

ROLL OF THUNDER
HEAR MY CRY

Adapted by
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From the novel by
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ABOUT THE PLAY

This authorized adaptation of Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry was commissioned by Seattle Children's Theatre, which also produced the premiere.

Subsequent productions have appeared at First Stage Milwaukee, City Theatre, Dallas Children's Theatre, Serendipity Theatre.

Selected scenes are published in Great Scenes and Monologues for Children by Smith & Kraus Press

CHARACTERS

CHILDREN

STACEY LOGAN
CASSIE LOGAN
LITTLE MAN
JEREMY SIMMS
LILLIAN JEAN SIMMS

ADULTS

PAPA
HAMMER LOGAN
BIG MA
MAMA
MR. MORRISON

CHORUS

MR. BARNETT	R.W. SIMMS	MELVIN SIMMS
HARLAN GRANGER	CHARLIE SIMMS	MRS. CRUMB
HAZEL	NIGHT MENS	SUSANNA
MR. GRIMES	JOE CALVERT	GIRL #2
MR. WALLACE	WOMAN #1, #2	MAN #1, #2
MIZ CROWDER	MARYLOU	GRACE
CLAUDE AVERY		

[The original production employed five youths and seven adults. Masks were utilized to represent a child's picture of the peripheral adults in her life.]

SCENE I

(Blinding headlights appear on a narrow country road. T.J., and the Logan children scramble out of the way of the whites only school bus.)

CHANT

This is my world! My world! My world!
This is my world! My world!

CASSIE

One of these days.

T.J.

One of these days what?

CASSIE

I don't know but you just wait.

T.J.

You ain't gonna do nothing 'cept get chased off the road by that Jefferson Davis school bus every morning for as long as your behind got shine.

CASSIE

Start in with me, T.J., and see if you don't end up back in that ditch yonder.

STACEY

Ain't gonna be no scrapping, Cassie.

CASSIE

Who died and made you King?

STACEY

It's the first day of school; you come home with your Sunday dress ruint and see if momma don't burn your bottom.

CASSIE

Consider yourself lucky, T.J.

T.J.

Talk that talk, Cassie girl.

STACEY

We better get right before we're late.

T.J.

I ain't never in no hurry to git to school.

CASSIE

I wouldn't be neither if my marks was bad like yours.

STACEY

Come on, Little Man.

(Little Man ignores him.)

Little Man, come on before we late.

CASSIE

(to Little Man)

What is it?

LITTLE MAN

I'm dirty.

T.J.

Would you listen after him...I'm dirty.

LITTLE MAN

I can't go to school like this.

STACEY

You got to go to school, Little Man.

T.J.

Now that's one I ain't tried. Ma, I can't got to school today, I'm dirty.

STACEY

Shut up, T.J.

T.J.

Ain't nobody doing nothing but having fun, Stacey.

CASSIE

We all dirty, Little Man, on account'a that bus...

LITTLE MAN

Look here, there's a tear in my pants.

STACEY

You turn on back for home and don't get your learnin', that's just what them white folks want.

(Little Man joins the others.)

T.J.

Now I know summer's over.

CASSIE

Why's that?

T.J.

Cause there's Stacey's puppydawg waiting for him at the crossroads.

(Enter Jeremy and Lillian Jean Simms)

JEREMY

Hi ya'll.

LILLIAN JEAN

Now you seen 'em, Jeremy, they alive and black as ever so come on.

JEREMY

Hi, Stacey. Running a little late this morning.

LILLIAN JEAN

Jeremy Simms, you stop talking with them colored and come on now.

CASSIE

Ain't nobody said so much as a boo to him yet, Lillian Jean.

STACEY

Mind yourself, Cassie.

LILLIAN JEAN

Jeremy Jedediah Simms, you come away from them nigras right now or I'm gonna tell Pa when we get home.

STACEY

You better go on before you get in trouble, Jeremy; we near late as it is.

JEREMY

Pa goan find some excuse to wail me no matter what I do so I might as well git whapped for doing something I like.

T.J.

What you like doing round here that's worth a whipping.

JEREMY

Talking with my friends.

CASSIE

Friends? Shoot, we ain't never done more'n jabber here at the crossroads for a few minutes long as you knowed us.

JEREMY

Seems like that's all there's time for what with separate schools and my daddy feeling like he do about colored.

