

CARNIVÀLE

by

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(PILOT)

In association with Twilight Time Films
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YELLOW PAGES: 01/25/02

PINK PAGES: 01/18/02

BLUE PAGES: 01/16/02

FINAL WHITE: 01/08/02

1 OVER BLACK:

1

OLD GABRIEL

Before the Beginning, after the great Celestial War between Heaven and Hell, God and Satan established an uneasy truce. Never again would they face each other in direct confrontation. So God created the Earth, inhabiting it with the crafty ape he called Man. And to each generation was born a creature of Light and a creature of Darkness, and they would gather to themselves men of ilk nature. And so, by proxy, through the millennia, great armies carried on the ancient war between Good and Evil.

*

SMASH CUT TO:

1A EXT. CORN FIELD - NIGHT

1A

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING shutters across a field of lush, green corn, stalks rippling under LIGHT WIND.

OLD GABRIEL (V.O.)

The final battle began at the dawn of the 20th Century, between the two Great Wars, in the heartland of an empire called America. It ended when a false sun set the skies ablaze above the Alamogordo Desert, and The Bomb was born. And on that day, man forever traded away wonder for reason.

*

THOMAS LE BLANC - dressed in mud-spattered tuxedo pants and a white pleated shirt, staggers through the corn, one hand pressed over a gaping wound in his neck, GLOWING BLUE ICHOR STREAMING THROUGH HIS FINGERS.

*

*

LUCIUS CROWE - hurtles through the forest of stalks in a loping sprint, his long, SLOW EVEN BREATHS punctuated by the occasional FERAL GROWL.

*

(CONTINUED)

1A . . CONTINUED:

1A

He comes to a sudden stop, wisps of steam rising off his bare back and chest. Fingers a torn corn sheaf, SNIFFS IT:

CORN SHEAF - spattered with LIQUID LUMINESCENCE.

LE BLANC - A SUBHUMAN HOWL slices through the STORM. He casts a terrified glance back and stumbles forward, pitching over the edge of a deep ditch, clawing at the air, a startled SHOUT escaping his lips as we

SMASH CUT TO:

2 INT. HAWKINS FARM - BEDROOM - DAWN

2

BEN HAWKINS eyes flutter open from the dream. Seventeen, lean from hunger, he sits in a rocking chair in a sparsely furnished bedroom. His eyes immediately fixate on

FLORA HAWKINS - late forties, lies in a small bed by the window. Under the frayed sheet, rimmed by cold morning light, the points of her shoulders and hips attest to the ravages of malnutrition and sickness. *

HER FACE - utterly still, eyes closed. *

BEN - gazes at her. A movement OS catches his attention. His eyes flicker to

THE WINDOW - a LIGHT BREEZE flutters the frayed curtains on either side of the open window.

OUT TO BLACK

SUPER: APRIL 19, 1934

SUPER: THE DUSTBOWL

CUT TO:

3

EXT. HAWKINS FARM - DAY

3

FURIOUS WIND, SCOURING DUST. Ben hacks a hole in the hardscrabble with a broken-handled shovel. Eyes fixed, glazed from exhaustion.

A GROWLING ROAR. Ben squints into the MAELSTROM.

POV - The outline of SOMETHING BIG, vague and monstrous.

Ben wipes grime and sweat from his eyes.

POV - A BULLDOZER looms into view, CREAKS to a STOP.

Ben slowly rises to full height, defiantly blocks the entrance to his yard as TWO MORE DOZERS pull up behind the first.

THE LEAD DRIVER - wears a cap, goggles. A bandanna covers the lower half of his face. He pulls it down, SHOUTS: *

DRIVER

We run you down, boy. Law says we can do that. We got the papers. You're trespasser, now.

Ben doesn't budge, gripping the shovel with white knuckles.

BEN

This is my place.

DRIVER

No it ain't. This here place is property of First Merchants Trust. You been warned. Law's on its way.

4

EXT. ROAD - DAY

4

A CARAVAN OF BATTERED VEHICLES AND TRAILERS CREAK to a slow stop. The lead truck sports a gaily painted sign: CARNIVÁLE. SAMSON, a dwarf, stands in the road, peering into the BILLOWING DUST.

POV - The bulldozers completely block the road.

JONES - Mid-thirties, wiry, tough looking, sporting a dusty Cleveland Indians cap. He swings down from the cab. On his right leg, an IRON BRACE.

He limps up to Samson. They have to SHOUT to hear each other over the SHRIEKING WIND:

JONES

'sup?

SAMSON

Boy's not gonna move. They're set to squash him.

JONES

Nah. They won't squash him.

SAMSON

Wager two bits.

JONES

You're on.

Jones starts forward. Samson grabs his arm.

SAMSON

Hey. I didn't say you could stick your nose in it.

JONES

You didn't say I couldn't.

Jones picks up a small rock and limps toward the bulldozers. Samson watches him.

SAMSON

(to himself)

Give them hell, Jonesy.

EXT. HAWKINS FARM - DAY

Jones approaches the first rig, SHOUTS:

JONES

How much it worth to get that hayseed out of the way?

DRIVER

Hell. We'll just roll over him.

The Driver throws his dozer INTO GEAR. Jones fires the rock. Sidearm pitch. Eighty MPH. It SMACKS the Driver's glove

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Oww, shit--

JONES

You don't want to do that. It'll gum up your works, make a mess of your rig.

DRIVER

(massages his hand)

T'ain't my rig.

JONES

Yeah? Who cleans it up? Boss man ain't going to be the one picking that boy out tween treads.

Jones picks up a second rock. A bigger rock. The Driver eyes him, nervous.

DRIVER

You got five minutes.

JONES

Fair enough.

BEN - hacks at the dry soil, his movements growing listless as he drains what's left of his strength.

JONES (O.S.)

This is no time for planting, son.

Ben ignores him. JINGLING. Metal on metal. Reveal A BROKEN SHACKLE clamped to Ben's ankle.

JONES

What they send you up for?

Ben gives him a you-don't-wanna-know glance.

DRIVER

(shouts)

I ain't got all day.

BEN

Mister. You tell that son-bitch better shut his pie-hole or I swear to God I'll beat his head in with this here shovel.

JONES

(to Driver)

Shut your hole!

(to Ben)

This your place?

BEN
 My Ma's. It's ours.
 (to Driver)
 It's mine, you son-bitch!

JONES
 Where's your ma?

Ben jerks his head toward a bundle next to the hole.

BEN
 That's her.

His MOTHER'S CORPSE is wrapped in a tattered quilt, one clawed hand exposed. As Jones stares, Ben gently tucks it back in. The Driver storms up.

DRIVER
 I told you five minutes--
 (sees the body)
 Oh swell.

Jones turns on the Driver.

JONES
 You got shovels?

Cowed, the Driver nods. Jones roughly shoves him away.

JONES (CONT'D)
 Get em.

THE STORM HAS PASSED, leaving a leaden stillness in its wake. The silence is broken only by cracked voices SINGING "NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE" accompanied by an ACCORDIAN.

The Carnivale convoy is parked out front: Battered stake-beds, a couple trailer rigs, a handful of passenger coupes and trucks towing ramshackle, once brightly painted trailers.

Gunny-sacks, suitcases and personal belongings and stage-props are roped on hoods, the tops of rigs. The faded, dusty signs, banners and decorative motifs only serve to make the convoy appear more melancholy. A few ROUSTABOUTS check straps and knots, smoke cigarettes, play cards.

ALEXANDRIA AND CALADONIA - Siamese twin sisters, play a game of cat's-cradle on the tailgate of a truck. Alexandria giggles as they execute a complex move with the twine.

LODZ - sits on the step of his trailer, listlessly drawing figures in the dust between his feet with a stick. He looks up, revealing sightless eyes, MILKY WHITE.

About thirty ROUSTABOUTS, PERFORMERS and FREAKS stand around a FRESH GRAVE, heads bowed, caps doffed, some SINGING, some MUMBLING the words of the old hymn. *

RUTHIE, a wizened, tattooed snake-charmer in her late fifties, plays a scarred SQUEEZE-BOX.

LILA - a massive bearded woman, dabs her eyes.

A GIANT - gazes down at the open grave, singing along in a deep voice.

JONES - looks like he has a hundred more important things he could be doing. Nevertheless, he's a man who finishes what he starts and, damn it, he started this.

SAMSON - impassively bears witness.

GABRIEL - a retarded strong-man with the face of an angel, stands by the open grave, attempting to sing along with the others, managing only a TONELESS BLEATING.

BEN - expressionless, swaying on his feet from hunger and exhaustion. He still clutches his broken shovel. He gazes at Gabriel, more puzzled than upset.

Gabriel notices Ben watching. Self-conscious, he STOPS SINGING. Ben sees something beyond the strong-man:

POV - An old school bus emblazoned with ornate script: APOLLONIA, QUEEN OF THE GYPSIES. In the rear compartment, SOFIE, late teens, watches the proceedings through the window-raven hair, pale flawless skin, violet eyes. To die for.

BEN - stares, captivated by her somber beauty.

SAMSON

Go ahead, Ruthie. Say some words.

Ruthie bows her head.

RUTHIE

Lord, never met this woman. Don't know what kind of life she did, whether she sinned or did good.

