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# Bastard Out of Carolina

By Dorothy Allison

People pay for what they do...  
and still more for what  
they allow themselves to become.  
And they pay for it simply;  
by the lives they lead. James Baldwin.  
The day I was born started off bad  
and only got worse.  
I guess I was lucky  
I got born at all.  
Hey Earle, pass me  
another one of those beers.  
You've had enough already, Travis.  
The sun's barely been up an hour.  
Jesus, Ruth, would you quit that?  
We're 20 damn miles to the airport  
and you're starting already?  
The way you're driving we'll be  
lucky if we get there at all.  
Could you two cool it and shut up,  
you're going to wake the baby up.  
Yeah... which one?  
My little sister.  
That's the one, smartass.  
Ruth, what did you do  
with my damn cigarettes?  
Hey Earle, got any more smokes?  
- No I don't, you want to know why?  
- Why?  
You smoked them all, that's why.  
Oh shit!  
When Travis smashed into the pickup, the  
Chevy folded up like an old accordion.  
It's a wonder they weren't all killed.  
The drinking must have helped.  
He's a liar. It was his fault.  
The truck was just there.  
Mama didn't know what hit her, even  
though she went through the windshield.  
She slept through the whole thing.  
Lucky that way.  
Can't you hold them, Wade?  
I am Ruth from my Aunt, and Anne  
from my Mama. Ruth-Anne.  
I got the nickname Bone

from Uncle Earle.  
He took one look at me and said, "She ain't no bigger than a knucklebone."  
Neither aunt Ruth nor Granny could write very clearly...  
and they hadn't bothered to discuss how Anne would be spelled.  
So it wound up three different ways on the form.  
As for the name of the father, Granny refused to speak it...  
after she'd run him out of town for messing with her daughter.  
Aunt Ruth had never been sure of his last name anyway.  
They tried to get away with just scribbling something down...  
but if the hospital didn't mind how a baby's middle name was spelled...  
they were definite about having a father's last name.  
Granny gave one, Ruth gave another, the clerk got mad...  
and there I was, certified a bastard by the state of South Carolina.  
Ruth-Anne's alright but Mattie-Raylene would've been better.  
Of course, nobody bothered to ask me. Nobody bothered to ask you? Nobody bothered to ask me. It's my baby.  
That's your own damn fault for sleeping three whole days.  
I had a concussion, Mama!  
How many babies I had, and did I sleep through any of them? I don't think so.  
What's that mangy dog doing in the yard?  
You ought to get Earle to shoot that dog, Mama.  
It's probably got rabies or something.  
Listen, kid. You aren't the first Boatwright to go through a windshield.  
None of this would have happened

if I'd been awake.  
They don't ask you  
for a marriage license  
before they put you on the table.  
I'd have said I was married  
and they'd have believed me.  
The way I'd have said it.  
No questions, no lies.  
No lies? You aren't married.  
It's only when you bring it to their  
attention that they write it down!  
You know anybody who reads  
those courthouse records?  
Anybody who comes onto my porch and  
asks to see my birth certificate...  
would get chased out of here.  
I might even take a shot at them.  
Well it matters to me.  
Why, you want something on your wall  
to prove you've done it right?  
A child's proof enough, there ain't no  
stamp on her that nobody can see.  
I don't care what they say, Bone.  
I won't have anybody call you trash.  
That stamp on your birth certificate,  
it's one they already got for me.  
No good. Lazy. Shiftless.  
I work my ass off  
over other people's peanuts...  
and they look at me  
like I'm a rock on the ground.  
No matter how hard I try,  
I still can't get away from it.  
One soft-talking,  
black-eyed man fixed that.  
He set a mark on me.  
And set a mark on you.  
Don't you worry, Bone.  
You've got me now, and I've got you.  
We'll stick together, the two of us.  
Let's go see Mama.  
Why thank-you, Earle.  
My pleasure, Judy.  
Hey hey, how's my little sweetie-pie?

Sweet as ever  
You watch yourself, that's  
my sister you're talking about.  
I just don't understand  
why you don't let me go with you.  
I could pretend that I'm her Daddy.  
- In a courthouse?!  
- Yeah.  
Come on, Earle, with all the  
deputies and sheriffs hanging around?  
Fresh out of the county farm for  
shooting up your brother-in-law's Chevy,  
you think they won't know  
who you are?  
You got kids running around Greenville  
County, but Bone ain't one of them.  
OK.  
Here we go,  
you're going over to Mama.  
Here we go, Bone.  
You put on a good show for Mama.  
Let me see if I heard you correctly.  
You said you want this fixed?  
That's right, I was there  
and really it was my fault.  
I couldn't find her husband. And there was  
so much excitement I just got confused.  
Just very confused...  
what with Anney here all bloody looking  
like she was dead to the world.  
She went right through  
that windshield, you know.  
Nine months gone, imagine that.  
There were people hollering, running  
around, screaming and, well...  
We just thank the good Lord  
she's still here with us today.  
You know how these things can happen.  
I do. I certainly do.  
You shouldn't have swung at him,  
Ruth, it didn't help.  
I've got us a man, Bone.  
A real man.  
He's handsome and kind, hard-working.

