

UNCHAINED MELODEE

PILOT EPISODE:
Tough Act to Follow

written by

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GENRE: Dystopian Fiction

LOGLINE: Pursued by her overseer from hell in the dystopian New Deep South where minorities and non-Evangelicals are enslaved or worse, a clever runaway slave masquerades as a male circus performer on a life-or-death quest to rescue and avenge her family.

TEASER

BLACK SCREEN:

We hear MELODEE (late 20s), her tone fiery. Her voice reminds us of Amanda Gorman, another confident, spirited young Black woman born many years before.

MELODEE (V.O.)
It's like we fell into a deep
hibernation.
(beat)
For years. For decades.

SLAM CUT TO:

INT. COMPUTER SCREEN - DAY

Social media sites. Tweets and posts float by with phrases like "fuck you," "fake news," and "lib media sucks."

MELODEE (V.O.)
We were in a deep sleep when
cyberbullies commandeered the
Internet.

I/E. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Video footage from FOX News, One America News Network and other questionable, alternative facts-driven media.

MELODEE (V.O.)
Asleep when right wing bullies
commandeered the airwaves.

I/E. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Video footage of an angry Donald Trump at rallies, smiling, smirking, frowning, the whole spiel. Interspersed with Trump is footage from the January 6 Capitol attack.

MELODEE (V.O.)
Asleep when the biggest bully of
all commandeered the power of the
federal government.

INT. PRESS ANNOUNCEMENTS - DIFFERENT LOCATIONS - DAY

On a split screen, three different proud doctors announce COVID-19 vaccines.

A news ticker scrolls below: COVID-19 VACCINES AVAILABLE TODAY. DOCTORS SEE PANDEMIC'S END IN SIGHT.

MELODEE (V.O.)

And we were definitely asleep when brilliant scientists delivered not one, not two, but three safe vaccines to stop the pandemic in its tracks.

I/E. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

TV Footage of protestors raging against vaccines and mask requirements at schools, in cities, at stores, on planes.

MELODEE (V.O.)

But

(beat)

You guessed it. A minority of bullies fucked it up for the rest of us by refusing to take the vaccines.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Footage of climate events: Floods, hurricanes, scorching deserts, traffic jams, Polar Bears on melting ice caps.

MELODEE (V.O.)

Then came the kicker. Massive, galaxy-wide solar flares caused by climate change.

(beat)

And again scientists were correct. Climate change was - is - real. So when we didn't do enough to curtail it...

EXT. EARTH SEEN FROM SPACE - NIGHT

Lights around the world fade out. The entire planet goes dark. A satellite passes by, sputters, and shuts off.

MELODEE (O.S.)

...our global computer and power systems failed. And because the pandemic had killed our best climate scientists and techies, we couldn't fix it.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

Coal plants expel black smoke into the air until the sky turns dark and day turns to night.

MELODEE

So now here in the 22nd century,
we're living in a 19th century
world. Where coal is our primary
energy source again. Ironic, eh?

EXT. ABOVE EARTH - NIGHT

Camera zooms into North America.

MELODEE

And the bullies have renamed the
USA...

EXT. NORTH AMERICA MAP - DAY

Slow zoom into a map of what was formerly U.S. states in the south and Midwest. California and northeastern states are x'd out. The new nation is labelled GREAT STATES OF AMERICA.

MELODEE (V.O.)

...the Great States of America.

INT. TV SCREEN - DAY

Thousands of faces begin to disappear until only twenty percent remain.

MELODEE (V.O.)

Despite the fact that two hundred
million of our citizens were killed
by climate change and the pandemic.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Enscorced in his chair in a blue Sharkskin suit and elongated red tie, LARSON E. CURTZ (a Botoxed 78) smirks, palms pressed together as if praying or taking a shit.

With a spray on tan and orange hair from a bottle, he's a dead ringer for his idol, Donald J. Trump, whose portrait hangs behind him.

MELODEE (V.O.)
 Now we're dictated to by a new
 bully--President Larson E. Curtz...

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Marching, helmeted thugs in black visors and full body armor
 wield automatic weapons at a petrified crowd.

