AMERICAN GOTHIC

"Potato Boy"
(Eps.#5)

Written
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FIRST DRAFT
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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?

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?

Okay.

Miss Holt

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

No.

Continued
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

CALEG

Miss Holt!

But it is Rose who peers in the room.

ROSE

What's the matter with you?

CALEG

Listen.

She does.

POTATO BOY (O.S.)

He sent him his love on the wings of a dove.

CALEG

What's that?

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
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

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 TELEEVANGELIST

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
CALEB (O.S.)

Is that it?

ROSE (O.S.)

That's its nasty old self all right.

EXT. THICKET - DUSK

Caleb and Rose take it in.

ROSE

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.

CALEB

Shoot.

ROSE

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.

What for?

ROSE

She said that the old Warrens were devil-worshipers 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.

CALEB

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

ROSE

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

CALEB

What accident?
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 ketch 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  
(coversing)  
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.
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 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.

Sing.

MERLYN

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 as 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.

I don't know.

MATT

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 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!
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.

CALEY
Who is?

MERLYN
All ruined. All spoiled.

CALEY
Who?

MERLYN
The boy.

CALEY
The Potato Boy?

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

CALEY
The Potato Boy's gonna die?

Merlyn looks at him with overwhelming pity. She vanishes.

CALEY
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
Ma'am?

Coffee.

Caleb figures maybe it's time.

Okay.

How do you like it?

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

I mean would you like some milk and sugar?

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

She brings him his coffee.

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

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?

Yes, ma'am.

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

Now bring your books over here.

Caleb sits next to her.
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
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 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
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 sobbs 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.

REVEREND

This is the house of God.

SELENA

I thought -

REVEREND

GET OUT!

Selena bows her head.

SELENA

I know it's too late...

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

REVEREND

GET OUT!

SELENA

Father, I -

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

REVEREND

Go.

SELENA

I'm sorry, Father.

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