(MORE)

RUTHIE (CONT'D)

All's I know, she got a son who gone through serious tribulation and great courage to face down them three big trucks and put her in the ground proper, and that says something, yessir. So she should go to heaven all right. Amen.

ALL

Amen.

A SCREECHING CRASH AS HALF THE HOUSE CAVES IN. The bulldozers belch smoke as they run it under.

SAMSON

C'mon, children, we got dust to shake!

RUTHIE

We can't just leave him.

Samson looks at Ben. The young man stares at the grave. *

SAMSON

Boy ran rabbit from a chain-gang. Still sporting ankle-iron.

JONES

(spits tobacco juice)
Nothing but trouble.

Ruthie throws him a glance that could curdle milk.

RUTHIE

That's what I said about you.

SAMSON

Aww, Ruthie, c'mon, don't do this. We got nothing open.
(pleads)
We're down to tater-shucks!

LILA

He can have my tater-shucks.

RUTHIE

Just to Milfay. *

6 CONTINUED: (3)

6

A DISTANT SIREN. Samson turns. About a mile off across the fields, a SHERIFF'S PROWLER kicks up a PLUME OF DUST. He heaves a sigh, calls to Ben:

SAMSON

You're welcome to ride with us,
boy.

BEN - opens his mouth as if to answer. Then his eyes roll up white and he collapses, sprawled out in the dust, out cold from hunger.

A SPLINTERING CRASH as what's left of the Hawkins place COLLAPSES. Samson glances back at the destruction, then at the distant police car.

SAMSON

Let's get him the hell out of here.

7 EXT. THE UNIVERSAL TEMPLE OF JERICHO - AFTERNOON

7

An impressive edifice flanked by a steel RADIO TOWER rises from the desolation. Smoke curls up from a hundred cooking fires in the SPRAWLING SHANTY-TOWN that surrounds the temple walls. In the distant background, some ten miles off, the hazy ghost of the CHICAGO SKYLINE.

A long, straight road in, the ugly stalks of power poles hugging one side, the shoulders strewn with the battered husks of abandoned vehicles. Two large administrative wings are still under active construction, cranes ferrying girders and material up to WORKERS.

8 INT. TEMPLE OF JERICHO - COUNTING ROOM - AFTERNOON

8

EIGHT WOMEN sit at numbered desks arrayed in a grid. Up front, a heavyset ELDERLY WOMAN READS FROM a dog-eared copy of "I WILL BE THY STAFF: The collected Sermons of Brother Justin" her voice a weary monotone. *

Cash is pulled from envelopes, numbers punched into ANTIQUE ADDING MACHINES. Hand-written letters, photographs and prayer cards are tossed unread onto a conveyer belt, ferried into canvas bins at the far end of the room.

KNIGHTS OF CANAAN - beefy thugs dressed in black stalk the aisles, each armed with a pump Remington. Sharp eyes under broad-brimmed hats scan for pilferers.

ELEANOR MCGILL - mid-sixties, seated at desk #11, slices open an envelope. A VOICE BOOMS over the LOUDSPEAKER.

(CONTINUED)

LOUDSPEAKER

Numba eleven. Numba eleven.

She twitches, cutting her finger. Squeezes it, BLOOD WELLING, then glances pensively toward a large window set high above the counting room.

INT. BROTHER JUSTIN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Dimly lit. Wall-to-wall carpet, mahogany paneling, massive, ornately carved antique furniture, oil paintings. SILAS, a diminutive, fussy-looking man with a small moustache, one lens of his spectacles smoked black.

BROTHER JUSTIN wears a full-length black hassock, a wide-brimmed preacher's hat. Middle-aged, smooth-shaven, handsome and kind. A SOFT KNOCK at the door.

BROTHER JUSTIN

Come in.

A grim, armed KNIGHT enters with Eleanor.

SILAS

Your eminence, need I remind you we're broadcasting in ten minutes?

BROTHER JUSTIN

This won't take three of them, Silas.

Justin dismisses the others with a gesture. With a bow of his head, Silas quietly shuts the door behind them. Eleanor flinches as a BOLT IS THROWN.

BROTHER JUSTIN

I've been watching you, Sister McGill.

ELEANOR

You have?

BROTHER JUSTIN

Yes. I just wanted to personally commend you for your volunteer efforts. To, shall we say, give credit where credit is due.

(notices her finger)

Oh, dear. You're bleeding.

He SNAPS the blinds shut, turns, and we see his face for the first time: Middle-aged, smooth-shaven, handsome and kind. A face you could tell anything. His voice is soft, cordial.

BROTHER JUSTIN (CONT'D)

I just wanted to personally commend you for your volunteer efforts. To, shall we say, give credit where credit is due.

(notices her finger)

Oh, dear. You're bleeding.

Eleanor looks at the BLOOD-SPOTTED HANDKERCHIEF wrapped around her finger.

ELEANOR

Oh! Oh no, Brother. That's nothing, really. Nothing for you to--

A surprised GASP escapes her lips as he takes her hand. He examines her wound.

BROTHER JUSTIN

That's a nasty cut, dear. You should have that looked at. We wouldn't want it to get infected.

(sees something in her sleeve)

Oh, no. What have we here . . . ?

Justin gives her hand a shake.

A LIBERTY DOLLAR - slips from her sleeve into his open palm.

Justin looks at Eleanor, crestfallen. Her chin trembles, eyes filling with tears of shame.

ELEANOR

I . . . I didn't mean to take it, Brother Justin. It's just . . . my boy had an accident--

BROTHER JUSTIN

I know. The tractor blade--

ELEANOR

--shoar his leg off.

Brother Justin effortlessly probes her mind, plucking personal tidbits like fruit:

BROTHER JUSTIN

Yes, and now he lies, cooped up in bed, watching the wheat grow and no one to harvest it. And his eyes, they wander to the bureau . . .

(a beat)

There was a gun there.

ELEANOR

I took it away while he was asleep. Buried it in the yard--

BROTHER JUSTIN

--under the willow-tree by the old silo.

ELEANOR

How did you know?

BROTHER JUSTIN

And you thought a few dollars would make things right. Not much. Just enough to hire some help to bring in the harvest.

(smiles, places the coin in her hand, folds her fingers over it)

Oh, dear Eleanor. I've seen you at the sermons and you pray so hard it breaks my heart. Yet my words, they flow past you like water over a stone.

(cradles her face in his hands)

We are all, each of us, little gods. We carry the seeds of our own salvation within us. You do believe that, don't you?

He suddenly grabs her jaw, squeezes. She COUGHS, spits a silver dollar into his palm.

BROTHER JUSTIN

See . . . ?

Eleanor staggers back, one hand on her throat, the other clawing at her belly. She falls to her knees and VOMITS A STREAM OF SILVER DOLLARS.

BROTHER JUSTIN (CONT'D)

. . . it was there inside you all
the time.

ELEANOR

(whimpers)

Please. No! It hurts--

Justin narrows his eyes, concentrates his will. She retches
up ANOTHER STREAM OF COINS. They scatter on the carpet, slap *
Brother Justin's patent leather boots. *

BROTHER JUSTIN

There there, dear. Let it out.
Let it all out.

Justin caresses the back of her neck as she continues spewing
coins. After a moment, he helps her to her feet, gently *
embraces her. The NO SIGN OF THE COINS ON THE FLOOR. He *
pull back, looks into her eyes. *

BROTHER JUSTIN

Better? *

Tears of pain and bliss in her eyes, Eleanor nods. *

INT. TEMPLE OF JERICHO - COUNTING ROOM - AFTERNOON *

ELEANOR'S DESK - Station Eleven stands unmanned, a stack of *
unopened letters on her desk. A NEW WOMAN is led to the desk *
by a KNIGHT. She takes a seat and begins slicing open mail. *

10 INT. UNIV. TEMPLE OF JERICHO - SANCTUM - LATE AFTERNOON 10

To a white-bread version of "GIMME THAT OLD-TIME RELIGION,"
a corpulent ANNOUNCER in a chalk-stripe suit, hand cupped
over one ear, INTONES:

ANNOUNCER

Bothers and sisters, welcome to The
Brother Justin's Church of the Air.

A CONGREGATION of WORSHIPPERS clad in the distinctive, oddly
formal black garb of The Knights of Canaan CLAP their hands.

IN FRONT - a line of the crippled, blind and diseased, all
gamely clapping.

A FAMILY - Mother and Father, rocking back and forth,
CLAPPING their hands. Then down to a five-year-old, CLAPPING
along, smiling.

ANNOUNCER

(over speaker)

And now, from the beautiful
Universal Temple of Jericho,
broadcasting the Lord's word across
America and around the globe,
Brother Justin!

The sanctum is thrown into darkness. A SURPRISED MURMUR from
the congregation. Hold a beat. The silence is broken by an
ECHOING POP. All eyes turn to the front of the sanctum.

10 CONTINUED:

10

ON THE DAIS - An antique microphone lit by a single overhead spot. A hand TAPS the microphone. Again, a loud POP ECHOES through the temple, continuing AT ONE SECOND INTERVALS.

BROTHER JUSTIN

The clock is ticking, my brothers
and sisters, counting down to
Armageddon.

BROTHER JUSTIN leans into the light, the wide brim of his hat cloaking his eyes in shadow. His approach to the mic is as gentle as a lover's kiss.

