

THE MERMAID

Written by

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A Mermaid found a swimming lad,
Picked him for her own,
Pressed her body to his body,
Laughed; and plunging down
Forgot in cruel happiness
That even lovers drown.

William Butler Yeats

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

Midsummer. 1920s. A storm RAGES.

A commercial fishing boat is tossed amongst the great waves. Its three CREW MEMBERS fight to maintain control of the medium-sized vessel.

At the bridge of the ship stands FRANK, a gruff man built like a tree. He anchors the wheel, fighting to hold it steady. You can almost make out a SMILE through the TORRENTIAL DOWNPOUR.

Tending to the sails is COLM, Irish and brooding. His TATTOOED arms pull at a rope, furling the jib. The sail fights his efforts, flapping in the wind.

COLM
Ay! Hoist the nets!

He shouts at TOMMY. Young and untried. The boy clings to the rail of the ship, his gaze faraway.

TOMMY
(hypnotized)
Do you hear that?

His words are drowned out by the storm...

COLM
(yelling)
You fuckin' deaf?

Tommy pays him no mind. He's LISTENING. *For what?*

And then--

We HEAR it. A faint, beautiful SONG on the wind. Tommy's entranced by the unearthly, female VOICE.

He uses a taunt rope to pull himself onto the railing of the ship. It rocks precariously from side to side. He sways with it, never taking his eyes off the sea.

Colm watches in disbelief.

COLM (CONT'D)
The fuck yuh doin' boy-o! 'Ave you gone mad?

Colm loses his grip on the sail. It FLAILS in the wind. He looks between the sail and Tommy, torn. Finally, Colm takes a step toward the young sailor.

Before he reaches him, a giant wave BASHES against the ship, ENVELOPING Tommy. When the water settles...

HE'S GONE.

And just like that, the storm DIES. Colm looks up at the charcoal sky. Bewildered.

Back to the new task at hand--

COLM (CONT'D)
Man overboard!

Frank looks over his shoulder, abandoning the wheel. He and Colm run to the side of the ship, scanning the surface. No sign of Tommy in the water.

FRANK
Check the fuckin' nets!

Both men work to ROTATE the capstan, reeling in the catch. The net slowly rises out of the sea. Despite the storm, it's FILLED to the brim.

The men slow their efforts, the load coming to a halt.

NO TOMMY.

Frank takes a step closer. A thick mass of BLACK SCALES is interwoven amongst the flopping silver. His eyes track the ONYX TRAIL until it becomes lost amongst the fish.

FRANK (CONT'D)
What in Christ's good name?

COLM (O.S.)
B--boss...

Frank looks at Colm whose face is as white as a ghost. He follows his comrades eye-line. Mouth dropping open.

We finally see why...

Protruding from the net is a pale, delicate HAND.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #1 - VARIOUS - NIGHT

A nondescript MASS OF LIGHT leisurely comes into focus. As it sharpens, we make out a glowing banner--

THE INVISIBLE CIRCUS

A STILT WALKER stands beneath the sign, waving everyone forward.

STILT WALKER
Come one, come all! Step into a
world unknown except by those
willing to pay the price!

CLOSE ON a BOY (5) holding his MOTHER's hand. As they move past he looks up at the DAZZLING SIGN, mouth agape.

Visitors are greeted by a world of RICH COLORS and TWINKLING LIGHTS. MUSIC carries on in the background...

The Boy walks forward, taking in everything around him as fellow CIRCUS GOERS crisscross in and out of view.

Food and prize BOOTHS line either side of him. He walks toward a game hut, STUFFED ANIMALS hanging from its roof.

The Boy's Mother pulls him back...

INT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT

Filled with EXOTIC ANIMALS. Wide-eyed, the Boy takes in a lion and two tigers, pacing in their cage. A man, ABRAHAM, sits with them. He sees the boy gawking, offers a SMILE.

The Boy grins, eyes roaming the other cages. Monkeys, elephants, and a GIANT BROWN BEAR. The bear stares at the boy and SQUATS.

When nature calls...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #1 - NIGHT

A shovel digs into a GIANT PILE OF SHIT. At the clean end is CILLIAN [Kill-e-an](18). He WHISTLES a tune, continuing the dirty chore. All in a day for this lowly circus hand.

Cillian wipes beads of sweat from his brow. Looks up to find the little Boy STARING at him. He waves.

Seeing the exchange, the Boy's Mother rushes over.

MOTHER
There. You. Are.

The Woman grabs her son, throwing Cillian a look dirtier than the shovel he's holding. She leads her precious Boy away, nose turned up. Cillian watches their retreat, more amused than offended.

VOICE (O.S.)
How 'bout you put that shit-eatin'
grin away an get back to shovelin'
it.

Cillian looks over to ALBERT, sixty-years-old with leathery skin and calloused hands. He cackles at his own joke, revealing a mouth full of ROTTING TEETH.

A few meters away stands JOHNNY, 30s. Probably handsome underneath the all-consuming tattoos and piercings. He smokes a cigarette while checking out a FEMALE PERFORMER.

He sticks his FORKED TONGUE out at her suggestively. The girl SQUEALS, scampering off.

Turning to Albert...

JOHNNY
Give the kid a break Albie. Didn't
yuh hear, his shit shovelin' days
are over.

Albert peers at Cillian.

ALBERT
That so?

CILLIAN
Goin' to college.

ALBERT
(mutters)
All we need in this world, one
more educated prick.

Johnny laughs, exhaling a plume of smoke. He strolls over to Cillian, giving him a congratulatory SLAP on the back.

JOHNNY
If yuh miss us over 'ere. There'll
always be a shovel of shit with
your name on it kid.

Cillian shakes his head, getting back to business. He digs into the brown SLOP, always with a good natured smile.

WHISTLING a merry tune...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #1 - NIGHT - MOVING

Shovel in hand, Cillian strolls along the various game booths. He slows at the sound of CRYING, quickly spotting the source.

A LITTLE GIRL weeps in front of a makeshift SKEEBALL setup. Inside the booth, a HUNCHBACKED CIRCIE, watches the emotional child.

HUNCHBACKED CIRCIE
Yuh can't get a prize if yuh don't
win...

Cillian walks up to the counter, tossing a few coins from his pocket.

CILLIAN
Ay, Rosie. How 'bout a round.

ROSIE
(shakes head)
We can't do this every time, kid.
You'll run me outta business.

CILLIAN
Last time. Promise on my mother's
life.

ROSIE
Your mother's dead so your promise
means shit.

Cillian smiles, slides another COIN across the counter.

A BEAT.

Rosie gives in, placing THREE BALLS in front of him. Cillian sets the shovel aside, crouching down in front of the Crying Girl.

CILLIAN
Which one do yuh want?

His attention startles her. She looks between Cillian and the prizes with big, wet eyes. Sniffles. POINTS. Cillian follows her gaze.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
Comin' right up.

He smiles before returning to the counter. Holds up the first ball. Tosses...

It lands in the LOWEST BRACKET. Second ball, same outcome.

He turns toward the Girl. WINKS.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
Just warmin' up.

Cillian takes a moment, lining up the third and final ball.

TOSSES--

It lands in the 50 POINT HOLE. Turning to Rosie...

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

(points)

That one for the little lady.

Rosie shakes her head, handing Cillian a giant, stuffed MERMAID. He crouches down, handing the prize to the Girl. She's positively BEAMING.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

Take good care of her, okay?

The Girl squeezes the new toy, running off. Cillian returns to the skeeball set up.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

'Nother round Rosie. Just for fun.

She rolls her eyes, presenting three new balls. Cillian takes three shots, all landing in the 50 POINT sweet spot.

CHEERS erupt to his right. Cillian smiles, believing the exuberant cry is for him.

He turns to find a GROUP OF BOYS cheering on their friend who plays a SHOOTING GAME. Cillian watches their camaraderie, smile faltering.

TEENAGE GIRL (O.S.)

Hey!

Cillian grabs his shovel, head swiveling toward the voice.

A TEENAGE GIRL walks hand-in-hand with the once weeping Girl, still clutching her prize. The Teenage Girl's unwavering gaze makes Cillian visibly nervous.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)

Did you win my sister this doll?

Cillian tries and fails to hold eye-contact. His limited interaction with folks his age reveals itself.

CILLIAN

Sorry. I... uh...

(beat)

Yeah?

The Teenage Girl sizes him up, looks like she's about to scold him. Instead, she surprises Cillian with an approving grin.

TEENAGE GIRL

Thanks.

CILLIAN

(hesitant)

The circus is s'posed to be fun.

He looks to the little Girl. With a reassuring smile--

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

No cryin' allowed.

The Girl hides a grin behind the doll. Her sister rests a hand affectionately atop her head.

TEENAGE GIRL

Emma why don't you go show mum and dad what you got.

Emma needs no further prodding. She scampers off.

TEENAGE GIRL (CONT'D)

Are you having fun?

CILLIAN

Huh?

She motions to his shovel, wrinkling her nose at the obvious STENCH. He blushes.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

Yeah.

TEENAGE GIRL

Really?

CILLIAN

I shit you not.

She LAUGHS. A beat. Holds out her hand. He hesitates, glancing at his own dirty mitts.

TEENAGE GIRL

It ain't your own shit is it?

Cillian hurriedly brushes his hands on his trousers. Shakes.

CILLIAN

Cillian.

CLAIRE

Claire.

(beat)

My friends and I were thinkin' of
seeing a film in the city
tomorrow. Wanna come?

CILLIAN

We head out in the mornin'.

CLAIRE

Too bad. You ever get a day off?

He shrugs. *That's a no.*

CILLIAN

Leavin' for school soon...

CLAIRE

Had enough?

CILLIAN

Just gettin' out before it loses
its magic.

She smiles, considering his answer.

CLAIRE

You know... I always hear of
people runnin' off *with* the
circus. Never heard of anyone
runnin' away *from* it.

Claire takes slow steps backward...

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

It was nice to meet you Cillian.

He watches her retreat. A sort of longing in the air.

For conversation? Companionship? Normality?

Maybe all of the above...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #1 - VARIOUS - NIGHT

Cillian strolls, all visitors gone for the night. Around
him MUSIC still plays. MOVING-- we see the mayhem that
ensues after dark.

A maze of the SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

INEBRIATED PERFORMERS and WORK HANDS are strung along the ground like bread crumbs. Cillian follows the trail with his head down, uninterested in the night's festivities.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT

Cillian reaches the tracks, heading for a boxcar. A SINEWY MAN stands outside, arms crossed. Cillian's immediately on edge. Gives a quick nod of recognition.

CILLIAN

Kurt.

KURT

Kid.

Cillian stops in front of the unwelcome guest, waiting for him to reveal his intentions.

No dice.

CILLIAN

Can I help yuh with somethin'...

KURT

The boss wants yuh.

CILLIAN

What for?

KURT

The fuck if I know.

Kurt shoulder-checks him as he passes. Doesn't bother making sure Cillian follows.

When the boss calls, they all follow...

EXT. LAVISH TENT - NIGHT

Kurt marches toward a LOOMING TENT, far nicer than those showcased thus far. Kurt stops at the entrance, waving Cillian forward.

INT. LAVISH TENT - NIGHT

Cillian steps through, Kurt in his shadow. He takes in the lavish interiors-- RICH VELVETS and FINE SILKS draped across every surface.

TAXIDERMIED ANIMALS are expertly placed around the room. Their DEAD EYES follow Cillian into the elegant space.

Before him, a HANDSOME MAN lounges in a chair, flipping through a worn book. This is ROLF, self-proclaimed 'ringmaster extraordinaire'.

Without looking up, Rolf motions to a nearby chair.

ROLF

Sit.

As Cillian does, Rolf makes a point to finish what he's reading before SLAMMING the book closed.

He sits there comfortably, watching Cillian squirm.

ROLF (CONT'D)

You're leaving me.

A statement or question? Hesitant--

CILLIAN

Yes.

The word gets caught in his throat. Cillian CLEARS it, giving a definitive nod.

ROLF

I don't remember agreeing to that.

CILLIAN

I...

Cillian's gaze darts to Kurt, who looms in the dark like a gargoyle. Back to Rolf--

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

I didn't realize I needed permission.

ROLF

Your life is mine until your debt is paid.

CILLIAN

I don't owe yuh any money.

ROLF

Money, no. Your life...

Off Cillian's confusion--

ROLF (CONT'D)

After your mother's death I could have thrown you into the streets.

(MORE)

ROLF (CONT'D)
Instead I fed you. Clothed you.
Gave you work.

CILLIAN
I shovel shit all day an' yuh
don't even pay me.

ROLF
And how much shit is your life
worth, boy?

Cillian holds his tongue. Kurt's eyes scan Cillian,
considering. Smiles.

KURT
Not much.

CILLIAN
(to Rolf)
More if I learn somethin'.

Rolf studies Cillian, his face unreadable.

ROLF
Anything I can do to change your
mind?

CILLIAN
No, sir.

ROLF
Very well, then.

He motions for the boy to exit. Cillian stands, taking
careful steps toward freedom. As he leaves--

ROLF (O.S.)(CONT'D)
(to Kurt)
Young strays have no concept of
loyalty do they?

KURT (O.S.)
Sure don't, boss.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - LOCATION #1 - NIGHT

Cillian moves towards the tracks, sending paranoid glances
over his shoulder.

He hops into an open boxcar, the door sliding SHUT behind
him...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #1 - DAWN

The sun hasn't risen but everyone's already hard at work. Tents are TORN DOWN. Animals boarded into train compartments. Everything packed into ROTTING BOXES.

A thick TENSION has settled over the once lively grounds, making us long for the previous night's energy.

Out of their costumes, the circies look worse for wear. The less than glamorous reality of it-- days of blood, sweat, and tears for a two-hour show.

As Cillian carries a crate toward a boxcar, he's almost PLOWED OVER by a familiar sailor.

COLM

Watch where you're fuckin' goin'!

Cillian takes a step back, gets a look at the man. Colm pays him no further mind, charging off.

Cillian stares after the stranger...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #1 - DUSK

Now, nothing more than a dirt lot. The train WHISTLES, pulling away from the 'station'.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - DUSK

Cillian sits in the sliding doorway of a cozy sleeping compartment. It's the bare minimum. Two bunks protrude from the wall. On the opposite side, storage trunks.

Sleeping on the top bunk is BENNY, circus lifer and high-functioning alcoholic. He SNORES, a whisky bottle tucked under his arm.

Cillian watches his feet, dangling from the train as it picks up speed. His focus shifts to the now empty lot, admiring the passing landscape.

Everything drenched in the sunset's PASTEL HAZE...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - DAY

Cillian strolls through the new lot, apple in one hand, shovel in the other. A herd of ELEPHANTS cross his path. They're led by a SQUAT MAN.

Cillian nods in greeting.

CILLIAN
Rufus, where you takin' the girls?

RUFUS
(Annoyed)
Back to the train. Kicked 'em all
out to make room.

CILLIAN
Room for what?

Rufus shrugs. Leads the elephants toward their designated compartment. As the animals lumber away, Cillian keeps moving, sliding his hand along their tough, leathery skin...

EXT. MENAGERIE - MOMENTS LATER

A horde of CIRCUS EMPLOYEES stand outside the entrance. It's quite a sight. An assemblage of performers and societal outcasts.

There's a noticeable tension among them. Speculative WHISPERS. Cillian pushes his way forward.

A sturdy, bald GIANT stands at the tent's opening, arms crossed. He pays no attention to the worried CHATTER. Cillian stops in front of him.

CILLIAN
Ryker, somethin' going on?

Ryker glowers, shakes his head.

RYKER
None of your business, kid.

Cillian tries to peak around him. We get a glimpse of people moving about inside the Menagerie.

Ryker sidesteps, blocking his view...

