

UNCHAINED MELODEE

**PILOT EPISODE:
Tough Act to Follow**

screenplay by

Carl Burcham

BLACK SCREEN:

HEAVY BREATHING from a female, running, being chased.

BAYING bloodhounds, the POUNDING of horse hooves and the TICK-TICK-TICKING of a road bike from those doing the chasing.

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. SYCAMORE ROW CHATTEL RANCH - DAY

A RAGING pack of blood hounds races through the backwoods in hot pursuit of a dazzling, quadron slave named MELODEE (25).

SUPER: ALABAMA, GREAT STATES OF AMERICA (2107)

In ragged, threadbare skirt and shoddy leather boots she SPRINTS through the thick underbrush. She's smart, rebellious and as clever as MacGyver in a situation like this.

MELODEE (V.O.)

Ever have one of those days?

Not far behind the lead dogs, on a sweating roan, the ranch's overseer-from-hell, JAKE SLOCOM (40s), a whirling dervish of anger, fear, and hypocrisy, CHOMPS a chaw of tobacco, as he dodges skinny pines and towering magnolias.

MELODEE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Feels like the world's gone mad and the bad guys are closing in.

Two of Slocom's crew, CASH HAYES on horseback and JERICHO LAW on pimped-out mountain bike, speed alongside him.

Melodee glances back. The hounds have closed the gap.

MELODEE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Every day seems to be like that now, ever since the autocrats and racists and conspiracy nutballs took over.

She seeks cover behind a large boulder marked discreetly with an X. She withdraws a hunter's knife hidden there.

The GROWLING lead dog charges. She slices a rope tied to a spike. The dog leaps at her. In midair, the hound is lifted into the air inside a rope net. It spins around the tree line and HOWLS at Melodee watching him from below.

MELODEE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Well, on this particular day, I'd
decided enough was enough!

She grabs a backpack hidden behind the boulder, stuffs in the
knife, and takes off like a comet.

Slocom and gang appear, a second hound BAYING beside them.
They glance up at the HOWLING bloodhound spinning in the net.

HAYES
Coon girl's pretty smart. Got to
climb up the tree to free the
hound.

SLOCOM
FUCK IT! No time.

The two men KICK their horses into high gear. The second
hound jumps in front to lead the way.

Melodee glances back, distracted. She trips and slides down a
steep hill into dense shrubbery and tall grass.

Slocom and Hayes see Melodee's fall but they aren't going to
chance spraining the horses' delicate ankles. They veer off
on a path less steep.

Law follows her. His bike CLIPS a rock. He flies off and
SMASHES his head on a boulder. Stone-cold dead, literally.

The second hound continues to HOWL behind Melodee.

She takes advantage of the break. She stops, tosses off her
tattered dress and DOUSES it with liquid.

She changes into a cloth shirt, button-up men's trousers and
wool duster. She straps on her backpack and races off again.

MELODEE (V.O.)
I was tired of the rapin' and
killin.' I needed a break from it
all.

Seconds later, the remaining hound discovers her clothes,
takes a SNIFF and takes off after her. After a few steps, the
dog wobbles and falls, fast asleep.

Slocom and Hayes arrive, see the slumbering dog, and see
Melodee's dress. Slocom sniffs it and immediately dry heaves.

SLOCOM
Kava root. Son of a.

Slocom is pissed. He SHOOTs the dog in the head. BAM! BAM!
And he returns to the chase. Hayes flinches, begins to object
to Slocom's reaction but decides against it.

EXT. CLIFF - DAY

Melodee peers over a steep cliff. A five hundred foot jump.
Sure death. Not a good idea.

MELODEE (V.O.)

Not like a vacation where you come
back all rested and relaxed.

Hayes sees her and jumps off his horse to pursue on foot.
Behind him, Slocom has Melodee in his sights but Hayes
obscures his shot.

SLOCOM

CASH, MOVE!

Melodee sees Hayes advance. She spins around, wiggles her
fingers irreverently goodbye over her shoulder and jumps.

Hayes now sees the edge of the cliff but he can't stop his
momentum. He SLIDES to the edge and flies off.

Slocom pulls up. He jumps off the roan, baffled, and peers
down as the SCREAMING Hayes falls to his death.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

On the horizon, Slocom watches Melodee float in the sky
hanging from a kite? At closer look, it's two sheets sewn
together. Whatever the hell it is, she dangles from it and
rides a thermal into the valley like a soaring hawk.

MELODEE (V.O.)

Nope. This was gonna be a permanent
break. There was no coming back.
And, besides, I had important work
to do.

Slocom watches as a locomotive appears, its black coal-
powered smoke flume rising into the sky.

Melodee veers toward it and LANDS on top of a train car.
She tosses off the chute and lays flat on the train as it
rolls out of sight.

EXT. CLIFF - DAY

Slocum SPITS out a wad of tobacco, mounts the roan, grabs the reins of Hayes's horse, and heads back to the chattel ranch.

SLAM CUT TO:

BEGIN MONTAGE

INT. CYBERSPACE - DAY

Profanity laced social media tweets and posts float by.
 "Drive-by media sucks!" "Cancel culture!" "Patriots unite!"

INT. NEWS STUDIO - NIGHT

An angry TV NEWS SHOW HOST and GUEST battle verbally.

NEWS SHOW HOST

Curtz is the ultimate patriot!

GUEST

Correction. Curtz is the ultimate
 autocrat!

EXT. U.S. CAPITOL - DAY

VIOLENT MOBS in white "AMERICA **IS** GREAT AGAIN!" baseball caps attack the U.S. Capitol wielding flag poles, bear spray, canes and bricks. They chant the mantra of the day.

MOB

PRESIDENT FOR LIFE. LARSON E.
 CURTZ!

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

PARENTS pick up their CHILDREN from school. RAGING PROTESTERS shout and point. They throw face masks and syringes at the families who flee in terror as the protesters run after them.

FEMALE PROTESTER

CHILD KILLERS!

The protesters start a chant.

PROTESTERS

NO NEEDLES! NO MASKS! NO NEEDLES!
 NO MASKS!

EXT. ARCTIC - DAY

Surrounded by water and melting ice caps, helpless, stranded Polar bears drift away on tiny blocks of ice.

EXT. GULF COAST - DAY

Hurricane-force winds drive a wall of water onto shore. Houses wiped out. Windows shatter. Roofs of abandoned cars poke out above the water surge that blankets the highway.

EXT. SPACE - NIGHT

Lights around the world fade out. Earth goes dark. A satellite slowly passes by, sputters, and shuts off.

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

From the South Portico, in blue Sharkskin suit and elongated red tie, LARSON E. CURTZ (a Botoxed 78) addresses a shoulder-to-shoulder MASS OF HYSTERICAL SUPPORTERS on the lawn below.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Marching, HELMETED THUGS in full body armor wield automatic weapons at petrified BLACKS, HISPANICS, ASIANS, INDIGENOUS, JEWS, MUSLIMS. A bleak detention camp looms behind them.

CURTZ (V.O.)

My fellow New Great States
Americans, we all know laziness is
a trait in minorities.

HYSTERICAL SUPPORTERS (O.S.)

LOCK THEM UP! LOCK THEM UP!!

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Straight from a scene in "FRANKENSTEIN," an angry MOB waves silver crucifixes at non-Christians. MUSLIMS, JEWS, HINDUS. They pelt them with rocks and celebrate with high fives.

CURTZ (V.O.)

And we know the guiding principles
of White evangelicals are the key
to keeping our newfound nation
great.

HYSTERICAL SUPPORTERS (O.S.)
 AMERICA IS GREAT AGAIN!

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY

Curtz applauds the supporters as they chant. He raises his hands, motions for silence as he delivers a final edict.

CURTZ
 Tonight, I have signed an Executive Decree for all White citizens to do whatever necessary to maintain our race's manifest destiny on earth.

HYSTERICAL SUPPORTERS
 PRESIDENT FOR LIFE! LARSON E.
 CURTZ. PRESIDENT FOR LIFE!

END MONTAGE

SLAM CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

Melodee battles the WIND as she lays spread eagle on the top of the train. She grabs the horizontal ladder and begins to pull herself toward the front edge of the car.

She carefully swings her body down on the vertical ladder and DROPS to the cabin deck.

A TALL MAN in a long coat with tails SLIDES OPEN the car door and stares at her. He's about twice Melodee's age, with piercing blue eyes, like hers.

His skin is a light caramel like hers. They could pass as father and daughter.