He's going to take care of us girls,  
I know he will.

So you wish me luck, sweetie.

OK, good luck.

Well?

- Thank-you ma'am.

- Thanks, Mama!

In sickness and in health,  
till death do you part.

I do.

And do you, Anney, take this man  
to be your lawful wedded husband...  
To have and to hold, for richer or  
poorer, in sickness and in health...  
Till death do you part.

I do.

I now pronounce you husband and wife,  
you may kiss the bride.

- Hey, Bone, who's your new daddy?

- You are.

- And who's the best daddy in the world?

- You are!

You've got that right.

You want to go again?

You're flying!

Honey-girl? Sweet thing,  
take a picture of me and Bone.  
Bone and her daddy. He's going  
to be a new daddy really soon.  
Really sorry about that, Lyle

- You're running late.

- You're telling me.

I've got my pickup here  
if you need any help.

We're OK.

He wasn't doing nothing wrong,  
just came along after it'd rained.  
The Devil's rain.

Yea, though I walk through  
the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil:

For thou art with me; thy rod  
and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me

in the presence of mine enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil;  
my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and loving kindness  
shall follow me all the days of my life;  
And I shall dwell in the house  
of Jehovah for ever. Amen.  
Come on.  
My Lyle worked two damn jobs  
for you, Anney Boatwright.  
He wouldn't have died in the road  
like that if it hadn't been for you.  
How dare you?  
Trying to keep you people up.  
You hold your tongue, woman.  
God's got his eye on you.  
You've got no right to judge us,  
no right at all.  
Nothing else will ever hit you  
this hard.  
Now you look like a Boatwright,  
now you've got the look.  
You're as old  
as you're ever going get, girl.  
This is the way you'll look  
till the day you die.  
I tell you what, it wouldn't be  
nothing for me to go over there  
and teach those people a little  
something about manners and respect.  
Earle, you can't solve everything  
with a shotgun. My Lord.  
I was thinking more along the lines  
of a two-by-four.  
Settle yourself, Earle. Nobody's going  
over there and that's that.  
Since when did you start telling me  
what I can and can't do, Raylene?  
Anney will stay here with Mama  
as long as she needs to.  
We take care of our own,  
like we always have.  
This here's our Daddy, practically  
every day we'd go on a picnic

and he'd throw me all over the field.  
That's not your Daddy, Bone.  
Your Daddy got run out of town.  
Uncle Earle nearly killed him.  
...like ??? the nigger.  
You listen up, Garvey.  
I'm going to tell you something  
I've been keeping from you...  
because the grown-ups  
don't want you to know about it.  
Because it might scare you.  
When you and Grey were just as big  
as Reese, sleeping in your cribs...  
a man came riding into Greenville  
County on a horse.  
Only, he didn't have a head,  
and he wasn't alive.  
The living dead, they called him.  
He went peering in through  
all the windows at night...  
looking for a boy ugly enough  
to steal.  
He couldn't tell which of you  
were uglier, so he took you both.  
You don't remember  
because you were too little...  
but he liked them plump and ugly  
and you two fit the bill.  
He took you to a shack in the woods  
to make stew out of you.  
When Uncle Earle showed up,  
he had a knife to your ear...  
he likes little boy's ears in stew.  
Tastes good on a biscuit.  
Granny!  
Have a nice night.  
A regular Rockefeller.  
I'll marry you Anney,  
then Bone would be alright.  
Anney and her girls have been alone  
for four years...  
one more day without you  
won't kill them.  
And you're already married, Billy.

Aren't we all?  
I've worked harder in a day  
than you have your entire life, Wade.  
Strong as an ox, I'll give her that.  
Hey girls.  
Hi!  
There she is.  
Her? That's your sister?  
That pretty little  
white-headed thing?  
Hey, you gotta watch yourself  
around Anney,  
you say the wrong thing and she'll  
take the shine off your teeth.  
She ain't any bigger than a girl.  
She's a girl alright.  
Our sweet Mama's baby-girl.  
But our Mama is a rattlesnake...  
and our Daddy was a son-of-a-bitch.  
What are you going to do with that  
certificate, after you've paid for it?  
Put it under the sink with all  
the other trash, where it belongs.  
Stop thinking about it, Anney,  
then everyone else will too.  
As long as it keeps getting a rise  
out of you, people will keep using it.  
Your shame is between you and God,  
Sister Anne.  
No need to let it mark your child.  
I've got no shame, Brother Calvin.  
And I don't need a man to tell me  
anything about my child.  
I'll be right back to get your order.  
OK.  
What did I tell you?  
Say something boy,  
you're making me nervous.  
That's some girl.  
I'd say somebody's smitten with you.  
Shut up, Earle would kill him  
before we even catch his name.  
Earle won't kill him.  
He brought him down here, didn't he?

