

"O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU"

By

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BLACK

together,
In black, we hear a chain-gang chant, many voices
spaced around the unison strike of picks against rock. A
title burns in:

O muse!
Sing in me, and through me tell the story
Of that man skilled in all the ways of contending...
A wanderer, harried for years on end...

On the sound of an impact we cut to:

A PICK

splitting a rock.

at
As the chant continues, wider angles show the chain-gang
work. They are black men in bleached and faded stripes,
chained together, working under a brutal midday sun.

lazily
It is flat delta countryside; the straight-ruled road
stretches to infinity. Mounted guards with shotguns
patrol the line.

The chain-gang chant is regular and, it seems, timeless.

We slowly fade out, returning to

BLACK

The last of the voices fades.

Harry
After a long beat we hear the guitar introduction to
McClintock's 'The Big Rock Candy Mountain.'

A WHEAT FIELD

beats
A road cuts across the middle background. Noonday sun
down.

pick
We hear the distant picks and shovels of men at work and
see, rising above ground level, the occasional upraised
and spade heaving dirt. Men are digging a ditch alongside
the road.

duck-
After a long beat, three men pop up in the wheat field in
the middle foreground. They wear faded stripes and grey

throwing
clanking
them
back

billed caps. They scurry abreast toward the camera,
an occasional glance back at the ditch-diggers. A
sound accompanies their run. Oddly, the wheat between
sweeps down as they run. After a brief sprint they drop
down into the wheat.

along
shotgun
the

In the background a man enters frame left, strolling
the road, wearing a khaki uniform and sunglasses, a
resting against one shoulder. He glances idly down into
ditch and strolls on out of frame right.

The three men rise back up from the wheat and, clanking,
resume their sprint.

THREE PAIRS OF EYES

behind

They are topped by three cap bills, and peer out from
a blind of greenery. We hear distant whistling.

the
leads

The men are looking at a weathered barn. A young boy,
whistling, is heading down the road that leads away from
barn, jiggling the traces of the old plough horse that
him. He turns a corner and is gone.

BARNYARD

are
squawking
bunched

The three clanking men (we can now see their leg irons)
awkwardly chasing a chicken around the yard. The
yardbird doesn't need to move much to elude the three
men.

COUNTRY LANE

It curves in a gentle S into the background. It is sun-
dappled, pretty.

We hear clanking footsteps approaching at a trot.

the
one

The three men enter in the foreground and trot on down
lane. The leftmost has a flapping chicken tucked under
arm.

AFTERNOON CAMPFIRE

fire,

The three men sit in a side-by-side arc around a dying

chicken
the

one of them contentedly picking his teeth with a small
bone, another wiping grease off his chin with a sleeve,
third idly poking at the fire with a spit.

listening.

Each of them, still bound by chains, clinks as he moves.
One of them abruptly cocks his head, listening.
The others notice his attitude and also freeze,

We hear the distant baying of hounds.

ROLLING HILLS

From high on a ridge we see the three chained men running
toward us.

sound.

In addition to their clanks we hear a distant chugging

TRACKING

Laterally with the clanking, running feet.

The chugging sound is very loud.

RUNNING

Next to a freight train. A boxcar door is open.

INSIDE THE BOXCAR

himself

The lead convict hooks an elbow in and starts hauling
up, his two clanking friends keeping pace outside.

clamber

Six hobos sit in the boxcar, lounging against sacks of
O'Daniel's Flour. They impassively watch the convict

in as his two confederates run to keep up.

stubble

The convict hauls himself to his feet. In spite of his
he has carefully tended hair and a pencil mustache. He is
Everett.

As he dusts himself off:

EVERETT

Say, uh, any a you boys smithies?

The hobos stare.

second

Everett gives an ingratiating smile as, behind him, the
convict starts to haul himself into the boxcar, the third
convict still keeping pace outside.

EVERETT

Or, if not smithies per se, were you otherwise trained in the metallurgic arts before straitened circumstances forced you into a life of aimless wanderin'?

immediately
in
the
grooves

The convict running outside the boxcar door stumbles and disappears and the middle convict is yanked out after. Everett, just finishing his speech, flips forward turn, smashes his chin onto the floor and is sucked out open doorway, his clawing fingernails leaving parallel on the boxcar floorboards.

The hobos impassively watch.

OUTSIDE

embankment.

The three men tumble, clanking, down the track

the

Squash - they come to a rest in swampland at the bottom. They shake their heads clear, then rise to their feet in muck and watch the train recede.

Its fading clatter leaves the baying of hounds.

EVERETT

Jesus - can't I count on you people?

The second con is Delmar.

DELMAR

Sorry, Everett.

Everett looks desperately about.

EVERETT

All right - if we take off through that bayou-

angrily

The third con, Pete, bald but also with beard stubble, cuts in.

PETE

Wait a minute! Who elected you leader a this outfit?

EVERETT

Well, Pete, I just figured it should be the one with capacity for abstract thought. But if that ain't the consensus view, hell, let's put her to a vote!

PETE

Suits me! I'm votin' for yours truly!

EVERETT

Well I'm votin' for yours truly too!

Both men look interrogatively to Delmar.

He looks from Pete to Everett, and nods agreeably.

DELMAR

Okay - I'm with you fellas.

Everett makes a sudden hushing gesture and all listen.

hear a
of
track.

The baying of hounds is louder now, but through it we
a rusty pump. The men turn in unison to look up the

toward

A small, distant form is moving slowly up the track
them.

flatcar.

As it draws closer it resolves into a human-propelled
An ancient black man rhythmically pumps its long seesaw
handle.

to

The three convicts look out at the swampland which begins
show movement, the bowing grass trampled by men and dogs.
The flatcar draws even and slows.

EVERETT

Mind if we join you, ol' timer?

OLD MAN

Join me, my sons.

pumping.

The three men clamber aboard and the old man resumes

hand

The three men exchange glances; Delmar waves a clanking
before the old man's milky eyes. No reaction.

DELMAR

You work for the railroad, grandpa?

OLD MAN

I work for no man.

PETE

Got a name, do ya?

OLD MAN

I have no name.

EVERETT

Well, that right there may be why you've had difficulty finding gainful employment. Ya see, in the mart of competitive commerce, the-

OLD MAN

You seek a great fortune, you three who are now in chains...

The men fall silent.

OLD MAN

And you will find a fortune - though it will not be the fortune you seek...

The three convicts, faces upturned, listen raptly to the blind prophet.

OLD MAN

...But first, first you must travel a long and difficult road - a road fraught with peril, uh-huh, and pregnant with adventure. You shall see things wonderful to tell. You shall see a cow on the roof of a cottonhouse, uh-huh, and oh, so many startlements...

The cloudy eyes of the old man stare sightlessly down the track as the seesaw handle rises and falls through frame.

OLD MAN

...I cannot say how long this road shall be. But fear not the obstacles in your path, for Fate has vouchsafed your reward. And though the road may wind, and yea, your hearts grow weary, still shall ye follow the way, even unto your salvation.

contemplate The old man pumps - reek-a reek-a reek-a - as all his words.

Loud and sudden:

OLD MAN

IZZAT CLEAR?

The men start, then mumble polite acknowledgement.

a golden The railroad tracks wind to the setting sun. Reek-a reek-a reek-a - the flatcar rolls, in wide shot, toward the horizon.

FADE

OUT

DAY

A hot dusty road leading up to a lone farmhouse.

The three men walk, clanking and abreast.

DELMAR

How'd he know about the treasure?

EVERETT

Don't know, Delmar--though the blind are reputed to possess sensitivities compensatin' for their lack of sight, even to the point of developing para-normal psychic powers. Now clearly, seein' the future would fall neatly into that ka-taggerly. It's not so surprising, then, if an organism deprived of earthly vision--

PETE

He said we wouldn't get it! He said we wouldn't get the treasure we seek!

Everett grows testy:

EVERETT

Well what does he know - he's an ignorant old man! Jesus, Pete, I'm telling you I buried it myself, and if your cousin still runs this-here horse farm and has a forge and some shoein' impediments to restore our liberty of movement--

Bang! A rifle shot kicks up dust in front of the men.

CHILD'S VOICE

Hold it rah chair!

front

The front of the farm house shows only a harshly shaded porch and a dark screen door.

almost

The screen door swings open and a child emerges on to the porch and steps down into the sunlight, holding a gun

bigger than he is. The grimy-faced boy, about eight years old, wears tattered overalls.

CHILD

You men from the bank?

PETE

You Wash's boy?

CHILD

Yassir! And Daddy tolt me I'm to shoot whosoever from the bank!

hands. He pokes his rifle at the three men, who raise their

DELMAR

Well, we ain't from no bank, young feller.

CHILD

Yassir! I'm also suppose to shoot folks servin' papers!

DELMAR

Well we ain't got no papers.

CHILD

Yassir! I nicked the census man!

DELMAR

There's a good boy. Is your daddy about?

THE BACK OF THE HOUSE

rusted
farm
artlessly
corner,

Wash Hogwallop, a sour-looking bald man, sits near a bathtub in a yard littered with ancient car parts and implements overgrown with weeds. He is whittling at a stick.

He glances up as the three convicts clank around the corner, then returns to his whittling.

WASH

'Lo, Pete. Hoor yer friends?

EVERETT

Pleased to make your acquaintance, Mister Hogwallop. M'name's Ulysses Everett McGill.

DELMAR

'N I'm Delmar O'Donnell.

PETE

How ya been, Wash? Been what, twelve, thirteen year'n?

Still looking sourly at his whittling:

WASH

You've grown chatty.

He tosses the stick aside and sighs.

WASH

I expect you'll want them chains knocked off.

THE HOGWALLOP KITCHEN

The four men and little boy sit around the kitchen table eating stew. A Sears Roebuck catalogue on the boy's chair brings him to table height. The cons are now rid of their chains and are dressed in ill-fitting farmer's wear.

WASH

year They foreclosed on Cousin Vester. He hanged himself a come May.

PETE
And Uncle Ratliff?

WASH
The anthrax took most of his cows.
The rest don't milk, and he lost a
boy to mumps.

PETE
Where's Cora, Cousin Wash?

Wash glances at the little boy.

WASH
Couldn't say. Mrs. Hogwallop up and
R-U-N-N-O-F-T.

EVERETT
Mm. Must've been lookin' for answers.

WASH
Possibly. Good riddance, far as I'm
concerned...

The three men slurp their stew.

WASH
I do miss her cookin' though.

DELMAR
This stew's awful good.

WASH
Think so?

He sniffs dubiously at his spoon.

WASH
I slaughtered this horse last Tuesday;
'm afraid she's startin' to turn.

LIVING ROOM

radio. Later. The four men sit about listening to a big box
a Wash is whittling once again; Everett dips his comb into

digging
in

pomade jar and carefully works on his hair; Pete is
around with a toothpick; Delmar dreamily waves one hand
time to the music.

The music ends.

ANNOUNCER

Well, that's the last number for
tonight's 'Pass the Biscuits Pappy
O'Daniel Flour Hour.' This is Pappy
O'Daniel, hopin' you folks been
enjoyin' that good old-timey music,
and remember, when you're fixin' to
fry up some flapjacks or bake a mess
a biscuits, use cool clear water and
good pure Pappy O'Daniel flour for
that 'Pass the Biscuits, Pappy'
flavor. So tune in next week folks,
and till then whyncha turn to your
better half and sing along with Pappy:
'You are my sunshine, my only
sunshine...'

Everett clears his throat.

EVERETT

Well, guess I'll be turning in...

He screws the lid back on the pomade.

EVERETT

Say, Cousin Wash, I guess it'd be
the acme of foolishness to inquire
if you had a hairnet.

WASH

Got a bunch in yon byurra. Mrs.
Hogwallop's, matter of fact.
Hepyaseff; I won't be needin' 'em.

THE THREE MEN

Sleeping in a hayloft. Everett wears a hairnet over his
painstakingly arranged hair.

Pete snores on the inhale. Delmar whistles on the exhale.

booms:

A spotlight plays over the hayloft ceiling and a voice

BULLHORN VOICE

All right boys, itsy authorities.

The three men rouse themselves.

BULLHORN VOICE

We gotcha surrounded. Just come on
out grabbin' air!

barnyard.

Everett shrugs his shoulders and peeks down into the

EVERETT

Damn! We're in a tight spot!

bullhorn

From high we see a foreshortened lawman holding a
surrounded by armed deputies.

bloodhound

Next to the man with the bullhorn, a tin-starred sheriff
watches impassively through mirrored sunglasses, a
drooling at his side.

MAN WITH BULLHORN

And don't try nothin' fancy - your
sitchy-ation is purt nigh hopeless.

DELMAR

What inna Sam Hill...?

EVERETT

Pete's cousin turned us in for the
bounty!

PETE

The hell you say! Wash is kin!

An unamplified voice echoes up from the yard:

VOICE

Sorry Pete! I know we're kin! But
they got this Depression on, and I
gotta do fer me and mine!

Pete screams down from the hayport:

PETE

I'M GONNA KILL YOU, JUDAS ISCARIOT
HOGWALLOP! YOU MIS'ABLE HOSS-EATIN'
SONOFABITCH! YOU-

spits

RAT-A-TAT-A-TAT- Everett pulls Pete down as a tommy gun
lead into the hayloft.

EVERETT

Damn! We're in a tight spot!

Pete is enraged:

PETE

Damn his eyes! Pa always said never
trust a Hogwallop-COME'N GET US,
COPPERS!

BULLHORN VOICE

So be it! You boys're leavin' us no
choice but to smoke you out.

EVERETT

Oh no! Lord have mercy!

Men approach the barn with torches.

DELMAR

What do we do now, Everett?

EVERETT

Fire! I hate fire!

