

AMERICAN GOTHIC

"Damned If You Don't"

Written

by

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. BOWEN'S JUNK YARD - NIGHT

A country junk yard at night: cast-away fridges, scrap metal and rusting cars stacked in haphazard rows, half-covered with vines. It's ominous with strange shadows and night noises.

We move deeper into the gloom as plaintive, singsong VOICES grow louder. It's a children's nursery rhyme drifting out of the darkness:

CHILDREN (V.O.)

(a la Pattycake,
Pattycake)

Sutpen the Junkman,
Something in your head
Sent you down the hallway
To catch them in the bed
Nobody will ever know
What it was they said
Before you loaded up your gun
And you shot them DEAD.

We hear the SOUNDS of breaking glass and children's laughter. Suddenly Caleb and Boone burst around a mound of discarded television sets. They duck into the shadows beside an old industrial freezer and hide.

Soon, another boy comes along.

BOY

Caleb, Boone, I'm not
laughing. Come on, y'all,
where are you?

Caleb calls out in a whisper --

CALEB

Sutpen's gonna getcha!

The boy whirls, but Caleb is hidden again. The boy becomes more and more nervous. He climbs a pile of junk and looks over the fields of scrap toward the owner's house --

EXT. ANSE BOWEN'S HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

A creepy, Victorian house abutting the scrap yard.

INT. ANSE BOWEN'S FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

ANSE BOWEN, 40's, a strong and content man, reads Popular Mechanics in his easy chair.

His daughter POPPY, 15, wearing man's boxers and t-shirt, reads a textbook, "WORLD HISTORY I," reclining on the floor in front of a fan. Her combination of developed body and dewy innocence create a powerful sexiness.

Her mother, ETTA BOWEN, 40's, heavy and loving, pokes her head in from the kitchen --

ETTA

I'm using the microwave, so don't anybody turn on the tube.

POPPY

Mama, how long's dinner gonna be?

ETTA

I'm thawing the chops right now. And there's corn to think about. Maybe a fresh garden salad. How does that strike y'all?

ANSE

Honey, we don't know about all that, we just want to know when we'll eat.

ETTA

Well, if you'd fix the electric so I could do more than one thing at a time --

The SOUND of BREAKING GLASS is audible through the windows. Anse freezes to his chair, white knuckles and all.

ETTA

Anse, honey, it's just children playing out there.

ANSE

Children, sure ... they're children.

POPPY

Those aren't kids, Daddy. It's Mad Chief Nonahela's ghost, swingin' a tomahawk, trying to lure you outside.

Anse looks at his daughter with "where'd you get that imagination" pride --

POPPY (CONT'D)

We read about him in school.
He was out for revenge, so he
went back to his ancestral
huntin' ground and killed all
the settlers there --

ANSE

Well, I better get to these
little vandals before this Mad
Chief Whatsit does.

Anse walks out the front door. Poppy rolls over and
adjusts the fan so it blows more directly on her body.

EXT. SCRAP YARD - NIGHT

The light from the porch casts long, strange shadows.
Bowen follows the sound of the children's rhyme --

CHILDREN'S RHYME (V.O.)

... You loaded up your gun
And you shot them DEAD.

The sing-song suddenly dies off, leaving an EERIE SILENCE--

Bowen plods deeper into the clearing where Caleb and his
friends were playing--

ANSE

Hey, come on, kids, I'm not
gonna scold you.

Anse approaches the exact spot behind the huge industrial
freezer where we saw Caleb hiding --

ANSE

I hear you. Come on out of
there. We just don't want to
see anybody getting hurt --

He hears a slight sound and steps forward --

LUCAS

All right, Anse. I don't want
to see anybody getting hurt
either.

Anse nearly keels over from fright as Lucas Buck steps out
of the shadows --

LUCAS

Little skittish tonight, Anse.
These Indian summers make a
person crazier than anything
we get in August.

Anse just keeps backing up.

ANSE

I knew you'd be coming.

LUCAS

And I knew you knew it.

(beat)

I did you a favor. And, if I
recall, you owe me one in
return.

ANSE

I'm sorry, Sheriff. Really I
am. I've been busy. It's
been such a long time.

LUCAS

Now, Anse ...

Lucas has him backed up against a junk pile.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

... You don't have to make any
excuses with me. Just come
around and see me anytime
before Friday at midnight.
Don't forget.

ANSE

Before midnight Friday. Okay.

Lucas turns and evaporates into the night ... his voice
trailing back from the darkness.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Just come see me, Anse, that's
all you have to do. You won't
have a problem in the world.

It's clear that Anse Bowen is plenty worried about his
problems.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. GAIL'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

It's sweltering hot. The covers bunch at the foot of the bed. Gail's nightgown is damp with sweat and clings uncomfortably to her. She tosses and turns on top of her bed.

The air conditioning window unit is obviously blowing hot air. Gail gets out of bed, turns it off, opens a window.

Outside, a car cruises by on the street, slowing a moment -
- it's Lucas Buck's Crown Victoria.

She resignedly flips on her laptop computer and goes to work. Taped to the wall behind her are photos and newspaper accounts of her parents' accident: "TRAGIC FIRE MARS BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION", "PUBLISHERS OF GUARDIAN KILLED IN FIRE."

TIME CUT:

SAME ROOM - 5:00 A.M. - DAWN

Gail sits at her dining room table, a damp cloth pressed to the back of her neck. The SHRILL TONE of a modem cuts out. She dials the telephone. DIAL TONE. RINGING. Then: the features editor, ERNEST "ERNIE" LEDBETTER picks up --

ERNIE (V.O.)
(southern accent)
Ledbetter.

GAIL
Hey, Ernie. It's me. I just modemed the Temple piece. It's a little long --

ERNIE (V.O.)
I have to do something, right?
(beat)
Hey, I heard one right up your alley. Remember Billy Flynn, the car dealer? Turns out he was dealing more than automobiles.
(beat)
Using his wife's chemotherapy bills to launder the money. Is that a Gail Emory feature, or what? I've been saving it for you.

GAIL

That's sweet, Ernie, but I believe I'm going to be stayin' down here awhile. I'm halfway through another feature, even better than the Temple story--

She runs her finger along the old articles and photos.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOWEN'S SCRAP YARD - DAY

Gail parks in front of an aluminum shed with its garage door thrown open -- Anse Bowen's business entrance. A sign reads: "BOWEN'S REPAIR & SCRAP - WE FIX ANYTHING"

GAIL

Hello? Is there anyone here?

From the back of the shop, T.J., 20's, sexy, nervous, early Anthony Perkins, walks out.

T.J.

Hold on. I'm comin'.
(won't look her in
the eye)
'289. A nice little engine.
Underpowered to my way of
thinking, but nice.

In lieu of talking to a pretty woman, T.J. circles her car appreciatively.

T.J.

In real decent shape, too. You garage her?

GAIL

No.

T.J.

You should.
(beat)
I'm T.J. --

GAIL

T.J., do you fix air conditioners?

T.J.

Sure do. We fix anything.

(gestures to sign)
You need to see Mr. Bowen,
'cause I'm still training on
large fans. That's a joke.
(beat)
He's around here somewhere.

They walk into the scrap yard.

EXT. SCRAP YARD - CONTINUOUS - MOVING

Gail and T.J. pick their way through the old cars and other
junk. It's gloomy and surreal.

T.J.
(calling out)
Mr. Bowen? Where are you?
(to Gail)
He's been acting squirrely
all morning.

They find Anse Bowen sitting on the hood of an old car,
staring straight ahead at an old hearse.

T.J.
Mr. Bowen? We got a customer.

Anse is lost in reverie --

ANSE
Some would look around and see
nothin' but a bunch of rustin'
junk. But I see the history of
Trinity.

