DADDY

Look to been stabbed on top of it. Boy, go on get Doctor Robinson.

PERCY

No! No. Don't want to see no doctor.

BOY

That's good, 'cuz he way on over at the Henry's, tendin' that horse.

Percy tries to stand, but collapses.

DADDY

Boy! You run get Doctor Robinson now. Tell him come to the house.

Boy turns and jogs up the bank.

Daddy lifts Percy and carries him up the levee.

INT. BOY'S HOME - DAY

A simple, wood plank home with a sheet hung in the corner of the front room.

DOCTOR ROBINSON, a tall, thin man in his fifties, emerges from behind the sheet.

Boy, Daddy, SISTER (early teens, tall and pretty), MAMA (Daddy's age), and GRANDDADDY (elderly), wait in the room.

DOCTOR

He's lucky you found him when you did. In fact, there's not a reason in the world that man's not dead.

DADDY

Stabbin' kill a man sure as anything.

INT. SHEET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Percy lies on a cot behind the sheet hung from the ceiling. His chest and head are bandaged.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

He has been stabbed. But not in the recent past. That piece of blade must have been lodged there for years. Got knocked loose from that beating he took, I imagine...

Percy passes out.

INT. SHEET ROOM - LATER

Boy looks down at Percy, who sleeps on the cot.

Percy's guitar is on the floor at Boy's feet.

Boy pokes Percy in the shoulder.

Percy stirs and opens his eyes.

BOY

Found your guitar.

PERCY

Thank you, boy. How long I been out?

BOY

You been sleepin' on and off three days.

PERCY

Damn. Ain't no one been comin' round askin' for me, have they?

BOY
Matter of fact, there was. Daddy
wouldn't let him wake you, though.

Percy eases up on his elbow.

PERCY
This man have a name?

BOY
No. Just some old timer. Chin
beard. Walkin' stick. Say you got
somethin' belong to him.

PERCY
What? Boy, you got to help me up...

BOY
Just foolin'.

Percy lays back down on the cot.

PERCY
(weakly)
You ought not fool 'round 'bout a
thing like that.

BOY
You ought not talk in your sleep.

EXT. BOY'S HOME (BACK PORCH) - DAY

Percy sits in a rocking chair, shirtless, in a pair of
oversized shoes.

He unwraps the bandage from his head. He chest bandage
remains on, spotted with blood.

Boy steps though the back door to the porch.

PERCY
Thank you again, boy, for findin'
my guitar.

BOY
Still ain't found your shoes.

PERCY
They was boots. And don't do no
more lookin'.

BOY

Come on now. Give you an excuse to take me out fishin'.

PERCY

You don't need me to fish.

BOY

Daddy won't let me go by myself no more. Say too many bad men out on the river.

PERCY

Like me.

BOY

You? You ain't near as bad as the ones put you down there.

PERCY

(smiles)

I suppose you right about that.

Sister walks up the steps with a load of wash.

She smiles at Percy, makes sexy eyes at him as she enters the house.

Percy takes a deep breath, shakes his head.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Boy, you ever see your daddy drink from a bottle? Maybe act a little funny after he done it?

BOY

You mean liquor? He don't allow it in the house.

PERCY

I see.

BOY

My Granddaddy got some though. Shoot, he dead drunk right now. Keep a big old jug hid out in the woods.

PERCY

Why don't you run on get it for me?

BOY

What about fishin'?

PERCY

We'll see.

Boy hops off the porch and heads for the woods. Sister comes back outside.

SISTER

He just leave?

PERCY

Went to the woods.

SISTER

And left me all alone with these clothes to fold. Shoot. Granddaddy sleepin', too. You want to lend me a hand?

Sister smiles at Percy.

Percy smiles back, but turns to see Daddy working out in the field.

PERCY

Maybe some other time.

Sister pouts as Percy steps off the porch, headed for the BARN.

INT. BARN - LATER

Percy paces the dirt floor and wrings his hands.

Soon, Boy enters, lugging a hillbilly-sized jug of liquor.

PERCY

Good lord.

Percy takes the jug from boy, takes a long, long drink and leans back against a hay bale.

PERCY

We got ourselves a secret?

BOY

Depends.

PERCY

On what?

BOY

On you carryin' my pole and worms.

Percy takes another long drink and hides the jug under some hay.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - DAY

Percy and Boy make their way down the embankment. Percy carries two cane poles, a worm sack, and his guitar.

Percy drops everything at the river's edge, grabs a pole and turns it to unwind the string.

Boy points down the river.

BOY

Right over there where we found
you. Moanin', bleedin', ain't had
no shoes.

PERCY

That bring back some good memories,
boy. Keep on talkin'.

BOY

(laughing)

You ain't never been fishin', have
you?

Percy has the line tangled around his arm, the hook stuck in his pants.

PERCY

Not in a long while.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - SUNSET

The river flows blood red in the setting sun.

The lines are out, both poles stuck in the mud on the bank.

Percy sits beside Boy, finishes a TUNE on the guitar.

BOY

I sure do like to hear a tune when
I drop a line. Devil give you some
good lessons, too.

PERCY

Ain't like that, boy. Devil don't
come for a man can't play.

BOY

Then why you wanna mess with him at all?

PERCY

Because he was once an Angel.

BOY

An Arc Angel, cast down from the pearly gates...

PERCY

That's right. That's what he give you. Look at what he once knew himself.

BOY

I know you ain't tellin' me you seen heaven.

PERCY

I seen somethin'. A light. A light so bright it shine right through you...

Percy SNAPS his fingers.

PERCY (CONT'D)

...but then it's gone. Next thing, you lookin' back in the face of the devil, knowin' what it is you ain't never gonna see again.

BOY

At least you got somethin', though. I bet you made more records than you can count.

PERCY

Records? I ain't made a one. I do, he gonna snatch me up. That was the bargain.

BOY

Sound like the devil ain't done you right.

PERCY

No son, he ain't. That what make him the Devil.

Percy puts his guitar back in the case.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Listen here, boy. I'm gonna head to town tonight. There's a thing there I got to get hold of.

BOY

I find your boots, you ain't got to wear them old clodhoppers.

PERCY

Stay away from them boots, boy. I ain't gonna tell you again.

INT. ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP - NIGHT

Percy approaches the herb shop down a dark and empty dirt road.

He walks around the side of the shop and works open a window.

INT. ME-MAW'S HERB SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The window slides open and Percy slips inside.

He stumbles around a bit in the dark, eyes on the ceiling.

A KNIFE gripped by a plump, black HAND comes around and is pressed against Percy's throat.

ME-MAW (O.S.)

You picked the wrong house to come creepin'.

PERCY

(croaks)

Me-Maw?

Me-Maw keeps the knife raised but allows Percy to turn and face her.

ME-MAW

Percy? I thought you was dead.

Percy snatches the knife away. He raises it toward Me-Maw, and she shrinks back.

PERCY

You can see I ain't. Ain't here to do no harm, neither. I just come for more root.

Percy removes \$20 from his pocket, lays it on the counter next to Me-Maw, and sinks the knife in it.

He turns from her, arranges the ladder, and reaches up for the Baobab Root that hangs from the ceiling.

Me-Maw looks at the knife and then back at Percy.

ME-MAW

Whole Baobab tree ain't gonna help you now, son. You done got a foot in the grave.

PERCY

I ain't got a foot in nothin'.

ME-MAW

You got to listen. I seen somethin' that day you was here, sleepin' in the back room.

Percy shakes his head, jerks the rest of the Baobab root from the ceiling.

ME-MAW (CONT'D)

I seen a church, son. I seen a field of burnin' cane...

Percy's stops cold.

He turns, slowly, descends the ladder and stares into Me-Maw's eyes.

ME-MAW (CONT'D)

How long it been since you went to them crossroads?

PERCY

Goin' on nine years.

ME-MAW

Devil don't give a man but seven.

PERCY

I know.

Me-Maw shakes her head.

ME-MAW

He done found you, now, Percy. You can't keep runnin' like you been.

PERCY
I ain't got no damn choice.

ME-MAW
You do got one. Not to keep
runnin', though. But to free your
soul altogether.

PERCY
How's that?

ME-MAW
The secret to it down in that cane
field. You got to get back there,
Percy. You got to get yourself back
home.

Percy considers this a moment.

PERCY
You don't know nothin', woman.

He turns and reaches for the door.

ME-MAW
You hid now in another man's shoes,
but you ain't gonna stay hid for
long. Five nights back, when he
come for you, the moon was half.
That moon come full, the Devil
gonna come for what's his.

Percy hesitates a moment in the doorway, then exits the shop.

INT. BOY'S HOME - NIGHT

The house is dark and quiet. Percy steps out of the Sheet
Room with his guitar.

He lays several bills on a table, then looks out the window
at the waxing gibbous MOON.

Percy reaches for the front door when Sister emerges from the
darkness.

SISTER
You ain't even said goodbye.

INT. BARN LOFT - DAY

From outside, the sound of Mama SCREAMING.

Percy sits up in a pile of hay. The liquor jug and Sister (naked, sleeping) are in the hay next to him.

Mama SCREAMS over and over.

EXT. BOY'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

Percy rounds the side of the house and squints in the sun. His eyes open wide as he runs toward the RIVER ROAD.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A truck is pulled over in the grass. The DRIVER holds his head and paces.

DRIVER
I ain't seen him, I ain't seen
him...

Mama is down on her knees WAILING in the middle of the road. A LIMP FORM lays in front of her.

Percy reaches them to see Boy laying there dead. PEOPLE begin to come down the road toward them.

Percy backs away from the sight of the accident.

On the side of the road, he his old BOOTS with fresh BLOOD still on them.

PERCY
Oh, no. Oh no no no...

Percy kicks the boots into the ditch.

His legs buckle. He staggers behind a tree and vomits in the grass.

Percy takes the new piece of root from his pocket, rubs it over the soles of his shoes, up his legs, and then frantically over his chest, head and face.

He then throws the root to the ground, looks back around the tree.

Daddy picks up Boy's limp body in his arms, hugs him tight to his chest.

Percy watches on as Mama continues to SCREAM.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - NIGHT

The lantern stop on the edge of town.

A train whistle SCREAMS in the distance.

Percy stands on the platform, a smoke in his mouth, his guitar at his feet.

He reaches up and lights the lantern with his cigarette.

He takes the lantern off the hook, and swings it as the whistle SOUNDS again.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

The car is smoky and half full. Several PASSENGERS, mostly men, sleep in their seats in the gently rocking car.