LILLIAN JEAN

Jeremy, I'm leaving.

(Jeremy waves goodbye.)

STACEY

We should be getting on too.

JEREMY

I sure wish it was different.

T.J.

I git to wishing that same thing round noontime when my daddy's got me chopping cotton.

CASSIE

What did I ever do to your daddy?

JEREMY

I don't imagine you done nothing but he's gonna whup me tonight just as sure as my name is Simms. He'll say I got to remember my place.

CASSIE

T.J.'s people lease land form Harlan Granger same as your daddy.

JEREMY

Yep.

CASSIE

...and my family got four hundred acres more'n half paid off.

JEREMY

Yep.

CASSIE

Seem like it oughta be proper for you to socialize with one or the other of us.

JEREMY

He gonna whup on me just the same.

T.J.

You oughta do like I do.

JEREMY

How's that?

T.J.

When Pa wants to wail me I run off. Ma gets so worried come middle night she sends him out with the lantern only I don't let on where I be hiding till he promise I won't get switched.

JEREMY

My Pa'd just send R.W. and Melvin after me then they'd whup on me for troubling them.

T.J.

There's always a way out of work and whuppings; we just ain't studied the situation enough.

JEREMY

I just figure I'll take my licks.

CASSIE

Your Pa must can't hit good like mine or you wouldn't be saying that.

JEREMY

He can hold his own with a shaving strap.

(Jeremy shows his bruised back.)

LILLIAN JEAN

Jeremy Simms, you pull your clothes down and come on right now.

(Jeremy moons Lillian Jean.)

STACEY

You 'bout the craziest somebody I know, Jeremy.

JEREMY

Well, if you had a sister like Lillian Jean I expect you'd cut loose every now and again too.

T.J.

Who say he don't?

CASSIE

Forget you, T.J.

STACEY

You better run on.

JEREMY

She'll probably make me tote her books every day for a week.

CASSIE

Serves you right for acting the fool.

JEREMY

See ya'll.

T.J.

Not if we see you first.

(Exit Jeremy.)

END SCENE I

SCENE II

(A classroom forms around Cassie in a rickety wood building.)

CASSIE

How in the world somebody's supposed to give a turnip about school when they got to sit up in a raggedy classroom like this and listen to a boring old biddy like Miz Crowder?

(Miz Crowder appears at her desk.)

MIZ CROWDER

It is my pleasure to announce that this year the county has provided enough textbooks for every child to have their very own.

(Cheers)

We all know how rare it is for a colored school to have such prosperity and how very important it is to take care of these books so that the children who follow you will have the same wonderful opportunity. Right?

ALL

Yes, Miz Crowder.

MIZ CROWDER

Cassandra?

CASSIE

Yes, Miz Crowder.?

MIZ CROWDER

Are you going to take care of your new book?

CASSIE

Yes, Miz Crowder.

MIZ CROWDER

Then next time say so along with everybody else.

CASSIE

Yes'm.

MIZ CROWDER

When I call your name come forward and receive your book. Claude Avery...
(Claude comes forward, takes a book and turns.)

What do you say?

Thank you, Miz Crowder.

CLAUDE

Grace Chandler.

MIZ CROWDER

Thank you, Miz Crowder.

GRACE

Cassandra Logan.

MIZ CROWDER

Thank you, Miz Crowder.

CASSIE

(Little Man is there before she looks up from her list.)

MIZ CROWDER

Clayton Logan.

(Miz Crowder offers a book but Little Man doesn't take it.)

LITTLE MAN

Excuse me, Miz Crowder.

MIZ CROWDER

Yes, Clayton?

LITTLE MAN

Could I have a different book?

MIZ CROWDER

What's wrong with this one?

LITTLE MAN

It's dirty.

MIZ CROWDER

Well. I have never in all my days...The County gives you a perfectly good textbook for free, mind you, and Clayton Logan has the audacity to turn his nose up at it.

CASSIE

They're all like that, Little Man.

MIZ CROWDER

You speak out of turn again, Cassie, and you will have the honor of being the first child corrected this year.

LITTLE MAN

(Distracting her)

Thank you for this fine book, Miz Crowder.

MIZ CROWDER

That's better. And I know that you are one child who will give it the care that it deserves.

