

I AM THE GUMBO

by

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FADE IN

EXT. RURAL SOUTH LOUISIANA. DAY.

Huge clouds over marsh, giving way to fields of tall sugarcane.

Advanced is sloshing and mucking, cursing in Cajun French.

EXT. A DITCH. DAY.

FILO DESORMEAUX, an old man, weilds a shovel with skill clearing the ditch at the edge of a field of mature sugarcane.

He wears loose-fitting pants, with suspenders, and a long-sleeved shirt buttoned to the neck.

Filo stops his work, addressing us.

FILO

Ah! Bonjour, mes amis! Bienvenu a la Louisiane.

Filo sticks the shovel into the ground.

FILO (CONT'D)

Good morning, my friends. Welcome to Louisiana!

Filo steps out of the Ditch.

FILO (CONT'D)

Oui est con pere?

Translating with a broad smile.

FILO (CONT'D)

Mais -- who's your daddy?

He wipes off the mud from his hands with a huge blue bandanna.

FILO

Well? --- Who IS your daddy? You see, down here everybody's related to everybody. It's jus' dat you don't never meet 'em all until somebody gets married... or dies.

He walks toward a Grove, a cluster of oaks, a dark mysterious place, an oasis in a sea of sugarcane.

FILO

Now ev'ry once in a while I say somethin' in French. Mais when I was growin' up people look down on
(MORE)

FILO (cont'd)
 you if you spoke it but me, I
 couldn't help it, no.

Filo enters the Grove, vines growing up into the trees and hanging down like long gnarled fingers, draped with Spanish moss.

FILO (CONT'D)
 French was all I knew 'till I was a
 man and my daddy, it's all he ever
 spoke. An' let me tell you...
 sometimes people do more dan look
 down on you.

Filo searches for and finds his mug of coffee which sits on a stump beside his accordion.

He drinks deeply from the mug.

FILO (CONT'D)
 I been kicked in places a man only
 talks about at Emma Lou's Lounge on
 a Sat'day night.

It seems the only light entering The Grove comes from a few slanting shafts of Biblical-like light.

FILO (CONT'D)
 Now me, I got eight brothers and
 t'ree sisters. Mais now, we're less
 dan a han'ful. Dare's me, my little
 brother Roland, and our sister
 Bernice.

He moves into a shaft of light.

FILO (CONT'D)
 An' we expectin' her to be joinin'
 the res' any time now....
 (rousing himself)
 Mais now you might t'ink dat dat
 might make me kinda sad. An' you
 would be right, yah.

He sweeps up his accordion.

FILO (CONT'D)
 But dare's somethin' about us
 Cajuns dat keeps us from stayin'
 sad for too long.

He starts squeezing out a single note, then a chord, repeated into a rhythm.

FILO (CONT'D)

An' it's dat -- inside his head
ev'ry Cajun's got -- A Band!

From deep within the darkness of the Grove, we can barely make out the dim, shadowy, luminescent figures of THREE OLD MUSICIANS (playing fiddle, accordion, and triangle), who seem to have magically materialized.

FILO

Now we don't all hear it at the
same time or in the same way ---
but it's dare!

Now the BAND joins in with Filo's rhythm, taking it up and bursts out into a vigorous two-step.

Filo can restrain himself no longer and dances around the stump raising a cloud of dust as the Band plays away.

EXT. HOMEPLACE. DAY.

A two-story Acadian-style cottage, expanded, modernized, and amply porched.

We see that the Desormeaux family are devout Catholics by the white-rocked Mary Grotto in the yard. Even their satellite dish has a Mary painted on it.

An ancient Live Oak Tree dominates the front yard, several branches nearly touching the ground.

Filo's wife, Teenie (TEE), stands on the Porch.

TEE

(shouting)

Filo? FILO!

She steps off the Porch.

TEE (CONT'D)

FI-LO!

He's nowhere in sight but she knows where he is.

She sets off toward the Grove with determination. Through an opening she glimpses Filo dancing, though she hears no music. He appears to be fending off an attack of stinging insects.

EXT. THE GROVE. DAY.

Filo is in rare form. The Band, which we now hear, is playing away. He is oblivious until the sound of Tee's voice stops everything...

TEE

Filo! ... If you woulda squeezed me
half as much as that thing we'd
have a lot more to show for it than
jus' t'ree boys.

Filo freezes in mid-stride ready to play his accordion. He
squeezes out a pathetic chord and addresses us:

FILO

My wife. Teenie. We call her Tee.
Too bad I don't carry her aroun'
inside my head.

And the Band disappears.

FILO (CONT'D)

(to Tee)

I squeeze you I get a squawk. I
squeeze this I get --- music.

He squeezes an unmusical chord. Tee takes the accordion from
him.

TEE

(softly & seriously)

Filo....

EXT. HOMEPLACE. DAY.

Filo is seated on the steps. Tee hands him a cup of coffee
and joins him.

TEE

Should we have a wake?

FILO

Wake? We all knew she was gonna
die. She knew she was gonna die. It
was a one year wake. An' don't you
think she didn't enjoy it neither.

TEE

Anyways --- it'll be nice to see
the t'ree boys back together.

FILO

Two-t'irds of 'em never left!

TEE

You know what I mean. Leon counts
too.

FIL0

Leon don't like the way we dress.
He don't like the way we drink. He
don't like the way we dance. An' he
don't like the way we talk. Oh-ho!
It's not leon. It's his new bride
you can't wait to grill like a link
of andouille sausage!

TEE

Well, we've never seen her.

FIL0

Some nerve! Gettin' married in the
middle of plantin'. I tell you he
done it on purpose!

TEE

Will Roland come?

FIL0

Little brother Roland. Oh, mais
yah. He'll fly down from California
for t'ree things: One, Bernice was
his sister too; two, so he can try
to put his arm aroun' my shoulder
an' say, "Well, Filo, it looks like
it's jus' you an' me now"; an'
t'ree --

(savoringly)

Gumbo....

(horizontally)

Shrimp... Sausage... Chicken... An'
okra --- g u m b o.

TEE

Well, we'll jus' have to remember
to keep Roland and Marguerite
separated.

FIL0

Mais how come? They been doin' it
good enough themselves for ten
years!

EXT. HOMEPLACE. DIRT DRIVEWAY. DAY.

MARGUERITE, scarf flying, is driving a yellow Cadillac
convertible. On the seat beside her is a large casserole.

Marguerite is a large woman. Not fat. Large-boned, as we
say. Like her body, her self is large. Gregarious.

EXT. HOMEPLACE. FRONT YARD. DAY.

Marguerite pulls up in a cloud of dust. She gets out.

MARGUERITE
 (overly dramatic)
 Oh, Filo. Filo.

FILLO
 (wearily)
 What is it, Marguerite?

Marguerite's moods have as many shifts as a Grand Prix race.

MARGUERITE
 Corning Ware of course. I make the
 bes' Corning Ware crab 'n crawfish
 etouffee funeral casserole there
 is.

Marguerite heads into the house.

TEE
 Well, I guess I betta get out yur
 suit. It'll need pressin'.

Tee goes in.

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY. DAY.

A white Volvo with an opened sunroof is traveling down the interstate.

Classical music advanced.

INT. VOLVO. DAY.

LEON, in his early 30's, professional and tidy, drives while SYLVIA, quite blonde but down-to-earth lovely, is tying Leon's tie.

SYLVIA
 Leon, I hope we're not late.

LEON
 We're bound to be in time for
 something. There's the wake. Then
 the funeral. Then the burial. And
 finally the get-together. It could
 go on for days.

EXT. STATE HIGHWAY. DAY.

On the outskirts of the town, in a large open field, workmen are assembling a carnival midway.

LEON (V.O.)
 We're just in time for the
 Sugarcane Festival.

INT. VOLVO. DAY.

From Leon's angle we see a dilapidated brick building fronted by an immense shell parking lot going by.

LEON
(wistfully)
Emma Lou's Lounge. A loud, dirty,
rough and tough honkey-tonk.

SYLVIA
Sounds disgusting.

LEON
Yeah --- Always wanted to go in
there.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY.

The Volvo is stuck behind a slow-moving tractor pulling several wobbling carts loaded with sugarcane.

The road parallels a bayou on one side and fields of sugarcane on the other.

Leon changes radio stations.

LEON
Better start getting in the mood.

Cajun music bursts out. Sylvia sticks her head out of the sun roof.

SYLVIA
WHAT'S THAT?!

LEON
SPANISH MOSS.

SYLVIA
AND THAT?

LEON
A BAYOU.

SYLVIA
WHAT?

She ducks back into the car.

INT. VOLVO. DAY.

LEON
A bayou. You take an oversized
ditch, add lots of mud, throw in a
(MORE)

LEON (cont'd)
couple of sofas, a rusted icebox,
and at least half a dozen
automobile tires --and you've got a
bayou!

EXT. BAYOUSIDE. DAY.

Leon and Sylvia stand at the bayou side. This particular one not being at all like his description. It is quiet and still, the green grass growing to the water's edge.

SYLVIA
Is there anything you approve of
here?

LEON
You.

He stoops down to swish at the water.

LEON (CONT'D)
I wonder if you'll taste it?

SYLVIA
Taste the bayou water? Why?

LEON
Oh, when people visit down here and
decide to stay, it's said that they
"tasted bayou water".

EXT. CANE FIELD. DAY.

They've stopped the car so Sylvia can have her picture taken in the cane.

SYLVIA
It's as high as an elephant's eye!

She slaps a mosquito on her arm.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)
Now I know what that was. But the
size! Everything's so different.

INT. VOLVO. DAY.

Sylvia finally lets herself relax.

SYLVIA
They're going to be different,
aren't they?

LEON
My parents? Just as much as you'll
be to them.

SYLVIA
But --- you're not like them, are
you.

LEON
(sharply)
No I'm not. We don't even speak the
same language.

SYLVIA
Leon, they do speak English---?

Leon laughs.

EXT. HOMEPLACE. DAY.

Leon and Sylvia drive up to a stop. Leon rolls down the
window. Looks and listens. Honks the horn.

INT. VOLVO. DAY.

He honks the horn one more time.

SYLVIA
Leon---!

LEON
Sorry. It's my heritage. Looks like
they're all gone To the funeral.

SYLVIA
Shouldn't we go?

LEON
There's time. This is the only
peace we'll get.

He opens the car door.

EXT. HOMEPLACE. FRONT YARD. DAY.

Leon ambles over to the Ancient Oak. Sylvia following.

LEON
You've got to understand. There's
two of everything here. One for
them. That only they know and
enjoy. And another for me. Two
languages. Two houses. Two trees.
Even two of me. In St. Louis, I'm
Leon. Here I'll be Le-ON.

Sylvia snuggles up to him.

SYLVIA

I love both of you! And I can't
wait to meet your parents --- all
four of them!

INT. FUNERAL HOME. DAY.

From the angle of the corpse we see Marguerite and Tee.

MARGUERITE

(whispering)
She looks terrible.

TEE

Marguerite, she's dead.

MARGUERITE

Well, you'd think Mr. Ransonet
coulda done something, you know,
with some rouge or a bit of
eyeshadow.

Marguerite takes out a lipstick from her purse.

TEE

Marguerite! She never did that when
she was alive.

INT. CHURCH. DAY.

