

'THE BIRD CAN'T FLY'

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2006

24FPS The Netherlands
IMG Productions(Pty) Ltd South Africa
Borderline Productions Northern Ireland
Anna Productions The Netherlands

EXT. DESERT/BARN - DAY

A scoop of sand is thrown on sand.

A young boy, RIVER (10, mixed race), watches a man, STONE (55, black) and his son, JOHNNY (15, black) dig frantically at a tangle of beams and rafters, buried in sand like snowdrifts. It is like the aftermath of an earthquake, but with sand rather than mud. River's father, SCOOP (35, black), a disabled man, thin, twisted, beautiful, is there. He watches, hovering on long crutches like an insect.

A shout. STONE uncovers a WOMAN'S FACE (JUNE 35, white), sticking up from the drifting sand, like a death mask. Her mouth is full of sand.

SCOOP swoops on the dead WOMAN, throws his crutches down. Behind them, a group of petrified WOMEN (GRACE, BELLE, FAIR, PRETTY, MERCY CHARM) look on. Terrified CHILDREN (7 other little BOYS and 1 little GIRL) peer out from behind the WOMEN's skirts, trying to see what's happening. The mothers try to block their views. RIVER pushes them aside and looks while the body of his mother is drawn out of the sand.

ON A FLAT PIECE OF SAND AN INVISIBLE FINGER WRITES IN THE SAND. THE SOUND OF DIGGING CONTINUES. THE MOVEMENT OF THE DIGGERS IS SEEN THROUGH THEIR SHADOWS. SAND FALLS ON THE TITLE. IT'S GONE.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL/KITCHEN - DAY

Steam escapes from a pot. An ageing white woman, MELODY, stirs the broth meticulously. Around her all sorts of pots are boiling on stoves.

Behind her the STAFF (including the COOKS), fat from years in the kitchen of a grand hotel, peer out through a little waiter's window (to peep into the main hall) at their head's height. Outside is a BAND playing happy music.

THE STAFF is entranced.

MELODY, descends on them, firm from years of management and restraint.

Yet as MELODY hustles her STAFF away, she herself glimpses, through the little window.

P.O.V. MELODY through waiters window into hall hotel: Through the legs of a waiting group of PAPARAZZI a YOUNG BRIDE enters. An OLD BELL BOY takes away the wet umbrella he was holding above her. She is wearing a long ostrich-feather boa. The PAPARAZZI flashing their cameras. She poses for them. Behind her a BAND is playing. The boa is slipping from her shoulder. She snatches up the boa. She laughs and throws the boa over her shoulder. People are laughing.

EXT. DESERT/BARN - DAY

RIVER watches as the body of his mother, JUNE, is laid on a makeshift stretcher. STONE closes her eyes with two fingers and covers her body with a sheet. The WOMEN are crying.

A WOMAN (GRACE, black) tries to comfort RIVER, he does not react.

The stretcher is lifted up. They carry her away. His mother's feet poke out from under an old sheet. One foot is bare, one has a blue shoe. SCOOP is following the stretcher, he and RIVER make eye contact. RIVER stares at his Dad.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL/KITCHEN - DAY

MELODY is looking through the legs of the PAPARAZZI. For a second she has a sad expression in her eyes but she immediately pulls herself together and turns around.

Behind her on the table a variety of beautifully garnished dishes is waiting to be taken through to the dining room by darting WAITERS. A platter bearing a steaming roasted swan is brought by two COOKS. One of them burns his hand, sucks it. We hear the BAND still playing happily.

MELODY swiftly takes a knife, sharpens it, makes incisions in the swan, picks up a feather and sticks it in to garnish the swan. MELODY works rapidly and precisely. The COOKS gather to watch her work.

The YOUNGER COOK sucking his burned hand.

MELODY
(without even looking)
Wash your hands.

The YOUNGER COOK is leaving. MELODY reaches forward to pluck out a dirty old comb protruding from the breast-pocket of his white uniform. She fixes the earnest young man with an icy gaze.

MELODY (cont'd)

No personal items in the kitchen. And certainly
not this!

MELODY opens a metal dustbin with her foot, throws the comb in. She gestures to several lists, which cover one of the kitchen walls from floor to ceiling. MELODY straightens the young man's apron.

MELODY (cont'd)

And go.

All around them, STAFF are rushing to and fro.

Time-lapse:

MELODY walks through the frantic activity. Upstairs the wedding reception is at its peak. MELODY is perfectly calm and at home. She closes a tap, adjusts a pot on a stove as she passes.

MELODY approaches the centrepiece to come, the wedding cake. She settles down in front of it, inspects it. Although she keeps up her stern appearance, she is clearly pleased. A WAITER brings her an array of extraordinary decorations. MELODY takes some crystallised blue flowers and puts them on the cake. She is satisfied.

The telephone goes. A WAITER carrying a pile of cake-plates picks up the phone. He listens, looking surprised. MELODY looks at him from behind the cake.

MELODY (cont'd)

No personal calls.

The WAITER holds out the phone to MELODY.

WAITER

Mrs. Greenfield, it's for you.

THE WAITER nods, gestures at his heavy pile, hands the phone over to MELODY.

The YOUNGER COOK looks surprised at MELODY, while stirring in a pot.

MELODY, tentative, puts the receiver against her ear.

MELODY

(Listens)

Yes?

(A beat)

Stone? Stone, is that you?

MELODY listens. Her eyes widen. The expression on her face changes. It's as if she's stopped breathing.

Around her, all sound stops, while the activity in the kitchen seems to slow down. The WAITERS walking past carrying the wedding cake, taps spurt out water, steam erupts into the air - all completely silent and in slow motion.

The cake disappears through the swing doors.

As though in a dream, MELODY takes off her apron, hangs it precisely on a hook next to the phone. Sounds return. The movement in the kitchen speeds up to normal.

MELODY opens her hands and stares at a little blue crystallised flower in her hand.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL/MELODY'S BEDROOM - DAY

MELODY's bedroom with a pitched roof, is small and impersonal. On the bed lies a little suitcase, open and empty. On the table, a picture of young MELODY with a girl (June 12 years) in front of a Hotel called Paradise. Beside it a green envelope with the name and address written on it: June Greenfield, 16 Mainstreet, Fairlands, 1073AX Lowerwoods.

MELODY stares at the name on the envelope. Then she tears it open, pulls out a green letter, which was carefully folded in three, takes out some bank-notes folded into the centre.

On the paper writing the last words are seen: 'ALWAYS HOPING TO HEAR YOUR NEWS. LOVE - MOTHER'.

MELODY meticulously crumples up the green letter into a ball.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL / RECEPTION - DAY

MELODY, in a neat black dress and a small hat with an ostrich feather on top, lays a huge bunch of keys on the desk in front of the old BELL BOY.

MELODY walks across the reception area to a side door pulling a small suitcase. Behind her the YOUNGER COOK walks up to the BELL BOY. From a hall in the distance sounds again the BAND.

YOUNGER COOK

(curious)

Where's she going?

OLD BELL BOY

She told me, she'll back in a week.

YOUNGER COOK

A week! Does Mr. Oates know that?

OLD BELL BOY

(Shrugs)

There's been a family tragedy, she said.

YOUNGER COOK

I didn't know she had any family.

OLD BELL BOY

Neither did I.

A FAMILY with a load of luxurious suitcases arrive. The YOUNGER COOK sneaks away. The BELL BOY takes over their suitcases.

EXT. PARADISE HOTEL - DAY

MELODY opens the staff entrance and steps outside. The rain stopped and the building is still a bit.

MELODY walks away. Behind her the five-star hotel, surrounded by big trees. On its roof, a large neon sign reads 'PARADISE HOTEL'.

MELODY walks alone through the garden of the hotel. An internal pain strikes her.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

MELODY waits at the bus stop. A car passes by in full speed through a puddle. The water splashes against her. MELODY gets soaking wet. Raindrops stream down MELODY's face.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

River looks into a simple kitchen, illuminated by candelabra. SIX WOMEN (GRACE, BELLE, FAIR, PRETTY, MERCY CHARM) are gathered around a table. Lying stretched out on an old white sheet in the middle of the table, is the white naked corpse of JUNE.

The WOMEN are washing the body of JUNE. A rusty enamel bowl of water is resting on her stomach. The WOMEN, dipping their rags in and out of the bowl. They all cry silently.

GRACE(35, black), stands at June's head. She slowly and tenderly washes her face and long blond hair.

Behind her RIVER peeping through the window. He sneaks away.

FAIR (40, black), immaculate and stylish, cleans June's left arm. She holds the arm with only two fingers, as if she's afraid of the dead body, washing it with a damp cloth.

MERCY (35, black), a shy, thin woman with a high-collared dress, washes the other arm, unafraid and affectionately.

CHARM (30, white), very fat, washes June's stomach, groin and thighs. She is brisk and unashamed in her movements. Behind her through the doorway to the verandah, the neck of an acoustic guitar is visible and sounds sad GUITAR MUSIC in major chords.

BELLE (46, black), with long painted black nails is at the feet. She is painting June's toenails light blue. BELLE sighs as the polish smudges slightly.

PRETTY,(24 black), an exquisitely attractive young woman but very naïve, stands nearby washing June's light blue dress in a kitchen pot. Tears glisten in her eyes.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE / VERANDAH - NIGHT

P.O.V. River: On the wooden verandah, a single blue woman's shoe is jumping up and down in time to the music, bouncing on a loose plank.

RIVER sits in the shadows. He watches the dancing shoe on the verandah.

His gaze moves towards SCOOP, who sits in a chair painted all over with blue dots and is playing a progression of deeply mournful chords on the acoustic GUITAR. He hums a melody over the chords.

It's the insistent tapping of SCOOP's foot on the verandah that's making the shoe dance.

PRETTY comes out with the wet leaking blue dress. She hangs the dress over the railing of the verandah. SCOOP looks up at her. She smiles at him, she tries to cheer him up. SCOOP smiles back. The music he plays gets more joyful. PRETTY with a smile on her face goes back inside.

SCOOP eyes RIVER in the shadows. He smiles at his son.

RIVER scowls at his father and lays a rifle on his lap.

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

A shiny new bus arrives in full speed in the rain. Brakes. Opens it's doors. The crowd gushes out and runs towards the airport with the sign 'International Departures'.

MELODY gets jammed in between the people. The feather on her hat gets stuck in the door and breaks.

People are scurrying about under umbrellas, disembarking from cars and taxis, fighting over luggage-trolleys.

There is the SOUND of aeroplanes taxiing in the background.

MELODY walks to the entrance. The feather awkwardly sways in front of her face, while walking she tries to mend it.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

RIVER carefully reaches and pulls a feather out of an OSTRICH (male), who sits near a headstone of an angel. The OSTRICH jumps up and hisses at RIVER.

JOHNNY, much taller then RIVER, hides behind the headstone and trembles with fear.

RIVER triumphantly runs very fast away with the feather. The bird runs away the opposite side.

JOHNNY carefully raises. At the other side of the angel he sees an ostrich egg. He smiles.

INT. BUS IN URBAN AREA - DAY

MELODY sits at the window of a bus without glass. Around and behind her CHINESE PEOPLE with their cargo. Everything Very loud CHINESE MUSIC blares out from speakers.

A poorly dressed CHINESE MAN beside her is knitting. Her hat gets blown off her head out of the window

MELODY slaps at the side of the bus.

MELODY
Stop! Stop! Stop!

But the driver doesn't hear it.

The CHINESE MAN gives a shrug.

EXT. BARREN LANDSCAPE - SUNSET

The bus has broken down on an empty road. The CHINESE PASSENGERS wait as the CHINESE BUS-DRIVER tinkers with the engine. MELODY sits on her suitcase. The MUSIC still blares out from speakers.

Suddenly she gets up and walks off down the tar road pulling her suitcase on wheels after her.

EXT. STONE'S SHOP / VERANDAH - SUNSET

A LITTLE GIRL is on the watch, as behind her RIVER clammers on a group of KIDS with sticks and scrambles through a high window.

INT. STONE'S SHOP / STORAGE-ROOM - SUNSET

RIVER squeezes through the window and drops onto the floor. He has the ostrich feather in his hand.

The walls around him are covered with shelves full of old tins, bottles and cardboard-boxes. Everything is dusty and dull. In the middle of the room stands a long trolley, on small wheels, piled with ice cubes. The ice is rapidly melting, dripping down onto the floor.

June's body lies on top of the ice cubes. Her skin is almost as translucent as the ice on which she lay. She wears a faded light-blue dress. Her feet, with their blue-varnished toenails, stick out from underneath the old sheet covering her. She is illuminated by a candle.

RIVER looks lovingly at the dead woman on the trolley. Slowly he comes closer. He lifts the feather to her face and very carefully strokes it over her eyes, nose, mouth and neck.

EXT. STONE'S SHOP / VERANDAH - SUNSET

On the verandah of the store, in front of a door, stands a mini-army of CHILDREN, consisting of: A tiny four year-old black girl, LITTLE, who is holding a doll, and a group of seven serious looking little BOYS (white and black, 6 to 9 years old). They're standing motionless, holding long sticks, like guards, in front of a wall and a door scattered over with signs: 'Undertaker', 'Diamond Permits', 'Post Office', 'Liquor Store', 'Hardware', 'Bank', 'Beer' and 'We buy Everything'. Above their heads the small window RIVER climbed through is seen. One of the boys has a whistle in his mouth.

GRACE walks up to the KIDS. She is holding a pinned black suit-jacket, altered to fit a young boy.

GRACE

Any of you kids seen River?

Nobody answers.

GRACE (cont'd)

You surprise me.

SCOOP arrives on his crutches.

SCOOP

He can't be far.

The KIDS shift hostilely. The boy with the whistle in his mouth casts a quick doubtful look at the little window above him.

INT. STONE'S SHOP - SUNSET

The big run-down general store is way past its glory days. The ceiling is hung with dusty chandeliers, all marked down with slashed prices.

The cupboards and shelves that line the walls behind the counter are divided into sections marked with signs placed over old signs. 'Funeral Service', 'Diamond Assaying', 'Birthday Cards'.

STONE is standing behind the counter. A cigarette dangles from his lips while he's fiddling with a dismantled carburettor in his hand, occasionally glancing at a book on car mechanics on the counter in front of him.

Next to him, against the counter, the coffin is leaning.