Her pinpoint landing on the train hasn't phased him a bit.

TALL MAN
 Nice of you to drop by. Quite an entertaining escape.

Melodee stares in disbelief. He's amused by her reaction.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)
 Sorry, I work with circus performers. Not much surprises me. Come in, before one of us falls.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

They step inside the passenger car of the old steam locomotive. Well-worn bench seats, Victorian era decorative flourishes, sconces with candles. A desk in a corner piled with paper. Melodee eyes the stocked bar.

TALL MAN

You look like you could use a shot.

MELODEE

Rather have water.

He hands her a bottled water. She downs it in one GULP. He hands her another. She GULPS it down too.

TALL MAN

Who are you anyway?

MELODEE

At the moment? Escaped property.
Name's Melodee.

THE SPANIARD

Just call me The Spaniard. My given name's too difficult for most folks to say.

The Spaniard points back over his shoulder.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)

And that angry guy back there?

MELODEE

The overseer for the chattel ranch I just escaped from. It was that or get raped the rest of my life. Or traded. Or killed.

THE SPANIARD

Think he'll come after you?

MELODEE

Oh yea. He's pissy that way.

A JOLT. The train GLIDES to a stop. Melodee glances out.

DWARFS, CLOWNS, ACROBATS, ANIMAL TAMERS, A BEARDED LADY and other strange CHARACTERS chat in the shade. Unlike Melodee, all are White.

Solar-powered AI BOTS supervised by human GAUCHOS begin to load the train cars with equipment and supplies.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

Sure'd appreciate it if you'd let me tag along for a little while.

THE SPANIARD

To avoid Mr. Pissy back there?

MELODEE

That and because I have to take care of some unfinished business.

The Spaniard rubs his chin.

THE SPANIARD

One more mouth to feed in these hard times. I dunno.

MELODEE

Just for a few shows?

THE SPANIARD

We only have two more shows this season. New Orleans and Natchez.

MELODEE

What if I'd do that trick landing at those stops?

THE SPANIARD

You do realize they kill escaped slaves down here? Your presence could put the circus in jeopardy.

Melodee glances out the window again.

MELODEE

Looks to me like you've already got a head start on runaways. What's one more gonna hurt?

She points to a bald, tattooed GIANT with a chest of granite and biceps the size of melons.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

That guy for instance. Gotta be running away from something or someone.

THE SPANIARD

That freak of nature? Ralph? Well, yea, actually he is. From his daddy. Wanted him to join the family business. Ralph preferred the circus.

She motions to an animated DWARF poking Ralph's chest.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)
Him? Ivan? Yeah, he is too. Family
kicked him out of his Virginia
home. Because he's different.

MELODEE
Just because he's a Little Person?

THE SPANIARD
NO! Cuz he's gay. Not a popular
persuasion in the New Deep South.

They watch Ralph and Ivan continue their lover's spat.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)
He and Ralph are sweethearts.
Lovey-dovey one day, fightin' like
hell the next.

He pours himself another shot.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)
So, yeah, we do have our share of
runaways. It's part of our name.

He points out the window to a BOT rolling up a banner.

"DOC WAYMORE'S RUNAWAY CIRCUS AND FANTASY FAIR."

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)
Maybe we can offer you a spot 'til
end of the season. You definitely
have a unique act. The Human Kite!

MELODEE
Thanks, Mr...Spaniard.

THE SPANIARD
We'll need to keep that runaway
slave thingie hush-hush though.
Anybody asks, you're my daughter.

MELODEE
Well, *Daddy*. Guess you're lookin'
at your newest circus performer.
Promise you won't regret it.

THE SPANIARD
Hope not.

INT. SYCAMORE ROW CHATTEL RANCH - BIG HOUSE - DAY

Ranch owner PETERSON PECK (70), a living Egyptian mummy, WHEEZES in his bed. He's wrapped from head to toe in blood soaked bandages.

Slocom KNOCKS, enters, and removes his hat respectfully.

SLOCOM
She got away, Mr. Peck.

PECK
And your crew?

SLOCOM
Hayes and Law both dead. One of the hounds is left but he's shell shocked. Won't be slave huntin' no more.

The old man cranes his neck toward Slocom. Only his mouth can be seen beneath the bandages as he SPEAKS.

PECK
But that black bitch still walks the earth?

Slocom nods, then catches himself, remembers Peck can't see.

SLOCOM
Afraid so. Used bedsheets to make some kinda kite. Just floated off a cliff and disappeared.

PECK
So porch monkeys can fly now?

Slocom fidgets nervously with his hat. No answer.

PECK (CONT'D)
Find her and bring her back. She's gonna pay for what she done to me.

Peck shoos out Slocom. When he's at the door, Peck MUTTERS.

PECK (CONT'D)
Which way was she going?

SLOCOM
Southwest.

PECK
So Jackson. Hattiesburg. Maybe New Orleans.

Peck COUGHS up blood. He WHEEZES and catches his breath.

PECK (CONT'D)
 Goddamn it! Catch her before
 somebody else does. Get!

Slocum nods, shoves his hat back on and shuffles out.

EXT. CIRCUS TRAIN - DAY

A dozen boxcars loaded with circus ANIMALS, PERFORMERS,
 ROADIES and supplies RUMBLES down the track behind two
 passenger cars on its way to New Orleans.

INT. CIRCUS TRAIN - DAY

The Spaniard CHOMPS on beef jerky. When he offers some to
 Melodee, she waves it off.

MELODEE
 I'm anti-carnivorous.

The Spaniard raises his brow.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
 What? Meat makes me sleepy.

THE SPANIARD
 You are one strange n--

The Spaniard stops himself in mid-word.

MELODEE
 You weren't gonna call me the N-
 word were you?

THE SPANIARD
 I was just--

MELODEE
 Cause the last man to call me that
 was my previous owner. And I cut
 his dick off with a hunting knife.

THE SPANIARD
 You cut his DICK off?!

MELODEE
 How'd you like it if some guy
 called you spic or a sand spade?

THE SPANIARD

I might slap him around a bit but I
wouldn't cut his dick off!

MELODEE

'Cept this senile old fuck's been
rapin' me for years and nobody's
said a word or lifted a hand.

THE SPANIARD

Did he die?

MELODEE

No such luck. I saved his life.
Cauterized the wound. I did chuck
his dick in the fire, though.

He shakes his head. Torn between disgust and admiration.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

And threw hot ashes in his face. He
might be a little blind.

THE SPANIARD

A *little* blind?

MELODEE

Lucky I didn't cut off his saggy,
wrinkled balls. But now the ole'
pervert'll keep his urge to get it
on with slave girls. Just won't
have equipment to enjoy it.

The Spaniard BITES off another piece of jerky and starts to
CHEW. He examines the cylindrical piece of dried meat. His
eyes bulge. He SPITS out the jerky and tosses what's left out
the open train car window.

Melodee smiles, amused. The train continues down the track.

EXT. WARD SLAVE-O-RAMA - NEAR NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Melodee's mother RUTH (50s), a proud mulatto striving to stay
positive, joins other SLAVES for a meeting with their master.

The SLAVES, BLACKS, JEWS, LGBTQ, HISPANICS, file in behind
her in search of a shady spot to sit.

The owner of the Slave-O-Rama, MITCH WARD (50s), introduces
preacher HONTZ SNYDER (60s), dinner-plate-faced, double-
chinned, belly over his belt.

WARD

In recent months, three slaves have run away from this slave dealership. And from me. Your master. I've asked Reverend Snyder to recite scripture to show you why that must no longer occur.

Snyder steps forward. He raises his bible like Moses brandishing The Ten Commandments.

SNYDER

Question: What does God demand servants to do for their masters?
Answer: Obey the master and you obey God!

GRUMBLES emerge from the back. Snyder shuts that down with an angry glance. His VOICE rises.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Question: Why are Blacks, Jews, Mexicans--the non-Whites--chosen as slaves? Answer: Because the Lord wants it so. They are dimwitted but strong. Ugly but made for hard labor, like mules and oxen.

Audience members COUGH, CLEAR their throats, SIGH.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Question: If a servant runs away, what should be done? Answer: He should be caught and punished however the master sees fit. Even killed if necessary.

Snyder saves the best for last.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

A final question: Do we blame the master for punishing his servant? Answer: NO! He is just doing what he must to help those who cannot help themselves, the non-Whites and non-evangelicals among us.

Snyder SNAPS the bible shut. In the distance, two of Ward's HENCHMEN drag a Hispanic slave, MARTINA (30s), to a wooden cross. They LASH her arms to the horizontal patibulum and expose her bare back to Ward, his whip in hand.