(Little Man walks toward his seat reading.)

George Johnson.

MARYLOU

His people done gone to Chicago.

MIZ CROWDER

Went, not done gone.

MARYLOU

Yes ma'am.

(Little Man throws his book onto the floor.)

MIZ CROWDER

Have you lost your mind? Pick up that book!

LITTLE MAN

No ma'am.

MIZ CROWDER

Don't you dare stand there and tell me no.

LITTLE MAN

I don't want it.

MIZ CROWDER

Do you want to get paddled?

LITTLE MAN

No ma'am.

MIZ CROWDER

Then you pick up that book before I lose my patience.

(Little Man crosses his arms, resolute.)

I don't know what you Logans think you are up to but I am about to put a stop to it right now.

CASSIE

I know why Little Man done what he done.

MIZ CROWDER

I don't recall giving you permission to speak.

CASSIE

But see, look here what it says.

MIZ CROWDER

You sit back down in that chair before I give you something for your trouble.

CASSIE

But you got to see this to understand.

MIZ CROWDER

I don't have to do anything except teach you willful children your place.

(Miz Crowder paddles Little Man while Cassie reads from the book in a circle of light.)

CASSIE

Year 1930, condition: new. Assignment: white. Year 1931, condition: good.

Assignment: white. 1933...Fair...white. 1934, very poor. Assignment: Nigra...I don't want my book neither, Miz Crowder.

END SCENE II

SCENE III

(Mama's classroom. Somehow brighter despite the squalor. Her action of pasting paper book covers is unnoticed by Miz Crowder.)

MIZ CROWDER

I just cannot imagine what got into those children of yours.

MAMA

I suppose not.

MIZ CROWDER

That Cassie, well, she's always been too high on herself, but Clayton is usually such a perfect little gentleman and there he was jumping up and down on that book like a dancing Tasmanian.

MAMA

It must have been quite a sight.

MIZ CROWDER

If I had closed my eyes I would have sworn it was Hammer Logan back from Chicago pitching a fit...Mary, what in the name of heaven are you doing?

MAMA

I'm just fixing these books.

MIZ CROWDER

That is County property you're destroying!

MAMA

These books were pretty near destroyed long before they decided to dump them on Great Faith, so I figure anything I do is an improvement.

MIZ CROWDER

Let's see if the school board agrees with you.

MAMA

How are we going to see, Daisy? Them folks haven't done so much as spit in the direction of this school since the day we opened our doors.

MIZ CROWDER

You are dangerous, Mary Logan.

MAMA

You know as well as you know your name that we haven't gotten anything from that school board until every bit of real use has been squeezed out of it for the white children over at Jefferson.

MIZ CROWDER

Every year seems like it gets worse.

MAMA

Exactly.

MIZ CROWDER

I mean you.

MAMA

Me?

MIZ CROWDER

You don't give a cups worth of care for the trouble you cause folks.

MAMA

How can you twist your mouth around something like...

MIZ CROWDER

The rest of us got to get along with these simple white folks.

MAMA

Of course we do, Daisy...

MIZ CROWDER

And I'm not about to lose my job behind some foolishness over a schoolbook.

MAMA

I'm the one standing here with the paste brush in my hand.

MIZ CROWDER

Then white folks close this school on us then where we all gonna be? Schooling's the only chance any of these children have to get anywhere in this world and if they got to take low in order to get the only book most them ever had in their house besides a Bible then they need to just shut up and take low.

MAMA

I don't think that's what we should be teaching them.

MIZ CROWDER

You got that one right; you don't think. And that's why you and yours are going to suffer.

MAMA

That may well be but until then I refuse to drop to my knees and shout hallelujah every time Harlan Granger passes gas.

MIZ CROWDER

You strut round a barnyard with your head held high and somebody's liable to lop it off for you.

(Shadows of Klansmen lynching a man appear as the chant emerges from the darkness.)

CHANT

Burn, nigger, burn!

VOICE #1

So you fought in the war!

CHANT

Burn, nigger, burn.

VOICE #2

This is Spokane, Mississippi.

CHANT

Burn, nigger, burn!

VOICE #3

You ain't even good firewood.

(A blaze of red light. A chilling scream that melts into the squeal of young Cassie back on the Logan farm.)

CASSIE

Ahhhh! It's Papa!

