

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

Twelve Short Southern Scenes

By

VIN MORREALE JR



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 311 Washington St., Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MCMXCIII by
VIN MORREALE JR
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT)

ISBN: 0-87129-827-9

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

A Note From the Author

With the inevitable homogenization wrought by modern communication technology, the essence of the true South lives on in its glorious individuals, their colorful speech patterns, personal courtesies and timeless concerns.

SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT
Twelve Short Southern Scenes

Contents

Dawn's Coming 7
Slow Dance With a Stranger 13
Nashville 17
Meeting Delilah 25
The Encounter 27
Unbuckling the Bible Belt. 36
Belinda's Marriage 41
The Affair 49
Just Another News Item 55
Wildcat 64
Lazlo's Mine 67
Wisdom 76

Dawn's Coming

CHARACTERS:

WAYNE

EARL, his son

SETTING: *A clearing in the field of a small pig farm in Georgia. The blue-gold haze before dawn.*

AT RISE: *EARL and WAYNE are sitting in the midst of the field, dressed in overalls. Each man carries a hunting rifle, as they look out across the audience at a point in the distance. WAYNE takes a swig from a jug of corn squeezing and passes it to EARL, who drinks, grimaces, then looks up at the sky.*

EARL. Dawn's comin'.

WAYNE. Yup. (*Pause.*) I reckon it won't be long now.

EARL. You think?

WAYNE. Yup. Figure they'll move in at first light.

EARL (*muttering*). Paw. Don't mind my asking this, but...

WAYNE. Speak your piece, boy.

EARL. Uh... Can't we get in real trouble for this?

WAYNE (*thinks for a moment*). Depends on what you mean by "trouble."

EARL. I mean, we might get ourselves killed and everything.

WAYNE. If you're killed, you ain't got no more troubles.

EARL. I suppose not... But what if we just get all shot up and wounded like?

WAYNE (*considers for a long moment*). That'd be trouble.

EARL. Or what if we kill a few of them and they lock us up for the rest of our lives?

WAYNE. That'd be trouble, too.

EARL. So what are we doin' this for?

WAYNE. It's the principle of the thing.

EARL. Oh. (*EARL seems to accept this, and looks off into the distance, then turns.*) The principal of what thing, Paw?

WAYNE. I'm not letting them take my land, boy. They'll have to drag me off it feet first.

EARL. But ain't there some other way?

WAYNE. You scared, Earl?

EARL. Hell, yeah! I ain't never killed anything bigger than a pig before. And that was only so's we could have ham for Christmas dinner!

WAYNE. Well, these bank people are a darn sight bigger'n any pig.

EARL. I imagine so. (*Suddenly.*) You don't think they'd send Charlie Waddell, do ya? His mamma would sure be mad at me if I killed old Charlie.

WAYNE. Charlie would know better 'n to come and take my land. If he don't, then he's no better than those Yankee bankers he works for. (*Confused.*) Besides. It don't seem right for a man to work all day playin' with other folks' money.

EARL. Whatta ya mean, Paw?

WAYNE. Bankin'. It don't seem right somehow... They take our money. Lock it up in that big old steel safe. Then they just sit there all day...watching that old safe, like somethin' magical's supposed to happen. Do it for

weeks. Then, when I come to get my money back, they open up that big steel door again, take out my money... then take out a little more that got interested in it while it was just layin' there in the safe. And they give it all back to me, grinning like fools and sayin': "Have a nice day, Mister Packhammer"! (*Shakes his head.*) 'Course I'm gonna have a nice day! They gave me back my money, didn't they?

EARL. Seems kinda silly when you put it like that, Paw.

WAYNE. Don't seem natural. Like that three-legged calf that was born last winter. Bankin's a lot like that three-legged calf. (*Pause. EARL checks his sights by aiming his rifle across the field. Then he looks up at the sky.*)

EARL. Dawn's comin'.

WAYNE. Yep... Sorry I got you into this, boy.

EARL. That's okay, Paw. We all gotta die sometimes.

WAYNE. That's sure enough true.

EARL. 'Though I was sorta hopin' I'd get a crack at Melinda May Tagget before my time was up. Y'know what I mean?

WAYNE. She's a purty one. No denying that. (*Suddenly harsh.*) You think I'm a fool for defending my land, boy?!

EARL. No, Paw. I never, ever thought you was a fool! (*Under his breath.*) I was just sorta hopin' I'd have a chance at Melinda May is all.

WAYNE. I'm doing this for you, boy!

EARL. I know, Paw.

WAYNE. My daddy farmed this land. And his daddy before him! And his daddy before him had to shoot a whole passel of Indians for this here land!

EARL. I know, Paw.

WAYNE. What would they all say if we just let some silly bank folk take it away from us without a fight?

EARL. They probably wouldn't say nothin'... On account of them being dead and all. (*Softly.*) Like we're gonna be...

WAYNE. Maybe. (*Looking off.*) Dawn's coming up real strong now, ain't it?

EARL. Sure is.

WAYNE. Damn it all, this farm's been in my family for generations!

EARL. That's what I can't quite figure, Paw. If this farm's been in our family for so many generations...how come we owe so much money on it?

WAYNE. Well, you remember when land values got real high and all? We borrowed mortgage money from the bank to buy that real fancy, brand new plow and harvester machine.

EARL. That was sure a pretty machine.

WAYNE. Expensive, too. But it was worth it. The salesman said it was gonna make us much better farmers.

EARL. So how come we didn't get to be much better farmers, Paw?

WAYNE. The damn machine broke.

EARL. That's right. I forgot. (*Pause, then carefully.*) Can I tell you something, Paw?

WAYNE. I suppose.

EARL. Something real personal like?

WAYNE. You got something to say, now's the time to say it.

EARL. I hate farming, Paw.

WAYNE. What did you say?

EARL. I said, I really hate farming. Always did.

WAYNE. But you're a fifth-generation farmer, boy!

EARL. I know. That's what's so darn funny about it all. I can't even stand the smell of pigs. I mean they really *stink!*

WAYNE. How come you never told me any of this before, Earl?

EARL (*shrugs*). Didn't seem to matter none then. (*WAYNE looks at his son, who can't meet his gaze. Then the older man shakes his head and spits. There is a long pause, as the two stare out across the field.*)

WAYNE (*softly*). Pigs do kinda stink, don't they?

EARL (*smiling*). That they do.

WAYNE (*starting to laugh*). I mean, if people smelled that bad, we wouldn't have hardly anything to do with them, now would we?

EARL (*laughing*). Not me. No way. (*WAYNE suddenly picks up a pair of binoculars and looks off across the field. EARL sees this and stops laughing immediately.*)

WAYNE. They're coming... Looks like Charlie Waddell, and three, maybe four sheriff's deputies with him.

EARL (*gulps*). I guess this is it, then.

WAYNE. Looks like it... (*They both check their guns carefully; pull out a few more boxes of ammunition from their pockets. Together, they raise their rifles and aim at their targets.*)

EARL. Paw?

WAYNE. Yes, son?

EARL. You gonna shoot old Charlie, or you want me to?

WAYNE (*doesn't answer for a moment, then lowers his rifle and sighs*). Earl... How's about instead of shooting Charlie, you go out to the sty and shoot us a pig...

EARL. You serious?

WAYNE. That big, ornery one...and then we'll invite

Charlie and those boys over for a big old ham breakfast.

EARL. But what about the farm, Paw?

WAYNE. Earl?

EARL. Yes, Paw?

WAYNE. I ever tell you how much I hate farmin'?

EARL. Go on! You?!

WAYNE. Never seemed quite natural for a man to play in dirt and pig shit for a livin'... (*Unloads his rifle and stands.*) Sort of ironic, don't ya think?

EARL (*jumping up*). Does this mean I get a chance at Melinda May Tagget?

WAYNE. Might as well. And maybe I'll try my hand at banking. (*WAYNE throws his arm around EARL, as the two walk off UR.*) Banking...yep, I could grow to like that...

EARL. Maybe you could ask Charlie for a job, Paw?

WAYNE. Maybe...

BLACKOUT

Slow Dance With a Stranger

CHARACTER:

PEARL

SETTING: *A bare stage. A small town in Mississippi.*

AT RISE: *A young GIRL in a plain country dress walks out into a single spotlight.*

PEARL. My mama always told me...she'd say, Child, don't never go slow dancin' with a stranger. Oh, you may think he's sweet and proper and oh-too-nice-looking and all. But somewhere under that fine cotton shirt and smooth-as-honey smile is a heart that's just waiting to pounce on a fresh young thing like you. And maybe you think it's okay because there are bundles of people around, and you like the music that's playin' anyway, and you might as well. But, child, she told me, when he comes moving across the floor like some fine-looking stallion that's suddenly found religion and wants to share it with you...you just pay him no never mind. Slow dancin' with a stranger is the straightest path to a broken heart, and that's the God's honest truth.

Now you think after hearing all that, I'da listened to my mama? Not me. I was sassy as a newborn goat. Always was. Always will be. Weren't nobody gonna tell me what to do... 'specially when Mama wasn't around to see!

So's on my sixteenth birthday, I throw on my prettiest blue cotton dress... (*She mimes the action.*) ...comb my hair up all high and fancy, and walk my sweet young figure down past Main Street to the church social. Umm umm umm. Then, I stand myself against the wall for a long spell...'cause the usual boys in these here parts are 'bout as plum ugly as a hog's brother-in-law...

Just when I start thinkin' about walking myself back home again, I feel this strong, smooth grip wrap around my fingers like a black satin glove made special for my little hand. I look up...way up...and there stands the prettiest man the good Lord ever seen fit to put on this earth. This man was tall and lean and smiling away at me like he was the one that invented teeth. I don't know who he is and nobody else don't neither. But the way he's tugging away at my arm, I know he wants to dance with me. This big, beautiful stranger wants to dance with *me*. Lord, what Mama would think to see us both together! (*She sways in place to the music only she can hear.*) The first dance is a fast dance and I get all my giggles and nerves shook right out of me on that dance floor. The second dance is even faster, but I'm really cooking now and clapping my hands and kicking my legs like I don't care if there's anybody else on God's good earth but me and that big, beautiful stranger.

After a spell of spinning and laughing, the music dies away. I start to feelin' kinda shy and all, 'cause remember I'm just sixteen today and he's...well he's...he's every inch a man, from the bottom of his spit-polished leather shoes to the top of his twenny-dollar hat.

So's I get real quiet, not wanting to stare at him, 'cause I'm a good girl and I know what's respectable and what's not...but not wanting to take my eyes off him neither, in case he ups and vanishes like a dream. He smiles that big grin and I grin, too, and he smiles so wide I'm afraid his face is gonna split in two. We both catch our breath and stand there, neither of us not ever wantin' to leave that dance floor. Then, he asks me my name in a voice as smooth and soft as molasses, and I say "Pearl" right up and loud like I was queen of the county! Well, that gets him to smiling again, and without ever tellin' me his own name, he reaches up a strong, smooth hand and rests it on my cheek. I don't even know this man's name, but he lays his big, gentle hand on my cheek like we was family. No...more than family...Like this...

(She closes her eyes and tenderly strokes her cheek with the back of her hand. She seems lost in a trance as she relives the memory.)

I swear, that man's hand on my cheek was like being kissed by an angel... When the music starts up again, it's playin' real slow-like. I look up straight into that stranger's beautiful brown eyes and I just know I'm in a whole world of trouble. With the slow, slinky music wrapping all around us, that stranger pulls me close to him, all gentle and firm, until my cheek is pressed right against his starched white shirt. He smells so good, all of pride and respectability, and I know without even looking that every young girl at that dance was wishin' and hopin' it was them perched on his chest instead of me. But it ain't, and I'm the special one in his arms tonight.

(She closes her eyes again and twirls across the stage.)

That stranger moves me across the dance floor so smooth, I swear my feet never touch no boards. When his arm curls back around me, I feel as safe as a baby in her mama's arms. *(She stops suddenly.)* That is...until Mama shows up...

The next thing I know, I'm standing all lonesome on the dance floor and there's my little Mama whompin' the bejeezus outa that big, beautiful stranger. He's scurrying around the dance floor, all curled up, trying to stop Mama's broom handle from messing up his purty face. And he's screaming for her to stop and she's screamin' at him to keep his hands offa her little girl, and I'm screaming away 'cause I don't know what else to do. Everyone else is laughing at the way me and Mama and the stranger is carrying on in the middle of a church social event. Finally, Mama's arms get tired from whompin' on the stranger, and he sees his chance. He high-tails it out the door, fast as a jack rabbit. Most people still say seeing that stranger fly outa that door with Mama and her wood broom right behind him was the high-point of the evenin'. When I got home, Mama whipped me good. Real good. I couldn't sit down without a cushion for three whole days.

So, my advice to you all is...never slow dance with a stranger... *(She rubs her backside.)* It just ain't worth it!

BLACKOUT