PETE

YOU LOUSY TIN-WEARIN' MOTHERLESS
BARNBURNIN' COCKROACHES-

Everett cuts in, his voice breaking:

EVERETT

NOW HOLD ON, BOYS-AINTCHA EVER HEARD
OF A NEGOTIATION? MAYBE WE CAN TALK
THIS THING OUT!

DELMAR

Yeah, let's negotiate 'em, Everett.

The hayloft is filling with smoke. Flames lick
downstairs.

PETE

YOU LOUSY YELLA-BELLIED LOW-DOWN
SKUNKS-

EVERETT

Now hold on, Pete, we gotta speak
with one voice here - CAREFUL WITH
THAT FIRE NOW, BOYS!

Pete grabs a flaming faggot and hurls it down at the
deputized congregation.

It lands harmlessly in some scattered straw.

BULLHORN VOICE

You choose it, boys - the prison
farm or the pearly gates!

The straw curls, lights, and the fire scuttles over to a
parked Black Maria.

With a loud airy WHOOOF! the undercarriage of the police
van pops into flame.

The man with the bullhorn sees it.

MAN WITH BULLHORN

Holy Saint Christopher - OUTA THAT
VEHICLE, CHAMP, SHE'S LICKIN' FAR!

Tommy guns are stored in the back of the van. The drum of

one starts spinning.

Flames lick up the outside of the van as - chinka-chinka-chinka - bullet holes walk across the body.

MAN WITH BULLHORN

Take cover, boys, THAT AIN'T POPCORN!

Yelling men scurry away.

many The vehicle rocks and chatters under the force of the
tommy guns now firing inside. Tires pop, hiss and settle;
doors pop open; glass shatters.

VOICES

Who's that?

An oncoming car is bouncing crazily across the yard, horn blaring. Deputies leap out of its path.

and The car shoots past the chattering van which still bucks
as bounces on its shocks, its interior strobing and flashing
if filled with trapped lightning.

The speeding car heads directly for the flaming barn door and crashes through in a shower of sparks.

flies The car brakes inside the barn and the driver's door
open. The little Hogwallop boy yells over the roar of the flames:

BOY

Come on, boys! I'm gonna R-U-N-N-O-F-T!

Pete, Everett and Delmar pile in.

DELMAR

You should be in bed, little fella.

The doors slam shut and the boy grinds into gear. He has wood blocks strapped to his feet so that he can reach accelerator, brake and clutch. He sits on a Sears Roebuck catalogue to give him a view over the dash.

BOY

You ain't the boss a me!

bursts The car speeds for the far wall, sheeted in flame, and
through.

COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The little Hogwallop boy walks away in long shot down the middle of the empty road. His walk is unsteady, the wood blocks still strapped to his feet.

He turns to face us and hollers:

BOY
You candy-butted car-thievin' so's
'n so's! I curse yer names!

the
Pete enters in the foreground and throws a dirt clod at
boy. It lands shy as Pete yells:

PETE
Go back home'n mind yer pa!

stopped,
the
We pan Pete over to the shoulder where the car is
its hood propped open. Everett and Delmar are looking at
engine.

PETE
What's the damn problem?

DRYGOODS STORE

small
The proprietor is a bespectacled middle-aged man wearing
sleeve garters and a visor. Behind him are stacked, among
other necessities, sacks of O'Daniel Flour. He pushes a
tin across the counter.

PROPRIETOR
I can get the part from Bristol;
it'll take two weeks. Here's your
pomade.

Everett is stunned.

EVERETT
Two weeks! That don't do me no good!

PROPRIETOR
Nearest Ford auto man's Bristol.

Everett picks up the tin.

EVERETT
Hold on there - I don't want this
pomade, I want Dapper Dan.

PROPRIETOR
I don't carry Dapper Dan. I carry
Fop.

EVERETT
No! I don't want Fop! Goddamnit - I
use Dapper Dan!

PROPRIETOR
Watch your language, young fellow,
this is a public market. Now, if you

want Dapper Dan I can order it for you, have it in a couple of weeks.

EVERETT

Well, ain't this place a geographical oddity-two weeks from everywhere! Forget it! Just the dozen hairnets!

PETE AND DELMAR

On a wooded hillside. They sit at a twig fire, roasting a small creature on a spit.

EVERETT (O.S.)

It didn't look like a one-horse town...

He stalks into frame and plops disgustedly down by the fire.

EVERETT

...but try getting a decent hair jelly.

DELMAR

Gopher, Everett?

EVERETT

And no transmission belt for two weeks neither.

PETE

Huh?! They dam that river on the 21st. Today's the 17th!

EVERETT

Don't I know it.

PETE

We got but four days to get to that treasure! After that, it'll be at the bottom of a lake!

He grimly shakes his head.

PETE

We ain't gonna make it walkin'.

DELMAR

Gopher, Everett?

Everett has taken out a can of near-empty Dapper Dan. He scrapes the last of it onto his comb and starts combing his hair.

We hear distant singing - one lone tenor voice.

EVERETT

Well, you're right there, but the ol' tactician's already got a plan-

to
Everett fishes a gold watch from his pocket and tosses it
Pete.

EVERETT
-for the transportation, that is; I
don't know how I'm gonna keep my
coiffure in order.

Pete looks at the watch, puzzled.

PETE
How's this a plan? How're we gonna
get a car?

EVERETT
Sell that. I figured it could only
have painful associations for Wash.

Pete pops the front and reads the inscription.

PETE
To Washington Bartholomew Hogwallop.
From his loving Cora. Ay-More Fie-
dellis.

EVERETT
It was in his bureau.

He screws the lid back on the pomade.

Delmar whistles appreciatively.

DELMAR
You got light fingers, Everett.
Gopher?

PETE
You mis'able little sneak thief...

He lurches threateningly to his feet.

PETE
You stole from my kin!

Everett scrambles up.

EVERETT
Who was fixing to betray us!

PETE
You didn't know that at the time!

EVERETT
So I borrowed it till I did know!

PETE
That don't make no sense!

EVERETT

Pete, it's a fool looks for logic in
the chambers of the human heart.
What the hell's that singing?

We can make out the words now, sung by the lone tenor.

VOICE

Oh Brothers, let's go down, come on
down, don't you wanna go down...

People in white robes are drifting down the hill, through
the woods behind the campsite. They join in with the lead
voice:

VOICES

Oh Brothers, let's go down, down to
the river to pray...

Delmar gazes wonderingly at the white-robed figures as he
answers Everett:

DELMAR

Appears to be... some kinda... con-
gur-gation. Care for some gopher?

the
Everett too watches the white-robed people following in
wake of the tenor. He answers absently:

EVERETT

No, thank you Delmar - a third of a
gopher would only rouse my appetite
without beddin' her back down.

There are more and more white robes drifting through the
woods, all of them strangely oblivious to the three men.

DELMAR

You can have the whole thing - me'n
Pete already had one...

There is an endless stream now, drifting through the
foreground, the background, the campsite itself.

VOICES

Oh, sisters, let's go down, come on
down, don't you want to go down...

DELMAR

We ran acrost a gopher village...

only,
whom
The drifting worshipers wear beatific expressions. One
a middle-aged woman, notices the three convicts around
the rest of the flock blindly drifts. She calls to them:

WOMAN

Come with us, brothers! Join us and
be saved!

THE RIVER

down
White robes stream down the hill, out of the woods, and
the riverbank. The voices swell in a great chorus:

VOICES

We went down to the river one day,
Studying about that good old way,
And who shall wear that robe and
crown, Oh Lord, show us the way...

foreground.
man
singers
down
them.
We are booming down to reveal a minister in the
He stands belly-deep in the river, easing a white-robed
back-down into the water. Behind him a line of robed
lengthens steadily as people stream out of the woods.
Pete, Delmar and Everett emerge from the woods and gaze
at the river. White-robed people continue to drift past

EVERETT

I guess hard times flush the chumps.
Everybody's lookin' for answers, and
there's always-

Delmar wades out into the stream, cutting in line.

EVERETT

Where the hell's he goin'?

water.
Delmar has reached the minister and holds his nose as the
minister incantates over him and lowers him into the

PETE

Well, I'll be a sonofabitch. Delmar's
been saved!

EVERETT

Pete, don't be ignorant-

Delmar is slogging back through the water.

DELMAR

Well that's it boys, I been redeemed!
The preacher warshed away all my
sins and transgressions. It's the
straight-and-narrow from here on out
and heaven everlasting's my reward!

EVERETT

Delmar what the hell are you talking
about? - We got bigger fish to fry-

DELMAR

Preacher said my sins are warshed

away, including that Piggly Wiggly I
knocked over in Yazoo!

EVERETT

I thought you said you were innocent
a those charges.

DELMAR

Well I was lyin' - and I'm proud to
say that that sin's been warshed
away too! Neither God nor man's got
nothin' on me now! Come on in, boys,
the water's fine!

LATER

The smoldering twig fire. A bloodhound on a leash circles
into frame, its tail fiercely wagging.

We follow it as, nose to the ground and straining against
its leash, it waddles over to an empty tin of Dapper Dan
pomade.

A VOICE

All tight, boys! We got the scent!

A CAR

smile.

Everett drives, shaking his head with a forebearing

Pete, sitting next to him, and Delmar, in back, are both
dripping wet.

Pete is sullen:

PETE

The preacher said it absolved us.

EVERETT

For him, not for the law! I'm
surprised at you, Pete. Hell, I gave
you credit for more brains than
Delmar.

DELMAR

But there were witnesses, saw us
redeemed!

EVERETT

That's not the issue, Delmar. Even
if it did put you square with the
Lord, the State of Mississippi is
more hardnosed.

DELMAR

You should a joined us, Everett. It
couldn't a hurt none.

PETE

Hell, at least it woulda washed away
the stink of that pomade.

EVERETT

Join you two ignorant fools in a ridiculous superstition? Thank you anyway. And I like the smell of my hair treatment - the pleasing odor is half the point.

He shakes his head and laughs.

EVERETT

Baptism. You two are just dumber'n a bag of hammers. Well, I guess you're my cross to bear-

DELMAR

Pull over, Everett - let's give that colored boy a lift.

stands
He
A thirtyish black man in worn go-to-meetin' clothes on the shoulder, waggling his thumb at the passing car. He grabs his battered guitar case as the car pulls over and trots up to the open window.

HITCHHIKER

You folks goin' through Tishamingo?

Delmar pushes open the back door.

DELMAR

Sure, hop in.

pulls
Everett looks at the man in the rearview mirror as he out.

EVERETT

How ya doin', boy? Name's Everett, and these two soggy sonsabitches are Pete and Delmar. Keep your fingers away from Pete's mouth-he ain't had nothin' to eat for the last thirteen years but prison food, gopher, and a little greasy horse.

HITCHHIKER

Thank you fuh the lif', suh. M'names Tommy. Tommy Johnson.

Delmar is genuinely friendly:

DELMAR

How ya doin', Tommy. I haven't seen a house in miles. What're you doin' out in the middle of nowhere?

Tommy is matter-of-fact:

TOMMY

I had to be at that crossroads las'
midnight to sell mah soul to the
devil.

EVERETT

Well ain't it a small world,
spiritually speakin'! Pete and Delmar
just been baptized and saved! I guess
I'm the only one here who remains
unaffiliated!

DELMAR

This ain't no laughin' matter,
Everett.

EVERETT

What'd the devil give you for your
soul, Tommy?

TOMMY

He taught me to play this guitar
real good.

Delmar is horrified:

DELMAR

Oh, son! For that you traded your
everlastin' soul?!

Tommy shrugs.

TOMMY

I wudden usin' it.

PETE

I always wondered-what's the devil
look like?

EVERETT

Well, of course there's all manner
of lesser imps'n demons, Pete, but
the Great Satan hisself is red and
scaly with a bifurcated tail and
carries a hayfork.

TOMMY

Oh no! No suh! He's white-white as
you folks, with mirrors for eyes an'
a big hollow voice an' allus travels
with a mean old hound.

PETE

And he told you to go to Tishamingo?

TOMMY

No suh, that was mah idea. I heard
they's a man there pays folks money
to sing into a can. They say he pays
extra effen you play real good.

Everett's eyes narrow as he studies the man in the

rearview.

EVERETT
How much does he pay?

TISHAMINGO

The car is pulling into the parking lot of a single-story cement-block building with a hundred-foot antenna and a handpainted sign:

WEZY
LISTENING AIN'T NEVER BEEN
SO EASY NOR
SO FINE

suspenders. As the men get out of the car, Everett snaps his

EVERETT
All right boys, just follow my lead.

INSIDE

Everett strides up to a portly middle-aged man who wears dark glasses and holds a white cane.

EVERETT
Who's the honcho around here?

MAN
I am. Hur you?

EVERETT
Well sir, my name is Jordan Rivers and these here are the Soggy Bottom Boys outta Cottonelia Mississippi-Songs of Salvation to Salve the Soul. We hear you pay good money to sing into a can.

MAN
Well that all depends. You boys do Negro songs?

Everett grimaces, thinking.

EVERETT
Sir, we are Negroes. All except our a-cump- uh, company-accompluh- uh, the fella that plays the gui-tar.

MAN
Well, I don't record Negro songs. I'm lookin' for some ol'-timey material. Why, people just can't get enough of it since we started broadcastin' the 'Pappy O'Daniel Flour Hour', so thanks for stoppin' by, but-

EVERETT

Sir, the Soggy Bottom Boys been
steeped in ol'-timey material. Heck,
you're silly with it, aintcha boys?

PETE

That's right!

DELMAR

That's right! We ain't really Negroes!

PETE

All except fer our a-cump-uh-nust!

THE STUDIO

Tommy,
Constant
back.

The three singing convicts form a semi-circle behind
who plays his guitar into a can microphone. They are
performing a hot and harmonized version of 'Man of
Sorrow'.
When they finish Everett whoops and slaps Tommy on the

EVERETT

Hot damn, boy, I almost believe you
did sell your soul to the devil!