Percy sits against a window, eyes closed, chin on his chest.

His guitar is on the seat beside him.

BIG LEMON, a short, portly man in his fifties, dressed in a dark suit and crooked bow tie, sits a row up and across from Percy. He is the only passenger awake.

He looks back at Percy several times, squints his eyes.

Percy's forehead beads with sweat. His face twitches and his eyelids flutter.

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Sun beats down on the field of sugarcane.

Black smoke rises as a section of cut crop is burned.

Young Percy carries Pretty Girl to the church in a wedding dress.

She kisses him and they both look to the church, where the doors open and several PEOPLE emerge.

A WOMAN descends the steps and shades her eyes.

An OLD MAN looks out across the cane and waves.

Percy and Pretty Girl lock eyes again and smile, and Percy now moves more quickly through the cane, which still obscures Pretty Girl's torso.

As the two near the church, the bells begin to RING louder and louder.

BACK TO:

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Percy's eyes snap open. He takes a quick breath.

He wipes the sweat from his brow, opens the blind on the window.

The sun is low on the horizon over a pine forest, interspersed with an occasional cotton field.

Big Lemon now stands and approaches Percy. He reaches out and touches Percy's shoulder.

Percy grabs Big Lemon's tie and pulls him off balance, pushes him against the back of the seat.

PERCY

What you want?

BIG LEMON

(croaks)

Loose shoes and tight pussy.
Yourself?

Percy loosens his grip.

PERCY

What you want with me?

BIG LEMON

I seen you with that guitar. I'm a
music man, too. Name's Big Lemon.
Play horn and women too young to
know better.

PERCY

I see.

BIG LEMON

We got somethin' in common, then.
What do you go by, friend?

PERCY

I don't go by nothin'. Just a man
on a train.

BIG LEMON

Well, where you headed, man on a
train?

PERCY

LaBorde, Louisiana. I'm headed
home.

BIG LEMON

Goin' home always good on a man's
soul.

PERCY

It may just be. Long as I get there
by the full moon.

Big Lemon gives Percy a puzzled look.

The car BUCKS violently.

Metal SCREECHES against metal on the tracks.

Big Lemon nearly falls over, but Percy holds him up.

A few passengers fall from their seats. Others cuss and shake
their heads as the train comes to a stop.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

Passengers exit the train. Some mill around near the cars,
others head toward a nearby SMALL TOWN.

The town is on the edge of a slow moving river that turns
into a swamp on the far side.

The tracks cross the river on a long trestle bridge that
disappears into the trees of the swamp beyond it.

Big Lemon emerges from the crowd and approaches Percy, who
stands away from the passengers on the edge of the woods.

PERCY

You get word?

BIG LEMON

Yeah. Engine seized. Next train
don't come through 'til midnight.

PERCY

Damn.

BIG LEMON

It ain't nothin'. Hell, gives us a chance to turn up a few drinks.

INT. SMALL TOWN CLUB - LATER

The bar is about half full, mostly with passengers from the train.

In the crowd are two tall, pretty young women, dressed identically: the TWINS OF PLEASURE.

They sit at a table with a well-dressed WEALTHY MAN.

Percy and Big Lemon walk in, approach the bar.

The Twins look them over. Big Lemon gives them a lecherous wink.

The twins roll their eyes simultaneously, go back to paying attention to the Wealthy Man.

The BARTENDER approaches.

BIG LEMON

Double Rye. What you drinkin', Man on a Train?

PERCY

Just beer.

The bartender pours their drinks.

Percy sips his beer and Big Lemon turns up his shot.

BIG LEMON

Hit me again, friend.

The Bartender pours another drink.

BIG LEMON (CONT'D)

Things a bit slow in here tonight, ain't they?

BARTENDER

Biggest crowd I seen in a year.

BIG LEMON

Well then. Big crowd like this
might need some music. I won't even
charge you my regular fee.

BARTENDER

Regular fee? Listen, friend, you
can blow whatever you want out that
horn, but I ain't gonna pay you for
it.

BIG LEMON

Just what lands in my hat, then,
partner. Just what lands in my hat.

EXT. SMALL TOWN CLUB - LATER

The bar is packed with a dancing crowd.

Big Lemon sits on a stool in the corner of the bar, PLAYS his
horn.

His hat is in front of him, half full with BILLS.

Big Lemon finishes his set.

BIG LEMON

Now we gonna hear from a man who I
hope knows how to play guitar.

Percy is hesitant at first, but soon takes the stage.

He plucks his guitar strings and begins to SING: DEVIL IN MY
POCKET

PERCY

In the time it takes to die/ a man
sees with just one eye/ Got a devil
in my pocket/ he only come out at
night...

Big Lemon nods his head to the music, a subtle smile forming
on his lips.

The effect on the rest of the crowd is the same as at the
work camp.

In the back of the bar, the Twins exchange glances behind the
Wealthy Man's head.

INT. SMALL TOWN CLUB - LATER

Percy and Big Lemon sit back at the bar. Big Lemon counts through a stack of bills.

PERCY
What time you got?

BIG LEMON
Quarter to eleven.

PERCY
Best get headin' back.

Percy stands to leave, but Big Lemon puts a hand on his shoulder.

BIG LEMON
You him, ain't you?

PERCY
Him who?

BIG LEMON
Don't play a fool with Big Lemon.
You Lincoln. Percy Lincoln.

Percy stares hard at his glass of beer.

BIG LEMON (CONT'D)
Funny thing, but I had to hear you
play before I got it figured. Word
been goin' 'round you been killed.

PERCY
Not just yet.

BIG LEMON
Why ain't you told me up front,
though? Hell, you well known. Might
even brought us in more money.

PERCY
I got to keep things quiet. I'm
bein' chased, you see.

BIG LEMON
Who be fool enough to chase you?

Percy casts a suspicious gaze around the bar.

PERCY

The Devil.

BIG LEMON

Yeah. I done heard that on you,
too.

PERCY

I may have got a way out of it,
though, I get back home.

BIG LEMON

How goin' back home gonna break
your bargain with the devil?

PERCY

I ain't got that part figured just
yet.

BIG LEMON

Hmm. You say you from LaBorde,
right? Louisiana?

PERCY

That's right.

BIG LEMON

Funny thing, but I remember hearin'
a story 'bout that town, some years
back. Believe it involved you.

PERCY

What story is that?

BIG LEMON

Let me see now.

Big Lemon furrows his brow in thought, stares into a candle
lit on the bar.

The light FLICKERS.

Big Lemon's eyes glaze for just a moment, before he blinks
and shakes his head.

BIG LEMON

Must have slipped my mind.

PERCY

Slipped your mind?

BIG LEMON
I remember, I let you know. Right
now, though, I believe we got some
business to tend to.

They are approached by the Twins of Pleasure, who slink like
cats across the room to Percy and Big Lemon.

BIG LEMON (CONT'D)
Well let me get my glasses. I must
be seein' double.

TWINS
(simultaneously)
We're twins.

BIG LEMON
Twins. I ought to know. Now which
is the evil one.

The twins smile seductively, bump their hips together and
both raise their hands.

BIG LEMON (CONT'D)
Umm, umm. Now that's what I like to
see. Young girls ain't afraid to be
a little bit bad. Why don't we get
on out of here, go somewhere nice.
You comin', friend?

PERCY
Gettin' late.

TWIN 1
Be a shame you didn't join us.

TWIN 2
Especially with them talented
fingers.

TWIN 1
Nice and long.

TWIN 2
Bet they can hit every note.

They are approached by the bartender.

BIG LEMON (CONT'D)
Double shot of rye and set these
young ladies up.
(to Percy)
You drinkin'?

PERCY
Yeah. Same as you.

INT. BROTHEL - NIGHT

An aging, seedy room, with an overstuffed Victorian-era chair and ratty velvet curtains on the walls.

An old Victrola in the corner plays a jumpy Ragtime TUNE.

Big Lemon sits in the chair, drinks from a fifth bottle.

He passes it to Percy, who sits beside him on the arm of the chair.

The Twins dance to the music in the middle of the room, wiggle their hips and rub up on one another.

Twin 2 moves toward Percy and begins to gyrate in front of him.

Twin 1 starts to rub up on Big Lemon, bounces and slides her butt up and down the front of his pants.

TWIN 1
I see why they call you Big Lemon.

Big Lemon grabs Twin 1 by the waist, and the two of them go into a back room.

Twin 2 moves in on Percy, presses herself against him and kisses him all over.

Percy begins to return her affections when the train whistle SOUNDS in the distance.

Percy pushes her away.

PERCY
That's my train. I got to go.

TWIN 2
That train ain't gonna take you
nowhere better than here.

Twin 2 grabs Percy's hand and guides it under her skirt.

TWIN 2 (CONT'D)
Oooh, you want to touch that...

Percy moves closer. They kiss.

From the back room comes a dull THUNK, like a bat on a watermelon.

An instant later, a heavy CRASH shakes the floorboards.

PERCY
What the hell...

Percy pushes Twin 2 away and runs to the back room.

INT. BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Big Lemon lies naked and unconscious on the floor.

Twin 1 stands above him with a brass lamp in her hand.

Twin 1 looks down at Big Lemon's privates, shakes her head.

TWIN 1
Almost sorry I missed out on that.

PERCY
Say! What the hell you think...

Percy moves toward Twin 1, but freezes at the CLICK of the hammer pulled back on a gun.

He turns to face Twin 2, who is now pointing a DERRINGER at Percy's head.

TWIN 2
You best not move.

TWIN 1
Now slide that money on out your pocket. Hard...

TWIN 2
...or easy.

Twin 1 slips up behind Percy with the brass lamp raised.

Percy sees her in a mirror, ducks and spins around. She swings and misses, falls over Percy's back.

They struggle. Twin 2 points the barrel back and forth between them.

A shot is fired.

Twin 1 drops to the floor.

Twin 2 SCREAM. She pulls the trigger on the empty chamber, throws the gun at Percy and attacks him.

Percy grabs her by the hair and flings her into the doorway. She slams against the wood planks and slides down, semi-conscious.

Percy steps over the dead Twin 1 to Big Lemon. He picks up his bloody head and slaps his face.

Big Lemon MUMBLES incoherently.

PERCY
Wake yourself up. Come on now...

There is loud BANG on the door in the front room.

The knob CLICKS and the door squeaks open.

WEALTHY MAN (O.S.)
Y'all alright? What in hell's goin' on?

PERCY
(whispers)
Fuck.