They steer the long line of men, women and children--Black,
 Latino, Asian, Indigenous, Jews, Muslims, among others--past
 a sea of non-Caucasians hanging from gallows. Some beheaded.

A bleak detention camp covered with barbed wire looms in the
 foreground.

MELODEE (V.O.)
 ...whose plan to maintain white
 male supremacy calls for enslaving
 or killing minorities and non-
 Evangelicals.

EXT. SPLIT SCREEN - RURAL FARM AND CITY GHETTO - DAY

On the left: An effervescent white family smiles at the
 camera. Behind them is an old barn. Painted on the side is a
 red, white and blue American flag with only thirty-five stars
 and the words, WE MADE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!

On the right: A Latin x family stands before a boarded-up
 shop staring sorrowfully at the camera.

The split screen morphs into a single screen. Suddenly, the
 white family removes assault weapons and annihilates the
 minority family. Bloods spatters the camera. The proud white
 mother and father pat their kids' heads for having such good
 gun skills. They return to their pose to face the camera.

MELODEE (V.O.)
 By minorities I mean anybody who's
 not white.
 (beat)
 Really. Anybody.

EXT. DESERTED HIGHWAY, DEEP SOUTH - NIGHT

Straight from a scene in "Frankenstein," an angry mob of
 Evangelical Southerners wave silver crucifixes at men, women
 and children of non-Christian faith--i.e., Muslims, Jews,
 Hindus, you get the idea--as they chase them down the road.

They pelt rocks and high-five in celebration as the non-Christians fall like pins in a bowling alley. Fatal othering at its best.

MELODEE (V.O.)

And by non-Evangelicals, I mean anybody who's not a proselytizing "Jesus Christ, our savior" bully.

INT. PASSENGER TRAIN CAR - NIGHT

A beautiful light skinned black woman sits in a red velvet chair illuminated by candlelight. She's calm, but animated. She peers at the camera.

MELODEE

(chuckles)

Hey now! We havin' fun yet?

(beat)

My name's Melodee, by the way. No last name. Kinda like Beyoncé!

She holds up a photo of Beyoncé. Gazes at it lovingly. Returns to face the camera.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

You may've noticed I'm one of those non-Caucasian folks--the kind they make slaves of these days.

She peers out the window. The camera captures the outside world as the train speeds down the tracks.

MELODEE (V.O.)

Even so, doesn't mean we've all given up. Some of us never will. I'm one of those *some ofs*. And this is my story.

INSERT: *UNCHAINED MELODEE*

INSERT: *A TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW*

END TEASER

ACT I

SLAM TO:

EXT. SYCAMORE ROW CHATTEL RANCH - DAY

SUPER FADES IN: ALABAMA, GREAT STATES OF AMERICA (2107)

TWO YEARS EARLIER

SFX: Heavy breathing from a female, running, being chased.

SFX: Baying bloodhounds and the pounding of horse hooves from those doing the chasing.

A raging pack of bloodhounds races through the backwoods in hot pursuit of Melodee (at age 25). She's frightened but poised in this life-or-death situation.

She sprints through the swampy terrain in ragged, threadbare skirt and shoddy leather boots.

On a sweating roan not far behind the lead dogs, the ranch's treacherous white overseer JAKE SLOCOM (40s) chomps a big chaw of tobacco, as he dodges skinny pines and towering magnolias in the thick undergrowth.

Two of Slocom's HENCHMEN, one on a horse, the other on a pimped-out mountain bike, speed along beside him. Melodee imagines what Slocom and gang will do if they catch her.

EXT. HANGING TREE - DAY

Melodee straddles a mammoth gray mare, hands tied behind her back, noose tight around her neck. Slocom slaps the mare's broad rump. The mare bolts. Melodee drops, kicks, and dies.

EXT. WOODEN PYRE - NIGHT

Melodee is tied to a stake surrounded by piles of wood. Slocom torches the kindling. Flames shoot skyward. She spits at Slocom before the inferno consumes her.