He's pretty cute, I wonder if he  
can smile. You do need a husband.  
Yeah, and a house, a car  
and a hundred-thousand dollars.  
He's still looking.  
Looking pretty good.  
Mama, I've got somebody  
I want you to meet.  
What in God's name is that?  
It's a side of beef, Ruth.  
Looks like you could use some.  
Evening ma'am.  
Mama, this is Glen.  
He works with me at the mill.  
Where would you like me  
to put this meat, ma'am?  
Did you steal it? Cause if you did,  
don't bring it into my house...  
I don't need no trouble.  
No, Mama, Glen's bringing you  
a present.  
Won't you just take it,  
it's a present from him to you.  
Where are we going to put it?  
It won't fit in the icebox.  
I'll help him.  
They think they can ask you  
personal questions  
just cause you served them  
with a cup of coffee.  
Yankees.  
This one man, he took out  
a whole stack of napkins.  
I was sure he was going  
to steal them.  
I've seen people open napkins up  
like diapers,  
fill them with sugar and walk out  
with them.  
But you know what he did?  
He wrote on them.  
For thirty minutes,  
one napkin after another.  
Then he just balled them all up

and threw them away.  
And right by the register,  
we sell notepads for ten cents.  
What is wrong with these people?  
I think you're the most beautiful  
woman I've ever seen.  
Is it OK that I said that?  
It's OK.  
Let him go now.  
Honest fight, Officer.  
You're a Boatwright,  
you don't need any more trouble.  
You! You'd better  
keep your nose clean.  
Fair fight, it was fair.  
Your Daddy would be ashamed of you,  
beating on a man and crossing the law.  
I'm not crossing any law.  
Damn! You're crazy.  
Come on old boy ??? and you smile at him...  
another one laughs  
and you nearly kill him.  
Go and get the truck.  
Clean yourself up.  
Hey Bone, I've got somebody  
that wants to meet you.  
Bone, this is Glen Waddell. Say hey.  
Hey.  
Hey Bone, how're you doing?  
Fine.  
Do you sit out here every night?  
After school.  
Is that your little sister there?  
She's a little sleeping beauty.  
Well, sure was nice to meet you.  
See you again sometime.  
Yes, Sir.  
Those sure are some pretty girls.  
He's kind of nice, isn't he?  
Sure he is.  
OK sit tight, I'll be a minute.  
Hey you.  
Hey.  
Bone, shut me in.

Granny, something's burning!  
Something big.  
I can't believe it.  
Come on! Gimme!  
- I want to do it!  
- Come on!  
One, two, three.  
So he bought you a shirt,  
that don't mean anything.  
Glen loves me, Mama.  
He loves my girls.  
You just don't like the Waddells.  
That whole family's stuck up,  
full of themselves.  
Glen's not like that.  
You don't know  
what that boy's like, Anney.  
I know he loves me.  
"Love", can't even hold a job  
for more than a month.  
That's not true.  
Glen's been working with Earle at the  
mill for eight months now. Ask Earle!  
There's something wrong  
with that boy, Anney.  
He's always looking at me oiy of the sides  
of his eyes, like some old junkyard dog...  
trying to steal a bone.  
And you're the bone he wants.  
So? What's wrong with that?  
You want me to spend  
the rest of my life  
working my ass off until I dry up and  
can't even imagine marrying again?  
Earle says he's got a temper on him.  
Earle's one to talk.  
Besides, do you know a man  
who doesn't have a temper?  
Bone! Glen's here.  
Oh you both look so pretty.  
Bone, one for you one for Reese.  
Alright.  
- Anney?  
- What?

Anney.  
Anney.  
You know.  
You know I love you.  
I can't wait no more.  
I can't.  
I love you with all my heart, girl.  
And your girls,  
God, I love them.  
Our girls.  
Our girls, Anney.  
Call me Daddy.  
Call me Daddy cause I love your Mama.  
Cause I love you.  
I'm going to treat you right,  
you'll see.  
Don't say no Anney,  
don't do that to me.  
I don't know, Glen, it's...  
Alright, I'm going to think about it.  
Anney?  
OK, alright.  
Come on out here, girls! God!  
I knew you'd say yes!  
Oh Anney, what you do to me!  
You've never even imagined, Anney.  
- Hey, Bone.  
- Hey.  
Are you sleeping?  
You're starting to look like me,  
Bone. You're growing up.  
What do you think, honey?  
Think I'm doing the right thing?  
I don't know.  
I think I am.  
I hope I am.  
Sometimes I just get so tired,  
you know.  
Sometimes I just want  
somebody strong to stand by me.  
Stay with me.  
I'll stay with you.  
I know you will, Bone.  
You'd better hurry up and get married