RYKER (CONT'D)
Don't test me.

VOICE (O.S.)
Put them down. I didn't give you
permission to--

Ryker looks over his shoulder, stepping out of the way as a lion and two tigers are carried out in cages. BURLY MEN are stationed at each corner, protruding bars rest on their shoulders.

Suddenly, the lion SHOOTs a paw through the cage, nearly clawing one of the men who CRIES out in surprise. The frightened worker steps away, shifting the cage's balance. The others scramble to redistribute the weight.

Abraham charges after--

ABRAHAM
Fucking idiots! What are you
doing? Those are my animals--

VOICE (O.S.)
Your animals?

The crowd parts like the red sea as Rolf strolls through. He carries himself with a foreboding authority. Abraham OOZES CONTEMPT at the sight of him.

ROLF
Are we forgetting who owns this
circus?

ABRAHAM
(teeth clenched)
No, sir.

ROLF
Good.

Rolf turns toward the crowd. Shouting--

ROLF (CONT'D)
Am I paying you all to stand
around like a bunch of gossipy
school girls? Get back to fucking
work!

Everyone SCATTERS. Rolf marches into the tent, Abraham glaring after him.

ABRAHAM
His circus? I'd like to see him in
the ring with em'. Alastair would
rip his pompous fuckin' head off.

Cillian grabs his arm.

CILLIAN
Probably shouldn't--

ABRAHAM
Shouldn't what? I raised those
cats.
(shouts toward tent)
(MORE)

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Without me they wouldn't do a
goddamn thing!
(to Cillian)
And he knows it.

With that, Abraham storms off.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - DAY

Cillian's steps kick up dirt as he wanders the lot, weaving through tents and circus equipment. A robust WOMAN catches his eye. Her back faces him as she watches a handful of MEN erect her tent.

He sneaks up from behind, enveloping her in his arms. She CRIES out in surprise.

WOMAN
This better be who I think it is.

She turns, revealing a GORGEOUS WOMAN with a lustrous BEARD. In spite of the facial hair she oozes a fabulous femininity.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Give Mama a proper hug.

He wraps his arms around her waist, spinning her in a circle. When her feet touch the ground--

MAMA
What am I gonna do without these
hugs of yours?

CILLIAN
You can always visit.

Mama strokes her beard. A forced smile...

MAMA
You know this face is best suited
for the circus.

CILLIAN
What are you talkin' about? People
will want to know where I got my
good looks from.

He flashes a sly smile. Mama cradles his face in her manicured hands.

MAMA
Your mother was a rare jewel.
(sad)
(MORE)

MAMA (CONT'D)
The selfish part of me wishes
you'd stay.

CILLIAN
We both know there's nothing here
for me.
(smiles)
But don't worry, you'll always be
my favorite girl.

He kisses her on the cheek before moving on. Hasn't gone
far when--

SULTRY VOICE (O.S.)
Am I not your favorite girl?

Cillian looks to his right. Lounging on a wooden box is
MARJORIE. She casually smokes a cigarette in a black slip.
Everything about her screams seduction.

Her appearance doesn't phase him. All in a day with
Marjorie.

CILLIAN
I think you're everyone's
favorite.

MARJORIE
Not yours, apparently.

Cillian shrugs, flashing an apologetic smile.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
I bet you will meet many pretty
girls.

CILLIAN
None as pretty as you.

MARJORIE
Then you'll come see me tonight?

He laughs.

CILLIAN
You're persistent.

MARJORIE
And you are stubborn.
(thinks)
You know, those college girls may
be good with their books but they
are still just little girls.

Cillian crosses his arms. Still with that easy smile...

CILLIAN
And I am just a wee boy.

MARJORIE
Yes. But I could make you a man.

They watch one another. Each waiting for the other to give up or give in. Marjorie offers nothing but a dramatic SIGH, bringing her foot to rest on the box.

Then, she's STRETCHING her leg until it's parallel to her head. Marjorie hooks the leg behind her neck before bringing it back down.

Just a CONTORTIONIST partaking in a 'casual' stretch.

Marjorie takes another drag on her cigarette. Like she wasn't putting on a show just for him.

He shakes his head, amused.

CILLIAN
You're good.

MARJORIE
(Tisks)
No, sweet boy. I am the best.

He LAUGHS, taking leisurely steps backward.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - NIGHT

Cillian hops through the open sliding door. His roommate seemingly where we left him, cradling a bottle.

CILLIAN
Long day Benny?

Cillian sits on the bottom bunk, unlacing his boots.

BENNY
They're all long kid.

Cillian nods in agreement, pulling his shirt over his head.

CILLIAN
You hear about the new attraction
they're addin'?

BENNY
Heard 'bout it. Don't give a shit.

CILLIAN
Must be something big though,
right? Moved everyone out.

BENNY
Don't worry 'bout it too much.
Secrets don't stay secrets in this
place for long.

CILLIAN
Yeah but... some of us only got a
coupl'a days.
(pause)
You ever think about leavin'?

BENNY
Why'd I do that? Got a place to
sleep. Booze to drink. I'm livin'
the fuckin' American dream.

CILLIAN
Don't yuh think--

Benny SIGHS from his bunk. Cillian smiles, taking the hint.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
Alright, alright.
(beat)
Sure glad to be gettin' rid of me
huh Benny boy?

BENNY
Nah. Whoever they cram in 'ere
next, bound to be worse than you
kid.

Cillian CHUCKLES, changing into a clean shirt and trousers.
He slips into his bunk. Not tired in the least.

BENNY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey.

Cillian peers over the side.

BENNY (CONT'D)
You know why things 'round here
don't stay secret long? 'Cause
there's always some nosey bastard
who can't mind his own fuckin'
business.
(beat)
And if it ain't you, it's just
gonna be somebody else.

Cillian mulls this over, a mischievous smile on his lips.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - NIGHT - LATER

Cillian lies in his bed, WIDE AWAKE. Benny SNORES above him. Sliding from his bunk, he moves to the edge of the sleeping car, slipping bare feet into unlaced boots.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - NIGHT

Cillian wanders in the direction of the menagerie, feet noiseless on the dirt lot. He's on high alert for any passersby.

MARJORIE (O.S.)
So you finally decided to come
visit me...

Cillian freezes. Looks to his left. Out of the shadows steps Marjorie.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Or is this one of my dreams?

Cillian walks casually toward her like he hasn't just been caught. He stops a few feet away, allowing Marjorie to close the gap.

She rests the cigarette between her lips, placing her hands on the sides of Cillian's face. Marjorie slides them down to the BUTTONS of his shirt.

She manages to undo the top buttons before Cillian grabs her hands. Marjorie takes a step back, removing the cigarette from her mouth. EXHALES smoke.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Not one of my dreams...
(beat)
Where are you sneaking off to?

He glances toward the menagerie. Marjorie follows his gaze, reading him like an open book...

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Ah. I see.

CILLIAN
Do you know what's in there?

Marjorie's red lips form an ALL-KNOWING SMILE.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
What is it?

She shakes her head slowly from side-to-side. Cillian studies her. A beat.

Puts on his best boyish charm...

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
It could be my goin' away present.
Come on, I just wanna see it.
Whatever it is. Just once.

Marjorie suddenly looks sad. She steps toward Cillian. Looking up at him through dark lashes.

MARJORIE
I don't want you to see.

CILLIAN
Why not?

MARJORIE
You'll think she's prettier than I
am.

Off his look of CONFUSION--

EXT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Marjorie walks to the tent's entrance. Ryker stands guard, perking up at the sight of her. She offers him her cigarette.

MARJORIE
Do you mind if I keep you company?
It gets very lonely at night.

He raises an eyebrow at the cigarette. A BEAT.

Takes the offering...

EXT. MENAGERIE - OUTSKIRTS - NIGHT

Cillian crouches in the shadows. He watches as Marjorie works her charm. She LAUGHS, touching Ryker's arm flirtatiously, the shoulder of her robe slipping down.

Just an 'innocent' girl looking for comfort...

Whatever she's saying has his full attention. Marjorie takes slow steps backward, leading Ryker away from his post. He follows her like an obedient dog.

She sends a glance in Cillian's direction. His CUE. He scurries to the tent, slipping inside...

INT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

The space is not as he expected. Empty except for a one-and-a-half story CYLINDER TANK in the center of the room. Apart from the metal rims holding it together, it's constructed entirely of thick GLASS.

Cillian takes hesitant steps toward the looming aquarium, pressing his face against the enclosure.

He SHADES his eyes, peering into the water when--

BAM! A SNARLING FACE emerges from the darkness.

Cillian CRIES out, falling backward. He scrambles in the dirt, trying to get far away from the fanged devil.

The creature watches him from its holding cell...

It's not a devil but a MERMAID, with skin and hair the color of PEARLS. Her face is angular, gills sitting underneath CUTTING CHEEKBONES. She snarls, baring sharp FANGS.

Her eyes are BLACK. SHARK-LIKE.

Cillian's eyes travel down her form, Her tale made of iridescent BLACK SCALES. The moonlight reveals its true colors, a mixture of EMERALD GREENS and OCEAN BLUES.

Cillian regains his footing. He can't take his eyes off her, staring blankly as if under a SPELL.

The Mermaid holds his gaze, inching toward the surface. He mirrors her movements, ascending the ladder.

INT. MENAGERIE TENT - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian crawls on hands and knees until his face hangs out over the water.

The Mermaid emerges, hovering just out of reach. He eyes her LIPS, the only feature with a flesh-like quality.

Rosy. Warm. *Inviting.*

Cillian leans forward. Her TALONED hands moving to cradle his face.

The moment her skin makes contact, something CHANGES. The snarl disappears, fangs RETRACTING. Her black, beady eyes revert to familiar, HUMAN EYES.

Brows furrowed, she studies his face as if truly seeing him for the first time.

THE MERMAID

You are so...

She struggles to find the word. Her expression matching his own. A kind of WONDERMENT, as if having discovered some rare, precious thing.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

Pure.

LARS (O.S.)

Ay, what're you doin' up there!

Cillian and the Mermaid break from their trance. Heads snapping in the direction of the third party. The Mermaid SNARLS, eyes turning jet black as she dives under the water.

Cillian scrambles to his feet, looking down at LARS, a fat, dim-witted man. He carries a bucket of fish in his hand.

INT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

Cillian climbs down the ladder, cursing himself.

CILLIAN

Sorry, I didn't--

LARS

(shakes head)

If it wasn't for me you'd be fish food right 'bout now. Think you owe me some thanks.

CILLIAN

Thanks...

LARS

Who gave you permission to be in 'ere? Place's off limits.

CILLIAN

Sorry, didn't know.

Cillian goes to step around him, but is GRABBED by the arm. Lars is more than happy to exercise his limited authority.

LARS

The boss is gonna hear about this one. An' if you don't come up with somethin' better than that, he's gonna have yer head.

MERMAIDS POV: She watches the tenuous exchange through the murky water. NARROWING IN on Lars' hand as it digs into Cillian's skin.

BACK TO SCENE:

Cillian clears his throat, trying to swallow his fear.

CILLIAN
I can keep a secret.

LARS
(a toothy smile)
Well, I can't.

Lars releases him.

Cillian hurries out, throwing one last look over his shoulder. The tank appears EMPTY.

INT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Lars stands in front of the tank, peering in.

LARS
Where are yuh girl?

He heads toward the ladder, STRUGGLING to climb with the bucket in hand. SLOP sloshes over the rim.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

He reaches the top, throwing the bucket onto the platform. It tips over, contents SPILLING EVERYWHERE.

LARS
Fuckin' hell.

Lars hauls himself onto the landing. He picks up a fish, holding it out to--

No one.

Looking down at the water.

LARS (CONT'D)
Come on girlie.
(clicks tongue)
Come on.

He crouches down, slapping the dead fish on the water's surface.

MERMAID POV: Watching him from below. The fish creates ripples in the water.

SLAP. SLAP. SLAP.

BACK TO SCENE:

Lars rests his hands on his hips, impatiently scanning the water. When...

The Mermaid APPEARS.

Keeping her distance, she stares at him with large, innocent eyes. HUMAN eyes. Her lips part ever so slightly.

Lars' ogles her, probably the closest he's been to breasts since infancy. He takes a step toward her, holding out the fish.

LARS (CONT'D)

That's it. That's it girlie. Just stay right there...

With his other hand he moves for the ZIPPER of his pants. Carefully letting down the fly.

Lars REACHES a hand inside his trousers...

From outside, an unidentifiable NOISE shatters the silence. Startled, Lars removes his hand. Whips around--

SLIPPING ON THE SPILLED SLOP.

She watches him flail, unmoved, as Lars desperately tries to regain his footing. As he struggles, she SUBMERGES herself.

Her eyes go BLACK just as they KISS the water...

CLOSE ON Lars's face. We see the MOMENT he realizes it's no use. His eyes WIDEN as he falls backwards into the tank.

His horrified CRY is abruptly CUT OFF as he goes under.

We're left to sit in a VIOLENT SORT OF SILENCE...

HOLD ON the CHURNING WATER until it settles. *We wait.* But Lars doesn't emerge. Instead, RED bubbles up from below...

CLOSING IN on the spreading CRIMSON...

DISSOLVE TO:

BLACK SCREEN.

It starts with a SCREAM. Piercing. Blood curdling.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - MORNING

Cillian, not having slept a wink, is out of bed in seconds. He pulls on his boots.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - MORNING

His fellow CIRCIES have emerged, bleary-eyed from their slumber. A few MEN rush toward the animal enclosures-- the most obvious cause for concern.

Cillian makes for the menagerie, almost at a full run. He's getting warmer...

EXT. MENAGERIE - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER

Marjorie stands outside, looking toward the commotion. She notices Cillian. Makes nervous eye contact.

With curiosity stronger than fear, Cillian runs into the unguarded entrance--

INT. MENAGERIE - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

He steps inside, freezing in terror. The water is stained BLOOD RED.

He sways on his feet. *So much blood.*

RYKER (O.S.)
Shut 'er up!

Cillian finds Ryker on the platform. To Cillian's left, an OLD WOMAN, coming to clean the glass.

The source of the SCREAM.

He moves to silence her but his job is done for him when she FAINTS. He manages to catch the Old Woman in his arms, setting her gently on the ground.

Then, Cillian runs toward the tank, SEARCHING. She APPEARS, hands pressed against the glass. Eyes wide. BLACK. The Mermaid opens her mouth in a SILENT SCREAM.

Cillian makes for the ladder.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

From this vantage point we see Lars' body floating face down in the water. Ryker shakes his head at the corpse. *Now, how to get it out?*

Cillian steps toward the water. Almost slips.

RYKER
Get outta here kid. Take the
banshee with yuh.

CILLIAN
What're you gonna do?

RYKER
Im'a let someone else deal with
this shit.

Cillian's eyes are fixed on the floating body. He doesn't notice Ryker reaching out.

Grabbing his shirt--

RYKER (CONT'D)
If I find out you been tellin'
anyone about this. I'll smash in
those pretty little college brains
of yours. Understand?

Cillian nods. Glancing toward the water...

CILLIAN
What d'yuh think they're gonna do
to her?

Ryker gives him a look. *Who the fuck cares?*

RYKER
I'm gonna go stand watch. An' I
don't wanna find you here when
Rolf comes 'round.

Ryker starts the descent, Cillian following close behind. By the time his feet hit the dirt, Ryker's already disappeared to man his post. The Old Woman has run off too, her SHAPE still visible in the dirt.

Cillian heads to the back of the tent, tries lifting the tarp. It's taunt.

CILLIAN
Shit.

MERMAID (O.S.)
(ethereal)
Boy.

Cillian starts. Turns. The Mermaid watches him through the murky red. She puts her hand up against the glass, a silent plea.