BROTHER JUSTIN

The worm reveals himself in many
guises across this once great land

. . . .

11 INT. CRABB FARM - LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

11

MRS. CRABB, a woman in her mid-sixties, and SEVERAL OTHER OLDER WOMEN sip tea and stare at the Philco as Brother Justin's sermon CONTINUES:

BROTHER JUSTIN

(on radio)

. . . from the intellectual elite
cruelly indoctrinating our children
with the savage blasphemy of
Darwin, to the craven Hollywood
pagans corrupting them in the
darkness of the local Bijou . . .

12 INT. DINER - LATE AFTERNOON

12

Several PATRONS crouched over coffee. All eyes on the radio. A heavy, cigar-smoking SHORT-ORDER COOK turns up the volume:

BROTHER JUSTIN

(on radio)

. . . from the false prophets,
cowering behind our nation's
pulpits, to the godless immigrant
scum breeding like rats in our
cities

*

13 INT. BARBERSHOP - LATE AFTERNOON 13

A BARBER clips a customer, both engrossed in Brother Justins's radio broadcast.

BROTHER JUSTIN

(on radio)

Every day, good, God-fearing
brothers and sisters are beaten
down, robbed of their dignity,
crushed into servitude under an
alphabet soup of federal programs.

14 EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK 14

The CARNIVÁLE CONVOY crests a rise, the big sky glowing red to the west by the setting sun, the shreds of clouds on the horizon rimmed with fire.

BROTHER JUSTIN

(on radio)

The WPA, the TVA, the CWA--thinly
veiled euphemisms for Marxism!
Socialism! Godless communism!

15 INT. LEAD TRUCK CAB - NIGHT 15

Jones drives, head lolling with every bump and pothole. Troubled, Samson stares out the passenger side, takes a swig from a pewter flask.

BROTHER JUSTIN

(on radio)

Does the Lord not weep at this
degradation? Does he not tremble
with righteous fury? Does he not
seek retribution?

SAMSON'S POV - A FAMILY huddles around a fire in front of a broken down jalopy loaded with possessions, the VAPOR OF THEIR BREATH giving their faces a haunted, wraith-like quality as they watch us approach and pass.

SAMSON - No reaction. It's like driving past a cow on a country road.

SAMSON

What is this hogwash?

JONES

Brother Justin. Knights of Canaan.
Real popular with the thumpers out
this way.

SAMSON

You rollin holy on me?

JONES

Cheeses me off. Keeps me awake.

BROTHER JUSTIN

(on radio)

And we shall be his scythe,
brothers and sisters! And the
streets shall be washed clean with
the steaming black blood of the
heretics!

SAMSON

Steaming black blood. Must've
missed that part in Sunday school.

He changes the station. Slim pickings. He settles on some
SCRATCHY HILLBILLY MUSIC.

JONES

Talk to Management about the hick?

SAMSON

Thirty-four dollars and eighty-
seven cents in the kitty. Already
choking on the nut. Last thing we
need's another belly to wash. You
know what he says?

(affects a deeper
register)

"He was expected."

JONES

Expected. What the hell's that
supposed to mean?

SAMSON

I stopped asking that question a
long time ago.

A small compound consisting of a main house, a sagging barn,
and silo. It was nice once, but has fallen into disrepair.

17 INT. CRABB FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

17

MADDY CRANE stirs. She's small for her age, eyes hollow, haunted by illness. Pretty in a fragile way. She slides down quietly from the lower bunk, pulls herself toward the window, dragging useless legs.

With considerable difficulty, she pulls herself up a step-stool and peers out the window.

POV - the brightly painted Carnivale convoy stirs up dust in the beanfield behind the house as they pull in and park. RIGGERS WITH LANTERNS direct traffic.

TOMMY (O.S.)

I told you they'd come.

She looks up, sees her brother, TOMMY. They trade smiles.

17A EXT. CRABB FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

17A

The two children gaze out the window, faces beaming with pure, high-octane joy.

18 INT. LILA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

18

Ben lies unconscious on a divan under a heavy velvet quilt. Lodz and Lila play gin. Every once in a while, Lila takes a hit of opium from a hookah on the floor. She looks at Ben.

LILA

Fine looking boy.

Lodz draws a card, runs a thumb over Braille on its corner.

LODZ

(sips absinthe)

You have a singularly prurient mind, Lila.

LILA

What do you know about it?

LODZ

More than I want to, believe me. Incidentally, dear, you should discard that jack of clubs. He's not doing you a bit of good and will only come back to haunt you.

She gives him a look, snaps down the jack. Lodz picks it up.

(CONTINUED)

LODZ (CONT'D)

Gin.

LILA

You old fraud.

He shrugs, jots down points on a pad of paper. Lila scowls. Ben MOANS in his sleep, turns fitfully.

LILA

Poor baby. What do you suppose he's dreaming about?

LODZ

(shuffles the cards)
None of your business, my dear.

LILA

Aww, Lodz. Tell me what he's dreaming. C'mon. Pretty please?

LODZ

(sighs)
Very well . . .

He puts down his glass, stands and places a hand on Ben's forehead. Stiffens as if hit by an electrical charge.

19

OMITTED

19

*

19A

EXT. CORN FIELD - NIGHT

19A

*

LE BLANC staggers through the corn, GLOWING PLASMA soaking his white pleated shirt. A SUBHUMAN HOWL slices through the STORM. He casts a terrified glance back and stumbles, hurtling headlong into a muddy irrigation ditch.

*
*
*
*

He frantically claws his way up the mud on the far side, slides down in a heap. Coughs, trembling hand compressing the GAPING WOUND on his neck, LIQUID LUMINESCENCE PULSING through his fingers, spattering his mud-caked shirt.

*
*
*
*

OS, dry LAUGHTER. He looks up.

*

LUCIUS - stares down at him, silhouetted against an iron sky, chest heaving, shoulder-length hair tumbling over his bare shoulders. A grin on his face, madness in his eyes.

*
*
*

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING, CRASH OF THUNDER and we

*

SMASH CUT TO:

*

20 INT. LILA'S TRAILER - NIGHT 20

LODZ - hands still locked on Ben, face twitching, convulsing.
In a HOARSE, TERRIFIED WHISPER:

LODZ
Lucius . . . ?

Lila grabs him, jerks him clear. He struggles to retain
consciousness, then goes limp in her arms.

SMASH CUT TO:

21 INT. BROTHER JUSTIN'S OFFICE - NIGHT 21

Seated at his desk, BROTHER JUSTIN jerks his head up,
snapping open his eyes with a shuddering intake of breath.
Sweating, he fights to fill his lungs.

BROTHER JUSTIN
(roars)
Silas!

Silas rushes in. *

SILAS
Your Holiness--?

Brother Justin slowly looks up. Sweat beads on his forehead.
More to himself than to Silas:

BROTHER JUSTIN
It's begun.

22 INT. LILA'S TRAILER - DAY 22

LOUD POUNDING OUTSIDE. Ben moans, rolls over. Shields his
eyes from the sun. He pushes down the quilt, realizes he's
naked. Pushes it down further, stares.

The SHACKLE IS GONE. He rubs the raw spot on his ankle.

23 EXT. MIDWAY - MOVING - DAY 23

Workers raise tents, set up booths. Samson walks through
with a farmer, MR. CRABB. Mid-fifties, he holds a tattered
fedora, nervously pulling at the brim.

SAMSON
It's out of the question, Mister
Crabb.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SAMSON (CONT'D)

Milfay's a big stop for us and
right now, we sorely need the cash.
Watch your step.

Several roustabouts check lines of lights across the ground.
Samson and Crabb step over them as they CONTINUE:

SAMSON

We been setting up on your spread,
what? Fourteen years? No trouble.

CRABB

No sir.

SAMSON

And you cashed the check. Cleared
the bank some time ago.

CRABB

Yessir, and I can give you a full
refund.

Samson stops, narrows his eyes at him.

SAMSON

If I didn't know better, I'd say
you're trying to chisel me. You're
not trying to chisel me, are you
Mr. Crabb?

CRABB

Lord, no! It ain't the money, no
sir! Money's just fine! It's just

. . .

(drops his voice)

. . . the missus. She's in one of
them, well, it's a sort of prayer
group. You know, them Knights of
Canaan? That Brother Justin fella
on the radio?

SAMSON

Yeah. I heard him.

CRABB

Well, they got it in their heads
that y'all are, well, up to, you
know . . . business.

SAMSON

Business?

23 CONTINUED: (2)

23

CRABB
Devilish business.

24 INT. LILA'S TRAILER - DAY

24

Clutching a sheet around himself, Ben rifles drawers for his clothes. Pulls out a huge pair of knickers. He glances at Lila, still SNORING in her chair. Chucks them aside.

Moves to the closet, throws it open. Gowns and dresses-- hopelessly frilly foo-foo fat-lady dresses.

BEN
Swell . . .

25 INT. SOFIE'S BUS - REAR LIVING COMPARTMENT - DAY

25

Sofie's mother, APOLLÓNIA, a woman in her fifties, lies in bed, her clear, pale-blue eyes staring at nothing. Beautiful once, her raven hair is streaked with white, cheeks hollow.

Sofie sits on the edge of the bed, tenderly brushing her mother's long hair. Speaks to her as if she's carrying on one side of a lively telephone conversation.