LITTLE MAN

Papa!

BIG MA

Don't you go through that fence. You children hear me? What's the use. Mary? Mary? Drop what you doing and come running.

(Enter Mama.)

MAMA

Miz Caroline, what in the world are you doing climbing through that fence?

BIG MA

It's David.

MAMA

David!

(Mama flies into his arms.)

BIG MA

Lord, if you ain't a sight to make a hard heart sing.

CASSIE

How long you home for?

PAPA

I got to be back driving spikes sun up Monday.

ALL

Monday?

LITTLE MAN

But that's day after tomorrow.

PAPA

I know, baby.

CASSIE

Can't you stay no longer?

MAMA

Any longer.

PAPA

Not without risking my job.

CASSIE

Who cares about that old railroad job?

PAPA

We all do, baby girl, cause we need that money to pay off the mortgage on these fine trees.

LITTLE MAN

Can't you work no closer to home?

MAMA

Any closer.

PAPA

Ain't nobody round here about to hire me to do nothing 'cept chop cotton.

STACEY

Why'd you come home, Papa?

BIG MA

He ain't hardly got here yet and ya'll trying to git rid of him already.

CASSIE

But there ain't no sense in his coming home when he can't stay long enough to light his pipe hardly.

PAPA

I come to bring Mr. Morrison.

LITTLE MAN

Who's Mr. Morrison?

(Enter the huge older man.)

MR. MORRISON

That be me.

BIG MA

Glory.

MAMA

David?

DAVID

He goan help round the farm.

STACEY

We don't need no help.

PAPA

Reckon I'm best judge of that.

MAMA

How are we going to pay him?

PAPA

We'll settle up come harvest. It won't be much but what he needs most is a bed and a bellyful.

MR. MORRISON

Miz Logan, I think you oughta know I got fired from off the railroad. I beat some fellas pretty bad.

MAMA

Whose fault was it?

MR. MORRISON

I'd say theirs, mostly...but they was white.

MAMA

Well, I appreciate your telling me how things stand.

MR. MORRISON

That's the sort of news a body's got to know.

BIG MA

Especially in these times.

MR. MORRISON

Especially in these here times.

(Exit all except Cassie. A Gospel song builds.)

CASSIE

It don't make no sense Papa risking his job to come home for a day and a half. All the grownups all the time whispering 'bout how Mr. Berry died and acting strange...it's enough to make a soul sit down on a log and talk to the moon.

END SCENE III

SCENE IV

(Mrs. Berry leads a funeral procession. The song, "Roll of Thunder," continues under the stylized dialogue.)

WOMAN #1

They been after John Berry since he came back from the war.

MAN #1

They say he was making eyes after some white woman.

WOMAN #2

Harrietta was with them. Saw the whole thing.

MAN #2

They followed him home.

MAN #1

Left six children...

WOMAN #2

...and a wife.

WOMAN #1

Sheriff called Harrietta a lie.

MAN #2

It's a shame.

WOMAN #2

Terrible...

MAN #1

It's a..

WOMAN #1

It's a..

WOMAN #2

It's a...

ALL

It's a terrible shame.

(Papa appears as one of the pall bearers.)

PAPA

In my house we don't shop at the Wallace store.

(Cassie appears in her own light that transforms into the schoolhouse road.)

CASSIE

Now why in the world would Papa up and say something like that out the blue?

(T.J., Stacey and Little Man appear beside her.)

T.J.

Cause it was Dewberry Wallace behind what happened to Mr. Berry.

STACEY

How you know it was him?

T.J.

Shoot, I know most everything there is to know in Spokane County.

CASSIE

That's cause you spend half your time listening at somebody's window.

T.J.

Just for that I'm not gonna tell what I know.

CASSIE

Good. Now maybe we can listen out for that old bus.

T.J.

You lucky I like you, Cassie girl.

CASSIE

You can't lick nobody, T.J. Avery.

STACEY

That's enough, Cassie.

CASSIE

I'm not studying you neither, Stacey Logan. You ain't but two years older'n me.

LITTLE MAN

Ya'll fight out here in this mud you're gonna get all dirty.

T.J.

We ain't got time to be juggin' round out here; we nearly late.

CASSIE

Since when you been in a hurry to git to school?

STACEY

Especially on test day.