(beat)
This old hearse carried a lot
of folks to their resting
place. I took the transmission
from it and stuck it in Bobby
Tate's ice-cream truck. Later,
he was hit by a train.

He points to a wrecked ice-cream truck.

T.J.
(cutting in)
Anse, she's got a problem with
her air-conditioning and we
all just setting around here
twiddling our thumbs --

ANSE
It's sorta funny. What was
hauling dead bodies hauling
ice-cream to little kiddies --

GAIL
It's a window unit.

ANSE
(coming out of it):
Well, T.J., go plug it in and
listen to it.

T.J. departs. Anse continues walking with Gail.

Anse throws open the back of the ice-cream truck. Stacked
inside are about twenty old air conditioners. He lugs one
to the ground.

ANSE
I'm gonna go ahead and guess
it's a compressor problem.
Nine times in ten it'll be the
compressor, or the relay that
tells your thermostat that the
compressor's working.

He quickly pulls the unit apart and extracts the
compressor.

ANSE
That'll have her.

They start back to the workshop. They are walking along
when Gail suddenly veers off the path toward an old Ford
LTD Estate Wagon. It's burned down one side, with melted
tires. Gail stands frozen in front of it.

ANSE
So you're Gail Emory.

GAIL
(re: car)
Did you haul in this one?

ANSE
Nope. My boss hauled it.

GAIL
I thought you were the boss.

ANSE
I was just an apprentice back
then. Like T.J.

GAIL
(flattering him)
From apprentice to owner. I'd
say that's pretty much the
American dream.

He's flattered by a pretty young woman.

ANSE

Yeah, well, it ain't always
that simple.

GAIL

Oh?

ANSE

When Wash Sutpen knew he was
going away for shooting that
boy, he sold me the business
for a good price.

(angry)

Too good. And, I've never
really felt right about it
either.

Anse's mood abruptly changes --

ANSE (CONT'D)

You shouldn't be back here.
Go wait at the shop. I'll see
about your unit.

He turns and strides away. She looks wistfully over her
shoulder at her parents' car, then walks away.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Selena stands in front of the chalkboard on which is
written: SCIENCE FAIR: WEDNESDAY. PROJECTS DUE: TUESDAY.

The class listens as Boone explains his project.

BOONE

... and the windmill will
really turn and generate
electricity that doesn't cause
pollution. Wind is a good
renewable source of energy.

He sits down.

SELENA

Now, don't get carried away,
Boone. It's a nice windmill,
but we all know cheap
electricity comes from oil and
coal and we don't want you
sending the cost of gasoline
through the roof.

(laughs)

How is everyone else doing?

JOSH

My daddy and I are gonna show
how come venison tastes best
if you get a good clean head
shot and don't run it.

The other kids AD-LIB other projects: "the inside of an
eye", "an ant farm", etc. Caleb, sitting in the back by
himself, is silent. Selena stops at his desk.

SELENA

Caleb, have you picked out
your project yet?

CALEB

(winging it)

Yes.

SELENA

Would you like to share it
with us?

CALEB

(thinking fast)

Um ... it's about weather.
Violent weather that changes
quick and destroys things.

Selena writes this down in a notebook.

SELENA

Good. Caleb Temple -- Weather.
(caring with an
edge)

Caleb, honey, everyone else
will have their parents here
with them at the Science Fair,
so if you wanted to bring
someone, say Sheriff Buck,
that'd be fine. He'd be happy
to help you with your weather
project.

CALEB

I don't need no help.

SELENA

Caleb, that's "I don't need
any help."

The bell rings, signalling the end of class.

SELENA

Everybody have a nice weekend.
Class dismissed.

The students begin bustling out of the room. Caleb slowly stands.

CALEB

If my daddy was still alive I
wouldn't have gotten no help,
and I don't need any now he's
dead.

Caleb gathers his books and exits the classroom.

EXT. BACK YARD OF BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

Caleb works on his science project: a tornado chamber. It's about four feet tall, with the proportions of a phone booth. Four plexiglass walls have vertical gaps to let in cool air; a hot plate on the floor creates steam; a light bulb is inside the chamber at the top.

Unseen by Caleb, Lucas watches from the Crown Vic.

Caleb puts a piece of dry ice in the water on the hot plate, and flips the switch.

It lights up and vapor boils up from the dry ice; drafts from the slits in the plexiglass walls spin the column of smoke around in a gentle, wispy vortex.

Lucas walks up. He keeps one hand hidden behind his back.

LUCAS

What're you working on there,
son?

CALEB

Tornado chamber.

LUCAS

Sort of a wimpy tornado, don't
you think?

Caleb becomes self-conscious. Lucas watches him carefully.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Hey, it's fine. A fine little
funnel.

(beat)

Bu, you know, I might have
something that could help its
stature a bit.

Lucas holds out a beer can-sized container. It's an Army surplus smoke flare.

LUCAS

This is a serious smoke bomb.
And I want you to have it.

Caleb accepts it. With a gleam in his eye, he opens the tornado chamber. He tosses away the dry ice and hot water, then sets the canister inside the chamber and pulls the tab. Caleb notices Buck backing away, and he does too.

The canister ignites, filling the chamber with brilliant red smoke. Caleb is into it.

CALEB

Whoa!

LUCAS

Now, that's a twister.

CALEB

(whooping with joy)
Look at her go!

They stand side by side, watching the smoke belch out, overflowing the tornado chamber, and filling Mrs. Holt's yard and finally the neighborhood with smoke. Neighbors YELL through the haze.

PULL BACK: A shroud of red smoke covers the entire block.

INT. ANSE BOWEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Anse is pacing back and forth in the living room. Etta Bowen knits in an easy chair.

ETTA

Anse, will you quit that pacing. You're as nervous as a prize poodle.

ANSE

(covering)
I can't help it. Poppy's late home.

ETTA

(pointed)
I can tell you one thing and that's nothing good is gonna come from avoiding Lucas Buck.

There's a noise on the steps and Poppy bounds into the house wearing her Junior Varsity cheerleading outfit.

POPPY

Hi Daddy. Hi Mama.

Poppy is halfway up the stairs when Anse calls her back.

ANSE

Poppy, come back here.

POPPY

What? I gotta change.
Valerie's picking me up.

ANSE

Honey, your mama and me don't
want you going out tonight.

POPPY

It's Friday night!

ANSE

Wouldn't say it if there
wasn't a reason.

(softening)

We'll make it up to you,
sweetie pie.

She sighs, sulks up the stairs and slams her door.

INT. THE BOWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Etta Bowen is asleep on the right side of the bed. Anse is wide awake on the left side, twisting and turning. He turns his eyes to the red glow of the digital clock: 11:15.

CLOSE ON Bowen's face. Eyes tightly closed. Sweat drips down his temple into his hair. Abruptly, his eyes pop open. He's hyperventilating.

He bolts upright and looks at the clock: 11:56. Turns to find the bed empty beside him.

ANSE

Etta? Etta?

Anse leaps out of bed and flips on the light. Etta's nowhere to be seen. He rushes down the hall --

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hall is shadows and emptiness. He pushes open the door to Poppy's room, looks in --

INT. POPPY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - ANSE'S P.O.V. --

Poppy's asleep.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Anse continues down the hallway. A dim light comes from downstairs. He takes the stairs two at a time --

ANSE

Etta?

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Anse looks around the darkened living room. The only light comes from the digital clock on the VCR -- 11:59. He continues into the kitchen --

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nothing in here either. Light shimmers from the partially-open basement door.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS - NIGHT

The door CREAKS open and Anse descends the rickety basement steps.

ANSE

Etta?