SOFIE
Who?
(listens a beat)
Oh, Mother, please. Every time we
pick up a new--

Stops as if interrupted, throws her mother a look.

SOFIE
He's just a boy.

The older woman's face remains still, eyes fixed on the ceiling.

Sofie "listens," clearly skeptical about whatever she's hearing. Suddenly, a BREEZE flips a stack of tarot cards off the bedside table. They scatter across the floor. *

Sofie gives Apollonia an impatient chiding look.

SOFIE
Oh, really mother.

She gathers them up. Steps over toward the window to pick up the final card, lying by itself on the floor. She looks out the window.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

25

POV - Ben peers out the door of Lila's trailer. Barefoot, draped in one of her voluminous kimonos, he ventures outside, looks around.

SOFIE looks at the suit of the card in her hand. Her expression immediately changes from one of amusement to concern.

INSERT: The tarot card in Sofie's hand - THE MAGICIAN, REVERSED.

26 EXT. LILA'S TRAILER - DAY

26

Laundry SNAPS in the wind, hanging from lines. OS, someone SINGS "BYE BYE BLACKBIRD" in a lovely, sibilant tenor. Ben darts across the yard, tugs a pair of dungarees from the flapping maze of drying clothes, revealing:

THE SINGER - Back to us. Dressed in knickers, cotton shirt, tweed cap. He washes clothes in a fifty gallon drum.

Ben stares down.

POV - A VESTIGIAL TAIL pokes from a hole in the back of the knickers.

GECKO

What're you . . . ?

GECKO'S FACE - is marked by the platelike scales of *Lamellar Ichthyosis*, ears docked to nubs. His hair has been fashioned *
into long, quill-like dreadlocks. *

He stands, gives Ben the once-over.

GECKO (CONT'D)

. . . some kind of a freak?

He sticks out his tongue, SURGICALLY SPLIT.

Clutching the kimono, Ben staggers back in a panic and bumps *
into The Giant. Startled, he spins off him, almost running *
headlong into Alexandria and Caledonia. They step back *
awkwardly, almost losing balance. *

ALEXANDRIA

Hey! Watch it!

He backs away, eyes wide as saucers, mouthing an apology. *
Stumbles and falls on his ass in a patch of MUD. *

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED:

26

SEVERAL CARNIES LAUGH as Ben struggles to stand, again falls. *
Jones pauses to look at Ben--the mud-caked kimono riding up, *
revealing splayed legs and bare, dirty feet. A cockeyed grin *
on his face, Jones does a sexy little Mae-West shimmy, *
playing for the other Carnies. *

JONES *
Cootch-chee-koo. *

They ROAR with laughter *

27 OMITTED

27 *

28 OMITTED

28 *

29 OMITTED

29 *

30

INT. LODZ'S TRAILER - DAY

30

Drawn shades, old world elegance. Posters, photos and yellow news-clippings line the walls. Lodz rests in a wingback chair, pours ABSINTHE in a snifter. His sightless eyes snap open at the sound of a KNOCK.

LODZ

Come.

Samson pokes his head inside.

SAMSON

You wanted to see me.

LODZ

Is the stranger still with us?

SAMSON

Far as I know.

(concerned)

You okay, Lodz?

LODZ

Close the door.

Samson steps inside, closes the door.

*

*

*

*

LODZ

He's dangerous, Samson.

SAMSON

Aww, hell, Lodz. Don't be a sap.
He's a rube.

LODZ

Last night, Lila asked me to read
his dreams. Harmless curiosity. A
little parlor trick to keep the
boredom at bay.

(downs his absinthe)

It almost destroyed me. Like
nothing I've experienced before. I
barely survived. A few more
seconds and I'd have been locked
inside him forever.

SAMSON

Hogwash.

LODZ

Indeed. Then answer me a riddle
old friend . . .

(leans forward)

Why does Lucius live in his dreams?

Samson's eyes go flat. Something cold and ruthless in that
little man. Memories.

SAMSON

Lucius is dead.

LODZ

Is he? He looked quite . . .
robust.

(sips his absinthe)

Have you talked to Management about
the boy's presence here?

SAMSON

Yeah. Yeah, I talked to him.

LODZ

And . . . ?

SAMSON

He told me to take him on full time
if I could.

Lodz considers this, clearly disturbed.

SAMSON

If the kid was a threat, Management would know about it.

LODZ

Would he?

SAMSON

What's that supposed to mean?

LODZ

(turns away)

Nothing.

He pours another glass of absinthe.

SAMSON

Maybe it's time you eased up on that stuff.

*
*

LODZ

Ahh, yes, my friend. But even as she rots my mind, the green fairy takes my hand and tells me pretty lies like . . .

*
*

(thinks)

. . . all is well.

With a bone-dry chuckle, he toasts Samson. Samson returns his gaze, stone-faced.

Shirt open, sweating, Ben trudges down a pot-holed road. A battered Model-A pick-up approaches from behind, Sofie at the wheel, two rusty five-gallon cans in the bed. Ben gives it a glance, keeps walking.

SOFIE

Want a ride?

Ben gives her a sidelong glance. Jaw set, pissed:

BEN

No.

SOFIE

Where you going?

BEN

None of your damn business.

SOFIE

What's got you so bothered?

BEN

I don't appreciate getting
shanghaied by a pack of freaks who
steal my duds.

31 CONTINUED: (2)

31

SOFIE

Freaks.

Ben falters. This is a pretty girl and he's being harsh, but, damn it, she's one of them. He shoves his hands in his pockets and speeds up.

SOFIE

Fine.

She grinds the gears and steps on the gas.

32 EXT. HOBO CAMP - MILFAY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

32

A dozen or so tents and plywood shanties line the railroad tracks near a damaged STAND-PIPE. Tattered clothes hang from lines, soiled by the soot of cooking fires.

As he walks by, Ben is pinned by the stares of a handful of MEN, WOMEN, and CHILDREN. Lean and dusty, hungry eyes.

A PAIR OF SMALL NAKED BOYS squat under the water-tower, poke a DEAD POSSUM with sticks. As he passes, they regard him with feral suspicion, guarding their kill.

OS, the strains of a LULLABY. Ben pauses, takes off his cap, dipping his head under a STEADY TRICKLE OF COLD WATER pouring from the tower's sluice-pipe, grabbing a drink. Notices:

A MAN - nearby, about forty, rough, sun-baked features. He stands still as a statue. Hat in hand, pressed against his chest. He stares at something OS, a shell-shocked expression on his face. Hold.

BEN - follows his gaze.

POV - a LEAN WOMAN rocks in the shadows of a lean-to, SINGING A LULLABY as she nurses a child.

MAN

It ain't right. Baby deserves a
decent burial.

Ben turns, sees the Man, still staring at the mother.

32 CONTINUED:

32

MAN

It ain't right. Baby deserves a
decent burial.

Ben stares at him, then the lean-to. Makes a silent
decision. *

33 INT. LEAN-TO SHACK - DAY

33

THE WOMAN - HUMMING, still rocking, a quiet smile on her face
as she holds the baby to her breast. Ben steps up.

BEN

Hey. Ain't that a pretty baby you
got? *

MILDRED

Shh. He's sleeping.

He manages a weak smile, crouches down in front of her as she
strokes the baby's head.

MILDRED

You're a little angel, aren't you?
Little gift from God.
(smiles, to Ben)
Do you believe in miracles?

Ben shakes his head.

MILDRED

They happen. They really do.
Doctor said I was barren. But I
prayed. Every night, I prayed real
hard. Just one, Jesus. You can
take it all. Just give me one
child. And you know what the Lord
did?

Ben waits.

MILDRED

Exactly that. He took the house.
He took the land. He even took my
mama's silver napkin rings.
Yessir, took everything I ever had.
He took it all and he turned it
into dust. And then . . .

She smiles, gazes down at the baby.

MILDRED (CONT'D)

. . . he blessed me with this
beautiful little boy.

She looks up at Ben. Though he makes an effort to hide his
horror, he just can't keep it from leaking around the edges.

Startled into clarity by his expression, she slowly stops
rocking. Looks at the baby. After a long beat, she meets
Ben's eyes with an expression of mild, troubled lucidity.

MILDRED

He's dead, isn't he?

BEN

Yes, ma'am. He is.

A silent tear escapes, rolls down her cheek. She tenderly
kisses the baby's forehead.

MILDRED

Bye-bye.

She gently tucks the blanket over the infant's face, offers
him to Ben.

33A

EXT. HOBO CAMP MILFAY OUTSKIRTS - DAY

33A

The Man waits outside, having watched the exchange. Ben
approaches, cradling the dead child. He hands the Man his
son. The Man meets his eyes.

MAN

Thank you.

Ben just stares at him a beat, then drops his eyes and moves
off without a word.

34 EXT. MOLIERE'S GAS STATION - DAY 34

JUNIOR, a pimply-faced attendant with a mop of red hair leans against the rear of Sofie's Model-A, chews tobacco as he pumps gas.

SOFIE
If you could fill those two cans,
I'd be obliged.

JUNIOR
Yes, ma'am.

Junior's old man, RED, checks the oil. Take Junior, add twenty years of hard knocks plus about seventy pounds of soft flesh, and you've got Red. *

RED
You with them carnies?

SOFIE
Yeah.