A country Catholic Church. Tee busily lights candles before
the Virgin.

She returns to the pew where Filo struggles mightily against
his suit and tie.

Marguerite silently delights in Filo's struggles.

Filo, in his writhings, catches sight of a tall, thin,
wrinkled but rugged man, his little brother, ROLAND, who
sits forlornly in the rear of the church.

Filo craftily nudges Marguerite, motioning her to Roland.

Marguerite's delight vanishes.

EXT. FUNERAL PROCESSION. DAY.

A long line of cars with headlights on being led by several
hearses and a motorcycle cop.

FILO (V.O.)
Teenie, I was thinking. Mais, if I
die, I want to be buried in my navy
blue jump suit.

 TEE (V.O.)
Filo!

EXT. CEMETERY. DAY.

The graveside ceremony has concluded. Filo, Tee, Marguerite,
and FELIX are walking away.

Felix, Filo's oldest son, is a short, dark man; intense,
stubbly, approaching forty.

 MARGUERITE
 (whispering to Tee)
Teenie, did you see Roland?

 TEE
Yeah.

 MARGUERITE
 (hopefully)
Do you think he saw me?

 FELIX
 (to Filo)
Well? Have you thought about it?

 FILO
 (annoyed)
I think about lotsa things!

The white Volvo drives up. Leon and Sylvia get out.

They are immediately swarmed over by a wave of OLD LADIES
who admire and hug a bewildered Sylvia and kiss an
overwhelmed but flattered Leon.

 FILO
Will you look at dat?

Tee and Marguerite watch with pride and amusement.

 TEE
She's prettier than her pictures.

 FILO
 (to Felix)
Jus' like yur brother: Late!

Felix is focused upon his own thoughts.

FELIX

Dad, so---?

FILO

The answer's still "no!"!

Filo is impatient to get home and out of his suit.

FILO (CONT'D)

Com'on Tee, we ain't fightin'
through dat jus' to see our own
son.

From the Family's angle we see that the assault has regularized itself into a receiving line, Leon the object of kiss after kiss.

FILO (O.S.)

Kissin' the old ladies! Pooyah-ee,
it mus' be like eatin' flour right
outta the bag.

TEE (O.S.)

Filo!

Leon sees the Family and shrugs his shoulders in helplessness. He blows a kiss and waves before disappearing amongst the Old Ladies.

Filo urges Tee and Marguerite toward the cars.

TEE

Maybe your right. Let's go.

FILO

Mais yah I'm right.

Filo insinuates himself close to Tee.

FILO (CONT'D)

What better place dan in yur own
home for the new daughter-in-law's
inspection?

FELIX

(to himself)

Inspection? Le inquisition.

We see Roland standing apart, bemused and lost.

EXT. HOMEPLACE. FRONT YARD. DAY.

The family entourage treks from their cars toward the House.

Filo lingers for a moment to cast a glance toward the Grove.

As he turns to continue he bumps his head on one of the low-hanging limbs of the Ancient Oak.

This unleashes a torrent of cursing in French.

INT. HOMEPLACE. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Tee, Marguerite, and Felix file in.

Filo follows still muttering, rubbing his head, and removing articles of clothing.

FILO

I would like somebody to ecksplain
to me the diff'rence between
hangin' a man quick with a rope,
from a tree an' hangin' a man slow
with a tie, in a church... 'cuz
mais I don't see no diff'rence!

He plops down into his easy chair.

TEE

Believe me, Filo, there's lots you
don't see.

FILO

Well, like I said, if I die I want
to be buried in my navy blue
jumpsuit.

TEE

When you die...you'll be buried in
this and this.

Meaning his disgarded clothes. She tosses shoes.

TEE (CONT'D)

---and these!

FILO

(catching one)

You may be right, Teenie. These
been killin' me for years.

CHERIE, dark-haired, young, and lovely, enters in a rush. She wears the uniform of a convenience store clerk.

FILO (CONT'D)

Oh Cherie! When's dat husban' of
yours comin' in?

CHERIE

Any time now. They had some weather
out in the gulf so he's runnin'
late.

FILO

You shoulda seen Leon and his new
bride. Drove up late!

CHERIE

Where's he?

FILO

Still out dare kissin' the old
ladies. His kissin' line was longer
than Father Degeteyer's
hand-shakin' line!

CHERIE

What's she like? Leon's bride --

FILO

Blonde....

Cherie dashes into the Kitchen. Teenie follows. Marguerite
smugly sits on the couch.

MARGUERITE

Well, Filo, you can try all you
want, but you won't be able to
upset me today. You can thank your
little brother Roland for that.
It's been a long ten years, but
he's come back.

Filo takes the challenge.

FILO

Ooooh. Well, what did he say to you
at the funeral?

MARGUERITE

Nothin'.

FILO

Did he sit with you?

MARGUERITE

Not exactly.

FILO

In fact. If he woulda sat any
further from you he'd of been in
the hearse. Idn't dat right,
Marguerite?

She jumps up off the sofa.

MARGUERITE

Filo. Before this day is through,
Roland will be standin' right here,
waiting por moi. C'est tout!

She marches off into the kitchen. Filo following.

FILO

Yah well if that's what you
think... you should of gotten in
Leon's old lady line 'cuz Roland he
sure didn't look like he was in no
kissin' mood to me!

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Filo stops short as he surveys a table overflowing with
containers of every sort and variety containing food.

Tee, Marguerite, and Cherie are busily transferring their
contents into freezer bags.

FILO

Oh, mon dieu!

CHERIE

Aunt Bernice was very popular.

The ladies return to their work. Filo takes advantage by
craftily opening the icebox door, sticking his head in.

Tee sees him through the back of her head.

TEE

Fi-lo! What did Dr. LeBlanc say to
you jus' last week?

Filo remains in the icebox.

FILO

He said one more beer an' I'll drop
dead.

TEE

So...?

He emerges with a pair of beers.

FILO

I take two.

Tee prys the beers from his grip.

TEE

Mais no! Filo Desormeaux, what 'm I gonna do? Every day at five-thirty Mass I light a candle for you and what good does it do?

MARGUERITE

A candle? For him? Mais, he needs a floodlight.

FILO

Marguerite...! You standin' on borrowed ground.

TEE

Filo, why don't you help?

FILO

How 'bout if I go out on the porch?

MARGUERITE

Yah, Filo, that'll help a lot.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Filo drags himself out onto the porch. He addresses us:

FILO

Now she's lightin' candles for me! Ever since Errol that's our youngest and Cherie that's the pretty young thing in the house, got married, Tee's been lightin' candles for grandchil'ren. An' before that it was Leon to get married. Then it's a candle for this an' a candle for that. Poor Father Degeteyer has to keep a fire extinguisher behind the Blessed Mother.

Felix comes out on the porch to take a smoke. He fishes a beer out of his suit coat pocket, tossing it to Filo.

FILO (CONT'D)

Yur a good son, Felix.

FELIX

Now--

Filo stops Felix with a raised and outstretched hand.

FILO

---I don't want to hear no more about it Felix!

EXT. CRAWFISH PONDS. DAY.

Filo, still with his beer, stands knee-deep in the pond, holding up a crawfish trap filled with crawfish.

FILO
These is good crawfish ponds, boy,
'n you wanna drain 'em?

Felix digs out a handful of dirt.

FELIX
This is valuable farmland.

EXT. HEADLAND. DAY.

Filo and Felix approach Felix's beat-up pick-up.

FILO
...SOYBEANS? You want to drain my
crawfish ponds to plant....

Filo can barely bring himself to utter the word.

FILO (CONT'D)
---soybeans???

They toss their empty cans into the bed of the truck.

Felix retrieves a fresh supply from an ice chest behind the seat.

FILO (CONT'D)
I been raisin' cane, sugarcane, for
thirty-five years an' I ain't about
to drain good crawfish ponds to
plant...

EXT. HOMEPLACE. FRONT PORCH. DAY

Filo and Felix are taking their places right back where it began.

FILO
---Soybeans---Mais, you try to make
a etouffe or a gumbo outta
soybeans.

Marguerite and Tee come out to the porch to investigate the ruckus.

MARGUERITE
Soybean? Etouffe? Felix, did he
fall off his chair again?

Tee plucks the beer out of Filo's hand.

TEE
Where'd you get this beer?

Filo points to Felix.

TEE (CONT'D)
Felix! You know better...

FELIX
It's a lite beer.

Tee hefts the can.

TEE
Yah. Very light.

Marguerite and Tee return into the house, Felix following, leaving Filo alone to contemplate his fate:

FILO
Well. My sister's dead. Felix, he's planting soybeans. Leon's kissin' the old ladies. An' dey take the beer right outta my hand....

He focuses on the Ancient Oak. Rubs his head.

FILO (CONT'D)
I think I'll get my chainsaw.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Tee, Marguerite, and Cherie gossip as they complete the disposal of the food and clean up.

CHERIE
Was it a beautiful Mass?

MARGUERITE
Oh yah, and so tasteful. It was very well done, Cherie.

TEE
And when Father Degeteyer said at the very end, "Our life on earth is but a dream and we only awaken when we pass", I cried tears.

Cherie stuffs plastic containers into a full refrigerator.

MARGUERITE
Oh yes, real tears.

CHERIE
Is Leon's wife pretty?

MARGUERITE

Sylvia---? Oh yes: very. But what do we know about her? Practical'y nothin'.

CHERIE

What's there to know?

Tee stops working. She responds to this question with all the authority and profundity of The Ten Commandments.

TEE

"What's there to know?"? Is she Cath'lic? Can she cook? How many children do they want?

CHERIE

Ohhhh....

Cherie starts to take the last casserole from the table but has trouble lifting it.

CHERIE (CONT'D)

What is this?

MARGUERITE

Oh, mon dieu!

Marguerite pulls Cherie back and away from the table.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

Step back! This could be Nadine Rochon's. I recognize the dish.

Marguerite lifts the lid, sniffing.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

Nothin'.

She dips her finger in and tastes the contents.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

Yah. This is of Nadine Rochon's concoctation. How that poor woman can cook a dish with so many ingredients and make it come out with no taste is beyon' me!

They are interrupted by the sound of a chainsaw.

They rush into the Living Room, where Felix joins them. He's changed into work clothes.

EXT. FRONT YARD. DAY.

The source of the noise is Filo with his chain saw, preparing to cut down the low-hanging limb of the oak.

TEE

FILO! FI-LO!

He revs the engine and lets it idle.

TEE (CONT'D)

What are you doin'?

FILO

Takin' a nap! Whatcha think I'm doin'?

TEE

Mais now?

FILO

Why not? It's old. It's dyin'. So I'm gonna put it outta it's misery before some hurricane named George does it.

He guns the engine.

TEE

FILO! FI-LO!

Leon and Sylvia drive up and to a stop just as the commotion peaks. They get out the car.

LEON

(to Sylvia)

Now this is more like it. Home sweet home.

LEON

HEY! WHERE'S YOUR SAFETY GOGGLES?

Filo lets the engine die. Tee braces for an expected explosion. Filo, who hasn't seen Leon and Sylvia arrive speaks before turning.

FILO

Dat's got to be Leon.

There's a great relief all around followed by a burst of greetings, handshakes and kisses. Sylvia hangs back from these.

TEE

You been away two years, get important and married, and that's all I get?