EXT. WHIPPING POST - DAY

Bullwhip in hand, Slocom takes aim at Melodee tied to a post, her bare back facing him. He unleashes his fury on her with lash after lash until she passes out.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Drooling hounds chase Melodee. Behind is Slocom, pistol in hand. If the dogs don't mangle her to death with razor-sharp teeth, Slocom will blow her brains out with cold black lead.

RETURN TO PRESENT

Melodee shakes off that last terrifying image and returns to reality. She glances back. The hounds have closed the gap.

She runs behind a large boulder marked discreetly with an X. She withdraws a bizarre-looking weapon, part bow, part spear-an atlatl.

The growling lead dog charges. Melodee flips the atlatl and an arrow like spear flies into the hound's chest. It drops and dies.

She locates another hidden object, a hunter's knife. She stabs the second hound and quickly withdraws the knife.

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

Slocom and gang appear, a third hound beside them.

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

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

The biking henchman follows Melodee. His bike clips a large rock. He flies off, smashes his head on a boulder. Stone-cold dead, literally.

SFX: The last 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, loose button-up men's trousers, and wool duster. She straps on her backpack and races off again.

Seconds later, the remaining hound discovers Melodee's clothes, takes a sniff and takes off after her. After a few steps, the dog froths, wobbles to the ground and wails in agony.

Slocom arrives with the other henchman, hears the whimpering hound and sees Melodee's dress. He holds it to his nose and immediately dry heaves.

SLOCOM
(mumbles)
Bitch. Three good huntin' dogs.

He shoots the dog in the head to put it out of its misery. Slocom and the henchman on horseback return to their chase.

EXT. CLIFF - DAY

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

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

SLOCOM
Move!

Melodee sees the henchman advancing. She spins around, wiggles her fingers over her shoulder with an irreverent goodbye and...jumps.

The henchman now sees the edge of the cliff but he can't stop. He slides to the edge and flies off.

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

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

Slocom watches as a train appears, its black coal-powered smoke flume rising into the sky. Melodee veers toward it and lands on a car. She tosses off the chute, and lays flat on top as the train rolls down the track and out of sight.

Behind her, above on the cliff, Slocom spits out a wad of tobacco. He mounts the roan, grabs the reins of the henchman's horse, and heads back to the chattel ranch.

EXT. TRAIN TO NEW ORLEANS - 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 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 ivory like hers. They could pass as father and daughter. Her pinpoint landing on the train car hasn't phased him one bit.

TALL MAN

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

Melodee flinches, stares at the guy in disbelief. He's amused by her reaction.

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

Not much surprises me. I work with circus performers.

(beat)

Come inside, before one of us falls off.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

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

TALL MAN

You look like you could use a shot.

MELODEE

Rather have water.

The man pours a glass of water, hands it to her. She downs it in one gulp. He pours another. She gulps it down too.

TALL MAN

Who are you anyway?

MELODEE

At the moment? Escaped property longing for the good life on the open road. Name's Melodee.

THE SPANIARD

They call me The Spaniard. Real name's too long and too hard to say for most folks.

The Spaniard points back over his shoulder.

TALL MAN

And that angry guy back there?

MELODEE

The overseer from whom yours truly escaped.

THE SPANIARD

Think he'll come after you?

MELODEE

Definitely. He's pissy that way.

A jolt. The train comes to a stop. Melodee glances out the window. Dwarfs, clowns, acrobats, animal tamers, a fat lady and other strange characters chat in the shade of tall trees. Workers start to load up the train cars with supplies.

THE SPANIARD

Think you could do that floaty trick landing for our show? Free room and board.

MELODEE

You did get the part about me being a runaway, right?

THE SPANIARD

Everybody in this band of bizarros is a runaway. You'll fit right in. Come here, I'll show you.

EXT. CIRCUS WAGONS BELOW THE TREES - CONTINUOUS

The Spaniard points to a bald giant with a chest of granite and biceps the size of melons.

THE SPANIARD

See that freak of nature? A runaway. Runnin' from his daddy. Wanted Ralph to join the family business. He preferred the circus.

He points to an animated dwarf poking the strongman's chest.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)

And Ivan. Also a runaway. Family kicked him out of his Carolina home. Because he's different.