before you start showing!  
This dress is too tight.  
It ain't right, his own brother  
turning him down to be best man.  
That's because  
he isn't the best man, Mama.  
I'm the best man.  
Come on boys, let the girls  
say goodbye to their Mama.  
Oh honey, don't cry.  
I'll be home before you know it.  
And then you'll have a new Daddy,  
and we'll be a family.  
Right?  
Now you be happy for me, sugar.  
I am.  
Why can't we go, Bone? Why can't we?  
Because it ain't for children.  
What are you doing, Earle?  
Giving you a chance  
to change your mind.  
Hellfire, Earle, I'm not going  
to change my mind.  
I've got a man who loves me.  
He loves you alright...  
Like a gambler loves a fast racehorse,  
or a desperate man loves whiskey.  
You're just jealous.  
Maybe I am.  
You keep it, it'll do you some good.  
- You look pretty.  
- Thank you.  
It's going to be a boy,  
I'm telling you. Glen Junior.  
Well, hot damn, Glen.  
Congratulations, boy!  
Oh, to hell with you.  
To hell with all of you.  
I tell you, never come  
between a man and his ambitions.  
Anney gives him anything but a boy  
he's going to go plumb crazy.  
Well a man should never put  
his ambitions in a woman's belly.

Me, I don't trust a man  
who won't take a drink.  
Hell, that'd serve him right  
if she gave him another girl.  
I'm hoping Anney does give him a son.  
A half-dozen sons while she's at it.  
There's something about that Glen.  
I almost like him...  
but I've got a feeling the boy could  
turn like whiskey in a bad barrel.  
- Hey smart girls.  
- Hey Mama.  
Sweetheart, I've got you something.  
Thank you, baby.  
Give me that.  
I'm making you a horsey.  
Hey, Bone!  
Come sit with me, come on.  
Here.  
The doctor says it's going  
to be a while, but she's doing fine.  
I know she's worried.  
She thinks if it's a girl  
I won't love it.  
It'd still be our baby.  
Even if she did have a girl,  
we'd have another soon enough.  
I'll have my son.  
Anney and I, we'll have  
our little baby boy.  
I know it.  
I just know it.  
Come here.  
Your Mama's going be alright.  
And I love you Bone.  
I know you don't believe me,  
but I do.  
We're going to be happy.  
Real happy.  
Everything's going to be alright.  
Get in the back, Bone.  
Go on, go to sleep.  
Your Mama's going to be alright.  
But she won't have no more babies.

My baby's dead.  
My boy.  
My boy.  
For the things  
which are not seen are eternal.  
Now may the peace of God,  
which surpasses all understanding...  
so guide your hearts  
and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.  
Now in glory, forever and ever.  
And may the grace of god in communion  
with the sweet fellowship...  
of the holy spirit go and rest  
upon us throughout this day.  
In Jesus' name, amen.  
We're moving.  
What? Where?  
I found us a place over  
by the JC Penney mill.  
Why? What's wrong with this place?  
Damn you, Glen Waddell.  
Don't you take Anney so far away.  
It's alright, Alma.  
It's going to be alright.  
You want to help me move?  
Get packing?  
What? What?  
We don't need nobody else's help,  
we're going to do fine on our own.  
OK?  
Alright.  
Let me get started then.  
Where's your Mama?  
Sleeping.  
What've you got there?  
A picture.  
Let me see it.  
Now, Bone,  
this ain't your Daddy.  
I'm your Daddy, Bone.  
Reese, honey.  
Tell me I'm your Daddy.  
Daddy.  
That's right.

Now you do it.  
Say it.  
Call me your daddy.  
Daddy.  
What's going on?  
Where's Bone off to?  
She's taking a little walk.  
That child's moody as hell.  
I don't know why they fired me,  
I was doing everything  
I was supposed to.  
I've got three sons.  
One's a lawyer, finest around, going  
to be district attorney some day.  
Another one is a dentist with the  
biggest practice in Greenville County.  
They make their Daddy proud.  
And then I've got you.  
When are you going to do something  
to make your Daddy proud?  
I'll tell you when, never.  
You come here looking for a job?  
Is that why you are here?  
Yes.  
No Sir.  
Other boys are getting laid off too,  
honey.  
Maybe you ought to ask James  
for that money he owes you,  
for the work you did on his porch.  
I can't do that. I'd rather starve.  
But he owes you.  
I told you I can't do that.  
I know it's hard, Glen,  
but James is your brother.  
We ain't gonna have the rent  
if you don't get it from him.  
You don't understand.  
James never said nothing  
about paying me at all.  
Hell, he didn't even ask for my help.  
I just went over there and did it.  
I never asked about money,  
I couldn't.