Audience members MUMBLE and turn away. A SHORT HISPANIC SLAVE takes two steps toward Ward, hangs his head in despair and returns to his previous spot in the crowd.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Master Ward mentioned slaves have been running away from their home.

Snyder points to the woman lashed to the cross.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Martina is one of them. And before she did, she set Master Ward's best hemp field on fire.

From the crowd, a whispered response.

LESBIAN SLAVE

You go girl!

SNYDER

The bible says if a master strikes his slave and the slave dies, then the master shall also be punished. But if that slave survives, no vengeance shall be taken. For she is her master's property.

Martina cannot see Ward but she turns her head as far as possible toward him and SPITS. She YELLS back in Spanish.

MARTINA

I'M NOBODY'S PROPERTY! AND YOU'RE NOT MY MASTER YOU PIECE OF SHIT!

Snyder doesn't speak Spanish but he knows Martina's words are spoken with anger and resentment.

Ward grits his teeth. He doesn't wait for Snyder's signal. He rears back and LASHES Martina, OVER and OVER again.

In the crowd: MOANS. SHRIEKS. SOBS.

Martina, her back bloody and cut, slumps and passes out. Ward motions for his henchmen to take her down from the cross.

Snyder addresses the shaken audience.

SNYDER

God bless Master Ward. I am sure Martina will be fine. But she will now practice obedience. As God requires of all enslaved property.

On the way back to their shacks, Ruth helps a Black slave past his prime, UNCLE SIMON (70s). He turns to her.

UNCLE SIMON

That was sure some psycho White man
bullshit!

Ruth smiles lightly, places an arm around the old timer and straggles back to slave quarters with him in tow.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF NEW ORLEANS - DAY

The circus train emerges from woods into an urban wasteland.

Black smoke flumes rise from every part of the city, like Victorian London at the dawn of the Industrial Age. Coal is king now, even here in New Orleans.

The train meanders through the devastation. Skyscrapers with shattered glass windows. Storefronts with the goods inside picked clean. Government buildings hidden by overgrown kudzu.

Beneath an underpass by the Mississippi River, hordes of homeless ITINERANTS stream from tents.

INSERT - STAKED WOODEN SIGN

"CURTZVILLE"

MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN in threadbare rags SCURRY alongside the circus train. They wave at DOC WAYMORES'S animals, PERFORMERS and FREAKS.

Circus PERFORMERS toss promo flyers from the train. Hundreds of pieces of paper cover the city like snowflakes.

INSERT - PROMOTIONAL FLYER

"CIRCUS PERFORMANCES ALL WEEK! CITY PARK"

A YOUNG GIRL catches a flyer and hands it to her MOTHER. They read it and smile.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS TRAIN STATION - DAY

The train SPITS OUT a final smoke flume and rests. CROWDS close in. The circus CREW JUMPS out and starts to UNLOAD.

Melodee notices a nearby sign.

INSERT - SIGN

"CRESCENT CITY SLAVE AUCTION. DAILY. SUNRISE TO DUSK. WHITE MALE BIDDERS ONLY."

She dips her broad brimmed hat over her face and hides behind a large magnolia to listen and observe.

EXT. SLAVE AUCTION HOLDING PEN - DAY

A nervous Black man, POMPEY (late 60s), addresses a small group of shackled SLAVES.

POMPEY

Listen up. I'm here to prepare you for tomorrow's auction.

Pompey points to a listless MIDDLE AGED SLAVE.

POMPEY (CONT'D)

You! What's your age?

MIDDLE AGED SLAVE

If I live to see coca and marijuana planting time, forty-five or fifty, I guess.

POMPEY

Today and every day forward, you're thirty.

MIDDLE AGED SLAVE

I know I'm older than that!

POMPEY

Not anymore. From now on, if anybody asks and you say forty-five or fifty, the master'll string you up and whup you 'til you smoke!

Pompey lets his words sink in. The slaves hang their heads.

MIDDLE AGED SLAVE

Well then, I reckon I'm only thirty.

Melodee smiles nervously, even though the scene is not funny. She recalls when she was sold at another slave auction.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. BATON ROUGE SLAVE MARKET - DAY

It's busy. Packed with SLAVE DEALERS, PLANTATION OWNERS, CHATTEL RANCHERS, AUCTIONEERS, FARMERS, SPECULATORS, THE CURIOUS and, of course, SLAVES. Thousands of slaves.

SUPER: *BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, EIGHT YEARS EARLIER*

The once thriving Louisiana state capital has become a scene from *Mad Max*. THUGS, SEX WORKERS and gun-toting RUFFIANS crowd filthy streets. Dogs and the HOMELESS ravage trash for food scraps, bottled water, anything of value for sale or trade.

EXT. SLAVE AUCTION PLATFORM - DAY

In the town square, a wooden platform serves as the stage for today's *entertainment*.

The AUCTIONEER, a self-important con man in stovepipe-hat and black tails, quiets the all male, all White AUDIENCE.

AUCTIONEER

Gentlemen, we've saved the most valuable slave for last.

The Auctioneer's GOONS escort MELODEE (at age 17) to stage.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Young Melodee is an authentic quadroon. Born to a Black nigrass. Fathered by a distinguished White political leader.

Melodee remains steadfast and proud despite the comment.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

She's the ideal fancy maid for those cold southern nights.

He shoots the crowd a lecherous grin and waits for the LAUGHTER to stop before he continues.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

How much do you bid?

FARMER (O.S.)

Five hundred Curtzcoin!

AUCTIONEER

Gentlemen! Please don't insult me.

He flashes an official-looking document.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
This notarized certificate promises
she's of good moral character.

PREACHER (O.S.)
Seven hundred.

AUCTIONEER
And she's very intelligent.

SCHOOLTEACHER (O.S.)
Eight hundred Curtzcoin!

Melodee wipes away tears, defiantly grits her teeth and
glares at the audience.

AUCTIONEER
Her chastity is pure. Gentlemen,
she has not yet been deflowered!

That did it. The lustful BIDDERS go bonkers.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Thirteen hundred.

LAWYER (O.S.)
Fifteen!

The camera zooms into a dapper, square-jawed, self-assured
blonde lawyer, SILAS GREENE (22).

SILAS GREENE
Seventeen hundred Curtzcoin!

The Auctioneer grins. He can see that's the winning bid.

AUCTIONEER
Going. Going. Gone!

The Auctioneer STRIKES his gavel and points to Silas.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)
Sold! To that young man for
seventeen hundred Curtzcoin!

From the crowd: MURMURS. CHEERS. APPLAUSE.

The other BIDDERS swarm Silas to congratulate him for his
purchase.

The Auctioneer's goons drag Melodee offstage and present her
to her new owner. Her head down, wrists cuffed, leg irons
tight, Melodee sobs.

Silas lifts her chin, retrieves a handkerchief and wipes the tears from her eyes. He motions for the goons to remove her handcuffs. She looks at him. He smiles. Her eyes brighten.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. SLAVE AUCTION HOLDING PEN - DAY

Melodee returns to reality. She surveys her surroundings. Confident that nobody has seen her, she creeps back to the circus to help with set up.

EXT. IVAN'S MAKEUP TENT - DAY

Ivan ducks into a tent bearing a sign.

INSERT - SIGN

"PERFORMERS ONLY"

Melodee HURRIES over.

MELODEE

Mr. Ivan?

Ivan pokes his head out of the tent flap.

IVAN

Been expecting you. Spaniard filled me in.

INT. IVAN'S MAKEUP TENT - DAY

Ivan POURS himself a whiskey shot. Points to the bottle.

IVAN

Snake bite medicine?

MELODEE

You circus folk sure like your spirits. No thanks, but I'll take some water.

Melodee sees a fruit bowl.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

And maybe a peach? Haven't enjoyed fresh fruit for years.

Ivan hands her the water and a peach.

IVAN
Spaniard says you...you jump?

MELODEE
Not really jump. More like kite.
Parakite.

Ivan squints. Parakite doesn't register.

IVAN
Whatever it is you do, you're gonna
need a costume. That's what I do.

MELODEE
Could you make the parakite too?

IVAN
Child, if it can be sewn, stitched,
tailored, tacked, embroidered or
knitted, I can do it.

MELODEE
Great. Already drew up what I need.

Melodee hands Ivan a pencil sketch.

INSERT - PENCIL SKETCH

The parakite resembles an upside down, oblong letter U.