Red exchanges a look with his son. Junior smirks, spits a jet of tobacco-juice. *

35 EXT. MOLIERE'S GAS STATION - MOMENTS LATER 35

Ben walks down the road, sees

POV - Sofie's car still parked next to the pumps. Not a soul in sight.

BEN - puzzled, gives it a mental shrug and starts to move on when he hears a STIFLED SCREAM, reacts.

36

INT. MARTY'S GAS STATION - DAY

36 *

A dimly lit garage cluttered with shelves of spare parts, motor-oil and stacks of tires.

Junior roughly bends Sofie over the hood of a dismantled Chrysler. He covers her mouth with one hand, presses the point of a screwdriver to her throat.

JUNIOR

Shuddup or so help me I'm gonna
stick you!

RED - slices an old fan-belt with a jackknife, SMACKS the makeshift whip against a tire.

Junior wrenches down the back of her blouse, RIPPING the fabric, exposing her bare back. *

RED

You wanna piece of her before I
thrash her? G'wan. I won't tell
your Ma.

Junior shoves between her legs. Sofie cringes, struggles as he starts roughly feeling her up, fumbling with the buttons on his pants with one hand. *

RED - clearly getting a charge out of it, absently rubbing his crotch as he flicks the broken fan-belt.

RED

That's right, boy. You show her
who's bo--

CRACK! Red's rudely interrupted by the flat of a TWO-BY-FOUR. Drops him hard like somebody just pulled the bones right out of him, revealing

BEN - standing behind him, good to go.

JUNIOR - turns. Outraged at the sight of his father on the ground, he brandishes the screwdriver, eyes crafty, gauging the odds.

BEN - face a hard mask, two-by-four ready to swing for the centerfield fence.

BEN

What're you waiting for?
(a ruthless smile)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

36

CONTINUED:

36

BEN (CONT'D)

Let's go.

The fight just drains out of Junior's face. He drops the screwdriver, backs away.

SOFIE

You sonofabitch!

THUNK! She hits Junior HARD in the back of the head with a can of PENNZOIL. He collapses. She drops the can and, snarling, STARTS KICKING HIM.

JUNIOR

(bawling)

Oww Jesus I'm sorry I didn't mean
nothin please God make her stop!

BEN

(roughly hauls her back)

He's done, Goddamnit! C'mon!

37

OMITTED

37

*

38

INT. MODEL-A - DAY

38

Ben shifts quickly through the gears, picking up speed. He throws sidelong glances at Sofie, who stares ahead, furious, holding what's left of her blouse together. She notices him, gives him a glare.

SOFIE

What're you looking at?

BEN

(embarrassed)

Nothin.

He returns his attention to the road.

BEN

Here . . .

(tugs off his coat)

. . . put this on.

She takes his coat and, turning away slightly, pulls it on. Ben focuses on the road ahead, and it's Sofie's turn to steal a glance or two.

39

OMITTED

39

39A EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - DAY 39A

The engine lies in pieces. Jones lifts the carburetor out of a bucket of gasoline, scrubs it with a rag.

JONES
Give me a screwdriver.

Gabriel hands him a monkeywrench. Jones just looks at him. OS, the sound of a CAR. Jones gazes past Gabriel.

POV - Ben pulls the Ford into the midway. Sofie gets out of the car, still wrapped in Ben's coat.

JONES - His expression hardens.

39B OMITTED 39B *

39C INT. SOFIE'S BUS - FRONT COMPARTMENT - DAY 39C *

Sofie tugs off her torn blouse. A KNOCK on the door. She slips on a robe and answers, the blouse in her hand. It's Jones. All business. *

JONES
What happened? *

SOFIE
Nothing. *

She starts to close the door. He holds it open, plucks the ripped blouse. He holds it up, gives her a pointed look.

JONES

Did he do that?

She pulls the blouse from his hand, turns away and retreats into the front compartment. Jones follows.

SOFIE

There were some men in town. They got . . .

(searches for a word that won't send him nuclear)

. . . fresh.

Sofie busies herself with minor housekeeping in an effort to keep things nonchalant.

JONES

So how'd the hick get in the picture?

SOFIE

He happened by. Stopped it. (off his reaction)

C'mon, Jonesy. It was nothing.

JONES

How many times you been told--

SOFIE

--I can't buy a dress. I can't buy a magazine. I can't sit in a beauty shop and read it. Is there anything I can do?

She starts toward the rear compartment. Jones grabs her arm, spins her to face him. She stares at him, shocked at the show of force.

JONES

Plenty. But one thing you cannot do is prance into these towns without asking for trouble.

*

*

SOFIE

(pulls away)

So it was my fault?

39C CONTINUED: (2)

JONES
Yeah. It was.

SOFIE
I was asking for it.

JONES
Yeah.

She SLAPS him. He reels back, shocked. She glares at him, angry tears in her eyes.

SOFIE
The only thing I asked for was a tank of gas and a Nehi soda and maybe ten minutes to myself. The rest of it . . . that was *them!*

Jones doesn't know what to say.

SOFIE
Get out.

JONES
Sof--

SOFIE
(gives him a shove)
I said get out!

He backs outside. She SLAMS the door, falls back against it. Then she presses both fists into her temples, speaks through grit teeth toward the rear of the bus:

SOFIE
Will you . . . please . . . *shut up.*

39D EXT. MANAGEMENT'S TRAILER - DAY

39D

Ben slips the key under the seat of the truck, SLAMS the door shut.

SAMSON (O.S.)
Hey kid!

He turns. Samson stands at the top of the steps leading into the trailer, locks up.

SAMSON
I been lookin all over for you.

(CONTINUED)

Ben just gives him a look, then starts away.

SAMSON
(panicked)
Hey! Hey kid!

MOVING - as Samson struggles to catch up with Ben. *

SAMSON
I hear Jonesy give you the
business. *
(struggles to keep up) *
Real card, that Jonesy. Always *
poking fun. *

BEN
Yeah. He's real comical. *

SAMSON
(breathless)
See? There you go! I admire a man
who can take a joke. Measure of a
man is his sense of humor. You
know who said that?

BEN
I don't care.

SAMSON
Hizzonor Will Rogers.

Ben speeds up, ducking under wires as a crew of workers run
strings of electric lights from the hot wagon.

SAMSON (CONT'D)
Okay, okay, so maybe it was Mark
Twain. The point is, I am about to
make you the offer of a lifetime.
(can't keep up)
Kid!

BEN
(stops, turns)
Stop calling me kid.

SAMSON

(out of breath)

Okay, then. What's your name?

BEN

Hawkins. Ben Hawkins.

SAMSON

Ben Hawkins. How would you like a career in show business?

BEN

What's the wages?

SAMSON

Well, nothing at first, but--

Ben starts away. Samson grabs his sleeve, lowers his voice.

SAMSON

Cut me a break here, Hawkins. Offer comes straight from the bossman. You walk, You're gonna make me look like a monkey.

Ben just gives him a once-over, the unspoken but clear message of which being "You already look like a monkey." He pulls clear of Samson's grasp, walks away. Angry, Samson SHOUTS after him:

SAMSON (CONT'D)

That's right! That's right, boy! You just go right on, Goddamnit! Walk! Nice straight bee-line back to that dirt-farm of yours. And when you get there, you be sure to give Johnny Law a big hi-dee-ho for me! And when he sends you upstate, boy--you listening to me, boy?--you be sure to ask him what kinda wages they paying for breaking rocks!

Ben falters. He knows Samson's right, and he's not one bit happy about it.

Jones is up to his elbows in the engine, Gabriel assisting. Someone steps up, blocking his light.

SAMSON (O.S.)

Got you an extra pair of hands.

Jones looks up, shielding his eyes against the sun. Ben stands on the platform with Samson. *

JONES

I ain't working with no Clem.

BEN

Fine.

Ben turns, starts away. Samson grabs his arm, throws a reproachful glance back at Jones.

SAMSON

Don't pay him no mind. Jonesy don't mean nothing. He just got a big mouth is all.

BEN

Yeah, and somebody's gonna bust it for him too.

Jones, still working on the engine, SNORTS.

JONES

Yeah? Like who?

BEN

Like me.

Jones stands, wipes his greasy hands off with the rag as he approaches Ben.

JONES

So. Whyn't you take a shot at it. Hick.

He spits a jet of tobacco juice on Ben's shoe. Ben takes a hard swing. Jones ducks under it, slick as warm oil.

SAMSON

Can it, Jonesy!

JONES

What's the matter, boy? Can't land one on a gimp?

Ben throws two more wild roundhouses. Jones ducks them both.

JONES

Come on, hayseed. Knock my block off.

Ben swings. Jones weaves back. Another strong shot. Jones gives him a kick in the ass with his braced leg. Ben sprawls, bites dirt. Jones LAUGHS, turns to Samson.

JONES

What the Hell got into you, hiring that nitwit? I mean . . .

SAMSON

(looks past him)

Jones.

JONES (CONT'D)

. . . sometimes I wonder if you're not going soft in the head--

SAMSON

Jonesy!

Jones stops, turns. Just in time to catch a jawbreaker from Ben. He goes down hard. Ben rubs his fist.

BEN

I ain't a hick.

JONES

You sneaky little son-bitch!

And he's up and swinging. Samson nods to Gabriel, who grabs Jones in a bear-hug. Enraged, Jones rails and kicks like a pinned cougar. Gabriel trades an apologetic look with Ben as if to say, "Shit happens." *

JONES

Lemme at that son-bitch sucker-punched me, hayseed hick peckerwood! Tear out his damn kidneys!

TOMMY (O.S.)

Mister?

They turn. Tommy stares at them, Maddy in tow in a rusty Radio Flyer.

TOMMY

Can y'all tote my sister up on that ride. Her legs don't work so good and she's too big for me.

SAMSON

Sorry, son. She's broke down.

Tommy gives Maddie a disappointed look.

TOMMY

Y'all aim to fix'er anytime soon?

Samson turns, gives Ben and Jones a sour look. Still pissed, but ashamed, they avert their eyes like a couple of errant teens. But there's still a score to settle.

41 EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - DAY

41

Ben, Jones and Gabriel crouch nearby as Ben removes the valve-covers on the big diesel engine.

JONES

It ain't a throwed rod.

Ben examines the heads, removes some grime.

BEN

Take a look.

Jones takes a look at the engine. Damn. The kid's right.

JONES

Shit. Looks like this old chump heister's down for the count.

*

But Ben's not paying attention. He's looking at the motor, the gear assembly, then up at Colossus itself, formulating a mechanical solution. Then he looks at Jones and we

*

*

*

SMASH CUT TO:

*

42

EXT. FERRIS WHEEL - LATE AFTERNOON .

42

Gecko has a serious bug up his ass.

GECKO

No!

Ben sits at the wheel of a Model-T. A fierce caricature of Gecko is painted on the side: GECKO THE AMAZING! Jones stands on the back bumper.

JONES

Just a couple more feet.

The car lurches back. Gecko jumps up on the sideboard, tries to wrestle the wheel from Ben.

GECKO

You can't do this!

JONES

Don't get your shorts in a bunch, Gecko. We'll have it back good as new!

CRUNCH. The rear fender crumples against the ferris wheel platform.

JONES (CONT'D)

Perfect!

Gecko runs back, stares at the damage and cuts an inhuman wail of abject woe. Samson steps up.

SAMSON

What's going on here.

GECKO

They stoled my coupe!

JONES

Gabe!

Gabriel picks up the rear of the jalopy. Jones kicks a stout crate under the rea axle, ducks down, unbolts the tire.

SAMSON

Jonesy.

JONES

Talk to the punk. It's his idea.

*

(CONTINUED)

Ben sits behind the wheel of the IDLING Ford.

Gabriel stretches a jury-rigged loop of canvas fire-hose from the flywheel under Colossus to the back of the Ford. Jones affixes it to the rear hub.

JONES

We're set here!

SAMSON

Okay, Hawkins. Talk.

Ben looks at Samson. He throws the Ford into first and eases out the clutch.

THE LOOPED HOSE - goes taut on the spinning rear wheel and

THE FERRIS WHEEL - begins slowly spinning.

Waiting kids CHEER. Tommy and Maddy look like they just may O.D. on pure joy. Samson steps back, staring at Colossus with open admiration.

SAMSON

Well. I'll be damned. You're a genius.

JONES

Yeah, a reg'lar Henry Ford.

GECKO

You're not gonna let them--

SAMSON

(interrupts)

What the hell're you doing out of your cage? We got a show in five minutes!

GECKO

But--

SAMSON

Git!

He kicks up a cloud of dust behind Gecko, runs him off. He looks at the growing crowd of Townies, turns to Ben.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

Hawkins, you hungry? I bet!

(leans in)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED: (2)

42

SAMSON (CONT'D)

What say you and me have a little
chat over a t-bone.

BEN

Thought you all was down to scuff.

SAMSON

Cookie might have a little
something hid away in the larder.
Game?

Ben smiles, nods.

43 INT. COOK-TENT - LATE AFTERNOON

43

A juicy, pan-fried t-bone steak under a mound of sauteed
onions. Ben digs in with knife and fork, total carnivore
mode. Samson sits across from him, sipping a cup of coffee.

BEN

(chewing)

Not gonna eat?

SAMSON

Nah. I'm not real hungry.

But his eyes are. And you can bet it's the only steak on
deck. Oblivious, Ben eats ravenously through the following: *

SAMSON

You're a might handy with machines
and whatnot.

Ben shrugs. *

SAMSON

Pick that up on the farm, you did?

BEN

Some.

SAMSON

I s'pose you got to, out there in
the sticks. Tractor gives up,
who's gonna fix it?

Ben just gives him a brief look, then returns his full
attention to his steak.

(CONTINUED)

SAMSON

I remember when I was a whelp. My daddy worked the stockyards. Big hands. Spoke German at home. Can't say I remember much of the Doitch though.

Samson chuckles, hoping the kid will open up. No dice.

SAMSON

So, your daddy teach you about motors, did he?

Ben glances at him. Makes a noise that could mean anything.

SAMSON

You're not real big on small-talk, are you, Hawkins?

Ben gives him a look.

BEN

What do you want to know?

SAMSON

What's your story?

BEN

I was born on a farm. You saw it. I grew up there. Started working it. Got run off by the bank. End of story. Satisfied?

Samson gives him an appraising look:

SAMSON

Do I look simple to you, boy.

BEN

No.

SAMSON

That's good. Because I'm not. I been to New York City. I been to Chi-town and the Big Easy. I met Dempsey and Caruso and made eyes with Theda Bara. On a bad day, I cracked tougher nuts than you.

BEN

So?

SAMSON

So I know there's more to you than
plowing and planting.

Ben looks at him, swallows. After a moment, he pushes the
plate away, stands and picks up his hat.

SAMSON

What's the matter. Don't like the
steak?

BEN

Meat's fine. It don't ask any
questions.

He exits. Samson watches him, eyes wary. *

44 EXT. TEN-IN-ONE - NIGHT

44

A FIRE-EATER blows a huge plume of FLAME. All eyes, Ben
mills through GAWKING TOWNIES. He moves aside as a pair of
excited, cap-gun armed KIDS blast through the crowd.

Ben passes a line of TALKERS working the crowd in front of
the ten-in-one BANNERS advertising various acts (LODZ, GECKO,
etc.), their pitches OVERLAPPING:

TALKER

Desires unveiled! Secrets
revealed! Dare to confound the
amazing, the astonishing, the
astounding mentalist, Professor
Lodz, as he probes the darkest
corners of your mind!

FLASHER

Come one, come all. See Lila, the
Bearded Woman of Brussels! Witness
the wonder of a woman--a beautiful,
charming woman--trapped inside the
body of a hirsute behemoth, the
eighth human wonder of the world,
all for a nickel!

JASPER

Stee-yep right up and see
 Alexandria and Caladonia! Two
 beauties tragically born joined at
 the hip. One bright as sunshine,
 the other dark as midnight, good
 and bad, yin and yang!

Gabriel, in wrestling tights, bends railroad spikes while
 Ruthie, brandishing a roll of cash, works the grind:

RUTHIE

Come, now. Is there a champion
 among you! Fifty dollars cash
 money say *no!* Surely there's one
 man with the brute strength, the
 stout heart and the spiritual
 fortitude to best my boy Gabriel in
 the ring! Many have tried. None
 have prevailed. What about you!
 Or you! A-one, two, three and it's
 all yours! Fifty clams for three
 seconds work! Just try earning
 that bustin sod, boys!

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45 INT. TEN-IN-ONE - NIGHT

45

SERIES OF SHOTS

A GIANT - stands on stage, comparing the size of his palm to
 that of a small child.

BEN - Watches with the rest of THE TOWNIES

A SWORD SWALLOWER - slides a long blade down his gullet, then
 suddenly crooks his head forward, eliciting GASPS from the
 audience. When he withdraws it, the SWORD IS BENT.

THE CROWD - roars and applauds

45A INT. ALEXANDRIA AND CALEDONIA'S TENT - NIGHT

45A

ALEXANDRIA AND CALEDONIA - seated on a jumbo lazy-susan as
 they sing a charming FRENCH FOLK-SONG in perfect harmony.

JASPER - offstage, behind a curtain, pulls a rope looped
 around the base of the lazy-susan/platform, slowly turning
 the twins around, revealing the THICK, MUSCULAR BRIDGE OF
 FLESH THAT CONJOINS THEM AT THE WAIST.

BEN - and the rest of the audience watch, entranced.

(CONTINUED)

45A CONTINUED:

45A

END SERIES

46 INT. LILA'S TENT - NIGHT

46

A FLASHER spins his spiel to a standing crowd of rubes.

FLASHER

What you are about to see will shock and astound you, ladies and gentlemen. Behold, I give you *Lila, the Bearded Woman of Brussels!*

The Flasher opens the curtain, revealing Lila, dressed in a Cleopatra get-up, reining on a chaise. She covers the bottom of her face with a black Chinese fan. A LOW MOAN of awe. Ben watches from the edge of the stage.

FLASHER

Yes folks, she's a bit shy, but if you put your hands together she just might lower that fan . . .

The crowd CLAPS THEIR HANDS. Lila slowly lowers the fan, teasing them. The Flasher's sharp eyes scan the crowd. Ben follows his gaze, sees

A LEAN MAN - standing next to him in soiled overalls. He's not yelling with the others, but staring wistfully, clearly lusting for Lila.