Taking a step toward her...

BANG. BANG. BANG.

Three shots ring out. Someone SCREAMS. We hear the entrance FLAPS being pushed aside.

ROLF (O.S.)
Get back to work!

The Mermaid VANISHES.

Cillian drops to his stomach, squeezing himself through the almost impossible opening. Inch-by-inch he disappears until the last bit of him is swallowed up.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - CONTINUOUS

Cillian dusts himself off with little success. His white shirt filthy. He weaves along the tents, in an almost drunken stupor.

His mind fixated on *Her*.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - LATER

Rolf and a small band of LACKIES stare at Lars, floating FACE DOWN in the water. Kurt pokes at the corpse with a wooden pole, struggling to maneuver the mass toward the platform.

JESSE, wide-eyed and innocent, peers into the water. Spooked.

JESSE
What're we gonna do with her boss?

ROLF
What are we going to do with her?

JESSE
When my brother's dog attacked
someone, had ta' put it down.
Dangerous, you know?

Rolf grabs Jesse, pushing him backward until he's hanging over the water. Jesse CRIES out, grabbing Rolf's wrists. Holding on for dear life.

JESSE (CONT'D)

What're you--

ROLF

I'd kill you, your brother, and
his damn dog five times over
before I let something happen to
her. Understand?

JESSE

P-p-please. Don't.

Rolf throws Jesse onto the metal surface.

Kurt has finally wrangled the body. Grabbing hold of Lars' feet, he drags him onto the platform.

ROLF

She's our ticket boys! Our fuckin'
golden ticket. Take a good look...

Rolf flips the body over with a SWIFT KICK. Jesse's face instantly PALES. All the men let out a GROAN, looking away.

We PAN DOWN to Lars' BLOATED FLESH. His fly is still open, pant leg stuck on a KNIFE HOLSTER. The weapon is UNACCOUNTED for. The blade has been put to good use as Lars' chest has been SLICED OPEN.

Rolf is the only one seemingly untroubled by the sight. He bends down to get a better look.

JESSE

I think she ate his...

He stops. Struck by that sudden and inexplicable feeling of being WATCHED. They all *feel it*. Collectively turning toward the water--

And there She is. Watching them. Her mouth smeared with BLOOD. There's something unsettling about her gaze, it's not the black eyes of a She-demon. They're human. *Knowing.*

Rolf slow claps, positively TICKLED. He grins down at her--

ROLF

Eat your heart out boys or the
bitch will do it for you!

Her eyes DARKEN at his unexpected delight. Rolf addresses his men...

ROLF (CONT'D)
Feed the body to the animals. And
if I were you-- I'd find that
fuckin' knife.

She sinks lower in the water, her malevolent snarl
distorted in red.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - NIGHT - MOVING

Cillian smiles to himself, carrying his shovel through the
circus nightlife. There's an old glamour to it. Twinkling
lights. Kids carrying cotton candy. Families ogling the
animals and circus 'freaks'.

He takes it all in for the final time, coming upon--

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Cillian follows the tracks. Examining each boxcar as he
passes. One in particular catches his eye. He jumps onto
the car, clinging to the bars.

CILLIAN
Sleepin' in here now?

We see who he's addressing--

Abraham sits in the barred car, his cats laying around him.
Gemma's head rests in his lap. She PURRS as he strokes her
face.

ABRAHAM
Better company.

Cillian remains tight-lipped. Eyeing the animals.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Don't look so worried...

CILLIAN
Just don't wanna wake up to find
you've become a midnight snack.

ABRAHAM
Don't worry about me kid. Go make
something of your life.

CILLIAN
Why didn't you?

Abraham raises an eyebrow, CHUCKLES. Cillian winces. Mimes
banging his head against the bars.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

I mean. You know...

(beat)

I know you hate seein'em in these cages. Why not shake this dust off your boots?

Abraham considers his question, admiring his four-legged family.

ABRAHAM

And who do you think Rolf's gonna bring in to look after 'em?

(looks to Cillian)

I can't take that chance, kid. If they're doomed to die in here, so am I. I think I owe 'em that much.

Cillian rests his head against the bars. He watches Abraham, admiring his friend's obvious adoration for something outside himself.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - NIGHT - LATER

Cillian lies in bed, ETCHING something into the underside of the top bunk. Wood shavings RAIN DOWN.

He finishes the final touches, admiring his work. Embedded in the wood is a CARVING of a MERMAID.

Cillian runs his fingers over the ROUGH GRAIN...

EXT. MARJORIE'S TENT - NIGHT - LATER

Marjorie smokes at the entrance, waiting. She isn't surprised to see Cillian emerge from the darkness. But there's a glimpse of something on her face--

Disappointment?

Cillian stops before her. Words aren't necessary, she knows what he's come for. Marjorie steps forward, memorizing his features. Standing on her tip-toes she kisses him on the cheek.

A goodbye kiss.

Stepping around him...

EXT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Cillian watches the familiar routine. Marjorie and Ryker's exchange is brief. She leads him away.

As soon as they're out of sight Cillian sneaks into...

INT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

She watches the entrance, as if expecting him. With slow, deliberate steps Cillian meets her at the tank.

He carefully presses his INDEX FINGER against the glass, methodically tracing her features. Nose... Eyes... Cheeks...

When he's finished his invisible sketch, Cillian rests his palm against the glass.

She stares at his hand before mimicking the gesture. Her pointed fingers CARESS the smooth surface. There's an INTIMACY to it. A distanced sensuality.

Her eyes meet his.

Then, she's taking off toward the surface.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian takes a seat on the platform, smart enough to keep his distance. She stares at him from the water.

SILENCE. Then--

CILLIAN

Do you have a name?

The Mermaid blinks at him. A beat. She rises, her mouth emerging from the water.

THE MERMAID

She gives us no names.

CILLIAN

Who doesn't?

THE MERMAID

The Sea.

CILLIAN

(beat)

Then what should I name you?

THE MERMAID

Nothing. I am not yours to name.

She glides closer, taking her time. He tenses.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

What is *your* name?

He remains silent, wondering what kind of power she'll have over him if he gives it up. She senses his apprehension. Smiles.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
All humans have names.

CILLIAN
How would you know?

THE MERMAID
I was one of your kind.
(beat)
Once...

Her voice trails off, thoughts far away. Another life. Another lifetime.

CILLIAN
(surprised)
Can you change back?

She shakes her head.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
Do you have... powers?

THE MERMAID
None that can help me now.
Boy...

CILLIAN
Cillian.

Her grin grows, savoring the word as it rolls off her tongue.

THE MERMAID
Kill-e-an...

He studies her carefully.

CILLIAN
Are there more of you?

She nods.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
The stories are true then...

THE MERMAID
You are... angry.

Cillian doesn't respond.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

Why?

CILLIAN

You're *murderers*.

The Mermaid flinches as if he's physically slapped her.

THE MERMAID

No.

CILLIAN

You kill--

THE MERMAID

No.

Her eyes BLACKEN. A *spreading ink spill*.

Then, barely above a whisper...

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

We only want to keep them
forever...

He shakes his head.

CILLIAN

I saw what you did.

THE MERMAID

I had to.

CILLIAN

Why?

She cocks her head, staring at him as if the answer should be obvious.

THE MERMAID

To save you...

Cillian's brow furrows, considering the truth of her words. She rises out of the water, propping her arms on the platform.

We see BRUISES on her wrists. ROPE BURNS. An identical RING circles her neck. The angry BLUES and PURPLES stand out against her pale skin.

Cillian's pained just looking at them. But if there are feelings of sympathy, he quickly shakes them off.

CILLIAN

What d'you want from me?

A smile plays on her lips. *Is she toying with him?* He opens his mouth to speak when-- VOICES approach.

Cillian looks toward the entrance, making for the ladder. He slides down, heading toward the old escape panel.

He looks back, trying to memorize everything about Her.

THE MERMAID

Will I see you again?

Cillian takes in her hopeful expression.

She's all he can see.

A loaded BEAT.

CILLIAN

Yes.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - MOMENTS LATER - MOVING

Cillian dusts himself off, sending paranoid glances toward the receding menagerie. The night dead around him.

Coming upon...

EXT. SLEEPING CAR - CONTINUOUS

Benny stands outside their quarters, lighting a cigarette. He waves out the matchstick, noticing Cillian's approach. There's a NERVOUSNESS in the air.

CILLIAN

Never expected to see you up at this hour.

Benny says nothing, watching Cillian jump into the boxcar. He goes back to smoking his cigarette, walking off.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - CONTINUOUS

Cillian enters to find Rolf lounging in his bunk. Kurt stands next to the bed, cleaning his fingernails with a KNIFE.

Cillian turns to run, but finds TWO MEN blocking his way. Mustering all his strength, Cillian attempts to plow through. But it's no use--

The door slides CLOSED as they hold a struggling Cillian. Rolf trails a calloused finger over the ENGRAVING.

ROLF
I hear you've been playing with my
mermaid...

Cillian remains TIGHT LIPPED. Rolf glances up, feeding on the fear in his eyes.

ROLF (CONT'D)
Magnificent isn't she?

CILLIAN
I won't tell anyone.

ROLF
Oh, I don't doubt that.
(beat)
The mute have no trouble keeping
secrets.

Rolf SNAPS his fingers.

CILLIAN
No!

Kurt steps toward Cillian, who thrashes against his restrainers. He grabs Cillian's face in his large hands.

Rolf watches in amusement. SNAPS his fingers again.

Like a trained dog, Kurt releases Cillian, resuming his original position.

ROLF
You're lucky my mermaid is so
taken with you.

CILLIAN
I don't--

ROLF
I know you're meant to be leaving
us but I'd suggest you reconsider.
(studies him)
Though I have an inkling you
already have.

CILLIAN
What d'yuh want?

ROLF

I want you to keep her happy.

(beat)

Unhappy creatures are self-destructive creatures. You think anyone's going pay to see a dead mermaid?

CILLIAN

You can't keep Her in there.

ROLF

I don't take orders from shit shovelers.

Rolf rises from the bed, stepping toward Cillian. He GRABS the boy's face, gaze boring into him.

ROLF (CONT'D)

I know how to make people do what I want. Doesn't take much, a little *pressure* is all.

A STARE-DOWN. Rolf finally releases him, leaving an IMPRINT on Cillian's skin.

ROLF (CONT'D)

But I'm not going to do that with you. 'Cause I can tell you're a smart kid. You have to know runnin' a circus is no cheap task. But what you don't know is the money's not coming in like it used to. Too much competition these days. The world's seen it all.

CILLIAN

But not Her.

ROLF

Precisely.

(reasoning)

Think about it kid, where'd these people go if we shut down? You and me-- we'd find other work. But *them*? Your negro friend? That bearded atrocity? The world isn't so kind to **freaks**.

Cillian takes this in. Knows it's true. Reluctant--

CILLIAN

And how m'I supposed to keep Her happy?

ROLF
You're already doing it my boy.
You're giving her hope.

CILLIAN
For what?

ROLF
Escape.

Rolf SNAPS his fingers, motioning for his companions to leave. They open the sliding door...

ROLF (CONT'D)
And you'd do well to remember, the only reason you're not floating at the top of that tank is because she still thinks you might be of use to her.

Rolf watches Cillian's expression fall. Almost sympathetic--

ROLF (CONT'D)
You'll find no soul in those black eyes. The instant you forget that...
(snaps fingers)
She's got you.

Rolf offers a condescending slap on the cheek, leaving Cillian to stare at his receding figure.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - MORNING

A persistent POUNDING wakes Cillian from his slumber.

MAMA (O.S.)
(banging)
Benny open up!

Benny GROANS from the top bunk. Cillian buries his head under the pillow.

CILLIAN
(muffled)
She's talkin' to you.

More POUNDING.

MAMA (O.S.)
Benny have you seen Cillian?

Benny throws his pillow at Cillian.

BENNY
 (grumbling)
 She's *askin'* bout you.

Benny makes no motion to move. Cillian rolls from his bunk, slogging toward the door. He throws it open--

Mama stands before him, still in her pajamas. Curlers in her beard. Relief crosses her face.

MAMA
 What the hell are you doin'?

She hits him upside the head. Cillian flinches--

CILLIAN
 Ah, what?

MAMA
 You were s'posed to see me before
 you left...
 (then)
 Why haven't you left?

Mama peaks her head in. Everything is as it's always been.

How to explain...

CILLIAN
 I'm not goin'.

MAMA
WHAT?

CILLIAN
 I got a...
 (beat)
 Promotion.

MAMA
 A promotion?

BENNY (O.S.)
 (cackling)
 He gets to shovel Rolf's shit now!

MAMA
 Shut up Benny!

She glares at Cillian. He can only offer a shrug.

CILLIAN
 I'll defer 'til spring. School
 will still be there--

MAMA

Or you get goin' to school now and
we'll be here when you're done.

Will you? Cillian doesn't respond.

MAMA (CONT'D)

Does Abe know 'bout this?

Cillian lets out a frustrated GROAN. He doesn't know how to explain, couldn't if he wanted to.

CILLIAN

I don't have to get permission,
yuh know? You're not my parents.

Mama's taken aback. A flicker of hurt crosses her face.

MAMA

Course not.

CILLIAN

Sorry, I--

MAMA

(waves him off)

I suppose we both know I'd be lyin'
if I said I wasn't happy to keep
you around a little bit longer.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - MORNING

Work boots kick up clouds of dust. Cillian wanders toward the menagerie, head down. Ignoring the curious looks of his fellow circies.

MARJORIE (O.S.)

I hope she was worth it.

Cillian finds Marjorie in her usual spot. She appears to be watching everyone at work. Half of her face is OBSCURED by a hand, holding a limp cigarette.

Cillian moves toward her.

CILLIAN

What?

MARJORIE

Was she worth it?

Marjorie lowers her hand, inhaling on the cigarette. Dried BLOOD stains the butt. Her left eye is BRUISED, several GASHES cut across her cheek.

Cillian hurries toward Marjorie, reaching out--

CILLIAN

Ay, what...

She clutches the front of his shirt, keeping him at bay.

MARJORIE

Was. She. Worth. it.

Flustered, he gives a half-hearted SHRUG. Then, a DEFINITIVE NOD. Marjorie releases him, smoothing out the wrinkles in his shirt.

Her anger DISSIPATES. She's back to her usual, cool self.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)

Good. I didn't want it to be for nothing.

He cradles her face in his hands, running his thumb along her split lip.

CILLIAN

Who--

MARJORIE

If I tell you, what are you going to do about it?

He opens his mouth. CLOSES IT. She smiles bitterly, pulling his hands away.

Taking a drag--

MARJORIE (CONT'D)

Little boys have no power here.
(motions to her face)
Women even less.

CILLIAN

I'm sorry.

It sounds like a question. She LAUGHS.

MARJORIE

I've been used by many men, but they've all had the decency to never pretend like they cared.
(motions)
Go. She's waiting.

Cillian takes a step back. Then another. He retreats, her sad eyes pushing him further toward the Menagerie.

EXT. MENAGERIE - MOMENTS LATER

Ryker stands at his post, stepping aside as Cillian approaches.

INT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

The Mermaid waits for him.

Cillian stops yards away, offering a self-conscious smile. She doesn't return the gesture, watching him curiously.

He shuffles toward the ladder, climbing...

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian sits on the platform, keeping his distance. The Mermaid appears, bobbing in the water. She glides toward the platform, resting her chin on the metal, fingers gripping the edge.

There's something almost *flirtatious* about it. An endearing coyness.

THE MERMAID
You do not trust me.

CILLIAN
Trust is earned.

THE MERMAID
How?

CILLIAN
I have... questions.

THE MERMAID
Men ask questions like they are owed answers.

CILLIAN
I'm just curious...