BELLE, STONE's wife, sits nearby, filing her nails in a constant rhythm.

BELLE

Why are you waiting? She's going off.

SCOOP comes in, BELLE shuts up. SCOOP looks down at the carburettor.

SCOOP

Problems?

STONE is struggling to put a small spring back into the carburettor with his thick fingers.

STONE

It's only an engine.

(Looks up)

How are you?

SCOOP shrugs.

STONE (cont'd)

Beer?

SCOOP nods.

STONE hands a beer to Scoop.

JOHNNY enters, sweaty, takes out an ostrich egg from inside his shirt. SCOOP drains his beer in one go, while JOHNNY places the egg proudly in his mother's lap.

BELLE

Only one?

JOHNNY

(confused)

But... But...

STONE

One's better than none, Belle. He does his best, eh, young man? I've been waiting for you.

STONE picks up a hammer lying on the counter. He looks at the coffin leaning there, and then at JOHNNY.

STONE (cont'd)

We gotta... put her away now.

(Looks at Scoop)

Would you like a moment?

STONE gestures towards the store-room door.

SCOOP nods, puts his empty bottle on the counter. He turns and shambles towards the store-room.

STONE looks at BELLE. They share a look of concern about the widower.

INT. STONE'S SHOP / STORAGE-ROOM - DARK

RIVER tenderly puts the white feather in between JUNE's folded hands.

A whistle outside signals danger. RIVER looks round, where to hide? He ducks underneath the trolley.

Water drips down on him, he shivers. He hears the door open and sees SCOOP'S feet that softly come up to the trolley, RIVER could touch them.

SCOOP looks down at June lying there.

A FLY buzzes around her head, settles on June's arm. Instinctively, SCOOP slaps the FLY. June's body trembles. Her arm slides off the trolley. The feather slips off her hand and falls to the ground.

Under the trolley, RIVER wants to reach out to catch the feather but he can't get it without being seen. The feather falls in the water. RIVER casts furious glances at SCOOP's legs.

SCOOP picks up the arm and gently caresses it. June's wedding ring glimmers in the candlelight. The FLY buzzes around his head.

He strokes her hand against his face. He gets tears in his eyes. His lips touch the hand. He opens his mouth a little and her fingers touch his tongue. He carefully kisses the hand.

Then, moistening her finger with his tongue, he slips off her wedding-ring. He puts his hand on her face.

A long beat.

RIVER sees his father's feet leave.

The door bangs shut, the candle flickers. RIVER picks up the feather, shakes out the water as much as possible and carefully puts it back into his mother's hands. He shuts his eyes and prays.

EXT. BARREN LANDSCAPE - SUNRISE

MELODY opens her eyes, she sits in the back of a pick-up truck half-buried in mailbags and parcels. She clutches her suitcase and stares at the receding road.

The pick-up drives on a dirt road, in a barren landscape further on are some sand-dunes. Behind it, a long plume of dust.

EXT. BARREN LANDSCAPE / MAILBOX - EARLY MORNING

A metal post-box on a pole is planted beside the road. The words "FAIRLANDS, City of Diamonds" and an arrow are painted on the side.

The pick-up skids to a stop, raising a huge cloud of dust.

An INDIAN POSTMAN climbs out of the cab holding a bundle of letters.

POSTMAN

Here we are, lady. End of the line.

MELODY looks around her.

MELODY

Don't you go all the way into town?

POSTMAN

Not any more.

MELODY

I could pay you. It's very urgent. Please.

The POSTMAN shakes his head.

POSTMAN

Sorry, against regulations. They check my mileage - it's not on my route anymore.

MELODY climbs off the mountain of parcels with her suitcase. She tries to beat the dust from her dress.

The POSTMAN puts the bundle of post into her hands.

POSTMAN (cont'd)

Take these in with you. Saves him the trip.

He gets back into his cab.

MELODY

(Defeated)

Isn't that against regulations?

The truck makes a U-turn around MELODY, and the POSTMAN leans out, points at the horizon.

POSTMAN

Just go straight. You can't miss it...

He looks in the air.

POSTMAN (cont'd)

... and the weather is fine.

He pulls off, heading back into the direction they came from, leaving MELODY in a cloud of dust.

She turns around and trudges off into the dunes, pulling her case behind her.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

RIVER, his rifle on his back, is sitting on the edge of a deep, precisely-dug grave. His legs hang down over the side as he obsessively sharpens the end of a long wooden stick into a lethally sharp point. Beside him lies a bundle of sharpened sticks.

Further away is the grave with the sculpture of the angel. That's where the female OSTRICH scratches about in the sand.

JOHNNY, neatening the corners with a sharp spade, keeps an eye on the big OSTRICH further on.

JOHNNY

Are you gonna use it to kill?

RIVER nods. JOHNNY is relieved.

In the distance a BELL starts ringing. RIVER jumps up, runs away from the clinging sound with a bundle of carved spears. JOHNNY runs off in the opposite direction, leaving his spade behind.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

MELODY, beads of sweat drenching her face, ploughs deep footprints into the soft sand as she trudges up the side of a sand-dune.

Pulling her suitcase behind her, MELODY disappears over the dune.

Stretched out for miles, an exactly straight track from the suitcase wheels runs up and down over the smooth, sand-dunes, disappearing over the horizon.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

The trolley wobbles and SHRIEKS under the heavy coffin, as it's pushed over an uneven dirt-track of the neat graveyard. The clanging sound of the BELL mixes with the shrieking of the trolley.

STONE pushes the trolley, sweating and grunting. SCOOP walks a few steps behind him. On his little finger, the wedding ring glints in the sun.

A FLY buzzes around SCOOP's head.

JOHNNY runs up, sweating. He takes over the hand-bell from BELLE. She frowns at him for being late.

Behind him, the small funeral procession passes by, EVERYONE dressed in black. They're walking through the graveyard.

Some of the tombstones are huge, little tomb-houses, reflecting the town's wealthy past. Most are more simple, with memorial gifts placed on top - like two gumboots and a spade, a watering can and a withered plant, an ashtray with a pipe or only a photograph of the dead person.

FAIR is wearing a huge hat, she's swaying jauntily on her high heels. PRETTY, beside her, wears a smaller hat.

BELLE looks over her shoulder for GRACE, who's running up late behind them. MERCY walks at the back of the group.

GRACE falls into step with the procession. She's panting, wipes her hair out of her eyes. She catches up with BELLE, holding the boy's black jacket in her hand.

GRACE

(Whispers)

That boy's impossible. I can't find him
anywhere.

BELLE sighs annoyed.

GRACE (cont'd)
(looking at the jacket)
So much work.

BELLE takes the jacket and thrusts it at JOHNNY. He beams. Scrambles himself into the jacket, which is way too small for him. For a moment he stops ringing the bell, and straightens up, then goes on ringing the BELL, very proudly.

CHARM starts humming an improvised tune to the rhythm set up by the shrieking of the trolley and the ringing of the bell.

FAIR also begins to HUM and PRETTY immediately joins in.

Tears start to run down GRACE'S cheeks as she too joins in the humming.

All the WOMEN HUM now, a gentle and loving lament.

Two OSTRICHES look at them from a distance.

SCOOP walks behind the trolley on the verge of crying. The FLY buzzes around his head (fits the music).

CHARM starts to SING a solo, full of dedication but slightly discordant, building on the humming, the ringing and the shrieking as they walk through the graveyard.

EXT. DESERT NEAR PARADISE HOTEL LETTERS - DAY

MELODY climbs up the slope of a dune. Rising before her, she sees huge letters spelling the words "Paradise Hotel", from behind, as if seen in a mirror. (It's the old hotel where she has been working long ago. The lettering is identical to the Paradise Hotel where she works right now.)

She stops for a moment. Her face softens. Then she hears the bell ringing.

MELODY climbs higher, suddenly she is in a hurry. She looks through the letters PARADISE down into the valley. The expression on her face changes - she is flabbergasted.

Laid out below MELODY is a town, but the entire town seems to be partly-buried by the encroaching desert. The letters 'Paradise Hotel' and most of the rooftops are all that protrude from beneath the sand.

Only a few houses down in the centre of town remain visible between the creeping dunes. There are no trees. Nothing, but the last vestiges of the town centre. And beyond, more sand dunes, right up to the horizon.

MELODY looks down, amazed. Just below her is the cemetery, almost as big as the entire town. She sees the group of MOURNERS gathered there.

The sound of their SONG reaches up to her.

MELODY starts to run down the dune, her rolling suitcase bouncing over the sand behind her.

With every step she takes, her legs sink deeper and deeper into the soft sand. She runs desperately, as though in a nightmare, but the clinging sand seems to prevent her progress towards the group in the graveyard below her.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

The dusty rope slips slowly through JOHNNY'S hand. STONE, opposite, holds the other end as they lower the coffin together. While the assembled mourners still sing.

SCOOP watches, sombre, a FLY buzzing around his head.

MELODY, dishevelled and covered in dust, finally reaches the group of MOURNERS. She tries to regain her breath.

MELODY

Stop!

The WOMEN stop singing, except for GRACE. Swept up in her emotion, eyes closed, she carries on singing. FAIR nudges her. She stops, opens her eyes and sees MELODY standing there.

The group of MOURNERS stare in silence at the panting WOMAN pushing at her hair and beating the dust from her dress in an attempt to regain her prim composure.

STONE, rope in hand, manages to speak.

STONE

Melody!

For a split second SCOOP gets a fright in his eyes.

MELODY steps forward, the MOURNERS parting to clear a path for her to the grave-side.

MELODY

Stop. Bring her back up.

Seeing this unfamiliar woman approaching, JOHNNY, unnerved, lets the rope slip through his fingers.

MELODY walks to the edge of the grave and looks down.

The coffin slams down into the grave, landing with a muffled thud. A cloud of dust billows out of the hole.

SCOOP

Hey! Be careful.

MELODY turns around and stares at SCOOP, she takes in his crutches.

STONE takes MELODY'S hand, shakes it, gravely.

STONE

Please, accept my condolences.

MELODY

Stone. You said you'd wait.

STONE

It was hot. It took too long. I figured you wouldn't come back.

EXT. GRAVEYARD NEAR TOMBSTONE - DAY

RIVER is hiding behind a headstone, like a trained sniper, lifts the barrel of a gun over the ridge of the headstone and stares down the barrel of the gun, using it as a telescope.

P.O.V. RIVER through his rifle: MELODY is standing at the edge of the open grave, looking down. Then looking over her shoulder signing STONE to bring the coffin up again. Nobody moves. MELODY's says something and points down into the grave. Nobody moves. MELODY takes hold of the end of the rope that JOHNNY is holding and begins to pull. STONE puts his hand on her shoulder gently, takes the rope from her. He signals to JOHNNY to take the other side. The coffin is raised again.

EXT. GRAVEYARD NEAR GRAVE - DAY

The coffin is placed with a thud in front of MELODY.

MELODY pulls a white handkerchief out of her sleeve, and in one movement wipes the dusty covering of sand off the lid, engulfing FAIR, who breaks out into a fit of coughing.

MELODY

(to Stone)

Can you open it for me?

(Urgently)

Stone?

(Softly)

Please?

STONE holds out his hand for the hammer from JOHNNY.

EXT. GRAVEYARD NEAR TOMBSTONE - DAY

Behind RIVER peep eight small heads - eight pairs of CHILDREN's eyes watching RIVER, staring down the barrel of the rifle, intently.

P.O.V. RIVER through his rifle: SCOOP steps forward, restrains STONE by his arm. He tries to convince STONE. GRACE starts to cry. CHARM titters nervously. All the WOMEN move nervously.

RIVER squeezes the trigger a tad. He could, if he wanted to...

EXT. GRAVEYARD NEAR GRAVE - DAY

JOHNNY shakes his head.

SCOOP straightens up and speaks quietly to MELODY.

SCOOP

June's dead, MELODY. Let her be.

MELODY shakes her head, determined.

MELODY

I have to see her.

STONE stands behind the coffin between MELODY and SCOOP, like a judge with his hammer. He hesitates.

STONE raps sharply on the lid.

SCOOP shrugs, defiant.

With sure movements of the hammer, STONE levers open the lid of the coffin.

The WOMEN whispers softly to each other and frown.

STONE lifts the lid off the coffin.

SCOOP turns away, distressed and enraged.

MELODY falls to her knees beside the coffin.

EXT. GRAVEYARD NEAR TOMBSTONE - DAY

RIVER looks over his shoulder at the kids behind him. He points his rifle into the air.

The SEVEN BOYS stick up their spears.

RIVER puts back his eye and aims through the viewer.

EXT. GRAVEYARD NEAR GRAVE - DAY

MELODY looks down at JUNE lying in the coffin, very carefully she brings her hand into the coffin, she pauses, then her fingers touch June's hair. She strokes her long hair tenderly.

MELODY adjusts the collar of her dress. Picks away some unseen speck of dust. Unthinkingly she takes the crumpled white feather out of June's hands and throws it like the dust out of the coffin.

The feather flutters down to the ground.

RIVER jumps up, screaming, from behind the tombstone.

RIVER

No!

MELODY, startled, swings round.

RIVER is screaming and pointing his gun in the air.

Behind him, the group of CHILDREN charges down from a dune, the BOYS carrying spears and LITTLE her doll.

RIVER (cont'd)

Get off her! Get off her!

RIVER and the KIDS run across the graves, like a pack of hungry wolves.

RIVER leaps over to the grave-side, runs up to the coffin. MELODY backs away. RIVER snatches up the feather and keeps on running, taking the feather with him.

SCOOP smiles.

SCOOP

Meet your grandson, Melody.

MELODY

A child?

MELODY, astonished, sees RIVER disappearing into the ranks of the running CHILDREN as they leave the graveyard in a trail of dust.

MELODY (cont'd)

June had a child? With whom?

It gets deathly quiet. MELODY looks around, searching. Her eye falls on SCOOP. He's got a triumphant look in his eyes.

MELODY gasps for breath.

SCOOP smiles.

A second FLY swoops down and begins to buzz around his head.

SCOOP waves away the two FLIES.

STONE gives a cough and holds up the lid. Nobody reacts. He puts the lid on the coffin.

MELODY (cont'd)

What happened?

STONE

She was in the old barn when it collapsed.

He hammers the nails back in.

STONE (cont'd)

We tried to save her but we're too late.