MELODEE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Needs to be light but strong. To
trap the air. I based it on one in
a book. By Leonardo da Vinci.

Ivan squints. Again, the name doesn't register.

IVAN
Okay. So one costume and one of
whatever this is.

Ivan tosses Melodee's sketch on a table.

IVAN (CONT'D)
There's something else I need to
make you.

Ivan RIFLES through a cabinet drawer and withdraws a fake
black beard. He places it on a mirrored makeup table.

IVAN (CONT'D)
A disguise. Spaniard said you're a
runaway.

(MORE)

IVAN (CONT'D)

And that "man getup" you're wearing ain't enough for you to hide in plain sight.

MELODEE

So much for the Spaniard wanting to keep the runaway thingie *hush-hush*.

IVAN

It is hush-hush doll. Just me and Ralph know and we'd never tell a soul. Cross my cute lil' heart!

Ivan winks at her. He CLIMBS a stool to get a better look at Melodee's face.

IVAN (CONT'D)

A little glue and the beard and you'll pass for a White man any day of the week.

MELODEE

Glue? How long does it last?

IVAN

'Bout a week 'fore we do a retouch.

MELODEE

A week!? Is it itchy?

IVAN

No more'n crab lice or poison ivy.

Melodee rubs her face, grimaces. Ivan SNICKERS.

IVAN (CONT'D)

I'm shittin' you girlfriend! Washes off with soap and water.

Melodee SIGHS, relieved.

EXT. SYCAMORE ROW CHATTEL RANCH - DAY

Slocum KICKS in the door of a decrepit slave cabin. Other SLAVES step on their porches to watch.

SLOCOM

Queenie! Get your fat black ass out here.

Inside, the weak voice of QUEENIE (22), a plump, dark-skinned slave pleads for mercy.

QUEENIE (O.S.)

Please, Master Slocom, I ain't done nothing wrong. I ain't.

SLOCOM

Spare me the whimpering bullshit.

Queenie creeps out onto the CREAKING porch. Slocom grabs her by the hair, SLAMS her to the ground. Blood seeps from a cut on her forehead.

Slocom bends over her, WHISPERS with a raspy, irate voice.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)

How'd she get all that shit? The knife, the rope net, the sheets?

Queenie SOBS hysterically.

QUEENIE

I really don't know, sir.

SLOCOM

You two're never without each other. Why ain't you together now? Why'd she leave you behind?

Slocom SPITS tobacco juice. It SPLATTERS Queenie's neck. She flinches but dares not wipe it off.

Her cherubic-faced husband JAMES (30s) emerges from the cabin and runs to her.

JAMES

Queenie didn't wanna leave me, Master Slocom.

SLOCOM

Didn't mind helping her insolent friend though, did she?

From James's silence, Slocom knows the answer.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)

Okay. Last time. Where'd she go, Queenie? Tell me or I'll kill you. Right here. Right now.

James lifts Queenie into his arms.

JAMES

Melodee said she was gonna get her freedom. Then she's gonna make her mama and daughter free.

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)
Said dyin' can't be no worse than
bein' a slave.

Slocom, irate, SPITS again. He peers at James and Queenie.

SLOCOM
You fools. One of you runs off, not
so rare. But she thinks she's gonna
set other Africoons free too?

JAMES
Can we go now, sir?

Slocom fumes. He draws his pistol and SHOOTs Queenie in the
heart while she's still in James's arms. Her head hangs.
Blood SPATTERS James's face and body.

JAMES (CONT'D)
NO! NO! NO!

James's face fills with anger. Slocom points the gun and
dares him to take a step toward him. He addresses the OTHERS.

SLOCOM
If any of you run away or help
another grunt run away, expect to
end up just like Queenie.

Slocom climbs onto the roan and GALLOPS off. The others
gather around James. They SOB louder and louder.

INT. IVAN'S MAKEUP TENT - DAY

Ivan finishes Melodee's beard disguise. THREE MEN explode
into the tent lugging Ralph, who MOANS in pain.

Ivan JUMPS from his stool, motions at a cot.

IVAN
What happened to my baby?

SKINNY GUY
Fell from the Big Top scaffolding.

Melodee LEAPS from the makeup chair. In men's clothing and
Ivan's beard disguise, she's a dead ringer for a White man.
She embraces an air of superiority and RASPS in an imitation
of a male baritone.

MELODEE
Ivan and I got this.

FAT GUY
Who the hell're you?

Ivan stops caressing Ralph.

IVAN
He is the new parakeet guy.

MELODEE
Kite. But yeah.

SKINNY GUY
You tame parakeets?

Melodee frowns, starts to answer but Ivan's had enough. He motions them out with a flip of his wrist.

UGLY GUY
Fine by me. Rather be workin' than
hangin' out with queens anyway. And
some bird trainer.

Ralph sneers and GRUNTS. The men get the idea and leave.

IVAN
(to Melodee)
You know what you're doing?

MELODEE
Gonna find out.

She examines Ralph.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
Fall on your shoulder or back?

RALPH
Shoulder.

MELODEE
Hear a snap?

RALPH
Yea. A pop.

MELODEE
So not so bad. Your shoulder's
dislocated.

Ivan caresses Ralph's cheeks.

IVAN
Oh my sweet, handsome muscle man!

Melodee POURS a whiskey shot, hands it to Ralph.

MELODEE
This'll help you relax.

Ralph downs the shot. Ivan downs one too. Melodee shakes her head, MUMBLES.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
You circus folk are amazing.

She points to Ralph's shoulder.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
Relax the muscles around that
shoulder. DO NOT tense up.

Ralph relaxes, SIGHS, squeezes Ivan's hand.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
Here we go. One. Two.

At two, Melodee yanks the shoulder hard and fast.

SFX: A gigantic POP.

RALPH
OH MY GOD! What the fuck Melodee!

MELODEE
You would've tensed up if I waited
'til three.

Ralph nurses his shoulder. After a few seconds, his expression changes from grimace to grin.

IVAN
Baby?

Ralph stops rubbing. Ivan sees this and hugs Melodee.

RALPH
Where'd you learn that?

MELODEE
Books mostly. And my mama.

IVAN
You sure read a lot for a runaway
slave. Isn't that illegal?

MELODEE

Oh yea! But mama snuck books from
the master's library and we'd read
at night.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

INT. SLAVE CABIN - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

Melodee (at 6) sits on her mother RUTH's lap (at 30) reading
from *Gulliver's Travels*. She finishes, SNAPS the book shut
and beams proudly at her mother.

MELODEE (V.O.)

*By six, I'd read the classics. And
by seven, I'd consumed the entire
encyclopedia, A to Z!*

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Ruth puts her finger to her mouth as she and Melodee trail a
wild boar through deep brush. She hands Melodee an atlatl
with a five-foot dart affixed to its grooved end.

She flips the shaft. The dart flies through the air and finds
its mark. The boar THUMPS to the ground.

MELODEE (V.O.)

From books, I learned how to hunt.

EXT. WATERFRONT - DAY

With a petrified Melodee strapped by rope to her back, Ruth
JUMPS off a rocky cliff. A parakite SNAPS open and they sail
over the river.

MELODEE (V.O.)

*And books showed mama and me how to
make my first parakite.*

END FLASHBACK

IVAN

That kite I'm making you!

MELODEE

Yep.

RALPH

Where's your mama now?

MELODEE

On a plantation around here. Just don't know which one. Yet.

INT. CIRCUS MAIN RING - NIGHT

The bleachers are PACKED. Standing room only. Bug-eyed KIDS are mesmerized by colorful PERFORMERS, exotic animals, and hilarious CLOWNS. Circus WORKERS pull ropes, cart props, and lead elephants, tigers, and ponies from the ring.

Flickering lanterns illuminate the face of tonight's Master of Ceremonies, the Spaniard. In black knee-high boots, red coat with tails and top hat, he addresses the audience.

THE SPANIARD

Ladies, gentlemen, boys and girls.
Tonight our giant circus tent is open to the starry sky.

Everyone gazes at the opening. A full moon peeks through.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)

Three minutes from now, you will witness a brave performing artist glide through that tiny aperture, land safely in this Big Top, and complete an important mission.

The Spaniard gestures to the opening.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)

Presenting the New Deep South's most famous aerialist, the Legendary Leonardo and his Fabulous Flying Wonder Wing.

The Spaniard TROTS off. The eyes of the captivated AUDIENCE are frozen on the opening of the Big Top.