T.J.

Since when I made me up a pretty crip sheet.

LITTLE MAN

You gonna cheat?

T.J.

Naw, I'm gonna pass.

STACEY

You shouldn't oughta cheat, T.J.

T.J.

How else am I gonna pass?

CASSIE

You might try studying.

T.J.

There ain't no use in it.

CASSIE

Then what you going to school for if you won't learn nothing?

T.J.

I thought you was smarter than that. Shoot, if I wasn't in school I'd be out breaking my back on daddy's farm from 'fore day to light gone.

STACEY

Let me see your crip sheet.

T.J.

Now you talking like you know. See, I'm a thinking man. I figure all I got to do is stay in school till I'm old enough to git away from this nothing town.

(T.J give his notes to Stacey.)

Me, I'm going to Chicago. Sorry but I can't take you.

LITTLE MAN

Uncle Hammer's in Chicago.

T.J.

And every time he come down here he's cleaner than a goose's belly. That's what put me wise.

(Stacey tears up the notes.)

You crazy?

STACEY

I'm not gonna let you cheat in my momma's class.

T.J.

You shouldn't oughta done that, Stacey. We're buddies and you ain't spozed to do your buddy thata way.

CASSIE

(To Little Man)

What is it?

T.J.

Boy, if I fail this test and get left back my daddy's gonna pull me out of school sure.

LITTLE MAN

Listen.

T.J.

It ain't like learning history is gonna make a bit of difference come harvest.

CASSIE

Hush, T.J.

T.J.

Who you telling to hush? You getting too big for your bloomers, girl. You better watch somebody don't bring you down a peg.

LITTLE MAN

It's the bus!

(The Children run. T.J. leaves them.)

CASSIE

We'll never make it to the crossroads.

We got to jump the ditch.

STACEY

It's too wide.

LITTLE MAN

We got to try.

STACEY

But we'll fall in the mud.

LITTLE MAN

It's either that or get run over.

CASSIE

(Cassie jumps. Stacey jumps.)

CASSIE

Quick, Little Man, jump!

STACEY

Jump!

(Little Man jumps and falls in the mud. Enter Jeremy.)

JEREMY

Ya'll alright?

CASSIE

What you want round us, Jeremy?

JEREMY

Let me help you out of there.

CASSIE

When I want your help I'll ask for it.

JEREMY

Grab holt of my hand, Little Man.

LITTLE MAN

Go on back to your friends on the bus.

JEREMY

Them's not my friends.

LITTLE MAN

Well, I ain't seen them run you off in the mud.

STACEY

You'd best get from around us, Jeremy, for a while at least.

(Jeremy ponders for a moment then jumps into the ditch.
Enter Lillian Jean.)

LILLIAN JEAN

Jeremy Simms, Pa's gonna bust your butt good this time.

(Exit Lillian Jean with Jeremy throwing mud after her.)

JEREMY

Ya'lls my friends.

END SCENE IV

SCENE V

(Hours later Cassie stands alone with her thoughts.)

CASSIE

The funniest thought just come into my head. How is it that T.J., who made us late fooling with his crib sheet, end up dry as a bone while Jeremy Simms, who wasn't nowhere to be seen, got top to toe mud worser than all of us?

(Stacey bolts by. Cassie grabs him.)

STACEY

Let go of me, Cassie.

CASSIE

Where you off to in such a huff?

STACEY

Don't you worry bout it.

CASSIE

If you going to that Wallace store then momma's gonna worry your bottom.

STACEY

She already done switched me on accounta T.J., now go on home.

CASSIE

Na-uh. Not unless you coming with me.

LITTLE MAN

He know you looking for him, that's why he's hiding in the commissary store.

STACEY

He can hide all he wants, he still gotta pay for what he done.

CASSIE

Boy, you set foot in that juke joint and we all gonna be in a world of trouble.

LITTLE MAN

Mama say we spozed to be boycotting Mr. Wallace.

CASSIE

Hush, Little Man; that's something we ain't spozed to say out in the air.

STACEY

All I know is that T.J. made him up a new crib sheet at lunch and hid it in my desk. Then he watched Mama tear up my test paper and wallop my bottom in front the whole class. Now tell me, am I spoiled to let him sit up in there and sip coca cola like somebody's rich uncle?