MAN

Boys, that was some mighty fine
pickin' and singin'. You just sign
these papers and I'll give you ten
dollars apiece.

EVERETT

Okay sir, but Mert and Aloysius'll
have to scratch Xes - only four of
us can write.

THE LOT

just
by
is
Flour.

A caravan of two oversize cars is pulling into the lot
as Tommy and the three convicts burst out of the station
door, whooping it up.
A sixty-year-old man in enormous seersucker pants held up
suspenders and the outward pressure of a blooming belly
getting out of the first car. His face is familiar from
countless sacks of Pass the Biscuits Pappy O'Daniel

Delmar waves a fistful of money at him.

DELMAR

Hey mister! I don't mean to be tellin'
tales out a school, but there's a

man in there hands out ten dollars
to anyone sings into his can!

PAPPY

I'm not here to make a record, ya
dumb cracker, they broadcast me out
on the radio.

of
and
A big shambling man of about thirty has followed him out
the car. He has the sloping shoulders, the pasty skin,
the aimlessly bobbing head of an intellectual flyweight.

JUNIOR

That's Governor Menelaus 'Pass the
Biscuits, Pappy' O'Daniel, and he'd
sure 'preciate it if you ate his
farina and voted him a second term.

rivals
Two other members of the retinue, older men whose girth
the governor's, are Eckard and Spivey.

ECKARD

Finest governor we've ever had in
M'sippi.

SPIVEY

In any state.

ECKARD

Oh Lord yes, any parish'r precinct;
I was makin' the larger point.

As Pappy brushes by them, Junior wheedles:

JUNIOR

Aintcha gonna press the flesh, Pappy,
do a little politickin'?

Pappy slaps at the young man with his hat.

PAPPY

I'll press your flesh, you dimwitted
sonofabitch - you don't tell your
pappy how to cawt the elect 'rate!

faux
get
Pappy waves his hat at the radio building as singers in
hillbilly outfits with various musical instrument cases
out of the second car.

PAPPY

We ain't one-at-a-timin' here, we
mass communicatin'!

ECKARD

Oh, yes, assa parful new force.

SPIVEY

Mm-mm.

The men head for the station, with Junior lagging.

PAPPY

Shake a leg, Junior! Thank God your
mama died givin' birth-if she'd a
seen ya she'd a died of shame...

A CAMPFIRE

It is night.

Tommy sits in the background, playing and singing a slow
blues. The three convicts, holding coffee cups, gaze into
the fire.

Over the dreamy song:

DELMAR

Why don't we bed down out here
tonight?

PETE

Yeah, it stinks in that ol' barn.

EVERETT

Suits me...

He stretches out.

EVERETT

Pretty soon it'll be nothin' but
feather beds'n silk sheets.

Pete swishes his coffee as he stares into the blaze.

PETE

A million dollars.

EVERETT

Million point two.

DELMAR

Five... hunnert... thousand... each.

EVERETT

Four hundred, Delmar.

DELMAR

Izzat right?

EVERETT

What're you gonna do with your share
of the treasure, Pete?

PETE

Go out west somewhere, open a fine
restaurant. I'm gonna be the maider
dee. Greet all the swells, go to

work ever' day in a bowtie and tuxedo,
an' all the staff'll all say Yassir
and Nawsir and in a Jiffy Pete...

He gives his coffee a thoughtful swish and murmurs:

PETE

An' all my meals for free...

EVERETT

What about you, Delmar? What're you
gonna do with your share a that dough?

DELMAR

Visit those foreclosin' sonofaguns
down at the Indianola Savings and
Loan and slap that cash down on the
barrelhead and buy back the family
farm. Hell, you ain't no kind of man
if you ain't got land.

PETE

What about you, Everett? What'd you
have in mind when you stoled it in
the first place?

EVERETT

Me? Oh, I didn't have no plan. Still
don't, really.

PETE

Well that hardly sounds like you...

A distant Voice:

VOICE

All right, boys, itsy authorities!

The three men tense up. Tommy stops singing.

VOICE

Your sitchy-ation is purt nigh
hopeless!

scramble
Pete shovels dirt onto the fire as Delmar and Everett
to peek over a low ridge.

parked
Their point-of-view shows a lone barn with their car
facing
to one side. Various police vehicles have pulled up
cars.
the barn, and armed men, their backs to us, train guns on
it, some taking cover on the near side of their parked

EVERETT

Damn! They found our car!

comments
The man with the bullhorn continues, directing his

at the distant barn:

MAN

We ain't got the time-and nary
inclination-to gentle you boys no
further!

stands
The three convicts notice the sheriff who once again
impassively next to the man with the bullhorn, holding a
leash against which a bloodhound strains.

MAN

It's either the penal farm or the
fires of damnation-makes no nevermind
to me!

The sheriff makes a signal to a man holding a torch, who
skitters up to the barn and lights it.

DELMAR

Damn! We gotta skedaddle!

EVERETT

I left my pomade in that car! Maybe
I can creep up!

DELMAR

Don't be a fool, Everett, we gotta R-
U-N-O-F-F-T, but pronto!

EVERETT

Where's Tommy?

PETE

Already lit out, scared out of his
wits. Let's go!

DAYTIME ROAD

The three men shuffle down the dusty road.

PETE

The hell it ain't square one! Ain't
no one gonna pick up three filthy
unshaved hitchhikers, and one of 'em
a know-it-all that can't keep his
trap shut!

EVERETT

Pete, the personal rancor reflected
in that remark I don't intend to
dignify with comment, but I would
like to address your general attitude
of hopeless negativism. Consider the
lilies a the goddamn field, or-hell!-
take a look at Delmar here as your
paradigm a hope.

DELMAR

Yeah, look at me.

EVERETT

Now you may call it an unreasoning
optimism. You may call it obtuse.
But the plain fact is we still have...
close to... close to...

He loses his drift as all three men turn, reacting to the
sound of an approaching speeding car.

EVERETT

...close to... three days... before
they dam that river...

crashes
to
The car comes into view cornering on two wheels. It
back onto all four and, as it speeds along, dollar bills
snap and flutter out its windows. The car roars up to the
three men as Delmar waggles a hopeful thumb. It screeches
a halt.

babylike
The driver, a young man in a sharp suit with a round,
face, leans over to call through the passenger window.

DRIVER

Is this the road to Itta Bena?

PETE

Uh... Itta Bena...

two
Delmar plucks a fluttering dollar bill out of the air and
looks at it wonderingly. He holds it stretched between
hands, brings the two sides together, then gives it an
appraising pop.

EVERETT

Itta Bena, now, uh, that would be...

PETE

Isn't it, uh...

at
out
Like a child gazing at soap bubbles, Delmar looks around
the wafting currency, and yanks another fluttering bill
of the air.

EVERETT

I'm thinkin' it's uh, you could take
this road to, uh...

There is the sound of a distant siren.

two
mirror.
The driver, still patiently leaning over to hear out the
brainwrackers, shoots a quick look in his rearview

PETE

...Nah, that ain't right... I'm
thinkin' of...

EVERETT

...I believe, unless I'm very much
mistaken - see, we've been away for
several years, uh...

The driver pushes open the passenger door.

DRIVER

Hop on in while you give it a think.

The three men climb in and the car squeals out.

INT. CAR

the
The driver shoots a glance up to the rearview mirror as
sirens grow louder, then gropes inside his coat.

DRIVER

Any a you boys know your way around
a Walther PPK?

DELMAR

Well now, that's where we cain't
help ya. I don't believe it's in
Mississippi.

fluttering
The man stops withdrawing the gun and appraises his
passengers. Delmar reacts to the paper currency
inside the car:

DELMAR

Friend, some of your folding money
has come unstowed.

DRIVER

Just stuff it down that sack there.
You boys aren't badmen, I take it?

DELMAR

Well, funny you should ask-I was
bad, till yesterday, but me'n Pete
here been saved. My name's Delmar,
and that there's Everett.

DRIVER

George Nelson. It's a pleasure.

giving
He opens his door and steps onto the running board,
Everett a casual:

NELSON

Grab the tiller, will ya buddy?

Everett slides over, startled. George Nelson, now fully

clamped

outside and facing the pursuit vehicles, has one hand on the car roof and waves to Delmar with the other.

NELSON

Hand up that Thompson, Jack.

Delmar gropes in the footwell.

DELMAR

Say, what line of work are you in, George?

EXT. CAR

Nelson sends a spray of bullets back at the pursuit car.

NELSON

COME AND GET ME, COPPERS! YOU
FLATFOOTED LAMEBRAINED SOFT-ASSED
SONOFABITCHES! NO ONE CAN CATCH ME!
I'M GEORGE NELSON! I'M BIGGER THAN
ANY JOHN LAW EVER LIVED! HA-HA-HA-HA-
HA! I'M TEN-AND-A-HALF FEET TALL AND
AIN'T YET FULLY GROWED!

returning

Nelson fires wildly as the pursuit cars gain on him, fire. He suddenly notices a herd of cattle grazing at the roadside and murmurs:

NELSON

...COWS...

He swings the tommy gun over with a whoop.

NELSON

I hate cows worse than coppers!

He lets loose a spray. One of the cows drops and the rest stampede toward the road.

DELMAR

Aww, George, not the livestock.

Energized, Nelson resumes bellowing:

NELSON

HA-HA! COME ON YOU MISERABLE SALARIED
SONSABITCHES! COME AND GET ME!

police

In bovine ignorance of the conventions of high-speed pursuit, some of the cows have wandered up onto the road. The lead police car broadsides one. George Nelson,

cackling

wildly, fires into the air as his car recedes.

SMALL TOWN

The car is speeding into town, dodging and weaving

through
means
spirits.

light traffic as George fires into the air - perhaps a
of clearing a path, perhaps an expression of high

The car screeches to a halt and George hops out, and the
three convicts emerge to follow him.

NELSON
COME ON BOYS! WE'RE GOIN' FOR THE
RECORD-THREE BANKS IN TWO HOURS!

Jowls shaking in a full run, George Nelson bursts through
the door of the bank, followed by the three men.

He fires into the ceiling and leaps up onto a table.

NELSON
OKAY FOLKS! HOLD THE APPLAUSE AND
DROP YER DRAWERS - I'M GEORGE NELSON
AND I'M HERE TO SACK THE CITY A ITTA
BENA!

young
on

He leaps down, fires into the air again, and sweeps a
woman standing in line into a full V-J dip, kissing her
the lips.

Delmar nudges Everett.

DELMAR
He's a live wire though, ain't he?

NELSON
Thanky dear! All the money in the
bag, and you can tell your grandkids
you were done by the best! I'M GEORGE
NELSON AND I'M FEELIN' TEN FEET TALL!

He winks at the three men who obediently wait.

NELSON
It's a kick and a quarter, ain't it
boys?

Distant sirens again.

EVERETT
Pardon me, George, but have you got
a plan for gettin' outa here?

NELSON
Sure boys, here's m'plan!

of

He whips open his suitcoat to reveal a half-dozen sticks
dynamite.

NELSON

They ain't never seen ordnance like
this! WELL, THANK YOU, FOLKS, AND
REMEMBER: JESUS SAVES, BUT GEORGE
NELSON WITHDRAWS! HA-HA-HA-HA-HA-
HA! GO FETCH THE AUTO-VOITURE, PETE!

as He sends a burst into the ceiling, and heads for the door
customers murmur.

VOICE
...it's Babyface Nelson...

George whirls.

NELSON
WHO SAID THAT?!

The customers stare mutely back.

NELSON
WHAT IGNORANT LOWDOWN SLANDERIZING
SONOFABITCH SAID THAT?! MY NAME IS
GEORGE NELSON, GET ME?!

to The customers shuffle their feet and glance uncomfortably
about. Delmar lays a hand on George's shoulder and tries
steer him toward the door.

DELMAR
They didn't mean anything by it,
George.

NELSON
GEORGE NELSON! NOT BABYFACE! YOU
REMEMBER AND YOU TELL YOUR FRIENDS!
I'M GEORGE NELSON, BORN TO RAISE
HELL!

OUTSIDE THE BANK

The siren grows louder as the four men emerge.

EVERETT
You gotta be a little tolerant,
George; all these poor folk know is
the legend. Hell, they can't be
expected to appreciate the complex
individual underneath-

NELSON
Aww, I'm all right-

stick He shrugs off Everett's hand and lights the fuse on a
of dynamite.

NELSON
This'll put me right back on top!

the
The car squeals up and, as sirens approach once again,
three men pile in.

NELSON
OR-VOIR, ITTA BENA! GEORGE NELSON
THANKS YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

crater
As the car peels out - KA-BOOM! - the dynamite blows a
in the street behind.

CAMPFIRE

It is night.

and
George Nelson, now strangely quiet, holds a coffee cup
stares gloomily into the fire.

slaps
After a long beat, Delmar, also staring into the fire,
one knee and ejaculates:

DELMAR
Damn but that was some fun though,
won it George?!

George responds, barely audible and without brightening:

GEORGE
...yeah...

however,
Everett and Pete exchange significant looks. Delmar,
is less sensitive to the Babyface's mood.

DELMAR
Almost makes me wish I hadn't been
saved! Jackin' up banks - I can see
how a fella could derive a lot a
pleasure and satisfaction out of it!

GEORGE
...it's okay...

DELMAR
Whoa doggies!

shrugs,
At length George swishes the coffee around his cup,
tosses the coffee and rises.

GEORGE
...Well, I'm takin' off.

dumbfounded
He digs into a pocket and tosses his car keys to a
Delmar.

GEORGE

You boys can have the automobile.

his Glassy-eyed, he continues to dig in his pockets and lets money fall to the ground.

GEORGE

'N might as well take my share a the riches.

DELMAR

What the - where you goin', George?

George has turned woodenly and walks away, leaving the campfire's flickering circle of light.

GEORGE

...I dunno... who cares...