INT. HIGH RISE STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Melodee MARCHES up steep stairs. She DRAGS her parakite and eyes a sign on the wall.

INSERT - SIGN

"43RD FLOOR"

RETURN TO SCENE

She STEPS over debris and enters an immense, empty room with floor to ceiling windows.

INT. FORTY-THIRD FLOOR - NIGHT

High winds PUMMEL the room. Fighting sporadic GUSTS, Melodee TRUDGES to the outside ledge.

EXT. HIGH RISE LEDGE - NIGHT

Melodee peers at her target, the sprawling circus tent.

MELODEE

Either I'm gonna be the life of
this party or the death during it.

Melodee CLIPS onto the harness, CHECKS the straps on her helmet, takes a deep BREATH, and DIVES off the ledge.

Ivan's customized costume from a full-body black, neoprene wetsuit is snug. To observers, she's invisible, the canopy, suit, helmet and goggles dark as coal in the night sky.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

A speck appears in front of the full moon, visible through the opening at the top of the tent.

The AUDIENCE SHRIEKS and APPLAUDS.

Melodee steers the parakite through the gap. She waves. Above the acrobat's net, she UNBUCKLES herself and drops to safety.

The AUDIENCE GASPS.

She rolls to the edge and gives her show partner the signal-- a double tongued click.

MELODEE

CLICK! CLICK!

A ten-foot tall African elephant, HARMONY JANE, THUNDERS over. With precise timing, Melodee PLOPS onto the elephant's bare back.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Let's give 'em a show baby girl.

The audience ROARS with delight.

LONGSHOT OF IVAN

In a full body red-striped swimsuit, Ivan perches on a collapsing seat above a full tank of water. To his right is a red and white bullseye.

ON MELODEE

Melodee sits on top of the elephant as it RUMBLES down the ring. She withdraws a ball from a strapped-on bag. She FLIPS up her helmet visor, aims at the bullseye and fires.

Misses.

The audience MOANS.

MIDSHOT OF IVAN

Ivan smiles and waves. Safe this time. He looks nervous as Harmony Jane gets closer.

ON MELODEE

She claws another ball and lets it rip. WHOOSH! Just wide but a bit closer than the first.

ON IVAN

Ivan SIGHS, wipes a brow. His nervousness increases.

The audience SIGHS then begins a CHANT.

CIRCUS AUDIENCE
DUNK HIM! DUNK HIM! DUNK HIM!

ON MELODEE

She's less than twenty feet from Ivan now as Harmony Jane zooms toward the dunk tank. Melodee's eyes sparkle with fire. She takes aim, rares back and heaves the third and final ball.

SLO MO OF THE BALL HEADED FOR THE BULLSEYE

SLO MO OF IVAN'S EXPRESSION TURNING TO DESPERATION

BINGO! Right on target. The ball SLAMS into the red bullseye.

A loud bell RINGS.

CIRCUS WORKERS wave the torches and run around the ring to excite the CROWD.

ON IVAN

Ivan awaits his fate. He SIGHS one last time, pinches his nose, waves to the audience. He WINKS to Melodee and watches as the bullseye flings back.

His seat collapses and he PLUNGES into the ice-cold, water tank. He ROCKETS out, SHIVERS and grabs a towel.

The AUDIENCE rises in a standing OVATION.

ON MELODEE

Melodee takes a victory lap. She grasps Harmony Jane's huge ears, smiles and waves to the audience.

After once around the ring, Melodee halts Harmony Jane, stands on her back, and removes her helmet. She presses her hand to her heart and throws the audience a heartfelt kiss.

She PLOPS back down. Harmony Jane makes a final celebratory TRUMPET as they exit the Big Top with kids and parents CHASING close behind.

EXT. ROAD TO NEW ORLEANS - DAY

On the roan, Slocom parallels the train track. He scans for clues from Melodee's escape. The relentless sun reflects off a large object. In this ungodly heat, is it real or a mirage?

Slocom KICKS the roan into a GALLOP. They reach the White object. Slocom JUMPS down.

The sheets Melodee used to escape.

He examines them closely. Four sheets stitched together. Ropes from four corners to form two holding loops.

Slocom places his hands in the loops and runs. The sheets CATCH wind. The canopy STIFFENS. His feet leave the ground. He becomes a human kite.

SLOCOM

Son of a bitch.

He stops running, TOSSES the sheets aside, and HOPS back on the roan. After a few miles, the train track diverges. One side heads north, the other heads west.

Slocom wipes dust off a green metal sign beside the track. An arrow labeled "NEW ORLEANS 18" points west. An arrow labeled "HATTIESBURG 95" points north.

Slocom frowns and withdraws a Curtzcoin from his slicker.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)
 (mumbles)
 Heads, N'Orleans. Tails,
 H-Burg.

He FLIPS the coin, COVERS it with his palm, and peeks. President Larson E. Curtz's ugly face smirks at him. He shoves the coin into his pocket and PLODS down the tracks toward New Orleans.

EXT. CIRCUS CAMP - NIGHT

The circus performance has ended. The CREW completes cleaning and becomes enthusiastic.

CIRCUS WORKER
 Party time!

EXT. BAND STAGE - NIGHT

A three-person music ENSEMBLE breaks into dance MUSIC. Couples wop, wobble, SING, and sway to the TUNES. Drinks poured. Joints lit. Food devoured. Smiles exchanged. And kisses SMOOCHED.

Melodee observes the merrymaking. Still in her performance costume and realistic black beard, she pulls off the White man guise skillfully.

At least, MASON MYERS (30s), a melodramatic gay acrobat in banana-in-my-pants tights is fooled. With a carnal gleam in his eyes, he swaggers over. Obviously plastered.

MASON
 (slurring words)
 You got a tough act to follow!
 Why've you never heard of me? I
 mean...heard of you?

He catches Melodee off guard. She's surprised men are attracted to her even when she's masquerading as one.

MELODEE
 Probably because I've never done it
 before an audience.

Mason inches closer. His alcohol breath causes her to step back. He still hasn't picked up on Melodee's indifference to his lothario power moves.

MASON

I'd like to do you with or without
an audience.

He sneers, lets go a creepy LAUGH.

Melodee shoves him away. Mason's delicate ego is bruised.

He grabs at Melodee's face and pinches off beard hairs in the
process. He rubs them in his fingers and grins.

MASON (CONT'D)

That beard's not real.

He steps closer. Scrutinizes her face.

MASON (CONT'D)

And you're not White! You're a...

MELODEE

Mister, don't say it, please. For
your own good.

Poor drunk Mason. He says it.

MASON

Nigger!

Melodee shakes her head. Swiftly, she KICKS Mason in the
balls. He doubles over. She KNEES him in the forehead. He
rocks on his heels and FALLS flat on his back.

The band stops playing. The dancers stop dancing. The
Spaniard, Ralph and Ivan RUN over.

THE SPANIARD

What--

MELODEE

Mr. Smooth's had too much to drink.
Apparently he thinks I'm not a fine
upstanding gay Caucasian gentleman
like himself.

Mason's out cold. Ralph and Ivan LAUGH.

THE SPANIARD

Least you didn't cut his dick off.
Ralph, take this moron to his tent.
Let's hope he sleeps it off and
forgets all about this.

Ralph SWINGS the passed out lover-wannabe over his shoulders
like a sack of potatoes and carts him away.

RALPH

He's sure gonna have some sore
jewels when he wakes up!

Melodee drops onto a wooden chair, rests her elbow on the
table, rubs her forehead.

IVAN

I'm sorry you had to deal with
that, sweetness.

MELODEE

Will I ever really be free, Ivan?
Mulatto? White? Woman? Man?

Ivan places his hand over hers. Leans in.

IVAN

Sometimes being free is not a
physical thing. Sometimes it's in
your mind. In your heart. I'm not
really free either but I don't let
that get me down.

MELODEE

You're a bigger man than me then.

Ivan shares his unique cackle. Melodee smiles, then breaks
out into laughter too.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS SLAVE MARKET - DAY

In her beard, Stetson, black slicker, and black leather
boots, Melodee prowls the auction grounds. She notices Pompey
smoking a joint.

MELODEE

Pompey, right?

Pompey turns, sees that it's a White man. Feigns deference.

POMPEY

Yes sir. Do I know you?

MELODEE

No, I saw you a coupla days ago.
Prepping slaves for the auction.

Pompey chuckles, offers Melodee a toke. She waves it off.

POMPEY

That was me. Here most every day.

MELODEE

Maybe you could help me.

POMPEY

Can try.