Percy drops Big Lemon's head and rushes to the front room.

INT. FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Percy enters the room to find the Wealthy Man standing in the doorway, a REVOLVER in his hand.

Twin 2 WAILS and crawls across the floor to her dead sister.

TWIN 2
He killed her! Shoot him!

The Wealthy Man raises the gun toward Percy.

Percy snatches the Derringer off the floor and points it at the Wealthy Man.

PERCY
Put it on the floor!

TWIN 2
His gun ain't loaded! Shoot him dead!

PERCY

Put it on the damn floor!

The Wealthy Man stands with the gun half raised for a long moment, before he drops it on the wood planks.

He takes a step back, raises his hands.

Twin 2 looks back and forth between the two men, leaps across the room for the revolver.

Percy kicks her in the face with his boot. Her head snaps sideways, and she drops to the floor, out cold.

The wealthy man looks at his gun a last time, turns and runs down the hall.

The train whistle SOUNDS again. Percy grabs his guitar and runs from the room.

INT. BROTHEL - NIGHT

Percy runs down the stairs and down a hall.

At the bottom of the steps, several PROSTITUTES and CUSTOMERS have come from thier rooms to see the commotion.

One is Pinky (from the craps game). He stands in his drawers with his arm bandaged, a ringed pinky finger on the shoulder of a semi-clothed YOUNG WOMAN.

He watches Percy run past in disbelief.

PINKY

Son of a bitch.

He pushes the young woman aside and rushes back into his room.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Percy approaches the head of the trestle bridge, which stretches across a slow moving river and runs deep into a swamp beyond it.

The train whistle SOUNDS a last time, blows white smoke against the NEARLY FULL MOON, a half mile over the swamp.

PERCY

God damn.

Percy lets out a breath, hangs his head.

Lonesome HARMONICA MUSIC plays in the distance.

Percy turns toward the sound, listens.

Down a ways from the trestle bridge is a rickey dock and a small shack on stilts over the water.

A single lantern hangs from the corner of the shack. Beneath it sits an old HARMONICA PLAYER.

EXT. RIVER/DOCK - NIGHT

A low mist hangs over the water and thins out near the land.

At the head of the dock, several pirogues are upside down on the shore.

As Percy approaches, the Harmonica Player stops.

HARMONICA PLAYER

Miss your train?

PERCY

I did. When's the next one comin' through?

HARMONICA PLAYER

Evenin' after next, I imagine. But you lookin' for a place to rest your head, I reckon you can lie out in that grass by the bank. Ain't nothin' gonna mess with you 'round here. Besides, I'll be up all night.

PERCY

I appreciate that. But I got no time for it. I know I can catch a short line down in Yazoo City. How far am I from that?

HARMONICA PLAYER

Yazoo City? It's just the other side of that bridge. But I tell you, son, that's a hell of a long trip. You got to get through three mile of swamp past this river, and that's if you don't get lost.

PERCY
I don't imagine I'm gonna lose
sight of that trestle.

HARMONICA PLAYER
Don't count on that trestle.
There's things out in that swamp
can play with your mind. Ghosts.
Goblins. Fire Babies...

PERCY
Fire Babies?

HARMONICA PLAYER
Yes sir. Soul of a baby die before
it been baptized. Condemned to
wander the swamp for all eternity.

Percy rolls his eyes.

PERCY
I see. Now how 'bout you sell me
one of them boats.

HARMONICA PLAYER
You got fifty dollars?

PERCY
Fifty? They ain't worth near that.

HARMONICA PLAYER
I'll take twenty and the guitar.

PERCY
You get twenty, and this guitar
stay with me.

HARMONICA PLAYER
Damn shame that would be. You set
off in that swamp alone, you ain't
gonna be around to play it again.

FOOTSTEPS creak on the planks behind them.

TEE (O.S.)
I take you out.

Percy turns to see TEE, a tall, muscular young man wearing a
felt hat and no shirt.

HARMONICA PLAYER
What you doin' up here, Tee?

TEE
Tryin' to help a man needs it.

PERCY
Can you get me across tonight?

TEE
I take you right now, you ready.

PERCY
I'm ready. How much you want,
partner?

TEE
How 'bout you play me a tune.

Percy looks from Tee to the Harmonica Player.

He has lowered his hand to rest on the stock of a SHOTGUN that leans, barrel-down, next to his rocking chair.

TEE
See you round, old timer.
(to Percy)
Let's get goin'.

Percy follows Tee off the dock.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Tee stands in the back of the pirogue and works the pushpole.

It glides alongside the trestle bridge support posts.

Percy sits in front, just behind an oil lantern that hangs from a hook on the bow.

The lantern casts creepy shadows on the bridge and a forest of cypress trees that grow straight out of the water, their limbs hung with thick hanks of Spanish moss.

An owl HOOTS in the distance. Bugs and frogs CHIRP and SING.

Tee poles along beside the trestle bridge.

A SPLASH in the water nearby.

Percy jumps.

Tee CHUCKLES.

Percy puts up his guitar.

More SPLASHES, this time, right alongside the pirogue.

PERCY
That a gator?

TEE
No sir. Gar. Come up to the top to
feed.

PERCY
Sound too big for a fish.

TEE
Shoot, them Gar reach upwards six
foot out here in this swamp. Got
some teeth on 'em to. Cut your hand
like a razor, you ain't careful.

PERCY
Least there ain't no gators out
here.

TEE
Gators out here. Gators everywhere.
Swing that lantern over to your
left.

Percy reaches out and grabs the lantern, holds it high and
stares out into the water.

The lantern light reveals a clear stretch of black water with
dozens of pairs of RED EYES glowing from the surface.

TEE (CONT'D)
Now them's gators.

PERCY
What they doin'?

TEE
Waitin'.

PERCY
For what?

TEE
For one of us to go over the side.

Tee LAUGHS.

TEE (CONT'D)

Now how 'bout that tune, partner?

Percy plucks the strings on his guitar, plays the Harmonica Players song, note for note.

TEE (CONT'D)

Say now. That ain't nothin' but what that old man play every damn night. You got to do better than that.

PERCY

How about this?

Percy plays a hopping blues riff, works his fingers on the strings and hums.

Tee bobs his head to the music.

EXT. RIVER/DOCK - NIGHT

Harmonica Player checks the knots on a few large boats tied to the dock.

FOOTSTEPS on the planks behind him.

He turns, to see Pinky rest his boot on the chair arm, right beside the shotgun.

HARMONICA PLAYER

I help you?

PINKY

I'm lookin' for a man with a guitar.

Pinky pulls his jacket aside to expose the butt of a revolver, then removes a big wad of bills from his pocket.

Harmonica Player raises his eyebrows.

HARMONICA PLAYER

Then you gonna need a pirogue.

EXT. SWAMP/TRESTLE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Percy finishes his song.

TEE
Damn. You really can play. What's
your name, partner?

PERCY
Percy.

TEE
Percy Lincoln?

PERCY
You heard of me?

TEE
Yeah. I heard you was dead.

PERCY
Well, I ain't. Least I ain't yet.

TEE
Where you headed in such a big
hurry, anyhow?

PERCY
South Louisiana. I'm headed home.

TEE
You got family down there, then?

PERCY
Matter fact, I do. I got a wife
down there. Got a child, too. Only
I ain't never seen him.

TEE
Why is that?

PERCY
He ain't been born yet when I left.

TEE
I see. How long that been?

PERCY
Nine years.

TEE
Damn. Why you ain't been back in so
long?

PERCY
Ain't never gave a damn to. Least
not 'til now.

The lantern FLICKERS.

Tee stops poling.

He stares at the trestle bridge until his eyes glaze.

After a long moment, he blinks and shakes his head.

TEE

You see that mile mark up on the
trestle?

PERCY

Yeah, I see it.

TEE

That where my Daddy went over the
side.

PERCY

Gators get him?

TEE

Yeah.

PERCY

Sorry to hear that.

TEE

Saw it happen myself, you see. But
it wasn't them little gators done
it. Was one in particular. Gator
name Old Iron Head. Near twenty
foot long. Got the bones of several
men in his belly. My daddy just one
of 'em.

There is a long moment of silence as Tee poles them through
the water toward the mile mark.

TEE (CONT'D)

Daddy still come to me, though.

Tee stops poling again, and Percy casts a wary glance back
over his shoulder.

TEE (CONT'D)

Late at night. Scratchin' at my
window. Whisperin' things don't no
man want to hear.

Tee turns the pirogue away from the trestle bridge, heads
into the swamp.

PERCY

Say. We best stick to followin'
that bridge.

TEE

I got to check my traps.

PERCY

You ain't said nothin' 'bout
checkin' no traps.

Tee rocks the pirogue slightly with his bare feet.

Percy reaches down and grabs the sides for balance.

TEE

Keep yourself quiet, or you'll be
swimmin' with them gators yourself.
Iron Head out tonight. I can feel
it.

Tee grips his pushpole with rugged hands, eases out into the
dark water and disappears in the mist.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Deep in the swamp, Tee stands in his pirogue beneath the
limbs of a large cypress tree.

The lantern sits on the pirogue's bow. Three meat hooks hang
from ropes on a thick cypress limb above them.

Two of the hooks are bloody and bare. A dead chicken is stuck
on the third.

TEE

Son of a bitch robbed me again.
Been recent, though. Feathers still
floatin'.

There is a loud bellowing sound. The surface water shakes not
far from them.

PERCY

God damn.

Tee poles them directly toward the shaking water.

PERCY (CONT'D)

What the hell you doin'?

TEE

I got that son of a bitch. He tied
up in the trot line.

Tee poles up alongside the alligator as it thrashes in the
water.

Tee pulls out his SHOTGUN, a double-barreled break action,
with sawed barrels and stock, which he holds like a pistol.

The gator continues to thrash.

Tee FIRES one barrel as the pirogue rocks. The shot hits the
stump, splitting it in two.

Iron Head pulls on the line. The stump breaks away from the
bank, slips into the water and pops back up like a big cork.

TEE

You! Grab the damn line!

PERCY

Like hell.

Tee points the shotgun at Percy.

TEE

You grab that line or I'll put a
round of shot through your head.

Percy grabs the chunk of wood, loops it around the bow, pulls
his hands away just as the rope snaps tight.

The alligator pulls the boat through the swamp, knocking it
into the trees and nearly turning it over.

Tee moves to keep the boat balanced, fires another shot into
the moving water.

For a moment, all is still.

Tee breaks open the gun, digs in his pocket for two more
shells.

