

Scene 1: All Hat and No Cattle

Interior of a home on a farm in Western Kentucky. Sunday, August 21st, 1955. Near sunset. In her first structured family sit-down, Mary Lankford (7) is listening chiefly to her older half brothers, Elmer "Lucky" Sutton (25) and John Charlie "JC" Sutton (21). Listening even more closely behind the brothers are their respective wives, Vera (29) and Eileen Sutton (27), and their mother, Glennie May Sutton (50). Glennie May cooks. You can smell it.

LUCKY

You can't just say someone's bad 'cause of that. Remember, who's the Lone Ranger's best pal?

MARY

Tonto.

JC

Tonto might not be like us but he also ain't like them boys who come to the pool now, either.

LUCKY

John Charlie, I was-

VERA

He's trying to put it lightly.

LUCKY

Sis, Tonto looks different, sure. But that's why The Ranger chose him.

JC

Oh for cryin'- We're not talkin' Injians, Lucky. They might as well be animals.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh, John Charlie!

(To Mary.)

LUCKY

I know its a little different but those folks just moved here and-

JC  
 With black folks they're liable to rip your little swimming  
 suit right offa you!

VERA  
 They are NOT-

EILEEN  
 Take it easy honey. Remember what the doctor said.

GLENNIE MAY  
 John Charlie Sutton, that is no way to speak to your little  
 sis-

JC  
 Forget my little sister it's all y'all who-

EILEEN  
 JC, KNOCK IT OFF.

LUCKY  
 She oughta be able to make friends!

JC  
 Like it or not, pool's closing.

GLENNIE MAY  
 What?

Mary is taken aback by this.

MARY  
 What? Mama?...

Glennie May can't bear to look at  
 Mary. After a moment, Mary runs to  
 her bedroom crying.

Beat. The family reflects on what  
 just happened. Outside, crickets  
 begin to chirp.

VERA  
 Is this what you meant when you said "break it lightly"?

JC  
 Oh, so... so my authority in this house- my DADDY's  
 authority here is a show to you?

LUCKY  
 JC, breathe-

JC  
 I don't like the way your woman's talking to me.

LUCKY

I don't like how you're talking to her. And I'm sure she don't either.

GLENNIE MAY

Now that's two against one.

EILEEN

John Charlie, I thought you told me you and Lucky had the same daddy.

JC AND LUCKY

We did.

JC

And daddy woulda said it like it is.

GLENNIE MAY

Come on y'all. We ain't but a quarter hour from when the Taylors arrive and y'all still need to get them kids DOWN.

VERA

I'll check on Lonnie's homework-

GLENNIE MAY

You know what!? I think John Charlie oughta... take the authority.

JC

I don't know nothin' about no Shakespeare nor no Hamlet.

GLENNIE MAY

Just-

JC turns to the bedroom.

EILEEN

I'll set another load in the bedrooms. Is Opee still reading to Charlton?

John Charlie exits to the bedroom.

Eileen follows with laundry.

LUCKY

Let Mary alone now...

Lucky exits as well.

VERA

I think he is. That or readin 'em beat poems.

GLENNIE MAY

You better be foolin. That kinda language doesn't belong within five miles of this compound.

VERA

It's a goof, Glennie May.

GLENNIE MAY

That Kerouac commie's gonna have young people slammin' bongos right through Satan's fiery gates, let me tell you.

VERA

To put it lightly.

(Beat.)

You don't have to do this, you know? We can send these folks right home.

GLENNIE MAY

I need it.

Lucky re-enters.

GLENNIE MAY (CONT'D)

And Opee may be your brother but tell him we don't got a plug-in to play his god-forsaken rock and roll records!

VERA

(To Glennie.)

Look at me.

(Preens Glennie May a little.)

A little rough around the edges.

LUCKY

You alright , Glennie May?

GLENNIE MAY

Lucky, two men done already fell right outta my life, and I'm not about to let your little brother take their place in this house.

LUCKY

Mama, you know he's all hat and no cattle. You're already hostin' folks tonight! When our daddy died you didn't see people for months. Now Oscar...

