

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM

A palm-sized stone soars through the air, wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. Tossed from the platform of the train's final car.

The compartment door creaks closed. The empty caboose disappears into the horizon.

EXT. FIELD

A barefoot FIELD WORKER emerges from the treeline. He snatches up the stone and vanishes back into the trees.

EXT. SCRABBY DIRT ROAD

A four-year old BOY crouches in the dirt, scratching with a whittled stick.

Distant crickets chirp. Otherwise, he sits in an oppressive quiet.

The field worker approaches, deep in concentration. His appearance startles the boy. Neither says a word.

INT. HETTY'S SHACK

The man bursts in the shack. A very OLD WOMAN leafs through a tattered Bible by the shack's only window.

HETTY
(barely acknowledging him)
Abel.

Abel digs into his tattered pants. Pulls out the stone. He thrusts it into Hetty's hand. Stares hard at her, lips pressed tight and eyes alight.

Hetty carefully unties the paper with arthritic hands. She turns it over to see a note penned beautifully in fine black ink.

ABEL
Read it.

HETTY
You read it.

Abel's eyes bug out. He steps right in her face.

ABEL

READ IT.

Hetty doesn't flinch. Eyes heavy with scorn. She turns away and mumbles loudly.

HETTY

Sorry you cain't?

She pulls the note right up to her face, squints and reads it to herself. Hands the stone and the note back to Able, and drops onto her bed pallet, hands in her lap.

HETTY (CONT'D)

Train's movin. Tonight.

She senses a slight movement in the doorway and the little boy from the dirt appears. Silently. Listening intently.

Abel stares uncomprehendingly at the brown paper.

ABEL

I'm goin then. Tonight.

Hetty struggles back up and grabs his arm in her gnarled hands.

HETTY

You takin Elijah with you.

Abel rips his arm away. Without warning, he flies into a nasty rage. Veins distend. Spit flies.

ABEL

I ain't takin nobody with me.

Hetty has no intention of backing down.

HETTY

He your son. You gonna let him to grow up like this?

The little boy flinches as Abel lurches across the dirt floor, aiming for the door.

HETTY (CONT'D)

He the only family you got left.

ABEL

(screaming)

Don't you talk to me about family, ol woman. You as alone as a body can be.

Cut by his remark, Hetty turns away and catches sight of the little boy - just before he disappears.

She pivots back to Able with utter disdain.

HETTY

You right. Ain't no person here but me.

A look of resigned agreement creases Abel's face. He crosses the threshold back into the twilight.

HETTY (CONT'D)

What you think is gonna happen to Elijah when that Peck finds out you gone?

Able shrugs heavily and walks away. Exposing a back striped with the scars of countless lashes.