CUT TO:

Surrounded by ALL THE PEOPLE the coffin is lowered down in the grave

CUT TO:

Sand falls down on the coffin, done by Johnny with a spade.

EXT. PATH AWAY FROM THE GRAVEYARD - DAY

MELODY and SCOOP walk on either side of STONE. They leave the graveyard. Behind them is only JOHNNY, he's filling up the grave in a constant rhythm. MELODY looks a few times over her shoulder, she opens her mouth but no word comes out.

STONE pulls MELODY's shrieking suitcase behind him. He lights a cigarette. He glances at MELODY. SCOOP, still bothered by the two persistent FLIES, flaps his hand round his head trying to wave them away.

MELODY looks around, aghast at the change in the town.

In the distance, with his gang of KIDS, RIVER is racing across the dunes, they disappear behind a dune.

EXT. MAINSTREET NEAR CHARM'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY walks with STONE and SCOOP along the sandy main street.

They're passing by a neglected house (it's not a ruin and free of sand), it's CHARM's house. She opens the shutters. STONE makes an effort to relieve the tense silence.

STONE

The weather's changed since you left... No more rain, and storms more frequent now.

MELODY looks at what is left of the Paradise Hotel.

STONE (cont'd)

The Paradise... remember? The music? You had such small feet...

A softening in MELODY. Clearly there used to be a little something between her and STONE.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAINSTREET NEAR FAIR'S HOUSE - DAY

THEY still walk along the sandy main street, passing by FAIR's house. FAIR stands in front of her door and is beating out the dust from her hat. In the distance, further on the Mainstreet, walk PRETTY and MERCY (not together).

MELODY

Where is everyone?

STONE

The mine collapsed. A lot of the guys go to town, don't come back. There's one mine still going, out in the desert. But they don't find much. Only Skinny, he found a huge one.

Shows with his hands how big the diamond was.

STONE (cont'd)

So now they're all hoping again. But it's dangerous.

MELODY glances at SCOOP, ahead of them, swinging on his crutches. STONE shakes his head.

STONE (cont'd)

(Whispers)

No... that was a car accident.

Behind STONE in the distance run RIVER and the KIDS.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAINSTREET NEAR STONE'S SHOP - DAY

MELODY, STONE AND SCOOP pass by the store. Above the store windows is a sign which reads "A. *STONE GENERAL DEALER*". The name of the shop is painted over the old, faded name of the previous owner. BELLE is knocking the dust out from her dress.

STONE

I've spread out a bit.

Next to it stands an old dented car. It's the only car in town.

STONE (cont'd)

My new car!

MELODY, overwhelmed by memories and grief, doesn't react. She walks on like in a trance.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAINSTREET NEAR MRS. GRAIN'S HOUSE - DAY

An extremely old white woman, MRS. GRAIN, is sitting in front of a very small house. She holds a black umbrella to shade her off from the sun. Beneath a hole in her chair is a conveniently placed chamber pot.

MELODY, STONE and SCOOP pass by. Abruptly, the toothless old WOMAN begins to shout.

MRS. GRAIN

Be good!!

She pisses into the chamber pot. MELODY, startled, snaps out of her trance.

MELODY

Miss Grain? Is that Miss Grain?

STONE nods.

STONE

(taps his head)

Gone where God doesn't reach.

MELODY

(On the verge of despair)

Why didn't June leave? Why didn't she get out?

SCOOP looks innocently and turns his head away. MELODY sees it.

MELODY (cont'd)

You could have come.

P.O.V. MELODY: A rifle barrel trained on them from between two sand humps.

MELODY (cont'd)

(Screaming)
Look out!

She knocks the MEN. SCOOP staggers and laughs a sardonic laugh.

SCOOP
It's a dud. He likes it to spy on us.

MELODY collects herself and her dignity.

MELODY
Why aren't they in school?

SCOOP
(glances at Mrs. GRAIN)
We can't afford a new teacher.

STONE
(somewhat disappointed)
Belle sent our oldest away to her aunt, but
Johnny, you know...

MELODY
(suddenly emotional)
My house.

SCOOP
(degrading)
June's house.

MELODY
(ignoring him)
Thank you, STONE.

She steps up on the verandah, STONE puts her case down, recedes.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE / VERANDAH - DAY

MELODY looks at the chair, which is painted with little blue dots all over.

MELODY
You painted my chair.

SCOOP
No, she did.

Suddenly MELODY sees the chair differently. She goes inside.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY comes over the threshold with her suitcase. Amazed by what she sees, she stands in the main room, that serves as a kitchen. The house is an absolute pigsty. The kitchen table, which, since June was laid out on it, is covered again with some dirty cups, cassettes and leftovers of food.

Most of the walls are covered with small light blue dots, made of small pieces of paper and plastic pinned to the plaster. The repeated pattern almost gives the effect of a designed wallpaper.

At the back of the room, there's an old sink with a copper tap and an electric stove. Scattered around the room are three chairs covered with clothes.

MELODY looks around, shocked. Her eyes search for something she recognizes. But the more she sees, the more shocked she gets. Broken cups, a lipstick crushed on the ground, a punctured football, a corner full of empty beer-bottles, some broken.

Her eye falls on a shiny guitar on the wall, just next to the door.

SCOOP enters, leans against the wall and looks at her. Around his head the two FLIES.

MELODY looks around her in disgust.

SCOOP kick off his shoes, his socks are with holes in. He throws his jacket on a chair.

MELODY

Where is the fourth chair?

SCOOP shrugs.

MELODY (cont'd)

What have you done?

SCOOP

Lived here.

MELODY picks up the lipstick and closes it. She puts it on the table.

MELODY, exhausted and suddenly very vulnerable, holds on to the railing of a chair in search of a place to sit.

MELODY

Isn't there going to be a... a wake for her, or something?

SCOOP takes a beer from a cupboard, scrabbles for an opener, opens it with his teeth, offers it to MELODY. She shakes her head. SCOOP shrugs and empties it in one gulp.

MELODY she gives a little kick against the punctured football.

MELODY (cont'd)

What's his name?

SCOOP

River.

MELODY

River? How old is he?

SCOOP

Ten... or so.

MELODY

Or so?

SCOOP fiddles with the ring on his finger, defensive.

MELODY (cont'd)

Never a word for eleven years.

(a beat)

Why didn't she tell me? I'm her mother.

MELODY still searching for a place to sit down, moves stuff about.

The FLIES start to irritate SCOOP.

MELODY picks up some very dirty clothes from a chair and moves them. She sits down on the chair.

SCOOP leans onto the table. One of the FLIES lands on a plate on the table. SCOOP slaps the FLY. He breaks the plate. The FLY circles up to hover above him.

MELODY (cont'd)

It's clear the boy can't stay here.

SCOOP stares at her, outraged.

MELODY (cont'd)

He'll come with me. He should be in school. I can pay for it. There's no chance for him here. Nothing.

SCOOP stares at her with aversion.

A little crack outside. SCOOP limps to the window, he smiles. Melody follows him.

RIVER is seen walking away.

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

GRACE (who lives opposite June's house) looks out of the window while she stitches a button onto a dress. Next to her, on a hot plate, is a pot of soup. Around her is a sewing machine, pin-cushions and other sewing material.

GRACE sees RIVER near a small dune behind June's house. Two OSTRICHES are browsing nearby.

MELODY comes out of the house of June, determined. She walks across towards RIVER.

The OSTRICHES run away at her approach.

GRACE take the pot from the hot plate and leave her house.

EXT. DUNE BEHIND JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

RIVER is sharpening a big knife on a stone. He works fast, efficient. A shadow is cast over him. It's MELODY looking down at him.

MELODY

Hi, River.

That's a very big knife you have. Where did you get it?

RIVER doesn't respond, continues honing the blade in a constant rhythm.

MELODY (cont'd)

I'm sure your mum didn't let you play with knives.

RIVER spits on the whetstone.

MELODY looks at him with disgust.

RIVER continues honing. MELODY bends over.

MELODY (cont'd)
You'd better give it to me.

MELODY holds out her hand for the knife. RIVER doesn't look up.

MELODY goes down onto her knees beside him.

MELODY (cont'd)
I'm your Granny, June's mother. From now on,
I'm going to take care of you.

RIVER stands up. His eyes narrow to thin slits as he checks the edge of the blade against the light.

MELODY, suddenly afraid, backs away from the boy. To cover up her fear she turns around and back towards the house. She speaks over her shoulder while walking away.

MELODY (cont'd)
No dinner until I get the knife.

MELODY walks on. In one swift practised movement, RIVER takes the top of the blade between thumb and forefinger, aims and throws the knife.

The knife flies through the air with amazing speed. It whizzes past MELODY's head with a whooshing sound, thuds blade-first into the wall of the house.

MELODY, shocked, looks at the vibrating knife in the wall. RIVER walks away at his leisure. MELODY turns around.

MELODY (cont'd)
(Calls)
River! You come back here!

RIVER, in the distance, doesn't turn.

MELODY, shaken, goes across and pulls the knife out of the wood, trying to stay firm.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

MELODY comes back in with the knife. She finds GRACE rummaging in the sink. An old cassette recorder plays MUSIC. SCOOP is sitting at the table and spoons up some soup out of the pot.

MELODY smacks the knife on the table.

SCOOP smirks.

SCOOP

(to Grace)

What a delicious soup, Grace.

GRACE

(babbling)

I seem to remember you liking soup, Melody, so
I thought... it's hot. I just finished making it.

GRACE pushes the pot towards MELODY.

MELODY

Thank you.

GRACE spills some soup as she pushes. MELODY, annoyed, looks around for a cloth to clean. She picks up some unspeakable piece of cloth.

SCOOP

(to Grace)

Where would I be without you.

GRACE

(to Melody)

Need any help with anything?

MELODY picks up the pot and puts it onto a plate so it doesn't dirty the table.

SCOOP raises a sardonic eyebrow at GRACE. GRACE nods, uncomfortable.

GRACE (cont'd)

I'd better be off, then. Let me know if there's
anything I can do.

MELODY nods, ushers GRACE out through the open door. MELODY closes the door behind her and turns of the music.

MELODY

What about River?

SCOOP

I'll leave him some.

MELODY

(point at the knife on the table)

Don't you have any notion how to raise a child?

SCOOP swats at the two FLIES buzzing around his head.

SCOOP

Have you?

SCOOP goes on eating out of the pot.

MELODY takes the knife and puts it away in a kitchen drawer.

She looks for a clean bowl. There are none. MELODY finds a filthy bowl, opens the tap, no water.

SCOOP (cont'd)

We fetch it now.

MELODY, surprised, looks at SCOOP. He nods to a big dented pot with water,

MELODY walks over to the dented pot, rinses the bowl, takes the pot, pours the soup in the bowl and hands it to SCOOP.

MELODY begins to rinse two other bowls. In one she pours again some soup, the other bowl stands empty next to the pot with soup. MELODY sits down at the table.

MELODY

Why is he like this?

SCOOP gets up, fetches himself another beer.

SCOOP

Go home, Melody. I'll get Stone to drive you to town tomorrow.

SCOOP puts the bottle in his pocket, picks up his guitar, slings it over his shoulder and leaves.

MELODY sinks back, lost.

EXT. WATERPUMP - LATE AFTERNOON

All the WOMEN, except GRACE, are filling their pots at a battered water-pump next to STONE's store.

The old diesel motor next to the well lies silent, the WOMEN pulling on a heavy chain attached to it.

MERCY, BELLE, CHARM and PRETTY pull the rattling chain together. CHARM sets the pace. FAIR keeps the kitchen pots under the trickle of water appearing out of the pump.

Some of the pots are already half-filled with water.

GRACE arrives, running, with an empty pot, takes her place on the chain.

GRACE

Sorry...

(Breathless)

I was chatting to Melody.

The women look curious, eager for gossip. GRACE has got their attention. But BELLE is dubious.

BELLE

Chatting. Really?

GRACE

Well, I thought I'd go over to make her feel welcome and less alone.

PRETTY

Alone.

FAIR

And?

GRACE makes mocking signs about Scoop and Melody.

GRACE

(to Fair)

You know her, Fair,... tt-tt-tt. She moved my pot so it wouldn't dirty her table.

FAIR

She hasn't changed a bit, I can tell just by looking at her. Bad as ever. Just like at Paradise.

PRETTY

Paradise.

CHARM

When she popped up in the graveyard I got such a fright. For a second I thought it was June. Kind of demon June.

FAIR

You're right Charm, she's still got that air... like she would stand there and tell the desert go back where he came from.

BELLE

'Why didn't you wait?' Not 'Thank you, Stone, for let me know my daughter died', but no - it's 'Why didn't you wait...'

BELLE and PRETTY just go on pulling the chain. MERCY is staring at nothing and distracted by her own thoughts. She doesn't keep the pace.

CHARM

Mercy!

MERCY looks at her.

CHARM (cont'd)

Just pull. And one... and two...

MERCY

Sorry.

FAIR

She may have left Fairlands as a chef, but let's not forget she started as a maid.

PRETTY

A maid.

MELODY arrives with a big dented pot. All the WOMEN turn and look at her. Not sure if she has over heard the last words.

BELLE stops pulling, forcing MERCY and PRETTY to stop also.

BELLE

(barely a flicker)
Hi Melody, are you settling in?

A beat.

MELODY looks at the pots filled with water and doesn't know where to stand to get water.

MERCY, feeling sorry for MELODY, takes the pot out of her hands.

MERCY
(genuine)
Let me help you with that.

MELODY stands with empty hands.

EXT. DUNES NEAR SCHOOL - DAY

Johnny runs through the dunes towards the schoolhouse.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE DEN - SUNSET

RIVER flattens the sand in front of him with his hand. Seven little BOYS are sitting quietly in a circle on the ground. LITTLE is asleep on the sand with her doll in her arms. The BOYS are watching RIVER, who stands up in the middle with a stick in his hands. The sand covers the entire floor of the old half-buried school-house and reaches halfway the windows. Scattered all over the place lies toys that looks like weapons.

The walls of the room are covered with war pictures and school maps, just visible in the flickering light of a candle. There's an air of ritual.

Coming in late, JOHNNY crawls inside the den. The sand reaches halfway up the door. He has to climb over LITTLE.

BOYS
Shh!

JOHNNY sits down.

RIVER looks at JOHNNY.

RIVER
We have to build up our forces.

The BOYS hold their breath, enthralled.