LEON

I'm all puckered out.

MARGUERITE

You smell like roses.

LEON

Aunt Marguerite, I'm crushed.

FILO

I bet you was.

Leon works his way to Filo. They shake hands.

LEON

Dad. Everybody. I'd like ya'll to meet Sylvia.

SYLVIA

(slowly & carefully)

Bonjour. Comment allez-vous?

There is a pause, then...

FILO

(roughly)

Non-non!

(excitedly)

It's ca-va. Bonjour. Ca va? Qui est ton pere?

SYLVIA

So --- Which tree are you cutting down?

LEON

Sylvia....

FILO

Mais what?

SYLVIA

Leon says there's two trees there.

Just to be on the safe side, Filo takes a peek.

FILO

Two...?

SYLVIA

The other one's hidden from him.

FILO

Well, don't you worry, Leon. I'll
jus' cut down the one you can't
see.

Filo cranks up the chainsaw.

TEE

Filo!

He idles the saw.

TEE (CONT'D)

Too bad you missed the Mass.
(to Sylvia)
Ya'll mus| have some beautiful
Cathedrals up in St. Louis.

SYLVIA

Oh, I'm a Baptist.

Filo kills the saw. Dead silence.

MARGUERITE

Maybe I'd better be going.

SYLVIA

Oh no, please. Stay.

TEE

Dear, do you come from a large
family?

SYLVIA

No.

TEE

Do you want a large family.

SYLVIA

Oh, we don't plan to have children.

FILO

Whoa! Better start lightin' som'
more candles...

SYLVIA

Candles--?

FILO

Or do Baptists use flashlights
instead?

TEE

Well, dear, sometimes no matter how
you plan...

SYLVIA

Oh, Leon's had a vasectomy.

The pause to end all pauses. Then Filo, delighted, whispers to Leon.

FILO

For five dollars I'll start up the chainsaw again.

Marguerite takes this opportunity to start on her way and she also whispers to Sylvia:

MARGUERITE

Cher, if you can't cook a goose, you're done for....

Marguerite escapes into her Cadillac, where she observes and listens.

SYLVIA

(through her teeth)

Leon, send in the clowns....

Leon quickly calculates, coming up with a brainstorm. He takes Tee and Sylvia each by an arm, escorting them toward the porch.

LEON

Momma, all Sylvia could talk about on the drive here is learning how to do some Cajun cooking and I said if there's anyone who knows everything about cajun cookin', it's you.

TEE

There's a lot to learn.

SYLVIA

Where do I start?

That's more than enough for Tee, who takes Sylvia over, onto the porch and into the house, Cherie following.

TEE

Mais cher, first --- you make a roux...!

Self-satisfied, Leon turns back to find Filo and Felix at Marguerite's car, waiting for Leon, who approaches.

MARGUERITE

She's lovely, Leon. Now when your mother's through with her, you

(MORE)

MARGUERITE (cont'd)
ought to get Filo here to teach her
how to cook a special new dish he's
created --SOYBEAN ETOUFFE!

She starts the car.

FILO
(sputtering)
Espece de tete bourrique---!

She jerks the car away from Filo and calls out as she drives
away---

MARGUERITE
Filo, one day you gonna curse me
one time too many and I'm liable to
move in!

She drives off, Filo shouting and chasing after her.

FILO
...an' if little brother Roland has
any sense, he's in a plane on his
way back to California right now!

Filo is left standing in the dusty driveway.

FILO (CONT'D)
Felix, you go get us some beers and
Leon, you go ahead and change into
something comfortable.

LEON
But I am comfortable.

Filo can only sigh and mutter as he shuffles toward the
House.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Tee and Cherie flank Sylvia, who is at the stove, stirring.

TEE
Roux is simply nearly equal parts
of flour and oil. Jus' remember to
keep stirrin'.

CHERIE
It's like bein' with your man in a
honkey-tonk: Don't never leave him
alone. Not even for a minute!

SYLVIA
When do I stop?

TEE

Not quite as soon as you think.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Felix sits on the edge of the porch drinking a beer. Filo rocks away.

FILO

Can Baptists have fun?

FELIX

It happens but they're not supposed to.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Sylvia continues to stir the mixture in the pot.

TEE

For a seafood gumbo you need a light roux sort of the color of, dead oak leaves.

Sylvia closes her eyes imagining that color then looks into the pot to compare.

SYLVIA

(unconvinced but politely)

Delicious.

Sylvia quickly recovers her enthusiasm.

SYLVIA (CONT'D)

How do you say, "How do you say that in French?" in French?

TEE

Comment diets-vous ca en francais?

SYLVIA

"Comment diets-vous ca en francais?"

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Filo has been rocking and thinking again.

FILO

Dat's too bad about Leon.

FELIX

What?

FILO

About Leon. You know. Um, about him getting dat uh, you know. That, uh...

FELIX

Oh.

FILO

Yah, a lot of dem boys got dat in the army. Back durin' the war. 'Specially dat wild bunch from N'Awlens. Dey all went out one night and caught it.

FELIX

Dad, I don't think...

And out comes Leon, changed, and carrying some recording equipment.

His appearance is guaranteed to provoke Filo, which Felix knows, and settles back with another beer to enjoy.

FILO

Well-well. If it isn't L.L.

No reaction from Leon.

FILO (CONT'D)

Or maybe I should say Mister Bean? Whatzamatter? Don't you think yur daddy can make a joke?

FELIX

You made us.

Felix tosses his brother a beer.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Tee inspects the bubbling pot approvingly.

TEE

Well --- we've done all we can do. Let it simmer.

SYLVIA

Comment diets-vous ca: I'm cooking a gumbo: en francais?

TEE

J'apais curie un gumbo.

SYLVIA

J'apais curie un gumbo.

TEE

We'll add the shrimps and oysters
later. I'm gonna change.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Leon attempts to find some safe topic.

LEON

How's the sugarcane this year?

FILO

It's in God's hands now. We could
use a cold snap to set the sugar. I
feel one comin'.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Cherie and Sylvia are sitting at the table. Cherie is
enthralled with Sylvia and has no inhibitions.

CHERIE

Are you in love with Leon?

SYLVIA

Oh, very much so.

CHERIE

An' ya'll can't have no chil'ren?

SYLVIA

We've chosen not to.

CHERIE

Can Baptists do that?

SYLVIA

Anyone can.

CHERIE

Not Cathlics, no.

This is at once scandalous and interesting to Cherie and
Sylvia is afraid she has opened a door she maybe hadn't
ought to.

SYLVIA

Cherie. Do you want children?

CHERIE

Oh yah. I mean, it's not why you
get married. At least for mos'
people. But after you do, it's what
happens. You have a family. My
family had one and the family

(MORE)

CHERIE (cont'd)
 before them did. So, shouldn't I?
 Or it would all come to an end....
 An' you and Leon won't have any.
 Ya'll 'a jus' be alone?

SYLVIA
 I guess we love ourselves too much.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Leon unpacks his recording equipment. Filo has still one more thought waiting to get out. Felix smokes a cigarette.

FILO
 Does it hurt much?

Felix nearly chokes as he swallows a mouthful of smoke.

LEON
 Huh?

FILO
 Well I mean can you still run an'
 do stuff?

LEON
 Oh sure, I'm in great shape.

FILO
 (to Felix)
 See? They can cure anything in them
 big cities.

Leon has got his equipment set up. He clips a lapel mike to Filo.

FILO (CONT'D)
 What's dat for?

LEON
 I want to record you telling some
 stories in French.

FILO
 Stories? If it's for yur radio
 station then you want some music!

Filo reaches down for his ever-present accordion.

LEON
 We don't play music.

FILO
 (laughing)
 Hey, Felix, dat's a good one! A
 radio station that don't play no
 music!

LEON
 It's all talk.

FILO
 Talk? Dare ain't been dat much talk
 since the war.
 (shouting into the House)
 THEY GOTTA WAR YOU DIDN'T TELL ME
 ABOUT?

TEE (O.S.)
 THERE'S NO WAR, FILO!

Cherie comes running out onto the porch, scanning the road.

CHERIE
 I thought I heard Errol's truck.

FELIX
 (shaking his head)
 Man, if I was my little brother,
 I'd get me a job closer to home.

FILO
 Je vais l'emmener avec moi!

Felix and Filo have a good laugh.

FELIX
 (translating)
 I'd take her with me.

CHERIE
 Why ya'll do that?

Leon attempts to re-attach the mike to Filo, who resists.

LEON
 Could you say it again?

FILO
 Take that damn thing away from me!

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Tee smells the gumbo.

TEE
 C'est bon!

SYLVIA

J'pais cuire un gumbo.

Tee is touched by this. She takes Sylvia by the hand.

TEE

But don't count on its coming out
right the first time.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

CHERIE

I mean it: Why ya'll do it? Talk
what we can't understand in front
of us?

FELIX

Well you see, Cherie: It's like we
all live in a house with no
walls...

With his ever-present accordion, Filo squeezes out and sings
an improvised song.

FILO

"No walls. No walls. We got us a
house with no walls!"

FELIX

Except maybe for the batchroom...

FILO

"...don't need no windows, but we
gotta have walls in da batchroom!"

FELIX

An' sometimes the adults want to
say something that the little folks
shouldn't hear an' since it's not
real nice to gather aroun' together
in the batchroom --- we talk in
French.

CHERIE

But I ain't little no more.

Cherie resumes her lookout at the edge of the porch.

FILO

"...any more. Any more and you'd
explode, ma chere. Talkin' French,
I love talkin' French..."

LEON

So why don't I?

FILO
 You didn't pick it up. "Pick it up.
 Pick it up..."

LEON
 You never let go of it!

FILO
 (to Felix)
 What's he talkin' about?

CHERIE
 There's Errol!

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. DAY.

From a high angle we see a shiny red pick-up truck tearing down the drive, Cherie running out to meet it.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Filo, feeling on a roll, picks up the microphone.

FILO
 Dey call it seven on 'n seven off
 but if you ax me it's more like
 sept en dehours et sept en de dans!

Filo and Felix fall over themselves laughing at this.

Leon has had about enough and snatches the microphone from Filo.

LEON
 Why wasn't I taught to speak the
 language?!

Filo stops laughing. He begins speaking soberly, thoughtfully, questioningly, but ends angrily.

FILO
 I don't understan' why people I
 don't even know, would wanna hear
 me tellin' stories about people dey
 don't know, can't know, an'
 wouldn't even wanna know if dey had
 the chance. Huh? Can you answer me
 dat?

LEON
 I would think that you'd be...
 proud, of what you are.

FILO

What I am? WHAT I AM? Ta's du toup!
Don't talk to me about what I am.
You don't know the half of it. You
don't know the one-tenth of it!

LEON

You're so blind. So damned
ignorant. You don't even know what
you've got.

FILO

(demonstrating)

What I got --- is a pain in the
ass!

Filo storms into the house, the screen door slamming shut.

A moment later we hear TEE'S VOICE: "Filo?"

Sylvia, unaware of the dispute comes breezing out onto the porch.

SYLVIA

Oh Leon...! Je peux parler un
petit... Leon...? What's the
matter?

FELIX

(in an exaggerated
accent)

Mais, he want to git in the
batchroom wit the res' of us but he
don't got no key.