MELODEE

Just because he's a little person?

THE SPANIARD

Hell no. Cuz he's gay. Not a popular persuasion in the 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. So we got our share of runaways. It's part of our name.

He points to a gaucho rolling up a banner: DOC WAYMORE'S RUNAWAY CIRCUS AND FANTASY FAIR.

THE SPANIARD (CONT'D)

We will need to keep that runaway slave thingie hush hush outside of the circus. Anybody asks, I'll say you're my daughter.

MELODEE

When do I start...Daddy?

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

All three blood hounds and both men.

(beat)

Dead.

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, realizes Peck can't see.

SLOCOM

Afraid so, sir. She used bedsheets
to make some sort of a kite. And
just floated away.

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 Slocom out. When Slocom reaches 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, catches his breath.

PECK (CONT'D)

Goddamn it! Catch her before
somebody else does. Get!

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

INT. CIRCUS TRAIN TO NEW ORLEANS - LATER

The Spaniard sits beside Melodee in the lead car as it
rumbles down the rickety rails. Behind them, twenty boxcars
have been loaded with the circus animals, performers, roadies
and supplies.

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

(alarmed)

You cut his dick off?

MELODEE

How'd you like it if somebody called you a sand spade?

THE SPANIARD

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

MELODEE

'Cept this man is a senile old fuck who's been rapin' me forever and nobody's said a word.

THE SPANIARD

Did he die?

MELODEE

No such luck. I cauterized the wound.

((beat))

I chucked his dick in the fire, though.

The Spaniard shakes his head.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

And I threw hot ashes in his face to get away.

(beat)

He might be a little blind.

THE SPANIARD

A *little* blind?

Melodee either doesn't get or doesn't want to acknowledge the Spaniard's sarcasm.

MELODEE

He's still got his balls though. So 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. But instead of his jerky, he imagines--

VFX: A white man's penis dissolves onto the screen.

ON SPANIARD'S FACE

His eyes widen. He stops chewing, spits out the jerky and tosses what's left out the open window.

Melodee smiles, amused, as the train rolls down the track.

EXT. WARD SLAVE DEALERSHIP - NEAR NEW ORLEANS - DAY

Melodee's mother RUTH (50s), a dignified mulatto who is struggling to stay positive joins with other slaves for a special meeting called by their master.

Fellow slaves--Blacks, Jews, LGBTQ, Native Americans, Latinos--file in behind her in search of a shady spot to sit.

The owner of the slave dealership, MITCH WARD (50s), introduces preacher HONTZ SNYDER (60s), rotund, cherubic faced, stoop-shouldered and filled with fire and brimstone. Ward addresses his property.

WARD

In recent months, five slaves have run away from their masters. No plantation, chattel ranch or slave dealership in Orleans Parish has been spared. It's why I've asked Reverend Snyder to share with you the word of God with you today.

Snyder nods, steps forward. He's pale, smug, self-righteous. He raises his bible like Moses brandishing The Ten Commandments. He displays a slip of paper.

SNYDER

Allow me to share a few important questions and their answers for you to think about. God's words not man's.

He reads from the paper.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Question: What does God demand
servants to do for their masters?

(beat)

Answer: Obey the master always!
Fearing God.

Grumbles emerge from the back. Snyder shuts that down with an angry glance. His voice rises.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Question: If the master punishes
more than he ought, what is the
servant to do?

(beat)

Answer: Always please his master.

Several slaves roll their eyes, look at the ground.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Question: Why are Blacks, Jews,
Indians and Mexicans chosen as
slaves and not whites?

(beat)

Answer: Because the Lord intended
it so. Their hands are large, their
skin thick and tough, and they can
stand the sun better than whites.

SFX: Audience members cough, clear their throats, sigh.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

Question: And if a servant runs
away, what should be done?

(beat)

Answer: He should be caught,
returned to his master and whipped
or burned or cut or punished
howsoever the master sees fit.

Snyder saves the best for last, absolution for white masters from all blame or guilt by the divine laws of God.

SNYDER (CONT'D)

And the final question: Is the
master to blame for punishing his
servant? His property?