Well, we'll just see then.  
There's other things we can do,  
other jobs.  
We can get Earle's help to move.  
After that, things seemed to move  
irreversibly forward.  
We moved and moved again.  
We lived in no one house more  
than eight months.  
Moving had no season,  
it was all seasons.  
Crossed time like a train  
with no schedule.  
We moved so often our mail  
never caught up to us,  
moved some times before  
we've even got unpacked,  
or I'd learned the names of all  
the teachers in my new school.  
Moving gave me sense of time passing  
and everything sliding...  
as if nothing could be held onto  
anyway.  
It made me feel, ghostly unreal,  
unimportant.  
Like a box that goes missing,  
turns up but you realize you never  
needed anything in it anyway.  
What the hell is this?  
Earle was just trying to help,  
Glenn, Good Lord.  
How can you shame me like that?  
I'm a grown man, I don't need  
your brother to pay my damn way.  
You give that back to him tomorrow.  
That's crazy, we need this money.  
You just do as I say!  
Sell the damn radio  
while you're at it.  
Things I do aren't good enough  
for you?  
I put my hand in a honey jar, it  
comes out piss! Nothing I do is right!  
Everybody has troubles

now and then, honey.  
You just give it time, sweetie.  
Things are going to work out.  
Shut up.  
You shut up.  
Don't give me that Mama crap.  
You shut your mouth!  
You just shut up, shut up!  
I'm sorry Anney, you know I don't  
mean to yell at you, I'm sorry.  
You know how much I love your Mama,  
you know I do.  
Oh Jesus, Glen.  
You don't know your own strength.  
I guess I don't.  
But Bone knows I'd never mean to  
hurt her. Bone knows I love her.  
Hell, Anney! I love all of you.  
You know that.  
No, he never meant to hurt me.  
Not really, I told myself.  
But more and more those hands  
seem to move before he could think.  
My dreams were full of long fingers,  
hands that reached around  
door frames,  
crept over the edge of the mattress,  
fear in me like a river,  
like the ice dark blue of his eyes.  
I'm hungry  
When we get enough bottles, we'll  
get you a can of pork and beans.  
How come we always gotta eat pork  
and beans cold, huh Bone?  
Because we haven't got electricity.  
The power company turned it off  
because Daddy Glen can't keep a job.  
How come Daddy Glen  
don't like you, Bone?  
How come you got to keep asking me  
a million questions?  
Making so much fuss over so little.  
You'd think you girls  
hadn't been fed in a week.

You don't know what real hunger is.  
Go on.  
Hey, honey.  
Soda crackers and ketchup!  
You're so casual about finding another  
job, but I feed my girls that garbage  
while you sit on your ass all day,  
smoking and telling lies.  
I was out looking for a job all day.  
How many?  
How many people did you see?  
A lot.  
Not my kids.  
I was never going to have my girls  
know what it was like.  
I was never going to have them  
go hungry or cold or scared!  
Never, you hear me?  
Never!  
What's that?  
It's a horse.  
Do you know what this is?  
Bone, you get Reese ready.  
I'm taking you over  
to Aunt Alma's for a little while.  
I'll pick you up later.  
Come on girls.  
We're going home.  
Now whose big dress is this?  
Reese, baby.  
My Mama used to cook this  
late at night.  
You've got to get the tomatoes almost  
done before you put the eggs in  
because you don't want to cook  
the eggs much at all.  
You want them soft.  
You want them to melt like butter  
between your teeth and your tongue.  
What're you going to do about it,  
Glen?  
What?  
Nothing, that's what.  
It's good.

Eat up, baby.

Anney's got her girls  
all dolled up today.

James, I figured we'd take  
fifty, maybe sixty thousand,  
put it in a liquid account,  
so we can write checks on it.

- You know, Daddy.

- What?

I got that job, and it's working out  
really well.

...write checks on,  
we buy us a couple of radio spots.  
We'll make these sort of public service  
spots and not use your name at all.

Anne Madeline asked  
for another pitcher of tea.

Take that one there on the table.

We don't want to make it look like  
we're trying to push you,  
specifically, well we just want to say  
we need a new district attorney.

Damn, you clumsy child!

Go on, Bone, go on.

- You bring those people around here!

- Daddy, that was an accident!

You bring them around,  
watch what they're doing!

- Those people are my family.

- Your family?

We are your family, right here, boy.

We're your family.

You can't hurt me anymore, old man.

It's my one day off, and you got  
to tear around here?

Now just, just cool it, kid.

You're a girl, not a racehorse.

You're a girl, not a racehorse.

You little bitch. You little bitch!

Come here!

Come on, you. You're smart.

Get up here.

- Stop it. I'm sorry.

- Come on.

- I'm sorry.  
- You're sorry?  
Glen?  
Glen?  
Glen, open the door.  
Glen, unlock this door!  
I'm sorry.  
Not as sorry as you're going to be.  
Glen, please!  
Tearing around here, making fun of me,  
embarrassing me in front of my daddy!  
I've waited too long to do this,  
too long.  
What did she do? Let me in!  
Stop it!  
She's my girl, too!  
Someone's got to love her enough  
to care how she turns out.  
Oh, babycakes.  
What did you do, honey?  
What did you do to make him so mad?  
She called me a bastard, Anney.  
And she was tearing around here,  
knocking things over.  
I never meant to beat her that bad,  
I swear I didn't. I would never...  
I'm sorry, baby.  
Don't cry.  
You made him mad, Bone.  
You'd better be careful.  
Come here, you stubborn thing.  
Come on.  
I had tried to be careful,  
but something had come apart.  
Something had gotten loose, like wild  
strands of hair unraveling in the dust.  
He wouldn't make enough money  
in his new job,  
so Mama went back to the cafe,  
working later and later.  
What is this?  
You know where I found this? I found  
this on the floor in the hallway.  
What did I tell you I'd do next time?