Leon steps off the porch, walking toward the Ancient Oak.

Filo appears at the screen door.

FILO

I think I know what the matter with
that boy is.

Filo goes out on the porch.

FILO (CONT'D)

He's been home nearly a whole day
an' he ain't even drunk yet.

FELIX

Just wait 'til tonight.

FILO

(doing a step, taking
Sylvia by the hand)

Friday night! The Fais-do-do!

SYLVIA
 "Fais-do-do"? What's that in
 English?

FELIX
 Nothing.

SYLVIA
 En Francais?

FILO
 Everything!

ERROL, in his oilfield work clothes and carrying his duffel
 over his shoulder and holding Cherie closely. Comes up on
 the porch.

FILO (CONT'D)
 Hey Errol! Here's your new
 sister-in-law.

Errol steps back in mock examination.

ERROL
 Throw the brother back. Keep the
 sister-in-law!
 (He kisses her, singing:)
 Ah, jolie blonde!

Errol and Cherie start quickly into the house.

CHERIE
 If ya'll 'a excuse us--

FILO
 Be seein' ya'll in about a week,
 huh?

TEE
 Filo!

ERROL
 Oh no. This is Festival week-end.
 Tonight we dance.

FILO
 But first another kinda dance--

Cherie and Errol scoot off into the house. Filo goes to
 Sylvia.

FILO (CONT'D)
 Don't worry. Tonight, we all gonna
 pass ourselves a good time.

SYLVIA
How do you say that in french?

FILO
(strongly)
Laissez les bon ton rouler!

Filo, along with Felix and Tee, go into the house, leaving Sylvia alone on the porch, looking after Leon.

SYLVIA
Laissez les bon ton rouler.... I
hope.

INT. LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON.

A large Crucifix above the mantel. A Sacred Heart of Jesus next to it and a miniature Mary grotto on the mantel overlook Filo, who snoozes on the sofa.

There is a hand-tinted photograph on the table beside the sofa of Filo and Tee, Filo in his Army uniform

INT. KITCHEN. AFTERNOON.

Tee sits at the kitchen table drinking a cup of coffee and saying her Rosary.

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. AFTERNOON.

Marguerite has turned sharply onto the drive from the main road and speeds down the drive raising a rooster-tail of dust.

INT. KITCHEN. AFTERNOON.

Tee's Rosary is interrupted by the sound of the car screeching to a halt and the door slamming shut and Marguerite's loud voice.

MARGUERITE (O.S.)
Oh Tee! Thank St. Anthony of Padua!
It worked!

Tee goes to the kitchen window.

TEE
Marguerite---?

We see Marguerite through the window from Tee's angle.

MARGUERITE
It's him! It's Roland! He's drivin'
down the highway comin' here right
now!

Tee goes out the back door.

EXT. BACK YARD AND PORCH. AFTERNOON.

Marguerite nearly runs Tee down in her excitement.

MARGUERITE

An' why is he comin' here? Because he knows this is where I'd be. Tee, between you, me, and the Blessed Saints, I made him come back. It worked! I had a plan and I executed it.

TEE

What worked? What plan? What execution?

MARGUERITE

He's been gone ten years. Ev'ry year on our anniversary I been sendin' him a gumbo--

TEE

Marguerite! You've poisoned him! An' he's come back to die!

MARGUERITE

No-no-no! He's come back TO ME! TO LIVE!

TEE

Whatever did you put in those gumbos?

MARGUERITE

(dramatically)

It's what I took out.

INT. KITCHEN. AFTERNOON.

Tee pours coffee for Marguerite who remains too worked-up to drink it.

MARGUERITE

The first year, the first gumbo, was the bes' I ever made! But then --the next one: I left a little something out: a pinch less of red pepper, then one sprig of parsley instead of two, an' the next no cel'ry, frozen okra --- an' then I started substitutin': I used, Rosemary --and, leeks.

Marguerite pronounces these with the disdain they deserve. The next is a shameful confession.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

'An the las' gumbo I sent him: I microwaved the roux.

TEE

Oh no!

MARGUERITE

Oh yes....

Marguerite scoops up the Rosary.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

What a challenge for ten years, cookin' a gumbo that seemed exactly like the one before but always less and never enough for him to notice until the day would come when he would feel he had to come back. Not for the gumbo, not for the cookin', not even for his sister's funeral, but POUR MOI!

TEE

For you? No-no, Marguerite, not for you. For gumbo.

MARGUERITE

Don't you understand? I am the gumbo!

TEE

Well I sure wouldn't be grettin' him in black.

MARGUERITE

Mais you right! When he comes, don't let him leave!

Marguerite rushes out the back door and into her car. Tee shouts after her:

TEE

Get into something bright! And sunny! AND YOUNG!

We hear the car start and drive off.

Tee contemplates this situation, then starts setting out many candles on the table.

INT. LIVING ROOM. AFTERNOON.

Filo is still asleep on the sofa. He becomes restless and awakens struggling to open his eyes.

From his angle we see a blurry figure at the end of the sofa. It is ROLAND, who is staring at Filo, who starts and falls off the sofa.

FILO
Goddam Roland! You tryin' to send
me to join Bernice?

Roland is distracted, in a daze, a philosophical funk.

ROLAND
Well, Filo, it looks like it's just
you and me now....

Filo, still groggy, struggles to his feet.

FILO
I mean it, Roland. You could of
killed me.

ROLAND
Filo. I don't know why I'm here....

Frightened and uncertain, Filo goes to the kitchen door.

FILO
You want a beer?

Roland takes Filo by the shoulder, walking him out onto the porch just as Tee comes out of the kitchen. They do not see her. She follows them, listening just inside the screen door.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. AFTERNOON.

ROLAND
Filo. They say they got a place in
Africa where all the elephants go
when they feel the end coming.

FILO
Oh, I know what. Maybe you come
back for some body.

ROLAND
Marguerite? Oh no, not Marguerite.
I don't know what....

Tee comes out on the porch.

TEE
How about stayin' for supper?

ROLAND
What's cookin'?

TEE
Le gombo a la daughter-in-law.

This initiates a far-away longing in Roland's eyes and voice.

ROLAND
---- gumbo ----?

TEE
Is that a yes or a no?

ROLAND
Gumbo ---

FILO
He means Yah, he'll stay.

Tee goes into the house.

FILO (CONT'D)
(conspiratorially)
Roland. As soon as you get the chance be sure to ax Leon what kind of music they play at his radio station.

TEE
(from off)
FI-LO!

Filo cringes.

FILO
Sometimes I think dat woman's got ears on the both sides of her head!

INT. KITCHEN. LATE AFTERNOON.

Filo, Tee, Felix, Errol, Cherie, Roland, and Sylvia are seating themselves down to supper.

Tee lights candles, which Filo notes with some distraction.

Leon arrives, having changed into a white shirt, sweater vest, and dark slacks.

FILO
Mon dieu! Leon! You dressed again?

TEE

Filo!

(crossing herself)

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Bless this house and those who live in it and we thank you for this food. At last! All three boys together.

FELIX

Good things come in threes.

FILO

Well then only two more wives to go!

CHERIE

(to Sylvia)

You want your potato salad in your gumbo or on it?

SYLVIA

Could I have it on a saucer?

Cherie reluctantly complies, mystified.

Roland takes a spoonful of Sylvia's gumbo with a smile on his face, which melts away into puzzlement and then concern.

He tries another. It doesn't taste bad and it doesn't taste good.

He looks around the table and sees everyone else enjoying the gumbo.

ERROL

Sylvia, this is delicious!

FILO

Yah it's pretty good.

This worries Roland.

ROLAND

(whispers to Tee)

Are they being polite?

TEE

(laughing)

Oh, Roland---

ROLAND

Teenie, is this gumbo any good? I can't... I can't tell.

Tee takes a long and large taste of the gumbo.

TEE
This is good.

Now Roland's really worried.

SYLVIA
Thank you. But I had lots of help.

FILO
(to Roland)
Now! Ax him now!

ROLAND
Oh --- Leon. What kind of music you
play at that radio station?

A silence. This time Leon is up to the task.

LEON
Dad. Do you have any dry, white
--wine?

Just as Filo opens his mouth...

TEE
FILO!

EXT. FRONT YARD. DUSK.

All is quiet. The house and yard bathed in the last glow of
the day.

Marguerite drives up. She hops out of the car. She is
dressed in day-glow orange. She is made-up to the gills and
brimming with excitement.

A yellow bug-light illumines the porch.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DUSK.

She bursts into the room. No one is there.

MARGUERITE
Filo? Tee---? Roland---?

INT. KITCHEN. DUSK.

The table's cleared and the dishes washed.

MARGUERITE
Roland---?

She notices a plate of food covered with clear plastic wrap.
There is a note on it. She reads the note.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

"Marguerite, Do you have another plan? We are all at the Festival." Another plan?

Marguerite is startled by a knocking on the rear door. She opens it and standing there is NADINE ROCHON, an ancient Cajun woman, cradling a slow-cooker.

Marguerite snatches a candle from the table and goes out on the rear porch.

EXT. BACK PORCH. DUSK.

MARGUERITE

Nadine. Nadine Rochon.

NADINE

Bernice was such a good woman dat I t'ought I'd bring somethin' for the family in addition to what I hat brought befor'.

MARGUERITE

Oh, the gumbo --

NADINE

No, this is gumbo.

MARGUERITE

Then what did you bring before?

NADINE

Jellied rabbit dumplings.

Nadine whips out a spoon, urging Marguerite to sample.

NADINE (CONT'D)

I know people think I'm not a good cook--

MARGUERITE

(tasting)

Nadine! An' you say this is gumbo? This is... it's inexpressible!

Marguerite is struck with an inspiration.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

Nadine! You've got to enter this in the Contest.

NADINE

Contest?

MARGUERITE

At the Festival.

NADINE

Oh I couldn't. Yes I could. But I
might. Yes I will...

Nadine fades away and out of sight, trailing the slow-cooker cord.

Marguerite goes out into the yard, smoothing out a dirt area, drawing a circle, placing the candle in the center and lighting it.

MARGUERITE

So he'd rather go to the Festival
instead of bein' with me? It's time
for reinforcements: the GRIS-GRIS!
Well, there's just so much you can
ask the Blessed Saints to do!

She gestures elaborately over the candle:

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

Away with the Rosemary, limp
cel'ries, and leeks --- Let this
Gris-Gris win what Marguerite seeks
--- GRIS-GRIS!

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE. NIGHT.

A high-powered CAJUN BAND of young, hip musicians plays. The lights of the carnival midway whirl behind the stage.

Dancers churn up dust.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE. EARLY MORNING.

It is the wee hours. The Band plays a slow waltz. The dust has settled and only a few couples are dancing.

The naked light bulbs strung out over the dancing area lend a starry effect.

We see Leon and Sylvia seated on the ground just on the edge of the dancing area. They are surrounded by the litter of the evening.

She is light-headed and dancing on air. Leon is more firmly rooted, though looking at the couples and listening to the music with some regret and longing.

SYLVIA

Go on. You can sing along. It's
just me. And moi.

LEON

I know the songs but not the words.

SYLVIA

Leon, can't you let up? Let go
--just a bit?

LEON

If I'd let go, I'd have to have
something to grab a hold of but I
have nothing. I'm afraid I'd just
keep falling.