George's Delmar stares at Everett, who looks appraisingly at money. retreating back. Pete scrambles to pick up the loose

DELMAR

Now wuddya suppose is eatin' George?

EVERETT

Well ya know, Delmar, they say that with a thrill-seekin' personality, what goes up must come down. Top of the world one minute, haunted by megrims the next. Yep, it's like our friend George is a alley cat and his own damn humors're swingin' him by the tail. But don't worry, Delmar; he'll be back on top again. I don't think we've heard the last of George Nelson.

sadly Delmar, gazing out at the blackness that has closed over George Nelson, hasn't really been listening. He turns back.

DELMAR

Damn! I liked George.

A FIELD

an A ploughing farmer has paused to look for the source of distant string-band music, growing closer. There is also approaching amplified voice:

VOICE

Don't be saps for Pappy; vote for Stokes and responsible gummint!

A stakebed truck approaches along the road bordering the field. It is festooned with Stokes banners showing the

bed
if

candidate holding high a broom. Pickers perform in the
of the truck, along with a dancer doing a two-step as he
pushes a broom. A midget in overalls waves his arms, as
conducting the music.

VOICE

He's against the Innarests and for
the little man!

truck

This, the driver's voice, is amplified through a flared
speaker mounted on the roof of the cab. As the oncoming
draws near, the midget bellows out at the farmer, who has
removed his hat to scratch his forehead.

MIDGET

Greetings, brother! Vote for Stokes!

The voice tails away:

MIDGET

Clean gummint is yours for the askin'!

Our pan with the passing truck comes to rest on the WEZY
radio building.

INSIDE

We are pulling back from a close shot of the portly blind
man.

MAN

Hang on! Lemme slap up a wire.

He turns away to load a recording as he talks into a
microphone.

MAN

Folks, here's my cousin Ezzard's
niece Eudora from out Greenwood doin'
a little number with her cousin Tom-
Tom which I predict you're just gonna
enjoy thoroughly.

'I'll

He switches off the microphone as the song, a duet of
Fly Away', scratchily issues from a monitor. He turns his
attention back to a well-dressed man sitting nearby.

MAN

Now what can I do you for, Mister
French?

FRENCH

How can I lay hold a the Soggy Bottom
Boys?

MAN

Soggy Bottom Boys - I don't precisely

recollect, uh -

FRENCH

They cut a record in here, few days ago, old-timey harmony thing with a guitar Accump-accump-uh-

MAN

Oh I remember 'em, colored fellas I believe, swell bunch a boys, sung into yon can and skedaddled.

FRENCH

Well that record has just gone through the goddamn roof! They're playin' it as far away as Mobile! The whole damn state's goin' ape!

MAN

It was a powerful air.

FRENCH

Hot damn, we gotta find those boys! Sign 'em to a big fat contract! Hell's bells, Mr. Lunn, if we don't the goddamn competition will!

MAN

Oh mercy, yes. You gotta beat that competition.

'I'll Fly Away' mixes up to play full over the following.

MONTAGE

wrapped
over

- The three men walk down a flat delta road, the sun shimmering off the rough pavement. Their bank loot, in a bandanna, is knotted to the end of a stick slung Delmar's shoulder.

two
of
Everett

- A different road under a threatening sky. The three men stand in the middle distance, waiting. In the foreground little black boys are walking home, each carrying a block of ice. A horse-drawn cart rumbles in from offscreen and waggles his thumb. Thunder rumbles.

black
Soggy

- A spinning 78 on a green felt turntable. The crude label identifies it as 'Man of Constant Sorrow' by the Bottom Boys.

dripping

- A high shot looking down through the rain past the eave of a barn, under which Everett, Pete and Delmar have taken cover. The three hold their coats pinched shut at

the
neck as they look forlornly up at the weather.

through
- The three men walk along a red dirt road elevated
a bayou.

Delmar
- The three men sit around a campfire. Everett sits on a
stump, expressively telling a ghost story as Pete and
gaze at him from below, wide-eyed and rapt.

burst
- The three men walk past a cotton field dotted with
pods.

dress
- A Woolworth's interior. A sad-faced woman in a calico
addresses the clerk:

SAD-FACED WOMAN
Do you have the Soggy Bottom Boys
performing 'Man of Constant Sorrow'?

CLERK
No, ma'am, we had a new shipment in
yesterday but we just can't keep it
on the shelves.

The sad-faced woman is crestfallen.

SAD-FACED WOMAN
Oh, mercy. Then - just the purple
toilet water.

of
- The three men walk down a road excavated through banks
clay, from which gnarled tree roots protrude.

hand
- A pie rests on a windowsill, steam wafting from it. A
enters from below the sill outside and disappears with
the
pie. A moment later we see Everett's and Pete's backs as
they scamper away across the yard. A short beat, and then
Delmar peeks over the sill. He ducks back down and then
his
hand reaches up to leave a dollar bill. Moments later we
see
him scampering away after Pete and Everett.

as
- Another campfire. The three men sit around it laughing
they enjoy the pie, each with a slab on a plate
improvised
of old newspaper. Everett finishes his piece, licks his
thumb
and tosses the newspaper onto the fire.

begins
We jump in to look at the soiled newspaper as flame

Plans
page
They?' -
at
who
pole.
point,
pincher -
a
the
topped
of
Everett
dives
Delmar,
the
road
Everett
Delmar,

to curl its edge. A story is headlined 'TVA Finalizing for Flooding of Arktabutta Valley'. The flame curls the away, briefly revealing the page beneath - with a story headlined 'Soggy Bottom Boys a Sensation - But Who Are before it too is consumed.

- A little general store. We are very high, looking down a foreshortened Everett, Pete, Delmar and store clerk, is wielding a long telescoping pole that stretches toward us. Everett is pointing up, directing the man with the He moves it tentatively to and fro until, at a certain Everett nods vigorously.

A reverse shows the end of the pole - a long stock- as it closes over a tin of Dapper Dan pomade, resting on a high shelf.

The exterior of the store shows it to be on a corner of a little crossroads town. The three men are emerging from store just as a car pulls up to one of the two bubble-gas pumps out front. A fancyman in a boater hat gets out the car and heads for the store, passing the three; glances at him and, as the man disappears inside, he dives into his car, waving for Delmar and Pete to follow. initially reluctant, is hauled into the car by Pete, and the men take off.

- The spinning 78 recording, as the song enters its last verse.

- A spinning car wheel.

- A panoramic boom up as the car toodles away, down a that winds through scrub grass toward a distant sunset.

THE CAR

The three men are driving through the heat of the day. drives; Pete is slouched in the front passenger seat; in back, picks out 'I'll Fly Away' on a banjo.

Pete listens to something, squints, tilts his head.

PETE
...Shutup, Delmar.

Delmar
Delmar and Everett exchange glances; Everett shrugs and desists.
human,
We can faintly hear a high, unearthly singing. Barely the sound seems to agitate Pete. He looks desperately out the window.
the
His hinging point-of-view shows, down the declivity from clothes
road and half hidden by trees, three women washing in the river.
mouth,
Pete's reaction is enormous. He jams a fist into his eyes widening. He yanks the fist out and screams:

PETE
PULL OVER!

Everett, startled, does so.

EXT.

Before the car has even come to a stop Pete's door flies open and he is stumbling down the bank to the river.

Everett and Delmar follow more casually, Everett chuckling.

EVERETT
I guess o' Pete's got the itch.

AT THE RIVER

three
The unearthly singing, full volume here, comes from the women, beautiful but marked by an otherworldly langor as they dunk clothes in the stream and beat them against rocks.

Pete is all awkward smiles and deep, burning eyes:

PETE
Howdy do, ladies. Name of Pete!

they
Strangely, the three laundresses do not answer, though do smile at him as they continue to sing.

Pete tries again as he reaches into their laundry basket:

PETE
Maybe I could help you with the, uh-

He realizes he is holding ladies' undergarments.

PETE

Ahem. I, uh...

He drops them back in the basket.

PETE

I don't believe I've, uh, heard that song before...

jovial: Everett and Delmar have arrived; Everett is loud and

EVERETT

Aintcha gonna innerduce us, Pete?

the Pete's eyes stay glued on the women as he hisses out of corner of his mouth:

PETE

Don't know their names. I seen 'em first!

Everett laughs lightly.

EVERETT

Ladies, you'll have to pardon my friend here; Pete is dirt-ignorant and unschooled in the social arts. My name on the other hand is Ulysses Everett McGill and you ladies are about the three prettiest water lilies it's ever been my privilege to admire.

one None of the women respond but, as all continue to sing, brings a jug marked with three Xes to Everett.

EVERETT

Why, thank you dear, that's very, uh...

He takes a swig.

EVERETTE

Mm. Corn licker, I guess, uh, the preferred local uh...

He passes the jug to Pete as the woman runs her fingers through his hair.

Pete The other two women are approaching to likewise tousle and Delmar.

cheeks, Delmar's woman caresses his face and, by squeezing his smushes his mouth into a pucker.

DELMAR

Pleased to meet you, ma'am.

the
The singing continues. The stream gurgles. Somewhere, in
distance, flies lazily buzz.

PETE

Damn!

FADE

OUT

FADE

IN

CLOSE ON DELMAR

snoring
We are very tight. Delmar's eyes are closed. We hear loud
snoring. At length his eyelids flutter open, but the
continues.

Delmar groggily props himself on one elbow.

Everett
It is late afternoon. He is still on the riverbank.
snores nearby.

is
The ladies are gone. The hamper of laundry is gone. Pete
gone.

and
After looking blearily about for a moment, Delmar starts
staggers to his feet.

DELMAR

Holy Saint Christopher!

He toes Everett urgently in the ribs.

EVERETT

Whuhh...

DELMAR

Oh sweet Lord, Everett, looka this!

Pete's clothes are laid out on the ground, not in a heap,
but mimicking the human shape, as if he had been simply
vaporized from within them.

Everett rouses himself and looks at the clothes: He scans
the opposite river bank.

EVERETT

PETE! Where the heck are ya! We ain't
got time for your shenanigans!

Delmar stares horrified at the pile of clothes: a spot in
the middle of the shirt is rising and falling, rising and

falling.

DELMAR

Sweet Jesus, Everett! They left his heart!

falling

Everett joins Delmar to look. The rhythmic rising and now travels up the shirt. A large yellow toad sticks its head out from under the collar.

Delmar keens. Everett is bewildered.

EVERETT

What on earth is goin' on here! What's got into you, Delmar!

DELMAR

Caintcha see it Everett! Them sigh-reens did this to Pete! They loved him up an' turned him into a horney-toad!

The toad hops down the river bank.

DELMAR

Pete! Come back!

in

He slides down the bank after the toad, Everett watching perturbation.

him.

The toad plops into the river and Delmar dives in after him. He emerges a moment later with the toad wriggling in his hand.

DELMAR

Don't worry, Pete! It's me, Delmar! Oh Everett! What're we gonna do?!

DRIVING

worried

We hear soft whimpering as Everett drives, sneaking glances over at the passenger seat.

it.

Delmar has the toad in his lap. He whimpers as he pets

Everett hesitantly offers:

EVERETT

...I'm not sure that's Pete.

DELMAR

Course it's Pete! Look at 'im!

The frog croaks.

DELMAR

We gotta find some kinda wizard can
change 'im back!

A beat. Delmar continues to whimper.

Everett squints and shakes his head.

EVERETT

...I'm just not sure that's Pete.

FINE RESTAURANT

Everett

conversation.

The tables are formally laid with linen. Delmar and
sit at a table, a shoebox between them, deep in

EVERETT

You can't display a toad in a fine
restaurant like this! Why, the good
folks here'd go right off their feed!

DELMAR

I just don't think it's right, keepin'
him under wraps like we's ashamed of
him.

EVERETT

Well if that is Pete I am ashamed of
him. The way I see it he got what
he deserved - fornicating with some
whore a Babylon. These things-

He points a knife at the shoebox.

EVERETT

-don't happen for no reason, Delmar.
Obviously it's some kind of judgment
on Pete's character.

ANOTHER PATRON

man

collar.

Sensing

turns

We are looking over the shoulder of a broad-shouldered
in a cream-colored suit and a shirt with powder-blue
He is digging into a huge plateful of steak and eggs.
something, he looks up, cocks his head, and then slowly
to look back.

and

He thus reveals a cream-colored eyepatch with powder-blue
trim; his good eye is looking intently off - at Everett
Delmar, who continue arguing, out of earshot.

BACK TO EVERETT AND DELMAR

Still heatedly discussing.

DELMAR

The two of us was fixing to fornicate!

gives

The waitress has just arrived for their order. Everett
her an ingratiating laugh:

EVERETT

Heh-heh. You'll have to excuse my
rusticated friend here, unaccustomed
as he is to city manners.

He ostentatiously fans some of his money.

EVERETT

Well mamzel I guess we'll have a
couple a steaks and some gratinated
potatoes and wash it down with your
finest bubbly wine-

BIG MAN

dainty

Watching Everett fan his money. The big man stops chewing
and slowly raises his napkin to his lips to give them a
pat.

BACK TO EVERETT AND DELMAR

As Everett closes his menu.

EVERETT

...And I don't suppose the chef'd
have any nits or grubs in the pantry,
or - naw, never mind, just bring me
a couple leafs a raw cabbage.

WAITRESS

Yes sir.

The big man appears as she leaves.

BIG MAN

Don't believe I've seen you boys
around here before! Allow me
t'innerduce myself: name of Daniel
Teague, known in these precincts as
Big Dan Teague or, to those who're
pressed for time, Big Dan toot court.

EVERETT

How d'you do, Big Dan. I'm Ulysses
Everett McGill; this is my associate
Delmar O'Donnell. I sense that,
like me, you are endowed with the
gift of gab.

Big Dan chuckles as he draws up a chair.