What did I say about this?  
Come on, get up. Let's go upstairs.  
You gotta learn to take care  
of things.  
That's why your Mama works so hard.  
Let's go, let's go.  
Reese, you just stay right there,  
play your cards. Come on, let's go.  
Glen always found something I'd done,  
something I had to be told.  
Something he just had to do  
because he loved me so much.  
I lived in a world of shame.  
I hid my bruises as if they were  
evidence of crimes I had committed.  
I didn't tell Mama.  
I couldn't tell Mama.  
Something's wrong with her, Glen.  
She's just accident-prone.  
She's always getting into something.  
Falling out of trees,  
falling off the porch.  
Lucky she's such a hard-headed brat.  
Maybe I ought to get her some vitamins,  
or something. Maybe she's thin-boned.  
Don't worry.  
Mama.  
Mama.  
How'd she break her coccyx?  
- Her what?  
- Her tail bone, lady!  
Her ass!  
What have you been hitting  
this child with?  
Or maybe you've just been throwing  
her up against the damn wall!  
What are you saying?  
What are you saying!  
You wanna talk about it, honey?  
Let me have my girl.  
How about we ask your Mama  
to leave, then  
maybe you can tell me what happened?  
- Mama.

- Come on.  
I'm getting you dressed  
and I'm getting you home.  
Lady, this child's been beaten.  
This child's been beaten and  
I'm going to call the authorities!  
We're over here.  
OK here we go, you're going  
to be home real soon.  
Thank you, doctor.  
Don't you dare.  
Anney.  
Anney.  
Anney, no!  
What in the hell happened to her?  
I'm sorry.  
You didn't do anything wrong.  
Throw the ball, Garvey!  
We stayed at Aunt Alma's  
until I got better  
but Daddy Glen said he couldn't live  
without Mama's love.  
She made him swear he would never  
lay a hand on me again.  
Girls? Daddy Glen's here.  
Bone? I want to ask you  
to do something for me.  
You know, your Aunt Ruth  
is real sick.  
Aunt Ruth's been sick for ages.  
Well.  
She's gotten worse  
and Travis is having a hard time  
taking care of her all by himself.  
He was wondering if you'd go  
out there for a little while  
until she gets better.  
- Hi, Ruth.  
- Hi, honey.  
Thanks for this.  
She's going to be fine. Just fine.  
OK, baby. Bye-bye.  
You be good.  
Take good care of her, OK? Love you.

I'm gonna take a trip,  
on that old gospel ship.  
I'm going far beyond the sky.  
I'm gonna shout and sing.  
You think I'm dying?  
No, just awful damn sick.  
Then what is it, child?  
Daddy Glen hates me.  
He don't like you much,  
but he's just jealous, I think.  
Come here.  
See, he's just a little boy himself.  
Wanting more of your Mama than you.  
Wanting to be her baby  
more than her husband.  
Men are just like little boys, jumping  
up on titty whenever they can.  
Your Mama knows it and we all do.  
Has he ever touched you, honey?  
Has he ever messed with you?  
Down here, honey.  
Has he ever hurt you down here?  
Are you sure?  
Auntie, do you believe in god?  
I sure as hell do.  
Good, because I'll be  
a gospel singer someday.  
All right, then. Carry on,  
little Bone. Turn up that radio.  
If you are ashamed of me,  
you ought not to be.  
Lest you better have a care.  
If too much fault you find,  
you will sure be left behind.  
While I'm sailing, through the air.  
Would you quit?  
You're scaring off my dogs.  
Oh, shut up, old man!  
We're full of spirit.  
I'm going far beyond the sky  
I'm gonna shout and sing  
till the heavens ring,  
till I bid this world goodbye.  
Alright then, honey.

I can't believe I got suckered  
into coming back home.  
What do you mean?  
Daddy said he'd make my car payments  
if I took care of Mama,  
so what the hell?  
You're talking about your car  
when your Mama's dying?  
You don't know what it's like, Bone.  
Getting out on your own  
and then being dragged back home.  
You wait a few years.  
Get yourself a sweetheart,  
a job that pays your own money,  
stuff you like to do that  
your Mama says is silly or simple.  
Just about everything I like  
in this world is silly or simple.  
But then, I don't care.  
I got my car and I got my own plans  
and as soon as that car is paid for,  
you can bet your ass I'll be gone again.  
Next time, the devil himself  
couldn't drag me back.  
Bone?  
Yes, Auntie?  
Turn off that radio,  
would you, honey?  
Will you sing for me?  
I'm gonna take a trip,  
on that old gospel ship.  
I'm going far beyond the sky.  
I'm gonna shout and sing,  
till the heavens ring.  
Till I bid this world goodbye  
That's nice, honey.  
Now is the neatest time  
Oh now, is the neatest time  
Are you trying to take the paint  
off the walls or just sour the milk?  
Bone!  
Knock it off, you're giving  
your Daddy and me a headache.  
But I'm feeling the spirit, Mama!

Mama?  
What is it?  
Come here, baby.  
It's Ruth.  
She's gone.  
She died?  
Mama.  
No.  
Bone.  
Bone.  
Bone, what are you doing up here?  
How many times are you going  
to make me call you, girl?  
- I didn't hear you.  
- Didn't hear me?  
I've been calling you for 5 minutes,  
your Mama needs your help down there.  
I didn't hear you.  
Don't you sass me.  
Don't you dare sass me.  
You think just because your aunt died  
you can talk to me like that?  
You're in my house now. I am the boss  
of my house, do you understand?  
Of all days, Jesus!  
Anney, let me handle this!  
- Come here.  
- No.  
Let me handle this!  
Glen?  
No, Glen. Glen!  
Glen!  
Wait here.  
She didn't do anything!  
Don't you say a word. Don't you dare.  
Glen, you stop it now!  
I appreciate you coming out here.  
Ruthie would have loved that sermon.  
It was short and sweet  
and she liked it that way.  
- Thank you very much.  
- Thank you.  
- Hey, Earle.  
- Hey, boys.

Hey, Bone!  
Come over here a minute.  
Here you are.  
Drink to your Aunt Ruthie.  
Just don't tell your Mama, though,  
she'll take my head off.  
Easy does it, kiddo.  
Oh, I'm sorry, Bone.  
Well, girl! Who slipped you  
some liquor?  
You're falling over drunk.  
No, I'm not.  
I just had a little.  
I heard that one before.  
Come on, let's get you into a bed.  
Oh, Jesus.  
Please!  
- Oh, no.  
- Please! No!  
Earle, get in here!  
Bring Wade and Travis with you!  
What's the matter, Raylene?  
Raylene, what the hell  
are you screaming about?  
Look at this, look at her.  
I'd kill him.  
How you like that?  
How you feel, big man?  
Get up, boy! Get him up!  
Bring him! Come here!  
- Anney.  
- Don't touch me!  
Look at me.  
God damn you.  
God damn you.  
He loves Bone.  
He loves her. He does.  
He loves us all, Mama!  
I'm sorry.  
Calm down, Anney.  
I made him mad.  
How do you like that?  
They're going to kill him!  
Shut up!

Get him over here!  
Set him up.  
Turn him around!  
Get him on his knees!  
Now, move! Out of the way!  
You like that?  
I hate those people.  
How come?  
They're always looking at us  
like we're something nasty.  
They look at you  
the way you look at them.  
Look at it from the other side  
for a while,  
maybe you won't be  
glaring at people so much.  
I heard you ran off to the carnival  
with a man  
but I never heard you say  
one thing about him.  
How come he didn't marry you?  
I did run off to the carnival  
alright, but not for no man.  
I never wanted to marry nobody.  
I like my life the way it is,  
little girl.  
Looks like you'll make yours out of  
pride, stubbornness, and too much anger.  
Better think hard, Ruth Anne, about  
what you want and who you're mad at.  
Better think real hard.  
Alma's gone berserk. Get in!  
Oh, God, come on.  
Stay away from my house!  
Stay away from my children!  
You son-of-a-bitch.  
You stay away from here.  
He's going be back,  
and I'm ready for him.  
"A man has his needs",  
that's what he always says.  
He's just taking a breather, Alma.  
I'll cut his throat,  
as soon as he's done breathing.

I said, "give me a baby, Wade.  
Just give me a baby."  
You know what he said to me?  
He wouldn't touch me if I took a bath  
in whiskey and put a bag over my head.  
I've been thinking.  
About what?  
Remember when you told me and Garvey  
about the living dead? Remember?  
I've been thinking maybe our daddies  
are the living dead.  
I've been thinking maybe  
they just take turns.  
Maybe.  
Hey, Bone.  
Want to come sit with me a minute?  
How are things going out  
at Raylene's?  
Fine.  
Earle still staying with you?  
Sometimes.  
Must be nice out there by the river.  
Quiet.  
You look like you're waiting  
for something, Bone.  
What are you waiting for?  
I'll be staying here at Alma's,  
until things get settled down.  
You want to stay here with me?  
I couldn't stand it if you hated me.  
I don't hate you.  
I just know you love him.  
He's good to you.  
He's good to Reese.  
He just...  
I don't know.  
I wouldn't ask you to come home  
unless I knew you'd be safe, Bone.  
I promise you.  
What?  
What are you saying?  
I won't go.  
I'll stay at Raylene's.  
I think she's glad to keep me.

I'll stay somewhere.  
But once you go back to Daddy Glen,  
I can't go with you.  
Oh, god.  
What have I done?  
Mama didn't try to stop me  
when I walked away.  
She just watched me go.  
At Raylene's the days were a gift,  
long and warm.  
The nights, quiet and cool.  
I slept dreamlessly  
and woke up at peace.  
Come on, come here.  
Do you like it?  
Hey, bone.  
It's been a while.  
Your Mama here?  
She's at Aunt Alma's.  
But she's coming over  
for some tomatoes.  
Good.  
I'll wait for her.  
Where's your Aunt Raylene?  
Down fishing.  
How about you go inside and make me  
a glass of iced tea while I wait?  
You are getting bigger.  
You going be dating any day, now.  
Getting married, maybe.  
Starting a family of your own.  
Breaking some man's heart  
just because you can.  
You're a jumpy girl.  
I talked to Anney, you know.  
She's coming back. She promised.  
Says she just needs a little time,  
time to make it up to you.  
She loves you more  
than I can understand.  
You know what your Mama told me?  
She's not coming home  
until you come home, too.  
You gonna have

to tell her it's all right.  
You'll have to tell her that  
we're going to be together again.  
No.  
I don't want  
to live with you no more.  
I told Mama she can go back.  
I told her she could.  
But I can't. I won't.  
You won't?  
You won't live with me no more?  
You are still a child.  
You don't say what you do.  
I'm your Daddy. I say what you do.  
No.  
I want you to try  
to be reasonable, girl.  
I want you to tell your Mama.  
I want you to stop all this nonsense  
before you make me really mad.  
I'd rather die than go back  
to living with you.  
I bet you would.  
I want you to leave.  
I'm going to tell her.  
I'm gonna tell her everything.  
You don't want to help  
your daddy at all, do you?  
Do you?  
You don't want to do anything for me!  
You're the reason.  
Anney loves me.  
I know it.  
But you make her ashamed,  
ashamed of you.  
And ashamed of loving me!  
And it ain't right!  
Anney is going to come back to me.  
I know it.  
She just needs a little time,  
I understand that with everything  
that's happened.  
But if she wasn't coming back to me,  
I would kill you. You know that.

I would break your neck.  
Damn you!  
Let me go!  
Come here!  
Let me go!  
Stop!  
Where are you going?  
Where do you think you're going?  
You're a big girl?  
You guess you're so grown up,  
you tell me what to do?  
Come here.  
You're going to say no to me?  
I'll show you how grown you are.  
You're so grown up?  
You're going to say no to me?  
Going to show me  
how big and bad you are?  
You son of a-bitch!  
You monster!  
Come on, baby.  
You bastard!  
Oh, no!  
Oh no, baby. Please!  
- Baby! I just wanted to talk to her!  
- Stay away!  
I don't know what happened!  
I just wanted to talk to her.  
Please, Anney. I didn't mean it.  
I didn't mean it. Please don't go.  
Get out!  
I didn't mean it!  
Don't go! I can't live without you!  
Kill me!  
Glen! Stop it!  
Please, baby, kill me!  
Oh god, help.  
Help me!  
Come on, Bone.  
Tell me who it was.  
Just tell me, sweetheart.  
No one's ever going to hurt you  
again. Just tell me.  
I want my Mama.

Your Mama ain't here, Bone.  
I think you ought to let her be.  
You want to go home?  
Let's go.  
Bone,  
I know you don't understand this.  
I barely understand, myself.  
No woman should have to choose  
between a baby and her lover.  
Between her child and her husband.  
We all do terrible things to the ones  
we love sometimes  
and it eats us up,  
but we do them, just the same.  
You want to know about your Mom,  
I know.  
I can't explain that to you.  
I can't.  
I don't know where she's gone.  
None of us do,  
but I know she loves you.  
Don't doubt that.  
And she'll never forgive herself.  
I hate her.  
You'll forgive her.  
I hate her.  
Hey, Anney.  
Hey, Earle.  
I'm OK, Uncle Earle.  
Bone, I never wanted you to get hurt.  
I never thought it would go  
the way it did.  
I never thought  
Glen would hurt you like that.  
And I just loved him.  
You know that?  
I just loved him so much.  
I couldn't see him that way.  
I couldn't believe.  
I couldn't imagine.  
You don't know how much I love you,  
honey.  
How much I've always loved you.  
Mama.

I love you, Bone.  
You're my best girl.  
I love you.  
Who had Mama been?  
What had she wanted to be or do  
before I was born?  
Once I was born, her hopes turned  
and I climbed up her life  
like a flower reaching for the sun.  
Her life had folded into mine.  
Who would I be when I was 15, 20, 30?  
Would I be as strong as she had been?  
As hungry for love, as desperate,  
determined and ashamed?  
I wouldn't know,  
but I was already  
who I was going to be,  
someone like her,  
like my Mama, a Boatwright,  
a bastard.  
A bastard out of Carolina.  
I love you, mama.