She gets up, really unsteady now.

SYLVIA

You can hold onto me.

He catches her. They kiss.

INT. VOLVO. EARLY MORNING.

Leon and Sylvia are driving home. She's still on air.

SYLVIA

Oh I love your parents! They're
wonderful! And I can make a roux!
And gumbo! And...

LEON

No you can't.

SYLVIA

Excuse me --- I can and I did! I
stirred it. And I stirred it.
That's the secret, you know. The
stirring.

LEON

Just see if it works back in St.
Louis.

EXT. HIGHWAY. EARLY MORNING.

The Volvo turns off of the highway, at the mailbox, onto the
Dirt Driveway.

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. EARLY MORNING.

The Volvo comes to a stop. Leon and Sylvia get out. He helps
her onto the hood.

It is a clear night. There are fires in the distance.

SYLVIA

What's that?

LEON

They're burning the harvested fields. Burning the leaves off the stalks. Then they load 'em 'n bring 'em to the mill.

SYLVIA

Beautiful.

LEON

When I went away to college, I thought I'd take some Cajun culture with me. And since I didn't speak it, or dance it or get drunk every night, I thought I'd learn to cook. But it never came out right. Sometimes I think it can't be transported over the state line. Or even out of the house.

SYLVIA

(laughing)

So when we invite Jamie and John over for gumbo, we risking poisoning them?

LEON

Why don't you go on. I'm gonna walk up.

She kisses him, gets in the car and drives away.

EXT. FRONT PORCH. EARLY MORNING.

All is dark and quiet. The yellow bug-light crackles and dies. The Volvo parked on the side.

From just out of view we hear a general ruckus with a car pulling up, car doors slamming and voices singing. The family come stumbling onto the porch.

Felix is the first to collapse on the steps.

Cherie and Tee struggle with a huge ice chest which they can't quite get up on the porch. Filo and Errol seem to be having a singing-badly-and-loudly contest.

Errol's shirt is torn and his face shows signs of a fight. After fishing around for the remaining beers from the chest, Tee and Cherie disappear into the house. Filo, noting their departure, goes to the chest, but--

TEE (OFF)

FILO!

He relents.

FILO
 DON'T WAIT TO PASS OUT WITH US!
 WE'LL DO IT OUT HERE!

FELIX
 Here-here!

Errol has gotten himself into the chest, head-first as Leon walks up.

FILO
 Hey Leon! You missed all the bes'
 part of the night. Errol beat the
 crap... Errol?

ERROL
 Help! I think I'm drowning.

Filo rouses Felix to help with Errol.

FILO
 Hey! Go help yur brother.

FELIX
 Are you kidding? I can't even help
 myself.

Filo insists and Felix manages to pull Errol from the chest by his feet. Errol emerges proudly holding three beers.

ERROL
 Look what I found!

He breaks them off, distributing.

FILO
 Hey Leon. You shoul'da seen yur
 little brother! Man he beat the
 livin' crap outta some kou-yanh
 from out in back 'a da levee.

LEON
 Congratulations.

ERROL
 Well, he beat me up but I won the
 fight.

LEON
 You want to hear a story?

FILO
 I wanna song!

FELIX
 I like stories.

ERROL

---- I gotta pee.

FILO

Alright. Go ahead. Tell yur story.

LEON

Before I left St. Louis, I made myself a little something. To wear. So that people wouldn't confuse me with someone that I'm not. Just for times like these. Because, you see, I'm not like you--

He starts unbuttoning his shirt.

ERROL

Wait! Don't tell us! You're...

(he belches)

Superman!

Errol breaks himself up over this but no one else does so he demonstrates his witticism, still to no avail. He gives up.

Leon removes his shirt. Beneath is a tee-shirt printed in bold letters: "NO I'M NOT A CAJUN --- I'M JUST DRUNK".

LEON

There! Now nobody will mistake me for you, or you for me.

Felix and Errol are close enough to read the shirt which sobers them considerably.

Filo can barely stand straight, let alone read.

FILO

Why's it so quiet. What's the matter?

FELIX

I think Leon wants us to read his chest.

FILO

Read his chest? Only if I was blind and he was --- Dolly Parton!

Now it's Filo's turn to break himself up but he makes another attempt to read Leon's chest.

FILO (CONT'D)

You're too damn close! Stand still! Back further! Aw, maybe you betta read it for me.

LEON

It says, "No, I'm not a Cajun, I'm just drunk".

Pause as Filo tries to process the information. Then he bursts out laughing. This is a great joke. He goes up to Leon, laughing, trying to use him for support.

LEON (CONT'D)

I can't believe this! I can't...
you can't even be insulted! CAN
YOU? You ignorant. Stupid.
GOD-DAMNED COONASS!

Almost at the exact instant of Leon's last word, Filo lands a solid right to Leon's jaw.

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. DAY.

It is the next morning. Saturday.

Cherie bopps down the drive toward the highway dancing to the band inside her head, her bare feet raising a cloud of dust made lovely in the sunshine. She hears shooting in the distance.

At the mailbox, Cherie goes through the mail, pulling out one letter and returning the remainder to the box.

She notes with concern that the letter is from "The Intercontinental Oil & Gas Company" and is "PERSONAL". More gunshots.

EXT. A HARVESTED CANE FIELD. DAY.

Cherie crosses the field heading toward a section of woods. The cane has been cut and stripped and lies crosswise over the furrows waiting to be burned.

She sees Errol coming out of the woods, rifle over his shoulder and several squirrels hanging from his belt.

CHERIE

(waving the envelope)
Errol! ERROL!

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. DAY.

Cherie and Errol walk back toward the house.

ERROL

(handing her the letter)
I can't believe it. I been
transferred to... I can't even say
it... Amarilla... Texas... Wes'
(MORE)

ERROL (cont'd)
Texas. It's so dry you can't even
spit there!

EXT. FRONT PORCH. DAY.

Cherie and Errol come walking up. Felix is where we left him last night. He is not quite asleep.

CHERIE
(to Errol)
I'm gonna make some coffee. Things
always seem better after coffee.

She goes in, letting the screen door slam, which is like a shot through the head to Felix.

Another shot as Leon comes out.

FELIX
Ohhhh, yi-yie! It's like we kill
ourselves every night and are born
again the nex' morning'.

LEON
I'm sorry about last night.

ERROL
Yah, what's the matter with you
anyways, Leon.

FELIX
He's lookin' for his roots when he
oughta be damn glad he's got shoes
on his feet.

Felix fishes a beer from the ice chest, pops the top and drinks, noting that he and Cherie have no shoes.

LEON
Starting early, aren't you?

FELIX
Nope. Never finished.... It's nine
a.m. Saturday mornin'. And yur
wearin' a tie.

ERROL
He's got you there, Leon.

FELIX
You don't know how good you got it.
You get to come home.... I've never
come home.

LEON
Look, Felix, I didn't ask to be...

FELIX
No! None of us axed...

LEON
That's just it!

ERROL
Well nobody asked me...! But I got
some news.
(dramatically collapses
onto the steps)
I've been transferred to...
Amarilla.

Felix is too stunned to speak. Leon consoles Errol.

LEON
Amarillo's not so bad. It's not the
end of the world...

ERROL
---no! But it's right on the edge.
You could fall right off!

And indeed, Felix falls off the porch. Cherie and Sylvia
come out with coffee, served in large mugs.

SYLVIA
Coffee ---!

FELIX
What timin'....

Felix manages to get back up on the porch. He tests his
coffee by trying to stand the spoon up on its own, finally
pronouncing that...

FELIX (CONT'D)
...it's not strong enough.

SYLVIA
(to Errol, consolingly)
Cherie told me.

ERROL
What we gonna eat out there?

CHERIE
Errol! Don't think about it ---
maybe it'll go away.

ERROL

If that was the case, Amarillo
would'a disappeared a long time
ago! Well, let's hit the Festival!
Have some fun.... While we can.

Cherie and Errol jump into the pick-up and drive away, radio
playing loudly.

In the meantime, Sylvia has urged Leon to take her over the
the Grove.

Filo and Tee come out on the porch as Felix drags himself
up, speaking to no one in particular...

FELIX

Well I'm not goin' nowhere except
on the back porch to finish my
coffee in solitude. Somebody's got
to be sensible.

Felix shuffles off the porch and around the house.

FILO

"Solitude"? "Sensible"? Sometimes I
wonder about dat boy....

Filo and Tee settle side-by-side on the porch steps.

EXT. THE GROVE/THE PORCH. DAY.

Sylvia and Leon explore the maze of the low-hanging limbs
and vines of the grove.

Filo and Tee sit on the Front Porch steps.

These scenes are intercut:

SYLVIA

Leon...

TEE

Filo...

SYLVIA & TEE

...you're going to have to talk to
him.

LEON

You can't talk to him. He doesn't
listen.

SYLVIA

Then let him talk.

FILO
I don't got notin' to say.

TEE
Then let him talk to you.

FILO
What has he ever said worth
listenin' to?

SYLVIA
Are you ashamed of him?

LEON
No! I'm not ashamed of him.

SYLVIA & TEE
...just listen to him....

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY.

Filo, Tee, Sylvia, and Leon drink their coffee with an air of silent expectation.

Finally, Leon sort of coughs.

FILO
What?

LEON
I was... coughing.

False alarm. They lapse into silence, Tee begins to see that the bull must be taken by the horns.

Filo makes a sort of low rumbling sound.

LEON (CONT'D)
Yeah?

FILO
I got...gas....

This sends Tee into action.

TEE
Leon --- did you know that the first coupla years I knew your father, there was only one word I ever heard come outta his mouth?

FILO
(reluctantly, but not for long)
Well... Before I joined the army I had the worse job dare was.

Filo knocks on the side table and stands up, as though waiting for someone to answer the knock.

Filo knocks again, then...

FILO (CONT'D)

"Telegram---!"

Filo tips his "hat", gives up the "telegram" and "leaves".

FILO (CONT'D)

Of course, it was hardly ever good news I was bringin' so it got so people didn't want to see me walkin' up to their house. But all I had to do was knock and stand dare. Back den, if you talked French or had an ackent it meant you was low, was from out in back 'o the swamps or somethin'.

TEE

Then one day, here he comes to my house.

Filo does his reenactment.

FILO

"Telegram."

For this first delivery, Tee joins the mime.

TEE

My brother's plane was shot down over France. It sounds so sad and funny but that's how we met. He tipped his hat and went away.

Tee stands wistfully at the "door" watching Filo "go away".

Filo returns and knocks.

FILO

"Telegram."

TEE

Then we found out my brother was taken prisoner.

Now without the knocking or the opening of the door.

FILO

"Telegram."

TEE

I am fourteen and in love with the young man all the family waits for. "It's a nice day, isn't it?" But he says notin'.

FILO

Mais but I wanted to say somethin' but I was afraid she'd make fun 'a me.

SYLVIA

You don't speak French?

TEE

Not back then. But you live with a man like Filo and besides picking up about 10,000 pairs of socks and half a million beer cans, you also pick up a lot of French.

FILO

Dat's not true! At least half of them cans was bottles.

Filo plops himself down on the couch.

SYLVIA

And your brother?

TEE

One year after the war we got a letter. He had died when his plane crashed.

A pause.

