

JOE. Percy –

PERCY. Joe Sutter, you need to wear a bell around your neck.

JOE. Then you'd know I was coming and you might run away.

PERCY. I might.

JOE. And that'd be a shame, cuz you'd never find out about this.

(He holds out a piece of rolled-up paper tied with a piece of ribbon.)

PERCY. What is it?

JOE. Ten acres.

[MUSIC NO. 17 – FOREST FOR THE TREES]

PERCY. Looks like a piece o' paper to me.

JOE. My old man sat me down last night. He's so afraid I'll hop that train outa town that he cut me in on a little of the family land.

PERCY. Just what you always wanted.

JOE. He let me choose whatever parcel I liked. So I picked ten acres right along Copper Creek, close enough from here you could throw a stone and hit it.

PERCY. Your worthless woods...

JOE. A corner of it, anyway.

PERCY. So you gonna sell it and move on like you said?

JOE. *(Sings.)*

I'D LIKE TO THINK THE OLD MAN DIDN'T RAISE A FOOL,
BUT SITTING IN THE WOODS OUT THERE TODAY,
I COULDN'T THINK WHY ANYONE WITH HALF A BRAIN
WOULD EVER PACK HIS BAGS AND MOVE AWAY.

I'M JUST A FOOL WHO COULDN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR
THE TREES,
THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY YOU CAME ALONG.
AND NOW THAT OUTBOUND TRAIN HAS ONE LESS
PASSENGER.
IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS THAT I BELONG.

(Speaks.)

You know, there's a clearing where a fella could put up
a little house, with trees all around it. Maybe tomorrow
I could give you the nickel tour.

PERCY. Maybe.

JOE. I was hoping you could help me decide where to put
the front porch.

PERCY. Front of the house might be good.

JOE. That's why I need your help.

THERE'S THINGS THEY NEVER TEACH YOU IN A COUNTRY
SCHOOL.

THERE'S THINGS YOU GOTTA FIND OUT FOR YOUR OWN.
I MAY BE SLOW, BUT EVEN SO I FIN'LLY KNOW
THAT I DON'T WANT TO LIVE MY LIFE ALONE.

I'M JUST A FOOL WHO COULDN'T SEE THE FOREST FOR
THE TREES,

THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY YOU CAME ALONG.

AND NOW THAT OUTBOUND TRAIN HAS ONE LESS
PASSENGER.

IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS THAT WE BELONG.

OH...I'M JUST A FOOL WHO COULDN'T SEE THE FOREST
FOR THE TREES,

THAT IS, UNTIL THE DAY YOU CAME ALONG.

AND NOW THAT OUTBOUND TRAIN HAS ONE LESS
PASSENGER.

IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS THAT WE BELONG.

IT'S HERE IN THIS WIDE WOODS

THAT WE -

PERCY. (*Cutting him off.*) Joe! Joe, you don't wanna be marryin' me.

JOE. Why not? I'm already used to your cooking.

PERCY. You gonna want children?

JOE. Hell, yeah. As many as you're up for.

PERCY. I can't have children no more...

JOE. Well, then we won't, or...

(His words trail off.)

PERCY. Joe, don't. Please...

JOE. Will you at least think about it?

SHELBY. (*As she comes out onto the porch.*) Percy, do you know where Hannah put the – Oh, I'm sorry...

JOE. That's okay. I guess we were just about finished here anyway. Ain't that right?

(No response from PERCY.)

Night, then.

(He exits through The Grill.)

SHELBY. Percy, are you okay out here?

PERCY. He wants me to marry him.

SHELBY. Percy...

PERCY. I said no. That man deserves better than me.

SHELBY. I'm not so sure there is better than you.

PERCY. Shelby. You don't know me.

SHELBY. I know that you're my friend.

PERCY. Yeah, well do you know why I got locked up for five years?

(Looks right at SHELBY.)

I killed somebody.

SHELBY. Who?

PERCY. My stepfather. Mason Talbott. I was sixteen when he got me pregnant.

SHELBY. Percy...

PERCY. My momma just slapped me and told me to shut up about it. But you know what? I found myself lovin' that little life inside me. Feelin' it grow. I got to callin' it Johnny B. After that song, Johnny B. Goode. And I swore to God that I was gonna protect that baby no matter what. But Mason, he got drunk and took to me with his fists so bad that...my baby – And all I could think was how I hadn't kept my promise. Mason musta been afraid of the police or somethin' – cuz he pulled me outa the hospital and dumped me in the back of his car. We ended up in this motel somewhere. Mason had a bottle and he was into it real good. He was sayin' how it was right that my baby died. I didn't say nothin'. But later on, when he was layin' there on the bed all passed out, I took out his straight razor.

(Spent, she sits in the porch rocking chair, motionless and almost numb.)

SHELBY. Percy...

[MUSIC NO. 18 – WILD BIRD]

Oh, Percy-girl...

(She kneels. Gently and peacefully, SHELBY comforts her silent friend with calm, quiet confidence.)

SING A LONELY CHILD SONG,
POCKET FULL OF RYE,