RIVER taps the book in front of him with the stick.

RIVER (cont'd)

Genghis Khan, the big warrior, had horses to conquer. We'll use ostriches.

The BOYS mutter across each other, amazed.

RIVER raises his hands for silence.

RIVER (cont'd)

I'm going to tame them.

RIVER draws a plan of attack in the sand with the teacher's pointing-stick as he talks. He draws matchstick figures of ostriches, arrows and symbols to illustrate his plan.

RIVER(cont'd)

Tomorrow we catch the father ostrich, the big one. Then we go after the mother, the grey one. When they get eggs and more ostriches hatch, you each get one. This means that we don't take the eggs to sell any more. Do you understand? Anyone found taking the eggs will be punished.

He stares at JOHNNY. JOHNNY looks away. The BOYS murmur in approval.

RIVER draws a long rope around the ostrich's feet.

RIVER (cont'd)

You must all look for rope. Bring all the rope you can find.

LITTLE opens her eyes, looks at RIVER, adoringly.

LITTLE

I've got a skipping-rope.

RIVER nods, smiling. MERCY is heard shouting for her daughter.

MERCY (O.S.)

Little! Little!

LITTLE

Suppertime.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DUSK

THE KIDS are leaving. LITTLE looks up at RIVER and extends her hand to him, asking to join her.

CHARM (O.S.)

Food!

RIVER shakes his head. He crawls back inside the schoolhouse.

INT. STONE'S SHOP - DUSK

JOHNNY takes the egg from a dish on the counter and puts it very carefully in a box with some soft clothes.

BELLE (O.S.)

Din-ner!

He quickly closes the box.

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

RIVER leafs through a book. It's filled with pictures of soldiers and war scenes.

A photo of a soldier running with his rifle above his head. And one of a wounded soldier on a makeshift stretcher with one bare foot and one boot. We hear the sounds of WAR and SCREAMING. RIVER's little sandy fingers stroke the outlines of the figures.

RIVER pulls the crushed white feather out of his shirt and carefully presses it onto this page and closes the book.

INT. JUNE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

MELODY opens a cupboard in the kitchen and finds one blue shoe. She carefully picks it up.

MELODY explores the kitchen looking for the other shoe.

INT. JUNE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MELODY pushes open the door to June's bedroom. She senses she is prying but can't help herself, she has to enter.

She opens June's wardrobe, explores, can't find the shoe, suddenly buries her face in June's dresses, sniffing, crying. In the distance someone is playing a GUITAR.

INT. PRETTY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

SCOOP is with PRETTY, he is drunk. He plays his GUITAR and SINGS a sad sentimental song while he looks at her. On the table lies a piece of green paper.

SCOOP

(sings)

All these years... all these years... all these long
and lonely years. While my world is filled with
glitters endless sprinkling around... I prefer to
see the stars shining on the firmament... You
must know that I'll never can forget you... You're
always in my mind... I love you...

(tears begin to trickle down his
cheeks)

... really love you but I think you do not know...
Send me a letter to tell me you're alive. Send me
a letter as a sign.

(he stops singing)

I wrote that song for June.

PRETTY nods and picks up the piece of paper.

SCOOP (cont'd)

You want me to read you that poem?

PRETTY

That poem.

SCOOP smiles at her. He takes the paper and reads out loud.

SCOOP

I decorate you with silver icing balls and
hundreds and thousands of crystallised flowers
in all colors of the rainbow. I'll make you seven
tiers high...

SCOOP breaks. Beat.

SCOOP (cont'd)

Melody wants to take River away.

PRETTY

Away.

SCOOP

Maybe she will.

PRETTY

She will.

SCOOP

(screams)

STOP REPEATING EVERYTHING I SAY!

PRETTY recoils.

SCOOP (cont'd)

Sorry, I... Pretty... You... I... you... I'm sorry...
I've to go...

SCOOP tries to stand up. He can't. PRETTY helps him to stand.

His arms are around her. Their faces almost touch. There is desire in SCOOP's eyes when he looks at PRETTY.

SCOOP (cont'd)

I've to go?

PRETTY

Go.

E/I JUNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

RIVER peeps through the window. The kitchen is lit-up with a oil lamp.

RIVER sees on the table the pot with soup and the one bowl. He looks longingly at the soup.

Then he notices that MELODY is sitting at the table. She is waiting for him.

MELODY turns around and looks at the window. Immediately RIVER slips down and crawls into what is left of the barn.

MELODY peers in the dark, she's sure she heard something.

I/E. BARN - NIGHT

The barn is a crisscross of beams and broken parts of roof boarding. RIVER carefully inches on his belly along a beam. He lights a cigarette lighter, below him, and sees a glimpse of the second blue shoe.

He holds his breath, reaches out for the shoe. He can't reach it.

He wriggles underneath the beam, reaches down and grabs the shoe. There is a strong creaking sound.

RIVER very carefully clammers round on top of the beam again, sweating, afraid it will all collapse.

RIVER sits on the beam. Again he lights the lighter and looks at the shoe in his hand.

SCOOP, still drunk, with his guitar and crutches, staggers past the barn, its wreckage like a ship on a beach in the moonlight.

SCOOP

June...! Fireflies...! June...!

He stops, squats down at the entrance to the barn. Sees the light is of a lighter.

SCOOP (cont'd)

River! River... Come out... Come out, it's dangerous. River, come out of there...

SCOOP tries to pull RIVER out but he can't.

SCOOP (cont'd)

I know you miss your mother. Think how it feels for me too.

MELODY appears at the side of the house and is about to speak, when...

Out of the barn RIVER starts screaming.

RIVER

(screams)

You killed her.

MELODY withdraw in the dark.

SCOOP

Son... it was the sand. The sand on the roof
made it come down, not me.

RIVER

(screams)

You promised her you'd fix it! I heard you, but
you didn't do anything! You killed her!

SCOOP

It was an accident.

RIVER bolts from the barn, smashes into SCOOP and sends him flying. SCOOP
crawls after his guitar, trying to protect it. RIVER comes to stamp on him. SCOOP
rolls away protecting his guitar.

MELODY is shocked with what she hears and about to step forward, when:

RIVER

I know where you've been tonight.

MELODY steps back again in the dark.

RIVER spits at SCOOP. SCOOP hits out at him with one of his crutches. The blue
shoe goes flying. RIVER jumps away. SCOOP swoops on the shoe and climbs up,
leaning on his crutch.

RIVER (cont'd)

Give me the shoe.

SCOOP

Why?

RIVER

(hissing)

I want you dead.

RIVER kicks against the crutch. SCOOP totters, passes out in the dust.

SCOOP lies on the ground, he doesn't move.

RIVER looks at Scoop, who doesn't move. It's deathly silent.

MELODY steps out of the dark.

RIVER turns around and stares at her.

RIVER runs away and disappears in the dark. SCOOP begins to snore. MELODY picks up the blue shoe.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - NIGHT

MELODY places the blue shoe next to its twin on the table and looks at them. Two dusty worn-out shoes.

MELODY sits, takes out her handkerchief. Meticulously she begins to polish the shoes.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

SCOOP, accompanied by his flies, puts a cassette in the old recorder, it's his own voice SINGING, a bit slow. SCOOP hits the machine. The singing goes faster (right tempo).

MELODY, on the sofa in a dressing gown with a cord, wakes up. She comes upright, creaky. On the ground the two very shiny shoes. MELODY pulls her dressing gown around her, she doesn't like SCOOP to see her less than formal.

MELODY

What time is it?

Scoop gives a shrug.

MELODY looks into River's room. His bed is unslept. She frowns a little.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / BATHROOM - DAY

MELODY splashes her face daintily. In the background we hear the sound of the cassette with Scoop's SINGING. She sits on her knees; in front of her stands a pot with water; she washes herself. (With every splash of water into her face her spirits raise.)

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY, refreshed and in an ironed dress, enters the kitchen. The CASSETTE is still playing. On the verandah sits RIVER. MELODY is relieved to see him. In the distance, on the Mainstreet, walks GRACE with a pot.

SCOOP (with his FLIES) sits at the table, eating some plain bread. MELODY precisely folds up her dressing gown with a cord and puts it neatly in her suitcase.

MELODY takes a breadboard and three plates, puts them on the table. SCOOP ignores her suggestion. MELODY cuts off some slices of bread. She lies one slice on 'River's' plate and one on her's. Preciously she cuts off a piece, bites it and tastes.

RIVER comes in, snatches a slice from the breadboard and returns to the verandah.

MELODY

In the Paradise Hotel, the one where I work
now, we use plates. Clean white plates with a
golden rim and...

MELODY looks at RIVER eating on the verandah outside. He is sitting with his back turned towards her.

MELODY (cont'd)

Uh... My job is to make wedding cakes. They're
like skyscrapers. Like mountains. And roast,
with all the trimmings. But my real forte is the
cakes. I decorate them with silver icing balls and
hundreds and thousands of crystallised flowers
in all colors of the rainbow. Sometimes we make
them seven tiers... seven layers high.

SCOOP, for a second, gets a fright in his eyes. He immediately pulls a plate towards him and puts a slice on it. MELODY is happy with his gesture.

RIVER comes in, grabs another slice and stuffs it in his mouth when he sees her dressing gown cord in the suitcase, which is the perfect piece of rope that he needs to catch the ostrich.

SCOOP

(Daring and provocative)

Well River, which one do you want? Your
grandmother, or poor old Scoop and his plain
bread?

MELODY

I...

SCOOP

Choose, River. Do you want to go up north with
Granny-Gran, my son?

RIVER looks at them both, without a word he snatches another slice and runs off. MELODY is humiliated, stands up and piles up the plates.

MELODY

He... He eats like a...

SCOOP

Like a child.

MELODY

Like a savage.

SCOOP takes a slice from the breadboard and shambles towards the CASSETTE recorder.

SCOOP

He's a free spirit, like...

SCOOP turns the volume of the CASSETTE recorder louder, clearly to irritate MELODY.

SCOOP (cont'd)

(Singing with the music)

Wiping away your finest fairest strand. I picked
the roses from your golden land. Counting my
blessings in your loving hands

MELODY

I know you're hiding something.

SCOOP is all of a sudden alert and aware of the danger, grabs a leather bag from a hook and sticks it over his shoulder.

SCOOP

You're mad. Totally nuts!

Grabs a cap from a hook, puts it on, grabs his crutches and slams the door. He's gone, leaving MELODY alone.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

SCOOP wearing a cap with the word 'Post' on it. He encounters the ostriches that are waiting near by the verandah. He throws them his bread. He 'walks' away with big steps.

EXT. WATERPUMP - DAY

The WOMEN are all at the water pump. SCOOP, still with big steps, passes them on his way out of town to fetch the post.

BELLE

(calls)

Bring me card from my daughter, Scoop.

SCOOP meets PRETTY's eyes. He looks at her, longing. She glances away. He follows his route, taking even bigger steps.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

The Mainstreet is empty.

MELODY comes out of the house and walks past MRS. GRAIN, who seems to be half asleep on her chair on the verandah.

MRS. GRAIN squints her eyes to see who it is. She recognizes MELODY.

MRS. GRAIN

Be good!

She pisses in the chamber pot.

INT. STONE'S SHOP - DAY

All the WOMEN are gathered around at the counter, talking.

FAIR bought a bottle of cool-drink, STONE writes down her expenses in his cashbook, JOHNNY sandpapers a rusty spade in a constant rhythm.

FAIR

When is that car of yours going to be ready?
We're going to need food for the men. They are
coming home.

STONE looks up from his writing and gives her a soothing nod. FAIR walks towards the WOMEN.

FAIR opens the bottle and puts it on the counter.

WOMEN

Thanks.

CHARM, leaning on the counter, picks up the bottle and takes a sip.

CHARM

(to all)

Will Scoop stay, you think?

BELLE shrugs and goes on painting her nails green.

MERCY

He's got no family, as far as I know.

BELLE

As long as he can pay his bills.

CHARM hands GRACE the bottle.

FAIR

Melody seems to have done well.

GRACE

You'd be surprised the things June told me about
Melody.

GRACE takes a sip and hands the bottle to MERCY.

PRETTY

Melody... Melody take River.

All WOMEN turn up to PRETTY.

FAIR

Take River? What you mean? She's going to take
him away?

MERCY takes a sip and pulls the blue round label from the bottle. She tries to roll a
flower from it but the result is not very good. CHARM smiles understandingly at her.

CHARM

I think she wants what is best for the child.

FAIR

June wasn't always the perfect mother.

PRETTY

Perfect mother.

FAIR looks annoyed at PRETTY.

PRETTY carefully reaches out for the bottle. But FAIR is faster and takes a sip before handing the bottle over to PRETTY.

GRACE

Surely Scoop won't let him go.

STONE fiddles with the car hooter; it blares out a low honk.

BELLE

Can't you bring that thing outside? This isn't a garage.

JOHNNY immediately stops sandpapering the spade.

INT. STONE'S SHOP - DAY

The door opens, MELODY is coming in. STONE jumps to his feet. ALL WOMEN look at MELODY.

STONE

Melody! Talk of the... What a pleasure! How are you and what can we do for you?

BELLE looks across at STONE, irritated.

MELODY

I'll need three bars of chocolate, a kilogram of flour, 300 grams of white sugar - castor sugar, two vanilla pods, some baking powder, two slabs of butter - unsalted.

(thinks)

And... a small tin whipping cream, some cocoa, uh... a bag of almonds - blanched... silver sprinkles...

BELLE

(sarcastic)

Are you getting all this down, Stone?

MELODY doesn't understand.

MELODY

What?

(to Stone)

What's the matter?

STONE points to his shelves with a hopeless shrug.

MELODY (cont'd)

So what do you have?

STONE takes the glass jar of cherries and puts it down in front of her.

FAIR

Not the cherries! They are for the men.

PRETTY

(whispers)

The men.

STONE looks at MELODY, takes pity on her.

STONE

It's okay. I'll have the car running this afternoon.

I can go and stock up.

He takes a plastic tub and ladles out a spoonful of margarine.

MELODY

All of it, Stone, can I get it all?

STONE obediently hands over the tub. The WOMEN watch. FAIR produces hissing sounds of disapproval because MELODY is buying all the food.

MELODY (cont'd)

Eggs?

BELLE

No eggs.