VERA

It's a lifetime to grief to watch your younglings go through it now too. But for you... and the kids... I can't...

GLENNIE MAY

Elmer, now that I'm not seein' through a liquor bottle every day things look a lot clearer. I took my time. And I know when I need my people. Something Oscar and your daddy never could do. Tonight I'm taking every bad memory from this house and I'm sending them to the Heavens. Your mama's on the beam. So in this house, if I say it's gonna be a good night, it better be.

VERA

(Holding on to Lucky.)

I never heard someone call you Elmer before.

LUCKY

It's Lucky to you.

From outside, the dogs can be heard barking.

GLENNIE MAY

That's it! No time for cream!

VERA

Oh, they're probably just barkin' at Opee's car again.

Scene 2: Beating a Dead Horse

Opee enters, with sunglasses on.

OPEE

Feast your peepers, daddy-o's!

GLENNIE MAY

Good Lord, Opee. Take those off.

He does.

OPEE

(Plaintive.)

Glennie, I'm not a beatnik. I just work in a record store.

Eileen enters from the bedroom.

GLENNIE MAY

Fine, Opee. Just don't walk in here with eyes like the devil. Is Charlton down?

OPEE

Like Cooter Brown.

GLENNIE MAY

I don't like that rhymin' neither, Opee.

OPEE

Alright Glennie May, it's your compound. Is that your Shephard's Pie? Fritters again?

GLENNIE MAY

Tonight's somethin' a little different. You'll just have to see.

The barking outside intensifies.  
That's a different kinda bark, though.

VERA

Isn't it?

JC re-enters from the bedroom. Opee sits. He's nervous, so he taps his foot.

JC

You gotta be kiddin' me with this stuff: "Canst work i' the earth so fast? A worthy pioneer!" What's 'at even *mean!*?

Dog barking intensifies more, not to an extreme extent.

GLENNIE MAY

John Charlie, you keep your voice down before you wake the kids and ruin the one helpful thing you did today. And you know damn well that passage is the Ghost of Hamlet's father tellin' Horatio and Marcellus they should give the ghost some credit for being able to navigate through the earth so well. I didn't raise a godforsaken imbecile. Opee, quit fidgeting. And JC, why do you still have your boots on!? I just got that carpet on special!

With a burst of energy, Billy Ray Taylor enters, making sure to close the screen door behind him.

BILLY

I heard shoutin' so I figured y'all were doin' well!

LUCKY

Well tan my hide and call me a saddle, if it isn't the king of the Christian County Carnival Himself, Billy Ray Taylor!  
(They hug.)

BILLY

Always a mighty fine introduction.

Dog barking continues.

GLENNIE MAY

Excuse me, but you must have somethin' extra tasty on the porch because I never heard them bark like that before.

Billy smiles, and turns around to open the door.

OPEE

Now *that's* a cool cat.

GLENNIE MAY

Opee!

LUCKY

I've never seen him this excited.

BILLY

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Lankford-Sutton grounds. It's my honor to introduce the new love of my life. The one, the only... Ms. June Marshall.

June Marshall enters. She is a sunny, clever girl of 18 years. A woman of color, she is has a very careful, though comfortable disposition, and glasses.

For a moment, the family is silent.

JC

And they say gentlemen prefer blondes.

GLENNIE MAY

My word-

VERA

Ms. June! Don't mind my brother in law, JC.

EILEEN

The porch light's on but nothin's upstairs. Try bein' married to him.

(Nervous laugh.)

JUNE

Oh-

LUCKY

(Offers hand.)

Howdy. Lucky Sutton. Owner, Hopkinsville Faire. Never miss a shot.

(She obliges.)

Pleasure...

(And he doesn't let go for a moment.)

VERA

Alright, Elmer.

LUCKY

And this is my wife Vera.

VERA

Pleasure's mine sugar. And this is my brother, Opee. You'll find that we... get out... a little more.

JC

Hey!

GLENNIE MAY

They do, John Charlie.

Opee shakes hands, then sits,  
tapping foot.