She considers him. Senses his SINCERITY.

THE MERMAID
Then ask.

Racking his brain--

CILLIAN
You said you were human once.

THE MERMAID

Yes.

CILLIAN

How?

THE MERMAID

If you perish in Her waters She
has the final say. Who lives. Who
dies...

Cillian ponders her riddles.

CILLIAN

Are there Mer-men?

She stares at him but her mind has wandered. He SHIFTS,
uncomfortable under her blank gaze.

THE MERMAID

So few...

Her pupils suddenly EXPAND. Black, glaring eyes--

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

Men are impulsive. Greedy. They
crave *power*.

(beat)

Only the pure of heart are given
second-life. She must maintain the
balance...

Her eyes close. When they open again, HUMAN EYES watch him.

CILLIAN

How old are you?

THE MERMAID

I stopped counting.

CILLIAN

When?

THE MERMAID

A lifetime ago...

He nods, taking this in.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

Now, what will you do?

CILLIAN

Do?

THE MERMAID

I must earn your trust but you
have no need for mine?

CILLIAN

I...

(beat)

What do you want?

THE MERMAID

Everyday you must bring me a gift.

Cillian LAUGHS. She doesn't join in.

CILLIAN

You're serious?

She blinks up at him.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

I shovel horse shit. I don't 'ave
any money.

THE MERMAID

The best gifts cannot be bought.

With this, she SUBMERGES herself.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #2 - NIGHT

Cillian soaks in the circus nightlife. Children play,
parents OOO-ING and AHH-ING at the various spectacles.

He weaves through the tents, stopping at Marjorie's. No
light shines through its crevices. Cillian hesitantly pulls
back the tent's flap, peeking inside.

She isn't there. He looks around, spots--

CILLIAN

Ay! Benny!

In the dark we can just make out Benny stumbling toward the
railcars with a bottle in hand. He halts, looking around
for the source.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

Benny!

Cillian waves, walking toward him. Seeing it's only his
bunk mate, Benny resumes his trajectory. Cillian jogs to
keep up.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
You seen Marjorie? Is she workin'?

Benny CACKLES, taking a swig from the bottle before lifting it in the air. Toasting the gods.

BENNY
Oh, she's workin' Kid.

Cillian frowns. Turning toward the circus grounds. The lively MUSIC grows LOUDER. Carries over to...

INT. DINGY TENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON skin. Beads of SWEAT collect on the pale surface. We PULL BACK--

Marjorie reclines in a chair. LUSTFUL MEN young and old are packed in like sardines around her. The light casts sharp shadows over her face. Her eyes are dark, almost vacant.

She moves her body sleepily, as if we're watching a dream. Twisting herself into intricate shapes and poses.

There's a CRAFTSMANSHIP to it. A sensual attention to detail that goes unnoticed by the lascivious audience...

INT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Inside, a small crowd has formed. WELL-DRESSED MEN circle the tank.

From a SPECTATORS POV we see the Mermaid, both arms pulled in opposite directions--

An UNDERWATER CRUXIFIXCTION.

She hisses and snarls, eyes a BOILING BLACK. The men watch, mouths open in delighted horror.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - TRAIN EN ROUTE - NIGHT

Cillian cradles a book but his eyes don't scan the pages. He's deep in thought. A kerosine lamp sways under the train's rocky movement.

Closing the story, Cillian leans over the side of his bed, storing it underneath. It lays to rest with a heap of other novels. ONE in particular catches his eye.

Cillian brings the book to sit in his lap, hand brushing a layer of dust from the cover.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #3 - DAWN

Everyone's at work, bright and early. The moon still high in the sky.

INT. MENAGERIE - DAWN

Cillian waltz through the entrance, book in hand. He's practically floating on air, a day-dreamer's smile on his face.

Approaching the tank he TAPS on the glass. Waits.

For nothing...

He peers into the aquarium. Can just make out her form at the top of the tank.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - DAWN

She bobs in the water, wide-eyes fixated on the fading MOON. Cillian studies her, wondering when she'll notice his presence.

Her gaze eventually finds its way to him. She stares, saying nothing.

He fumbles to fill the silence...

CILLIAN

You said I was t'bring you a gift?

She swims over, resting her arms on the platform. The BRUISES on her skin are noticeably worse than before.

Without thinking, Cillian rushes over. Kneeling, he drops the book, his hands moving to her BATTERED WRISTS. His thumb runs along the black and purple trail. A choked whisper...

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

What are they doin' to yuh...

The Mermaid watches his hands LINGER on her scales. She turns her palms over until they PRESS against his.

Her taloned fingers run over his skin, like a palm reader deciphering his future. She looks up at Cillian.

A CHARGED BEAT.

Suddenly, her expression DARKENS, hands LOCKING around his wrists. Cillian TENSES, gives a small TUG. Her grip only TIGHTENS.

Then, *just like that*, She RELEASES him, turning her attention to the fallen book. We're left wondering if it was just our imagination.

Cillian redirects his focus, trying to control his SHAKING HANDS.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
It's a storybook...

She picks up the bound words.

THE MERMAID
I know what it is.

CILLIAN
Right...
(beat)
The author wrote about you...

He gently pries the novel from her grasp, purposefully distancing himself. She pretends not to notice.

She furrows her brow. Cillian holds up the book, hesitates-- *can she read?* She stares at it blankly.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
The. Little. Mermaid.

She tilts her head. Intrigued. Runs her taloned hands over the picture of the mermaid, a much softer version of herself.

THE MERMAID
You will read it to me.

He can't tell if this is a question or a command. Either way, he nods.

She makes herself comfortable, a child ready for a bedtime story. Cillian positions himself on his stomach, opening the book to its first page.

CILLIAN
"Far out in the ocean, where the water is as blue as the prettiest cornflower, and as clear as crystal, it is very, very deep; so deep, indeed..."

The Mermaid smiles faintly, her mind wandering to *the sea...*

INT. MENAGERIE - MORNING - LATER

They're still in their original positions, but Cillian has migrated forward. They're now practically nose-to-nose as he reads.

CILLIAN

"...The prince asked her who she was, and where she came from, and she looked at him mildly and sorrowfully with her deep blue eyes."

Cillian glances up to find her BLUE EYES watching him.

A LINGERING BEAT...

He clears his throat, tearing his gaze away. Continues--

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

"But she could not speak. Every step she took was as the witch had said it would be, she felt as if treading upon the points of needles or sharp knives; but she bore it willingly..."

THE MERMAID

(whisper)

How does it end?

(beat)

Does she get her prince?

CILLIAN

You'll find out...

Cillian moves to turn the page but The Mermaid reaches out, stopping him.

THE MERMAID

Tell me now.

(begging)

Please.

He hesitates. Shakes his head.

CILLIAN

No. He marries a princess and...

(reluctant)

She turns into foam.

She takes this in, clearly heartbroken.

THE MERMAID

He must have loved her very much.

He looks at her, confused. Glances down at the book.

CILLIAN

It's just'a story.

THE MERMAID

No.

CILLIAN

You think he knew one of you--
your kind?

THE MERMAID

I know.

CILLIAN

How?

Quoting a previous passage--

THE MERMAID

(pained)

"A mermaid has no tears and
therefore she suffers so much
more..."

He looks down at the book. Closes it definitively.

MERMAID

You will bring me another?

CILLIAN

You don't want somethin' else?

She shakes her head.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

Okay.

He pushes the book toward her

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

Your gift m'lady.

She runs her pointed hands across the cover. Returns it.

THE MERMAID

One day you will tell me the rest.

CILLIAN

You know how it ends.

THE MERMAID
Maybe we will rewrite it.

He considers this statement, the possibility of an impending future together. Then, thoughtfully--

CILLIAN
What's it like...
(beat)
Bein' a mermaid?

THE MERMAID
I don't know what you ask...

CILLIAN
If you-- if you could use one word
to describe it.
(beat)
What it's like...

She watches him. Her eyes wander back to the closed book and its all too familiar tragic ending.

THE MERMAID
Lonely.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #3 - EVENING - MOVING

Cillian wades through the growing crowd of SPECTATORS, SHIT SHOVEL in hand. Guests clear the way for him as he whistles a lively TUNE.

Everything around him appears BRIGHTER. HAPPIER. It's a picturesque night, alive with the promise of entertainment. He looks around in CHILD-LIKE WONDER, as if it's his very first time at the CIRCUS.

MAMA (O.S.)
I remember you tellin' me you got
a promotion...

He stops, BACKTRACKS. Mama watches him from her post, prepared to be seen by ogling customers. He shrugs. Smiles.

CILLIAN
Turns out shit doesn't shovel
itself.

MAMA
Suppose not...

She eyes him up and down. Sensing her disappointment, he walks to Mama, arms open wide. Scooping her up, Cillian SPINS her in a circle. She doesn't soften.

Setting her on the ground--

CILLIAN
What's the matter?

MAMA
I've been hearin' things...

CILLIAN
Yeah? 'Bout what?

He knows exactly what. His forced ignorance gives him away.

MAMA
So, it's true.

He looks down at his shoes. Shrugs.

CILLIAN
Someone has to take care of Her.

MAMA
Don't dirty your hands for his
benefit.

He gives a wry smile, holding up the shovel.

CILLIAN
Too late.
(Then, serious)
She doesn't 'ave anyone else. She
needs me.

Mama studies him. Gently...

MAMA
It's nice to feel needed, isn't
it?

Cillian steps away from her with a roll of his eyes. He
shoves the head of the shovel into the dirt.

CILLIAN
Stop. I know what yer doin'. But
this is for you too-- for
everybody.

MAMA
We'll be just fine.

CILLIAN
You don't *know* that.

This statement lingers.

MAMA

The world is a big place, you
deserve a chance to see it.

Cillian kicks at the dirt.

CILLIAN

You're not. Abe's not. You think
he's so wise-- what's the
difference between me and him?

MAMA

He's those cats' world, they don't
know anything else.

CILLIAN

Well, I'm--

MAMA

No.

Mama's face grows stern, pointing an authoritative finger
at him.

MAMA (CONT'D)

It may come to feel like it but
you're not her entire world, not
even close. So don't go making her
yours.

Cillian stares at her blankly. Then, a small LAUGH escapes.
He leans in, kissing her on the cheek.

CILLIAN

Why's everyone always lecturin'
me?

MAMA

Cause you always look like you need
some sense talked into yuh.

Smiling he takes hold of his shovel, moving to step around
her. She grabs onto his arm. Gravely serious...

MAMA (CONT'D)

You hear what I said.

CILLIAN

I heard yuh, Mama.

Cillian disappears in the growing crowd as the MUSIC
carries over to--

INT. MENAGERIE - TANK - NIGHT

CLOSE ON the Mermaid's face. Black, dead eyes stare out at a group of spectators. She's again strung up, bound by both wrists.

Bubbles stream from her open mouth, blurring the faces
PRESSED UP against the glass.

INT. DILAPIDATED TENT - SAME TIME

Marjorie performs for a sweaty, intimate crowd. Her features appear SHARPER, eyes shrouded in SHADOW. For a moment she resembles her mermaid counterpart.

INT. MENAGERIE - DUSK

Cillian reads aloud to the Mermaid from a new book. She stares at him, ENRAPTURED. He glances up, smiling at her look of wonderment. Continues reading...

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - NIGHT

We weave through the boisterous crowd. It's noticeably packed. *Something* is drawing people in.

We pass fire breathers. Jugglers. Kids carry toy guns. Prizes of all sizes and shapes. The night is ALIVE.

INT. MENAGERIE TENT - DUSK

Another book. Another night. Cillian lays on his back, directly next to the water's edge. The Mermaid rests her chin next to his head so she can see the pictures.

She points to something on the page. He laughs, turning to look at Her, their faces a BREATH APART.

She sinks under the water. We follow her into the dark...

INT. DILAPIDATED TENT - NIGHT - LATER

Marjorie contorts herself. CLOSE ON fragmented body parts. An abstract painting of skin and black lace...

INT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Trailing over black scales... Then white... traveling up the Mermaid's torso to her neck until we land on BARED FANGS.

A piercing SHRIEK breaks through the water. Her free hand claws a rope around her neck.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - DUSK

A ROPE tightens around a box as it's unloaded from a horse-drawn cart.

All hands on deck as the train is unpacked. Only this time, Cillian will not be participating. He zigzags around those at work. Coming upon the Menagerie, book in hand.

INT. MENAGERIE - DUSK

Cillian steps inside, stopping in his tracks.

ABRAHAM stands in front of the tank, arms crossed. He stares up at the Mermaid who watches him with a pitch gaze, palms pressed against the glass.

Cillian's presence goes unnoticed.

CILLIAN

Abe?

Abe turns, startled. Then, relieved.

ABRAHAM

Don't scare me kid. Thought you might be a ghost.

CILLIAN

No such thing as ghosts.

ABRAHAM

Funny. At one point, I would've said the same thing about mermaids.

Cillian watches them study each other, doesn't like it one bit. Breaking their contact--

CILLIAN

What're yuh doin' here, Abe?

ABRAHAM

Thought congratulations were in order. Quite a promotion.

CILLIAN

I don't want a lecture, alright.

Abraham puts his hands up in surrender.

ABRAHAM

Won't get one from me, kid.

CILLIAN
No? Thought you wanted me to make
somethin' of myself.

ABRAHAM
Something tells me you still will.

They both stand there, waiting. Cillian looks back at The Mermaid.

CILLIAN
They're not gonna like you bein' in
here.
(beat)
You should probably go.

Abraham doesn't miss the possessiveness in his voice.

ABRAHAM
(smiles)
Looks like *they* aren't the only
ones.

Cillian ignores the jab, climbing the ladder.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Careful...

Cillian stops, hands tightening around a rung.

CILLIAN
If you have somethin' to say, just
say it...

ABRAHAM
You're forgetting.

CILLIAN
Forgettin' what?

ABRAHAM
What she is.

CILLIAN
She's--

ABRAHAM
--A wild thing. And wild things
have no loyalty to humans.

CILLIAN
Comin' from the guy who sleeps
with tigers.

Abraham nods, gives a sad smile.

ABRAHAM
Men... always think we're
invincible, don't we?

CILLIAN
Wouldn't know. I'm just'a boy.

With that, Cillian continues his ascent. Abraham watches him, concerned.

But leaves him be.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian sits down at the water's edge. He kicks off his boots, rolling up his pant legs. Makes himself comfortable, soaking his feet as she swims toward him.

THE MERMAID
Who was he?

CILLIAN
Abe? He works here. He's a tiger
tamer.

THE MERMAID
Tiger...

The familiar word scratches at her memory. She cocks her head to the side, suddenly PERKS UP.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
Will you bring me one?

He laughs. Shakes his head.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
Why not?

CILLIAN
Well, I...
(Beat)
I just can't.

A glimmer of disappointment. She looks toward the entrance.

THE MERMAID
That man...
(beat)
You do not trust him.

CILLIAN

What?

(Surprised)

No. Abe's-- he's the closest thing
I have to family.

She takes this in.

THE MERMAID

Where is your *real* family?

He shrugs.

CILLIAN

Didn't know m'dad. And my mum...

(pained)

She passed away when I was small.

THE MERMAID

Do you remember her?

He shakes his head, emotions bubbling up.

CILLIAN

No.

(soft)

I don't want to remember...

THE MERMAID

Why?

CILLIAN

Because... then I'll know what
I've lost.

(new thought)

People 'round here say I look just
like her. Though, 'suppose that's
how it works.

THE MERMAID

She must have been lovely.

He nods solemnly.

CILLIAN

Do you remember your parents?

She is quiet. Contemplative. As if trying to conjure up
their memory now.

Finally, she gives up. Shakes her head, staring at her
taloned hands in apparent disgust. Flexing her fingers, she
brings them to her face. Feels the sharp EDGES of her
cheekbones.