(beat)

Answer: No! No! For he is only
doing his duty as a God-fearing
Christian in the Great States of
America and the New Deep South.

Snyder closes the bible. He peers out at the stunned crowd.

SLAVE AUCTIONEER

God bless you all. Go forth with
good will in your heart and
obedience to your master in mind.

On the way back to their shacks, the sermon's attendees whisper and sigh. Ruth helps a veteran Black slave past his prime named UNCLE SIMON (70s). He stops, and turns to her--

UNCLE SIMON

That sure was some psycho White man
bullshit!

Ruth smiles, 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 piney woods into a hot, humid, urban wasteland.

Concrete rubble and rebar blanket the once thriving city's landscape. It's desolate and dreary, reminiscent of a bombed out European city in World War II.

The sun's a giant flaming orb spewing stark white rays. In this century, the sky's no longer blue. It's void of color, like bleached white sand.

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 that're mere facades with the goods picked clean, government buildings hidden now behind scrub brush and overgrown weeds.

Rats, roaches, buzzards, stray cats and wild dogs pick at corpses in varying degrees of decomposition.

Beneath an underpass by the Mississippi River, hordes of homeless itinerants stream from tents. A staked wooden sign reads: CURTZVILLE.

Men, women and children in threadbare rags scurry alongside the circus train. They wave at DOC WAYMORES' animals, performers and freaks.

Circus performers toss promo flyers from the train. Hundreds of pieces of paper fall like snowflakes over the city.

CLOSEUP OF A FLYER...

"CIRCUS PERFORMANCES ALL WEEK! CITY PARK"

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

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: "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 your 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,
 (beat)
 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--

EXT. RICHMOND SLAVE MARKET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

It's busy. Packed with slave dealers, plantation owners, chattel ranchers, auctioneers, farmers, speculators, the curious and, of course, slaves. Thousands of slaves.

SUPER: RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, EIGHT YEARS EARLIER

The once thriving Virginia state capital has become a scene from *Mad Max*. Thugs, whores and gun-toting ruffians crowd filthy streets. Dogs and the homeless ravage trash for food scraps, drinking 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 man.

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 crowd goes bonkers.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Thirteen hundred.

LAWYER (O.S.)
Fifteen!

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

SILAS GREENE
Seventeen hundred Curtzcoin!

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

AUCTIONEER
Going.
(beat)
Going.
(beat)
Gone!

The Auctioneer strikes his gavel and points to Silas.

AUCTIONEER (CONT'D)

Sold! To that young man for
seventeen hundred Curtzcoin!

MID-SHOTS OF CROWD

SFX: Murmurs. Cheers. Applause.

Other men congratulate Silas for his purchase.

The Auctioneer's goons drag Melodee offstage and present her
to her new owner.

BACK TO PRESENT

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.

END ACT I

ACT II

EXT. IVAN'S MAKEUP TENT - DAY

Ivan ducks into a tent bearing the sign "PERFORMERS ONLY."
Melodee trots over.

MELODEE

Mr. Ivan?

Ivan pokes his head out of the tent flap. He smiles. Melodee takes that as a sign that his "poking attack" is over.

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.

ON THE DRAWING

The parakite resembles an upside down, oblong U.

MELODEE (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. 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 climbs a stool to get a better look at Melodee.

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

Slocom kicks in the door of a decrepit slave cabin. Women and young children scramble off the porch. 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. 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, that bow, the sheet kite?

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's gonna make her mama and sister and daughter free. Just like she is now.

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!

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 Ten 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.

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.

(beat)

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)
 I'm going to pull your arm back
 over your shoulder as if you're
 scratching your neck.

Melodee threads Ralph's arm over his shoulder. He winces at
 the pain.

RALPH
 Mother!

MELODEE
 Okay. At three, I'll gently move
 that arm toward the other shoulder.
 (beat)
 Ready?

Ralph nods.

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

At two, Melodee yanks the shoulder hard and fast.

SFX: A gigantic pop.

SFX: A loud howl from Ralph.

RALPH
 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.

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.

MARY (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.

MARY (V.O.)

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

BACK TO PRESENT.