MELODEE

I'm looking to buy a front of the house servant. Polished. A mulatto or quadroon'd be good.

Pompey leans in, lowers his voice.

POMPEY

You lookin' to bed her too?

MELODEE

(fake chuckle)

Oh no, no! My wife would cut my dick off!

They both laugh, Melodee at the irony, Pompey at the White man's fear of his wife.

POMPEY

Why don't you just come to tomorrow's auction?

MELODEE

Can't wait that long. Wife said don't bother comin' home today if I ain't got a domestic with me.

POMPEY

Ok then. Check with Ward Slave-O-Rama in Metairie. If Mitch Ward ain't got what you want, nobody in Orleans Parish does.

Melodee tips her Stetson.

MELODEE

Appreciate it.

POMPEY

Always happy to help a man keep his dick attached!

They share another good laugh. She steps away. Pompey takes another TOKE.

EXT. WARD SLAVE-O-RAMA - DAY

Melodee RIDES down a pothole-ridden road covered in rubbish.

She sees a gigantic billboard with a finger pointing to the reader.

INSERT - BILLBOARD

"WARD SLAVE-O-RAMA. YOU'LL NEVER BITCH 'BOUT A SLAVE FROM MITCH!"

BACK TO SCENE

She enters an expanse of blacktop, a one-time parking lot. Abandoned cars and trucks. Broken glass. Sheet metal.

A circular concrete structure sits in the distance. Melodee realizes it's a former car dealership.

Mitch Ward BOUNDS out the front door, fake smile plastered on his pasty, pale face. His luminescent neon-green Seersucker jacket is two sizes too small, his pants a size too big. Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp without the Hitler mustache.

WARD

You look to me like a man in the need for new property!

MELODEE

That'd be correct.

WARD

In the right place. Just received a shipment of kikes and wetbacks and a coupla gooks and gays. Come into the showroom. Take a look-see.

INT. WARD SLAVE-O-RAMA SHOWROOM - DAY

Where used cars once sat, slaves are now on display. Shackled by hand and leg irons, tethered by chains to canon balls.

Melodee glowers. Ward beams proudly.

Each cage has a tag with race, age and skillset. No name.

They walk by "KIKE, 28, Bookkeeper," "GOOK, 43, Chef," "GAY, 28, Bed boy," "WETBACK, 39, Landscaper."

Melodee feels nauseous, covers her mouth. Ward is clueless.

WARD
 You won't find better property
 around. Got dealerships in Natchez
 and Atlanta, too.

Ward points to another room.

INSERT - SIGN

"SERVICE CENTER"

BACK TO SCENE

WARD (CONT'D)
 Got the best service warranty in
 the business too. Lemme show you.

INT. WARD SERVICE CENTER - DAY

They enter a large "garage." Beanpole skinny ROY SIKES (40s)
 CHOMPS on a slimy cigar. Ward introduces him to Melodee.

WARD
 Roy here's the head of our service
 and parts department. He runs a
 tight ship.

SIKES
 You know it boss. Well-trained
 slaves is what keeps our customers
 happy!

Melodee eyes all the latest *accessories*. It's a "Slaves R' Us
 Superstore." Iron collars, handcuffs, thumbscrews, whips,
 chains, gags, and yokes hang on every wall.

JEFFERSON, a meek brown-skinned teen creeps over.

JEFFERSON
 Pardon Master Sikes. Finished
 polishing the new parts.

SIKES
 Good boy!

He turns to Melodee.

SIKES (CONT'D)
 Jeff here was a mean spirited,
 disobedient young nigger boy when
 his master sent him in for his one-
 year check up. Now look!

JEFFERSON

Yes sir. I've learned my lesson.

Jefferson bows. Sikes pulls a peanut from his jacket. TOSSES it to the teen. He bows again.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

Thank you, Master Sikes!

SIKES

There's more where that came from once you clean them toilets and wash off the new property that come in this morning.

Jefferson runs to finish his chores. Ward nods a goodbye to Sikes. He places an arm around Melodee as they walk back to the Showroom.

INT. SHOWROOM - DAY

Ward leads Melodee to a table beside a row of office files.

WARD

What make 'n' model you wanting?

Melodee shrugs. Ward realizes she doesn't understand.

WARD (CONT'D)

My bad! I sold cars when there was still gas and electric. I mean like rag heads, half-breeds, coons.

She swallows hard at Ward's blatant racism and plays along.

MELODEE

Ah! An Aunt Jemima. Light skin. Experienced. A good-natured mammy the wife can trust for cleaning and cooking.

WARD

We got lots of them in inventory.

Ward SLAPS a heavy journal on a table and opens to a section titled HOUSE NIGGERS. He scans it with his index finger.

WARD (CONT'D)

Seven in stock. All are workin' for me up at the Big House.

Melodee spots her mother's name.

INSERT

Name: Ruth Origin: Baton Rouge, LA Age: 52 Nigger %: Octoroon

RETURN TO SCENE

Melodee feigns disappointment. She's found what she came for.

MELODEE

All seem too old. Not really what I
was looking for.

Ever the used car salesman, Ward's not about to let a
customer get off the lot without a slave purchase.

WARD

I assure you, our properties are
the best in the parish. I can deal.

No dice. Melodee heads for the door.

MELODEE

I'll just check the New Orleans
Slave Market.

She makes it outside, but Ward is on her heels.

WARD

That meat market! Their inventory's
Level E or F. It's street trash!

Melodee makes one last try to convince Ward she's serious.

MELODEE

Then I'll just buy a server bot.

WARD

A bot? No, this is not California!

Finally, she reaches her horse. Ward keeps on going and going
with the sales pitch, the Energizer Bunny of Slave Salesmen.

WARD (CONT'D)

I didn't even get your name!

Melodee's not about to provide him with a name. Ward's
irritated. He KICKS pebbles around the lot, lowers his head,
and returns to the showroom to torture his property.

EXT. WARD BIG HOUSE - DAY

Melodee RIDES along a gravel driveway. Next to Ward's massive brick Antebellum home, FEMALE SLAVES of all races hang laundry, BEAT rugs, and tote buckets into the Big House.

Melodee sees her mother Ruth. She glances around. No overseers or Whites in sight. She CREEPS toward her mother. Ruth sees her, DROPS her wicker basket, and RUNS to Melodee.

MELODEE
(whispers)
Don't mama! Not now.

Ruth stops. She understands. No celebratory reunion for mother and daughter. Not yet.

Melodee points, and acts as if she's asking for directions.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
You healthy mama?

RUTH
Yes. But I wanna hear 'bout you.
How'd you escape? Find me?

MELODEE
The skills you taught me came in handy. And had a bit of luck.

RALPH
Just like I taught you! You make a good White man too. Just can't fool your mama!

They smile at each other knowingly.

MELODEE
I'm hiding with a circus. And I'm going to come for you, mama. You can hide with me. And, I need your help to rescue Mary too.

RUTH
My baby girl's got her mama's spirit, that's for sure.

The other slaves sneak peaks now. Curious.

RUTH (CONT'D)
Awful dangerous proposition. But I trust you with my life, daughter.

Melodee ends the conversation with a loud, dramatic flourish to ensure the curious slave women hear her.

MELODEE

(loudly)

Thank you ma'am. My wife says I have a terrible sense of direction.

She WHISPERS to Ruth one last time.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

Tomorrow night mama. At eight. Right after sundown. Be up front.

Melodee ambles back to her horse. Ruth snatches the wicker basket and strolls into the Big House. She hides a huge smile.

INT. NEW ORLEANS ROADHOUSE - DAY

Slocom leans against the packed bar. Obnoxious PATRONS BLOW OFF STEAM telling bullshit tall tales. Slocom overhears one told by a bald, frumpy STORYTELLER (50s).

STORYTELLER

Never seen anything like it! He floated in on a kite, plopped on an elephant, and dunked that dwarf right into the pool!

Slocom SPITS tobacco on the filthy, wooden floor.

SLOCOM

What'd this kite flyer look like?

The Storyteller smiles. Finally, a willing audience!

STORYTELLER

Dressed in black from head to toe.

SLOCOM

What race?

STORYTELLER

White, I guess. Hard to tell in the low lantern light.

SLOCOM

You're not sure then.

STORYTELLER

Well, no. Why don't you go see the act for yourself. Here.

He hands Slocom a folded promotional flyer.

The flyer reads: "CIRCUS LEAVING SOON. FINAL TWO PERFORMANCES TONIGHT AND TOMORROW! CITY PARK."