Sorrowful--

THE MERMAID

I do not look like them anymore...

Cillian watches helplessly, not knowing how to comfort her.
Tries a distraction instead.

He reaches for his book, holding it up.

CILLIAN

You sure you don't want somethin'
else?

THE MERMAID

No.

He opens the novel, thumbing guiltily through its pages.

CILLIAN

It's really just... paper.

THE MERMAID

No.

(beat)

It's an escape.

He's taken aback by the familiar phrasing.

CILLIAN

Well, there's gotta be a better
one.

Cillian scoops up water, squeezing it between his palms. The
water shoots into the air like a squirt gun.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

What do mermaids do for fun?

She watches him. Expression serious.

THE MERMAID

Drown men.

He looks up at her, STUNNED. Water leaks from his fingers.
Then, Her face breaks into a smile, fangs gleaming.

Tinkling LAUGHTER escapes her lips.

Cillian doesn't join in, staring at her. *Is he angry?* Then--

He KICKS water into her face.

It's on.

The Mermaid retaliates, sending WAVES of water in his direction. He's instantly DRENCHED head to toe. To avoid his return volley, she sinks under the surface.

He can't see her in the dark water. Calling out--

CILLIAN
Ay, that's not fair.

He searches for her but finds nothing. His apprehension GROWS. Then, She appears before him, cheeks BLOATED.

With uncanny precision, she sends a STREAM OF WATER spewing into his face. Cillian tries futilely to block the ammo.

Water drips from his chin.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
Okay, I deserved that.

She bobs in the water, looking up at him. The moonlight reflects off her pale skin. She's practically LUMINESCENT.

Her hands come to rest on his thighs. Lifting herself closer to Cillian, they hold each other's stare.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
(whispered)
'Ave you ever loved someone
before?

She nods.

THE MERMAID
The moon.

CILLIAN
The moon?

THE MERMAID
She is the only one who keeps me
company. Night after night.
(beat)
Until you...

Her taloned hands DIG into the fabric of his pant legs, pulling him toward Her.

He tears at the fabric of his shirt. Tosses it aside before lowering himself into the water.

They simultaneously sink under.

INT. TANK - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Cillian and the Mermaid circle, never taking their eyes off one another. She slowly approaches him until they're inches apart.

Carefully, she presses her lips against Cillian's. He doesn't react. Shell-shocked.

She pulls back, self-conscious.

Then, Cillian reaches out, mouth crushing hers. We catch glimpses of her FANGS as their lips move together. Cillian's hands sweep over scaled skin, tangling in her pale hair.

Cillian's so enraptured, he doesn't register her tail slowly TIGHTENING around him. The Mermaid's hands glide down his arms, locking around his wrists.

Cillian's eyes open. AIR.

He tries to extract himself...

But her tail only TIGHTENS further, hands holding him in an iron grip. Cillian looks up toward the water's surface. A vein in his neck BULGING. His gaze returns to her and finds--

EYES BLACK AS COAL.

He let's out a waterboarded CRY, thrashing with all of his might. She watches him struggle, perfectly calm.

Then, as if by some miracle, he wiggles FREE. The moment he slips from her grasp, the black, dead eyes disappear.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian BREAKS through the surface, gasping for air. With the last of his strength he FLINGS himself onto the platform, rolling away from the edge. SPITTING UP water.

She EMERGES.

Cillian rests his cheek on the cold metal. COUGHING and HEAVING. Struggling to speak--

CILLIAN

You...

THE MERMAID

I--

CILLIAN
--You tried to kill me.

His eyes are wide, still trying to process. She shakes her head vehemently.

THE MERMAID
No.

CILLIAN
(sotto)
Rolf was right...

THE MERMAID
(hissing)
No!

She lunges for the platform, Cillian instinctively moves away. She halts, her eyes pleading with him to understand.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
(sotto)
I... forget.

A water DROPLET rolls down her cheek, mimicking a tear. Cillian can only lay there, catching his breath.

Eventually, he gets to his feet. Can't stand to look at her.

INT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

Cillian hits the dirt, walking toward the exit. He looks over his shoulder to find her watching him, hands pressed to the glass.

Cillian leaves, the betrayal weighing heavily on him.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - NIGHT - MOVING

Cillian stares at the ground, kicking at the dirt. He pays no mind to those wandering around him.

Maybe the magic has finally lost its allure...

EXT. LAVISH TENT - LATER

Kurt stands guard outside, arms crossed. As Cillian approaches--

KURT
What the fuck happened to you?

CILLIAN
I need to talk to him.

KURT
He's busy.

CILLIAN
It's important.

Kurt decides to allow it, looking for a little drama to liven up his night.

INT. ROLF'S TENT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Cillian charges inside, Kurt on his heels. Rolf sits at an oak table, eating dinner. He perks up at the sight of Cillian, as if he's a welcome guest.

KURT
Sorry boss.

Rolf waves him away.

ROLF
The more the merrier. So happy you could join us...

Cillian stops just inside the entryway. *Us?*

Marjorie emerges from another room, readjusting her dress. Her eyes pass over Cillian, uninterested. She walks to Rolf, one hand resting on his shoulder. The other reaches out for his wine glass.

Marjorie takes a sip. Cillian looks between them.

ROLF (CONT'D)
Sit.

Not an offer. Rolf's plastered smile doesn't quite meet his eyes. Cillian takes a seat as Rolf motions for Marjorie to leave.

She walks around the table toward the exit. Her hand trails along Cillian's shoulders before falling away. Everyone watches her go.

The second she disappears, Rolf looks back to Cillian.

A momentary SILENCE.

ROLF (CONT'D)
I assume you're here for a reason.
Spit it out then.

CILLIAN
She's dangerous.

ROLF

And?

CILLIAN

And I've been thinkin'...

ROLF

(Tisks)

Such a hazardous pastime.

Rolf grabs his knife, digging into his meal. He slices off a piece of FLAKY FLESH.

CILLIAN

She isn't worth the risk. You should--

With lightening speed, Rolf THRUSTS HIS KNIFE into the table. The tip LANDING between Cillian's fingers. Cillian stares at the blade. Eyes WIDE.

ROLF

What did I tell you about getting caught on her *hook*?

CILLIAN

No that's not--

ROLF

You think I should let her go?

CILLIAN

I can't do what you asked. She tried to kill me.

ROLF

And yet *here you are*.

(beat)

Tell me, how did you ever manage to escape?

CILLIAN

I just... got away.

ROLF

Or did she let you go?

Cillian opens his mouth to reply. *Hesitates*. Rolf points the knife at Cillian.

ROLF (CONT'D)

There. That's doubt. And with that doubt she will fill your head with all kinds of ideas.

(MORE)

ROLF (CONT'D)
 (beat)
 They do that...

CILLIAN
 Mermaids?

ROLF
 Women.

Rolf pauses, thinking.

ROLF (CONT'D)
 I was married once, you know.

CILLIAN
 Was?

ROLF
 She died. But it's how I know.
 I've seen it in your eyes. I had
 the same look when I fell in love
 with my wife. And I let her paint
 all those pretty pictures in my
 head...

Cillian is tired of Rolf's good-natured attitude. He slams
 his fist on the table.

CILLIAN
 This isn't about that. People are
 going to get hurt.

Rolf pauses, waits for another outburst. When it doesn't
 come, he goes back to his meal.

His knife SCREECHES over the porcelain plate. Eerily calm.

ROLF
 I let her go. We close down. You
 don't think that hurts people?
 Though...
 (chews)
 I wouldn't mind having a Siberian
 to add to my collection.

Cillian's eyes travel over his personal 'menagerie'. His
 gaze lands on a SEVEN-FOOT BOX obscured in velvet. Rolf
 follows his stare.

ROLF (CONT'D)
 Pandora's box.
 (smiles)
 Care to open it?

Cillian ignores his question.

ROLF (CONT'D)
I'll make you a deal. Keep her
company until we sail for the
World Fair. Then you're free of
all this.

CILLIAN
It's not much of a deal if I'm
dead.

ROLF
You don't look like a corpse to
me. Must be doing something right.

After a moment Rolf looks up, like he's suddenly realized
Cillian's been here this whole time.

ROLF (CONT'D)
How rude of me...

Rolf tilts his plate toward Cillian.

ROLF (CONT'D)
Fish?

Cillian eyes the flaky, white meat. SHARP BONES protrude
from the flesh. Cillian shakes his head in disgust. He
stands, making his way to the entrance.

Hesitates in the doorway...

CILLIAN
Who will look after her when I'm
gone?

Rolf chews thoughtfully.

ROLF
Perhaps, I'll do it. I think she'd
like that.

He grins, taking an EXAGGERATED bite. Cillian leaves without
another word.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT - LATER

We can HEAR the night's festivities in the background.
Cillian walks along the tracks. Compared to the grounds,
there is some semblance of peace and quiet here.

He eventually comes across Abe who sits in the doorway of a
boxcar. Drink in hand. Eyes on the stars.

Cillian approaches, hands in his pockets. Abraham looks over, bleary eyed.

CILLIAN
Don't think I've ever seen you
drunk before.

ABRAHAM
(belches)
Me at my best.

Cillian gives a half-hearted smile, takes a seat next to Abraham.

CILLIAN
What's the occasion?

ABRAHAM
Just felt like a good night to
drown my sorrows.

Cillian nods at this, buying time. Abraham takes a deep breath, followed by a long drink. Then--

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Well...

CILLIAN
Well what?

Abraham throws him a look but Cillian is watching the sky.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
You were right.

ABRAHAM
About?

Cillian's gaze shifts to the ground, embarrassed.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Ah--
(laughs)
Mermaid troubles.

Abraham eyes him.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
Self-pity isn't a good look on
you.

No response. Abraham takes another swig.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

You know, I don't love my job but I love my kids. Love 'em a hell of a lot more than I love you...

CILLIAN

(smiles)

Thanks.

ABRAHAM

But love isn't easy. And sometimes it comes at a price.

Abraham pulls his shirt over his head, turning so Cillian can see his back. ANGRY SCARS mar the surface of his skin. Abraham points to RAISED SPOTS near his neck.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

A ways back, Alistair got spooked. Grabbed hold of me and shook me 'round like a rag doll. For'a moment... I thought that was the end of everything.

(beat)

But that was my decision. I go in that cage knowing what's at stake. You don't get to feel sorry for yourself kid. You get to make a choice.

CILLIAN

It doesn't feel like much of a choice.

ABRAHAM

'Suppose not. But we're all gonna die someday.

Abraham's voice trails off, brow furrowed.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Maybe the best way to live life is to find something worth loving...

(beat)

...and let it kill you.

Abraham attempts to pull his shirt back on, still clutching the bottle. Watching him fumble, Cillian takes the drink from his grasp.

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)

Thanks.

(pulls shirt on)

(MORE)

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
But if you make that choice, you
make it knowin' what you could
lose. And then it's on you.

Cillian kicks at the dirt, uncomfortable with the graveness
of the topic. Deflecting--

CILLIAN
So, what you're sayin' is--
(self-conscious smile)
You'd let me kill yuh then?

Without missing a beat.

ABRAHAM
A thousand times over.

Cillian looks at his friend. Knows he means it. Abe
suddenly sways forward, off balance. He steadies himself
before prying the flask from Cillian's hand.

Raising his drink in the air...

ABRAHAM (CONT'D)
To love. And its hand in our
inevitable downfall.

Abraham takes a swig, offering it to Cillian. He takes the
flask. Drinks.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - MOVING - LATER

Cillian walks toward the big top, MUSIC and APPLAUSE
emanate from the tent. Cillian doesn't enter, walking past.
His steps are sluggish, heavy. Like maybe his first drink
wasn't his last.

Cillian comes upon a dilapidated tent. MUSIC trickles from
the heavy fabric. He stands outside, debating.

Finally, he enters-

INT. DILAPIDATED TENT - CONTINUOUS

The space is warm, sweaty. Packed with men of all ages. In
the center of the room is Marjorie, reclining in a chair.

Cillian's entrance CATCHES her eye. She holds his stare,
neither ashamed nor embarrassed but unmistakably SAD.
Cillian looks away first.

Slow and precise, Marjorie continues her routine. As it comes to a close, she turns her back to the audience, letting ONE STRAP of her lace leotard fall. Then THE OTHER. The fabric shimmies down to her ankles.

The finale everyone is hungrily waiting for.

CLOSE ON HER FACE as she turns around.

MARJORIE'S POV: She searches the crowd. Cillian is GONE. The tent flap SWAYING from his departure.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He keeps moving, his feet taking him to the place you'd expect.

There it is. In the distance--

The Menagerie. A crowd waits out front.

His steps quicken--

EXT. MENAGERIE - MOMENTS LATER

Cillian pushes his way to the entrance. A well-dressed BUSINESS MAN glares.

BUSINESS MAN
Back of the line.

Cillian ignores him. Taking a step around Ryker, who reaches out, grabbing him by the shirt.

RYKER
Don't.

Cillian pushes his hand away, stepping inside.

INT. MENAGERIE - TANK/PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian runs directly into a MAN. This man doesn't even notice, preoccupied with the spectacle before him.

The tent is filled to the brim. Everyone PUSHES and SHOVES to get a closer look. Men crowd the glass, KNOCKING on the enclosure. Some CALL OUT to her. Others WHISTLE. Anything to get her attention.

Her eyes appear LARGER. Pits of bottomless black. The scales on her body raise like HACKLES. She bares her fangs at her admirers.

MERMAID POV: We see the faces of the spectators pushing up against the glass. The TAPPING on the enclosure creates an unbearable, hollow POUNDING.

She CHARGES them.

The men WHOOP and HOLLER. Those closest jump back, LAUGHING. She takes off in the opposite direction.

The crowd's LOVING it.

BACK TO SCENE.

Rolf watches from the platform, Kurt and a few well-muscled men at his side. They keep their distance from the water.

Rolf smiles down at his entranced guests, addressing them--

ROLF

What you see here gentlemen is no
fantasy. It's the first and only
of its kind.

Cillian pushes his way to the ladder. The desperate movement catching Rolf's attention. Kurt steps forward, ready for action. Rolf saddles up next to him, whispering in his ear.

Kurt immediately stands down. *Is he going to allow it?*

Not quite...

As Cillian reaches the platform, he's restrained by Kurt and Jesse. Rolf steps toward the captive.

CILLIAN

Get 'em out of here.

ROLF

(voice low)

Let's not cause a scene.

CILLIAN

Fuck you.

ROLF

(to Kurt)

Oooo, someone's learned some big-boy words.

Cillian moves to grab Rolf but is held back. Their jostling has moved them noticeably CLOSER to the water.

Sharp CRIES bubble up from the crowd.

The Mermaid LAUNCHES herself from the water, onto the platform. In a matter of seconds her hand is wrapped around Jesse's ankle, sharp talons DIGGING into his skin.

Jesse SCREAMS as she slides back into the water, Her scales SCRAPING the metal like chain mail.

Desperate to save himself, Jesse's grip on Cillian TIGHTENS. The momentum throws them from their feet.

They're both dragged into the water...

INT. MENAGERIE - TANK - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Submerged, it's difficult to tell up from down. A vortex of WATER and BUBBLES engulf Cillian.

He tries to gain his bearings in the dark. Notices a growing CRIMSON STAIN reaching out toward him. We don't see its origin but hear muffled SCREAMS from the crowd as BLOOD fills the space.

Cillian turns away from the oozing red and--

COMES FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE MERMAID.

Her mouth is smeared with Jesse's blood. Watching him with an apologetic gaze.

Distracted, neither notice a WIRE NOOSE hovering above them. It finds its way around Cillian's neck.