BIG DAN

I flatter myself that such is the

case; in my line of work it's plumb necessary. The one thing you don't want is air in the conversation.

EVERETT

Once again we find ourselves in agreement. What kind of work do you do, Big Dan?

BIG DAN

Sales, Mr. McGill, sales! And what do I sell? The Truth! Ever' blessed word of it, from Genesee on down to Revelations! That's right, the word of God, which let me add there is damn good money in during these days of woe and want! Folks're lookin' for answers and Big Dan Teague sells the only book that's got 'em! What do you do - you and your tongue-tied friend?

DELMAR

Uh, we uh-

EVERETT

We're adventurers, sir, currently pursuin' a certain opportunity but open to others as well.

BIG DAN

I like your style, young man, so I'm gonna propose you a proposition. You cover my check so I don't have to run back up to my room, have your waitress wrap your dinner picnic-style, and we'll retire to more private environs where I will explain to you how vast amounts of money can be made in the service of God Amighty.

Everett rises and digs in his pocket.

EVERETT

Well, why not. If nothing else I could use some civilized conversation.

As the three men start to move off, Big Dan gives Delmar
a tilt of the head and a crinkling smile.

BIG DAN

Don't forget your shoebox, friend.

dining- We hear bellowing issuing from a curtained private
room.

INSIDE THE PRIVATE ROOM

Pappy O'Daniel sits smoking a cigar, nursing a glass of

retinue. whiskey, and soliciting the counsel of his overweight

PAPPY
Languishing! Goddamn campaign is languishing! We need a shot inna arm! Hear me, boys? Inna goddamn ARM! Election held tomorra, that sonofabitch Stokes would win it in a walk!

JUNIOR
Well he's the reform candidate, Daddy.

getting Pappy narrows his eyes at him, wondering what he's at.

PAPPY
...Yeah?

JUNIOR
Well people like that reform. Maybe we should get us some.

Pappy whips off his hat and slaps at Junior with it.

PAPPY
I'll reform you, you soft-headed sonofabitch! How we gonna run reform when we're the damn incumbent!

He glares around the table.

PAPPY
Zat the best idea any you boys can come up with? REEform?! Weepin' Jesus on the cross! Eckard, you may as well start draftin' my concession speech right now.

Eckard grunts as he starts to rise.

ECKARD
Okay, Pappy.

Pappy whips him back down with his hat.

PAPPY
I'm just makin' a point, you stupid sonofabitch!

ECKARD
Okay, Pappy.

helpfully As he settles back Eckard looks around the table and relays:

ECKARD
Pappy just makin' a point here, boys.

A MEADOW

off
with
large

The car boosted from the general store has been pulled
the road and parked a few yards into a field littered
bluebonnets and rimmed with moss-dripping oak.

Everett, Delmar and Big Dan sit on a blanket around a
picnic hamper. Big Dan is just sucking the last piece of
chicken off a bone.

He tosses the bone over his shoulder, belches, and sighs.

BIG DAN

Thankee boys for throwin' in that
fricasee. I'm a man a large appetite
and even with lunch under my belt I
was feeling a mite peckish.

EVERETT

Our pleasure, Big Dan.

BIG DAN

And thank you as well for that
conversational hiatus; I generally
refrain from speech while engaged in
gustation. There are those who attempt
both at the same time but I find it
course and vulgar. Now where were
we?

DELMAR

Makin' money in the Lord's service.

BIG DAN

You don't say much friend, but when
you do it's to the point and I salute
you for it.

Delmar is pleased and embarrassed.

DELMAR

Oh, it weren't nothin', I-

BIG DAN

Yes, Bible sales. The trade is not a
complicated one; there're but two
things to learn. One bein' where to
find your wholesaler - word of God
in bulk as it were. Two bein' how to
rekanize your customer - who're you
dealin' with? - an exercise in
psychology so to speak.

He rises to his feet and tosses down his napkin.

BIG DAN

And it is that which I propose to

give you a lesson in right now.

off He reaches up and with one hand easily rips a stout limb
a tree. He casually strips its twigs.

EVERETT

I like to think that I'm a pretty
astute observer of the human scene.

BIG DAN

No doubt, brother - I figured as
much back there in the restaurant.
That's why I invited you out here
for this advanced tutorial.

His club is ready. He swings at Delmar who staggers back
with a grunt.

Everett wears a puzzled smile.

EVERETT

...What's goin' on, Big Dan?

Delmar, though stunned, is faster to size things up. He
charges Big Dan and wraps his arms around him.

Delmar roars.

Big Dan rears back and whacks at his head.

Everett is still puzzled, but willing to be instructed:

EVERETT

Big Dan, what're you doin'?

Big Dan walks awkwardly over to Everett with Delmar still
attached to him like a hunting dog locked on to a bear.

Big
blow

Dan takes a break from whacking at Delmar to deliver a
to Everett.

reeling. The blow catches Everett on the chin and sends him

BIG DAN

It's all about money, boys! Atsy
answer! Dough re mi!

his Big Dan bear hugs Delmar and tosses him away. He whacks
Everett into a semi-conscious heap and then paws through
pockets.

BIG DAN

Do unto others before they do unto
you!

He pulls out their wad of cash.

BIG DAN
I'll just take your show cards...

He walks over to Delmar who is on the ground moaning, and kicks him several times.

BIG DAN
...and whatever you got in the hole.

He takes Delmar's shoebox and flips off the top.

Inside is a bed of straw with the toad resting on it.

BIG DAN
What the...

He pokes around the straw with his finger; nothing else inside.

BIG DAN
It's nothin' but a damn toad!

Delmar, moaning, looks blearily up through swollen eyes.

Big Dan has the toad in his enormous fist.

Delmar moans through cracked and bloody lips:

DELMAR
No... you don't understand...

BIG DAN
Don't you boys know these things
give ya warts?

against
He squeezes the frog, crushing it, and tosses it away
a tree.

DELMAR
Oh Lord... Pete...

Big Dan is over at the car, cranking it up.

BIG DAN
End of lesson.

He climbs in.

BIG DAN
So long, boys! Hee-hee! See ya in
the funny papers!

The car belches and pops and toodles off down the road.

carcass
Delmar staggers to his feet and stumbles over to the
of the frog, weeping.

DELMAR
Pete... Pete... Pete...

FADE

OUT

PAN DOWN FROM BLACK TO BRING IN A TORCH

thunder

Flickering in the night. We hear the rumble of distant
as the continued pan down brings the torch's bearer into
frame - a man with the slavering grin of the dim-witted
sadist. He watches as we hear:

VOICE

Where are they?!

There is the sound of a lash and a scream.

VOICE

Talk, you unreconstructed whelp of a
whore! Where they headed?

Another lash brings another scream.

wields a

The screams come from Pete. His arms, stretched high over
his head, are tied to a tree limb. His interrogator
bullwhip.

INTERROGATOR

Your screams ain't gonna save your
flesh! Only your tongue is, boy!

Another lash, another scream.

INTERROGATOR

Where they headed!

at

sunglasses

A third man walks into the torchlight, a hound drooling
his heels. He is Cooley, the sheriff with mirrored
whom we remember from previous barn confrontations.

COOLEY

Lump. I.O.

The two men acknowledge by backing away from Pete.

We hear a pat... pat... and then the accelerating pitter-
patter of arriving rain.

Cooley looks up.

COOLEY

Sweet summer rain. Like God's own
mercy.

He looks back down at Pete.

COOLEY

Your two friends have abandoned you,

Pete. They don't seem to care 'bout
your hide.

He shrugs, looks off.

COOLEY

...Okay.

out

Looking up, into black: a rope is tossed up - it recedes
of the torchlight into black night - and then drops back
down into the light, a noose bouncing at its end.

COOLEY

Stairway to heaven, Pete.

licks

The two henchmen fit the noose over Pete's neck. Cooley
his lips. His dog slobbers.

COOLEY

We shall all meet, by and by.

PETE

Goddamnit!

the

Cooley holds up one hand. The two men pause in fitting
noose.

Pete is sobbing:

PETE

Godfer gimme!

Thunder crashes.

BACK OF A HAYTRUCK

are

Everett and Delmar sit disconsolately on a haybale as the
stakebed truck bounces along a rough country road. They

both ill-kempt and heavily bruised.

Though still an undammable river of verbiage, Everett now
seems to be talking out of weary habit, not conviction:

EVERETT

Believe me, Delmar, he would've wanted
us to press on. Pete, rest his soul,
was one sour-assed sonofabitch and
not given to acts of pointless
sentimentality.

Delmar doggedly shakes his head.

DELMAR

It just don't seem right, diggin' up
that treasure without him.

We distantly hear picks ringing and male chanting.

Hollow-
Delmar:

eyed, Everett tries to convince himself as much as

EVERETT

Maybe it's for the best that Pete was squashed. Why, he was barely a sentient bein'. Now, soon as we clean ourselves up, get a little smell'um in our hair, we're just gonna feel a hunnert per cent better about ourselves and about...

His voice trails away as he looks out at the road.

and
side
forth.

They are passing a line of chained men in prison stripes duck-billed caps wielding pickaxes and shovels at the side of the road. Guards bearing shotguns amble back and forth.

his

As he stares at the line of men Everett tries to pick up his thread:

EVERETT

...and about... life in general...

The prisoners look like phantoms in the heat and dust.

EVERETT

Jesus. We must be near Parchman Farm.

The men, giving throat to a dolorous chain-gang chant, do not look up at the passing haytruck.

Everett is haunted:

EVERETT

Sorry sonsabitches... Seems like a year ago we bust off the farm...

smaller,

The last man in line swings his pick and, as he grows smaller, looks up. Everett stares.

It is Pete.

until
away.

Lone and lorn, he returns Everett's slack-jawed stare until heat ripples and the truck's dusty wake dissolve him away.

Everett blinks.

EVERETT

Pete have a brother?

DELMAR

Not that I'm aware.

Everett shakes his head as if to clear it.

EVERETT
Heat must be gettin' to me.

The truck rattles on.

TOWN SQUARE

Ithaca, Mississippi. On a bunting-covered stage a pencil-necked man with round rimless glasses addresses a crowd of rustics.

Stokes, pictures, stands
The pencil-neck is identified on posters as 'Homer Friend of the Little Man', and, in life as in the he shakes a broom over his head. A midget in overalls next to him.

STOKES
And I say to you that the great state a Mississippi cannot afford four more years a Pappy O'Daniel - four more years a cronyism, nepotism, rascalism and service to the Innarests! The choice, she's a clear 'un: Pappy O'Daniel, slave a the Innarests; Homer Stokes, servant a the little man! Ain't that right, little fella?

The midget enthusiastically seconds:

MIDGET
He ain't lyin'!

STOKES
When the little man says jump, Homer Stokes says how high? And, ladies'n jettymens, the little man has admonished me to grasp the broom a - ree-form and sweep this state clean!

Stoke's waves.
The midget waves his little midget broom in time with waves.

STOKES
It's gonna be back to the flour mill, Pappy! The Innarests can take care a theyselves! Come Tuesday, we gonna sweep the rascals out! Clean gummint - yours for the askin'!

He beams amid cheers and then, as three girls in gingham frocks run out to join him:

STOKES
An' now - the little Wharvey gals!
Whatcha got for us, darlin's?

The oldest girl is about ten.

LITTLE GIRL
'In the Highways'!

STOKES
That's fine.

Delmar The haytruck has pulled into the square and Everett and
are climbing out.

Everett stares at the stage.

EVERETT
Wharvey gals?! Did he just say the
little Wharvey gals?

Delmar shrugs. For some reason, Everett is enraged:

EVERETT
Goddamnit all!

Onstage, the three girls are singing in untrained but
enthusiastic harmony:

GIRLS
In the highways, In the hedges...

Everett stomps toward the stage, fighting his way through
the crowd. Puzzled, Delmar follows.

DELMAR
You know them gals, Everett?

just
fiddle
Everett.
Everett reaches the stage and climbs up into the wings
as the song ends. The midget starts buck-dancing to a
tune as the three little girls, filing off, notice

YOUNGEST
Daddy!

MIDDLE
He ain't our daddy!

EVERETT
Hell I ain't! Whatsis 'Wharvey' gals? -
Your name's McGill!

YOUNGEST
No sir! Not since you got hit by a
train!

EVERETT

What're you talkin' about - I wasn't
hit by a train!

MIDDLE
Mama said you was hit by a train!

YOUNGEST
Blooney!

OLDEST
Nothin' left!

MIDDLE
Just a grease spot on the L&N!

EVERETT
Damn it, I never been hit by any train!

OLDEST
At's right! So Mama's got us back to
Wharvey!

MIDDLE
That's a maiden name.

YOUNGEST
You got a maiden name, Daddy?

EVERETT
No, Daddy ain't got a maiden name;
ya see -

MIDDLE
That's your misfortune!

YOUNGEST
At's right! And now Mama's got a new
beau!

OLDEST
He's a suitor!

EVERETT
Yeah, I know 'bout that.

MIDDLE
Mama says he's bona fide!

This worries Everett:

EVERETT
Hm. He give her a ring?

YOUNGEST
Yassir, big'un!

MIDDLE
Gotta gem!

OLDEST
Mama checked it!

YOUNGEST
It's bona fide!

MIDDLE
He's a suitor!

EVERETT
Hm. What's his name?

MIDDLE
Vernon T. Waldrip.

YOUNGEST
Uncle Vernon.

OLDEST
Till tomorrow.

YOUNGEST
Then he's gonna be Daddy!

EVERETT
I'm the only damn daddy you got! I'm
the damn paterfamilias!

OLDEST
Yeah, but you ain't bona fide!

EVERETT
Hm. Where's your mama?

Stokes is announcing from the stage:

STOKES
And now let's fetch back the Wharvey
gals to sing 'I'll Fly Away'.

onstage: The girls call over their shoulders as they run back

MIDDLE
She's at the five and dime.