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

The basement is cluttered with junk. Light comes from a single 40 watt bulb hanging on a cord.

ANSE

Etta?

He walks around old furniture -- deeper into the shadows -- toward the large furnace and SLAMS straight into Etta, coming around from behind the furnace. They both SCREAM. Etta drops a load of fresh laundry --

ANSE

Oh, Etta. What're you doing down here in the middle of the night?

ETTA

Poppy has practice tomorrow and I want her to have fresh clothes.

He kisses her. Looks at the spilled laundry.

ANSE

I'll help you get this up.

Anse gets on his knees and starts picking up laundry.

Etta heads for the light switch on the wall --

ETTA

We could use some more light
down here.

Her hand closes in on the wall switch --

She receives a TREMENDOUS SHOCK and --

The lights blow out. It's pitch black and --

Etta flies backwards across the room into a stack of old
furniture.

There's a CRASH. Then complete silence.

ANSE

Etta? Etta? Etta!

FADE OUT.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. BOWEN'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Darkness. Etta Bowen groans. Anse stumbles toward his wife in the inky blackness.

ANSE

Etta, where are you? Say something.

He finds her body. Strikes a match. Trying to feel for a pulse. The match goes out. He lights a piece of newspaper as a torch. Puts some laundry under her head.

ANSE

I'm gonna get help.

He runs up the stairs, using the fiery newspaper for light.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Anse careens through the room, hitting light switches -- nothing happening. The torch flames out and he's in darkness. The glow from the telephone illuminates the terror on his face as he dials 911.

ANSE

It's Anse Bowen. My wife's been hurt bad. On Fern Valley Road. Just past Old 27. She got shocked. Hurry. She's not moving. Come on, please hurry.

He drops the phone and rushes out the back door --

EXT. BOWEN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bowen runs around the corner of the house to the circuit breaker box.

He pulls the cover off the box and begins hitting reset switches. Suddenly, there's a voice beside him.

LUCAS

Got your call.
(beat)
Need a light?

ANSE

Etta's hurt.

Lucas flips on his flashlight and hands it to Anse.

LUCAS

What are friends for, Anse, if not a bit of illumination in times of darkness?

Anse hits the correct switch and the house lights up like a Christmas tree. In the distance we hear an AMBULANCE SIREN.

ANSE

I gotta meet the ambulance. She's hurt bad.

LUCAS

Not that bad, Anse.

Anse stops in his tracks.

LUCAS

Two hairline fractures in her ankle, a dislocated hip, shock to the heart, but Etta's got a strong heart. I'm just guessin', of course.

Anse doesn't ask. He starts around the house. An ambulance races into the driveway. Matt and a PARAMEDIC hurry out.

ANSE

Etta's in the basement.

He leads Matt, the paramedic and Lucas into the house.

INT. BOWEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

All the digital clocks in the house ominously flash 12:00, 12:00, 12:00. Lucas sees the clocks and smirks to himself. Poppy appears at the top of the steps in her nightgown, sleep in her eyes.

POPPY

Daddy? What's goin' on?

ANSE

There's been a little accident, but everything's gonna be all right.

POPPY

Where's mama?

Anse ignores her as they hurry for the basement.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Bowen runs ahead, kneels next to his wife.

ANSE

Oh, Etta. I'm sorry, darlin'
I'm sorry.

Matt and the paramedic sit down next to Etta. Bowen backs away to give them room. Lucas watches like a spectator.

Matt pulls open one of her eyes with his finger, shines a light into it --

MATT

Possible concussion --

Her leg is twisted to one side; Matt feels the thigh with his hand --

MATT

Dislocated hip. Let's watch
the spine and move her
carefully.

Anse looks on, mortified, as Matt and the paramedic lift her onto a gurney.

MATT

Give us a hand here, will you,
Mr. Bowen?

Lucas steps forward, puts a hand on the stretcher --

MATT

I asked Mr. Bowen.

LUCAS

Well, excuse me, doctor.

Anse, the paramedic and Matt lift the stretcher up the narrow basement stairs --

EXT. BOWEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They load Etta into the ambulance. Lucas leans in to see how things are going --

LUCAS

You know the way back? Took
you long enough to get here.

MATT

Under ten minutes, Lucas. Any faster and we would have been here before the accident happened.

Matt gets into the passenger seat.

LUCAS

What's that mean, doctor?

MATT

It's like those volunteer firemen who seem to get to the fires before they start.

(sarcastic)

Of course, it could just be coincidence.

Matt slams the door to the ambulance, and it pulls away.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Matt sits next to Etta's bed. She's woozy, but awake, and her right ankle is in a cast. Poppy and Anse sit in chairs next to her bed. Matt holds up a couple of X-rays and describes her injuries:

MATT

(re: X-rays)

There are two hairline fractures on the ankle, here. And you've dislocated your right hip joint, here.

(switches X-rays)

You've suffered a mild concussion, so I want you to be very careful getting around.

(puts down X-rays)

You'll be able to go home tomorrow. The cast will be off in about eight weeks.

Anse is dumbfounded; he's heard this diagnosis before. There's a KNOCK and Lucas leans in.

MATT

Sheriff, visiting hours are over, so you'll have to wait outside.

LUCAS

This is a courtesy call,
Harvard. I don't suppose they
taught you that up north.

MATT

To the right, at the end of
the hall, is our lounge. Feel
free to grab a donut and come
back at nine a.m.

Buck makes eye contact with Anse, then shrugs and exits.

MATT

(to Etta)

You may feel some pain as the
sedative begins to wear off.
I'm giving you a prescription
for some --

Anse abruptly stands up.

ANSE

Excuse me for a moment,
doctor.

(off Matt's look)

I'll be right back.

Anse leaves.

EXT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lucas chats with an orderly as Anse walks up.

LUCAS

Well, it ain't exactly deer
season. But if a few of those
venison steaks found their way
over to my house, you could
say the poor animal ran in
front of your car ...

(joking)

I'll make sure there's no
autopsy.

ORDERLY

Count on it, Sheriff.

ANSE

Sheriff Buck?

LUCAS

Let's take a little walk.
Don't want to agitate the good
doctor.

Lucas and Anse pass under an "Exit" sign --

INT. HOSPITAL STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

It's a deserted institutional stairwell.

ANSE

I just want to say I'm sorry I missed coming by. I've been real busy.

LUCAS

Now, Anse, I already told you, you don't have to apologize. I understand. You've had an accident and your hands are going to be plenty full around the place. Let's just forget about it.

ANSE

Thank you, Lucas. I appreciate that.

(deadly serious)

Now, tell me what you want and I'll do it.

LUCAS

It was such a simple little thing. Hardly seems worth it now.

ANSE

Anything, Lucas. Just tell me.

LUCAS

Well, I have a friend coming to town for a few days. I was hoping you'd pick him up at the Greyhound for me. See, I've got my Chamber of Commerce meeting --

ANSE

(obvious relief)

That's it? Why didn't you say so? Ah, heck, I'm glad to do it for you, Lucas.

LUCAS

And I knew I could count on you, Anse. Just tote him back to your place and I'll swing by and get him when I get a chance.

Lucas reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small card.

LUCAS (CONT'D)
It's the 3:18 out of Columbia.
I've written it all down.

INT. ETTA'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Matt listens to Etta.

ETTA
Anse should have gone to see
the sheriff. Sheriff told him
to come see him and he didn't
go.

MATT
What are you talking about,
Mrs. Bowen?

ETTA
When the sheriff asks you to
do something, you do it. Anse
Bowen can be stubborn as a
mule sometimes.

(scared)
I got a girl to think about.

MATT
Listen, Sheriff Buck is a
public servant --

ETTA
(impatient)
I know all that, Doctor.