IVAN

That kite I'm making you now!

MELODEE

Yep.

RALPH

Where's your mama now?

MELODEE

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

RALPH

Ivan and me'll help you find her any way we can.

Melodee smiles and turns serious.

MELODEE

In my brief life, three white men have owned me. One raped me continuously. One fathered me and didn't bother marrying mama. And one fathered my daughter without marrying me. I paid back that first one. I intend to make the other two pay as well.

EXT. SYCAMORE ROW CHATTEL RANCH - NIGHT

Slocom climbs the steps to another slave cabin. This time, he knocks. A beautiful mulatto, COFFEY (30s), answers. She calms a crying, swaddled infant.

Coffey smiles. She's surprised but happy to see Slocom. He removes his hat, nervously pinches the bill.

SLOCOM

Going away for a few days. And
(beat)
I wanted to see her 'fore I left.
(beat)
And you.

Coffey sizes him up. He seems sincere. She passes him the infant. Instantly, Slocom melts like a hot waxed candle.

The baby stops crying, blinks at Slocom, laughs. A tear comes to Slocom's eye and drips onto the child's face. He panics.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)

Damn. Daddy's sorry Phoebe.

Coffey uses her apron to wipe away the tear from INFANT PHOEBE'S face. She rubs Slocom's back. A fire flickers behind them as father, mother and child enjoy the moment.

END ACT II

ACT III

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 the 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.

INT. HIGH RISE STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Melodee marches up steep stairs. She drags her parakite behind. A sign reads "43RD FLOOR." She climbs 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.

SFX: Audience shrieks. Applause.

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

SFX: The audience gasps.

She rolls to the edge and gives her show partner the signal.

SFX: Melodee clicks her tongue twice: CLICK. CLICK.

A ten-foot tall African elephant, HARMONY JANE, thunders over. With precise timing, Melodee plops onto the elephant's bare back. She whispers.

CLOSEUP OF MELODEE

MELODEE

Let's give 'em a show baby girl.

SFX: 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 the visor on her helmet, aims at the bullseye and fires. Misses. Ivan smiles and waves to the audience.

SFX: The audience moans.

MIDSHOT OF IVAN

He looks nervous as Harmony Jane gets closer.

ON MELODEE

She claws another ball and lets it rip. Just wide but a bit closer. Ivan sighs, wipes a brow. His nervousness increases.

SFX: Another sigh from the crowd, followed by a chant.

CIRCUS AUDIENCE
DUNK HIM! DUNK HIM! DUNK HIM!

ON MELODEE

She's less than twenty feet from Ivan now. 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.

Ivan awaits his fate. He sighs, pinches his nose, waves to the audience, and watches as the bullseye flings back, his seat collapses and he plunges into the ice cold, water tank.

SFX: Cheers explode from the bleachers.

The audience rises in a standing ovation.

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 and rides Harmony Jane out of the Big Top. Kids and parents chase after.

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 extend from four corners to form two loops for holding onto.

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)

Only thing this useless shit's good
for. 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!

WOODEN STAGE

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?
(beat)
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 seducer, power moves.

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

He sneers, let's go a creepy laugh.

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

He grabs at Melodee's face and pinches off bears 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.

Mason doesn't listen.

MASON

Nigger!

Melodee shakes her head. Swiftly, she kicks Mason in the balls. He doubles over. She knees him in the forehead. He rocks back 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 white gentleman like himself.

Mason's out cold. Ralph and Ivan laugh.

THE SPANIARD

Least you didn't cut his dick off.

(beat)

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 makes no effort to hold back a wide smile.

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.

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 obliges.

POMPEY

That was me. Here most every day.

Melodee returns the joint.

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
Dealership 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 DEALERSHIP - DAY

Melodee rides down a pothole-ridden road covered in rubbish. A hand-painted sign reads "WARD SLAVE DEALERSHIP, YOU'LL NEVER BITCH ABOUT HOW SLAVE BOUGHT FROM MITCH!"

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.

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 DEALERSHIP - DAY

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

Melodee grimaces.

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

What make and model you want?

Melodee shrugs. Ward realizes she doesn't understand.