Percy grabs the pole, pulls it back to hit Tee, when the
water parts behind them.

Percy drops the pole, grabs his guitar and leaps out of the
pirogue into the water.

Iron Head rams the boat, knocks Tee over the side.

Percy swims to a collection of Cypress knees, holding his guitar above the water.

Tee flounders toward Percy, sticks out his hand.

Percy reaches out for him.

Their fingers touch just as Tee SCREAMS.

He releases Percy's grip and is pulled violently under.

Percy presses himself up against the Cypress trunk as Iron Head swims back.

Iron Head opens his bloody mouth and snaps at Percy before swimming away.

Percy lets out a long breath.

He spots the upturned pirogue in the light of the moon.

He eases out into the water, turns the pirogue back over and climbs in. He poles into the darkness with his guitar.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Percy glides through the water, guided by the occasional ray of yellow moonlight that filters down through the moss and trees.

At a break in the canopy of Cypress trees, Percy looks to the MOON: very close to full.

He changes direction, then changes direction again-- obviously lost.

PERCY

God Damn.

There is a flash of fire deep in the swamp.

The flame and eerie, red afterglow last no more than a couple of seconds: a FIRE BABY.

Percy turns toward the flame. The shadows play eerily on his features.

FIRE BABY

(a child's voice)

Percy... Percy...

Percy stares into the darkness, entranced. There is another FLASH, and then another.

Each is closer than the one before, each WHISPERS his name.

A last FLASH and WHISPER come from only a dozen yards away.

Percy snaps out of his reverie.

He grips the pushpole and turns the pirogue quickly away from the Fire Babies.

EXT. SWAMP - LATER

Percy looks back over his shoulder.

A single fire baby FLASHES deep in the swamp.

Percy eases up on working the pole. As he does so, the pirogue bumps against a rickety DOCK.

EXT. SWAMP/DOCK - NIGHT

Percy climbs onto the dock and eases his way down the creaking planks.

He disappears into the inky shadows.

EXT. SHACK - NIGHT

Percy emerges from a path and into a clearing.

At the edge of the clearing is a cypress-plank shack.

Percy makes his way toward it, steps up on the porch.

As he reaches out to knock, a match STRIKES.

A gnarled hand lights a pipe in the darkness.

The pipe glows orange on the face of BLUE EYE, a weathered old man with jet black skin and pale blue eyes.

BLUE EYE

Son, you about as lost as a man can be.

INT. SHACK - NIGHT

Blue Eye lights a candle, exposing a sparsely furnished one room shack.

He sets a candle on a table, lights it.

He then pulls out a chair and motions for Percy to sit down.

BLUE EYE
Keep it around for visitors.

PERCY
The chair?

BLUE EYE
The candle.

Percy takes a close look at Blue Eye, who stares blankly at an angle toward the ceiling.

Percy waves a hand in front of the man's face. No reaction.

Percy takes a seat.

Blue Eye makes his way to a large metal pot, fills a glass with the water inside.

He brings the glass and a piece of corn bread back to the table and sets them down.

BLUE EYE
Ain't got much, but the Good Lord
will strike down them ain't kind to
travellers.

Percy eyeballs the corn bread and water.

PERCY
Hope you ain't been drinkin' this
water. Look to be near black.

BLUE EYE
That water been boiled an hour.
It's them pine needles stain it.

PERCY
Pine needles, hunh?

BLUE EYE
That's right. Won't hurt you none,
neither.

(MORE)

BLUE EYE(cont'd)

I imagine that pone a bit ripe, but it ain't made me sick yet. 'Bout all I got, though, after that flood come through a week back. Done scared off my chickens.

PERCY

They all drown?

BLUE EYE

Hard to say. Me, I feel the water on my feet I climb a tree. Maybe them chickens done the same.

PERCY

Never seen a tree climbin' chicken.

BLUE EYE

Then you ain't been lookin'.

Percy chews on the stale corn bread, notices a salt box nearby.

Percy takes a pinch and starts to put it on his food, spots something in the box.

He pushes a layer of salt aside, exposes the top digit of a FINGER.

PERCY

I believe you got a finger in your salt.

BLUE EYE

You just full of complaints, ain't you? Besides, that ain't a finger. It's a whole hand.

PERCY

I see.

BLUE EYE

I don't believe you do. It's curin', son. It's a hand of glory. When it ready, I can use it to open any lock. Put a candle in it after dark, only man see the light is the one got the hand. Course, that part ain't gonna help me none.

PERCY

You sure that's right? I figure a chopped off hand could open a lock, folks would be chopin' off hands every chance they got.

BLUE EYE

It can't be any old hand, son. Got to be the left hand of a murderer. And it got to be chopped clean at the wrist when he swingin' from a rope by his neck.

Percy reaches touches his neck.

PERCY

I might could believe that. Now how you get that one that's curin'?

BLUE EYE

Old friend of mine. Knew I wanted it. Brought it by last time he was out. He ain't never come back around after, though. Magic spooks some folks, you see.

Percy takes a sip of water.

He tastes it on his tongue, pauses, and drinks it down.

PERCY

You ever seen one of them that worked?

BLUE EYE

Seen one work years back, back when I was still seein'. Say... I believe I know your voice. Took me a bit, but you that guitar player, ain't you? Percy Lincoln.

PERCY

That's right.

BLUE EYE

I heard you play years back, down in Evangeline. Also heard you was killed by the Devil.

PERCY

He ain't got me yet. But he sure tryin' to.

BLUE EYE
Maybe I can help.

PERCY
How's that?

BLUE EYE
Blind man see things other folks
can't.

PERCY
That a fact?

BLUE EYE
It is. I see you scared. I see you
runnin'.

PERCY
I ain't scared of nothin'. I'm just
headed home.

BLUE EYE
Home? Why in hell you want...

Blue Eye pauses for a long moment.

He raises his hands and his body begins to tremble.

BLUE EYE (CONT'D)
You from LaBorde, ain't you?

PERCY
I am.

BLUE EYE
You lookin' for somethin' down
there, too. Somethin' to do with
the Devil... only you ain't got no
idea what it is.

PERCY
How you know all that?

BLUE EYE
Like I said. Blind man can see. In
fact, I know what it is you lookin'
for.

PERCY
Then you best start talkin'.

The knife is on the table between them. Percy eyeballs it.

Blue Eye reaches out and grabs it in a fluid motion, begins to clean his fingernails.

BLUE EYE
Oh, I would, but my memory feelin'
a bit weak at the moment.

PERCY
Weak memory is a bad thing.

BLUE EYE
It might be feelin' a whole lot
stronger, though, I had a chicken
leg in my mouth.

A cock CROWS in the distance.

PERCY
Gettin' near sunup.

BLUE EYE
Yeah. And my rooster ain't dead.

EXT. ISLAND - DAY

Motey yellow light filters through the dense growth of tree limbs, vines and moss.

Percy crouches behind a shrub.

Blue Eye sits on the low limb of a nearby tree.

A chicken walks past, and Percy leaps out and grabs it.

BLUE EYE
You get you another?

PERCY
Yeah. I got near all of 'em.

Percy takes the chicken to the PEN, throws in inside.

A fat chicken, OLD BESSIE, walks right up to Percy and PECKS him on the leg.

PERCY
Son of a bitch...

Percy dives at her but misses, falls on his face.

PERCY (CONT'D)
Damn!

Blue Eye LAUGHS.

BLUE EYE

Sound like you after Old Bessie.
She a tricky one. You get her and
them others, I tell you what you
need to know.

Blue Eye climbs down out of the tree.

EXT. CHICKEN PEN - DAY

Percy throws another CHICKEN in the pen, along with a dozen others.

Next to the chickens is a another pen with a big HOG.

The hog ruts around in the mud and watches Percy with beady eyes.

There is RUSTLING in the underbrush.

Percy spies Old Bessie, pecking around in some dirt on a trail.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Bessie continues to peck at the feed. Percy crouches behind a bush.

He positions himself to leap out at the chicken, but hesitates.

He picks up a rock instead.

EXT. SHACK - DAY

Blue Eye holds the HAND OF GLORY in front of a locked back door.

He passes the hand over the lock and tries the knob. Nothing.

He tries it a second time. Same result.

Blue Eye WHISPERS to the hand, waves it around a few times over his head.

He passes it over the lock a last time.

The knob turns.

The door swings inward.

Percy stands inside, the doorknob in one hand, a dead Bessie in the other.

PERCY
I got your chicken.

Percy walks back into the house.

Blue Eye shakes his head, throws the Hand of Glory out into the yard.

INT. SHACK - EVENING

Percy and Blue Eye sit at the table, a pile of chicken bones on a plate between them.

Percy plays a jumping blues tune on his guitar and SINGS.

PERCY
Got a black cat and a mojo
hand/don't cross my doorstep...

Blue Eye pounds a beat out on the table.

Percy finishes his tune. Puts his guitar in the case.

BLUE EYE
Wooo! Damn, boy! Let me hear
another!

PERCY
Got no time for it. I got to get
movin.

BLUE EYE
Now?

PERCY
Full moon come up tomorrow night. I
don't leave here soon I ain't gonna
live past it. And it ain't gonna be
just me.

Blue Eye faces Percy directly and swallows, hard.

BLUE EYE
OK then. You got family down there,
ain't you?

PERCY

That's right.

BLUE EYE

There ain't nothin' more to it than that. They in trouble, Percy. That's why you got to get back. You got to save your family.

PERCY

I do that, I get back my soul?

BLUE EYE

You will. Sure as anything.

Percy nods his head.

A smile crosses his face for an instant, and then is gone.

PERCY

I ought to had that figured all this while. Thank you. And thank you for the food and water. Now I got to get movin'.

BLUE EYE

Hold up one more minute, now. There may be some rough men you got to deal with, so let me ask you somethin'.

PERCY

Go ahead.

BLUE EYE

You ever kill a man?

PERCY

Not one ain't had it comin'.

BLUE EYE

Well then. I guess you be alright.

Blue Eye makes his way to a cabinet, removes a bottle and pours two glasses.

Unseen by Percy, Blue Eye removes a VIAL from his pocket, takes a pinch of powder from it, drops it in Percy's drink.

His eyes, CLEAR AND SEEING, dart toward Percy before regaining the glazed look as he turns back to face him.

BLUE EYE (CONT'D)
We gonna drink us a toast before
you leave.

They drink. Percy drops the glass and grabs his stomach.
He staggers into the table, collapses to the floor.