BILLY

See, honey. Just like Lucky said. They got a place for  
everything.

Billy Ray holds June's hand. He  
nods to her as if to ask, are you  
okay? She nods back.

EILEEN

We even keep three kids in the back.

JUNE

It's lovely. Thank you all for having me. So much like my  
mama's place.

JC is taken aback by that comment  
while Vera and Glennie appreciate  
it.

GLENNIE MAY

Thank you, sweetie.

BILLY

Now this all might seem a little sudden. But I don't think  
we seen weather quite like the last two weeks before in this  
beautiful country.

JUNE

When Connie hit forty miles from home, I thought I could  
recover. But then Diane displaced half the people on the  
east coast not but a week later.

BILLY

Thousands of other people didn't have no choice but to move  
on to something... somewhere...

JUNE

Greener.

BILLY

This old carnie's heart didn't have much choice neither.  
(They embrace.)

JC

Lovely.

Beat.

BILLY

JC, you okay?

Pause. Opee starts to tap his foot.  
Because all kinds of folks are findin' new roots all across  
the east. All colors.

JC

And you, fleein' a flood just to sink yourself.

GLENNIE MAY

John Charlie! Enough!

BILLY

I don't know a lot about how you was *raised*, but I know  
you're man enough not to kick someone when they're down.

JC

That doesn't mean you try and save em!

GLENNIE MAY

John Charlie Sutton, you're beating a dead horse with a  
sledge hammer. Knock it off. We heard you.

Beat. Billy Ray comforts June.

JUNE

So...

(Looks to Billy Ray.)

Y'all play poker?

VERA

Oh my stars, I love Poker! Lucky lets me join with the boys  
sometimes.

EILEEN

When he has extra losin' money!

JC, Vera, and Billy Ray Laugh.

EILEEN (CONT'D)

Oh, but that's gamblin'. Glennie May don't do nothin'  
ungodly on this whole compound. No drinkin', cussin',  
fightin' or gamblin'. I'n't that right Ms. Glennie May?

BILLY

Oh, we just play for peanuts.

Beat.

GLENNIE MAY

Let's play.

BILLY

Whew... you had me scared this night was over for a second.

GLENNIE MAY

'm sorry, it's just been some time since I been called that. Ms. Taylor, I'm Ms. Glennie May. It's a pleasure to have you.

JC

Daddy would be-

GLENNIE MAY

Daddy would be three handles deep at The Cork by now.

OPEE

You know what this calls for... a little Danny Kaye and The Andrews Sisters.

GLENNIE MAY

Opee, we don't have that kinda power. And Oscar never let us listen to that kinda-

OPEE

I got all the power I need-  
(Pumps arm.)  
right here.

Opee cranks as "Civilization" ramps up.

LUCKY

Oh, you finally got that Victrola.

GLENNIE MAY

Just none of that overseas music that your friends listen to on boats while they inject themselves with hashish.

BILLY

Woah!

Billy and June share an uncomfortable laugh.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh, honey, don't worry. That's just Opee's beat poet friends. Now I don't like to pass judgement but you get one whiff-

OPEE

Glennie May met my friend who sells incense once.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh, please. The whole neighborhood's incensed by what you bongo-jockeys get up to.

EILEEN

Glennie May, what if the children hear you?

GLENNIE MAY

Oh lovely, now only the men can "say it like it is."

BILLY

You don't need no moonshine, do you?

VERA

No sir.

LUCKY

Oh! 'Scuse me for getting ahead of myself. You get everything you need from the car?

BILLY

(Looking to June.)

We did? We did. We just didn't... I haven't used the loo in about a hundred fifty miles. You mind if I... One, Two...

LUCKY

Skip to my loo. But look out for spiders... My darling.

Billy Ray nods. He kisses June on the top of the head before exiting in a rush.

Scene 3: The Riper the Berry

LUCKY

So... I was about to ask Billy Ray how have y'all been but... Where are you... What do you... What are-

JC

Yeah, what's your... whole deal?

JUNE

(Smiles.)