STONE gestures helplessly to the empty egg cartons behind him. MELODY leans forward. Before STONE can stop her, MELODY draws loose a little red rope around a box on the counter, and the box falls open. Johnny's ostrich egg in the nest of cloth.

MELODY

As ever.

JOHNNY

(stammers)

That's not for sale.

MELODY

First come first served, isn't that the rule?

BELLE bristles. Her eyes grow wide as MELODY slaps down her money.

EXT. DESERT-ROAD - DAY

SCOOP struggles back onto the dune on his crutches. Behind him the postbox of Fairlands is seen, cracked on its pole. A few more FLIES have gathered buzzing round his head.

EXT. MAINSTREET NEAR JUNE'S HOUSE / VERANDAH - DAY

MELODY returns, JOHNNY is carrying all the shopping and a pot with water as well. MELODY is carrying the ostrich egg. JOHNNY looks around nervously to make sure RIVER does not see.

MELODY

Don't you miss school?

JOHNNY

We're in schoolhouse every day, it's our den...

JOHNNY realizes what he just said. He tries to redeem his fault.

JOHNNY (cont'd)

That's a special egg. You'll have to make the egg warm.

MELODY

Don't worry. I knows what to do with eggs. I'll make it very warm.

JOHNNY, happy with Melody's answer, smiles broadly while he puts down her shopping on the verandah and leaves.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

MELODY puts the ostrich egg on the table.

She opens the oven. It is full of ashes and burned wood and nameless dripping stuff. She takes everything out of the oven, reaches in, something really horrible and unrecognizable comes out in her hands, something that was cooked many aeons ago. She recoils.

MELODY rolls up her sleeves...

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

JOHNNY, with the little rope from the box, comes into the schoolhouse, where RIVER tests the strength of a knot.

LITTLE is pulling the hair out of her doll's head and rolls a thread from it.

JOHNNY shows his little red rope to RIVER.

RIVER

This isn't enough. We need more. More rope.

JOHNNY

Captain, she's going to bake a cake!

KIDS

A cake...!

LITTLE

Is it your birthday?

RIVER

(as if a cake is his right)

Might be.

RIVER tries to change the subject to more important matters.

RIVER (cont'd)

Today is the day. We need a longer rope!

THE KIDS don't listen to him, they're whispering about the cake to be.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

MELODY scrubs. She scrubs the sink, she scrubs the tap, more than efficient, obsessive.

She opens the fridge, it's full of wood.

She closes the fridge. Opens it again. Piles everything out, revolted.

Scrub, scrub, scrub, lots of water and soap...

The female OSTRICH walks up the verandah.

The head of the female OSTRICH pops through the door, and looks cautiously around. She stretches her neck towards the table, where her egg is (plus the other ingredients for cake), and hisses.

MELODY turns with a brush, jumps back, startled.

The OSTRICH withdraws its head in fright.

MELODY tries to close the door but the ostrich's head pops back in, gets caught between the door and the door frame. The bird screams and squeals.

MELODY shouts into the bird's ear.

The bird, shocked, retreats, pulling his head back outside.

MELODY slams the door shut. Sand is cascading down on her from the roof on everything she just cleaned. Through the window she sees the OSTRICH running away.

E/I. JUNE'S HOUSE / VERANDAH - DAY

MELODY with a chair in her hands looks a bit suspiciously around but sees nobody. She puts her suitcase outside on the verandah, together with a few other bits of furniture.

MELODY carefully moves the shiny blue shoes out of the way while she polishing the floor till it shines...

CUT TO:

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

MELODY looks around. The room is clean. A single blue flower drifts down onto the floor. MELODY picks it up, surprised. She unrolls it and sees it's the blue label of a cool-drink.

She looks at the walls and becomes conscious it's not wall paper. The walls are full of label-flowers.

She blows on one of the small "flowers". In a puff of dust, the flower breaks off, flutters down to the floor.

MELODY runs her hand down the wall and little blue flowers and dust flutter down to the floor.

MELODY coughs.

She applies, very carefully, the scrubbing brush to the walls. She tries to brush off the dust. Blue flowers come away on the brush.

Suddenly MELODY goes crazy. Scrubbing away like a mad thing. The flowers all start falling down in a shower, of their own accord. She steps back, shocked.

MELODY is banging on the wall with the brush as if she was lashing out at someone.

Flowers cascade down around her, MELODY is, banging the walls with a big broom like mad. She's coughing and choking. Clouds of blue paper flowers flutter around her. Then the rain of flowers stop exposing the bare walls, full of cracks and holes.

EXT. HOUSE MRS. GRAIN - DAY

GRACE walks to MRS. GRAIN who sits on her chair. GRACE looks at June's house, hears the banging on the walls. She gets curious and tries to see what's happening, while she takes the chamber pot from under the chair and disappears around the corner, still glancing at the house.

INT. MERCY'S HOUSE - DAY

MERCY (living next to the house of June) is laying the cards for PRETTY on the table. She turns one over. It's the Jack of Diamonds. She shakes her head: bad card. Pretty is unhappy. Mercy hears a noise and looks up. Through her window she sees RIVER sneaking onto the verandah.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE / VERANDAH - DAY

RIVER sneaks underneath the window towards MELODY's suitcase, lying open on the verandah. The tassel of her dressing-gown cord is visible, from beneath the neat piles of clothes inside.

RIVER pulls the cord of the dressing-gown out of the suitcase. He messes up her obsessively neat packing. He turns around and suddenly spots some blue flowers on the sand. He examines them.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

MELODY is on her hands and knees in the midst of a huge pile of blue flowers. The rest of the kitchen is spotlessly clean, the brass tap gleaming above the sink. The two shiny shoes next to the door. But the wall behind her is bare, cracked, exposed.

RIVER bursts into the kitchen. He stops in his tracks, stares at the transformed kitchen, then down at the pile of flowers on the floor. Furious.

RIVER

What did you do with Mum's flowers!

MELODY gives a shriek, realizing what she's been doing.

MELODY

I had to clean up before making you a pie.

RIVER looks at the pile of ingredients. Then his gaze lights on the egg.

RIVER

(Accusing)

You've taken an egg.

MELODY doesn't understand what he means.

MELODY

No! I bought it for you. It's for your pie.

RIVER grabs the egg from the table and puts it to his ear as if listening.

RIVER

(fighting his tears)

It's too late now. It's cold. It's dead. You don't understand anything. You are a stupid woman!

MELODY

(suddenly)

No, no, I *do* understand. Child, I do. You can have the egg if you want it.

RIVER looks at the egg.

RIVER

This egg's no use now.

MELODY, relieved that she's been able to calm his temper, tries to please him.

MELODY

You want to hatch one? We'll find you another one. OK? With this one I'm going to make you a de-li-cious pie, or cake. Whatever you like most. You can lick the bowl.

RIVER looks at her, scornful. Agonizingly slowly he brings the egg above his head.

MELODY (cont'd)

No River, please - don't -

RIVER stands totally still. MELODY, entreatingly, looks at him. RIVER doesn't even blink. MELODY tries to smile. She does a little step towards him. His hands tilt. With an indifferent gesture he drops the egg on the ground. It breaks in two pieces and the yolk splashes all over.

RIVER is gone through the open door.

MELODY in total exhaustion next to the broken egg.

EXT. TOWN - DAY

Ostrich looks.

River runs away towards schoolhouse.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

MERCY and PRETTY are standing in the doorway. At a loss for words they look at MELODY.

MERCY picks up a stray flower and walks to MELODY. PRETTY stands watching.

MERCY

Don't you remember how the men bring flowers back with them after the rain...? Scoop used to bring the blue ones back for June. Before he had the accident.

MERCY puts her arm around MELODY.

MERCY (cont'd)

Melody... I can try to contact June for you. If you want. I can.

PRETTY

She can.

MERCY takes the broom and puts it in PRETTY's hands, who begins to sweep. MELODY stands forlornly. MERCY sits down on the couch and puts her cards in front of her. She looks at MELODY.

MERCY shuffles.

MERCY

What do you wish to know?

MELODY doesn't move. The sweeping sound fills the room.

MERCY (cont'd)

You don't have to tell me. Just think it.

One by one MERCY turns a card. She places them in front of her on the table. She looks. MELODY holds her breath.

MERCY (cont'd)

(very concentrated)

She didn't suffer. She died instantly.

(beat)

It's no one's fault. No one, that's what she's trying to tell you.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

RIVER has JOHNNY pinned down on the ropes the KIDS brought for the ostrich-capture. Also Melody's dressing-gown cord. The kids look at them.

RIVER

I told you, no more eggs!

JOHNNY

But captain! It was before you said!

RIVER

And you took my jacket!

JOHNNY

(who is still wearing the jacket)

They gave it to me!

LITTLE caresses her now bald doll. She apparently has pulled out all the hair.

LITTLE

Look!

She points at the ostriches, who are in sight.

RIVER jumps off JOHNNY, grabs the ropes.

RIVER

Come on.

He runs away. All the KIDS follow him.

I/E. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

The card of 'the tower' (it's a tower hit by a stroke of lightning) gets turned over.

MERCY

Black clouds are gathering. Rivers will burst their banks. No one can...

MELODY

Stop.

MERCY looks up from the cards. MELODY shakes her head, she doesn't want to hear more.

MERCY wipes the cards together. PRETTY is still sweeping.

MELODY, trying to restore her control, takes the broken egg and saves what is left of the yolk.

PRETTY exchanges looks with MERCY. MERCY signs her it's OK.

MELODY hovers around the ingredients for the pie. She walks to the oven.

MELODY is at the oven, trying to light it. The whole room fills with smoke. It's streaming from every crack in the stove.

MERCY quietly walks to the fridge, opens it.

MERCY

Where's the wood?

MELODY

I, er...

MERCY goes outside.

Beside of the house is a pile with wood. Neatly mount up. MERCY takes some. Smoke comes out of the door and the windows (not out of the chimney).

MERCY comes back in the room filled with smoke. She crosses to the stove and wedges the oven door slightly ajar with a piece of wood.

The fire begins to draw and immediately stops smoking.

MERCY

(softly)

I have the same problem.

The smoke is clearing. PRETTY is still sweeping.

MELODY

Thank you.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

When the smoke clears SCOOP takes in the scene, MELODY with MERCY and PRETTY in a clean kitchen. He is flabbergasted.

SCOOP

(to MELODY)

So... you've been wiping us off the walls.

MELODY

They fell off.

SCOOP, still wearing his cap, is speechless. He runs his hands along the naked walls, their cracks, nervously.

MELODY takes in his outfit and walks to the verandah. She sees her messy suitcase, sighs, digs up the post.

MELODY (cont'd)

The man in the post truck gave them to me.

SCOOP grabs the mail out of her hands, quickly checks it with his back turned to MELODY.

He doesn't find what he is looking for and throws the pile on the table.

SCOOP

I've just been to the bloody post box! Look at me, I'm a cripple!

MERCY

Get over it, Scoop. Is there anything for me?

MERCY takes the post from the table and takes out a letter.

MERCY (cont'd)

For Belle. Two from her daughter, she'll be thrilled. Cool down, I'll bring them.

(to MELODY)

You'll manage?

MELODY nods, MERCY leaves with the letters.

SCOOP hangs his cap on the hook.

MELODY

She never wrote to me.

SCOOP

You never wrote to her.

MELODY

I did. I did write to her. Every few months and I send money.

SCOOP

We never got anything from you. I should know.

PRETTY is about to speak.

SCOOP (cont'd)

Pretty... My dear Pretty, did no-one send you a letter? We'll have to write you one. Come. Let's help Melody with the rubbish.

PRETTY comes to him, reluctantly. MELODY watches them go outside with the rubbish - there's something in his behavior that doesn't quite 'fit' - why he's suddenly so nice and cooperative.

EXT. RUBBISH DUMP - DAY

SCOOP is at the rubbish heap, all the blue flowers from the wall are in a great burning heap. Around his head buzz several FLIES.

PRETTY walks away down the street, SCOOP looks around as if to bring her back but she carries on walking. In the distance run the KIDS (with the rope) over a dune.

He looks at the fire. June's flowers are burning and turn into ashes.

Out of the chimney of June's house stutters smoke as well.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

Order has been restored. MELODY, wearing an apron, is alone, baking.

The cherries glisten in a bowl on the table.

In a montage of images:

She lifts and flips some dough on the table in front of the window.

She rolls it out flat with a beer bottle.

MELODY deftly puts the rolled out dough in a greased baking tin.

She pours the cherries on top of the dough.

She slips the pie into the upper level of the oven.

EXT. RUBBISH DUMP - DAY

SCOOP sees MELODY coming out of the house. She moves the chairs from the verandah into the house, like if it's her daily job. It's clear that MELODY took over his house. Out of the chimney still comes smoke.

SCOOP wants her to go - to go as soon as possible. With one of his crutches he kicks sand on what is left of the fire and bulls towards the house.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - DAY

SCOOP storms into the kitchen. MELODY just takes the pie out of the oven. On the table the two empty halves of the broken eggshell.

SCOOP thuds down at the table, his hands are actually shaking. He picks up a big piece of the shell.

SCOOP

River has to stay here with me. You can send us
some money if you like. I'll send him to school.
But he has to stay with me. He's my son.

MELODY glances at him while she continues to cut the pie out of the tin. She puts the pie on a dish and leaves the house.

SCOOP looks at the broken pieces of shell on the table.

EXT. CHARM'S HOUSE - DAY

In the doorway CHARM cleans endless amount of toys.

She sees MELODY marching off to the schoolhouse with the pie. She is curious.

E/I. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

MELODY knocks on the door, which is buried in sand.

No answer. MELODY pushes away a piece of board and pokes her head inside.

MELODY on her knees, holding the pie, registers in shock the photographs of wounded soldiers, exploding houses, screaming people and warplanes dropping bombs, that decorate the walls. In the back is handmade machinery looking like ancient weapons.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

MELODY, still walking with the pie, hears screaming kids, looks out where it's coming from.

EXT. NEAR LETTERS PARADISE HOTEL - DAY

P.O.V. MELODY: The male OSTRICH runs through the letter "D" of "Paradise Hotel" sticking out of the top of a dune. She is followed by the running KIDS.

EXT. PARADISE HOTEL SIGN - DAY

RIVER appears running after the male ostrich. He's followed by the whole gang, one by one. They run behind him pulling a long rope, knotted from several shorter pieces of rope. They all run through the letter "D" behind RIVER.