LEON

Why didn't you teach me French?

FILO

Mais, why should I?

LEON

Grand pere passed on something wonderful to you. What about me? WHAT WAS I GIVEN?

FILO

Somethin' a whole lot better.

LEON

No. You've cheated me. You've raised me as someone I should't be!

FILO
 What's he talkin' about? Someone
 you shouldn't be? Whatzat mean?

LEON
 It means you've failed!

Filo is on the verge of slugging Leon again.

LEON (CONT'D)
 Go ahead! Hit me again!

FILO
 You'd love that, wouldn't you?!

This disarms and deflates Leon.

LEON
 ---- yes I would. How did you know
 that?

FILO
 'Cuz that's exackly what I woulda
 wanted except this time I'd be
 ready an' give the ol' man one BAM!
 right square in the face! ----
 Well, me, I got to dance. We got to
 go to the Festival. Tee, that Band
 up here, it's startin' to tune up
 yah!

Filo puts his arm around a reluctant Tee.

EXT. FRONT YARD. DAY.

Leon and Sylvia walk across the yard toward the Ancient Oak.

They sit on the massive roots of the tree.

LEON
 Have I got a band in my head? Yah
 --a band saw!

ROLAND (O.S.)
 That's better than a drill press!

The source of the voice eludes Leon and Sylvia.

LEON
 Uncle Roland---?

ROLAND (O.S.)
 Is Marguerite around?

LEON
 No. I don't think so.

They are still searching.

ROLAND (O.S.)

Good....

And Roland plops down from the Oak.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

She's been chasing me ever since I got back.

SYLVIA

And you don't want to get caught?

ROLAND

I'm not sure.... But if I know Marguerite, she's cooking something up. How's the jaw?

This reference brings back all of Leon's longing and anger.

LEON

Just look at me, Uncle Roland: Leon Desormeaux, and I'm not in the least any different from anybody else I know in St. Louis. And I can't even make a decent roux! And that's the point: I've missed something. And not through any fault of my own. It's him. People like him. They wiped out an entire generation. They denied me a part of myself. How can I not hate him for that?

Roland trips on one of the roots.

ROLAND

Damn roots---! Leon, come up with me.

SYLVIA

Well, if you boys are going to climb trees I'm going to practice my roux-making.

EXT. UP IN THE ANCIENT OAK. DAY.

Roland and Leon have climbed quite a ways up the old tree. They have a grand view of the countryside.

ROLAND

What do you hear?

LEON

The wind.

ROLAND

What do you see?

LEON

The land.

ROLAND

There's a band playin' somewhere inside you and before you leave you gotta find a way to hear it an' then you gotta decide whether you gonna jus' sit there or whether you gonna let go, get up --- and go dance! And --- for someone on his way to being a judge, that's all I can offer.

LEON

You? A judge?

Roland and Leon are letting themselves down from the last branch.

ROLAND

Mais ouai. At the Festival. Third Circuit Court of the Gumbo. Don't know how. Don't know why. How about I appoint you my Special Assistant?

LEON

Can you do that?

ROLAND

Mais cher, this is Louisiana!
(suddenly mock serious)
There's a kind of inevitability building up here, Leon. Like a Greek Drama.

LEON

Greek Drama? You never told me you knew those things.

ROLAND

Well, not everything you pick up in California is communicable!

They laugh. There is a burst of Cajun music.

EXT. FESTIVAL. EVENING.

We are plowing through the crowd to the sound of a lively Cajun Band.

We are excitedly observing all the sights: carnival rides, food booths offering everything from gumbo to fried

alligator to boudin balls to fresh hot coffee.

Among the many Festival-Goers we come upon is Filo.

FILO

You lost? Looks like it to me.
Com'on with me. I know where you
goin'.

He maneuvers through the crowd and we come upon the Performance Stage backed with the lights of the carnival rides and a dancing area lit with crisscrossing naked light bulbs.

FILO (CONT'D)

You wanna know what he's singin'
about? I'll translate: roughly: You
see, it's Sat'day night: time to
drink and dance and... What's that?
Oh, okay. You wanna see the cookin'
contest? Well okay. Follow me--

He leads us back into the crowd, through a maze of people:

FILO (CONT'D)

They not such a good band anyhow.
Not half a good as the one I got up
here!

He's brought us to an open shed-like building:

FILO (CONT'D)

Here we are!

INT. FESTIVAL. SHED. EVENING.

A large crowd sits on folding wooden chairs for the finals of the gumbo cook-off.

The Contest shares space with pig-pens and rabbit cages.

The field has been narrowed down to five: a scrubbed and pert feminine 13 year- old 4-H'ER, a neatly dressed, neatly-trimmed BEARDED MAN in his 40's, Marguerite, Nadine Rochon, and a BURLEY YOUNG MAN.

The Bearded and Burley men sit together, their game faces on.

Tee and Sylvia have seats on the front row, with Marguerite.

The finalist gumbos are lined up on a table identified only by letters.

Roland, appropriately clip-boarded and ribboned, prepares for the tasting.

ROLAND

Well, Leon, I don't think they'll be much drama, Greek or otherwise.

LEON

Marguerite's gumbo?

ROLAND

Mais who else? Ten years. Twenty gumbos. Like clockwork.

A terribly efficient CONTEST ORGANIZER approaches.

ORGANIZER

Mr. Desormeaux, are you ready?

ROLAND

Let's go.

ORGANIZER

Do you have your personal portable tasting device?

He whips out a metal tablespoon.

Leon takes a seat with the ladies.

As we move to a good place to view this, Filo comes up, tapping us on the shoulder.

FILO

Ain't it fun to watch somebody that don't know something that you know an' that he don't know that you know that he don't know?

Roland, making a show of fairness, tastes the first of the gumbos. It is that of the 4-H'er.

4-HER (V.O.)

Did I remember to skim the grease off the top---?

After tasting, Roland dips the spoon in a plastic cup of draft beer, takes a sip to cleanse the palate, then proceeds to the second, that of the Bearded Man.

BEARDED MAN (V.O.)

I can't loose. My secret is parsley.

Roland moves to the next, which is the Burley Man's.

BURLEY MAN (V.O.)

(glaring at Bearded man)
Basil is your secret.

This time Roland cleanses his spoon by thrusting it into a glob of Potato salad, followed by a sip of beer, then moves to the next, which is Nadine's

NADINE (V.O.)

I don't... I don't have a secret.

Roland moves to the last gumbo, which is Marguerite's.

He thrusts the spoon in the potato salad, takes a bite of french bread, and sips the beer, before tasting.

Marguerite, though radiantly confident, is leaving nothing to chance.

MARGUERITE (V.O.)

"Hail Mary, full of Grace, may the chicken be tender and the okra not stringy..."

Roland goes through the motions of checking off items on his clipboard before taking center stage.

ROLAND

Ladies, and gentlemen... I am pleased to award First Place to gumbo number... "D"!

He lifts the card before the gumbo, reading off the name of...

ROLAND (CONT'D)

----Nadine Ro-chon...? Wait!
What---

Everyone realizes what has happened except Nadine. She is swarmed over by well-wishers, etc. Roland is dumfounded.

Marguerite is stricken, empty. Roland and Marguerite seem to be the only people in the shed.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(hesitantly)

Marguerite...? I... didn't think
--- I just assumed that...

(bewildered but strong)

Things really have changed in ten years. When did Nadine learn to cook so well?

MARGUERITE

She's exactly the same. You've changed.

She has been stoic but can withhold it no longer.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

It's all my fault! I changed you.
I've killed... I've murdered your
taste buds! Ruined you for life!
You'll never be a Cajun again!
Ruint! Ruint! RUINT! RUINT!!!

She rushes off, disappearing in the crowd, leaving Roland in the center of the shed, even more bewildered and lost than he was before. He turns back to face the family.

ROLAND

How can this be? On the one hand my
brain says Marguerite's gumbo is
magnifique. On the other hand my
stomach says Nadine's is best|

FILO

Well Roland, it looks like you need
more hands.

ROLAND

I got to go figure this out....

The music from the Festival Stage is advanced.

FILO

(to us)

That takes care of him. Now what
about you? You hear that? That's
not my band. It could be yours.
It's Saturday night. We at the
Festival. Allons danser!

The music increases as...

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE. NIGHT.

The Band plays a lively two-step. Many couples dancing, including girls with girls, mothers with sons, anyone with everyone.

Tee urges Sylvia to join in. Leon watches from the periphery.

At a nearby food stand, Felix, large plastic cup of beer in hand, is purchasing a Gyro from a "Greek Fisherman".

Tee continues her urging, Filo adding to the good-natured game.

TEE

Allons danser---!

SYLVIA

Oh, I can't dance.

FILO

You mean you don't dance.

ERROL

You got two feet you can dance.

Errol and Cherie demonstrate.

ERROL (CONT'D)

Here's the Cajun Quarter-step: you
throw two-bits on the ground...

(he tosses some quarters)

---And stomp on 'em! Jus' make sure
they not drillin' bits!

Errol and Cherie get caught up in the frenzy and disappear
into the dancing crowd and the dust.

SYLVIA

Leon! Come dance with me---!

Suddenly it seems as though everyone has stopped to watch
Leon attempt to dance.

LEON

I can't. I WON'T!

He rushes off into the crowd and is lost.

SYLVIA

Leon---!

FILO

Dat boy's got more exits than the
Interstate highway!

EXT. FESTIVAL GROUNDS. NIGHT.

Sylvia, in pursuit of Leon, bumps into Felix, knocking his
beer over him.

SYLVIA

Oh---!

FELIX

That's okay. You saved me the
trouble.

Sylvia starts off but Felix holds her back.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I know where he's going. I'll go.
He's gonna kill himself and I know
where.

EXT. EMMA LOU'S PARKING LOT. NIGHT.

Leon stands staring with oasis-in-the-desert yearning at the gaudy flashing neon sign proclaiming the dilapidated warehouse as EMMA LOU'S.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE. NIGHT.

The Band is on break, lounging with cigarettes and beer.

Filo slowly dances alone. He takes Sylvia by the hand.

FILO

It's a waltz.

SYLVIA

How can I dance if I can't hear the music?

FILO

By bein' close to one who does.

They begin to dance.

SYLVIA

I should be with Leon.

FILO

Felix knows about these things.

EXT. EMMA LOU'S. NIGHT.

Leon stands before the Door of Emma Lou's as though before an altar. The flashing red and green and blue sign above him lights his face: "Enter Here"

He reaches out and opens the Door.

The burst of sound and light engulfing him are of thermonuclear proportions.

Felix joins Leon as they step into this as though boarding the Mother Ship.

EXT. FESTIVAL STAGE. NIGHT.

The Band have finished their break and we now hear an end of the evening waltz.

SYLVIA

Doesn't anyone understand what Leon's going through?

FILLO

So Leon gets a little upset and thinks he's gonna hurt me and call me a coonass. Hell, I been called that a hun'ed times but I tell you what: I'd let him call me that ev'ry minute of ev'ry day the resta his life rather than have him havin' somebody call him that just once.

(slaps his arm)

Scares mostiques!

(to the Band)

Com'on boys, serenade us home.

From a high angle we see the family walking off into the night followed by Filo's Band, playing the waltz.

EXT. FRONT YARD. EARLY MORNING.

It is late in the early morning before sunrise.