WARD (CONT'D)

My bad! I sold cars when there was still gas and electric.

(beat)

What I mean is, like, rag heads, half-breeds, niggers, you know.

She swallows hard to absorb the blatant racism, plays along.

MELODEE

Ah! An Aunt Jemima. Light skin. Experienced. A mammy my wife can trust for cleaning and cooking.

WARD

Oh, got lots of them in inventory.

Ward slaps a heavy journal on a table and opens to a section titled HOUSE NIGGERS. Scans the page with his index finger.

WARD (CONT'D)

Got seven in stock. All are workin' up at my Big House.

Melodee spots her mother's name.

INSERT

Name: Ruth Origin: Richmond, VA Age: 47 Nigger %: Octoroon

RETURN TO SCENE

Melodee feigns disappointment.

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 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 the New Deep
South 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 are around. 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? And 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 Hannah and 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)

Last I heard, Hannah's in Natchez.

MELODEE

Yes, and my Mary's still with her father in Richmond. We'll find them. And we'll all be together.

RUTH

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 walks into the Big House.

END ACT III

ACT IV

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

(intimidated)

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."

Below the headline, a drawing captures a performer hanging from a large kite. The performer looks exactly like Melodee.

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!

(beat)

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?

IVAN

Nope. Un uh.

RALPH

Never.

Rochambeau extends his palms toward Melodee's face.

SHERIFF ROCHAMBEAU

Mind if I check for myself?

Melodee glances at Ivan. He crosses his fingers. She nods, spreads her stance, and crosses her arms behind her back.

Rochambeau plants his right foot, places both palms on Melodee's beard and yanks.

MELODEE

OH MY GOD!

Melodee rubs her face. Rochambeau check his fingers. Not a single hair.

THE SPANIARD

Satisfied?

MASON

It's fake! I'm telling you!

Harmony Jane nudges Mason with her trunk. He sways. She nudges him again, this time toward the exit.

THE SPANIARD

Harmony Jane's trying to tell you something Mason.

Ralph and Ivan laugh.

IVAN

Proof that elephants are the smartest animals in the circus.

The sheriff motions for his deputies and they leave. Mason tries to turn back but Harmony Jane won't have it.

THE SPANIARD

Don't bother coming back either!

The Spaniard winks at Melodee. Ralph and Ivan smile at her. Melodee continues to rub her face.

MELODEE

(to Ivan)

Soap and water, huh?

IVAN

Aren't you glad I was wrong?!

EXT. CIRCUS ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A serpentine line winds in front of the ticket booth. A sign reads: "NO CURTZCOIN. GOODS ONLY!"

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

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

A prim, FEMALE LIBRARIAN TYPE steps up. An EXCITED BOY holds her hand, taps his feet. His head rests on the counter.

FEMALE LIBRARIAN TYPE
Your flyer said one.

TICKET BOT
Circus Sundays, one. Weekdays, two.

FEMALE LIBRARIAN TYPE
But we only have two cans of beans.
(beat)
Do you honor Curtzcoin?

The Ticket Bot points to the sign.

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

A NERDISH MAN steps forward, sets two bars of soap on the counter. He smiles at the woman.

NERDISH MAN
My guest decided not to come.

FEMALE LIBRARIAN TYPE
Thank you! Why don't you us?

The man hands the Ticket Bot two more soap bars. All smiles, the boy grabs the nerdish man's hand. The three of them head into the Big Top.

EXT. SUPPLY TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

A TRANSPORT BOT tows a loaded metallic bin to a train car marked "SUPPLIES." He slumps down. Checks his power setting.

The red battery icon reads "10%." The bot beeps.

TRANSPORT BOT
Eeeg. Eeeg. Eeeg.

Nearby, SECURITY BOTS guard the supply train as Worker Bots unload the bartered goods and stack them for inventory.

The Transport Bot's battery icon drops to 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.

SFX: Melodee double-clicks her tongue. CLICK. CLICK

MELODEE
(to elephant)
Let's get out of here girl.