The last length of rope is a skipping-rope and LITTLE is hanging from the end of it, holding on tight. She is pulled at an amazing speed across the sand, just narrowly missing the huge letter, as she's pulled through it. She disappears in a cloud of dust.

Last comes JOHNNY trying to catch up, waving his little red piece of rope above his head.

EXT. DOWN IN A DESERT DIP - DAY

The male OSTRICH is standing in the dip below.

RIVER puts his finger to his lips, warning the gang to be quiet. He creeps slowly down towards the bird.

JOHNNY, excited, takes the end of the rope out of LITTLE's hand. He tries to tie his rope to the end of the skipping-rope.

RIVER stalks down the slope towards the bird, pulling the rope. The other BOYS follow, fanning out in a semi-circle.

The male OSTRICH looks up.

The BOYS sprint around the bird, trying to encircle it with the rope.

RIVER

This side! More this side!

The BOYS move to his commands.

The OSTRICH turns to flee. RIVER shouts to the BOYS.

RIVER (cont'd)

Closer! Over here! This way!

The BOYS run forward, holding the rope, trying to form a circle.

The OSTRICH spreads his enormous wings and stamps his feet. Sand scuffs up in all directions.

LITTLE sits on the slope of the dune. She shows her bald dolly the exciting action going on below.

JOHNNY is still trying to connect his rope.

The OSTRICH is surrounded by the kids, encircled by a corral made of rope. They want to bind his feet together.

RIVER (cont'd)

Pull!

The BOYS pull. The little red rope is pulled out of JOHNNY's hands. It is connected. He looks proud.

The OSTRICH's feet get entangled in the rope. He spreads his wings wide and puffs out his chest.

RIVER loops the dressing-gown cord into a lasso and swings his lasso above his head, throws.

The lasso drops over the OSTRICH's neck. The KIDS yell like cowboys.

The bird bolts, pulling the lasso tight. RIVER is dragged along a few steps, almost jerked off his feet.

The kids look in adoration.

RIVER leaps on top of the OSTRICH. He screams of triumph. The BOYS release the rope.

EXT. AT THE DESERT DIP - DAY

MELODY looms up behind LITTLE. She sees what is happening, is shocked. She thrusts the pie into the girl's hands.

MELODY

Hold this. Don't you dare eat it.

RIVER sits on the OSTRICH. As the bird begins to run. The KIDS scream of fear.

BANG! MELODY is right there in front of them. The OSTRICH whips past her, she grabs the cord, the OSTRICH throws RIVER off, who hits the ground. The

OSTRICH keeps on running into the blue yonder. MELODY's hands are scorched by the rope but she runs over to RIVER, horrified, to help him up.

MELODY (cont'd)

River...

RIVER jumps to his feet, furious.

RIVER

You made us fall! I had him! You let him go!
That's *my* ostrich. *You* let him go.

MELODY

Those birds can kill you, you know that don't
you!

RIVER points at his cheek.

RIVER

I know.

MELODY

When I lived here, there was a man who was
ripped apart by an ostrich. One kick of his foot,
guts all over.

RIVER faces up to her, defiant.

RIVER

You spoil everything!

He lashes out at her.

She grabs his hand.

RIVER (cont'd)

Let go. Let me go!

She has to let go. Next to her stands LITTLE holding up the pie, MELODY takes it.

MELODY holds the pie out to RIVER.

River tries desperately not to look at the wonderful pie.

The CHILDREN all stare at the pie, hungry, delighted.

MELODY breaks off a piece of the crust and holds it up. River can't no longer resist.

RIVER carefully takes it, smells it, pops it in his mouth, chews. He closes his eyes, savoring the delicious pie-crust.

MELODY smiles, her first victory to win him over!

LITTLE looks at MELODY, speaks to RIVER.

LITTLE

She's like your Mummy.

RIVER's eyes widen. He spits out the piece of pie.

RIVER

It's a poison pie! Poison pie! You can't down me
with your poison. A poison pie!

He looks at the KIDS as if they're late for their cue.

KIDS

(Belatedly)

Poison pie?
Poison pie! We don't want your poison pie!
Poison pie!

MELODY's spirits sink away. She manages to pull herself together.

She turns and begins to walk away.

JOHNNY

Wait - maybe... the pie...

RIVER glowers at him.

RIVER

POISON PIE!

MELODY is walking away with the pie.

BOY 1

(mumbles)

I want pie.

BOY 2

(hesitating)

So do I.

BOY 3

I'm hungry

LITTLE puts a pinch of sand into her dolly's mouth.

RIVER

Order! Order! The pie is not important. We're trying to catch ostriches!

(to Johnny)

Fetch my gun.

JOHNNY runs away, delighted to be given such an important mission. The kids are disappointed.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

MELODY walks blindly back down the main street. She clutches the pie awkwardly.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

SCOOP with his guitar sits frozen, on the table in front of him lies the broken egg shell. His FLIES buzz around his head. Through a window the female OSTRICH is hissing at him. We hear melody stepping onto the veranda.

The OSTRICH walks away from the window. On the verandah SCOOP hears SOUNDS. MELODY gives a cry. SCOOP produces a satisfied smile.

SCOOP jumps up and moves to the door. To his surprise he sees:

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY on the verandah. She has put the pie-dish on the verandah step. She pushes the plate towards the bird. The female OSTRICH steps forward when she sees SCOOP on the threshold. The OSTRICH hisses again to him. SCOOP quickly withdraws.

Clucking quietly the OSTRICH starts to eat the pie.

I/E. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

GRACE is sewing the dress. FAIR is looking through the window. She sees the other OSTRICH arriving, MELODY is with two eating OSTRICHES.

FAIR

She's gone mad, completely insane. Look at that.
All our cherries. It's an outrage.

GRACE stands up. FAIR opens the window and peep out of it.

GRACE

Leave her. June always used to feed them.

A gust of wind moves their hair.

GRACE (cont'd)

Wind's changing.

They sniff the air like dogs.

FAIR

I don't like it.

The breeze rustles and moves the curtains.

EXT. DUNE NEAR MAINSTREET - DAY

The KIDS lie down behind a dune to spy.

JOHNNY arrives panting with the gun and hands it to RIVER.

RIVER grabs the gun and looks through the rifle.

P.O.V. RIVER through his rifle: MELODY strokes the OSTRICHES.

JOHNNY

Your granny got the right idea, Captain. What
we must do. We get her to make another pie. We
get her to make a bigger pie. Much, much bigger.
Then they get down... then...

RIVER throws down the gun.

RIVER

NO MORE PIES!

JOHNNY is crestfallen. It's the only good idea he's ever had.

JOHNNY

No pie?

LITTLE looks at JOHNNY. She puts her finger to her lips.

LITTLE

Ssh. You only have to dig.

RIVER looks at LITTLE and considers what she just have said. Then he looks at MELODY and turns to JOHNNY, speaks very clearly.

RIVER

Yes, you have to dig.

(again he looks at MELODY)

You have to dig a special grave. A very, very deep grave.

JOHNNY is reprieved, enthusiastic.

JOHNNY

Dig. I dig a special grave. I dig.

Johnny runs away.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY looks at the leftovers of the pie. All her work for nothing. On the floor of the verandah she notices her suitcase. It's open and inside it's a total mess. She sighs. RIVER runs past with a gun over his shoulder. FAIR passes by. Mrs GRAIN sits on her chair.

MELODY looks at a broken hinge, a crack in the floor and a withered plant in a pot.

MELODY resolutely she steps back into the house.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY starts to pack. SCOOP watches her. Now he has what he wanted, he looks strangely uncomfortable.

MELODY closes the zipper of her suitcase.

SCOOP

You won't be able to leave today. The wind's changed.

It's factual information, not a kindness.

MELODY picks up her suitcase. SCOOP tries to stop her.

SCOOP (cont'd)

MELODY, you can't leave right now.

MELODY

Why not?

SCOOP

Wind is coming.

MELODY

Goodbye, Scoop.

SCOOP

Stone won't take you. And if you walk, you'll die.

She brushes past him and leaves him behind in the neat and clean kitchen.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

JOHNNY digs his spade into the sand alongside June's grave.

A gust of wind (force 1, at a scale from 1 to 4) blows the sand up.

JOHNNY shakes his head and empties the streaming spadeful of sand into the teeth of the wind.

EXT. WATERPUMP - DAY

The WOMEN are flocked about the pump, there is a sense of urgency in the air. They move fast and try to fill as many pots as possible. The wind is rising and the water is streaming fast into the pots.

EXT. STONE'S SHOP - DAY

MELODY, her suitcase rolling behind her, comes up to the store.

STONE has his head under the bonnet of his grand car. MELODY taps him on his shoulder.

MELODY

Stone, will you take me to town please?

STONE

I was thinking of going this afternoon, but the wind's changed.

STONE sees her suitcase and looks at her. He shakes his head.

MELODY

(pleading)

Please Stone. For old times' sake...

STONE looks at his car and up at the sky.

STONE

Maybe we can beat her. Hop in, we'll see whether this old girl wants to go...

MELODY gets in, her suitcase on her lap. STONE turns over, the motor's dead.

STONE gets out and starts pushing. MELODY gets out too. They push the car onto the street. He goes back in and turns over the motor - nothing.

EXT. MAINSTREET IN FRONT OF SHOP STONE - DAY

MELODY behind the car. GRACE arrives with her pot full of water. Sees STONE and the suitcase in the car.

GRACE

(to MELODY)

You're leaving?

MELODY nods.

STONE tries to start the motor again, nothing happens.

GRACE (cont'd)

And the boy? What will happen with the boy?

MELODY

I can't help him.

GRACE

You should have tried to stay in touch with her.
It doesn't cost much to write.

MELODY

I did write but she never answered my letters.

GRACE

June never got any letters from you.
Why didn't you answer the ones she wrote you?

MELODY reacts, surprised.

GRACE (cont'd)

She always wrote you on your birthday.
Personally I said, 'forget it', but June would
never give up.

MELODY stares at her. The motor suddenly turns.

STONE

Hop in!

MELODY snaps out of her trance, jumps into the car. The car drives away.

EXT. MAINSTREET IN FRONT OF SHOP STONE - DAY

MELODY is in the car. The WOMEN with their pots, come around the corner.
BELLE sees the car driving and storms into the middle of the street like an avenging
angel.

BELLE

Where are you going? Stone! You must be crazy,
it's a south one!

STONE

She needs to go.

BELLE tries to pull MELODY out of the car unceremoniously and turns off the
engine.

MELODY

Hey!

The WOMEN gather around them.

BELLE

(to MELODY, rapidly)

You can leave if you want but not with my husband to get stuck in some sand-dune and choked to death when the storm comes down. You go, MELODY, if you want to. You go. You walk. You got here on your two feet didn't you?

BELLE hisses at MELODY, FAIR joins her. MERCY and GRACE don't. The WOMEN are divided in Melody's favour.

MELODY takes her suitcase out of the car. THE WOMEN watch, BELLE towers and glowers.

CHARM and PRETTY come walking closer with their heavy pots full of water.

MELODY starts walking off down the street. MERCY runs after her.

MERCY

Don't go. Not now... And don't give up on River.

FAIR

(with a trace of irony)

Don't give up on Scoop.

BELLE and FAIR laugh.

PRETTY

(deadly serious)

Don't give up on Scoop. Silver icing balls and crystallised flowers.

MELODY suddenly comes to a halt and stares at her.

MELODY

What?

PRETTY

Silver icing balls and hundreds and thousands of crystallised flowers in all colors of the rainbow. One day he'll go seven tiers high.

MELODY stares at PRETTY.

MELODY

(very quiet)
What are you saying?

PRETTY
Saying? His poem.

MELODY
His poem?!

PRETTY nods.

PRETTY
I look out of the window and dream of the
desert. I remember the pancakes that I made for
you. Pancakes with chocolate and lemon.

MELODY
My pancakes. Where? Where is this poem?

PRETTY walks toward her house. Turns around. Beckons her. MELODY follows,
leaving her roller-suitcase where it stands. The wind is rising.

INT. PRETTY'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

PRETTY picks up a piece of green paper that is pinned to the wall, amongst other
postcards and notes. It's a cut out of Melody's letters. She hands it to MELODY.

MELODY is aghast. She starts to read. Her eyes fly over the words. She turns it
around and examines it, searching for the missing parts.

MELODY
This is his poem?

PRETTY
(nods)
His poem.

MELODY
You've got more?

PRETTY
More?

PRETTY shakes her head.

PRETTY (cont'd)

No more.

MELODY begins to understand that someone is lying. And that someone can only be Scoop.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

MELODY throws open the door. (outside wind force 2) SCOOP is playing his GUITAR. More and more FLIES gather around his head, buzzing and buzzing.

SCOOP

I told you he wouldn't take you with him.
There's a storm coming.

MELODY ignores what he says. She speaks, musing quietly.

MELODY

So you're a poet? One who writes very original
songs?

SCOOP is suddenly aware of the coming danger.

MELODY looks at the guitar, it's perfect proportions and faultlessly polished surface.

MELODY (cont'd)

I suppose I paid for this. For playing all those
beautiful love songs.

In one brusque movement, MELODY swings the guitar by its neck, in an arc, smashing it to pieces against the door.

SCOOP gasps, paralysed. He leaps to his feet, totters, grabs for his crutches. One falls to the ground, one he can grab.

SCOOP

My guitar! You ruined my guitar! I'll kill you...
you old bitch!

He raises the crutch and let it almost come down on MELODY; she sidesteps neatly; the crutch hits the table and fly out of his hand.

MELODY

You took my letters!

(beat)
And my money!

SCOOP
My wife's money.

She walks up to SCOOP, flailing her arms. He holds her off with one arm, the other he needs to lean onto the table to keep upright.

MELODY
Did she know? Did she?

SCOOP sees the kitchen knife in between the mess on the table, he grabs it.

MELODY shrinks.

They stand facing each other, the table in between them. SCOOP threatening with the knife and leaning on one hand. FLIES buzz around his head, louder and louder.

Scoop's disability is MELODY's advantage; he is unable to walk without his crutches. MELODY pushes the table into his stomach. SCOOP falls backwards onto a chair. The knife slips out of his hand.

MELODY grabs the knife. SCOOP leans awkwardly to the table.

SCOOP
(scornful)
Playing the tough lady again?