Oh! Don't be shy, Lucky. I've heard more about you than anyone. Now please, if you can help it I have no intention of keepin' this family so on edge. Just like y'all, we got the same rush at our fair from all them boys in blue comin' back in North Carolina. But comin' down to see family for a weekend landed me in Billy Ray's whole outfit. I ain't never seen no carnival like that. And when I met him... it was history.

EILEEN

Oh... Lucky you.

An egg timer goes off.

OPEE

What's that?

JUNE

Smells delicious.

GLENNIE MAY

That is... I got just the things we need for a night of games. There's always ice box cake or biscuits and gravy if you're a mite peckish. But that was the sound of my new...

She presents the tray, protected by mitts. A tray of bright blue muffins. Are they naturally blue?

blueberry corn bluffins.

Beat.

OPEE

Bluffins?

EILEEN

Why are they blue?

GLENNIE MAY

Oh... I didn't mean to-

JUNE

It's still the same stuff, just turns the batter blue the riper the berry.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh! You bake!?

JUNE

What self respecting woman doesn't?

JC

(Attempting politeness.)

See, now, I heard somewhere y'all couldn't see color.

GLENNIE MAY

John Charlie Sutton! Next thing on the menu is your GOD FORSAKEN tongue.

JC

I honestly *did*.

VERA

We know, JC. That's what's so embarrassing about it.

JUNE

Yes. John Charlie was it?

JC

Speaking.

JUNE

I can see color. And guess what I'm seein' right now.

What? JC

Beat. The dogs outdoors can be heard barking.

Yella. JUNE

Glennie May, Vera, Eileen, and Lucky all laugh.

Scene 4: Nip it in the Bud

With more energy than before, the screen door to the porch flings open followed by the entrance of Billy Ray, who is now changed. He makes sure to close the screen door behind him and block it with his body. June stands up and starts to grab her purse. The dogs outdoors stop barking. After a moment, JC stands.

BILLY  
Honey, it's fine. It's okay. It just... It started to rain.

Rain bullets? JUNE

No. Come on. We're here to have a good night. Let's play. BILLY

Wait- JC

But- JUNE

I'll get the cards! GLENNIE MAY

No you won't! You're the guest tonight. VERA

In my own home!?! GLENNIE MAY

Welcome. I'll get 'em. VERA

LUCKY

So, I know I said poker. But we actually have something better.

JC

What happened out there?

GLENNIE MAY

What could be better'n poker?

VERA

Uh... That's a pretty tough sell around these parts, buddy. Hate to tell ya.

Billy Ray produces a set of five dice from his pocket, and shakes them.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh no, now I know that's gamblin. That's the sound of the devil's rattlesnake tail if I've ever-

BILLY

Glennie May, please this- June and the girls played it down at-

JUNE

It's a church game!

OPEE

Ooooo it's a church game, Glennie May. What are you gonna do?

VERA

Well I can't find them cards and ain't a store within fifty miles that sells 'em till tomorrow.

JUNE

Please, Ms. Glennie May.

BILLY

Ain't even a store for fifty miles?

LUCKY

Nearest folks livin' nearby is forty.

VERA

Then, I guess we gotta play it.

EILEEN

I still wanna know what it's got to do with poker.

JC

Billy Ray, what did you see out there? Are y'all simple?

BILLY  
Just drop it.

Beat.

GLENNIE MAY  
Well, go on then.

JUNE  
Okay, well... You have five dice... and... Oh... Billy Ray's better at explainin' it than me... Billy Ray?

BILLY  
Right. So... How many cards you got in your hand in a game of poker... usually?

EILEEN  
Five.

BILLY  
And how many dice?  
(Rolls.)

EILEEN  
Five...

Billy Ray pauses.

VERA  
Billy Ray?

Beat.

BILLY  
Y'all hear them stories from pilots and Air Force folks...

OPEE  
Wait...

JUNE  
Baby what about they game?

VERA  
What are y'all... the plane that blew up over Germany?

OPEE  
No, are you talking about...

BILLY  
How they seen these... flying silver...