MATT
Your husband is right to stand
up to that kind of thuggish
intimidation --

ETTA
(whispers)
Doctor Crower --

Etta stops mid-sentence and her eyes grow wide. Standing
in the doorway is Lucas, and behind him Anse.

LUCAS
"Intimidation?" "Thuggish?"
Doctor, I go where I'm
invited; I help when it's
asked for. This feels like a
mutiny against my good
intentions.

(pointedly)
Isn't that right, Etta?

ETTA
You won't find no mutiny here,
Sheriff. After all you done
for us.

Matt looks at Etta. She quickly looks away. Lucas wins this round.

EXT. BACK YARD OF BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

Caleb is discouraged. He's got dry ice in his chamber again, but the windows of his tornado chamber are scorched and nearly opaque. Matt sees this, walks over to his side.

MATT
Hey, Caleb.

Caleb ignores him, moves to the other side of the chamber.

CALEB
I'm trying to do something.

Caleb glowers at his tornado chamber; then pushes it over in frustration. The water and dry ice spill out onto the lawn.

MATT
What happened?

CALEB
Nothing. I hate this thing.

MATT
I built one of those once.
Want to know why the tornado
forms in there?

CALEB
I don't care.

MATT
(persuasive)
That's all right, but it's
really interesting.
(beat)
It's all about convection and
evaporation. I have a book you
could read ... it's got
pictures of whole towns being
destroyed.

CALEB
(sensing an angle)
Can you get me dry ice and
some new plexiglass?

MATT
I think I can scare some up.

CALEB
It's due on Tuesday.

MATT
(chuckling)
I'll give you a hand. Let's
take it inside.

They carry the chamber onto the porch.

EXT. STREET - IN FRONT OF BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

Lucas Buck sits in his car and watches Matt and Caleb carry the tornado chamber into the boarding house. Lucas stares long after they're gone.

EXT. SCRAP YARD - DAY

Gail surreptitiously approaches Bowen's Scrap Yard. It's locked and appears deserted.

She climbs the fence and hurries into the maze of cars and junk.

Gail slips deeper into the woods. Overhanging trees, Spanish moss, a sort of sylvan cathedral. She spies her parents' car.

Gail tries the front door of the old station wagon. It creaks open. Inside, the vinyl has melted and refrozen into strange shapes. She sits.

Gail opens the glove box. Finds a packet: registration, maps, insurance information. She reads her mother's name.

She sees her reflection in the dashboard plastic, and suddenly --

GAIL'S FLASHBACK:

INT. STATION WAGON - DAY

GAIL'S POV: from the backseat as a little girl. The car is moving very fast. We hear tires SQUEALING. Her mother whirls in the passenger seat, her face panicked, not looking at Gail, but past her out the rear window.

A cop cruiser pursues them with its lights flashing.

The station wagon slows and pulls to the side of the road.

Young Gail's mother has something in her hand. We can't quite see what it is. She opens the car door and leans out.

CLOSE ON HER HAND reaching beneath the car. She stashes something beneath the car.

The SQUAWK of a sheriff's bullhorn.

SHERIFF'S BULLHORN (V.O.)

Please step slowly from the vehicle...

INT. BOWEN'S SCRAPYARD - BACK TO REALITY - DAY

Gail snaps out of her reverie. She slides across the seat and opens the passenger-side door.

She crouches beneath the car and slides up under it.

GAIL'S POV: the undercarriage of the old car. Spider webs and rust. And something else --

AN ANCIENT "HIDE-A-KEY" CONTAINER

magnetically stuck to the underside. Gail pries it off and gets out from under the car.

Gail slides the top open and, inside, is a very small BRASS KEY on a long chain. Suddenly, a voice nearby --

LUCAS

Whaddaya got there, pretty?

Gail is startled but maintains her composure and conceals the key in her fist.

GAIL

Oh, it's you.

She's face to face with Lucas Buck who is holding a bouquet of two dozen blood red roses. Gail subtly slides what's in her hand into the pocket of her jeans.

GAIL (CONT'D)

Have you been following me, Sheriff?

LUCAS

You know, it's just occurred to me what might be the key to understanding your personality.

(beat)

I'm groping here, 'cause I'm no medical doctor, but I think the word is paranoid.

GAIL

I don't want your flowers.

Lucas snickers at this. He pulls a flower from the bunch, and holds it right next to her cheek --

LUCAS

That would be lovely, accenting your complexion in such a striking way.

(beat)

Except they're not for you.

He puts the flower back into the bouquet.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Now, don't look at me like that. It hurts my feelings. I got a call on a trespassing out here. And poor Bowen's been havin' a hard time -- his wife injured and all. I brought some pretty flowers to cheer Etta up. It's a shame that a man can't take care of his invalid wife without worrying about folks out on his property ... stealing things.

GAIL

I'm not stealing.

Lucas fixes her with a steely stare --

LUCAS

If you say so, Ms. Emory. There's no such thing as a perjury charge out here in the woods.

Gail starts away.

GAIL

Goodbye, sheriff. A pleasure, as always.

Lucas stares after her, then turns and walks toward Bowen's house.

INT./EXT. BOWEN PICKUP/GREYHOUND PARKING LOT - DAY

Heat waves roil off the country blacktop as a Greyhound bus ominously moves closer and closer.

Bowen and Poppy wait in the front seat of the family F-250 pickup in the parking lot of the tiny Greyhound station. Poppy looks sexy and fetching in a flowery sun dress.

The air breaks squeal and the bus stops. The door opens. Only one person gets off. As he does, Anse Bowen sighs --

POPPY

Who's that, daddy?

ANSE

I'll be damned. Wash Sutpen.
(finally hearing)

A man I knew a long time ago.

WASH SUTPEN walks slowly down the steps of the bus, blinking in the sunlight. He's carrying one small valise and a small gift-wrapped package. He scans the lot, sees Bowen, waves and smiles a pearly white smile.

Sutpen's entire person seems younger than Bowen's, even though he must be at least 15 years older. He's handsome and there's a predatory swagger to his stride.

Anse gets slowly out of the truck.

ANSE

I want you to wait here.

POPPY

Daddy!

He slams the door and goes to meet Sutpen.

EXT. GREYHOUND STATION - CONTINUOUS

Anse meets Sutpen halfway across the gravel. They shake hands.

ANSE

Wash, it's been a long time.
How're you?

SUTPEN

A long time, it sure has been.
Too long. You know what I'm
saying...

(laughs easily)

Too long, Haw Haw Haw. I'm
fine, Anse. Fit as a fiddle.
How you been?

ANSE

I been fine, real fine. The
place is doin' fine, too. I'm
sorry I stopped writin' you. I
was never much at writin'. You
know I was thinkin' about you.

SUTPEN

Hell, I know that. I
appreciated what you sent when
you did.

They hear a door slamming and both turn. Poppy is starting
coltishly across the lot. The wind is blowing her dress
sheer against her body and she awkwardly smooths it down.

As she approaches, Sutpen does a double take and lets out a
slow -- almost wolfish -- whistle.

She comes up to the two of them and stands demurely in
front of the fascinating stranger. There is a long beat of
awkward silence -- the cat and bag have parted ways.
Sutpen looks her up and down, then steps a bit too close --

SUTPEN

If you're little Poppy, then I
definitely brung the wrong
gift.

POPPY

I'm Poppy.

ANSE

This is Wash Sutpen, my old
boss.

Sutpen holds the wrapped package out to Poppy.

SUTPEN

It's just somethin' I made on
the inside.

POPPY

Really? It's for me?

She opens the plain brown wrapping, and finds a hand-carved wooden train car with a string to pull it. Something you'd give a 5-year-old. Her face goes slack.