MELODY points the knife to his neck.

MELODY
I know how to cut meat.

Beat.

SCOOP surrenders and slides down on the chair.

MELODY (cont'd)
Where are the letters?

A KNOCK at the door.

MELODY carefully walks to the door, keeping an eye on SCOOP. She opens the door - nobody's there.

EXT. HOUSE MRS. GRAIN - AFTERNOON

The only people in sight are GRACE and MRS. GRAIN on the other side of the street.

GRACE lifts MRS. GRAIN off her chair on the verandah, their hair is blowing in the increasing wind. She carries her inside the house, closes the door.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE / KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

MELODY is standing in the door. The wind is blowing fiercely in her face.

Behind her SCOOP is trying to take his crutches from the floor.

MELODY closes the door again. Even before her hand leaves the doorknob, there's another loud knock on the door.

She opens it abruptly.

At her feet, a large stone is lying on the verandah. MELODY looks outside.

SCOOP is behind her on his crutches. He raises one, trying to hit her from behind.

Another stone comes flying in. MELODY steps aside.

The stone hits SCOOP.

SCOOP

Ow!

SCOOP hits the floor.

MELODY closes the door. The next stone bangs against the door.

A very loud bang sounds up from another wall behind them. MELODY is standing in the middle of the kitchen.

SCOOP crawls, on all fours, to the wall.

Another stone hits the window; the glass shatters over SCOOP's head. MELODY jumps back in alarm. The wind enters the house.

More stones hit windows, glass breaks. Ceiling comes down.

MELODY and SCOOP duck down both under the table as the sand showers down upon the table.

From under the table, MELODY and SCOOP can just make out the outlines of RIVER standing on the dune, orchestrating the assault like some malevolent demon.

MELODY AND SCOOP

River!

The kids have their own kind of Roman catapult.

SCOOP

(awe inspired)

Jee. He knows his business.

A loud bang on the roof makes the house tremble.

EXT. DUNES NEAR JUNE'S HOUSE - GETTING DARK - STORM

Outside, RIVER and his army of BOYS, all wearing goggles and so, are attacking the house. Their movements are quick and organized, they communicate by whistles. They move swiftly to encircle the house.

LITTLE crouches behind a sandhill, rocking her bald doll to sleep, anxious.

RIVER, a scaled-down Napoleon, points towards A BOY in charge of the Roman catapult. RIVER raises his arm to the sky.

THE BOY (the trigger-man) aims carefully at one of the windows. And as RIVER drops his arm, he releases his missile.

Another pane of glass implodes into the house.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - GETTING DARK - STORM

MELODY and SCOOP still under the table. The wind gets stronger (force 3). Now nearly all the windows are broken.

MELODY

She wrote to me. Where are they? Where are those letters? Scoop!

SCOOP climbs from under the table. He raises a crutch. MELODY ducks away, thinking she is attacked again. But the crutch smashes with full force into the wall of the kitchen.

The boards give way. Letters, hundreds of them, fall out. The wind catches them, they begin to flutter out like birds. Most of the green pieces of paper with cut out parts (Melody's letters) and white one's (June's letters).

The letters fly about through the house. MELODY, desperately, tries to catch and collect them, grabs them and loses them while they dance away from her again and again.

Another bang sounds. The door flies open. The whole kitchen is filled with flying paper, circling faster now. The draught draws the letters outside.

MELODY, half-crouching to the open door, is trying to grab the letters before they fly away.

MELODY (cont'd)

You stole her letters to me. You stole her letters
and now she is dead.

A stone hits MELODY's head and knocks her unconscious facedown to the floor of the verandah.

SCOOP crawls over to her on the verandah.

SCOOP sits down next to MELODY. He sees she is unconscious.

The storm is darkening. MOTHERS nervously call their children... SCOOP looks in the distance.

EXT. DUNES NEAR JUNE'S HOUSE - GETTING DARK - STORM

P.O.V. RIVER:

SCOOP, next to MELODY, clambers up. Half sitting, half standing.

SCOOP

River!

SCOOP is dragging MELODY's body inside. This is very difficult for him to do.

EXT. DUNES NEAR JUNE'S HOUSE - GETTING DARK - STORM

The sand is all-enveloping now. LITTLE, halfway covered in sand, is sitting at RIVER's feet, looking at her doll. The head is dented.

LITTLE

She is dead.

RIVER looks at LITTLE and realizes what she just have said. His face changes in a split second from confidence to shock.

The BOYS huddle together in a group around RIVER. One of the BOYS takes his brother's hand. They are scared.

The MOTHERS (FAIR, GRACE and CHARM off screen) nervously call their children. The BOYS leave.

Another BOY looks jealous to the leaving BROTHERS and starts to follow them, hesitating.

One by one the others follow.

JOHNNY arrives with his spade. He looks down at LITTLE, now almost buried.

JOHNNY

We have to go home, Captain.

JOHNNY, apologetic, steps forward, his hand reaching down to LITTLE. With one movement he pulls her out of the sand.

RIVER watches, unable to move.

LITTLE follows JOHNNY, trustingly, as he leads her away through the swirling clouds of sand.

RIVER stands, completely still, staring at his own house.

EXT. DUNES NEAR JUNE'S HOUSE - GETTING DARK - STORM

P.O.V. RIVER:

The house, through the sand, a ghostly silhouette, like a cardboard cut-out, deserted, without substance.

SCOOP

River! River! River!

No reaction.

SCOOP closes a shutter.

EXT. DUNES NEAR JUNE'S HOUSE - GETTING DARK - STORM

RIVER turns and disappears in the storm. His handmade weapons are disappearing under the sand.

EXT. MAINSTREET STONE'S SHOP - GETTING DARK - STORM

STONE is covering his car (in the middle of the road) with a polyethylene sheet while BELLE closes the window with a rope and JOHNNY puts wood in front of a window.

INT. JUNE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - STORM

SCOOP lights or turns up a storm lantern. There is less wind inside because one of the shutters is closed.

MELODY comes to and opens her eyes.

SCOOP sits at what's left of the chair. He looks at MELODY before he begins to read out loud:

SCOOP

Mum, tomorrow is your grandson's birthday... I never realized my son would grow so fast. I look up and see him running round the house, and I think one day I'll have to let him go. Strange to think about, isn't it?

He gives the letter to MELODY who presses the letter to her bosom.

SCOOP (cont'd)

I have to go and find him. It's a south wind.

The wind howls outside. SCOOP puts on his jacket. He takes the big knife. MELODY looks worried.

SCOOP (cont'd)

In case he's stuck somewhere.

MELODY wipes her head, blood comes off.

MELODY

I'll come with you.

SCOOP

No, wait here in case he comes back.

MELODY takes the storm lamp and follows him.

INT. MERCY'S HOUSE - STORM NIGHT

MERCY hammers on the inside pieces of wood in front of the window. LITTLE peeps under her arm and looks outside.

LITTLE

Mum... there's a ghost walking with a living person...

MERCY, worried, places a beam in front of the wood to fix the wood.

E/I. SCHOOLHOUSE - STORM NIGHT

MELODY with the lamp follows SCOOP. The wind is very heavy.

They crawl into the schoolhouse

On their hands and knees SCOOP and MELODY enter the den. They are exhausted and covered with sand.

SCOOP

River?

MELODY

River?

There is nobody in the schoolhouse. The wind howls, sand beats against the walls.

SCOOP looks around at the walls of the schoolhouse. The images of war and destruction. He shakes his head in despair.

SCOOP

Wait here till the storm is over. I'll find him.

MELODY gives him the lamp.

SCOOP shows her his crutches and smiles, it is clear he can't carry the lamp. Out of his jacket he takes a little torch and connect it to his crutch. Clearly made for it.

He goes out into the dark storm.

LITTLE TIME LAPSE:

MELODY is crouching in a corner. The war photo's on the walls move.

She clasps her arms around her body. She listens to the screaming wind. It sounds like a crying child.

MELODY

River?

A corner of the roof comes off. Sand blows inside. The light blows out.

MELODY clammers outside into the storm.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - STORM NIGHT

SCOOP heads into the storm (force 4), he can hardly see and is hardly to be seen. He stumbles. His crutches sink into the sand.

SCOOP wanders between the headstones. He hits upon something. It is the angel headstone. The angel looks down on him. He steps aside. BANG! The sandy rise surges up beneath him. SCOOP stumbles, grabbing for his crutches. It is the female OSTRICH raising up, she was half buried in sand.

The OSTRICH screams at SCOOP, she bursts from the sand and launches an attack on him. She kicks and stamps with her prehistoric feet, her long neck weaving like a giant snake in the blinding sand. At her feet is her nest, with huge white eggs in it.

SCOOP falls, rolls away from her. The bird follows, tries to stamp on his head. SCOOP rolls aside at the last moment, and tries to creep away from her.

But the OSTRICH, crazed in defence of her eggs, kicks him again. SCOOP's body folds double. He tries to defend himself but the huge bird wants to kill him. SCOOP pulls his knife and points it towards the bird. The bird goes on stamping on him. SCOOP desperately tries to stab the bird, but she seems invincible with her enormous body and wings protecting the eggs at her feet.

SCOOP thrusts a last stab out towards the enraged bird. The knife sinks deep into her, straight to the heart. The bird screams, stumbles and collapses down onto her eggs.

SCOOP sobs in desperation, he crawls away from the dying bird. The OSTRICH's head comes up one more time. She gives a last scream and collapses. SCOOP recoils in horror backwards, staring at the dead bird.

INT. MERCY'S HOUSE - STORM NIGHT

MERCY, at her table, turns over a card. She is shocked with what she sees.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - STORM NIGHT

SCOOP crawls. He's in panic. He searches for his crutches. He looks over his shoulder. He wants to get away. He is scared. He can't find his crutches. He crawls between the graves. He bumps into something.

SCOOP looks what it is. He sees the two big prehistorical feet of the male ostrich standing in front of him. He hears the hissing above his head. He looks up. The ostrich is looking down at him. Very careful and very slowly SCOOP goes backwards. He smiles at the bird, that doesn't know what has happened a minute ago. SCOOP moves away from the deadly dangerous feet. He keeps smiling.

THE OSTRICH makes a move in SCOOP's direction. SCOOP tries to shuffle back faster, while he keeps the forced smile on his face and his eye at the BIRD.

THE OSTRICH makes another step forward. SCOOP pushes himself backwards and feels he slips into something. He disappears into the hole JOHNNY dug.

SCOOP tries to climb out. His legs can't carry him. His hands desperately scrape the sand into the hole. He is stuck. He tries to climb out. He screams but the storm is louder than his voice. He realizes the situation he's in. With all his efforts he screams.

SCOOP

RIVER!!

EXT. DUNES - STORM NIGHT

RIVER

DADDY!!

RIVER, lost in the storm, screams. No one reacts. He fights against the sand blowing in his face. Slowly he moves forwards. Impossible to see where he's going.

CUT TO:

EXT. DUNES - STORM NIGHT

MELODY, also lost in the storm, holds her arms around her face.

She sees a SMALL FIGURE, walking slowly in the teeth of the storm.

Sand drives across her field of vision. MELODY struggles towards him. In front of her the letters 'PARADISE' appear.

All of a sudden the little person stands in front of her. It is RIVER!

She grasps him to her, looks around for shelter, can see nothing.

There is the sound of cracking timber. MELODY and RIVER are sucked down into a whirlpool of sand, MELODY clutches on to him, they fall through a kind of plug-hole of sand into a great well of darkness.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL - STORM NIGHT

A terrible thud, then an odd sound, like a spring boinging. (In fact it *is* a spring boinging). In the dark hardly visible some sand is falling. Then the sound of rummaging.

A flaring flame. It's RIVER (his goggles are pulled off), with his Dad's cigarette lighter he illuminates MELODY's face, on which the marks of the violence are still visible.

RIVER

Aren't you dead?

MELODY

Not yet!

They are sitting on a vast double bed in the middle of an old-fashioned hotel bedroom. They look each other straight in the eyes. A look of pain suddenly crosses RIVER's face. He burns his fingers.

RIVER

Ouch!

Dark again.

The lighter is lit again. MELODY holds up a candelabra with a few stumps of candles. RIVER doesn't bring the lighter to the candles. Therefore MELODY holds a candle into the flame.

MELODY

We're in Paradise.

Sand is still trickling through the opening that they have fallen through.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL - NIGHT

MELODY is holding the candelabra high in front of her. She walks down the stairs.

MELODY wanders through the hotel. Everything is covered in sand and dust. Behind her, with a clear distance, walks RIVER. He has been in the building before.

MELODY is walking down another staircase going deeper and deeper into the heart of the building. She hears RIVER following her.

She crosses a long hall. Tables are surrounded by upended chairs sticking out of the sand. Obviously the hotel was once large and luxurious. MELODY looks over her shoulder. She hesitates, should she wait for RIVER or not? She walks on.

She walks through rooms set with old broken sofas, a poolroom with a pool table, corridor walls are marked with the faded outlines where paintings once hung. RIVER follows her from a distance.

They pass a bar almost completely covered in sand with a sign reading: "BLACKJACK, ROULETTE AND FREE CHAMPAGNE". RIVER enters the bar.

MELODY

Stone used to come here. To play games. When he won he sometimes asked me to dance with him.

INT. KITCHEN PARADISE HOTEL - NIGHT

MELODY enters the kitchen. A stove sticking out of the sand. On top big cooking-pots full of sand stand on the huge gas ranges. On the walls ancient, nearly perished lists are hanging, from floor to ceiling. The same as in the other hotel. RIVER, carefully, follows the light.

There's a telephone on the wall, beneath it a fragment of cloth in the sand.

MELODY reaches down, pulls out an apron. She shakes off the sand, hangs it on a hook next to the telephone.

A row of lockers stands in a recess at the back of the kitchen. MELODY walks up to the lockers.

RIVER follows her with his eyes. MELODY brushes away the dust with her hand. 'Miss MELODY' is stencilled on the locker door.

From a shelf above the lockers, she takes down a small clay pot and turns it around. Inside, buried in sand, is a small brass key.

MELODY

Look this is my locker.

She unlocks the door to the locker, opens it.

RIVER

(surprised)

Oh, that's where you hide the key.

Inside two black maid uniforms hang neatly next to each other. Beneath them, a pair of neatly-placed shoes.

MELODY smiles faintly, remembering.

RIVER casts a quick look.