EXT. ISLAND - NIGHT

Percy's eyes open on a lantern hung in a tree.

He lays on the ground, hands tied behind his back, a NOOSE
around his neck.

The rope loops over a limb of a tree, and is tied around the
HOG at the other end.

Percy struggles to rise, but Blue Eye whips his Hog, YANKING
Percy up.

He CHOKES and JERKS as he dangles by the neck.

Blue Eye stops whipping the hog and approaches Percy. He
pulls a HATCHET out of a tree.

Percy sees this.

As Blue Eye draws closer, Percy closes his eyes and stops
twitching.

Blue Eye comes at Percy with the hatchet. He slices the rope
tying Percy's hands, grabs hold of his left hand and raises
the hatchet over his head.

Percy eyes SNAP OPEN.

He KICKS Blue Eye in the gut.

The old man drops his weapon and falls to his knees.

Percy wraps his legs around Blue Eye's neck, chokes him until
his nose begins to bleed and he passes out.

Percy grabs the rope over his head, calls to the hog.

The hog comes toward him and the rope lowers.

The hog starts to lick the blood on Blue Eye's face and then
BITES into his shoulder.

Blue Eye SCREAMS.

Percy pulls the noose off his head.

BLUE EYE

Help me.

PERCY

Fuck you.

With Blue Eye and the hog in a death struggle, Percy grabs the lantern off the tree and runs into the night.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Percy poles through the misty swamp, raises his lantern to show a lightning damaged Cypress tree.

He turns left, and glides into the darkness.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

A pirogue glides up to Blue Eye's dock.

A hand with a large Pinky Ring grips the pushpole.

A feeble SCREAM from Blue Eye in the distance.

Pinky steps onto the dock, heads toward the sound.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Percy stands by himself at a lantern stop near the river levee.

The sun beats down. He shades his eyes with his hand.

In the distance, black smoke rises above the trees.

A train whistle SOUNDS from far, far away.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Percy sits in a nearly empty car and stares out the window at the flat delta landscape.

Tall stands of pine trees stretch into the distance, interspersed with fields of cane.

The train comes out of a stand of trees, runs close along the levee.

A troubled expression crosses Percy's face.

A PORTER enters the car and makes his way down the aisle.

Percy touches his arm.

PERCY

Say. I been sleepin'? Look like we
pass LaBorde.

PORTER

I don't know you was sleepin' or
not, but we don't stop no more in
LaBorde. Not for many years. New
line stay on the river, don't cut
back through all them cane fields
like it used to.

PERCY

Damn. God Damn. How in hell am I
supposed to get there?

PORTER

Not on this train. You got to ride
on through to New Orleans.

PERCY

And get a short line from there?

PORTER

Ain't no short line go there
neither. You want to get out to
LaBorde, you got to take you a bus.

PERCY

Son of a bitch.

Percy clenches his jaw and stares out the window.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Percy exits the train.

EXT. CITY STREET/NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Rain pours down on the city.

Percy runs through it to the bus station.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Percy enters, shakes off the rain.

He approaches the counter and lays down several bills.

PERCY

I need to get to LaBorde.

COUNTER MAN

LaBorde, hunh? There ain't no bus
go out that way 'til tomorrow.

PERCY

Damn. What time tomorrow.

COUNTER MAN

Nine in the mornin'.

Percy shakes his head in disbelief, exits the bus station.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

The rain has stopped.

Percy walks along a quiet, foggy street.

He stops at a large oak tree which has grown so the trunk
spills out over the curb and crowds the sidewalk.

Behind it is a narrow, bricked, passageway between two
buildings.

Percy walks down the passageway, which turns and dead-ends
into an iron gate.

The gate swings open at Percy's touch.

EXT. CURIO SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Percy walks slowly down the dark passage, until he reaches a
door with "CURIOS" painted on a dusty pane of glass.

Percy turns the knob, enters the shop.

INT. CURIO SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The shop is small and dimly lit. The walls are lined with
African masks, potion bottles, and bones.

At first, the shop appears empty. But as Percy looks over the masks on the walls, he pauses on a FACE that looks similar to the masks.

The eyes blink, and the VOODOO PRIEST (a wiry, dark skinned Haitian man in his 70's, with three ritualistic SCARS on his left cheek) steps away from the wall.

PERCY

I was told you could speak with the Devil.

VOODOO PRIEST

What is it you need?

PERCY

Full moon come tonight. I need time.

The Priest places his hand over Percy's ribs, stares into his eyes.

VOODOO PRIEST

Follow me.

Voodoo Priest turns from Percy, enters an ALTER ROOM.

INT. ALTAR ROOM - DAY

Percy and Voodoo Priest sit across from one another at an altar in a room with bare brick walls and no windows.

On the Alter is a large knife, a candle on a skull, and a steel plate.

A large, silver crucifix is sunk into the wood on one end. Beneath it is a stack of bills (money).

Percy's sleeve is rolled up, and his bare forearm rests on the steel plate.

VOODOO PRIEST

You leave here, you walk straight to the corner of Rampart and Basin. Girl gonna show there before dark, take you where you need to go. Do you understand this?

PERCY

Yes.

VOODOO PRIEST

The umbilicus will tie you to the world of the living, both through this night and the next. Do you understand this?

PERCY

Yes.

VOODOO PRIEST

You ain't got to tell me where you runnin' to, but you best get far as you can up river...

PERCY

Who say I'm runnin'?

Voodoo Priest gives Percy a puzzled look.

VOODOO PRIEST

You ain't runnin', then why you here?

PERCY

Like I said. I need time. My family in trouble. I got to get back to 'em.

VOODOO PRIEST

Who told you this?

PERCY

Old Woman. Up near Greenville. Her and a man out in the swamp.

Voodoo Priest turns back Percy's collar, touches the noose scar on his neck.

VOODOO PRIEST

Same man give you this?

PERCY

Yeah.

VOODOO PRIEST

Well, maybe they seein' somethin' I ain't. I wouldn't count on that, though.

A long pause.

PERCY

Say I was to run? How long can I
keep goin'?

VOODOO PRIEST

Long as you want. You may still die
in a week, but it ain't gonna be
the devil that do it.

Percy considers this.

PERCY

What I got to do?

VOODOO PRIEST

You got to tie that umbilicus round
your neck, like I said. Then, just
as the sun settin', you go out on
flowin' water, up to your knees.

PERCY

Out on the river?

VOODOO PRIEST

River the best place for it. You
drip the blood from the cut I'm
gonna make onto your guitar, then,
you slip it off in the river.

PERCY

Why I got to do that?

VOODOO PRIEST

That guitar gonna draw him, same as
the umbilicus keep him back. After
you done it, though, you got two
full days he ain't gonna see you.
Two full days you can run, and if
you get far enough, he ain't never
gonna find you.

PERCY

Then I just get me another guitar
and that's it?

VOODOO PRIEST

It ain't that easy. You can't play
no more music ever again.

PERCY

That ain't right. He ain't told me
how to play.

VOODOO PRIEST
Right and wrong got nothin' to do
with it. This the Devil.

PERCY
How 'bout at the end? If I keep
runnin' now, can I get back my
soul?

VOODOO PRIEST
You got your whole life to get
right with God. And if you don't,
at least you still got a whole
life.

Voodoo Priest raises the knife.

VOODOO PRIEST (CONT'D)
You ready?

PERCY
Get it done.

Voodoo Priest brings the knife down and cuts open Percy's
arm.

Blood spills into the plate, drips onto the wooden table.

Voodoo Priest wraps Percy's arm in a towel.

VOODOO PRIEST
If you don't run, you best remember
this: he is still powerful in
darkness. When the sun set, you
shut your windows and lock your
doors. When the sun set, you keep
yourself safe.

Percy tightens the towel on his arm, exits the Altar Room.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

Percy stands on the corner, a cigarette hangs from his lips.

He is approached from behind by a six year old GIRL, with big
eyes, side ponytails, and a white dress.

She comes up to Percy and tugs on his sleeve.

Percy looks down at her, tosses his smoke.

He follows the girl as she walks quickly down the sidewalk.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Percy follows the girl down a deserted residential street, to the head of an alley.

She turns to face Percy, says nothing as she points down the alleyway.

Percy walks down the alley.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Halfway down the alley, Percy turns back.

The girl is gone.

A DOG SNARLS and comes at Percy.

He kicks it, hard, and the dog whimpers away.

A baby CRIES close by. Percy turns toward the sound.

A screen door SLAMS.

FOOTSTEPS approach.

A MIDWIFE (50's, heavysset) approaches Percy with a cotton towel soaked in blood.

MIDWIFE

Ten. And you ain't got this from me.

Percy hands her a bill, slips the towel under his jacket, and walks away.

The midwife crosses herself and shivers.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

Percy kneels on the bricks in an empty alley.

The umbilical cord is on the towel before him.

He slices off a piece with a razor, squeezes his forearm so the blood from the cut drips down on it.

Percy then ties the piece with a string, and ties the string around his neck.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER - DAY

The sun sets as Percy stands alone on the bank of the Mississippi.

He takes off his shoes and rolls up his pantlegs.

He then removes his guitar from it's case, drips blood on it from the cut on his arm.

He wades out into the flowing water with his guitar, holds it out in front of him.

Percy looks to his guitar, the water, the sun, and then back to his guitar.

His hands tremble.

He can't let it go.

Percy goes back to the bank, places his guitar in the case and stares into the setting sun.

EXT. CURIO SHOP - DAY

Voodoo Man stands outside the iron gate in the alley, watches the sun set.

He closes and locks the gate, turns and walks down the passageway to his shop.

INT. CURIO SHOP. BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Voodoo Man enters the room, closes the door behind him and strips off his shirt.

A live CHICKEN is in the corner of the room. Voodoo Man grabs the chicken, pulls a handful of feathers from its side.

Voodoo man then approaches the table, where the steel plate lays with Percy's dried blood in it.

He takes the handful of feathers, throws them in Percy's blood. He begins to CHANT.

Voodoo Man slits the chicken's throat, and blood squirts all over the table, the plate, and Voodoo Man's body.

He rubs the blood and feathers on his body and begins to SHAKE all over.

His head tilts back and his eyes show only whites, as his body tenses in a silent SCREAM.

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A run down 2nd floor room with cracked walls and peeled paint.

A single, bare bulb hangs on a chain over a cot in the center of the room.

A window looks out onto the street.

VOODOO PRIEST (V.O.)
Tonight, you keep yourself safe.

Percy locks the door, shuts and locks the windows.

