

EXT. WEST MEMPHIS BUS DEPOT -- DAY

Japheth enters the front door of the bus depot. The floor is bare cement--the walls painted two-tone. There are perhaps fifteen people waiting in the one room--two or three BLACKS, the rest WHITES. They sit in wooden benches on the perimeter, quiet, sweating in the humid heat as a ceiling fan stirs the stale air and a few circling blowflies. Japheth approaches the ticket agent.

JAPHETH

Ticket to Helena, please.

AGENT

Helena?

JAPHETH

Helena.

AGENT

Seventy-five cents.

JAPHETH

When's the bus due?

Japheth is beginning to feel the need to shit again. The "Red Devil," quinine pills he has taken for his malaria fevers are still working double-time. Sweat beads on his forehead. The agent looks up at the large clock on the wall. It reads 8:15.

AGENT

About five minutes, if she's running on time.

JAPHETH

Is there a toi. .. a rest room?

The agent glances over at the "coloreds." Japheth is obviously in need.

AGENT

Nope...but they got one at the depot down in Hughes. That's about twelve miles down the line. Bus'll stop there-you'll have time.

JAPHETH

Thank you, sir.

Japheth walks stiffly to a nearby pew and seats himself. He looks about the room at the array of faces. Each tells a story of hard times, hard work, and unsure futures. There is a young mother with three children. There is a very old couple-the woman rests her head on the man's shoulder. The coloreds sit on their own pew, near a drinking fountain with a sign above, reading, "COLOREDS ONLY." A SEVENTY EIGHT PHONOGRAPH PLAYER in the ticket agent's booth plays "MISSISSIPPI RIVER BLUES, by JIMMIE RODGERS." The front door opens and the red tip of a thin white cane taps just inside. It is followed by a BLIND BLACK WOMAN. She is very fat, and waddles slowly as she taps along with her cane. She is cleanly and neatly dressed. Her blind eyes are rheumy and white with cataracts. She taps toward the ticket booth. Everyone in the room watches her agonizingly slow progress. Finally, she reaches the cage.

BLIND WOMAN

I'd like a ticket to Helena, please.

AGENT

Seventy-five cents.

The blind woman rests her cane against the booth, hikes up her skirt, reaches inside her bloomer leg, and extracts a large, gleaming, silver dollar.

ALL watch, fascinated. She fumbles the dollar. It hits the cement floor with a "PING," bounces and rolls, audibly, in a slow, wide arc, and then in shrinking concentric circles until it finally shimmies to a chiming stop in the center of the open space in the middle of the waiting room. (NOBODY BREATHES) The blind woman has tilted her head, following the music of the coin as it rolled. She holds on to the booth for support, as she lowers herself to her knees, and then crawls in the general direction of the coin. Her hands gently skim and pat to the left and right as she goes. Many sweating faces hungrily eye the coin, then her, then the coin again. She comes aching close to touching the coin, but passes by it and begins to head away from it. Greedy eyes narrow at the sight, but Japheth rises and walks to the coin. He picks it up, All eyes watch him.

JAPHETH

Ma'am...

The blind woman rises to her knees and turns toward him.

JAPHETH (CONT'D)

...here

Japheth places the gleaming dollar in her pink, upturned palm. He helps her to her feet. Just then the BUS pulls up outside.

AGENT

Eight-thirty! Helena!

Departs in five minutes!

Everyone moves for the front door. Some jostle past Japheth and the blind lady. Japheth exits before she can say thank you.

EXT. BUS DEPOT -- DAY

The people from inside are boarding the bus. As Japheth waits to board, a REDNECK man, about fiftyish, stares menacingly at Japheth and then spits a big blob of tobacco juice into the gutter. They do not exchange words. Japheth boards.

INT. BUS -- DAY

Japheth tips his snap-brim hat to the BUS DRIVER as he enters, and finds an empty bench about four rows back. Some blacks board, and take their place, quietly at the rear of the bus. The redneck boards and glares at Japheth. The blind woman boards last and almost passes Japheth before she stops and turns, gazing beyond him with her rheumy eyes.

WOMAN

Thank you, Mistah.

She continues on to the rear of the bus. The bus lurches forward and begins the trip South. Japheth moves forward to a seat behind the driver.

JAPHETH

(to driver)

How long to Hughes?

DRIVER

Ten, maybe fifteen minutes.

JAPHETH

They got a restroom there,  
right?

DRIVER

...uh, yeah, thas right.

Japheth is really feeling the effects of the Red Devils now, his stomach is growling fiercely, and he fears he might shit his pants. He returns to his original seat and leans his head against the window, sweating. The redneck man has moved to the seat behind Japheth. He leans forward, very close.

REDNECK

You a niggah-luvah, boy? ...  
Cuz if they's one thing I  
caint stand, that's a  
niggahluvah.  
You hear me, boy?

Japheth looks straight forward.

JAPHETH

Yes sir, I hear you.

REDNECK

Good. I sure hope you're  
passin through, because we  
don't want no niggah-luv:n  
sons o' bitches in Hughes.  
You understand me, son?

JAPHETH

Yes sir.

REDNECK

Make sure you do.

The man gets up and moves to his original seat. Japheth looks out the window of the bus. He sees some blacks, laboring in the field.

DISSOLVE TO: