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AMERICAN GOTHIC

"Potato Boy"
(Eps.#5)

Written

by

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AMERICAN GOTHIC

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TEASER

FADE IN

INT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Miss Holt puts away linens. Something catches her eye.

MISS HOLT'S POINT OF VIEW - CALEB

brushes his teeth in the bathroom. He turns around in a circle before each spit.

CALEB

(to himself)

So be it.

He washes the spit down, brushes, and repeats the ritual.

MISS HOLT

steps closer. Would be amused if it were any other child.

MISS HOLT

Whatcha doin'?

CALEB

Brushin' my teeth.

She watches as he repeats the ritual again. There's something almost obsessive about his concentration. He feels her gaze.

CALEB

Don't want no cavities.

INT. CALEB'S ROOM - NIGHT

There are a few pictures on the wall -- Lincoln, W.E.B. Dubois, including a portrait of Christ -- as well as some figurines on the bureau. Caleb meticulously works his way around the room, turning their faces to the wall.

Miss Holt has followed him in. She's worried.

MISS HOLT

Everything all right, Caleb?

CALEB

Yes, ma'am.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

MISS HOLT
Why are you doing that?

CALEB
So I can sleep. Don't like being
watched.

A double edge to that. Caleb goes to the bed. Tucks the
blankets in military style. Then works himself under the
tight, tight sheets. He has tucked himself in.

CALEB
Turn off the light?

MISS HOLT
Ever say your prayers, Caleb?

CALEB
Nope.

MISS HOLT
Never?

CALEB
With Merlyn I did sometimes. We
pretended we were sayin' good night
to our mama. Thought maybe we
could talk to her in Heaven.

MISS HOLT
I'm sure she heard you.

CALEB
Once I thought she answered.

MISS HOLT
What did she say?

CALEB
She said good night.

MISS HOLT
Will you say prayers with me?

CALEB
Okay.

MISS HOLT
Now I lay me down to sleep. You
know this one?

CALEB
No.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

MISS HOLT
Say it with me. Now I lay me down
to sleep.

CALEB
Now I lay me down to sleep.

MISS HOLT
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

CALEB
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

MISS HOLT
If I should die before I wake...

CALEB
What?

MISS HOLT
If I should die before I wake, I
pray the Lord my soul to take.

CALEB
If it's all the same to you, Miss
Holt, I'd rather not say that.

MISS HOLT
That's okay.

She kisses him on his forehead. Miss Holt gets up and opens
a window a bit to let in the night breeze.

MISS HOLT
Good night, Caleb.

CALEB
Good night.

Miss Holt leaves, shutting the door quietly behind her.

ON CALEB

alone in the room. Nowhere near sleep. A voice drifts in
on the night wind. A child's voice, beautiful and haunting.
At first, we can barely hear it.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
When Jesus went down to the waters
that day, He was baptized in the
usual way. When it was done, God
blessed his soul...

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 3

Miss Holt!

CALEB

But it is Rose who peers in the room.

ROSE
What's the matter with you?

Listen.

CALEB

She does.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
He sent him his love on the wings
of a dove.

What's that?

CALEB

ROSE
That's just the Potato Boy.

Caleb stares at her.

ROSE
Don't you know nothin'?

Caleb can only shake his head.

ROSE
He lives out in that old Warren
house.

MRS. RUSSELL (O.S.)
Rose! You come to bed!

ROSE
(shouting)
Okay, Mama!
(then, to Caleb)
He's deformed.

And she leaves him alone.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
On the wings of a snow-white dove,
He sends His pure, sweet love.
Signs from above, On the wings of a
dove...

Caleb listens. The music touches him, but his face reveals
nothing.

CONTINUED

#K0609

5

CONTINUED 4

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
On the wings of a dove...

FADE OUT

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN

EXT. STREET - DAY

Bright and early Sunday morning. Miss Holt walks ahead of Caleb and Rose. She's in a flowered dress, he's wearing a hand-me-down shirt and tie. He is uncomfortable.

MISS HOLT
Do you good, Caleb.

CALEB
Yes, ma'am.

As they approach .

A CHURCH

ROSE
Lord knows you need savin'.

MISS HOLT
Rose? You let he who is without
sin cast the first stone.

Rose takes this as approval.

ROSE
Yes, ma'am.
(a beat)
Ma'am?

MISS HOLT
What is it?

ROSE
Do I have time for the bathroom?

Miss Holt pauses on the church steps.

MISS HOLT
Oh, Lord. All right -- Caleb, you
find us seats.

As Miss Holt leads Rose around the side of the church and down the basement stairs, Caleb looks toward

THE CHURCH GRAVEYARD

He hesitates, then moves behind it.

INT. RECTORY - DAY - THE REVEREND

sits alone in his vestments. He's 60, looks 80. His eyes look as if they have peered directly into Hell. He opens a worn black box and takes out an old-fashioned, metal and glass syringe. Draws some medication. He pulls up his vestments and injects himself in the stomach. He puts everything away.

He tries to steady himself.

EXT. CHURCH - GRAVEYARD - DAY

Caleb kicks rocks through the tombstones. He comes across some 13/15-year-old boys who are smoking. Caleb ducks behind a monument.

TEEN 1

So she says she don't want to go home. She ain't tired.

TEEN 2

No.

TEEN 1

Yes. So I take her to the quarry.

TEEN 3

You're a liar.

TEEN 1

Swear to God.

TEEN 3

Debbie Hornbeck ain't goin' to the quarry with a loser like you.

TEEN 1

Maybe -- but let me tell you -- Debbie Hornbeck wanted it. —

TEEN 2

So what happened?

TEEN 1

So we're like kissing. And she's like, I don't know, like, excited.

TEEN 2

Uh-huh.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

TEEN 1

And she takes her top off. And I can't believe it. I'm like squeezing her titties and I'm looking right in her eyes. She don't even mind.

TEEN 3

You're full of it.

TEEN 2

Shut up -- Let him tell...

ON CALEB

Mesmerized. Thrilled and a little frightened.

TEEN 1 (O.S.)

And then she starts playin' around with my zipper. And I start playin' around with hers. And then she unzips me and so I unzip her. I'm just like doin' what she's doin'. So then she takes her pants off and that's it. She's completely nude.

MISS HOLT (O.S.)

Caleb!

Caleb looks up, startled.

MISS HOLT

Come on out of that graveyard.
What are you doing in there?

The boys jab out their cigarettes and glare at Caleb.

INT. CHURCH - DAY - CLOSE ON A WATER STRIDER

there in the holy water font.

A COUPLE OF OBESE WOMEN

fan themselves. One whispers something snide to the other.

AN OLD MAN

passes some money to another.

A WOMAN

hits her squirming child.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

A SAD, WORM-EATEN CHRIST

presides over.

THE REVEREND

preparing to give communion. The choir sings "We'll Gather at the River."

REVEREND

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

CALEB

has lined up to receive communion. As he reaches the Reverend:

REVEREND

This is my body. Eat of it.

The Reverend's hands tremble as he places the wafer on Caleb's tongue.

REVEREND

This is my blood. Drink of it.

As Caleb drinks, the cup of wine slips from the Reverend's hands. It hits the floor. Caleb and the Reverend are drenched in the blood-like spray. For a moment, both are frozen, dripping red. The choir stops singing.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Neat, dull, empty. The radio is playing and has probably been going all night.

ANNOUNCER

When talking about their friends, few people would include a bank on their list. But people who have received loans from Trinity Bank just might make such a claim. Why? It's our people, pure and simple.

Ben comes out of the kitchen holding a jar of instant coffee. He sits in his La-Z-Boy. He eats the coffee out of the jar with a dirty spoon.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

ANNOUNCER

How can a bank be a friend?
Because we're there to help you.
We're at your side, helping you
make your dreams come true. Even
if others have turned you away,
we're here to help. So whether you
want debt consolidation,
refinancing, or that dream home,
let your friends at Trinity Bank
help make your dreams come true.

Ben carefully puts the jar of coffee onto a folding tray table next to the La-Z-Boy. He sets the spoon down, carefully, then stands.

ANNOUNCER

The only question you have to ask
yourself is: what do I need to make
my life complete?

He goes to the bookcase and rearranges his football trophies, then turns a

FAMILY PHOTO

face down.

EXT. SELENA'S HOUSE - DAY - THROUGH WINDOW

Inside, Selena finishes putting on a bathrobe. Underneath was probably nothing. In the b.g. a television plays MOS --

A TELEVANGELIST

hand over heart, smiling.

INT. PATROL CAR - DAY

A cleaned-up Ben is parked outside, watching Selena's window.

BEN

Oh, God...

Then:

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

LUCAS

(singing)
I've been working on the railroad,
all the livelong day...I've been
working on the railroad, just to
pass the time away...

As he strolls up to Ben's car, leans in the window.

BEN

Lucas, don't start with me.

LUCAS

As Sheriff, I can hardly approve
this use of county property.

BEN

Well then just fire me, Lucas.
Let's get it over with.

LUCAS

If you had let me finish what I was
going to say, Ben...As Sheriff, I
can hardly approve this use of
county property, but as your
friend --

BEN

Lucas, please.

LUCAS

You have a bad habit of
interrupting, Ben. A very bad
habit. It's rude.

INT. SELENA'S HOUSE - SELENA'S POINT OF VIEW THROUGH WINDOW

Lucas' mouth moving as he rags on Ben. He looks up her way
again, smiling.

SELENA

pulls back away from the window.

She sits in front of the television, turns up the sound.

TELEVANGELIST

Some people think they can just go
on sinnin'. But Jesus said, go and
sin no more...

EXT. STREET - DAY

Ben turns away, stares through the windshield. Lucas stares at him. There is a long silence.

Finally:

BEN

Sorry.

Lucas opens the passenger door, slides in.

INT. PATROL CAR

LUCAS

What I was going to say was, as your friend, I can appreciate the view.

Ben looks at him, wary.

LUCAS

It's tough on us bachelors, ain't it, Ben? Married men envy us; they think we're out humpin' every night. But it's no fun to be alone in the world. You'd do almost anything for a little intimacy. For a little kind attention. Do things you'd never thought you'd do.

BEN

Amen to that.

Ben stares at him. Was this actually a moment of vulnerability -- or some sort of calculation? Lucas smiles.

LUCAS

You're a tomcat, Ben. Yes you are.

Ben sighs, starts the car as Lucas grins, starts to sing again.

LUCAS

Can't you hear the Captain shouting, rise up so early in the morn...Can't you hear the Captain calling, Dinah, blow your horn...

EXT. WARREN HOUSE - DUSK

A decaying wreck. Seen from a distance.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Is that it? CALEB (O.S.)

That's its nasty old self all right. ROSE (O.S.)

EXT. THICKET - DUSK

Caleb and Rose take it in.

Mama says they ought to burn it down, scatter the ashes, burn it again, dig up the earth, take it out on a barge and dump it in the middle of the ocean. ROSE

Shoot. CALEB

Wait, I'm not finished. Then she said they should bring in forty priests to do twenty-four-hours-a-day exorcisms for a year solid. ROSE

What for? CALEB

She said that the old Warrens were devil-worshippers and fornicators and Episcopalians. They killed babies and drank blood and had black mass. When Old Man Warren would come to town, all the electricity would go off. He had hair on his tongue. ROSE

Rose -- I never heard nothin' about all that. CALEB

It's been pretty quiet there for a number of years. Ever since the accident. Folks don't talk about it much. ROSE

What accident? CALEB

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

ROSE

It's just called the accident. My
mama says it was God's punishment
for their evil ways.

CALEB

What punishment?

ROSE

The Potato Boy. Long about
thirteen years ago, before we were
born, there was this girl who used
to go out to the Warren house and
pick up their laundry although I
personally wouldn't have done it
for a million dollars. Anyways,
Old Man Warren took a shine to her
and he ketched her and he put her
in the cellar. And then he had a
baby with her.

(beat)

I guess Old Mrs. Warren weren't too
much to look at.

CALEB

Where's the laundry girl now?

ROSE

She died having the baby because it
weighed thirty pounds. It was a
monster. It had no eyes and it had
a tail.

FROM INSIDE, a muffled THUMP; footsteps. A door closes.

ROSE

And that's the Potato Boy.

Then:

POTATO BOY (O.S.)

Go down, Moses. Moses, go down...
Hmmm...

CALEB

He sings beautiful.

ROSE

Well, sure -- he's got to.
(the final horror)
The Warrens got no TV.

Caleb peers at the house. He's skeptical of this tall tale,
but something here is calling to him. As he hums softly to
himself,

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Caleb, carrying a lunch bag, passes his homeroom, sees

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Selena sits surrounded by empty chairs. She's got her face in her hands.

CALEB

(tentative)
Miss Coombs?

She looks up suddenly -- her face is streaming tears.

SELENA

(covering)
What is it.

CALEB

You said you wanted to see me...

She gets up, walks to the window, hurriedly drying her eyes so he won't see.

SELENA

That's right, I did. But it's okay...

Caleb makes the long walk up to her.

CALEB

You sure?

She nods, then turns to face him.

SELENA

I'm sorry.

She means about her crying; he takes it the wrong way.

CALEB

I'm flunkin' out, ain't I?

SELENA

Yes you are, Caleb.

CALEB

You gonna hold me back?

SELENA

I'm not sure I know what to do.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

CALEB

You can hold me back. It's all right.

SELENA

I know this has been a very hard year for you.

CALEB

Let's face it, Miss Coombs, it weren't all that great before.

SELENA

I can help you, Caleb. If you'll spend some time after school with me.

CALEB

I don't think so.

SELENA

Why not?

CALEB

That's all anyone wants to do anymore. Help me. Doctor Crower, my cousin, Sheriff Buck, you. With everyone talking about helpin' you all the time, you start to feel --

Selena smiles at him with a certain admiration.

SELENA

What.

CALEB

I don't know.

SELENA

Helpless?

CALEB

Maybe.

SELENA

I'm not worried about you. I know you're going to be all right. You're strong, Caleb. Like your daddy.

CALEB

My daddy wasn't strong. That's why I gotta be.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

SELENA

You don't have to prove yourself to me, Caleb.

Caleb squints at Selena, forming a new opinion of her.

CALEB

It's hard. Sometimes you want to do good things and sometimes you want to do bad things.

Selena's not sure if he's talking about him or her.

CALEB

You're a nice lady, Miss Coombs.

SELENA

Well, there's differences of opinion about that.

CALEB

Are you Sheriff Buck's girlfriend, or what?

Selena laughs at that.

CALEB

'Cause if you are, maybe you could ask him why he wants me to go live at his house. What's he tryin' to do, start a scout troop?

Selena has probably never had a laugh at Buck's expense before, and it all comes out now. Caleb is delighting in making this woman laugh.

CALEB

He's persistent. You gotta give him that.

POINT OF VIEW - FROM OUTSIDE

Caleb and Selena laugh. She touches his arms lightly.

BACK TO SCENE

Selena gets a hold of herself.

SELENA

Caleb, we're supposed to be talking about you.

CALEB

All right.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 3

SELENA
What are we going to do about your grades?

CALEB
I don't know.

SELENA
You didn't even try on your report.

CALEB
I know that.

SELENA
Well, what do you think we should do?

Caleb thinks.

CALEB
Pardon my language, Miss Coombs, but I don't give a rat's ass about the Monroe Doctrine.

Selena wants to maintain the role of teacher, but is completely charmed by this boy. She leans close to him.

SELENA
Neither do I.

INT. SHRINK'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben on the couch; in the chair, DR. PERRY. Fortyish, with elegant tailoring and precise mannerisms; originally from Atlanta, he's now the pre-eminent, and only, practicing psychiatrist in Trinity.

DR. PERRY —
Feelings of emptiness go with the territory, Ben. It's the modern condition.

BEN
That's not very helpful.

DR. PERRY
Do you want help, or insight?

BEN
Help! I get all the "insight" I can stomach on the job.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

DR. PERRY

From your partner.

Ben stiffens, starts to bite a nail.

BEN

We're not exactly partners.

DR. PERRY

But you do have a working relationship.

BEN

(resentful)

Yeah, sure -- it's a full time job keeping my mouth shut and covering his ass.

DR. PERRY

About what, Ben?

Ben's eyes, defiant a moment ago, suddenly go furtive. He glances fearfully toward the window.

BEN

Nothing. Just the usual work stuff.

(sitting up)

I'm sure my time's up.

Dr. Perry glances at the wall clock.

DR. PERRY

Almost. Not quite.

(beat)

You're in a classic co-dependent relationship, Ben. And between now and next time, I'd like you to consider the cost -- in personal terms -- of your extreme loyalty toward Sheriff Buck.

Ben gets up, stretches.

BEN

Believe me, Doc, I have. Every day of my life.

And walks to the door.

CUT TO

EXT. WARREN HOUSE - NIGHT

A slow move toward a lighted upstairs window -- a dark, festering house.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
I once was lost but now I'm found,
was blind but now I see...

The Potato Boy's voice is pure and clear. It is high, almost like a girl's. A caress. We move in, then

DISSOLVE TO

INT. POTATO BOY'S ROOM - NIGHT

It's spare, shrouded: a beautiful ruin. The Potato Boy sits in a chair looking out the window. We can't see his face. He is a lump. As we draw closer, he stops singing. He senses something, but does not turn around.

POTATO BOY
Someone there?

Silence.

POTATO BOY
Is that you? I won't turn around.
I promise.

Again, no response.

POTATO BOY
Please...please...

He puts his head in his hands. Reveal:

MERLYN

sitting next to him. She looks at the Potato Boy with something very much like adoration. She reaches out toward him.

MERLYN
Sing.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN

INT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - CALEB'S ROOM - NIGHT

Over the sleeping Caleb:

POTATO BOY

Will the circle be unbroken? By
and by, Lord, by and by...

Caleb wakes. This voice is not drifting on the night wind. It's in the room. His eyes scan the dark room frantically.

CALEB'S POINT OF VIEW - A SHAPE

in the shadows.

POTATO BOY

There's a better home awaitin' in
the sky, Lord, in the sky.

The shape emerges. It's Merlyn. Singing with the Potato boy's voice. She smiles at Caleb and vanishes.

ON CALEB

Was that a dream or what?

CUT TO

EXT. STREET - BARBER SHOP - DAY

Ben finishes writing a ticket and tucks it under the windshield wiper of a nice old mid-sixties Buick. As he moves to the next car he hears behind his back,

LUCAS (O.S.)

(pleasant)
What the heck you doin', Deputy?

Ben turns, stares at Lucas, grinning, takes the ticket from the Buick and tears it up.

LUCAS

You know that's Emmet Wallace's car, Ben -- what would he think if he came outa the barber shop and found a parking ticket on his windshield?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BEN

(not backing down)
He'd think he better feed his meter
next time he gets a haircut.

Lucas gives Ben a quizzical look, walks up to him and puts
the pieces of the ticket in Ben's shirt pocket.

LUCAS

You feelin' okay, Ben? Maybe you
oughta move into the shade...

Ben takes the pieces out of his pocket, throws them into a
trash can.

BEN

I feel fine, Lucas. And do me a
favor, will you? Whatever
relationship you have with Emmet
Wallace, keep me out of it, okay?

As he walks off, checking the meters,

LUCAS

Relationship...?

INT. CHURCH - CONFESSIONAL - DAY

The Reverend slides open the screen. From the other side:

A VOICE

Forgive me Father, for I have
sinned.

REVEREND

When was your last confession, my
son?

Reveal:

MATT

on the other side.

MATT

I don't know.

REVEREND

What is it you wish to confess?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

MATT

I've taken the Lord's name in vain about nine thousand times. That's just since I've been here in Trinity. I've lied. I've lusted. Coveted. Hated. How much penance am I up to?

REVEREND

Quite a bit.

MATT

I've also...I'm sorry, Father.

Matt gets up to leave.

REVEREND

Wait.

MATT

Sorry.

REVEREND

Doctor Crower. Matt.

Matt stops.

MATT

I thought this was supposed to be anonymous.

REVEREND

Sit down, Matt.

Matt slowly sits.

MATT

Have you had any more blackouts, Father?

REVEREND

Don't forget you're in my office, Doctor Crower.

Matt is silent for a moment.

MATT

Have you ever been betrayed, Father?

REVEREND

Yes.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

MATT

Not a bad business turn or a disappointing friend. I mean, someone you pinned your life to. Someone you gave everything to. Someone who held all the cards and then turned out to be... such a goddamn loser.

The Reverend stiffens. Matt has touched a deep nerve.

MATT

(continuing)

Someone who found it easy -- effortless almost -- to send you straight to Hell.

Matt waits for a reply. There is none.

MATT

You don't think you're capable of hating with such intensity. With such energy. It is an anger and loathing of almost religious vigor.

These two men are each in a separate personal Hell.

REVEREND

How can a physician -- a healer -- hate another man with such utter conviction?

MATT

Who's talking about another man?

Matt gets up and leaves.

REVEREND

Matt! Matt!

The Reverend is alone in the church.

EXT. CHURCH - GRAVEYARD - DAY

The Reverend rushes out, but Matt is nowhere to be seen. The Reverend goes to his knees in the graveyard. He is gasping for breath. He steadies himself against a tombstone.

CALEB

You okay?

The Reverend cannot speak. He nods.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

CALEB

You don't look okay. You want me to call someone?

The Reverend shakes his head. Motions for Caleb to sit. Collects himself.

REVEREND

You won't tell anyone?

CALEB

Only if you die.

REVEREND

Fair enough.

The Reverend is getting his breath back.

REVEREND

What are you doing out here, Caleb?

CALEB

Thinkin'.

REVEREND

What about?

CALEB

The Monroe Doctrine.

The Reverend assesses Caleb.

REVEREND

A lot of people in this town looking out for you, Caleb.

CALEB

Don't I know it.

REVEREND

It's good to have friends.

CALEB

Yes it is.

REVEREND

You know, sometimes -- I think you're old enough to understand this -- sometimes people have their own reasons to be your friend. They're looking out for themselves. You know what I mean?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

CALEB

I do.

REVEREND

It's a sad fact.

CALEB

That's how you know it's true.

REVEREND

You're going to be okay, Caleb.

CALEB

That's what Miss Coombs says.

The Reverend stiffens at the mention.

CALEB

That's my teacher.

REVEREND

Never mind about that. Anyone ever gives you any trouble, you come to me. I'm here for you, Caleb. I don't want anything from you. This is from the heart. Anyone ever tries to hurt you, you come running.

Caleb takes this in.

CALEB

You mean that?

The Reverend spits on his hand and offers it. Caleb spits on his own and they shake solemnly.

REVEREND

Spit shake in the graveyard. Not a more sacred oath a man can make.

Caleb is touched by this.

CALEB

Amen.

INT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Miss Holt, Caleb, Mrs. Russell, Rose and Matt have just finished grace.

MISS HOLT

Dig in!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

They do. Mrs. Russell heaps food on Rose's plate.

ROSE
Don't like corn.

MRS. RUSSELL
Since when?

ROSE
Since I seen it stuck between Billy
Ray Duvall's teeth.

Caleb snorts into his milk.

MATT
How's school going, Caleb?

CALEB
Fine. How's the hospital?

MATT
Good.

CALEB
Are we good liars or what?

MATT
The best.

MISS HOLT
Doctor Crower, you're such a good
influence.

MATT
These mashed potatoes are something
special.

MISS HOLT
Don't you change the subject—on me.
Lying's nothing to take lightly.

There is a knock at the back door. Rose leaps up.

ROSE
I'll get it!

MRS. RUSSELL
Rose! You come back here and
finish!

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

MATT

(to Miss Holt)
It's all right. Every boy's got to
grow up with a little devil in
him --

Rose returns with Lucas in tow. He's carrying a pie.

LUCAS

Didn't mean to interrupt.
Everybody like rhubarb?

ROSE

My Auntie Flynn ate rhubarb and
they found her dead. She was so
bloated up her eyes popped out!

MRS. RUSSELL

Rose!

LUCAS

The girl's right -- Rhubarb's half
poison and half sweet ambrosia.

He offers Caleb some pie.

CALEB

No thank you. I'm kind of full.

LUCAS

I'm sure you are.

(beat)

Want to take a ride?

Caleb's tempted, but Miss Holt holds up her hand.

MISS HOLT

It's a school night, Caleb. And
you got --

Suddenly, she freezes, choking on something. Off her
panicking look,

LUCAS

(to Matt)

Is there a doctor in the house?

But Matt's already in gear, grabbing Miss Holt from behind
in a righteous Heimlich. As she lets out a loud GASP,

LUCAS

(to Caleb)

Let's go.

Grinning, Lucas follows Caleb out.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Lucas' patrol car swerves wildly across the road. Stops inches from a ditch. The engine dies.

INT. PATROL CAR - CONTINUOUS

Caleb and Lucas catch their breath. Caleb has been driving.

CALEB

Sorry.

LUCAS

It's all right. You're doing fine. It doesn't take much. It's power steering. Now start her up again.

CALEB

Sheriff Buck --

LUCAS

Lucas.

CALEB

I'm thinkin' about what you said about the rhubarb.

Lucas laughs.

LUCAS

What about it? That it's half poison and all that?

CALEB

Yeah -- I mean, the first guy that ate it -- what was he thinking?

LUCAS

Probably thinking about how hungry he was. It's just like anything else, I guess -- it's just a matter of knowing how far you can go.

MATT

And how far is that?

LUCAS

Easy -- stop before you die.

Caleb looks a little uneasy -- he's gripping the steering wheel and frowning.

LUCAS

You want to call it a night?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

CALEB
If it's all right with you.

LUCAS
Whatever you want is all right with me, Caleb. I'm glad to spend the time with you.

Caleb stares into the night. For a moment there is just crickets and stars.

CALEB
Why?

LUCAS
Why what?

CALEB
Why you so interested in me?

LUCAS
This is Trinity. We take care of our own.

CALEB
Last year Goosie Chubb's mama was killed by that truck and you didn't spend no time with him.

LUCAS
Well, the honest truth was that I never cared too much for Goosie Chubb. That boy just plain ol' gave me the willies.

CALEB
I can see that.

LUCAS
But there's no denying it, Caleb. I feel a special connection with you. Call it whatever you want. You know what a mentor is?

CALEB
Half man, half beast?

Lucas doesn't break eye contact -- but pauses.

LUCAS
That's the Minotaur. A mentor is like...a father. A wise advisor.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

CALEB
You want to be my mentor?

LUCAS
I'll help you find the way, Caleb.
Growing up's like groping in the
dark. Sometimes you need someone
with a flashlight.

Caleb considers this.

CALEB
Okay.

LUCAS
Okay.

Sometimes it's that simple.

EXT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
Yes, we'll gather at the river.
The beautiful, beautiful river.

Silent, save for the Potato Boy's voice. Selena walks slowly past the house, pausing for a moment to look up at

CALEB'S LIGHTED TOWER WINDOW

She smiles, walks on.

INT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - CALEB'S ROOM - NIGHT

He's lying in his tight bed, listening to:

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
Gather with the Savior at the
river, That flows by the throne of
God...

Merlyn is sitting on his bed. She's crying.

CALEB
Merlyn. What's the matter?

MERLYN
So innocent...

CALEB
What is?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

MERLYN
The boy. So beautiful and pure.

CALEB
Who is?

MERLYN
All ruined. All spoiled.

CALEB
Who?

MERLYN
The boy.

CALEB
The Potato Boy?

MERLYN
He's dying. He's dying right now.

CALEB
The Potato Boy's gonna die?

Merlyn looks at him with overwhelming pity. She vanishes.

CALEB
Merlyn!

Caleb is alone in the dark.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
Yes, we'll gather at the river.
The beautiful, the beautiful
river...

INT. PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Ben stares at Selena's house. Poisoned thoughts churning in his mind.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
Gather with the Savior at the
river, that flows by the throne of
God...

FADE OUT

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN

INT. WOMAN'S BOUTIQUE - DAY

Small-town version of trendy. Selena enters to shop for herself. She's feeling, well, good. She investigates a circular rack.

Next to her are two somewhat respectable middle-aged women. They glower at her. Selena's reputation precedes her. She smiles at them. The two women turn away.

WOMAN 1
(not really under her
breath)
Whore.

The women walk out of the store, leaving Selena poleaxed.

SELENA
What? What did you say? WHAT DID
YOU SAY?

Everyone in the store is staring at her. Over this tableau:

POTATO BOY (O.S.)
(singing)
Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me...

INT. SELENA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Selena opens the back door, revealing Caleb.

SELENA
Good. You brought your books.

CALEB
Yes ma'am.

SELENA
Come in and make yourself
comfortable. I'm just getting
myself some coffee.

Caleb looks around. He feels weird being in his teacher's home.

SELENA
You haven't developed a taste for
it yet, have you, Caleb?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

Ma'am?

CALEB

Coffee.

SELENA

Caleb figures maybe it's time.

Okay.

CALEB

How do you like it?

SELENA

Don't know, ma'am. Haven't had it yet.

CALEB

I mean would you like some milk and sugar?

SELENA

Yes, ma'am, I would. Thank you.

CALEB

She brings him his coffee.

You can relax, Caleb. I ain't gonna bite you. Least not where it shows.

SELENA

This gets a smile out of him.

We're not in school, Caleb. True, I'm going to help you with your homework, but we can also pass a pleasant morning as friends. Get to know each other. You know what I'm saying?

SELENA

Yes, ma'am.

CALEB

Selena realizes that Caleb will be a slow thaw. She sits at a table.

Now bring your books over here.

SELENA

Caleb sits next to her.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 2

SELENA
Why don't we start with John Quincy Adams?

CALEB
What about him?

SELENA
For starters, who was he?

CALEB
Secretary of state to James Monroe. Sixth president, 1825 to 1829. He had an unhappy, ineffective administration.

SELENA
Compton's.

CALEB
Who?

SELENA
Compton's encyclopedia.

CALEB
Yeah. I guess you've heard it a lot.

SELENA
I guess I have. How's your coffee?
Caleb sips it. Hates it.

CALEB
Good.

SELENA
Want some more sugar?

CALEB
You bet.

She gets up and takes it to the counter. Finds the sugar.

SELENA
This is nice, isn't it?

CALEB
What's that?

SELENA
Just having you here. It's nice. I like doing things for you.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 3

She brings him back his coffee.

SELENA

Here. Try it now. Better?

Caleb sips. Still hates it.

CALEB

Yeah.

SELENA

You don't have to drink it, Caleb.

CALEB

Thank you.

Selena admires him in the morning light. She touches his cheek.

SELENA

Caleb. That's a Bible name.

CALEB

I know.

SELENA

"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land of Canaan."

CALEB

Wow.

SELENA

Caleb was a prince. A favored son of the Hebrews. He and Joshua were the only ones to survive the forty years in the desert. True and strong. The only ones who survived.

Selena holds his face and for a moment, is lost in the contemplation of it. Caleb breaks the uncomfortable moment.

CALEB

You read the bible, Miss Coombs?

SELENA

You seem surprised by that.

CALEB

Just askin'.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 4

SELENA

I used to.

CALEB

Why did you stop?

SELENA

I found more interesting material.

CALEB

American history?

SELENA

No, Caleb.

She stares at him with what only can be described as love in her eyes. It comes from an unnerving nether world between motherly and carnal love. Caleb is paralyzed by its strangeness.

CALEB

Do you have anything to eat?

Selena breaks her gaze. Smiles at him.

SELENA

Anything you want.

She goes to the refrigerator and opens it.

SELENA

Got RC, Moonpies, half a mufaletta, the heads of some students from last year...

Caleb is 99% sure she's kidding.

SELENA

...just kidding. Oh, here we go.

She takes out a watermelon and sets it on the counter. From a drawer, she pulls a Hitchcockian knife and holds it out to Caleb.

SELENA

You want to do the honors?

CALEB

Okay.

He goes to her. She hands him the knife.

SELENA

You be careful now.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED 5

CALEB

I done this before. Should I cut it sideways or longways?

She reaches around him.

SELENA

You know, maybe I should help you.

CALEB

I can do it.

SELENA

Why don't I steady it for you.

She holds the watermelon as Caleb wields the knife.

CALEB

You sure it's ripe?

SELENA

One way to find out. Easy now. Don't cut yourself.

CALEB

I won't.

Caleb makes a slice in the watermelon. It's rotten inside. The innards pour out in a putrid red wave that quickly spreads across the counter.

Caleb jerks back, losing his grip of the knife. He tries to grab it before it falls and catches it by the blade. He cries out as it cuts into his palm.

SELENA

Caleb!

Selena turns on the faucet and holds Caleb's hand in the water, but this just hurts him more. She takes his injured hand and quickly wraps it in her shirt. Caleb is moaning with the pain.

SELENA

It's gonna be all right. It's gonna be all right.

She picks him up and carries him out of the kitchen.

THE SINK

as Caleb's blood mixes with the watermelon juice.

INT. SHRINK'S OFFICE - DAY

Ben on the couch, hugging his chest tightly. Staring at the ceiling, sweating. The clock ticks the minutes as Dr. Perry waits him out. Finally:

BEN
You want to know the cost? All right.

He starts to rock himself on the couch.

BEN
I wake up every morning with my guts tied in a knot. Shaving? I wonder what it'd be like to slice my face up so I don't have to go in. Then I wonder what it'd be like to slice his face.

He's trembling. Dr. Perry clears his throat.

DR. PERRY
Well? What do you think?

BEN
I think I'm a coward.

DR. PERRY
Why do you think that?

BEN
(exploding)
Because I wear a gun, and he doesn't! While we're driving around in that damn car, I could just take out my weapon, and turn it on him -- BAM! -- just like that.

DR. PERRY —
Aren't there other options?

BEN
Yeah. Instead, I wet my pants while he plays his mind games with me. All because I can't --

Ben's losing it... he's biting his lip, trying not to cry, rocking himself furiously until...

DR. PERRY
Can't what. Can't what, Ben?

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

BEN

Turn him in for killing that poor
Temple girl!

The shrink stares. He runs his hand through his hair,
nervous. But Ben sits up, exhales; he's calmer than we've
ever seen him.

CUT TO

INT. SELENA'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY

Selena sits in a large chair, holding Caleb in her lap. He
is moaning and trying very hard not to cry.

CALEB

It hurts...

SELENA

I know it does. The hand's very
sensitive. It's gonna hurt like
hell, but it's gonna be all right.
You want to let go and cry you go
right ahead.

Caleb does, a little -- but we get the sense that he might
be letting go about other things as well as his hand.

Selena soothes him. She strokes his head and rocks him back
and forth. The Pieta.

SELENA

Why don't we take a look at it?

CALEB

No...

He keeps his fist tightly tangled in her bloodied shirt.

SELENA

All right. Whenever you're ready.

She rocks him.

SELENA

Whenever I got hurt, this is what
my daddy would do.

The memory is comforting and very sad.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

SELENA
(almost inaudibly)
When Jesus went down to the waters
that day, he was baptized in the
usual way. When it was done, God
blessed his soul. He sent him his
love on the wings of a dove...

This has a creepy resonance for Caleb. He forgets about his
hand and stares at Selena.

SELENA
On the wings of a snow-white dove,
He sends his pure, sweet love.
Signs from above on the wings of a
dove...

She kisses him on the forehead. She has tears in her eyes
too. She stares into Caleb's face. She kisses him on the
mouth.

FADE OUT

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

INT. WARREN HOUSE - POTATO BOY'S ROOM - DAY

We see him from behind sitting in his chair. He is not singing. Something is wrong. His breathing is labored. We move closer.

He slumps to the ground. He turns and we see his face. A misshapen head with only indentations for eyes. He is fighting for breath.

He quiets, sensing something. He smiles.

POTATO BOY

I can see you.

WIDE - MERLYN

cradles his head in her lap. Trying to soothe him.

EXT. STREET - BARBER SHOP - DAY - CLOSE ON THE WINDSHIELD

of Emmet Wallace's Buick -- a pink PARKING TICKET is slapped on top of an existing one. As the WIPER BLADE slams down onto it, PULL BACK ON

BEN

standing taller, no slouch; even his uniform fits him.

BEN

There you go, Emmet -- double or nothing.

And as he strolls off, whistling, RACK FOCUS TO
BARBER SHOP

Lucas standing in the window, watching Ben. Not happy.

EXT. SELENA'S HOUSE - DAY

Lucas gets out of the Crown Vic and walks toward the house.

LUCAS

Someone's in the kitchen with
Dinah; Someone's in the kitchen I
know...Someone's in the kitchen
with Dinaaaaah.... Strummin' on
the ol' banjo...

He heads around to the back door.

INT. SELENA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Quiet, quiet. Lucas comes in quietly -- sees the mess in the sink; doesn't know what to make of it. Then a voice distracts him.

SELENA (O.S.)

Easy, baby.

Lucas moves through the kitchen.

SELENA (O.S.)

I'm gonna take care of you. Don't you worry. Kiss it, make it feel better.

INT. DEN - CONTINUOUS

as Lucas moves slowly through the doorway. He stops, not quite comprehending what he sees.

LUCAS' POINT OF VIEW

Caleb has moved across the room. Selena has followed and has cornered him. There is blood on both of them.

SELENA

Come to mama...

BACK TO SCENE

takes a beat to process this.

LUCAS

What the hell's goin' on here, Selena?

Selena and Caleb look up, frozen. Lucas advances on them.

LUCAS

(to Caleb)

And what are you doin' here?

Caleb takes the opportunity and runs. Selena looks up at Lucas and looks, for an instant, like a cornered animal. She may rip his throat out, she may cower, she may run.

LUCAS

(recovering)

Well -- robbing the cradle, aren't we, Miss Coombs?

SELENA

(flushed, shaking)

Nothing happened.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

LUCAS

(raised eye)
Oh? That sounds like something
did happen.
(shaking head)
I hope the Board of Ed doesn't hear
about --

She flies at him in a rage -- clawing him.

SELENA

You'd use that against me? For
what -- don't you have enough on
me already?

He's got her by the wrists, sits her down.

LUCAS

Come on, now, Selena -- what're you
so het up about? You did good
work...

She goes as cold as she was, a moment ago, hot.

SELENA

What do you mean, work?

LUCAS

You know -- boys never forget their
first time...
(grinning)
He'll be seeing family in a whole
new way.

SELENA

(whispers)
You sonuvabitch.

Lucas lets her go, pleased with himself. —

LUCAS

Yup -- you, me, and Caleb -- one
big happy family.

As he strolls out, Selena watches him go, then curls in a
ball and sobs wretchedly.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Caleb runs and runs and runs.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Caleb runs to it, as if to seek sanctuary.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Vast and empty. Caleb bangs through the doors.

CALEB
Reverend! Reverend!

He is answered only by his echo.

CALEB
Help me! Please! Reverend!

Caleb searches the pews, the altar, the confessional. He is alone.

CALEB
Is there anybody..?

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Caleb wanders out and drops to his knees among the tombstones. An absolutely broken and lost little boy. He cries.

CALEB
Merly, help me. Oh God...I
can't...please, Merly, please.
It's too much. It's too much.

WIDE - A TINY FIGURE

weeping among the dead.

CUT TO

INT. SHRINK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The ticking clock reads 8:00. Dr. Perry opens a door to

INT. WAITING ROOM

a patient sits with a copy of Psychiatry Today in front of his face.

DR. PERRY
Ready, Ben?

Lucas puts the magazine down, sizes up Dr. Perry, who shrinks back into his office.

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

LUCAS

Ben couldn't make it tonight,
Doctor Perry. So he offered his
time to me.

(smiling)

That's the kind of relationship we
have.

DR. PERRY

Oh, well, um...actually, I have
another --

Lucas gets up, tosses the magazine -- its pages flutter
loudly, ominously in the uneasy silence until it whaps onto
the side table.

LUCAS

Another patient?

He looks around the empty room, through the open door into
Perry's private office.

LUCAS

I don't see anyone.

(an edge)

Don't you trust me, Doctor?

DR. PERRY

Of course I do, it's just that --

Lucas strides to the inner door, holds it open for Dr.
Perry.

LUCAS

It's just that you find it hard to
trust. That's why your
relationships -- your
three...unconventional...marriages
in Atlanta ended so badly, is that
what you're trying to say?

Dr. Perry's freaked; he glances at the outer door, the one
to freedom, but he loses his nerve.

LUCAS

This way, Doc -- we've got plenty
of time.

Meekly, the shrink starts to enter his office.

INT. SHRINK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Perry enters like a condemned man. We see Lucas enter behind him, pick up a letter opener from the shrink's desk, examine it, then:

LUCAS
(gesturing with letter
opener)
Go ahead -- lie down. Tell me all
about it.

Off Perry's terrified face,

FADE TO

INT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

Matt walks through the living room. He hears something. He peers out the window.

MATT'S POINT OF VIEW - THE PORCH

Caleb and Lucas sit in a glider in the summer night.

LUCAS
You want to tell me all about it?

CALEB
Maybe some other time -- ain't much
to tell, really.

LUCAS
Okey-doke. When you're ready to
trust me... I can wait... trust is
always a very important and
powerful element of human nature,
Caleb. In my work, I use it almost
as currency. I feel everyone
deserves my trust unless they prove
otherwise. You'll find that as you
grow and deal with more and more
new people, this becomes very
important.

CALEB
How do you know who to trust?

LUCAS
The eyes. Everything you ever
wanted to know about a man is
written in his eyes...

ON MATT

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

whose eyes clearly declare his fear and complete impotence in the face of this new friendship. He turns and walks away.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. RECTORY - NIGHT

The Reverend opens his syringe case and draws his medication. He hears the church doors open. He puts down the syringe and gets up.

INT. THE CHURCH - NIGHT

Dark. The Reverend enters and looks around.

Father...

SELENA

She stands by the front doors.

This is the house of God.

REVEREND

I thought -

SELENA

GET OUT!

REVEREND

Selena bows her head.

I know it's too late...

SELENA

The Reverend advances on her. He looks like he's going to kill her. Veins are bulging in his neck.

GET OUT!

REVEREND

Father, I -

SELENA

He raises his fists to strike her, but seems paralyzed. He drops his hands.

Go.

REVEREND

I'm sorry, Father.

SELENA

She walks out.

INT. RECTORY - NIGHT

The Reverend returns to his desk. Slumps there for a moment. He opens a drawer and searches for something.

A PHOTOGRAPH.

Taken about 15 years ago. The Reverend is laughing. On his lap, his daughter, Selena. The Reverend Coombs picks up the syringe. Looks at it for a long time, then injects himself.

He takes up the photograph.

REVEREND
Selena. My poor baby...

And cries.

INT. MISS HOLT'S BOARDING HOUSE - CALEB'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caleb sits on his bed. He gets up and goes to the window. He opens it and listens for a long time.

There is no singing.

Miss Holt comes along and peeks in the room.

MISS HOLT
Caleb, you brush your teeth?

CALEB
No, ma'am.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Caleb brushes his teeth. Takes a good long look at himself in the mirror. Spits.

CALEB
So be it.

FADE OUT

THE END