She CRIES OUT as he's dragged toward the surface.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian rolls onto the platform, GASPING for air. Kurt towers over him, prying the wire over his head.

Below, Ryker ushers out the last few spectators. They all crane their necks to get a last look at the damned creature. As the final visitor EXITS, Cillian's pulled to his feet.

The moment he straightens, Kurt PUNCHES him in the stomach. Cillian doubles over as Kurt brings his knee up, hitting him square in the face. Blood from Cillian's nose falls at their feet.

Kurt pushes Cillian until he teeters on the edge of the platform. A two-story drop awaits him. Rolf pays this altercation no mind, descending the ladder.

Struggling--

CILLIAN

Let go.

KURT

(calls out)

What do you want me to do with 'im
boss?

Rolf moves toward the entrance. Turns before exiting. He studies Cillian, clinging desperately to Kurt.

ROLF

I think he's had enough.

(beat)

Do as he says.

Kurt smiles. With a slight SHOVE, Kurt releases Cillian who CRIES OUT, feet slipping from the platform.

Falling...

Falling...

Falling...

Off-screen the Mermaid SHRIEKS.

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Cillian falls through water. He drifts further and further, into the deep, blue sea. Frantically searching, he finds nothing but ocean.

Then, a DARK SHAPE forms in the distance. Panicked, he backpedals. Arms circling. The SHAPE draws closer and closer, coming into focus.

We recognize the Mermaid. He reaches out as she swims closer.

THE MERMAID

Come back to me...

She leans in, lips brushing Cillian's before DIVERTING. She rests her cheek against his. Mouth to his ear...

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)

I. Want. Your. *Heart*.

CLOSE ON CILLIAN'S FACE. His eyes shoot open, mouth agape. He GASPS. The Mermaid pulls back, eyes BLACK. Cillian looks down, blood POURING from his chest.

On her. She smiles venomously, holding up his red, BEATING HEART. Opening her fanged mouth she takes a bite.

Cillian's dead eyes watch her.

CUT TO:

INT. MENAGERIE - TANK - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Cillian's still submerged. He looks up, noticing the familiar tank platform. Wide-eyed, he swims forward. Hands pressing against glass.

Standing naked before him is the Mermaid. Her gills have VANISHED, replaced by baby smooth skin. The tail exchanged for TWO LEGS.

She holds his HEART in her hand, mouth dripping with blood. Cillian looks down at his own form where GLEAMING SCALES SHINE.

He CRIES out to her. A corner of her stained mouth turns up, letting his heart fall from her open palm.

It goes CRASHING into the dirt. Turning from him, she walks toward the entrance.

His nails DIG into the glass. A CRY of anguish escaping him as she disappears from sight.

INT. MAMA'S TENT - NIGHT

Cillian GASPS, eyes darting left to right. Sweat drips down his face. Mama hovers over him, lets out a SIGH of relief.

MAMA

Look who decided to come back to
us.

Cillian moves to sit up.

MAMA (CONT'D)

Careful...

He doesn't heed her warning. GRIMACES in pain.

CILLIAN

How long 'ave I been out?

MAMA

Couple days. Found you outside my
tent.

He moves to stand.

MAMA (CONT'D)
Take it easy now.

Mama helps him up.

MAMA (CONT'D)
You gonna tell me what happened?

CILLIAN
I fell.

MAMA
You fell?

CILLIAN
Yes.

MAMA
That's all I get?

CILLIAN
That's all there is.

Cillian kisses her worried brow before pulling away. He takes stiff steps toward the exit.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - NIGHT

Cillian beelines for his compartment, throwing open the door.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Benny lays in the top bunk, whiskey in the crook of his arm. His other hand cradles a cigar, it sways to MUSIC trickling in from the grounds.

Cillian glares, digging through his trunk for a change of clothes.

CILLIAN
Gotta do that in here?

Benny exhales a cloud of smoke. COUGHS. He extinguishes the cigar in an ashtray balanced on his stomach.

BENNY
Couple'a days away an I already
forgot what'a spoilsport you are.

CILLIAN
Bother to find out what happened
to me?

BENNY

Better to not ask questions 'round here.

(beat)

Kurt came 'round lookin' for yuh. Wondered if you were back on your feet.

CILLIAN

Why's he care?

Benny sighs.

BENNY

That would'a been me askin' questions kid. Just told me I'm suppose'ta give you this...

Benny reaches around, pulling out a piece of paper. He hands it to Cillian.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Circus folk. Always a flair for the dramatics.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - NIGHT

Cillian walks toward Rolf's tent. His steps stiff. As he wades closer, Marjorie emerges from the tent. They make eye-contact.

She casually looks away as they cross paths. Cillian steals a glance but keeps moving.

Then, he stops. Turns.

CILLIAN

What're you doin' with him?

Marjorie halts. Spins.

MARJORIE

What business is that of yours?

He shrugs.

CILLIAN

Guess it's not.

(beat)

Just think you deserve better is all.

Marjorie takes steps forward, narrowing the space between them.

MARJORIE

It's funny. Men love to tell me I deserve better. Yet none have ever been willing to offer it.

(beat)

He has something to offer.

CILLIAN

And what's that?

She smiles. Strikes a pose.

MARJORIE

He's going to make me the star of the show.

CILLIAN

Ringmaster?

MARJORIE

No, silly boy. Ring-*mistress*...

Cillian looks at her like she's made a deal with the literal devil. He shakes his head, turning to walk away--

CILLIAN

Thought that was yer title already.

Something dark falls over Marjorie. She lashes out, pulling him toward her. Her angry stare forces his gaze to the ground.

She GRABS his chin so he has no choice but to look her in the eye.

MARJORIE

You don't get to judge me you *stupid boy* when you've never had to step out into the real world and live in it.

She holds his gaze. Sees something there...

MARJORIE (CONT'D)

You think you're so different from them, don't you...

Marjorie releases him. Cillian steps away, holding his tongue. He retreats, moving toward his original trajectory. She calls after him--

MARJORIE (CONT'D)

It's always heartbreaking...

He stops in his tracks. Looks over his shoulder.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
Watching boys become men.

INT. ROLF'S TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Rolf sits at his desk, shuffling through a stack of papers.
He looks up as Cillian enters.

ROLF
Have a seat.

Cillian follows the command, watching Rolf lock documents in
a DESK DRAWER.

CILLIAN
Surprised I'm not dead?

Rolf turns. Smiles.

ROLF
You looked like you had a thick
skull.
(beat)
Jesse on the other hand...

Cillian stares, expressionless.

ROLF (CONT'D)
Dead as a doornail. I believe he
has you to thank for that.

CILLIAN
I didn't do anything.

ROLF
You did enough.
(beat)
And you understand why I had to do
it don't you? You were about to
make a fool of me and in front of
my customers.

CILLIAN
What business could you have with
'em?

ROLF
I'm using them to build intrigue.
They'll spread the news far and
wide. A real, live mermaid.

CILLIAN
No one will believe 'em.

Rolf nods thoughtfully.

ROLF
Fair point. I can't tell you how many times someone has tried to sell me a female in a fin. As if I couldn't tell the difference. But they all learned a hard lesson...

He licks his lips, savoring his next question.

ROLF (CONT'D)
How does one prove the authenticity of a mermaid?

Rolf takes a seat across from Cillian, wearing a sadistic smile.

ROLF (CONT'D)
--You drown her.

Cillian's expression morphs into one of horror. Rolf presses onward--

ROLF (CONT'D)
I brought you here because I've been thinking a lot about what you said. And...
(beat)
I agree. She is too dangerous.
(shrugs)
It took a few fatalities to get there. But it's clear she's a liability.

CILLIAN
So, you're going to...

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
Let her go.

ROLF
Sell her.

Cillian shakes his head.

CILLIAN
What? No.

ROLF
But you were right.
(beat)
Sure, she'll bring in cash for a while. A few months. Years.
(MORE)

ROLF (CONT'D)

But even so-- what's she going to cost me in damages? Lives? What if she dies? Is stolen? Too many uncertainties.

(beat)

But if I sell her? Now *that's* a guarantee. Could keep this place runnin' for decades.

CILLIAN

I won't let you do that.

ROLF

You will. Because everyone's livelihood depends on it.

(beat)

In case you forgot, we sail tomorrow. So I'd say your goodbyes tonight.

Rolf stands.

ROLF (CONT'D)

I'm telling you this as a curtesy. Believe it or not, I like you kid...

Cillian's mind is still reeling. He gets to his feet, in a daze. Rolf walks him to the entrance.

ROLF (CONT'D)

But if you ever interfere with my business again... I'll put you in the ground.

EXT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT

Cillian hobbles forward, face stoic. Ryker nods to him as he approaches, almost expectant.

INT. MENAGERIE - TANK - NIGHT

The tank has been cleaned. Dark water devoid of its former rosy hue. Cillian walks toward the glass.

She APPEARS. Relieved. Sorrowful. Her black pupils retract, BLUE IRISES watch him.

Cillian presses his hand to the glass. She mimics the gesture.

THE MERMAID

You came back to me...

Cillian nods.

CILLIAN
(gently)
I brought you somethin'.

The SOUND of someone approaching. Her gaze shifts, suddenly transfixed on the ENTRANCE.

Then, we SEE what she's staring at. Reflected in the glass is GEMMA, plodding toward her.

Cillian steps aside, watching Abraham lead Gemma by a chained leash. The Mermaid lowers herself so she's eye-level with the tiger.

She reaches her finger tips toward the animal, brushing the enclosure. Gemma SNIFFS at her hand. LICKS the tank. The Mermaid glances at Cillian who offers a sad smile.

She averts her attention to Gemma who lets out a friendly CHUFFING sound. Rearing up on her hind legs, the tiger pushes her paws to the glass. The Mermaid backs away, taking in the size of the cat, totally enamored by the creature.

The Mermaid flips in the water, playfully swimming along the edge of the cylinder. Abraham allows the chain to slip from his grasp as Gemma prances after her.

The Mermaid LAUGHS as Gemma pounces along, occasionally stopping to scratch at the barrier between them. Letting out a pleasant CHUFF to her new friend.

Cillian and Abe take a step back. Watching as two doomed creatures enjoy a brief moment of happiness.

INT. MENAGERIE - LATER

The Mermaid's face is pressed to the glass. Her nose, inches from Gemma's.

CILLIAN (O.S.)
She can performs tricks for yuh.

THE MERMAID
Tricks...

He nods. Looks to Abe, who takes the hint. With a SNAP of his fingers Gemma turns to him. Plods over.

Abraham begins directing her through a SERIES OF MOVEMENTS. While Cillian's absorbed by the impromptu performance, we PAN to the Mermaid who watches the UNNATURAL DISPLAY.

MERMAIDS POV: Her gaze moves from Gemma, zeroing in on the man MANIPULATING her.

BACK TO SCENE:

The Mermaid's pupils widen, black spilling over. Her top lip curls back in a SNARL, watching Abraham like a hawk tracking its prey.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - LATER

Cillian sits on the platform, staring at the moon. The Mermaid swims the perimeter of the tank, keeping an eye on him.

Sensing something is off, she swims over. Rests her chin on his knee.

THE MERMAID
You are sad.

He looks down at her. Nods.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
Why?

He stares. Blinks. Cillian's eyes shift to the water, unable to explain. She moves into his field of vision.

Unable to tell her the truth, he goes with the best lie--

CILLIAN
You killed him.

THE MERMAID
I had to...

CILLIAN
(whisper)
Why?

She lifts herself out of the water, hovering just beneath him.

THE MERMAID
Because...

We think we already know the answer, and yet--

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
I love you.

This hits him. Hard. Cillian swallows back a wave of emotion. They stay like this a moment.

She moves closer. Face hovering just beneath his.

We wait for him to close the gap...

But he PULLS AWAY, standing up on the platform. She sinks lower into the water, STUNG.

He waits a moment, as if trying to decide something. Suddenly, he's pulling at the fabric of his shirt, tossing it aside. Lets his trousers fall to his feet.

Then, Cillian DIVES into the water.

INT. TANK - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Cillian and The Mermaid circle, never taking their eyes off each other. An underwater ballet.

She swims closer, diverting at the last moment. He cranes his neck as she swims over his head. The Mermaid comes down behind Cillian, wrapping her arms around him.

He TENSES.

But She merely presses her cheek against his back, closing her eyes. SAVORING the feeling of his skin against hers. We stay on this a moment.

Finally, he turns around in her arms, leaning his forehead to hers. His hands trail along her scaled skin.

The Mermaid's hands trace his cheeks, running over his lips. She reads his skin like braille. Their lips hover, about to collide. But before they do--

Cillian LOOKS UP.

CUT TO:

INT. TANK - SURFACE - CONTINUOUS

Cillian and the Mermaid break through the surface. He takes in GULPS of air, chest heaving.

INT. TANK - SURFACE - LATER

They float on their backs, cheeks pressed together. Staring up at the glowing moon.

Her hair wafts around their heads, Cillian's fingers tangling in the pale tendrils.

THE MERMAID

(quiet)

It could always be like this...

Cillian eyes her from his peripherals. He remains silent, looking back toward the moon.

He can't bare to tell her otherwise.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - LATER

Cillian lays on his stomach, chin resting on his crossed arms. She perches her chin on the platform's edge.

THE MERMAID

I have a question now...

CILLIAN

Yes?

He drinks her in, mentally preparing to say goodbye.

THE MERMAID

(whisper)

Will I be like that creature?

Cillian tenses. A question he's been both anticipating and dreading. Evasive--

CILLIAN

What do you mean?

THE MERMAID

Will they make me... *perform*?

He hesitates.

CILLIAN

I--

(forced)

I don't know.

Her expression hardens.

THE MERMAID

Will you be with me?

CILLIAN

I don't know.

Her lips pull back in a grimace. Fangs visible.

THE MERMAID
(venomous)
You are *lying*.

Her eyes turn to black pools. She grabs his face, talons digging into his skin. Drawing blood.

THE MERMAID (CONT'D)
(hissing)
I can see it in your eyes.

He jerks away. Touches the blood on his face. Staring at his red fingertips, Cillian offers the only words he can utter...

CILLIAN
I'm sorry.

Her face falls, She knows this is goodbye. The Mermaid backs away from the platform, diving under the water.

Shaken, Cillian makes for the ladder. Descending.

He lands in the dirt, sparing a last glance at the tank. She's no longer visible.

As he makes for the exit--

THE MERMAID (O.S.)
Please. You are my only hope...

Cillian stops, his face crumbling. He turns.

Her hands are pressed against the glass. Human eyes watch him. *Plead* with him. Even her sharp features appear to have SOFTENED.

What can he say? Words cannot fix this.

Cillian turns away, taking heavy, deliberate steps toward the exit. It looks almost painful, as if he's walking on broken glass.

Behind him, the Mermaid CRIES out in anguish, POUNDING her fists against the glass prison. Cillian flinches at the heartbreaking sound but doesn't dare look back.

INT. SLEEPING CAR - NIGHT - LATER

Cillian jumps into his sleeping compartment, stopping in the doorway. A suitcase lays across Cillian's bunk. Benny digs through a storage trunk, packing his belongings.

He glances up.

BENNY
You look like shit.

Cillian doesn't respond, getting ready for bed. Notices a train ticket on Benny's bunk. Cillian's curiosity gets the best of him.

He holds it up.

CILLIAN
California.
(beat)
Thought all grunts and performers
were goin' with the show?

Benny shrugs it off.

BENNY
Never liked boats.

Cillian turns to stare at Benny. Prying--

CILLIAN
Thought you were livin' the
'American Dream'.

Benny shakes his head.

BENNY
Dreams die, kid.

CILLIAN
What does that mean?

BENNY
Remember what I told you about
questions?

Cillian studies him. There's something off in Benny's demeanor. Maybe it's how he won't look Cillian in the eye.