ANSE

Say thank you, Poppy.

POPPY

Thanks. Really, it's great.

ANSE

I know it's too young for you.

(beat)

Time is moving a lot faster
out here.

ANSE

We better get goin'.

Remember, we got your mama
laid up at home.

As they climb into the truck Sutpen watches the way Poppy moves in her summer dress.

INT. PICKUP - CONTINUOUS

ANSE

(sincerely)

It's good to see you out,
Wash.

As Anse drives away, Poppy sits in the middle between the two men, but her golden thigh presses against the muscular leg of ex-con Sutpen.

SUTPEN

(menacing)

Good? Good, Anse? No, it's a
good deal better than that.
It's called living!

FADE OUT.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. BOWEN DINING ROOM - NIGHT

There's a long wooden table with caneback chairs. Casserole dishes sit on warming plates. T.J. sets the blood red roses brought by Lucas in a vase at the center of the table. Mrs. Bowen props her cast on a chair.

ETTA

Lucas, those flowers are pretty enough to brighten the whole house.

(beat)

Why won't you tell me who's comin' for supper?

LUCAS

Now, Etta, the point of a surprise is surprise.

(to T.J.)

Go on back to the kitchen and bring out them ribs.

T.J.

They're not here yet. You don't want 'em to get cold?

LUCAS

But if you listen carefully, when I'm talking to you, you might have a real bright future in Trinity.

T.J. hurries back into the kitchen to collect the ribs. As he is reemerging with a big platter -- sure enough -- the front door swings open and Bowen, Poppy, and Sutpen enter. Sutpen looks comfortable being in his old house, the scene of much misery.

Etta Bowen is aghast.

ETTA

Lucas Buck!

LUCAS

What is it, Etta?

ETTA

I don't want that man in my house.

LUCAS

(shrugging)

If you say so, Etta, but I hardly think that's taking an enlightened view of rehabilitation.

Anse takes Etta aside.

ANSE

(whispering)

I wouldn't have him here either. But it's a favor to Sheriff Buck. We'll have dinner with him, then he's leaving.

ETTA

(whispering)

I am not happy about this.

Anse realizes Lucas has been overhearing this exchange, and turns to him.

ANSE

If you say he's okay, then he's okay.

LUCAS

He won't be with you more than a couple days until I can get him settled over in Goat Town.

ANSE

You didn't say nothing about him staying.

LUCAS

Oh, I'm sorry, Anse, is someone using your extra room?

Anse has been outmaneuvered.

ANSE

Well, no.

LUCAS

All right, then. Another problem solved. With Etta laid up you can use the extra help around here anyway. Wash Sutpen isn't a freeloader.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

(to room)

It's my job to keep an eye on parolees in Trinity. So let's enjoy ourselves while we're at it. There's baby backs with all the fixings and a bucket of frosties in the kitchen.

Sutpen slides up to Mrs. Bowen as she's struggling to stand on her injured leg. He's oily and charming.

SUTPEN

Ma'am, you set right there and let me get it for you.

ETTA

(happily surprised)

Oh, for me, well, I would like a little something.

SUTPEN

A plate with all the fixin's and an icy cold beer coming up.

ETTA

Thank you, kindly. But, hold the beer, I'm on Darvon.

They begin helping themselves and taking their seats.

TIME CUT:

CLOSE ON A RIB BONE

Being licked clean by Sutpen, with great satisfaction.

Poppy can't keep her eyes off of Sutpen, and Anse can't avoid noticing his daughter's fascination with this man.

SUTPEN

I believe that's the best rib I've tasted in --

LUCAS

-- fifteen to twenty-five years?

Sutpen glares.

SUTPEN

Thanks for bringing that up, Lucas.

LUCAS
Just teasing, Wash. Judge was
way out of line on that one --

SUTPEN
Amen.

Sutpen gets the last bit of meat off the bone and his eyes
return to Poppy.

POPPY
Can I ask a question?

SUTPEN
Sure.

POPPY
Why'd you go to prison? You
don't have to answer.

ANSE
Now, Poppy, he don't want to
talk about that, he said so.

The conversation is getting a bit edgy for Etta, who
suddenly reaches for the cake cover --

ETTA
(chipper)
It's the pig pickin' cake old
Mrs. Carter used to make.
(beat)
She's dead, you know.

LUCAS
There is nothing like a pig
pickin' cake.

Sutpen wipes barbecue sauce off his mouth.

SUTPEN
(to Etta)
I don't mind talking about it,
ma'am. It's a fair question.
(to Poppy)
I was trying to protect my
family. Someone was taking
liberties he shouldn't have
with my daughter. Thought I
caught him, and tried to
straighten him out. I went a
little too far --

LUCAS
Turned out not to be the right
man, either.

POPPY

What happened after that?

SUTPEN

I lost everything. My wife, my
business, and my daughter.

(beat)

She was smart, and pretty.
Just like you.

Poppy blushes. Bowen squirms in his seat.

LUCAS

Anse sure thought she was
pretty.

ANSE

(a little too quick)

No, I didn't.

Sutpen looks up; Bowen avoids his glance.

LUCAS

Your daddy used to work for
Mr. Sutpen. Right about the
time all this was happening.
Before he met your mama, he
had something of a crush on --

Sutpen begins to understand what Lucas is saying --

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Well, anyway, everybody
deserves a second chance!

POPPY

That's right. Everybody
deserves a second chance.

Etta serves the cake.

ETTA

Who wants Cool Whip?

Sutpen slowly shakes his head. He's staring at Bowen.

INT. EXTRA BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's late. The guest bedroom is austere: twin bed, bedside
table, bureau, bible. Sutpen is unpacking his small valise:
spare overalls, flannel shirt, shiny twenty dollar shoes,
worn photo of his daughter and wife.

He's placing his stuff in the bureau when a CLICKING sound
begins coming from the hallway. It grows louder.

Poppy passes by the open door in a summer nightshirt, pulling the toy train behind her.

Clack, clack, clack, clack going away. Sutpen lies back on the bed and waits. The clacking stops. Then, begins coming back toward him ... clack, clack, clack.

Poppy passes slowly by --

SUTPEN

That little toy's growin' on you.

She stops in her tracks. Flushed. Doesn't know what she's getting into --

SUTPEN

You find the secret yet?

Like a kitten with a string, Poppy is intrigued.

POPPY

There's a secret?

SUTPEN

Come set over here.

Poppy moves a couple of feet into the room. Sutpen moves his legs a bit to make room on the narrow bed.

SUTPEN (CONT'D)

(patting bed)

This here'd be more comfortable for you.

Poppy sits nervously on the end of the bed.

POPPY

What's the secret?

SUTPEN

Here, I'll show you.

As Poppy gently holds the toy train toward him, Sutpen sits upright and subtly slides closer to her. Instead of taking the toy from her, he closes his rough hands over hers. She recoils slightly, pulling one hand free, but leaving the other.

SUTPEN

Easy. It's underneath here.

He moves her hand under the train and slides it along the smooth wood. Together, their hands push a hidden lever and a secret compartment reveals itself.

As Poppy focuses on the train in her lap, Sutpen's hand caresses slowly along the inside of her forearm --

SUTPEN
(watching her)
Doesn't that feel nice?

His other hand moves to the back of her neck and the soft, downy tenderness there, and he whispers in her ear --

SUTPEN (CONT'D)
(almost purring)
And this is another place that feels good.

Poppy shivers and suddenly stands. She backs up, toy in hand, staring wide-eyed. Sutpen watches with a Cheshire grin.

POPPY
(stammering)
What? I mean, tell me what it's for. That little compartment.

Sutpen begins to laugh. Poppy is simultaneously nervous and entranced.