YOUNGEST
Buyin' nipples!

WOOLWORTH'S

sister The faces of a six-year-old girl and her four-year-old
light up.

GIRLS
Daddy!

a Next to them is a two-year-old girl with a string wrapped
around her waist. The other end of the string is held by
woman in her thirties with a haggard, careworn face. The
woman also holds a babe-in-arms.

Everett, entering, goggles at the infant.

EVERETT
Who the hell is that?!

WOMAN
Starla Wharvey.

EVERETT
Starla McGill you mean! How come you never told me about her?

SIX-YEAR-OLD
'Cause you was hit by a train.

EVERETT
And that's another thing - why're you tellin' our gals I was hit by a train!

WOMAN
Lotta respectable people been hit by trains. Judge Hobby over in Cookeville was hit by a train. What was I supposed to tell 'em - that you was sent to the penal farm and I divorced you from shame?

EVERETT
Well - I take your point. But it leaves me in a damned awkward position vis-a-vis my progeny.

A man in a straw boater joins them.

BOATER
'Lo Penny... This gentleman bothering you?

EVERETT
You Waldrip?

BOATER
That's right.

Everett sniffs and, catching a scent, squints.

Waldrip's hair, protruding from under his boater, is plastered against his scalp.

EVERETT
...Have you been using my hair treatment?

WALDRIP
Your hair treatment?!

Everett covers his anger with an exaggerated politeness.

EVERETT

S'cuse me...

He draws Penny aside.

EVERETT

Well, I got news for you case you hadn't noticed - I wasn't hit by a train. And I've traveled many a weary mile to be back with my wife and six daughters.

SIX-YEAR-OLD

Seven, Daddy!

PENNY

That ain't your daddy, Alvinelle. Your daddy was hit by a train.

EVERETT

Now Penny, stop that!

PENNY

No - you stop it! Vernon here's got a job. Vernon's got prospects. He's bona fide! What're you?

EVERETT

I'll tell you what I am - I'm the paterfamilias! You can't marry him!

PENNY

I can and I am and I will - tomorrow! I gotta think about the little Wharvey gals! They look to me for answers! Vernon can s'port 'em and buy 'em lessons on the clarinet! The only good thing you ever did for the gals was get his by that train!

EVERETT

...Why you... lyin,... unconstant... succubus!

WALDRIP

You can't swear at my fiancee!

EVERETT

Oh yeah? Well you can't marry my wife!

eludes.
prances
stunned

With this he takes a wild swing which Waldrip easily
Waldrip adapts a Marquess of Queensbury stance and
about, delivering stinging punches to the nose of a
and outclassed Everett.

A crowd is gathering and voices murmur:

BYSTANDERS

Who is that man?

PENNY

He's not my husband. Just a drifter,
I guess... Just some no-account
drifter...

EXT. WOOLWORTH'S

Its glass doors swing open and Everett is hurled out and
bellyflops into the dust of the street.

BRAWNY MANAGER

...And stay out of Woolworth's!

MOVIE THEATER

Romantic music tinnily plays as Delmar and Everett watch,
Everett slumped down and angrily hissing:

EVERETT

Deceitful! Two-faced! She-Woman!
Never trust a female, Delmar! Remember
that one simple precept and your
time with me will not have been ill
spent!

DELMAR

Okay, Everett.

EVERETT

Hit by a train! Truth means nothin'
to Woman, Delmar. Triumph a the
subjective! You ever been with a
woman?

DELMAR

Well, uh, I - I gotta get the family
farm back before I can start thinkin'
about that.

EVERETT

Well that's right! If then! Believe
me, Delmar, Woman is the most fiendish
instrument of torture ever devised
to bedevil the days a man!

DELMAR

Everett, I never figured you for a
paterfamilias.

EVERETT

Oh-ho-ho yes, I've spread my seed.
And you see what it, uh... what it's
earned me... Now what in the...

to
The screen is flickering down to black as the music slows
sludge and stops.

The theater is dark and quiet.

Everett and Delmar, and the rest of the sparse audience, look restively about.

A man carrying a shotgun enters the auditorium.

behind He walks halfway down the aisle and stops several rows

Delmar and Everett. He scans the theater, then brings a whistle to his lips.

chained At his whistle the back doors burst open and a line of
it. men trot in at double-time. With much clanking they file into one row and then, that row filled, the one behind

They remain silently on their feet.

convicts The first guard and two others who escorted in the
whistle. scan the theater. The first guard again blows his

The two rows of chained men sit.

After another silence:

FIRST GUARD

...Okay boys! Enjoy yer pickcha show!

speed. One more whistle cues the movie to grind back up to

A hissing whisper from behind draws Everett and Delmar's attention:

VOICE

Do not seek the treasure! It's a bushwhack!

middle Everett and Delmar turn and stare, saucer-eyed. In the
haunted of the frontmost row of convicts sits Pete - bald,
Pete.

After a long, disbelieving stare:

DELMAR

...Pete?

Pete whispers again, urgently:

PETE

They're fixin' a ambush! Do not seek the treasure!

ghost. Everett, jaw hanging open, can only stare, as if at a
Delmar stares also, but finally brings out another:

DELMAR

...Pete?

PETE

Do not seek the treasure!

Everett's face remains frozen in horrified disbelief, but Delmar finally accepts Pete's corporeal reality.

DELMAR

We thought you was a toad!

that? Pete squints and cocks his head as if to say, What was

mouth Delmar repeats the whisper slowly and with exaggerated movements:

DELMAR

We thought... you was... a toad!

also Pete shakes his head - didn't catch it - and repeats, overarticulating:

PETE

Do not... seek... the treasure!

A guard murmurs:

GUARD

Quiet there. Watcha pickcha.

VERANDA

Mansion, Pappy O'Daniel sits on the veranda of the Governor's the smoking a cigar and sipping from a glass of bourbon as evening sun goes down.

PAPPY

I signed that bill! I signed a dozen a those aggi-culture bills! Everyone knows I'm a friend a the fahmuh! What do I gotta do, start diddlin' livestock?!

JUNIOR

We cain't do that, Daddy, we might offend our constichency.

PAPPY

We ain't got a constichency! Stokes got a constichency!

ECKARD

Them straw polls is ugly.

SPIVEY

Stokes is pullin' ah pants down.

ECKARD

Gonna pluck us off the tit.

SPIVEY

Pappy gonna be sittin' there pants
down and Stokes at the table soppin'
up the gravy.

ECKARD

Latch right on to that tit.

SPIVEY

Wipin' little circles with his bread.

ECKARD

Suckin' away.

SPIVEY

Well, it's a well-run campaign,
midget'n broom'n whatnot.

ECKARD

Devil his due.

SPIVEY

Helluva awgazation.

JUNIOR

Say, I gotten idee.

ECKARD

What sat, Junior?

JUNIOR

We could hire us a little fella even
smaller'n Stokes's.

Pappy whips at him with his hat.

PAPPY

Y'ignorant slope-shouldered sack a
guts! Why we'd look like a buncha
satchel-ass Johnnie-Come-Latelies
braggin' on our own midget! Don't
matter how stumpy! And that's the
goddamn problem right there - people
think this Stokes got fresh ideas,
he's oh coorant and we the past.

ECKARD

Problem a p'seption.

SPIVEY

Ass right.

ECKARD

Reason why he's pullin' ah pants
down.

SPIVEY
Gonna paddle ah little bee-hind.

ECKARD
Ain't gonna paddle it; he's gonna
kick it real hard.

Pappy

With his mouth forming an O around his dropping cigar,
looks sadly from one to the other, like a spectator at a
particularly boring tennis match.

SPIVEY
No, I believe he's a-gonna paddle
it.

ECKARD
Well now, I don't believe assa
property scription.

SPIVEY
Well, that's how I characterize it.

ECKARD
Well, I believe it's mawva kickin'
sichation.

SPIVEY
Pullin' ah pants down...

ECKARD
Wipin' little circles with his
bread...

A NOOSE

through
hound.
into a

In slow motion it is dropping... dropping... dropping
the night. We hear distant thunder and the howl of a
The sounds recede, and the black background dissolves
pan down from a raftered ceiling as the noose fades away.

like
Their

The continued pan down shows that we are in a barracks-
cabin. It is night. Convicts are ranged in bunk-beds.
snores stand out against the chirp of crickets.

hands
one

In the upper berth of the foreground bed is Pete. His
are clasped behind his head. A manacle and chain links
wrist to a rail that serves as headboard.

He stares up, haunted, at the phantom noose.

PETE
I could not gaze upon that far

shore...

He reacts quizically to a whispered:

VOICE

Pete!

A moment later Everett rises over the lip of his bed. His face is blacked and he sways as if standing on a boat.

EVERETT

Hold still.

He is raising a large, long-armed, short-nosed pincering tool. He locks the nose onto Pete's chain and levers the arms. As his hand chinks free, Pete does not react to his newfound liberty.

to We hear an agonized voice from off as Everett continues sway:

DELMAR

...Cain't stand much longer.

Pete's eyes burn into Everett's.

PETE

It was a moment a weakness!

EVERETT

Quitcha babblin' Pete - time to skedaddle.

THE THREE MEN

woods. We track with them as they walk through the moonlit
is Delmar's and Everett's faces are thoroughly blacked; Pete
just finishing blacking his, and he hands the shoe polish
back to Everett.

PETE

They lured me out for a bathe, then they dunked me'n trussed me up like a hog and turned me in for the bounty.

EVERETT

I shoul'da guessed it - typical womanly behavior. Just lucky we left before they came for us.

DELMAR

We didn't abandon you, Pete, we just thought you was a toad.

PETE

No, they never did turn me into a toad.

DELMAR

Well that was our mistake then. And then we was beat up by a bible salesman and banished from Woolworth's. I don't know if it's the one branch or all of 'em.

PETE

Well I - I ain't had it easy either, boys. Uh, frankly, I - well I spilled my guts about the treasure.

DELMAR

Huh?!

PETE

Awful sorry I betrayed you fellas; must be my Hogwallop blood.

EVERETT

Aw, that's all right, Pete.

Pete is shaking his head, miserable.

PETE

It's awful white of ya to take it like that, Everett. I feel wretched, spoilin' yer play for a million dollars'n point two. It's been eatin' at my guts.

EVERETT

Aw, that's all right.

Pete starts weeping.

PETE

You boys're true friends!

He hugs a stunned Delmar.

PETE

You're m'boon companions!

He hugs Everett, who looks profoundly uncomfortable.

EVERETT

Pete, uh, I don't want ya to beat yourself up about this thing...

PETE

I cain't help it, but that's a wonderful thing to say!

EVERETT

Well, but Pete...

He clears his throat.

EVERETT

Uh, the fact of the matter is - well,

damnit, there ain't no treasure!

at
Now it is Pete's turn to be stunned. He and Delmar stare
Everett.

EVERETT

Fact of the matter - there never
was!

PETE

But... but...

DELMAR

So - where's all the money from your
armored-car job?

EVERETT

I never knocked over any armored-
car. I was sent up for practicing
law without a license.

PETE

But...

EVERETT

Damnit, I just hadda bust out! My
wife wrote me she was gettin' married!
I gotta stop it!

Pete stares vacantly off.

PETE

...No treasure... I had two weeks
left on my sentence...

EVERETT

I couldn't wait two weeks! She's
gettin' married tomorra!

PETE

...With my added time for the escape,
I don't get out now 'til 1987...
I'll be eighty-four years old.

Delmar, not angry himself, is trying to work it out.

DELMAR

Huh. I guess they'll tack on fifty
years for me too.

EVERETT

Boys, we was chained together. I
hadda tell ya somethin'. Bustin' out
alone was not a option!

PETE

...Eighty-four years old.

Delmar brightens.

DELMAR
I'll only be eighty-two.

Pete lunges at Everett.

PETE
YOU RUINED MY LIFE!

Everett's He tackles him and, with his hands wrapped round
throat, the two roll over.

EVERETT
(strangled)
Pete... I do apologize.

PETE
Eighty-four years old! I'll be gummin'
pab-you-lum!

now They have rolled through some brush and their bodies are
halfway into a clearing. They abruptly stop.

well, Pete, lying on top of Everett, looks up, startled by loud
chanting. Everett, lying on his back, tries to see as
his eyes rolling back in his head.

Their point-of-view shows a great open field where men in
bedsheets parade in formation before a huge fiery cross.

and Pete and Everett hastily crabwalk back into the bushes
then push through with Delmar.

wail, The ranks of hooded men, chanting in a high hillbilly
intersect and shuffle like a marching band at halftime.

At length they stop in perfect formation, still chanting, to
face the Imperial Wizard, who stands in front of the
burning cross dressed in a red satin robe and hood trimmed with
gold.

The An aisle leads through the middle of the formation to the
burning cross, before which a gibbet has been erected.
from backmost row has stopped, facing away, only a few yards
the bushes that hide Delmar, Pete and Everett.

As the chanting continues, two Klansmen lead a black man,
whom they grasp by either arm, up the aisle toward the
gibbet.

BLACK MAN
I ain't never harmed any you
gentlemen!

Everett hisses:

EVERETT
It's Tommy! They got Tommy!

DELMAR
Oh my God!

It is indeed Tommy Johnson.

TOMMY
I ain't never harmed nobody!

Pete is staring aghast at the makeshift gibbet.

PETE
The noose. Sweet Jesus! We gotta
save 'im!

Klansmen,
A broad-shouldered man in the middle of the ranks of
sensing something, slowly turns to look back over his
shoulder. He thus reveals that his hood has only one eye-
hole.

fixed
He slowly draws off his hood. It is, of course, Big Dan
Teague. His one good eye looks about; his other eye, now
revealed, is hideously clouded and stares up and off in
sightlessness.

something.
Everett, still crouched behind the bushes, notices
He hisses and points.