EILEEN  
Oh, good GRAVY. Here we go!

OPEE

I don't know what they're callin' em but it's in West Virginia and Iowa and DC and everywhere.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh, and you just lap right up don't you?

EILEEN

Probably just heat lightning.

BILLY

It's not.

Pause.

JUNE

Baby, what is it?

BILLY

(To June.)

I've never seen lights like that before.

JC

(Incredulous.)

You saw lights?

LUCKY

In the outhouse?

BILLY

In the valley passed the tree line.

VERA

Then it's an angel! Sent to watch over this... family... evening...

JC

That close?

LUCKY

(Psh...)

I hit cans out there from the porch.

BILLY

It was in the trees.

VERA

Ooooo, you're never comein' back here if you got into Opee's toilet Moonshine.

BILLY

Vera, it's a long drive back. I'm not getting thrown in jail.

LUCKY

Mama, just let me check. Please.

EILEEN

Glennie May. The Lord sends messengers in the form of light.

GLENNIE

I know, Eileen.

EILEEN

Do you think it's...?

Beat. Glennie May appears as horrified as in awe in her recollection.

JC

You know it's them Robinson boys.

GLENNIE MAY

Them Robinson boys was all the way in town at not but three o'clock. You think they got a car, or know the way, or even give a damn about us?

BILLY

Robinsons?

JC

Mama, if daddy knew them boys was shootin' fireworks...

GLENNIE

(Heated.)

Daddy ain't home. And you don't know it's them.

JC

or downin' power lines he'd'a run around the compound six times by now.

VERA

(Distraught.)

You don't know what it could be, John Charlie.

LUCKY

This is horse-hockey. JC, I don't know if somebody's burnin' newspapers or what, but this ain't exactly a "shoot the air" thing yet.

GLENNIE MAY

John Charlie. Keep it light. But you and your brother can make sure we're safe. The only one who shoots... is the one who never misses.

LUCKY AND VERA

[Really? Are you sure?]



EILEEN

Oh, Glennie May the lord's messengers take many a strange and wonderous form.

GLENNIE MAY

Child, I read the Bible too, and those angels are half the reason I let Lucky have a gun. How do you tell the difference between those angels and demons anyhow?

VERA

(Teasing Opee.)

Well fear not! Nobody stands a chance with my big brother around.

OPEE

Alright...

EILEEN

I just hope this all gets over with- get back to the game.

GLENNIE MAY

Oh, I'm sure it'll all boil over quick. They work with honest to goodness clowns after all.

JUNE

(To Opee.)

Why don't they want your help?

OPEE

(Leaning back.)

Accidentally hit JC with an automatic nailer once.

Beat.

Best mistake I've ever made.

Opee stops tapping his foot.

VERA

June, honey did you need any lemonade or bites?

(Catches a glimpse out the kitchen sink window.)

Oh my-! Glennie May...!

JUNE

Bites?

EILEEN

(Laughs.)

Small plates, honey.

JUNE

On account of me? No, no. We had so many little square burgers on the ride in- I'm worried for your outhouse.

GLENNIE MAY

Well, honey, anything-

EILEEN

Now, what do you do for work, Ms. Taylor?

Outside, the dogs can be heard  
barking, which slowly starts to  
ramp up.

VERA

Eileen, leave'er be.

(To Glennie May.)

You need to look over here.

JUNE

Most off you found me in the library growin' up. Now I'm  
lucky young'ns ask *me* for help at the Card Catalog.

VERA

You're a librarian!?

JUNE

Assistant to. Card Catalog Clerk, they call me. At least  
they *did* before the hurricanes.

OPEE

I'm willin' to bet they didn't never spelled that correctly.

JUNE

(Through a smile.)

They sho' din't.

EILEEN

Well, that's so impress- good for y'all! And you're so  
eloquent!

VERA

Eileen-

EILEEN

I thought you were a baker.

VERA

(To Glennie May.)

You need to see this.

JUNE

I gotta bake to live!

GLENNIE MAY

(Approaching the window)

June, was it?