CILLIAN
What aren't you sayin'--

Benny waves him off. Shuts his suitcase. Casually heading for the door.

BENNY
This place has made you paranoid.

Cillian blocks his escape.

CILLIAN

Think I don't know yuh? You
wouldn't move more than two feet
if yuh didn't need money to buy
booze.

When Benny tries to step around him, Cillian snaps,
grabbing him by his shirt. He pushes Benny against the
wall. Lifting him off the ground.

BENNY

Ay! What the fuck are yuh doin'.

CILLIAN

Tell me why you're goin'-- and
I'll letcha down.

BENNY

This whole look isn't--

Cillian SLAMS him up against the wall again. Benny lets out
a GROAN...

BENNY (CONT'D)

Alright. Fuck. I'm--
(beat)
Abandoning a lost cause.

Cillian allows Benny's feet to touch the floor but holds
him in place.

CILLIAN

What're you--

BENNY

I've worked in this industry long
enough to know when I'm on a
sinkin' ship.

(beat)
No point in waiting to go down
with it.

CILLIAN

Rolf's sellin' Her to save this
place.

BENNY

He's gonna sell her alright, but it
ain't to save this place...

CILLIAN

You don't know what--

BENNY

You don't gotta believe me, kid.
You'll see soon enough. He's
sellin'.

(then)

All of it.

Cillian takes a step back, stunned. Benny dusts himself off.

CILLIAN

Why wouldn't yuh say anything?

BENNY

Ain't my bomb to drop.

(beat)

Sorry.

Benny offers Cillian a consoling slap on the arm, stepping around him. Then, he halts in the doorway, digs into his pocket.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Here.

Benny hands him his boat ticket.

BENNY (CONT'D)

Since I won't be using it.

(beat)

Just don't do anything stupid,
yeah?

Cillian takes the ticket, watching as his bunk mate wanders off into the night.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - NIGHT - LATER

There will be no celebrations tonight. HEAVY RAIN has chased everyone to their beds. Except one...

Cillian makes his way through the grounds. Coming upon a tent...

INT. MAMA'S TENT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Cillian peaks his head in.

Mama sits at a vanity, running oil through her beard. Her face is otherwise undone.

Catching Cillian's reflection in the mirror. She smiles.

MAMA

Feels like just yesterday you were
hiding under my bed during a
thunderstorm. Shaking like a leaf.

Cillian gives a sad smile. Nods.

MAMA (CONT'D)

Suppose that's not why you're here
now.

CILLIAN

I wish it were...

(beat)

I decided I'm goin' with the show
after all. Came to say goodbye.

He steps further into the tent. Mama stands, walking over to
him. Cillian envelopes her, squeezing her tight. He lifts
her off the ground. Spins in a circle. Setting her down...

He doesn't let go. Tears prickling at the corner of his
eyes.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

(quietly)

You'll always be m' favorite girl.

Something in his voice scares her. She pulls back. Wiping
away the tears in his eyes.

MAMA

Now, why does it feel like you're
sayin' goodbye for the last time?

Cillian forces a reassuring smile.

CILLIAN

Circus folk. Always a flair for the
dramatics.

He kisses her on the cheek.

EXT. CIRCUS GROUNDS - LOCATION #4 - DAWN

UNIDENTIFIABLE POV:

We walk through the rain, taking slow, steady steps.
Leading to...

EXT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

Even Ryker has abandoned his post for drier pastures. We
walk into-

INT. MENAGERIE - CONTINUOUS

The Mermaid watches the entrance. As we approach, a REFLECTION comes into FOCUS--

MARJORIE.

She stands in front of the glass, clutching her dripping robe. The Mermaid watches her with BLACK eyes as she takes a drag on a cigarette. Exhaling smoke.

A long BEAT.

MARJORIE
I'm going to miss this.

The Mermaid blinks at her, head cocked.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
I've enjoy our little chats. As one-sided as they may be. You're quite the listener...

The Mermaid inches closer.

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
I know you understand me.
(beat)
We're not so different from each other, you know?

Through the glass, Marjorie's face is REFLECTED onto the Mermaid's body. She admires the illusion, *daydreaming*...

MARJORIE (CONT'D)
(good humored)
Of course, I've never killed a man before...

Marjorie smiles as she exhales, just the thought of it bringing her immense pleasure.

The smoke blows against her reflected SIREN-SELF, shattering the illusion. The Mermaid stares through the smog.

One last INHALE. Marjorie throws her cigarette on the ground, making for the exit.

THE MERMAID (O.S.)
There is still time...

Marjorie stops dead in her tracks.

She peeks over her shoulder, half expecting to see the Mermaid directly behind her. But of course, the Mermaid is where she's always been--

Inside her glass prison.

Marjorie considers her words, the corner of her mouth
TURNING UP.

EXT. SLEEPING CAR - LOCATION #4 - MORNING

The boxcar door SLIDES open, Cillian's boots sinking into mud. A rucksack is thrown over his shoulder.

Everyone is already at work. Tents are being torn down.
Animals moved. LIGHTENING flashes.

He looks up toward the dripping clouds.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIP - MORNING - LATER

A dark, brooding sky.

Cillian now stands on the deck of a ship. He watches as passengers board, all hurrying to get out of the rain.

INT. SHIP - VARIOUS - DAY - MOVING

Cillian weaves through the hallways, squeezing past fellow passengers.

He ventures deeper into the vessel, looking for a place to lay low.

INT. SHIP - HULL - LATER

Cillian finds himself among the stacked cargo. Moving to the back of the space, he squeezes himself between boxes, HUNKERING down.

There is nothing to do but wait...

INT. SHIP - HULL - NIGHT

Cillian has dozed off. There's a loud NOISE as the ship's engine's pick up. It wakes Cillian from his fitful slumber.

He slowly stands, stretching out his stiff joints. Cillian begins zig-zagging through the maze of cargo.

EXT. SHIP - DECK - NIGHT

Cillian emerges, taking a deep breath of ocean air. Almost everyone has gone to sleep for the night.

A few passengers linger on deck. Strolling. Smoking. A few empty their stomachs over the railing.

He keeps moving, head low, carefully scanning the deck for anyone who might recognize him. Then, he sees Marjorie standing at the bow. Looking down at the water.

He approaches, silently standing next to her. She glances over, lets out a choked laugh.

MARJORIE

(sotto)

Oh, you stupid, stupid boy.

CILLIAN

I wanted to say I'm sorry.

She shakes her head. Exhausted.

MARJORIE

Your words are empty.

Marjorie moves to walk away. He calls after her.

CILLIAN

He's lyin' to yuh. Yer never gonna be the star of the show. There is no show.

(beat)

He's sellin' it. All of it.

Marjorie stops. Turns. All of her dreams for a better life, threatening to disintegrate before her eyes.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

He's offering you nothing.

MARJORIE

No.

CILLIAN

I think I can prove it but--

(hesitant)

I need him... distracted.

Marjorie digests this. Reluctantly--

MARJORIE

He visits me at midnight...

INT. SHIP - STORAGE - LATER

Weaving through boxes. An eery silence hangs over the abandoned space. We keep moving until we come upon a tank.

She's submerged, her eyes black, gaping pools. When her lips part, they release an ethereal, dark MELODY.

EXT. SHIP - DECK - MOMENTS LATER

On deck, Marjorie smokes. She stares at the water below. On the wind we may catch The Mermaid's SONG.

Marjorie perks up. Looks around. But the sound is blown away by the wind. Perhaps just her imagination.

She takes another drag, attention diverting toward the water once again. It begins to CHURN, waves lapping aggressively against the hull. Suddenly--

LIGHTING and THUNDER crack open the sky. She looks up as rain begins to fall.

INT. SHIP - CORRIDOR - MIDNIGHT

Cillian creeps down an empty hallway. The ship sways from the BUILDING STORM. He tracks the room numbers, stopping in front of a door. Places his ear to the wood. Lightly KNOCKS.

Waits...

Hearing nothing, he inserts a pin into the lock, working it until there is an almost inaudible CLICK.

He pushes the door open slowly, holding his breath...

INT. ROLF'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

It's dark. Cillian feels around until he locates a kerosene lamp. He holds up the small flame, scanning the room.

Surrounding him is Rolf's personal menagerie, their dead eyes follow him in the dark.

Sending paranoid glances toward the door, he moves to Rolf's desk. Opens its various drawers. All hold useless trinkets or nothing at all. When he goes to open the last one, it doesn't budge.

Hopeful, Cillian works the lock with the pin.

CLICK.

The drawer slides open. Cillian sets the kerosene lamp on the desk, pulling out a stack of papers. Squinting, his eyes scan the pages--

Bingo.

The ship LURCHES unexpectedly, forcing Cillian to take steps backward to maintain his balance. His foot CATCHES on the head of a BEARSKIN RUG.

Cillian's sent SPRAWLING backward. The papers fall from his hands, fluttering to the floor. He lands against 'pandora's box', sliding to the ground.

The VELVET DRAPE falls away, enveloping him. Cillian struggles to free himself. Tossing the blanket aside, he regains his feet. Cillian turns, staring into the dark box.

LIGHTENING FLASHES. Igniting the room in a WHITE LIGHT.

A GAUNT FACE stares at him from the boxes murky water. Fanged mouth open, eyes black as the midnight sky.

Cillian jumps back. A scream catching in his throat.

But the face doesn't move. Still as a marble statue. With shaking hands, he grabs the lamp. Holding it up--

A DEAD MERMAID stares at nothing, mouth opened in a silent scream. Black hair frames her cutting cheekbones. Gills flexed. He leans in closer, fingers trailing visible SCRATCH MARKS in the glass.

He lowers the lamp, its light dancing off dingy, fuchsia scales.

ROLF (O.S.)
So happy you two could finally
meet.

Cillian whirls around. Rolf stands in the doorway.

ROLF (CONT'D)
My wife.

Rolf moves inside, closing the door behind him. He stops in front of her. His hand caresses her cheek through the glass.

ROLF (CONT'D)
She was so beautiful...

Cillian watches the exchange. Rolf's expression changes, glaring at the snarling face.

ROLF (CONT'D)

Tied rocks to her ankles. All she left was a note. It seemed odd that we never found a body.

(beat)

But one night, it all made sense. Because I saw her. *Watching* me from the water.

(reminiscent)

People told me I was crazy...

Rolf smiles.

ROLF (CONT'D)

After painting all those pretty pictures in my head-- that bitch tried to end it all. After I gave her everything...

(turns to Cillian)

Except for hope.

Cillian looks to the dead mermaid.

CILLIAN

What happened to 'er?

ROLF

Drowned herself. Irony isn't it. First time by water. Second by air.

CILLIAN

To get away from you...

ROLF

You see how well that worked out.

Cillian stares at the mermaid. Then--

CILLIAN

You can't sell.

Rolf leans over, picking up the scattered parchment. Holding them up--

ROLF

It's already been done.

(Cheshire grin)

I have the receipts to prove it.

A beat. Then--

CILLIAN

She's not yours to sell.

ROLF
And there it is...

Rolf sighs, falling into a nearby chair.

ROLF (CONT'D)
What're you gonna do with her kid?
Keep 'er for yourself?

Cillian doesn't respond.

ROLF (CONT'D)
Set her free?
(beat)
Maybe buy a nice little house on
the coast so you can be
together...

Rolf LAUGHS.

Then, without warning, he jumps up, GRABBING Cillian by the back of the neck.

He SHOVES him against the glass, forcing him to stare into the eyes of the dead mermaid.

ROLF (CONT'D)
This is what she is boy.
(whispers)
A *siren*.

Rolf leans in close.

ROLF (CONT'D)
Have you ever asked her how many
men she's killed? How many poor
souls she's *lured* into her waters.
(beat)
You haven't. Because you don't
want to know the answer.
(shrugs)
It's okay, you need to blame
someone. I get it. Easier to blame
me than a pretty face and a nice
pair of tits. But I'm the hero of
this story. I'm the one saving
lives...

CILLIAN
And retiring a rich man.

ROLF
Ah, well... perks really.

Cillian's hands clench in anger, looks like he's about to lash out. Rolf waits, amused.

But Cillian does nothing. Rolf nods toward the entrance.

ROLF (CONT'D)

If you stand in my way, any person
who gets hurt from this point on
is on your hands. I told you...
desperate creatures are
destructive.

The door to the cabin opens. In steps Kurt and another
HIRED HAND.

ROLF (CONT'D)

Now that you're done going through
my things, my boys will see you
out.

They grab Cillian by each arm, dragging him away.

INT. SHIP - HOLDING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cillian is thrown inside. There's only a bunk-bed and
toilet to fill the closet-sized space. Cillian scrambles up
from the floor, grabbing for the door.

It SLAMS in his face. LOCKS.

The room sways under the storm's violence.

INT. SHIP - HOLDING ROOM - TIME LAPSE

The sun rises and sets through the port hole. The storm
maintaining its fury. We see Cillian in VARIOUS POSITIONS
around the room. Trying the door. Again and again. Pounding
on the decaying wood.

Then, he's lying in bed, carving into the underside of the
bunk. We know what it is.

A MERMAID floats above him.

INT. SHIP - HOLDING ROOM - DAWN

Cillian wakes, looking worse for wear. As soon as he comes
to, there's the sense that something is DIFFERENT. *But what?*
His gaze travels to the window.

The storm has CLEARED. Everything soaked in an EERY CALM.
The sunrise streaks the sky in pastel.

Cillian rises from his bed. Goes to the door. POUNDING.

CILLIAN

Come on.

(Pounds on door)

Just let me get some fresh air!

Where m'I gonna go?

He leans his head against the wood. LISTENS for a reply. Nothing. Cillian tries the handle.

It POPS open.

Carefully he widens the gap. Peaks out into--

INT. SHIP - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

It's empty. Believing it too good to be true, Cillian waits a beat for his captors to appear. When they don't, he steps out.

And hurries down the hallway, almost at a run.

INT. SHIP - LONG HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Cillian wanders the hall, eyes cast to the ground. He squeezes past an ELDERLY COUPLE, continuing until he comes upon a door reading CREW ONLY.

Makes sure no one witnesses him disappear inside.

INT. SHIP - CREW HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The hall is empty. He moves along, coming upon--

INT. SHIP - STEERAGE - CONTINUOUS

Filled with rows of stacked boxes. A few cars. He walks through the maze, searching. Doesn't find what he's looking for...

There's a dull, constant RUMBLING in the background. Cillian follows the sound, leading to an ESCAPE LADDER. He stares down the vertical passage--

INT. SHIP - BOILER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian drops down. Surrounded by dead furnaces. Mouths gaping, waiting for fuel. CREW MEMBERS feed the hungry machines, throwing skeptical glances his way.

But they have a job to do and say nothing.

Cillian keeps moving, following the aisle to the far side of the room. He's greeted by a door, tucked away in the furthest corner, it reads

RESTRICTED. KEEP OUT.

Pushing through--

INT. SHIP - PRIVATE STEERAGE - CONTINUOUS

Cillian enters, hesitant.

A TANK looms in the center of the room. And BLEEDS RED.

A moment of PANIC. Cillian races to the glass. Searching. Almost SLIPS. He looks down to find SMEARED DROPS OF BLOOD.

Cillian climbs the rungs.

INT. SHIP - PRIVATE STEERAGE - TANK PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

He crawls onto the platform, coming to his feet. He notices Her first. Then--

THE BODY. She cradles the back of the victim's head, gazing down at him.

He can just make out her faint voice, SINGING a kind of soothing lullaby. Then, She looks toward him. Expression unreadable.

Cillian takes a dazed step forward. He no longer has eyes for Her, staring at the face of the dead man.

A tragically familiar face...

CILLIAN

Abe?

(beat)

Abe!