EVERETT
The color guard.

guard
Off to one side is a robed and hooded three-man color
displaying a Confederate flag.

satin-
In front of the crowd the Imperial Wizard raises one
draped arm, and the chanting stops.

WIZARD
Brothers! We are foregathered here
to preserve our hallowed culture'n
heritage! From intrusions, inclusions
and dilutions! Of culluh! Of creed!
Of our ol'-time religion!

straightening
having
Over in the bushes Everett, Delmar and Pete are
up and adjusting their appropriated robes and hoods,
disposed of the color guard.

WIZARD
We aim to pull evil up by the root!

Before it chokes out the flower of our culture'n heritage! And our women! Let's not forget those ladies, y'all, lookin' to us for p'tection! From darkies! From Jews! From Papists! And from all those smart-ass folk say we come descended from the monkeys! That's not my culture'n heritage!

A roar from the crowd.

WIZARD
Izzat your culture'n heritage?

Another roar.

WIZARD
And so... we gonna hang us a neegra!

A huge roar - and now the ranks resume their chanting. The color guard hustles up the aisle to draw up behind the two men leading Tommy to the gibbet. Everett hisses:

EVERETT
Hey Tommy! It's us!

Behind Everett in the deep background someone emerges from the ranks into the middle aisle. He approaches with a strong, purposeful stride - Big Dan Teague, bareheaded, holding his hood under his arm.

Everett hisses again:

EVERETT
Hey Tommy!

Tommy looks back over his shoulder.

TOMMY
...Huh?

Everett is oblivious to the big man approaching from behind.

EVERETT
It's us! We come to rescue ya!

TOMMY
That's mighty kind of ya boys, but I don't think nothin's gonna save me now - the devil's come to collect his due!

PETE
Tommy, you don't wanna get hanged!

TOMMY

Naw I don't guess I do, but that's
the way it seems to be workin' out.

EVERETT

Listen to me, Tommy, I got a plan -

head. Whoosh - arriving Big Dan whips the hood from Everett's

Everett is exposed - in blackface.

The chanting abruptly stops. The crowd is stunned.

in Big Dan whips off the other two hoods - Delmar and Pete,
blackface.

From the crowd:

VOICE

The color guard is colored!

Big Dan roars.

The crowd roars.

Everett screams:

EVERETT

Run, boys!

Pandemonium breaks out, and the Imperial Wizard takes off
his red satin hood for a better view.

He is the reform candidate Homer Stokes. Next to him, his
midget also pulls off his midget hood.

Stokes is peeved.

STOKES

Who made them the color guard?

pursues Everett, Pete, Tommy and Delmar, bearing the Confederate
flag, are retreating across the neutral ground separating
the mob of Klansmen from the burning cross. The mob

in full cry.

turns. When the intruders reach the foot of the cross, Delmar

crowd. He javelins the flagpole up and out toward the pursuing

Homer Stokes is mortified.

STOKES

Damn! Can't let that flag touch the
ground!

The crowd gasps and watches, heads tilted back, in

silence.

The only sound is the fluttering flag.

the

Homer Stokes' eyes rise, hesitate and start to fall as flag reaches its zenith and starts to descend.

upturned

We boom down with the hurtling flag toward a sea of white hoods. Dead in the middle is bareheaded Dan Teague.

off

His arms are tensed out at his sides like a waiting kick-returner. He squints up with his one good eye, judging distance and trajectory.

popping.

From somewhere we hear a loud BOINK, as of a wire

The flag flutters.

The crowd is silent.

Big Dan sets and...

WHAP! He snaps his hands up and together.

He has caught the flagpole. The flag has not touched the ground.

The crowd cheers.

cheers.

Big Dan looks around, beaming acknowledgement of the

From somewhere, another BOINK.

As Big Dan's look reaches front again, his smile fades.

His eye tracks up - up-

fall.

CREEEEEEK! The fiery cross is twisting and starting to

At the foot of the cross Everett snaps its last guy wire with his pincers - BOINK - and the four men sprint off.

toward

WHOOOOSH - As the crowd scatters, the cross descends

Big Dan, frozen, looking up.

obliterates

It crashes in a shower of sparks and embers that

Big Dan Teague.

A PACKARD

It is pulling up in front of a town hall from which party sounds filter out.

Eckard,

Pappy O'Daniel emerges from the car with his retinue -
Spivey and Junior.

PAPPY
I'm sayin' we har this man away.

ECKARD
Assa good idea, Pappy.

SPIVEY
Helluva idea.

ECKARD
Cain't beat 'em, join 'em.

SPIVEY
Have him join us, run our campaign
'stead a that pencil-neck's.

ECKARD
Enticements a power, wealth, settera.

SPIVEY
No one says no to Pappy O'Daniel.

ECKARD
Oh gracious no. Not with his
blandishments.

SPIVEY
Powas p'suasion.

PAPPY
What's his name again?

ECKARD
Campaign manager? Waldrip.

SPIVEY
Vernon Waldrip.

ECKARD
Vernon T. Waldrip.

PAPPY
Hmm... His folks from out Tuscarora?

SPIVEY
Tuscarora? Might be. I b'lieve they
is.

ECKARD
Not a doubt in my mind.

Pappy is disgusted:

PAPPY
You don't know where his goddamn
folks from; you speakin' outcha
asshole.

ECKARD

Well now Pappy I wouldn't put it
that strong...

voice As the three men make their way up the steps, Eckard's
is fading:

ECKARD

...but p'haps yaw right...

In wide shot, they disappear into the building.

view A reverse shows the wide shot to have been the point-of-
of Everett, Pete, Delmar and Tommy, who peek out from the
mouth of an alley. Everett hisses his intelligence:

EVERETT

Well, it's a invitation-only affair;
we'll have to sneak in through the
service entrance-

PETE

Wait a minute - who elected you leader
a this outfit? Since we been followin'
your lead we got nothin' but trouble!
I gotten this close to bein' strung
up, n'consumed in a fire, 'n whipped
no end, 'n sunstroked, 'n soggied -

DELMAR

'N turned into a frog -

EVERETT

He was never turned into a frog!

Delmar sulks:

DELMAR

Almost loved up though.

Everett is stunned.

EVERETT

So you're against me now, too!... Is
that how it is, boys?

saddened. Silence. No one wants to meet Everett's eye. He is

EVERETT

The whole world and God Almighty...
and now you. Well, maybe I deserve
this. Boys, I... I know I've made
some tactical mistakes. But if you'll
just stick with me; I need your help.
And I've got a plan. Believe me,
boys, we can fix this thing! I can
get my wife back! We can get outta

here!

car
Headlights play; the men suck back into the alley as a
passes by.

emerges
hood
The car tools up to the banquet hall and Homer Stokes
with his midget. The midget tosses his balled-up white
into the car and both men shrug into their suitcoats.
Stokes is angry:

STOKES
...goddamn disgrace. Made a travesty
of the entire evenin'...

the
They too start up the stairs. Stokes's pace is brisk and
midget hops awkwardly to keep up.

STOKES
...what I wouldn't give to get my
hands on those agitators. Whoever
heard a such behavior. Even among
culluds. Or mulattos, maybe - I
suspect some miscegenation in their
heritage... how else you goin' explain
it - usin' the Confed'it flag as a
missile...

BANQUET HALL KITCHEN

four
with
Everett, Pete, Delmar and Tommy are entering through the
back door. The blackface has been scrubbed off but all
now wear long gray beards as disguise, clumsily affixed
spirit gum. Each is carrying a musical-instrument case.
They elbow past the bustling kitchen help.

EVERETT
Scuse me... scuse me... we're the
next act...

DELMAR
Everett, my beard itches.

PETE
This is crazy. No one's ever gonna
believe we're a real band.

EVERETT
No, this is gonna work! I just gotta
get close enough to talk to her.
Takin' off with us is got a lot more
future in it than marrying a guy
named Waldrip. I'm goddamn bona
fide. I've got the answers!

HEAD TABLE

side
and
as

Out in the banquet hall Penny and Waldrip sit side-by-side at the head table, surrounded by the Wharvey gals. Penny and Waldrip are facing the hall with their backs to the stage the four bearded band members - Everett, Pete, Delmar and Tommy - take their places.

draped
spot

Pappy O'Daniel stands by Waldrip's chair with an arm over his shoulder, leaning in to murmur confidentially. Waldrip sits stiffly erect as he listens, frowning at a spot in space.

Suddenly Waldrip erupts:

WALDRIP

Well that's a improper suggestion!
I can't switch sides in the middle
of a campaign! Especially to work
for a man who lacks moral fibre!

PAPPY

Moral fibre?!

He waves his cane, outraged.

PAPPY

You pasty-faced sonofabitch, I
invented moral fibre!

Up on the stage, the band has launched into a song.

PAPPY

Pappy O'Daniel was displayin'
rectitude and high-mindedness when
that pencil-neck you work for was
still messin' his drawers!

A hissed Voice:

VOICE

Psst! Penny! Hey! Up here!

turns

As the two men continue to exchange sharp words, penny turns her head to look steeply up over her shoulder.

down

Everett is up onstage just behind her. As the rest of the band continues to play, he is parting his beard to hiss at her:

EVERETT

Penny! It's me!

Dismayed, she shakes her head and tries to unobtrusively wave him away. He is undeterred:

EVERETT

No, Penny, listen! We're leavin' the state! Pusuin' opportunities in another venue! I got big plans! Not minstrelsy; this-here's just a dodge - I'm gonna be a dentist! I know a guy who'll print me up a license! I wanna be what you want me to be, honey! I want you and the gals to come with me!

plate She shakes her head vigorously and looks down at her as Everett continues pleading to her back:

EVERETT

They're my daughters, Penny! I'm the king a this goddamn castle!

Stokes has ambled up to the head table.

STOKES

What're you doin' here, Pappy? I guess someone let on there was free liquor, heh-heh.

PAPPY

Yeah, you'll be laughin' out the other side your face come November.

ECKARD

Pappy O'Daniel be laughing' then.

SPIVEY

Not out the other side his face, though.

ECKARD

Oh no, no, just the reg'la side -

This byplay is interrupted by a roar from the crowd.

The band has launched into 'Man of Constant Sorrow', precipitating the huge reaction. Everett, still trying to get Penny's attention, looks up, stunned at the ovation.

Cry from the crowd:

VOICE

Hot damn! Itsa Soggy Bottom Boys!

looks. Everett and the boys, still singing, exchange bemused

A shrug, and they lean into the song with a will.

Everett performs an impromptu buck-and-wing, bringing the crowd to new heights of hysteria.

PAPPY
Holy-moly. These boys're a hit!

JUNIOR
But Pappy, they's inter-grated.

PAPPY
Well I guess folks don't mind they's
integrated.

Stokes is also staring at the band, frowning. He murmurs
to himself:

STOKES
Wait a minute...

Everett catches Stokes' look. The two men look at each
other, aghast.

Stokes raises his voice accusingly:

STOKES
...you's miscegenated! All you boys!
Miscegenated!

Everett raises the volume of his singing. Stokes cries
out:

STOKES
Get me a mike-a-phone!

A mike is thrust into his hand and he bellows into it,
overwhelming the music, which the boys eventually
abandon.

Stokes continues bellowing into the silence:

STOKES
These boys is not white! These boys
is not white! Hell, they ain't even
ol'-timey! I happen to know, ladies'n
gentlemen, this band a miscreants
here, this very evening, they
interfered with a lynch mob inna
performance of its duties!

The crowd stares at him, stone-faced. Stokes plows on:

STOKES
It's true! I b'long to a certain
society, I don't believe I gotta
mention its name, heh-heh...

Nobody joins in the laugh; Stokes slowly strangles on it.

STOKES
...Ahem. And these boys here trampled
all over our venerated observances
an' rich'ls! Now this-here music is
over! I aim to -

Boos start up among the crowd.

STOKES

I aim to hand these boys over to -
listen to me, folks!

The boos are growing in volume. There are cries of 'More music!' and even one 'Shut up, pencil-neck!'

STOKES

Listen to me! These boys desecrated
a fiery cross!

away More boos. Waldrip approaches and nudges the microphone
to murmur confidentially in Stokes' ear. Stokes excitedly
retrieves the mike and struggles to be heard:

STOKES

And they convicts! Fugitives, folks,
escaped off the farm!

This cuts no ice; the boos have become overwhelming.

STOKES

Folks, these boys gotta be remanded
the 'thorities! Criminals! And I
happen to have it from the highest
authority that that Neegra sold his
soul to the devil!

He is hit by a tomato.

'Man The boos are deafening; the Soggy Bottom Boys, sensing
opportunity, launch back into the interrupted verse of
of Constant Sorrow'. The boos become wild cheers.

with Stokes is being pelted by foodstuffs. Shielding himself
one arm, he bellows into the mike:

STOKES

Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Is you
is or is you ain't my constichency?

INT. RUSTIC CABIN

tinny Far up some sleepy holler. An old man in overalls and his
the wife sit hunched before a crystal set, listening to the
voice. They look at each other wordlessly, look back at
crystal set.

BACK TO BANQUET HALL

looks Stokes is almost drowned out by the music as his midget
apprehensively on.

STOKES

Is you is or is you ain't -

plug;
A disgruntled audience member yanks out the microphone
Stokes continues to mouth the inaudible words.
Pappy is considering the crowd.

PAPPY

Goddamn! Oppitunity knocks!

high
He starts clambering up onto the stage.
Two men advance through the clapping audience holding
either end of an eight-foot rail. When they reach Stokes,
other audience members help load him onto the rail.

Onstage, Pappy claps along with the audience.

As they play, the band members fearfully eye Pappy, who
advances on them.

and
relaxes,
Pappy joyfully shakes his fat ass in time to the music
does a little two-step. The audience roars. The band
performing with even more gusto.

and
Stokes is being through the crowd on the rail, jeered at
pelted with comestibles until he bangs out the exit.