MELODY walks past the row of other lockers. She stops. Tentatively, she tries the door - it's unlocked.

RIVER (cont'd)

Whose locker is that?

MELODY

June's.

The whole interior of the locker is covered with faded blue paper flowers. In the middle hangs a small posy of real dried blue flowers. At the bottom lies a creased uniform, an ostrich feather pinned onto it like a brooch.

Scattered around the uniform, pieces of crumbled paper.

MELODY picks up a piece of paper and unfolds it. It's an ironing-list written in her own precise handwriting.

MELODY(cont'd)

'Always iron cotton between 165 and 195 degrees - linen between 195 and 230 degrees. The iron must be thoroughly cleaned every Monday morning with vinegar'.

RIVER also picks up a paper and unfolds it. On the paper is written: 'PULL THE SHEET STRAIGHT! 40 CENTIMETER ON ALL SIDES. TUCK IN TIGHTLY - ALL AROUND. RESULT MUST BE FLAT AND SMOOTH'.

MELODY (cont'd)

These are the things I taught your mother.

RIVER

What a stupid things.

Sand trickles in above them. The ceiling cracks. MELODY looks up. She turns around and walks back to the door.

MELODY

River!

The ceiling cracks again, more frightful than before.

MELODY (cont'd)

River, we have to go. It's getting dangerous here.

RIVER sits on the ground in front of his mothers locker and is trying to take the pinned ostrich feather from the uniform. The cracking sound gets stronger.

MELODY (cont'd)

Come.

RIVER got the feather and stands up. He puts the feather in his shirt and looks at her with his 'captain look'.

RIVER

I'm coming.

RIVER walks towards MELODY. Above him a creaking sounds and a thud as part of the ceiling falls in. RIVER looks up. He is almost surprised it is really happening.

Sand and planks fall over him. He disappears under the collapsing ceiling.

MELODY screams and doesn't wait till all the sand is down. As a lunatic she starts to dig in the heap, pulling planks away.

She sees RIVER's arm and pulls.

RIVER gasps for breath. MELODY pulls RIVER out of the sand. RIVER screams. He is in pain.

INT. PARADISE HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

MELODY carries RIVER on her back, he is heavy. His knee is strapped up with an improvised bandage. He holds the candelabra. RIVER clearly is in pain. MELODY needs all her strength to walk.

The candle, not hold straight by RIVER, begins to leak. The hot grease drips into MELODY's neck.

MELODY

Ow!

INT. STAIRCASE PARADISE HOTEL - NIGHT

Dark - The sound of footsteps onto a staircase and MELODY panting heavily. Combined with the indistinct sounds of her carrying RIVER up the staircase.

A thud.

RIVER

Ow.

MELODY

Are you ok?

The sound of rummaging. The flame again illuminates MELODY's and RIVER's faces. RIVER again with the lighter. MELODY holds up a stump of candle. RIVER lights it.

They sit on the stairs. MELODY looks up to check how far she still have to carry. She sighs. Silence. Sand trickles down a wall.

MELODY (cont'd)

I've walked these stairs endlessly.

Her hand slides over the bannisters.

MELODY (cont'd)

There was just the two of us, nobody else to look after us. I was so happy to go. I packed both our suitcases.

RIVER looks at her. But MELODY doesn't see that she finally got his attention.

MELODY (cont'd)

I thought we were a close family.

(A beat)

I thought she loved me.

RIVER

She loves you...

MELODY gets snapped out of her thoughts.

RIVER (cont'd)

... but I was in her belly. She needed to hatch me.

MELODY smiles.

MELODY

Like you want to hatch an ostrich?

RIVER

Yes, to tame them.

MELODY

That's a noble aspiration.

RIVER's hand reaches for his shirt where he put June's feather, takes it out and looks at it.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAWN

The graveyard is covered under a fresh blanket of sand. In places, the graves have been covered completely by the smooth layer of sand. Some taller headstones protrude from the sand, but none of the relics from before remain.

JOHNNY walks with spade and broom. Out of the sand he pulls the two gumboots. The desert is peaceful.

JOHNNY puts down the broom, lifts his spade and starts digging in the same spot as before. There are a lot of flies.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - SUNRISE

Not far from where JOHNNY is digging, a small bit of a corner of a disappeared building is revealed by the storm. The first sunbeam appears from over the horizon. Wood creaks and RIVER starts to emerge from the sand. He is covered in dust.

A small hillock takes away JOHNNY'S view on the revealed building. He just sees RIVER. It looks like he's rising from a grave. RIVER bends over and pulls MELODY out of the ground.

JOHNNY is speechless, terrified. He stares at them. They both are white from the sand and the dust. They look like ghosts.

MELODY and RIVER walk up to him. RIVER limps with his leg (it is exactly the same way his father SCOOP used to limp).

JOHNNY

(stutters)

I'm sorry, Captain. It was ready but the wind destroyed it. I always work hard. You know I can work hard.

RIVER glances at MELODY.

RIVER

I don't need it anymore. You can stop digging.

JOHNNY

But captain, the hole, the deep hole I had to dig for you...

MELODY looks from JOHNNY to RIVER.

RIVER feels MELODY's eyes and looks up at her. He blushes.

MELODY strokes JOHNNY on the head.

MELODY

There is a lot to sweep.

JOHNNY smiles broadly and picks up the broom.

RIVER goes over to June's grave, kneels and tenderly sticks the feather out of his shirt into the sand.

MELODY and JOHNNY watch. JOHNNY realizes the gravity of the moment.

JOHNNY sighs and begins to broom.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

MELODY and RIVER walk down the main street. Everything's transformed. All the footprints have disappeared. Some houses have changed into a dune, others are revealed. The houses have lost their colour and are covered in a layer of sand that

clings to their roofs and walls, white, like the surrounding desert - white like Melody and River.

Between all the houses hangs laundry, waving from improvised washing lines.

There is nervous activity everywhere. ALL WOMEN walk in and out of their houses and KIDS run around. Sounds of cheerful screaming. The street has a festive atmosphere.

CHARM and her four little SONS are digging to reveal the verandah of their house again. CHARM sings, again slightly discordant, this time built on the rhythm of the digging of her boys.

STONE's car is a small dune in the middle of the street. STONE is digging. The "Car Repair Service" sign, next to the shop, has fallen down. It's sticking out of the sand. STONE digs up Melody's suitcase.

BELLE is sweeping the verandah.

As MELODY and RIVER walk past. RIVER pulls MELODY's hand. He is in a hurry.

STONE and BELLE stop their activities and stare at them walking hand in hand. STONE even forgets to give MELODY her suitcase.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

June's house is wrecked, all windows are broken. Everywhere is sand. Many things are destroyed by the storm. Stuck on hooks, flutter lost garment in the breeze.

MELODY and RIVER look for Scoop.

MELODY

Scoop!

RIVER

Dad!

They walk through the remains of the house and call his name.

EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

GRACE dressed to the nines, comes out of her house carrying MRS. GRAIN, two screaming little boys at her heels.

GRACE

(to the kid)

Daddy is coming today, sweetie. Perhaps he'll bring us the biggest diamond we've ever seen!

MELODY walks up to her.

MELODY

Have you seen Scoop?

GRACE

He always shows up when the men arrive. Don't worry. He always does.

INT. PRETTY'S HOUSE - DAY

PRETTY is putting on a beautiful dress, her hair is in curlers.

RIVER

Is my dad here?

PRETTY

Here?

RIVER

Yes, *here*.

PRETTY blushes and shakes her head.

EXT. CHARM'S HOUSE - DAY

CHARM just reaches the door of her house. Her four SONS are around her fighting for her attention while she answers MELODY.

CHARM

Scoop?

No, not yet seen.

CHARM grabs a shoe out of the hands of one of her fighting kids.

CHARM (cont'd)

That's your brother's.

Yes, yes. You all get fresh clothes.

INT. FAIR'S HOUSE - DAY

RIVER stands in front of FAIR. Her hair is in curlers too and she is half naked. She squeaks and tries to cover her body.

FAIR

Go away!

Her son polishing his shoes is dressed very fancy.

INT. MERCY'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY looks inside through the open window. MERCY shakes her head. On the table lie her cards.

EXT. JUNE'S HOUSE - DAY

MELODY and RIVER arrive both at the verandah. LITTLE sits on the verandah. Her doll has a wild new hairstyle, made from blood-flecked feathers pricked into the bald doll's head.

LITTLE

He's at the graveyard.

LITTLE watches MELODY and RIVER as they run off towards the graveyard.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

The male OSTRICH is picking like mad into the little rise nearby the angel headstone. Hundreds of feathers drift over the graveyard on a breeze.

JOHNNY, frightened, hides behind another headstone.

MELODY and RIVER come closer and see what the OSTRICH is picking.

MELODY begins to hiss like an ostrich. The BIRD looks up. MELODY spreads out her arms and runs towards the BIRD. She hisses viciously. She claps her hands and stamps her feet like if she's an angry ostrich herself.

The big OSTRICH looks surprised. Turns around and runs away.

RIVER and MELODY plunge down and see the knife in the bird. MELODY pulls the knife out and realizes what has happened. She looks around for Scoop.

RIVER bends over the bird carefully puts the head and the neck of the bird onto the body. He rearranges the feathers and caresses the bird. His hand goes into the feathers, under the bird. He feels. All of a sudden his face lights up. MELODY doesn't understand why he suddenly gets excited.

RIVER

It's... It's... She has... There is... There are eggs.

RIVER pulls an egg out from under the bird.

RIVER (cont'd)

It's still warm.

MELODY looks at the egg, the little boy and the dead bird. Her eyes start to shine.

MELODY

Put it back! Put it back! Don't let it cool down.

She snatches the egg out of his hands. Falls on her knees. Pushes the egg back under the dead bird and runs away.

169-171 OMITTED

EXT. STONE'S SHOP / VERANDAH - DAY

MELODY arrives panting. She looks up to the WOMEN and their KIDS on the verandah. They all look beautiful and are excited, the men are about to arrive any minute.

MERCY

What's the matter, Melody?

MELODY

I need help.

The WOMEN look surprised.

FAIR

I didn't catch what you said.

MELODY

Can you help me... us? Please?

GRACE steps down onto the street.

GRACE
What happened?

INT. JUNE'S DEMOLISHED HOUSE - DAY

MERCY throws a huge bundle of dresses on to the table.

MELODY grabs a skirt and puts it on as fast as she can, right over the dresses that she's already wearing.

INT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

GRACE pulls all dresses in her house from the hangers onto a big a pile of clothes on her table.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

PRETTY and FAIR taking the dresses from the washing lines. BELLE passes by with a bundle of dresses.

INT. JUNE'S DEMOLISHED HOUSE - DAY

CHARM pulls out her dress and buttons it around MELODY'S waist. MELODY urges her to hurry up.

MELODY is wearing all the women's dresses and skirts simultaneously. The WOMEN add parts of their own outfits.

EXT. JUNE'S DEMOLISHED HOUSE - DAY

MELODY comes out of the house, wearing all the dresses from the town at once. She looks very very fat.

A battered pickup truck roars down the main street hooting its horn raucously. On the side is written "T.A.S. Diamond Co." The back is stuffed with tools and ten dusty, unshaven MINERS (black and white men) wearing overalls and boots.

MELODY crosses the street. The PICKUP DRIVER jams on its brakes and skids to a halt just in front of MELODY. The MEN all look surprised at the weirdly dressed running woman.

On June's broken verandah, in front of the ruined house, the WOMEN appear in what is left of their beautiful dresses. The MEN look even more surprised.

KIDS come running down the street, whooping.

KIDS

Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!

They jump into the MEN's arms, shrieking with excitement.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

In the shadow of the angel headstone MELODY sits down on the eggs, wearing all the skirts.

LITTLE passes by, in her hand she has the neck of the guitar. She walks on. She passes June's grave on top still sticks out the feather. She walks on and arrives at a piece of sand covered with flies. She sticks the neck of the guitar into the sand. All the flies fly away, up into the sky.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - SUNSET

The huge male OSTRICH walks towards MELODY still sitting on the ground. She remains motionless, afraid.

The bird bends his long neck down towards MELODY, sniffs her. His beak is close to her ear. MELODY quivers, tries to stay calm.

The OSTRICH makes a soft, sweet, clicking sound and slowly sits down next to her.

EXT. DUNE - SUNSET

RIVER and JOHNNY sit on the edge of the dune and watch the sun going down behind the graveyard. They see the OSTRICH and MELODY.

JOHNNY

Is she not afraid?

RIVER shakes his head.

EXT. GRACE'S HOUSE - DAY

TIME JUMP:

RIVER comes out of GRACE's house, carrying a pie (not as beautiful as Melody's pie was).

GRACE stands in the open door. The rest of the WOMEN (except Belle) look at him from behind the window.

EXT. STONE'S SHOP - DAY

STONE and BELLE wave at him, when RIVER passes.

All the houses in the Main Street have lost their cover of sand and got back their weather-beaten appearance.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

MELODY is still sitting on the ground near the angel. RIVER shows her the pie and breaks off a piece of pie-crust. He gives it to MELODY. She takes it, smells it and pops it into her mouth.

MELODY closes her eyes and chews. It's clearly the best pie she's ever tasted.

RIVER smiles.

Suddenly MELODY'S opens her eyes wide. Her whole body begins to tremble.

RIVER looks shocked.

With shaking hands, MELODY carefully lifts up the layers of skirt.

Under the skirts are her bare legs. In between them are several ostrich eggs. Out of one egg climbs a BABY OSTRICH.

MELODY reaches down, picks up the BABY OSTRICH. She ruffles the head with her thumb, gently. The little bird makes a small cheeping sound. She looks at RIVER and gives him the BABY OSTRICH.

MELODY

'One'. I think his name is 'One'.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

MELODY is still sitting on the ground in her skirts. RIVER begins to walk. The little OSTRICH follows him.

THE CREDITS START.

RIVER walks on followed by seven baby ostriches.

More of the sand dune and surrounding landscape becomes visible.

He keeps on walking and the seven small ostriches become 15.

Become 45 small ostriches.

Become 200 small ostriches.

Become 500 small ostriches.

Become 1500 small ostriches.

Become 2000 small ostriches.

Become 5000 small ostriches.

RIVER is no longer visible. Only an amazing number of swarming baby ostriches can be seen for miles and miles.

FADE TO BLACK: