

A DEEP RURAL TRACT

An original drama by: Loretta Moore

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## CHARACTERS

ADELL-one of McMillan children

BO-one of McMillan children

WILLIS-one of McMillan children

SHARONLEE-one of McMillan children

MR HUNTLEY-longtime friend of the McMillans

JUDGE HENRY WATSON

PROSECUTOR-JOSEPH WILLIAMS

AUNT ROSE-sister of Wilbur McMillan

ACT I

Scene I

SETTING:

The courthouse in Townsey, Miss.  
Wilbur McMillan murder trial  
the year 1979

AT RISE:

Sister of Wilbur McMillan, Rose Atkins is  
on the stand.  
McMillan children and friends are present.  
Prosecutor Joseph Williams  
Henry Watson is presiding over trial.

JUDGE

(To Prosecutor)

Permission granted, if question is pertinent to the case.

PROSECUTOR

(Looks to Judge respectfully; then turns back to witness)

Rose Atkins, can you honestly say that your brother, Wilbur McMillan and his wife,  
Lurene had a good marital relationship?

(McMillan children facially express anger at prosecutor)

ADELL

(Angry-faced)

I could scratch that Prosecutor's eyes out, askin' Aint Rose somethin' like that.

SHARONLEE

Jest who the hell does he think he is!

(Willis staggers in, and falls into chair)

Jonnelle and her Physician husband was jest rollin' ...up..up..as I was comin' in. Wha...  
whats goin' ..own?

ROSE

(Emphatically)

My answer is yes. Yes they did. But, to the question asking if the marriage of my brother and Lurene strained sometimes. I'd have to say yes to that, too. I been married a long, long time myself, and there's plenty of times my husband, Jed and me ain't seen eye to eye. But that don't mean he'd murder me, or I'd kill him, now do it? My brother did not kill Lurene.

(Relatives and Huntley heard stirring in reaction)

PROSECUTOR

(Walks away from witness, stops, speaks)

Miss Atkins, am I to believe that the severe mental illness that Lurene McMillan suffered had no affect on the marriage?

HUNTLEY

(Along with relative's angry response)

Poor Rose....Ain't no reason to put her through all this.. That brazen nig prosecutor is bearin' down own my nerves like you don't know...!

WILLIS

(Slurring, leaning over toward Huntley)

Mr. Huntley...I..thinkkk...that young... Prosecutor...knows..exactly where...he wants ta...go....

PROSECUTOR

(Turns attention to judge)

Your Honor, may I continue with questioning?

(Judge nods his approval)

Are you saying that there was never a time when your brother expressed anger toward his wife, Lurene?

ROSE

(Angrily)

Young man.....

PROSECUTOR

(Indignant response)

Mrs. Atkins, that would be 'prosecutor,' or Joseph Williams, Thank you.

JUDGE

Proceed, please, Witness.....

ROSE

(Looks contemptuously at prosecutor)

Mr. Williams, Prosecutor, I can say that Wilbur, my brother endured a lot. But I also would have to say that he loved his wife and was the most patient man I ever saw. Lurene

was 'queer actin.' We all kinda knew that from the start. We didn't know if that was 'cause she was a full-blood Indian or not.

JUDGE

Prosecutor, if there is nothing further to ask Mrs. Atkins, please call the next witness to the stand.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honor, I would like to call Bo McMillan to the stand.

JUDGE

Mrs. Atkins, you are dismissed. Would Bo McMillan please come forth as the next witness?

BO

(Rising, leans over, whispers to relatives and Huntley)

I can't wait ta go up there.

(Bo is approaching witness stand. Rose Atkins' face is scrunched up in anger as she returns to sit with relatives)

ROSE

That damn prosecutor....

(She then looks around)

Jonnelle and the Doctor didn't come yet?

WILLIS

(Drunkenly)

They was comin' ...up...up..as I...was...Probbly in the bathroom...powderin' her turned-up nose....

ROSE

(Looks agitated)

Willis, how much you had to drink?

WILLIS

Not enough, Aint Rose...No..not...E..nuff.....

SHARONLEE

(Rising)

I'm goin' out ta git a smoke. I'll see if Jonnelle's in the ladies room.....

(Leaves)

Scene Ends

ACT I

Scene II

SETTING: Late-March, 1979 at the McMillan farm.  
Lurene McMillan's funeral and burial.

AT RISE: Mid-morning in the old-fashioned kitchen.  
Willis and Adell, Bo, Sharon. Tense  
atmosphere.

ADELL

(Rises, goes for the coffeepot. Returns, pours for them all and  
sits down)

Willis, how 'bout that time we was all setting' out there in mama's vegetable garden,  
settin' own a big ole tree trunk. 'N' you thought you heard somethin' neath that ole rotten  
log, 'n' when you pulled it back, Lordy, sure enough, it had ta be at least a hundred a em,  
baby snakes; they was jest a workin' under there. Gives me the heebies-geebies even  
now, jest thinkin' 'bout that.

(SharonLee, grimaces, pulls hard on cigarette)

BO

Yall know I ain't got no love for nobody's snakes. I ain't like Willis. He ain't never been  
scared of no snakes.

(Starts to chuckle)

Do yall remember that time Willis chased me with a snake. I sure ain't never forgot it. I musta been 'round twelve. Anyway, Willis always did like ta tease and stir up trouble. We was out in the field, and he spots this indigo snake. 'had all these pretty colors, but I ain't never seen a snake I like. Big too. 'N' soon's he picks the dang thing up, I tell him ta put that thing down. But see he had a plan for me, 'cause he knew how scared I always been of snakes, so he comes at me wid it, I'm yellin' at him not ta come no further. But oh, no, ole Willis who like ta tease all the time wid that regular ole crafty smile on his face, keep comin' at me, slow. By now I'm backin' up. And he still comin' at me. Well I tell him once again ta throw than thang down. But no, he keeps on a comin.' So I turns and starts runnin'. And then he takes off after me. He's runnin' afta me, and yellin, "I'm gone git you, Bo. I'm gone git.. ya. Me 'n' this snake gone git ya." 'N' then, laughin' like a fool, that dang boy tell me he gone throw that dang crawly thang at m' back. "n' What's he say that for. I picked up speed, runnin' like I was runnin' for 'm life. Then I felt something hit 'm back. I quickly re'lized, hit was that dang snake Willis had threw on m.' Well, I took off faster than a bat outta hell. Couldn't nothin' stop me. I was runnin' so fast I could hardly catch m' breath, 'n' I could hear Willis laughin' like a crazy man b'hind me. I shook, and I shook but I dodn't stop runnin.' Finally I felt that dang snake drop off m' back, but I didn't stop runnin.' I was runnin' so hard that I felt somethin' wet comin' down m' face, I didn't stop ta find out, jest kept runnin.' Later I learnt hit was blood, I was bleedin' from me nose, but I didn't care then what hit was, I jest knew I had ta keep runnin.' M' stomach and chess felt like they was goin' blow up, but I kept own runnin.' I didn't stop 'til I made it to the house.

WILLIS

(Does not laugh with relatives)

I ain't never in all my life seen nobody run like Bo did that day.

BO

(Others are laughing hard)

Run the soles off my shoes...And then run outta m' shoes, left 'em in the dust. I was wailin' so loud, Mama come out the house, and I collapsed in her arms. Then you was doin' some runnin' gittin' away from mama with that razor strap of hers.....

WILLIS

In all these years, I ain't forgot that whippin' either....

ADELL

(Passes cookie plate around)

Don't yall forgit these brownies Aint Rose made. She sure been faithful. Been here with Daddy all this time. Helpin' him through this. Mama didn't want Reverend Beasley to do the funeral. I think that's somethin' else hard to settle in daddy's mind. Mama went ta church but she never was a Christian like us. And I su'pose, daddy realized her wishes would be to rest with her people.

(Everything suddenly becomes solemn and quiet)

BO

It sure wont easy takin' mama out the room, 'n' puttin' on the truck in that box. 'The hardest thing I ever done.

WILLIS

Yep, mama will be in the 'happy hunting grounds.' Hit wont no rest waitin' for her at the church cemetery.

ADELL

I better go check on the children outside. They might be up ta somethin' out in that ole curin' shed. Also daddy said they was some snakes out there...It might be time for them ta come own in and git dressed for the funeral, or at least have a little somethin' ta eat. That's a long drive out ta where mama's people live.

(Looks down at her nails, shakes her head in disgust)

I need ta do somethin' 'bout these nails a mine.

(Goes out of sight. You hear faintly the sound of children playing. She calls to the children)

Buddy Jr., Jason, Willie, Curtis, MaryJo, CarolAnn, Dwight Jr....Yall betta come own....

(Silence still surrounds the table)

SHARONLEE

(Squashing cigarette out in ashtray)

I stopped off in Bastrop, and got the children somethin' ta eat. But, I might wonta bring them in, and wash 'em up some, and dress 'em. Time is movin' on.

(Looks like someone whose batteries have run down)

If mama's funeral begins at three, we need ta be outta here in a half hour. You know how those roads can be goin' back into them woods. And, it's been rainin', so ya know it's gone be worse with the mud.

BO

Yeah, if you gotta git 'em ready, you might betta git started. Ya know we gotta go out ta Uncle Big Oaks, 'n' pick him and Aint Soft Wing up. Yeah, I'd say we betta be leavin' pretty soon.

ADELL

(Returns, picks up a knife and starts slicing huge ham on table)

I should put own a pot a beans, or some peas. Something everybody could git to without me havin' ta fix, fix, fix...