As the songs rolls into its big finish the audience roars
approval, and Pappy elbows in to the microphone, beaming.

PAPPY

That's fine, that's fine!...

He drops one arm around Everett, the other around Delmar.

PAPPY

...Ladies'n gentlemens here and
listenin' at home, the great state
of Mississippi (Pappy O'Daniel,
Gov'nor) thanks the Soggy Bottom
Boys for that won-a-ful performance!

Cheers.

PAPPY

Now it looks like the only man in
our great state who ain't a music
luvva, is my esteemed opponent in
the upcomin', Homer Stokes -

Boos.

PAPPY

Yeah, well, they ain't no accountin'
f'taste. It sounded t'me like he
harbored some kind a hateful grudge
against the Soggy Bottom Boys on
account a their rough'n rowdy past.

Boos.

PAPPY

Sounds like Homer Stokes is the kinda
fella gonna cast the first stone!

Boos.

PAPPY

Well I'm with you folks. I'm a f'give
and f'get Christian. And I say, well,
if their rambunctiousness and
misdemeanorin' is behind 'em - It
is, ain't it, boys?

Everett hesitates, not sure where this is going.

EVERETT

Sure is, Governor.

PAPPY

Why then I say, by the par vested in
me, these boys is hereby pardoned!

Loud cheers prod Pappy to another level of inspiration:

PAPPY

And furthermore, in the second Pappy
O'Daniel administration, why, these
boys - is gonna be my brain trust!

Raucous cheers.

The band beams, but Delmar leans into Everett, worried:

DELMAR

What sat mean exactly, Everett?

EVERETT

Well, you'n me'n Pete'n Tommy are
gonna be the power behind the throne
so to speak.

DELMAR

Oh, okay.

PAPPY

So now, without further ado, and by
way of endorsin' my candidacy, the
Soggy Bottom Boys is gonna lead us
all in a chorus of 'You Are My
Sunshine' - ain't ya, boys?

He gives Everett a meaningful look, which Everett holds

for

a considering beat.

EVERETT
...Governor - that's one of our
favorites!

Pappy returns a considered appraisal:

PAPPY
Son, you gonna go far.

The song begins.

LATER

The steps of the meeting hall. People stream out of the
concert into the warm summer night.

steps
Everett, now relieved of his beard, is walking down the
with Penny.

EVERETT
I guess Vernon T. Waldrip is gonna
be goin' on relief. Maybe I'll be
able to throw a little patronage his
way, get the man a job diggin' ditches
or rounding up stray dogs.

DELMAR
Is the marriage off then, Miz Wharvey?

PENNY
McGill. No, the marriage'll take
place as planned.

EVERETT
Just a little change of cast. Me and
the little lady are gonna pick up
the pieces'n retie the knot,
mixaphorically speakin'. You boys're
invited, of course. Hell, you're
best men! Already got the rings.

He raises Penny's left hand with his own to display their
wedding bands - but Penny's finger is bare.

EVERETT
Where's your ring, honey?

PENNY
I ain't worn it since our divorce
came through. It must still be in
the rolltop in the old cabin. Never
thought I'd need it; Vernon bought
one encrusted with jewels.

EVERETT
Hell, now's the time to buy it off
him cheap.

PENNY

We ain't gettin' married with his ring! You said you'd changed!

EVERETT

Aw, honey, our ring is just a old pewter thing -

PENNY

Ain't gonna be no weddin'.

EVERETT

It's just a symbol, honey -

PENNY

No weddin'.

DELMAR

We'll go fetch it with ya, Everett.

EVERETT

Honey, it's just - Shutup, Delmar - it's just -

PENNY

I have spoken my piece and counted to three.

She walks off.

EVERETT

Oh, goddamnit! She counted to three! Sonofabitch! You know how far that cabin is?!

His attention, and everyone else's, is drawn by a procession on the street below. A crowd carrying torches jogs behind a man in clanking leg irons and wrist manacles who is being escorted by four policemen trotting alongside, their nightsticks held across their chests in riot-ready formation.

Everett and the rest of the Soggy Bottom Boys descend the last couple of steps to meet the oncoming criminal.

Delmar

cries out:

DELMAR

George!

It is indeed George Nelson, grinning and game despite his heavy restraints.

GEORGE

'Lo, boys! Well, these little men finally caught up with the criminal a the century! Looks like the chair for George Nelson. Yup! Gonna electrify me! I'm gonna go off like

a Roman candle! Twenty thousand
volts chasin' the rabbit through
yours truly! Gonna shoot sparks out
the top of my head and lightning
from my fingertips!

As he passes he turns to call back over his shoulder:

GEORGE

Yessir! Gonna suck all the power
right outa the state! Goddamn, boys,
I'm on top of the world! I'M GEORGE
NELSON AND I'M FEELIN' TEN FEET TALL!

Delmar, smiling, shakes his head as he watches him go.

DELMAR

Looks like George is right back on
top again.

BLACK

In the black we hear snuffling, growing louder, closer,
slobberier.

being

A crack of light. We are inside a cupboard. Its door is
nosed open by an eagerly sniffing snout.

washed

hairnets,

As the door swings wide the inside of the cupboard is
with light. It contains, next to a tangled bunch of
several neatly stacked tins of Dapper Dan pomade.

PINEY WOODS

woods.

Everett, Pete, Delmar and Tommy are walking through the

EVERETT

Well, at least you boys'll get to
see the old manse - the home where I
spent so many happy days in the bosom
of my family - a refugium, if you
will - with a mighty oak tree out
front and a happy little tire swing...

them.

tree

three

They emerge into a clearing. The cabin stands before
It is indeed a peaceful-looking haven with a mighty oak
in front. There is, however, no tire swing; instead,
nooses hang from one stout limb.

DELMAR

Where's the happy little tire swing?

and

Two shotgun-wielding goons fall in behind the four men

push them forward.

fresh-
rough

Moving forward reveals, next to the oak tree, three
dug graves. Standing at the far lip of each grave is a
pine coffin.

the

The sheriff with mirrored sunglasses, Cooley, steps off
porch, the drooling hound at his heels.

COOLEY

End of the road, boys. It's had its
twists and turns -

EVERETT

Waitaminute -

COOLEY

- but now it deposits you here.

from
bandannas

The goons are shoving them toward the tree. Three
gravediggers, having just finished their work, emerge
the three graves. They are shirtless black men with
round their necks.

EVERETT

Waitaminute -

COOLEY

You have eluded fate - and eluded me -
for the last time. Tie their hands,
boys.

EVERETT

You can't do this -

COOLEY

Didn't know you'd be bringin' a
friend. Well, he'll have to wait
his turn -

EVERETT

Hang on there -

COOLEY

- and share one of your graves.

EVERETT

You can't do this - we just been
pardoned! By the Governer himself!

DELMAR

It went out over the radio!

COOLEY

Is that right?

look

The leering goons, who have been lashing the men's wrists behind their backs, pause, their sadism stymied. They to Cooley for guidance.

So too does the drooling hound.

Silence.

Finally:

COOLEY

...Too bad we don't have a radio.

happy

The goons recover their leering grins and resume their task.

their

The gravediggers stand next to the graves, leaning on shovels. They begin to sing a slow and dirgelike 'You've

Got

to Walk That Lonesome Valley'. Sweat glistens on them and trickles down their faces like tears.

PETE

God have Mercy!

TOMMY

It ain't fittin'!

EVERETT

It ain't the law!

COOLEY

The law. Well the law is a human institution.

Cooley gives the faintest smile.

COOLEY

Perhaps you should take a moment for your prayers.

PETE

Oh my God! Everett!

DELMAR

I'm sorry we got you into this, Tommy.

PETE

Good Lord, what do we do?

head

Pete is in tears. Tommy is terrified. Delmar bows his head to silently pray.

Everett bows his head as well. He murmurs:

EVERETT

Oh Lord, please look down and

recognize us poor sinners... please
Lord...

The singing of the gravediggers begins a mournful swell.

EVERETT

...I just want to see my daughters
again. Oh Lord, I've been separated
from my family for so long...

more
The mournfully building song is now supported by a bass
palpable than audible - the song, it seems, rising out of
the earth itself.

EVERETT

...I know I've been guilty of pride
and sharp dealing. I'm sorry that I
turned my back on you, Lord. Please
forgive me, and help us, Lord, and I
swear I'll mend my ways... For the
sake of my family... For Tommy's
sake, and Delmar's, and Pete's...

The rumble is building.

EVERETT

...Let me see my daughters again.
Please, Lord, help us... Please help
us...

The rumble erupts into a deafening roar.

A wall of water is crashing through the hollow.

It engulfs everything and everybody. The cabin itself is
ripped away; the Soggy Bottom Boys are knocked off their
feet and all is noise and confusion.

UNDERWATER

A silent world. Everett tumbles in the current in natural
slow motion.

pomade.
Suspended around him are scores of tins of Dapper Dan

a
frantically
Other objects spin slowly by; framed sepia-tinted family
portraits, tree limbs, a fishing pole, an outhouse door,
frying pan, a noose, an old banjo, the wild-eyed
paddling bloodhound, a tire with a rope tied around it.

FURTHER DOWNHILL

newly
The churning torrent opens into a lowland to become a
created river, fast-moving but no longer violent.

After a beat of hold on the rippling waters, the surface

is

broken by the up-bob of a pine coffin.

shaking

The coffin floats downstream for a beat and then Everett pops out of the water next to it, gasping for air,

finish

his head clear of water, and moving his shoulders to freeing himself from the rope round his wrists.

Pete and Delmar emerge nearby, gasping for air.

downstream.

The men hang onto the coffin, which bears them

Dazed, they look around.

quiet

The inundated valley shows only the occasional roof- or treetop poking out of the newly formed river. All is

except for the gurgle of water.

DELMAR

A miracle! It was a miracle!

EVERETT

Aw, don't be ignorant, Delmar. I told you they was gonna flood this valley.

DELMAR

That ain't it!

PETE

We prayed to God and he pitied us!

EVERETT

It just never fails; once again you two hayseeds are showin' how much you want for innalect. There's a perfectly scientific explanation for what just happened -

PETE

That ain't the tune you were singin' back there at the gallows!

EVERETT

Well any human being will cast about in a moment of stress. No, the fact is, they're flooding this valley so they can hydro-electric up the whole durned state...

Everett waxes smug:

EVERETT

Yessir, the South is gonna change. Everything's gonna be put on electricity and run on a payin' basis. Out with the old spiritual mumbo-jumbo, the superstitions and the

backward ways. We're gonna see a
brave new world where they run
everyone a wire and hook us all up
to a grid. Yessir, a veritable age
of reason - like the one they had in
France - and not a moment too soon...

His voice trails off as he notices something.

its

A cottonhouse in the middle of the river is submerged to
eaves. A cow has taken refuge on its roof. It stands
staring
at Everett, who returns the stare.

He shakes off the vision and clears his throat.

EVERETT

Not a moment too soon. Say, there's
Tommy!

Tommy has indeed just surfaced downstream, clinging to a
half-submerged piece of furniture.

EVERETT

What you ridin' there, Tommy?

The furniture beneath him begins to rotate in the current
and, to keep his head above water, Tommy climbs in place
like a hamster on a wheel. As the chest exposes its

ribbed

upper half:

TOMMY

Rolltop desk...

STREET

Everett and Penny walk arm in arm, the seven Wharvey gals
behind. The girls sing 'Angel Band' as the grown-ups

talk.

EVERETT

All's well that ends well, as the
poet says.

PENNY

That's right, honey.

EVERETT

But I don't mind telling you, I'm
awful pleased my adventuring days is
at an end...

He fumbles in his pocket.

EVERETT

...Time for this old boy to enjoy
some repose.

PENNY

That's good, honey.

EVERETT

And you were right about that ring.
Any other weddin' band would not do.
But this-here was foreordained, honey;
fate was a-smilin' on me, and ya
have to have confidence -

He is slipping it onto her hand.

PENNY

That's not my ring.

EVERETT

- in the gods - Huh?

PENNY

That's not my ring.

EVERETT

Not your...

PENNY

That's one of Aunt Hurlene's.

EVERETT

You said it was in the rolltop desk!

PENNY

I said I thought it was in the rolltop
desk.

EVERETT

You said -

PENNY

Or, it might a been under the
mattress.

EVERETT

You -

PENNY

Or in my chiffonier. I don't know.

Everett shakes his head.

EVERETT

Well, I'm sorry honey -

PENNY

Well, we need that ring.

EVERETT

Well now honey, that ring is at the
bottom of a pretty durned big lake.

PENNY

Uh-huh.

EVERETT
A 9,000-hectacre lake, honey.

PENNY
I don't care if it's ninety thousand.

EVERETT
Yes, but honey -

PENNY
That wasn't my doing...

two
Indignation quickens her pace. Everett keeps up, and the
are pulling forward out of frame.

EVERETT
Course not, honey, but...

bunch,
we
We are now on the Wharvey gals who follow in a ragged
still singing. From somewhere distant, through the song,
can just hear a rhythmic clack of metal on metal.

of
and
The second-to-last girl is the oldest; she holds a piece
string along which we travel, still listening to Penny
Everett, off:

PENNY
I counted to three, honey.

EVERETT
Well sure, honey, but...

around
open
We reach the end of the piece of string; it is wrapped
the waist of the toddler, who lingers in frame. She gazes
down a quiet street at the edge of town that ends in an
field.

EVERETT
...finding one little ring in the
middle of all that water...

His voice, and that of the singing girls, recedes.

EVERETT
...that is one hell of a heroic
task...

of
The string is given a tug and the little girl waddles out
frame.

rhythmic
A train track is thus revealed in the distance. The
clack is from the hand-pumped flatcar.

singing

The blind seer pumps the car along the distant track,
harmony under the Wharvey gals' receding voices.

THE END