He goes to a sink, washes his face, and looks into a cracked mirror.

He reaches out and touches his reflection.

The mirror cracks further and SHIFTS to expose a whiskey bottle, full, the seal still on the cork, wedged into a hole in the wall behind the mirror.

Percy looks around suspiciously, pulls the bottle out of the wall.

He stares at it a moment, then uncorks the bottle and takes a drink.

He goes back to the cot and sits down, takes another long pull from the bottle.

Percy stares for a moment at his guitar case.

He takes another drink, then removes his guitar from the case.

His fingers hover over the strings a moment before he STRUMS it.

He strums the guitar again, begins to HUM and SING: *Sugarcane Blues*.

PERCY
Hmm-hmm...sugarcane/ in the
sugarcane...

As he plays, he looks out the window.

Outside, a slow rain has begun to fall. He focuses on a GAS LAMP across the street.

The lamp blurs in the rain, turns into the sun.

FLASHBACK

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

The sun beats down as Percy walks quickly across the cane field, Pretty Girl in his arms.

As they get closer to the church, the Woman at the bottom of the steps stops shielding her eyes and turns to the Old Man.

The Old Man stops waving, shields his own eyes from the sun and stares out at Percy and Pretty Girl.

Pretty Girl now looks to Percy, but her smile falters.

A troubled expression crosses Percy's face.

Pretty Girl's arms are locked tight around his neck as Percy breaks into a run through the last several yards of cane.

The church bells RING so loud they are nearly DEAFENING.

BACK TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Percy sets down his guitar, wipes sweat from his brow.

He picks the liquor bottle up off the floor. It is nearly empty.

He takes a pull.

Percy looks back to the street, where a PROSTITUTE now stands beneath a streetlamp.

She stares directly into Percy's window.

Percy stares back, lights a smoke with a wooden match.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Percy leans back against a brick building.

The prostitute is on her knees in front of him; her head bobs up and down.

Percy takes a last pull on the bottle, drains it.

He MOANS as his eyes roll back in his head.

Percy's grabs the prostitutes hair as his body tenses.

He drops the bottle.

It SHATTERS on the pavement.

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

The rain pours as Percy stumbles and trips on a curb, falls face down in the gutter.

He climbs to his hands and knees, VOMITS, and wipes his mouth with his sleeve.

His field of vision swirls.

He LAUGHS, brushes himself off, but pauses.

A lone, dark FIGURE stands a ways down the street.

Percy climbs to his feet and backs away.

The Figure approaches.

Percy turns and runs.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The rain pours.

Ahead, Percy sees the light in a church in Jackson Square.

SINGING comes from inside the church.

Percy approaches, climbs the steps, and tries the door: locked-- the light was only a reflection from the street lamp on a window.

The rain pours down harder, and the singing turns to CRYING.

Percy backs away from the church, turns to see:

The Figure, only a quarter block away.

Percy turns and runs back across the square.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Percy stops running. He grabs the necklace and squeezes it.

He turns. The Figure is gone.

Loud VOICES and a JAZZ MUSIC come from the warehouse.

Percy enters.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A CROWD in fancy dress, laughing and drinking.

A JAZZ COMBO plays on a low stage, led by a PIANO PLAYER--
late 50's, pencil line mustache, ash-grey skin.

He finishes an intricate solo just as Percy enters, stumbling
and soaked to the skin.

All turn and stare.

PIANO PLAYER
How in the world you find this
place, Mister?

PERCY
I got no idea.

PIANO PLAYER
Well, now you here, what you think?

PERCY
On what?

PIANO PLAYER
My tune.

PERCY
It was alright.

The crowd GASPS.

PIANO PLAYER
Just alright? That's it?

PERCY
What you want me to say?

PIANO PLAYER
How 'bout you answer me this. You a
music man yourself?

PERCY
I play guitar.

PIANO PLAYER
Then let's see what you got,
Mister. Don't nobody call me
alright unless they can do better
themselves.

The GUITAR PLAYER hands his guitar to Percy.

Piano Player goes to work on the keys, hammers out a
difficult tune.

He stops, looks to Percy.

Percy starts in on the guitar, repeats the Piano Player's
tune note for note.

The Piano Player raises his eyebrows, launches into another
song.

He finishes.

Percy repeats it.

They go back and forth, each tune faster paced and more
difficult than the next, until the Piano Player's fingers
fumble across the keys.

The room falls silent.

The Piano Player stands, approaches Percy with clenched
fists.

Percy steps back.

PIANO PLAYER
My friend, tonight you drinkin' for
free.

The Piano Player bows, then holds up Percy's hand.

The crowd CHEERS.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

After hours.

Percy, Piano Player, and other BAND MEMBERS drink at a table.

A SINGLE CANDLE burns on the table. It is the only light.

Two WOMEN stand on either side of Piano Player.

They LAUGH, Piano Player pounds the table.

PIANO PLAYER

What's your name, anyhow?

PERCY

Percy.

PIANO PLAYER

Percy Lincoln? I heard of you.

PERCY

Heard I was dead?

PIANO PLAYER

Matter of fact, I did. Hell boy,
bad as you lookin', you may be half
way there.

WOMAN 1

He look near dead as you, Jelly.

PIANO PLAYER

Hush up, woman. I heard all manner
of other things 'bout you too. That
you been to the crossroads, for
one.

PERCY

Could be I have.

PIANO PLAYER

Well, good for you. What you doin'
down here in New Orleans, anyhow?

PERCY

I'm on my way to LaBorde. Headed up
tomorrow. It's my home.

PIANO PLAYER

Home? Why in hell anyone want to go
home? Ain't nothin' never there but
bad memories. That what bars for,
Percy, so you ain't never got to go
back.

Percy laughs.

PERCY

Well, all my memories from home is good.

PIANO PLAYER

They is hunh? That sound like the Devil's doin' to me.

PERCY

You crazy.

PIANO PLAYER

You can bet your life on that. What's left of it, anyhow. But I may still be right on the Devil. Could be what he give you is what he took.

Percy gives Piano Player a puzzled look.

PERCY

That don't make no sense.

PIANO PLAYER

It don't? Then let me ask you this. The devil, he give a man a look at heaven, don't he?

PERCY

I believe so.

PIANO PLAYER

But you ain't knowed that before you seen him, did you?

PERCY

No.

PIANO PLAYER

And you was a happy man before then? A happy man who could already play like nobody else?

PERCY

That's right.

PIANO PLAYER

Then why in hell you gone to see Him in the first place?

Percy says nothing.

PIANO PLAYER (CONT'D)
You don't remember, do you?

PERCY
Remember?

PIANO PLAYER
Why you went to them crossroads,
you damn fool.

PERCY
You can go to hell.

The Piano Player LAUGHS. They all LAUGH, except Percy.

The Piano Player waves for them to STOP.

He grips Percy's arm, stares him in the eyes.

PIANO PLAYER
I guess I'll see you there.

Piano Player leans forward and BLOWS OUT the candle.

BLACK OUT

EXT. BACK ALLEY - DAY

Grey dawn. Percy lays on his back, an empty bottle of liquor
at his side.

Percy opens his eyes.

He touches the piece of umbilical cord on his neck.

PERCY
Fuck you, devil.

Percy grabs his stomach and DRY HEAVES.

The spasms last for several seconds, then subside.

EXT. CITY STREET/NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Percy walks unsteadily down the street, wipes sweat from his
brow.

Ahead, is a CORNER STORE.

The SHOPKEEPER, a mean-looking man in his 30's, sweeps the
sidewalk.

EXT. CORNER STORE - DAY

Percy approaches. He nods.

The shopkeeper nods back.

Percy sees a small CROSS carved into the wood on the door frame, runs his finger across it.

PERCY
You got religion?

SHOPKEEPER
You askin' or buyin'?

PERCY
Buyin'.

SHOPKEEPER
Then go inside.

INT. CORNER STORE - CONTINUOUS

A small, well-kept store.

A mousy woman in her early 20's stands behind the counter.

She has bruises of varying size and color up and down her arms and neck, and a fresh bandage is on the side of her face.

Percy enters.

ANGELA
And how are you today, sir?

PERCY
Man outside say you got religion.

ANGELA
It cost three dollars.

Angela reaches beneath the counter and removes a bottle of Absinthe.

Percy grabs the bottle, looks it over.

PERCY
What the hell is this?

ANGELA
It's Absinthe. I thought you might
want to try some.

PERCY
I've heard of it.

ANGELA
Did you know it is also called the
green fairy?

PERCY
No...

ANGELA
Well, it is. It is said when you
take your first drink, you will see
all things the way you wish they
was.

PERCY
That a fact?

ANGELA
And on your second, you will see
things the way they are not.

PERCY
What happen on the third?

ANGELA
You will see the world the way it
truly is, and that is the most
terrifyin' vision of all!

PERCY
How 'bout you just sell me some
whiskey?

ANGELA
Oh. I see...

She pouts sadly and begins to put the bottle back.

PERCY
Hold up. I'll take that Absinthe.

Angela smiles.

ANGELA
It's the best religion you ever
had.

Percy removes a fold of small bills from his boot, peels off three ones, sets them on the counter.

He slips the fold of bills back into his jacket instead of his boot.

They exchange smiles.

PERCY
What's your name?

ANGELA
Angela.

PERCY
That's a pretty name.

ANGELA
Thank you kindly.

Percy blinks, nearly smiles.

The door swings open.

SHOPKEEPER
What in hell goin' on in here?

Angela begins to tremble.

ANGELA
Nothin'. I'm sorry. It just took me
too long to count out the change...

The Shopkeeper rushes behind the counter and grabs her arm, hard.

Angela cringes.

SHOPKEEPER
Don't you run that damn mouth at me
in front of other folks. You hear?

The Shopkeeper turns on Percy, stares him in the eyes.

SHOPKEEPER (CONT'D)
I believe you best be on your way.

Percy considers them a moment, then exits the shop.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Percy pulls the cork on the Absinthe and takes his FIRST DRINK.

He GRIMACES and rubs his head, nearly loses his balance.

He looks across the street at:

A naked woman leaned against a balcony post.

She smiles at Percy and motions for him to come over.

Percy takes a step toward her into the street.

A car SKIDS and nearly hits him.

Percy steps back and shakes the vision from his head.

The woman is fully clothed, and is paying Percy no mind.

PERCY

God damn.

He looks at the bottle in disbelief, re-corks it and sticks it in his jacket.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Percy makes his way into the bus station.