WILLIS

(Reflective; sad)

Mama woulda had a pot of somethin' own, alright. They was always a pot bubblin' on that stove when we was all growin' up; and a pan of cornbread or biscuits to eat with it. Mama always made sure wasn't nobody ever hungry. We could come in and out, 'n' be goin' into that ole pot of beans or peas she kept goin' on the stove.

BO

(Attempts to lift the weight of gloom starting to bear down)

Now, jest where is that wife of mine? I shoulda never let my wife loose with her mother. That mother of hers gone stop and talk ta everybody she runs into in town. She would talk to a bird if he could talk back. Speakin' of birds, this mornin' comin' in, comin' by Townsey Pond, it was at least twenty Whistlin' Swans out there. Willis, you 'n' Daddy started breakin' ground in the fields in the far corners?

WILLIS

Not yet. I gotta a feelin', ain't no cotton gone be planted by me....

ADELL

(Appears nervous; she looks disgustedly at her nails)

These nails of mine, hmm, hmm hmm... Seem like ta me it's too cold ta be plantin.' Guess who I ran into this mornin' when we come through town. My first grade teacher, Miss Arnette. Kin you believe Miss Arnette still teachin.'?

BO

I remember Miss Arnette. Her son, Ray was in my class throughout school. Mr. Arnette still run the movie-house, I hear.

ADELL

Miss Arnette gave us her sympathies. She was sayin' how Mama used ta carry the nicest lookin' produce of anybody in and around Townsey, Mississippi. She said she always waited for Mama's truck 'cause Mama grew the best vegetables and fruit in the county.

Miss Arnette said Mamas' vegetables and fruit was so pretty, she had the pleasure of eatin' AND lookin' at 'em. Mama made good sellin' her produce, takin' that truck into town three times a week through spring and summer. I remember helpin' her load that truck up early in the mornin.' She'd leave here loaded down. She'd make her rounds, 'n' come back empty. Sometimes, she'd be done soll out early, 'n' we'd haveta come back 'n' git some more, 'n' go back out. 'N' then, ya know she had folks in town puttin' in orders for somethin' special they wanted her ta bring 'em. Yeah, Mama made good money sellin' her produce.

WILLIS

(Sadly)

Too bad Mama never spent some of it own herself...She never did think of herself, always said it was too many of us for her to do that. She neva thought 'bout herself. Mama never wanted ta crowd in own any of us.

SHARONLEE

All the while we was growin' up, she never had morein' three dresses as I recall. Everybody bought her stuff after we was grown, because we could. 'N' daddy did, too since he could afford to git her nice things by that time.

ADELL

(Sounding annoyed, and gazing at her outstretched hands)

Now you know Jonnelle and Doc should be here by now!

BO

(Cynically)

You know you can't expect Jonnelle to ever show up own time, so ya know she ain't, even for her own Mama's funeral. Jest when did the wife of a rich doctor have to show up own time. Yall ain't forgot have yall, we jest Mississippi Rednecks. Doc ain't never been comfortable 'round us. Yall know that.

SHARONLEE

(Looks as if her batteries have run down, gets a cigarette).

If that's what we are, Jonnelle can't turn up her nose at us... she's one of us; and Jerald can't 'cause he married one.

BO

Thing was, she always was busy dreamin' about bein' somebody else. From the time she was knee high to a grasshopper, Jonnelle was becomin' somebody bigger, and better... and she definitely did not think of herself as a Redneck.

WILLIS

(Dejectedly)

Mama never thought about herself as no Redneck either. She thought of herself what she was...a full-blooded Indian. Know somethin' I figured out, mama mighta been different

from us, but she was smarter. She seemed ta know how everything worked. When she was still in her right mind, before she took sick, she had good notions about life.

SHARONLEE

(Cigarette has settled her nerves; she's smiling)

I know one thing, Mama sure knew I had got myself pregnant. She mighta knowed before I did. One day she put those black as coal eyes own me, and said, "Sharonlee, you pregnant, Girl"? She told me, she kept noticin' my dress tail gittin' caught on everything I passed. That, she said, meant I must be pregnant.

WILLIS

(In a burst of anger)

Look at us! We sittin' 'round this table like it's a Thanksgivin' dinner. And, Mama's gone be burid today. Mama's dead, and don't none of us know for sure how she got that way.

(He pushes away from the table, and gets up)

I'm goin' to town. I need somethin' a lot stronger then this coffee!

SHARONLEE

(Pulls deeply on cigarette)

Willis, I kin use somethin' ta drink m'self. Bring back a coupla six-packs.

(Willis rises abruptly to leave. Mr. Huntley knocks and enters.  
He and Willis bump into each other)

WILLIS

Hey, Mr. Huntley.

(Willis speaks and keeps moving. Huntley looks baffled)

HUNTLEY

Hey, Willis...Uh, how yall doin'?

ADELL

Mr. Huntley, come on in and take a seat. I'll get you some coffee.

(He sits down at table, Adell goes to counter)

BO

Good you was able to make it, Mr. Huntley. How you doin'? How Mrs. Huntley doin'?

HUNTLEY

I'm doin' right well. Mrs. Huntley not too spry, though. I thought I saw Rose and Jed's car out front. They here?

SHARONLEE

Mr. Huntley, Aint Rose is in there wid daddy. He's not holdin' up too good. Uncle Jed down with his arthritis, 'n' couldn't make it.

ADELL

(Returns with a cup, pours coffee, hands it to Huntley)

Help yourself to some of Aint Roses' cookies, Mr. Huntley.

HUNTLEY

Be glad to. Nobody bakes like your Aint Rose.

(He reaches for the cookie platter)

BO

Willis finally broke loose with it...I knew it was comin'....

(He looks disappointed and sad)

SHARONLEE

Willis was closer to Mama than any of the rest of us. Plus, he was right here when it all happened.

(Rises and goes toward back door)

I wonder when Jonelle and Jerald gone git here... I better git these children in here, and git them ready.

BO

Like I say, Dr. Harrison ain't never in no hurry to be 'round us McMillans.

ADELL

(Gets up from chair)

Let me go do these awful-looking nails of mine.

Scene Ends

ACT I

Scene III

SETTING: The Wilbur McMillan trial.

AT RISE: Sharonlee is on the witness stand.

PROSECUTOR

(Looking toward the judge, he's rubbing his hands together  
and is in deep contemplation)

Your Honor, if you will give permission to do so, I'd like to question the witness here  
about the behavior of Lurene McMillan.

JUDGE

Permission granted.

PROSECUTOR

(Pacing in front of SharonLee on stand; stops)

It has been said that your mother, Lurene McMillan often would leave the premises of  
your father's farm, seeking peace. This is something that you and your siblings saw her  
do. True?

SHARONLEE

Yes, Mama would slip off when none of us was 'round ta keep a eye on her.

PROSECUTOR

Your mother, it seems, was trying to escape something. Is it possible she was seeking safety...from your father?

SHARONLEE

(Stands up, angrily. A look at the other McMillans shows them reacting in protest. The Judge motions for everyone to sit, they do it reluctantly. Rose leans over to say something to Mr. Huntley)

My daddy was never a threat to my mama! And I strongly resent it if that is what you are sayin!' Mama was runnin' away from whatever was botherin' her inside her head. It had nothin' ta do with daddy or anybody. Daddy understood mama morein' anybody did, he loved mama with all his heart. Mama was lost to the world.

SHARON LEE  
(Sobbing)

Mama was a sick woman, she wont right since we lost our two young brothers in the barn fire...Mama...felt guilty 'cause she left the boys home to po..lay...while we was all out workin' in the fields. They was playin' with matches in the barn...'n'...everything caught fire...includin' Tommy 'n' James. After that, mama was lost to the world. Mama used ta be carryin' 'round the onliest toys of the boys, like the toys was them. Then, she started runnin' off from the house...goin' into the bayous where the cypress trees was... and she thought they was her Indian relatives...She used ta say that the boys was there bein' takin' care of by her people.....

PROSECUTOR

Your Honor, I'd like to call another witness to the stand, please.

JUDGE

You may. Witness dismissed.

(Sharonlee leaves weeping)

PROSECUTOR

I would like to have Mr. Robert (Bo) McMillan come to the stand please.

(Bo goes up, takes oath)

JUDGE

Prosecutor, you may proceed.

(Willis enters loud and drunk)

ROSE

(Admonishes Willis)

Willis, why you come here like this. I don't know what your problem is, but you betta keep it down. Jest look at you, you ain't in no shape to be at your father's trial.

WILLIS

(Loud)

Now..yall would..dent..want me...ta missss...the..fi...anl..day of...dad...dy's..tri...alll,  
now would...yall?

JUDGE

You, young man, are creating a disturbance. If you cannot conduct yourself in a proper manner I will ask you to leave this courtroom?

(Willis takes a seat, settles down)

SHARONLEE

(Rises)

I'm goin' for a smoke....

ROSE

Sharonlee, run ya sister Jonelle outta the ladies' room while you at it. If you don't, long's it's a wall mirror, she'll be in there.

WILLIS

So ole Doctor Bills' watchin' ov...ver...ole daddy, huh? Toooo bad...ole Doctor Bill wont able ta come...help...mama...Nobody was...ab...ble ta rescue her....

JUDGE

(Angrily)

I must have total silence from the entire McMillan family, or I will stop this proceeding.

(Then to Prosecutor)

You may proceed with questioning.