EXT. LILA'S TENT - NIGHT

Ben lights a hand-rolled cigarette, as TOWNIES stream past him out of the tent. He hears a MURMURED CONVERSATION. Walks around the corner.

In the darkness at the rear of the tent, negotiations are in progress. The Flasher hustles the Lean Man.

FLASHER

Miss Lila would be honored if he paid her a call. Of course, she's a very busy woman. We have a number of performances--

LEAN MAN

I got money.

FLASHER

It isn't a matter of money, my friend--

LEAN MAN

I got twenty dollars.

FLASHER

As I was saying.

LEAN MAN

Twenty-five.

He digs into his pocket, pulls out two balled-up tens and a fiver. The Flasher, affecting great patience, takes them. After a moment:

FLASHER

Come on.

He pulls the Lean Man into the rear of the tent through a hidden flap. Disgusted by what he saw, Ben drops his cigarette in the dirt and grinds it out underfoot.

SAMSON (O.S.)

How about that.

Ben turns. Samson chews on a toothpick.

BEN

She's a whore.

Samson eyes him coldly, jaw set.

SAMSON (O.S.)

You listen up, Boy. Lila ain't doin a thing to that chump the First Merchants Trust didn't do to you. And I'll tell you what. Twenty years from now, you won't be waking up hard dreaming about no banker.

He stares at Ben, gives him a mirthless smile.

SAMSON

You think on that.

The little man turns and saunters off. Ben stares after him. *

Jones lifts Maddy from the wagon, straps her into Colossus next to Tommy. *

JONES

You give that man over there a ticket? *

Maddy nods. *

JONES (CONT'D)

Then here's two back. And two for
your brother.

(he hands her four
tickets)

Your money's no good here,
Sunshine.

Maddy GIGGLES, delighted.

JONES (CONT'D)

Now you hang on and say hi to the
Man in the Moon for me.

Jones smiles, spits tobacco juice and gives the clutch handle
a pull. The kids SQUEAL as they're carried upward.

EXT. BEAN FIELD - NIGHT

Ben sits on the tailgate of a stake-bed Ford. He watches the
brightly lit ferris-wheel turn lazy circles.

SOFIE (O.S.)

Thought you might want this back.

Ben starts, sees Sofie. She holds out his coat.

BEN

Thanks.

SOFIE

Appreciate what you did. You know
. . . earlier.

Sofie's accustomed to taking care of herself, not at all used
to thanking near strangers. Nevertheless . . .

SOFIE

Thanks.

BEN

It was nothin.

SOFIE

Stupid. Should've seen it coming.

Ben smiles despite himself at the irony of it. Sofie laughs.

SOFIE

Swell, huh. Some fortune-teller.

Ben shrugs. She takes a seat next to him.

SOFIE
There's talk about you coming on
permanent.

BEN
That'll be the day.

SOFIE
Oh.

She gives him a disappointed glance.

BEN
(flustered)
I'm sorry. It's just . . .
This all, it's not for me.

SOFIE
What is for you?

BEN
I don't know. Not anymore.

Sofie smiles, gazes at the lights of the ferris wheel.

SOFIE
The people in these towns, they're
asleep. All day at work, at home.
Sleepwalkers.
(looks at Ben)
We wake them up.

Ben considers it for a moment. She gives him a nudge, slides
off the tailgate.

SOFIE
Come on. I'll read your cards.

BEN
My what?

SOFIE
Your cards. You know. Past,
present, future.

Ben shakes his head.

SOFIE
What's the matter?

BEN
I'm broke.

SOFIE

No charge.

They hold eye-contact for a long beat. Then Ben looks away.

BEN

Nah. That's okay. Maybe later.

SOFIE

Later.

Which means "never" and they both know it. She gives him a sad smile and a shrug.

SOFIE

Okay. Later.

She gathers her skirts and starts back toward the midway.
Ben CALLS AFTER HER:

BEN

Hey! What's your name?

SOFIE

Sofie.

BEN

Ben. Ben Hawkins.

She nods, then turns and is swallowed by the milling crowd.
Ben stares after her.

50

OMITTED

50

51

EXT. GECKO'S TENT - NIGHT

51

Waiting for his next show, naked but for a dhoti, Gecko
smokes a hand-rolled cigarette in his cage. HEADLIGHTS wash
across him. He shields his eyes. CAR DOORS SLAM. Thuggish
men pour out of the trucks.

*
*

A STATE TROOPER - takes a step forward, scans the area and
JACKS a shell into his twelve-gauge.

Gecko's eyes widen in alarm.

GECKO

Jumpin Jesus . . . !

52

EXT. MANAGEMENT'S TRAILER - NIGHT .

52

A squat trailer streaked with soot. A sign stenciled on the door: MANAGEMENT - KEEP OUT.

53 INT. MANAGEMENT'S TRAILER - NIGHT

53

PUCCINI plays softly on a Victorola in the corner. Samson sits at a desk, tabulates receipts on an abacus.

SAMSON

Good night!

He addresses a confessional-like alcove behind him, its interior shrouded by a burgundy satin curtain. A slow, steady PUSH toward its brocaded surface as Samson CONTINUES:

SAMSON (O.S.)

Two hundred and forty-seven clams
and it's still rolling in. How's
that for breaking ice?

The curtain stirs, behind it, a SHARP, HOARSE INTAKE of breath.

SAMSON - banding a wad of singles. A SHOTGUN BLAST ECHOES, distant SHOUTS. He looks up, startled.

54 EXT. MIDWAY - NIGHT

54

The Trooper FIRES a second shot into the air, racks in a third.

TROOPER

That's right, show's over!
Everybody get on home!

THUGS--some uniformed, most dressed in street-clothes, faces hidden behind bandannas--herd people away, brutally beating stragglers with batons.

A Trooper sics a GERMAN SHEPHERD on a black man as his CHILDREN SCREAM, trying in vain to pull him free of the dog's snapping jaws.

The ruthlessness of the police far exceeds the show of resistance from the townies. Jones fights his way through the confusion to the lead Trooper.

JONES

(shouts)

What the hell're you people doing?

TROOPER

You run this here flea-circus?

(CONTINUED)

SAMSON (O.S.)

That'd be me.

The Trooper turns, looks around at eye-level. Then down.

TROOPER

(chuckles)

Well lookie here. It's the big bossman.

SAMSON

You ain't local.

TROOPER

We're State. And you and your type ain't welcome here.

SAMSON

I got legal paper says we are.

MRS. CRABB

I own this property and you're trespassing!

Samson turns. Mrs. Crabb stands with her PRAYER GROUP. *

SAMSON

Well well. If it isn't Mrs. Crabb. And her prayer group.

MRS. CRABB

(to Trooper)

Run them off. They don't got permission.

SAMSON

Pig's eye. We paid fair-square and you know it.

MR. CRABB - averts his eyes. Its a raw deal, but hell, it's the wife, right? What're you gonna do?

BEN - fights his way through the confusion toward the epicenter.

The Trooper steps between Samson and Mrs. Crabb.

TROOPER

(shouts to be heard)

You can pack it up or we can burn it down. Your choice, freak.

SAMSON

You ain't here official.
(looks around)
Half these men don't even got
uniforms.

He looks at the smirking faces of Mrs. Crabb's "prayer group," then, infuriated, at the Trooper.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

Who the hell're you really workin
for?

TROOPER

I said . . .

He shoves Samson down with the breech of his shotgun.

TROOPER (CONT'D)

. . . shut it down.

BEN - steps in from the side and BODY-SLAMMS THE TROOPER. A DEPUTY drops aim on him with his riot-gun. Jones grabs the the barrel, forces it up. The SHOT fires wild into the air.

The Deputy wrestles his shotgun free, racks in a second shell. A half-dozen guns are COCKED, trained on Jones.

SAMSON

(claps his hands)
You heard the man! We been
sloughed. Carny's closed! We're
packing it up!

Momentarily distracted by his commanding voice, the Troopers turn to look at Samson. Gabriel takes Ben's arm in a firm but gentle grip, pushes him back toward the CROWD OF CARNIES, then steps in to block the Troopers' view.

HANDS - reach out, gently pulling him steadily back, back until he's swallowed in the protective womb of the crowd.

SAMSON (CONT'D)

Break down Colossus. You! Start
striking the back-end!

As the crowd quietly disperses, the lead Trooper struggles to his feet. Hatless, uniform soiled, leaves stuck to the fringe of hair around his surprisingly bald head, he turns to his deputies.

(CONTINUED)

TROOPER

Where'd that punk go?

Ruthie pucks up the Trooper's crushed smokey-hat.

RUTHIE

What punk?

TROOPER

The one'd hit me.

SAMSON

Wasn't one of mine. Ruthie?

RUTHIE

Never seed him before. Musta been
a townie.

Furious, the Trooper snatches his hat from Ruthie, dusts it off.

TROOPER

Oughta run in the lot of you.

SAMSON

Officer, you'd have to feed us.

Lila eyes the Trooper up and down with a salacious grin.

LILA

I could eat a horse.

Disconcerted, he stares at her, then turns to his men:

TROOPER

Okay, men. Let's move the rest of
these folks out!

(to Samson)

I want you people gone at first
light.

SAMSON

You won't even know we were here.