EXT. BUS - DAY

Percy steps up to a run down bus, the door opens.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Percy climbs the steps onto a nearly empty bus. An old BUS DRIVER sits behind the wheel.

PERCY

You goin' through LaBorde, right?

BUS DRIVER

Third stop.

PERCY

OK then.

Percy walks back and takes his seat.

EXT. LABORDE - DAY

The bus drives down a wide dirt road deep in the woods.

The woods soon give way to an open cane field and a narrow road that runs between the woods and the cane.

The bus slows, pulls over. Percy exits.

The bus drives off, a cloud of dust in it's wake.

The dust settles. Percy is alone.

He shades his eyes against the hot sun, looks about, and then walks down the narrow road.

EXT. PERCY'S SHACK - DAY

Percy reaches the end of the road, where the tin roof of a shack is just visible through the trees.

Percy looks back across the cane to a church steeple in the far distance.

Percy removes the Absinthe from his jacket, takes the SECOND DRINK.

He makes his down a trail toward a beautifully kept little home.

It is freshly whitewashed. Azaleas and flowers grow in the yard.

He approaches the shack, but and as he climbs the front steps, a puzzled expression crosses his face.

He shakes his head and sees the shack in reality: decrepit and run down.

The porch sags. The front door is nailed shut with a piece of wood. The windows are all broken.

Percy brushes cobwebs aside and looks through a broken out window at a room with some ratty furniture.

Footsteps CRUNCH down the cane road.

Percy turns.

A man in his 30's, JIMMY, stands in the road.

JIMMY
You lost, Partner?

PERCY
Who are you?

JIMMY
Names Jimmy. Jimmy Gray. My
grandaddy live just up the road.
Don't know who you lookin' for,
but I got to tell you, don't nobody
live here no more.

PERCY
I live right here.

JIMMY
You do?

PERCY
Used to. My wife still live here,
though. Her and my child. There
ain't no way they just up and left.

JIMMY
How long you been gone.

PERCY
Near nine years.

JIMMY
That's a long time. Maybe my
grandaddy know more on it than me,
though. I only been comin' here
myself on and off for two year. But
I tell you, ain't no one never been
'round here in that time.

Percy takes a long drag on his smoke, exhales, and looks back
across the cane.

He removes the Absinthe bottle from his jacket.

He stares at it a moment, then uncorks the bottle and takes a
Third Drink.

PERCY
We best go see your grandaddy.

Percy steps off the porch, follows Jimmy up the cane road.

EXT. MR. GRAY'S HOME - DAY

Percy and Jimmy come to another run-down shack, in slightly better condition than Percy's.

MR. GRAY, an elderly man in hat and suspenders, sits under a tree in a rocking chair.

PERCY

Mr. Gray?

MR. GRAY

Who there?

Mr. Gray squints.

Percy walks up close.

PERCY

Mr. Gray? It's Percy. Percy Lincoln?

MR. GRAY

Percy Lincoln. What you doin' here?

PERCY

I come back. For my wife and child. They may be in some kind of trouble. I got to know where they at.

MR. GRAY

Boy? You playin' some kind of joke?

PERCY

I ain't playin' nothin'. I'm tellin' you need to see my wife. I need to see my damn child!

Percy shakes all over as he turns back to the cane field, looks out across it to the church.

FLASHBACK

INT. CHURCH/FLASHBACK - DAY

Young Percy sits on the church steps with his guitar, faces a small crowd of well-dressed PARISHIONERS.

He plays AMAZING GRACE.

The Parishioners clap when he finishes.

The doors open, Percy puts his guitar in the case, and the they begin to go inside the church.

WOMAN

Your wife ain't comin' this mornin'?

PERCY

She say she got the mornin' sickness.

Several Parishioners exchange glances.

WOMAN

Oh now. Go on and get her. Do her some good.

OLD MAN

She likely need her rest. Why don't you come on in Percy, tell her all about the sermon when you get back home.

WOMAN

That ain't the same...

OLD MAN

Woman...

PERCY

I imagine I will head back. Maybe she feelin' better now.

The Old Man bites his lip, looks at several others as Percy starts off through the cane.

EXT. CANE FIELD/FLASHBACK - DAY

Young Percy walks down the road on the edge of the cane field, toward his shack.

Young Percy reaches the edge of the yard, pauses.

A large car is parked beside his home.

He stares at it as he walks past, climbs the steps on the porch.

Repetitive BANGING and MOANS can be heard from inside.

Young Percy opens the door.

INT. PERCY'S SHACK/FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

Young Percy enters the shack.

The front room is empty, but the bedroom door is open.

Young Percy enters the bedroom.

INT. PERCY'S SHACK/BEDROOM/FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

Young Percy stops in the door, his jaw drops.

Pretty Girl (his wife), several months pregnant, is on top of a HANDSOME MAN, riding him hard.

They both spot Young Percy at the same time.

For a moment, all three are frozen in place.

PERCY

What... what the hell you doin'?

Pretty Girl slides under the covers, shaking.

Young Percy, still in the doorway, stares at his wife in disbelief.

Handsome man gets out of bed, collects his clothes, keeping an eye on Young Percy.

HANDSOME MAN

See you 'round, baby.

He is taller and bigger than Young Percy, and bumps him in shoulder as he exits the room.

INT. PERCY'S SHACK/FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

Handsome Man is nearly to the front.

Young Percy snaps.

He charges Handsome Man from behind, tackles him to the floor.

They struggle.

Percy gains the upper hand and soon has his opponent pinned on his back.

Percy punches him in the face several times, but Handsome Man pulls a KNIFE from his pocket.

He SINKS it into Percy's ribs, breaks the blade off inside him.

Percy MOANS, but only becomes angrier. He continues to throw punch after punch, beats Handsome Man in the face until he stops moving.

Percy then stands, brings his boot down over and over on Handsome Man, smashing his skull to pulp.

Pretty Girl emerges from the bedroom, her pregnant belly wrapped in a damp sheet.

PRETTY GIRL
Oh god... oh god...

Their eyes LOCK.

A FIRE POKER leans against the hearth.

Young Percy grabs it, grips it tight.

PRETTY GIRL
Percy?

She backs into the bedroom.

Young Percy goes toward her, slowly.

He raises the poker.

Pretty Girl SCREAMS.

CUT TO:

EXT. CANE FIELD/FLASHBACK - DAY

Young Percy now runs through the cane field with Pretty Girl in his arms.

The church bell begins to RING, and PARISHIONERS begin to come out the door.

Young Percy reaches the edge of the cane field, crosses the road.

The people on the church steps look frightened. The woman crosses herself as Young Percy reaches the church.

Young Percy drops to his knees at the foot of the steps.

Pretty Girl's head flops limply to the side. Blood flows from her crushed skull.

The white wedding dress is actually a sheet, soaked through with blood.

BACK TO:

EXT. CANE FIELD - DAY

Percy stands on the edge of the cane road.

He turns back to the tin roof shack, where Jimmy stands beside Mr. Gray.

MR. GRAY
Son? Don't you remember?

Percy turns and runs blindly across the cane.

He stops in the middle of the field, pulls off his jacket, flings it to the ground and rips his shirt open.

He yanks his necklace off, stomps it into the ground.

Percy drops to his knees in the cane, puts his face in his hands.

His body jerks with sobs. Tears come through his fingers.

He wipes his face and looks down. The Absinthe bottle has fallen from his jacket, and beside it is half of a THOUSAND DOLLAR BILL.

Percy picks it up.

He stares at it long and hard, then looks up to the sun, which turns into...

EXT. CITY STREET/NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT

... a headlight on a car on the road.

The car pulls to the curb.

Percy climbs out.

The car drives away.

EXT. CORNER STORE - NIGHT

Percy enters the store.

The shopkeeper is behind the counter.

SHOPKEEPER
I help you?

PERCY
You ever hear of a club called the
S&S? Man name Simmons run it.

SHOPKEEPER
Yeah. All manner of sin go on over
there.

PERCY
Where it at?

SHOPKEEPER
You just come in for directions, or
you gonna buy somethin'?

PERCY
Give me a bottle of whiskey.

SHOPKEEPER
OK then. S&S ain't but three blocks
up Rampart, where it cross
Iberville. Now let me get you that
whiskey. Just got a new shipment
in.

The shopkeeper disappears in a back room.

Angela stacks vegetables on a shelf in the back of the store.

Percy walks back to her.

PERCY
Hey there.

ANGELA
You ain't gettin' no more Absinthe?

PERCY
I think that one time was 'bout all
I can handle.

Angela smiles at Percy and turns toward him.

Her left eye is dark and swollen.

She catches his look and looks quickly away.

PERCY (CONT'D)
You OK there?

Angela looks straight down and continues to stack the
vegetables. Percy reaches a hand toward Angela's face.

The Shopkeeper BANGS a bottle on the counter.

Angela bumps a box of jars, which falls to the floor and
shatters.

Percy kneels to help her, but she shakes her head angrily.

Percy turns to the Shopkeeper.

SHOPKEEPER
Here's your fifth.

Percy returns to the counter.

PERCY
OK then.

SHOPKEEPER
That's three dollars.

Percy pays and as he exits the store, the shopkeeper goes
around the counter.

SHOPKEEPER (O.S.)
Godamm, girl! Look at what you
done.

ANGELA (O.S.)
I'm real sorry...

SHOPKEEPER (O.S.)
I done told you not to be talkin'
to folks come in here. Now pick
that mess up.

A SMACK and a THUD as she hits the floor.

EXT. CORNER STORE - CONTINUOUS

Percy pauses.

He steps back inside.

The door swings shut behind him.

INT. CORNER STORE - CONTINUOUS

Percy steps back inside.

At the back of the store, the shopkeeper beats Angela with a razor strop.

Percy walks quickly toward them, fifth bottle gripped by the neck.

PERCY

Hey there.

The shopkeeper turns.

Percy cracks him over the head with the bottle.

The shopkeeper drops to his knees, grabs his head and falls to the floor.

Angela crawls away and covers herself up in the corner.

Percy goes to her.

PERCY

It's OK. You gonna be OK.

She grabs Percy around the neck. He helps her to her feet.

The shopkeeper crawls back to the counter, reaches behind it, comes out with a shotgun.

Percy runs toward him, but the shopkeeper PUMPS it and puts the barrel in Percy's face.

SHOPKEEPER

You just fucked up, you son of a bitch.

PERCY

What you gonna do?

SHOPKEEPER
You think I got this gun for show?

PERCY
Then go on and pull that trigger.