CASSIE

No, but you can wait and get him tomorrow.

STACEY

If he'd done you this a way, would you wait?

(Pause)

Take Little Man home.

CASSIE

We ain't leaving you out here by your lonesome.

STACEY

Ain't no need all of us getting switched.

(T.J. tries to sneak out.)

LITTLE MAN

There he go!

(Stacey tackles him.)

T.J.

Ow, Stacey! I think you busted my arm. Ow!

(Stacey pauses then T.J. attacks.)

CASSIE

Get him, Stacey!

LITTLE MAN

He can't lick you, Stacey!

(Enter R.W. Simms.)

R.W.

What in the name of thunder are you pickaninnies...Melvin!

MELVIN

(Offstage)

What?

R.W.

Git out here! We got us a show.

(Enter Dewberry Wallace.)

DEWBERRY

What you hollering after, R.W.? Wee doggie. Look at them coons go at it.

R.W.

Two bits say the little bony one wins.

MR. WALLACE

You're on.

CASSIE

Come on, Stacey, let's git.

MR. WALLACE

I got two bits riding on you, you lazy ape, now git back in there.

R.W.

You make me lose my money, boy, and I'm gonna take off my belt and beat you till your backside ain't got no more flesh'n a soupbone.

(They throw the boys together.)

DEWBERRY

Git to it, consarn you! And make it good!

(R.W. takes off his belt. T.J. attacks.)

Ow! Your'n fights dirty!

R.W.

That's the way! Bite the son of a gun!

(Mr. Morrison appears suddenly and stops the fight.)

DEWBERRY

What the hell you think you doing there, uncle?

MR. MORRISON

(to T.J.)

Go home, son.

(Exit T.J.)

DEWBERRY

You hear me talking to you, boy?

(Mr. Morrison starts off with the children.)

Don't you turn your back on me, nigger.

MR. MORRISON

(to Stacey)

Get your kin in the wagon.

STACEY

Yes, sir.

R.W.

Maybe he's deaf, Mr. Wallace.

DEWBERRY

Maybe he's new round these parts and got to be taught his propers.

MR. MORRISON

You're welcome to give 'er a try if you're of a mind.

R.W.

Melvin, I 'spect you'd better come on out here.

DEWBERRY

Naw. Stay put, Melvin. It's too hot to be building fires today.

R.W.

Ain't that the truth.

(Mr. Morrison gathers the children's things.)

DEWBERRY

You over to the Logan place, ain't you, boy?

R.W.

Yeah, he is. I seen him with that other upppity nigger.

DEWBERRY

Well then, I 'spect me and a few friends will be paying you a little welcome visit real soon.

R.W.

First cool fall evening.

END SCENE V

SCENE VI

(The wagon.)

CASSIE

It weren't like we went down there dancing or nothing...T.J. stashed his cheat notes in Stacey's desk. That's why he was hiding down there. He figured we wouldn't come after him. You gonna tell on what we done, Mr. Morrison?

MR. MORRISON

Ain't my place to tell on ya'll. A man does what he does then he stands by his deeds.

STACEY

I understand.

(Stacey goes to Mama on the porch while Cassie hides with Little Man nearby.)

CASSIE

(to Audience)

Dogged if I do. Here Mr. Morrison is giving us a way out of a whipping and Stacey can't run fast enough to blabber to momma.

MAMA

Didn't I tell you to stay away from that commissary?

STACEY

Yes'm.

MAMA

But you just had to go down there.

STACEY

Yes'm.

MAMA

And you been fighting too, haven't you?

STACEY

Yes'm.

MAMA

I suppose this has to do with those notes that I found?...And, of course, Cassie and Little Man went traipsing off behind you.

CASSIE

(to Audience)

If you don't but know one thing about Stacey then it's that he won't never speak on nobody but hisself.

MAMA

Cassie, Little Man, come on in here.

CASSIE

Now if he could only learn how to lie.

(Enter Cassie & Little Man)

MAMA

We're going to end this thing once and for all this evening. Your papa told you never go down to that Wallace store.

CASSIE

But we only...

MAMA

I don't want to hear it! But you all better hear this and I mean good. Mr. Wallace is an evil man. He and his friends poured a bucket of coal oil on Mr. Berry and burned him to death.

(The wheezing breath of dying Mr. Berry rises under the scene.)