SUTPEN
You don't care about no compartment --

POPPY
I've got to go to bed now --

SUTPEN
(mysterious)
But, you already know what it's for ...

His laughter follows Poppy as she bolts from the room and down the hall.

EXT. MARSH - DAWN

It's an idyllic morning at the edge of a warm, sandy, reedy marsh. Caleb and Gail in cut-offs and T-shirts. The two of them stand in three foot water. Gail holds a string that angles down into the water. Caleb has a net poised above the water. Gail is thinking more about Caleb than crabbing.

GAIL
How're you doing, Caleb?

CALEB
(ignoring)
Don't jerk it too much. I told
you, you gotta lead him in.

GAIL
I'm glad we're able to spend
some time ...

CALEB
Not so hard --

Gail takes the hint and focuses on the string which seems
to bounce of its own accord, sending small ripples across
the water --

CALEB (CONT'D)
Trick is to be real gentle.

GAIL
Is it a big one?

CALEB
Medium. Get 'em a little
closer.

Intense concentration as they stare into the water --

CALEB
There he goes. Lift up real
slow now --

Caleb swoops the net down, splashing water everywhere, but
then he lifts the net. Gail looks at a Blue Point crab --

CALEB
Heck, he is good sized.

As she leans over the net, the key around her neck dangles
forward ...

CALEB
(re: key)
What's that, Gail?

As soon as Caleb touches the key --

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. SAME MARSH - NIGHT - (CALEB'S VISION)

The water is dark and churning; Caleb is scared and, though
he still holds the key, Gail is nowhere near. He looks at
the key -- it glows brightly in his palm.

The black water begins to swirl more violently, pulling Caleb toward it like a whirlpool. Caleb SCREAMS and tries to back away --

Slowly, a warm cocoon of light envelops Caleb. Merly is beside him. The pull of the whirlpool intensifies --

CALEB

Merly! I'm getting sucked
down! I'm going under!

MERLY

You can't do everything
yourself, Caleb. You've got to
learn who to trust.

CALEB

Merly!

Merly drifts across the water and disappears. Caleb is sucked under --

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. SAME MARSH - REALITY - DAWN

Same peaceful marsh. Gail plunges into the water and pulls out Caleb who is spitting and coughing --

GAIL

Caleb!

Gail hugs him to her chest and wades ashore.

GAIL (CONT'D)

Caleb, are you all right?

Caleb is coming out of it. He tries to shake it off --

CALEB

I'm all right. I'm fine.
I'm, I'm --

(deep breath)

Gail? I think about Merly a
lot. We used to go crabbin'.

(beat)

I miss her.

GAIL

I know you do. It's okay to
talk about it.

They sit on the shore and Gail puts her arm around his shoulders.

CUT TO:

INT. BOWEN'S LIVING ROOM - DUSK

It's the end of a long, scorching workday. Poppy, hot, barefoot and languid, peers through the window at Sutpen, who's working in the garden.

EXT. GARDEN -- POPPY'S P.O.V. - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

Sutpen, shirtless, his muscular body covered with sweat and dust, finishes turning the soil in Mrs. Bowen's vegetable garden. He wipes his brow. Walks wearily for the house.

EXT. PORCH - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

Sutpen sits on the porch steps. Pulls off his work shoes.

Poppy comes out. She's carrying Bomb Pops.

POPPY

Hello, Mr. Sutpen.

He nods hello, then goes back to pulling off his boots.

POPPY

Brought you a Bomb Pop. Being as it's so hot.

Sutpen accepts the treat.

SUTPEN

Thank you.

Poppy sits nearby, on a porch swing. Sutpen peels the paper from the multi-colored frozen confection. The first breeze of the day starts blowing, rippling Poppy's shirt --

POPPY

(re: breeze)

Don't that feel nice?

SUTPEN

Mm hmm.

POPPY

I've always liked Bomb Pops better than Push-ups or Drumsticks. Ice milk is what my friend Lois likes, but I'm like, what's the point --

Bowen puts his finger to his lips. She stops talking.

SUTPEN

Shh. You'll feel the breeze on
your skin better when you're
still.

POPPY

Really?

SUTPEN

(hypnotic)

Mm hmm. That way you feel the
completeness of it all: the
cool breeze at the end of a
hard workday, blowing over
your cooling body; the sound
of a wind chime tinkling from
far away;

(beat)

Close your eyes.

She slowly and sleepily closes them.

POPPY

They're closed.

SUTPEN

Now open your mouth, just a
bit. Keep your eyes closed.
'Cause this the best of all.

She keeps her eyes closed. Sutpen holds out the bomb pop
that is rapidly melting in the late afternoon heat. Lime
and Purple and Red drip down to the end of the tip, a large
droplet forming just over Poppy's lips --

SUTPEN

... The way something cool
feels when it's dripping down
your dry throat.

The droplet separates and falls between her parted lips.

POPPY

Mmm. Hmm.

SUTPEN

This is the feeling of being
alive, of being alive and
free, and that's the best
feeling of all.

Poppy keeps her eyes shut, but leans forward, her lips
greedily looking for another taste. Sutpen holds the Pop
closer and her lips close around it. She shudders, opens
her eyes and is staring straight into Sutpen's --

POPPY

That's nice.

The reverie is cut short by the sound of heavy boots tramping across the porch. Sutpen pulls his bomb pop out of her lips and leans away --

SUTPEN

Evenin', Anse.

Anse watches them suspiciously ... there's nothing going on but two people enjoying a popsicle on a hot day. Poppy blushes and excuses herself.

POPPY

I better see if Mama needs anything.

Anse and Sutpen both watch her go, but with entirely different agendas.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

It's very late. Lucas slips into the back yard of the boarding house. He comes to Caleb's tornado chamber.

It's not plugged in and there's no dry ice, but mysteriously, a little funnel cloud forms inside. It begins whirling furiously, reflecting Buck's growing anger.

He slides the plexiglass window open a little wider and the tornado slips out, whirls a moment in the yard, then lifts up over the trees and disappears against the sky.

LUCAS

Tornado in a box. Hardly seems fair.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

CLOSE ON A MICROFICHE READER

It's a schedule for the 3-day Trinity American Bicentennial "Happy Birthday America" program.

Gail studies the screen carefully. There's the Optimist Club Breakfast, Children's Parade, Chamber-of-Commerce Square Dance, etc. Nothing too exciting. Then she spots a little ad in the program:

"Guess The Location of the Centennial
Time Capsule And Win A Prize"

She reads the ad:

GAIL (V.O.)

(reading)

"The secret location of the Trinity Guardian Centennial Time Capsule, buried in 1876, will be revealed after the fireworks. Submit your best guess and win a new RCA 8-Track player courtesy of Trinity Motors and the Guardian. Meet at the bandstand after the fireworks and promenade by candlelight to the Time Capsule."

She flips off the microfiche reader and goes to the reference desk.

REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

May I help you?

Gail shows her the printout from the microfiche.

GAIL

Was this time capsule ever opened?

REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

(reading)

I can't honestly say I remember.

GAIL

There's no mention of it in the newspapers of 1976.

REFERENCE LIBRARIAN

So there isn't.

INT. BOWEN'S UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

It's sweltering.

BOWEN (V.O.)

(yelling)

Poppy?

Bowen storms up the stairs.

BOWEN

Poppy?

He knocks on her bedroom door. No answer. Opens it. Empty but for frilly, girly things and a Tiger Beat poster of Keanu Reeves. He shuts the door quietly.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Poppy, wispy sun dress and all, ambles along the path between the abandoned cars and the creek. She hums to herself, her head in the clouds. Hears splashing water.

Looks through the trees at the creek. There's a crude dam and a swimming hole.