We see a light in the second-floor window go off. It is quiet except for the crickets and frogs.

We discover ROLAND, sitting in the Ancient Oak.

ROLAND

(to us)

I've kinda gotten to like it up here.

A car drives up. It is Marguerite. She is on a mission.

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(to us)

Shhh! Don't say nothin'.

As she walks, Marguerite busily figures on a notepad.

MARGUERITE

That's it then! It took ten years at two gumbos per year to get him where he IS. To reverse the process and to get him back to where he WAS and do it before he leaves day after tomorrow--

She flips to another page in the pad.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

---I'd have to cook and feed him 20 gumbos which comes to one gumbo every three-point-two hours. I hope Roland's got the stomach.

ROLAND (O.S.)
I hope you got the onions.

MARGUERITE
What?

Marguerite quickly discovers the source and location of the voice.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)
Roland? Are you crazy?

ROLAND
Yah! 'An I ain't comin' down until
I'm a Cajun again!

MARGUERITE
You mean that? Don't go away! Wait
right there! I'm gonna get my pot!

ROLAND (O.S.)
MARGUERITE!

MARGUERITE
My cookin' pot. Man, have you got a
California mind!

She rushes to the car.

ROLAND
(shouting after her)
As long as I get my cajun stomach
back---!
(to us)
I hope she realizes the sacrifice
I'm making. I've got hemorrhoids,
you know.

She returns with her pot and his salt-water fishing rig.

MARGUERITE
Would you believe I had it in the
trunk?

ROLAND
It's four in the morning. I'm
sittin' up in a tree talkin' to
myself. 'An you're standin' there
with my old fishin' rig. Try me.

She hands the rig up to him and disappears into the house.

ROLAND (CONT'D)
(to us)
'An I was afraid of the
earthquakes.

INT. POLICE CAR. EARLY MORNING.

Felix and Leon, quite drunk, are being driven home by
Deputies DUGAS and FONTENOT.

FELIX
Yur my favorite deputy deputy
deputy Deputy Dugas.

DUGAS
Yah, Felix.

FELIX
You too Fontenot.

LEON
(meaning the deputies)
Hey Felix! I can see 'em. There's
two of everything!

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

Roland lowers the line of the rig which has been fashioned
into a cradle. Marguerite places a bowl in the cradle. She
motions for Roland to reel it up.

ROLAND (O.S.)
What you want me to do now?

MARGUERITE
Taste it.

ROLAND (O.S.)
Qu'il ya! What is this?!

MARGUERITE
Pre-roux: Flour --- and oil.

She rushes back into the house.

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. EARLY MORNING.

Leon and Felix emerge from the Sheriff's car.

The silent sweep of the red and blue light illumines their
faces.

The car drives off.

LEON
Where are we? Where were we? And
how did we get here?

FELIX
Congratulations, brother. Yur
dyin'.

Supporting each other, they start down the drive, shuffling in the dust.

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

Marguerite pours the next installment into the lowered bowl. Roland ratchets it up into the tree.

MARGUERITE

Well---?

ROLAND (O.S.)

Hmmm. Not bad.

MARGUERITE

It's the same flour and oil
--rouxed.

Again, she disappears into the house.

EXT. DIRT DRIVEWAY. EARLY MORNING.

Leon and Felix have stopped to observe a cane field burning in the far distance. There's something delightfully pagan in the sight and sound of the fires.

LEON

Are we perchance in purgatory?

FELIX

Iszat anywhere near New Orleans?

LEON

I think it IS New Orleans!

Both enjoy this jest and shuffle, steadying each other, down the drive.

INT. KITCHEN. EARLY MORNING.

Marguerite is at the stove busily stirring. She has all her ingredients arranged a la TV cooking show.

As she adds the ingredients, we get a from above view as per same.

Marguerite is aware of this and shamelessly relishes her "role" as mistress of the gumbo.

MARGUERITE

Now we add the water, stir, and all
of our vegetables: onions, bell
peppers...

(taking a swig of beer)

...onions, bell peppers, onions...

(MORE)

MARGUERITE (cont'd)
 (another swig)
 ...onions, bell pepper, okra,
 onions --and stir it some more.

She empties the remainder of the beer into the pot.

EXT. FRONT YARD. EARLY MORNING.

Leon and Felix stagger to a stop at the edge of the yard.

They see Marguerite's car and then Marguerite as she comes out of the house with yet another installment of her gumbo.

She goes to the base of the tree.

MARGUERITE
 HEY!

The bowl descends. Leon and Felix stare in disbelief as she pours the mixture and the bowl disappears seemingly into the tree.

LEON
 She's feedin' the tree.

FELIX
 Whatever happened to jus' plain
 sun, air, water --- and dirt.

They shuffle themselves over to the tree and collapse.

MARGUERITE
 Well-well--

LEON
 Ah, bonjour, Aunt Marguerite.
 (proudly)
 I'm dyin'.

MARGUERITE
 Congratulations.

She scoots off back into the house.

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

Leon grips Felix's arm.

LEON
 Hey! I remember! Emma Lou's Lounge!
 Except all I can see are these red
 and green and blue blobs up in the
 sky.

FELIX
Yah, you spent mos' of the evenin'
on yur back under the table.

LEON
Am I dead yet?

FELIX
(handing him a beer)
Here. The final nail.

LEON
Where you keep getting these from?

Leon manages to pop the top.

Marguerite arrives with another installment.

MARGUERITE
(to us)
The world's quickest gumbo. Jus'
like ON the TV.
(looking up)
Well?

ROLAND (O.S.)
Has this got leeks in it?

MARGUERITE
The las' one did and it nearly sunk
our marriage.

This time as she returns into the House and the Kitchen we follow her.

INT. KITCHEN. EARLY MORNING.

Marguerite busies herself with the gumbo.

Sylvia enters. She has been sleeping in her clothes.

SYLVIA
What's going on?

MARGUERITE
(matter-of-factly)
Cookin' gumbo.

SYLVIA
Oh ---

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

Roland eats gumbo as he gazes god-like down upon Leon and Felix below.

We follow his gaze down.

LEON

...and the last thing I remember is lying there amazed that the stars were like colored blobs so close it seemed I could reach out and touch them. I WAS IN EMMA LOU'S LOUNGE!

FELIX

Leon, you don't know how much it took for me to walk in there with a man wearin' a tie. I tol' people you were on yur way to church to be married. I tol' people you were runnin' for mayor. I tol' 'em you was on yur way to a fun'ral.

LEON

An' you was right! Am I dead yet?

FELIX

It happens when you sleep.

They contemplate this sobering fact.

LEON

Felix?

FELIX

Yah?

LEON

You gotta band?

FELIX

---- Yah.

LEON

Do I gotta band?

FELIX

Whattaya hear?

LEON

(listening)

Nuttin'---

A silence. Felix is hardly conscious. Leon is listening.

Sylvia comes out onto the porch. She sees Leon and Felix lying under the tree.

SYLVIA

Leon! Leon---

Sylvia, nearly tripping over Felix, takes Leon in her arms.

SYLVIA

Leon--

Felix rouses himself up.

FELIX

Can't a man die in peace? Gonna
find myself a quieter tree.

Felix shuffles away toward the House.

LEON

Sylvia, don't worry. I'm just
killing myself. Wake me when I'm
dead. You know what? I can almost
see both trees now if they'd only
quit moving.

SYLVIA

How about me?

LEON

There's only one you. That's why I
love you. Sylvia. Why can't he say,
Look, I'm sorry. I deprived you of
your --- heritage.

SYLVIA

Leon, do you think he's ever say
something like that?

LEON

I don't want him to make it up to
me. I just want him to know he's
hurt me.

SYLVIA

Don't you think you've hurt him?

LEON

But that's what children are for,
aren't we?

Sylvia kisses him as he nods off.

EXT. BACK PORCH. EARLY MORNING.

Felix just manages to step up onto the back porch where he
curls up into a corner to sleep.

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

Marguerite holds one-third of a six-pack of beer.

MARGUERITE
 (loud whisper)
 Roland! Roland!

The line comes down and she attaches the beers. It ascends.

ROLAND (O.S.)
 Now that's more like it!

INT. SECOND-FLOOR HALL. EARLY MORNING.

We are outside Errol and Cherie's room.

CHERIE (O.S.)
 OH YAH?

ERROL (O.S.)
 YAH!

CHERIE (O.S.)
 YAH!!

INT. ERROL & CHERIE'S BEDROOM. EARLY MORNING.

Cherie has just slammed herself shut in the bathroom. Errol is at the door.

ERROL
 WELL THEN I GOT HALF A MIND TO JUS'
 PACK UP 'AN GO TO AMARRILA WITHOUT
 YOU!!

INT. KITCHEN. EARLY MORNING.

Marguerite cooks. Tee, in her flannel robe, enters. Tee has gone through all of this before.

TEE
 'Mornin' Marguerite.

MARGUERITE
 'Mornin' Tee.

TEE
 Betta open up a burner for coffee.
 Looks like we're startin' Sunday
 early. By the way. Whatcha doin'?

MARGUERITE
 Finishin' that gumbo I started ten
 years ago.

TEE
 Oughta be good.

MARGUERITE

They'll be droppin' outta the trees
for it.

EXT. HOME PLACE. EARLY MORNING.

Errol comes slamming out, pursued closely by Cherie.

Errol comes to a stop near the base of the tree. Cherie can hold her own and catches up, twisting him around.

CHERIE

OH YAH!? Well, if you REALLY wanted
to punish me you'd take me to
Amarilla WITH YOU!

Not waiting for Errol to respond, she retreats into the House.

ROLAND (O.S.)

Hey!

Errol looks up in time to catch a beer.

ERROL

(to Leon)

Betcha they ain't got no trees like
this in St. Louis.

LEON

(slapping a mosquito)

I'm drunk.

ERROL

Oh yah? I'm mad. Leon, she wakes up
in the middle of the night an' she
says to me...

INT. KITCHEN. EARLY MORNING.

Cherie unburdens to Tee, Sylvia, and Marguerite over coffee, except Marguerite, who is still drinking beer.

CHERIE

"...Errol, I want some
intangibles."

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

Errol likewise expounds.

ERROL

"Intangibles? Cherie. Look at the
time. Where 'n the hell'm I gonna
get intangibles at four o'clock in
the mornin'?"

LEON
That's tellin 'er.

INT. KITCHEN. EARLY MORNING.

CHERIE
An' all he can say is, "Well we
jus' got a new pick-up truck. What
more you want?"

EXT. OAK TREE. EARLY MORNING.

ERROL
It's dat wife of yours, Leon. Been
puttin' ideas in Cherie's head dat
dey ain't got no room for.

Errol starts to go. Stops.

ERROL (CONT'D)
Uh, Leon?

LEON
Yeah?

ERROL
Where you get yur, uh, intangibles
from?

LEON
From not having anything better.

Errol heads off into the darkness.

From Roland's POV we see Leon lying flat on his back.

ROLAND (O.S.)
Bravo, Leon, my boy.

LEON
'M I dead yet, Uncle Roland?

From Leon's POV we see Roland in his perch up in the tree.

ROLAND
Almos' but not quite. It's not
easier for me, no. Qu'il ya! Dey
got spiders up here the size of
tarantulas!