LITTLE MAN

What'd they do that for?

MAMA

Mostly because John Berry was a Negro. And anyone who goes down to that store might just as well spit on his grave.

CASSIE

We're sorry, Mama.

MAMA

Right now I don't have any use for sorry children. Your daddy and I are organizing a boycott and if my own won't stay away from that wicked place then we're dragging all the way to Strawberry twice a month for nothing.

STACEY

Mama, we ain't never going back there no more. None of us.

(Cassie steps out of the scene)

CASSIE

Something about the way Stacey spoke his piece just made a licking seem unnecessary. He can get like that sometimes, almost like he grown. Makes me fearful to come cross of him but I wouldn't never let on as such.

END SCENE VI

SCENE VII

(The school road appears. It is raining. Stacey and Little Man carry tin cans of water and shovels.)

STACEY

Stop daydreaming and git to toting water, girl!!

CASSIE

It don't make a bit of sense us getting soaked to the bone out here in the woods.

LITTLE MAN

It's worth it to settle up with that bus.

CASSIE

We could just go on our way down the center of the road like we always do then, when Mr. Grimes come to chase us, chuck a rock through his windshield

STACEY

If they set Mr. Berry on fire for looking at a white woman, what you think they'd do to us for wrecking the school bus?

LITTLE MAN

They gonna set us afire?

STACEY

Naw. Cause ain't nobody gonna know nothing about it. Far as anybody figure this here's just a gully got dug out by the rain.

LITTLE MAN

Here come the bus!

STACEY

Go on, if you wanna and take Little Man with you, but I got to see this through.

LITTLE MAN

Me too.

CASSIE

Jimminy.

(Chant: This is my world. This is my world...)

SUSANNA PEMBERTON

Faster, Mr. Grimes!

GIRL #2

You too fast as it is, Susanna.

SUSANNA

Just cause the boys don't pay you no mind...

STACEY

(Whispering)

Come on, Mr. Grimes.

LITTLE MAN

Faster!!

JOE CALVERT

(On bus)

Look at the water fly!!!

ALL

Whee!!

MR. GRIMES

Here come a big one!

(Crash.)

CASSIE/LITTLE MAN

Yeah!!

STACEY

Shhhh!

(CHANT: *They's comin...* Builds in the background as the world melts into nightness with frightened farmers awaiting the arrival of the Klan.)

CASSIE

I don't think I've had a better day in my whole life. Watching Mr. Grimes walk round that bus and cus and kick at this end then at the other is like ice cream, peach cobbler and caramel syrup on a July afternoon. Like Big Ma say, "Lord, take me up to heaven cause I'm ready for glory!"

CHANT

The night men is comin'.
 The night men is comin'.
 They's comin'.
 They's comin'.
 The night men is comin'.

CHORUS

(Counterpoint)

Lord, I hope it ain't Luther they after.

CHORUS

(Counterpoint)

Jesus don't let them take 'way my Ben.

CHORUS

(Counterpoint)

God in heaven please look down in mercy.

CHORUS

(Counterpoint)

Put out that lantern and pass me my gun.

(Cassie is awakened from her reverie and finds herself standing beneath Stacey's window in the darkness.)

STACEY

Who that?

CASSIE

Shhh. It's me.

STACEY

Mama catch you out here tonight you gonna sit soft for a week.

CASSIE

Same as you so stop talking so dern loud.

STACEY

What you doing up?

CASSIE

What you think is going on?

STACEY

Ain't nothing going on?

STACEY

Then why's Big Ma sitting in the kitchen with a rifle?

STACEY

Hush, girl, before you wake Little Man.

CASSIE

Don't put it off on him. You know what this is all about and I'm not going back to my room till you set me wise.

STACEY

I don't know what's going on, Cassie...Honest. But it ain't nothing to worry about.

CASSIE

If you don't know what is then how come you know what it ain't?

STACEY

Miz Avery come by to tell Big Ma that the night mens is riding.

LITTLE MAN

What're night mens?

STACEY

Go back to sleep, Little Man.

LITTLE MAN

Are the night mens coming to get us?

STACEY

Why should somebody come get us?

CASSIE

Do you think they know about the bus?

STACEY

Hush yourself.

LITTLE MAN

They coming to get us on account of the bus?

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