Harmony Jane barrels out. Slocom scrambles down the stands. He's caught in the masses as they jockey 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. OUTSIDE CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

Acrobats, clowns, animal tamers and other performers sign autographs. A man in BLACK BODY SUIT and matching helmet chats with a little girl. Slocom muscles his way to him.

SLOCOM
(mumbles)
Finally.

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

SLOCOM (CONT'D)
Guess you think you're hot shit?

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

BLACK BODY SUIT
Back in the day, maybe.

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
(beat)
nice gentleman.

Five other black body suit clones step forward.

SLOCOM
She's got a fan club?

BLACK BODY SUIT
Duh! Have you seen *his* act?

Slocom reholsters his gun and continues his search.

EXT. WARD SLAVE DEALERSHIP - NIGHT

In her white man's outfit, Melodee leans forward in the saddle. 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 action.

SFX: CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

SFX: The sound of hounds howling. Loud. Getting closer.

MELODEE

What's with white people and dogs?
What's wrong with a cute kitten?

Ruth looks over Melodee's shoulder. Two of Wade'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.

Wade'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.

Wade's lead rider doesn't. Suddenly, his head snaps back. He falls off. Felled by a rope strung 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 back 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.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

I swear if I ever get Mary a pet,
it's gonna be a cat.

The path splits, one trail heads east, one west.

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. The second dog follows, just seconds later.

Melodee slows the horse to a trot.

RUTH

How'd you?

MELODEE

Remember that medical book you took
from Jefferson Cole's library?

(beat)

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.

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.

SFX: Grumbling noises from the crowd. Angry shouts.

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.)
 IT'S A RAID!

SFX: Screams. Wails. Shrieks.

Pandemonium. A panicked mob.

EXT. OUTSIDE CIRCUS TENT - NIGHT

Slocum watches as the frenzied circus goes turn on one
 another. He looks for any sign of Melodee.

The Sheriff and his men run ahead of the rioting horde. Mason
 grabs his 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. The battery % reads zero.

MASON
 There not charged up! Come on!

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

SFX: A lion roars. Then another. ROAR! ROAR!

A stunning 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 over. 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 goes continue to go berserk scrambling out in a human stampede.

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 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.

(beat)

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.

SFX: Melodee clicks her tongue twice. 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.

SFX: Melodee clicks her tongue. CLICK. CLICK.

Harmony Jane presses her foot onto Slocomb's chest. He gasps.

SLOCOM (CONT'D)
I CAN'T BREATHE!

Melodee looks at Ruth. They chuckle.

RUTH
Tell that to Eric and George!
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. Places it over Slocom's mouth.

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

SFX: Melodee clicks. CLICK. CLICK.

Harmony Jane removes her foot.

Ralph, Ivan and the Spaniard appear with big smiles.

THE SPANIARD
This the pissy overseer guy?

MELODEE
Yup.
(beat)
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

I have an idea. Can you carry him
over for me?

Ralph throws Slocom over his back and follows Melodee.

INT. ABOARD CIRCUS TRAIN - DAY

The Spaniard, Ralph, Ivan, Ruth and Luna (without Samson and Delilah) chat and down celebratory whiskey shots. Melodee turns to face the camera.

ON MELODEE

MELODEE

So, that's how Mama and me ended up
with the circus. Now, we're headed
to Natchez for our next shows. And,
to rescue my baby sister, Hannah.

Outside the window, we see the train has begun to depart.

MELODEE (CONT'D)

But, there's that one loose end I
know you're all wondering about.

She motions for the camera to come closer. She points out the window. An adjacent train heads in the opposite direction.

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

See the train. There's your answer.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

A panoramic shot follows the other train down the track, a black flume puffing away into the gloomy sky.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Darkness. Faint voices outside. Mumbling inside the car. The door slides open. ESRAH and JAVIER, two railyard employees in blue coveralls 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

A tied up white man? Never seen that before.

Esrah starts to climb into the car. Javier restrains him.

JAVIER

Not our concern. Can't be good.

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, Jave. 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 more laughter.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

From above, we see Slocom's train rumble down the track on its way to the next destination. A sign reads: "JACKSONVILLE, FL 404 MILES."

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END