INT. KITCHEN. EARLY MORNING.

Tee hands Cherie a mug of coffee.

CHERIE

Betta give me one for Errol. I'm goin' down to the bayou. That's where he goes whenever we fight. He gets his guns. Goes to the bayou. And shoots snakes. I just pray to God they got snakes in Amarilla.

EXT. BACK PORCH. EARLY MORNING.

Felix is quite happily propped against the house.

Sylvia comes around the side of the house with coffee, discovering him.

She approaches carefully, then gently fans the aroma toward him. He opens his eyes.

FELIX

Everything sorted out yet?

SYLVIA

I don't think so and it's not even dawn.

FELIX

Sunshine brings on a whole new set of woes.

A gunshot in the distance.

FELIX (CONT'D)

Them too?

SYLVIA

Uh-huh. Want some?

She demonstrates that the spoon will almost stay up on its own.

FELIX

No. I've worked hard for this hangover and I intend to enjoy it.

He tries the spoon himself.

FELIX (CONT'D)

I'm impressed.... You wanna ask me why I drink so much. Well, I've often thought on it. An' you know what? I don't have a single, solitary god-damned good reason in the world. An' I'm gonna keep it up 'til I do. Wake me for Mass.

INT. LIVING ROOM. EARLY MORNING.

Filo lies on the sofa, Tee hands him his coffee.

TEE

You know --- what's wrong is that
ya'll both right.

FILO

Well what 'm I supposed to do? Huh?
You know but yur not gonna tell me,
are you?

TEE

Filo, we didn't raise 'em to be
like us. We raised 'em to be
better. Whether they like it or
not.

Filo takes a lingering sip of coffee. Rouses himself from
the sofa with an idea.

FILO

Teenie. Go get me that machine of
Leon's. That recordin' machine 'n
bring it out to me.

EXT. WOODS. DAWN.

Trees are outlined against the first glow of dawn.

Crickets and frogs provide the appropriate pastoral sounds.

Gunshots.

EXT. BAYOUSIDE. DAWN.

Cherie, carrying the two coffees struggles through the thick
undergrowth.

A gunshot in the distance.

CHERIE

Errol! Errol!

Her blouse catches on a sticker-bush, ripping it at the
shoulder. She looks up.

INSERT: dark clouds obscuring the moon.

EXT. OAK TREE. DAWN.

Filo stands awkwardly over Leon. Tee hangs behind.

LEON

I'm not sleeping --- or sober.

FILO

Good! Because dare's some things I got to say that I don't want you to remember in the mornin'...

LEON

---oh, the morning---

FILO

Yah, jus' wait 'til the sun comes up right at the end of the driveway there 'n it'll be like somebody stuck icepicks in both yur eyes 'n pulled 'em out through the back of yur head.

LEON

That makes me feel warm all over.

Leon slaps at a mosquito as Tee brings the tape recorder and hands it to Filo.

There is an explosion in the distance. Tee, Filo, and Leon take notice of it.

TEE

Amarillo.

LEON

Intangibles.

FILO

Hand grenades.... Now. You been wantin' me to tell you a story.

Filo fiddles with the tape recorder.

FILO (CONT'D)

How you turn it on?

LEON

Press play and record.

FILO

Yah but I just wanna record.

Leon reaches over and turns the machine on.

LEON

Yur on...

INT. KITCHEN. DAWN.

From overhead we see Marguerite at the stove stirring the gumbo. She samples it. It is good. She looks up, addressing us:

MARGUERITE

There! Fini! Now for Roland's last installment. The test!

Into a bowl, Marguerite scoops a generous amount of rice.

Just as she starts to ladle gumbo from the pot on the stove, she hesitates.

She notices a slow-cooker on the table.

MARGUERITE (CONT'D)

Mon dieu! She's been back?

Marguerite is confirmed in an idea. She ladles the contents of the cooker into the bowl, topping it with a dollop of potato salad.

EXT. OAK TREE. DAWN.

Sylvia has joined the group there.

FILO

It's recordin'? Well, you see, there was this skool. An' at the end of the year they was gonna have this big dance for all the ate-grade klasses. Leon, you remember when you were in the ate-grade?

LEON

I don't remember the beginning of this conversation.

FILO

Oh yah you do. Yur teacher was a Miss Reed.

Filo sits down on one of the big roots. Tee and Sylvia remain standing.

Leon's memory of the incident begins to well up despite his efforts to keep it down.

FILO (CONT'D)

An' since it was for mos' of the students their firs' dance, the teacher, she wanted to make sure ya'll knew all the different kinds of dances so she axed som' of the boys and the girls in the class to ax their parents if they would come and teach the kind of dance they bes' knew how to do. You didn't

(MORE)

FILO (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 know I knew that, did you? What you
 didn't know either was that Miss
 Reed, she called me a few days
 after that and she says, Mr.
 Desormeaux, I'm reel sorry you
 couldn't come teach Leon's class
 some french dancin'. I hope you
 feelin' better now. An' I didn't
 say, I don't think I will. But me,
 I'm not mad, no. Not then. Not now.
 Because I knew exackly how you felt
 and why you felt like that. An' in
 a way I was kinda glad too, because
 it was only me you was ashamed of
 -- an' not yourself.

(slaps a mosquito)

Scares moustiques!

LEON

And if you had it to do all
 over...?

TEE

We'd do it exactly the same.

LEON

But why?

TEE

We're proud of the results.

LEON

I guess some people never learn.

TEE

An' some are afraid to learn.

SYLVIA

I'm not afraid, Leon. Why should
 you be?

EXT. BAYOUIDE. DAWN.

Cherie sloshes through low water, dodging overhanging limbs,
 still carrying the two mugs of coffee.

An explosion nearby.

EXT. OAK TREE. DAWN.

Leon slaps at a mosquito.

LEON

Damn mosquitoes!

FILO
 (hesitant, grudging)
 Sacres moustiques...

LEON
 What?

FILO
 Sacres moustiques: damn mosquitoes.

LEON
 Sacres moustiques---?

FILO
 Mais ouai. Dat's good.

Leon hesitates. We hear the sound of a lone fiddler tuning up. Leon hears it too. He quickly looks around to see if anyone else hears it.

They seem not to.

In the distance, barely materializing, is a FIDDLER. He begins playing a waltz.

LEON
 Sylvia, do you... hear something--?

SYLVIA
 No...

LEON
 You don't? She doesn't---! Are you sure?

SYLVIA
 Yes. I am sure.

Marguerite arrives with the gumbo. She stands watching.

EXT. BAYOUSIDE. DAWN.

Cherie breaks into an open area. She sees the silhouette of a figure standing waist-deep in the bayou.

There is an explosion on the opposite side.

CHERIE
 Errol?

ERROL
 Cherie? Is that coffee?

CHERIE
 Yah.

ERROL

It'll be cold! Why didn'tja bring
the thermos?

EXT. FRONT YARD. DAWN.

Leon stands in amazement watching and listening to the Fiddler play. An ACCORDIONIST and GUITAR PLAYER materialize and Leon's BAND is complete. They are much younger than Filo's Band.

Sylvia takes Leon's hand.

SYLVIA

Don't you want to dance?

TEE

Dancin's like makin' a roux. Jus'
keep yur feet movin'.

FILO

Let the music wash over you like
the rain.

EXT. FRONT YARD. DAWN.

Sylvia takes Leon by the arm and they dance. Hesitantly. Awkwardly. Slowly, the Band playing to Leon's level.

Even Roland, in the tree, drinking his beer, is enjoys the sight.

From a high angle we see Leon and Sylvia joined by Tee and Filo dancing.

A very loud explosion from the Bayouside brings a yelp from up in the tree and Roland comes tumbling down.

Marguerite rushes up to succor Roland.

MARGUERITE

Oh Roland! ROLAND!

ROLAND

Alright-alright! I'm okay.

MARGUERITE

Don't move! Take some of this.

She spoons the gumbo into Roland before he can object or stop her.

She quickly stands and steps back in anticipation.

Roland, in the meanwhile, busily debates what he's just tasted until finally:

ROLAND

You call this gumbo?! It's ---
plain! It's a prairie! A Savannah!
It's nothing!

Marguerite falls to her knees, making the sign of the cross:

MARGUERITE

---it's Nadine Rochon's prize-
winnin' gumbo! O, thank you all the
Blessed Saints in Heaven!

ROLAND

An' I could tell!
(crossing himself)
Thanks from me too. I'm a Cajun
again!

Sylvia screams.

Appearing out of the dawn's early light is Errol, lamp-black under his eyes, stripped to the waist, soaking wet, with ammo cartridges criss-crossing his chest and hand grenades hanging from his belt, carrying Cherie, who still holds the two coffee mugs.

Errol sets her down.

ERROL

We decided we'd go an' check out
Amarilla.

Felix, yawning and rubbing his eyes, comes around the side of the House to investigate the commotion.

As Felix rounds the corner, Cherie holds out the two mugs to him.

CHERIE

(whispering)
Mornin' Felix. One's cold coffee.
The other's bayou water.

Felix examines the contents of the mugs, not quite certain which is which. He takes one.

FELIX

Leon! Sylvia! I have here the
Solution to everything: Bayou
Water!

SYLVIA

Bayou water?

LEON

Yes. Remember? Once you taste it,
you'll never leave.

Leon examines the mugs. Takes one as though to drink.

FILLO

(quickly)

You drink dat and you're guaranteed
never to leave. It's full of
typhoid, yellow fever, malaria,
diarrhea...

ERROL

---and snake parts!

Leon, instead, pours half out over Sylvia's head and the
remainder over his head just as the sun breaks out.

LEON

There! Baptized proper.

TEE

Well --- everybody---! Marguerite?
Roland?

They look around but Marguerite and Roland are gone.

EXT. HIGHWAY. MORNING.

Roland and Marguerite speed down the highway in her yellow
Cadillac convertible, the Band playing away in the back
seat.

EXT. FRONT YARD. MORNING.

As everyone is walking back and into the House, Filo comes
up and addresses us:

FILLO

Don't worry, no! That was Leon's
band. Me. I got mine right here.
Ah, you hear it? Mais that's good.
Now don't go way. Why don't ya'll
join us for breakfast?

INT. KITCHEN. MORNING.

A CLOSE-UP of eggs being broken in a hot skillet.

The Eggs are being fried alongside bacon and sausages.

Coffee is poured and The Band, along with the family all
crammed into the kitchen.

Filo, noticing us, approaches closely:

FILO
Oh yah --- us Cajuns live like this
all the time, yah.

 TEE (O.S.)
FILO!

EXT. CANEFIELD. DAY.

Felix, hot and sweaty, operates a crane which is loading
cane into a large open cart.

EXT. DITCH ON EDGE OF CANEFIELD. DAY.

Filo, as in the beginning, clears the ditch. He stops,
addressing the audience:

 FILO
Au revoir, mes amis!

ROLL CREDITS

CREDITS ARE INTERRUPTED BY:

INT. SYLVIA AND LEON'S APARTMENT. NIGHT.

The candle-lit table is set with two steaming bowls of
gumbo.

Cajun music plays. Leon goes to the stereo. His finger
poised to turn the music off.

 LEON
Here goes---

He turns it off. The music continues.

Sylvia kisses him and they dance.

CREDITS RESUME UNTIL:

FADE OUT

END