Cillian jumps into the water, swimming over to Abe's floating corpse. The Mermaid backs away.

Cillian cradles Abe's head in his hands, staring down at his splotchy complexion. He sees Abe's chest. It's been SLICED OPEN.

He is forced to look away. A CHOKED SOB escapes him.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

(sotto)

No no no.

Cillian rests his forehead against his friend's. Cries. His sadness quickly morphs into RAGE. Suddenly, he turns on her, SEIZING her by the throat.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
(screaming)
What did you do!

The Mermaid grabs his wrist. Could easily pull him off if she wanted to. Instead, she allows him to take his anger out on her.

He pulls her closer, their faces mere inches apart. His hands shake.

Wide, BLOODSHOT EYES stare at him. Pleading.

THE MERMAID
Kill me.

Tears stream down his face. Jaw clenched. Looks like he might do just that.

Cillian SHOVES her aside, focusing on pulling Abraham onto the platform. Sobbing, Cillian crawls onto the metal, dragging Abe's limp body behind.

She watches him struggle, offering no help.

INT. SHIP - ROLF'S ROOM - LATER

Cillian sits in a chair, sopping wet, a towel around his shoulders. Rolf walks in.

Pulling up a chair, he sits across from Cillian.

ROLF
I'm sorry for your loss. Truly.

Cillian glares at him. His apology playing like a performance.

CILLIAN
What are you going to do with him?

ROLF
We'll bury him at sea. After everyone's gone to sleep. No need to induce panic.

CILLIAN
What will you tell them?

ROLF
Nothing.

CILLIAN
Nothing?

ROLF

Nobody is going to ask. Nobody is going to care...

It's a heartbreaking truth. Cillian wipes away tears.

CILLIAN

What was he even doin' in there?

ROLF

Someone had to look after her.

Rolf studies Cillian, pats him on the knee.

ROLF (CONT'D)

Tell you what, I'll give you five percent of the profit off her. Make up for what she's taken from you.

Cillian stands, dropping his towel onto the chair.

CILLIAN

I don't want yer money.

ROLF

Can't say I'm disappointed.

(beat)

We dock tomorrow. Let's put this behind us and focus on giving the world one hell of a final show. Shall we?

Rolf extends his hand in camaraderie. Cillian doesn't take it. Disgusted. He walks out.

EXT. SHIP - DECK - NIGHT - LATER

Cillian walks out onto the deserted deck. Kurt and the Hired Hand wait near the ship's edge. Abraham's body lies at their feet, concealed in a thick, velvet tarp.

As soon as they spot Cillian, Abe's body is hoisted onto the ship's railing. It balances precariously under the sway. Cillian steps forward. Stares at his concealed friend.

Impatient--

KURT

Any last words.

Cillian glares.

KURT (CONT'D)
I ain't a fuckin' priest.

Cillian reaches out, placing a hand on Abe. He quickly pulls it away. As if the corpse will collapse under his touch.

A heavy silence. Then--

CILLIAN
(choked up)
Goodbye friend.

Cillian steps back. Nods. Abe's body is tossed overboard. The moment Abe leaves their grasp is the moment they walk away. Completely apathetic.

He steps up to the railing, watching as Abraham goes crashing into the water. The body floats for a moment before being SWALLOWED by the sea.

As the body disappears, something dark falls over Cillian. A foreboding VACANCY in his stare.

INT. SHIP - HOLDING ROOM - NIGHT

Cillian lies in bed. His fingers trailing over the mermaid engraving, expression reminiscent. A nostalgic beat...

Carefully, he brings his knife to the wood.

Placing the tip over her HEART, Cillian TWISTS THE BLADE.

INT. SHIP - VARIOUS - NIGHT

Cillian steps out of his room, standing there a moment as if gathering courage. He walks down the hallway, a KNIFE tucked in the back of his trousers.

His steps pick up speed, eyes brewing violence. We stay with him as we move through the ship's winding hallways.

INT. SHIP - PRIVATE STEERAGE - CONTINUOUS

Cillian stops before the looming tank. She watches him with remorseful eyes, placing her hand against the glass.

He diverts toward the ladder, grabbing a rung. Climbs. She follows him to the surface.

INT. PRIVATE STEERAGE - TANK - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

The Mermaid emerges, Her big eyes drinking him in. For a moment he's mesmerized by her, irises as blue and deep as the ocean.

He snaps out of his trance, swallowing back emotion.

CILLIAN
I brought you a gift...

She perks up, moving close. His hand discretely reaches around his back, grabbing the hilt of the knife.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)
(softly)
I'm sorry...

A *flicker* of something in her expression-- *does she know?*

Then--

VOICES approach. Cillian retracts his hand, looking toward the interruption. He hurries down the ladder.

INT. SHIP - PRIVATE STEERAGE - MOVING

Cillian winds through the cargo, putting distance between him and the unexpected visitors. In the distance we can hear an indistinguishable NOISE. It grows louder as Cillian wanders close...

EXT. SHIP - STEERAGE - CONTINUOUS

We hear them before we see them. GROWLS. WHINES. The cats are backed into a corner of their cage. They HISS, seemingly at nothing in the opposite corner.

Cillian approaches them carefully, making soft NOISES under his breath. It does little to subdue them. As Gemma's hackles raise, he holds his hand to the bars.

CILLIAN
(soft)
What's the matter girl?

Then, something catches his eye.

BLOOD. Smeared underneath the scattered hay. He follows the fresh trail to find what the animals are cowering from. In the corner sits a bloody FORM.

Peering closer, we understand it's a HUMAN HEART. Cillian looks from the heart to the animals who refuse to go near it.

Because they understand who it belongs to. Gemma lets out a low growl. Alastair ROARS. They are mourning.

Horrificed, Cillian takes clumsy steps backward. As he begins his haunted retreat, Gemma calls after him, scratching against the bars.

He turns away. Their fate is sealed. The heartbreaking CRIES echo in the dark.

EXT. SHIP - DECK - DAWN

Cillian emerges, hurrying to the side of the ship where he VOMITS over the railing. With shaking hands, Cillian takes the knife from the back of his pants. Throws it into the sea.

He wipes his mouth, before becoming wracked with sobs. His grip on the railing is the only thing keeping him upright.

Before him we see land, LOOMING closer. Almost there now...

EXT. DECK OF SHIP - MORNING - LATER

The ship has docked. A flurry of activity below.

EXT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - MORNING

Everyone rushes around in preparation. We follow CILLIAN as he weaves through his fellow workers. A grim look on his face.

Slowly the space COMES TO LIFE around him. He makes for a tent. We follow him inside...

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

He moves through. When he emerges...

EXT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - NIGHT

It's NIGHTTIME. The fair is flourishing. A crowd bigger than we've ever seen migrate like birds. Fluttering from spectacle to spectacle.

Cillian's mind is elsewhere. We stay with him...

EXT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - BIG TOP - NIGHT

Cillian wanders past the big top. He looks lost, like he's woken up from an all-to-real nightmare.

CHEERS erupt from inside the tent. Sounds like a full house. Through a crack in the entrance we can barely make out the performance inside.

On Cillian, considering if he should enter.

One final show.

CUT TO:

INT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - BIG TOP - NIGHT

Two silk ropes trickle down from the ceiling. Rolf stands between them, arms raised. IDENTICAL TWINS step into the ring.

The lights DIM.

Dreamy music plays as the twins approach the silks with elegant steps.

The girls climb the fabric with ease. Rolf acts as a conductor, each move of his arms prompts the performers into different spins and tricks.

Horses run in a circle around him. A WOMAN balances elegantly on a stallion's back. We stay with the show for a moment before turning to view the crowd. CLOSING IN ON--

INT. BIG TOP - UNDERNEATH BLEACHERS - NIGHT

CILLIAN. He watches the performance, peering through the crowd's feet. He eyes Rolf vengefully.

The crowd CLAPS.

EXT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - NIGHT

Cillian exits the big top, hands in his pockets. The sound of CHEERING spectators taunts him.

He walks alone in the dark. Suddenly, he stops. Paces. Deep in thought.

Unbeknownst to Cillian, three GIRLS consider him as they smoke. They GIGGLE as one breaks away, coming toward him. She looks friendly and well intentioned, offering him a cigarette.

Cillian stops pacing, hardly acknowledges her.

CILLIAN
Don't smoke.

He goes to step around her but she cuts him off, lighting her cigarette.

GIRL
You work here?

He just looks at her. She offers a flirtatious smile.

GIRL (CONT'D)
I thought I saw you earlier.

CILLIAN
What's it to you?

His tone doesn't dissuade the girl.

GIRL
You know, I've considered runnin'
away with circus couple'a times.
It's so glamorous...
(beat)
Maybe you could show me around?
Convince me to runaway with you...

Cillian considers her for a moment. Takes a step forward.
They're now practically nose-to-nose.

A brief flicker of EXCITEMENT behind her stare.

Cillian PRIES the cigarette from her lips. Takes a long
drag. She raises an eyebrow at him.

CILLIAN
If this place 'as taught me
anything it's that-- all the glitz
and glamour...
(blows smoke)
It's just an illusion.

The momentary tension is broken as he looks away, gaze
shifting to the ground. He tosses the cigarette in the
dirt. Trampling it as he steps around her.

The GIRL looks over her shoulder, watching his retreat.

EXT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - MENAGERIE - NIGHT

In the dimming light we can make out the makeshift
menagerie. Cillian approaches. In the background we glimpse
MARJORIE. Watching him.

Ryker stands out front, arms crossed. Cillian takes
confident steps forward, putting on a sudden, exasperated
energy.

CILLIAN
'Ay Ryker. Rolf asked me to get
yuh. Some drunkin' idiot causin' a
ruckus near the big top. Messing
with some of the animals.

RYKER
Where's Kurt?

CILLIAN
Couldn't find him. Needs muscle
now.
(beat)
I'll keep an eye out 'til you get
back.

Ryker shakes his head.

RYKER
Gotta do every fuckin' thing
'round here.

He storms off. Cillian watches him go, hands in his pockets. Once Ryker's out of sight, he walks into...

INT. MENAGERIE - NIGHT

Cillian wanders in. All is quiet. He arrives at the tank. She materializes, watching him cautiously.

Cillian stops, considering Her.

CILLIAN
You didn't do it.

A loaded beat.

THE MERMAID
No.

CILLIAN
Why didn't you--
(beat)
I almost...

He wells up. Breaks down. Leaning his head against the tank. She rests her head against his--

THE MERMAID
Shhhhh...
(beat)
It does not matter now.

Cillian wipes his eyes. Takes a deep breath.

A beat. Finally--

CILLIAN
We're getting out of here. Now.

Cillian climbs the ladder.

INT. MENAGERIE - PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Cillian meets her at the top, reaching out to her.

CILLIAN (CONT'D)

Hurry.

She grabs for him, wrapping her arms around his neck. He uses all of his strength to pull her from the water. Her tail wraps around him, giving Cillian the freedom to use both hands to guide them down the ladder.

It's an unsteady descent, water droplets coating the metal rungs. He reaches the bottom.

As soon as his feet touch the ground, there's APPLAUSE. She peeks over Cillian's shoulder, eye's immediately going dark. She HISSES.

Cillian turns to see Rolf walking toward them with slow, even claps.

ROLF

And he sticks the landing.

Cillian backs against the enclosure, Rolf blocking their only exit.

ROLF (CONT'D)

I thought you were smarter than this kid.

Cillian holds her tighter. Over Cillian's shoulder, the Mermaid's mouth moves silently, a mute incantation.

When he doesn't give him the satisfaction of a reply, Rolf sighs. He pulls out a PISTOL, pointing it at Cillian.

ROLF (CONT'D)

I'll need you to put the fish back in its bowl.

Cillian holds his ground.

ROLF (CONT'D)

Fine.

(cocks gun)

I'll do it myself.

The Mermaid clings tighter to Cillian, burying her face in his neck. Cillian closes his eyes. Braces himself--

BANG.

As the gun goes off, faraway CHEERS erupt from the big top. Cillian opens his eyes wide.

ON ROLF who looks down at his chest, blood SEEPING through his shirt. He sways, unsteady on his feet before FALLING to his knees.

MARJORIE stands behind him, holding a gun. Cillian stares at her, stunned.

Marjorie walks toward them, stepping over Rolf's dead body. She keeps the gun drawn. The Mermaid watches her with black eyes, talons digging into Cillian's shirt. Her lips are still moving in their silent prayer.

Is that a slight smile we see?

Marjorie's hand is steady. Her eyes bright.

MARJORIE

Now what should I to do with you?

She cocks the pistol.

CILLIAN

Please...

Marjorie watches him, tilts her head as if really considering her options. Her stare is void of remorse.

Marjorie's finger hovers over the trigger. Tenses...

CUT TO:

EXT. WORLD FAIR GROUNDS - NIGHT

A CRACK loud enough to rattle teeth. The sky LIGHTS up as rain falls.

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT - LATER

Trapeze artists bow as the crowd applauds their extraordinary abilities. When they step from the stage, the lights DIM.

All chatter DIES. The quiet intensity of expectation.

MARJORIE steps into the spotlight. Dressed in an exquisite suit fit for a world-class ringmaster. Behind her, CIRCUS HANDS wheel in a large object, concealed by a heavy tarp.

The room remains quiet as Marjorie makes her way to the center of the ring. The OBJECT stops next to her. She soaks up the attention from the crowd. A delicious smile overpowers her features.

Taking a step forward...

MARJORIE

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen...

(beat)

The moment we've all been waiting for!

Marjorie grabs the tarp, giving it a powerful TUG. We STAY ON Marjorie's face for the unveiling. Fully BASKING in the glory of this moment.

Then, come the SCREAMS. First one. Then more, until it's ALL WE CAN HEAR. Yet Marjorie appears unfazed, smile never faltering. Finally, she looks to her left.

Inside the aquarium is ROLF. His face frozen in surprise. The blood from his chest paints the water scarlet. CLOSING IN on his DEAD EYES.

EXT. BEACH - SAME TIME

Cillian walks through the torrential downpour. His steps heavy. The Mermaid is concealed with a tarp. Behind them we can just make out the TWINKLING LIGHTS of the World Fair.

As he walks, the tarp is incrementally ripped away by the turbulent winds. Exposed, the Mermaid looks up to the sky, soaking in the rain. Eyes drinking in the moon's brilliance.

Cillian's pace doesn't slow as he walks straight into the water, taking careful steps into the hungry Sea. The force of the ocean threatens to topple them.

LINGERING ON their struggle, the tide DRAGS them into open water.

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Drifting, they find themselves in the IMPACT ZONE of an oncoming wave. It LOOMS above them before CRASHING DOWN on their heads. They are forced under...

EXT. OCEAN - UNDERWATER - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

They are sent SPINNING. The Sea tearing them from each other's grasp.

We follow Cillian's disorienting trajectory until he's able to right himself. Everything BLACK around him. We can't make out his depth. Don't recognize up from down.

He frantically searches the dark abyss. Panicking.

Has she abandoned him?

A SHAPE comes into view, drawing CLOSER. She *appears*. Swims toward him, arms outstretched. He uses the last of his strength to reach her.

At last, they COLLIDE.

The Mermaid holds Cillian's face in her hands, enraptured by him. Their lips meet.

Her hands move down his chest, strong arms wrapping around him. Eyes still closed, she slides her cheek against Cillian's, savoring the feeling of his smooth skin.

The Mermaid's lips part, her voice a quiet HISS in Cillian's ear.

THE MERMAID
I. Want. Your. Heart.

Suddenly, Her eyes SNAP OPEN, looking right at us.

A DEMONIC STARE pulls us in.

FADE OUT.

BLACK SCREEN.

A soft, female VOICE fades in. A familiar SIREN SONG.