With a final hard look, the Trooper moves off with his men, herding the townsfolk away. Samson watches them, then looks down. He bends, picks up a tattered religious tract.

THE TRACT - a copy of "THE SHINING TORCH!" A crudely drawn
portrait of Brother Justin graces the cover. *

54 CONTINUED: (4)

54

Samson looks at it, disturbed.

OUT

FADE IN:

55 EXT. BEAN FIELD - DAWN

55

The ten-in-one is struck, billowing as it collapses. Riggers SHOUT DIRECTIONS to one another as they disassemble Colossus.

SERIES OF SHOTS

COLOSSUS - IN PIECES, BEN AND OTHERS SECURING IT TO THE REAR OF A TRUCK WITH ROPES. *

ROUSTABOUTS - ROLLING UP A TENT ALONG WITH BEN. *

BEN - AND ANOTHER MAN THROWING THE LAST CANVAS DUFFELS INTO THE BACK OF A STAKE-BED. FINISHED, BEN PULLS OFF HIS CAP, WIPES SWEAT AND GRIME FROM HIS EYES.

END SERIES

56 OMITTED

56

57 EXT. BEAN FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

57

Ben dunks a tin ladle into a pail of water, takes a drink. He pulls on his coat, stares at the other roustabouts finishing the loading. Seems conflicted.

SOFIE (O.S.)

One of us?

BEN

Huh?

She smiles at the ground.

SOFIE

Last chance for that free reading.

BEN

Nah. Thanks.

SOFIE

Scared?

BEN

No. I just don't, you know, believe in that whole hocus-pocus.

SOFIE

So? If you don't believe in it,
what difference does it make?

He looks at her. Can't help but admire the economy and
perfection with which she's trapped him.

INT. SOFIE'S BUS - FRONT COMPARTMENT - DAWN

Sofie holds the front curtain open for Ben as he enters. He
is immediately taken with the decor--a colorful melange of
Gypsy arcana, mementos and exotica, some of it genuine, a lot
of it fake. The walls are draped in satin. Sofie motions to
a round table draped with velvet brocade. *

SOFIE *

Sit. *

Ben hesitates, then takes a seat at a round table. Sees *

POV - Apollonia lies in the rear compartment. Sofie draws
the curtain shut and sits opposite him in a frayed wing-back
chair. *

She sets a silk-wrapped deck of Tarot cards before Ben. All
business. *

SOFIE *

Past, present or future? *

BEN *

What's the difference? *

She gives him an even gaze. *

SOFIE *

Very well . . . the past. *

(unwraps the deck) *

Shuffle. *

He shuffles the Tarot cards. She cuts them, draws three from
the top and places them face down. Flips one over: THE MOON. *

SOFIE *

The Moon. *

BEN - stares down at the card and FLASHES TO: *

MEMORY HIT - INT. HAWKINS FARM - NIGHT

MOONLIGHT cascades in through the windows. FLORA HAWKINS, in
her thirties, addresses us MOS, HER VOICE SYNCHED BY SOFIE'S: *

SOFIE (V.O.)

Oh, my Lord. Child . . . what you
done?

She bends picks a KITTEN up by the loose skin behind its
neck. Stares at it, face wan with shock and horror.

SOFIE (V.O.)

You got no right, boy. No right.
Lord takes what's his, man don't
take it back! It's a sin . . .

BACK TO:

BEN - snaps from the memory with an involuntary gasp. He
looks at Sofie, who seems to be in a light trance.

SOFIE (CONT'D)

(as Flora)

. . . a sin against nature.

She blinks, effortlessly returns to the present. Reacts to
Ben's expression.

SOFIE

Are you all right?

BEN

Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine.

SOFIE

Would you like me to stop?

BEN

No. Go on.

Sofie shrugs, flips over the second card: Death.

SOFIE

Death.

FLORA HAWKINS, holds a burlap sack underwater in a galvanized
tub. Bubbles break its turbulent surface. Face twisted with
rage and superstitious fear, ROARING VOICE SYNCHED BY
SOFIE'S:

61 CONTINUED:

SOFIE (V.O.)
You're marked, boy. Hear me?
Marked by The Beast . . . !

BACK TO:

62 INT. SOFIE'S BUS - FRONT COMPARTMENT - DAWN

62

She recovers. Looks at Ben, troubled.

SOFIE
What does she mean?

But Ben doesn't seem to hear, his eyes locked on the card.

SOFIE
Ben?

BEN
I don't know what you're talking
about.

She looks at him, knows he's lying. After a beat, snaps over
the third and final card.

SOFIE
The Magician. Reversed. You have
a great talent or ability.

BEN
Reversed?

SOFIE
Upside down. See? That means it's
been wasted, unfulfilled. It's a
gift you've hidden from others.

Ben shakes his head. Again, she falls into a light fugue, as
if listening to someone in the next room:

SOFIE
(as Flora)
Don't!

62A MEMORY HIT - INT. HAWKINS FARM - NIGHT

62A

FLORA HAWKINS, teetering on the brink of death, cringes in
bed, pressing herself back against the wall, her frayed
blanket clutched to her bony chest in one hand, the other
groping for the crucifix on the wall behind her.

62A CONTINUED:

62A

SOFIE (V.O.)
Don't touch me! Keep your hands
off me, you filth! Out! Get out!

BACK TO:

62B INT. SOFIE'S BUS - FRONT COMPARTMENT - DAWN

62B

Ben stares at Sofie, startled.

SOFIE
Why was she so scared?

Eyes downcast, he draws back. Finally, he looks up to meet
her eyes and

SMASH CUT TO:

63 BLACKNESS

63

BROTHER JUSTIN'S FACE looms out of the shadows. HIS EYEBALLS
SOLID-BLACK. He ROARS:

BROTHER JUSTIN
Tell me!

BACK TO:

64 INT. SOFIE'S BUS - FRONT COMPARTMENT - DAY

64

Ben rears back in his chair, stares at Sofie. Her eyes are
locked on the cards, her breath coming in small GASPS.

BEN
Sofie . . . ?

Ben tentatively touches her hand. She looks up from the
cards. Her eyes HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED TO SOLID BLACK ORBS.

BEN - bolts up, terrified, his chair crashing to the floor.
He almost trips over it as he backs away from the table. He
turns and races out.

Puzzled, she stares after him, her eyes restored to normal.

SOFIE

Ben--?

*
*

65 EXT. BEAN FIELD - OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

65

Ben runs as fast and as far as he can get from what he's just seen. He reaches the rusted hulk of a broken-down tractor choked with BEANPLANTS long gone to seed.

Cradling a stitch in his side, he leans on it, CATCHING HIS BREATH. Silent, bitter tears track the dust on his cheeks. In the distance, the Carnies finish loading the last of their gear. Truck-doors slam, final ORDERS SHOUTED.

TOMMY (O.S.)

Hey, mister?

Ben turns, glances behind him. Sees Tommy Crabb, his fragile sister in the Radio Flyer.

BEN

Yeah. What?

TOMMY

Can you watch my sister? I gotta go pee something awful.

Ben roughly wipes the tears off with the back of his forearm, regains his composure, turns and nods. Tommy hightails it toward the farmhouse.

MADDY

I'm real sorry.

BEN

What for?

MADDY

It's our gremmie called the law.

BEN

Well, you can't tell her what to do, so there's nothing to be sorry about.

MADDY

Gremmie says ya'll are marked.

That word again. Damn. He looks down at his shoes. A sad smile, then:

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED:

BEN

Nah. They're not marked. Just
people, that's all.

(glances at her legs)

How long you been like that?

MADDY

Forever.

BEN

Does it hurt?

She nods.

SAMSON (O.S.)

(calls)

Hawkins . . . !?

66 EXT. LEAD TRUCK - DAWN

66

Up in the cab, Jones STARTS THE ENGINE. Samson cups his
hands around his mouth, SHOUTS:

SAMSON

You riding with us, boy?

67 EXT. BEAN FIELD - OUTSKIRTS - DAWN

67

Ben kneels down next to the girl in the Radio Flyer. Places
his hands on her shins.

A SLOW, STEADY PULL takes us into a tangled patch of
BEANPLANTS choking the tractor, their vine-like stalks and
fragile leaves the turn yellow, curl brown, vines drooping as
the PLANTS DIE.

68 EXT. LEAD TRUCK - DAWN

68

Standing on the running-board, Samson shakes his head.

SAMSON

(mutters)

Hell with it . . .

(shouts back)

Let's shake some dust!

ENGINES ROAR. Samson slides inside the cab. The convoy
lumbers toward the highway.

(CONTINUED)

Samson turns, sees .

*

POV - Ben running like mad to catch up with the convoy.

*

Ben runs up, swings up onto the running board of the last truck in the convoy, climbs up the slats of its stake-bed and rolls over the top onto the top of a load of folded tents. *

He hunkers in the rear of the stake-bed. Drawn, exhausted, he curls up among the packed tents, closes his eyes, cradled in a canvas womb.

MADDY - waves as the convoy passes, then turns and, pulling her Radio Flyer, runs toward the Crabb farmhouse while, UNDER HER FEET

BEAN PLANTS - WITHER AND CURL UP like drowning spiders, the pestilence and rot accompanied by a disturbing INSECTILE BUZZING THAT STEADILY RISES IN VOLUME and we're

OUT