Sutpen's clothes are in a pile on the shore. She watches carefully. Sutpen surfaces from under the water. She steps forward.

POPPY

Hey.

She waits for Sutpen to reply. He doesn't.

Poppy, enchanted, takes off her shoes. She walks along the edge of the crude dam. Dips one foot into the water. Her toenails are painted red.

POPPY

That's nice.

Sutpen dunks himself under the water, then pops out. She pulls one foot out, puts the other one in, then --

-- accidentally-on-purpose falls in with a big SPLASH.

Sutpen catches her, lifts her with ease. Her soaked dress clings to her wet body.

SUTPEN

Whoa. Careful there.

POPPY

(laughing)

Ah, I'm already wet. What's it matter? I can swim.

SUTPEN

All right, then.

He drops her suddenly. She SHRIEKS with glee and grabs him tighter, then slides down his body into the water and dives under.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Bowen strides through the woods, past the sheet metal and cast-off junk. Hears high-pitched giggling and steps up his pace. Bowen peers through the trees and sees the Sutpen and his daughter having a splash fight --

BOWEN

Sutpen!

Poppy climbs out first. Sutpen follows.

SUTPEN

What?

Bowen closes the distance until he's right in Sutpen's face.

BOWEN

I'm only gonna warn you once.

SUTPEN

Oh, yeah, you gonna make somethin' of it?

Bowen suddenly shoves Sutpen who barely budes.

SUTPEN (CONT'D)

(prison-hardened)

Go for it.

Bowen isn't a patsy either: he feints a jab and lands a hook to Sutpen's stomach. Instantly, they're on one another, tumbling into the water.

They grapple like animals until Bowen, with the greater rage and adrenalin, gets the upper hand. He pushes Sutpen's head under the water and holds it there. Poppy screams.

POPPY

Daddy, don't!

Bowen realizes what he's doing, and lets Sutpen up, who angrily shakes himself free.

BOWEN

Poppy, you get back to the house and don't come here again.

Poppy runs off, crying and angry.

The two men pull themselves out of the water.

SUTPEN

What the hell is this?

BOWEN

I don't want you going
anywhere near Poppy again.

SUTPEN

You're talking crap, Bowen.

BOWEN

Don't you say a word or even
look at her sideways. Hear?

SUTPEN

We was just swimmin'.

BOWEN

Yeah, you was just swimmin'.

They stare each other down with undisguised malice, until
Bowen spits on the ground and walks away.

FADE OUT

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. BINGHAM FISH BOIL - DAY

A fish house near the docks. Five tables and a boiling cauldron. Bowen sits at the back table staring at a plate of fish sticks and a bowl of fish stew.

Lucas Buck enters, making a show of shaking hands with BOB BINGHAM, owner and overweight fan of fish sticks.

BINGHAM

Howdy, howdy, Sheriff, you
bless our humble shanty with
your presence.

LUCAS

Save the false humility, Bob,
you're a genius with the fish
stick and you know it.

Buck reaches for his wallet while Bingham dishes up a steaming plate.

BINGHAM

Now, Sheriff, your money don't
spend here.

LUCAS

Thank you, Bob.

Lucas sits down across from Bowen. He douses his food in Tabasco, then digs in.

LUCAS

Damn. This is a fish stick.
What's on your mind, Anse?

ANSE

Sutpen.

(beat)

He's worryin' little Poppy.
She's just fifteen. I want
him gone.

LUCAS

She is a healthy looking girl.

ANSE

I've come upon 'em swimmin'
together.

LUCAS

You mean swimmin' together or
doing somethin' else together?
Be honest with me.

ANSE

There was a closeness.

LUCAS

(laughing)

Can't arrest a man for
swimmin', Anse. Not even in
Trinity.

(beat)

You keep an eye on her, and
she'll be safe. She is a fine
looking girl.

ANSE

I don't want him in my house.

LUCAS

Put him up for two more days,
Anse, and that's all I'll be
asking.

ANSE

No good'll come from this.

LUCAS

A man's got a right to protect
his daughter in his own home.

(beat)

I believe those were Sutpen's
exact words...at his trial.

Bowen knows what he's talking about. He nods guiltily.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

You gonna eat that?

He reaches for Bowen's fish sticks.

INT. SCHOOL - EVENING

The classroom is packed with parents and students --
including Lucas, Selena, Gail, Matt, Boone and Caleb.

At the front, Josh has an electric fan pointed at a
windmill, which spins rapidly, creating electricity that
powers an H.O. train through a miniature town.

JOSH

... Energy from wind is cheap,
pollution-free, and plentiful
enough for the future of South
Carolina.

Vigorous applause. Josh's father hugs him proudly.

SELENA

Thank you, Josh, for solving
an energy crisis some of us
weren't even aware of.

(reading)

And now Caleb Temple will talk
about tornadoes and home
safety ... Caleb?

Caleb wheels his gleaming new machine to the head of the
class.

CALEB

This is a tornado chamber.
It'll demonstrate how a funnel
cloud forms.

Using tongs, Caleb places dry ice in a pan of water resting
on a hot plate at the bottom of the chamber. He adjusts the
sliding glass doors.

Caleb plugs the machine in. Flips the switch. Nothing
happens. The dry ice steams a little, but there is no
tornado, no light.

Caleb, worried, flips the switch several times.

CALEB

Maybe there's a wire loose or
somethin'.

Caleb jiggles the wiring. Suddenly, the bulb at the top of
the chamber POPS; the wire short-circuits; black smoke
pours from the top of the chamber.

CALEB

That ain't what's supposed to
happen.

SELENA

Isn't what's supposed to
happen.

The crowd chuckles softly.

Small flames come from the top of the chamber. Lucas Buck watches the machine catch fire, then reaches for a fire extinguisher. He strolls to the front of the class and casually douses Caleb's project.

SELENA

Caleb, darlin', I'm not sure this qualifies as "home safety."

A big laugh from the crowd. Caleb stands awkwardly next to his chamber.

CALEB

I'm sorry about that, Ms. Coombs.

Matt unhappily watches Caleb's project finish in disaster. Lucas catches his attention --

LUCAS

You're not much help to the boy, are you, Harvard?

Matt ignores Lucas and walks to Caleb's side and speaks quietly to him.

SELENA

Well, moving along to the next project. Rebecca?

Matt's words give Caleb a second wind --

CALEB

No! Wait. I'm not done.

(beat)

This chamber just demonstrates what I was gonna talk about. I can still tell y'all about tornadoes and the storms that cause 'em ...

(beat)

The winds can blow more than 500 miles an hour, but what does all the damage is the "pressure differential." There's a thing called Bernoulli's Principle, which says the center of a tornado has really low air pressure.

Caleb holds the audience rapt.

TIME CUT/DISSOLVE TO:

Caleb is finishing up his talk. - Lucas seems bored, but others listen carefully.

CALEB

... so always open your
windows when there's a tornado
warning or your house could
explode from the inside out.

Kids and parents alike APPLAUD. Matt is sharing in Caleb's victory.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CALEB'S ROOM - NIGHT

Caleb comes in. Sets his broken tornado chamber next to the door.

Pulls something out of a notebook. It's an "Honorable Mention" certificate. He climbs on his bed and pins it up. Looks at it. It's a bit crooked; he straightens it.

Then he kicks off his shoes and lays back on the bed, all alone. Closes his eyes.

The room begins to glow with a warm, inviting light. It's MerlyVision. Merly sitting on the foot of the bed.

MERLYN

Caleb, you did real good. I'm proud of you. We're all proud of you.

CALEB

You was there? And Mama?

MERLYN

We were all there, Caleb.

He smiles peacefully to himself, his eyes closing drowsily.

CALEB

I knew it. I could feel it. I was happy...

Caleb falls soundly asleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOWEN'S HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Heat lightning flashes in the sky. The first drops of rain begin to fall, and distant THUNDER rumbles --

INT. ANSE BOWEN'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Another bolt of lightning casts strange shadows through the living room; the wind from the storm blows the curtains.

Anse lays down the law for Sutpen.

ANSE

At night, you're in your room. During the day, you're out of the house. The only reason you're here is as a favor to Sheriff Buck. So you just remember that.

SUTPEN

Oh, I'll remember.

Sutpen turns his back and heads up the stairs. Bowen follows him up the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Anse follows Sutpen, who never turns or acknowledges Anse's presence. Sutpen goes into the extra bedroom and closes the door. The rain picks up, pummeling the roof.

TIME CUT:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - OUTSIDE POPPY'S ROOM - NIGHT

At the opposite end of the hall from Sutpen's bedroom is Poppy's bedroom. Bowen knocks.

Poppy, her face streaked with tears, leans out.

POPPY

What?

ANSE

How're you doing, honey?

POPPY

You don't care. You're treatin' me like a five-year-old.

ANSE

I'm treatin' you like my daughter.

(beat)

And I'm telling you to make sure and fix the little latch on your door tonight.

POPPY

That all?

ANSE

Don't be angry. C'mon, give me
a hug goodnight.

She slams the door in his face.

TIME CUT:

INT. BOWEN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sutpen lies in bed, his eyes wide open, listening. Etta is asleep next to him. A flash of lightning followed by the long, rolling sound of THUNDER startles him. The thunder stops, and he can hear the faint "click, click, click" of the wooden toy. He jumps out of bed and grabs his 30.06 from the corner cabinet.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bowen stands outside Poppy's door, listening. The "click, click, click" is gone; it's just a tree SCRATCHING against the house. He moves a chair down the hall and sits halfway between Poppy's room and Bowen's, gun at his side.

The door to the master bedroom at the end of the hall opens. Etta, in a robe, hobbles on crutches to Anse.

ETTA

You coming back to bed?

ANSE

Not tonight, I ain't.

ETTA

I thought you were gonna to
ask him to leave.

ANSE

I know what I'm doing.

ETTA

Like a fool.

Etta shakes her head and returns to her bedroom.

INT. ANSE & ETTA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Etta dials a number.

MATT (V.O.)-
You've reached the office of
Doctor Matthew Crower. I'm not
available right now. In an
emergency dial my pager at
555-9467.

She dials the other number.

TIME CUT:

INT. BOWEN'S UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

It's late. Bowen still sits in the hallway, the 30.06 next to him. His head tilts back against the wall. Mouth open, he's sleeping.

MUFFLED, EROTIC WHISPERS grow louder; there's a MAN'S and a WOMAN'S VOICE ... building toward a climax --

CLOSE ON BOWEN'S FACE: His eyes suddenly open, his head snaps forward. The erotic WHISPERS metamorphose into the sound of WATER RUSHING THROUGH THE PIPES.

Bowen relaxes.

DISSOLVE TO:

Bowen asleep, again. More sounds: BEDSPRINGS SQUEALING rhythmically, as if under the weight of a couple in the throes of passion. LOUDER AND LOUDER. Bowen awakes with a start: the sounds immediately change. It's only a SQUEAKY SCREEN DOOR, blowing in the storm. Bowen relaxes.

DISSOLVE TO:

Bowen asleep in the chair, yet again. A new sound: FAINT, ECSTATIC MOANING, almost drowned out by the storm. The moaning grows louder, and two voices are now distinct: the deep GROAN of a man, and the more delicate WHIMPERING of a woman -- or is it a girl?

Bowen sits bolt upright. But this time, the sounds continue exactly as they were when he was asleep. An EXPLOSIVE series of THUNDERCLAPS shake the house.

Wind from the storm SLAMS a door back and forth against the door frame, never quite closing it all the way. Bowen looks up. It's Sutpen's door.

Bowen clicks the safety on the 30.06 and marches down the hall to Sutpen's room. Peers in.

BOWEN'S P.O.V. OF SUTPEN'S ROOM

The bed is ruffled, but no one's there. The thunderstorm blasts one climactic THUNDERCLAP, then settles back to a steady, quiet, rhythmic rain --

BACK TO SCENE

Once again, Sutpen hears the ECSTATIC MOANS. He moves down the hall toward the source: Poppy's bedroom.

Bowen tries the door. It's locked. A RAPTUROUS DUET BUILDS TO CRESCENDO as Bowen tries to force the door --

ANSE

Poppy, open up!

Bowen uses the butt of the gun to smash off the doorknob. He shoves the door open a couple of inches before it catches against the latch.

In a fevered rage, Anse kicks the door open --

ANSE

Sutpen!

Bowen rushes into the room.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Sutpen is outside, by himself, having a cigarette, and with a satisfied smile, disappears into the storm.

TWO GUNSHOTS come from upstairs.

Sutpen stamps out his cigarette, then nods, satisfied, and walks away, disappearing into the storm.

CUT TO:

INT. POPPY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The distinctive CLACK, CLACK, CLACK of a handmade wooden toy rolling across the floor, then stopping at his feet.

Bowen sees what he has done.

ANSE

Poppy!

CUT TO:

EXT. BOWEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Matt Crower's car races up the gravel driveway and skids to a stop.

He leaps out, and heads for the house.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Matt bounds up the stairs.

Mrs. Bowen is at the landing, crying, wringing her hands. She sees Matt, and shakes her head.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BOWEN'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The storm has passed. The Crown Vic and other cruisers are in Sutpen's muddy driveway. Ben chats amiably with the coroner, not paying much attention to the house.

INT. BOWEN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bowen is beyond despondent, sitting on the couch, weeping. Nobody is watching him. He rummages in a drawer and pulls out a heavy-duty orange extension cord, then slips furtively into the kitchen.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. BOWEN'S YARD - DAY - INTERCUT

Lucas Buck walks from the crime scene to the shop, where T.J. is sitting by himself.

LUCAS

You'll handle it okay.

T.J.

It's just, it's just, I can't get my mind around what happened.

LUCAS

Son, it's probably time you started thinking about moving up in the world.

T.J.

Well, I can't stay here.

LUCAS

That's where you're wrong.
Trinity needs things repaired.
Hell, we need a Mr. Fix-It.
(sizing him up)
You could start your own
business.

T.J.

I ain't got that kind of
money.

LUCAS

Something could be arranged
... say a low interest loan.
Particularly if somethin' came
on the market at a good price.

T.J. understands his meaning. His eyes narrow. He considers
the offer.

INT. BOWEN'S KITCHEN - DAY - INTERCUT

Bowen moves like an automaton -- his mind is made up. He
has fashioned the extension cord into a noose. Tosses it
over an exposed beam. Tests its strength. Stands on a
kitchen chair. Puts the noose around his neck. Takes up
the slack --

EXT. BOWEN'S YARD - DAY - INTERCUT

T.J. has reached a decision --

T.J.

I've always wanted to own my
own business.

LUCAS

And I can arrange it. Down
the road, maybe I'll ask you
for a small favor --

Lucas puts out his hand to shake. T.J.'s hand meets his.

At the precise moment they shake, we see behind them,
through the window to the kitchen, where --

INT. BOWEN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Bowen's feet drop off the chair. As he violently thrashes
in mid-air, we hear a familiar song, slightly altered:

CHILDREN'S VOICES

Bowen the Junkman,
Something in your head
Sent you down the hallway
To your daughter's bed:
Nobody will ever know
What it was she said
Before you loaded up your gun
And you shot her dead.

Bowen's feet finally go limp.

FADE OUT

THE END