SHOPKEEPER
Suit yourself.

He pulls the trigger with a dry CLICK.

SHOPKEEPER (CONT'D)
Fuck.

Percy knees the shopkeeper in the groin and twists the shotgun from his hands.

The gun crashes to the floor.

The men struggle, roll around on the wood floor PUNCHING and GOUGING eyes.

The Shopkeeper reaches out and grabs the shotgun again.

They struggle over it, and it FIRES.

For a moment, neither move, then...

Percy rises, holding the shotgun.

He puts a hand on his ribs-- the site of the old wound.

He pulls it away, dripping blood.

The shopkeeper lays on his back, unhurt.

He sits up and Percy SMASHES him in the head with the gun butt.

He then goes behind the counter and grabs a SHELL, reloads the shotgun.

The Shopkeeper crawls toward the door, but Percy puts the barrel to the back of his head and FIRES.

He drops the shotgun to the floor, grabs Angela by the arm and takes her out the door.

EXT. CORNER STORE - DAY

Percy and Angela exit.

Angela is frantic. Her face, hair and dress are spattered with blood.

ANGELA
Oh god. Oh my god.

Percy pulls her away.

INT. CHEAP HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Percy enters the room, Angela right behind him.

PERCY
You can hold up here for long as
you like, but I got to go.

Angela grabs Percy's hand.

ANGELA
Wait.

Percy pulls away from her, but she grabs hold of his neck and begins to kiss him all over.

She steps back, pulls off her dress, and lays back on the bed.

Percy stares at her, but stays put.

PERCY
You don't owe me nothin'.

ANGELA
I want to.

PERCY
I can't.

She reaches out for him, but Percy pulls away.

Angela covers herself and begins to cry.

Percy reaches into his boot and removes all his money, drops it on the bed.

PERCY (CONT'D)
Take this. Take all of it. Get
yourself on a train. Go wherever
you want. You just don't want a
thing in the world to do with me.

ANGELA
Why you say that about yourself?

PERCY
All I ever touch turn and die.

ANGELA
I ain't dead.

Percy doesn't answer.

He picks up his guitar and exits the room.

EXT. S&S CLUB - NIGHT

An old brick building, S&S painted in fading letters over the front door.

Percy walks toward the club, holding his ribs.

He steps inside.

INT. S&S CLUB - CONTINUOUS

A burly BARTENDER pours drinks for several MEN who sit around the bar.

All turn to face Percy as he enters.

BARTENDER
You lost, partner?

PERCY
I come to make a record.

BARTENDER
You did, hunh? Well who the hell are you?

Percy removes the torn thousand dollar bill from his pocket, lays it on the bar.

The Bartender raises his eyebrows.

INT. S&S OFFICE - DAY

The Bartender enters the office, where SIMMONS sits behind a desk, a cigar in his mouth, a YOUNG WOMAN on his lap.

SIMMONS
You got somethin' to say?

BARTENDER
Yeah. Percy Lincoln ain't dead.

Simmons removes his cigar.

He pushes the Young Woman off his lap and gives the Bartender a hard stare.

INT. S&S CLUB - NIGHT

Simmons approaches Percy.

SIMMONS
Well, well.

Simmons looks at Percy's suit, soaked through with blood.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)
Damn. How bad you hurt, Lincoln?

PERCY
Ain't nothin'. Just give me a
drink.

Simmons nods to the bartender.

He places a bottle and glass on the bar in front of Percy. He fills the glass to the top and leaves the bottle.

Simmons turns to two of the men at the end of the bar.

SIMMONS
Two of you get in there and set
things up. We ain't got all damn
night!

Percy knocks back his shot, pours another.

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

Percy enters a small room with a stool and a microphone on a stand.

He takes his guitar out of the case, sits down.

He begins to PLAY.

INT. SOUND ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The SOUND MAN stands above an old LP PLAYER, which is connected by a cable to Percy's microphone.

The needle of the LP player carves into a blank record.

The sound man wears headphones, turns knobs on the LP, uses a small brush to remove the freshly scraped vinyl from the new grooves.

The sound man looks up to Simmons, nods his head. Simmons nods back, chews on his cigar with an air of solemnity as he looks through the glass to Percy.

MONTAGE

Percy plays several different songs.

INT. STUDIO - LATER

Percy finishes a song. He winces and grabs his stomach.

Blood has pooled on the floor beneath the stool.

He tries to pick the tune up again, but his hands are shaking. His fingers fumble over the strings and he nearly drops his guitar.

Simmons enters. He sees the blood on the floor.

SIMMONS

Damn, Lincoln. You need to get sewed up.

Simmons grabs Percy's arm, but Percy pulls away.

PERCY

Just one last song.

SIMMONS

Shit. Let's do it. One more.

Simmons motions to the sound room and exits.

PERCY

This one called Sugarcane Blues.

Percy steadies his hands and begins to play SUGARCANE BLUES and SING.

INT. SOUND ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The men exchange glances, nod their heads in approval.

PERCY
... I killed my baby in the
sugarcane/ in the sugarcane, in the
sugarcane...

INT. STUDIO - LATER

Percy finishes the song.

Simmons and the others enter, congratulating Percy.

Percy lays the guitar in its case.

SIMMONS
You're gonna be a rich man,
Lincoln. Now let's get you fixed
up.
(to Bartender)
You. Run and get that old saw bones
up the street.

BARTENDER
I imagine he sleepin'.

SIMMONS
I don't give a damn if he fuckin' a
hooker! Put a gun to his head, you
got to...

PERCY
Hold up.

Percy raises his shirt.

The men stare at the wound.

PERCY (CONT'D)
It ain't bleedin'.

The men look at one another, mystified.

Percy begins to LAUGH, but covers his mouth with his hand.

PERCY (CONT'D)
Goddamn. I got to go.

Percy exits the club.

Simmons watches in disbelief.

EXT. S&S CLUB - DAY

Grey dawn. Percy steps out of the club.

He walks quickly and then runs down the deserted street.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Percy enters his hotel.

INT. HOTEL/HALLWAY - DAY

Percy makes his way down the hall, unlocks and opens the door.

PERCY
Angela...

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Percy enters the room.

PERCY
Angela?

The room is empty. Angela is gone.

Percy closes the door behind him, locks it with his key which he leaves in the inside lock.

He sits on the cot, and stares out the window.

There are FOOTSTEPS in the hall.

Percy turns and smiles.

EXT. HOTEL/HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

PINKY'S HAND, with the sparkling diamond pinky ring, touches the doorknob.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Percy heads for the door.

His smile turns to a look of puzzlement as the knob turns.
The door swings open.

PERCY

Fuck.

There are two GUNSHOTS.

Both hit Percy square in the chest.

Another SHOT hits him in the neck.

A final SHOT hits him in the gut.

Percy's legs buckle.

He falls to the floor.

Beneath the cot, Percy sees a pair of BOOTS in the doorway.

Pinky's SEVERED HAND drops to the wood planks beside them.

In the doorway is Blue Eye, a crude bandage on his face and neck, a smoking gun in his hand.

BLUE EYE

Fuck you, Percy Lincoln.

He turns and walks back down the hall.

Percy climbs to his knees.

Blood comes from his mouth.

He grips the windowsill and looks out the window to the rising sun.

FLASHBACK

EXT. CROSSROADS IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA - NIGHT

Same as opening scene. The moon is full. The woods are dark. Mist hangs in the road.

Young Percy (16) walks toward the crossroads. He wears a dress jacket and bow tie. He carries a GUITAR in one hand, a BOTTLE of whiskey in the other.

At the center of the crossroads, Young Percy sets down his guitar. As he bends, he WINCES.

PERCY

Ahhh...

Percy sticks his free hand beneath his suit jacket, removes it, his fingers slick with BLOOD in the light of the moon.

Percy uncorks the bottle with his teeth, takes a long pull. He begins to SOB and wipes his eyes with his sleeve.

Percy takes a HANDKERCHIEF from his pocket, holds it against his side so it soaks up blood.

He squeezes the blood into the bottle and sets it on the ground.

PERCY

Please.

Percy drops to his knees, his hands held in prayer.

PERCY (CONT'D)

Please.

There are FOOTSTEPS on the road behind him. Percy turns. His eyes grow wide with horror.

The Devil approaches Percy, extends his hand.

Percy takes it.

CUT TO:

PERCY'S HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Percy stares out the window at the rising sun.

It turns into a blinding white LIGHT, and he reaches toward it with his bloody hand...

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER HOME - DAY

A home in the French Quarter.

Two men, one with a STRAW HAT, the other balding (BALDY), sit in chairs on the porch and drink beer.

An old, hand-crank Victrola is balanced in the window frame behind them.

A blues TUNE finishes playing on the Victrola, and the record scratches out.

STRAW HAT

Say, Baldy. Put on somethin' by
him.

Baldy removes the old record and puts on a new one, but pauses and doesn't put the arm down.

He cocks his head, cups his hand to his ear.

In the distance, a brass band can now be heard.

BALDY

I believe they comin'.

The music grows louder: a DIRGE.

Both men walk to the porch rail, look down the street toward an approaching JAZZ FUNERAL.

EXT. CITY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Hundreds of men and women make up the procession.

Sad music plays.

In the middle is a simple pine casket, held by S&S Bartender and others.

Simmons walks alongside them, with a woman under his arm.

A hand painted cotton banner reads: PERCY LINCOLN RIP.

The crowd fills the street as it passes by the porch.

EXT. FRENCH QUARTER HOME - CONTINUOUS

The procession passes.

The men watch on from the rail as the crowd begins to disperse.

All that remains is a tall, impeccably dressed man, with a chin beard and cane, who lingers near the porch: The Devil.

STRAW HAT

Damn shame he gone.

BALDY
Yes sir. Damn shame.

DEVIL
He is one lucky man.

STRAW HAT
How you figure that?

DEVIL
Any man who dies in debt, is a
lucky man indeed.

BALDY
He owe you?

DEVIL
He did.

STRAW HAT
How much?

DEVIL
His soul.

Baldy and Straw Hat exchange glances.

BALDY
Maybe I can help you out on that.

The Devil raises his eyebrows.

BALDY (CONT'D)
His soul right here.

Baldy lowers the arm on the record. A scratchy first few
notes of SUGARCANE BLUES begin to play.

The Devil LAUGHS, shakes his head and walks away.

Percy's record spins round and round on the turntable, and we
slowly...

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END

Chris Gordon was born in Austin, Texas. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Government from Stephen F. Austin State University.