Slocom DOWNS his shot, STASHES the flyer in his slicker, and nods at the storyteller on his way out.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

In her black costume, Melodee practices with Harmony Jane.

Just then, Mason EXPLODES into the Big Top. A well-fed MAN with a badge and three OTHER MEN PARADE IN beside. Their considerable paunches attest to a love of rich Cajun cuisine.

Mason points at Melodee and GROWLS.

MASON

That's him sheriff! Er, her. The nigger girl.

Melodee GRITS her teeth. That N word again!

Sheriff BUD ROCHAMBEAU (45) stares at Melodee. Ralph, Ivan and the Spaniard overhear Mason's voice and hurry over. Rochambeau REMOVES HANDCUFFS, approaches Melodee.

SHERIFF ROCHAMBEAU

You're under arrest. Might've heard here in the Great States of America, we've brought back a little thing called slavery.

THE SPANIARD

Mason, what kind of trouble have you stirred up now?

MASON

The justice kind. He is not a "he." He's a "she." And, a coon at that!

THE SPANIARD

Prove it!

MASON

What?

THE SPANIARD

Prove it. That is a beard on his face! And his skin is lighter than yours or mine. Ever see a slave with skin that light Ivan? Ralph?

EXT. CIRCUS ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A serpentine line winds in front of the ticket booth.

The TICKET BOT, a solar-powered, metallic droid programmed for a single task, performs its gatekeeper function.

TICKET BOT
(in a nasal monotone)
Two goods per guest ticket.

A prim grandmother, ANTONIA (70s), steps up. Her excited grandson BUDDY (10) holds her hand, TAPS his feet. His head rests on the counter.

ANTONIA
Your flyer said one.

TICKET BOT
Circus Saturdays, one. Weekdays,
two.

ANTONIA
But we only have two cans of beans.
Do you honor Curtzcoin?

The Ticket Bot points to the sign.

INSERT - SIGN

"NO CURTZCOIN. GOODS ONLY!"

TICKET BOT
No Curtzcoin. Only goods of value.
Food. Clothes. Bottled water.

A nerdish WALTER (70s) steps forward, SETS two bars of soap on the counter. He smiles at Antonia and her grandson.

WALTER
My guest decided not to come.

ANTONIA
Thank you sir!

WALTER
Walt.

ANTONIA
Walt. Why don't you join us?

Walter hands the Ticket Bot two more soap bars. Buddy grabs Walter's hand. The three of them head into the Big Top, all smiles.

EXT. SUPPLY TRAIN - NIGHT

A TRANSPORT BOT tows a loaded metallic bin to a train car.

INSERT - SIGN ON TRAIN

"SUPPLIES"

The Transport Bot slumps. Checks his power setting.

INSERT - POWER INDICATOR

"10%"

The bot BEEPS out a warning.

Nearby, SECURITY BOTS guard the supply train as WORKER BOTS UNLOAD the bartered goods and STACK them for inventory.

The Transport Bot's power indicator drops.

INSERT - POWER INDICATOR

"5%"

INT. BIG TOP - NIGHT

From the top row of the jam packed stands, Slocom watches Melodee's Legendary Leonardo act come to a rousing finish.

Atop Harmony Jane, she removes her helmet, presses her hand to her heart, and tosses a kiss to the audience.

SFX: Tumultuous crowd cheering and applause.

Melodee spots Slocom eyeing her from the bleachers. She PLOPS down on the elephant. In a hurry now.

MELODEE

CLICK! CLICK!

MELODEE (CONT'D)

(to elephant)

Let's get out of here girl.

Harmony Jane BARRELS out. Slocom SCRAMBLES down the stands. He's caught in the excited throng JOCKEYING to meet the Legendary Leonardo and his extraordinary elephant sidekick.

SLOCOM
Out of the way!

The crowd ignores Slocom's order. He rolls his eyes, REMOVES his gun and waves it at the running masses.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)
I said move.

The crowd points at the gun. Everyone STEPS ASIDE to let Slocom RUN down the center like Moses parting the Red Sea.

EXT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

ACROBATS, CLOWNS, and other PERFORMERS sign autographs. A man in BLACK BODY SUIT and matching helmet chats with a little girl. Slocom muscled through.

Slocom PRESSES his gun barrel against Black Body Suit's back.

SLOCOM
Guess you think you're hot shit?

Black Body Suit spins around. Slocom's grin disappears.

BLACK BODY SUIT
Back in the day, maybe.

It's not Melodee.

SLOCOM
Who the fuck are you?

BLACK BODY SUIT
Back at ya buddy. Who're you?

Black Body Suit motions for Slocom to stop pointing the gun.

BLACK BODY SUIT (CONT'D)
Do you mind?

Slocom doesn't budge.

BLACK BODY SUIT (CONT'D)
I'm head of the Legendary Leonardo fan club.

He calls out to his friends.

BLACK BODY SUIT (CONT'D)
Team. Come introduce yourselves to this nice gentleman.

Five other black body suit CLONES appear, stare at Slocom.
Slocom shakes his head and moves on.

EXT. WARD BIG HOUSE - NIGHT

In her White man's outfit, Melodee leans forward in the saddle. She sneaks to the front of Ward's estate. She dismounts and creeps down the road.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS. A twig CRACKS.

Melodee clenches her fists and prepares for a clash.

RUTH
(whispers)
Now can I hug my baby girl?

Melodee SIGHS. Unclenches her fists.

MELODEE
Mama!

Reunited mother and child HUG. Ruth cups Melodee's face.

RUTH
Now, let's get the fuck outta here!

Melodee smiles, grabs her mother's hand. They STEP softly.

MELODEE
(whispers)
Nobody followed you?

RUTH
Don't think so but Ward has guards.

Melodee helps her mother ONTO THE HORSE and CLIMBS behind.

SFX: CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

Bullets WHIZ by. Melodee KICKS the horse into a GALLOP.

SFX: CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

SFX: HOUNDS HOWL. Loud. Getting closer.

MELODEE
Why's it always gotta be hounds?
White people never heard of cute
kittens?

Ruth looks over Melodee's shoulder. Two of WARD'S MEN pursue them on horseback. Two HOWLING bloodhounds lead the way.

RUTH

I'm sorry Dee Dee. This escape is gonna get us both killed.

MELODEE

No mama. I've planned it for a long time. Just like you taught me. Measure twice, cut once.

Ward's men and the hounds are closing in.

The foliage thickens. The gravel road yields to grass.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

Get ready.

RUTH

For what?

MELODEE

To duck.

RUTH

What?

MELODEE

NOW! DUCK!

Both women duck their heads.

Ward's lead rider doesn't. Suddenly, his head SNAPS back. He FALLS off his horse. Felled by a rope between two trees.

The second rider sees him go down and DUCKS. He makes it under the rope. He lifts his head and smiles proudly.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

(to Ruth)

Stay down!!

The second rider's head SNAPS back like the first one's did. He FALLS off the horse. A second rope!

MELODEE (CONT'D)

Okay, it's clear.

They raise their heads. Ruth points behind them. The bloodhounds continue chase. Melodee takes a peek.

The path splits, one trail in overgrown weeds heads east, the other, an extension of the exiting horse trail, heads west.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
 Whatdya think, mama? East or west?

RUTH
 When in doubt, always follow the
 wisdom of Robert Frost.

MELODEE
 The road less taken? Good advice!

Melodee turns east.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
 Mama, take the reins.

Melodee reaches into a saddlebag. She TOSSES pieces of meat
 at the dogs. Four. Five. Six large chunks.

The dogs stop to INHALE the meat. They lose ground on
 Melodee. And they start to wobble. The lead dog totters and
 FALLS. Seconds later, the second dog FALLS.

Melodee slows the horse to a TROT.

RUTH
 How'd you?

MELODEE
 Remember that medical book you took
 from Jefferson Cole's library? Had
 a real informative section on
 sedatives. Those hounds should be
 out for quite a while.

RUTH
 Always said you should be a doctor!

MELODEE
 Still might be.

Melodee turns the horse west, back to New Orleans.

INT. CIRCUS - NIGHT

The Spaniard ANNOUNCES the final act.

THE SPANIARD
 Ladies, gentlemen, boys and girls.
 A big round of applause for our
 performers, clowns, animals and the
 crew who made this circus possible!

The BAND PLAYS "ENTRANCE OF THE GLADIATORS."

The CIRCUS PERFORMERS MARCH around the ring.

SFX: Wild CHEERS, APPLAUSE, CHANTS of approval from the CROWD.

CLOWNS make balloon animals for the children.

PERFORMERS WALK on their hands and do somersaults.

KIDS pet the PONIES, DOGS and ELEPHANTS. But they simply gaze at the wilder beasts--LIONS and BEARS--in wheeled cages.

At the height of the final sendoff, Sheriff Rochambeau appears. This time with MORE MEN. Mason among them. The band stops. The circus parade ends.

SHERIFF ROCHAMBEAU
Folks, we're shutting down the show. For a second time, we have reports of illegals.

GRUMBLING and angry SHOUTS from the crowd.

SHERIFF ROCHAMBEAU (CONT'D)
Remain calm. Exit slowly. If you're a White citizen with an OFFICIAL CURTZ CARD, you can be on your way.

MAN IN THE CROWD (O.S.)
RAID!

SCREAMS. WAILS. SHRIEKS.

EXT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

Slocum watches as the frenzied CIRCUS GOERS TURN on each another. He looks for any sign of Melodee.

The Sheriff and his men RUN ahead of the RIOTING horde. Mason GRABS the sheriff's arm.

MASON
Even if we can't catch illegals, we can raid the supply train. They got all kinds of shit! Follow me.

SHERIFF ROCHAMBEAU
Come on men!

EXT. SUPPLY TRAIN - NIGHT

Rochambeau and his men STOP running. The GUARDIAN BOTS are frozen. The door to the car is wide open, unguarded. All of the goods used to barter for tickets are stacked inside.

Mason CREEPS toward one of the frozen BOTS and TOUCHES the cold metal chest. Sees the power indicator is red.

INSERT - POWER INDICATOR

"0%"

BACK TO SCENE

MASON

They're not charged up! Come on!

Mason, the sheriff and his men RUSH into the train car.

SFX: A LION ROARS. Then ANOTHER.

A stunning, well-muscled blonde, LUNA ALEXEYEV (30s), calmly saunters to the train car. Arms crossed, she glares at the crazed thieves as they raid the circus inventory.

She CRACKS a whip at the two roaring, teeth-baring behemoths at her side. Her lions SAMSON and DELILAH.

She points to the men in the car. The lions LEAP inside. The men have no time to react.

The lions TEAR into flesh. Blood SPURTS. Bones BREAK. His jelly-belly wobbling, the sheriff TAKES OFF. Samson TEARS into his leg. The sheriff FALLS. Delilah FINISHES him off.

Mason tries a different tactic. Surrender. He closes his eyes, DROPS the stolen goods, and raises his hands high.

MASON (CONT'D)

They made me!

Luna shakes her head, turns and SNAPS her fingers. The lions stop their vicious attack and RUN to her.

She CLOSES the train car door behind them, crosses her arms, and posts herself in front of the secured train. Samson and Delilah stake out spots beside her.

Mason opens his eyes. He surveys the carnage, sees Luna and her lions guarding the train car. He peeks around the corner, decides to take a chance. And, he BOLTS to freedom.

EXT. IVAN'S MAKEUP TENT - NIGHT

Melodee and Ruth RIDE up. They observe the ongoing chaos. CIRCUS GOERS go berserk SCRAMBLING out of the Big Top.

MELODEE
Stay here, mama.

Ruth nods. She DUCKS into the safety of Ivan's tent.

EXT. SIDESHOW AREA - NIGHT

Hiding in a corner, Slocom sees Melodee leave Ivan's tent.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

The Spaniard, Ivan and Ralph brood in the stands. Melodee takes a seat. A few more AUDIENCE MEMBERS STUMBLE OUT. The remaining PERFORMERS and GAUCHOS begin CLEANUP and TEAR DOWN.

THE SPANIARD
You missed all the fun.

RALPH
We were worried about you.

MELODEE
I'm good. Rescued mama. She's in your tent, Ivan. That alright?

IVAN
More the merrier.

THE SPANIARD
We'll clean this up and leave at sunrise gents. And lady.

MELODEE
I'll check on mama then help you.

EXT. IVAN'S MAKEUP TENT - NIGHT

Melodee OPENS the tent flap. The barrel of a gun POKES out. She raises her hands.

Slocom STEPS out. RESTRAINS Ruth. He points the gun at her head and TAUNTS Melodee.

SLOCOM
Came for one. Caught two.

MELODEE

Your lucky night.

He **SHOVES** Ruth to the ground. **GRABS** Melodee and **SHOVES** her beside her mother. He points his weapon at them.

SLOCOM

Up to me, I'd kill you both. But
I'm sure Mr. Peck'll love havin'
the nig-nog who cut his dick off.
Along with her mother.

Ruth glances at Melodee, raises her eyebrows. Melodee nods. It's true. Ruth grins proudly.

Melodee returns her gaze to Slocom. She's distracted by something behind him. Slocom **WITHDRAWS** two sets of cuffs, starts to place them around the women's wrists.

MELODEE

CLICK! CLICK!

Slocom senses something behind him. He turns and sees a **CHARGING**, ten foot tall, ten thousand pound African elephant.

Harmony Jane is upon him. She **KNOCKS** him down. His gun and the cuffs **SLIP** from his hands and **FALL** to the ground.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

CLICK! CLICK!

Harmony Jane **PRESSES** her foot on Slocom's chest. He **GASPS**.

SLOCOM

I CAN'T BREATHE!

Melodee looks at Ruth. They **ROAR WITH LAUGHTER**.

MELODEE

Well *Master* Slocom, paybacks are
hell, aren't they?

Harmony Jane raises her head and **TRUMPETS** out a victory call.

SFX: PFFUGAH! PFFUGAH!

Her slobber **DRIPS** onto Slocom's face. Melodee grabs Slocom's outstretched hands and **SNAPS** his own cuffs on him.

She **WALKS** to her horse, **REMOVES** a rag and a small bottle. She **SOAKS** the rag with liquid. **PRESSES** it against Slocom's mouth.

He **STRUGGLES** for a few seconds. Then he's out, fast asleep.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
CLICK! CLICK! CLICK!

Harmony Jane removes her foot.

Ralph, Ivan and the Spaniard appear with big smiles.

THE SPANIARD
This the pissy overseer?

MELODEE
Yup. And this is my mother. Ruth.

They all nod at each other.

MELODEE (CONT'D)
You don't mind if she comes along
with the circus, do you?

THE SPANIARD
(to Ruth)
If you're anything like your
daughter, I'd love to have you.

RALPH
What're we gonna do with this guy?

MELODEE
My first thought is to kill him.
But, that'd be stooping to his
level.

RUTH
Be nice if he could feel what you
and me feel everyday. Lack of
choice. Loss of freedom.

Melodee beams at her mother's comments.

MELODEE
Mama, your wisdom never ceases to
amaze me. I have an idea. Ralph,
can you carry him over for me?

Ralph CHUCKS Slocum over his shoulder and FOLLOWS Melodee.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

A train ROLLS down the track, black flumes leaving tiny grey
clouds in the gloomy sky.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Darkness.

MUMBLES from inside the car. The door SLIDES open. Two rail yard employees in blue coveralls, a bulky Black man, ESRAH (40s) and a short Hispanic, JAVIER (50s), peer inside.

The outside sunlight streams into the car like a spotlight.

We see Slocom. Tied up. Mouth duct-taped. His eyes bulge.

Esrah and Javier shoot each other a questioning glance.

ESRAH

Never seen that before.

Esrah starts to CLIMB into the car. Javier RESTRAINS him.

JAVIER

Not our concern.

Esrah BRUSHES him off, CLIMBS in, RIPS off the duct tape.

SLOCOM

SHIT! Dumbass coon. Untie me.

Esrah STEPS back. Javier smirks. Slocom grows impatient.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)

What're you waiting for?!

Esrah smiles at Javier.

ESRAH

Think you're right. Ain't our concern. Next stop can handle it.

Esrah SLAPS the duct tape back on Slocom's mouth. Slocom WIGGLES, PROTESTS beneath the tape. Esrah climbs out.

JAVIER

Sorry you couldn't stay longer in Mobile. You'd fit right in here in the New Great State of Alabama.

ESRAH

Oh, I don't know, Javé. He'll do okay in Jacksonville too.

JAVIER

Plus Florida's got more sunshine. Good for a nice redneck sunburn.

Javier SLAMS the door shut. Slocom hears LAUGHTER.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

From above, we see Slocom's train LEAVE the station.

INSERT - ROAD SIGN

"JACKSONVILLE, FL 404 MILES"

The train WHEEZES down the track and out of sight.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END